“To Bark with Judgment”: Playing Baboon in Early Modern London

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Who or what played the baboon on early modern London’s stages? Such a question may seem as obscure as its answer obvious; I ask it, however, to foreground the long history of trained animal performers and their relationship to canonical English drama. The surprising presence of performing baboons in early modern London has been mostly forgotten or overlooked; yet a striking amount of plays between 1595 and 1616 mention their presence, suggesting that simians may have been more important to London’s stage history than we have realized. Plays like Syr Gyles Goosecappe (circa 1600), Every Woman in Her Humor (circa 1600), Shakespeare’s Othello (1604) and Macbeth (1606), Jonson’s Volpone (1606), Lord-ing Barry’s Ram-Alley (1607–08), and Cooke’s City Gallant (1612), along with texts like Thomas Dekker’s Jests to Make you Merry (1607) and Samuel Rowland’s Humors Looking Glasse (1608), document the popularity of troupes of performing baboons in early modern London.¹

This forgotten aspect of the Renaissance English stage connects with some of the most celebrated aspects of the theater itself—its profound mimetic potential to represent real and imagined social spaces. It also gestures towards its underbelly: its harsh labor conditions, spectacular violence, and audiences who were seemingly willing to laugh at both. In this essay, I connect early modern cultural ideas about baboons with some of the valences of their performance history, arguing that both suggest early modern London’s stage baboons may have been more culturally relevant than we think.

That there might be baboons where we anticipate human actors is itself interesting; that we are unsure of whether a number of early
modern performers were human or baboon—blind Gew, Bavian in Shakespeare's *Two Noble Kinsmen*, and Thomas Greene's "apes," to name just a few—is even more so. A zoological approach to early modern London's stages thus reveals a stunning slippage between human and animal actors. This was especially true of early modern "baboonizers," performers who specialized in bawdy mimicry that cut across species boundaries. Baboonizing, as a popular theatrical trope, connected the pleasures of mimesis on the Renaissance stage with its violent and intimate histories of human and animal interaction. Because these links worked in real and imagined ways (both onstage and off), early modern London's stage baboons remind us that the lines between aping and acting was often deliberately blurred. The lack of any conclusive archival evidence about the species of these performers may reveal more than we think about the material realities of the stage and those who worked there.

**Polysemous Simians**

Who or what was an early modern baboon? The term itself connotes a panoply of potentialities across the late medieval and early modern periods. The Middle English babewyn described a grotesque decorative figure in architecture and is believed to derive from the Middle French babuin, "gaping figure," a hypothesized portmanteau of both the Middle French "baboue," for grimace, and "babine," for muzzle. Thus, a medieval baboon described something akin to a monstrous, muzzled, grinning fool, a symbol of grotesque humor. This association only strengthened with the arrival of Barbary apes in Europe during the middle of the thirteenth century (in Gibraltar) and of other species of monkeys and apes in the sixteenth century. Like other simians, early modern "baboons" were valued for their seemingly uncanny ability to mimic human behavior.

Because baboons participate in broader histories of "monstrous" hybridity in the early modern period, representations of them in early modern literature and art are often infused with a wide array of allegorical meanings. Yet this capacious pictorial and discursive history is paradoxically linked to a scant material one, raising real questions about the animal's presence in early modern Europe. How many "baboons" were there in early modern England? Where did they come from? Who brought them there and why? And how
many performed on London's stages? To begin to answer such questions, one needs to grapple with not only the many synchronic meanings of the term in early modern English but also shifts in meaning between early modern and modern systems of species nomenclature. For example, it is tempting to conclude that what we might term a baboon—one of five species of Old World monkeys inhabiting Africa and the Middle East that are among the largest non-hominid primates—maps neatly onto early modern definitions of baboons. But to do so ignores not only the many other meanings of “baboon” within Renaissance contexts but also the ways in which language itself reveals changing relationships between humans and other species of animals.

Renaissance systems of species classification, like Swiss naturalist Conrad Gesner’s influential binomial system in the mid-sixteenth century, emerged in tandem with the arrival of many New-World animals in Europe, including simians, suggesting that the etymological relationships between creatures described as “apes,” “jackanapes,” “marmosets,” “monkeys,” or “baboons” may be more meaningful than scholars have recognized. Some important distinctions exist: The first tailed monkeys in Europe were most likely Brazilian marmosets. “Marmoset,” loosely meaning a “small murmuring mouse,” originally described the cynocephalus, or a species of dog-headed wild men known for engorged phalluses and violent assaults on women and children. That the term connoted both the creature’s small size and its large capacity for violence reveals that such associations were not as oxymoronic as they might seem to modern readers. By the mid-fifteenth century the term “marmoset” was associated with small, tree-dwelling, New-World animals known for their long tails. The Libel of English Policy (1436) links “marmussettes tailed” with Italian “chaffare,” or trade in luxury spices. Similarly, William Horman’s Latin grammar Vulgaria of 1519 has young scholars copying: “the marmeset has a very longe tayle.” Such examples may hint of broader cultural associations between the allure of eroticized luxury represented by the animal’s long tail and the discipline needed to tame it.

Other terms provide clues to the material lives of the animals themselves. By the end of the sixteenth century, for example, “Barbary ape” no longer signified both Iberian and African short-tailed macaques: “Gibralter” emerges as a popular term for short-tailed monkeys from southern Spain while “Barbary” connoted Northern
African species.¹ Philological distinctions between simians may seem semantic, but, as the terms “Barbary” and “Gibraltar” make immediately clear, animals were associated with foreign places, even as they became more prevalent in England. Some emphasized the body of the animal: a modern baboon was called a “cercopithecus” (the Greek kerkos for “tail” with pithecus for “ape”) or a “drill.”¹⁰ (Confusing the matter further, the genus cercopithecus now refers to guenons, an Old World monkey.) A “jocko” described what we would term a West African chimpanzee, derived from Battel’s report of the “Engeco” of Angola (published in Purchas’s Hakluytus Posthumus, 1625), which itself was most likely a misunderstanding of an African term for the animal: “ncheko.”¹¹ Finally, the modern term “macaques” fuses these histories together: it was originally a French term derived from the Portuguese “macacos” used to describe Brazilian monkeys. The “caco” ending, however, derives from West African Bantu, which purportedly mimicked the screams of an entirely different species of monkey. The homophonc cries embedded in the term defined these creatures as both wild and tamed, even as the term gestures to the complex global trade networks that led to their arrival in Europe. And it continues to echo through the modern scientific genus term for these creatures: macaca.

Stage Simians

Other terms gesture towards another important contact zone between people and animals in Renaissance England: the stage. Though the name might suggest otherwise, a “jacknape” referred to one of the many trained monkeys who performed in London’s violent animal-baiting arenas.¹² A further diminution of “Jack,” from Jacques, a common name for a French peasant, the term “jacknape” emphasized both the tameness of these creatures and the fact that most were likely Brazilian spider monkeys, which were first reported and brought to Europe by French missionaries.¹³ Its use as a term of contempt for someone of a lesser social class emphasized the animal’s status as a captive performer.¹⁴ Shakespeare’s Merry Wives of Windsor, for example, makes this clear: throughout the play, the French Dr. Caius repeatedly calls the Welsh parson Evans a “jackanapes;” Evan later adopts this as a disguise, leading the townschildren in a pastoral performance (designed to trap Falstaff
and staged in Windsor forest). The play ends with even the disgraced Falstaff mocking Evans as a theatrical jackanape.

Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* suggests one of the ways in which early modern playwrights used this polysemous literary potential to great effect, connecting simian ability for mimicry with human actors. Baboon performers demonstrate another. Like "jackanapes," baboon was a theatrical term of art. By the seventeenth century, the term focused on the baboon's animal body and its renowned performance abilities. Known for their "great tails" and greater "tools," baboon signaled a certain kind of bawdy performance, usually by an animal, which mimicked human tropes of gender. Yet Evans's performance within Windsor forest suggests that humans also aped in this way. To do so, Evans's undoubtedly donned both a prosthetic "tool" and "tail," documenting another way in which clothing and accessories helped create the illusion of both species and gender difference in performance even as the material conditions of acting blurred them.

Such performances were very much in demand and cities like London offered a wide array of examples of "baboonizing," a term that Randle Cotgrave, in his *A French and English Dictionary* (1650), coined in both French and English to describe the use of "apish or foolish tricks, waggish or knavish prankes," in order to "deceive, cozen, [or] gull." Unlike the more generic term "aping," which connoted a series of mute gestures or behaviors, "baboonizing" emphasizes a style of performance simultaneously associated with the animal, its physical behavior, and with the urban spaces in which it performed. Baboon performances, like those of mountebanks, ape carriers, charlatans, hustlers, puppeteers, and tricksters, were designed to delight, distract, and deceive. Shakespeare emphasizes the link between baboons and theatrical deception in *Othello*: at the start of the play, Iago chides Roderigo for his "silliness," namely his love-struck suicidal tendencies, noting that he'd rather "change his humanity with a baboon" then "drown himself" for the love of a "guinea-hen," or woman (1.3:312–13). Iago's human-simian continuum is constructed through the irrationality of love. His point, of course, is that Roderigo is ridiculous, aping gestures of love. But there is more to it than that: it is also a joke about Iago's ability to deceive Roderigo and others through acting. To play the part of the baboon is to deceive: "I am not what I am" (1.1: 65).

A popular madrigal from the period emphasizes this specialized
“knavery.”17 In it, an ape, a monkey, and a baboon debate their performance abilities. The ape and the monkey both swear “solemnly” that the “their three natures” are in “sympathie,” but the baboon “denies such a straine,” arguing: “I haue more knauery in me than you twaine.” Such knavery, the second verse of the ballad emphasizes, cannot be contained: Whereas the ape’s performance domain is on a horse in Paris Garden and the monkey’s is performing in a great man’s house, the baboon claims the street itself, noting that wherever he performs “from city, country they will run.” The baboon in the ballad is confident in his superior status as a simian performer because of his superior knavery. He or she has more tricks up his or her sleeve or perhaps involving his or her great tail than either the gentleman’s monkey or the warder’s ape. As the ballad suggests, such knavery needs no specific performance location (and perhaps no human handler), drawing its own crowd wherever it performs. The baboon’s claim is both familiar and ridiculous, gesturing towards the complex histories of early modern London’s street entertainments.18

Surely baboons did not wander the streets earning their own livelihood as actors. Yet the archival void behind their performance history—and those who handled them in London—offers no immediate corrective: the simplest solution is to read the baboon as a metaphor for the human, ignoring the paradox of intimacy upon which the logic of mimicry resides. Baboon performers too easily become human baboon trainers or handlers. Consider the case of “blind Gew,” or “Gue,” an actor beloved by Renaissance audiences for his uncanny—and protean—gifts for aping humans. Valorized by Guilpin, Marston, and Jonson, to name just a few of his best known fans, Gew emerges as an enigmatic figure, whose talents far exceeded those of his simian and human peers.19 Though a few of the references to Gew are cruel, comparing the foolish gestures of obsequious courtiers to his awkward movements on stage—his blind “groping in the dark” for “a six-pence”—most suggest that if he was paid, the money was well earned. To play a part like Gew was to play a part well: he rivals even Italian gallants for sheer actorly range. Was he also someone’s property?

Like others on early modern stages, especially the many boy actors pressed into service and the many animals baited in nearby arenas,20 Gew’s status as a performer was complicated by his status as a laborer, throwing into relief the ways in which the material working conditions of the theater shaped its entertainments. The
witches’ brew in *Macbeth*, comprised of foreign human and animal parts and “cooled” by the “blood of a baboon” (4.1.26–37), also hints at the violent ways in which bodies—whether human or animal—were imagined on London’s stages.21 The legacy of this history, however, remains hazy. For some, Gew seems a talented baboon performer and a blind one at that.22 Others insist with equal fervor that such talent marks him as human: surely he must have been a human handler or trainer of baboons.23 And what of the seemingly anti-Semitic resonance implied by his name?24 To wrestle with the legacy of “blind Gew” is to enter not only into a fierce critical debate about acting and its relationship to the category of the human but also into many debates about what early modern drama tells us about early modern vectors of identity. Was Gew a simian exception that proved the rule? Was he really a baboon? Was he human? Or, in a perverse riff on that ultimate Shakespearean twist, was he a human actor, playing an ape, playing a human? Gew, the “blind baboon,” forces us to consider such questions. In the remaining space of this essay, I survey a few of accounts of early modern baboonizing in order to argue that although these moments offer few clues, if any, to the species of their performers, they do have much to tell us about the choreographed tropes of gender in the period and how such tropes resonated on stage.

**He- and She-baboons**

Baboonizing, as a theatrical trope, depended upon broader cultural ideas about baboons and about their bodies. As the philological survey above suggests, the creatures were associated both with mimicry and with their excessively long “tools” and “tails.” Works like Skelton’s mid-sixteenth-century poem, “Defense Against the Lusty Garnesche,” and John Taylor’s early seventeenth-century poem, “Taylor’s Revenge,” equally corroborate the association between baboons and a certain kind of “bawdiness.”25 Likewise, early modern naturalists often commented extensively on these qualities that rendered them both “familiar” and “ridiculous” to human spectators.26 Edward Topsell, who drew upon the work of Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner in his influential *History of Foure-Footed Beastes*, thought baboons had a remarkable ability to imitate “all” human actions, both playful and violent: they “leape, singe, drieue
Wagons,” and are capable of “raigning and whipping the Horses very artificially” and they are “as venerous as goats.”

Topsell’s evidence is, of course, dubious, but it demonstrates the extent to which humans and baboons were intimately linked with one another. For example, though Topsell warns women of baboons’ rapaciousness, he quickly notes that baboons also love little children—so much so that they will “suffer” to suckle them. He reports that some even say that baby baboons will suck human breasts, if held in the right way and given the opportunity. Such (undoubtedly imagined) reports of baboon breast-feeding are offered as instances of intimacy, proof of baboon love for human children and human love for baby baboons: she-baboons nurture children with their breasts.

He-baboons do something else entirely. Topsell concludes the segment by describing at length one particular male baboon’s behavior at the French court. Noting that the creature had the head of a dog and the body of a man, and that he ate his meat so modestly “that any man would think he had understood human conditions,” Topsell emphasizes that this baboon was exceptional in his remarkable ability to perform human masculinity: “he stood up like a man, and sat down like a man. He discerned men and women asunder, and above all loved the company of women and young maidens.” And, most importantly, “his genital member was greater than might match the quantity of his other parts.” The French baboon courtier, with his giant member and his love of maidens, tropes manliness perfectly, demonstrating the importance of the gendered choreography of sexuality in understanding—and aping—“human conditions.” Even Topsell’s baboons—whether lactating and loving, rapacious and violent, or sly and French—reveal the important, implicit assumptions about gender that infused even most fantastic accounts of sexual choreography: baboons were valued for their ability to mimic tropes of gender in performing human gestures of intimacy. Topsell’s (and Gesner’s) argument about baboon mimicry implicitly depends upon an assumption about shared material histories. Their text depends upon the assumption that baboons easily learned gendered tropes of intimacy from humans and hints at the possibility of the reverse: that humans also learned tropes of performance from baboons. This, I argue, connects to broader discussions of gender and performance on London’s purportedly all-male stages.

Topsell’s text emphasizes that early modern cultural ideas about
baboons depended upon imagined intimacies between human and baboon bodies. Plays like Lording Barry’s *Ram-Alley: or Merry Tricks*, John Cooke’s *The City Gallant*, and Shakespeare’s *Two Noble Kinsmen* staged such notions, connecting animal bodies with human tropes of gender in London’s performance spaces. Ram Alley, for example, was one such space where humans (adult and children) and animals (perhaps also adult and children) offered knavish entertainments. Known for its illicit entertainments, the street (like the private theater nearby), was nestled deep in Whitefriars liberty, a paradoxical space known for lawlessness yet also defined by its relationship to Temple Hall, the legal district of early modern London. As the titular pun of the play suggests, its many sexual jokes relied on this imagined and real spatial location: the play’s “merry tricks” are associated with the alley’s *meretrices* or prostitutes. The play thus links bawdy performances by boy actors in the theater with those by humans and animals that occurred nearby.

First performed in 1607–8 by the Children of the King’s Revels at Whitefriars, a theater known for staging bawdy plays geared towards a queer, male “early modern sexual minority,” the play and its many jests about sexual surveillance depend on its doubled alleys. Mimicry defined the theatrical culture of Whitefriars, so much so that that Mary Bly, in her study of the company’s queer repertory, argues that it could only be staged at Whitefriars. Its unique location allowed the theater to develop a particular kind of humor for a particular kind of audience member. Laughter was integral to this process: the play’s humor forged important, erotic bonds between playwrights, actors, and audience members within the intimate realm of Whitefriars.

In her review of Bly’s argument about Whitefriars, literary critic Patricia Cahill wonders, however, about the effect of that laughter and if the inclusiveness (and intimacy) on which it rests precludes certain questions from being asked, particularly those that focus on the darker aspects of this queer history such as aggressiveness, violence, and shame. The play’s investment in baboonizing occupies one such negative space. Laughter, of course, is one of the important markers of humanity in the period: baboons, like other animals, were believed to be able to “mawkishly” mimic human emotion but they were not believed to be able to genuinely laugh on their own accord. Laughter implied human judgment, a bodily reaction of a rational mind. The play’s inclusive, queer laughter
may have redefined the space, but it did so at the expense of the animals (and perhaps also at the expense of the boy actors and sex workers) in its midst.

Two performances of baboonizing occur in Ram Alley. The first is offered willingly by the play’s cross-dressed “heroine”; the second is demanded of an older Captain (under threat of a whip). Early in the play, Constantia, a wealthy, chaste gentlewoman, disguises herself as her beloved’s male page in order to dissuade him from his attempts to marry a rich widow. Though Constantia is honorable, she seems to relish her cross-dressed disguise, particularly the way it allows her to perform a certain kind of bawdy humor. Her very first lines in the play, for example, pun overtly on her ability to fill her codpiece, undoubtedly drawing attention to the surprising presence of the boy actor’s tool beneath the purportedly empty codpiece (sig. A3 r). Constantia’s supposedly absent “tool” is also conjured early on in the play through her relation of an obscene tale of baboonizing she offers to her lover as news that supplies the “city’s discourse” (sig. B v).

It goes something like this: The woman, like other city “dames,” was “much desirous to see the Baboones doe their newest tricks” (sig. B v). Inspired by their performance, the woman wakes the next morning, naked in her bed, and begins to mimic their behavior, striving to get her right leg “across her shoulder” and over her head (sig. B v). She succeeds at first but quickly gets stuck, “tumbling from her bed upon the floor” (ibid). Her maid, hearing her scream, comes to her aid and discovers her on the floor “trust up like a foote-ball.” The maid then screams for help as well, believing that her mistress has broken her neck. Her husband and a good number of his neighbors venture into the bedroom and survey the woman on the floor. One neighbor think she’s bewitched, another, possessed by the devil, still a third, that she is being punished for her pride, since the devil saw fit to put her head where “her rump” should be. Finally, Constantia (in disguise as the male page) steps in and helps the woman untangle herself.

Ashamed, the woman reports what truly happened. As her husband listens in amazement, one neighbor quips that she should take the act on the road, for “if her husband would leave his trade, and carry his wife about to do this tricke in publicke, she’d get more gold then all the Babones, calues with two tayles, or motions whatsoeuer,” (sig. B2 r). Constantia’s report of this complicated tale elicits a simple response from her lover: he simply concludes that
she "is a wag" herself, i.e., a knavish prankster (sig. B2 r). The pun works in precisely the ways that Bly has identified as characteristic of the Whitefriars' repertory: it is a misogynistic ruse that displays the talents of the play's cross-dressed (yet purportedly chaste) heroine. Such mimicry is ludicrous: the joke, of course, is about a naked housewife in a compromising position.

And yet such a reading does not quite account for the tripled reference to baboonery at the heart of the performance. Within the erotically charged imaginative realm of "Ram Alley," the baboon's merry tricks leads to the wife's merry tricks, which quickly collapse into the area's real association with meretrices (or prostitutes). Add to this the boy actor's own performance as Constantia, cross-dressed as a boy page, which probably involved elements of baboonizing as well. The play's complex staging of simian mimicry undoubtedly fostered audience desire for the boy actor's body (perhaps in an equally compromising position), but it also associated such desire with an appreciation for baboon performance (and the housewives they inspire).

One might argue that this moment of baboonizing is erotically charged because it is associated with public humiliation. Later in the play, Boutcher, Constantia's beloved, commands a similar performance of a young braggart soldier in a pub. Perhaps moved by the earlier tale's emphasis on humiliation, Boutcher demands that the Captain raise his "snout" in the air and perform tricks equal to "three baboons" (sig. G2 r). Goaded into playing the part of the baboon, the Captain warns him that his tricks are "dangerous," and agrees to baboonize not out of fear of assault by Boutcher and his mates, but "for a loue [he] beare unto these tricks" (sig. G2 v). His insistence of the danger of the performance hints of the potential for violence (then and now) when working with wild animals on stage. But the performance lacks teeth: the joke is that the "outlandish" creature from "Catia" does not skip when Boutcher's friend "shakes his whip," or "stirreth not, moveth not, waggeth not" for the great Turke or pope of Rome. When asked to perform for the town of Geneva, the "baboon" prays like a "Puritan" (sig. G2 v). It is easy to grasp why this might inspire laughter in Whitefriars: even a baboon can mock a Puritan. The punch line of the joke, however, does not capture the gestures and tropes of the Captain on stage: what of his "love" for performing baboon tricks, even at the threat of a shaking whip? Ram Alley thus posits that humans might have enjoyed aping animal others even as it links such performances
with an eroticized humiliation. In their absurd mimicry of them, the Captain and Constance’s baboonizing momentarily disrupt assumptions about bodily power based on both species and gender distinctions, so much so that the mere presence of a baboon on stage inspired a host of jokes about masculinity and sexual prowess.

Conclusion: Shakespeare’s Baboons

Such performances resonated especially loudly in a space like Whitefriars, designed to cater to audiences expecting a sexually inflected style of performance. But baboonizing also occurred in other performance venues in London. We might read, for example, the schoolmaster’s many warnings to Bavian about how to perform the morris dance in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Two Noble Kinsmen* as commenting on such wide-scale appeal for mimicry, offering something akin to Hamlet’s advice to the actors. He warns Bavian to “carry your tail without offence,” “tumble with audacity and manhood,” and to “bark . . . with judgement” (3.5.34–38). The joke, of course, is that the schoolmaster asks Bavian to play the baboon as if it were human, a seemingly impossible task, unless, of course, the actor was human. Yet, in doing so, the play also suggests that the actor is something less than human, connecting the mimetic ridiculousness of baboons themselves.

The Schoolmaster choreographs the “merry rout,” “rabble,” “company,” “or chorus,” into a “morris,” and in doing so, creates gendered pairs of performers: the Lord of May and his lady Bright; the Chambermaid and the Servingman; the Host and his spouse; the traveler and the tapster; the “beest-eating Clown;” a he-fool and the jailor’s daughter as a “she-fool,” and finally, “the babion with long tail and eke long tool” (3.5. 127–34). Bavian’s “rude,” “raw,” and “muddy” performance as a baboon seemingly culminates in the appearance of two baboons on stage. The baboon is thus merely one more contradiction staged in the dance-within-the-play. Along with a “famous clown,” “fools” and a babion with a long tail and eke long tool,” the stage directions note that a “he-baboon” and “she-baboon” join in the procession (3.5.138–40). Shakespeare’s (and Fletcher’s) baboon barks with judgment even as it offers a rude, raw, and muddy performance.
While it is tempting to solve the problem of Bavian in Shakespeare’s *Two Noble Kinsmen* through these gendered performances, insisting that such distinctions of a “he-baboon” and a “she-baboon” hint at a human body beneath the lifelike apparel, my final example of baboonizing complicates such a conclusion. It is often cited that, in a performance in 1615, Thomas Greene, a famous clown in the Queen Anne’s Men, also played the part of a baboon “with a long tail and a long tool.” Believed to cite both Shakespeare’s play and Chapman’s *Memorable Masque at Middle Temple and Lincoln Hall* (1613), which delighted crowds with the performances of “a dozen little boys” dressed as baboons dressed as humans, Greene’s “baboon” purportedly delighted the crowd in 1615 with an even ruder, rawer, and perhaps muddier rendition of baboon bawdry.

The problem, however, as theater historians note, is that Greene died in 1612. Who or what played the part of “Greene’s baboon”? Did Greene play the part of a baboon prior to his death? Did another actor, in 1615, ape Greene’s performance? Did a baboon ape Greene, who aped a baboon? Tales like Gew, Bavion, and Greene’s many baboons seem to raise more questions than we can confidently answer; it is likely that we will never know who or what played these baboons. Though it is tempting to try to correct the confusing legacies of Gew, Babion, and Greene’s many apes, such an impulse ignores the fact that their careers were all defined by their ability to blur the line between “aping” and “acting.” Early modern London’s many stages offer one kind of space where, to paraphrase Donna Harraway, many species met in violent and intimate ways. Given this fact, Harraway’s insistence that animals and humans exist in “situated histories” and interrelated networks of nature and culture, where “all the actors become who they are in the dance of relating . . .” seems almost moot when read against the histories of these performers. Their legacies, now mostly lost, gesture towards the ways in which aping was key to the renaissance and perhaps to the ways in which simians were as well.

**Notes**

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1. In Chapman’s *Syr Gyles Goosecap* begins with two characters mistaking another for the “great baboon, that was to be seen in Southwark” (1.1.10), suggesting that baboons were part of the many theatrical attractions that defined London’s outer liberties. In the anonymously written, Jonsonian inspired *Every Woman in Her Humor*, Getica, herself a bawd, mentions seeing performing baboons along with “*Julius Caesar* played by the mamets” or puppets (5.1.6–9); both performances mark her taste for imitative humor. In Jonson’s *Volpone*, the English travelers Peregrine and Sir-Politic discuss “baboons,” and their ability to act as “spies,” concluding that they “had their hand in a French plot or two” but ultimately were “too given to Women” (2.1.86–91) in *Selected Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. Johanna Procter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 135–292. Dekker’s *Jests to Make You Merry* (London, 1607) describes a maid’s trick on a gentleman, who believes she is like “Bankes’ horse,” the “baboons,” or “Captain Pold’s motions” (a famous puppeteer), sig. C4 v, whereas Samuel Rowland’s “Strange sighted Traveler,” in his *Humors Looking Glass* (London, 1608) lists London’s famous attractions, including its “babonnes,” sig. D3 r. I discuss *Ram Alley* and *The City Gallant* later in this article. Finally, Iago declares that he would rather change his humanity with “a baboon” than drown himself over the love of a woman in the opening act of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, while the witches in his *Macbeth* call for baboons’ blood in their diabolical potion in act 4, connecting the animals’ performances in London’s paratheatrical spaces with the violent histories of baited monkeys, screaming in London’s bear gardens. For more on simian performers, see W. Strunk Jr., “Elizabethan Showman’s Ape,” *Modern Language Notes* 32, no. 4 (1917): 215–21, 216.


3. These creatures, known today as *macaca sylvanus*, were well known in the classical world and were often kept as pets. William Coffman, *The Ape in Antiquity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1931), 162. However, it is likely that no northern European had seen a living Barbary ape until the late twelfth century, when Portuguese travelers began to bring live specimens north from the tip of the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa.


5. There is scant evidence of simians in early modern England, but it documents their presence. As early as 1443, Eton College prohibited scholars, fellows, chaplains, and college servants from keeping “a monkey,” or any other “rare and rapacious” animal, NRA 31984, Eton College 5483, ms 300, part 28, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, accessed on July 25, 2012. In Newington ward, during the first quarter of the sixteenth century, William Rutland was fined for owning a “nape,” which had bitten local children. Canterbury Cathedral Archives, CC/JQ/302/x; likewise, in Canterbury, Master Roderam was fined for numerous incidents in
which his “ape” attacked local women and children, Canterbury Cathedral Archives, CC/JQ/352/5. Naval records also corroborate their presence, especially in the late seventeenth century: In 1677, a monkey owned by Lt. Robert Thomson attacked a child, who subsequently “fell ill with fright,” the child’s father attacked the monkey with a knife, National Archives, ADM 106/324, fol. G-J.

In 1690, the estate of Capt. Henry Beale lists his monkey, West Yorkshire Archive Service, SpSt 6/2/2/9. In 1697, the estate of Col. Russell, paid Mrs. Owin £21 for the “dieting and nursing of monkeys,” Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, DR 37/2/ Box 98/498.


13. The term “jacknape” became widespread in late fifteenth-century literature as a popular, and opprobrious, nickname for William de la Pole, which punned on his badge of the clog and chain, similar to those that chained monkeys. By the late sixteenth century, the term also referred to a “monstrous” variety of marigold, so named by “vulgar” women because it visually reminded them of jackanapes on horseback in bear gardens. See John Gerard, Herbal or General History of Plants (London, 1633), sig. Qqq 2 v; Randle Holme, Academy of Armory, (Chester, 1688), 172.

14. The term was an insult: for example, in 1606, Edward Hills of Dorset was accused of sleeping through church and he replied by calling the parson a “jackanape.” Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, D/5/28/9.

15. Caius calls Evans a jackanapes three times: “You, jacknape, give-a this letter to Sir Hugh. . . . I will cut his troat in de Park, and I will teach a scuryv jackanape priest to meddle or make” (1.4.95–96). Later, he vows to kill Evans for his advances on Anne: “[b]y Gar, me vill kill de priest, for he speak for a jackanapes to Anne Page” (2.3. 71–72). Finally, he insults him directly, linking cowards, dogs, and apes in metonymic and material chains: “By Gar, you are de coward, de jack-dog, john-ape” (3.1.72). For more about boy actors, captivity, and performance, see Amanda Bailey, “ ‘Bought my boye’: The Boy as Accessory on the Early Modern

16. London was not the only town to do so; records from the Mayors Court Books indicate that in Norwich in 1605, two baboons were licensed to perform in the city's streets. See Archie Tyson's introduction to Every Woman In Her Humor (New York: Garland, 1980), 16. See Cotgrave, French and English Dictionary (London, 1650), sig. H5 v.


20. For more on boy actors, see Bailey, "'Bought my Boy.'"


27. Ibid., 3.

28. This connection resonates in other contemporaneous representations of women and the "all-male" stage; see, for instance, Natasha Korda on Dutch women and tropes of aping in Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern Stage (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 125.

29. Recent critical approaches to the play's eroticism have focused on its urban topography, fusing the imaginative world of the play with that of the surrounding location near the theater. See Andrew Griffin, "Ram Alley and Female Spectatorship." Early Theatre 9, no. 2 (2006): 91-97. See also Mary Bly, "Playing the Tourist

30. Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins*, 120.


34. All citations are from Lording Barry, *Ram-Alley* (London, 1612).

35. Critics debate both the play’s performance history and its authorship: it was most likely performed by the King’s Men at Blackfriars in 1613–14, and since the 1970s, it is believed to be the work of Shakespeare. All citations are from William Shakespeare, “Two Noble Kinsmen,” in *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition, 2nd Ed.*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: WW Norton, 2008), 3203–86.


37. The second antimasque of Beaumont’s *The Masque of Inner Temple and Grayes Inne*, which was performed at Whitehall in 1612, also included a morris procession with both a “hee baboon” and a “shee baboon,” both “appareled to the life.” See Helge Køkeritz, “The Beast-Eating Clown, The Two Noble Kinsman, 3.5.131” in *Modern Language Notes* 61.8 (1946): 532–35, 534.


42. Ibid., 25.