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‘She tooke armes her selfe’: Violence, Propaganda, and Social Criticism in *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*

Submitted for the Degree of Master of Letters

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Abstract

The Life of Long Meg of Westminster, registered with the London Stationers’ Company in 1590, is a short book about a tall, fighting woman. Often treated as an unimportant, ephemeral text, scholars of early modern English literature, especially feminist critics, have used the central character to provide context for works about or including fighting women. Yet little scholarly work has focused on the book itself, which warrants further attention because when read in its various contexts it shows signs of enmeshment with contemporary literature and historical events.

Approaching the text generally from post-revisionist feminist and historicist critical viewpoints, this thesis examines the jest-biography for what it reveals about early modern gendered concepts of violence, through its use of swords, warfare, and codes and language of honour and fighting. Despite past critical attention that has focused on female subjection or, conversely, ‘power’ in the text, the jest-biography may be revealed, intriguingly, as both questioning and reaffirming conventional social roles for women and men.

Examining the jest-biography at two points in time shows that the text has the potential to have different meanings depending on when it was read. Around 1590, when the text was first registered with the Stationers’ Company, it may be understood as referring to events of the late sixteenth century, such as the English defeat of the Spanish Armada, and is referred to in literary debates including the Martin Marprelate controversy. In 1620, the text may be interpreted as forming part of the English *querelle des femmes* debates printed around the same time. By studying the instances of gendered violence in the jest-biography within their literary and historic contexts, it becomes clear that the text is not just an ephemeral jestbook, but rather has the potential to be interpreted as a work of propaganda and social criticism.

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A note on texts: Although nearly all original spellings have been preserved in the body of the thesis, U/V, F/S, I/J, UU/W and VV/W have been modernised where necessary for clarity. Spellings are uniformly preserved in the notes and bibliography. When necessary, if Ns or Ms have been dropped in the text, they have been included in italics.

Introduction

On 18 August 1590, Thomas Gubbins and Thomas Newman registered *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* with the London Stationers' Company[1], laying claim to a short book about a sword-wielding, cross-dressing, extraordinarily tall ('long') woman: a character at the intersection of history and fiction. Long Meg has many adventures in the often-reprinted, anonymous text: the plot follows her from her arrival in London to work as a servant in an inn, to her transition into a local cross-dressing hero(ine), her joining the English army first as a laundress, and then fighting as a soldier, to her marriage and proprietorship of her own inn. Throughout, the text shows her as having an intriguing duality: a woman with the capabilities of a man; and an historic character with semi-mythic, folk-hero status.

Contexts: The 'Real' Long Meg; Print History and Paratexts; Popularity and Survival

Long Meg of Westminster seems to have been a real person who became a popular subject of entertainment in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, and Bernard Capp appears to have found evidence of her. In May 1561, a woman named Margaret Barnes, 'otherwise called Long Megg', appeared voluntarily before the Bridewell Governors (the men tasked with punishing 'unruly women') in a bid to clear her name, and that of her establishment, from accusations of involvement with prostitution. Barnes' inn seems to have had a bad reputation: several of her associates had been accused of various illegal activities, in addition to prostitution (in one case, abandonment of an infant). Barnes was given safe conduct for the meeting with the

[1] Gubbins worked in publishing from 1587-1615; Newman from 1587-1592. They seem to have worked together frequently: while there are few records of Newman's output, out of the seventeen times his name is mentioned, nine times are in association with Gubbins. Their interest in the Long Meg jest-biography is consistent with the rest of their catalogue: 'The type of literature they published suggests that both men were interested in pamphlet literature and collections of fabliaux.' Geoffrey Creigh and Jane Belfield, *The Cobler of Caunterburie and Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie. Medieval and Renaissance Texts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 113.

Bridewell Governors, but 'the matter was so vehemently justified against her, that she could not denye the same…' Her reputation seems to have been seriously threatened or damaged; she soon moved to an establishment in Redriff (Rotherhithe), Southwark, which put her outside the jurisdiction of the authorities of London and Westminster. Even so, she was again accused of harbouring prostitutes in 1562.[2] William Vaughan writes in 1600 that 'It is said, that lo*ng* Meg of Westminster kept always 20. Courtezans in her house, who*m* by their pictures she sold to all commers'.[3] *Hollands Leaguer*, printed in 1632, refers to a '*infamous* house of open Hospitality' which was 'renowned for the memory of that famous *Amazon, Longa Margarita*'.[4]

Long Meg inspired several (known) pieces of literature, including two ballads, a play, and several printings of jest-biographies. *A Ballad of longe Meg of Westminster* was entered into the Stationer's Register on 27 August 1590 by Roger Ward, just nine days after the first known jest-biography of Long Meg was registered. A second ballad, entitled *the madd merye pranckes of Long Megg of Westminster* was registered to John Danter on 14 March 1595, neither of which have known surviving copies.[5] A play, *Long Meg of Westminster,* was performed by the Admiral's Men on 14 February 1594, and was put on a recorded sixteen times between 1594-1597; it is now lost.[6] This lost material gestures to the character's cultural importance, but it is

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[2] Bernard Capp, 'Long Meg of Westminster: A Mystery Solved', *Notes & Queries* 45 (1998): 302–304. Guildhall Library, London, Bridewell Hospital Court books, I (1559-62), fo. 135.
[3] William Vaughan, *The Golden-Groue Moralized in Three Bookes…* (London, By Simon Stafford, dwelling on Adling hill, 1600), P3.
[4] Nicholas Goodman, *Hollands Leaguer* (London, Printed by Augustine Mathewes for Richard Barnes, 1632), F.
[5] Neither are mentioned in Carole Livingston's comprehensive study of extant sixteenth century ballads. Carole Rose Livingston, 'The extant English and Scottish Broadside Ballads of the Sixteenth Century: a Catalogue and Essay (Music, Song, Censorship)' (PhD. Diss., New York University, 1986). https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2186/docview/303509712?accountid=13042.
[6] Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 70. Patricia Gartenberg, 'Shakespeare's Roaring Girls', *Notes and Queries* 27, no. 2 (April 1, 1980): 174. Gartenberg states that there were 32 performances of the play, but records from Philip Henslowe's *Diary* and the Lost Plays Database note 16 performances between 1594-1597. It is unclear from what source Gartenberg derived the number of performances she notes. Walter M. Greg (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary, part I* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1904), 21-22, 24-25, 49, 50, 51). https://lostplays.folger.edu/Long_Meg_of_Westminster#Performance_Records.

through the many versions of the jest-biography that we get a sense of Long Meg's remarkable literary longevity.

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Classifying works of sixteenth and seventeenth century literature is often challenging, and *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1620), the text that this thesis will primarily be exploring, is no different. Does the anonymous author intend for this to be a joke book? A folk history? Both? The term that best fits this work is 'jest-biography', which can be considered a sub-genre of jestbook that focuses on the story of the life of a central, often historic, character. This classification befits texts grounded in the history (however much embellished) of early modern England, which are also supposed to be humorous, and follow a plot arc instead of being made up of discrete jests. Although critics refer to *The Life of Long Meg* in different ways, F. P. Wilson categorises the texts as jest-biographies in his survey of early modern English jestbooks, so this thesis will follow suit.[7]

The Long Meg jest-biography has eighteen distinct early bibliographical identities, existing in separate recorded editions or printings from 1590 (the first recorded version), 1620 (earliest extant edition), 1635, 1636, 1638, 1650?, c. 1680 (a fragment, containing chapters 7-14 only), 1690?, c. 1711-30?, c. 1740-70?, c. 1750-70?, 1750?, c. 1755, 1760?, 1775? (Newcastle), 1775? (London), 1780?, and 1785?. There are also later editions or antiquarian reprints (usually of the 1635 edition) from 1800, 1805, 1810, 1813, 1815, 1816, 1820, 1835, 1871, 1872, 1880, 1963, and 1966. *The Life of Long Meg* was not only a Renaissance phenomenon; it seems to have

[7] F.P. Wilson, *Shakespearian and Other Studies*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969), 321.

had cultural resonance or sparked antiquarian interest well into the eighteenth-century (there is a copy of the c. 1690 printing in Samuel Pepys' library).[8]

This thesis will focus on the earliest known versions of the jest-biography, examining the context of the lost 1590 text, and examining the earliest surviving text of 1620.[9] The latter has only one extant copy (which is not readily available online) and has been overlooked by scholars in favour of a copy that has a forged date of 1582, and the extant 1635 edition.[10] As sections of the 1620 text seem to refer to events and literature of the 1580s and 1590s, the earlier texts seem to have been preserved to a great extent in the later ones. Because the first registered version of the *Long Meg* jest-biography is lost, it is impossible to determine the exact timeline of the jest-biography and precisely what changes may or may not have been made between its composition, its registration in 1590, and the publication of the first extant version in 1620. The two earliest extant versions of the text (1620 and 1635) are themselves very similar, so it seems the story did not develop or change very much over time. The later published versions of the jest-biography include much of the same text, although some chapters are not present (and how the shortened versions of the text have influenced some critical work will be discussed in this thesis).

Some library records, bibliographies, and critical works refer to a 1582 edition of the Long Meg jest-biography. In fact, the British Library-held copy noted as being from 1582 has a title page and colophon cut from Claude de Sainlien's *Frenche schoolemaister* (dated 1582); they are pasted onto what is noted as the English Short Title Catalogue's c. 1650 Long Meg

[8] C. S. Knighton, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge*. Supplementary Series. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (363(26)).
[9] It is possible that the registered 1590 version of the text was unpublished at the time, but it is more likely that any printed copies have been lost.
[10] A copy of the digitised version of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1620) was requested from Princeton University Library for this research.

text.[11] Although intriguing that someone attempted to 'create' an earlier version of the jest-biography, as the forgery has been established, the '1582' version will only be discussed in terms of how the mistaken date has influenced critical discourse about *The Life of Long Meg*.[12]

Ownership of the print rights to the Long Meg jest-biography changed hands several times in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. After Gubbins (fl. 1587-1615) and Newman (c.1564–1594) entered the jest-biography into the Stationers' Register in 1590, the rights to it were transferred from Edward White (fl. 1605-1624) to Thomas Pavier (d. 1625) and John Wright (fl. 1602-1658) on 13 December 1620.[13] It is unclear how the text changed hands between Gubbins and Newman and White between its registration in 1590 and the first extant version of 1620. The rights were transferred from Pavier's widow to Edward Brewster (fl. 1616-1640) and Robert Bird (fl. 1623-1639) on 4 August 1626. Another transfer happened from John Wright to Robert Bird on 29 April 1634 – and another from Bird and Brewster to John Wright, Junior (fl. 1635-1640) on 13 June 1642.[14]

The number of recorded transfers in the Stationer's Register suggests that although the Long Meg jest-biography could easily be classed as or considered an ephemeral book, it was important enough to multiple publishers to protect their rights. Given the fragile quality of the paper of many extant printings, and the fact that publishers did not always register their texts, it is likely that there were even more versions printed and lost. The earliest surviving version (1620) was printed under the names of Edward Allde (the printer) and Edward White (the

[11] STC (2nd ed.), 17782: 'Copy catalogued has title page and colophon forged from STC 6749: *The Frenche schoolemaister* (1582). The centre of the title page has been cut out and the title "Long Meg" written in manuscript. The imprint on the title page reads: Imprinted at London for Abraham Veale, dwellinge in Pauls church yeard at the signe of the Lambe.'
[12] F.P Wilson noted in 1969 that the ca. 1650 edition had a 'faked title-page' from 1582. F.P. Wilson, *Shakespearian and Other Studies*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969), 321.
[13] SRO7323
[14] F. P. Wilson, 'The English Jestbooks of the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 1939): 155.

stationer or 'publisher') who transferred the rights in the same year the text was dated as being printed. As Edward White senior had died in late 1612 or 1613[15], a family member, probably his son Edward junior, transferred the rights to the jest-biography, along with eleven other texts, to Thomas Pavier and John Wright on 13 December 1620.[16]

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Paratextual elements of *The Life of Long Meg* are crucial to its interpretation, so the use of the word 'preface' throughout this thesis should be clarified. The modern concept of this distinct prefatory material would be a 'foreword', but that term was not used in this way until 1842.[17] Gérard Genette might term this material an 'allographic preface', or a preface with 'a separation between the sending of the text (the author) and the sender of the preface (the preface-writer)'.[18] So, for the sake of clarity, this thesis will refer to the introductory material included with the jest-biography as the 'preface' to *The Life of Long Meg*.

The physical appearance of the paratextual elements of the 1620 printing of *Long Meg* suggest it may have been published with an intent to generate antiquarian interest: the title page and preface are set in roman font, and the bulk of the text in black letter. It may be possible to extrapolate some meaning from the use of particular fonts in *Long Meg* – the publisher/stationer was seeking a visual separation between the preface and the text and could be referencing back

[15] Nadia Bishai notes that 'Edward White senior's final entry in the *Register* is 12 August, 1612. The next White-related entry is that of Sara White, 'mistres white wydowe, dated 12 January, 1613'. Nadia Bishai, "At the Signe of the Gunne: Titus Andronicus, the London Book Trade, and the Literature of Crime, 1590-1615", in *Titus Out of Joint: Reading the Fragmented Titus Andronicus,* ed. Liberty S. Stanavage and Paxton Hehmeyer (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 11.

[16] Stationers' Company (London, England), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London* (London: Stationers Company, 1877), 44. SRO7324.

[17] 'foreword, n.'. OED Online. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73263?redirectedFrom=foreword (accessed April 17, 2020).

[18] Gérard Genette, Richard Macksey, and Jane E. Lewin. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 263, https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2102/10.1017/CBO9780511549373.

in time to an older story/history, and even emphasising a particular kind of English-ness. As Zachary Lesser has argued, however, the kinds of typefaces chosen for early modern English texts may not always have been intended to give meaning – often fonts were chosen for practical reasons: it may have been easier for printers to keep a text set in black letter, rather than change it to roman; and headers, and other prefatory material, were often set in roman font, possibly for ease of reading.[19] Yet, even as Lesser argues that ascribing social meanings to fonts at this time may be reductive (black letter was used for law books as well as ballads, so it does not necessarily point to a text being 'popular culture'), he does persuasively argue for black letter's 'Englishness':

> …one of the dominant meanings of black letter in this period, I am suggesting, was the powerful combination of Englishness (the "English letter") and past-ness (the "antiquated" appearance of black letter by the seventeenth century) that I call typographic nostalgia. It is this combination that allows black letter to evoke the traditional English community, and a large part of what scholars are really discovering when they perceive "popular culture" in black letter is the construction of this nostalgia in the very texts they are reading.[20]

Typographically, the 1620 version of *The Life of Long Meg* may be deliberately presenting the text as from an older era, as well as emphasising Meg as an English folk heroine.

The Life of Long Meg's paratextual elements, especially the preface, both clarify and obfuscate an intended audience by giving the reader direct instruction on how to interpret the text. The dedication of *Long Meg* is 'To the Gentlemen Readers', which may suggest that a high-class readership was anticipated, or at least an audience who aspired to gentlemen's status; equally, a lower-status audience may be mocked by such a dedication. Likewise, readers are

[19] Zachary Lesser, 'Typographic Nostalgia: Playreading, Popularity and the Meanings of Black Letter', *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*. ed. Marta Straznicky (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 103.
[20] Lesser, 'Typographic Nostalgia', 107.

directed to use 'Long Meg as a Whetstone to mirth after your serious busines', suggesting that the text was expected to be escapist – either ingenuously or disingenuously.[21]

Although it is tempting to approach *Long Meg* as a way of learning about the lives of 'average' or lower-class urban English people (she is first a servant in, then the proprietor of, a London inn), or a popular culture text written for the lower classes by one of their own, jestbooks were often the products of the highly educated classes. As Linda Woodbridge explains:

> Walter Smith, who wrote *Twelve Merry Jests of the Widow Edith*, was a member of Sir Thomas More's household. The author of the verse jest "How a sergeant would learn to be a friar" was Sir Thomas More himself…This is not popular culture. Such authors wrote *about* common people, but did not speak *for* them.[22]

The anonymous author of the preface uses dog Latin for humorous effect: 'gentlemen' are reminded that 'Cicero would oft Delirare after his weighty affaire'.[23] As much as the references to Classical authors (Virgil and Cicero) and 'gentlemen' in the 1620 jest-biography's preface may suggest one kind of readership for the jest-biography, even if the book is intended as 'light' reading, it must be kept in mind that texts like these had some social mobility. Tessa Watt writes that:

> As literacy increased, the market for cheap print expanded, and there may sometimes have been gaps between authorial intention and audience consumption. But the buyers remained socially variegated: in the early seventeenth century gentry collectors were still copying ballads into their commonplace books; probably the same ballads which were found on the walls of 'honest alehouses', in 'the shops of artificers' and in 'the cottages of poor husbandmen'.[24]

The Life of Long Meg, then, should be read with caution, as it neither accurately represents the life of the average, poor, or otherwise disenfranchised person, nor should it be read as being

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[21] Anon., *The life of Long Meg of Westminster: containing the mad merry pranks shee played in her life time, not onely in performing sundry quarrels with divers ruffins about London, but also how valiantly shee behaved her selfe in the warres of Bolloigne* (London: Printed by Edward Allde for Edward White, 1620), sig. A3-A3^{v}.
[22] Linda Woodbridge, 'Jest Books, the Literature of Roguery, and the Vagrant Poor in Renaissance England', *English Literary Renaissance* 33, no. 2 (2003): 210.
[23] 'Delirare' roughly translates as 'crazy'. *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. A3v.
[24] Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 3.

written specifically for them. Margaret Spufford notes that the consumption of these texts by the servant class also cannot be ruled out, despite the possibly of derisive laughter at their expense:

> ...the aspirations of the servants who formed the bottom of the social pyramid are reflected and catered for. Even if the reflection is sometimes distorted by laughter, it seems likely that these 'small merry books' were intended to be read by the servants themselves. *Long Meg*, the Lancashire lass who first made her appearance in 1582, made her career as a servant in a London inn.[25]

The book, then, could well have been read and enjoyed across the social spectrum. As a key aspect of this thesis is examination of the use of violence, the considerable knowledge of duelling and forms of violence and weaponry depicted in the jest-biography suggests authorship, or at least input, by someone well educated (and wealthy) enough to have studied swordplay. However, such references do not necessarily suggest an intended audience: contemporary playwrights, including Shakespeare in the opening of *Romeo and Juliet* (printed 1597), assumed some knowledge of duelling practice and etiquette in audiences that reached across social strata – the humour of biting thumbs in act one, scene one depends on an audience's understanding that the servants are playing with the (duel) etiquette of their masters. Certainly, higher status readers were interested in the lower classes, just as the lower were interested in the higher. Pamphlets about the London criminal underclass and 'canting' books (works explaining the codes and vocabularies of criminals) were popular, including the late sixteenth-century 'coney-catching' pamphlets by Robert Greene, and Thomas Dekker's *Lanthorne and Candle-Light* of 1608; the material Dekker drew on was reprinted a few times in the early seventeenth century.[26] Similarly, the most effective propaganda or social criticism does not present itself as such – and, indeed, this is simply another ambiguity in the rich tapestry that is *Long Meg.* The text is as contradictory

[25] Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-century England* (London: Methuen, 1981), 59-60.
[26] 3.1 Canting Lexicography, John Considine, *Ashgate Critical Essays on Early English Lexicographers: vol. 4, The Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2017).

as the idea of Meg herself: a patriotic folk heroine in the text, who was possibly a brothel-keeper in reality.

The preface to *Long Meg* intentionally situates it in a well-known tradition of prose histories and tales of heroism, as well as self-described jest texts, noting that 'many men have made many pleasant Jiggs; as the Jests of Robin Hood, and Bevis of South-hampton, and such others, as serve to procure mirth, and drive away melancholy: Now at last because amongst the three Doctors of health, Doctor Merry-man is not the least, and that longer lives a man of pleasant disposition, then a sadde Saturnist...'[27] Notably, both Robin Hood and Bevis of Southampton (or Hampton) are English folk-heroes, known for their martial exploits. Both books were published in editions around the same time as the earliest registered *Long Meg* text: *Bevis of Southampton* in 1585; *A merry Jest of Robin Hood, and of his life* in 1590 (the latter also published by Edward White). The preface also seems to refer to Samuel Rowland's *Doctor Merry-Man: or Nothing but Mirth,* which has an extant copy from 1618 (two years before the earliest extant copy of *Long Meg*). Although comparable, *Doctor Merry-man* is different from Long Meg in that the book has no significant story arc, so should not be considered a jest-biography, but it does have similar, although relatively common themes: mocking the Spanish and Catholic priests, and, like *Long Meg*, it considers issues about soldiers returning from war. In Rowland's book, a beggar learns to use the language of a soldier to elicit pity, highlighting a fear about returning soldiers from war and their legitimacy (or not) as disabled people. The beggar brags that 'Most Townes in Flaunders I have learnd to name, / And am a poore distressed Souldier lame'.[28] *Long Meg* deals with the issue of returned soldiers in a different way, when, in

[27] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. A3.
[28] Samuel Rowlands, *Doctor Merry-man: Or, Nothing Bnt [sic] Mirth. Written by S.R.* (London: Printed [by J. White] for Sa. Rand, and are to be sould at his shoppe neere Holborne bridge, 1618), A2v.

chapter five of the jest-biography, Meg engages in a duel with an injured soldier, thereby restoring his self-respect as a martial man – and finding a way of rewarding him for his 'manhood' and providing him with money, without forcing him to resort to begging or charity. Meg leverages masculine honour to provide for the distressed soldier; this respect for 'real' men figures as a major theme throughout the book.

Long Meg shares significant similarities in themes and language with other contemporary jestbooks and should be considered an important part of that tradition. At the time the earlier Long Meg texts were printed, there was a relatively high concentration of similar jest texts, including *The Merry Jests and Witty Shifts of Scoggin* (c. 1565)[29], *A Pleasant History of Frier Rush* (1620), and *Tarleton's Jests* (c. 1613)[30] amongst others.[31] Scoggin's 'merry jests' are about community disruption, even as they highlight various foibles (his 'jests' include tricking women into sex, dressing as a priest to deceive 'country people' and take their money, as well as exposing a Catholic friar for keeping a 'concubine').[32] *Friar Rush*, although classified as a jest-biography by F. P. Wilson, differs greatly from *Long Meg* in that is not about a 'real' or even identifiably folkloric figure, but tells the story of a devil who disguises himself as a man and wreaks havoc on a religious order who are already gluttonous and otherwise irreligious.[33] What

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[29] In 1565-6 Thomas Colwell received a license to print the *Geystes of Skoggon*. *A transcript of the registers of the company of stationers of London*, Vol. 1 (London: Birmingham: Priv. Print., 1875-77, 1894), 134. Douglas Gray, "Scoggin [Scogan, Scogin, Skogyn], John (supp. fl. 1480), supposed court jester and author". Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 23 Jan. 2022. https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2648/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24848.

[30] STC (2nd ed.), 23683.3. Spellings of Tarlton/Tarleton's name are used interchangeably both in contemporary works and modern critical texts. This text will use the spelling 'Tarlton' but will keep any alternate spellings in quotations and text titles.

[31] For a list of jest-biographies see Wilson, 'The English Jestbooks of the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', 154-156.

[32] *Scoggins Iestes* (London: Printed by Raph Blower, dwelling in Lambert hill neare old Fish street, 1613). https://www.proquest.com/books/scoggins-iestes-wherein-is-declared-his-pleasant/docview/2264207192/se-2?accountid=13042.

[33] *The Historie of Frier Rush*… (London: [Printed] by Edw. All-de, & are to be solde by Francis Groue dwelling on Snow hill, 1626). https://www.proquest.com/books/historie-frier-rush-how-he-came-house-religion/docview/2248556312/se-2?accountid=13042.

is comparable is the clear warning about a return to Catholicism that is found in both texts, which were published in the same year. Similarly, *Robin Good-Fellow* (1639), although following a plot-arc of a life (similar to *Long Meg*), is a supernatural tale of a half-fairy trickster.[34] Long Meg seems to be different from many comparable jest texts in that her 'tricks' and 'jests' tend to be for community defence and consolidation, not for personal gain or pleasure.

Long Meg has much in common with *Tarleton's Jests*: although also based on a real person as well, *Tarleton's Jests* does not follow a discernible plot arc in the same way as *Long Meg*. The text can be categorised as a jestbook, based on the jokes and humour of Richard Tarlton, d.1588, the famous actor and clown (also an accomplished fencer), who was also (likely) a provincial immigrant to London, like Meg. *Tarleton's Jests* is also, unsurprisingly, steeped in familiar tavern humour, and the book takes familiar shots at English enemies in a similar way to *Long Meg*. As Tarlton jokes:

> In Carter-lane dwelt a mery Cobler, who being in company with Tarlton, askt him what Countrey man the divell was : quoth Tarlton, a Spaniard ; for Spaniards like the Divell, trouble the whole world.[35]

As part of what is essentially a job interview, to prove her physical capability to be a maid and enforcer at the Eagle Inn in Westminster, Meg exchanges punches with Sir James of Castile (the Spanish butt of jokes in two chapters of the jest-biography). Meg is stronger, and Will Sommers (another famous actor and clown) notes that Meg: Strikes a blow like an Oxe, for she hath strooke downe an Asse. At this they all laught, Sir James was ashamed…[36]

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[34] *Robin Good-Fellow, His Mad Prankes…*(London: [printed] By Thomas Cotes, and are to be sold by Francis Groue, at this shop on Snow-hill, neere the Sarazens head, 1639). https://www.proquest.com/books/robin-good-fellow-his-mad-prankes-merry-iests/docview/2240939079/se-2?accountid=13042.

[35] *Tarletons Iests. Drawne into these three parts...Full of Delight, Wit and honest Myrth* (London: Printed [by Thomas Snodham] for Iohn Budge, and are to be sold at his shop, at the great South doore of Paule, 1613), B4.

[36] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B3.

In addition to the jokes at the expense of foreigners, Tarlton's adversaries and locations are similar to Long Meg's, and both characters are depicted as disrupting the *status quo*, and mocking people in positions of power who misuse their authority. Both texts are mostly located in London: Tarlton takes on the city watch in two jests ('How Tarleton deceived the Watch in Fleetstreet'; 'How Tarleton answered the Watchmen comming from the Court'), as Meg does in chapter eight ('a merry Jest how shee met a Nobleman, and how she used both him and the Watch'). Tarlton also argues with watermen[37] as Long Meg does in chapter fifteen (with 'the mad pranke shee played with a waterman of Lambeth'), and gallants (young men who are generally well dressed and depicted as eager for a fight), again as Long Meg does in chapter eight. These two jest texts take aim at the same targets: men in positions of authority; aggressive youths following silly fashions; and watermen, who controlled most access to the Thames in London, who are frequently objects of humour.

Although there are obvious similarities between Tarlton and Long Meg, in their longevity as jest figures blurring the line between history and folk status, there are also striking differences, especially how their texts depict and discuss women. Long Meg is a consistent protector of women; *Tarleton's Jests* asks the reader (or listener) to laugh at his hoodwinking of a naïve country girl, to whom he promises marriage, has sex with, and then abandons ('How Tarlton deceived a Countrey wench').[38] As Peter Thomson notes:

> Invariably, women were Tarlton's butts. It is an example of folk culture merging with plebeian sexism, and the Tarlton myth should not be permitted to blur its unpleasantness.[39]

[37] *Tarletons Iests*, sig. A3v.
[38] *Ibid.*, sig. D2v.
[39] Peter Thomson, 'The True Physiognomy of a Man: Richard Tarlton and His Legend', in *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries in Performance*, ed. Edward J. Esche (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 201.

Although *The Life of Long Meg* seems to be consciously placed in this jestbook tradition, it differs from other often-reprinted texts, especially in how it employs violence, community, and patriotism, and how it describes the social roles of women.

The Life of Long Meg is unique in that it is the only known surviving identifiable jest-biography about a woman. Although there is a tradition of female comic figures in 'ephemeral' jest texts (such as Mother Bunch and the Widow Edith[40]) these are jestbooks, not jest-biographies. They are composed of distinct jests about the deeds (or misdeeds) of the women, but do not have the same kind of plot arc, nor do they narrate a life history. Although different, however, it is useful to locate Meg physically within the tradition of these jest texts about women: in the environment of the inn or tavern. Much of the action in *Long Meg* happens in a tavern setting: both the Eagle Inn where Meg is a tapster/bouncer, and then in her own inn. Tavern women in jest-literature, such as Mother Bunch and John Skelton's Elinor Rumming, are described as grotesque. Mother Bunch is famously excessive: 'she was squared into inches, being in height twelve thousand and a halfe…in bredth a eleven thousand, and two inches…when she laughed, she was heard from Algate, to the Monuments at Westminster…she was once wrung with winde in her belly, and with one blast of her tayle, shee blew down Charing crosse, with Pauls aspiring steeple'.[41] Elinor Rumming is unkept and sagging with age, 'Droupy and drowsy, / Scurvy and lowsy', and 'ugly fayre'.[42] Long Meg is usually described as

[40] Walter Smith's text *The Twelve Merry Jests of Widow Edith* (1525, STC [2nd ed.], 22869.7; 1573, STC [2nd ed.], 22870) is a jestbook that focusses on the exploits of a vagrant woman who deceives many men. Although the text opens with an anecdote about Edith's life, the text does not have a discernible plot arc in the same way *as Long Meg* and other jest-biographies.

[41] Pasquil, *Pasquils Iests with the Merriments of Mother Bunch, Vvittie, Pleasant, and Delightfull* (London, Printed by Miles] Flesher] and are to be sold by Francis Grove ouer against Saint Sepulchers Church without Newgate, 1629), sig. A2.

[42] John Skelton, *Elynour Rummin, the Famous Ale-Wife of England. Written by Mr. Skelton, Poet Laureat to King Henry the Egiht [Sic]* (London, Printed by Bernard Alsop] for Samuel Rand, 1624), sig. A4.

attractive, if extraordinarily tall, in the jest-biography, but is certainly part of the tradition of unusual or exceptional women located in tavern humour.

Both literary and 'real' tavern women were considered important conduits of local culture, as Pamela Allen Brown explains:

> Popular representations of jesting alewives and tippling gossips, including Noah's Wife, Mother Bunch, and Long Meg, situate women and skilled players in the "neighbourhood theatre" that linked the dramas of everyday life to the dramas of the stage…Like old wives and gossips, alewives were important transmitters of culture; but unlike them, their storytelling held a recognized value in the market because attracting and entertaining customers helped build the alehouse keeper's fortunes. Popular texts situated an alewife such as Mother Bunch firmly at the center of the interconnected (and quickly commodifying) worlds of local gossip, print culture, orality, and performance.[43]

Long Meg is a character that should be considered both as an important vector of this recognised female culture and space, even as she performs traditionally male violence through the use of swords and male clothing.

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Having considered possible audiences/readership for *Long Meg*, and how the paratextual elements may inform its interpretation and possible audiences, can *The Life of Long Meg* be considered a popular book? Although it is tempting to think of *Long Meg*, and other contemporary histories and jestbooks that are presented or classified as 'light reading', as being intended for mass consumption as 'popular' books, this definition belies the complicated nature of determining the parameters of early modern print popularity. Emma Smith and Andy Kesson explain in the introduction to *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England* that critics have struggled to find a useful way to define what constitutes a

[43] Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018) 16; 76, https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2102/10.7591/9781501722363.

'popular' text – which is different from contemporary understanding of the term that connotated a 'dangerous privileging of ordinary people':

> When early modern scholars employ the term 'popular'…they often have very different kinds of popularity in mind. Peter Burke has recently defined popular culture as 'the culture of the non-elite'…These [craftsmen and peasants] are not quite the Italian women, French Catholics or English mutineers that early modern writers had in mind, and the various groups, real or imagined, which scholars enthusiastically recuperate as popular were perceived by early modern commentators as a terrifying, potentially revolutionary force.[44]

With the definition of 'popular' varying for modern critics and 17th century English authority figures, can we determine for whom *Long Meg* was written? Was it for barmaids who would see themselves reflected in the text, or lawyers or businessmen using the book as a relaxing distraction or 'light reading' at the end of a long day, as the preface might suggest? As the audience could reasonably have changed over time anyway – this ambiguity in the text, and its varying contexts, is one of the reasons it is worth further study.

Determining the commercial popularity of an early modern English book is also problematic for multiple reasons, and one is because there is a distinction between reissued texts and new editions. It is not always easy to tell if a book is a reprint or a reissue, and the distinction is important: new editions may suggest that a publisher thought a text was likely to appeal to customers, while a reissue may indicate an overabundance of leftover texts, and therefore poor sales. As there is only one extant copy of the 1620 version of *Long Meg*, no comparison between 'editions' or printings is possible, so we cannot determine if the text was reissued. Also, regulations concerning the allowable number of copies per setting of type may have been inconsistently enforced: 'Between 1587 and 1637 regulations issued by the Stationers' Company

[44]Andy Kesson and Emma Smith, *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England* (Surrey, England; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2013), 4-5. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=1217924.

also supposedly forbade formes to be kept standing and limited editions to 1,250-1,500 copies from one setting of type, or 2,500-3,000 copies for certain small publications. Exceptions were admitted in 1635…but the same decree confirmed that the regulations since 1587 had often been ignored'.[45] And cheap texts such as these, after all, were often omitted from wills – making them difficult to trace; additionally, entire editions of books and jest texts were often read until they fell apart.

It is likely the only reason the single known copy of the 1620 edition of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* has survived is because it was part of a private library collection. The book was bound in a fine binding for the collection of John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, the 3rd Marquess of Bute (1847-1900); his collections were particularly strong in 17th century British literature, including plays, histories, and British ephemera. A list of Bute's English broadsides was published in 1892, running to more than 300 items, the earliest of which dates from 1580. The collection was bound in five volumes, and is now at Harvard University.[46] There is also the Bute collection of early English plays, which is now held in the National Library of Scotland. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) formed the core of the collection, and it was further grown by her son-in-law, the 3rd Earl of Bute (1713-1792). It was then expanded by the first Marquis of Bute (1744-1814), who acquired the Shakespeare quartos for the collection. The National Library of Scotland acquired this collection of English plays from the Bute estate in 1956; it contains 1,266 English dramatic works, including seventeen 16th century editions, and 530 17th-century and 650 18th-century editions. This collection has 39 Shakespeare quartos, including 16

[45] Charles C. Mish, 'Best Sellers in Seventeenth-Century Fiction', *Bibliographic Society of America Papers* 47 (1953): 356. James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 24.
[46] *A list of broadsides and satires...illustrative of English history and social life, 1560-1748...the property of the marquess of Bute, K.T.* (London, 1892).

that date before the first folio of 1623, and also includes works from other contemporary dramatists, including Dekker, Middleton, Lyly, Ford, and Webster. In addition to major figures in English drama, there are works by more minor playwrights of the 18th and 19th centuries.[47] With this level of interest in 'popular' literature (mostly drama) of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, it is possible that *The Life of Long Meg* was collected by Lady Montagu or the 3rd Earl or First Marquis of Bute.

The bookplate and binding of the extant copy of the 1620 edition of *The Life of Long Meg* suggests how it was valued. There do not seem to be any extant records that suggest specifically how and why the book came to be in the 3rd Marquess' library, although it may have been collected by one of his ancestors. We know the book was in the collection by 1876 because William Carew Hazlitt mentions it in *Collections and notes, 1867-1876.*[48] The 3rd Marquess would have been 29 years old at this point and working on renovating Cardiff Castle; although it is unclear in which house *Long Meg* was kept, its physical appearance is consistent with many of the bindings in the Bute library in Cardiff. Bute's copy of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1620) can now be found in a fine Victorian binding: red goatskin with gilt-tooling and marbled endpapers by William Pratt, who was in business in London from 1864-1893 – which would be consistent with when Hazlitt notes that the book was in Bute's library.[49] The bookplate and binding of the extant copy of the 1620 edition of *Long Meg* has the 3rd Marquess' bookplate, but not the bookplate specific to Mount Stuart, so it is a reasonable assumption that the book was housed at another Bute property: Dumfries House or Cardiff Castle. Bute may have inherited the book from the Loudoun Castle or the Luton collection, but it is also possible that Bute bought the

[47] 'Bute Collection', National Library of Scotland, accessed 6 November 2022, https://digital.nls.uk/catalogues/special-and-named-printed-collections/?id=524.
[48] William Carew Hazlitt, *Collections and notes, 1867-1876* (London, 1876), 286.
[49] Maurice Packer, *Bookbinders of Victorian London* (London: British Library, 1991), 121.

book himself, or one of his agents purchased it for him. Even if the book was inherited, he thought enough of it to allow it precious space in his library, and probably had it bound or rebound at significant expense.

Mirjam Foot's research on early printed book survival suggests that *The Life of Long Meg* (1620) might have been included in the Bute library because of its black letter font, which was in vogue amongst book collectors of 19th century Britain:

> Two early- to mid-nineteenth-century witnesses of the English passion for collecting are Robert Southey, who in 1807 noted that 'there is, perhaps, no country in which the passion for collecting rarities is so prevalent as in England', and R. P. Gillies who in 1851 derided his countrymen:
>
> > "There had sprung up a kind of *mania* for purchasing black letter volumes, although the purchasers themselves, from year's end to year's end, did not read, far less write, fifty pages consecutively. Among such people, it must be owned, the bibliographical propensity, though it had, indirectly, good results, was nearly as absurd as the *ci-devant* 'tulip-madness' in Holland".
>
> One of those 'good results', at least for the binders, was an increased demand to have those rarities suitably clothed.[50]

The jest-biography's survival may be a by-product of the mass collection of black letter books in Victorian Britain, and it was prized enough to be put in a fine binding. The book was purchased by American collector Robert H. Taylor (1908-1985) from the Bute collection and is now held in Princeton University Library. Ultimately, its print history and survival suggest that *The Life of Long Meg* could be *for* anyone – serving maid to nobility.

Critical Context and Theoretical Approach

Scholars of early modern English literature seem to have avoided in-depth study of *The Life of Long Meg*, possibly because without detailed contextualisation it is easy to dismiss the

[50] Mirjam Foot, *Studies in the History of Bookbinding* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 317. (Quoting from R. P. Gillies, *Memoirs of a Literary Veteran* vol. II [London, 1851], 2).

book as a straightforward jest text. Likewise, it is a difficult book to categorise: it is neither all history nor all fiction. There are few studies focused on the jest-biography; instead, the majority of critical work has been done by feminist scholars and those of gender studies who have used the jest-biography as a reference point for writing about other literary warrior women (and, more generally, socially aberrant women).[51] Long Meg has been regarded as an example of a formidable woman, or, conversely, as one that reinforces patriarchal stereotypes. Although the character has not been ignored in critical works, little examination has been done of aspects of the jest-biography other than her cross-dressing, and often scholars have conflated various versions of the Long Meg jest-biographies and other references to the character to tell a 'story' about her life. Patricia Gartenberg published an article focussed on Long Meg in 1983 but, although important for bringing attention to the jest-biography, it is mostly a summary of the book's plot without much detailed analysis.[52] Similarly, in 1981, Simon Shepherd's book *Amazons and Warrior Women* includes several references to Long Meg, and was a key work in the field for renewing interest in the jest-biography, but he conflates many of the early editions of the jest-biography to tell a more general story about Long Meg (as a historic figure), and his argument is partially predicated on meanings generated by the '1582' text. Likewise, Margaret Spufford also refers to the '1582' text in her influential book *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (1981).[53] This thesis will query arguments based on the forged '1582' text and will discuss in the following chapters how studying *Long Meg* in its registration context of 1590, and how the

[51] Frederick O. Waage published a 13-page article in 1986 that includes substantial analysis of *Long Meg*, but it is a comparative work with Moll Cutpurse. Frederick O. Waage, 'Meg and Moll: Two Renaissance London Heroines', *Journal of Popular Culture* 20, no. 1 (Summer, 1986).
[52] Patricia Gartenberg, 'An Elizabethan Wonder Woman: The Life and Fortunes of Long Meg of Westminster', *Journal of Popular Culture* 17, no. 3 (Winter, 1983).
[53] Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women*, 71. Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, 245.

meanings generated by different versions, may influence how we understand the jest-biography within its historic and literary contexts.

In one of the few recent sustained studies of jest-biographies (which pays a significant amount of attention to *Long Meg*), Ian Munro argues that the violence in the text is repetitive, and that Meg is described as 'freakish':

> As a general rule, almost every incident in the jestbook follows the same pattern: Meg finds herself, or some other underdog, in a difficult situation, powerless against a male adversary of some sort; in response, Meg hits him with her big stick until the problem is solved...The repetitive structure encodes the fundamental doubleness of the books' treatment of Meg…And although the narrator always seems somewhat amused by her physical prowess, Meg's positive influence on the ways of the city is also made clear...While Mother Bunch is a kind of urban deity, Meg is a civic benefactor and local hero, one whose fame may be broad but whose deeds are felt most strongly on the neighbourhood level.[54]

While fundamentally agreeing that Meg's fighting functions mostly as a corrective to 'bad' men, this thesis seeks to address gaps in Munro's and other arguments: that Long Meg's fighting is repetitive, which ignores the specific differences and nuances in language and contexts of violence used in the book. Indeed, while Long Meg is, indeed, a 'civic benefactor', her reach is further – she is a patriotic hero (evidenced by her successful exploits with the English army in France). Likewise, it will argue that the 1620 text of the jest-biography does not actually depict Meg as 'freakish': she is described as a 'proper woman' [55] and her physicality described as 'every limbe was so fit to her talnes, that she seemed the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a womans mould'.[56] Although certainly an unusual woman, and she is depicted as a 'freak' in other contemporary texts, she is described as physically excessive only once, in chapter eighteen

[54] Ian Munro, *A Woman's Answer Is Never to Seek: Early Modern Jestbooks, 1526-1635* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), xxvi-xxvii.
[55] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cv.
[56] *Ibid.*, sig. B2r.

(as having a 'grosse' body[57]) – she is, arguably, not actually depicted as freakish in the 1620 edition of the jest-biography.

This thesis mainly intends to do what can be considered an historicist reading of the jest-biography. Whilst it will necessarily engage with previous criticism, including feminist and gender criticism – as these are the theoretical schools that have paid the most attention to the text previously – it also must be selective. There is not enough space or scope for engaging closely with the history of feminist criticism (some of which is significantly outdated and less relevant), and works of gender studies, in a thesis of this length. It is certainly important that Long Meg is a cross-dressed woman, and how she functions in the 'man's world' of sixteenth and seventeenth century England by dressing as a man is certainly critical to any argument about her use of multiple varieties of violence – but it is not the only important aspect of the text. This thesis has no intention of significantly building upon, engaging with the entirety of, nor arguing a new place for the text in feminist criticism and gender studies, especially where criticism has addressed cross-dressed and martial women in early modern literature (especially the rich field of the history of theatrical transvestism, such as the work done by Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass[58]); however, some of this material will necessarily be referenced and explored. Due to the content with which the thesis engages, it will by necessity utilise multiple critical approaches, the foremost being 'literary historicism' and 'social history'. The focus will be on how explorations of the language of violence, book history, paratextual elements, and references

[57] The text notes that 'such grosse bodies are commonly pinched with soarest paines, when they once fall into any infirmitie. The disease having more matter to worke upon in a fatte body then a leane: an instance of this principle was Meg'. *The Life of Long Meg* 1620), sig. E2v.
[58] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

to and in contemporary texts (both 'historic' and 'literary') inform readings of *Long Meg* and its contexts.

At the same time, an awareness of feminist criticism is necessary for an exploration of this variety of source text: as Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss have pointed out, it is important to read texts about women particularly critically, for 'the historical power of masculinity makes culturally sanctioned stories suspect; the gaps between events and discourses, between what women are and what they are made to be, [has] set up both contradictions in discourse and literary possibilities of recognizing and resisting them'.[59] The Long Meg jest-biography is an excellent example of a seemingly culturally sanctioned (it exists in eighteen distinct editions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), yet socially critical (and often contradictory) text. Because the Long Meg jest-biography is deeply ambivalent, this thesis seeks to read between the gaps in the Long Meg story: it will question if the Long Meg jest-biography disrupts conventional contemporary ideas of 'gender', and critiques social inequalities within the contexts of sixteenth and seventeenth century cross-dressing, violence, duelling, and honour codes through humour and laughter.

This thesis also recognizes that certain kinds of critical approaches, such as feminist revisionism, as Dympna Callaghan has explained, can be problematic. Callaghan explains that revisionism can be seen as being 'simply oblivious to, or in denial about, the structural inequities in early modern and, for that matter, contemporary patriarchy'.[60] She also notes that, 'Feminist scholarship…presents us with two divergent perspectives [revisionism and exclusionism], which nonetheless have the potential to add up to a valuably complex, nuanced picture of women's

[59] Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss, *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.
[60] Dympna Callaghan, *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 6.

simultaneous participation in *and* exclusion from early modern culture. Women's status in early modern England is, paradoxically, that of *excluded participants'*.[61] Consequently, this thesis also seeks to employ a post-revisionist feminist critical approach, in addition to its 'historicist' viewpoint, and will consider Long Meg as an 'excluded participant' in her society, examining literary manifestations of women's engagement with violence (such as duelling).

Fundamentally, this thesis seeks to bring renewed and more detailed attention to *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*, a text that combines humour and history, from its current relative obscurity in the early modern English literary canon.[62] It also intends to do what other studies of the *Long Meg* text have not: explore the importance of the print and book history of the work and the paratextual elements that help critics and readers understand its possible/potential readership; the broader literary context and references; and, especially, a close examination of the uses, contexts for, and the language of violence and fighting. *The Life of Long Meg*, it will argue, is a unique text with a central character who does not merely reinforce patriarchy through mimetic forms of violence: she challenges conventional views of social and gender hierarchy through appropriating 'masculine' violence, dress, and honour codes.[63] The Long Meg jest-biography is

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[61] Callaghan, *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies*, 7.

[62] Although scholarly works about Long Meg have been scant in recent years, a doctoral thesis titled 'Long Meg of Westminster: Women, Waives and Outlaws in Premodern England' by Bethany Jones (Lancaster University) was 'published' in 2019 (it has only recently been discoverable online, and is embargoed until 2025, so is not currently accessible). The abstract suggests that the thesis mostly focusses on how the text interacts with legal language and issues and the concept of outlawry in jest texts. In 2016, Maggie Ellen Ray discussed Long Meg in the context of the work of John Taylor, in her article 'John Taylor and the Ghost of Long Meg of Westminster: Authorship and Poetic Authority in "The Womens Sharpe Revenge"', which is discussed in chapter two, but her article is not wholly focussed on the jest-biography.

[63] Although a problematic term, this thesis will use the term 'patriarchy' as it is understood and used by Anthony Fletcher: 'I mean by the term the institutionalised male dominance over women and children in the family and the subordination of women in society in general. This seems to me to be an outstandingly significant feature of English society between 1500 and 1800…When socialist and radical feminists took up the notion of patriarchy in the 1960s they were looking for a concept which would help them to theorise as well as historicise male dominance. The trouble with some of this work was that it tended to assume that patriarchy was and is immovable and monumental. It also became, in this reading, a system fired by an undifferentiated and consistent male commitment to domination and control in every sphere of life.' Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xv-xvi.

unlike any other work about contemporary cross-dressed female literary heroines, despite intriguing similarities, and rewards further study because it challenges notions of male dominated social hierarchy and honour cultures with female exceptionalism through the uses of violence.[64]

In three chapters, this thesis will place the jest-biography in its literary and historic contexts. Chapter one will examine instances of violence in the context of the jest-biography's registration in 1590. Only one chapter of the eighteen that make up Long Meg jest-biography is not fundamentally about a fight of some kind,[65] so this thesis will explore how Long Meg's use of violence functions, in context, as nationalistic allegory, and as pro-military and religious propaganda. Chapter two will focus on the literary and historic contexts of the 1620 version of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster.* It will explore aspects of the seventeenth century English *querelle des femmes,* comparing *Long Meg* to *querelle* texts of 1620, mainly *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir,* all of which comment upon women's appropriation of male clothing, fashions, and use of weapons. Putting these texts into conversation with *Long Meg* will show how the jest-biography can be considered a celebration of a certain variety of female independence, a reinforcement of 'traditional' values, as well as a work of social criticism. Chapter three will examine the contemporary literary intersections of gendered honour and duelling, and how those inform the jest-biography and its contexts. It will consider the codes of honour that governed men and women; and how cross-dressing in the context of duelling can be understood as

[64] This thesis refers to honour and duelling as cultures because they had specific behaviours, language, and customs associated with them. Likewise, this thesis purposefully uses the term 'cross-dress' instead of 'transvestism'. Although literary and social criticism about early modern women or literary characters wearing men's fashions has used the terms interchangeably, it is now generally accepted that 'transvestite' has a history of pejorative usage, with implications of mental illness. It seems that at this time 'cross-dressing' is a more acceptable description for women wearing clothing typically associated with men.

[65] Chapter sixteen of the jest-biography instead focuses on how Long Meg prevents fights in her inn by outlining four rules that limit violence.

questioning, but also sometimes reinforcing, conventional gender roles. This section will examine the chapter about Long Meg's marriage that scholars of early modern literature seem to have found difficult to reconcile with Long Meg's 'independence' and 'power' in the rest of the text, and will question if Long Meg is as 'proto-feminist' or 'profeminine' as she may seem.

As literary critics increasingly turn attention to texts on the 'edge' – of society, of literature, or notions of gender in early modern England – this thesis will seek to answer two general questions: first, what does it mean when Long Meg, as an 'excluded participant', utilises, or even seizes, 'masculine' forms of social agency, when she *take[s] arms* for herself (as the title of this thesis suggests)? Second, how does that violence function in the context of other literary examples of women who fight? Does *Long Meg* sustain a conventional view of female power (or lack thereof), or does the text challenge it? Is the text fundamentally conservative or radical? This thesis seeks to demonstrate that far from being an ephemeral, unimportant text, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* is a work of social criticism and propaganda.

Chapter one: *Long Meg*, Propaganda, and Violence

> Gentlemen…give themselves rather to become Battalus knightes [effeminate, dissolute men], then Martiall wights, & have greater desire to be practised in Carpet trade, then in that kinde of virtue, which extendeth it selfe to the common profite, and preservation of the countrie…But what reputation bring they to their houses, that licentiously, in ryot, rometh to and fro, not knowing in what fashion to disguise them selves, what countenance they should beare in the streetes, nor with what curiositie they should give entertainment, furnished with three or foure French, Italian, or Spanishe words, thinking that the whole glorie consisted in being newfangled in their apparell, straunge in their conceiytes…To be shorte, in Englande, Gentlemen have robbed our women of their minds, and our women have beereaved us of halfe our apparel.
>
> Barnabe Rich, *Allarme to England* (1578)[66]

Much like Barnabe Rich writes in 1578, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* depicts a tension about the growing importance of foreign fashions (including swords and fighting), and the impact this internationalism has on Englishness and masculinity. In the three following sections, this chapter will identify and consider aspects of violence in the *Long Meg* jest-biography that function as pro-English/anti-foreign propaganda, pro-military propaganda, and state-sponsored religious propaganda around the end of the sixteenth century, at the time the jest-biography was first registered with the Stationers' Company. The first section of the chapter will explore how the depiction of duels and combat between Long Meg and foreign fighters (a Spanish knight and the French army), may be interpreted as nationalist propaganda. The second section will discuss how Long Meg's use of fighting may be read as pro-military propaganda, examining the jest-biography's use of the concepts of military impressment and recruitment. The

[66] Barnabe Rich, *Allarme to England* (London, By Henrie Middleton, for C. B[arker] Perused and allowed, 1578), sig. Hr-v. Plutarch describes Batalus in *Demosthenes*: 'Now Batalus, as some say, was an effeminate flute-player, and Antiphanes wrote a farce in which he held him up to ridicule for this. But some speak of Batalus as a poet who wrote voluptuous verses and drinking songs. And it appears that one of the parts of the body which it is not decent to name was at that time called Batalus by the Athenians.' Plutarch. *Plutarch's Lives,* with an English Translation by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1919), 7, 4.

third section will discuss the way the text engages with the Martin Marprelate religious literary controversy of the late 1580s, and then, more generally, with anti-Catholic sentiment. These three sections will suggest that far from being a simple joke book, *Long Meg* may be read as reflecting on contemporary events and literature at the time of its probable composition around 1590, as well as demonstrating enmeshment with contemporary social issues at the time of its publication in 1620.

This chapter will use the term 'propaganda' to describe how the *Long Meg* jest-biography may reflect concerns about foreign and religious influences on English life, although the term 'propaganda' itself is, of course, somewhat anachronistic (it acquired its current meaning – a considered attempt to shape public opinion – in 1622 when the Vatican formed its anti-Protestant organisation *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith). As Peter Burke has argued, 'popular' literature was used to shape opinions and beliefs in early modern England: 'The possibility of propaganda has always to be borne in mind when one is studying broadsides and chap-books. These were the 'mass media' of the period, and it was obvious to political and religious leaders that these media must be used in order to influence as many people as possible.'[67] And as Joad Raymond has argued, the scope of the use of propaganda is a wide one: 'Books were used as propaganda (though this term may be anachronistic) and this use was decentralized. The persuasive capacity of books was exploited

[67] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 111. 'The term "propaganda" is, of course, problematic, since it was not in general and widespread use during the early modern period. Nevertheless, the existence of the phenomenon is unmistakable. In the words of Bob Scribner, the "extreme linguistic nominalism that asserts that we should not use words for historical phenomena that contemporaries of the time would not have used clearly founders on such an example". It is also possible that the term "propaganda" would not have confused contemporaries as much as we might assume. The OED dates the use of the "propagation" to 1588, the word "propagating" to John Pory in 1600, and the verb "to propagate", including beliefs and doctrine, to 1570. In some sense, the term "propaganda" itself was in circulation, and men such as William Prynne certainly interpreted the Catholic *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, as a body involved in propaganda as we would understand it'. Jason Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda During the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 2.

not only by the state, but by anyone seeking the approval of the public, be he politician, campaigner for rights, or preacher'.[68] Propaganda, in this context, does not necessarily mean an organised state-sponsored campaign to shape public behaviour through jest texts, but, as Burke has argued, the possibility of propaganda in the form of popular texts is a vital consideration when approaching works that show enmeshment with current events and contemporary literary debates.

Nationalism, Violence, and Propaganda

In 1588, two years before *Long Meg* was first registered, England faced a national crisis in the form of an attempted invasion by the Spanish Armada. That event haunts the *Long Meg* text through metaphor and allusion: the text consistently glorifies the English at the expense of the Spanish and the French – England's historic enemies – and questions the way each culture/country uses the organised violence of duelling and war fighting. The English way of doing either is, of course, portrayed as being superior. Depictions of fighting in the jest-biography serve as examples of nationalism, as well as examples of social criticism and propaganda. Within the context of the jest-biography, the character of Long Meg may be interpreted as nationalistic in that she willingly, and successfully, fights for her country, despite her status as a woman – an 'excluded participant'.

What does it mean to say that *The Life of Long Meg* is a 'nationalistic' text? Some critics have argued that English (and, later, British) people did not truly define their nationhood until the 18th or 19th centuries; others have maintained that nationalism was present in the early modern period, or even well before. As Andrew Escobedo notes:

> One of the primary difficulties for any examination of Renaissance nationalism is in convincing scholars of modernity, on the one hand, that national consciousness existed at

[68] Joad Raymond, *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

> all in the sixteenth century, and persuading scholars of medieval literature, on the other hand, that nationalism was something other than old news in the sixteenth century. One thus starts off with few friends.[69]

In her study of British nationalism, Anna Suranyi argues that the definition of nationhood changed over time in the early modern period:

> [Although] this emerging and nascent form of national identity [in early modern England] was not identical to the full-blown nationalism of the nineteenth century, it did share some features with it…conventions existed for distinguishing between whole countries, and their peoples, on the basis of supposedly innate characteristics. Such conventions served not only to describe the differences between foreign peoples, but also to delineate an awareness of what it meant to be English.[70]

Long Meg functions as propaganda because it defines Meg and England in opposition to the 'other' – foreigners and their fashions, and religions or religious ideas not sanctioned by the state. As Bertrand Taithe and Jim Thornton have argued, propaganda seeks to reaffirm a social group's values by insulating it against outside influences: 'Propaganda promotes the ways of a community as well as defining them; in this sense at least, it is a two-way process which reaches out for unanimity within a group it often helps to define. This defining purpose is central to propaganda, and propaganda is a tool of exclusion as well as inclusion'.[71]

The jest-biography consistently positions Long Meg as an example of the correct way of being English in a time of threat to national boundaries and state religion. Further, it is Long Meg's status as a woman, her own 'otherness' juxtaposed with her capability for 'masculine' violence, that makes her such a useful tool for propaganda. Chapter two of *Long Meg* describes a comic scene of pugilism with a foreigner. Long Meg, newly arrived in London, is introduced to

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[69] Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe, Dee, Spenser, Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 10.
[70] Anna Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation: Travel Writing and National Identity in Early Modern England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 39.
[71] Tim Thornton and Bertrand Taithe, *Propaganda: Political Rhetoric an Identity, 1300-2000* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 3-4.

the proprietor/hostess of the Eagle Inn in Westminster for a job – also present is Sir James of Castile, a Spanish knight, and two members of Henry VIII's court: jester Will Sommers (d. 1559, also called Will Somers, Somer, or Summers) and (Doctor) John Skelton (d.1529, also known as John Shelton). The courtiers are incidental to the exchange, but they help fix the story as occurring in 'the time of Henry the Eight of famous memorie'.[72] They also ensure that the text is understood as being part of an established jestbook tradition: Will Sommers appears as a comic figure in *A merie and [pleasant] prognostication devised after the finest fashion* in 1577; Skelton too stars in jestbooks, including *A C Mery Talys* (1526), *Jests of Skelton* (1565-1566), and *Merie tales…made by Master Skelton Poet Laureat* (1567).[73]

When the Hostess asks Sir James of Castile if he thinks the tall and physically impressive Long Meg is a good candidate for the job of maid and enforcer (to make men pay their bills), he muses that 'I cannot thinke…that she is so strong.'[74] Skelton then suggests that Sir James himself 'try her…for I have heard that Spaniards are of a wonderfull strength'.[75] So Sir James challenges Long Meg to 'change [exchange] a boxe on the eare'.[76] When he strikes her, however, she stirs 'no more than a poste', she then strikes him so hard that he falls 'downe…at her feet'. Although overly simplistic to imagine Meg as a stand-in for Queen Elizabeth, the image of a Spanish man falling at the feet of an English woman has some resonance with Spain's failed invasion of England.

A second example of Spanish versus English fighting is in chapter four of the jest-

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[72] Anon., *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (London: Printed by Edward Allde for Edward White, 1620), STC (2nd ed.), 17782.5. Sig. Br.
[73] '[A]bout 1490, in his preface to Eneydos, William Caxton refers to him as 'late created poete laureate in the university of Oxford' (A. S. G. Edwards, 43)…' (Complete English Poems, 131)'. Entry for John Skelton, Scattergood, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. P. M. Zall, 'The Natural History of Jestbooks', *Prairie Schooner* 36, no. 4 (December 1, 1962): 325.
[74] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B3r.
[75] *Ibid.*, sig. B3r.
[76] *Ibid.*, sig. B3r.

biography, in which Long Meg duels with Sir James – a formal fight, as opposed to an exchange of punches. Sir James is courting (or seeking a sexual relationship with) the Hostess of the Eagle Inn, but she is not interested: her 'affection was set on Doctor Skelton'. Sir James threatens that 'if hee knew who were her [the hostess'] Paramour, he would run him through'. The text does not make clear if she is annoyed with Sir James for his persistence, or if she simply sees an opportunity for an excellent joke: 'she had a great delight to be pleasant'.[77] The implication is that the Hostess finds Sir James' presumption insulting: consequently, she asks Meg to arm herself, wear men's clothing, and fight Sir James. Meg, of course, wins.

With the text's emphasis on Sir James' foreignness, personal combat serves as a stand-in for international conflict in this chapter – but a further code is being invoked, that of *code duello*: the set of conventions and/or rules followed by duellists. [78] This emphasis on Meg's success in a formal fight is important because what is being threatened in this chapter is not just Sir James' foreign, national honour, but his personal honour, as it is expressed in terms of honour culture and specific language. The duel, the ritualised physical procedure of protecting reputation through swordplay, was supposedly used almost entirely and specifically amongst men belonging to elite or wealthy social groups. It had its origin in the judicial duel (more common in the Middle Ages), and trial by combat, in which, if a man accuses another of a crime, the first proves his claim through combat. Such duels, often deadly, had fallen into disuse by the 16th century, but had been replaced by the more personal duel of honour. Duels of honour were extra-legal, could be prompted my significant as well as trivial insults, and usually focused on testing skills or proving superiority with swords (especially with rapiers) rather than determining the

[77] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B4r.
[78] 'duello, n.'. OED Online. December 2020. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/58252 (accessed January 04, 2021). The term is borrowed from the Italian language, although 'duello' is used in English literature by 1606.

righteousness of a combatant or seeking divine intervention in a dispute.[79] As Jennifer Low has explained, 'remnants of the old view were mingled with the popular understanding of the duel of honour' although 'most anti-duelling tracts interpret the duel as different in kind from the trial by combat, perceiving it as a form of lawlessness rather than as an appeal to God for judgment'.[80] Yet, despite how it was often used in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century for revenge and petty squabbles, the intellectual heritage of the duel, with its roots in truth, justice, and righteousness, forms the basis of this kind of personal combat.

The duel of honour had become popular partly because rapier fencing gained prominence in England in the 1580s. This new way of fighting had been brought back from the Continent by men on their travels; greater access to rapier training in England had become available when Italian fencing masters opened establishments in London in the late sixteenth century.[81] There is technically a distinction to be made between fencing and duelling. Rapier fencing, and knowledge of *code duello*, was seen as a sign of affluence and education – even of upward social and economic mobility, whereas the act of duelling was technically extra-legal.[82] When Meg shows herself able and willing to fight a duel, she demonstrates that she has learned the male skill of swordplay and has a working knowledge of the rules of duelling, used to protect honour outside of formal legal channels: to all of which she adds, of course, her essential Englishness.

Duelling in England seems to have reached a peak of popularity in the last two decades of the sixteenth century and the early part of the seventeenth century, but the government of Elizabeth I had already identified civilian sword fighting as a social problem well before the

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[79] Jennifer A. Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 17.
[80] Low, *Manhood and the Duel*, 17.
[81] *Ibid.*, 3.
[82] Tobias E. Capwell, *The Noble Art of the Sword: Fashion and Fencing in Renaissance Europe, 1520-1630* (London: Wallace Collection, 2012), 83.

Long Meg jest-biography was registered in 1590. *The Articles for the Due Execution of the Statutes of Apparell* from 6 May 1564 banned the use of long, sharpened swords and rapiers:

> [A]n usage is crept in, contrary to former orders, of wearing of long Swords, and Rapiers, sharpened in such sort, as [it] may appear [by] the usage of them [that] can not tende to defence, whiche ought to be the very meaning of wearing of weapons, in times of peace.[83]

The Articles notes that there are only two reasons for using swords: for public service (to the state) and for private revenge (duelling), the latter of which it disdainfully connects to 'fashions' – including fashions in clothing. John Stow's *Annals* (1580), referring to this section of *The Articles,* equated the popularity of rapier duelling with the fashion for excessively large ruffs: 'hee was helde the greetest gallant that had the deepest ruff and the longest Rapier. The offence to the eye of the one, and the hurt that came unto the life of the subject by the other caused Her Majesty to make proclamation against them both.'[84] The Elizabethan fashion for rapier duelling was dangerous enough for the government to seek to control the use of swords generally, and rapiers in particular. *The Articles* asserts that long, sharp swords, such as rapiers, should not be used 'in times of peace'. Yet English men continued to kill each other in duels with these fashionable swords, despite the threat of 'imprysonment of … body' for those who created, wore, used, or owned these banned weapons.

The number of duels and duel challenges mentioned in newsletters and correspondence increased from five in the 1580s, to nearly twenty in the 1590s. Even more duels were recorded in the subsequent decades: in the 1610s there were thirty-three recorded duels and challenges, but the actual number is likely to have been much higher.[85] And, although there are no statistics

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[83] *Articles for the Due Execution of the Statutes of Apparell…vi. of May. Anno. M D LXII* (London: In Powles Churchyarde, by Rycharde Jugge and John Cawood, printers to the Quenes Majestie, 1564), 3.
[84] Egerton Castle, *Schools and Masters of Fencing: From the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century* (Mineaola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 20-21.
[85] Markku Peltonen, 'Francis Bacon, the Earl of Northampton, and the Jacobean Anti-Duelling Campaign' *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 10.

for deaths caused by duels in England, from 1590 to 1610 one-third of the nobility (or around 4,000 men) was killed in duels or private fights in France. Anti-duelling literature, common after the succession of James I in 1603, appears to indicate a growing problem for a government concerned with a significant proportion of young, aristocratic men killing each other in duels.[86]

As historian Frank Henderson Stewart explains, there are roughly four identifiable forms of honour operating in the late 16th and early 17th century: [87] 'horizontal honour', the respect between social equals; 'vertical honour', the expectation of respect from social inferiors; 'positive honour', the inherent right to respect based on hereditary social place or glory (usually in a military context or in service to the monarch or state); and 'negative honour', the defence of reputation from slander.[88] 'Honour groups', usually delineated by ancestry or wealth, were concerned about maintaining status amongst themselves: men were counselled to ignore verbal insults from social inferiors. As Anthony Stafford wrote in 1635, 'if any man of your owne Ranke doe you an affront, shew that you are sensible of your Honour.'[89] Admitting and acknowledging an insult was understood to be granting horizontal honour to the insulter by showing a respect for his opinion and social status.

Long Meg and the Hostess of the Eagle Inn are described as exploiting the duelling code

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[86] Craig Turner and Tony Soper, *Methods and Practice of Elizabethan Swordplay* (SIU Press: 1990), 6.
[87] Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54. The history of honour is complicated, so this thesis will focus on personal honour as it pertains to sixteenth and seventeenth-century English culture, and the relationships between male and female conceptions of honour.
[88] Stewart, *Honor*, 59. For detailed descriptions of early modern honour culture, see Charles Laurence Barber, *The Theme of Honour's Tongue: a Study of Social Attitudes in the English Drama from Shakespeare to Dryden* (Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1985); Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness, and Honour* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994). A useful synthesis of current research on early modern British honour culture, especially as it relates to gentry (mostly from outside London), may be found in Lloyd Bowen, *Anatomy of a Duel in Jacobean England: Gentry Honour, Violence and the Law* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2021), 2-4. Another key text about early modern English honour culture is Mervyn Evans James' *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), although his key findings have been revised over time by other scholars.
[89] Anthony Stafford, *The Guide of Honour, or the Ballance Wherin She May Weigh Her Actions* (Thomas Cotes for S. Cartwright, dwelling at the Bible in Duck-lane, 1634), sig. E3r.

and codes of honour to teach the arrogant Spanish Sir James a lesson. The women manipulate Sir James masterfully: the hostess concocts a story that a (fictitious) man has 'monstrously misused [her] in wordes'[90], and laments that she has 'no body to revenge' the insult: she has no male protector, and she literally does not have the physical form (body) to participate in masculine duelling culture. [91] Her language is carefully constructed: she has been insulted by words, not physically assaulted, and she uses the language of duelling to convey the insult to her male audience. As Richard Jones describes in 1590 in *The Book of Honour and Armes,* 'Injuries are either by words or by deeds, and that in everie Injurie by words, the Injurer ought bee the Challenger: but in an Injurie by deedes the Injured ought to challenge, as for example'.[92] The Hostess knows that an insult (words as opposed to deeds) can be a reason for a duel, and that in this situation Sir James will feel the need to defend his imagined claim to her body through the ritualised violence of a duel.[93]

The hostess further relates a fake duel challenge, telling Sir James that the man who has abused her has instructed her to find 'the proudest Champion I had come into St. Georges fieldes and quit my wrong, if they durst', following the duel challenge pattern Richard Jones outlined in 1590.[94] The hostess simultaneously evokes the language of a personal duel of honour and the judicial duel (with the pointed use of the term 'Champion') to encourage Sir James to avenge the fictional insult by playing on his pride as a swordsman and a nobleman. The outcome of this

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[90] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B4v.
[91] *Ibid.*, sig. B4v.
[92] Richard Jones, *The Book of Honor and Armes* (London: Printed by [Thomas Orwin for] Richard Jones, dwelling at the signe of the Rose and Crowne neere Hoburne Conduit, 1590), sig. Bv. The book is usually attributed to Jones, the publisher/stationer, but some scholars have suggested that the text may be a compilation of works by William Segar, Thomas Bedingfield, and possibly Vincentio Saviolo. Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in early modern England*, 49, fn. 183.
[93] Jones, *The Book of Honor and Armes*, sig. Bv. Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England*, 3. *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B4v.
[94] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B4v. St. George's Fields are located in Southwark, near entertainment venues and with the open space required for a duel, but are outside the jurisdiction of the City of London.

contrived duel of honour is designed, on one level, to be humorous, but it also serves as propaganda and social criticism. Although Sir James approaches the fight with braggadocio, even asking the Hostess and Doctor Skelton to attend the duel and be 'eye witnesses of [his] manhood', he is publicly shamed when he loses to the disguised Long Meg. For her fight against Sir James, Long Meg dresses in 'Gentleman's apparel', her borrowed clothing indicating her (temporarily appropriated) higher social status; she adopts masculine honour, crucially, with her male disguise.[95]

It is significant that *Long Meg* includes an example of how cross-dressing sometimes extended to crossing social as well as gender boundaries. Long Meg borrows an expensive 'sute of white Satten, that was one of the Guardes that lay at her house' for her duel against Sir James of Castile.[96] By wearing the clothing of a high-status man, she is able to meet Sir James on his own social level for the duel. As Peter Stallybrass has argued, early modern signifiers of clothing are a vitally important way of accessing contemporary interpretations of social status:

> ...this opposing of clothes and person was always in tension with the social practices through which the body politic was composed: the varied acts of investiture. For it was investiture, the putting on of clothes, that quite literally constituted a person as a monarch or a freeman of a guild or a household servant. Investiture was, in other words, the means by which a person was given a form, a shape, a social function, a 'depth'.[97]

That Long Meg dresses in higher status clothing is nearly as important to the plot of this chapter as her wearing men's clothing. Sir James could have refused to fight with a social subordinate (or a woman, for that matter), but the borrowed white satin suit of a 'guard' that Long Meg wears suggests to her opponent that he/she is at least close to his own social level, that he can presume

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[95] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B4r-B4v.
[96] *Ibid.*, sig. B4v.
[97] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

that he/she has a working knowledge of *code duello,* and thus he can, and must, engage in a duel for honour's sake.

Aside from Meg's cross-dressing as a guard, there is another element of gendered clothing to be considered in this section of the jest-biography. The Hostess, Meg's employer, offers a reward for a successful duel with Sir James: '…if she [Meg] beate him, she should for her labour have a new petticote : let me alone (quoth Meg) the devil [take] me, if I loose a petticote...'[98] This juxtaposition of Meg's appropriation of high-status male clothing with her enthusiasm about a petticoat (a fundamentally feminine item of clothing) shows both the text's preoccupation with appearances, but also the relationship between the women of the Eagle Inn. Christine Varholy writes that:

> When women acquired their own clothing, when the circulated or translated clothing among themselves, or when they used clothing to alter their identities through costume or disguise unbeknownst to their sexual partners, their behavior was perceived as threatening and was denounced, in part, because it disrupted clothing's perceived ability to signify a stable class identity. Thus the practice of cross-class dressing opened up a wealth of erotic possibilities at the same time that it provoked cultural anxieties about transgressive sexuality and the manipulation of identity, conduct traditionally associated with the brothel and the theatre.[99]

By removing men from the economics of (women's) clothing, and by appropriating the language and physical signifiers of upper-class masculinity in a duel, the women show a radical adoption of agency through the medium of clothing.

After a short duel with Meg, Sir James proves to be a coward and begs for his life after he is defeated, calling on his opponent to spare him, while pleading that his male honour (and life)

'[98] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B4v.

[99] Cristine M. Varholy, '"Rich like a Lady": Cross-Class Dressing in the Brothels and Theaters of Early Modern London', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring - Summer, 2008): 7. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40339588

is more important than the female honour of the Hostess: 'Oh save me Sir (quoth he) I am a knight and 'tis but for a womans matter, spill not my blood'.[100] Ironically, the 'women's matter' over which Sir James is first so eager to engage, then reluctant to be injured or killed for, has the effect of feminising him: Meg strikes Sir James' 'weapon out of his hand, then when she saw him disarm'd, she stept within him, and drawing her Ponyard [dagger], swore all the world should not save him.'[101] By taking his weapon – an identifiably phallic symbol – she renders him 'unmanned' and impotent – unable to protect his own masculine honour. Meg then declares that she will not kill Sir James on the condition that he publicly performs two things: he must serve at supper, and he must 'confesse [Meg] to be [his] better at weapon in any ground in England'.[102] The Hostess and Long Meg use the male honour codes associated with duelling to defend the Hostess' female honour – the Hostess using her obvious knowledge of duelling culture to instigate the duel, and Meg using her knowledge of and proficiency in swordplay. The humour of this chapter, then, is on two levels: the women challenge and defeat a man in terms of his masculine honour (Meg is a better man than Sir James); and even an English woman is superior in battle to a Spanish man. Further challenging the social hierarchy through cross-dressing, the end of the chapter depicts laughter at the jest, with 'Sir James playing the proper Page, and Meg sitting in her Majesty' as he serves her at dinner.[103] A tavern worker being served by a nobleman in that same tavern, like a queen, is the very definition of an upended social structure – a

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[100] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cr.

[101] *Ibid.*, sig. Cr. Although the term 'ponyard' or poniard has an etymological basis in French, the term is found in English literature as early as 1533, so the term does not necessarily denote that it is a French weapon. Likewise, although poniards could be used as parrying daggers in duelling, Meg only pulls her second weapon after she has successfully disarmed Sir James, suggesting that she is 'swordfighting' in the English style. 'poniard, n.'. OED Online. Oxford University Press. https://oed.com/view/Entry/147634?redirectedFrom=ponyard (accessed May 11, 2020).

[102] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cr.

[103] *Ibid.*, sig. Cv.

situation created by Meg's appropriation of a specific kind of masculine clothing, social codes, and her superior ability to fight.

The nationalism of this chapter is reinforced when an abashed Sir James admits his duel defeat to Sir Thomas More, who is visiting the inn for dinner. The real More, who like Skelton and Somers, was also the star of jest texts – and was additionally an author (he wrote *A Merry Jest* around 1514) – responds to Sir James' 'confession' by saying that it is 'no dishonour to be foylde by an Englishman' as 'Caesar himself was beaten back by their valour'.[104] The joke, of course, is that an Englishwoman has beaten Sir James in the duel – and also that he was 'foiled' by a woman. A foil is a blunted weapon, used for practice, suggesting the Sir James has been emasculated through the medium of swordplay. Such details may encourage a reader to take the text solely as an exercise in humour, but through that humour it may also be interpreted as propaganda.

The descriptions of weapons are important for interpretation of this section of the text. Early in chapter four, the Spanish Sir James threatens to 'run…through with his rapier' any competitor for the affections of the hostess of the Eagle Inn, showing that he (unsurprisingly) favours a fashionable Continental weapon. The author of the jest-biography specifically notes his use of the popular rapier, rather than using the more general term 'sword'[105]. The rapier was of Spanish origin; Tobias Capwell writes that

> [rapier] probably…originates with the Spanish *espada ropera,* a 'sword of the robe', that is, a 'dress' sword, one worn with everyday clothes. An Iberian or at least south European origin for the rapier is supported by what may be the first German use of the term, in the martial arts compendium of Paulus Hector Mair (after 1542), in which the 'rapir' is referred to as the 'ensis hispanicus'.[106]

[104] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cr.
[105] *Ibid.*, sig. B4r.
[106] Capwell, *The Noble Art of the Sword,* 31-32.

Use of a rapier suggests acquisition of skills in swordplay through reading fencing treatises, taking lessons from fencing masters, and practicing in fencing schools with blunted or button-tipped weapons – rather than through military experience.[107] Such study was considered essential for a cultured and courteous gentleman – Markku Peltonen notes that '…duelling [was] perceived as an integral part of courtesy, but it was even said to enhance the general level of civility within gentlemanly society'.[108] In a way, rapier fencing training could be seen as a social leveller: virtually any man who could afford an expensive sword and training for using it – which could run to £20-100 – could do so.[109] Similarly, unlike the broadsword or longsword that had typified earlier combat (and judicial duels in the decades and centuries before), rapier fencing and duelling gave less advantage to stronger or larger men.[110] Duels consequently became more popular, not least because successful rapier duelling was more dependent on finesse and skill than brute strength. Indeed, Vincentio Saviolo, the great fencing master, writes in 1595 that in duels 'men are not measured as woollen Cloth by the yarde…little men have oftentimes overthrowen great fellowes'.[111]

In contrast to Sir James' 'foreign' rapier, Meg carries a sword (also called a whinyard – a short sword) and threatens Sir James with a poniard (dagger). She fights with English weapons of an older style, despite the trend for foreign swords. Fighting with what is likely to be a shorter sword also puts her at a distinct disadvantage – his reach with the longer rapier would be much

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[107] Low, *Manhood and the Duel*, 19.
[108] Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England*, 18.
[109] Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth, *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 254.
[110] Green and Svinth, *Martial Arts of the World*, 254. Jennifer Low even speculates that had they been allowed to train, the lighter, easier to handle rapier would have been an ideal weapon for women to use. Jennifer Low, '"Women are wordes, men are deedes": female duelists in the drama', in *Women, Violence, and English Renaissance Literature: Essays Honoring Paul Jorgensen*, ed. Linda Woodbridge and Sharon A. Beehler (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2003), 273.
[111] Vincentio Saviolo, *Vincentio Saviolo his practise In two bookes. The first intreating of the use of the rapier and dagger. The second, of honor and honorable quarrels* (London: Printed by [Thomas Scarlet for] John Wolfe, 1595, sig. Q4r.

greater, which makes her victory the more impressive. Meg wins her duel not only because of her natural talent, but also because of her quintessential Englishness: both are superior to the Spaniard's masculinity and his training in fashionable swordplay. This section of the jest-biography suggests that even an English woman is superior in fighting to a Spanish man – especially if she is armed with English weapons. Furthermore, Meg's use of a short sword rather than a rapier shows that she is a good citizen and follows the government's dictates about rapier duelling.

This shift in popular weaponry, and its meanings, was reflected in contemporary English literature and theatre. Around 1597 Henry Porter (d. 1599) wrote *A pleasant Comedie of The Two Angry Women of Abingdon*, which equates rapier duelling with the lack of 'real' masculinity:

> I see by this dearth of good swords, that dearth of sword and Buckler fight, begins to grow out, I am sorry for it, I shall never see good manhood again, if it be once gone, this poking fight of rapier and dagger will come up then, than a man, a tall man, & a good sword and buckler man, will be spitted like a Cat or a cunney, then a boy will be as good as a man…[112]

Porter describes how the changing fashion for weapons puts men who use the old style of fighting (with sword and buckler) at risk: even tall men who would naturally have an advantage in the older style of sword fighting. Porter, who, ironically, himself died of a rapier wound in 1599[113], equates swordplay with sex: a man may be 'spitted' (run through his body) with a rapier like a 'cunney' (which had the meanings of both a rabbit and female genitalia). As Porter's dialogue suggests, rapier duelling could be imagined as feminising and infantilising swordplay –

[112] Henry Porter, *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon. 1599.* (London: Issued for subscribers by the ed. of the Tudor facsimile texts, 1911), sig. E3v.
[113] G. K. Hunter, 'Porter, Henry (*d.* 1599)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed 29 Sept 2014, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22568.

making men less manly.

This section of the jest-biography may be interpreted as an allegory not only for the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, but also more generally for the intermittent Anglo-Spanish war, which lasted from around 1585-1603. The character of Long Meg may even refer to the female political leader ultimately responsible for England's victory: Queen Elizabeth I. For when Sir James is forced to serve Long Meg at dinner, she is described as sitting 'in her majesty'.[114] Although it is unlikely that Meg was intended to be taken literally as a stand-in for the queen (albeit impressive, Long Meg the barmaid is not a typical representation of Gloriana), this text is part of a tradition of popular print propaganda that glorifies England's past and contemporary defeat of Spanish adversaries. Sir James of Castile in the jest-biography may even represent a specific Armada figure. His name is an Anglicization of Don Diego, and at the time of the Spanish Armada there were a few important military figures with that name: Don Diego Flores de Valdes (or Valdez), the commander of the Squadron of Castile; Don Diego Medrano, who had command of the galleys; and Don Diego Carrillo de Mendoza y Pimentel who, like Sir James of the jest-biography, was of Castilian origin. The latter's failure during the Armada was particularly public: having been taken prisoner, there was published in London an account of his part in the war in 1588 (just two years before the registration of the Long Meg jest-biography) under the title *The deposition of Don Diego Piementellj, cheefe maister of one regiment of the campe of the King of Spayne*.[115] This deposition outlines, in detail, Pimentel's ancestry, his connections to the Spanish royal family, and his role and history in the military, before

[114] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cv.
[115] Diego Carrillo de Mendoza y Pimentel, *The Deposition of Don Diego Piementellj, Cheefe Maister of One Regiment of the Campe of the King of Spayne as Hee Deposed Before, and in the Presence of the Chiefest Lords of the Counsaile of the Haghe in Holland. Translated Out of Dutch into English, by F.M.* (London: Printed first at Delfe, and nowe reprinted at London by [John Charlewood for] John Woolfe, 1588).

explaining how he came to be captured by a Dutch admiral. That public, published humiliation of a high-ranking military man may be gestured at in the *Long Meg* jest-biography.

Long Meg's defeat of Sir James is not the only place in the jest-biography that likely refers, indirectly, to the contemporary foreign conflicts. Chapters eleven and twelve of the jest-biography describe how Long Meg fights against the French army; in the internal chronology of the jest-biography this would have taken place during the Italian Wars of 1542-1546. In chapter eleven, despite previously having proven that she is perfectly capable of fighting as a soldier, Meg works in the menial, typically female, post of 'laundress' (which also had associations with prostitution) in the town of Boulogne, which was at that time under English control.[116] At this point in the text the French are besieging the town, and the English soldiers are 'wearied with long waking'.[117] One night, French soldiers attempt to breach the city walls, but are seen by the English watch, who raise the alarm. Instead of waiting for the soldiers to respond, Long Meg, who is awake and doing laundry, grabs a halberd – a long, heavy spear with an axe head at the end – and proceeds to do battle herself. The weapon she is depicted as using, one used by foot soldiers, suggests her sheer strength and range of capabilities as a warrior. She calls the other women in the town, and these 'women Souldiers' throw stones and pour boiling water on the attackers, before the (male) English soldiers can take up arms and defend the city. When the English open the gates to engage in a sortie to beat back the French from the walls, Long Meg continues to fight alongside the men: she is 'one of the formost with her Halbert to follow the Chase'.[118] She is rewarded for her valour by King Henry VIII who gives her eight pence a day

[116] In chapter ten of the text, Meg offers to take the place of a colleague when the army is rounding up men to fight in the war with France. Meg proves to an army captain and a crowd of people that she can fight. She shoots and reloads a gun ['Caliver'] 'with such nimblenes [*sic*] and activitie, that they all wondered at her'. The captain agrees to take her into his troop, although first she works as a 'laundress'. *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. D3r.
[117] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. D3r.
[118] A 'halbert', or halberd, is a long two-handed pole weapon, topped with an axe blade and spike. *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. D3v.

pension for the duration of her life.

Long Meg's specific use of a halberd, a heavy, brutal weapon, is just one example of how the text uses specific language and terminology of violence to demonstrate Meg's capabilities as a warrior. In chapter twelve, Long Meg is still with the English army in France, but again proves herself to be a formidable fighter. Dressed as a soldier, she accepts the single combat challenge of a Frenchman – and ultimately cuts off his head with a scimitar, which is 'othered' by its eastern, 'foreign' origins. Although it is never made explicit, the English Long Meg may here be understood to have acquired an enemy's weapon, possibly through defeating an opponent in battle – as it is unlikely the English troops had spare weapons of this sort available for their laundresses. Meg uses this scimitar, a special variety of sword, to decapitate the best of the French soldiers. This episode from the jest-biography may be a metaphor of the righteousness of the English (Protestant) cause: Meg (a woman) uses the appropriated weaponry of the great threat to Christianity (the 'Turks') to cut off the head of the best of the French (Catholic) soldiers.

After her victory over the French champion, Long Meg pulls off her 'Burganet', a metal helmet, releasing her long hair, 'whereby the French-men perceived she was a Woman, and thereupon the English without Bollein [Boulogne] gave a great showte'.[119] The French prince is seemingly so impressed with Meg's victory over his champion that, like his enemy King Henry, he rewards her with money: a 'hundreth [*sic*] crowns for her valour'.[120] Long Meg's obvious military superiority, combined with the juxtaposition of her long hair and her masculine headgear, serves as both jest and as propaganda: even an English woman is a better warrior than

[119] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. D3v.
[120] *Ibid.*, sig. D3v. King Francois' son, who later became King Henri II, owned a scimitar, which probably was made shortly before his death in 1559. This sword is housed in the Wallace Collection in London. Capwell, *The Noble Art of the Sword*, 77.

the best of the French soldiers. English victory is absolute.

In the light of the similarities between events of the jest-biography and recorded historical events, and the literary texts describing them, we should read the jest-biography – much as we read contemporary texts like *The Faerie Queene* – with an eye for topical resonance (if not allegory). Although it is tempting to equate Long Meg with Queen Elizabeth directly, as both are victorious women who faced foreign aggression, it is more likely that Long Meg is meant to be understood more generally throughout the text as an inspiring, folkloric figure. The text can be interpreted as English propaganda more broadly in that Long Meg's exploits stir up (and propagate) nationalistic fervour in a time of Spanish aggression, and help remind readers of earlier (similar) triumphs over French military forces.

Military Propaganda

Although any section of *The Life of Long Meg* depicting Meg fighting in the army may be interpreted as military propaganda, some sections of the text are so obviously pro-military service they may even be considered recruitment propaganda. Chapter five of the jest-biography is about Long Meg's duel with an injured soldier who has returned to England from war; chapter ten of the text describes a scene of military conscription, and shows how Long Meg comes to join the army herself.

Following directly after the chapter about Long Meg's defeat of Sir James of Castile in a duel, chapter five is striking because it draws a direct contrast between two kinds of men. Sir James (as a foreigner) is depicted as failing at masculinity as he loses two fights to Long Meg. In contrast, in the next chapter, which describes a sword fight between Long Meg and an injured (former) soldier, she is not the victor: this is the only fight she loses in the jest-biography. Unlike the way Long Meg humiliates Sir James in chapter four, the headline of chapter five notes that

the section will be about the 'courtiesie shee [Long Meg] used towards Souldiers'.[121]

In the internal chronology of the jest-biography, readers might assume that the unnamed soldier may have been involved in the Italian Wars of the mid-sixteenth century, which saw fighting in Italy, France, and the 'Low Countries', or in one of England's earlier invasions of France.[122] This visitor to the Eagle Inn is described as a 'poore Souldier…that was in great distresse, simply attired, and worse maimed'.[123] He is said to be a vagrant, which was not an uncommon state for former soldiers, there having been official action against vagabonds that coincided with or followed military activity and wars, including Henry VIII's expedition to France in 1545 and the war against Scotland and France from 1562-1564.[124] After 1588, ex-military men had swelled the ranks of the unskilled and poor in both urban and rural areas, and posed a problem more dramatic than those of the average vagrant poor: because they were trained in fighting, they had the potential to become violent.[125] In 1575 the Privy Council was troubled by 1,500 soldiers returning from Ireland who formed 'common routes…of roguing beggars by the highway side', while in the wake of the Portugal expedition mutinous veterans rioted in the metropolis (500 were reported in Westminster alone).[126]

The soldier in chapter five of the Long Meg jest-biography used to live 'like a man, but falling into extreame sicknesse…lost [his] service'.[127] Much like other vagrants or former

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[121] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cv.
[122] In chapter ten, the jest-biography refers to the Siege of Boulogne, which took place from 19 July to 18 September 1544, as Henry VIII attempted to retain his territorial holdings on the French mainland. The siege certainly took place sometime after chapter five in the internal chronology of the jest-biography – possibly by a few years.
[123] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cv.
[124] A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: the Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1987), 93.
[125] 'Suspicion of vagrants mounted, accentuated after 1588 by the presence on the roads of demobilised soldiers and sailors. The problems were particularly acute in the towns. Their populations were swollen by the arrival of unskilled newcomers. Unemployment or under-employment was rife, owing in part to the unpredictable nature of work in the cloth industry'. Marjorie K. McIntosh, 'Local Responses to the Poor in Late Medieval and Tudor England', *Continuity and Change* 3, no. Special Issue 02 (1988): 230-231.
[126] Beier, *Masterless Men*, 94.
[127] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C2r.

soldiers, he lost his place in the social and economic grid of early modern England: all men who were not property owners, merchants, or guild members were required to be in some kind of service (or be apprenticed), or risk being labelled criminals. The text notes that this has influenced the Soldier's perception of his masculinity: he used to live 'like a man' but feels emasculated by his lowered status through lack of employment.

The text describes how Long Meg devises two tests to ascertain if the soldier is in fact a 'good' man: she first assesses his morality through conversation, and then arranges a duel of honour for/with him. When the soldier visits the Eagle Inn, he is in bad spirits; he 'fetcht a great sigh' when Meg brings him beer. Meg tries to cheer him by pointing out that he is 'big enough, and GOD hath done his part in thee, a man proper enough'. Already locally famous for helping people in trouble, she then tests his morality by suggesting that instead of living in poverty, he should steal: 'If I were a man, by Cockes bones I would rather with my sword teare mony out of the peasants throtes, then live in this want: but see the slavish and base humors of Cowardes, that for feare live in misery'.[128] She seems to prey on the man's insecurities and pride as a soldier, suggesting that he is a 'coward' (and not a real man) because he chooses to live in poverty instead of using violence, and theft, for financial support. But the reader knows that Long Meg is not seriously suggesting that the soldier should steal from the poor or from the naive farmers or labourers ('peasants') visiting London – early in the same chapter she is described as being 'famoused amongst all estates, both rich & poore, but chiefly of them which wanted, or were in distresse' because 'there was no poore neighbour dwelling nigh, whom she would not relieve'.[129] In reply to Long Meg's suggestion that it is better to steal rather than live in poverty, the soldier asserts that he refuses 'to picke a pocket, to filtch any thing out of a house, or to steale a sheete

[128] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C2r.
[129] *Ibid.*, sig. Cv.

from the hedge, or to robbe any poore men, Women or Children as they travaile,' because 'I holde it in scorne, and had rather bee famisht, then incurre such base discredit'.[130]

Having ascertained the soldier's superior morality and sense of honour (he refuses to 'discredit' himself through theft), Long Meg challenges him to a second test: she lends him a sword and asks him to challenge a 'Servingman, a tall knave, with a blew Coat, and a white satten doublet' to a fight.[131] She then dresses herself in the ambiguous male apparel she had described, which consists of the coat of a servant or apprentice combined with the doublet of a noble or wealthy man. Although open to multiple interpretations, this apparel would suggest the wearer is the servant of a nobleman, with her white satin doublet suggesting an expensive cast-off from an employer. These mixed sartorial signals, in a text preoccupied with the signifiers of sex, class, wealth, and honour, may be intended to indicate that the disguised Long Meg will be skilful enough at swordplay: an armed serving man from a wealthy or noble house may well have been trained in fighting to help protect the household. In 1577 William Harrison wrote in his *Description of England* that 'Our nobility wear commonly swords or rapiers with their daggers, as doth every common servingman also that followeth his lord and master'.[132] Meg meets the soldier in the designated area, and, as promised, he challenges her to a fight by giving her 'some crosse language' – a prompt to fight based on *code duello*.[133] They clash, and the soldier proves to be a powerful opponent: he is 'one that feared not his flesh, [and] laide on such a loade, that Meg was faine to bid him stay his hand'.[134]

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[130] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C2r.
[131] *Ibid.*, sig. C2r.
[132] Capwell, *The Noble Art of the Sword*, 113.
[133] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C2r. Jones, *The Book of Honor and Armes*, sig. Bv. As Jones explains 'Injuries are either by words or by deeds, and that in everie Injurie by words, the Injurer ought bee the Challenger: but in an Injurie by deedes the Injured ought to challenge, as for example', The soldier's 'crosse language' to Long Meg is an insult and a reason for her to duel.
[134] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C2v.

Meg loses this fight – if by choice is unclear. Either way, having established that the ex-solider is a 'real man', Long Meg gives him clothing, a sword and money, and bids him to be 'a true man, and get him a service, and when that money was spent come to her for more'.[135] She rescues him, then, not just by giving him the trappings of status and masculinity that will allow him to seek work (clothing and a sword), but also by reminding him of his own capabilities. This section can be interpreted as propaganda for disbanded military men. Although reflecting anxieties about injured soldiers and their place in society, it also suggests that 'real' men serve in the army, and that they should be able to prove themselves, in morality and 'service' as well as fighting, when off the battlefield. Furthermore, this chapter comes before Meg's own voluntary induction (not conscription) into the army – despite an awareness of the very risks to heath and body described – she is depicted as willing to risk life and limb for England.

Military conscription, which was a nearly constant threat in the sixteenth century, is used as an important plot point in *Long Meg.* Chapter ten of the jest-biography explores a range of contemporary issues concerning the English military, and may be interpreted as pro-military propaganda. It opens with an explanation as to why England is going to war in the first place: 'there fell a great strife, betweene the French King and Henry R. of England: whereupon he resolved to levie an Army of men, with a mighty Fleete to passe into France: upon which there was a general presse through England, and especially about London and Westminster'.[136]

The Life of Long Meg of Westminster, first registered in 1590, was likely in circulation at another time of 'general presse', or mass conscription, and the situation it describes will have been (perhaps alarmingly) familiar for contemporary readers or audiences. As England (and later Britain) did not have a regular, professional standing army until Parliament's New Model Army

[135] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C2v.
[136] *Ibid.*, sig. D2v.

was created around the time of the English Civil War, armies were, in the time of *Long Meg*, raised through conscription. In 1589, just a year before the registration of the Long Meg jest-biography, there had been the largest recorded conscription of the late sixteenth century: 'Elizabeth had levied some 100,000 men for military service but this had been spread out over the period 1585-1602, an average of only 5-6,000 men a year. Only during the Portugal expedition of 1589, the counterstroke to the Armada, did Elizabeth raise a force as large or larger than the Mansfeld force [of around 12,000 men]'.[137] Thus, the jest-biography was registered in what was likely a time of fear of men being forced into military service, and being removed from their homes, families, and work. It seems to aim to mitigate that fear, however, and show the glory of military service – thus the text can be read as pro-military propaganda. As Gillian Brennan explains, around the time that *Long Meg* was registered, there was an acute need to shape public opinion about military service:

> In the 1590s, the need for patriotic propaganda was as great as ever from the government's point of view. The urgency to persuade Englishmen to repel the invaders may have gone, although there were further armadas in 1599 and 1601; but recruits were needed for the long and tedious campaigns in the Netherlands in support of the Dutch…Deserters and traitors continued to be a problem…The realisation that Shakespeare's audience was not only divided by wealth and status, but also included men who had fought in disastrous campaigns and suffered depravation and repression changes the perception of national united taken for granted by many critics.[138]

In chapter ten of the jest-biography, a constable visits the Eagle Inn and presses Harry the Ostler (hosteler/innkeeper), Meg's fellow servant, for military service. Long Meg, however, intervenes to 'intreat the Constable, and to tell him that hee [Harry] was the onely stay of her Mistresses…and if that he were prest forth her Mistres were undone'.[139] Long Meg's argument is

[137] Stephen J. Stearns, 'Conscription and English Society in the 1620s', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 1972): 4.
[138] Brennan, *Patriotism, Power and Print*, 48-49.
[139] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. D2v.

compelling: Harry would have had a lot of responsibility, probably seeing to horses as well as having some general management in the running of the inn, and possibly was the only man working at the inn at that point (if any younger or fitter male employees had already been conscripted). The constable ignores her, and Meg gives him a box on the ear, causing an uproar. Neighbours are shocked that 'the Constable was beaten for pressing of a man'.[140] The dangerous challenge to authority escalates when the captain arrives (at this time the title 'captain' was often a general term for military leader; he could be a company commander or even a colonel).[141] Meg asserts to the 'captain' that she has the skills and the potential to be a soldier equal to those of any man – a useful piece of pro-army propaganda. By so stating she makes the army appear desirable (and any man who does not choose to join it seem less, and more fearful, than a woman):

> I dare doe as much as any of thy troope, either advauncing my colours, tossing of a pike, or discharging a Piece [gun]. For proofe quoth she, and she snatcht a Caliver [gun] out of ones hand that stood by: see how well I can both charge and discharge, which she performed with such nimbleness and activitie, that they all wondered at her…[142]

Much like Long Meg's skill with a sword, her ability to use a gun, at that time a reasonably specialised skill, seems to be innate, although there may be other explanations for her proficiency.[143]

This section of the book raises a particular question: how would a woman learn military

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[140] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. D2v.
[141] 'The captain commanded the company, assisted by his lieutenant and a number of ensigns. The term "captain" was also generic, referring to a senior soldier who commanded, or had commanded, a unit; thus confusingly a colonel of a regiment could also be referred to as "captain".' Paul Scannell, *Conflict and Soldiers' Literature in Early Modern Europe: The Reality of War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 121.
[142] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. D3r.
[143] 'The weapons drill illustrated by De Gheyn, originally entitled Wapenhandelinghe van Roers Musquetten ende Spiessen, is in three parts: for the caliver, a lighter smaller bore longarm than the musket, the musket itself and the pike. The main differences between the caliver and the musket are in loading; the caliver is loaded from a flask, the musket from a bandoleer, and in the fact that the lighter caliver did not require the use of a rest.' Jacob De Gheyn (ed. David J. Blackmore), *The Renaissance Drill Book* (London: Greenhill, 2003), 7.

skills at this time? Contemporary readers may have understood Meg's skills to be from tuition from any of the tavern's male servants, or soldier or ex-soldier patrons, or possibly from a local militia system, which was formalised in 1572-3 (after the internal chronology of the book, but before the text's registration), which taught men to march and use weapons.[144] If Meg was as capable of passing as a man, wearing breeches and covering her hair, as other chapters of the book suggest, it is possible that readers may have understood that she had participated in some local military training. Or, if the readership of the book assumed Meg was literate or had someone to read to her, there were books available theoretically to learn military skills; many of these books were readily available in the 1590s:

> The London bookseller Andrew Maunsell's catalogue, which appeared in 1595…listed books of self defence, such as di Grassi's *True Arte of Defense* and Saviolo's *Practice in two Bookes* alongside the respected English works on the military arts. The most recently printed manuals, such as Styward's *Pathwaie to Martiall Discipline* (1581), Garrard's *Arte of Warre* (1591), Clayton's *Approved order of Martiall Discipline* (1581), Roger Williams's *Briefe discourse of Warre* (1590), Barnabe Rich's *A Path-Way to Military Practice* (1587) and John Smythe's *Certain discourses concerning the formes and effects of diuers sorts of weapons* (1591) and *Inscrutions, observations, and orders mylatarie* (1594) and were all available to Maunsell's customers, as were the classics of military thought.[145]

Irrespective of how she became proficient in military skills, Meg's abilities, and her assertiveness, win her a place in the army: she is given the press money ('an Angell'), and is allowed to go in Harry's place – although, despite her obvious fighting skill, she works first as a

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[144] '...Elizabeth's government established the foundation for an effective militia system when the trained bands were introduced in 1572-3...The muster did have a training element, which usually took place on the second day of the gathering and involved marching, forming companies into squares, and manoeuvring them about the muster ground. These drills were occasionally followed by mock battles that might involve both foot and horse troops, if the latter were raised in inadequate numbers. The real training of the militia was to take place at home where men engaged in "special" or "private musters." It was at these gathering that members of the militia were expected to learn how to use their weapons, how to march in files, and in the case of mounted troops, how to charge the enemy'. David R. Lawrence, *The Complete Soldier: Military Books and Military Culture in Early Stuart England, 1603-1645* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 31-32.

[145] Lawrence, *The Complete Soldier*, 43-44.

laundress.

Although Meg's initial motive for joining the army seems to be to 'save' both Harry and the Eagle Inn, there is a current of patriotism running through the sections in which Meg is in military service. Female-specific patriotism in military contexts was not unheard of: Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van de Pol write in their seminal work about female cross-dressing in early modern Europe that among the many reasons women may have dressed as men to perform military service, one was out of patriotic duty: 'Like romantic motives, enlisting as a soldier or seaman to help defend the homeland was to a certain degree a legitimate reason for a woman to dress in men's clothing. Indeed, in periods of war we usually find peaks in the numbers of women dressed as men'.[146]

This section (chapter ten of the jest-biography), in which Meg saves Harry from military service, benefits from comparison with the impressment scene of Thomas Dekker's play *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600), which has a similar premise, but a different outcome. Simon Eyre, shoemaker and future Lord Mayor of London, promises his employee Ralph, who has been selected for military service, and his new wife Jane, that he will use his influence to make sure Ralph is not sent to war. Despite his bluster, Eyre is rebuffed by Lacy (at this point in the play the company commander):

LACY

Truly, my friends, it lies not in my power.
The Londoners are pressed, paid and set forth
By the Lord Mayor. I cannot change a man.

…

[146] Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 30.

EYRE

> Tawsoone, my fine Firk, tawsoone! Peace, scoundrels. See you this man, capitains? You will not release him? Well, let him go. He's a proper shot: let him vanish! Peace, Jane, dry up thy tears, they'll make his powder dankish. Take him, brave men. Hector of Troy was a hackney to him, Hercules and Termagant scoundrels. Prince Arthur's Round Table, but the Lord of Ludgate, ne'er fed such a tall, such a dapper swordman. By the life of Pharaoh, a brave, resolute swordman. Peace, Jane; I say no more, mad knaves.[147]

Understanding that the higher-ranking man has no intention of changing his mind, to save face Eyre quickly backtracks and encourages Ralph to go, comedically overstating the shoemaker Ralph's skills as a warrior. Ralph does return to England eventually, but severely wounded. Whilst Dekker's play is not necessarily anti-military service in that it does show an injured soldier being successfully reincorporated into society, Long Meg instead shows an idealised version of military service, beginning with her introduction to the army. Whilst the text celebrates Long Meg's abilities and patriotism (shown by her willingness to fight in the war), the jest-biography is also critical of 'Harry the Ostler' who is 'very loath to goe' to France to fight: he is less of a (patriotic) man than Long Meg.

Religious Propaganda

In addition to having the potential to serve as military propaganda, there are two sections of *The Life of Long Meg* that may be interpreted as religious propaganda. The first section depicts a humorous duel, which provides a link between the jest-biography and the Martin Marprelate literary/religious debates of the late sixteenth century. The second shows how Long Meg's interaction with, and fight against, a 'bad' Catholic priest may serve as Protestant propaganda.

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[147] Thomas Dekker and Jonathan Gil Harris (ed.), *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (London: Methuen Drama, 2008), 1.146-150; 1.163-171.

Chapter eight of the Long Meg jest-biography seems to refer to the Martin Marprelate controversy: Long Meg is shown using weapons and wearing male clothing for fun and freedom (instead of her usual reasons of protection of the weak, didactic purposes, or in battle): 'It chanced of an Evening, that Meg would needs be pleasant, and so put on a sute of mans apparel, and with her Sword and Buckler walkt the streetes'.[148] At the same time, a nobleman 'goe[s] abroad with one man to see fashions' (not unlike Prince Hal in *Henry IV, part 2*) and meets Meg on the street, thinking her 'a tall fellow swinging up and downe': her physical demeanour is that of a swaggering young man.[149] The nobleman, who is apparently looking for any opportunity for a fight, and seems to find Meg's confidence provocative, confronts her:

> How much money quoth the Nobleman hast in thy purse? In faith quoth Meg, little enough: wilt lend me any? I marry [quoth] the Nobleman and putting his Thumbe to Megs mouth, said, there's a tester: Meg with that up with her fist, and tooke him a good boxe on the eare, & said, there sir Knave, there is a groat againe, and now I owe you but two pence.[150]

Gestures involving thumbs were a common aspect of the visual language of insult (consider 'Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?' from act one, scene one of *Romeo and Juliet*). As the nobleman intrudes maliciously into Meg's physical space, mimicking forced sexual contact, he gives her a reason to fight a duel with him; both, after a brief brawl, draw their swords.

This chapter of Long Meg is remarkably similar to an episode in *Tarleton's Jests* – but there are significant differences. The scene from *Tarleton's Jests* is worth quoting at length:

> As Tarlton & others passed along Fleetstreet, hee espied a spruce yong gallant, blacke of complexion, with long haire hanging downe over his eares, and his beard of the Italian cut, in white Satten, very quaintly cut, and his body to stiff starcht, that he could not bend himselfe any way for no gold : Tarlton, seeing such a wonder comming, trips before him,

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[148] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C3v. Although the term 'streetwalker' had the meaning of a prostitute seeking clients as early 1591, when Robert Green uses the term in his *Notable Discovery of Coosenage*, Long Meg intends to pass as a man.
[149] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C3v.
[150] *Ibid.*, sig. C3v. A tester (or testoon) was a silver coin worth 6d; a groat was worth 4d.

> and meeting this gallant took the wall of him, knowing that one so proud, at least looked for the prerogative. The gallant scorning that a Player should take the wall, or so much indignitie him, turnes himselfe, and presently drew his Rapier, Tarlton drew likewise : The Gentleman fell to it roundly, but Tarlton in his own defence, compassing and trauversing his ground, gaped with the wide mouth, whereat the people laughed : the Gentleman pausing, enquired why he gaped so? O Sir saies he, in hope to swallow you, for by my troth, you seeme to me like a prune in a Messe of white Broth: at this the people parted them, the Gentleman [noting] his mad humour, went his way well contented, for he knew not how to amend it.[151]

Both incidences of violence are incited by a man of superior social status taking offense from one of lower social status – not uncommon in duelling culture, but contradicting contemporary fencing masters (such as Vincentio Saviolo) who wrote that duelling should be a last resort: 'I judge it not meet that a man should hazard himself in the perill of death, but for such a cause as deserveth it'.[152] Likewise, the men (or woman) of lower social status prove to be able opponents (the real Tarlton was a famously skilled fencer in addition to being an actor and jester), and in both situations the fights are resolved with humour – unsurprisingly, since both are from jest texts. *Long Meg* could possibly have borrowed this scenario, in part, from *Tarleton's Jests*, but there is another key link between Tarlton and *Long Meg*: Meg initially seems to be winning the sword fight against the disguised nobleman, but is outnumbered when the constable and the local watch arrive 'to part the fray'. The constable questions the combatants, and the nobleman gives his name (although it is never noted in the text): 'they all put off their Caps' as a sign of respect for his high status. When the constable asks Meg for her name, she replies that she is 'Cutbert Curry Knave'. The constable then commands the watch 'to lay holde upon her, and to carry her

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[151] *Tarltons Iests Drawne into these Three Parts. 1 His Court-Wittie Iests 2 His Sound Cittie Iests. 3 His Country Prettie Iests. Full of Delight, Wit, and Honest Myrth* (London, Printed by [Thomas Snodham] for Iohn Budge, and are to be sold at his shop, at the great South doore of Paules, 1613), Bv-B2. Tarlton died in 1588, and the jests included in this book are attributed to him, so were likely in circulation in some form well before they were published.

[152] Saviolo, *His Practice*, sig. Aa2v, 394.

to the Counter'.[153] Although the alias Meg uses seems on one level to be merely a pun on her actions, and perhaps her reputation as a protector of the weak – 'to curry' is to beat or hit, and a 'knave' is an unscrupulous man – 'Cuthbert Curryknave' is the pseudonym of the anonymous author of *An Almond for a Parrat* (1589), a pamphlet attributed to Thomas Nash, and written as part of the Martin Marprelate controversy.[154]

The Martin Marprelate controversy was essentially a literary duel, with opponents trading witty ripostes about religion through the popular genre of the pamphlet. The works can be considered propaganda, as religious leaders sought to shape public opinion through the medium of print. The controversy began in 1588, just two years before the *Long Meg* jest-biography was registered, when established church leaders enlisted the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and especially Richard Tarlton, to mock the Disciplinarian religious movement (which sought to remove some of the hierarchy of the English church):

> To effect Whitgift's and Hatton's purpose, Tarleton created the character Martin Marprelate—a drunken blaspheming Disciplinary priest of lewd living on the run from the church authorities. The dual purpose of this character was both to ridicule the Disciplinary preachers as employing scripture to advance their own carnal, selfish ends, and to refute the Disciplinarians' challenge of the Ordinary's court as unlawful by showing objectively the need for an Ordinary, superior to such priests, who held the power of licensing, supervising, and correcting such ungodly, heretical, misbehaving, rebellious, and sacrilegious priests as Tarleton represented on the stage.[155]

When Tarlton died on 3 September 1588, the Martin Marprelate role was taken on by Will Kempe in a jig called *The May-Game of Martinisme* – but the battle quickly turned from stage to pamphlets.[156] Disciplinary writers started publishing humorous tracts that challenged the

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[153] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C3v.
[154] 'While it is generally accepted that Nashe was Cuthbert Curry Knave (in *Almond*) and Lyly wrote under the name Pap Hatchet (in *Pap With a Hatchet*), the identity of Pasquil, who wrote three anti-Martinist tracts, remains hidden.' Arul Kumaran, 'Robert Greene's Martinist Transformation in 1590', *Studies in Philology* 103, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 253.
[155] J. P. Conlan, '"Where's Tarleton?": The Contentious Chaucerian Afterlife of Elizabeth's Most Famous Clown', *Comparative Drama* 49 (4), 2015: 448.
[156] Conlan, 'Where's Tarleton?', 449.

authority of the leaders of the established English Church.[157] Their pamphlets appropriated the character of Martin Marprelate to attack religious leaders thought to be too concerned with maintaining hierarchies left over from the Catholic church, employing, as Edward Arber writes, 'the "extemporizing" style of Richard Tarleton the clown, to ridicule and affront a proud hierarchy endowed with a large legal means of doing mischief'.[158] In response, senior established church leaders and Privy Counsellors hired popular authors, including John Lyly and Thomas Nashe, to write humorous rebuttals to the Martin Marprelate pamphlets.[159] As anti-Martinist Lyly writes in *Pappe with an hatchet* (1589): 'these mutiners in Church matters, must have their mouthes bungd with jests, not arguments'.[160]

The reference to Cuthbert Curryknave in the Long Meg jest-biography may indicate that at the time of registration in 1590, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* was intended, directly or indirectly, to reflect upon the Marprelate debate on the side of the anti-Martinist authors working for the established English Church. This is consonant with the rest of the jest-biography which is, in many ways, conservative and nationalistic. Thus, it is tempting to read the fight between Long Meg and the disguised nobleman as a direct allegory for the Marprelate debate; Long Meg being the pro-establishment figure, and the quarrelsome, disguised nobleman of the jest-biography as the Marprelate author, who was an educated gentleman or nobleman disguised by a pen name –

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[157] Although in retrospect the Martinist authors have occasionally been grouped with Puritans, the anonymous author behind Junior (probably the same author as Martin Marprelate) noted that although Puritans agreed, in theory, with attacking the church authorities, they disagreed with the Martinists' use of jests: 'Those whom foolishly men call Puritanes, like of the matter I have handled, but the forme they cannot brooke. So that herein I have them both [Puritans and church authorities] for mine adversaries'. Martin Marprelate, *Theses Martinianae*. Ed. John Penry (Wolston, Warks: John Hodgkins, 1589), sig. Aiir.

[158] Edward Arber, *An Introductory Sketch to the Martin Marprelate Controversy, 1588-1590* (Westminster, 1895), 11.

[159] Benjamin Griffin, 'Marring and Mending: Treacherous Likeness in Two Renaissance Controversies', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (January 1, 1997): 367.

[160] John Lyly, *Pappe with an hatchet* (London: Imprinted by John Anoke, and John Astile [i.e. T. Orwin], for the Bayliue of Withernam, cum priuilegio perennitatis, and are to bee sold at the signe of the crab tree cudgell in thwack-coate lane, 1589), sig. A4r.

but it is more complicated. More than twenty candidates have been proposed as the Martin Marprelate author, and a likely candidate is Job Throckmorton (or Throkmorton), a notoriously anti-Catholic MP.[161] Although Throckmorton was arrested in October 1590, suspected of writing as Martin Marprelate, he was released.[162] As the grandson of Sir George Throckmorton and Katherine Neville, the eldest daughter of Sir Edward Neville and the sister of Sir Henry Neville, all of whom were important members of Henry VIII's court, Throckmorton may have been somewhat protected by his family's social and political connections. John Penry, another suspected author of Marprelate texts, was convicted of 'publishing seditious and scandalous words' (although he was not officially accused of writing as Martin Marprelate) and was executed on 29 May 1593.[163]

Crucially, just as the Long Meg of Westminster jest-biography seems to refer to the Marprelate controversy, so both Marprelate and anti-Martinist authors also refer to Long Meg: in the Martinist tract *Theses Martinianae* (1589) and the anti-Martinist *An Almond for a Parrat* (1589), both of which were printed shortly before the Long Meg jest-biography was registered in 1590. The anonymous anti-establishment author writing under the name of 'Martin Junior' (the ostensible son of Martin Marprelate) refers to Long Meg in *Theses Martinianae,* when he says that the author of the anti-Martinist tracts is so crude that 'I can not bee induced to thinke, that hee hath had his bringing up at any other trade, then in carryeng [*sic*] long Meg of Westminsters hand-basket'. He insults the anti-Martinist author by feminising him, suggesting that he works as a maid (a socially subordinated position) to a woman who is certainly unusual, but who also may

[161] Joseph Black, ed., *The Martin Marprelate Tracts: A Modernized and Annotated Edited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xxxiv-xxxv.
[162] *Ibid.,* xliii-xliv.
[163] *Ibid.,* xxxvii.

have been a notorious brothel-owner.[164] In response, Lyly ripostes in 1589 in *Pappe with a hatchet,* 'O doost remember, howe that Bastard *Junior* complaines of brothels, and talkes of long Megg of *Westminster*'.[165] He mocks Martin Junior's reference to 'popular' culture (and perhaps a jest text) and brothels, even as Martin Junior disparages the authors of the Anti-Martinist texts for their own use of wit and humour.

Keith Thomas points to the reason why the Marprelate debate is especially noteworthy, as it created a peculiar tension between the three involved groups:

> ...the episode of Martin Marprelate appears all the more bizarre. For Martin attacked the bishops in the spirit of the Terrae Filius, exposing their private peccadilloes...Yet the irony was that not only the Church but also its Puritan opponents condemned Martin for treating the matter with such levity. However much the graver Puritans disliked the bishops, they did not want scurrilous assistance of this kind. [166]

The Marprelate debate was deeply socially and religiously divisive, revealing England to potentially be vulnerable to attack by both English Catholics (living within the country and abroad) and Catholic Spain and France, as those in the English church with differing opinions fought amongst themselves.[167] Indeed, that is what the anti-Martinist *An Almond for a Parrat* suggests: in the pamphlet, European Catholics celebrate the 'Schismatike one Martin' who is responsible for turning English citizens against the queen, and each other.[168] Conversely, the Long Meg jest-biography is nationalistic, and seeks to glorify and unify England. But the fact that the Long Meg jest-biography and the Marprelate texts may be put into conversation suggests

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[164] *Theses Martinianae*, sig. D2r.
[165] Lyly, *Pappe with an Hatchet*, sig. C2r.
[166] Keith Thomas, 'The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England,' *Times Literary Supplement*, vol. 21 (1977): 79.
[167] Joseph Black, 'The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-89), Anti-Martinism, and the Uses of Print in Early Modern England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, no. 3 (October 1, 1997): 718.
[168] John Lyly and Thomas Nash, *An Almond for a Parrat, or Cutbert Curry-knaues Almes*…(Imprinted at a Place, Not Farre from a Place [i.e. London?: By the Assignes of Signior Some-body [i.e. Eliot's Court Press?], and Are to Be Sold at His Shoppe in Trouble-knaue Stréet, at the Signe of the Standish, 1589), A1-A4v.

that we should approach *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* the way critics have approached the Martin Marprelate exchanges: as having the potential for serious social criticism, despite the jesting tone. The Marprelate quarrel illustrates how important subjects were regularly embedded in humorous literature at this time, and *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* should be understood as having scope to do more than, as the preface suggests, 'procure mirth, and drive away melancholy'.[169]

While religious authorities and political leaders were occupied with challenges to hierarchy within the English church, such as the Marprelate authors, there were also Catholic attempts on the English throne. Aside from the threat the Spanish Armada posed in 1588 to English Protestantism, in 1586 the Babington plot to assassinate Queen Elizabeth and crown Mary, Queen of Scots had been uncovered. Chapter eighteen of the jest-biography, the last chapter of the earliest extant text, takes a clear anti-Catholic position by describing Long Meg's fight with a 'Fryer', and inverting the rhetoric of Catholic ritual as a way of comically illustrating the potential dangers of return to a Catholic England and the influence of 'bad' priests.

Long Meg is much older in this chapter, which is the last section of the earliest extant version of the jest-biography (1620). The context is 'In Queene Maryes [Mary Tudor's] dayes, when Fryers and Monkes began againe to shew themselves'.[170] This would put the internal chronology of this chapter of the jest-biography between 1553 and 1558. Long Meg falls so gravely ill that 'Physitions gave her over'. She makes an astonishing recovery from near death, and the text describes the poor comfort Friar Oliver, the local priest, gives Long Meg. Instead of visiting her to give her spiritual succour, he tries to get some 'spending money from her' and to

[169] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. A3r.
[170] *Ibid.*, sig. C2v.

sell her masses.[171] Friar Oliver says that Long Meg's illness is a 'visitation of the Lord for the great sinnes' she had committed. He recounts these sins specifically; she is a 'Ruffler, a Fighter, and a brawler'; in her chamber are 'Swords and Bucklers, Pike-staves, and Halberts', weapons of personal protection and her army career, respectively.

The language Friar Oliver uses to describe Meg is intriguingly gendered: he accuses her of being 'lewd', commenting on a particularly female lack of sexual probity, but also accuses her of other sins. He calls her a 'brawler', and a 'fighter' (which she undoubtedly is) – but, more offensively, he calls her a 'ruffler', which was a term for a con man who used an assumed status of someone who has been in military service to either beg or get a job.[172] As Long Meg was in military service (and was distinguished, at that) this term could be understood as particularly insulting. The jest-biography uniformly describes Long Meg as a heroine and a morally upright champion of the weak and poor; in contrast, Friar Oliver's attempt to extract money for masses by suggesting that she should perform public penance (or pay up), is not a legitimate religious ceremony for the sake of her soul.[173]

Long Meg, enraged by his insults and attempt at extortion, miraculously gets up from her sickbed, dresses herself 'in mans apparell', arms herself with a bat, and approaches Friar Oliver in public saying that she is 'sent to thee from God, not onely to tell thee of thy sinnes, but to enjoyne thee pennance for the same'. She accuses him of being a 'whoremaster, frequenting the company of light and lascivious women...sitting all day bibbing at the Alehouse, when thou shouldest be at the Booke, with a thousand more other offences, which I can*n*ot rehearse...'[174]

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[171] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C2v-C3r.
[172] 'ruffler, n.1'. OED Online. Oxford University Press. https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2446/view/Entry/168617?rskey=HSuweb&result=1&isAdvanced=false.
[173] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. C3v.
[174] *Ibid.*, sig. C3v.

Despite being a topsy-turvy, humorous episode in the text – Long Meg cross-dresses, beats up a man in religious orders, and convinces him in his gullibility and fear that she is an avenging angel – this scene of Long Meg protecting herself and her community from a 'bad' priest reflects deeply held English Protestant fears of a lingering threat of religious and political upheaval, as well as renewed focus on Catholic religious ritual. In this context, the jest-biography could serve to bolster English nationalism and unify Protestants in their duty to the queen and her government during a time of war against Catholic rulers, and in the face of Catholic plots against the throne.

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Although *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* has not been taken particularly seriously by critics of early modern literature, a close reading of the details of the language and uses of violence show that the jest-biography may have multiple nationalistic and religious meanings that may be interpreted as propaganda. It may be read as nationalist propaganda in that it uses references to specific kinds of weaponry and ways of fighting to illustrate English superiority, and in that it alludes to historic and contemporary events to celebrate English victories. It is pro-military in that it celebrates the English army through the performance of Long Meg in battle, and may be interpreted as recruitment propaganda, describing 'real' masculinity as (voluntary) military service at a time when men were being forced to fight. The text may also be read as supporting the religious *status quo* in that is uses references to instances of fighting that reflect contemporary religious issues as a way of consolidating established, not radical, Protestant nationalism in a time of Catholic threat to England. Far from being an unimportant joke book, *Long Meg* reflects sixteenth and seventeenth century social concerns through its use of the language of violence.

Chapter two: *Long Meg* and the *Querelle des Femmes*

As chapter one of this thesis argued, references to events that happened around the same time as the registration date of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* in 1590 mean that the text can be interpreted as functioning as propaganda specifically of late sixteenth-century England. But the earliest extant printing of the text is from 1620, and by examining the publication context of this version of *The Life of Long Meg*, and reading the jest-biography in a different literary and historic context, it will be revealed, in yet another way, to be much more than an ephemeral jest text: it may be read as an attempt by an historic agent (publisher or promoter of the book) as a way of reflecting on popular contemporary literary debates about women.

As it seems likely, if the 1620 version of the Long Meg jest-biography is a new printing of the 1590 version, it raises the question of *why* the surviving members of the White family decided to print the jest-biography in 1620, after the death of White Sr., but before they transferred the rights. The preface to the text provides a clue to a possible answer: the publication may be a last effort to make some profit out of the jest-biography before transferring the rights, possibly because the text had the potential to be particularly marketable at just that time. The prefatory material suggests that the jest-biography may have been intended to find a place in a contemporary literary debate about women. The author of the introduction asks the reader to bear Long Meg's 'grosse faults…for that shee was a Woman'.[175] This expression is typical of texts about the fundamental nature of women printed in this period, asking forgiveness for their inherent weaknesses. Without the discovery of further evidence (such as a copy of a late

[175] Anon., *The life of Long Meg of Westminster: containing the mad merry pranks shee played in her life time, not onely in performing sundry quarrels with divers ruffins about London, but also how valiantly shee behaved her selfe in the warres of Bolloigne* (London: Printed by Edward Allde for Edward White, 1620), STC (2nd ed.), 17782.5., sig. A3v.

sixteenth-century version of the text) it is not possible to date the preface to *The Life of Long Meg* with certainty, but it may have been purposefully added to the jest-biography to coincide with the increase in the number of a particular kind of texts about the social role of women being printed in English at that time: the *querelle des femmes*.

Texts from the English *querelle des femmes* ('the quarrel about women' or 'the question of women'), like jest-biographies, tend to be in the format of pamphlets or short books. Their publications cluster around certain years: Pamela Joseph Benson observes that there were five *querelle* texts published in 1540-42, five texts in 1557-61, three texts in 1567-72, five texts in 1589-1599, four texts in 1605-1613, and, remarkably, ten texts in 1615-1622 – around the same time as *The Life of Long Meg* was published in 1620.[176] Although most jest literature has not been considered part of the *querelle* tradition, study of *querelle* texts, and especially *The Life of Long Meg*, can be greatly enhanced by considering them together.

Benson limits her definition of *querelle* literature to 'attack and defence' texts, and does not include in her list some 'popular' works (like *Long Meg*). Although recent scholarship of the English *querelle des femmes* has, to some degree, done more to include 'ephemeral' and 'popular' works of literature, including some jestbooks, ballads, and pamphlets alongside more 'serious' books, such as translations of Classical texts, etiquette books, and texts about Christian morality, the *Long Meg* jest-biography, and some similar texts, have been overlooked.[177] Yet *Long Meg*, other 'semi-historical' and 'historical' texts, such as sermons and letters, and 'literary' texts such as poetry, plays and masques, as well as pamphlet debates and jest texts, all have the potential to inform and participate in debates about women – and could therefore be

[176] Pamela Joseph Benson, *Texts from the Querelle, 1616-1640* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 44.
[177] Amanda L. Capern, *The Historical Study of Women: England 1500-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 31.

considered examples of *querelle des femmes* literature. This chapter seeks to expand current criticism about English *querelle des femmes* literature by considering *Long Meg* in the light of the debates taking place about women in texts published around 1620.

Long Meg may have been left out of critical discussions of English *querelle des femmes* texts because it is a short and cheap jest text, rather than a work discussing philosophy, morality, or religion – but it is worth noting that just because the text may not, ostensibly, take itself particularly seriously, does not mean it was not intended to be subversive, nor to instruct. As Ian Maclean has noted:

> ...Agrippa himself admits that, in declamations of the sort he wrote in favour of woman, there are many invalid arguments and jests. For all this, as with intellectual satire...it would be unwise to assume that there is nothing but flippancy in the writer's purpose, even if the genre as a whole was intended to amuse rather than persuade. As in the case of intellectual jokes, the humour may indicate the impossibility of discussing in serious terms the proposition of woman's equality, and therefore represents a strategy of discourse which is subversive in intention.[178]

The possibility for subversiveness in the humour in or relating to *querelle* literature, and any other text about women available around the same time, like *Long Meg*, must be kept in mind. As a jest-biography the text is meant to be humorous, but it is also by definition multi-genre, as a work of fiction based on the life of a 'real' person, giving it an association with some established *querelle* literature, such as Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*, that rely on examples of 'real' women. In examining *Long Meg*'s *querelle* credentials it is important to explore the historical contexts of the book, and to examine how 'real' women (written about in 'non-fiction' works and in legal and other records) and 'fictional' women (who were depicted in literature) related to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century English *querelle des femmes*.

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[178] Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 91.

Crucially, the language of violence and weaponry is present throughout these texts of the 'woman controversy', as well as *Long Meg*, so comparison benefits an understanding of all. This chapter will explore three central questions about *Long Meg* in the context of the English early seventeenth century *querelle des femmes* literary tradition: Does the jest-biography seem to agree with or query various *querelle* texts that refer to women's use of cross-dressing and weapons? Can the jest-biography be interpreted as supporting or criticizing the *status quo*, especially relating to women? And does contextualising Long Meg within the tradition of *querelle* literature have the potential to inform how modern critics read both the jest-biography and contemporary debate texts about women? This chapter will focus first on the publication and historic contexts for *querelle* literature and the 1620 version of the jest-biography and contemporary issues of honour and violence. It will then discuss three examples of texts considered to be part of the established English *querelle* tradition: the Swetnam controversy of 1615; the *Hic Mulier*/*Haec-Vir* debate of 1620; and John Tayor's manufactured debate about women and *The Women's Sharp Revenge* (1640).

The *Querelle des Femmes*

Querelle des femmes texts, which can be found in multiple European languages, are literary works that consider the essential nature of women, and are often presented as attack and defence tracts.[179] An important example is Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* ('Concerning Famous Women'), which dates from around 1380; another is Christine de Pizan's responses to the *Roman de la Rose* ('Romance of the Rose'), specifically *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* ('Book of the City of Ladies'), first published in 1405. The latter challenges a reductive notion of women as either inherently good or bad and reacts against the idea of exalting and making them

[179] Capern, *The Historical Study of Women*, 32.

objects of devotion. English *querelle* literature, to some extent, responds to a translation of this work, which was rendered into English in 1521 by Brian Anslay.[180] *Querelle* texts about 'real' or 'historic' women are important features of the debates: *Of the Ryghte Renoumyde Ladies*, a translation of part of Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* that Henry Parker, Lord Morely presented to Henry VIII in 1543, consists of biography. The book contains mini-narratives about women famous for their virtue, or infamous for 'bad' or immoral behaviour.[181] Alcuin Blamires notes that in medieval European literature, the rhetorical tradition of Biblical women, such as Deborah, Judith, and Esther '…specifically held that the use of examples of strong women would be particularly efficacious as a way of exhorting *men* to valour...If the commendation is explicitly that courageous women equal or surpass men, women are yet more distinctly being evaluated on their ability to emulate masculine aspirations'.[182] This concept of 'strong' women inspiring men to be 'real men' encourages comparison with Long Meg, who is depicted as leveraging typically masculine forms of violence to correct men lacking in conservative masculinity.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the nature of gender and sex was being actively debated in medical treatises which attempted to define men and women's essential nature. Between the registration of the first known Long Meg jest-biography in 1590 and the 1620 version, the understanding of what constituted gender radically changed. Ideas of sexual differentiation in late sixteenth century England were built on the Aristotelian and Galenic one-sex model which agreed that women's sexual organs were the same as men's, only internal, and

[180] Pamela Joseph Benson, *Texts from the Querelle, 1616-1640* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), ix.
[181] Guyda Armstrong, *The English Boccaccio: A History in Books* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 139.
[182] Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 276-177. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.04182.

that sex was mutable.[183] For example, Ambroise Paré's (c. 1510-1590) popular medical text *On Monsters and Marvels* (1573) considers several examples of women who spontaneously turn into men, including 'Germain-Marie' who, when chasing after pigs, builds up so much heat that her female genitalia inverts to expose male reproductive organs – (s)he thereafter lives as a man.[184] Presumably, in this case, a prolapsed uterus was interpreted as a spontaneous sex change, but it is important to note that the Long Meg jest-biography was composed at a time when gender itself may have seemed, to a certain degree, fluid, and from a medical standpoint, at least, women were thought of as having the potential not just to behave as men, but also to literally physically become male.

By the time the 1620 version of *The Life of Long Meg* was printed, medical knowledge had shifted significantly. There had been new revelations in science, leading to fresh interpretations of Classical texts by physicians. In England, around the time the 1620 Long Meg jest-biography was printed, Helkiah Crooke's medical text *Mikrokosmographia* (published in London in 1615, 1616, 1618, 1631, and 1651) distinguishes clearly between male and female anatomy.[185] As Ian Maclean summarises, 'By 1600, in nearly all medical circles…one sex is no longer thought to be an imperfect and incomplete version of the other'.[186]

The Life of Long Meg was repeatedly printed over a period of time in which notions of the essential, sexual self were being reimagined and reassessed. In the late sixteenth century, masculinity, and sex, could be understood as constructs, as women were understood to be imperfect versions of men. The jest-biography responds to this notion in its first chapter: the

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[183] Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19-20.
[184] Donald Beecher, 'Concerning Sex Changes: The Cultural Significance of a Renaissance Medical Polemic', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 1000.
[185] Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia a description of the body of man* (London: Printed by William Jaggard, 1615), sig. S3r.
[186] Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman,* 33.

author of the text describes Long Meg as '...the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a womans mould'.[187] Meg's female body is depicted not just as excessive for a woman, but as having a male corporeality. Her stature makes her exceptional; she wears male clothing and behaves in a masculine way, but not all the time – she is more than a woman, but also not quite a man. Yet, despite what might be interpreted as physical excessiveness, at no point in the jest-biography does the author describe Meg in terms of 'monstrousness'. She is always a 'proper' woman.

In addition to shifting notions of sex, there was increasing debate about women wearing pieces of traditionally men's clothing, such as doublets, men's hats, and daggers, worn with more traditionally feminine attire, such as skirts – although there is some debate as well about women entirely cross-dressing. These women who wore fashionable items of men's clothing attracted ire from the highest echelons of early seventeenth century society. Sermons, ordered by King James I, described women who wore men's clothing as aberrant and dangerous; but they also sometimes linked the breach of gendered clothing to violations of sumptuary codes. In 1619, John Williams, one of the king's chaplains and Dean of Salisbury, wrote *A Sermon of Apparell*, probably at the king's behest. The main point of his argument, as Sandra Clark explains, is that 'what God forms, the devil deforms': what was worn on the surface of the body had the potential to alter what was beneath.[188] 'Soft clothing', or expensive fabrics denoting wealth and rank, Williams argued, belonged only in the 'king's house'. All others wearing clothing above their station were an 'abomination' to God, he claimed, including women who dressed in masculine garb. This sermon illustrates the way surface manifestations of gender were perceived: keeping

[187] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Br.
[188] Sandra Clark, '"*Hic Mulier*", "*Haec Vir*", and the Controversy over Masculine Women', *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 2 (April 1, 1985): 157-183: 166.

people in their social place often meant enforcing a consistent visual code. Williams attacked 'the *prodigious* apparition of our women…*Monstrum a monstrando* (say the Grammarians) monsters are therefore so termed, because men cannot for their hearts, but runne *out to see them*'.[189] Williams was particularly concerned with the attention cross-dressed women attracted when they 'come into a Church, *Chimaera-like*…halfe male, and halfe female.'[190] Although his argument about male clothing worn by women causing a spectacle may appear to be a digression from his central point about the display of wealth, his sermon was focused on the religious basis for social distinction – which indicates that Williams and his audience understood women who wore male garments to be subverting the social order. Williams thrice scolds women who wear men's clothing in this sermon; his conflation of cross-dressing with the transgression of sumptuary codes suggests that the attacks on cross-dressing women were ultimately as concerned with status as they were with gender or sex. Women who cross-dressed, much like Long Meg, used clothing to move above their socially prescribed station (as Meg does in chapter four when she wears the clothes of a higher status man to duel with Sir James). As social subordinates, women were expected to subscribe to a specific, modest visual code including a 'comely Hood'[191] to cover the hair, and a 'concealing straight gowne',[192] and those who did not were doubly transgressing.

Jonathan Dollimore explains that 'Essentially the assertive female cross-dresser inverted the metaphysics of difference: from being a divine law inscribed essentially in each of God's

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[189] John Williams, *A Sermon of Apparell…22. of February, 1619 by John Williams, Dr. in Divinitie, Deane of Salisbury, and One of His Majesties Chaplaines Then in Attendance. Published by His Majesties Especiall Commandement* (London: Printed by Robert Barker, and John Bill, printer to the Kings most excellent Majestie, 1620), sig. D2v.
[190] Williams, *A Sermon of Apparell,* sig. D2v.
[191] Anon., *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-woman: Being a Medicine to Cure the Coltish Disease of the Staggers in the Masculine-feminines of Our Times. Exprest in a Briefe Declamation* (London: printed [at Eliot's Court Press] for I. T[rundle] and are to be sold at Christ Church gate, 1620), sig. A4r.
[192] *Hic Mulier*, sig. A4v.

subjects and which knowledge of self would confirm, sexual identity and sexual difference are shifted irretrievably into the domain of custom, of the social, and that which can be contested.'[193] This shift from essential to the social, also demonstrated in the shift away from the Galenic one-sex model, is in itself a radical change in thinking – encouraging a consideration that gender may be a performance. Mary Beth Rose argues that texts that depict cross-dressed women can provide an outlet for the tension between radical and conservative, and inherently unsettle the established social order: 'As a result of this disjunction between content and form, female independence and equality between the sexes are depicted in the debate as desirable and just, but also as impossible for a hierarchical society to absorb without unacceptable disruption'. [194]

Official sumptuary laws were repealed in 1604, about fifteen years before Williams' sermon, possibly because they were becoming unenforceable, but 'official' desire to control fashion, however, clearly remained. Instead of managing fashions by law, powerful men attempted to control them through morality and religion. When King James I attacked women (seemingly of no specific social group) for dressing in masculine clothing, he was challenging a hierarchy in flux and shifting social *mores* – all in the guise of controlling women's attempts at sartorial freedom. Powerful men were evidently alarmed by the lack of physical differentiation exhibited when women dressed in male garments – ironically, as male fashions were becoming increasingly feminine. King James' vitriol, and Williams' sermon, seems to have been ineffective at changing women's minds about clothing; in 1620, the king instructed the clergy of the city of London to admonish women who wore fashionable, masculine styles. Crucially, this included wearing rapiers and daggers. John Chamberlain (1553–1628), whose surviving

[193] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 297.
[194] Mary Beth Rose, "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in The Roaring Girl", *English Literary Renaissance* 14, no. 3 (1984): 378.

correspondence gives insight into the political and social climate of early modern London, remarks in a letter of 15 January 1620 that the king was concerned about fashions for women that included stylish masculine clothing. He writes:

> Yesterday the bishop of London [John King] called together all his Clergie about this towne, and told them he had expresse commaundment from the King to will them to inveigh vehemently and bitterly in theyre sermons against the insolencie of our women, and theyre wearing of brode brimd hats, pointed dublets, theyre haire cut short or shorne, and some of them stillettaes or poinards, and such other trinckets of like moment, adding withall that yf pulpit admonitions will not reforme them he would proceed by another course; the truth is the world is very far out of order, but whether this will mend yt God knowes.[195]

Chamberlain notes that the concern is not just with the wearing of doublets, but with women who wear weapons, stilattes (thin, sharp daggers), and poniards (thrusting combat weapons of varying lengths, similar to parrying daggers) – the trouble was not just the lack of physical differentiation between men and women, but also the way women were adopting male visual signifiers of honour culture: women were showing the potential to perpetrate typically masculine forms of violence and usurp the traditional role of men in the culture of violence and honour.

While violence in early modern England could of course be random, any kind of systematic violence, such as duelling and, in some cases, brawling, rioting, and domestic violence, are usually related or connected to honour and social status. Literature of the early seventeenth century describes women's and men's honour in different ways, so it is important in any discussion of gendered violence to examine the distinctions. While male honour is usually described as revolving around family status, keeping one's word[196], and defending oneself with force if necessary, women's honour is usually described in terms of sexual integrity (chastity for unmarried women and monogamy for married women) and domestic skill. Garthine Walker

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[195] John Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain,* ed. Norman Egbert McClure (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939), 287.
[196] Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54.

writes that 'sexual probity was…central to the dominant discourse of early modern gender ideology', and that female honour was 'overwhelmingly seen in sexual terms'; she also suggests that the discourse of female honour consisted of an 'authority invested in [women's] daily labours and household position' in addition to sexual virtue, social status, and reputation.[197]

Despite the different ways of defining female honour, maintaining and protecting women's honour and reputation presented the same challenges as men's: both are predicated on the concept of 'social credit', as a sort of balance sheet of behaviour seen as morally good or bad.[198] This explains, for instance, how the vocabulary of insult found in contemporary legal records and literary texts uses a perceived lack of female honour (expressed in epithets such as 'whore' or 'bawd') to lower the social standing of women through sexual defamation. As Loreen Giese explains:

> Defamation depositions contain insults that are mainly based on female sexuality, whether the insult is directed at a male or female. Here, a taxonomy of words exist ranging from 'a naughtie unholsom woman'…to 'an whore an arrant whore a bitch yee woorse then a bitch a whott tayled whore for one nor two nor tene nay twentye will skante serve thy turne'.[199]

The way female honour is imagined may run parallel to the concept of male honour when considering the figure of the martial woman in early modern English literature. Indeed, even though Long Meg in the jest-biography usually enacts a rough kind of localised justice and protects her reputation through violence (as if she is a man), she is still verbally attacked in

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[197] Garthine Walker, 'Expanding the Boundaries of Female Honour in Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6. Sixth Series (January 1, 1996): 235, 245.

[198] 'It was generally recognized that honour and reputation differed for men and women, though both contained multiple elements. For women, sexual honesty was the crucial prerequisite, and while she could win respect through many other attributes, there counted for nothing once her sexual reputation was lost. For men, reputation was more often seen in terms of their 'credit', ability to govern and provide for a household, and physical courage'. Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 253.

[199] Loreen L. Giese, ed., 'Introduction to the London Consistory Court Depositions, 1586-1611', London Record Society, and London Metropolitan Archives. *London Consistory Court depositions, 1586-1611: list and indexes* (London: London Record Society, 1995), xx-xxi. The latter example is from 28 May 1590, around the same time the first Long Meg jest-biography was registered.

conventionally 'female' terms as well as 'male'. For example, the 'bad' vicar in chapter three defames her female honour for calling her a 'sham'd whoore'.[200] With seemingly no other recourse to defend her honour, Long Meg responds with physical violence to teach him to respect her.

The conceptual similarities between male and female honour, in terms of social 'credit', mean it is not so great a leap to make to find women, in literature at least, protecting their honour through duelling and other structured forms of violence. Regardless if women actually fought duels in sixteenth and seventeenth century England (it is possible that women did duel and were not caught, or not prosecuted for doing so), there was no specific legal ban on women duelling.[201] But, as Dympna Callaghan points out, 'the absence of legal restriction means that the nature of the prohibition is so deeply embedded in the culture that no one found need to specify it: a law becomes necessary only if there [is] some likelihood of it being broken'.[202] Women duellists, while present in early modern English literature, seem to have been too rare in 'real life' to require formal legal control. However, women certainly did use weapons, if not swords, in early modern England: Garthine Walker has identified a significant number of women who were accused of assaults with weapons. The ambiguity of legal records leaves room for multiple interpretations of women's use of weaponry and violence:

> If women really did leave weapon-use to male partners, it follows that solitary female and all-female groups of defendants would rarely have been armed. Yet…it was actually in all-female groups of assailants that women were allegedly most often armed. Significantly, too, women prosecuted for single-handed assaults were almost as likely as lone males to be accused of using weapons…Although women in general were far less

[200] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B4r.
[201] Extensive research has indicated no extant legal records in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that involve women being prosecuted for formally duelling. Possibly, the social prohibition was so strong that it was considered impossible for women to duel, so it was labelled or prosecuted as another kind of assault.
[202] Dympna Callaghan, *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 12.

> likely to use weapons than men, the association of weaponry with masculine violence is not as clear-cut as has been assumed.[203]

Some women as well as men wore daggers or knives, and there were women involved in the production of weapons.[204] Female cutlers (blade makers) were often wives or widows of male cutlers, but other female apprentices were involved in the Cutlers' Company of London in their own rights. On 5 May 1613, Elizabeth Peele, the apprentice of cutler Richard Plucket and his wife, was sworn 'to be a free sister of this [cutlers'] howse'.[205] Katherine Falkingham, wife of John Falkingham, was described as 'sole Marchant' and 'sole merchant feme', and took two woman apprentices in October 1682 and September 1686.[206] Grace Lucas, apprentice of Frances Doubleday, was 'sworn free' on 5 June 1688, and Anne Guest, daughter of Richard Guest, was made a member of the guild 'by patrimony' on 26 April 1689.[207] Although many of these examples of women involved in sword and blade production are dated later than the *Long Meg* jest-biography, they show that the understanding and use of bladed weapons was not limited to men in the seventeenth century.

In the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century, around the time Long Meg as a character was particularly popular in texts and on stage, duelling culture was not just a physical manifestation of skill and honour, but also a system of visual codes. Women as well as men could understand the meanings of swords and could recognise that a man wearing a Spanish rapier was displaying wealth and education, and a certain stylishness, whereas a man wearing an English sword either could not afford a rapier, or was indicating his suspicion of continental

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[203] Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 78.
[204] Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order*, 28.
[205] Charles Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company of London and of the Minor Cutlery Crafts with Biographical Notices of Early London Cutlers*, Vol. II (London: Printed Privately for the Cutlers' Company, 1923), 65-66.
[206] Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company of London*, 58-59.
[207] *Ibid*., 71.

fashions and practices. Readers (or an audience of an oral performance) of the *Long Meg* jest-biography (including women) will have had the potential to understand the social implications and the visual signifiers of weaponry.

The Swetnam Controversy

Much of the early 17th century English *querelle* literature reflected this anxiety about women's appropriation of elements of traditional masculinity, including violence. The first of the two English early seventeenth century literary controversies about women that this chapter will discuss begins in 1615 with the publication of Joseph Swetnam's anti-woman text, *The araignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women.* The first edition of this book was registered in 1615; its author named as 'Thomas Tell-troth'. It was printed again in 1619, under Swetnam's stated authorship.

Swetnam's book received several responses, including three (extant) works ostensibly by women: Rachel Speght's *A mouzell for Melastomus* (1616), Constantia Munda's *The worming of a mad dogge: or, A soppe for Cerberus the jaylor of Hell* (1617), and Esther Sowernam's ('sower' compared to Swetnam's 'sweet') *Ester hath hang'd Haman* (1617).[208] Although only Rachel Speght, author of *A Mouzell for Melastomus,* has actually been identified as a 'real'

[208] While Rachel Speght has been confirmed as a woman, it is possible Sowernam and Munda's texts may have been written by men under female pen names. Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynicall Bayter of, and Foule Mouthed Barker Against Evahs Sex. Or an Apologeticall Answere to That Irreligious and Illiterate Pamphlet Made by Jo. Sw. and by Him Intituled, The Arraignement of Women. By Rachel Speght* (London: Printed by Nicholas Okes for Thomas Archer, and are to be sold at his shop in Popes-head-Pallace, 1616). Constantia Munda, *The Worming of a Mad Dogge: Or, A Soppe for Cerberus the Jaylor of Hell No Confutation but a Sharpe Redargution of the Bayter of Women* (London: Printed [by George Purslowe] for Laurence Hayes, and are to be sold at his shop neere Fleet-bridge, over against St. Brides Lane, 1617); Ester Sowernam, *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman: Or An Answere to a Lewd Pamphlet, Entituled, The Arraignment of Women With the Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Men, and Husbands. Divided into Two Parts. The First Proveth the Dignity and Worthinesse of Women, Out of Divine Testimonies. The Second Shewing the Estimation of the Foeminine Sexe, in Ancient and Pagan Times; All Which Is Acknowledged by Men Themselves in Their Daily Actions. Written by Ester Sowernam, Neither Maide, Wife nor Widdowe, yet Really All, and Therefore Experienced to Defend All* (London: Printed [by Thomas Snodham] for Nicholas Bourne, and are to be sold at his shop at the entrance of the Royall Exchange, 1617).

woman, all three authors wrote with a female authorial voice. The conflict between all of them was captured in a play in 1620, entitled *Swetnam the Woman Hater Arraigned by Women*, which depicts Swetnam being assaulted and put on trial by the women he has insulted.[209] Although Swetnam's anti-woman text was reprinted at least ten times between 1615 and 1634, none of the 'female' responses to the text seem to have been reprinted: Swetnam's brand of misogyny seems to have sold better than the related defences of women. [210]

In *The Arraignment*, Swetnam presents himself as a protector of young men from deceitful women. He describes women as being frivolous, weak, querulous, and manipulative: they nag and scold their husbands, yet they cry 'dissembling tears'.[211] Swetnam's deliberately provocative rhetorical position, the typical 'us and them' viewpoint of an anti-woman text, positions the book as defending a 'real' masculinity that is under threat, and asserts men's social place above women. Swetnam uses the language of war to illustrate what he describes as the essential differences between the natures of women and men, arguing that an ideal man is aggressive and violent, and that women are passive:

> A man rejoyceth to march among the murthered carcasses, but a woman to dance on a silken carpet: a man loves to heare the threatnings of his Princes enemies, but a woman weepes when she hears of wars…a man tryumphes at warres, but a woman rejoyceth more at peace.[212]

Unsurprisingly, the language of fighting and violence is found frequently in the Swetnam controversy, and in much of the literature of the *querelle*, as much of it has a fundamental structure of attack and defence. Whilst Swetnam uses the language of violence, fighting, and

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[209] Anne M. Haselkorn, *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 45. The author of the play is unknown.
[210] Haselkorn, *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print*, 61.
[211] Joseph Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women or the Vanitie of Them, Choose You Whether: with a Commendation of Wise, Vertuous and Honest Women: Pleasant for Married Men, Profitable for Young Men, and Hurtfull to None* (London: Printed by George Purslowe for Thomas Archer, and are to be solde at his shop in Popes-head Pallace, neere the Royall Exchange, 1615), sig. B4v.
[212] Swetnam, *The Araignment*, 39, sig. F4r.

swordplay rhetorically throughout the *Arraignment*, he also warns men to beware of literal, physical violence: 'For women have a thousand ways to entice thee and ten thousand ways to deceive thee...For a woman will pick thy pocket and empty thy purse, laugh in thy face and cut thy throat'.[213]

Rachel Speight's anti-Swetnam response uses the language of violence as well, suggesting that Swetnam's seeming distrust and dislike of women stems from fear about a failure of masculinity:

> Is this any commendation to men, that they have been and are over-reacht by women? Can you glory…in their strength, whom women overcome? …[Is] strength, so slightly seated in your Masculine gender, as to be stained, blemished, and subdued by women?[214]

Speight's response, questioning Swetnam's strength, is a well-placed blow: Swetnam was not only a writer, but also primarily a teacher of swordplay. Swetnam published a fencing treatise, *The Schoole of the Noble and Worthy Science of Defence*, in 1617, after he initiated this literary controversy about women and gained notoriety as an author: it is even possible that Swetnam wrote his 1615 anti-woman text as a form of self-promotion (though he wrote anonymously, his authorship was soon revealed). If so, he built up his hypermasculinised reputation through exploiting a popular genre in advance of publishing his fencing manual, a text primarily directed to a male audience.[215]

Whilst Swetnam obviously had a professional interest in weaponry and fighting, he does not argue against, or even directly mention, women who duel, fence, or wear weapons in *The Arraignment*. But he does use violence and weaponry to illustrate the differences between

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[213] Swetnam, *The Araignment*, sig. C4v.
[214] Sowernam, *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman*, sig. F2r.
[215] For a detailed discussion of the tradition of early modern pro- and anti-woman texts, see Linda Woodbridge's *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

women and men, and as ways of describing his perception of the weaknesses of women: 'As the best melted blade is mixt with iron, even so the best woman that is, is not free from faults.'[216] Here he refers to the process of sword production: superior blades were made of steel, and one component of steel is brittle iron. He also equates of female sexuality with the violence of swordplay:

> For if thou strike with thy sword, she will strike with the scabbard; choose not the rapier by his ringing, nor thy wife by her singing; for if thou doest, thou mayest be very well deceived in both, for thy rapier may prove a gad, and thy wife but little better.[217]

Swetnam warns men that, even if they use physical strength or power against women, equating the phallic imagery of swords with the potential for physical domination, women too can use their sexuality (scabbards, a metaphor for female genitalia) to punish men in return. The rhetorical device of weaponry is extended when Swetnam warns that men should not choose 'the rapier by his ringing, nor thy wife by her singing' as superficial qualities can deceive. He goes on to note that an untrustworthy rapier may in fact be a 'gad', a crude metal spike – but a gad is also a vociferous woman who talks with friends and acquaintances outside the home ('gadding' about). Much of the language of Swetnam's misogyny emanates from images of violence and weaponry.

'Constantia Munda', the author of one of the responses to Swetnam, *The Worming of a Mad Dogge*, also uses the language of weaponry as sexual organs, conflating Swetnam's lack of manhood with his poor writing:

> Lord! how you have cudgeld your braines in gleaning multitudes of similies as twere in the field of many writers, and thrasht them together in the floure of your owne devisor; and all to make a poore confused misceline, whereas thine owne barren foyled foyle is not able to yeeld the least congruity of speech.[218]

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[216] Swetnam, *The Araignment,* sig. F4v.
[217] *Ibid*., sig. G3r.
[218] Munda, *The Worming of a Mad Dogge,* sig. D4r.

A ‘foyled foyle’, a weapon used for fencing practice, either has a button on the end or a blunted tip to prevent injury on impact: a weapon from which the deadliness has been removed. This specific ‘foyled foyle’, Swetnam, is described as impotent, ‘barren’; Munda uses the term simultaneously to attack Swetnam’s masculinity and his creativity. She challenges the originality of his text by asserting that he has stolen his ideas from other works and put them together, creating a ‘poore confused misceline’, which was a common practice in the *querelle des femmes*. Ian Maclean describes the *querelle* as being ‘characterized by indiscriminate plagiarism and the repetition of stock arguments by both feminist and anti-feminist writers’.[219] As Susan Amussen and David Underdown note, the ‘female’ responses to his text show a better understanding of the *querelle* tradition than Swetnam’s:

> All three of the published responses to Swetnam displayed more erudition that he did. They all suggested that he was too ignorant and illiterate to observe these rules [of the intellectual game of the ‘battle of the sexes’ literary controversies], that his arguments lacked the required scholarly underpinnings and that he was not part of the fashionable classes among whom such things were appropriately discussed.[220]

By appropriating the concept of weaponry, Munda turns Swetnam’s own language against him, and renders him rhetorically and creatively impotent.

Swetnam is further rendered powerless by the women characters in the anonymous play *Swetnam the Woman-Hater Arraigned by Women*, which was published in 1620. Disguised under the name ‘Misogynos’, the character of Swetnam in the play involves himself with a legal case in Sicily, in opposition to women. Although he argues successfully, the case is overturned and he is exposed for his cowardice, as he loses a duel to a prince dressed as an Amazon. The

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[219]. Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610-1652* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 25.

[220] Susan Amussen and David Underdown, *Cultures of Early Modern Europe* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 24-25. http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2197/10.5040/9781350020702.

women he has offended assault him as a mob and put him on 'trial' for his slander. However, as tempting as it is to read the play as Sweatman getting his just desserts for his literary misogyny by the performance of a group of women using violence against him, as Chantelle Thauvette notes, the prince, Lorenzo (dressed as a woman) does '…not constitute female resistance but rather a campaign of masculine self-representation that allows him to recuperate the ailing patriarchy by restoring himself to the succession.'[221] The message seems to be fundamentally conservative: 'good' masculine rule is restored, and 'bad' men punished.

Although Swetnam's literary adversaries did not literally take up arms against him, they certainly did rhetorically. And, of course, the same can be said too of the jest-biography, in which Long Meg fights against swaggering men (similar to Swetnam) who use violence against women for no other reason than to demonstrate what is often proved to be their puny strength. As an example, a 'bad' vicar in chapter three of the jest-biography, threatened by Long Meg's physical abilities, seeks to pick a quarrel with her, in order 'to buckle with her, and to give her the overthrow'.[222] Long Meg is the victor in their tussle, and the bad man is punished. *Long Meg* is, in its use of weapons, and in its depiction of a triumphant martial woman, a useful reference point for approaching how violence is used in the English *querelle des femmes*: a 'good' woman uses what is traditionally masculine styles of violence to teach 'bad' men to be better.

The *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* Controversy

The Life of Long Meg of Westminster was printed at the right time to engage with, or perhaps even take advantage of, the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate. The publisher John Trundle registered *Hic Mulier* on 9 February 1620; this anti-woman pamphlet, which he closely followed with

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[221] Chantelle Thauvette, "Masculinity and Turkish Captivity in 'Swetnam, the Woman-Hater'", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 52, no. 2 (2012): 426. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23257967.
[222] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B3v.

Haec-Vir, an ostensibly pro-woman pamphlet, on 20 February 1620. The *Long Meg* jest-biography was printed around the same time, but probably closer to the end of the year.[223] As there are three extant printings of *Hic Mulier* from 1620, and only one of *Haec-Vir*, it seems that (like Swetnam's text) overt misogyny may have sold better than defences of women.

The titles of *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* are Latin puns: Hic Mulier roughly translates as 'the Male-Woman'. Cristina Malcolmson explains: '*Hic Mulier* is a Latin joke, using the masculine form of the demonstrative adjective, "this", with the feminine word "woman" in order to satirize women who dress and act like men'.[224] *Haec-Vir* uses the same joke about men; this second pamphlet, the title of which loosely translates to 'the Woman-Man', uses personifications of inverted versions of gender roles to challenge the debate about women generally, and *Hic Mulier* specifically: the man dresses in feminine clothes; the woman wears masculine fashions – including a sword.

Although *The Life of Long Meg* is referred to frequently in critical works about cross-dressed women, comparative analysis with early 17th century *querelle* texts is lacking. For instance, Sandra Clark has examined the *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* pamphlets of 1620 in conjunction with the Swetnam controversy of 1615 to explore a more generalised idea of the role of women in early seventeenth century England. In her essay, however, Clark only mentions that Long Meg is part of the literary tradition of cross-dressed warrior women, stating that such women were 'obviously very rare in real life'.[225] Yet, it seems clear from existing sermons and government decrees that fashionable, partial cross-dressing was an issue of concern for powerful

[223] The 1620 printing of *Long Meg* was almost certainly produced before December, when the rights to the text were transferred.
[224] Cristina Malcolmson, '"As Tame as the Ladies": Politics and Gender in *The Changeling*', *English Literary Renaissance* 20, no. 2 (March 1, 1990): 325.
[225] Sandra Clark, '"*Hic Mulier*", "*Haec Vir*", and the Controversy over Masculine Women', *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 2 (April 1, 1985): 179.

men. Although, certainly, there is little existing evidence and few historic records of women behaving in a similar way to Long Meg (using swords and other weapons, and openly participating in military service as a woman – as opposed to women who joined as men, and then were caught), the jest-biography was reprinted or reissued at a time of anxiety about women wearing men's clothing, and the implications that had on society.

The morality of women wearing men's clothing is a central aspect of the *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* debate of 1620, and this is, of course, a key part of the humour of *Long Meg*. *Hic Mulier* is particularly concerned with the power of fashion: '…the folly of imitation, the deceitfulnesse of flatterie, and the grosest basenesse of all basenesse, to do whatsoever a greater power will command you'.[226] Stylish masculine or gender-ambivalent clothing worn by women is depicted as a 'monstrousnesse' and a 'deformitie' of apparel, implying that the clothing itself has the power and the potential to corrupt the person beneath. *Hic Mulier* suggests that cross-dressing women prefer:

> [The] loose, lascivious civill embracement of a French doublet, being all unbutton'd to entice, all of one shape to hide deformitie, and extreme short wasted to give a most easie way to every luxurious action…[227]

The author argues that male fashions worn by women are not just sexually suggestive and confusing, but irreligious: '…the French doublet truss'd with points' is likened 'to *Mary Ambraes* [Ambree's] light nether skirts, the Fooles Bandricke [baldric], and the Divels Ponyard'.[228] It is noteworthy that the author emphasises the evil associated with women wearing weapons: the 'Divels Ponyard' along with the 'Fooles Bandrick' – a baldric is a belt worn over the shoulder used to carry a weapon. Although a poniard is a long dagger, the sword was

[226] *Hic Mulier*, sig. A4r.
[227] *Ibid.*, sig. A4^{v}.
[228] *Ibid.*, sig. A4v-Br.

typically a Christian symbol (the hilt of the sword is literally a cross), and this inversion means *Hic Mulier* conflates women's use of weaponry with deeply irreligious and dangerous behaviour – going so far as to directly associate it with the Devil. The author further asserts that women have traded 'for Needles, Swords; for Prayer bookes, bawdy Jigs'[229]; the loss of femininity is here equated with the loss of religion and morality. This questioning of 'women's work' is also addressed in *Long Meg:* although consistently depicted in the jest-biography as a moral and upstanding citizen, Long Meg too rejects the needle when in chapter two she asserts that although she is capable of many domestic tasks, 'my needle…that I have been little used to', which suggests that in the context of the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate, Long Meg could be read as questioning her social role, and rejecting some forms of 'women's work' whilst embracing the sword.[230]

The author of *Hic Mulier* further uses the language of violence to criticise women's financial freedom, as well as their loss of conventional female identity:

> Such [women] as are able to buy all at their owne charges, … swimme in the excesse of … vanities, and will bee man-like not onely from the head to the waste, but to the very foot, & in every condition: man in body by attire, man in behaviour by rude complement, man in nature by aptnesse to anger, man in action by pursuing revenge, man in wearing weapons, man in using weapons: And in briefe, so much man in all things, that they are neither men, nor women, but just good for nothing.[231]

With a pun on the homophones waist/waste, the author disparages those women who are 'able to buy all at their own charges'. 'Charges' has a triple meaning of responsibility, money, and the gunpowder and shot used in firearms. This criticism is not directed at women only, as the author also argues that men should control the economics of fashion and prevent their dependent women from buying masculine-style clothing and weapons. The text seems to suggest that the

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[229] *Hic Mulier*, sig. A4v.
[230] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. B3r.
[231] *Hic Mulier*, sig. B2r.

physical wearing of weapons and male attire encourages women to pursue revenge, to engage with masculine duelling culture – suggesting that trying to behave as men puts them so far outside society's boundaries as to erase them – to make them 'good for nothing'.

Hic Mulier refers to a few literary warrior women, but notably not Long Meg. The text mentions Mary Ambree (who is occasionally listed alongside Meg as a patriotic/heroic warrior woman), and her 'light nether skirts'.[232] Mary Ambree, like Long Meg, is a woman who participates in warfare, in her case to avenge her lover's death in battle. She appears in ballads, extant copies of which exist from the seventeenth century, but it is clear the ballad (or the character in oral history) was in circulation well before (she is referred to in extant texts from 1602: Thomas Dekker refers to her in *Satiro-mastix*, and John Marston in *The History of Antonio and Mellida.* Her name is also mentioned alongside Long Meg's in Thomas Dekker and John Webster's *Westward Ho!* in 1605).

Mary Ambree is a useful counterpoint to Long Meg because she dresses and fights as a man with the sole purpose of revenging the death of her 'own true love', fallen in battle – unlike Meg, who uses violence in multiple contexts. Mary Ambree dresses in 'A fair shirt of Male', has 'A Helmet of proofe', and carries 'A strong armed Sword', a gauntlet, and a 'Target'. She fights so valiantly that '…many a thousand she brought on their knée'. Upon discovering that she is a woman, her enemies are impressed; much like Long Meg receiving money from the enemy king for her valour in chapter twelve, the 'Prince of great Parma' offers Mary Ambree marriage, but she scoffs that 'It never shall be said that in *England* so free, / That a stranger did marry with mary Ambree'.[233] She returns to England 'Still holding the Foes of brave *England* in scorne'.

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[232] *Hic Mulier*, sig. A4v-Br.

[233] *The Valorous Acts Performed at Gaunt, by the Brave Bonny Lasse Mary Ambre.*..London, Printed for William Gibertson sic] in Giltspur-street, 1660, https://www.proquest.com/books/valorous-acts-performed-at-gaunt-brave-bonny/docview/2240886898/se-2?accountid=13042.

Like Long Meg, Mary Ambree's martial prowess does not make her less attractive, necessarily, but it is her status at the beginning of the ballad that authors seeking to suppress women's wearing of male coded garments use to question her morals: the 'brave Serjeant Major' is Mary's 'own true love' but is not referred to as her husband. The suggestion is that she travels with him as his mistress, or is a camp follower or prostitute. Both Mary's success in battle, and her lack of adherence to social norms (including her possible status as a camp follower) make the character a target for men writing about the dangers of women wearing men's clothing.

The author of *Hic Mulier* refers to other women who engage with warfare and swordplay as:

> [The] idle Sisters of foolish *Don Quixote*, … believe every vaine Fable which you reade, or … think you may bee attired like *Bradamant*, who was often taken for *Ricardetto* her brother; that you may fight like *Marfiza*, and winne husbands with conquest, or ride astride like *Claridiana*, and make Gyants fall at your stirrops.[234]

Bradamant and Marfiza are cross-dressed warrior women from *Orlando Furioso*, a poem by Ludovico Ariosto translated into English by Sir John Harrington (there are extant editions from 1591, 1607, and 1634). Bradamante is a Christian and an expert warrior who marries her lover after he bests her in a fight; Marfisa first fights as a warrior with the Saracens, then converts to Christianity and fights against them, marrying a Christian knight. Claridiana is a cross-dressed warrior woman, an Amazon who marries the Knight of the Sun, from Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra's book *Espejo de principes y cavalleros*, the first book of which was translated into English by Margaret Tyler under the title *The mirrour of princely deedes and knighthood* (in editions from 1578, 1580, 1599). Although these women warriors may be reincorporated into society by their marriages, the author of *Hic Mulier* seems to argue that female warrior literary characters pose a threat to (unexceptional) women by providing them with inspiration for

[234] *Hic Mulier*, sig. B3r.

appropriating masculine fashions and behaviour.

There are two notable warrior women excluded from this list, as well as the rest of the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* controversy: Britomart from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene,* and Long Meg. It is likely that Britomart avoids being used as an example of a 'bad' woman because Spenser uses the character as a symbol for Queen Elizabeth. Garthine Walker argues that some literary warrior women's use of violence can be read as culturally 'sanctioned', and thus not necessarily radical:

> The virtuous warrior-woman was a cultural resource for ordinary women. This applied even to queenly virtue, supposedly far beyond Everywoman's reach, for the state–household analogy enabled a slippage between queen and commoner. A monarch's defence of her realm from foreign invasion, say, might resonate with women who defended their households from more mundane foes. Moreover, the virago's characteristics were those to which women were taught to aspire. Her violence was defensive, never offensive. She selflessly defended her monarch, husband, children, nation or religion. Self-sacrifice imbued her acts. She was compelled to act with force and violence only by exceptional circumstances. Law sanctioned this model of female force. Technically, it constituted no breach of the peace for a wife to beat her husband's assailant, for daughters to fight in defence of their parents, or for maidservants of their masters or mistresses.[235]

It is possible that Long Meg and Britomart, as English women who fight for patriotic reasons and marry and subject themselves to their husbands, were not actually considered transgressive enough by the author to be mentioned in this indictment of cross-dressed women.

Registered to the same stationer just eleven days after *Hic Mulier*, *Haec-Vir* personifies and depicts Hic Mulier and Haec-Vir as a cross-dressed woman and a femininely dressed man respectively. The text is in dialogue form, and begins by describing the gender ambiguity of contemporary fashions: the masculine woman mistakes the feminine man for a woman – and *vice versa*, injecting an element of topsy-turvy humour. The text is particularly important because it makes the radical argument that 'custom is an idiot', and that women blindly abiding by the rules

[235] Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order*, 87-88.

men have prescribed for them without independent thought are acting illogically.[236] Although ostensibly *Haec-Vir* is a defence of women, and makes what can be considered a pro-woman argument in this context, it is deeply ambivalent. It is also important in this context because it is leveraging humour (like any jest text, but also the Marprelate texts) to make a serious point about the social problems of gender ambiguity in fashion.

Haec-Vir does not argue for women's essential moral strengths and virtues (as do most other pro-woman early modern texts), but instead claims that men are responsible for women's transgressions:

> When the accuser is guilty of as much or more then that hee accuseth, or that I see you refuse the potion, and are as greaviously infected, blame mee not then a little to stagger, and till you will be pleas'd to be cleans'd of that leprosie which I see apparent in you, give me leave to doubt whether mine infection be so contagious.[237]

Although not an isolated example, *Haec-Vir* is remarkable in that it argues that women are transgressive in direct response to men behaving (and dressing) more like women. *Hic Mulier*, the masculine woman, argues that not only have men stolen female fashions: '…you have gone a world further, and even ravisht from us our speech, our actions, sports and recreations'.[238] The text is critical of men who have adopted feminine fashions and behaviours, and those who have abandoned manly pursuits:

> For this you have demolish'd the noble schooles of Hors-manship (of which many were in this Citie) hung up your Armes to rust, glued up those swords in their scabberds that would shake all Christendome with the brandish, and entertained into your mindes softnes, dulnesse and effeminate nicenesse.[239]

Haec-Vir suggests that men have become less interested in military pursuits, including the use of

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[236]Anon., *Haec-Vir: Or, the Womanish-Man: Being an Answere to a Late Booke Intituled Hic-Mulier. Exprest in a Briefe Dialogue Betweene Haec-Vir the Womanish-Man, and Hic-Mulier the Man-Woman* London, printed at Eliot's Court Press] for I. Trundle] and are to be sold at Christ Church gate, 1620. Sig. B2v.
[237] *Haec-Vir*, sig. Cr.
[238] *Ibid.*, sig. Cv.
[239] *Ibid.*, sig. C2r.

swords, which may be why women have taken to wearing them. Men are also described as less sexually forceful, with their feminine fashions; men are no longer interested in 'Hors-manship' (which could also be a pun about visiting prostitutes as well as studying the equestrian arts).

Through humour, *Haec-Vir* is critical of a social system that allows men to behave and dress in a feminine fashion with impunity, but then blames women for blurring gender divisions by adopting male clothing and weapons. The power to dictate fashions still lies with men, the text argues, as women have only become more masculine because men have become more feminine. Hic Mulier eventually concedes that if men stop being so feminine, women will gladly give up masculine behaviour and dress. At the end of the pamphlet, the feminine man and the masculine woman agree to swap clothing. Hic Mulier promises that if men will:

> Be men in shape, men in shew, men in words, men in actions, men in counsell, men in example: then we will love and serve you; then will wee heare and obey you; then will wee like rich Jewels hang at your eares to take our Instructions, like true friends follow you through all dangers, and like carefull leeches powre oyle into your wounds…[240]

Ultimately, the text proves not to be arguing for any kind of freedom for women, but makes a conservative argument that women will be 'real' women if men will be 'real' men.

Visual signifiers of 'true' gender, especially that of hair, are employed in the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* controversy, as well as in other contemporary texts. In *Haec-Vir*, men are accused of trading martial exploits for intricate hairstyles: 'Why doe you curle, frizell, and powder your hayres, bestowing more houres and time in deviding locke from lock, and hayre from hayre…then ever *Caser* [sic] did in marshalling his Army.'[241] When Chamberlain wrote in 1620 that King James was concerned with women who wore men's clothing, he also includes

[240] *Haec-Vir*, sig. C3v.
[241] *Ibid.*, sig. Cr.

those with 'theyre haire cut short or shorne'.[242] William Prynne's 1628 pamphlet *The unlovelinesse, of love-lockes,* the primary purpose of which was to convince men not to wear fashionable, long hairstyles, also provides insight into the debate about women. Directed at the 'Christian Reader', Prynne's text, much like *Haec-Vir*, seems to argue that women's cross-dressing (especially when it comes to their hair) is a result of men's failure to be 'real' men. He states that the times are:

> Dengerous, Unnaturall, and Unmanly…wherein as sundry of our Mannish, Impudent, and inconstant Female sexe, are Hermophradited, and transformed into men; not only in their immodest, shamelesse, and audacious carriage, (which is now the very manners and Courtship of the times ;) but even in the […] Whorish Cutting, and Crisping of their Haire, their Naturall vaile, their Feminine glory, and the very badge, and Character of their subjection both to God, and Man…[243]

The 'unnatural' and 'unmanly' nature of society is responsible for women's adopting of men's clothing and short hairstyles, he argues. The religious basis of Prynne's argument 1 Corinthians 11:14-15: 'Doeth not even nature it selfe teach you, that if a man have long haire, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long haire, it is a glory to her: for her haire is given her for a covering.'[244]

Chapter seventeen of the Long Meg jest-biography benefits from a comparison to the *Hic Mulier*/*Haec-Vir* controversy and Prynne's pamphlet in how it employs clothing and hair for humour. Long Meg punishes Huffing Dick, a man who is disrespectful to women generally, and Long Meg specifically, by forcing him to dress in feminine garments, at the same time she is dressed as a man. Huffing Dick, a blustering, swaggering ruffian, visits Long Meg's inn because

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[242] John Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain,* ed. Norman Egbert McClure (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939), 287.
[243] Prynne, William. *The Unlouelinesse, of Love-lockes.*..(London: Printed, anno. 1628), sig. A3r.
[244] *The Holy Bible: Quartercentenary Edition: An Exact Reprint*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1 Corinthians 11:14-15.

'had made a vow to quarrell with Long Meg'.[245] He attacks one of Long Meg's female employees by calling her a whore and hitting her with his sheathed sword. Long Meg (with no trace of irony) beats him nearly to death for violating the rules of her inn (no brawling), and forces him, as a further punishment, to 'put [her] maydes Petticoates on, and follow [her] today to dinner with a Sword and buckler; and I [Long Meg] will be drest in mans apparell'.[246] The sword and buckler (small shield) is an important aspect of the punishment as it signifies his impotence, having been physically bested by Long Meg – it is as if he is carrying his own severed genitalia. Dick initially says 'rather kill me' than wear women's clothing, but, after being subjected to a further beating, eventually relents.[247]

Although dressed supposedly 'full woman-like', Huffing Dick also has to cope with hiding a beard during his punishment; he begs Long Meg to allow him to wear a 'muffler' in order 'to shadow' it in public, demonstrating a concern with not passing properly as a woman whilst forced to cross-dress.[248] She agrees, but then pulls down the cloth and exposes Dick's face in front of a group of men: Dick is subjected to public ridicule for failing to perform a masculine role successfully. Dick does not behave like a 'real' man as he picks a physical fight with a woman by assaulting that woman's female employee, and then, to make things worse, loses the fight. But, amusingly, and crucially for the humour of the text, he also makes a terrible woman, both in appearance and action – whereas Meg is able to function successfully as a man.

The Huffing Dick section of *Long Meg* also benefits from comparison with *The Faerie Queene* – both focus on warrior women and hair, but in different ways. Although Simon Shepherd argued in *Amazons and Warrior Women* that '[Long Meg's] story could not have been

[245] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cv.
[246] *Ibid.*, sig. E2r.
[247] *Ibid.*, sig. E2r.
[248] *Ibid.*, sig. E2r.

influenced by Spenser's Britomart, who appeared in print in 1590' because the first version of *Long Meg* is from 1582.[249] We know now that the '1582' version of the text has a forged date, and since the jest-biography is first registered in 1590, there is scope for there to be more of a relationship between the texts than Shepherd had imagined. *The life of longe megg of Westminster* was registered 18 August 1590[250]; the 'fayrye Queene' on 1st December 1589.[251] There is certainly resonance between the texts, although it would be nearly impossible to determine if there is a symbiotic relationship, or if *The Faerie Queen* is being referenced in *Long Meg*, since it is possible for the jest-biography to have been in circulation before registration. Either way, although the texts are very different in terms of cultural placement, one is 'high' culture, one more 'popular culture', there are similar depictions of masculinity, and how it may be recuperated through the figure of an idealised warrior woman.

The Huffing Dick episode in *Long Meg* is comparable to the treatment of Artegall in book five, canto five of *The Faerie Queene.* Artegall hears of men being enslaved by women, and so devises a fight with Radigund, queen of the Amazons. She defeats him, and takes him captive, making him do menial, typically feminised work such as cleaning and sewing. The knight is rendered a maid when he fails at masculinity and violence, as is Huffing Dick. Both are forced to dress not just as women, but women in a socially subordinated position. Donald Stump writes that:

> When he [Artegall] strikes off Radigund's helmet, the sight of her beauty robs him of his characteristic sternness. As the narrator observes, "No hand so cruell, nor no hart so hard, / But ruth of beautie will it mollifie" (V.v.13). Yielding, as he had earlier done with

[249] Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 71.
[250] SRO3099
[251] SRO2975

> Britomart, he allows humility to lapse into self-humiliation and submissiveness to become servility.[252]

The removal of a helmet and the resultant revelation of femininity in both texts creates a challenge to masculinity – men in *Long Meg* and *The Faerie Queene* are 'unmanned' by the revelation of the warrior woman's 'true', feminine self. Although Huffing Dick and Artegall are punished, Artegall is recuperated by another warrior woman, Britomart, when she overthrows Radigund and puts the city of Amazons under Artegall's rule in book V: 'The liberty of women [she] did repeale, / Which they had long usurpt; and them restoring / To mens subjection, did true Justice deal.'[253]

Long Meg, unlike Huffing Dick who tries to hide his beard when dressed as a woman, uses her hair as a way of revealing her 'proper' femininity – even when she is otherwise dressed to pass as a man. After her defeat of Sir James of Castile in a duel in chapter four she pulls her hat off 'and her hair falling about her ears' shows herself a woman, and is even described as a 'proper woman', despite her use of a sword and her man's apparel.[254] After defeating the French champion in single combat during the siege of Boulogne in chapter eleven, she removes her burganet (a type of helmet) and again 'let[s] her hayre fall about her eares: whereby the French-men perceived she was a Woman'.[255] Although the language in this section of the text suggests that Long Meg's hair is possibly not very long (only that it covers, at a minimum, her ears) – it seems to be long enough to function as a visual sign that she is a 'real' woman. It is no coincidence that as a sign of shame Dick wears a head and face covering, hiding his masculine

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[252] Donald Stump, "Fashioning Gender: Cross-Dressing in Spenser's Legend of Britomart and Artegall", *Spenser Studies*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (2000): 107. https://doi.org/10.1086/SPSv15p95.
[253] Edmund Spenser (ed. Thomas P. Roche, and C. Patrick O'Donnell), *The Faerie Queene*. Penguin Classics. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1987), 809 (5.7.42.5–7).
[254] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. Cr.
[255] *Ibid.*, sig. D3v.

hair (beard), whilst Meg's hair (covering) reveals her to be a 'proper' woman. Although Meg's use of male attire and weapons may be radical, her use of her feminine hair may be construed as a visual sign of conservative feminine physicality. Similarly, Meg's martial successes in the jest-biography support the rule of Henry VIII, and do not create any kind of additional space for women to openly serve in the military—like Britomart, Meg's exceptionality may be read as socially conservative. Although *The Faerie Queene* and *Long Meg* have many similarities, the jest-biography, by definition, focuses more on the uses of humour to punish badly behaved men. The community punishes Huffing Dick accordingly through the humiliation of public, derisive laughter, whilst Long Meg is celebrated.

There is a third text from the 1620 *querelle* controversy that is not regularly included in critical conversations about the early modern debate concerning women, but is worth considering in this context. *Muld sacke: or The apologie of Hic Mulier* does not really focus on women, but rather on men – yet it does discuss women's behaviour and clothing. It essentially makes the same argument as *Haec Vir* in that men are ultimately responsible for women's social transgressions – but the author of *Muld Sacke* argues directly, in a way the author of *Hic Mulier* only implies, that the definition of a masculine woman should be expanded to include not just women who wear masculine garments, but also women who challenge and disrupt hierarchy through 'masculine' behaviour.

> In your description of the Masculine Feminine, you have erred from the Rules of a good definition, in reducing the generall name of *Hic Mulier*, to those you call deformed monsters, by cutting their haire, wearing French doublets, having open breasts and false bodies: but I call a woman, of whatsoever degree, who exceedes the ends of her Creation, *Hic Mulier.*…A woman was created to honour her Parents, and obey her Husband; Fathers, to use their lawfull authoritie over their Children; Husbands to overrule & command their Wives: as he therefore is an effeminate man, that transfers his birthright upon his Daughter or Wife, so is shee a Masculine Woman that bereaves Parents of authoritie, Husband supremacie, or debords from the modestie required in her sexe: shee then, that dare presume to over-rule her Husband (or sometimes for his owne good beate

> him) although shee neither paint, cut her haire, or be deformed with new invented fashions, is not-withstanding *Hic Mulier*.[256]

Muld Sacke is more critical of women than *Hic Mulier* in that it explicitly seeks to control the behaviours that challenge hierarchy, rather than the superficial, visual signs such as clothing, hair, or weapons. This text suggests that much of the debate about women's appropriation of masculine fashions is not really about clothes, but maintaining a male-dominated social hierarchy, and it directly criticises men for how much agency women have taken along with their masculine garments.

John Taylor and *The Women's Sharpe Revenge* (1640)

This chapter will examine a final text, one that may be considered an extension of the early seventeenth century English *querelle*: *The Women's Sharpe Revenge.* It was printed in 1640, so well after the *querelle des femmes* texts that coincide with the 1620 printing of *Long Meg*, yet it should be considered in this context because the main defender of women is Long Meg herself. In the text, the (ostensible) female authors Mary Tattle-well and Joan Hit-him-home ('spinsters') resurrect the ghost of Long Meg, who 'hearing the abuse offered to Women, riseth out of her grave'[257], arguing that men who slander women have forgotten that they were brought into the world by women (a common argument in pro-woman *querelle* literature), and enumerates her own martial deeds. The text then treads a well-known route of praising women, explaining why women are better than men, and then arguing against male drunkenness.

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[256] Anon. *Muld sacke: or The apologie of Hic Mulier: to the late declamation against her Exprest in a short exclamation. Non est mollis è terris ad astra via.*, (London: Printed [by William Stansby] for Richard Meighen, and are to be sold at his shops under Saint Clements Church, and at Westminster Hall, 1620), sig. Bv-B2r.

[257] Mary Tattle-well and Ioane Hit-Him-Home (pseuds.), and John Taylor, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge: Or an Answer to Sir Seldome Sober That Writ Those Railing Pamphelets Called the Iuniper and Crabtree Lectures, &c.: Being a Sound Reply and a Full Confutation of Those Bookes: With an Apology in This Case for the Defence of Us Women. Performed by Mary Tattle-well, and Ioane Hit-him-home, Spinsters* (London: By I. Okes and are to be sold by Ia. Becket at his shop in the inner Temple-gate, 1640), sig. A3r.

The anti-woman writings that instigate this cluster of *querelle des femmes* texts are *Diverse Crabtree Lectures* and *The Juniper Lecture* (both 1639), and were published under John Taylor's name. These were followed by the rebuttal, *The Women's Sharpe Revenge*, in 1640. But, as Simon Shepherd has established, all three texts were written by John Taylor (the Water Poet), suggesting Taylor was not actually invested in the debate about women and their essential qualities and virtues, but rather in using the popular, presumably well-selling genre of the *querelle* to further his own career as an author.[258] Shepherd notes that this 'exchange' is particularly intriguing because the early texts attack 'scolds', whilst the response is actually no response at all; it is, rather, 'a two-fold silencing of women: they are attacked as scolds, and their "reply" is written by a man. The woman is effectively removed from the gender controversy altogether and the male take-over is complete'.[259]

Maggie Ellen Ray explores why Long Meg specifically is utilised by Taylor in his 'rebuttal', arguing that Taylor sees a correlation between himself as a marginalised poet (not classically educated, and 'self-made') and Meg (marginal as a socially 'deviant' woman):

> In defending themselves, both also engage in the task of defending the groups they represent and confronting the established hierarchies that threaten these groups. In Long Meg's case, women in general and un-domiciled women in particular, and in Taylor's case, watermen and bourgeois poets. Meg's life is rich with stories of her insisting upon the utility of the marginal figure as one necessary to society: she defends the weak and attacks the strong, chiding the rich and assuaging the poor without regard to social hierarchy. Rather, she is motivated by her own intrinsic sense of what is worthwhile and valuable.[260]

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[258] Simon Shepherd, *The Women's Sharp Revenge: Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), 23.
[259] Shepherd, *The Women's Sharp Revenge*, 23.
[260]Maggie Ellen Ray, 'John Taylor and the Ghost of Long Meg of Westminster: Authorship and Poetic Authority in "The Womens Sharpe Revenge"', *Studies in Philology* 113, no. 4 (2016): 932-933.

Although an intriguing assertion – that Taylor saw himself in the Long Meg 'myth' – it would be useful to know what version of Long Meg she understands Taylor was co-opting for *The Women's Sharpe Revenge.* Taylor may or may not have been familiar with the jest-biography: *The Women's Sharpe Revenge* notes that Long Meg is 'Titled from *Westminster*, because there borne', although the jest-biography is clear that she is from Lancashire.[261] However, the rest of Meg's exploits mentioned in the rebuttal are similar to those included in the jest-biography – but Taylor may have been working off the (now lost) play or the (lost) ballad text, or even a general knowledge of the character from an oral tradition instead of the jest-biography. Ray refers to the 1635 printing of the *Long Meg* jest-biography in her study (which does contain the same chapters as the 1620 version), but there is seemingly no consensus about the basis for Taylor's reference point (if there is one), and as the character is leveraged in various ways in other contemporary literary texts, a better idea about his source material would be useful for this argument. As this thesis will discuss in the next chapter, references to Long Meg in other contemporary material (including *The Gentle Craft*) say very different things about the character.[262]

There have been some interpretations by critics that Long Meg of *The Women's Sharpe Revenge* is a shrew or scold; Ray argues that 'The ghost of Long Meg essentially fashions herself as the shrew of all shrews...she is a threat in every way to men who seek to offend women, omnipresent and unsilencable in voice'.[263] Likewise, Katherine Henderson conflates various versions of the Long Meg character to make an aside in a footnote that:

> Long Meg was a serving maid in the reign of Henry VIII, infamous as a scold and possibly a procuress, whose escapades were described in ballads and pamphlets for a century. However, a popular semifictional biography (*The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*, first printed in 1582) presented her as an essentially good-hearted and

[261] Taylor, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*, sig. A9.
[262] Ray, 'John Taylor and the Ghost of Long Meg', 932.
[263] *Ibid*., 931.

> generous person as well as a valiant heroine in the wars against the French at the Battle of Boulogne (1544), so her designation here as a woman's champion need not be ironic.[264]

Although Long Meg is depicted in the 'Epistle' to *The Women's Sharpe Revenge* as angry at men for 'abusing' women, it can be argued that she is not necessarily shrew-like or a scold: most of this 'Epistle' is Long Meg recounting her martial deeds, proving herself a suitable defender of women, before the text returns to the perhaps more typically shrew-like 'authors' Mary Tattle-well and Joane Hit-him-home. Association with or appropriation of male violence does not in itself necessarily make a woman a shrew in early modern England, which was usually described not just as pushing the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour, but also as unruliness of speech: 'scolding', 'nagging', and as an abundance of talking. Meg's part in the text opens with a remonstrance to the 'peevish Knave' that awoke her – Taylor's Meg assumes it is a querulous man who 'wakned [her] dead ashes'.[265] Likewise, Long Meg is never depicted as shrew-like in the 1620 jest-biography: she is subservient to her husband (for the one chapter he makes an appearance), and she is never accused of being a nag, nor of speaking too much. If anything, Meg is the anti-shrew in the 1620 jest-biography – she consistently uses deeds instead of words, which is in itself both radical (she adopts a kind of non-verbal masculinity) and conservative (she is a 'proper' woman). Both Taylor's Meg and the Meg of the jest-biography can read as ambivalent – both conservative and radical.

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This chapter set out to answer three questions: does *Long Meg* fundamentally agree with, or question women's use of cross-dressing and the use of weapons as presented in *querelle* texts? In so doing, can the jest-biography be interpreted as supporting the *status quo*? How does

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[264] Katherine U. Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 307, fn. 7.
[265] Taylor, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*, sig. A8-A8v.

contextualising the jest-biography within the *querelle* tradition inform both *Long Meg* and other books about women published around the same time?

The Life of Long Meg seems to fundamentally agree with much of the 'anti-woman' *querelle* texts in that the conservative nature of her use of masculine clothing and weapons is intended to bolster a male dominated social hierarchy. She is happy to perform the role of a 'real' woman, when men behave like 'real' men. However, the jest-biography provides further useful context of the *querelle des femmes,* and vice versa, because of what it says through its deep ambivalence. Long Meg is presented as a forceful female character throughout the majority of the jest-biography. She shows a certain degree of independence (until she marries, and then again afterwards), and she uses violence, including the ritualised, masculinised violence of swordplay and fighting, as well as her seemingly inherent ability to brawl, to achieve her own goals: including delivering justice (both microcosmic, in her neighbourhood; and macrocosmic, fighting in France with the English army and inspiring an entire fighting force) and protecting herself, her employees, and her inn, from badly behaved men. When placed in its literary and socio-political contexts it seems logical that the text was reprinted around the same time as *Haec-Vir*, which makes essentially the same argument: women will be 'real' women when men are 'real' men – a seemingly conservative concept.

Long Meg addresses many of the same issues as contemporary *querelle* texts, including women dressed in men's clothing, the depiction of fighting and use of the vocabulary of violence, swordplay, and combat, and the concepts of idealised womanhood and marriage. All of these are useful considerations to any attempt to interpret the *querelle* texts in their historic contexts, and also suggests that a wider view of English *querelle* literature may be useful for understanding both contemporary 'popular' texts, and the English *querelle* tradition itself. The

Long Meg jest-biography should be studied for what it can add to discussions about the English *querelle des femmes* and how popular texts had the potential to make powerful statements about social issues through humour. Long Meg is exceptional, and radical, through her appropriation of masculinised violence and men's clothing, yet through that exceptionality seems to support the *status quo*. Both the jest-biography and the seemingly pro-woman *Haec-Vir* are critical of how unexceptional men, too, challenge that same social hierarchy by not behaving as 'proper' men – those who are less brave, patriotic, are less successful at fighting, or wear feminised fashions. However, despite her exceptional nature, there is no question that Long Meg fully, successfully, and unapologetically participates in male violence and honour codes, which is in itself radical. It is only by studying the jest-biography alongside contemporary, perhaps more self-consciously 'serious' texts such political works and *querelle* texts, that it becomes clear that *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* is not just a jestbook, a pro- or anti-woman text, a challenge to men to be 'real' men, or a work of social criticism, but all of them: it is a neglected part of significant literary debates about women that were taking place the early seventeenth century.

Chapter Three: *Long Meg* and Literary Contexts

At the same time notions of essential sex were being discussed in medical treatises in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and *querelle des femmes* text debated issues of women's social roles, other texts of multiple genres also explored the outward manifestations of gender, the perceived power clothing had to change the person underneath, and how that presented a challenge to social hierarchy. Women who dressed in fashionable men's garments were considered a nuisance by some contemporary commentators, and a danger to the social order by others. In 1576, George Gascoigne satirised women wearing masculine fashions when he wrote: 'What be they? women? masking in mens weeds? […] Wo to Men in dede'.[266] Gascoigne description of 'masking' (wearing a costume) suggests that gender itself could be considered a performance – a concept reflected by some cross-dressed women characters in sixteenth and seventeenth century English drama. As Natalie Zemon Davis explains, like jestbooks, these depictions were available to people from across the social spectrum:

> These varied images of sexual topsy-turvy—from the transvestite male escaping responsibility and harm to the transvestite fool and the unruly woman unmasking the truth—were available to city people who went to the theater and to people who could read and afford books. They were also familiar to the lower orders more generally in both town and country through books that were read aloud and through stories, poems, proverbs, and broadsheets.[267]

While the two previous chapters have focussed on historic contexts for *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1620), and how it can be read as being enmeshed with contemporary events and texts, this chapter will consider how acts of violence and cross-dressing, when done by or associated with women in various contemporary literary contexts, including dramatic and

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[266] George Gascoigne, *The Steele Glas* (London: Printed [by Henrie Binneman] for Richard Smith, 1576), sig. I.jv.
[267] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 136.

'fictional' prose texts, should inform examination of the jest-biography (and *vice versa*). As discussed in the previous two chapters, the *Long Meg* jest-biography uses the outward manifestations of gender (such as clothing and swords) and more internalised aspects of it (including manners, behaviour, and the vocabulary and use of structured violence) to depict Long Meg as both challenging and supporting a male-dominated social hierarchy. This chapter will examine how depictions of other fighting and cross-dressed characters, and how Long Meg is depicted in contemporary works of literature, suggest that she is an important touchstone for literary depictions of women – especially those that engage with violence. This chapter will examine sections and elements of four dramatic texts: *The Roaring Girl* (1611), *Love's Cure, or the Martial Maid* (ca. 1606-1615; published 1647), *The Maid's Tragedy* (ca. 1608-1611), and *The Fair Maid of the West* (ca. 1597-1603, published 1631). It will also consider the masque *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (1624-25), the prose text *The Gentle Craft* (1597), and elements of *Patient Griselda* (ca. 1600).

Long Meg and contemporary dramatic texts

Jennifer Low argues in *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture*, that fencing and duelling, as cultural practices, had traditionally defined what it meant to be a man; women's use of violence in literary texts was used to demonstrate 'proper' masculinity to men. Low explores the different ways in which women who duel inform literary depictions of masculinity in early modern England, in both their successes and failures, and she uses the genre of drama to provide context for fighting women:

> Women's duels in…plays differ from men's in that they enact an almost purely didactic function; by contrast, men's duels are almost invariably prompted by the desire for revenge or for glory, both of which motives derive from the values of heroic self-assertion. Plays in which women fight define a broader range of acceptable behaviour for

> women; however, as they do so, they challenge the link between masculinity and violence by suggesting that motive can redefine the practice of duelling — almost to the extent of changing the name of the act when the duel no longer engages the corpus of social practices with which it had seemed indissolubly linked…Most consistently, female dramatic characters who engage in duels are represented neither as transcending their sex nor as violating its nature: instead they seem to accept the female role as a uniquely instructive one, using the combat as a didactic tool.[268]

Low's study of early modern English duelling is almost wholly focused on masculinity, and does not consider in depth how the practices of fighting and violence may have informed ideas about women's social roles, nor how depictions of martial women in different literary genres may complicate the argument that women used swordplay only for didactic purposes (although this thesis does argue that in many instances Meg fights to teach men to be 'real' men). By considering a greater range of the literature of duelling, fighting, and cross-dressing, and comparing them to the *Long Meg* jest-biography, it is possible to see women's practice of swordplay and other forms of fighting more generally as social criticism, as well as reinforcing social norms of 'proper' masculinity.

Low outlines the problems modern scholars encounter when examining early modern cross-dressing, noting that there were many reasons for women to wear men's clothing in the early modern period:

> [W]e must be careful to avoid prematurely closing out possible explanations of an overdetermined practice. 'Haec Vir' depicts cross-dressers as advocates of androgyny whose creation of an ambiguous gender challenges received assumptions of essential gender differences. But cross-dressing also served a much less radical purpose: not to challenge gender distinctions but simply to get around them. Cross-dressers might accept gender distinctions but wish to subvert them on an individual basis. Such revolutions were not political but personal. Literal female-to-male impersonation was not common during the period, but it was far from unheard-of. It is impossible to gain accurate records of it because, if successful, it went undetected.[269]

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[268] Jennifer A. Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 8-9, 139.
[269] Low, *Manhood and the Duel*, 138.

While 'real' women may have had many motives for wearing masculine clothing, it must be noted that there is a distinction to be made between cross-dressing with the intention of passing as a man, which as Low points out may have happened more than records indicate, and the modish quasi-cross-dressing of women adopting specific male garments, such as hats, swords, and doublets, with the intention of using them as fashionable additions to more traditionally feminine clothing (such as voluminous skirts). Both 'full' cross-dressing, with the intention of passing as a man, and this partial cross-dressing, taking on certain aspects of male visual codes (especially swords and daggers), may be interpreted as radical acts.

Long Meg's use of crossdressing and swords makes her an important reference point for another female historic/literary character who wears men's clothing: Moll Cutpurse, as she is depicted in Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's 1611 play *The Roaring Girl* (which is about another unusual London woman who wears men's clothing and uses swords). In scene ten of the play, Moll Cutpurse saves Jack Dapper, a 'gallant' and gentleman, from being imprisoned falsely for debt by a sergeant and a yeoman. After Moll chases the lawmen away, the grateful Dapper addresses her respectfully as 'Captain Jack', describing her heroism as male, and locating it in a military context. Crucially, he asks if she was inspired to save him by Long Meg: 'prithee Captain Jack, be plain and perspicuous with me: was it your Meg of Westminster's courage that rescued me from the Poultry puttocks indeed?'[270] This is probably a reference to chapter six of the Long Meg jest-biography, in which Meg beats up the 'bailey of Westminster' (a law-enforcement agent) rather than let him imprison one of her friends for debt. This reference in *The Roaring Girl* suggests that a similar scenario may have been staged in the Long Meg play (1594-1595) or that there was a version of the jestbook available and in circulation before and

[270] Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 767.

around 1611 when *The Roaring Girl* was produced. It also suggests that the jest-biography, ballad, or another version of Long Meg's story was popular enough for Dekker and Middleton, famous for their localised London jokes, to count on the audience's understanding the reference, indicating contemporary popularity of the Long Meg character. By 1611, Long Meg was well-known as an heroic, cross-dressed fighting woman.

The *Long Meg* jest-biography and *The Roaring Girl* have much in common – the titular characters are both based on 'real' women (Moll Cutpurse was an alias for Mary Frith), both characters use violence to teach men to be 'proper' men, and, crucially, both continue their uses of violence until the ends of the texts. Moll, like Meg, uses the structured violence of the duel to teach a man to respect women. In scene three, Laxton, a gallant, tries to engage Moll for a sexual tryst, titillated by her masculine garments and behaviour, assuming that it means she is sexually available as a prostitute. Although she is aware it is an invitation for sex, she purposefully construes his language as a challenge to a fight, positioning herself as a competent duellist by agreeing to meet him in Gray's Inn Fields (outside the jurisdiction of the City of London – an ideal place for an illicit meeting). In scene five, they meet, and she draws her weapon, to his surprise:

> Moll
> Draw, or I'll serve an execution on thee
> Shall lay thee up till doomsday.
> Laxton
> Draw upon a woman? Why, what dost mean, Moll?
> Moll
> To teach thy base thoughts manners! Thou'rt one of those
> That thinks each woman thy fond flexible whore:
> If she but cast a liberal eye upon thee,
> Turn back her head, she's thine; or amongst company,
> By chance drink first to thee, then she's quite gone…
> …
> *They fight*
> …

Moll

> If I could meet my enemies one by one thus,
> I might make pretty shift with 'em in time,
> And make 'em know, she that has wit and spirit
> May scorn to live beholding to her body for meat,
> Or for apparel, like your common dame
> That makes shame get her clothes to cover shame.
> Base is that mind that kneels unto her body
> As if a husband stood in awe on's wife;
> My spirit shall be mistress of this house
> As long as I have time in't.[271]

Moll uses a duel to teach Laxton that not all women are available for sex at his whim. Long Meg does the same throughout the jest-biography, notably in chapter four of the text, in which she uses a similar duel to teach the persistent Sir James that the Hostess of the Eagle Inn is not sexually available. Both characters use the phallic symbol of the sword, and the humiliation of losing a duel to a woman, to teach men not to attempt to exploit women sexually, and, conservatively, to protect a traditional notion of women's honour as sexual probity.

The last lines of the section quoted above are particularly useful when comparing *The Roaring Girl* with *Long Meg*: Moll muses that she will not steal or prostitute herself to survive, not letting her physical needs overcome her morality (much like the injured soldier of chapter five of *Long Meg*), but also makes the comparison of her mind bending to her body's will with a husband subjugating himself to his wife. Moll reinforces the idea that a man is above his wife – yet, just as Meg never actually stops fighting or wearing men's clothing in the jest-biography, Moll does not reconcile herself to marriage at the end of the play, as most early modern comedies show 'independent' or 'strong' women characters doing. Although both Meg and Moll reinforce a patriarchal system, there is a subtle undermining of that hierarchy: through appropriations of 'masculine' violence, women may operate within the existing social structure,

[271] Middleton, Dekker, *The Roaring Girl* in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Taylor and Lavagnino, 745-747, lines 69-141.

whilst still carving out their own roles as exceptional women. In the play and in the jest-biography, neither woman stops fighting.

Although the two texts have key similarities, so it would be difficult to contextualise *The Roaring Girl* without *Long Meg*, the play and the jest-biography also have important differences: Moll cross-dresses all the time, seemingly without intending to pass as a man – she is openly a woman in men's clothing. Meg cross-dresses to pass as a man to fight in duels and in military contexts, but mostly dresses in traditionally female garments (and is enthusiastic about petticoats). Despite her brushes with the law in 'reality', Moll is mostly considered a lovable, local rogue in the play, and those who work against her are presented as the villains – her reputation is seemingly rehabilitated by Dekker and Middleton. Meg is a war hero and a local Robin Hood figure (although her reputation as a procuress may have been similarly transformed by the author of the jest-biography). Moll is exceptional because she chooses to cross-dress and fight; Meg because her extraordinary physical presence allows her scope for freedom to which other women do not necessarily have the same access. But both women used the masculinised ritual of the duel to defend women's honour – not just to teach men to be 'real' men.

Although *Long Meg* and *The Roaring Girl* are often compared, there are three other contemporary plays that explore women's use of cross-dressing and duelling culture and violence, sometimes in mimetic and didactic ways, which are also important to put into conversation with *Long Meg*: Beaumont and Fletcher's *Love's Cure, or the Martial Maid* (ca. 1606-1615, published 1647) and *The Maid's Tragedy* (ca. 1608-1611); and Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West* (ca. 1597-1603, published 1631).

The plot of *Love's Cure* is predicated on violence and cross-dressing: the catalyst for the action is a death caused by a duel (Alvarez, the main patriarch in the play, kills Don Pedro,

another patriarch), which leads to a family vendetta and further violence. This primary reason for the action, set out in the first ten lines, tells the audience or reader that honour and violence are the driving forces of the play, and explains that the exiled Alvarez has been welcomed back into society from his punishment of exile after leading a successful military campaign. The conflict between the families had led to Alvarez's children being raised in 'opposite' genders for their safety: Clara is raised by her father in a military camp as 'Lucio', her brother; the 'real' Lucio is raised as a woman by their mother in Spain. Their recuperation into their 'proper' gender roles, by changing dress and behaviour, forms most of the action and comedy of the play. Lucio is mocked for his conventionally womanly behaviour, and although Clara is not ridiculed for her interest in masculine pursuits (there is no question in the play that men's behaviour and dress are considered superior), her conduct is depicted as deeply unnatural. The play suggests that apparel and gendered behaviour (such as duelling) influences the fundamental person beneath – yet, crucially, that gender (in a modern sense) is mutable: Clara wears feminine clothing, and stops sword fighting, when presented with a good enough, and socially acceptable, incentive (marriage to an attractive nobleman on the other side of the family feud); likewise, Lucio takes up a sword and wears trousers, and works to avenge the family honour when presented with an attractive woman. Literally, as the title suggests, love is the cure for their 'unnatural' behaviour.

One of the most insightful speeches about gender in *Love's Cure* comes from the servant Bobadilla, charged with retraining the siblings into their 'proper' roles: he admonishes Clara for her reluctance to stop fighting, turning the language of violence to reinforce ideas of feminine sexual probity:

> Well: I doe no more then I have authority for: would I were away though: for she's as much too man|nish, as he too womanish…I have like charge of you Maddam, I am as well to mollifie you, as to qualifie him: what have you to doe with Armors, and Pistols, and Javelins, and swords, and such tooles? remember Mistresse; nature hath given you a

> sheath onely, to signifie women are to put up mens weapons, not to draw them…faith, I know not what to say to'ye both Custome hath turn'd nature topsie-turvy in you.[272]

This concept that 'nature hath given you a sheath only' unsubtly makes the point that the sword is phallic: Clara, as a woman, should not be using 'such tooles', which are the purview of men, but should rather be aware that her own female genitalia should prohibit her from engaging with masculine duelling culture. But it is in Bobadilla's use of the word 'Custome' in the last line of this speech that is especially important, and similar to *Haec-Vir's* statement that 'Custome is an idiot' in 1620. Bobadilla here argues that the outward manifestations of gender (in modern terms) and behaviour has changed their fundamental 'nature' – has turned it upside down, showing an anxiety about the power clothing and behaviour have to transform the person underneath, and allow women to take social agency through masculine dress and weapons.

Although both Clara and Lucio are retrained into behaving and dressing as their 'proper' genders, it cannot be ignored that both were successful in the roles to which they were raised: Lucio passed as a woman in aristocratic society; Clara was talented with a sword and other typically masculine arts and passed as a man in a military camp. Unlike Long Meg, who never needs to be socially recuperated into her society in the jest-biography (her exceptionality means she can be both a 'good wife' and beat up local ruffians as necessary), anxiety about Clara and Lucio's performance of gender is never fully resolved in this play, even as they reintegrate into their society in conventional gender roles. It can be argued that Clara's use of swordplay and violence is rooted in teaching the men to be better, as her abilities ultimately stop the family vendetta and show that the men's bloodthirsty behaviour is socially damaging. Yet even as the play demonstrates that 'proper' gender roles can be (re)established through the strength of

[272] Francis Beaumont, *Comedies and Tragedies Written by Francis Beaumont and Iohn Fletcher* (London: Printed for Humphrey Robinson ... and for Humphrey Moseley, 1647), 131.

conventional romantic relationships (love is the cure), at the same time, much like *Long Meg*, it also suggests that the performance of masculinity through weaponry is available to women, and that they can be successful at what was typically seen as masculine violence. The play radically suggests that gender, and more specifically the social constructs of masculinity, is both mutable and a performance.

Thomas Heywood uses a reference to Long Meg in his play *The fair maid of the west. Or A girle worth golde. The first part* (*c*. 1603-1604, printed 1631) as shorthand for the concept of the cross-dressed woman who engages in masculine violence. In the play, the title character, Bess Bridges, wears male clothing and weapons to protect herself from men who behave dishonourably – although, notably, she does not actually fight any duels. Despite this, the two women have much in common: Bess is of impeccable character, although she works as a tapster in a tavern (much like Meg) and she changes in and out of male garb as necessary. She compares her own masculine posturing to the heroic exploits of Long Meg, noting that her male clothing inspires her to a kind of masculine proclivity for violence – although her male servant, Clem, believes it gives her an opportunity to take masculine sexual agency as well:

> *Besse*: But that I know my mother to be chaste, I'de sweare some Souldier got me.
> *Clem*: It may be many a Souldiers Buffe Jerkin came out of your fathers Tanne-fat.
> *Besse*: Me thinkes I have a manly spirit in me In this mans habit.
> *Clem*: Now am not I of many mens mindes, for if you should doe me wrong, I should not kill you, though I took you pissing against a wall.
> *Besse*: Me thinkes I could be valiant on the sudden: And meet a man i'th field. I could doe all that I have heard discourst Of *Mary Ambree* or *Westminster Long-Meg.*
> *Clem:* What *Mary Ambree* was I cannot tell, but unlesse you were taller you will come short of *Long Meg.*
> *Besse*: Of all thy fellowes thee I onely trust, And charge thee to be secret.
> *Clem:* I am bound in my Indentures to keepe my Masters secrets, and should I finde a man in bed with you, I would not tell.[273]

[273] Thomas Heywood, *The fair maid of the west. Or, A girle worth gold. The first part* (London: Printed by Miles Flesher for Richard Royston, and are to be sold at his shop in Ivie Lane, 1631), sig. D3r-D3v.

Although finding a certain amount of freedom in her male clothing, Bess still sees herself not as a male hero, but as a cross-dressed heroine. By comparing herself to Long Meg or Mary Ambree, another English woman who dressed as a man to fight in the army, Bess notes that the clothes inspire in her a 'manly spirit' – but does not transmute her into a man.

In *The Fair Maid of the West*, as well as in other contemporary texts, the insinuation is made that women wearing male garments have the potential for masculine sexual agency. While Bess is consistently portrayed as virtuous and virginal, Clem sees male clothing as simultaneously heteroerotically and homoerotically charged. He imagines Bess with male genitalia ('pissing against a wall'), and also imagines her in bed with a man. While male clothing, as a disguise, allows Bess to protect her honour, Clem interprets a male sexual agency. At this time, a woman transgressing against clothing strictures could also be seen as being sexually transgressive – a whore. As Sandra Clark writes about assumptions about the morality of cross-dressed women in early modern literature: 'If a woman discards the restrictions proper to her sex in one way, so the logic goes, she will not scruple to do so in any other.'[274] Although Bess dresses as a man to protect her (women's) honour (rooted in sexual probity), she returns to her feminine role and clothing as soon as possible. The threat of a duel with the cross-dressed Bess is enough to teach a 'bad man' to respect her, but there is more at play here: she just as comfortably takes on the guise of a man to protect her honour as easily as she sheds it to resume a female social role, questioning the boundaries between male and female honour – and gender itself.

The Maid's Tragedy (registered with the Stationers' Company on 28 April 1619; quoting from the published edition from 1650) is in many ways very different to *Long Meg*, *Love's Cure*,

[274] Sandra Clark, '"Hic Mulier", "Haec Vir", and the Controversy over Masculine Women', *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 2 (April 1, 1985): 169.

and *The Fair Maid of the West*, depicting not a woman who uses swordplay for the physical defence of others or herself when under threat, or for patriotic reasons, but for self-sacrificing revenge. Aspatia (the titular 'Maid') is incompetent and untrained with the practical use of the sword but, intriguingly, has significant command of the language and ceremonies of masculine honour codes, which she uses to commit suicide by duel.

At the behest of the king, her betrothed (Amintor) leaves her and marries another woman (the king's pregnant mistress who later accuses the king of raping her); Aspatia dresses as her fictional, hitherto unknown brother, bent on revenge for his 'sister's' dishonour and disappointment, and provokes Amintor to a duel:

> *Aspatia.* You must be urged ; I do not deal uncivilly with those that
> Dare to fight; but such a one as you
> Must be us'd thus. (*She strikes him*)
> *Amintor*. Prethee youth take heed ;
> Thy sister is a thing to me so much
> Above mine honour, that I can endure ;
> But stay not, lest thou draw a timely death upon thy self.
> *Asp.* Thou art some prating fellow,
> One that has studied out a trick to talk
> And move soft-hearted people ; to be kickt, (she kicks him)
> Thus to be kickt ------ (*aside*) why should he be so slow
> In giving me by death? *Amin.* A man can bear
> No more and keep his flesh ; forgive me then ;
> I would endure yet if I could; now shew
> The spirit thou pretendest, and understand
> Thou has no honour to live : (*They fight.)*
> What dost thou mean? thou canst not fight :
> The blows thou makest at me are quite besides ;

And those I offer at thee, thou spread'st thine arms ,
And tak'st upon thy breast, alas defenceless.[275]

At first, Amintor is reluctant to fight the disguised Aspatia – to spare his former betrothed further pain by killing or injuring her 'brother', he says that Aspatia is 'above mine honour' – prioritising her above his reputation. He tries to convince her not to fight, but the repeated physical insults of striking him and kicking him, trespassing into his physical space, and verbal insults, seem to leave him no choice but to protect his honour through the violence she is so clearly seeking – it seems his honour is more important after all. He finds out quickly, but still too late, that he is fighting an inexperienced duellist, and is horrified to find that he has mortally wounded the disguised Aspatia. Unlike Beaumont and Fletcher's *Love's Cure,* the only recuperation the play allows for Aspatia is her own death, wrought through an appropriation of masculine duelling culture. Amintor is doubly shamed by Aspatia's provocation to the duel, and then to find that he had fought and killed a 'defenceless' woman. Amintor later stabs himself to death. Ultimately, although Aspatia's use of swordplay can be interpreted as didactic – Amintor is shamed through her use structured violence – she uses her knowledge of duelling culture to avenge herself and her honour. This suicide by duel demonstrates how an appropriation of masculine agency can be an act of self-destructive self-determination through violence, not just as a way of teaching men to be 'real men' – different, but comparable, to Long Meg, whose productive uses of violence are also for self-determination as well as community protection – not only for didactic purposes. The appropriation of masculine violence is used in both texts to show women taking arms themselves, for their own purposes.

[275] Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy as it Hath been Divers Times Acted at the Black-Friers, by the Kings Majesties Servants* (London, Printed for William Leake, 1650), I^{v}.

Long Meg and *The Fortunate Isles, The Gentle Craft,* and *Patient Griselda*

King James' obvious concern about (partially or fully) cross-dressed and armed women was reflected in Ben Jonson's *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (1624-25). This masque, which celebrated the king and his unification of Britain, includes the characters of Long Meg and Mary Ambree.[276] Unlike the jest-biographies, which describe Meg as unusually tall but in proportion ('every limbe was … fit to her talnes')[277], Jonson's masque portrays Meg as a monstrous giant. In his anti-masque, the character of Doctor Skelton, (who in chapter two of the Long Meg jest-biography improvises a much kinder poem about Meg's remarkable size), here mocks her:

> …Westmister [sic] *Meg*,
> With her long leg,
> As long as a Crane;
> And feet like a plane:
> With a paire of heeles,
> As broad as two wheeles;
> To drive downe the dew,
> As she goes to the stew:
> And turnes home merry
> By Lambeth ferry.[278]

By describing Meg as having comically long legs and outsize feet, Jonson describes her as monstrously gigantic, and more like the excessive women of tavern jest humour, such as Mother Bunch. Jonson seems to allude to an episode in chapter fifteen of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*: a waterman (ferryman) of Lambeth insults Long Meg, who punishes him for his

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[276] Anon., *The valorous acts performed at Gaunt, by the brave bonny lasse Mary Ambre* [sic]*; who in revenge of her lovers death, did play her part most gallantly. To the tune of, The blind beggar* (London: Printed for William Gibertson [*sic*] in Giltspur-street: ca. 1660-1665). This seems to be the earliest known extant copy, but the ballad was certainly in circulation decades before.

[277] Anon., *The life of Long Meg of Westminster: containing the mad merry pranks shee played in her life time, not onely in performing sundry quarrels with divers ruffins about London, but also how valiantly shee behaved her selfe in the warres of Bolloigne Westminster* (London: Printed by Edward Allde for Edward White, 1620), STC (2nd ed.), 17782.5., sig. Br.I.

[278] Ben Jonson, *The Fortunate Isles and Their Union* (London: S.n., 1625), sig. Cr.

impertinence by tying him to a tow rope and pulling him behind his own boat, nearly drowning him. While this reference suggests that Jonson may have had the stories of the jest-biography in mind when writing about Long Meg for the masque, his way of describing her greatly differs. Calling her home 'Westmister', an alternate spelling for Westminster, he emphasizes the 'mister' seemingly to stress her masculinity. He also suggests that Meg engages with typically male (and therefore deviant in a woman) sexual behaviours by going to the 'stew' or brothel.[279] Here he may be saying that she visits stews for sex, an act that was traditionally associated with men, or that she was herself a prostitute, or was a brothel keeper, a role that either sex might take. In any case, this portrayal of Long Meg visiting the stews contradicts that of the 1620 jest-biography, which does not depict her as morally transgressive (nor as a giant).

Long Meg and Mary Ambree are silent in Jonson's masque, only figuring as objects of spectacle: potentially they are supplied as a display for the hostile gaze of the king. By implication, the masque is anti-woman in a way the jest-biography is not; Jonson seems to play to King James' known dislike of women wearing masculine fashions by portraying famous and popular fighting and cross-dressed women as grotesquely humorous. Around the time that this masque was written, as well as the time the jest-biography was printed, powerful men were concerned with keeping women subordinated. If women, through their clothing, queried their place in the social order even indirectly, that could serve as a challenge to masculinity, and kingship more generally: as the man was head of the household, the king was head of the

[279] 'This state of things [legalised prostitution in Southwark] was officially fixed by Henry II's ordinance of 1161, which legalized and officially authorized a series of brothels in Southwark ('the Stews') and prevailed till its abolition by Henry VIII in 1546'. Frédérique Fouassier-Tate, 'Fact versus Fiction: The Construction of the Figure of the Prostitute in Early Modern England, Official and Popular Discourses', in *Female Transgression in Early Modern Britain: Literary and Historical Explorations*, ed. Richard Hillman and Pauline Ruberry-Blanc (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 75.

country. Any questioning of the social order, even women cutting their hair short and wearing swords, could be interpreted as an attack the foundations of society. Natalie Zemon Davis describes how this subordination of women to men was useful for supporting the political structure of James I's England:

> Kings and political theorists saw the increasing legal subjection of wives to their husbands (and children to their parents) as a guarantee of the obedience of both men and women to the slowly centralizing state—a training for the loyal subject of seventeenth-century France and or for the dutiful citizen of seventeenth-century England.[280]

Although demonstrably a 'dutiful citizen' in that she fights for king and country, the Long Meg of the jest-biography may be read as subtly questioning this hierarchy: she is depicted as a 'good' woman in that she ultimately accepts a woman's role in society in some ways, but she challenges a simple interpretation of a woman's social role through fighting and wearing men's clothing.

Much like Jonson's masque, Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* depicts a very different Long Meg than the character in the jest-biography. This book, published around the same time as the jest-biography was registered, should be examined in any study of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*, for how it informs, and/or is informed by, a contemporary understanding of Long Meg specifically, and women generally. The text probably dates from the late sixteenth century: the London Stationer's Register records a book 'Entred for his Copie vnder th[e h]andes of master Dix and master Man a book called the gentle crafte intreatinge of Shoomakers' on 19 October 1597, which is likely to be Deloney's book.[281] This makes the first recorded version of the work a fairly close contemporary of the 1590 version of *Long Meg*. However, early printings of *The Gentle Craft* have been lost – the earliest recorded version in the ESTC is 1599, although, like *Long Meg*, it was reprinted frequently throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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[280] Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 128.
[281] Stationers' Register Online: SRO3996, https://stationersregister.online/entry/SRO3996

Simon Barker notes that:

> *The Gentle Craft* is a prose narrative in two parts, thought to have been written about 1596 and published in 1597 (Part I) and 1598 (Part II) although there is much speculation over the accuracy of these dates. Most modern editions have been based on surviving seventeenth-century versions of the text: a single copy of 1627 (Part I) held by the University of Sheffield and two copies of 1639 (Part II) held in the British Library and the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The provenance of an earlier edition (dated 1599 and held by the Biblioteka Gadanska in Poland) is uncertain, but it is of immense interest because it includes several additional pages and indicates that the author intended to produce a third part.[282]

The Gentle Craft is probably now best known for inspiring Thomas Dekker's 1599 play *The Shoemaker's Holiday*; but, as Barker has argued, as this thesis does for *Long Meg*, the book deserves critical attention in its own right, as a work of 'popular' literature concerned with nationalism, the effect of war on 'ordinary citizens', anti-Catholicism, the threat of foreign powers, social and economic mobility, the social roles of women, and, generally speaking, the 'everyday' life of Londoners.[283] Thus comparison of the texts benefits an understanding of both.

The Life of Long Meg of Westminster and *The Gentle Craft* may have many similarities thematically, but Meg portrayed in vastly different ways. *The Gentle Craft* describes a love triangle between the attractive Richard Casteler, a shoemaker, and two tavern servants, Gillian and (Long) Meg:

> But among many that secretly affect him [Richard Casteler], I will onely tell of twaine, because above all the rest, their merriments doe only remaine in memorie, the one of them was called Margaret, of the spread-Eagle, but more commonly knowne by the

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[282] Thomas Deloney, ed. Simon Barker, *The Gentle Craft* (Non-canonical early modern popular texts) (Aldershot: Ashgate 2007), xxix.

[283] 'Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* has long been regarded as an important prose work form the closing years of the sixteenth century, yet its significance has hitherto been determined almost solely by the status given it as the source for Thomas Dekker's play, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599). More recently, however, prose works and other non-dramatic popular forms (such as the kind of ballat with which Deloney's name is also associated) have attracted considerable critical attention in their own right and not simply for their relationship with the contemporary drama...Moreover, as criticism turned in the last twenty years or so to consider popular (but non-canonical) texts, just as it did, say, to the previously 'marginal' texts by women writers, it has to come to terms with a literary history that had obscured or undervalued such writing.' Barker (ed.), *The Gentle Craft***,** vii; xii-xiii.

> name of long Meg of Westminster: The other was a proper neat wench named Gillian of the George, both of them as wily as they were witty, who among all the Maides in Westminster were reputed to be the best servants; having therefore good wages, they maintained themselues gallantly, and therewithall so honestly, that no man could quip them with bad living, though afterward it fell out otherwise, as in this histories you shall heare.
>
> Margret was a maiden bourne in Lancashire, in height and proportion of body, passing the ordinary stature of women, but there-withall very comely, and of amiable countenance, her strength was agreeable to her stature and her courage as great as them both: she was of quicke capacitie, and pleasant disposition, of a liberall heart, and such a one as would be sodainely angry, and soone pleased, being readier to revenge her wrongs by weapons, then by words: and therein did shee differ from the nature of other women, because shee could not abide much brabling: and so heedfull was she of her behaviour in her yonger yeeres, that her good properties far exceeding her portion, she was wood by divers, but would be won by none, for the man whom shee most loved, least thought upon her. And albeit shee manifested her good will by divers meanes, yet did Richard little regard it, having his mind nothing bent unto marriage, by meanes whereof Margaret grew into such sad conceits as changed her chery cheekes into a greene wan countenance: in-somuch that every one wondred to see her pensivenes.[284]

Thus far the description of Meg follows that of the jest-biography: Meg is not monstrous, and is even attractive – she 'comely' and is 'woo[e]d by divers[e] [men]'; she is of good character and is not sexually promiscuous; not shrewish in her speech, and sooner redresses wrongs with weapons than words. Both she and Gillian wish to marry Richard and are egged on and deceived by Richard's friend Robin (a trickster in the jest tradition). Richard eventually marries another woman; both women are miserable about their rejection, but manage in different ways:

> Thus Margaret in a melancholy humor went her waies, and in short time after she forsooke Westminster, and attended on the King's army to Bullen, and while the siege lasted, became a landresse to the Camp, and never after did she set store by her selfe, but became common to the call of every man, till such time as all youthfull delights was banished by old age, and in the end she left her life in Islington, being very penitent for all her former offences.

[284] Barker (ed.), *The Gentle Craft*, 74-75.

> Gillian in the end was well married, and became a very good house-keeper, living in honest name and fame till her dying day. [285]

Although the texts are similar in that Meg is described in both as joining the army as a laundress and going to Boulogne, *The Gentle Craft* diverges from the 1620 jest-biography greatly in the depiction of Long Meg as sexually promiscuous and, notably, penitent at the end of her life. The jest-biography has no direct mention of sexual activity, although there is a certain amount that might be assumed from Long Meg's post in France as a laundress – but it is never made explicit. Meg in the jest-biography, like Gillian in *The Gentle Craft*, is well married and successful in the jest-biography. Furthermore, in chapter 18 (the last of the 1620 text), Meg is rebuked by the local Catholic priest (Friar Oliver) for her 'ill life' – yet she is never penitent. In fact, she rises from her sick bed and beats the friar in public for his insolence.[286] The Long Meg of the jest-biography is never apologetic for her choices or her actions.

These two books, both featuring Long Meg, registered around the same time, and similar in many ways (both are demonstrably popular, frequently reprinted, fairly 'cheap' texts), should influence how both texts are studied. Although the Long Meg of the jest-biography is consistently portrayed as morally upright, a protector of the weak and innocent, and an upholder of justice – Meg of *The Gentle Craft* may have been in the back of some readers' minds. It is impossible to say what any oral tradition of Long Meg may have said about her 'virtue', and how she was depicted in the lost play and ballads – but a new dimension may be read into the jest-biography if a character exhibiting some sense of sexual freedom is positioned as Meg is: a Robin Hood figure, the best of English soldiers, and a figure of justice.

Was the jest-biography's author 'rehabilitating' Meg into a patriotic figure for

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[285] *Ibid.*, 100.

[286] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. E3v-E4.

propaganda purposes? Or was there simply an understanding that her exceptional stature and abilities put her outside the normal constraints of the conventional construction of female honour? Either way, Deloney's text, when read in conjunction with the jest-biography, suggests that *The Life of Long of Westminster* may be even more socially disruptive than is first obvious: when read together, the texts suggest Meg is able to navigate both male social codes, such as duelling, but also a kind of male sexual freedom, with such ease that the author of the jest-biography does not seem to feel it necessary to 'punish' her. At its crudest, a sword is a phallic symbol, and Meg's proficiency with it can suggest the potential for male (sexual) agency, even as she demonstrates submission to a certain kind of male authority.

The way Long Meg behaves with 'real' men and accepts their authority is vastly different from the way she humiliates 'bad' men like Huffing Dick and Sir James of Castile. The term 'proper', used to describe Meg, is also used to describe her husband. In chapter thirteen of the jest-biography, she marries a 'proper tall man and a Soldier'; this section is one of the key places in which the text can be interpreted as social criticism. Long Meg's husband becomes aware of her previous exploits and how 'mankinde she was', so seeks to put her in her (proper) place by picking a quarrel with her to provoke a physical fight:

> [C]alling her aside unto a backe Chamber, [he] stript her into her petticoate, and there delivered her one staffe, and tooke himselfe another, and told her, that for that he had heard she was so mankinde as to beat all she met withal, he would try her manhoode: and therefore bad her take which Cudgill she would. She replyed nothing, but held down her head, and with that he laide her on the three or foure blowes: and she in all submission fell downe upon her knees, desiring him to holde his hands and to pardon her. Why quoth he, why take you not the sticke and strike? Husband quoth she, whatsoever I have done to others it behooveth me to be obedient towards you: and never it shall be said, though I can swinge a Knave that wrongs me, that Long Meg shall be her Husbands Master: and therefore use mee as you please.[287]

[287] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), sig. D4r.

This chapter, with its (potentially) surprising depiction of marital violence being perpetrated against a woman who elsewhere in the text has protected others from similar treatment, seems to have perplexed scholars of early modern (proto) feminist literature. Of course, as disturbing as this section may be to modern readers, a certain amount of wife beating was legally and socially tolerated at the time this text was published, and that context must be kept in mind.[288] However, Linda Woodbridge somewhat oversimplifies this chapter in relation to other, similar instances of male domination in literature:

> When Renaissance authors betray admiration for an aggressive virago, she is usually a single woman – Long Meg of Westminster, Moll Cutpurse, Bess Bridges, Rosaline; if such a character eventually marries, she is expected to hand over the sovereignty to her husband forthwith, if she hopes to retain that admiration. It was thought rather charming when an assertive virgin took command of the situation, but the sky changed when she was a wife: the charm of a domineering wife was a topic the Renaissance entirely neglected.[289]

Although Woodbridge is pointing to a long tradition of literary fighting women abandoning their swords and breeches when they marry, especially in early modern English drama, this is not true of Long Meg, who does not abandon her cross-dressing or fighting after the marriage chapter (thirteen of eighteen) in the first extant version jest-biography (1620). In fact, she continues to fight in men's clothing into her old age and to the end of the (existing) text. Having proven that she is a 'proper' woman, the husband figure disappears from the narrative, and seems primarily to have made an appearance to reinforce the idea that, despite her strength, Long Meg accepts the authority of 'proper' men. Although she does seem to be part of the tradition that critics (such as Woodbridge) have outlined – the warrior woman who abandons her power when marrying, or, more specifically, when confronted by or presented with a 'real' man – critics have not

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[288] 'As well as authority over her goods, the husband has authority over her person, and may 'correct' or beat her to a 'reasonable degree'. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 76.
[289] Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 201.

considered in detail the jest-biography's immediate literary and historic contexts which suggests why this happens. It is also important to consider which version of *Long Meg* critics are examining: the forged '1582' version, which was assumed to be the earliest extant version, and which many scholars working in feminist criticism in the 1980s and 1990s used, ends with the 'pranke' Meg plays on the Waterman of Lambeth, which does not show her cross-dressing, and excludes the final chapter about Meg cross-dressing and fighting with Friar Oliver, which is included in the 1620 and 1635 versions of the text. The jest-biography may have vastly different meanings about female agency depending on which text is being studied: the 1620 version shows that Long Meg's marriage does not fundamentally change how she deals with 'bad' men (with cross-dressing and weapons).

The marriage chapter of *Long Meg* is not often put into conversation with another often-printed and popular work with a woman as a central character, *Patient Griselda,* although it could greatly benefit from further comparison. In her study of the various permutations of the story, Madeline Rüegg notes that there are over 120 adaptations of the story of Patient Griselda (or Grissell/Gressell) from the late fourteenth century until 1700, in various European languages.[290] There are two English versions logged in the London Stationers' Register that predate the time *Long Meg* was likely popular in England, but may still have been in circulation: Owyn Rogers registered a 'ballett intituled the sonnge of paycente gressell' between 1565-1566[291]; Thomas Colwell registered 'the history of payciente Gresell' (1568-1569)[292]; and, perhaps most importantly, 'The Plaie of Patient Grissell', which was registered by Cutbert Burby

[290] Madeline Rüegg, *The Patient Griselda Myth: Looking at Late Medieval and Early Modern European Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 2.
[291] SRO559
[292] SRO1049

on 28 March 1600.[293] The registration of the play puts interest in the Griselda character squarely in the time Long Meg was most popular, and around the time the now lost Long Meg play was performed (from 1595-1597).

The Griselda story is that of a woman's profound subjection. A marquis (Walter) is forced to marry by his subjects so he can produce an heir – so he chooses a poor, beautiful, virtuous local girl. They have two children, but to test her obedience, he takes both children, telling her they will be killed (when actually he sends them away to be raised). As his obedient wife, Griselda complies. That not being enough, he tests her again by sending her back to her father, saying he wants to dissolve their marriage, as he wants to marry another woman. She again submits to his will, even as the marquis demands that she plan his wedding. This 'new bride' turns out to be the now grown daughter that was sent away, accompanied by her brother. Griselda's absolute obedience is confirmed, and she returned to her place as the marquis' wife, and the family is reunited. The story's first known appearance is in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (c. 1348-1353) and was translated by Petrarch into Latin with some changes, making it a particularly Christian tale of submission.[294] Notably, the tale is reworked by Christine de Pisan in *Book of the City of Ladies* (1404-1405) which forms part of the *querelle des femmes*. Christine argues that Griselda's virtue in caring for her father is an example of women's moral superiority as women often care for aging parents, as well as functioning as an example of extreme female patience despite her husband's 'strange' behaviour.[295] The Griselda story forms the basis for Chaucer's *Clerk' Tale* in the *Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400), positioning it squarely in the English (*querelle*) literary canon. As Alcuin Blamires writes:

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[293] SRO4288
[294] Rüegg, *The Patient Griselda Myth*, 1.
[295] Janet Smarr, 'Women Rewrite Griselda: From Christine de Pizan to Julia Voznesenskaya', *Heliotropia* 15 (2018): 210. https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/heliotropia/15/smarr.pdf

> ...as much as Griselda possesses steadfastness, her husband (in conformity with the antimasculine underside of these profeminine discourses) is, for most of the narrative, a mass of whim and inconsistency...He is a creature of what Chaucer would call 'newfangelnesse' in his sudden tests of his wife, and the yawning gap between his original demeanour and that which he later shows Griselda...The anti-misogynistic stance of the narrative therefore includes a counter-attack which taints Walter with the very shortcomings which he so cruelly seeks to find in his wife.[296]

Although the *Griselda* story in its many forms requires too much interrogation for any full exploration in this thesis, it must be remembered in any study of Long Meg that her subjection to her husband appears in a literary context that includes profound obedience of wives to husbands, and with it a 'profeminine' criticism of husbands who test their wives. Thus, it is useful to recognise Griselda as a character running parallel to Long Meg to understand the chapter of the jest-biography about marriage. Meg subjects herself to the 'test' of her husband, much as Griselda submits to the tests of her husband – both prove to be 'proper' women.

Long Meg's rejection of a weapon, of a phallic symbol, just as she is being challenged to a fight by her husband, reflects this subjection – Long Meg here does not teach her husband a lesson about being a 'real' man, but teaches all men about 'proper' masculinity. The forcible stripping-down to her petticoat – to a private, essential example of feminine fashion in a time of anxiety about women wearing men's clothing – reinforces the necessity of reading the jest-biography within its literary and historic contexts. Only then can this chapter be understood not necessarily as undercutting the 'proto-feminist' sensibility of the rest of the text, as Linda Woodbridge suggests, but as potentially engaging with the contemporary literature that is so preoccupied with women's full or partial cross-dressing, and, through it, social agency. Ultimately, this chapter of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* suggests that Meg's husband never needed to 'put her in her place' – she was already there, and had been from the beginning.

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[296] Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 164-165. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.04182.

But, as Simon Shepherd writes, both the concepts of fighting women and conventional marriage hold an intriguing tension: 'proper' men do not need correction, but, in context, it is a warrior woman who decides who is a 'proper' man:

> The warrior women do believe in marriage, they believe also in its corollary, proper government, but they believe in these ideals in a world improperly governed and where the alternative to marriage is much more humiliating. The situation to our eyes is painfully compromised and ambivalent. It is a world of he for God only, she for God in him. But for warrior women it is also a world of he for God only, she for God in him, as long as he can prove God is in him.[297]

In this context, does marriage make a warrior woman conventional or radical – who really holds the power? This thesis suggests that the marriage in the Long Meg jest-biography, by Shepherd's definition, is radically ambivalent.

The release of Long Meg's hair after a battle or a fight, especially when understood in the context of debates about appearance and anxiety about women's appropriation of masculine attire and men's adoption of longer, more feminine hairstyles, demonstrate her 'proper' womanhood, and show she can, and does, behave as a 'real' woman once badly behaving men have been corrected. This chapter shows that Long Meg, despite her strength and fighting ability, can be considered an ideal wife in the strain of Patient Griselda, as reflected in contemporary popular works. Showing that Meg is a 'proper' woman in the context of a conventional marriage demonstrates that her otherwise unconventional dress and behaviour do not render her monstrous. Reading the first extant text of 1620, Long Meg, radically, does not lose her social agency as a fighter after she marries, but is still, demonstrably, a 'proper' woman because she is fundamentally a good wife.

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[297] Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 72.

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Although this thesis does essentially agree with Jennifer Low's argument that women in early modern English literature (especially drama) use swordplay for didactic purposes, there are other reasons for violence that are equally necessary to consider when examining the role of the armed and cross-dressed woman in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century English literature. On the one hand, Long Meg is shown putting 'bad' men in their place: '[Long Meg] buckled with…two sturdy knaves, and hurt the one sore, and beate downe the other, that they intreated her upon their knees to spare their lives.'[298] On the other hand, she embraces subjugation to her husband on her own knees. By putting *Long Meg* into conversation with contemporary dramatic and prose texts, it is evident that the jest-biography shows complicated and radical ideas of female honour and social power through instances of violence and cross-dressing.

[298] *The Life of Long Meg* (1620), D2r.

Conclusion

The title of this thesis is taken from Vincentio Saviolo's 1595 book *His Practice,* a fencing manual that describes and illustrates rapier technique along with the etiquette associated with duelling – but it closes with a chapter on an entirely different topic. Titled 'The Nobility of Women', this section lists and describes women who have taken up arms, including 'manye Queenes and noble Ladies [who] have gotten great renown and become glorious for armes and warlike exploits' – this section is similar to *querelle des femmes* literature in that it describes the heroic nature of some exceptional women.[299] It discusses, in particular, Joan of Arc, explaining that after she had gained the reputation for being a prophetess, 'she took armes her selfe, and behaved her selfe in such sorte among the other Captains and men of armes, that in a verye shorte time she was made Captaine generall of the whole armye.'[300] The description, of a woman's fighting ability being superior to men's (indeed, superior to that of a whole army of men, like Long Meg), is a reference point for the central questions of this thesis: what does it mean when women, particularly Long Meg of Westminster, take arms for themselves? How do texts about women who fight and wear and use weapons challenge the traditional view of female power (or the lack thereof)? As the last three chapters have considered, some answers may be found by examining examples of violence in the jest-biography in its literary and historic contexts.

Well may Jennifer Low argue that swordplay and duelling defined early modern masculinity, yet this thesis has suggested that *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* is deeply ambivalent as it shows swordplay and duelling as questioning conventional femininity, even while the woman wielding the sword may be understood as conforming to orthodox ideals of

[299] Vincentio Saviolo, *His Practice* (London: John Wolfe, 1596), sig. Llv.
[300] *Ibid.*, sig. Ll2v.

womanhood. Long Meg's use of more traditionally English weapons (swords, bucklers, and poniards), as opposed to a fashionable, continental rapier – and her volunteering for army service (as opposed to a man shirking it) – shows her to be the ideal English woman *and* the ideal English man. By not fighting against her husband when he beats her, she shows that 'proper' men do not need to be put in their place by 'proper' women.

This thesis set out to read between the gaps in the Long Meg story through the examination of the language of violence and historical references. There are many such gaps, not least because the text will have had the capacity to have different interpretations depending on when it was read. For instance, chapter 13, the section about Long Meg's marriage: in 1590 it could have been read through the lens of Queen Elizabeth's succession crisis – Meg's marriage, showing an independent and martial woman bending to the will of a greater force, may have seemed an allegory for Parliament's attempt to convince the queen to name an heir. By 1620, however, this same section may have had new interpretations.

Although the marriage section of the jest-biography may be read generally as an allegory for the government of King James I (who reigned in England from 1603-1625), who was trying to maintain a clear hierarchical society with himself as head of the country, it must also be noted that, as Frederick Waage has argued, that any glorification of the 'golden age' of Henrician or Elizabethan England, like the *Long Meg* jest-biographies, may be interpreted as 'implicit criticism' of the new Jacobean dynasty.[301] And considering the trouble to which James I's government took to reprimand women for wearing fashionable, masculinised garments and weapons, even as men were wearing more feminine fashions, there is scope to read *Long Meg* as criticism of that hypocrisy (much like *Haec Vir*). Reading *Long Meg* in 1590, before Queen

[301] Frederick O. Waage, 'Meg and Moll: Two Renaissance London Heroines', *Journal of Popular Culture* 20, no. 1 (Summer, 1986): 106. https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2186/docview/1297337795?accountid=13042.

Elizabeth's death in 1603, may have evoked very different feelings from a reading in 1620: Waage describes Meg as a bearer of 'nostalgic nationalism' – which may have scope to be read as simultaneously humorous and critical.[302]

Much more could be made of the meanings generated by the jest-biography in its various frames of reference. Reading the jest-biography in the context of 1590, its date of registration, and closer to the probable date of composition, enables critics to see how the jest-biography is enmeshed with contemporary literature. It also enables readers to see how the text may have reflected on historic events, such as the attempted invasion of England by the Spanish Armada, and religious ones, such as the Martin Marprelate literary/religious controversy. *Long Meg* also reflects on events in a more oblique way: it comments on military recruitment by taking its own pro-military stance, and it responds to the threat of resurgent Catholicism by depicting a 'bad' priest who attempts to blackmail Long Meg by instructing her to perform public penance (or pay up), and instead is publicly humiliated himself. In these ways, the text can be interpreted as propaganda.

Laughter and humour are important aspects of social criticism, and must also be scrutinised in *The Life of Long Meg* to make sense of the book: where are the laughter and humour located, and at what and whom are the readers (both historic, and as critics) supposed to laugh? Some critics, including Ian Munro, suggest that Long Meg herself is where the humour is located:

> On the one hand, the comedy of the piece comes out of the martial quality of Meg, and out of her unwomanly behaviour; that Meg's strength and physical aggressiveness should be considered freakish and abnormal is repeatedly made clear. On the other hand, our sympathies are always with the underdog, and with fighting the good fight; while not all of Meg's battles seem heroic, the majority still involve her correcting and redressing

[302] Waage, 'Meg and Moll: Two Renaissance London Heroines', 106.

> wrongs. And although the narrator always seems somewhat amused by her physical prowess, Meg's positive influence on the ways of the city is also made clear...[303]

This thesis argues that Meg of the 1620 version of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* is not the object of laughter in the text, although her actions (usually appropriated 'male' violence) are catalysts for the humour. It suggests that the objects of laughter are the Huffing Dicks and the misbehaving, lascivious friars and churchmen; the proud Spaniards and the cowardly French soldiers, running from the English women protecting the walls of Boulogne with stones and boiling water. Locating the humour in the failure of masculinity, not in an 'abnormal' femininity, is key to the argument of this thesis that depictions of violence in the text question conventional interpretations of both male and female honour.

Although published more than thirty years ago, Keith Thomas' seminal essay on laughter in Tudor and Stuart England is a useful text for examining how humour is used in the Long Meg jest-biography – as a way of consciously manipulating social behaviours:

> This conservative function of laughter had long been recognized by literary theorists, who gave comedy a moral justification. It was, they said, an essential corrective, uniquely capable of exposing follies and affectations, particularly those not amenable to the criminal law. It made people conform to accepted standards for fear of being thought ridiculous. Ridicule was central to Renaissance comic theory, where laughter itself tended to be seen as wholly derisive and satirical. 'The occasion of laughter', wrote Thomas Wilson in 1560, 'is the fondness, the filthiness, the deformity and all such evil behaviour as we see to be in other[s]'…[Yet] Most laughter may have been conservative in its effect, but there was also a current of radical, critical laughter which, instead of reinforcing accepted norms, sought to give the world a nudge in a new direction. In the jest-books the jokes were often presented in semi-biographical forms as the exploits of some real or imaginary trickster – Howleglass, Tarlton or Robin Goodfellow – who went through life outwitting those with whom he came into contact and exposing them to ridicule.[304]

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[303] Ian Munro, *A Woman's Answer Is Never to Seek: Early Modern Jestbooks, 1526-1635* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), xxvi-xxvii.
[304] Keith Thomas, 'The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England' (*Times Literary Supplement*, 1977, vol. 21) 78.

Long Meg leverages ridicule through violence as a social corrective: she forces men to be 'real men', and through these actions is a 'proper' woman. Other texts about or including Long Meg-the-historic-character are laughing *at* her – such as Jonson's *The Fortunate Isles* (1625) which both silences Long Meg and presents her as a freakish spectacle – but, as this thesis argues, the 1620 jest-biography does not. Its use of humour is conservative in that it reinforces cultural stereotypes and conventional social roles, and yet the very action of a woman, even an exceptional, fundamentally conservative woman doing the correcting, can be disruptive.

In the introduction to the 1620 printing of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*, the text mentions two other heroic, post-medieval, quasi-chivalric English texts, which had been published in new editions or reprinted around the same time as the first registration of the *Long Meg* text: *Bevis of Southampton* in 1585; *A merry Jest of Robin Hood, and of his life* in 1590. These comparisons are important when trying to understand how humour functions in the text: Hans Jauss observes that it is important to note what 'artistic standards' and conventions have been established for a text when approaching it:

> The ideal cases of the objective capability of such literary frames of reference are works which, using the artistic standards of the reader, have been formed by conventions of genre, style, or form. These purposely evoke responses so that they can frustrate them. This can serve not only a critical purpose but can even have a poetic effect. Thus Cervantes in *Don Quixote* fosters the expectations of the old tales of knighthood, which the adventures of his last knight then parody seriously.[305]

Although Long Meg can be compared with Robin Hood (she takes from the rich or otherwise unworthy to give to the poor, and protects the weak), and with her martial prowess, she can also be compared with Bevis of Southampton. Yet the preface also apologises for Meg's 'grosse

[305] Hans Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1970): 13.

faults…for that shee was a Woman'.[306] More specific to how gender functions in humour, Susan Amussen and David Underdown note that:

> The contrast between expectations and reality in the relations between men and women has, however, always been a great source for humour, sometimes of an uneasy kind, and the early seventeenth century was full of it. Incongruity – the disjuncture between the expected and what happens – has been understood as a source of laughter since ancient times; what is historically specific are the expectations that are upended.[307]

The preface to the jest-biography asks readers to anticipate both masculine heroism and the 'faults' of women: one might be expecting Mother Bunch and getting an exceptional woman knight and folk hero (a perhaps more 'popular-culture' Britomart) – and in that frustration we may locate some of the potentially socially disruptive humour of *Long Meg*.

David Cressy bids us to remember that literary cross-dressed figures were not necessary indicative of the 'real life' social matrix of early modern England, and that how laughter is constructed, and where it is located, is of vital importance:

> The prevalence of the disguise motif in early modern literature, with its jokes about sex and costume, suggests that the inner and outer signs of gender identity formed a topic of continuing concern, at least among playwrights and playgoers. It may even reflect anxiety. When the comedy invites us to laugh, is it the laughter of idle amusement, the laughter of venom, of disquiet, or uncomfortable self-recognition? One does not have to endorse the extreme view, that the crisis in the sex-gender system of early modern England was part of "the historical process eventuating in the English Revolution" to agree that the putting on of female apparel could be both mildly amusing and profoundly problematic…The evidence suggests that cross-dressing in practice was neither the subversive abomination nor the eroticized transgression that some scholars have claimed. Neither the records of ecclesiastical justice nor the London comedies reveal, in my reading, a sex-gender system in crisis. Indeed, one could argue that the system was robust

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[306] Anon., *The life of Long Meg of Westminster: containing the mad merry pranks shee played in her life time, not onely in performing sundry quarrels with divers ruffins about London, but also how valiantly shee behaved her selfe in the warres of Bolloigne* (London: Printed by Edward Allde for Edward White, 1620), STC (2nd ed.), 17782.5., sig. A3v.

[307] Susan D. Amussen and David E. Underdown, *Gender, Culture and Politics in England, 1560–1640*. Cultures of Early Modern Europe (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 22. http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2197/10.5040/9781350020702.

> enough to play with, with a measure of festive tolerance and allowance for good clean fun. [308]

Locating the humour, the laughter, the 'fun', in *The Life of Long Meg* helps a modern critic to understand what the text might be trying to accomplish in context – the potential for functioning as propaganda, to force men to behave as 'real' men through derisive laughter, while at the same time considering female exceptionalism, and consolidating English identity through the figure of a folk heroine in times of crisis. This tension between the literary use of an aberrant woman to enforce conservative ideals of masculinity through violence is one of the aspects of the text that makes the Long Meg jest-biography worthy of further study, and reflects Cressy's argument that crossdressing may be read as ambivalent: 'neither [a] subversive abomination nor [an] eroticized transgression'.

This thesis argues that *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*, although it depicts conservative ideals of masculinity and femininity, fundamentally is a radical text – although some critics who have written about the book would disagree. In 1992, Stephen Orgel wrote:

> The legendary Long Meg of Westminster, whose stories provided a model for both Britomart and Moll Cutpurse, is invariably represented as an effective supporter of the social order, an essentially conservative figure, whose intermittent transvestite exploits are devoted to unmasking the pretension of male upstarts in the interests of confirming patriarchal virtues. And unlike both the historical and fictive Moll, she ultimately marries and renounces her pretensions to masculinity.[309]

Orgel's argument is compelling, but this thesis seeks to query this view by adding another facet – as touched on in previous chapters, there is an important distinction between the early *Long Meg* texts. Although some versions of *Long Meg* (including the forged '1582' copy) close at the point

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[308] David Cressy, 'Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (October 1996): 458; 464.

[309] Stephen Orgel, 'The subtexts of The Roaring Girl', in *Erotic Politics: The Dynamics of Desire in the Renaissance Theatre*, ed. S. Zimmerman (London: Routledge, 1992), 10. https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2102/10.4324/9780203977101.

of Meg's marriage, the altercation with her husband and subsequent submission, and then a final 'prank' on the Waterman of Lambeth (which does not include crossdressing or weapons), the earliest extant version (1620) depicts a Meg that performs 'manly' feats of strength and localised justice, cross-dressed and armed, until the end of the text. Her marriage does not 'cure' her of her ability and willingness to perform masculinity, as might be suggested by reading the shortened versions of the text.

By reading *Long Meg* in the context of the ca. 1620 *querelle des femmes* texts, it is possible to interpret the jest-biography as radically ambiguous: it does not clearly support straightforward freedom for women to wear men's clothing, although Long Meg is always portrayed positively (and often heroically) when she wears men's garments. Likewise, it does not directly criticise cross-dressing, although there is no argument to Meg being stripped to her petticoat and beaten by her husband because he has heard rumours about her 'manhood'. The text generally questions the social roles of men, as well as women, through its representations of violence and derisive laughter – showing how men can be revealed to be 'proper' men through the depiction of a woman successfully participating in what were typically considered masculine codes of dress and conduct. Yet, as Natalie Zemon Davis has argued, there are many dimensions to the idea of the 'woman on top' as a function of the carnivalesque, providing a social outlet to a hierarchical system. While *Long Meg* is radical in that it shows an exceptional woman taking significant social power (taking arms herself), the text is not dangerously disruptive: it can be read as propping up the patriarchal system, especially, and most obviously, through its perfunctory use of the husband character. Yet it must be remembered that the first extant version of this book was published in the same year (1620) as *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir*: there was a challenge to norms of dress, reflected in officially sanctioned outcry from the pulpit. As Zemon

Davis has argued: 'The woman-on-top renewed old systems, but also helped change them into something different.'[310] Frederick Waage puts it most succinctly as he describes both Long Meg and Moll Cutpurse as existing 'on the clouded plain between absolute conventionality and conventionally styled absolute unconventionality. The reading of their lives requires a complex response to a presentation which, by incarnating simple, absolute, contradictory conditions, forbids a conventional interpretation.'[311]

The Life of Long Meg of Westminster should be paid more critical attention for three reasons: its popular longevity and frequent reprintings, suggesting continuing cultural resonance and antiquarian interest over several decades; for its specific depictions of violence, useful for interpretation of the text in its contemporary and historic contexts; and for its complicated depiction of a fighting woman using violence and derisive laughter for the purposes of national and community consolidation. Long Meg is a 'proper' woman and wife, the best of English soldiers, and a defender of the government-sanctioned Protestant faith. Far from being a simple jest text, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* depicts a complex 'historic' literary character functioning as propaganda and social criticism, and shows, radically, how an exceptional woman may query conventional interpretations of women's honour and limited social power through typically masculine forms of violence.

[310] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 151.
[311] Waage, 'Meg and Moll: Two Renaissance London Heroines', 105.

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