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Mobbing, (Dis)order and the Literary Pig in The Tale of Colkelbie Sow, Pars Prima

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MOBBING, (DIS)ORDER,
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THE TALE OF COLKERBIE SOW, PARS PRIMA

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In the *Pars Prima* of the Older Scots text *The Tale of Colkelbie Sow* (*ca*. 1450-1500), a burlesque feast of fools and the unexpected civil defense addresses late-medieval Scottish fears of social disorder and lawlessness by comically subverting legal language and established standards of community obligation.[1] The unlikely hero of the text is a piglet who later gains fame as a boar of great renown, or so the narrator claims. A sense of catharsis is prompted, in part, by two mobbing scenes: the first is a clash between the swine and the feasting fools, and the second includes not only the former participants, but also the local rustics (arguably fools themselves). Social hierarchy is overturned when the swine – normally a source of great civic disruption – band together to rescue their fellow piglet. The local community, who would be expected to raise the hue and cry in response to civil disturbances, prove themselves to be inept buffoons, while the fools of the notorious feast are made into a depraved rabble easily rejected from society. It is the pigs, charging in from the margins of society, who restore peace to the community in this subversive reimagining of the keeping of law and order in a medieval community.

The Tale of Colkelbie Sow (hereafter *Colkelbie Sow*) was composed in the fifteenth century by an unknown author. The language suggests a date of composition after 1450[2] though its editor Greg Kratzmann suspects

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[1] This paper was first presented at the International Conference for Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature (ICMRSLL) in Bochum, Germany (2014), and in a revised version at Out of the Margins, hosted by Marginalia in Cambridge, United Kingdom (2014). I am grateful for input received at both of these conferences.

[2] The language of *Colkelbie Sow* and its dating is explored by C. D. Jeffrey, "*Colkelbie Sow*: An Anglo-Scots Poem," in *Proceedings of the Third*

that it could have been composed as late as 1490.[3] The definitive *terminus ad quem* of 1501 is provided by Gavin Douglas's reference to 'awld Cowkewyis sow' in *The Palice of Honour*. Several other late-fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts make passing reference to the narrative as well: *The Laying of Lord Fergus's Gaist* (another poem of the Bannatyne Manuscript), *Doverrit with dreme, devising in my slummer* (formerly attributed to William Dunbar) and William Dunbar's *Schir, ʒe haue mony seruitouris*. In all of these instances the fool's feast in *Colkelbie Sow* has become synonymous with what Bawcutt describes as a "rowdy peasant feast."[4] MacDonald has recently suggested a hitherto unacknowledged allusion to *Colkelbie Sow* in Dunbar's *Testament of Andro Kennedy*[5] and Kratzmann has previously demonstrated that it was a likely source for John Skelton's *Elynour Rummyng*.[6] The obvious popularity of *Colkelbie Sow* during its time is at odds with modern scholarship, which has largely passed over the text. This study proposes to gain a deeper understanding of literary humor in late medieval Scotland by considering the social context influencing the comedy of *Colkelbie Sow* and the resulting treatment of several key groups in the medieval community (the rural community, their livestock and those living on the fringes of society).

The first mobbing scene involves a "cursit cumpany / And mensles mangery" (l. 179-80, "cursed company and unseemly banquet")[7] and the swine intent on rescuing a piglet stolen for their feast. When the cook attempts to butcher the piglet it lets out a piercing squeal (ll. 182-4), which summons "all the swyn thairabout [to] [rusch] furth in a rout" (ll.

International Conference on Scottish Language and Literature, ed. Roderick J. Lyall and Felicity Riddy (Glasgow: University of Stirling, 1981); See also Ian Jamieson, "Some Attitudes to Poetry in Late Fifteenth-Century Scotland," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 15:1 (1980): 28-42, esp. 29-33, for a discussion of the role of the narrator in *Colkelbie Sow* and his relation to wider narratorial conventions in late fifteenth-century Scottish literature.
[3] Gregory Kratzmann, ed. *Colkelbie Sow and the Talis of the Fyve Bestes* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1983).
[4] Priscilla Bawcutt, ed. *The Poems of William Dunbar, Volume II* (Glasgow: Cromwell Press, 1998), 314, notes to line 57; 452, notes to lines 65-6.
[5] Alasdair A. MacDonald, "William Dunbar and *Colkelbie's Sow*: Dogs and Swine," *Notes and Queries* 61.4 (2014): 481-2.
[6] Gregory Kratzmann, *Anglo-Scottish Literary Relations, 1430-1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 157-164.
[7] All *Colkelbie Sow* quotations from Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*.

185-6). The porcine militia mobs the erstwhile feasters. At this point the owners of the swine notice the absence of their pigs and suspect foul play on the part of the feasting "fools" (as they are called throughout the narrative). The hue and cry is raised and is followed by a shamefully inept muster and impromptu country-dance. The local cowherds, shepherds and swineherds eventually arrive to engage in the second mob, which now includes all three parties – the local community, pigs and feasters. This second mob results in the defeat of the feasting outcasts.

The use of pigs in lieu of dogs, cats, sheep or cattle has particular implications for the comic underpinning of the text. Records from Scotland, as well as those from England and the Continent, consistently record porcine legal troubles during the medieval and early modern periods. *Colkelbie Sow* manipulates legal language that is often found describing cases involving swine as well as that found more generally in agrarian legislation. This comic reclamation of legal language serves as one of the key elements contributing to the depth of the comedy found in this narrative; this is not merely a burlesque peasant brawl or slapstick free-for-all, but a social commentary on community standards and the keeping of law and order. A brief look at the legislation relating to swine in the medieval and early modern period will bring the humorous subversions pervading the narrative into sharper focus.

In both Scotland and England swine appear in a variety of contexts. Ault, in his study of husbandry and village by-laws in medieval England, finds that by-laws concerning pigs abound;[8] Winchester's study of the Scottish Borders and Northern England confirms Ault's observations and notes that the most common by-laws regulate the ringing of swine (piercing the pigs' snouts with metal rings to prevent them from rooting up the ground and damaging crops).[9] In the urban agricultural environment, damage done by roaming swine was the source of extensive government regulation. The *Records of the City of Norwich* for 1354 observe that boars, sows and pigs who were allowed to "go vagrant" were responsible for killing and eating children, maiming "divers persons and children," exhuming dead bodies, and wrecking both houses and

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[8] Warren O. Ault, *Open-Field Husbandry and the Village Community: A Study of Agrarian By-Laws in Medieval England* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1965), 27-9.

[9] Angus J. L. Winchester, *The Harvest of the Hills: Rural Life in Northern England and the Scottish Borders, 1400-1700* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 39-40.

gardens.[10] And the consequences for allowing swine to roam free were severe:

> anyone who may find them [the pigs] thus going about at large
> without a keeper by day or night that the said pigs may be killed
> by anyone who shall be willing to kill them without being
> interfered with, troubled or injured for the killing of such pigs
> going about contrary to this ordinance (Hudson and Tingey 206).

Two points of this penalty are particularly telling: firstly, that anyone *willing* to kill the pigs may do so – these pigs were so fearsome that killing them was apparently not for the faint of heart. Secondly, any person brave enough to kill loose swine is completely protected from any retaliation sought by the owners. Early Scottish records also indicate that swine were causing enough trouble to fall under serious legislation – the *Leges Burgorum* (*ca*. 1124-53) states that all swine must be provided with a permanent minder (a swineherd) to prevent them from scathing or disturbing the townsfolk.[11] Similar legislation appears again in the *Fragmenta Collecta* from *Ancient Laws and Customs of the Burghs of Scotland 1124-1424*. One fragment states that any vagrant swine that has *scathed* (that is, damaged the property of or injured) a neighbor may be slaughtered and eaten (Innes 179). Medieval pigs were not only recurrent troublemakers, but extremely dangerous ruffians at that.

The extent of their murderous and violent activities is further demonstrated in their frequent court appearances for inflicting serious bodily harm on humans. Animal trials were relatively common throughout Europe, especially between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.[12] Though not as pervasive a practice (or as well documented) as it was on the Continent, there are examples of animal trials taking place in Scotland.[13] Both Cohen and Jamieson observe that in medieval

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[10] William Hudson and John C. Tingey, eds., *The Records of the City of Norwich, Volume II* (Norwich: Corporation of the City of Norwich, 1910), 205. See also, Dolly Jørgensen, "Running Amuck? Urban Swine Management in Late Medieval England," *Agricultural History* 87.4 (2013): 429-51.

[11] Cosmo Innes, ed., *Ancient Laws and Customs of the Burghs of Scotland, 1124-1424, Volume I* (Edinburgh: Scottish Burgh Records Society, 1868), 41. I must thank Janet Hadley Williams for kindly directing me to this source.

[12] This interesting aspect of medieval legal history has even made it into modern popular culture by way of the Colin Firth film *The Advocate* (1993). This film portrays a fifteenth-century French lawyer appointed to defend a homicidal pig.

[13] Hampton L. Carson, "The Trial of Animals and Insects. A Little Known Chapter of Mediaeval Jurisprudence," *The Proceedings of the American*

Europe secular trials involving swine tended to be the most common, and that pigs were generally tried for violent crimes, especially against children.[14] The extent to which swine were anthropomorphized in these cases is perhaps best demonstrated by the court appearances of the animals. Courtroom behavior had a direct impact on sentencing:

> [pigs] would frequently act disrespectfully—grunting, squealing and trying to poke their noses through the bars of the prisoner's box. Disorderly conduct of this kind often told against them in sentencing. An animal that remained quiet during the proceedings would […] receive a certain measure of consideration for its demeanour (Jamieson 49).

Jamieson also notes that in one extreme case in 1386 in Falaise, France the sow was "attired in a waistcoat, gloves, pair of drawers and a human mask on her head to complete the resemblance to a human criminal" (49). The Falaise pig is just one representative example of the measures humans were willing to take in order to ensure an animal was tried in the same manner as a human defendant. This case also demonstrates the extent to which humans believed animals had a capacity for understanding and acting on ethical and moral principles. There have been numerous attempts to rationalize criminal animal trials, which I will not explore here; the primary concern of this discussion is demonstrating that trials of pigs, in particular, had a certain cultural currency in Europe during the time in which *Colkelbie Sow* was composed. This image of swine as violent threats to the community when not properly minded is essential to interpreting the (comic) implications of their rampage against the feasting fools.

Manorial court legislation from the Scottish Borders and Northern England offers some particularly relevant examples of the legal language manipulated in *Colkelbie Sow*. Evidently, there was some friction existing between livestock owners and manorial courts: owners were known to intervene in the impounding of stray livestock by performing "rescues," in which "an individual attempted to recapture animals when they were being driven to the common pound," or by committing a "fold break," in

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Philosophical Society 56.5 (1917): 410-415, 412; Philip Jamieson, "Animal Liability in Early Law," *Cambrian Law Review* 45 (1988): 45-68, 45. Jamieson notes that a dog was tried during the first half of the sixteenth century in Scotland, citing E. P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1906), 325.

[14] Esther Cohen, "Law, Folklore and Animal Lore," *Past and Present* 110 (1986): 6-37; Jamieson, 49.

which "stock [was] taken from the pinfold without making the necessary payments" (Winchester 40). In cases of general public order, the courts leet[15] often dealt with "breaches of the King's Peace: [which includes, but is not limited too] fighting (affrays), uproar or hubbub (hubbleshows), [and] drawing blood" (40). In *Colkelbie Sow* these public order offenses are subtly parodied: the first mob is referred to as a "fellon affray" (l. 255) and the additional descriptions mimic official court language (discussed below). By turning a manorial court transgression into a peacekeeping measure, the text cleverly manipulates expected standards of community obligation.

The comic reinterpretation of community peacekeeping also reflects local governance practices. The idea of the community, or neighborhood, in governance first appears in legal records in the thirteenth century.[16] The neighborhood becomes integral to the keeping of order in the medieval community and is eventually extended to include both implicit and explicit standards of neighborly duties and behaviors (Neville; Winchester 46). Keeping good neighborhood involved ensuring that all members of a given community were peaceable and maintained their community obligations, including activities such as communal livestock management and cooperation during the harvest season. In the Scottish Borders this was especially important as the "landscape [contained] large expanses of common land and grazing herds of livestock" and "reiving[17] remained [an ever-present] threat" (Winchester 46). Another measure related to the development of community consciousness was the raising

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[15] Courts leet were medieval criminal courts charged with the punishment of small offenses and were generally presided over by the local lord. "Court leet, n." *The Oxford English Dicitionary* (*OED*), www.oed.com. The manorial court is nearly interchangeable with the court leet – the court leet was primarily concerned with cases within a county or part of a county while the manorial court was specific to the local manor house that it served. The two increasingly became conflated when local lords were elected as sheriffs, and the two courts often met together. For further background see, Maureen Mulholland, "Trials in manorial courts in late medieval England," in *The Trial in History, Volume I: Judicial tribunals in England and Europe, 1200-1700*, ed. Maureen Mulholland and Brian Pullan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 81-101.

[16] Cynthia J. Neville, "Neighbours, the Neighbourhood, and the Visnet in Scotland, 1125-1300," in *New Perspectives on Medieval Scotland, 1093-1286*, ed. Matthew Hammond, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 161-74.

[17] *Reive,* v. 1: "to rob, plunder, pillage, esp. in the course of an armed foray or raid": *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (*DSL*), www.dsl.ac.uk.

of the hue and cry. In the medieval village the hue and cry was used as a way to police the community and was primarily "designed to counter immediately an assault or theft."[18] In the town the hue and cry functioned in a similar manner:

> London's *Liber Albus* (1419) […] stipulates that in order 'to preserve peace in the city' every witness to a felony should raise the hue and those who heard it were obliged to pursue and arrest the transgressors. Those who failed to respond or who levied the hue without cause were to be heavily amerced.[19]

Just as legal language is repurposed for comic ends, *Colkebie Sow* also appropriates the real regulations concerning the raising of the hue and cry for comic purposes. The hue and cry becomes an essential catalyst for the comic action and instigates both mobbing scenes.

This historical context – the dangerous reputation of swine and their continual legal troubles resulting from their bad behavior – provides essential background for reading the swine of *Colkelbie Sow*. Furthermore, the types of laws concerning keeping the peace and regulating livestock add additional layers of cultural context to this narrative. Despite seeming topsy-turvy, this text maintains a strong awareness of the social and cultural milieu of medieval Scotland. By using a community terror, the pig, as the hero-protagonist and by implicating the mobs with both peacekeeping and criminal disruption, the comic depth of the narrative is significantly enhanced. Additionally, the cultural currency of "Cokelbeis gryce"[20] is evident in its casual use as an idiomatic expression for rowdy feasting in other texts from the period.

The piglet is the first to raise the cry: "the pure pig gaif a rore" (ll. 182). This porcine squeal leads to the first muster, and with it the first clues to the subversive nature of the narrative. The passel of swine includes nineteen pigs that are individually named and given additional biographical detail. Beyond the normal habit of naming pets, these pigs are anthropomorphized: they are personally identified with specific habits

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[18] Christopher Dyer, "The English Medieval Village Community and Its Decline," *Journal of British Studies* 33.4 (1994): 407-429, 421.

[19] Samantha Sagui, "The hue and cry in medieval English towns," *Historical Research*, 87.236 (2014): 179-193, 181.

[20] William Dunbar, "Schir, ȝe haue mony seruitour," *Poems of William Dunbar,* ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, 2 vols. (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1998), I: 223, ll, 66, and II: 412, note. "Gryce," or "grice," n. "a little pig": *DSL*. Notably, in the Bannatyne Manuscript "gryce" has been written in the margins around l. 110 – the first mention of the "littill pig."

and histories, and they consciously (if figuratively) take up arms against
the fools. Particularly, we meet "Stiftapill" who rushes "out with a rore"
(ll. 221-2) and whose name roughly translates to "strong-headed,"[21]
"Hogy evir in the eb" (l. 230), who apparently has a fondness for "rooting
for shellfish on tidal flats,"[22] "Reid Kit that oft rord" (l. 238), "Wrotok
and Writhneb" (l. 229) whose names roughly mean "rooter" and "twisted
snout,"[23] respectively, "Sigill Wrigill" (l. 243), and "Baymell bred in the
bog" (l. 233). This anthropomorphizing lends the pigs a sort of pseudo-
community member status – the vivid image of the variously hobbling
and grunting rescuers removes any sense of an indistinguishable drift of
raging swine. They are no longer just livestock, but independently acting
and, to some extent, responsible community members. After the cast of
boarish rescuers has been described, they mob the fools:

> With sic a din and a dirdy,
> A garray and a hirdy girdy,
> The fulis all afferd wer,
> And the harlot hurt thare
> With bair Tuskyis tuth.
> And for to say the verry suth,
> In that fellon affray
> The littill pig gat away
> And ilk bore and ilk beist
> Defoulit the fulis of the feist.
> Sum mokit, menyeit, and merrit
> Thus wer thay fro the meit skerrit.
> Is nocht this a nyce cais? (ll. 249-61)

The attack, described as "a din and a dirdy, a garray and a hirdy girdy"
and a "fellon affray," echoes the language describing the public order
offenses mentioned above, in particular the sanctions against *affrays* and
hubbilschows. The humiliation endured by the mobbed fools is
compounded by the irony of their having been "defoulit" (or trampled) by
the "meit" (l. 260). The narrator's reversion to identifying the hogs as
meat is disconcerting: the audience has already invested themselves in the
various personalities and identities of the pigs, so this reminder of their
non-human reality provokes the comic incongruity of the scene. It also
heightens the levity in the sense that the food bites back – badly
frightening the fools in the process. This first mob still retains a playful

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[21] Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*, 108, note to l. 221.
[22] Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*, 109, note to l. 230.
[23] Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*, 109, note to l. 229.

tone despite the seeming violence of the scene: though the fools get trampled, there is only one indication of any real injury (the harlot gets hurt by Tusky's tusk, l. 252-3). The narrator's final exclamation also reinforces the jesting tone: "is nocht this a nyce cais?" (l. 261). His ironic description of the mob as a "cais" reinforces the (mis)use of legal language seen throughout the narrative. The *Dictionary of the Scots Language* classes this usage under the third definition for "Cas(e, Cais), n." meaning, "a (real, alleged, or supposed) state of things; a situation; a matter for consideration." Other examples of this usage include several explicitly legal instances from Gilbert Hay's *The Buke of the Law of Armys*.[24] Despite, or perhaps because of, the ironic use of language throughout this mobbing scene a merry and jesting tone is achieved. By turning a threatening situation into a humorous account of a rather bizarre hue and cry, there is a cathartic release from the real pressures of active community protection.

This first mob is perhaps even more humorous when considering the seemingly digressive discussion of the moral character of pigs versus dogs preceding the mob.[25] The narrator declares: "luvand beistis swine be, / Contrair houndis nature" (ll. 200-201) and goes on to assert that while dogs love men they turn on one another in a moment, while on the other hand pigs will rush to the rescue if any of their kind is in trouble –

> And on of thame be ourthrawin
> That his cry may be knawin
> All the remanent that heiris
> Cumis in thair best maneiris
> To reskew as thay may. (ll. 213-217)

From the evidence of the dangerous and destructive nature of swine repeatedly testified by historical legislation against them, as well as their frequent arrests for brutal attacks on humans, swine were surely not considered "luvand beistis" (l. 200). This irony is augmented by the language used to described their brotherly behavior: it is almost identical to that regarding the circumstances under which a hue and cry was raised: as quoted above, Sagui observes that "in order 'to preserve peace in the city' every witness to a felony should raise the hue and those who heard it

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[24] J. H. Stevenson, ed., *Gilbert of the Haye's prose manuscript (A.D. 1456), Volume I: The Buke of the Law of Armys*, (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1901), cf. 256, ll. 6-8; 285, ll. 2-6; 299, ll. 9-30.
[25] MacDonald discusses this image in relation to the *Testament of Andro Kennedy*.

were obliged to pursue and arrest the transgressors" (181). Here, every pig that hears the cry is *intrinsically* inclined to provide immediate assistance to the injured party – it is not just a matter of community obligation, but also an inextricable aspect of their ethical and moral codes. When considering the pervasive confusion of human and animal throughout the poem it is not unreasonable to detect an admonition to the audience to behave in a similar manner under such circumstances. There is also a comical turn in this passage through the reference to the swine performing a "reskew" – the very sort of activity that could be perceived as disruptive if undertaken by a hog's owner.

Though the first mob is rather playful, there is still a serious undercurrent. After all, the pigs have had to attack marauding criminals in order to save the piglet. But, the slapstick antics of the muster that occurs just after this mob provides a counterbalance to any aggressive energy provoked by the scene. Where the pigs are described as "golfand full grim" (l. 224: "grunting fiercely"), the rustics gather in a disorderly mass. Though the rustics seem to be off to a promising beginning: "than dyn rais and dirray, / Stok hornis blew stout, / Mony on ischit out" (ll. 274-76), they soon become comic fodder. First to gather are the cowherds and shepherds: among the cowherds is "Hoge Hygin" (l. 279) whose name, though common for a rustic,[26] is reminiscent of two of the hogs – "Hogy" (l. 230) and "Hoglyn" (l. 231); a rather homely family: "Symy that was sone brint / With his lad Loury / And his gossep Gloury"[27] (ll. 280-2); then "Thurlgill [thrings] till a club / So fers, he [fle] in a dub" (ll. 285-6: "brandishes a club so fiercely that he flies into a puddle"). This company is marked by their "baner" – a cow's tail fastened to a flail (l. 330-2). The shepherds, led by "Fergy Flitsy" (l. 298), gather from various brooks, braes and streams with "Barmyberd"[28] flying their banner (ll. 303-7). The cowherds and shepherds are momentarily disconcerted and run in fear from one another until they recognize each other's banners (l. 315-324). After these two 'companies' manage to unite the swineherds appear:

> The thrid fallowschip he saw
> That thay windirweill knaw,
> The swyne hirdis in a rowt
> And Sueirbum with his snowt

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[26] Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*, 110, note to l. 279.

[27] *Sone brint*: sunburned, Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*, 151; *Gloury*: with staring eyes, Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*, 110, note to l. 282.

[28] *Barmyberd*: yeasty-beard, Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*, 111, note to l. 307.

> Wes captane of thame thair,
> And borne wes his banair
> Upoun a schule for to schaw,
> A flekkit sowis skyn faw (ll. 341-48)

Ironically, "Sueirbum" seems to be a derivative of *sweir* meaning "lazy."[29] Considering the swine seemed to have escaped *en masse* perhaps his name is no accident. The continuing conflation of swine and man is best represented by lines 343-4: the pigs also "[rusch] furth in a rout" (l. 186, cited above) and Sueirbum is snouted. The martial imagery first evident in the pigs' muster and mob is amplified by the mock-heroic description of the assorted company banners and captains.[30] This rollicking assembly bleeds over to the tone of the poem itself; the tumbling verse is at times hard to follow as a result of the unusual syntax and obscure diction.[31]

These mirrored musters serve to confuse the audience's perceptions about the accepted social hierarchy and exactly who should be responsible for maintaining law and order. The mock-heroic language describing the community's muster – complete with bannermen, captains and rustic weapons – satirize not only the heroic mode, but also the actual practice of raising the hue and cry. Indeed, just these sorts of men would be expected to run down criminals, and the highly embellished depiction of the second muster reinforces the comic treatment of the hue and cry first employed during the porcine muster. Comedy is often aimed at the most serious or threatening circumstances faced by society: by making a mockery of the hue and cry *Colkelbie Sow* confirms the necessity of the practice itself, while creating an outlet for the tensions and pressures associated with such situations.

The targets of these musters and mobs are a rather sinister group of feasting fools. Bitterling's study places the fool's feast of *Colkelbie Sow* in the context of the *monde renversé* and the *festum stultorum* common to medieval European civic celebrations. The mustering men, he argues, are consistently related to fools and foolishness – this in part demonstrated by

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[29] Kratzmann, *Colkelbie Sow*, 111, note to l. 344.

[30] Notably, Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* also humorously complements its mobbing scene with mock-heroic and chivalric imagery.

[31] Klaus Bitterling, "On Some Literary Traditions of 'Colkelbie's Sow,'" in *Bright Lanternis*, ed. J. Derrick McClure and Michael R. G. Spiller (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989) 104-117, esp. 106-9, discusses the odd language of the text.

the bells Swanky and Copyn Cull wear (ll. 362-364) (108). He also points out that itinerant entertainers and other ill-reputed groups populate the fools' feast. Overall, Bitterling reads the narrative as a ubiquitous representation of the fool, foolishness and the inverted world. He suggests that this *foolish* treatment has roots in estates satire, but his reading tends to emphasize the pervasiveness of the turbulent and topsy-turvy narrative. I would like to revisit this last aspect of Bitterling's study in order to propose a more nuanced understanding of the three groups. The pigs are not foolish: they demonstrate a singular capacity to act with focused intent. The topsy-turviness, as it relates to the swine, instead arises from the incongruity of their destructive and dangerous reputation being diverted to protect the community. The local community is indeed made up of fools and they do caper about in ridiculous fashion but, crucially, they are ultimately able to mob the feasters and restore order. On the other hand, the foolish intruders are actually rather threatening – and from the scant evidence given about the feast they seem more sinister than foolish. They are intrinsically unsavory types: some for violent reasons – "a murderer of leil men, / A revischer of wemen" (ll. 169-170) – while others are neither rapists nor murderers, but still guilty of generally disruptive behavior – "a brawler" (l. 132), "a drunkin drechour" (l. 140: "drunken loafer"), and "a noyefull nychtbour" (l. 152). Furthermore, the range of guests is impressive: there are the personified crimes "Schir Ockir and Ser Symony" (l. 172), heretics such as, "on apostita freir" (l. 119), "a sismatyk" (l. 153), "an heretyk" (l. 154) and "a lolard" (l. 155), and also relatively harmless guests such as "a libbar[32] and a lyar" (l. 26) and "a fond fule" (l. 124). Though the guests range from violent criminals to community misfits, most of the feasters in some way threaten the peaceful operation of the community and there is no lenience for allowing their antics to go forward unchecked.[33]

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[32] "Libbar, n. a." is a gelder, or sow-gelder, *DSL*. Perhaps this particular feaster is rather sinister from the porcine perspective.

[33] Bitterling links the use of catalogues with traditional forms for describing fools and folly in the fifteenth century (109). He ultimately posits that, "these turbulent accumulations of words or of rhymes seem to contribute to a stylistic effect which runs counter to and even neutralizes the result which would otherwise be reached by the means of individualizing peasants and animals by their names" (108). Although this is true in the respect that the verse itself seems to obscure meaning, it is also true that the author is extremely careful in each and every characterization (something with which I don't believe Bitterling would disagree).

   This sort of mobbing scene is not unique to *Colkelbie Sow*. Richard Holland's roughly contemporary work, *The Buke of the Howlat* (*ca.* 1448) (hereafter *The Howlat*), provides a useful point of comparison, for it also features two mobbing scenes. The narrative of this text follows the fortunes of an owl and his role in the social hierarchy. The Owl, unhappy with his plumage, complains to Nature who then decrees that the other birds should give him a feather each. But after receiving the parti-colored plumage the Owl becomes exceedingly pretentious and prideful. In response to this behavior Nature suggests that each bird take back his or her own feather – instigating the mob. This mob is different from that of *Colkelbie Sow* insofar as the mob in *The Howlat* is not a typical angry mob since they are prompted to action by Nature throughout the narrative. But *The Howlat* does provide a useful contextual basis for considering the mob as a means of facilitating both humorous and censorial agendas; though the humor of the two texts arise from different sources,[34] the mob functions in both narratives as a catalyst for the comic action. Parkinson asserts that the two mobs in *The Howlat* are meant to re-establish order and return wayward characters to the proverbial fold.[35] In this respect *Colkelbie Sow* is quite unlike *The Howlat*: the ultimate goal of *Colkelbie Sow* is to exclude certain disruptive groups, not to chastise and reintegrate them. Despite this difference in context the form of the mobs share similarities. In particular both begin with a 'minor' mob: *The Howlat* begins with the mobbing of a Rook guilty of disturbing the feast (ll. 824-5).[36] This mob ends with the Rook covered in muck and quickly moves into a slapstick episode – in this case a fools' games performed by the Lapwing and Cuckoo (ll. 833-45). As discussed above, *Colkelbie Sow* begins with the comical porcine-led muster and mob then transitions to the slapstick antics of the rustics' muster.

Here, I am emphasizing that although the verse seems impenetrable, it actually provides a sustained and nuanced social commentary.

[34] *Colkelbie Sow* being a play on legal language and perceived standards of community obligation, while *The Howlat*'s comedy arises from the machinations of Nature and an imagined avian hierarchy reminiscent of *The Parlement of Foules*.

[35] David Parkinson, "Mobbing Scenes in Middle Scots Verse: Holland, Douglas, Dunbar," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85.4 (1986): 494-509, 499.

[36] All references to Holland's *The Buke of the Howlat* from Ralph Hanna, ed., *The Buke of the Howlat*, (Suffolk: Scottish Text Society, 2014).

The two examples diverge in regards to the motivation for the second mob. In *The Howlat* the Owl is attacked, his donated plumage removed and harmony is reasserted. Parkinson points out that whereas the Rook, an upstart intruder, poses no internal threat to the avian hierarchy the behavior of the Owl directly threatens harmony within the community of birds; as a direct result of the mobbing the hierarchy is re-established and the Owl rebuked and reintegrated (500). In contrast, *Colkelbie Sow*'s second mobbing scene ends with the final, definitive exclusion of the outcast feasters. Rather than balancing an innocuous threat with a real threat to community order, as is the case in *The Howlat*, the mobbing characters in *Colkelbie Sow* attack the same target in succession and the pigs take part in both mobs. This active reengagement features the local community and the pigs working in tandem against the feasting fools:

> Lord God, so lowd as thay cryd!
> Full oft the fulis thay defyd
> And on thame semblit attonis,
> Bot their wes breking of bonis –
> "Hold!" "How!" "He wes heir!" –
> Thay chace with a fresch cheir,
> Fyll on the foirsaid sottis
> And ourthrew all the ydiottis,
> Both of the swyne and the men. (ll. 482-90)

This final attack demonstrates none of the incompetence of the previous muster: somehow the bumbling mob has transformed and attacks in an organized battle array – "on thame semblit attonis" (l. 484). The men have become miraculously single-minded, rather disconcertingly to the audience. The narrator has again led the audience along only to sharply change directions: just as he gives a detailed description of the swine only to abruptly revert to calling them meat after the first mob, the previous four hundred lines are surprisingly undercut when the rustics manage to competently launch an attack.

Parkinson suggests that in mobbing scenes, "the intruder's downfall turns disruption into a joke," and that, "mobbing was for fools, not devils and heretics" (509). *Colkelbie Sow* complicates this reading of the mobbing scene, as there are two groups of fools – the locals and the outcast feasters. And, to add to the confusion, the so-called "fools" (the outcast feasters) include heretical figures and other quintessentially unsavory types. Conversely, the locals are much more foolish throughout the narrative – they stumble and roll into formation, become confused about who to attack, and begin a country-dance when they recognize one

another. Even the language of the second mobbing adds to the confusion: the subjects of the passage, "the swyne and the men" (l. 490), only appear at the end of the statement. In between the "fulis" are defied (l. 483) and the "sottis" and "ydiottis" are overthrown (ll. 488-9). Considering the previous action, it is actually quite unclear whether the narrator means that the erstwhile feasters or the locals are the victims of the attack. The final statement provides slight clarification – though even this resists identifying the locals clearly, as it only says "the men;" it is only the alliance with the pigs – the clear heroes fighting off the felonious feasters – that clarifies the identity of the attackers (the various herders) and the attacked (the feasters). To some degree, all of this confusion obfuscates the message of the second mob: this narrative ultimately seeks to reinforce communal concepts of good neighborhood, so the final brutal exclusion of the feasting fools is the only viable outcome.

This sort of aggressive and exclusive laughter is also evident in other medieval comic traditions. In his study of German comic tales, Coxon offers some relevant observations about the purpose of such forms of communal laughter. He observes that certain sorts of comic tales seem to "reinforce conventional… principles of exclusion, and encourage hostile and aggressive forms of laughter as the customary recipient response."[37] In other words, Coxon argues that excessively aggressive laughter could reinforce and rehearse community norms by picking out a figure, or group of figures, which could be collectively ridiculed and excluded. *Colkelbie Sow*'s extensive list of criminal and unwelcome characters creates just such a group ripe for expulsion. By using the pigs as the agents of this expulsion the comic *frisson* is heightened; instead of humans taking up their expected responsibilities, some of the most marginalized inhabitants of the medieval community become the heroes of the tale. Ultimately pigs make perfect comic heroes: they are some of the most valuable, yet destructive inhabitants of the medieval community, and by creatively redefining their role *Colkelbie Sow* produces a humorous commentary on the community's standards of good neighborhood.

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[37] Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Later Middle Ages: German Comic Tales 1350-1525* (London: Legenda, 2008), 19.