Chapter 14

Mucedorus

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By virtue of the very nature of Elizabethan drama, there are particular challenges for anyone attempting to determine the most "popular" play of the period. Drama offers two primary modes of consumption, through the communal experience of theatregoing and the relative private experience of reading, and success in the one format need not necessarily translate to popularity in the other. Further, our methodologies for measuring both are partial and arguably misleading. This chapter takes the case of a specific play, the anonymous *Mucedorus*, to interrogate some of the problems in defining and articulating print popularity in the case of drama, and the effects of popularity on the text's afterlife. *Mucedorus,* which tells the story of the titular prince who, disguised as a shepherd, woos a foreign princess, kills a savage woodland dweller and unites two kingdoms, is particularly helpful for its relative obscurity in the present day, despite apparently being one of the bestsellers of its time.

Little quantitative evidence survives to help us ascertain the popularity of plays before they reached print. With the obvious exception of Henslowe's account book, few financial records of Elizabethan playhouses survive, leaving us in most cases to conjecture how long a given play was in the repertory, how often it was played and whether it not it sustained recurring audiences.[1] We are dependent, rather, on the evidence of printed playbooks, which poses new problems. One longstanding school of thought, for example, suggests that a play would only pass into print once it had exhausted its life on stage;[2] if so, then the theoretical possibility needs to be acknowledged that the most popular plays may have waited years to be printed, or not printed at all, while less popular plays were retired early and printed quickly, or not at all.[3] For book scholars, the popularity of the play begins with its first publication, which becomes an origin point eliding the prior commercial history of the play.

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[1] See R.A. Foakes (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary.* 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2002).

[2] For a summary of positions, see John Jowett, *Shakespeare and Text* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 9-10.

The very fact of a play text reaching print may imply failure on stage (as in Jonson's *Sejanus* and *Catiline*) or overwhelming success (as in *Romeo and Juliet*, which "hath often been (with great applause) played publiquely").[4] Print publications both substitute for and consolidate the reception of the plays as staged, and both success and failure are used to sell printed texts.[5] The additional danger a presentation that justifies publication through success or failure on stage is that it implies a mono-directional line of transmission from performance to print, when of course evidence suggests that many plays did remain in the company's repertory after publication.[6]

Our methodologies for determining popularity through sales, reprints and rates of publication have been the focus of ongoing debate, particularly in the work of Alan Farmer, Zachary Lesser and Peter Blayney, discussed elsewhere in this volume.[7] Nonetheless, it needs to be noted that however we interpret the evidence provided by the reprinting and republication of playbooks, there is no simple quantitative formula for determining popularity. The "most spectacularly and scandalously popular play of the English Renaissance" in terms of box-office success was Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, running for an apparently unprecedented nine consecutive performance at the Globe in 1624;[8] yet its popularity in print is confined to an extraordinary flourish – three quartos within eighteen months and six extant manuscript versions, testifying to the immediacy of its impact at a significant political moment in Jacobean London rather than to continuous stage life. This was a short-term bestseller, an immediate smash. Conversely, *Mucedorus* does not appear to have been printed until almost a decade after its first performance, but its publication history is then continuous for seventy years; the Elizabethan equivalent of a "sleeper hit" in print, divorced from its initial moment of creation. Finally, of course, the popularity of a play might be more qualitatively discussed in terms of its cultural saturation; the legacy of a play such as *The Spanish Tragedy, Tamburlaine* or *Romeo and Juliet*, reflected in references, adaptations, tributes and other media.

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[3] Elizabethan plays apparently popular onstage but not published for many years include the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (usually dated to the 1580s; first published 1598) and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (c.1590; first published 1633).

[4] *An excellent conceited tragedie of* Romeo and Iuliet *As it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publiquely, by the right Honourable the L. of Hunsdon his Seruants* (London, 1597), title page.

[5] See also the title page of *The nevv inne. Or, The light heart A comoedy. As it was neuer acted, but most negligently play'd, by some, the Kings Seruants. And more squeamishly beheld, and censured by others, the Kings subiects. 1629. Now, at last, set at liberty to the readers, his Maties seruants, and subiects, to be iudg'd* (London, 1631).

[6] Examples include Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, *1 Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, all performed at court in 1612-13. See Roslyn Evander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company 1594-1616* (Fayetteville, 1991), p. 140.

[7] See Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56.1 (2005): pp. 1-32; and Peter W.M. Blayney, 'The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56.1 (2005): pp. 33-50.

A play's popularity, then, may best be thought of in terms of a conglomeration of measures, acknowledging the approval of the state, physical reprints of books and/or the cultural work done by the play. Yet "popular" does not solely, of course, imply "successful". Michael Hattaway notes that "[t]o the Elizabethans, in fact, 'public' and 'popular' were virtually synonymous . . . 'Drama for the people' therefore is one definition of popular drama. Another might be 'drama of the people'."[9] Popular exists in implicit opposition to notions of the private, elite, sophisticated and artistic, a set of oppositions that is challenged usefully throughout Hattaway's important monograph.

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[8] Gary Taylor. 'Thomas Middleton: Lives and Afterlives', *Thomas Middleton: Collected Works*, eds Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), p. 49.

[9] Michael Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre* (London, 1982), p. 1.

Nonetheless, it remains the fact that our understanding of the correlation between the market for the auditing of drama and that for the reading of printed plays remains necessarily hazy. However, we should note the fundamental problem of measuring the "popular" – which I will continue to use with awareness of the dual meanings of "successful/acclaimed" and "of the people" – through its textual manifestations. In a society of increasing but still limited literacy, there is an element of exclusivity to printed drama in terms of the education and financial background of its consumers, which inevitably reframes the popular within a less "popular" format.

Despite these caveats, however, we may still assert with Victor Holtcamp that "*Mucedorus* was arguably the most popular Elizabethan play of the 17th century".[10] This anonymous play can be positioned as popular in all senses of the word, across platforms and measuring criteria. Its publication history is unmatched by any other early modern play: by 1668, no fewer than eighteen quartos had been published including, between 1610 and 1626, an average of one new printing every two years.[11] Although the first quarto of the play appeared in 1598, the text is usually conjecturally dated to the late 1580s or early 1590s, suggesting some form of ongoing company investment if not continuous performance for its first decade of life.[12] There are several allusions to the play in the literature of the period: Rafe, in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) is announced to have played the title role, in an imagined amateur performance by apprentices "before the wardens of our company", and the play is mentioned again in

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[10] Victor Holtcamp, 'A Fear of "Ould" Plays: How *Mucedorus* Brought down the House and Fought for Charles II in 1652', in Douglas A. Brooks (ed.) *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* (Lampeter, 2007), p. 141.

[11] For identification of the eighteenth, which only survives in fragments, see Richard Proudfoot, '"Modernising" the Printed Play-Text in Jacobean London: Some Early Reprints of *Mucedorus*', in Linda Anderson and Janis Lull (eds.), *'A Certain Text': Close Readings and Textual Studies on Shakespeare and Others* (Newark, 2002), pp. 18-28.

[12] Logan, Terence P., and Demzell S. Smith, eds. *The Predecessors of Shakespeare: A Survey and Bibliography of Recent Studies in English Renaissance Drama* (Lincoln, 1973), pp. 229-30.

Cowley's *The Guardian* (1642).[13] This kind of citation is one of our most important forms of qualitative evidence for a play's popularity in a broader discourse; as, for example, in the reference to *Romeo and Juliet* by the scholars of *1 Return from Parnassus*, on which René Weis remarks "they know Shakespeare's dramatic verse and are quoting heard lines from memory."[14] While evidence of this nature is purely anecdotal, it is indicative not only of availability of a play, but also of engaged reader/audience response.

If these allusions are to be taken seriously as referring to continuous popular performance, they offer some corroboration of the claims of the quarto title pages that the play was performed "sundrie" times around London, presented as "very delectable and full of mirth."[15] *Mucedorus* was performed at both the Globe and Whitehall by the King's Men, demonstrating the company's usual versatility with space. The relationship between the two is difficult to interpret in terms of the direction of popularity, as Hattway suggests:

> [t]he play must have enjoyed sufficient repute in the public playhouses for it to be commanded at Court, but it is also important to remember that the play and others of its kind may have derived their popular appeal from the fact that they gave the public playhouse audiences a taste of the dramatic fare offered before the monarch.[16]

That amphitheatre and banqueting hall work together to consolidate a play's position in the popular mind-set seems apparent, the new court performance serving to add new legitimacy in 1610 to a play that had already enjoyed popular success in London.

We also know that the play survived as a performance piece into the Interregnum, at least in the provinces, where it famously caused an accident at an illegal performance in Witney. The preacher Nicholas Rowe sternly (but not without some glee) recounts the incident, in which the floor of the venue collapsed mid-performance, prompting Rowe to acknowledge God's judgement against the players.[17] In this instance, the play's popularity with its provincial audience, leading to an overcrowding of the Witney inn, went some way towards consolidating its unpopularity with the authorities, Rowe and, by extension, God, as an exemplar of an out-of-favour form of entertainment.

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[13] Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner (Manchester, 2004), Induction, l. 84.

[14] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Rene Weis (London, 2012), p. 55.

[15] *A most pleasant comedie of Mucedorus the kings sonne of Valentia and Amadine the Kings daughter of Arragon with the merie conceites of Mouse. Newly set foorth, as it hath bin sundrie times plaide in the honorable cittie of London. Very delectable and full of mirth* (London, 1598), title page.

[16] Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, p. 130.

The Witney incident reminds us that popularity is not a homogeneous phenomenon; what is popular among one group may be unpopular in other eyes, and the question of censorship comes into play in other instances where popular opinion is at odds with an institutional perspective, as the repression of *A Game at Chess* demonstrates.[18] More broadly, the popular is subject to vogue, as both a play and its form become more or less fashionable. In the case of *Mucedorus*, its apparent early modern popularity has become the cause of subsequent unpopularity in critical discourse; in 2007, Richard Preiss pointed out that only seventeen articles on the play had been published in the previous fifty years, "or one for every (extant) early modern printing."[19] There are few good modern editions of the play, and the stage history over the last two hundred years is negligible, confined primarily to amateur and festival performance.[20]

The unpopularity of *Mucedorus* can be attributed to two factors. The first is its association in the early 1630s with the name of William Shakespeare by the compiler of a volume entitled "Shakespeare Vol. 1" which made its way into the library of King

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[17] Holtcamp, 'A Fear of "Ould" Plays', provides a full discussion of this incident.

[18] See Gary Taylor: The play "had the longest consecutive run of any English play before the Restoration, and that run would certainly have continued if the play had not been suppressed" (Taylor and Lavagnino, *Thomas Middleton*, p. 1825).

[19] Richard Preiss, 'A Play Finally Anonymous', in Brooks, *Shakespeare Apocrypha*, p. 118.

[20] For a review of the play in relatively recent performance, see Joseph H. Stodder, 'Mucedorus and The Birth of Merlin at the Los Angeles Globe', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.3 (1990): pp. 368-72.

Charles I.[21] The attribution was picked up by Francis Kirkman, and *Mucedorus* subsequently entered the extended group of anonymous and misattributed plays that came to be known, in C.F. Tucker Brooke's edition of 1908, as "The Shakespeare Apocrypha". From the point of its association with Shakespeare, subsequent scholarship on the play focused almost entirely on the question of its authorship. This positioned it as in some way "other" to Shakespeare, whether entirely dissimilar (often with the value judgement of "not good enough") or as a simpler, more rudimentary version of Shakespeare that represented his juvenilia. Positioned in inverse relationship to an authorial canon of unusual cultural standing, criticism of *Mucedorus* became focused on what it was *not*.

The second, related factor is the aesthetic and literary depreciation of the play, routinely dismissed as a crude, folksy or rough entertainment. Its popularity is often discussed in the form of embarrassment at the poor taste of our ancestors. Charles Knight summed up the general impression: "A more rude, inartificial, unpoetical, and altogether effete performance the English drama cannot, we think, exhibit."[22] Knight's remark remains typical, and even today critical discussion of the play tends to relate it to popular drama where "popular" equates to "populist", which is read in turn as non-Shakespearean, non-professional and/or non-literary. Hattaway concludes his essay on the play with the dismissive statement "[n]o one could claim that *Mucedorus* has much in the way of literary or even dramatic merit. It is a gallimaufry, a pleasant pastime – reassuring in its romantic view of the world",[23] and even Preiss, in his reclamation of the play as an important company property, begins with Philostrate's apology that it is

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[21] See Peter Kirwan, "The First Collected 'Shakespeare Apocrypha'", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.4 (2011): pp. 594-601.

[22] Charles Knight, ed. *The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakspere: Doubtful Plays &c.* (London: 1841), p. 306.

[23] Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, p. 140.

"nothing, nothing in the world".[24] Gestures towards its lack of literary quality are particularly interesting, as the primary basis for the play's retention of any interest for early modern scholars has been its privileged material existence as a hugely successful book; yet references to its rudeness and artificiality encourage us to think about it as something unworthy of print at all.

The popularity of *Mucedorus* has thus become a problem for the play, with narratives being concocted to account and, indeed, apologise for this anomaly. The processes by which this play became so successful on stage and in print must, it appears, be understood differently to the processes that consolidated the cultural status of Shakespeare and the King's Men. The play's attempts to court popular appeal through the appearance of bears, cannibals and prominent clowns is seen as a weakness that has led to the play being recast as an exemplar of a different kind of popularity that exempts it from association with author, company and more prestige forms of theatrical entertainment. It is these attempts to refigure the popular that form the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Mucedorus for the Masses

The publication record of *Mucedorus* is primarily Jacobean. The play was first printed in quarto in 1598, again in 1606, and then with revisions and additions in 1610.[25] It is at this point that republication becomes particularly frequent, consolidating this popular Elizabethan play as an even more popular Jacobean book.

Richard Preiss's recent contribution to studies of *Mucedorus* seeks to account for the play's popularity according to relatively modern concepts of intellectual property and brand management. He notes that the run of reprints beginning in 1610 followed the Star Chamber inquest into the touring practices of Lord Cholmeley's Men, who toured the country performing from printed books including *Pericles* and *King Lear*.[26] Preiss argues that the King's Men, hearing of their plays being performed from "allowed" books in the provinces, "suddenly became aware that they could not control their own dissemination, neither of their identity as 'the King's Men' nor of the dramatic material that constituted it."[27] He suggests that the company, realising that the King's Men "brand" would be disseminated with or without their involvement, made the decision to give away Mucedorus, explaining the sudden increase in reprints. In giving away something that was never really its own, the company attached its "brand" to a play that would boost its profile around the country while dissuading amateur performances of its more valuable, more jealously guarded properties. In effect, "the King's Men were surrendering a single product to disseminate an entire platform."[28] Popularity, in this scenario, is exploited for commercial and capital gain, pleasing the masses while developing the company's market reach.

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[24] Preiss, 'A Play Finally Anonymous', p. 117.

[25] *A most pleasant comedie of Mucedorus the Kings sonne of Valentia, and Amadine the Kinges daughter of Aragon With the merry conceites of Mouse. Amplified with new additions, as it was acted before the Kings Maiestie at White-hall on Shroue-sunday night. By his Highnes Seruantes vsually playing at the Globe. Very delectable, and full of conceited mirth* (London, 1610).

The key evidence for this intention underlying the play is the presence of a doubling chart in the first and all subsequent quartos. In the 1598 quarto, this takes up A1^v and is headed "Eight persons may easily play it". In the 1610 quarto, this is revised to "Ten persons" to acknowledge the inclusion of new characters in the additions. The assumption of critics is that the doubling chart was designed to promote the play as a working script for performance, actively encouraging amateur companies to perform it without the need for licence. While this argument explains an implicit invitation for readers to perform the play, Preiss overreaches by yoking this to a particular strategic moment in the history of the King's Men. The play carried this invitation from its earliest publication; it is not a Jacobean innovation. The difference is not in the fact of the play being offered for performance, but in the readjustment of the doubling chart to "Ten persons" and the increased rate of publication. To attribute the increased rate to a new strategy of product dissemination would suggest that the King's Men retained some interest in the play that allowed it to dictate the rate of publication; but this does not in itself suggest why the play suddenly began selling so well. London reprint rates of one new printing every two years from 1610 seem overmuch if we are to believe that *Mucedorus's* primary platform was provincial performance during this period. The adjusted doubling chart is also careless, adding two new actors for two new characters who only appear in brief scenes and could be far more economically integrated.[29] The information contained within the paratexts is updated to be accurate, but it is not suggestive of a strategy newly geared towards amateur playing.

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[26] Preiss, 'A Play Finally Anonymous', pp. 124-26.

[27] Preiss, 'A Play Finally Anonymous', p. 127.

[28] Ibid.

More careful consideration, however, is given to the revisions to the play that fit it towards court presentation. In 1606, as Richard T. Thornberry has pointed out, someone carefully revised the play's Epilogue in order to change the gender of the addressed monarch.[30] Comedy's line "Yeelde to a woman" changes to "Yeeld to King *Iames*" and Envy's "forst me stoope vnto a womans swaie" to forst mee stoope vnto a Worthies Sway".[31] Thornberry deduces from this that the play received a court revival in or around 1606. The second period of revisions came between 1606 and 1610, when a substantial set of additions were written. The additions serve to reveal from the start that Mucedorus is a prince, where the original text has the prince only reveal his true identity to his onstage and offstage audience at the play's end, and to add some comic business for the clown, Mouse, and the bear who dominates the play's opening action. A new Prologue dedicates the play to James, and an extended Epilogue creates a masque-like finale in which the allegorical character Envy promises defiance but is defeated by the splendour of James. The 1610 quarto boasts of these additions and also of the play's performance at Whitehall, for which it seems reasonable to assume that they were written.[32] The presentation of the play at court is, of course, further evidence of the company's ongoing investment and interest in the play.

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[29] The two new characters are the King of Valencia and Anselmo. Two other new named characters, Roderigo (who speaks seven words) and Borachius (silent) are not accounted for.

[30] Richard T. Thornberry, 'A Seventeenth-Century Revival of *Mucedorus* in London before 1610', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28.3 (1977): pp. 362-64.

[31] *Mucedorus* (1598), F4^{v}; *Mucedorus* (1606), F4$^{v.}$

That *Mucedorus* may have had a particularly prominent role in court performances has been further asserted by Teresa Grant, who notes that *The Winter's Tale* and the masque *Oberon, the Fairy Prince* were also written for the King's Men around the time of the revisions to *Mucedorus*.[33] She suggests that the three plays were performed together to take advantage of the availability of two polar bear cubs recently brought to the country and resident in the King's menagerie. The use of real bears in performance has been disputed by Helen Cooper and others, who maintain that the dangers of incorporating wild animals would have been too great, particularly given the close proximity of Prince Henry to the animals in *Oberon*.[34] The confluence of bear plays at this particular moment is undeniable however, and *Mucedorus* is in keeping with the popular fascination at this time with performing animals and the representation of bears onstage; a context which *Mucedorus*'s obscurity has all but removed from discussion of *The Winter's Tale*.[35]

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[32] *Mucedorus* (1610), title page.

[33] Teresa Grant, 'White Bears in *Mucedorus, The Winter's Tale* and *Oberon, The Fairy Prince*', *Notes and Queries* 48.3 (2001): pp. 311-13. See also George F. Reynolds, who similarly argues for the play's popularity based on its utilisation of bears: '*Mucedorus,* Most Popular Elizabethan Play?', in Josephine W. Bennett, Oscar Cargill and Vernon Hall Jr. (eds.), *Studies in the English Renaissance Drama* (London, 1961), pp. 248-68.

[34] Helen Cooper, 'Pursued by Bearists', *London Review of Books* (6 January 2005), accessed online 25 July 2011.

Preiss's argument that *Mucedorus* was farmed out at this time for provincial players is at odds with the scale of investment in text to fit it for court performance. The new scene with the bear adds additional challenges for any company attempting to mount the play, and the Epilogue specifically calls for the presence of the monarch, rooting the revised text firmly in Whitehall performance.[36] The one-way passage from company to amateurs, city to provinces, is in fact reversed. The play was long available to the masses, as evidenced by the "Eight persons" doubling chart and by the familiarity with the play implicit in the Induction to *The Knight of the Burning Pestle.* Performance at court follows this, the popular play revised, complicated and re-presented in a light intended to be particularly flattering to James; and perhaps elevated alongside William Shakespeare's new play and Ben Jonson's new masque. MacDonald P. Jackson has made an isolated but persuasive argument for at least the possibility that the additions – which echo *Twelfth Night* in the King of Valencia's "Enough of Musicke, it but ads to torment"[37] – may have been written by Shakespeare in his capacity as the company's resident dramatist, an argument that recognises the importance to the King's Men of the play pleasing the King.[38] Across the first twenty years of the play's life, then, *Mucedorus* appears to have enjoyed an increase in popularity and status, finally being canonised in a major court performance. This may well have been the climax of the play's London performance history, but to speak of the play as an undesirable property farmed out for the provinces is misleading. The only change in *Mucedorus's* fortunes after this point was a substantial increase in the regularity of publication by London-based printers, in quartos that capitalised on the prestige performance and metropolitan popularity of the play.

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[35] For a near-exhaustive discussion of readings of the bear, see Maurice Hunt, '"Bearing Hence": Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44.2 (2004): pp. 33-46.

[36] *Mucedorus* (1610), F3v.

[37] *Mucedorus* (1610), D3r.

[38] MacDonald P. Jackson, 'Edward Archer's Ascription of *Mucedorus* to Shakespeare', *Journal ofthe Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 22 (1964): pp. 233-48.

The 1610 additions

The third quarto of *Mucedorus* in 1610 thus stands in unusually complex relation to discourses of popularity. It lends prestige to a play hitherto associated with apprentice performance and amateur playing, while simultaneously appearing to lend court authority to the play for the further dissemination of a King's Men's "product"; and it rewrites the play for a specific prestigious occasion while spearheading a massive increase in the rates of publication that would see it become the most widely available of early modern dramas. Furthermore, as shall now be explored, the revisions act to distinguish the play from current "popular" concerns, marking it deliberately as out of date at the same point as it was made newly famous.

Mucedorus is a romance narrative, chronicling the adventures of the titular prince as he roams the forests and courts of a foreign land in disguise. As Abigail Scherer reminds us, in the same year as the revised play was published, James I introduced a special statute for control of vagrants and wild men as they impinged on the royal forests.[39] Scherer suggests that the untamable presence of Bremo, the play's cannibal and self-professed "king" of the forests, may have stirred up feelings of vulnerability in court performance, speaking to very real Jacobean concerns. The play establishes an opposition between court and forest, tame and untamed spaces, between which the disguised Mucedorus moves freely in his pursuit of Amadine. In both the original and revised texts, Mucedorus is the tamer of wild spaces; he slays the bear that pursues the cowardly Segasto and the princess in Act One, and then later ingratiates himself with

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[39] Abigail Scherer, '*Mucedorus's* Wild Man: Disorderly Acts on the Early Modern Stage', in T.H. Howard-Hill and Philip Rollinson (eds.), *Renaissance Papers 1999* (Rochester, 1999), p. 57.

Bremo and kills the outcast with his own club. Bremo is disorder personified, the failure of society.[40] For the court audience in 1610, then, the play speaks to topical - a further aspect of "popular" – concerns, potentially serving to allegorise James's own pursuit of local control.

The significant difference between the two versions of the play, however, is in Mucedorus's perceived social identity at this point. In the 1598 text the character only appears to the audience as a shepherd until the final scene; while a reader has the privileged information of the doubling list and title page, the spoken text includes no reference to Mucedorus's true princely status. The scene plays as a cross-rank romance, with the shepherd transgressing social norms in his usurpation of the courtly Segasto's role as Amadine's suitor. In this reading, Mucedorus enacts the self-regulating practices of excluded spaces, dispensing a form of forest rather than courtly justice in his execution of Bremo via a trick. His triumph is cast as one of individual human virtue over baseness, good over evil; he is a folk hero.

In the revised 1610 text, Mucedorus's true identity is explicit from the start. The Valencia scenes act to assert and remind audiences of his status as prince, and to state his dynastic marriage with Amadine as the object of his quest. Understood as a prince entering the forest, his taming of wild spaces enacts a reassertion of law-abiding society and a display of monarchical power. The prince, as the proxy of the state, colonises and takes over the space of exclusion, restoring justice and liberating virtue. As Arvin Jupin suggests, his role is to temper the "uncivilised impulses which can also lead to tragedy if left uncontrolled", thus keeping the social threat firmly within safe, comic conventions in the manner of other disguised ruler plays such as *Measure for Measure*.[41] It is no accident that, in both texts, it is in the forest that Mucedorus's true identity is subsequently revealed to other characters: having conquered an excluded space, he then uses that setting to enact a resumption of his public persona. The reunion of both Mucedorus and Amadine with their parents subsequently occurs in what Tucker Brooke fittingly describes as "an open space" outside Aragon's court;[42] a liminal space between court and forest which dissolves the dichotomy between civilised and newly-tamed spaces and restores monarchical control over the whole kingdom.

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[40] Scherer, '*Mucedorus's* Wild Man', p. 63.

[41] Arvin Jupin (ed.), *A Contextual Study and Modern-Spelling Edition of Mucedorus* (London, 1987), p. 40.

The transformation of Mucedorus's known identity for the bulk of the play affects the experience of watching it, resituating the play explicitly within a Jacobean discourse of disguised ruler plays and the effective, centralised exercise of power. However, the removal of the play's surprise ending marks an interesting divergence from current theatrical trends. Mucedorus's surprise revelation of his identity is almost without precedent in Elizabethan drama.[43] Andrew Gurr, however, points out that these revelations are a regular and deliberate feature of Jacobean tragicomedy, beginning with Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* in 1609. Gurr argues that these plays in fact "depended on their ability to hold the audience in suspense until the surprise revelation."[44] Such endings are commonplace in the period: King's Men's plays such as *A King and No King, Philaster,* and later *The Renegado* all hinge on the final surprise revelation, as does Jonson's contemporaneous *Epicoene* for the Children of the Queen's Revels.[45] The revelation normally reconciles a previously untenable situation; for example, the incestuous love of *A King and No King* is proven lawful when the lovers are revealed to be unrelated. In this, the 1598 text of *Mucedorus* is surprisingly anticipative of the later structural trend. The incompatibility of shepherd and princess is a recurrent theme throughout the play, and even Amadine refers to Mucedorus almost invariably as "Shepherd", both directly and indirectly.[46] However, the use of a revelatory ending changes the rules at the last moment and sanctions a conservative dynastic marriage.

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[42] C.F. Tucker Brooke (ed.), *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* (Oxford, 1908), V.ii.0.1.

[43] Hints are given at 3.1 "More may I boast and say; but I/Was never shepherd in such dignity" (4-5), and again at 4.1: "Now, Mucedorus, whither wilt thou go?/ Home to thy father, to thy native soil,/ Or try some long abode within these woods?" (1-3) The former deliberately plays with the audience's lack of knowledge, while the second hints at a real identity while still being attributable to the "shepherd." Quotations taken from Brooke, *Shakespeare Apocrypha.*

[44] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company 1594-1642* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 46. In this, the genre followed Tasso's *Il Pastor Fido*; see Marco Mincoff, '*The Faithful Shepherdess*: A Fletcherian Experiment', *Renaissance Drama* 9 (1966): pp. 163-77 (p. 175).

[45] Bellario proves to be a girl, thus invalidating claims of infidelity with Arethusa (*Philaster*, 1609); Vitelli is revealed to be a gentleman instead of a merchant, thus asserting his own rights to marriage (*The Renegado*, 1623); and Arbaces is

By removing this feature, associated with the newer tragicomedies, *Mucedorus* was retrospectively cast as a more dated, conventional pastoral romance. In this, it was made more explicitly a precursor of Shakespeare's plays of the same period with which it shares generic DNA, such as *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*. Barbara Mowat and David Frost both argue that these plays draw on old romance themes and plots to create a deliberately old-fashioned style – in the case of *Cymbeline*, even parodic- that allows the dramatist to blur the divide between tragedy and comedy.[47] For Frost, the revival of this "primitive stage romance" was an act of penance for a recent offence, the company offering an old play "clearly innocent of meaning" that made amends through nostalgic clowning.[48] In this final act, *Mucedorus* was perhaps deliberately cast as "popular" in

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revealed to be the son of Gobrius rather than of the king, thus licensing his marriage to his "sister" Panthea, though this "surprise" is hinted at throughout the play in the discussions of Gobrius and Arane (*A King and No King*, 1611). *Epicoene* (1609) uses the surprise revelation of a character's gender to more explicitly comic effect.

[46] See especially III.i, in which she uses "Shepherd" in preference to "Mucedorus" throughout.

[47] Barbara A. Mowat, '"What's in a Name?" Tragicomedy, Romance, or Late Comedy', in Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (eds.), *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works Vol. IV: The Poems, Problem Comedies, Late Plays* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 129-49; David L. Frost, '"Mouldy Tales": The Context of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*', *Essays andStudies* 39 (1986): pp. 19-38. We might note that *The Winter's Tale* experiments with introducing a "surprise ending", though one that is significantly more signposted than the other plays here mentioned.

[48] Frost, 'Mouldy tales', pp. 21-3. He conjectures that Shakespeare capitalised on the surprising success of *Mucedorus* by writing the deliberately old-fashioned *Cymbeline*.

opposition to the play's artistic experiments, the removal of the surprise ending serving to associate the play more clearly with the company's nostalgic romances (typified by Shakespeare) and less with the newer tragicomedies emerging from the stable of Beaumont and Fletcher.

The popularity of *Mucedorus*, then, ultimately becomes an effect of the play's success in both elite and popular spheres. Its success cannot be attributed to a specific group or historical moment, for it is its versatility and appeal to all levels of society that perpetuated its appearances at court and in print. By turns ahead of its time and deliberately dated, socially transgressive yet politically apt, *Mucedorus's* popularity needs to be located in its confluence of several spheres of activity at the end of the first decade of the seventeenth century, where an Elizabethan favourite became, for a short while, one of the most important items in the Jacobean repertory. We do not need to apologise for *Mucedorus's* popularity; rather, *Mucedorus* alerts us to the importance of acknowledging that theatrical popularity cannot be quantified or objectively construed, but is itself an effect, a transitory and changing phenomenon that is partially reflected by, rather than entirely constructed within, the print market.