

MASTIFFS AND SPANIELS: GENDER AND NATION IN THE ENGLISH DOG

*He hath been brought up in the Ile of Dogges & can both fawne
like a Spaniell, and bite like a Mastive. – Moll Cutpurse*

In her seminal book on animals in the nineteenth century, *The Animal Estate*, Harriet Ritvo postulates that “animal-related discourse has often functioned as an extended, if unacknowledged metonymy, offering participants a concealed forum for the expression of opinions and worries imported from the human cultural arena.”¹ Most recent work on animals in early modern England has concentrated on the degree to which such opinions and worries concern the animal-human boundary and the question of what it means to be human.² This large issue was certainly as much in question for the early moderns as it has been since, but it can tend to obscure some of the more unique deployment of animals at work in the period. Animal discourse may fit into larger philosophical or theological ideas about humanity but actual animals could also be deployed, consciously and more or less systematically, as a vehicle for expressing attitudes specific to a place and time. In what follows I explore one such metonymy in early modern England. It is a metonymy that links English dogs with early modern English attitudes toward national character, attitudes in which hopes and anxieties about nation and gender coincide.

By the end of the sixteenth century England was already considered to have a unique relationship with dogs, and England’s nascent national identity was already connected with the dogs for which it was famous throughout Europe. Two kinds of dogs were particularly celebrated as products of English soil: the mastiff and the spaniel. From its humble origins as a tinker’s cur, the English mastiff was increasingly cultivated by the aristocracy and acclaimed by the public for its behavior in the national sport

of bull and bear baiting. The mastiff's courage and strength were appealing to those who wanted to advertise English masculine valor, both to themselves and to foreigners. The dog itself seemed to justify these claims in humoral terms, mirroring in body and mind the temperament frequently attributed to northern humans, men whose "grosse bloud and thicke Spyrites" make them "bolde and full of vertuous courage... not a whitte afrayde to hazarde their bodyes in the adventure of anye perilous extremitie."³ Such commonplaces of climatic influence were not always positive, however. If they allowed the mastiff to be lauded for its strength, bravery, and tenacity, they also allowed it to be criticized for its roughness, stupidity, and laziness. The valiance of the mastiff, as for the English themselves, was both advertised as "natural" and thought to be produced by disciplined intervention. Spaniels, the quintessential dogs of the English gentry, were antithetical to the mastiff in almost every respect. Where mastiffs were rude, foolhardy, and potentially lazy, spaniels were genteel, intelligent, and almost frenetically active. Spaniels were also often celebrated for their loyalty and devotion, qualities that made them models of civility and common interest. At the same time, the devoted spaniel could all too often be described as *fawning*, showing a false sycophantic loyalty or self-destructive attachment. The fawning spaniel was frequently associated with women or with foreigners (the word "spaniel" refers to the dog's supposed Spanish origin). These fears coalesced in attitudes toward the toy spaniel, delicate, pretty, and impractical, a dog decried as both foreign and effeminate. As a gendered pair, the mastiff and spaniel record a significant uneasiness about the English national character, caught between barbarism and excessive civility. It is an uneasiness that combines regional climate, including things such as "air" and "ground," and more abstract notions of race or breed as they were demonstrated in the animal world as a whole, and it demonstrates that the emerging discourse of nationality in the early modern period was as much concerned with the natural world as it was with human institutions.

Judging by the frequency of commentary, almost everyone in late sixteenth-century Europe, it seems, knew that England had a special relationship with dogs. Certainly the English believed themselves to be special in this regard, as Fynes Morison observes:

England hath much more dogges, as well for the severall kinds as the number of each kind, then for any other territorie of like compasse in the world, not onely little dogges for beauty, but hunting and water-dogges, whereof the bloudhounds and some other have admirable qualities.⁴

Lyly's *Euphues* also claims of England that "They excel for one thing, there [their] dogges of al sortes, spanels, hounds, maistiffes, and divers such."⁵ But foreigners also remark on English dogs in the period. Abraham Ortelius, for example, in his *Epitome of the Theatre of the Worlde* (1603) calls England notable for two things, its women and "a most excellent kind of mastiffe dogges of a wonderful bigness and admirable fierceness and strength."⁶ The sixteenth-century German visitor to England, Paul Hentzer, singled out English dogs for praise, and his 1654 edition of Gratius the Faliscian's *Cynegeticon* (1654), Christopher Wase says that English dogs "have deserved to be famous in adjacent and remote countries where they are sent for great rarities, and ambitiously sought for by their lords and princes."⁷ Perhaps most tellingly of all, when the famous continental zoologist Konrad Gesner sought a section on dogs for his encyclopedia, he asked the English physician John Caius to tell him about English dogs, and his request resulted in the earliest monograph we have on the subject. Caius' monograph *De Canibus Britannicis* (1570), was loosely translated in 1576 by Abraham Fleming under the more narrow title *Of English Dogges*. Fleming's work was repeated by Harrison in his *Description of England* and inserted entire into Topsell's entry for "dog" in his *History of Four Footed Beasts* (1607).

Most foreigners, like Ortelius, thought of English dogs primarily in terms of the large fierce guard dog which came to be called a "mastiff." Such opinion seem actually to have been accurate. England seems really to have possessed an extraordinary number of large fierce dogs, although the

continuing existence of such dogs depended on systematic human action. There are two pieces of evidence that suggest the presence of a relatively indigenous population of large dogs. The first piece of evidence is etymological. The word “dog” itself, today the most ordinary tag for any animal of the species, is actually an unusual word. The most common root in the Germanic languages underlies the modern word “hound,” not “dog.” The OED surmises that the word “dog” originated as a term for one kind of dog, specifically a large strong dog used for the defense of life and property. In the sixteenth century the word “dog” began to filter into other languages in reference to such an animal, often with the adjective “English” attached. The OED cites examples in Dutch, German, and French (OED sb 1). Modern dog breeds, whose names solidified in the eighteenth century, tend to support this theory. Breeds with the English root “dog” in their name, like the “dogue de Bordeaux” and the “dogo Argentino,” are invariably big guard dogs. Now, the simplest way of explaining why the English word “dog” became a term for the entire species in English itself and a synonym for English canines in foreign languages is that the subgroup it originally designated was predominant, either literally or in the popular imagination. There were either so many big dogs or they were so important that the word originally used only for them became the word for *any* domestic canine. There is some historical evidence to support this surmise. As far back as Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, foreign commentators were remarking on the predominance of large guard dogs in Britain, and English laws referred consistently to mastiffs throughout the Middle Ages. We have to understand, of course, that the term “mastiff” remained quite loose well into the eighteenth century. Although as we'll see there were conscious attempts to develop and lay claim to what we might want call a specific breed in the late sixteenth century, the term “mastiff” was not itself the subject of such attempts, remaining instead a term for a variety of large heavy dogs used for defense of property and physical labor such as carrying and water-drawing.

All of this suggests the notable presence of actual dogs, especially mastiffs, in England, but it was above all in the popular imagination that

such dogs gained their force. One passage in Shakespeare's *Henry V* demonstrates the extent to which natural history and climate theory could be merged in the service of national identity. The scene is late in the play, the night before the battle of Agincourt, in the French camp. The French lords, full of their prospective triumph in the coming day, are discussing the abilities of the English soldiers:

CONSTABLE Alas, poor Harry of England! He longs not for
the dawning as we do.

ORLEANS What a wretched and peevish fellow is this King of
England, to mope with his fat-brained followers so
far out of his knowledge!

CONSTABLE If the English had any apprehension, they would run
away.

ORLEANS That they lack; for if their heads had any
intellectual armour, they could never wear such heavy
head-pieces.

RAMBURES That island of England breeds very valiant
creatures: their mastiffs are of unmatchable courage.

ORLEANS Foolish curs, that run winking into the mouth of a
Russian bear and have their heads crushed like
rotten apples! You may as well say, that's a
valiant flea that dare eat his breakfast on the lip of a lion.

CONSTABLE Just, just; and the men do sympathize with the
mastiffs in robustious and rough coming on, leaving
their wits with their wives: and then give them
great meals of beef and iron and steel, they will
eat like wolves and fight like devils.

ORLEANS Ay, but these English are shrewdly out of beef.

CONSTABLE Then shall we find to-morrow they have only stomach
to eat and none to fight. (3.7.130-153)⁸

There are at least three things worth noticing in this passage with regard to the mastiff. First, the connection between English male “valiance” and the English mastiff is cast as part of an independently authenticated natural history. Orleans, who mentions the Russian bear, is clearly thinking of mastiffs in the context of the practice of bear baiting, itself recognized as an English national sport. The passage invokes the dogs not purely as imaginary or symbolic representatives of national qualities but as real animals, bred in England and recognized by others as a kind of national product. Second, underlying the reference to an animal associated with England are some of the most basic assumptions about the role of region or climate in determining the attributes of an animal or human. Rambures doesn’t say the English breed valiant dogs, he says that the “*island of England*” breeds them. The word “breed” is being used in a general sense (OED 4). And the qualities attributed to English mastiffs, “robustious and rough coming on,” are exactly the kind of qualities attributed to northern peoples by theorists like Levinus Lemnius and Jean Bodin. The association between mastiffs and English-ness is not therefore either conventional or purely symbolic but rather grounded in accepted environmental theories of the period. Third and finally, despite its apparently secure statement of environmental influence the passage posits a potentially ambiguous relationship between nature and culture. It may begin with environment, but it ends with diet, one of the six “non-naturals” that is most clearly under human control. The Constable’s reference to “great meals of beef and iron and steel” implies a program by which English valiance can be produced through conscious intervention, although environmental tendencies are still an issue. Only the ostrich, for example, was sometimes thought to eat iron, but it was associated in some accounts with a northern temperament. The metal itself resonates elsewhere in the play, as Mary Floyd-Wilson has pointed out, arguing that the English “mettle” that so astonishes the French in the play is an example of its persistent psychological materialism.⁹ This suggestion of conscious intervention reflects back on the choice of the word “breeds.” While it could certainly mean simply to produce or generate,

“breeding” was also used, as today, to refer to artifice, both at the biological level and in terms of training, or education. To say that England “breeds” valiant creatures may nationalize the event, but it is perhaps not as clear a reference to environmental determinism as it might seem. What is at stake, at least in this passage, is the question of merit. Is “English bravery” natural bravery or natural foolhardiness, carefully engineered courage or elaborate stupidity? Does English-ness reside in the natural qualities of a breed or in the disciplined intervention and coercion of nature?

The English themselves were increasingly aware of the value of their mastiffs. In Abraham’s Fleming’s loose translation of John Caius’, which runs to about thirty-seven pages, by far the longest entry is on the mastiff, occupying almost one quarter of the whole. English writers also paid particular attention to classical references to English dogs. William Price uses the discussion of the mastiff type specifically to praise England:

from a country of Epirus , called anciently Molossia , at the present Pandosia ... comes in Noble race of dogs celebrated by all antiquity, and preferred before those of any other nation whatsoever for matchless stoutness until Britain being discovered, and our dogs brought to trial, the Molossians were found to be surpassed in carriage by the British mastiffs.

The British hounds no other blemish know,
When fierce work comes, and courage must be shown.¹⁰

Mastiffs accompanied the English when they went abroad, too. Of the two dogs specifically mentioned in the annals of the Virginia colonies, one is a mastiff.¹¹ Of the two dogs reportedly aboard the Mayflower, one was a mastiff. The dogs were alongside their masters in more troubling aspects of aggressive English self-assertion as well. When Essex took his army to Ireland in 1598, William Resould wrote to Cecil from Lisbon reporting that local rumor put Essex’s force at 12,000 men and 3,000 mastiffs.¹² We have no evidence that the force actually included such an enormous number of dogs,

but the subject had clearly been under discussion. A year later, in January 1599, another letter recorded that Essex, “makes great provision for horses, and many are presented him. They talk likewise of carrieng over two or three hundreth mastives to worry the Irish (or as I take it) theyr cattell.¹³ The final qualification is ominous. Although the letter writer seems to think it unlikely that mastiffs would be used against people, he has to reinterpret the news to avoid this chilling suggestion. If in fact mastiffs were used against the Irish people, it would most likely have been against civilians, since the dogs’ famous ability to distinguish between friend and foe would be compromised in a pitched battle.

It was above all in its role in bear, bull, and lion baiting, themselves sometimes referred to as national sports, that the mastiff gained a particularly nationalistic inflection. When foreign ambassadors came to England, they were almost always treated to a baiting. In 1623, for example, the Spanish ambassador was,

much delighted in bear-baiting. He was the last week at Paris-garden, where they showed him all the pleasure they could both with bull, bear, and horse, besides jackanapes, and then turned a white bear into the Thames, where the dogs baited him swimming, which was the best sport of all.¹⁴

When English ambassadors went abroad, they demonstrated the valiance of the mastiff whenever possible. The records of the East India company bear witness to the dogs’ prevalence as an instrument of policy. For example, in 1615, Thomas Keridge reported the effect of the company’s gift of a mastiff to the Mogul, then besieging Ormuz. The Mogul set the dog against a leopard, which it killed, and a bear, which some Persian dogs refused to touch, and “so disgraced the Persian dogs, whereby the king ws exceedingly pleased.”¹⁵ A month earlier a young mastiff reportedly killed a tiger in India. The dogs were popular in the East Indies, as well. One letter from Batavia describes the spectacle of the English mastiff in the court of a local dignitary:

It is strange to see the earnest emulation of these Princes to procure rarities that others have not, to impress conceit of greatness in the vulgar; a wild mastiff dog because not common has his attendants, and is fanned from flies with as much observance as a principal personage.¹⁶

English embassies to European countries also used mastiffs, although not as colorfully. One of the most well-known of these ambassadorial spectacles, recounted by Harrison in the section of the Description of England devoted to dogs, (he is inserting the story into an otherwise straightforward crib on Caius) is the embassy to France in February, 1571 of Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, where “one English mastiff ... alone and without any help at all, pulled down first an huge bear, then a pard, and last of all a lion, each after other, before the French king in one day.”¹⁷ Although the embassy was ostensibly a brief congratulation for the French king on his marriage, much of Buckhurst’s time was taken up with marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and the duke of Alençon). It was therefore a particularly appropriate opportunity for demonstrating the strength, vigor, and valiance of English bodies. Fighting mastiffs were also considered an appropriate aristocratic gift throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When Henry VIII sent a force to Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1544 to aid him against the French king, the four hundred English soldiers were accompanied with four hundred English mastiffs, each with an iron collar.¹⁸ Overall, it appears that the fame of the English mastiff was part of a sometimes very self-conscious attempt at national self promotion. Mastiffs were valuable tools of foreign policy.

As the passage from *Henry V* reveals, the connection between the English and their mastiffs was not just a case of historical accident or deliberate policy. In cultivating mastiffs as a national animal, the English were assisted by contemporary theories of environmental influence. The body of the mastiff matches precisely the description of the northern human body in early modern natural philosophy. Caius’ description of the mastiff is perhaps the most complete:

This kind of dog, called a Mastiff or Bandog, is vast, huge, stubborn, ugly, and eager; of a heavy and burdenous body, and therefore but of little swiftness; terrible and frightful to behold ... [I]t is a kind of dog capable of courage, violent, and valiant, striking cold fear into the hearts of men: but standing in fear of no man; in so much that no weapons will make him shrink, or abridge his boldness.¹⁹

As one might expect given the materialist psychology of the day, Caius's physical description merges seamlessly with his analysis of the dogs' character, a character which matches the one that the English climate was supposed to give to English men. In addition to the northern boldness and courage described by Lemnius and others, the large size of the dogs itself played into theories of climate. Northern humans were also frequently described as large bodied.²⁰ Bodin, in his *Six Books of a Commonweal* (1606), calls northerners cruel because bestial, given to fury, war, and the manual arts. All of these correspond well to the mastiff which was both the original "dog of war" and employed frequently in physical labor. This paradigm of regionalism was almost always gendered as well. Bodin, for example, repeatedly calls southern climates feminine. At one point he even goes as far as to imagine the paradigm within a single body, facing west. The right or north side, with liver and gall, connected with the Moon and Mars, is more masculine. The left or south side, having the spleen and melancholic humors, is feminine.²¹ If, in Shakespeare's words "the men do sympathize with the mastiffs," it could be seen as a natural, environmental sympathy. This connection does more than anything else to explain the fondness of the early modern English for blood sports. The bear garden was a place in which the materialist psychology of English male "valiance" was rendered spectacular. The mastiffs with their "robustious and rough coming on" played out a fantasy of natural strength, alleviating any possibility that England's growing civility would somehow weaken it.

If the English sympathized with their mastiffs in ways that were appealing, however, they also sympathized with them in their perceived

liabilities. These too were ascribed to climate, which sometimes, as John Barclay put it, “ravisheth away the mindes of men, and maketh them addicted to certaine affections.”²² There were two ways that the English environment was thought to be potentially flawed. First, in terms of humoral tendencies, northerners were sometimes thought of as leaning toward the phlegmatic. Bodin is a good example of this fairly commonplace view. “And even as they which live at the extremities of the Poles, are Flegmatike, and at the South melancholie; even so they which are thirtie degrees on this side the Pole, are more sanguine.”²³ Second, England was sometimes thought of not as excessively northern, but rather as excessively fertile. Barclay, for example, says “there is no fault in the climate to dull their wits, but too much abundance to make them idle.”²⁴ Both of these arguments, contradictory though they are in theory (as is true of much geo-humoralism, not to mention early modern natural philosophy as a whole), lead to the same conclusion. Overabundance, Barclay says, makes the English lazy. But Phlegm too can lead to large and lazy bodies. Falstaff is the quintessential gross phlegmatic. English mastiffs, of course, were by definition big heavy dogs, “of little swiftness,” and with large appetites. Whatever their potential for aggressive defense of life and property, they were not frenetic or active dogs. The best mastiffs, it was argued, didn’t bark except for a good reason, nor were they easily angered, although when angry they were, as Lemnius says of the English, not easily satisfied. The danger with such dogs, of course, is that they will lose sight of their supposedly natural ambitions and become lazy amiable brutes, the same danger often thought to threaten English men. The intelligence of mastiffs was also questioned in a way that reflected contemporary ideas about climate. It was part of the commonplace that northern peoples, while valiant, lacked “policy” or intelligent judgment. The behavior of mastiffs, particularly in baiting, raised the same question. Christopher Wase, for example, wonders whether his classical author, Gracian, is saying that British dogs are brave but stupid in comparison to the Molossians, or whether he is saying that British dogs are both the brave and smart. He concludes in favor

of his country. "This interpretation," he says, "may be verified from the nature and usual experience of our mastiffs that play at the bull or bear; which will play low and creep beneath till they fasten upon the beast" (Jesse 344). It is not only a question of intelligence. The adjectives attached to mastiffs, "wild," "cruel," "currish," and "rude" reflect broader concerns about their value as an emblem of civility. Wase, whose preface to Grattius is almost entirely positive on the subject of the English relationship with dogs, nevertheless warns his countrymen lest by "continual conversation with dogs [they] become altogether addicted to Slaughter and Carnage, which is wholly dishonorable, being a servile employment."²⁵

And as it turns out, the English worked hard to ensure that their dogs manifested the kind of intelligent valiance that was frequently attributed to the dogs' "nature." Caius, for example, notes that,

Our Englishmen (to the intent that their dogs might be more fell and fierce) assist nature with art, use, and custom. For, they teach their dogs to bait the bear; to bait the bull, and other suchlike cruel and bloody beasts (appointing an overseer of the game) without any collar to defend their throats: and oftentimes they train them up in fighting and wrestling with a man having (for the safeguard of his life) either a pikestaff, a club, or a sword. And by using them to exercise as these, their dogs become more sturdy and strong. (28)

The qualities most valued in the mastiff and those most intimately connected with this dog as a representation of English national identity are, in Caius account, not entirely, or perhaps not even substantially the result of a specific environment. Instead they develop from a disciplined and systematic intervention and "assistance" of what is still held up as a natural tendency. Animal baiting in the early modern period was a significant economic activity, and the value placed on mastiffs, their commodification, rested on an ambiguous coincidence of nature and careful design. The verb "bait" was used both to refer to the action of the attacking animals who "bait" the victim (OED 3) and to the action of the humans who incite them to

do so, sometimes with great difficulty (OED 1,2). Both senses occur with roughly equal frequency in the period. Thus both the dogs and their victim are “baited.” On the whole, the spectacle of baiting relied on the artificial elaboration of supposedly natural behavior. Animals, both attacking and attacked, were disciplined into displaying what was considered most wild and undisciplined. When the animals were untrained or unfamiliar to each other, as when the Tower lions were involved, the results were usually disappointing. One such encounter reads more like farce than thrilling spectacle. On June 23rd, 1609 the royal family went to the Tower to watch the baiting of a Bear that had killed a child accidentally left in the bear house:

This fierce Beare was brought into the open yard behind the Lyon's den, which was the place for fight; then was the great Lyon put forth, who gazed awhile, but never offred to assault or approch the Beare; then were tow mastife dogs put in, who past by the Beare, and boldly seized upon the Lyon; then was a stone-horse put into the same yard, who suddenly scented and saw both the Beare and Lyon, and very carelesly grazed in the middle of the yard between them both; and then were sixe dogs put in, the most whereof at the first seized upon the Lyon, but they sodainly left him, and seized upon the horse, and would have werryed him to death, but that threee stout beare-wards, even as the King wished, came boldly in, and rescued the horse, by taking off the dogs one by one, whiles the Lyon and Beare stared uppon them, and so went forth with their dogs; then was that Lyon suffreed to go into his den againe, which he endeavoured to have done long before; and then were divers other Lyons put into that place, one after another, but they shewed no more sport nor valour than the first, and every of them so soone as they espied the trap-doores open, ran hastily into their dens.²⁶

The only animal entirely untouched in the debacle was the bear for whom the event had been created. It had to be rescheduled to be “bayted to death upon a stage” a fortnight later, with a portion of the ticket sales going to the mother of the dead child.

This tendency to blur the line between nature and culture follows the history of the mastiff during the seventeenth-century. Caius classified all

dogs into three groups, one “gentle,” one “homely,” and one “currish.” The first two categories are direct representations of class distinctions. Gentle dogs were owned by aristocrats and used primarily for the leisure activity of hunting. Homely dogs were owned by working folk and used in practical applications. Mastiffs, of course, were in the second category and were sometimes condemned by the comparison. In 1566, Thomas Blundeville, searching for an analogy to explain the superiority of Neapolitan horses over others, says that they excel others “even so farre as the faire greyhoundes the foule mastiffe cures.”²⁷ Yet because of their appeal as emblems of a particular kind of national identity, mastiffs were increasingly popular with the aristocracy. Chatsworth, Elvaston Castle, and Hadzor Hall all eventually became breeding centers for dogs of this type. The dogs began appearing in aristocratic portraiture as well, beginning perhaps with one of Elizabeth I’s master of the armoury, Sir Henry Lee, whose life was saved by his mastiff, but most famously popularized by Van Dyck, copies of whose mastiffs were inserted into portraits throughout the seventeenth century.²⁸ This gentrification of the mastiff was so thorough that by the end of the eighteenth century it could be claimed that “what the lion is to the Cat the Mastiff is to the Dog, the noblest of the family; he stands alone and all others sink before him.”²⁹ The most famous aristocratic connection with the mastiff is the Legh family of Lyme Hall in Cheshire. Modern mastiff fanciers to this day credit Lyme Hall with the origination of the breed. Lyme Hall’s dogs were apparently much valued. Robert Dudley owned one as did several other aristocrats. The Legh family muniments testify both to the care given the dogs and to their commodification. John Egerton, the first Lord Bridgwater, wrote in one letter to his uncle,

You have long knowne me for an swift Dogge-driver, but never for a Mastiffe=monger yet I must now earnestly desire you that by your means & my Aunts I maye have a faire and good Beare dogge & & I praye you let me be beholding to you for such a one or none , for whose I am to geine him to I woulde either gaine a good one or none.³⁰

Egerton's letter suggest that the mastiffs bred by aristocrats were as likely to find themselves in the bear garden as any common cur. Other documents support this. Although the owners of the bear garden maintained their own kennels (around 70 dogs lived in them), audience members were free to bring and bet on their own dogs.³¹ The Lyme Hall mastiffs were also the subject of perhaps the most audaciously nationalistic story connected with the English mastiff, a story that bring us back to Agincourt. Sir Piers Legh, as the story goes, was wounded in the battle. His mastiff bitch guarded his wounded body, refusing to give it up to anyone but an Englishman. The bitch returned to England, and the Lyme Hall dogs are supposedly derived from her litter. The ultimate provenance of this story is murky, and its basic elements are extremely commonplace, but its nationalistic and aristocratic inflection are unique. It's also an early modern story, not a Medieval one. It doesn't seem to emerge until the seventeenth-century; it is commemorated at Lyme Hall in a stained glass window dating from that period. What families like the Leghs were doing with mastiffs in the period began to challenge the very assumption that underlay the practice of breeding: that mastiffs represent a kind of valiance natural to the English. Like the dog trainer who "assisted nature with art," the aristocratic owner systematically intervened and cultivated a commodity whose value depended on its being a product of such intervention. Likewise English-ness was itself the product of the increasingly ambiguous notion of breeding, hovering between environmental determinism on the one hand, and human artifice on the other.

While the mastiff was on its trajectory from tinker's cur to national icon, there was another dog that already occupied a solid place in the national imagination, particularly for aristocrats. There were, after all, two dogs in the accounts of the Virginia colony, two dogs on the Mayflower. One of them was the mastiff; the other, equally celebrated as a product of "English soil," is the spaniel. In *Of English Dogges*, the spaniel, in its various

forms, occupies seven and a half pages, by far the longest entry apart from that on the mastiff. They are one of only four kinds of dogs recognized under Elizabethan law.³² Like mastiffs, spaniels accompanied many English travelers throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³³ Like them, they served as gifts between aristocrats as part of foreign policy. In the annals of the East India company, spaniels and mastiffs were the most popular English gift, almost always mentioned together. In 1615, Thomas Keridge wrote back home from Ormuz to the company that the king of Persia would be well content with “2 or 3 mastiffs, a couple of Irish greyhounds, and a couple of well-fed water spaniels.”³⁴ A Nov 20, 1614 short list of items desired by the great Mogul includes mastiffs and spaniels.³⁵ They garnered extensive literary praise as well. In *Sir Philip Sydneys Ourania* (1606), Nathaniel Baxter gives one line to the mastiff and greyhound, two to hounds, but 47 lines to the “quick senting Spannel, fit for Princelie game”:

If thou wilt seeke a constant faithfull friend
 In life and death, thy bodie to defend
 Walking and running by thy Horses side,
 Scorning all dangers that may thee betide
 Being a faithfull and true Companion
 In joy, and wofull desolation
 Whome neither change, or sad calamitie,
 nor raging famine, adversitie,
 Nor naked state, or pynning povertie:
 Can make to shunne, or leave thy company:
 Then take thy Dogge.³⁶

Baxter’s verse depicts an extraordinarily active animal, with its insistence on the verbs, “walking,” “running,” “scorning.” The repetition, “neither... or.. nor... nor” in the second half emphasizes the spaniel’s steadfastness. To him, it is an ideal animal. “How may my pen these Spanniels commend,” he asks, “Whose qualities are such as have no end?” The spaniel’s many qualities were so frequently mentioned by admirers that they even became

something of a joke. In *Two Gentleman of Verona*, Launce marvels that his milkmaid “hath more qualities than a water-spaniel, which is much in a bare Christian” (3.1.267). By the mid seventeenth century, the large spaniel had become a frequent accessory in the genre of martial portraiture, in part because of their aristocratic associations and in part because their famous loyalty made them a reassuring backdrop in an era of divided loyalties. This spaniel is the perfect Englishman’s companion, an animal whose activity and steadfast loyalty parallels the community of interest that was the root of the commonwealth.

Unlike mastiffs, spaniels were also renowned for their intelligence. As Karl Holtgen has pointed out, the iconography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries consistently associated spaniels with the active imagination.³⁷ He identifies the metaphor in Burton, Huarte, Dryden, and Hobbes, among others. But as Holtgen points out, the idea is more than merely metaphorical. The hunting dog’s ability to follow a branching scent trail was the opportunity for a famous disquisition on animal intelligence.³⁸ What went through a dog’s mind when it had to choose between different options? James I even attended a mock debate on the subject of whether or not a dog could follow a syllogism. Since the debate centered on the scent trail, we may presume that the dog in mind was either one of the spaniels or perhaps a hound, not a mastiff.

To some degree, however, the very intelligence and excessive loyalty of the spaniel made it potentially suspect. Spaniels were frequently described in imaginative literature as “fawning,” a kind of sensational loyalty whose potential hypocrisy made it suspicious. The word “spaniel” could be used as a verb to express precisely this anxiety. As Antony considers the ruin of his hopes in *Antony and Cleopatra*, he wonders,

Do we shake hands. All come to this? The hearts
That spannell’d me at heels, to whom I gave
Their wishes, do dis-Candie, melt their sweets
On blossoming Caesar; and this pine’s barkt
That overtop’d them all. (4.12.20ff)³⁹

Antony's mixed metaphors here reflect the disordered state of his mind, but lest we think they are dead metaphors we have only to look at the pun of "barkt" which gestures back to the dogs implied in "spannell'd." These are false friends like Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, the little dogs who bark at Lear to compound the betrayal of his trust. The spaniel's cringing, subservient behavior also became a byword for a destructive self-abnegation, usually figured as feminine. "The more the spaniel is beaten, the fonder he is," ran the proverb, one frequently used to justify abusive behavior toward women.⁴⁰ This use was also a live metaphor in sixteenth century England. In fact, Shakespeare bases on it some of his pathology of love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Helena, fruitlessly pursuing Demetrius, is finally brought to the clearest possible statement of her attitude:

Demetrius: Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?
 Or rather do I not in plainest truth
 Tell you I do not, nor I cannot love you?
Helena: And ever for that do I love you the more.
 I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
 The more beat me I will fawn on you.
 Use me but as your spaniel: Spurn me, strike me,
 Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
 Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
 What worser place can I beg in your love
 (And yet a place of high respect with me)
 Than to be usèd as you use your dog? (2.1.199-210)⁴¹

Helena's love has completely drained her of any independent identity except as a reflection of Demetrius' disdain. She has aggressively subordinated herself to his will and his identity. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* this attitude is ostensibly comic rather than truly pathological but its violence remains disturbing. Bruce Boehrer calls Helena's state a "sinister kind of puppy love" and identifies it with the plays persistent bestiality.⁴² Helena's case is also oddly similar in some ways to that of the obsequious young Englishmen so often decried as being enamored with foreign ways at the

expense of their own country. The supposed tendency of the English to subordinate themselves (and England) to other nations was something of a national obsession. More than one writer mentions the story of the painter who, wanting to paint every man in his national apparel, was forced to paint the Englishman naked, “such be our fickle and unstable heads, ever devising and desiring new toys.”⁴³ William Rowley devoted an entire work to this vice. The Englishman, he says, “killeth his owne with culling, and prefers the corruption of a forraine Nation before the perfection of his own profession.”⁴⁴ Some did argue such behavior was potentially useful. Morison, for example, says that because “the English above all others ... subject themselves to the Lawes, customes, language, and apparrell of other Nations,” they please strangers. Some, he admits, “may judge it an apish vice thus to imitate other nations, but in my opinion, this obsequiousness of conversation, making us become all things to all men, deserves the opinion of a wise man.”⁴⁵ The Englishman, at home perhaps a spaniel for loyalty, was abroad a spaniel for obsequiousness.

Spaniels themselves, despite their adoption as a quintessentially English dog, also always retained a hint of foreignness. Their name itself means “Spanish dog,” and could be used, retrospectively, to identify a Spanish person. In English usage, the term was usually xenophobic, and could be combined with the proverbial as in the “fawning spanolizing Spaniell.”⁴⁶ But the usage isn’t restricted to England. The French satire *Les Abus du Monde* contains an allegorical representation of the league of Cambrai in which Spain is shown by a pair of spaniels helping to assail the lion of Venice.⁴⁷ The term could also, by extension, be applied to perceived foreign influences. As early as 1562, Thomas Pilkington called Papists, “diligent spayniels to seek alwayes possible to set up that vyle podell of idolatrie, of their god the Pope.” Pilkington, who associated the Papist cause firmly with a Spanish influence, later speaks, ambiguously, of “the Pope’s spanielles.”⁴⁸ Caius himself is slippery on the foreign origins of spaniels:

The common sort of people call [them] by one generall word, namely Spanielles. As though these kinde of Dogges came originally and first of

all out of Spaine

...

Not that England wanted such kinde of Dogges, (for they are naturally bred and ingendered in this country.) But because they beare the generall and common name of these Dogges synce the time they were first brought over from Spain. (15 & 42)

This uncertainty about the nationality of the spaniel is compounded by a semantic confusion about which dogs should be referred to by the term. On the one hand, the word was used to refer to a group of middle-sized hunting dogs such as “setters,” “water-spaniels,” and “land-spaniels.” On the other hand, because all of the small dogs in England at the end of the sixteenth century resembled smaller versions of the large hunting spaniels, it was perhaps natural that they should also be called “spaniels,” or “spaniels gentle” (from their aristocratic ownership), even though these animals were classified by natural philosophers like Caius and Topsell as separate from the hunting spaniels. These small spaniels were always thought of as foreign, frequently finding themselves on lists of foreign animals and affectations such as Jonson’s “perfumed dogs, monkies, sparrows, lildoes, and paraquettoes.”⁴⁹ Many thought they came originally from Malta, but their broad associations are with the irresistibly fascinating orient: “If I had brought (Ladies) little dogges from *Malta*, or straunge stones from *India*, or fine carpets from *Turkie*, I am sure that either you woulde have woed me to have them, or wished to see them.”⁵⁰ By the eighteenth century this semantic confusion appears to have evaporated, perhaps because of the introduction of toy breeds such as pugs that did not resemble spaniels. Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, the new term “lapdog” began to replace “spaniel” for such animals. As Jodi Wyatt has convincingly demonstrated, however, they retained their “metonymic association with women, wealth, and outlandishness.”⁵¹

The small “spaniel gentle,” later to become the lapdog, excited moralizing comment precisely because it was associated with a particular kind of femininity.⁵² Abraham Fleming was the first, but certainly not the

last to criticize this dog and its owners. Of the many passages he added to Caius in *Of English Dogges*, only one carries such ideological weight:

These dogges are litle, pretty, proper, and fyne, and sought for to satisfie the delicateness of the daintie dames, and wanton womens wills, instruments of folly for them to play and dally withall, to tryfle away the treasure of time, to withdraw their mindes from more commendable exercises and to content their corrupted concupiscences with vaine disport ... These puppies the smaller they be, the more pleasure they provoke. (21)

Others are sometimes less extreme in their language, but the sixteenth-century saw the beginning of a long-running sex joke about these small dogs. Baxter, always upbeat about spaniels, makes it a matter of mild envy:

The little Spannell in the Ladies lappe,
Is blest with extraordinarie happe,
Feeding and lodging in that Princely place.
That whilom did renowned Hector grace.
Young loving Lords doe wish, it were their Doome
A little while to take their Spannels Roome.⁵³

His little spaniels are clearly gifts from the young lords since they remain "their spannels." They just get to occupy a space desired by their masters. But envy is exactly the kind of masculine anxiety evoked by more severe judgments as well. The spaniel gentle represented a kind of early modern femininity in itself, with its size, delicacy, prettiness, and apparent impracticality, but it was also figured as a rival, threatening to displace female attention. Lyly plays on both aspects in his dedication to *Euphues & his England*: "It resteth, ladies, that you take the paines to read it, but at such times, as you spend in playing with your little dogges: and yet will I not pinch you of that pastime, for I am content your dogges lye in your laps, so *Euphues* may be in your hands, that when you shall be wearie in reading of the one, you may be ready to sport with the other."⁵⁴

If spaniels were merely a fashion, we might be able to understand reactions to them as part of the Puritan opposition to vanity, but they occupy

a far more deeply embodied position. The spaniel gentle was useless for almost everything, Caius says, except, curiously, as medicine. They are good for a sick stomach “applied as a plaster preservative, or borne in the bosom of the diseased and weake person” (22). It is not clear whether dogs applied like a plaster were always alive at the time. The French surgeon Ambroise Paré, for example, was extremely fond of a preparation called “oil of whelps.” Nevertheless, the principle behind such treatment reveals the close bodily association between the spaniel and its human owner.⁵⁵ And while the dog might confer health on the owner, the owner could confer sickness on the dog. Caius describes the process:

Moreover the disease and sickness chaungeth his place and entreth (though it be not precisely marcked) into the dogge, which to be no untruth, experience can testfiy, for these kinde of dogges sometimes fall sicke, and sometime die, without any harm, outwardly inforced, which is an argument that the disease of the gentleman or gentle woman or owner whatsoever, entreth into the dogge by the operation of heate intermingled and infected. (22)

A spaniel was in some sense a humoral extension of its owner’s body. Even in a world in which all bodies were partially permeable, the boundary between human and dog seems especially open. It is perhaps no accident that the first English experiment in blood transfusion, in 1683, was performed on dogs: a spaniel and a “mongrel cur.”⁵⁶ It was even possible to argue, as Orion does in Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*, that dogs “come nearest” to men of all creatures. “There be of them,” he concludes “as there be of men, / Of every occupation more or less.”⁵⁷ This parity suggests its opposite. There might also be of men as there be of dogs. The English and the dogs that so many of them owned, celebrated, or castigated are such a pair.

Of course the parity between the early modern English and their dogs is a double one, involving both spaniel and mastiff. Given the kind of imaginative energy that the early modern English devoted to their dogs, this ambiguity is highly significant. Thomas Proctor, in the preface to his

Knowledge And Conducte Of Warres (1578), wonders why the Englishman “having a stronge bodie, good will enoughe, and a fertyle cuntry ... should not excell other nations in deades & exployctes of Armes, and extende the victorious forces of this Realme, by renowned conquests farre.” After all, he says, “the cuntry of Macedone beyng not great, under the conducte of the most puissant Alexander, subdued the mighty Monarchie of the Persians.” Proctor’s answer to his own question is “Lacke of endeavour, & discipline,”⁵⁸ the very things that were feared in the English dog, and the terms around which the opposition between mastiff and spaniel revolve. The early modern English may have the potential for valorous action, their climate may seem promising, but when it comes down to it, they might also lack the will. In their collective imagination they are as if caught between rough mastiff and the fawning spaniel, between rude valor and effete civility, between mindless ferocity and sycophantic obsequiousness.

¹ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate* (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 70.

² Good examples are Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000) and her edited collection *At the borders of the human* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999). Bruce Boehrer, in *Shakespeare among the Animals: Nature and Society in the Drama of Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), also frequently sees animal discourse as interrogating notions of humanness, although his wide-ranging study is not limited to this issue.

³ Levinus Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions* (London, 1576), p. 13.

⁴ Fynes Morison, *Itinerary* (London, 1617), vol. 3, p.148. Keith Thomas also suggests that dog ownership was widespread in England by the sixteenth century: Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁵ John Lyly, *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit* (1579) and *Euphues and His England* (1580), ed. Edward Arber (London, 1869), p. 438.

⁶ George R. Jesse, *Researches into the History of the British Dog* (London: R. Hardwicke, 1866), p. 206.

⁷ The Faliscian Grattius, *Grati Falisci Cynegeticon. Or, a Poem of Hunting by Grattius the Faliscian*, trans. Christopher Wase (London, 1654), p. 35, Jesse, *Researches into the History of the British Dog* p. 207.

⁸ All references to *Henry V* are from the Arden edition: William Shakespeare, *King Henry V* (London: Methuen, 1967).

⁹ Mary Floyd-Wilson, "English Mettle' in *Henry V*", *Shakespeare Association of America* (Minneapolis: 2002).

¹⁰ *Grati Falisci Cynegeticon. Or, a Poem of Hunting by Grattius the Faliscian*, p. 35.

¹¹ John Smith, *The Generall History of Virginia* (London, 1624), vol. 6, p.232.

¹² Great Britain. Public Record Office., Robert Lemon and Mary Anne Everett Green, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Edward Vi., Mary, Elizabeth [and James I.] 1547-[1625]*, 12 vols. (London: Longman, 1856), 266.116.

¹³ *Calendar of State Papers*, 270.25.

¹⁴ John Nichols and John Timbrell Milward Pierce Pierce, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First, His Royal Consort, Family, and Court* (London: J. B. Nichols, 1828), Book 4, p.79.

¹⁵ Great Britain. Public Record Office., William Noël Sainsbury, J. W. Fortescue, Cecil Headlam, John Monson Monson and Society of Antiquaries of London., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1574-1715*, 28 vols. (London: Longman, 1860), 2.396.

¹⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial*, 6.374.

¹⁷ William Harrison, *The Description of England (1587)* (Toronto: Dover, 1994), p. 344.

¹⁸ Jesse, *Researches into the History of the British Dog*.

¹⁹ John Caius, *Of English Dogges*, trans. Abraham Fleming (London, 1576), p. 28. All other references noted in the text are to this edition.

²⁰ Thomas Walkington, *Optick Glasse of Humors, or, the Touchstone of a Golden Temperature* (London, 1607), p. 30.

²¹ Jean Bodin, *The Six Bookes of a Commonweale (1606)* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), p. 562.

²² John Barclay, *The Mirror of Mindes, or Barclay's Icon Animorum*, trans. Thomas May (London, 1631), p. 54.

²³ Bodin, *The Six Bookes of a Commonweale (1606)*, p. 554.

²⁴ Barclay, *The Mirror of Mindes, or Barclay's Icon Animorum*, p. 106.

²⁵ Grattius, *Grati Falisci Cynegeticon. Or, a Poem of Hunting by Grattius the Faliscian*, preface.

²⁶ Nichols and Pierce, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First, His Royal Consort, Family, and Court*, vol. 2, p.259.

²⁷ Thomas Blundeville, *The Fower Chiefyst Offices Belongyng to Horsemanshippe* (London, 1566) , p. 8.

²⁸ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, p. 107.

²⁹ William Fermor, *Cynographia Brittanica* (London, 1800).

³⁰ John Egerton, "Letter to Sir Peter Legh," Legh of Lyme Correspondence, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

³¹ John Taylor, *Bull, Beare, and Horse, &C.* (London, 1638). CSP Domestic, 19.19.

³² M. B. Wynn, *The History of the Mastiff* (London, 1886), p. 103. The other two, "hounds" and "tumblers," are both perceived as more widely dispersed groups, with the exception of the bloodhound, another famous native breed.

³³ Smith, *The Generall History of Virginia* Book 6, p. 232, Harrison, *The Description of England* (1587), p. 344.

³⁴ *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial*, 2.396.

³⁵ *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial*, 2.340.

³⁶ Nathaniel Baxter, *Sir Philip Sydneys Ourania: Or Endimions Song and Tragedie, Containing All Phylosophie* (London, 1606), ll.1600 -11-12.

³⁷ Karl Josef Holtgen, "Clever Dogs and Nimble Spaniels: On the Iconography of Logic, Invention, and Imagination," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 24 (1998).

³⁸ Edward Topsell, Konrad Gesner and Thomas Moffett, *The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents and Insects* (London, 1607).

³⁹ William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* (London, Methuen, 1954). "Spannell'd" is an emendation of "pannell'd," but one so manifestly correct that it has always been widely accepted.

⁴⁰ Morris Palmer Tilley, *Elizabethan Proverb Lore in Lyly's Euphues and in Pettie's Petite Pallace* (New York: MacMillan, 1926), #578.

⁴¹ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1968).

⁴² Boehrer, *Shakespeare among the Animals: Nature and Society in the Drama of Early Modern England* p. 47.

⁴³ James Pilkington, *Aggeus and Abdias Prophetes, the One Corrected, the Other Newly Added* (London, 1562), p. 56.

⁴⁴ William Rowley, *The English Ape, the Italian Imitation, the Footesteppes of France* (London, 1588), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Morison, *Itinerary* vol. 3, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁶ Henry Burton, *The Baiting of the Pope's Bull: Or an Unmasking of the Mystery of Iniquity* (London, 1627).

⁴⁷ Pierre Gringore, *Les Abus Du Monde* (Paris: 1509).

⁴⁸ Pilkington, *Aggeus and Abdias Prophetes, the One Corrected, the Other Newly Added* sig Dd5, Ff8.

⁴⁹ Emma Phipson and James Edmund Harting, *The Animal-Lore of Shakspeare's Time, Including Quadrupeds, Birds, Reptiles, Fish and Insects* (London: K. Paul Trench, 1883), p. 56.

⁵⁰ Lyly, *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit (1579) and Euphues and His England (1580)*, p. 432.

⁵¹ Jodi L. Wyatt, "The Lap of Luxury: Lapdogs, Literature, and Social Meaning in the 'Long' Eighteenth Century," *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 10.4 (2000), p. 275.

⁵² The association of spaniels of all kinds with women, and sometimes children is already attested in Elizabethan and Jacobean portraiture.

⁵³ Baxter, *Sir Philip Sydneys Ourania: Or Endimions Song and Tragedie, Containing All Phylosophie* ll. 42-47.

⁵⁴ Lyly, *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit (1579) and Euphues and His England (1580)*, p. 220.

⁵⁵ The connection between these dogs and bodily functions is also revealed by the fact that they were frequently called "fisting-hounds" (OED).

⁵⁶ Lowthorp, *The Philosophical Transactions and Collections to the End of the Year 1700, Abridg'd and Dispos'd under the General Heads*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (London, 1731), p. 229.

⁵⁷ Thomas Nashe, "Summer's Last Will and Testament," *Piere Penniless His Supplication to the Devil and Selected Writings*, ed. Stanley Wells (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p. 107.

⁵⁸ Thomas Proctor, *Of the Knowledge and Conducte of Warres, The English Experience* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), ¶iv.