

Wolves in Jacobean ‘Textual Spectacles’:
Reading the Strategical Context of
The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes (1607)

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Abstract

This paper examines the discourses of fighting animals in *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, particularly in the chapter on wolves, as the author's presumable strategy to gain patronage, appealing not only to the general readers, but especially to King James. Though known as a Puritan preacher, Edward Topsell does not elaborate much on the common association of wolves with heretics. At the same time, it is discovered that he does not denounce animal baiting, but adapts such motif in his discourses, while maintaining Puritan sympathy towards animals. His chapter on wolves is formed by a wide range of narratives; among them is a group of discourses minutely observing battles between animals, which this paper defines as constructing 'textual spectacles.' By displaying these in-text spectacles of fighting beasts, the author enhances the reading experience and attempts to entertain his supposed audience--particularly the new Sovereign himself, from whom Topsell would have wished to win patronage.

London, where Topsell worked as a perpetual curate and his *Historie* was printed and sold, actually offered opportunities to witness caged wild beasts and animal spectacles both for the populace and the royal audience. Geographical evidence suggests that about a mile-walk from his parish would bring Topsell to the Tower Menagerie and its beasts, and he would have also been familiar with people's reports on the Bear Garden across the Thames. Several examples of his 'textual spectacles' show that his discourses of struggling, fighting animals indeed resemble the actual scenes of bloody sports favoured not only by the general public but also by the king. The verbal illustrations of wolves attacking and killing enormous bovines, for instance, encourage the eager readers to observe the violent scenes in their mind's eye and thus satisfy their appetites for the bestial theatre. Topsell's dedicatory to the Clerk of the Closet and his former patronage at church, as well as his chapter on kingly lions in *Historie*, reveal his connection to the king; his 'textual spectacles' could have worked in building a firmer link with James, who even reformed the building for lions at the Tower for the pleasure of baiting performances. Though mostly following Puritan norms as a cleric, Topsell on purpose uses the motif of animal fighting as an entertaining element. At the end of this paper, it is also mentioned that the cleric was in urgent need for financial support. Although his strategy to find patrons results

in failure, his 'textual spectacle' would have worked as eye-catching storytelling, presenting extravagant rows of snarling and menacing animals before the mind eye of the readers.