Thomas Middleton’s Middle Way:
Political Irony and Jacobean Drama

by

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ABSTRACT

THOMAS MIDDLETON’S MIDDLE WAY:

POLITICAL IRONY AND JACOBEAN DRAMA

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The dissertation examines Thomas Middleton’s political irony in his drama. It differentiates this irony from the broad phrase “Middletonian irony” or the various kinds of irony featured in his oeuvre by observing its connection to what Sir Francis Bacon calls a “crossroads,” which produces opera basilica—works for the monarch to resolve. Middleton and Rowley’s definition of ironia in The World Tossed at Tennis (1620) in which the eye looks “two ways at once” positions the envisioned royal audience at such a crossroads. In doing so, Middleton and Rowley revise rhetorical definitions of irony that promote an inferred meaning which trumps literal interpretations; they instead favour a third meaning with their analogy of the tailor who stitches two previous habits into a new fashion with his needle. Rulers are thus encouraged to abandon singular, entrenched political habits in favour of new and mutually constituted fashions of governance. The course to which Middleton directs rulers and audiences here and elsewhere resembles the tradition of the via media with its projected balance, but its remaining tension infuses that outcome with the ongoing oscillation of the via diversa. In this manner Middleton’s political irony expands upon Bacon’s idea of “perpetual renovation” by seeing governance as a theatrical continuum of historical emulation and revision. By resisting the permanence and centrality of authority, my work presents responses to recent studies in political theology, which
uphold the superiority of the monarch, and to Middleton criticism’s conflicted prescription of either a deliberate intention on the author’s part (moral or satirical) or a complete dissolution of meaning. Instead, Middleton uses a didactic allegorical framework that is politically charged but remains ridden with tension. The dissertation’s first two chapters observe opera basilica intended for the newly appointed monarch, James I, in The Phoenix (1603–4) and the Lord Mayor of London in The Triumphs of Truth (1613). The final two chapters examine the ways in which Middleton’s opera basilica gradually transform into burgeoning citizen politics with The World Tossed at Tennis and his final play A Game at Chess (1624). Although Middleton’s message remains equivocal, it is unequivocally political.
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Dedication

It may seem odd to dedicate a study of irony to someone I love so unequivocally, but Katie Ryan has seen me through every day that went into producing the full drafts of this dissertation and has carried me over every hurdle along the way. She has been a constant and brilliant source of inspiration during times of doubt, a hand when I needed to be held, and a voice when I lost mine, as well as a devoted and compassionate partner. Someone once told me that people in relationships should be like trees: close enough to support one another during strong gusts. All I can say is that I count myself extremely lucky to have found the strongest tree, and I strive every day to give you “the same,” Katie: *quos amor verus tenuit tenebit*. 
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.................................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements................................................................................................................................... iv

Dedication................................................................................................................................................ vii

Table of Contents.................................................................................................................................. viii

Introduction........................................................................................................................................... 1

Middleton’s Political Irony .................................................................................................................. 5

Middleton’s Political Irony’s Influences ............................................................................................... 13

Religion and Middleton’s Political Irony .............................................................................................. 22

Jacobean Politics ................................................................................................................................... 29

Perpetual Renovation: *Opera Basilica* and Citizen Politics ............................................................... 37

Chapter One: Ruling as Obeying in *The Phoenix* ............................................................................. 44

*The Phoenix* in Its Historical Time and the Contemporary Critical Conversation.......................... 45

Fluid Sovereignty: The Materiality of the Boy Actor and the Myth of the Phoenix............................ 51

Teaching the Monarch to Act (with His People): Disguise and Collaboration ........................................ 58

Middleton’s Contractual Theatre: Beyond the Court Performance .................................................. 70

Chapter Two: Thomas Middleton Counselling Thomas Myddleton in *The Triumphs of Truth* .......... 77

Between Sin City and the City of God: The Political Irony of Middleton’s Show ................................. 81

Rethinking Medieval and Civic Traditions: The Perpetual Renovation of Lord Mayors’ Shows .......... 90

Middleton’s Civic Influences: Anthony Munday’s and Thomas Dekker’s Shows .................................. 95

Implicating the Lord Mayor and Other Readers ................................................................................. 105

Chapter Three: Tossing *The World Tossed at Tennis* Around London ........................................... 110

Libel Play: The Frances Howard and Robert Carr Scandal and *The Witch* ........................................ 114

The Outset of the Thirty Years’ War: Prince Charles the Soldier and King James the Scholar ........... 121

Looking Two Ways at Once: *Ionia*’s Perpetual Renovation .............................................................. 124

News and the Commercial Theatre: The Citizen’s Politics ................................................................. 137

From Masque to Play: Transforming the Theatre ................................................................................. 139

Model Citizens ..................................................................................................................................... 149
Chapter Four: *A Game at Chess* and Citizen Politics................................................................. 153
The Wider Janus Face: News, Full Allegory, and Works for Citizens........................................ 157
The Royal Plot .................................................................................................................... 164
The Pawn Plot .................................................................................................................... 175
Citizens’ Perpetual Renovation......................................................................................... 190
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................ 197
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 207
**Introduction**

The dissertation takes Thomas Middleton’s political dramatic works as its subject matter and interprets their ironic frameworks as challenges to Jacobean governance’s tendency to impose a singular vision onto the English kingdom.\(^1\) By exploring irony as a political device, my work differs from critical efforts to identify a signature ironic style that pervades the Middleton canon. Such efforts often use the phrase “Middletonian irony” and attend to a vast array of deployments and usages, including situational irony, sustained irony, and dramatic irony, as well as the early modern rhetorical definitions from which I will be distinguishing Middleton’s use of irony in political drama.\(^2\) The project investigates the ways in which what I am labelling Middleton’s political irony offers plural perspectives that at once challenge any unified political vision and beckon the attuned interpreter to establish some temporary resolution that remains unexpressed but encouraged.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Throughout the dissertation, I use the word “political” and its variations in reference to the early modern conception of “politics,” which Debora K. Shuger defines as “‘government’ or ‘governance’: that is, whatever pertains to the ordering and rule of a polity” (*Political Theology*, 141, n.4).

\(^2\) Many critical understandings of Middletonian irony tend to be rather general. For instance, although Dorothy Farr provides a warranted counterclaim to T.S. Eliot’s dismissive statement that Middleton “has no message” (Eliot 148), her discussion of the irony she perceives as Middleton’s message is rather general: “Middleton’s ‘message’ is contained in his irony; it is an irony born of the equivocal view of life which for Middleton was basic to the human comedy” (1). Several scholars, however, have offered impressive overviews of the playwright’s unique use of irony. R.B. Parker is the first of Middleton’s earlier critics to notice the nuanced complexity of his drama: Middleton’s “successful and consistent irony…lends the language a tension and significance which is typical of Middleton’s mature dramatic style, where the meaning of a speech comes as much from the situation in which it is spoken as from what it says or what it conveys through the image patterns” (187). The most succinct and recent addition to scholarship on Middletonian irony is Paul Mulholland’s work on *A Trick to Catch the Old One*. His examination of Paul’s boy-company production identifies “a binocular experience whereby dramatic situations possess both a literal meaning and an ironic significance that subverts, opposes, qualifies, or otherwise comments on it. Dual or multiple consciousness in *A Trick* additionally detaches an audience from simple or direct sympatheic engagement with the presented material or characters to encourage a more critical and analytical perspective” (52-53).

\(^3\) Plural forms of governance would not have been alien to an early modern audience. An early political model based in collective rather than individual governance is republicanism. Andrew Hadfield summarizes early modern republicanism’s values as pluralistic: “The personal and public interaction of friends and allies is shown to be infinitely preferable to solitary action. The former leads to cooperation, the exchange of valuable advice and the establishment of a desirable body politic among equals; the latter to solitary, hierarchical rule, which invariably degenerates into tyranny” (74).
My thesis makes two critical interventions. It offers an alternative to current work on early modern political theology and provides a new way of understanding the critical conundrum in Middleton scholarship to date: do the plays advocate an intentional message, either through political satire or moral didacticism, or do they embody an endlessly playful energy that destabilizes meaning altogether? Political irony provides an answer to this dilemma by maintaining attention to Middleton’s allegorical framework and topical material, but without ascribing an intentional meaning on the author’s part or a unified solution to the moral and political dilemma at hand. In retaining a degree of tension, the irony provides a rationale for the poststructuralist tendencies that inform common approaches to the Middleton canon, but allows us to interpret these hermeneutics instead with an informed sensitivity to the historical conditions that produce these texts. Middleton’s avoidance of a uniform message while simultaneously encouraging moral conduct creates a crossroads that resembles the classical and humanist traditions of the via media, or middle way, but inflects this moral course with via diversa (an early form of dialogism) that presents spectators with problems to be wrestled with rather than a contained social world or identity.

The ability of Middleton’s political irony to encourage unity without painting a complete picture discourages static politics in favour of ongoing and changing forms of governance that

\[4\] George E. Rowe, Jr., for instance, makes the good point that Middleton’s “comic resolutions…[are] constantly undermined by the ineradicable presence of a world which will admit no such harmony,” but he ascribes a proto-postmodern approach that regards such tension as creating “Meaningless Forms”—what Rowe names the chapter of his book from which the quotation derives (51). Another case is Swapan Chakravorty’s Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton. The book begins with a promising outlook on Middleton’s irony: “Middleton’s celebrated ‘irony’ is less a matter of clinical sang-froid than of a committed search into the linked premises and hidden mechanisms which condition the self-understanding of sexual desire, social interest, and political ambition” (15). However, Chakravorty’s work perceives this effect as instrumental in “postmodern theatre and pedagogy” (193).

\[5\] The concepts of the via media and via diversa will be elaborated upon in greater detail in the influences section of this introduction.
are mutually constituted. The dynamic technique of Middleton’s political irony corresponds with Sir Francis Bacon’s political concept of “perpetual renovation,” which involves ongoing emulation of past models in tandem with present concerns to envision future habits of governance. Middle ton’s political irony operates in a similar manner by attempting to encourage interpreters to see multiple realities, disavowing a perfected image of time, selfhood, and politics. The severity of this lesson depends upon the audience. Middleton’s early drama aims to produce a pedagogic dynamic that resembles Bacon’s description of opera basilica (works for the ruler) when it is performed for London’s authorities. While recent studies in early modern political theology would seem to agree with this model in which adroit governance is left to the monarch, Middleton’s ironic political works complicate traditional government by portraying various rulers as sharing or constituting their power with their subjects. Middleton’s decentering of power counters James I’s repeated insistence on his superiority to the polis over the course of his reign, a duration of time that coincides directly with the extant dramatic works of Middleton. By approaching political drama from this angle, we can see that the theatre does not establish a marginal counterculture to the mechanisms of power, but instead reveals the ways in which these institutions are reliant upon one another insofar as governance, like theatre, is enacted through shared and collective action. Hence, Middleton does not challenge James’s, Charles’s, or the Lord Mayor’s right to rule, but rather reminds them that they are primary figures whose political motions depend upon fellow actors in order to execute their policies adeptly. The dramatist’s opera basilica are thus lessons in acting as well as governance.

The subversive element to Middleton’s political drama arrives at the end of his dramatic career when he concocts an early formulation of what I label “citizen politics.” I argue that this

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6 The final section of this introduction will provide more information on the subject.
invention is initially the result of the entertainment and commercial interests of the early modern theatre, but eventually develops into an interrogative dramatic form of the commercial theatre that resembles the playwright’s opera basilica. The financial motivations behind including political content in drama makes sense in relation to the popular political texts that were circulated in oral and printed forms for Londoners, such as verse libels and news pamphlets. Middleton’s theatre thus enters into these public discourses, but its political irony causes these political allusions to be pluralistic rather than polemical. Although the theatre remains powerless to facilitate riot or dissent, given its distracted nature, I contend that its variety nevertheless allows for a pleasurable and politically charged double perspective that permits citizens to see their rulers as fallible and to feel a sense of duty with respect to their role in sustaining their country’s faith. Although it remains untenable to pinpoint a political allegiance, motive, or polemic to Middleton’s art, I argue that the unsettled tension of his political irony and its suggestion that attuned spectators ought to locate a middle ground for themselves provides Londoners with the opportunity to enact interpretive democracy. These politically interpretive acts usher in an early form of citizen politics. Before delving deeper into these matters, it is

7 Paul Yachnin cautions early modern critics against reading unified political purposes in early modern drama (Stage Writings, “The Powerless Theatre”). This caveat leads Yachnin to perceive the theatre as a powerless medium because of the multiple ways in which audience members can engage with its drama.

8 I want to stress that I am using the word democracy in relation to political interpretation, not action. Early modern society did not experience anything that approximates our modern conception of democracy. In his examination of Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure (1604), Jeffrey Doty offers an explanation nearing what I am referring to: “The playhouse was a democratizing space because in it, private persons imitated the actions of kings and queens, and those roles were often infused with topical political content” (56). Doty goes on to state that plays vary in their capacity to incite democratic thought according to the degree to which they engage the audience. The theatre’s interpretive democracy was thus temporarily established on a collective scale and was not perceived as having significant power to effect social change. As we will see, Middleton’s political irony and the interpretive democracy it entails involve plural perspectives and frame living authorities allegorically within the dramas. For rulers, this means attending to multiple realities; for citizens, it reveals the importance of interpretation for instilling an early sense of political responsibility, even if at this stage these nascent citizen politics only involve maintaining their national faith on an individual scale. Although any text can be said to inspire interpretive democracy, given that interpretation is subjective, the structural dimension and topical nature of Middleton’s political irony directs interpreters toward a political problem that remains unresolved, while also allowing for various other interpretations.
necessary to define Middleton’s political irony more thoroughly in relation to modern
scholarship and the rhetorical manuals of Middleton’s age.

**Middleton’s Political Irony**

The tailor comes to be rhetorical…

By his needle he understands *ironia*,

That with one eye looks two ways at once.

(Middleton and Rowley *The World Tossed at Tennis*, 118-25)

In this passage, taken from *The World Tossed at Tennis* (1620), Middleton and Rowley describe *ironia*, and I use this unique understanding of the trope to define Middleton’s political irony. Although they play upon irony’s dual (or duelling) literal and figurative meanings, various factors (the masque’s audience, topicality, framework, and wider implications) extend this common usage by metaphorically depicting politics as fashion. Governors’ need to re-evaluate present trends with recourse to past habits correlates with the tailor’s engagement with the ongoing cycle and invention that is fashion and the wider culture it represents, which must often suit current demands. In order to invent or reinvent the habit of the body politic, the ruler must look to multiple styles in order to devise an appropriate vestment that pleases the whole and reflects the common good. The dual perspective that shapes the masque’s narrative complements this approach. Up until the playwrights define *ironia*, the Soldier and the Scholar have been conversing and debating about the merits or failures of their stations. This aspect of the plot is made all the more pertinent when we recognize that the masque was performed during the outset of what would later be known as the Thirty Years’ War, and was intended to be performed for Prince Charles, who was advocating that Britain go to war, and King James I, who adamantly clung to his peacekeeping mission. The either/or framing of this topical matter onstage is altered
by the arrival of Pallas, who blends her two identities in her roles as Minerva to the Scholar and Bellona to the Soldier, while remaining Pallas to both. Her middling identity serves as an example of where the men must find their mutual, yet divided path. As we will see in chapter four, which examines this work in greater depth, Middleton and Rowley’s political irony represents more than a derisive inversion; it is more than a fleeting, witty moment; it is more than a social critique in which meaning is inflected to one side of a binary construction. Middleton and Rowley’s ironia is located in the middle, but it oscillates continually between poles of meaning and identity, leaving the interpreter in an uncertain middle state. Their political irony circulates around pressing topical matters situated in allegorical dramas that entail representations of London’s governors and citizens, but it gives them no overt solutions. The authors’ use of irony nevertheless prompts their audiences to engage with political issues in a mutual direction, thereby broadening the available options and revealing that the ruler’s individual conceptions of righteous governance are insufficient. Like the playwrights and the acting company, political leaders are directed through the structural or sustained allegories of the plays to see governance as a collaborative activity that involves continual reflection upon their

9 My working definition of allegory resembles the modern concepts of “structural irony” and “sustained irony” through its focus on topical subject matter that is developed over the course of a narrative that reflects Jacobean reality. In their most recent edition of A Glossary of Literary Terms (2014), M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham define structural irony as “a structural feature that serves to sustain a duplex meaning and evaluation throughout a work” (186). Although their eleventh edition omits any mention of sustained irony, Abrams and Harpham’s definition correlates with the concept of “sustained irony,” as evidenced by the fact that this same passage reads as follows in Abrams’s 1985 edition of the same work: “Some literary works exhibit structural irony, in that they show sustained irony” (90). Both of these concepts involve a framework that engages the reader at an early moment in the narrative and carries them through to an endpoint. Middleton’s political irony likewise involves “a duplex meaning” and an evaluative edge, but structural or sustained irony does not fully represent what Middleton and Rowley offer as a definition. By leading audience members through to an ironic ending that propels this lesson beyond the narrative, Middleton’s political irony differs from structural or sustained irony in inviting them to develop their own outcomes instead of arriving at a definitive climax. Structural irony is a modern phenomenon and the earliest reference to sustained irony that I have been able to locate is in Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong’s 1989 English translation of Kierkegaard’s The Concept of Irony (1861) (196). For the purposes of this dissertation, I therefore use Middleton’s political irony and the allegorical frameworks it operates within because these are the terms he uses and what was common currency during the period. Although I use structural or sustained irony on occasion to refer to this framework in Middleton’s drama, my primary attention is to allegory and Middleton’s political irony.
governing habits, as their world perpetually renovates itself with new customs and fashions to accommodate political affairs at home and abroad.

Although I take my definition of irony from a collaborative work, my primary focus in the dissertation is on a selection of Middleton’s topical political dramas. While collaboration can make pinpointing an authorial signature difficult, two things indicate that the definition of *ironia* found in *The World Tossed at Tennis* is more likely Middleton’s invention than Rowley’s.¹⁰ Outside of a critical tradition that ascribes an ironic tone to Middleton, there is one other reference to the concatenation “two ways at once” in the early modern dramatic canon, and it is located in a Middleton play. At the conclusion of *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (c. 1614-1619), after the Duchess has given Aurelia, previously disguised as a Gypsy girl, leave to choose whom she will marry, Aurelia unwisely decides to pursue Lactantio, who declines her offer. Knowing that she has made an ill-fated decision between him and the now offended Andrugio, Aurelia laments that she has “undone” herself “[t]wo ways at once” (5.2.153, 154). The context of this phrase provides a distinctly different meaning from that in *The World Tossed at Tennis*. Rather than using irony as a way to see the whole political landscape in a positive manner that increases the audience’s appreciation for other perspectives, Middleton fractures Aurelia’s identity. Both situations, however, offer problems that need to be resolved and question the present social order by establishing a spectrum of possible identity formations.

The analogy between rhetorical formulation and tailored clothing also connects with another text in Middleton’s oeuvre. In his Epistle to *The Roaring Girl* (1611), his collaboration with Dekker, Middleton describes “[t]he fashion of play-making…as the alteration in apparel”

¹⁰ I recognize that although I am staking this claim, it remains possible that the invention is Rowley’s, despite the evidence I am providing to suggest otherwise. There is a possibility that Rowley imitated Middleton or other authors in this unique circumstance.
While such comparisons can be found in Dekker’s work as well as that of other dramatists,\(^\text{11}\) the Epistle bears Middleton’s signature, showing a penchant for this analogy that is not evident elsewhere in Rowley’s canon. Rowley individually authored two extant plays (*A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* and *All’s Lost for Lust*), neither of which refers to the tailor device. Therefore, although Rowley likely agreed and perhaps elaborated upon the definition of *ironia*, I am comfortable with ascribing the description of this device to Middleton, but will not be occluding Rowley’s influence and authorship when I examine the text in chapter four.

The mutual purpose of Middleton’s political irony and its capacity to affect audience members who are attuned to the topical matters around which the irony fluctuates challenges the views that irony is elitist and desensitizing.\(^\text{12}\) Irony is not always a means to position an interpreter at a comfortable and superior remove from the subject matter. Whereas David Farley-Hills regards Middleton’s irony in comedy as a “distancing” effect that “avoids arousing [the] audience’s emotions” (162), I am inclined to see it, particularly when topical or recent political matters are referred to, as precipitating in audience members an ethical duty or responsibility by inviting them to see beyond singular vantage points.\(^\text{13}\) Although irony can have an uncanny effect that produces in the audience a reaction in which a fictional world both is and is not

\(^\text{11}\) Anna Bayman notes that in *The Gul’s Horne-Booke* Dekker “made much of the comparison between tailoring and publishing” (83).

\(^\text{12}\) In explaining irony’s distancing effect, Linda Hutcheon observes in *Irony’s Edge* that “[d]istance can, of course, suggest the non-committal, the inferred refusal of engagement and involvement…and so its more pejorative associations are with indifference…or even Olympian disdain and superiority” (49). I label this indifference and lack of commitment as desensitization on the part of the audience, as they do not have to establish an emotional tie to the characters. Hutcheon later elaborates upon the “superiority” she mentions in the quotation above as a form of elitism: “In a negative sense, irony is said to play to in-groups that can be elitist and exclusionary” (54).

\(^\text{13}\) Middleton’s drama thus frames what Patrick Gray and John D. Cox’s study of early modern ethics identifies as the complex middle ground that is continually redefined depending upon the context that informs it: “vice and virtue are nothing more than mental placeholders, disguises, for what are in fact manifestations of impersonal social forces. Ethics has no meaning in and of itself; it stands in relation to its ground of being, which Jameson[... in *The Political Unconscious*] takes to be political” (4).
familiar, the familiarity of this disorienting experience—given its resemblance to the spectators’ own world—asks them to wrestle with this jarring representation.\textsuperscript{14} Jeremy Lopez argues that the early modern theatre functioned in a similar manner; playwrights utilized theatrical conventions “to make an audience comfortable, even smug in its mastery of the dramatic” only then to present them with a departure from traditional stagings (133). This process was necessary to produce new genres or modes in the theatre, leading dramatists “to shock” their audience “out of its complacency” and “to insist upon the importance of…the incongruous” (Lopez 133). Middleton’s political irony relies upon a similar theatricality in its adoption of the everyday in order to unravel its comforts.

Middleton’s political irony thus tends to differ significantly from the common understanding of the trope as a witty inverse of meaning, often at the expense of the recipient. This definition is present in early modern rhetorical handbooks as well as early modern translations of classical rhetorical manuals and is often associated with mockery or dry humour.\textsuperscript{15} Richard Sherry’s early modern treatise on grammatical and rhetorical figures provides one such example when he acknowledges the troubling nature of \textit{ironia}, which is based upon “dissimulacion, not so mucho perceiued by the woordes, as either by pronunciation, or by the behauior of the perso[n], or nature of the thing” (sig. D2r). Likewise, in his \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, which was assigned reading in early modern universities, Aristotle perceives this form of irony as being a derisive correction of “the vulgar” (70). The ironist’s sarcasm is usually

\textsuperscript{14} Although the uncanny is commonly associated with Freudian psychoanalysis, its theoretical usage in theatre connects more readily with the work of Bertolt Brecht, specifically his idea of “Not/But” in which stage representations are not our reality, but they also are our reality. Brecht regarded this notion as an essential concept “on which so much depends if society, in the shape of the audience, is to be able to look at what takes place in such a way as to be able to affect it” (197).

\textsuperscript{15} Middleton’s canon, of course, deploys this understanding of irony. Critical discussions often lump it under the umbrella category of “Middletonian irony”; however, my interests are with events that resemble the ironic effect described in \textit{The World Tossed at Tennis}. 

9
comprehended through the delivery or intonation of the author or speaker. Hutcheon regards such elitist condescension as generating “targets” or “victims.” The ironist’s inflection in these circumstances erases the division between the literal and the intended meanings, closing the gap and reducing irony to one meaning. Hutcheon, on the other hand, identifies irony’s more poignant effect:

…irony has an evaluative edge and manages to provoke emotional responses in those who “get” it and those who don’t, as well as in its targets and in what some people call its “victims”… (2)

When the tension lingers, the “evaluative edge” persists and “provokes emotional response[s]” in its interpreters (namely those who comprehend it), for as Hutcheon suggests, irony is in the eye of the beholder. The disparate yet acute reaction that Hutcheon theorizes resembles what Steven Mullaney calls the “affective irony” of early modern theatrical technology. He defines this variety of irony as events in which “the emotions represented or acted out on stage alienate the audience, and so serve to define exactly, and only, what the audience won’t be induced to feel, leaving open, as irony is wont to do, the wide range of what members of that audience—collective but not communal, heterogeneous, and anonymous—might feel instead, in their own contrary fashions” (84-85). Like Hutcheon, Mullaney does not presume to be able to attribute a unified or ideal reaction to the irony, but instead attends to the emotional potential that “irony’s edge” can produce. These approaches frame my own investigation of irony and politics, for it is a dangerous practice, without the necessary historical documentation, to ascribe specific intention to an author or to deduce the entire audience’s reaction, a tendency that several critics have
observed in scholarship on early modern political drama.\textsuperscript{16} This dissertation’s interest is in what Middleton’s audience are not “induced to feel,” namely a sense of security in contemporary methods of governance.

Attuned audiences watch the social fabric being torn, but Middleton gives them no clear pattern from which to mend it; the edge of his political irony nevertheless encourages them to stitch it together anew. As aforementioned, irony is in the eye of the beholder; however, we can examine the collective experience of those who do perceive Middleton’s political irony. The device generates what Susan Bennett labels various “interpretive communities” that grasp, ignore, miss, and reject, amongst a host of other possible reactions to the political irony (40-43, 140). This dissertation is preoccupied with the hypothetical audience members who recognize the irony. The audience members’ wounds and their self-crafted sutures will vary, but they collectively form around a common political issue.

Middleton’s political irony thus resembles the “inclusive” form of irony that Hutcheon describes, but differs from it in some respects. Hutcheon sees the third meaning, or the “ironic” one, that the clash of literal and inferred meanings yields as both better and worse than other forms of the trope:

While, in reality, of course, one of the “notes” of irony is literally silent, unsaid, to think in terms of a playing together of two or more semantic notes to produce a third (ironic) one has at least one advantage over the related image of irony as a photographic double.

\textsuperscript{16} Gary Taylor and Paul Yachnin provide warranted caveats on attempts to deduce authorial intention and efforts to ascribe political affiliation. Taylor makes an amusing and apt comparison between such readings and the blind Gloucester on the heath in King Lear, whereby readers are similarly led astray and find themselves washed up on the shores of authorial intention (“Forms of Opposition,” 287). Yachnin shows the ways in which the institution of theatre does not allow for a unified perspective or politics, for the early modern audience’s reception of Hamlet is as varied as the play-world characters’ interpretations of The Mousetrap. Hence, it is impossible to anticipate or to channel a political agenda entirely (“Powerless Theater,” 58).
exposure…it suggests more than simply the overdetermined space
of superimposition by implying a notion of action and interaction
in the creation of a third – the actual ironic meaning. What both
images lack, of course, is any sense of that critical edge or
evaluative investment that I have argued to be part of the definition
of irony. (60)

Middleton and Rowley’s Pallas, however, retains “that critical edge or evaluative investment” by
not sealing the dialogic tension into a cohesive synthesis. Pallas remains double and inchoate. In
this way, Middleton and Rowley offer an irony that channels differing political poles into a third,
ironic middle ground while retaining the “rapid perceptual or hermeneutic movement
between…[the two poles] that makes this image a possibly suggestive and productive one for
thinking about irony” (Hutcheon 60). There is an image in the crossway, but it is fluid and keeps
the ironic tension between the states of war and peace in flux. Pallas is the promise of a still point
while nevertheless remaining in motion between the states of war and peace.

Middleton and Rowley’s irony thus paradoxically produces an ongoing tension while
drawing its audience toward a projected but unfinished resolution. Its complexity speaks to both
the anxieties and merits of irony during the period. George Puttenham, for instance, perceives
irony as one of several “abuses or rather trespasses in speach” (208). His concern over the trope
and others, such as allegory, stems from its “doubleness” (238). Such rhetorical plurality,
however, is not always regarded as a negative quality. In a section of his dialogic work, Certaine
questions and answeres… (1591), entitled “Trueth spoken by contraries,” William Burton offers
an optimistic view of irony:
Q. Yet God spake by contraries, and is that truth? A. Every contrarie speech is not sinne. For sometime there is a figure vsed therein, which is called amongst the learned Ironia, and as Zanchius saith; Omnis Ironia non est vitiosa: that is, every ironcall, or contrarie speeche, is not vnlawfull. (sig. F4v)

Burton reveals that even the creator, the ultimate voice of truth for early modern people, spoke ironically. Doubleness could thus stress the limitations of worldly knowledge, leaving the mysterious uncertainty of irony’s equivocation as the closest approximation of truth that humanity could hope to achieve.17 Although the definition that Middleton and Rowley create and that Middleton uses over the course of his dramatic career has loose affiliations with the variations of irony developed in these tracts, I contend that the playwrights’ influences stem from humanist traditions of the via media and via diversa, popularized by Erasmus, as well as the literary works of the Elizabethan authors Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe, whom Middleton mentions and emulates repeatedly in his early work.

**Middleton’s Political Irony’s Influences**

Erasmus also portrays Pallas as a double figure in The Praise of Folly (1511). Erasmus’s Folly constructs Pallas in a similar vein to Middleton and Rowley’s definition when she refers to Odysseus as “a perfite wyseman” for having been guided by Pallas; she further describes him as being “double, and craftie,” and states that he “vsed Pallas aduyse in all procedyng[s]” (sig.

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17 This understanding resembles the Socratic irony that Dilwyn Knox perceives as one of the two broad categories of ironia that can be identified in the medieval and early modern periods. Unlike the witty inflection of meaning found in rhetoric manuals, Socratic irony “was motivated by a dislike of ostentation, rather than a wish to mock an antagonist” (Knox 127). This perspective, Middleton and Rowley’s definition, and the ideas of Puttenham and Burton provide a refutation to Claire Colebrook’s general statement that irony in early modern England “was a specific device, not a sensibility or attitude” (8).
Although Folly then claims that Odysseus was “ouerwyse,” portraying him in a somewhat negative light, it is unclear whether or not Erasmus shares Folly’s sentiments. His choice to follow the critique of wisdom with Folly’s self-praise, for example, leads us to wonder if her contrary actions do in fact result in the gateway to enlightenment, since she reasons that fools are, in a sense, free men and hence better off than Odysseus. The “answer” to the reader’s dilemma would seem to appear three pages later, when Folly rebukes Euripides’s condemnation of her for creating foolish men, with a counterstatement from Euripides himself: “Wheras these wisemen are thei, that ar double tounge” (sig. G2v). This form of reasoning in Erasmus is commonly called the via diversa, a rhetorical convention marked by “its propensity for contrarianism, irony, pro-con reasoning, and critical thinking, its drive to be intellectually inclusive, and its authorial stance that could seem at times slippery or improperly vague” (Sloane 119). Erasmus’s style caused significant controversy in his time, especially surrounding The Praise of Folly; the ironic uncertainty of the meaning of his work created an anxiety concerning such rhetorical devices, which lingered over the years. Like Middleton’s political irony, however, the via diversa could also produce a sense of truth for the interpreter through its contraries.

The via diversa of Erasmus’s work provides a method for discerning truth or reason, but it is couched in imagined worlds that defy conventional morality and spur controversy, meaning that it is not regarded by dominant authorities as the most favourable means by which to arrive at truth. As a political instrument, for example, the via diversa proves troublesome to authorities because it defies order and unity. As Thomas Sloane points out, Erasmus’s via diversa was not

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18 Although I am using Sir Thomas Chaloner’s English translation from 1549, accessed via Early English Books Online (EEBO), Betty Radice’s translation of Folly’s description of the epic hero as the “‘many-counselled Ulysses’” (represented in Chaloner’s text as “perfite wyseman”) is also important to take into consideration for this study of irony, which connects the idea of looking two ways at once with a plural form of political thought (116).
always popular in early modern political thought for the reason that the \textit{via diversa} “conflicted with the increasingly hard line being drawn by religious and political leaders of the period” (119). The general dislike rulers had for the \textit{via diversa} does not mean that they did not utilize plurality, but that they coalesced its competing views into a synthesis that they advanced as the solution to the anxiety.

Erasmus, too, had a tendency at other places in his writings to pronounce a more unified take on contradictory values. In his political treatise “A Complaint of Peace,” for instance, he states that war is unholy and that Peace, too often neglected by her children, is the way to bind the rifts in the social fabric: “The conflicting forces of the elements are unevenly balanced so as to preserve unbroken peace, and despite their fundamental opposition they maintain concord by mutual consent and communication” (290). The previous flux of Erasmus’s \textit{via diversa} is sealed by the enforced unity of “fundamental opposition.” By binding the contradictory factions of war and peace into an unavoidable binary, Erasmus overrides the tension by claiming that it establishes “concord.” Gregory Dodds shows that this proclivity to harness the competing sides of the tension, which the \textit{via diversa} precipitated, produced a model of self-fashioning that major writers like Erasmus and later King James VI and I were prone to exhibit: “As with Erasmus, James’ moderate rhetoric appears to present an enlightened individual who was self-consciously irenic and non-partisan. A superficial interpretation of both individuals, however, obscures the potential for tolerant rhetoric to isolate and denigrate religious minorities, to reinforce the status quo, and to function as personal self-fashioning” (170). In such cases, Erasmus’s \textit{via diversa} collapses into a self-assured method for resolving or addressing the contradiction at hand by articulating the \textit{via media} instead of the \textit{via diversa}. 

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The prescription for a channelled solution between poles or extremes is commonly referred to as the *via media*, or middle way. This middle path involves binaries constructed out of extremes that must be balanced according to virtues in order to preserve personal and social harmony. The journey finds its roots in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where Middleton likely would have encountered the phrase “[i]n medio tutissimus ibis,” which translates to read: “in the middle course you will go most safely” (2.137). Ovid’s concept of the middle way likely derives from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, wherein the philosopher describes a similar balancing act when he depicts the moderate man as “a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it” (31). The *via media*’s form of moderation presumes that its conscientious followers or adherents are adroit in their conduct and comportment without needing to reconsider or reassess their positioning because they follow the true course of enlightenment.

Middleton’s drama does and does not advocate the *via media*. Despite critics’ observation of lascivious pleasures in Middleton’s work, scholars are also drawn to read morality into Middleton’s craft. As a result, several readings approach the complexity of his irony by acknowledging this duality, but end up ascribing a stark moral message to the playwright. David M. Holmes, for instance, dismisses cynical and disinterested readings of Middleton’s plays but replaces these interpretations with an overly simplified view of his drama as inflected with “faith and fundamental philanthropy” (40). Leslie Thomson identifies a double vision in Middleton’s work that she attributes to “the coexistence of overt amorality and equally overt moralizing” (1). These outlooks are correct to identify a moral framework in Middleton’s work, but overlook the ways in which this didactic framework remains incomplete. They thus tend to see the drama as
presenting answers rather than problems. Unlike the traditional via media, Middleton’s middle way does not reaffirm the audience’s faith in themselves as upright persons who are able to moderate their political landscape; rather, its projected outcome is infused with the via diversa, causing its interpreters to be unable to achieve self-assured cohesion of themselves or their world. Middleton draws his audience to a moderate solution, but denies them the via media’s closure or its reassurance that its followers have an even-tempered comportment.

Early on in Middleton’s career we see him adopting such a position when he puns on his own name in one of his first writings. G.B. Shand’s translation of Middleton’s Latin opening of The Ghost of Lucrece (1599) provides us with this example of Middleton’s middle way:

To the most chaste and pure Ghost of Lucrece: Thomas, in a moderate and weighty voice [with a pun (Medius . . . Tonus) on “Middleton”], cries out the first “Arise.” (1989)

Middleton writes himself into the narrative by introducing himself as the speaker and then declaring “[a]rise.” By doing so, he takes on the role of conjuror, breathing ghostly life into his title character. Lucrece’s resting place, however, remains as ambiguous as the identity of her author. Despite this via diversa, there remains “a moderate and weighty voice” with which Middleton identifies and which is intended for readers, who are tacitly urged to reflect upon the material they are reading. Although Middleton is facetious in adopting the role of conjuror, his readers are nevertheless plunging into his ghoulish necromancy. The underlying premise is that by partaking in this imaginative venture they have a duty to remain vigilant. Hence, Middleton’s middle way is not a desirable outcome, but rather a state that is in play prior to any morally inflected decision, during which an individual is not fully capable of distinguishing good from
evil. The middle that his irony produces is not so much a way or path as it is an intermediate condition.

Middleton’s political irony is thus characterized by his enmeshing of the *via media* with the *via diversa* to form his own middle way that draws the interpreter into a conscientious engagement with his work. The effect correlates with the works of other Elizabethan authors and corresponds with Catherine Belsey’s idea of an interrogative text as one that “disrupts the unity of the reader...[and] invite[s] the reader to produce answers to the questions it implicitly or explicitly raises” (91). We find an earlier example of this kind of narrative in Thomas Nashe’s *Christ’s Tears Over Jerusalem* (1593). The work’s focus on the fall of Jerusalem, personified by Nashe as the grandmother of London, is not entirely a history of what was, for it is also a lesson for correcting current affairs. Nashe breaks from the narrative by beginning a paragraph with an address to his fellow citizens:

*London*, looke to thy selfe, for the woes that were pronounced to

*Jerusalem* are pronounced to thee. Thou, transgressing as
greiuously as shee, shalt be punished as grieuously. Fly from sinne,
take no pride or vaine-glorie in it; for pryde or vaine-glory in sinne,
is a horrible sinne, though it be without purpose to sinne. (112)

Nashe does not allow his readers to assume a privileged position of superiority in relation to the circumstances set out in the text, for Londoners transgress “as greiuously as” Jerusalem’s inhabitants have, meaning readers should “take no pride or vaine-glorie in” these follies, as they reflect the present state of things. Nashe’s tendency to leave readers to their own devices

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19 In his introduction to Middleton’s *Plato’s Cap*, Paul Yachnin suggests a similar interrogative dimension in the writer’s art when he notes that the mock almanac “develops a degree of reflexiveness on its own nature and conditions of production” (197).
suggests the lingering influence of Erasmus on later early modern literature. This is not an isolated case in Nashe’s canon. The via diversa that imbues the via media of Christ’s Tears Over Jerusalem is a blunter version of his sharp and abrupt conclusion to Pierce Penniless, his Supplication to the Devil (1592): “And so I break off this endless argument of speech abruptly” (145). Nashe’s texts are interrogative in their habit of prompting readers to consider their implications and meanings individually, thereby leaving them in an unresolved middle state.

Evidently, Nashe’s work served as inspiration for Middleton, given that Middleton frequently emulates Nashe in his writing. Middleton refers to Pierce Penniless and Nashe himself in The Black Book (1604):

> I was led by Pierce Penniless and his hostess, like a feeble farmer ready to depart England and sail to the kingdom of Tartary.[…]

(582-84)

> I am not a little proud, I can tell you, Barnaby, that you dance after my pipe so long, and for all counterblasts and tobacco-Nashes, which some call railers, you are not blown away[…]

(780-82)

Even earlier than The Black Book, we see the influence of Nashe in Middleton’s The Penniless Parliament of Threadbare Poets (1601). The name Pierce Penniless echoes Nashe’s original invention Pierce Penniless, his Supplication to the Devil, in which the author refers to himself as a threadbare poet. As Swapan Chakravorty observes in his introduction to The Penniless Parliament, Middleton’s use of the pen name “Simon Smellknave[…]…a pseudonym of Thomas Nashe commences Christ’s Tears, written after Pierce Penniless, with one “hundred vnfortunate farewels to fantastical Satirisme” (12). The fact that the text still contains socio-political content means that Nashe is being somewhat facetious in this statement; he retains a social commentary, but with a blunter edge. Middleton also adopted such a technique at times. Rachel E. Hile, for example, notes that in Father Hubburds Tales (1604) Middleton derives inspiration from Edmund Spenser’s Mother Hubberds Tale (1591) to develop a less overt form of social critique. Although Spenser’s text was controversial when it was first printed, by the time Middleton composed his pamphlet, Spenser’s text seemed “a more acceptable model for satires” (Hile 305).
Nashe,” further links him with the Elizabethan writer (1999). Chakravorty contends that the author “seems to have viewed himself as Nashe’s literary heir”; moreover, it is clear that Nashe’s satiric prose inspires Middleton’s political irony (1999). Jason Scott-Warren summarizes Nashe’s style: “Nashe bites (the pun on ‘gnash’ was current in his lifetime). His satirical vein is like a sword-thrust, a punch on the nose, a bee-sting; his words are steeped in gunpowder, or inspired by drinking it, as well as by fits of head-banging and wall-scratching” (207). Such a writer serves as a suitable inspiration for Middleton’s Microcynicon: Six Snarling Satires (1599), one of “ten books” suppressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, leading to the work being “publicly burned on 4 June 1599” along with Nashe’s own works (Wall 1970). Satire clearly infuses Middleton’s early work and his later writings—especially A Game at Chess (1624)—but after the ban, satire was no longer a narrative that Middleton could easily use to deal with political matters. Satire nevertheless finds its way into the Middleton canon at opportune moments, as in The Witch (1616), which was influenced by the scandal involving the earlier marriage of Frances Howard and Robert Carr as well as the couple’s trial concerning their involvement in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in late 1615.21

Middleton did not look to Nashe alone to develop his technique. In The Black Book he also mentions a performance of Christopher Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus “when the old Theatre cracked and frighted the audience” (156-57), and critics have noted similarities between the two playwrights. Paul Yachnin establishes a correlation between Marlowe’s and Middleton’s dramatic works with the concept he calls “Marlovian interpretive oscillation,” a mode of writing that does not allow the reader or audience member to rest comfortably upon a definitive interpretation (Stage-Wrights, 94). Meaning and intention remain unstable, leaving the

21 Chapter three will attend to these matters in more detail.
interpreter unable to reconcile the competing ideological representations within the narrative scope of a given performance. Like Yachnin, Scott McMillan observes Marlowe’s influence on Middleton’s irony:

Middleton obviously listened to Marlowe from an early age—one stanza of *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased* (16.97-102) is a paraphrase of *Edward II* (5.1.11-15), for example—and his mature work deepened the relationship. His ironic tone in both comedy and tragedy draws upon *The Jew of Malta* and *The Massacre at Paris*; the sharp focus and relentlessness of his satire are secular versions of the religious intensity of *Doctor Faustus*. (76)

Although Marlowe is generally praised for his use of the *via diversa* in plots that make outsiders into heroic figures, or at least protagonists, and render Christians as hypocrites, Andrew Duxfield perceives a regular theme of unity in Marlowe’s work: “Marlowe’s tragedies exhibit a profound interest in the…ideal of unity” that Elizabeth “and her Privy Council approached pragmatically by offering a *via media*” (1). Duxfield is not rash enough to suggest that Marlowe prescribes or produces unified politics or meaning in his dramatic canon, but the playwright’s dual attention to unity and flux lends a complex dimension to his works that resembles Middleton’s political irony’s dual influences of the *via media* and the *via diversa*. This twist on traditional Christian ideals of unity leads to questions regarding Middleton’s political irony in a Christian world, particularly given his frequent interest in Calvinism. To approach this issue, it is worth considering how Nashe and Marlowe present Calvinism in their works, but first we must attend to Middleton’s theological influences.
**Religion and Middleton’s Political Irony**

Middleton’s *The Two Gates of Salvation* (1609), later reissued as *The Marriage of the Old and New Testament* (1620) and *God’s Parliament House* (1627), is frequently used as a means for critics to establish the author’s Calvinist beliefs based upon its single reference to its religious ideology. The work is framed in the tradition of Christian typology: Middleton juxtaposes corresponding passages from the Old and New Testaments across adjacent pages of the printed book. In *The Two Gates*, Middleton refers at one point to the “elect” and “predestination”—tenets of Calvinism. My view of Middleton’s interest in Calvinism does not define Middleton as a Puritan or see his deployment of the religion’s discourse as fundamentalist, by which I mean the presumption to know with certainty the unforeseeable outcomes of Calvinism’s religious tenets. For instance, although Jack Herbert Heller’s reading of the character Master Penitent Brothel from Middleton’s *A Mad World, My Masters* (1605) appreciates the fluctuations in the character’s spiritual state, his approach to the Calvinist implications reinforces the binary either/or structure of the doctrine rather than attending to the ambiguous continuum the play presents. Heller declares Penitent Brothel “Middleton’s sharpest piece of irony,” but claims that the conversion from Brothel to Penitent is a seamless spiritual transmutation, which shows that “the way to be excluded from the world [of sin] is to repent” (87, 86). This either/or scenario ignores the ongoing process that repentance entails, a tendency that Heller had acknowledged earlier when he described repentance as “an ongoing

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22 *Two Gates* often functions as the text to which critics point in order to substantiate the view that Middleton writes with a Calvinist outlook. These readings stem from Paul Mulholland’s observation that *The Two Gates of Salvation* is heavily indebted to the Geneva Bible and that Middleton’s preoccupation with the ideas of predestination in the marginal glosses, which are at times likely Middleton’s own given a lack of source material, suggests a Calvinist interest (“Typology” 27-36). Mulholland, however, treats Calvinism in the text as a singular instance rather than as a trend that pervades the entire canon. It is therefore problematic to presume that Middleton’s religious inculcation programs him to assign the roles of elect and reprobate to his characters.
responsibility” that he claims differs from conversion “because Christians continue to sin” (35). Despite Heller’s insistence that there is a difference between repentance and conversion, both require vigilance. Converts and repentant Christians are thus always at risk of reverting to their sinful habits.

In Middleton’s universe, a person’s conversion or repentance also depends upon the interpretation of texts and theatrics. The transition from Brothel to Penitent, from sinner to saved, relies upon a confrontation with both literature and sin in order to change for the better. Penitent Brothel enters reading a religious tract advising him against adultery. Having recognized the folly of his ways and having pledged to the audience that he will “ne’er embrace her [sin] more—never—bear witness, never” (4.1.29), a Succubus enters and attempts to entice him into lascivious conduct. In this scene, the audience watches literature’s transformative capacity in action followed by theatre’s ability to confirm the legitimacy of this conversion through the public dimension and testing procedure of temptation. Although Penitent Brothel banishes her from the stage, cleansing it of her sinful presence, the Succubus’s call to “[r]emember!” seems two-fold (4.1.42): despite the fact that the text asks us to interpret this call as a memory of deviance—so that Penitent might return to his former corrupt state—it also reminds us that Penitent’s journey forward is fraught. He has not perfected his existence, meaning that he remains in a middle state. Hence, he must remember the Succubus, but in such a way as to eschew her. The past is not where he ought to reside, but he cannot presume that his present state is static. He remains in an uncertain liminal zone, like the Courtesan in Middleton’s A Trick to Catch the Old One (1606), who perceives that a person “that knows sin, knows best how to hate sin” (5.2.152). Middleton’s savvy characters thus do not presume to be free of sinful temptations,
and other characters’ presumed superiority or overzealous faith remains the target of his ironic edge.

This equivocal presentation of Calvinism does not lead persons to be able to ascertain their predestined state; it instead entertains a degree of free will. Christopher Haigh suggests that although Calvinism was widespread in early modern England, its tenet of double predestination was not always strictly adhered to by preachers or warmly accepted by subjects: “Although the simplest catechisms avoided the issue of predestination, from the 1580s the more advanced texts and many sermons taught election and assurance. But these proved to be highly unpopular doctrines, and writers such as Gifford, Perkins, Dent and Bayley had to devote much attention to meeting popular criticisms” (577).23 Middleton relies upon a predestination model, but certainly challenges the severity of “[w]hat is clear[:] that predestination was thought to bring about melancholy and despair – as Calvinist writers from Gifford and Dent to Bolton and Sibbes admitted” (Haigh 581). Middleton’s theatre delivers entertainment rather than sermons, meaning that his lessons are pluralistic rather than polemical. The playfully serious tension of Middleton’s political irony produces a Calvinist world in which audiences and characters are preoccupied with their religious state but cannot unveil its mystery.

Like Middleton’s, Nashe’s literary corpus is also frequently inflected with Calvinist undertones. Mauricio Martinez sees Nashe, in works ranging from Terrors in the Night (1594) to Pierce Penniless to Christ’s Tears Over Jerusalem, following the theological fascination with “the interior spaces of the closet and bedchamber” that “occupy a privileged position in a theology of presence,” influenced by religious thinkers such as John Calvin and later William Perkins and John Norden (46). As Kristen Abbott Bennett points out, however, in Lenten Stuffe

23 Double predestination is a Calvinist belief whereby persons are predestined by God to be saved or lost.
Nashe “mocks the Calvinist theory of predestination” (104). While Calvinism is of interest to Nashe, his wavering portrayals of its tenets remain ambivalent. As with Middleton, it remains difficult if not impossible to determine with any degree of certainty the author’s positions on the Calvinist religion, discrediting efforts to attribute a puritanical or zealous attitude to the author’s Calvinism.

An even more equivocal portrait of Calvinism can be found in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, to which Middleton sometimes refers. In addition to the mention of *Doctor Faustus* in *The Black Book*, the woodcut from the title page of Middleton’s *The Owl’s Almanac* (1618) pays homage to the imprint of the later printed edition of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1616). Between the production of *Doctor Faustus* that Middleton recalls (ca.1588-89) and the second printed edition, or B-text (1616), several changes were made to Marlowe’s original play text. In what is commonly referred to as the A-text (1604), the Good Angel states, “Never too late, if Faustus can repent” (sig. C2v). Playwrights were likely later hired to update the A-text and one of their changes was the alteration of this line, which reads in the B-text as “Never too late, if Faustus will repent” (sig. B4r). In his library edition of the play, Michael Keefer observes that the Calvinist ambivalence of the A-text is stripped away in the B-text with the single emendation that Samuel Rowley or William Birde made: “Enfolded in that conditional clause…is the brute question of fact on which the doctrine of double predestination hinges. If Faustus is going to be able to repent, then he is eternally out of trouble and it is never too late; but if he cannot, it will always have been too late” (84). The radical uncertainty of the line in the A-text, which suggests that Faustus might in fact be unable to achieve salvation, is circumvented by the alteration in the B-text, which presumes that Faustus has a choice of whether or not to repent. The B-text thus extirpates the interpretive oscillation that Yachnin identifies in Marlowe’s oeuvre.
Even if Middleton was a Calvinist, then, we can garner more knowledge of his religious habits from his literary influences’ fascination with and scepticism about Calvinism than from the fervent espousals of Calvinist tenets and beliefs that zealous Puritans of early modern London promulgated. As Joseph Campana puts it: “Attempts at sermonizing fail in Middleton” (473). Calvinism’s interpretive game of occluded divine truth and equivocal worldly knowledge produces an endless puzzle, but one with real consequences. In discussing Middleton’s *A Mad World, My Masters*, for instance, Derek Alwes provides an apt overview of God’s absence and the audience’s role in Middleton’s theatre: “the world of the play is one that God has apparently abandoned to its own devices. The only way spiritual values can be present in the plays is paradoxically by virtue of their absence, a void that the audience has to fill” (107). The ethical responsibility that Middleton’s interrogative dramas can inspire in attuned audience members is thus of their own devising, but remains in accordance with Protestantism’s values. As Ron Huebert suggests in his article on Middleton’s style, the compulsion to act ethically is a common element in Middleton’s art: “When the world is changing faster than might be comfortable for most human beings, when old values are under attack and new ones uncertain, the most disastrous course of all is the decision to simply drift” (608). Middleton’s Calvinism is informed by an unknowable outcome for citizens who must nevertheless persevere to maintain a righteous inner balance in the hope that they are elected. This middle state complements his political irony’s focus on the necessity to achieve a balanced government with the awareness that the times are always changing. The dramatist uses this fact to spur interpreters to be conscientious about their spiritual condition and that of their political state, encouraging them to take action to avert error.24

24 We will examine the interrelation of citizens’ inner spiritual states with their outer political state in chapter four.
With the exception of *The Witch* and *A Game at Chess*, Middleton’s originally intended audiences for the works this dissertation explores are governors. While early modern political theology, defined as the intersection of religion and politics, suggests that the sovereign is aligned with God and allocated the power and right to rule the multitude, Middleton’s writing does not tend to depict authorities in such an autonomous or unquestioned manner. His Calvinism’s lingering uncertainty contributes to this unsettling of hierarchical relations. The following passage from his earliest extant work, *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased*, reveals Middleton’s attitudes to the sovereign and the ways in which Calvinism’s mysteries can level political relations:

> For God hath no respect of rich from poor,
> 
> For he hath made the poor and made the rich.

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25 Political theology has its roots in the idea of the king’s two bodies: the body natural and the body politic (Kantorowicz). The ruler’s body takes on a transcendent quality when he or she becomes the sovereign. These medieval traditions have been repeatedly inculcated to the point where they are believed to inform modern-day concepts of the state. In this vein, Carl Schmitt is often cited for his claim that contemporary habits of governance “are secularized theological concepts” (36). His notion that the sovereign is the ultimate decider has been both refuted and supported as a view of early modern political theology, either through direct engagement with his theories (see Julia Reinhard Lupton’s *Citizen-Saints*) or through brief reference that is then overshadowed through recourse to historical tracts that inform the era’s views (see Shuger’s *Political Theologies in Shakespeare’s England*). Speaking to both of these trends in her survey of literature on Shakespeare and political theology, Jennifer R. Rust states: “Lupton is able to transcend the Schmittian focus on the singular person of the sovereign ‘decider’ who remains the dominant focus of Shuger’s political theology” (178). Although political theology is not the dissertation’s central focus, Middleton’s political irony’s ability to decentre the sovereign’s singular role as “decider” and bring him into the fold of his body politic to establish mutual governance with his people presents a challenge to the dominant habits of thought in early modern England and keen applications of Schmitt’s contemporary theories.

26 In her introduction to *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased* (1597), Shuger identifies Middleton’s Calvinism as a “radical dualism” that “pervades the whole poem, opposing nature to grace, morality to eternity, earth to heaven...In Middleton’s hands, in fact, the distinction between nature and grace takes a curious, almost gnostic, turn, where nature at moments seems an autonomous, demiurgic force opposed to divine wisdom” (1917). This reading derives from the poem’s place in a Christian universe that sees the afterlife in heaven as an ideal state, which establishes an apotheosis in relation to the lesser condition of this world. As my ensuing reading of the poem will show, I do not disagree with Shuger that this was a reality for early modern Christians; however, those who lived in this fallen world were left to face this cruel nature that was ostensibly created by God, leaving them in a middle state that is full of strife. My reading of Middleton’s Calvinism does not therefore disagree with Shuger’s, but ponders instead upon the responsibilities that are left to those who are (pre)destined to deal with the politics of this world in an ethical Christian manner.
Their bodies be alike, though their minds soar,
Their differences naught but in presumption’s pitch.
The carcass of a king is kept from foul,
The beggar yet may have the cleaner soul. (37-42)

The ironic questioning of whether a king or a beggar is more virtuous under the surface again shows Middleton’s consistent interest in Calvinism, given the lingering uncertainty of who are reprobates and who are the elect. However, we also see a blending of politics and religion occurring with the reminder that mortality renders everyone common and that what lies beyond worldly existence remains unknown for everyone from kings to beggars.27 Divine providence thus remains a mystery in the Middleton universe rather than a quality that monarchs can presume to wield naturally. Rulers remain important for Middleton, but not inherently superior.

These limitations deny authorities complete control and audiences utter faith in the abilities of their governors, leaving the ultimate judgment of God silent in the drama’s political irony. Middleton’s texts do not offer conclusive answers because the problems they stage cannot be completely resolved in their present moment or at least not through worldly means. Even if interpreters find ways to overcome the politically charged ironic dilemmas that Middleton stages, the hermeneutics of their competing politics are only temporarily quelled, for new events will give way to “emergent” issues. David Glimp applies such a lens to Middleton, claiming that the playwright’s theatre correlates with the concept of political emergence or emergency, a topic of interest in studies of political theology: “States of emergency prompt both critical reflection, an evaluative state requiring cognitive distance from the action and characters’ duress, and the

27 The contents of the passage show an interest in the monarch’s place in God’s world and the poem’s subject matter is clearly biblical, but critics have also deduced that the piece contains topical subject matter pertaining to the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. G.B. Shand argues that The Wisdom of Solomon is an indication of Middleton’s early interest in politics; he reads the work as infused with “patriotic protestantism” (“The Aim of Wisdom of Solomon,” 68).
affective intensity that derives from the complex interplay of sympathy and distance” (362). Although Middleton stresses the importance of dealing with current, pressing matters, the greater, ongoing emergency in his works concerns a future trajectory that extends beyond the present emergency and is collective in nature. In this way, Middleton’s work counters political theology’s tendency to confer the power to resolve such matters upon the sovereign. While Middleton upholds the sovereign as the people’s leader, he constructs him as a fellow person on this voyage. I therefore extend Glimp’s observation by arguing that, for Middleton, emergency is an ongoing condition that entails common dilemmas. These remain a matter for an individual decider (i.e., James) to resolve, but he is reminded of his shared fallen condition with the people and is encouraged to make decisions with collective interests in mind.

**Jacobean Politics**

Questioning singular governance or the notion of the “decider” is especially significant since the texts examined in this dissertation come from the Jacobean era. James’s reign almost directly coincides with Middleton’s writing career, with the exception of his early Elizabethan works, which are designated in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino’s *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (2007) as “Juvenilia,” and one extant Caroline Lord Mayor’s Show, *The Triumphs of Health and Prosperity* (1626). Although Elizabeth I used methods of surveillance by establishing the first secret service with Sir Francis Walsingham and his network of spies and drew upon the divine right of kings to substantiate her rule, she maintained an image of loving, mutual respect with her people and country and often made processions in public. James, on the other hand, was far more reserved; his writings were also much more emphatic in promoting God’s appointment of him to rule the kingdom. This historical context has led to incorrect generalizations concerning Jacobean governance. As Debora Shuger has observed, what has
typically defined James as a ruler is the anachronistic term “absolutism.” The attribution of this quality to James, or to the Stuarts more broadly, can lead to the misunderstanding that James was an unwavering tyrant, which is not the case. The king had to operate in the court’s English legal systems and was answerable to parliament. Shuger observes that the modern usage of the term “absolutism” seems to refer most commonly to a ruler governing independently of his kingdom: “Modern historians of Stuart political thought generally understand…[absolutism] as the opposite of the view that power derives from the community” (Political Theology, 56). As the context I have provided suggests, James did not operate outside of the polis or kingdom and in this context was not all that different from his predecessor. What distinguishes James is the prominent image he cultivated as the kingdom’s decider and his lack of interest in establishing a commonality with his public beyond this patriarchal role, thereby neglecting to acknowledge his interdependence.

Middleton’s political irony challenges James I’s governing technique and his reluctance to see politics as inevitably involving coexistence. In the previous example from The World Tossed at Tennis, for instance, James’s imposition of a peaceful stance during an outbreak of war suggests that such governance stems from individual politics. The plurality of Middleton’s political irony has the potential to disrupt the singularity of James’s government, but it does not oppose the monarch’s right to rule the kingdom. By framing the king’s politics in dialogue with others’ ideas, such as his son’s or his people’s, Middleton questions the ruler’s mastery over his subjects and the land. Irony thus has the potential to unsettle the autonomy of James’s and other governing authorities’ political missions by illuminating a fractured reality—prompting them to
see two ways at once. The jarring effect that the double vision produces is physically enacted in dramatic works that position the ruler onstage in allegories that the audience gradually knit together in their minds with moral stitch-work that Middleton provides while simultaneously splitting that mental image with the via diversa that disrupts unified understandings of Middleton’s structural irony. The ruler is left to sew the tears together anew with guidance and support from his fellow political actors. In shifting James’s role from omniscient director to leading player, Middleton stages a world in which conversation and mutual action are preferable to the stagnant imposition of solitary policies, making governance a collectively devised process.

The indeterminate state that Middleton’s political irony advances dispels the conventional via media that James projected by establishing himself as the ideal ruler who was able to achieve a balance between extremes. An example of James’s via media can be found in Daemonologie (1597), in which James tacitly presumes that his divine right as king protects him from wicked forces. In this work the king ostensibly delves into the dark arts of necromancy and witchcraft with God’s protection; the title page’s emblem, for instance, reads: “IN MY DEFENCE, GOD ME DEFEND” (sig. A1r). He positions himself as suitable to manoeuvre the murky subject matter and depicts his treatise as an exception to other studies of necromancy, such as those of Cornelius Agrippa, whose “curiosities of these black arts” are “both vnnecessary and perilous” (sig. A5r). In The Advancement of Learning (1604), Bacon recounts the journey that James takes

28 A better way to conceive of Middleton’s questioning of James’s methods in an absolutist vein, then, is to approach his governance as a stubborn imposition that is untenable rather than as a divinely appointed seat of authority. Since Middleton never posits that James is not fit to rule, his political irony challenges the king’s image and attitude but not his right to rule. In doing so, Middleton’s political irony calls into question the monarch’s presumptuous hubris to master time. As Mikhail Bakhtin puts it: “This old authority and truth pretend to be absolute, to have an extratemporal importance” (212). In actuality, the monarch remains in flux with his kingdom and must alter to suit the times.

29 As previously mentioned, Gregory Dodds notes this tendency in James’s and Erasmus’s works. Likewise, Jonathan Goldberg observes that James’s combination of Roman subterfuge and Stoic perspicuity form what the king regarded as ideal governance, despite remaining an uneven and hypocritical conglomeration (115).
in the narrative in similar terms. He compliments the king’s superior navigational and balancing skills:

Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering into these things for inquisition of truth, as your Majesty hath shewed in your own example; who with the two clear eyes of religion and natural philosophy have looked deeply and wisely into these shadows, and yet proved yourself to be of the nature of the sun, which passeth through pollutions and itself remains as pure as before. (177)

Bacon portrays the monarch as an idealized, unblemished ruler who is utterly virtuous before and after his engagement with irreligious practices.

The king’s relation to the subject matter of his work differs significantly from Middleton’s connection to witchcraft as articulated in his introductory material to *The Witch*. Middleton personifies the manuscript as feminine—following the logic of the play’s title, for the text is called “the witch”—and characterizes himself as the teacher “that first taught her to enchant” (11). Middleton’s reference to himself as a warlock who instructed the witch in her dealings is clearly playful and facetious; however, in making the jest, he admits a connection to the text and its subject matter instead of distancing himself from the subversive contents as James does. While both authors and their texts value virtue and do not encourage sinful behaviour, James champions a pure image of himself, which Bacon augments, whereas Middleton grounds his subjects and himself in the world through their shared humanity and their common yet fraught relationship with the world and its fallen state. Middleton’s political irony retains a ruptured outlook that does not presume to know the answers or to be able to resolve the dilemma whereas Bacon consolidates these conflicting energies over James’s own body, which
he presumes is able to master this tension. Middleton’s middle way instead unsettles the tacit unity that James, as the sovereign, advocates and stages an indeterminate middle state in which interpreters must continuously strive to locate a virtuous path, regardless of their social station.

This disruptive capacity that Middleton’s political irony can achieve thus unsettles stable images of the monarch’s personal body and of his kingdom, thereby demonstrating that any control over or perfection of these entities that the king is able to attain is fleeting and illusory. Middleton’s political drama revisits the concept of the body politic by considering the value of its many members’ interpretations of politics while nevertheless upholding the chief role of the king. The concept of the body politic involves a conglomerate social entity with the ruler operating as the head and the people functioning as the multiple limbs and organs, thereby constituting an ordered arrangement of the kingdom. This conceptualization of society manifests hierarchical relations that position the ruler as the head of state and the lowly peasants as the body’s feet. On the one hand, this structure troubles a fluid perspective of the body politic by advancing a top-down structure. On the other hand, the overall health and order of the body politic are shown to rely upon outside and internal forces that this discourse of unity commonly understands as harmful. As Jonathan Gil Harris notes, “Jacobean writers frequently argued that political ‘poisons,’ if properly administered by the body politic’s ‘physicians,’ could serve a medicinal function; in many cases, however, this…model generated problems which served to question rather than confirm the legitimacy of the body politic’s rulers” (Foreign Bodies, 14).

According to Harris, then, governance is complex and involves rulers relying upon elements that the dominant social order labels negative in order to remedy matters at hand. A cunning

30 Ernst Kantorowicz’s The King’s Two Bodies remains an invaluable resource on the concept of the body politic. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio’s collection The Body in Parts provides an overview of how and why early modern society conceived of the various contributors to the body politic’s functionality in terms of their human anatomy.
reasoning brings about a healthier social whole by acknowledging that a poison can also function as a cure. Looking two ways at once allows governors to rule a balanced society by comprehending their body politic as an entity they are unable to perceive perspicuously or to regulate entirely. The lingering ironic agents, whose purpose cannot be codified entirely as good or evil, and the interrogative structural irony of Middleton’s work undermine authorities’ omniscient understanding of people and things, rendering governance as an ongoing tension that Middleton’s political irony communicates.\textsuperscript{31}

Middleton frequently blurs binaries to question the ordered relations of society. An example is his mock almanac \textit{Plato’s Cap} (1604), in which Middleton has his character use proverbial language that closely resembles the politics Gil Harris describes: “‘one man’s meat is another man’s poison’” (164-65).\textsuperscript{32} The phrase’s equivocation transforms the world into a situational and uneven landscape that cannot be interpreted with utter certainty. This outlook matches Gil Harris’s investigation of a body politic whose success is predicated upon agents that would typically be considered ailments rather than allies. On a political scale, we see a similar

\textsuperscript{31} Such figures operate like the \textit{Silenus}. Deriving from the classical works of Alciabides and Plato, the \textit{Silenus} was widely understood as an ironic figure whose external appearance did not reflect its true inner condition. Erasmus writes on this topic: “Sileni were certain Images krauen and grauen and made after such a fasshio[n] that they might be opened & closed agayne which when they were close[d] had a scoreful and monsterous shape & when they were opened so[d]denly thei sewid as godes” (\textit{Sileni alcibiadis}, sig. A2r). In his discussion of the implications of the \textit{Silenus} with respect to the irony of earlier writers, Joseph Dane provides further context on the significance of the figure: “The importance of the texts by Erasmus and Rabelais does not lie in the definitions of irony they provide; nothing particularly new or interesting is added to the rhetorical tradition here. Rather it lies in their association of the Silenus image (and consequently the ironic Socrates linked to it) with general problems of interpretation. The Silenus becomes proverbial in the Renaissance, and, as a proverb, it becomes extremely flexible in meaning and potential application” (21). These ideas can be said to influence Middleton insofar as Calvinism leaves the matter of one’s spiritual condition unknown. As aforementioned in my analysis of \textit{The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased}, for example, Middleton points out our inability to discern whether a king or a beggar is one of God’s elect or a reprobate. On a political scale, then, the monarch cannot determine with utter accuracy the inner conditions of his subjects. Middleton’s political irony occasionally relies upon such characters in order to unsettle the governor’s presumptuous virtue as well as his ability to discern such qualities in others.

\textsuperscript{32} The phrase was popular in early modern England, but it perhaps has origins in Lucretius’s \textit{The Nature of Things}. The early modern proverbial language in Middleton’s text echoes the following concatenation of words from Lucretius’s work: “‘One man’s meat is another’s poison’” (4.637).
outlook dramatized in Middleton’s collaboration with Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl* (1611), in which the patriarch Sir Alexander attempts to control his son Sebastian’s love life by rejecting the dowry of his desired partner, Mary. Sebastian engineers a plot by means of feigning that he will marry Moll Cutpurse, a character based upon the real-life, cross-dressing Londoner Mary Frith. Speaking to each other, the couple use the same terms to describe Moll’s assistance to their plot as Gil Harris does the body politic:

*Sebastian.* [To Mary] This is the roaring wench must do us good.

*Mary.* [To Sebastian] No poison, sir, but serves us for some use,

Which is confirmed in her. (4.1.147-49)

Although the characters “use” Moll for their own service, they nevertheless enter into a collective, one that is fraught and diverse yet amicable. These mutual tactics, which remain a form of power, differ from Sir Alexander’s strategy, which projects his own selfish desires onto his son in order to secure or expand the patriarch’s lineage, wealth, and status.³³

Singular control over events is thus dismissed in favour of collective action that appreciates plurality. *The Roaring Girl*’s narrative demonstrates the theatre’s capacity to assemble persons as a collective by gradually bringing Sir Alexander out of the safe, private confines of his house and into the polis, which reflects the coexistent environment of the playhouse. As Gary Taylor argues, the theatre’s politics generate affective bonds through proximity: “The body politic consists of many corporal bodies, and theatre brings many bodies

³³ Kelly J. Stage shows the ways in which Moll’s actions “counter official power by the operation of trickery and wit” (418). Stage applies Michel de Certeau’s concepts of “strategy” and “tactic” from *The Practice of Everyday Life* to arrive at such a conclusion. In this work, de Certeau defines these two terms as follows: “limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power” (38). If by “power” de Certeau means total control, then this assessment is correct; however, there is a mutual, networked, or shared power that is involved in tactics, for they are ostensibly advantageous to the user, even if he or she does not share the typically privileged position of the strategist. I am therefore inclined to see Middleton as privileging tactics over strategies as a form of power or governance because of their collective nature (39).
into interactive proximity to one another, proximities that intensify emotional contagion”
(“History,” 56). This space unsettles the ostensible solitary control of individuals—be they patriarchs like Sir Alexander, the sovereign, or the naïve playgoer believing he has the answer—by bringing them into the fold of events and thus out of their isolated control over those events. Middleton’s political irony reminds audiences that life, like theatre, is a collaborative enterprise, making interpretive control of it and its events into an illusion. Once Sir Alexander recognizes that other people not only exist, but that they matter, he is able to widen his outlook on the world, causing him no longer to see Moll as monstrous or poisonous. After Trapdoor has revealed all of the traps and plots that Sir Alexander has laid for Moll over the course of the play, Sir Alexander pleads with Moll for forgiveness:

To all which, shame and grief in me cry guilty.

— [To Moll] Forgive me; now I cast the world’s eyes from me,

And look upon thee freely with mine own:

I see the most of many wrongs before thee

Cast from the jaws of Envy and her people,

And nothing foul but that. I’ll never more

Condemn by common voice, for that’s the whore,

That deceives man’s opinion, mocks his trust,

Cozens his love, and makes his heart unjust. (5.2.242-50)

The “common voice” is shown to be erroneous, for Sir Alexander discovers that Moll is not a whore, a thief, or a deceiver in any respect. His hypocritical methods of ensnaring her through deceitful schemes prove that he and the common voice he represents are deleterious and wrong. Middleton and Dekker’s representation thus reminds us that the multitude, whose common
slanders of Moll are voiced through the character of Sir Alexander, can also resemble an obstinate sovereign who looks only one way instead of two. Common opinion, in this context, differs from the broad plurality and inclusivity of Middleton’s political irony insofar as common opinion anxiously desires unity and agreement whereas Middleton’s political irony sees the whole picture, but in a way that appreciates its variegations without obliterating them. Up until this point, Sir Alexander has been the representative of those who see Moll only as a villain, but at this final moment he casts these eyes of the world aside and adopts a different perspective, joining the diverse collective whose mutual celebrations constitute a comedy.34

Perpetual Renovation: Opera Basilica and Citizen Politics

Time is also a factor for Sir Alexander, who insists on maintaining his legacy, his patriarchy, and himself, but eventually learns to change and adapt to the times. Middleton’s critiques of James function in a similar manner since James adamantly clung to his policies and politics, such as his mission as a peacemaker. Unlike the case of Sir Alexander, however, Middleton cannot make the governor into a subject of ridicule, even if he is brought back into the fold by the end. Hence, the circumstances change when the drama is intended for governors. Offensive content is omitted or framed in a less derisive manner and the stakes are higher concerning the interpretation of the political irony, since authorities are responsible for a larger body than their own selves.35 Although Middleton’s political irony indicates that the trajectory of

34 Middleton’s political irony’s ability to stage collective politics while retaining the diverse and conflicted energies of the polis resembles political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s concept of the “flesh of the multitude,” which represents “pure potential, an unformed life force, and in this sense an element of social being, aimed constantly at the fullness of life” (192). The perpetual renovation of Middleton’s ironic political world likewise resists unification in favour of a collective double vision that brings its governing authorities into the fold of the body politic.

35 Sir Alexander can be said to fall under the category of an authority since he is a justice, making him responsible for exacting penalties for various infractions; however, to my knowledge, he does not represent a living authority in London, meaning that Middleton and Dekker do not risk censorship as a result of his character.
the kingdom is important, it nevertheless situates the need to determine a temporary course of action within a melting pot of perpetually renovated politics based in past, present, and inchoate future tactics. The phrase “perpetual renovation” and its political nature derive from Bacon’s tract for James, The Advancement of Learning. Bacon draws attention to the impossibility of solidifying immortality in the present moment by looking to historical figures such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar and stressing that their everlasting quality is achieved through inscription and preservation in the collective memory of their people’s history, wherein “the copies cannot but leese of the life and truth” (168). These persons’ fame and our knowledge of them “remain in books” and are reinvigorated through “perpetual renovation” (168). Bacon’s concept, however, regards the image that is recorded in literature as exemplary and as perfectly represented. Whereas Bacon is preoccupied with ideal situations in which governors achieve an apotheosis that establishes a legacy that can be recalled in its full and complete glory again and again, Middleton concerns himself and his audiences with problematic events that require perpetual renovation and a recognition that the current governor has yet to achieve the lasting state that Bacon envisions. The perpetual renovation of Middleton’s political irony thus unsettles comfortable illusions of legacy or fixed politics and reveals that governors rely upon theatrics and the collective memory that performance generates in order to ensure longevity. Although governors hold a post that carries greater social responsibility, they must, like their citizens, negotiate a tempestuous world in an ongoing manner rather than acting as omnipotent deciders.

Middleton’s dramatic allegories, constructed out of topical allusions, follow Bacon’s suit only insofar as they present problems to rulers with the acknowledgement that it is their task to find a temporary solution to the matters at hand. Bacon refers to such regal tasks as “‘opera basilica’” (174). The phrase opera basilica refers to the works of a king, “towards which the
endeavours of a private man may be but as an image in a crossway, that may point at the way but cannot go it” (174). Bacon’s clarification that these works are for the monarch alone to deal with seems to uphold early modern political theology’s view of the sovereign as the decider; however, he also indicates that persons can “point at the way,” meaning that playwrights, like Middleton, cannot be responsible for solving the problem but can set out a crossroads for the monarch to navigate. Subjects cannot presume to tell the king how to rule, but they can present public concerns by framing them in a pointed yet ambiguous manner.36 Middleton’s political irony’s ability to accomplish this task thus makes it the greatest possible intervention a playwright can make in Jacobean governance.

The first two chapters of this dissertation investigate dramas that are written with an audience comprising governors in mind and stage opera basilica for them. Middleton’s first extant play The Phoenix (1604) makes it clear from the outset that Phoenix is a loose representation of James, given that the play’s Duke, who becomes Phoenix’s predecessor by the end, has reigned for “[f]orty-five years,” which is exactly how long Elizabeth had ruled England (1.7). Using this allegorical framework that shapes the disguised-duke play, the chapter first establishes a case for E.K. Chambers’s 20 February 1604 performance date. By situating the play at this time, before James was about to proceed through the streets of London to celebrate his accession to the English throne, we can deduce that the play’s opera basilica instruct the monarch on what he must bring about in his own polis. The chapter first purports that Middleton’s drama unsettles the monarch’s comfortable image of himself as the decider through its use of a boy company and the metaphorical concept of the phoenix, which both suggest that

36 In her examination of political censorship in the period, Annabel Patterson states that “ambiguity becomes a creative and necessary instrument” for early modern writers, for whom capital punishment was an ongoing concern (11). Direct, radical action was not an option; hence, Middleton’s political irony is the most effective means available for challenging Jacobean politics.
James remains in a state of development as a new king of England. The narrative’s dramatic irony and disguised- duke plot further the image of James as fallen since he must rely upon secrecy in order to exert his virtuous policies. In addition to these frameworks, the second plot involving the satire of the many knights James’s reign produced mocks the new king’s recent actions. The Jeweller’s Wife collapses these two plots, but her response to Phoenix and the lingering ambiguity concerning her spiritual condition cause tension rather than cohesion. Middleton’s conclusion augments this uneasiness with the conditional and contractual statement that “when” these events are brought about, harmony can be achieved (15.349). The chapter ends with some speculation about the success Middleton might have had in encouraging the king to don such theatrical governance.

Chapter two looks to Middleton’s only regular patron during his career, namely the city of London and its Lord Mayors’ Shows. Focusing primarily on his first Show, *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613), the chapter critiques the excessively moral readings that pervade earlier scholarship on the Shows. Keeping an eye to the didactic form of the Show, the section looks as well to recent criticism, particularly Tracey Hill’s book, which claims that a “critical edge…can be detected in the Shows – especially [in] those by Middleton” (*Pageantry and Power*, 301). By observing the ways in which Middleton positions the Lord Mayor as an actor or Everyman within the *psychomachia* allegory of his Show, I argue that he offers a unique and interrogative approach to the genre. Middleton’s textured oscillation of Truth and Error presents the city’s authority with a world in flux, thereby encouraging the vigilance and humility that is required to steer London on a safe course through the year ahead. Beyond these dramatic techniques, Middleton’s printed text complements his vision by toying with conventional praise. More specifically, Middleton plays upon the fact that he and the Lord Mayor share the same name
(Thomas Myddelton). Through this irony and efforts to replicate the pageants’ political irony in the printed book, Middleton further connects the governor with his people and reminds them that they share a purpose as well as a fallen state.

The final two chapters gradually shift the dissertation’s focus from *opera basilica* to what I am calling “citizen politics,” or the responsible and political acts of interpretation that playgoers devise. For this reason, the third chapter focuses on *The World Tossed at Tennis*, a masque intended for a “royal night” but never actually performed for James and Charles. It was subsequently “tossed” into the commercial theatre, with some alterations, and later printed with further materials included. To begin discussing this stage oddity, I examine the case of Middleton’s *The Witch* in tandem with the historical scandal of Frances Howard and Robert Carr, which involved Howard’s divorce from the Earl of Essex, her ensuing marriage to Carr, and the couple’s involvement in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. Middleton’s use of materials from verse libels in his loose allegory of these events positions the play within a public discourse, but *The Witch*’s nature as theatre retains an ambiguous interpretive dimension that distinguishes it from libel culture in encouraging spectators to draw their own conclusions. While it is folly to claim that *The Witch* gave playgoers a sense that they had any political power, the play does mock James’s questionable governance concerning the recent affairs that Middleton alludes to and does offer attuned audience members a position of interpretive superiority by aligning them closer to divine providence in relation to these politics than their monarch seemed to be. Although God’s motives remain unknown to all, all know James’s errors.

In positioning governors as deciders who are susceptible to error and are accountable to a greater authority, Middleton creates an ironic dimension for his audience that resembles the reality he and Rowley attempted to show James and Charles. When the inaugural court
performance of *The World Tossed at Tennis* was cancelled for unknown reasons, the masque that was transformed into a play offered citizens an opportunity to interpret topical matters democratically in the commercial theatre. This experience resembles Middleton’s prior efforts with *The Witch*, but unlike *The Witch*, which capitalizes upon recent political history for entertainment’s sake alone, *The World Tossed at Tennis* plays into a burgeoning culture of the news that the Thirty Years’ War brought about in London. As such, its ironic dimension carries greater importance for the audiences in the theatre, which was likely the Swan, and later for book buyers. From the portions of the work added, removed, or removed and later added again, we can glean that Middleton and Rowley point to the work’s subversive nature to foster citizen politics. Its indirect involvement in the news market contributed to a counterculture that we will see James later taking steps to censor.

The topic of news culture and censorship concludes with Middleton’s final play *A Game at Chess*, which satirized the prolonged marriage negotiations James instigated between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta. Although the text has received substantial attention for its satire of the Spanish, or the Black House, my contribution instead looks to the ways in which Middleton uses the chess allegory of major political players as the play’s primary appeal to avert substantial attention not only from his criticisms of the White House, but also, and more importantly, from the pawn plot, which tells a very different history of what occurred. Whereas the plot concerning the main pieces champions a zealous Protestantism and the victories of the White House’s English royalty, the pawn plot undoes this jingoism by indicating the realities of what occurred, namely that the English royalty put the nation at risk and that the country’s only saving grace resided in the mysteries of divine providence. These intertwining plots create an interrogative experience for the audience that revises *opera basilica* as citizen politics by
endowing audience members with the responsibility to interpret their recent history for what it was rather than what they were told it is. As we will see, then, Middleton’s political irony inspires responsibility from its many audiences by continually reminding them that unity requires vigilance and is thus to some degree as illusory as the dramatic allegories that Londoners and their governors are led to interpret.
Chapter One: Ruling as Obeying in *The Phoenix*

Middleton’s *The Phoenix* begins with the old Duke reflecting that he has reigned for “forty-five years” (1.7), a statement that immediately establishes the fact that Middleton’s first extant single-authored play preoccupies itself with the new monarch’s politics. Elizabeth I, James’s predecessor, had ruled as Queen of England for this exact duration, so Middleton’s protagonist Phoenix serves as an allegorical representation of the king, for whom the play was performed. These topical allusions manifest a didacticism that has been interpreted both as propagandist and satiric. This chapter locates a middle ground between these scholarly views and in so doing claims that Middleton’s drama unsettles the early image of superiority James promoted in his reprinted tracts, *Basilicon Doron* (1603) and *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1603), and points to work that James had yet to complete. By substantiating previous suggestions that 1604 was the year in which the play was first performed, I establish that its *opera basilica* concerning a disguised ruler’s navigation of his polis are preoccupied with the real journey that James would soon take in *The Magnificent Entertainment* (1604). This entertainment involved the civic celebrations of James’s accession, to which Middleton contributed a speech. This historical backdrop establishes an interpretive framework for the monarch: James is encouraged to wrestle with the issues presented to him, which echo topical matters in his first year as king, and to enact social change as he embarks on his travels through his own cityscape.

The *opera basilica* of Middleton’s political irony are supported by the material condition of the play and the mythology that informs its political theology. By having a boy actor play Phoenix—the allegorical representation of James—Middleton stages the adult monarch as younger, metaphorically addressing the infancy of his reign in England. However, Middleton
also praises James for his wisdom. I therefore posit that Middleton both questions and upholds James’s abilities as a ruler, perceiving him as fit to reign but reminding him that he is not infallible. The myth of the phoenix and its connection to the king’s body natural and body politic accentuates his shared humanity and fallen state, indicating a fluid concept of sovereignty that destabilizes the independent role of the decider.

The audience’s inability to unify the image of the sovereign complements the play’s presentation of a generally harmonious play-world that retains a degree of ambiguity. In attending to the play’s structural features, specifically its sustained use of dramatic irony and its double plot, we can see that Middleton crafts these structural features as ways to create unresolved matters rather than a complete picture. The Jeweller’s Wife functions as a converging point to these overarching narratives, but the discovery of her crimes leads to more problems not only for the play-world governor but also for Jacobean audiences concerning the proliferation of knighthoods after James assumed the English throne. Middleton thus constructs an interrogative narrative for the monarch that attempts to convey the fallen nature he shares with his subjects while still celebrating him as a just, learned, and righteous king who has work to accomplish.

_The Phoenix_ ends with an effort to spur the monarch to enact the social change it presents in his own kingdom. In looking forward to a future state that is based upon what has transpired onstage, Middleton offers the sovereign a contract that has yet to be fulfilled during his own travels around his city. The chapter concludes with observations on what actual social change might have occurred as a result of Middleton’s play.

**The Phoenix in Its Historical Time and the Contemporary Critical Conversation**

Scholars hypothesize that _The Phoenix_ may have been performed at some point between 24 March 1603, when James assumed the throne, and 1604, when the theatres reopened after a
prolonged outbreak of plague. However, James Leeds Barroll’s historical documentation and evidence concerning the 1603-1604 plague period indicates only brief windows—between 28 April 1603 and 5 May 1603 or between 9 May 1603 and 19 May 1603—during which The Phoenix could have been performed before the theatres fully closed (102). Middleton’s reference to “the plague that never leaves the city” makes it even less likely that The Phoenix was performed during these intervals, as the line suggests that the bout of plague lasted for some time (15.231). Middleton also makes a reference to “the Turk” as an “Infidel” (15.252, 253), which resembles James’s mention of “cruell Turkes and Infidels” in Lepanto (sig. B1v). Like Basilicon Doron and The True Law of Free Monarchies, Lepanto was another Scottish text reprinted for English book buyers “[w]ithin three weeks” of Basilicon Doron’s March 1603 release date (Doelman King James, 23). Although Turks are regularly referred to as infidels in early modern literature, the use of this phrase with a court performance in mind likely caters to James, especially given that Turks are not mentioned until this concluding scene. Basing the play’s date upon Lepanto alone, however, is tenuous given the popular correlation between Turks and infidels at the time, indicating that more evidence is required in order to situate the play in relation to James’s accession. Looking to other disguised-duke narratives, we can locate a means by which to accomplish this task. Marston’s The Malcontent (1603) was most likely performed in 1603 and printed in 1604.37 At the beginning of Act 2, Scene 3, Pietro observes: “The night growes deepe and fowle” (sig. D1v). This same line appears interrupted in The Phoenix. Near the end of Phoenix and Quieto’s meeting, Phoenix begins to say, “The night grows deep, and—” before he is cut off by two Officers who enter the scene (12.203). I have been unable to locate another concatenation of these words in Early English Books Online (EEBO) and therefore

37 In their introduction to the play in The Selected Plays of John Marston, MacDonald P. Jackson and Michael Neill provide 1603 as the year of performance, following G.K. Hunter’s persuasive case for this date (190).
conclude that Middleton gained inspiration to write *The Phoenix* from seeing Marston’s *The Malcontent* in 1603 before the theatres closed, and that he reproduced this line, consciously or not, from memory. These details appear to indicate that *The Phoenix* was written for performance after James’s accession and likely composed during the time in which the playhouses were closed.38 This chapter therefore positions *The Phoenix* historically as a play that was first performed before James at court in the winter of 1604 and later in the year at St Paul’s for theatregoers.

This dating is in keeping with E.K. Chambers’s suggested court performance of 20 February 1604, which he based on the title page’s indication that the play was staged before James, and the corresponding moments in the records at which a performance at court might have occurred (3.439). Chambers substantiates his historical inquiry with a letter by Philip Gawdy dated 20 February 1604, in which Gawdy writes: “‘Ther hath bene ij playes this shroftyde before the king and ther shall be an other to morrow’” (4.118, n. 4). Lawrence Danson and Ivo Kamps have supported Chambers’s groundwork with reference to Gawdy’s records and to Chambers’s reference to payment made to Edward Pearce:

Separate entries in the Chamber Accounts record two payments of £10 each made on 20 February 1604 to Prince Henry’s company and to “Edward Pearce m’f of the children of Powles” (Chambers, IV, 169). Since there is no indication that the Paul’s Boys performed before the King at court at any other time, it is reasonable to conclude that one of the plays referred to by Gawdy

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38 Although *The Magnificent Entertainment* (1604) occurred on 16 March 1604, ushering the monarch through the streets of London in celebration of his crowning, James had already been appointed King of England on 24 March 1603. The public festivities had been severely delayed as a result of the plague.
is the same for which the Paul’s Boys were paid on 20 February 1604; and, if the title-page of the 1607 quarto speaks true, that play was *The Phoenix.* (“Works Included,” 346)

Furthermore, Chambers’s supposition is based upon the quarto text of *The Phoenix*, first printed in 1607 with a title page stating that the play “hath beene sundry times Acted by the Children of Paules, And presented before his Maiestie” (sig. A1r). Although there is no unequivocal extant evidence to establish that the play was in fact performed before James at court, it remains highly probable, especially given Thomas Pendleton’s account of the title pages of Paul’s boy-company plays: “the title pages of all but two of these quartos claim their plays had been acted ‘lately’ or ‘sundry times’ or ‘divers times’ at Paul’s, but only *The Phoenix* is said to have been played at court” (84). Pendleton was likely unaware of the variant 1608 title page of *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, which adds to the information from the 1608 quarto’s title page that the play had also been performed at Blackfriars and “before his Maiestie on New-yeares night [1607] last” (sig. A2r). Mulholland suggests that these details were likely provided by Henry Rocket, the publisher, after his purchase of the edition, to George Eld, the printer, for commercial reasons: “Rockytt probably supplied additional details of performance and authorship and insisted on displaying this information prominently on the reset title page to promote sales” (*A Trick*, 9). The attention paid to correcting or adding these specifics as they relate to performance in the quarto text’s printing leads us to the fair assumption that the details on *The Phoenix*’s title page are accurate and that the play was performed before James at court. Dating *The Phoenix* after the outbreak of plague in 1603 and before the king’s accession celebrations allows us to appreciate the play’s lessons. By staging Phoenix’s travels at home for James on 20 February 1604, prior to
the king’s own journey through the city on 15 March 1604, Middleton provided the new monarch with a governing model to emulate.\textsuperscript{39}  

Middleton’s instruction figures in the little critical attention that \textit{The Phoenix} has received, and the scholarship that exists on the play focuses on straightforward didacticism or satire. Clifford Davidson has interpreted \textit{The Phoenix} as a close cousin of the moral play derived from the popular dramatic tradition of the medieval period, which was adopted and reworked by the early modern theatre. More specifically, he associates the genre’s overt religiosity with the proto-nationalism and idealism that he sees in \textit{The Phoenix} and Middleton’s Lord Mayors’ Shows (122). Davidson’s generalization about the play corresponds with Leonard Tennenhouse’s new historicist interpretation of the denouement to \textit{The Phoenix} as an example of the subversion-to-containment model that obliterates the social vices that have contaminated the body politic over the course of the play (159).\textsuperscript{40}  

Tennenhouse’s interpretation of \textit{The Phoenix}’s politics is as troublesome as the oppositional models that Margot Heinemann and Douglas F. Rutledge apply to the play. These scholars claim that the play is merely satirical, a supposition they support by examining the problematic character of the dishonourable Knight (Heinemann 70-71; Rutledge 101).\textsuperscript{41}  

Historical accounts indicate that James made a plethora of knighthoods available to

\textsuperscript{39} The play, of course, was also staged at Paul’s, and as aforementioned, references to the plague and \textit{The Malcontent} suggest that any public performance at Paul's would have taken place after the theatres were reopened in 1604.

\textsuperscript{40} Mark Fortier offers a concise summary of the containment/subversion dynamic: “New historicism has been strongly influenced by the work of Foucault on the ways that institutions of power foster and channel such forces as sexuality, madness, illness and crime...This has given rise to the twin concepts of subversion and containment: the state needs to foster insurrection in order to exercise its powers of response; representations of radical and subversive activity and thought on the stage, especially when ultimately overcome, contribute to the legitimacy and authority of the powers that be” (165). Stephen Greenblatt’s essay “Invisible Bullets,” located in his book \textit{Shakespearean Negotiations} and other collections, provides a popular example of this dynamic. A more recent example of this trend with respect to \textit{The Phoenix} is Trish Thomas Henley’s passing generalization of the play as “a utopian fantasy about a new heir who will see and correct the corruption of his subjects” (266).
others who in turn received bribes for them from those who could afford them, thereby inflating the value of knighthoods. 42 James’s decision threw established ideas of status into disarray by obliging those of a certain income to purchase them. Hence, the station of a knight could be purchased as well as earned, causing knights to become less reputable and more common. In the play, the Knight’s presence and his seedy conduct comment upon this recent debacle. While the play certainly suggests these readings, critics have tended to attribute a predominant intention or purpose to them, thereby interpreting The Phoenix as either propaganda or satire. The scholarship thus polarizes into a binary, wherein Middleton’s play is seen as either an earnest praise of the king and his governance or a politically charged critique of his recent error.

Alan C. Dessen provides a more balanced reading of the play, which allows for a nuanced perspective of its moral implications as well as of its criticisms of James’s politics. Like Davidson, he links The Phoenix with the medieval moral dramatic tradition but distinguishes between its literal surface and an allegorical level that positions The Phoenix in relation to an estates play, noting that the exposure of all the vices of Ferrara represents “a larger thematic unity, the health of the kingdom” (293). Dessen’s reading provides an alternative to William Power’s allegorical interpretation, which approaches loosely defined characters as direct representations of political persons, particularly Proditor, whom Power interprets as Ralegh (57). Dessen produces an interpretation of allegory more akin to the doubleness that Middleton’s

41 Another example of this critical trend is Albert Tricomi’s examination of anti-court drama; however, unlike Rutledge and Heinemann, Tricomi reads the references to knights as a failed effort on Middleton’s part to achieve a militant position (20). Tricomi’s insistence that the play be read as recalcitrant reveals his proclivity to interpret political early modern drama through a narrow lens that perceives plays as either radically oppositional or wholly propagandist.

42 Lawrence E. Stone describes James’s prodigal award of knighthoods as follows: “With the accession of King James on 24 March 1603, royal parsimony was suddenly replaced by the most reckless prodigality: in the first four months of the reign he dubbed no fewer than 906 knights. By December 1604 England could boast of 1,161 new knights, which means that the order had suddenly been increased almost three-fold” (74).
political irony facilitates. We can still deduce, as N.W. Bawcutt states, that “Middleton wrote his play with a royal audience in mind” (287), but we should avoid hazarding guesses that the play attempts to offer James a rigid lesson or that it maps Jacobean reality comprehensively onto the play world. It is necessary, then, to reconsider Marilyn L. Williamson’s observation that *The Phoenix* is “the most sententious and didactic of all Thomas Middleton’s plays” by reconsidering the lesson she observes as fractured and interrogative rather than static and contained (183). Despite the play’s championing of James by means of its virtuous protagonist, *The Phoenix’s* didacticism produces *opera basilica* by means of Middleton’s political irony instead of propaganda because the king’s work is just beginning rather than finished.

**Fluid Sovereignty: The Materiality of the Boy Actor and the Myth of the Phoenix**

Middleton’s political irony operates through seeing two ways at once, or seeing multiple dimensions of time; in *The Phoenix*, Middleton portrays this double perspective through the boy actor who plays Phoenix. Although the decision to cast a boy actor as James is made in order to avoid censorship, given that it was illegal to stage living monarchs at the time, the choice indicates more than merely an effort to distance the allegorical representation of James from the king himself. By loosely tying the monarch to a boy actor, Middleton destabilizes attempts to regard Phoenix as perfect, as he remains a person in the course of development rather than a complete figure. Middleton still has the Duke open with commendations of Phoenix’s “serious studies, and…fruitful hours” which shall “grow up into judgment” (1.34, 1.35), suggesting that

43 Kevin A. Quarmby astutely cautions against the tendency to see the emergence of disguised-duke plays as an oppositional response to James’s monarchy, given that the genre has a trajectory that precedes his reign. Quarmby suggests that the Whig bias that develops after the Restoration leads to anti-Stuart attitudes that seep into modern scholarship. This is a warranted caveat, but Quarmby at times seems to go so far as to preclude any reading of the dukes as representing James (6). My approach retains an attention to these fictional rulers as figurations of James without imposing a modern factional politics onto the early modern period or attributing political intention to the playwright beyond the reproduction of current, competing or ongoing political issues in an ironic framework that presents *opera basilica*. 

51
Phoenix already possesses excellent knowledge at the outset of the play. The republications of *Basilicon Doron* and *The True Law of Free Monarchies* would have demonstrated James’s “serious studies,” but the adult ruler still needed to “grow up” as a mature governor of his new body politic, namely England. Hence, the youth of the boy actor stands in for the metaphorical inexperience that James has of England and its politics. Although Fidelio proclaims Phoenix the “wonder of all princes, precedent, and glory,” as well as the “[t]rue phoenix,” Phoenix must first develop the vaster wisdom of a king by learning of his second body, the body politic, and travelling through it. Despite any successful achievement of harmony and maturity that Phoenix makes along this journey, Middleton’s politic irony indicates that the kingdom and Phoenix’s own body remain transitional and transformative entities that cannot be ordered with any sense of longevity.

Critics’ previous readings of the boy actors conflict with my argument given their claims that Phoenix remains prominent and authoritarian, regardless of whether or not the play had been staged by a boy company, but textual evidence suggests otherwise. Michael Shapiro maintains that Phoenix would have been played by an older boy actor, especially given the sophisticated language and elegant speech that the role demands (117). The prophecy Phoenix tells to Proditor shortly before they are about to execute their plot to assassinate Phoenix’s father, however, suggests that even if Phoenix was played by the eldest boy in the company, who was roughly eighteen years of age, he did not appear to be the tallest. Proditor’s metaphorical dream vision that ostensibly foreshadows his downfall indicates the discrepancy between Phoenix’s age and size:

There was a villainous raven seen last night

Over the presence chamber in hard jostle
With a young eaglet. (15.19-21)

A raven is a rather large bird and obviously correlates with Proditor in its “villainous” description. The reference to Phoenix as the “young eaglet,” on the other hand, is a compliment, for such birds were symbolically regal, but it also likely draws attention to the shorter stature of the actor playing Phoenix when compared to Proditor. Phoenix is not a pipsqueak boy, for he has a demanding part; however, these lines reveal that he is not the largest boy in the company. This discrepancy compromises attempts to interpret Phoenix as an idealized embodiment of James. Such poignant staging does not clearly target James in a satiric vein, for as already mentioned, the text’s likening of Phoenix to an eaglet is a compliment; instead, the text, when performed, merely levels the playing field: James is “one of the boys.” The ruler stands on equal or comparable footing with his subjects, allowing the boy company to frame governance in a mutual manner, wherein the Machiavellian villain Proditor is presumably the largest figure who looms over the other boys. By communicating that Phoenix is the lead actor but still inexperienced in some capacity, which his people can assist him with, Middleton’s play reminds James that his monarchy is provisional rather than solidified by prompting him to see himself two ways at once: old and young. The boy actor’s body thus represents an appropriate vehicle to communicate that the nature of monarchy involves change and transformation. Boy actors

44 E.M.W. Tillyard explains: “The aspray, or osprey, was a small eagle, king among birds, and fish were supposed to yield themselves voluntarily, turning their bellies up to him” (35). This early modern understanding suggests a natural devotion that other members of the body politic should show to Phoenix, regardless of their size.

45 Edel Lamb notes that the “[p]layers at Paul’s in 1599…included the seven-year-old Thomas Ravenscroft and the 13-year-old John Tompkins” (3). By the time of performance in 1604, more boys would have presumably been added to the roster, but this evidence suggests that the boys would have been between at least twelve and eighteen years in age, if not younger.
represent liminal bodies in early modern scientific discourse. Their stage of development is neither fully male nor female. As Edel Lamb observes:

The changing body of the boy cannot indicate a definitive gender identity; it is always in transition. As Germaine Greer claims, the period of life, now known as adolescence, “is not a moment but a process.” The boy, therefore, exposes the temporal process of becoming adult and becoming masculine. Moreover, this cycle is commonly represented in the period as circular and old age is often imagined as a second childhood. Images of childhood thus signal the unstable nature of manhood through a variety of associations to gender, age, the body and temporality. (30-31)

The Phoenix conveys this metaphorical arc of life by fusing it with the symbolic conception of royal lineage as a phoenix that is everlasting yet transitional. Given the few lines that Middleton allocates to the old Duke, we can infer that he too would have been played by a younger member of the company. The cyclical nature of human life and governance that the boy actor’s body stages stresses the point that James, like Phoenix, is part of a legacy greater than himself. The Duke pronounces at the outset, “We know we’re old, my days proclaim me so” (1.6). He indicates that the current condition of the body politic (“We”) is currently old and that it is because of his personal age (“my days”) that this is so. Phoenix, on the other hand, must attain

46 Thomas Lacquer contextualizes early modern children’s liminal nature with respect to their sex with the story of “a girl…Marie, who became Manuel when she sprouted a penis ‘at the time of life when girls begin their monthlies’;…A bit more heat or acting the part of another gender can sometimes bestow a penis, which entitles its bearer to the mark of the phallus, to be designated a man” (126).

47 The convention of young boys playing older men is also not an uncommon practice on the early modern stage. In his ode for the boy actor Salomon Pavy, for example, Ben Jonson recounts the boy’s striking ability to play older men.
the necessary experience in order to rise out of his father’s ashes and assume the throne. However, by opening the play with the old Duke stating “we…have seen our face / In our grave council’s foreheads,” Middleton portrays James’s end as much as his beginning, given that the old Duke represents the inevitable end the king faces (1.2-3). No matter how robust Phoenix’s body and character are, the play reminds us that the monarch is susceptible to change.

Middleton presents the cycle of kingship not only through the body of the boy actor, but also through the myth of the phoenix, which its prince allegorically represents. The name Phoenix suggests fluidity and change, especially in relation to governance. Ernst Kantorowicz contextualizes the mythical bird’s relation to the body politic:

The species, of course, was immortal; the individual, mortal. The imaginary bird therefore disclosed a duality: it was at once Phoenix and Phoenix-kind, mortal as an individual, though immortal too, because it was the whole kind. It was at once individual and collective, because the whole species reproduced no more than a single specimen at a time. (389-90)

By loosely representing James as a young prince of eighteen—when he was thirty-seven years old at the time—and pitting him onstage with an equally incongruous allegorical representation of his predecessor—given that Elizabeth, unlike the Duke, was neither a man nor alive at the time of James’s accession—Middleton presents James as both “Phoenix and Phoenix-kind.”48 He is one ruler in a long lineage that precedes him and proceeds from him, and he is new to this role as King of England, despite having been King of Scotland his entire life. The play’s allegory communicates the incongruity between James’s wisdom as a governor and his inexperience with

48 Middleton also averts censorship, given that the youth of Phoenix makes it not immediately apparent that the character correlates with James.
the kingdom of England at its outset when Lussurioso comments that Phoenix is “elder in virtues than in years” (1.17). Phoenix already possesses the necessary abilities and character to govern, but he lacks the experiential knowledge that time and action will give him. As the Duke remarks: “what is in hope begun, / Experience quickens; travel confirms the man” (1.25-6). The Phoenix therefore champions James as an admirable ruler, but advances the notion that the monarch must still gain an understanding of his kingdom in order to manage England adeptly.

The play thus frames governance as interdependent in nature, wherein the sovereign must also learn from and be managed by the people. Middleton resorts to classical texts to situate this perspective in the play. The Duke commends Phoenix for understanding the following “true knowledge” (1.58): “He that knows how to obey, knows how to reign” (1.57). This maxim derives from Aristotle’s Politics. When discussing a learned constitutional rule to which the monarch ought to adhere, Aristotle suggests “that men are praised for knowing both how to rule and how to obey, and he is said to be a citizen of excellence who is able to do both well” (66). This model of concomitant politics communicates a power dynamic in which the ruler relinquishes his mastery over his subjects and shares governance as well as service with his people. Melissa E. Sanchez has shown a similar relation at work in the monarchies of Elizabeth and James, which adhered to the commonplace “claim that sovereign and subject, like husband and wife, are bound as much by reciprocal love as by law or necessity” (3). In Basilicon Doron, however, James’s description of marriage frames this relationship in a dominant manner in which the Prince is the head that orders the unruly civic, female body: “Ye are the head, shee is your body; It is your office to command, and hers to obey; but yet with such a sweet harmonie, as shee should be as ready to obey, as ye to command; as willing to follow, as ye to go before; your loue being wholly knit vnto her, and all her affections louingly bent to follow your will”
Middleton’s deployment of Aristotle questions the ostensible supremacy that James articulates in this passage. Despite the king’s references to “loue” and “affections,” these qualities are not mutual since James advocates that the prince’s wife, and metaphorically his subjects, ought to “obey” and the governor should “command,” whereas Middleton, like Aristotle before him, asserts that in order to rule, a leader must first learn to obey his people.

Middleton’s fluid conception of the prince’s governance differs significantly from the image that James presented to his people. Soon after he was hailed King of England, James’s works on governance, Basilicon Doron and The True Law of Free Monarchies—written initially for the Scottish people—were reprinted for the English public. Given the educational scheme of his play, Middleton would likely have read these works, especially the former, or at least have been aware of their existence before composing the play, for the printed books were more than likely available before The Phoenix was performed.49 Middleton’s familiarity with James’s writing also remains a possibility given that in Thomas Dekker’s printed text of The Magnificent Entertainment’s reception, intentions, and performances, Dekker credits Middleton with a contribution to his pageantry. In his speech for Zeal that Middleton wrote for these ceremonies, he advances a shared political relationship between the monarch and his city that corresponds with the power dynamics we have observed in The Phoenix. The Phoenix’s Aristotelian conception of mutual governance relates to Zeal’s request that James see himself as accountable to the city rather than as its decider. Having aggrandized James as an exemplary ruler in his reunion of Britain, Middleton concludes Zeal’s speech by making a polite request: “lowly I

49 James Craigie notes that preparations for the March 1603 editions of these texts began as early as 22 September 1602, a claim which Craigie bases on the earliest mention of the new edition that is located in a letter from Nicolson to Cecil (28). Although James’s preface to Basilicon Doron notes that pirated copies were in circulation and that this new edition is an effort to provide an authentic copy, there are no records of such printed materials. Craigie thus surmises that this might be a reference to manuscript copies (21).
entreat / You’d be to her as gracious as you’re great” (2178-79). The narrative structure of *The Magnificent Entertainment* in which James is cast as the bridegroom to the personified female London frames these words as a conditional bond of love based upon mutual affection that recognizes James’s right to rule, but asks that he pledge to rule kindly, thereby establishing a subtle contractual bond. These pageants attempt to constitute a new vision of governance between the monarch and the city, but James was not attentive or engaged. His lack of interest distances him from the people, unlike Elizabeth, who accepted gifts, participated in dialogue, and acted as part of the ceremonies in her royal entry. In *The Phoenix* and later in *The Magnificent Entertainment*, Middleton sets out *opera basilica* that encourage the sovereign to enact mutual policies, thereby attempting to teach James how to be an English governor (and actor).

*Teaching the Monarch to Act (with His People): Disguise and Collaboration*

…a prince need not travel farther than his own kingdom, if he apply himself faithfully, worthy the glory of himself and expectation of others. And it would appear far nobler industry in him to reform those fashions that are already in his country than to bring new ones in…therefore I hold it a safer stern upon this lucky advantage, since my father is near his setting, and I upon the eastern hill to take my rise, to look into the heart and bowels of this dukedom, and in disguise mark all abuses ready for reformation or punishment. (*The Phoenix*, 1.92-97, 1.100-04)

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50 As part of the entertainments, the queen received an English Bible from the City, “with both hands…kiss[ed] it, and lay[ed] it upon her breast; to the great comfort of the lookers on” (98). She also led the crowd by holding “up her hands to heavenward and will[ing] her people to say Amen” and spoke lines, such as “‘be ye well assured, I will stand your good Queen’” (95).
With this speech in the first scene, Middleton conveys to his audience the plot they are about to see unfold, namely a disguised-duke narrative in which they share Phoenix’s perspective through the sustained dramatic irony of the prince’s disguise. As a result, the audience witnesses Phoenix developing a sense of theatrical governance. This complicit experience and its valiant aim to “mark all abuses” establish a virtuous structural framework that complicates critics’ desire to see The Phoenix as satirical. However, the dramatic irony Middleton creates between his audience and Phoenix allows for spectators to see the common condition that the people share with their sovereign, as Phoenix often draws attention to the slight mischief that his disguise entails, thereby preserving a critical dimension to the drama. As Peter Hyland reminds us: “Disguise was historically almost always seen in a negative light, and so even disguises in romantic comedy that are presented in a positive light often demonstrate some anxiety about it” (13). Indeed, Phoenix shows “some anxiety” during his involvement in the Captain’s sale of his own wife to Proditor. Phoenix bemoans in an aside that he is unable to enact justice due to the necessity of his disguise: “If I were as good as I should be—” (8.97). The implication is that if Phoenix were as good as he should be, then he would not take part in these acts; he would dismantle the scheme before it took shape.

Of course, he is unable to do so because his true self would be revealed. The entrapment he partakes in is therefore necessary in order to purge the state of its abusers. Phoenix thus exerts what Shuger refers to as a bonus dolum, or good trick (Political Theology, 94). This legal tactic justifies deception if it exposes a greater culprit. At the very outset of his journey, for example, Phoenix shares a “white lie” with the audience by reconstructing the truth that he still travels, fulfilling the dialogue with his father, but at home rather than afar: “By absence I’ll obey the duke my father, / And yet not wrong myself” (1.87-88). Theatricality thus becomes a means to
enact proper justice and governance; however, the play nevertheless portrays Phoenix as conscientious regarding the use of such deceptive techniques. While Phoenix is never at risk of sinning, he must remain vigilant so that he does not cross the line between a good and a malicious trick. Through Phoenix’s example, then, Middleton demonstrates that a prince must know how to act well.

Phoenix’s subterfuge can therefore be rationalized as necessary for society to thrive, and its tactics portray the prince as nearer to the people and the audience by allowing him to traverse the cityscape. Phoenix’s mission remains righteous, but he adopts the guise of a lower station in order to execute it:

…I cannot otherwise think but there are infectious dealings in most offices, and foul mysteries throughout all professions. And therefore I nothing doubt but to find travel enough within myself, and experience, I fear, too much. Nor will I be curious to fit my body to the humblest form and bearing, so the labour may be fruitful: for how can abuses that keep low come to the right view of a prince? Unless his looks lie level with them, which else will be longest hid from him, he shall be the last man sees ’em. (1.110-19)

The passage confirms the aforementioned suggestion that Phoenix needs to traverse his second body; he must explore the body politic and detect its corrupt activities. Phoenix acknowledges that this quest depends upon his looks lying “level” with his abusers, which entails him fitting his “body to the humblest form and bearing,” making him common. His descent in rank is

51 Ivo Kamps reminds us that early modern subjects often desired a managed social world, and he distinguishes Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure’s subversion-to-containment model as different from the dramatization of such Christian governance in The Phoenix (250). Whereas Shakespeare’s Duke is panoptic and absolute, Middleton’s is moderate and cooperative.
emphasized by the gradual transition Phoenix makes from speaking formal verse with a courtly audience to conversing in prose with Fidelio in the passage above, after his fellow nobility have exited the stage. This entire process is deemed necessary because otherwise “abuses that keep low” would not “come to the right view of a prince.” Our viewing experience of Ferrara’s vicious dealings and Phoenix’s deceptive actions are thus justified because such engagement with sin is warranted in order to purge and avoid it, but Phoenix and the audience must remain vigilant during their encounters with vice.

The scene in which the Jeweller’s Wife steals Phoenix away represents the end of Phoenix’s journeys, as he makes clear in the following statement: “He travels best that knows when to return” (14.105). She mistakes Phoenix for her Knight and pulls him into her dark parlour where Phoenix’s attempts to illuminate his surroundings are thwarted by the Jeweller’s Wife, who repeatedly blows out his candle. As Jeremy Lopez notes, the scene entails a pleasurable dynamic for the audience in which they share superiority with Phoenix over the events (104). Phoenix anxiously reconstitutes his authority in order to achieve this effect. He begins by relaying to the audience the way in which they should view the scene and the Jeweller’s Wife: “Fair room, villainous face, and worse woman. I ha’ learned something by a glimpse o’th’ candle” (13.18-20). Middleton toys here with Phoenix’s vulnerability, but never allows the Jeweller’s Wife to gain the upper hand. When asked for a kiss at the closing of the scene, for instance, Phoenix exclaims, “Enough!” (13.102). In this final dolus bonum, which Phoenix identifies as such when he states that the “age must needs be foul when vice reforms it” (14.65-66), the audience is complicit in a good trick that unveils the Jeweller’s Wife’s seedy dealings, but the conclusion to this dramatic irony in the next scene brings the wider implications
of her actions to light, which entail a satire of the real crown’s acts concerning the sale of knighthoods.\footnote{52}

The Jeweller’s Wife disrupts the unifying ambitions of Dessen’s estates allegory by retaining a degree of uncertainty with respect to the overall cleanliness of the body politic; she thus adds an element of the \textit{via diversa} to the play’s moral conclusion, thereby establishing Middleton’s political irony.\footnote{53} Although I acknowledge that Phoenix’s final dialogue with the Jeweller’s Wife represents a pinnacle in the play—given that it merges the two plotlines—I argue that by dramatizing this anticipated moment as a rupturing of the seamless fabric crafted by Phoenix in the final scene, Middleton’s sustained allegory extends beyond its narrative’s parameters by leaving matters unfinished. My interpretation of Middleton’s ironic interplay of \textit{The Phoenix}’s two plotlines revises Swapan Chakravorty’s reading:

If the disguised-ruler device solves some problems, it also creates others. The separate plots, for instance, are made to revolve round a moral commentator [Phoenix] like “a multi-ringied circus with a single ringmaster”. This inhibits the possibility of connecting the plots by the less intrusive logic of irony, and risks stifling the fun with the heavy moralizing. (\textit{Society and Politics}, 34)

While I concur with Chakravorty that Phoenix functions as a centrifugal point that merges the two narratives of Middleton’s play and as the interconnector of the predominant narrative and its subplot, I suggest that Phoenix’s bridging of the plots precipitates a conundrum that hints at

52 The sustained dramatic irony of Phoenix’s disguise comes to an end with his revealing himself to be the prince, but this discovery does not contain the Jeweller’s Wife entirely, leaving matters somewhat open-ended.

53 While other more opprobrious characters are punished in the final scene, the Jeweller’s Wife is a final lesson to James both in the mercy Phoenix grants her and for her indication that the disreputable knights of Ferrara—satirizing those of London—are in fact to blame for the wrongs Phoenix attributes to her. More details and readings on these matters will be provided later in the chapter.
perpetual renovation rather than absolute closure. The political irony that his encounter with the Jeweller’s Wife yields is not “the less intrusive logic of irony”; it is instead a form of structural irony that culminates with an oscillating force that remains unresolved. This political irony leaves the interpretation of her character open-ended for Phoenix and produces opera basilica for James by drawing attention to the unruly behaviour of knights. The verbal exchange between Phoenix and the Jeweller’s Wife thus lends a degree of humility to the supreme and righteous demeanour that Phoenix exhibits in the final scene.54

Phoenix’s direction of the play’s final events is challenged when the Jeweller’s Wife rebukes his misogynist chastisement of her and those like her for the corruption of the city by suggesting that his knights, too, are to blame for Ferrara’s unruly body politic. Phoenix codifies the Jeweller’s Wife, as he already has the Captain and Falso, as a contaminant of the body politic that needs to be purged:

Stand forth—thou one of those
For whose close lusts the plague never leaves the city.
Thou worse than common—private, subtle harlot,
That dost deceive three with one feigned lip:
Thy husband, the world’s eye, and the law’s whip. (15.230-34)

Phoenix’s blame of the Jeweller’s Wife for “the plague [that] never leaves the city” resembles James’s proclamation from 16 September 1603, calling for suburban buildings to be demolished as a precaution to prevent further spread of the plague. Although The Phoenix might not draw attention to these specific regulations, its protagonist nevertheless identifies an unfaithful spouse

54 Their heated conversation thus disperses “authority among multiple voices,” creating a plurality that Michael Bristol observes in the early modern period and interprets as having the capacity to counter “philosophically unified forms that reveal a singular, sovereign voice” (21).
as the cause of the epidemic much as James had accused “dissolute and idle persons” for the spread of the plague (Steele 111). 55 The Jeweller’s Wife becomes both a victim and a culprit in the ruler’s allegorical cleansing of the body politic, but she speaks back against her accuser:

‘Tis ’long of those, an’t like your grace, that come in upon us, and will never leave marrying of our widows till they make ’em all as free as their first husbands. (15.243-46)

Phoenix draws attention to the ironic, recalcitrant inversion of culpability that this passage conveys when he can only respond by saying, “I perceive you can shift a point well” (15.247). In showing that she is a victim of her circumstance and that her male betters are in fact no better than she, the Jeweller’s Wife reveals that the errant knights, whom Phoenix has not dealt with and whom James has created, are the real culprits. Although she is attempting to avert chastisement, the Jeweller’s Wife does so through the rhetorical means that were available to early modern citizens who wished to question the sovereign. The playwright confers upon the Jeweller’s Wife the power of parrhēsia. 56 She politely but ironically counters the truth of the

55 Jonathan Dollimore notes the unjust correspondence between disease and sex workers, or what the early modern state labels social contaminants, in James’s proclamation and Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure: “Here, as with the suppression of prostitution, plague control legitimates other kinds of political control” (“Transgression and Surveillance,” 77). The Phoenix’s plot involving the Jeweller’s Wife likely serves as loose inspiration for the narrative involving Mistress Overdone, her house of misrule, and her customer, Lucio, given that Middleton’s play was written before Measure for Measure.

56 The rhetorical trope broaches a dialogic space between the monarch and the people through polite decorum. Early modern rhetorical manuals advocate that parrhēsia should be expressed with courtesy to the ruler. In The garden of eloquence, conteyning the fitures of grammer and rhetoric (1577), Henry Peacham describes parrhēsia as “when speaking before them whome we ought to reuerence and feare, & hauing something to say, which either toucheth themseluues, or their friends, do desire them to pardon our boldnesse” (sigs. M2v-M3r). Angell Day humorously describes the trope as “libertie to speake, when by winning of curtesie to our speech we seeke to auoyd anie offence thereof, as thus. Pardon if I be tedious, the circumstance requireth it” (2. sig. O2r). David Colclough surveys these and other rhetorical tracts from the period to deduce that “[t]he pervasiveness of rhetorical education in sixteenth-century England means that a great many Englishmen would have been aware of the figure,” giving them the necessary oratory skill to be frank with authorities without risking punishment (60). Like the political irony I am investigating in Middleton’s drama, parrhēsia is a political engagement that does not posit a lucid polemic but instead introduces opera basilica for the monarch to address. For more on parrhēsia’s applications to Middleton’s The Phoenix and Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure, see my article on the device in relation to these two plays.
new sovereign, leaving him essentially speechless. Preceding Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* (1604) and Marston’s *The Fawn* (1604), this segment from *The Phoenix* perhaps inspired Shakespeare’s ambiguously silent Isabella at the denouement of *Measure for Measure* and Marston’s Princess Dulcimel, whose subtle rebuke of her father’s query, “Royally wise, and wisely royal father—”, is clarified by Dondolo when he remarks, “That’s sententious now, a figure called in art *Ironia*” (5.458, 5.459). All three plays are similarly shaped by their indirect allegorical representations of James and conclusions that subtly question the idealistic portrait of that protagonist.

In *The Phoenix*, criticism of the monarch is evident in allusions to James’s sale of knighthoods. The play’s subplot involves the Jeweller’s Wife’s adulterous relationship with a Knight whom she finances in order to gain sexual pleasure and hopefully an audience at court. Her father Falso’s satirical apology to the Knight elucidates this topical concern:

Why this is but the second time of your coming, kinsman. Visit me oftener. Daughter, I charge you bring this gentleman along with you. Gentleman? I cry ye mercy, sir! I call you gentleman still, I forget you’re but a knight. You must pardon me, sir. (9.1-5)

The number of newly dubbed knights threw the customary order of rank into disarray.

Traditionally, a gentleman ranked lower than a knight, but as Falso’s sardonic comments to the Knight suggest, the status of a gentleman now carries more clout than that of a knight. Situating *The Phoenix* as an interregnum play that precedes James’s politics, Paul Yachnin provides an alternative to this interpretation by suggesting that the knights in question refer to Essex’s

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57 *The Phoenix*’s influence on *The Fawn* is particularly likely given that both plays take place in Ferrara. In his edition of *The Fawn*, David Blostein notes that critics have drawn connections between Duke Gonzago, Princess Dulcimel’s father, and James (32).
knights rather than James’s (“Two Allusions,” 376). However, Middleton frequently and satirically mentions knights in plays we know to have been written after James’s accession to the throne of England.\textsuperscript{58} It thus remains more likely that Middleton’s allusions are to James’s knights rather than to Essex’s.

Yachnin’s hesitation to interpret the knights as James’s rather than Essex’s stems from warranted scepticism over why the budding playwright would present such an obvious offense to the king. If the play was performed at court on the date Chambers proposes, then it is possible that the Knight or certain lines concerning his character could have been cut from the performed text to avoid offending the king.\textsuperscript{59} But the inclusion of the Knight might instead represent recent history, specifically James’s suggestion that he had debased the social station. In a proclamation dated 11 January 1604, the speaker describes James’s approach to determining the good character of his future members of Parliament:

\begin{quote}
As he is about to summon Parliament (which he would have done before but for the Plague), and is anxious that h[e] first should set a good example to others, the King lays down the following regulations. Great care to be shown in selecting Knights and Burgesses of good ability and sufficient gravity and modest conversation, men neither of superstitious blindness nor turbulent humours, not bankrupts or outlaws but regular taxpayers.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} See Michaelmas Term: 1.2.188, 3.1.47-50, 3.4.62-63; A Trick to Catch the Old One: 2.1.167-69; A Mad World, My Masters: 1.1.61-72, 2.1.4-5, 5.2.18-19; Your Five Gallants 2.4.54-56. Lawrence Danson and Ivo Kamps support this attribution in their justification for the play’s date, stating that the play was written “probably between the spring of 1603 and early 1604” (“Works Included,” 346).

\textsuperscript{59} Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa speculate that cuts were made “to censor dubious pieces of dialogue which might give offence” (44).
The proclamation communicates an indirect acknowledgement on James’s part that he has caused the chain of rank to fall into disarray by appointing too many knights, some of whom do not uphold the quality of the station. Although all knights should be just and noble persons, James’s proclamation indicates that he must carefully select virtuous knights to comprise parliament, tacitly indicating that his recent actions have produced several errant knights. The Knight thus functions as a reminder of James’s previous errors and of his previous recognition that he has unsettled the social order. The model governor Middleton conveys onstage, like James himself, is both susceptible to fallibility and responsive to the people’s criticisms.

Even after Phoenix attains his dukedom in the final scene following his grandiose discovery, his governance remains imperfect as the result of his inability to determine the condition of all the members of his body politic, for he cannot fully discern the character of the Jeweller’s Wife. After his logic is questioned with her turn of phrase, which suggests lewd knights are the real cause of the city’s corruption, the Jeweller’s Wife promises that she will live a virtuous life if Phoenix pardons her. Her suggestion that she will repent restores a degree of uncertainty to the play’s allegorical framework; the Jeweller’s Wife cannot be neatly codified as a vicious or virtuous element of the body politic. The Niece, the Jeweller’s Wife’s cousin, heightens this ambiguity by proposing that the Jeweller’s Wife’s “birth was kin to mine; she may prove modest. / For my sake, I beseech you pardon her” (15.263-64). Preceding her plea, Falso

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60 Stone remarks that 255 more knighthoods were distributed between March 1604 and December 1604 (74). These figures remain outside of the purview of this study, which focuses on the historical events leading up to The Magnificent Entertainment (1604). The commentary on knighthoods might have become increasingly satirical if the play were performed at Paul’s in the ensuing months and years after James’s accession celebrations.

61 Hence, The Phoenix represents a blunter edge of the typical satire that David Kathman sees influencing boy company dramas after the Bishop’s Ban: “commercialization and competition, along with the banning of prose and verse satire in 1599, led the boys’ companies to become increasingly topical and satirical in their plays” (163).
offers to stand as “her warrant” but Phoenix dismisses his efforts, with the rationale of “lust being so like”—in other words, like father like daughter (15.257, 262). The Jeweller’s Wife remains an unknown variable positioned in the middle of a binary opposition constructed out of familial relations. From one angle, Falso’s relation to her would define her as lustful, but the Niece’s affiliation to her signals virtue. The uncertainty of the Jeweller’s Wife’s spiritual state retains a tension that remains unresolved and does not allow Phoenix to categorize her as fundamentally corrupt. Phoenix instead complies with the Niece’s proposal and follows up with another proposal:

For thy sake I’ll do more. Fidelio, hand her.

My favours on you both; next, all that wealth

Which was committed to that perjured’s trust. (15.265-67)

Continuing with his plan to restore the social order, Phoenix conveniently shifts his and the audience’s attention away from the uncertain matter of the Jeweller’s Wife to his marriage of Fidelio and the Niece, leading into Phoenix and Quieto’s purging of the “barretor” Tangle’s madness.62 These comedic actions represent Phoenix’s restitution of governance. His sudden redirection of events, however, calls attention to the artificiality of his control, and the matter of the Jeweller’s Wife’s inner worth lingers as an ongoing issue, no matter how harmonious the play’s conclusions might seem.

The outcome depends equally upon Phoenix’s judiciousness concerning the mercy that he shows the Jeweller’s Wife. Phoenix’s travels have aimed to reduce the gap between the eyes of the court and the base crimes of citizens:

62 Drawing upon John Cowell’s legal dictionary The Interpreter (1607), Subha Mukherji clarifies that Tangle “is a barretor – ‘a common wrangler, that seteth men at ods, and in himselfe . . . at brawle with one or other’” (“Middleton and the law,” 110).
For oft between king’s eyes and subject’s crimes
Stands there a bar of bribes; the under office
Flatters him next above it, he the next,
And so of most, or many.

Every abuse will choose a brother:
’Tis through the world, this hand will rub the other. (1.120-25)

However, as Phoenix comes to see, the gap is not so easily closed. Later in the play, Quieto provides Phoenix with a more nuanced and accurate image of the law:

Law is the very masterpiece of heaven.

But see yonder.

There’s many clouds between the sun and us,
There’s too much cloth before we see the law. (12.194-98)

Quieto’s lesson provides Phoenix with the necessary perspective to reconsider his riposte of the Jeweller’s Wife. In Basilicon Doron, James promoted a similar lesson to Henry. After having instructed his son in the ways of the law, he broadens the scope to include several other facets of early modern culture: “as I said of Iustice, so say I of Clemencie, Magnanimitie, Liberalitie, Constancie, Humilitie, and all other Princely vertues; Nam in medio stat virtus” (43). Johann P. Sommerville translates the final Latin phrase to read, “For virtue lies in the middle” (277).

However, whereas James leaves such judgment to kings and princes, Middleton shows Phoenix learning lessons from his subjects (Quieto), listening to culprits’ counterpoints (the Jeweller’s Wife), and adhering to counsel from others (the Niece) in order to arrive at a merciful and just verdict. The Jeweller’s Wife thus complicates any structural closure to the dramatic irony of

63 According to Mark Fortier, early modern Christian equity entailed such a balancing of perspectives: “Equity is not a force for extremity, but for religious, political, and social moderation” (Culture of Equity, 47).
Phoenix’s disguise that frames the play by serving as an exception to the law and retaining a degree of ambiguity with respect to her spiritual state.

**Middleton’s Contractual Theatre: Beyond the Court Performance**

These legal matters demonstrating the limitations of the monarch and the legal system would also have been of interest to the later audience at St Paul’s, which would have comprised a large number of law students from the Inns of Court and offered an intimate and private environment for viewing. The interrogative and provisional circumstances of the law, in addition to the character of the Jeweller’s Wife and the play’s conclusion, disavow the comic unity that Steven Mullaney ascribes to all boy-company plays by virtue of their private venues and the limited genres that they staged: “Over 85 percent of the boys’ plays were comedies, largely satires: in terms of dramatic genres, a contained form of social criticism, one that relies, as pre-Elizabethan drama had always done, on a stable and circumscribing social structure” (*The Place of the Stage*, 53). Lucy Munro counters Mullaney’s generalization by observing that in spite of Paul’s smaller audience, we cannot presume that the drama shaped a uniform reaction: “even relatively small audiences such as those in Blackfriars or Whitefriars theatres might have contained sufficient social identities and allegiances to make a uniform interpretation virtually impossible” (72). She continues by arguing that comedy’s “social aberrance…could actually work against comedy’s movement towards closure and harmony” (72). While I agree with Munro that boy-company productions accommodate plural and contentious reactions, I contend that the ending to *The Phoenix* unravels the isolated and privileged viewing that Paul’s afforded spectators not only through staging radical “social aberrance,” but also by framing the

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64 W. Reavley Gair notes that the private nature of Paul’s theatre would have allowed for “4 square feet per person as this was a ‘select house’” (67). Such a space differed significantly from a public theatre like the Globe, which would not have afforded audience members any significant degree of privacy or individual space during a performance.
circumstances that have transpired in the play world as a provisional contract that Phoenix offers to the audience at Paul’s and to their monarch in the play’s initial court performance.

During this final speech, it is unclear whether it is the character Phoenix or the boy actor playing him who delivers the lines. He speaks from a liminal position by reflecting upon the play world while establishing a contrast with the audience’s reality:

- We both admire the workman and his piece.
- Thus, when all hearts are tuned to honour’s strings,
- There is no music to the choir of kings. (15.348-50)

The reflection upon the dramatic work indicates that the actor playing Phoenix steps out of his role as Phoenix in an imaginary landscape to assume either the identity of an actor or that of the character speaking between the fictional Ferrara and the real Jacobean court. Hence, “We” no longer only speaks for a royal We, despite the fact that the Duke has bequeathed his throne to Phoenix. “We” also implies a collective that extends beyond the play world to the audience. Although this truncated epilogue resembles conventional addresses to the audience for applause and approval, the regal audience, the topical matters, and the temporal language of these closing words must give us pause to consider the final lines’ unique implications. Not clearly Phoenix nor the actor playing Phoenix, the character/actor represents an authority governing both the politics of the imagined play world of Ferrara and the theatrical event that extends to the audience’s reality. The conclusive thrust of “[t]hus” amplifies the importance of this spatiotemporal dissonance that requests the audience to reflect upon the fictional world they have witnessed in relation to their social world. The “when” that follows creates a disjuncture between the space and time of the play world that has been mostly set in order by a ruler who has navigated its landscape and that of the current social world, thereby indicating that such
purification, however imperfect it remains, has not yet been brought about in Jacobean London. James is therefore subtly encouraged to conduct such travail in his forthcoming civic ceremonies.

The contractual language of these three final lines implicates the audience in an action that transcends the events of the play and leaves the perpetual renovation of the world in the real king’s hands. C.E. McGee offers a similar reading of contractual theory in Middleton and Rowley’s *The World Tossed at Tennis*. Chapter four will explore his application in greater detail, but at this point it is important to note that McGee identifies spatiotemporal rhetoric that implicates the real-world rulers and their politics and that closely resembles my reading of *The Phoenix*’s conclusion: “the grand compliments expected of the finale are qualified (‘when his glorious peace’ [815]; italics mine) and conditional (‘if’ it hold’ [876]; italics mine)” (1406). I perceive a similar dynamic at work at the conclusion of *The Phoenix* and suggest that it addresses the need for perpetual renovation in a contractual form. As Sanchez’s work revealed earlier in this chapter, the symbolic language of ideal Elizabethan and Stuart England conceives of governance as a mutually constituted marriage, providing a way of seeing how *The Phoenix*’s and *The World Tossed at Tennis*’s politics offer an early form of the later contractual theories of royalist philosophers.  

Overlooking the differences between the play’s time and the audience’s real time has caused critics to miss the complex form of *The Phoenix*. Although Linda Phyllis Austern is

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65 The ending of *The Phoenix* thus represents an earlier instance of what Victoria Kahn perceives as “the constitution of the affective subject[, which] is central to early modern contractual theory” (85). Her examination of the contractual bonds that form out of early modern literature in the early years of the civil war are based in a gendered reading of power between monarch and people with the former party as the dominant member of the relationship (86).
correct in her recent interpretation of what the play’s final lines promise, she misconstrues Phoenix’s final words as representing a unified ending:

*The Phoenix* closes with the (re)establishment of harmony in the generic tradition of mainstream Elizabethan and Jacobean comedy. The concluding lines of the play, spoken by the morally upright Prince Phoenix after he emerges unscathed from the political corruption around him, refer to the reflection of heavenly concord into his court and kingdom. (191)

Not “all hearts” are conclusively “tuned to honour’s strings,” as this remains to be proven with the Jeweller’s Wife’s future conduct. Phoenix’s references to “the workman” (i.e., Middleton) and his “piece” represent a metatheatrical commentary on the play, positioning Phoenix as an intermediary in a liminal space between the play world and the audience’s immediate reality. Danson and Kamps’s gloss of “piece” as “masterpiece” provides further insight on the play’s projected contractual bond (126). Middleton’s “masterpiece” reflects that of the law—Quieto describes the law as “the very masterpiece of heaven” (12.195)—and in doing so is crafted in order to provide a means by which the king and the aspiring lawyers at Paul’s could enact social justice in everyday life. *The Phoenix*’s didacticism is thus dynamic, and its finale encourages perpetual renovation through Middleton’s political irony. The play’s allegory of James’s accession to the English throne provides a stage cue for its king to enact these works, for he is about to embark on his own travels through London.

It is worth considering that James might have taken Middleton’s advice and that Middleton could have been using knowledge of the king’s previous clandestine travels as
inspiration for Phoenix’s disguise. Sir Roger Wilbraham records in his journal, for instance, that in April 1603 James was

…met 4 miles from London by the lord mayor & such unspeakable number of citizens as the like number was never seen to issue out upon any cause before. 4 nights he lodged at Charter House. Four nights more he lodged at the Tower, during which time he secretly in his coach & by water went to see London, the Whitehall & the jewels there. (qtd. in Woodford 75)

Perhaps from having gained some knowledge of these ventures and having seen Marston’s *The Malcontent*, Middleton devised a disguised-duke play that might have contributed to James’s decision to travel through London with Queen Anne the day before *The Magnificent Entertainment*. Unfortunately, James did not follow Phoenix’s example of mutual governance when he was discovered during a visit to the Royal Exchange. In *The Time Triumphant* (1604), a citizen writing under the name of Gilbert Dugdale summarized the event:

…countrymen let me tell you this, if you hard what I heard as concerning that you would stake your feete to the Earth at such a time, ere you would run so regardles vp and downe…this shewes his loue to you, but your open ignorance to him, you will say perchance it is your love, *will you in loue prease vppon your Soueraigne thereby to offend him, your Soueraigne perchance mistake your loue and punish it as an offence*, but heare me when hereafter [he] comes by you, doe as they doe in *Scotland* stand still, see all, and vse silence[.] (sig. B2r)
James’s demand that his citizens accord him the same respect the Scottish people knew to give him—by standing in quiet and still devotion to him—is satirized here as proper love. If the king learnt anything from Middleton’s play, then it was certainly not mutual or collaborative governance.

The king’s reclusive nature continued in the years following The Phoenix and The Magnificent Entertainment, as he became increasingly reluctant to hear his subjects. A speech James delivered to parliament on 21 March 1610 reasserts the king’s role as decider, describing his dependency upon the English people as a tenure now passed:

…you doe not meddle with the maine points of Gouernment; that is my craft: tractent fabrilia fabri; to meddle with that, were to lesson me: I am now an old King; for sixe and thirtie yeeres haue I gouerned in Scotland personally, and now haue I accomplished my apprenticeship of seuen yeeres heere; and seuen yeeres is a great time for a Kings experience in Gouernment…I must not be taught my Office. (190-91)

Although the opening and closing lines of this segment suggest otherwise, James clearly made efforts to adapt to the English political system between his rise to the English throne and this speech delivered seven years later. He refers to his time in office as his “apprenticeship,” using the discourse of the people and English civic practice to justify his right to rule. This language reveals a history of receptive education rather than a consistently stubborn pupil, and Middleton’s Phoenix is part of that tradition, even if the king did not evidently change his comportment after seeing the play. With the king reluctant to hear further council on the
governance of his kingdom, Middleton eventually turned his political irony instead to the Lord Mayor of London.
Chapter Two: Thomas Middleton Counselling Thomas Myddelton in *The Triumphs of Truth*

And because man’s perfection can receive no constant attribute in this life, the cloud of frailty, ever and anon shadowing and darkening our brightest intentions, makes good the morality of those cants, or parts, when they fall and close into the full round of a globe again, showing, that as the brightest day has his overcastings, so the best men in this life have their imperfections; and worldly mists oftentimes interpose the clearest cogitations, and yet that but for a season, turning in the end, like the mounting of this engine, to their everlasting brightness, converting itself to a canopy of stars. (*The Triumphs of Honour and Virtue*, 247-58)

This passage from Middleton’s 1622 Lord Mayor’s Show for Sir Peter Proby encapsulates the political irony that we find in the dramatist’s earliest Show, *The Triumphs of Truth*. As with the previous discussion of *The Phoenix*, this chapter revisits the moral structure of the playwright’s dramatic work to expose an ongoing oscillation that disrupts unified interpretations of its narrative and idealized portraits of its governor. The “cloud of frailty” that Middleton describes for his readers resembles “the many clouds between the sun and us,” which Quieto reveals to Phoenix. Again, the playwright separates and distances human governance from divine

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66 I concur with Tracy Hill’s claim that “it is inaccurate to call the Lord Mayor’s Show in its entirety a ‘pageant’” (*Pageantry and Power*, 12). This dissertation adheres to Hill’s caveats and terminology, labelling *The Triumphs of Truth* a Show and the individual performances that comprise it pageants. I also follow Hill’s suggestion that “livery company” is a more appropriate term than “guild,” given that early modern people never referred to the companies as guilds: “No one in this period called the secular livery companies ‘guilds’, despite the way so many modern commentators treat these terms as interchangeable or even prefer the older word. The term ‘guild’ refers to the quasi-religious fraternities which were the ancestors of many of the livery companies of the sixteenth century onwards; the companies themselves never used the term” (*Pageantry and Power*, 12).
perfection and order, and refers to the natural world’s imperfections to comment upon the
limitations of rulers’ command in the earthly sphere. He observes that sunny days entail a degree
of overcast and does so in order to draw attention to the ways in which the governor’s
“perfection can achieve no constant attribute in this life.” For Middleton, the best Lord Mayor
possesses “imperfections” and perseveres in the pursuit of virtue while reconciling his and his
kingdom’s middle state between the transitional world and the heavenly realm he aspires toward,
knowing that he cannot maintain a constant, ideal polis so long as it remains worldly.
Middleton’s representation of the via media in his Lord Mayors’ Shows thus retains a degree of
via diversa by reminding governors that they cannot actually achieve the utopian city that
Middleton’s Shows portray. Instead, the Lord Mayor must strive to locate a balance that leans
toward virtue, thereby achieving a moderate method of rule rather than pompously attempting to
attain perfection.

I observe this tendency in Middleton’s earliest Lord Mayor’s Show The Triumphs of
Truth, written for the Lord Mayor of 1613, Sir Thomas Myddelton. This Show was the most
extravagant Lord Mayor’s Show of the Jacobean era: “The total cost of £1,300 makes this show
the most expensive such pageant; the average cost, based on available records, of a Lord
Mayor’s show in the early Stuart period comes to slightly over £700” (Bergeron Triumphs of
Truth, 965). Although the Show’s stern morality would have appealed to its Puritan patrons,
Middleton capitalizes upon the generous budget to produce a series of pageants that use
repetitive effects to generate ironic visual representations of governance. These devices present a
continuum of perpetual renovation that revises the common synchronic structure of Lord
Mayors’ Shows. The Show’s representation of the via media remains earnest in its depiction of
the Lord Mayor’s adroit rule and character, but encourages a mutual governance and sustained
reflection that enriches its journey by means of the via diversa. This political irony is most evident in Perfect Love’s speech for the Lord Mayor before he attends the feast in his honour. Discouraging “excess” and “epicurism, both which destroy / The healths of soul and body” (667-68), Perfect Love instead encourages the Lord Mayor to let “moderate judgement serve him at the feast” (679). In doing so, Perfect Love illustrates that knowledge of extreme vice is required in order to avoid it; the playwright does not presume that the Lord Mayor automatically knows to avert gluttony. The moderation Middleton’s Show upholds presents an alternative to the ascetic Christianity that is characteristic of Lord Mayors’ Shows’ overt morality. I argue that Middleton consistently draws attention to the necessity of moderation and vigilance through his political irony’s insistence upon perpetual renovation. In this manner, Middleton’s first Lord Mayor’s Show reworks the formulae of previous Shows by advancing a sustained and conscientious reflection that promotes perpetual renovation rather than aggrandizing the current times or the newly elected official.

The chapter attends to the ways in which Middleton directs the mayor to see two ways at once over the course of his mediated journey through London. In drawing attention to the circular and fluctuating nature of civic governance, Middleton uses the traditional didacticism of Lord Mayors’ Shows, but adapts these generic conventions to reveal that the mayor’s lessons extend beyond the Lord Mayor’s Day or the mayor’s year. Middleton’s pageantry relies upon the works of Anthony Munday and Thomas Dekker, but adds a reflective dynamic that observes the realities of the mayor’s full year in office. Middleton accentuates the ongoing process within which the current mayor operates, namely that next year a new official will take his place and different hardships will lie ahead for him during his tenure. The pageant writer stages idealistic ethereal concepts across the cityscape that the Lord Mayor can approximate but never achieve,
leaving him and the landscape as inherently flawed bodies that can be moderated but never perfected. Between the cities of God and vice, Middleton establishes political irony that casts the Lord Mayor as an actor who must continually aspire to emulate Truth and eschew Error, looking two ways at once without fully achieving either state.

Middleton also manipulates the conventions of printed texts of Lord Mayors’ Shows to provide his readers with an imagining or reimagining of the day’s events that is ideal insofar as it records Middleton’s vision for how his art is received, but this reception is anything but unified. Printed texts of Lord Mayors’ Shows are typically taken to be accentuated praise and propaganda, two common threads of criticism that this chapter will challenge. David M. Bergeron, for instance, argues that the vivid details included in the printed books of the Lord Mayors’ Shows’ processions allow readers to reimagine the movements of the day, positioning themselves in the eyes and mind of the Lord Mayor who occupied the privileged seat of dramatic reception for the pageants. The details these texts bear can convey an accurate record of what transpired on the Lord Mayor’s Day, but they also illustrate an idealized representation of what the playwright intended the Lord Mayor to see or how he wanted it to be received:

…playwrights intend the pageant texts for readers; these texts become commemorative books that both capture and immortalize the event and add to it. They assume an expository and narrative function that sets them apart from the typical dramatic text…these publications do not obliterate theatrical performance or displace it so much as they complete it.

("Stuart Civic Pageants," 4)
Bergeron’s statement that the printed book “completes” the theatrical vision of the pageant writer may be true of some Lord Mayors’ Shows, even others by Middleton; however, _The Triumphs of Truth_, as we will see, provides perspectives that disorient readers, rendering Middleton’s supposed “complete” account unsettled with lingering *via diversa* for his readers.\(^{67}\) By dramatizing the repetitive onslaught of Error, portraying the Lord Mayor as an Everyman in his _psychomachia_ allegory, and playing on his shared name with the Lord Mayor, Middleton provides a praiseworthy account of the Lord Mayor but imbues this narrative with political irony both in performance and in the printed text. Middleton’s vision for _The Triumphs of Truth_ is anything but “complete.”

**Between Sin City and the City of God: The Political Irony of Middleton’s Show**

When compared with his other dramatic works, Middleton’s Lord Mayors’ Shows often appear to be simplistic, propagandist texts. The criticism on the Shows generally supports this tendency. David Bergeron’s comparative study of _The Triumphs of Truth_ with the city comedy _A Chaste Maid in Cheapside_ from the same year is a prime example. Taking the view that these two works represent the highest achievements of Middleton’s career as a writer, Bergeron surmises that “Middleton has, perhaps unconsciously, fashioned an impressive Renaissance gold medal with one side depicting a large foreground of sin and corruption (the comedy) and the obverse with an equally large foreground of virtue (the pageant)” (“Middleton’s Moral Landscape,” 133). Like Bergeron, Gail Kern Paster offers a bifurcated reading of Middleton’s canon, arguing that his Lord Mayors’ Shows represent an Augustinian City of God and that his city comedies depict a vicious, predatory landscape (_The Idea of the City_, 10, 152). While these

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\(^{67}\) The chapter thus observes the ways in which Middleton establishes political irony in his pageants’ performances on the Lord Mayor’s Day as well as in his printed text’s “complete” accounts of these events. It also examines political irony in materials added after the event, such as Middleton’s Epistle to the Lord Mayor, which would not have been part of the day’s festivities.
readings establish critical appreciation for both genres, they also tend to oversimplify them. City comedies do entail a moral dimension that tempers their satiric and bawdy content, and the Shows, as we will see, retain an edge that at times borders upon the satirical.

More recent criticism offers an alternative to such approaches that reveals the previously unnoticed satirical aspects of Lord Mayors’ Shows. My investigation, however, is preoccupied with the ways in which Middleton’s Show reinvents the traditional conventions and narrative of Lord Mayors’ Shows. As in the case of my discussion of The Phoenix, my argument here locates a middle way between didactic and oppositional criticism to demonstrate that Middleton’s lesson in governance is not as static as previous examinations suggest. As Ian Munro states, The Triumphs of Truth offers us “a radical reimagining of the form and content of civic pageantry,” but it remains indebted to the fabric that Anthony Munday and Thomas Dekker had established (“The populations of London,” 45). These authors also created vibrant displays for their Lord Mayors that, as we will see, at times verged upon satire in their social critique. This chapter does not aim to establish Middleton as a better pageant writer than his contemporaries, but instead examines his use of political irony to show the unique ways in which he unsettles the Lord Mayor’s potential to develop a comfortable image of himself as permanently just and upright and as infallibly perspicuous over the civic body he manages.

Middleton’s lesson would have been particularly relevant given the Puritan sympathies of the elected mayor of that year, Sir Thomas Myddelton. As Ian W. Archer points out, the mayor’s previous puritanical religious and political actions provide some background on Myddelton’s character: “Not only did Myddelton participate in godly projects such as the translation of the Bible into Welsh, but he was also one of the group of city bigwigs who backed the controversial

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68 The Shows of these authors will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter.
benefaction of the widow Sarah Venables to support silenced nonconformist clergy, a bequest that was contested in the law courts” (139). Archer and others have suggested that Myddelton’s character likely resulted in the overall “ascetic” quality of Middleton’s first Show (Hill *Pageantry and Power*, 313). However, *The Triumphs of Truth* unsettles asceticism by celebrating moderation instead. The austere Christianity of previous Shows is therefore replaced with a balancing act in which the idealistic imagery of the city is unachievable since Error’s repeated presence demonstrates the necessity of persistent temperance. Although the Show does not question the Puritan mayor’s right to govern, the perpetual clash of vice and virtue challenges the abilities of its primary participant and spectator (the mayor), the attendant crowd, and the reader to reconcile its conception of London.

The Show thus repeats the framework that we have seen at work in *The Phoenix*: Middleton hints at the ostensibly perfect governor’s fallibility and humanity by presenting him with an uneven moral landscape that he cannot fully reconcile with the idea of a perfect kingdom. The dynamic that Middleton creates by coupling the conventional morality and jingoism of Lord Mayors’ Shows with a self-reflexive, interrogative series of pageants establishes lessons that serve to enmesh the Lord Mayor within a conflicted dramatic event. The mayor retains a primary role, following the traditional flattery of the elected official, but is constantly reminded of his provisional and susceptible state, as he is entangled within the dramatic fabric that entails vice and virtue. The tension that results from intermingling propaganda and conscientiousness allows us to re-evaluate Gail Kern Paster’s reading of the city in early modern drama. The distinction the Show makes between the idealistic City of God that the Show’s pageants emblematize and the real city shows that Middleton knows that London has not achieved and cannot ever fully realize an ethereal apotheosis. The inability to make a heaven
on earth sheds new light on Paster’s binary insofar as the city is neither the acme of virtue nor the nadir of sin, but exists somewhere in between these two poles, prompting civic officials to approximate an emulation of the kingdom of heaven while acknowledging that they can never achieve that perfect state.69

My interpretation thus resists the common reductive binary formulation of early modern playwrights’ work that regards their dramatic output for civic officials as strictly propagandist and their theatrical productions as depicting the city as a competitive and sinful environment. Both Bergeron and Paster establish a reading of the Shows in contrast to the comedies without considering the ways in which the two genres might be similar. The fictional events onstage and in London’s streets do not readily fall into Paster’s and Bergeron’s strict categories. A Chaste Maid in Cheapside does in fact present its audience with a chaste maid who lives in Cheapside, thereby challenging the claim that city comedies capitalize solely upon vice. Likewise, The Triumphs of Truth contains the figure of Error, who is a recurring threat that is not easily ostracized.

Critics frequently refer to Error as a unique threat in relation to the standard villains of civic pageantry. Ceri Sullivan notes that “Error makes constant challenges” to the Lord Mayor (87); Tracey Hill establishes a contrast between Middleton’s Error—who “is hardly shackled and silent” and is “given full rein to seduce the new mayor to corruption”—and the static configurations of social evils that Anthony Munday and other writers of Lord Mayors’ Shows conceive (Anthony Munday, 159); and Bruce Boehrer perceives a doubleness in Error’s disruptive challenge to the Show’s civic politics: “beneath the language of civic boosterism,

69 Paster makes a case similar to Bergeron’s in differentiating the city of the Shows from that found in the comedies: “the discrepancy between the city as it appears in the playwrights’ entertainments and the city as it appears in their plays may be attributed to the usual differences between a city as it ought to be and a city as it is” (The Idea of the City, 151).
Middleton’s pageants offer us glimpses of a municipal government marred by materials, and shrouded in a stinking, poisonous haze” (575). These interpretations lend a complexity to the Show’s morality that imbues its lessons with a sustained oscillation between London’s spiritual nadir and acme. The inability to close the gap and perfect the civic landscape communicates Middleton’s political irony through the mayor’s need to recognize the perpetual renovation that sustains the spiritual and political conditions of the city.

As Bergeron suggests, the allegory of The Triumphs of Truth is inspired by the moral-play tradition of medieval drama. In this, more than in any other extant Show of Middleton’s or of any other writer, Bergeron sees Middleton as “giv[ing] greater evidence” of “the traditional iconographical presentation of allegorical figures. It is not merely a portrait, however, for it has a dramatic function: to sharpen the contrast between good and evil” (English Civic Pageantry, 182). Middleton’s Show, however, does not comfortably augment the binary division of the two forces because, as the critics mentioned above (and Bergeron himself) suggest, the repetition of vice indicates that its attraction and presence cannot be easily obliterated or avoided.70 This is not to say that Error and his vicious ways are encouraged or that the Lord Mayor falls victim to his trickery; rather, the pageantry consistently communicates that the mayor must persevere against Error by acknowledging him and recognizing that he persists beyond the initial encounter.71 The ongoing passage of time that Middleton unfolds in his Show does not therefore blend vice and virtue, but serves to remind the Lord Mayor that he cannot ignore Error if he believes that he has

70 In his introductory preface to the Show in Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works, Bergeron remarks upon the ongoing flux of Truth and Error, which “occurs several times, suggesting, as Truth herself points out, the necessity of vigilance” (967).

71 Middleton’s Error is commonly misrepresented in criticism as female, but Middleton makes clear reference to “his mist” and “his champion” (623, 230). Envy, on the other hand, is traditionally female. This recurring error in the scholarship likely results from the common image at the time of Error as female, which is popularized in book one of Spenser’s The Faerie Queene.
safely identified and evaded him after their initial encounter. As with the portrayal of James in
*The Phoenix*, Middleton’s Lord Mayor’s Show reconceives the moral allegory as a sustained
political process in which the governor and his world do not achieve the pinnacle of the drama’s
utopian virtue, or in this case, Truth. They remain in a fraught middle state, striving to emulate
virtue.

Even though his Lord Mayors’ Shows represent instances of Middleton at his most
polemical, he nevertheless infuses their middle way with nuances that indicate perpetual
renovation, forecasting a prolonging of the mayor’s journey by combining the traditional middle
road with *via diversa*. The Puritan officials of the city who sponsored these Shows presented a
just cause for the absence of a sharper pronouncement of Middleton’s political irony. Tracey Hill
provides an apt interpretation of the way in which overt morality pervades Middleton’s *Triumphs
of Truth*. Middleton would have had to cater to the puritanical civic authorities and their elected
official, but Hill’s assessment points to a repetitive strain in the Show that I contend disrupts the
comfortable separation of oneself from error: “Middleton’s first show, *The triumphs of truth*, can
be characterised as stern, seeking to instruct much more than to entertain. As well as being the
longest Show from the period, it makes its moralistic point again and again and again, and
dramatises the threats to the Lord Mayor perhaps rather too aggressively for popular taste”
(*Pageantry and Power*, 313). I argue that the repetition Hill points to correlates with her
observation that a “critical edge…can be detected in the Shows – especially [in] those by
Middleton” (*Pageantry and Power*, 301). Middleton’s continual reminder to the Lord Mayor
produces an allegorical doubleness in which London lies between a city of God that its citizens
can never fully achieve and a sin-ridden city that must be averted at all costs. The repetition of
the lesson points “again and again and again” to the fact that the mayor and his metropolis
remain earthly and thus perpetually positioned between the kingdom of heaven and the hellish abyss. The mayor must maintain a middle state, persevering to remain devout while not ignoring Error or presuming that he can safely and unquestionably evade its temptations or deceitful ways.

Middleton celebrates the Lord Mayor’s virtue in this process by promoting his ability to lead citizens on a moderate course toward truth during his year in office, but reminds him that his virtuous condition is contingent upon him remaining aware of his own spiritual state—which is provisional—and upon developing a further conscientiousness about the wider vices of the civic body for which he is now responsible as the Lord Mayor of London. When Myddelton and his train arrive on the shores of the Thames by Baynard Castle, for example, the Angel of Truth remarks that the mayor has eluded Error’s corruption by means of the Angel’s unseen victory:

_I am Truth’s Angel, by my mistress sent_
_To guard and guide thee. When thou took’st thy oath,_
_I stood on thy right hand, though to thy eye_
_In visible form I did not then appear;_
_Ask but thy soul, ’twill tell thee I stood near;_
_And ’twas a time to take care of thee then,_
_At such a marriage before heaven and men,_
_Thy faith being wed to honour; close behind thee_
_Stood Error’s minister that still sought to blind thee,_
_And wrap his subtle mists about thy oath,_
_To hide it from the nakedness of troth,_
_Which is Truth’s purest glory; but my light,_
Still as it shone, expelled her blackest spite;
Her mists fled by, yet all I could devise
Could hardly keep them from some people’s eyes,
But thine they flew from[.] (217-32)

The Angel’s speech following the king’s induction of the mayor into office reveals the Lord Mayor’s limitations as well as his own. The mundane realm lessens the ethereal power of Truth’s divinity when her angel transmits it from a celestial to an earthly sphere. The Angel could “hardly keep” the forces of Error at bay—risking the contamination of the mayor’s train who attended the ceremony—but manages to secure the Lord Mayor’s virtuous state. The intervention shows that the grace of angelic mediators remains susceptible to flaw in the worldly sphere, but, more importantly, the Angel’s speech relays an ethereal dramatic event that transpired without the Lord Mayor’s knowledge. Hence, the speech serves the concomitant purpose of reminding him to be mindful of his limitations and to keep on guard constantly, for he cannot presume to have panoptic control of his polis or even of himself.

The Angel’s speech continues in this vein, drawing attention to the work that lies ahead for the Lord Mayor. As Paster remarks, “The Angel of Truth in Middleton’s Triumphs of Truth describes the year as a series of temptations, making the magistrate’s office a test of the soul to perceive illusion and deception” (“The Idea of London,” 59). Paster’s observation reminds us that Middleton’s Lord Mayor’s Show functions not only as devout praise and flattery of the

72 The ceremony goes unmentioned in Middleton’s description of the events that occur between the water pageant consisting of five islands and the mayor and his train landing at Baynard’s Castle, but anyone familiar with Lord Mayor’s Day celebrations would be aware that this tradition had taken place. Middleton likely decided not to include it because Thomas Myddelton was already a knight. However, Richmond Barbour suggests that London’s speech to Myddelton before he embarks upon the Thames—specifically her command to “disdain all titles / Purchased with coin” (177-78)—entails a satirical assertion of the Lord Mayor’s “namesake’s civic honor over the King’s notoriously vendible knighthoods” (88). It is therefore also possible that Middleton intentionally chose not to include this portion of the ceremonies so as to commend the Truth of the Lord Mayor by not contaminating him with the king’s erroneous actions.
mayor, but also as a cautionary lesson concerning the year ahead of him. The remainder of the Angel’s speech to the Lord Mayor conveys this reminder by foreshadowing Error’s return:

Wake on, the victory is not half yet won;
Thou wilt be still assaulted, thou shalt meet
With many dangers that in voice seem sweet,
And ways most pleasant to a worldling’s eye;
To yon triumphant city follow me,
Keep thou to Truth, eternity keeps to thee. (233-39)

The opening call signals that the Lord Mayor must be alert not only to the condition of his soul but also to that of the city, as the verb “wake” urges him “[t]o stay awake for” his “work or active occupation; to pass the night in work, study, etc.” (OED “wake,” v.4a). Having received the king’s blessing and having been officially inducted, the Lord Mayor now bears this wider responsibility to which the Angel directs his attention. Hence, Myddelton must be aware that the year ahead will present perils and repeated assaults on the spiritual condition of London. The Angel’s description of Myddelton as having “a worldling’s eye” also emphasizes his relation to divine Truth; his status and worth allow him to glimpse Truth while remaining unable to achieve Truth’s or her Angel’s celestial vision. His state remains marred by his existence in the mundane realm. The Angel’s suggestion that the Lord Mayor’s “victory is not half yet won” while still describing London as “triumphant”—indicating that a victory has indeed been accomplished—signals the political irony of Middleton’s Lord Mayors’ Shows: Middleton’s Triumphs celebrates the Lord Mayor’s new title, but looks toward a spiritual victory that has yet to be accomplished in the year to follow the Lord Mayor’s Day. London is thus triumphant in its initiation of
Myddelton into office, but it will remain triumphant only if the Lord Mayor can consistently channel Truth over the course of the year.

*Rethinking Medieval and Civic Traditions: The Perpetual Renovation of Lord Mayors’ Shows*

The distinction Middleton makes between the Lord Mayor receiving his honourable title and the projected virtuous outcome that his accomplishment promises to bring retains the pomp of the annual celebrations while eschewing pride. This interpretation fits the morality of the historical and literary medieval traditions that Bergeron and Paster attribute to Lord Mayors’ Shows, but the repetitious overlap of the cities of God and sin in Middleton’s civic pageantry adds a critical dimension to the scheme. The virtue/vice binary threatens to lead the Lord Mayor to establish a prideful supposition that he possesses an inherently upright character, but Middleton’s political irony lends a dynamic quality to the puritanical didacticism that moral drama and civic pageantry can generate. Instead of representing a pinnacle of virtue, the Lord Mayor becomes an Everyman in a *psychomachia* allegory dramatized for London. In her introduction to *The Triumphs of Honour and Virtue* (1622), Ania Loomba proposes that Middleton portrays the Lord Mayor of that year, Sir Peter Proby, as this familiar character type: “the newly appointed mayor [is] cast as a sort of Everyman who must resist temptation in order to govern well” (1714). The coupling of the moral tradition with politics is also evoked in the Mirror of Princes genre of the medieval period, which Anke Bernau likens to Middleton’s pageantry, arguing that this emulative literary mode of governance inspired Middleton’s *The Triumphs of Honour and Virtue*: “It is in the mayoral pageants that we can see Middleton’s own uses of the medieval past. In his third, *The Triumphs of Love and Antiquity* (1619), history is once again a repository of worthy ‘examples’ for the present: these examples function as a ‘crystal glass / By which wise magistracy sets his face’ (113-16)” (256). Bernau provides a
similar reading of trans-historical engagement in Middleton’s *The Triumphs of Integrity* (1623): “Patterns, mirrors, examples: these are the functions to which Middleton puts the medieval past time and time again…These processes are enabled by a city that provides the framework within which tradition can be praised, though often in the name of change” (257). Bernau’s and Loomba’s analyses of the Shows’ interaction with England’s history and their common emblematic figures are not formulaic, for as Bernau points out, this reflection upon Britain’s past artistic and historical traditions is “often in the name of change,” indicating that the tableaux that Middleton’s Shows delineate are anything but static. Although Middleton upholds the Lord Mayor’s character, he remains concerned with the “communal memory” and condition of the mayor’s polis, knowing that it remains a fractured world and that its governors are inherently fallible as mortal men who temporarily hold office only to be succeeded by the next mayor.

As with the metaphorical Phoenix, the ceremony and discourse of Lord Mayors’ Shows reflect the political continuum in which all governors are transitory. As the Russian ambassador Aleksei Ziuzin observed in his account of *The Triumphs of Truth*, “with the Lord Mayor rode side by side, at his left hand, the Lord Mayor whom he was replacing, and behind them rode the aldermen, elected people who would be Lord Mayors in the future” (140-43). The positions of the authorities in the train signify not only the historical roles they currently enact in civic processions and on their city’s everyday stage, but also the future places they will one day occupy. Present governance is not only metaphorically but also physically located between past and future authorities. Middleton’s theatrical spectacles thus heighten what the mayor was already led to believe by being in close proximity to his predecessor and successors: that his reign is temporary and his power is transitory.
Middleton’s theme of perpetual renovation correlates with the general dramatic practice of Lord Mayors’ Shows, given that they are topical and ephemeral while simultaneously striving to root the event in a far-reaching national history. My application of perpetual renovation closely resembles Lawrence Manley’s broader contextualization of Lord Mayors’ Shows’ governing process: “Annual variations in an ever-widening repertoire of myths, motifs, and ideas reinforced a sense that history, the community, and its values were all human productions, arising from an ongoing civilizing process” (Literature and Culture, 215). The transition from one official to the next that was both a palpable and symbolic element of the Show correlates with the metaphoric association of governance within the wider cosmos. Manley links the twelve livery companies to the twelve signs of the zodiac, showing the perpetual nature of what Time calls “joys immortal” while also stressing the transience and changeable reality of the Lord Mayor’s body and governance (Literature and Culture, 278), an idea that can be found in a text such as Dekker’s Warres, Warres, Warres (1628). Dekker addresses his pamphlet to the Lord Mayor and, prior to providing an almanac of war, states: “And in a yeare this princely Bridegroome shines, / Twelue times, in his 12. houses, (the 12 Signes)” (sig. C4r). Dekker depicts the Lord Mayor’s time in office as a moment in which to shine, and stresses the fluctuation of that time by means of the twelve signs he moves through over the course of his year in office. The need to clarify that the twelve houses refer to the twelve signs accentuates the correlation between the zodiac’s and the livery companies’ houses, as Dekker must specify whether he is referring to zodiacs or livery companies. Although Dekker’s prose presents one Lord Mayor governing the twelve houses, the tacit message is that another Lord Mayor of another livery company will make this journey through the signs of the zodiac next year. Both Manley and Dekker illustrate a transitional course that the mayor ventures upon, depicting the
seasonal and unforeseen political changes through a zodiacal calendar that fluctuates. This
dynamic conception of governance also influences Middleton’s approach to the Lord Mayor as a
governor whose time in office is temporary, meaning that the works he must accomplish are part
of a perpetual renovation that precedes his term and will proceed from it. Despite the ephemeral
nature of this obligation, the Lord Mayor must nevertheless persevere to maintain a vigilant
governance and faith during his time. Middleton’s Show portrays him as such through the
psychomachia it stages, with the mayor as its Everyman.

Middleton’s Shows depict the space between heaven and earth as one in which the mayor
must consistently aim upward without presuming that his person or office guarantees his moral
conduct. His governance involves heeding Christian values while maintaining a dual focus on the
worldly sphere he governs that is at once divinely created and the devil’s playground. The
pageants assure the mayor of his capacity to undertake his social station while cautioning him
from abandoning the humility necessary to maintain his virtuous comportment. The mayor must
comprehend the difference between eternal time, which he can strive toward but never master,
and mundane time, which he occupies. Having vanquished Error’s efforts to charm the Lord
Mayor, Middleton’s personification of Time communicates a similar message to the Lord
Mayor:

This Time hath brought t’effect, for on thy day
Nothing but Truth and Virtue shall display
Their virgin ensigns; Infidelity,
Barbarism, and Guile, shall in deep darkness lie.
O, I could ever stand still thus and gaze;
Never turn glass again, wish no more days,
So this might ever last: pity the light

Of this rich glory must be cased in night.

But Time must on; I go; 'tis so decreed,

With joys immortal, triumphs never-ending.

And as her hand lifts me, to thy ascending

May it be always ready, worthy son,

To hasten which my hours shall quickly run. (470-83)

Time advises Myddelton that on the Lord Mayor’s day he is safe from Error, but laments that this cannot always be the condition of his rule, for “Time must on.” His speech draws attention to the ways in which the world operates, which neither Time nor the Lord Mayor is able to sway (476-77). The natural transition from day to night limits the celebrations, revealing that even Time is subject to the cyclical conditions of the globe. This fluctuating state of things reveals the imperfections of the world, revealing the inability for anyone to wield external forces completely. The ascetic perfection that the mayor’s Puritan background threatens to impose is thus replaced with moderate governance that seeks to retain a balance instead of fully resolving the issues at hand. Middleton cautions the mayor against pride by presenting him with a greater power (Time) that also cannot command the world. In presenting this personification who also fails to master worldly circumstances, Middleton dissuades the elected official from exhibiting hubris while still depicting him as a “worthy son,” encouraging him to maintain his duty to the city in the face of imperfection.

The mayor’s responsibility is again described as ongoing, for Time will bring the Lord Mayor “weekly” to St Paul’s Cross to hear a sermon (484). Although it was an annual tradition for the mayor to hear a sermon at St Paul’s Cross as part of his Lord Mayor’s Day, Time’s
reference to this event points not only to this day but also to the mayor’s repeated return to Paul’s Cross over the course of the year. At Paul’s the mayor can hear “Truth’s celestial harmony” again and again, so long as he bends “a serious ear” to the holy sermon (485-86). In doing so, the mayor can remain one of Truth’s seed who can aspire to “joys immortal” and have “triumphs never-ending” (480). In keeping such perfection out of the Lord Mayor’s reach, Middleton subtly indicates that it is the mayor’s duty to ensure that he and his city aspire to achieve these triumphs of Truth throughout the year rather than passively and arrogantly consuming the spectacles and speeches as confirmation of his righteous appointment.

Middleton’s Civic Influences: Anthony Munday’s and Thomas Dekker’s Shows

By setting out a future trajectory for the mayor rather than affirming his static glory, Middleton’s depiction of time and governance as perpetually renovated in *The Triumphs of Truth* differs from the portraits of civic governance in previous Lord Mayors’ Shows. Munday’s civic pageantry, for instance, is usually interpreted as an aggrandizement of national or civic chronology. David Bergeron, for example, claims that Munday establishes “a historical sense of continuity” by positioning his Shows at the climactic point of civic history, whereas Tracey Hill perceives Munday’s celebration of the city as entailing a nostalgia for its past accomplishments and mayors, thereby expressing “the quotidian voice of the early modern citizenry” that celebrates civic rather than national rule (Bergeron *English Civic Pageantry*, 159; Hill *Anthony Munday*, 4). In either case, topical issues for Munday become entrenched in unified stability by either upholding London’s antiquity or celebrating the diverse city through a singular “quotidian voice.” His earliest Jacobean Lord Mayor’s Show, *The Triumphs of Reunited Britannia* (1604), for example, celebrates James’s recent *Union of England and Scotland Act* (1603) and situates this event in relation to Britain’s mythological origins. The text welcomes “King James, our
second *Brute* and king” (336). The Show forges a reunified kingdom by envisioning James’s political act as mirroring the ancient foundational legend in which Brute established Britannia. Munday synchronizes the tie further by comparing James’s promised union to Henry VII’s synthesis of the factional houses of York and Lancaster, which ended the Wars of the Roses. He draws upon the country’s history to document an historical linearity that heralds James as the acme of English governors. In making the king’s union of England and Scotland the pinnacle of history rather than one act in a greater trajectory of moments that will occur, Munday’s Show promulgates James’s reunion of what Brute’s followers allowed to fall into ruin, and he has the monarch accomplish an even greater feat of reconciliation than the Tudors did by ending civil strife between nations rather than a conflict waged within England alone. This historicity results in a supersessional model of nationalism, wherein the present moment configures a perfecting of past events. Munday’s pageantry thus champions a *via media* similar to that which we saw at work in James’s or selections of Erasmus’s writings in which a synthesis is provided as a solution to the tension of contraries. Munday strives to bridge the gulf between past and present rather than allowing an oscillating *via diversa* to hold sway.

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73 Jonathan Gil Harris examines the multiple ways in which early modern literature embodies a palimpsestic quality that produces untimely matter, allowing a polychronic intermeshing of past and present habits of thought to proliferate. One of the three categories he creates out of this study is the supersessional text, which represents the least celebratory or overt model of polychronicity. Examining instances of Christian typology and unified national history, Harris summarizes this historical and literary trend with an apt analogy: it is “the philosophical equivalent of the decidedly odd custom whereby we blow our noses into handkerchiefs that we then fold and put into our pockets—a desirable expulsion that is simultaneously a retention” (*Untimely Matter*, 29).

74 Although Middleton could be said to present such a model of the *via media* as well in a work such as *Two Gates of Salvation*, the text’s interpretive framework is not as static as it may appear. According to Lori Anne Ferrell, the work’s adherence to Calvinist doctrine produces a more mutual than bound format “in which the Old Testament does not so much prefigure Christ’s teachings as provide a commentary to them” (679). By cross-examining the parallelism of Middleton’s work with the “connecting lines and geometric figures” of William Perkins’s *A Golden Chain*, Ferrell deduces that Middleton’s typology allows for a “polyphonic format” that communicates “harmony” in a less fundamental and more fluid manner, wherein readers draw the lines between passages with their eyes rather than following predetermined pathways (679). *Two Gates* remains entrenched in the tradition of typology, but allows some room to knit the Old and New together in diverse ways.
Despite Munday’s fervent disposition for supporting proto-national and civic causes, his works nevertheless entail a degree of socio-political content that verges upon satire, but these instances inflect their allegiance to one side over another instead of preserving a via diversa. Roze Hentschell examines one case in which Munday’s civic devotion has a subtle political bite against the crown. She analyzes the ways in which his later Show Himatiapoleos, The Triumphs of Olde Draperie, or the Rich Clothing of England (1614) contains subtle remarks in its pageants concerning James’s recent alignment with the infamous Cockayne project, which was “a scheme to replace England’s traditional economic lifeline, the export by the Merchant Adventurers of unfinished woollen textiles to the Netherlands, with the direct delivery of home-finished cloth to markets throughout Northern Europe” (Manley “Introduction,” 1397). For the Drapers’ livery company, this event had major consequences; Hentschell provides context for the ways in which the wool industry developed an early sense of English national identity that was compromised with James’s support of the Cockayne project: “The cloth industry was so plagued with troubles that in 1613 James ordered a report to be written on the ‘Estate of Clothing’ in England in order to better understand how to approach the problems” (153). Looking to Munday’s portrayal of the first Lord Mayor of the Drapers, Henry Fitz-Alwine, and his speech in Himatiapoleos, Hentschell observes that Munday has him explain “that just as God has divinely placed the King on earth ‘to rule,’ so did the King choose a Lord Mayor to ‘figure’ the King’s ‘authority’” (171). As Hentschell points out, the Show features instances that celebrate the Lord Mayor and ignore the magnanimity of James’s station. Munday refers to the Lord Mayor as “Maire,” and his marginalia etymologically explicates the term’s significance: “In the olde Saxon tongue from whence it was derived, it signifieth Dominus or Lord” (73). The archaic term thus allocates the mayor an ancient lineage. Munday also completely ignores James’s involvement with the day’s
events, omitting details of the traditional ceremonies at Whitehall for no clear reason (Hentschell 76-77). In sum, Munday states that “all this could not please the king,” thereby furthering the oppositional energy that had developed between the city and the crown as a result of the Cockayne Project (79). Munday, therefore, is not devoted to a particular governor—praising James in his first Jacobean Show and virtually ignoring the mayor, but then satirically biting at the king ten years later, as Hentschell observes—but he is unquestionably preoccupied with the merit and status of the city as a site of proto-nationalism. Munday’s strength as a pageant writer is his ability to celebrate the civic community. Middleton, on the other hand, bears unequivocal allegiance to no one, seeing an equivocal world.75

Middleton’s allegorical narrative communicates his political irony through interrogative and interactive qualities that distinguish his Show from the comfortable remove we find in other Shows. Performed the year before The Triumphs of Truth, Dekker’s first Show, Troia-Nova Triumphans (1612), provides a fit contrast by which to understand Middleton’s political irony. The two writers address and position their respective mayors quite differently. Although I am presenting in what follows a more favourable reading of Middleton’s Show’s capacity to encourage civic duty, I do not wish to dismiss Dekker’s civic contributions or attitudes toward the city as simplistic or oblique. In other words, it is not my intention to create a hegemonic binary comparison that champions a nuanced Middleton as superior to Dekker or more sophisticated than he. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Dekker’s approach to civic affairs is far more complicated than most critics perceive, which has led some scholars to refute reductive generalizations. As Martha Straznicky observes, Dekker’s The Shoemaker’s Holiday (1599) entails a subtle criticism of the recent Lord Mayor, Sir John Spencer, whose fiasco

75 This reading is in keeping with Gary Taylor’s summary of Middleton’s commercial and social allegiances: “No one owned him” (“Lives and Afterlives,” 49).
concerning his daughter’s dowry mirrors the circumstances of Dekker’s characterization of Sir Roger Oatley (365). Dekker’s later pageantry is also infused with rich political content, despite Bergeron’s characterization of *Britannia’s Honour* (1628) and *London’s Tempe* (1629) as dotages (*English Civic Pageantry*, 177). Kara Northway, for example, observes an ironic message in the Lemnian Forge pageant of *London’s Tempe*, whereby Vulcan’s Cyclopes’ song echoes notorious translations of Virgil’s *Aeneid* from previous years. Northway asserts that the context of this song suggests a mockery of past failures, hinting that John Campbell should not emulate his father who had previously served as Lord Mayor of London in 1609 (181). My editorial work on *London’s Tempe* for *The Map of Early Modern London* project also reveals the Show’s preoccupation with recent military politics, suggesting a much more complex agenda than Bergeron perceives. Although *Troia-Nova Triumphans* appears to be a more simple narrative construction, I attempt to provide a nuanced reading by examining its unique contribution to civic pageantry. In this manner, I aim to avoid perpetuating unified readings of Dekker’s politics, which a critic such as Julia Gasper has advanced in claiming that a militant Protestant zeal pervades his canon and thereby defines Dekker as a writer (11).

By approaching Middleton’s work as a variation of Dekker’s, we can remain appreciative of Dekker’s work while acknowledging Middleton’s unique contribution as indebted to Dekker’s Show. Angela Stock recognizes Dekker’s influence on Middleton by arguing that in *The Triumphs of Truth* Middleton “takes Dekker’s insistence on the conditional nature of civic honour even further by demanding evidence of the mayor’s probity and honour” in the moment rather than presuming his virtue (143). I concur with Stock’s position but extend it by suggesting that Middleton is preoccupied not only with the present but the future as well. I agree with Stock that Middleton is interested in the mayor as an actor, both in the moment of the spectacle and in
his future governance of London. Dekker’s Epistle to the Lord Mayor, on the other hand, centres upon his current person rather than his immediate or future actions: “Honor (this day) takes you by the Hand, and giues you welcomes into your New-Office of Pretorship. A Dignity worthie the Cities bestowing, and most worthy your Receiuing. You haue it with the Harts of many people, Voices and Held-vp hands: they know it is a Roabe fit for you, and therefore haue clothed you in it” (1-5). Although the Epistle conventionally entails grandiloquent praise of the mayor’s abilities, Dekker’s Epistle manipulates this custom to stress the importance of reciprocal governance between the mayor and his people. Citizens, for example, “haue clothed” the mayor in his official garbs, and honour “giues” the Lord Mayor his title and “takes” him by the hand, indicating that the Lord Mayor is not autonomous. Dekker’s Epistle offers something more than overt praise, but these descriptions presume that the mayor is already entitled to these things and already bears these qualities. The passage also glorifies the Lord Mayor as the central figure with the congratulatory repetition of “you.” Dekker establishes a mutual tie between the mayor and the city, but focuses too much upon the present comportment of the mayor to warrant a sustained reflection upon this bond. The conditional language of Dekker’s Epistle later becomes unconditional, thereby emphasizing this sense of closure and unity by describing the mayor’s subjects who “haue bestowed these their Loues vpon you” and in dedicating the printed book “to your Noble Disposition” (18, 21). While the mayor might owe the people his title, Dekker’s concluding remarks to the Epistle already allocate virtue to him on their behalf, since Dekker presents him as already having attained a righteous comportment. The Lord Mayor is front and centre, an ideal figure whose rule is mutually dependent but who is also automatically fit for emulation.
As is conventional in dedicatory Epistles to the Lord Mayor, Middleton also compliments Myddelton with hyperbolic language, establishes a humble attitude in relation to the mayor, and provides an overall aggrandizement of the mayor’s achievement and character; however, the Epistle to *The Triumphs of Truth* also toys with these conventions in ways that remind the Lord Mayor that he remains accountable to God and the city during his year in office. Such materials, which were not components of the performance, complement the original performance’s political irony by guiding readers to reimagine the Lord Mayor’s role in the events as that of a common man in a position of power rather than as a distant and supreme authority. Middleton first plays upon the irony that the mayor shares his name and in so doing conflates their identities, thereby contributing to his Epistle’s focus on the wider Christian cosmos by reminding the mayor that he is not a unique or singular entity. Middleton’s Epistle is preoccupied with the mayor’s actions—past and present—and his current position within the grander scheme of his life and his world:

As often as we shall fix our thoughts upon the Almighty Providence, so often they return to our capacities laden with admiration, either from the divine works of his mercy or those incomprehensible of his justice. But here to instance only his omnipotent mercy, it being the health and preservation of all his works, and first, not only in raising, but also in preserving your lordship from many great and incident dangers, especially in foreign countries in the time of your youth and travels; and now, with safety, love, and triumph, to establish you in this year’s honour, crowning the perfection of your days, and the gravity of your life, with power, respect, and reverence. Next, in that
myself, though unworthy, being of one name with your lordship, notwithstanding all oppositions of malice, ignorance, and envy, should thus happily live, protected by part of that mercy—as to do service to your fame and worthiness, and my pen only to be employed in these bounteous and honourable triumphs, being but shadows to those eternal glories that stand ready for deservers; to which I commend the deserts of your justice, remaining ever,

To your lordship, in the best of my observance,

Thomas Middleton (23-46)

Although Middleton refers to Myddelton’s Lord Mayor’s Day as the ripeness of the mayor’s life, he begins by referring not to the Lord Mayor but to God, who has delivered this event and safely guides the mayor through the day, as He has during the Lord Mayor’s previous journeys when he was a leading figure in the East India Company. As with Phoenix’s journey, the Lord Mayor’s travels afar are combined with those at home through the city, and he remains aware of his life’s arc in which his present moment figures as a climactic instance. Being at the perfection of his days, the Lord Mayor is ripe for office, having managed to avoid sinful conduct during his youth, but he must also remain aware that God ultimately governs as “Almighty Providence.” Middleton aligns himself with Myddleton again when he states that he can also achieve solace by averting the opposing forces of Error. The playwright positions himself as subservient to the

While we might associate perfection today with a superhuman quality, it is worth noting that for Middleton perfection is achieved through collective rather than individual aspirations. In The Manner of His Lordship’s Entertainment (1613), which he wrote for Hugh Myddelton—Thomas’s brother—as a commemoration of his New Rivers project that brought fresh water to London, Middleton has Perfection deliver a speech in which she attributes the perfection of the event to “Favour from princes, and from all applause” (54). The individual project is only perfect by means of fuelling “the public good, which grace requires” (57). In this manner, the perfection of Myddelton’s days is a result of the people electing him into office rather than a direct correlation with his personal character or actions, speaking to the idea that perfection for early modern people was about coming into a ripe state of existence—as the Lord Mayor has in taking office—rather than an infallible nature.
Lord Mayor who cannot compare to his station or character. Although Middleton follows the conventions of Epistles to Lord Mayors’ Shows by assuming a humble voice, he nevertheless establishes an evaluative comparison between himself and Myddelton. In this manner, the dramatist reduces the mayor’s eminence and subtly continues in this vein when he downplays the grandeur of his pageants, which are “but shadows to those eternal glories that stand ready for deservers.” The comparison here shifts from one between Middleton and Myddelton to one between the artistry of the triumphs, which depict the city of God, and the actual kingdom of heaven. Middleton’s commendation of the mayor for these rewards repositions the writer in the seat of authority, presuming to speak of the heavenly bliss awaiting the mayor while reminding him that these “deserts,” or deservings, have yet to be achieved. In downplaying his artistic creation, Middleton simultaneously counsels Myddelton that his city will likewise not achieve such divinity: neither Middleton’s pageants nor Myddelton’s city will ever compare with the kingdom of heaven. Middleton’s Epistle fashions the mayor into an Everyman rather than an authority through its future outlook, its conflation of the author with the mayor, and its conscientious Christianity, whereas Dekker’s praise relies upon mutual civic support but presumes that the Lord Mayor has it.

Like his Lord Mayor, Dekker’s Show has been celebrated chiefly for its morality. Bergeron sees Dekker’s *Troia-Nova Triumphans* as the epitome of Lord Mayors’ Shows for its moral-play structure. He ends his chapter on Dekker by essentially claiming that if only Dekker had not written his later two Lord Mayors’ Shows, *Britannia’s Honour* (1628) and *London’s Tempe* (1629), we would be able to call him an exemplary writer of Shows (*English Civic Pageantry*, 178). Bergeron favours a unified dramatic approach that idealizes an overt narrative structure and undervalues the importance and symbolism of spectacle. Dekker’s Show is more
sophisticated than these strict parameters lead us to believe. The battle between Virtue and Envy in the third device differs markedly from the common didactic model. Envy and Virtue are pitted not only in combat but also in dialogue, which disrupts the usual single speech formula of Lord Mayors’ Shows. Where Dekker’s work differs from other writers of Lord Mayors’ Shows is in the manner by which the viewer is positioned in relation to the spectacle and dialogue. Virtue uses her shield to fend off her opponents with its dazzling effect. Then, through her ethereal power, she is able to thwart “their arrowes, which they shooe vp into the aire,” only then to “breake there in fire-workes,” as a result of her invisible abilities, thereby coupling theatrical spectacle with divine miracle (292-93). These awe-inspiring effects, however, are followed by the ensuing description of the arrows’ destruction: they explode as if “hauing no power to do wrong to so sacred a Deity as Vertue” (293-94). Dekker’s description of the event coupled with Virtue’s repeated direction to the mayor and his train to go “[o]n, on” fashion the Lord Mayor into a witness rather than spurring him into action or pricking his conscience (309, 321).

Dekker’s pageants serve as opera basilica, and their combined usage of spectacle and speech to communicate these lessons to the Lord Mayor makes his Show unique, challenging Bergeron’s separation of the Shows’ bodies (material spectacles) from their souls (the text). The opera basilica of Middleton’s Show differ from Dekker’s in the manner by which the Show frames them by drawing the Lord Mayor into the events as a character (as well as an observer), and by establishing repetitive interplay between Error and Truth. Dekker’s Show instead features one encounter between Envy and the Lord Mayor wherein her efforts to overcome Virtue thereafter

77 In his revised edition of English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642, Bergeron clings to the distinction between the material conditions of the spectacles and the poetry of the Shows by separating these two components into different chapters on the body and the soul of the Shows.
are quelled by Virtue. When Envy does return after the journey to the Guildhall, she is assaulted with pistols and is “seene no more” (523).

**Implicating the Lord Mayor and Other Readers**

Myddelton, on the other hand, keeps encountering Error, and his gaze is repeatedly disrupted by the ongoing oscillating visual spectacle of vice and virtue that Error’s returns precipitate. After Truth expels Error’s mists, the veil is lifted that had covered Middleton’s personification of London. London then delivers a speech commending Virtue’s actions and the train moves forward. They are intercepted, however, at the Cross, located in Cheapside, by Error, who, “full of wrath and malice to see his mist so chased away, falls into [a] fury” (622-4). At the conclusion of his brief tirade, Error commands, “*drop down, sulphurous cloud*” (634),

> At which the mist falls again and hangs over all the beauty of the mount, not a person of glory is seen, only the four monsters
> gather courage again and take their seats, advancing their clubs
> above their heads; which no sooner perceived, but Truth in her chariot, making near to the place, willing still to rescue her friends and servants from the powers of Ignorance and Darkness,
> makes use of these words. (635-42)

The recurring actions of veiling and unveiling that are produced by Middleton’s Show provide the reader and the Lord Mayor with a double image of the city that the mayor must continually negotiate—one that can shine with heavenly bliss but can also be enveloped in sin—and he is not always entirely aware of his need to combat Error, nor is he in control of the counterforces. 78

Only Truth is able to accomplish this task. She does so when she commands, “*Vanish again, foul* 78

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78 As aforementioned, Truth’s Angel relays the *psychomachia* that transpired during the Lord Mayor’s ceremonies at Whitehall, of which he was unaware.
“mist, from honour’s bower” (648). Truth is the ideal, but her purity cannot persist on earthly
ground. Even Truth must persevere to undo Error’s work, but her success is conditional upon
Londoners remaining her friends and servants.

The Lord Mayor is still the primary figure in the Show who must strive to emulate
Truth’s justice, but he remains entangled in the fallible mundane realm. Like an Everyman, the
mayor is figuratively the central character whom audiences and readers gravitate to—for he
embodies their common mortal condition and represents their collective embodiment as the
moderator of their civic body—but he is also at the centre of the spectacle, as he is literally and
physically positioned between Error and Virtue. We visualize this staging when Middleton
describes the movement from the pageant comprising Truth’s initial chastisement of Error to the
mayor’s encounter with the King of Moors:

These words ended, they all set forward, this chariot of Truth and
her celestial handmaids, the Graces and Virtues, taking place next
before his lordship; Zeal and the Angel before that, the chariot of
Error following as near as it can get; all passing on till they come
into Paul’s Churchyard, where stand ready the five islands[.]

(385-90)
The passage allows us to glimpse the ways in which Middleton cleverly crafted a Show that
could communicate the Lord Mayor’s common struggle and fallen state not only to its mayor and
his train but also to the crowds who came out to watch. Gail Kern Paster reminds us that the
nature of Lord Mayors’ Shows means that the Lord Mayor, his Sheriffs, Aldermen, the
ambassadors, and other high-ranking officials would hear the speeches delivered in the pageants,
but the thousands of Londoners who crowded to watch the Lord Mayor’s Show would only have
witnessed the spectacles, depending on where they were positioned (*The Idea of the City*, 139). Despite such auditory impairments, Middleton manages to position the Lord Mayor dramatically between Virtue, who leads him, and Error’s chariot, which follows closely behind him. Their order effectively portrays the Lord Mayor as an Everyman, but also as an actor who is materially and metaphorically in the middle. Although he pursues Truth, the crowd observes not a superior, but a fellow mortal man who is striving to adhere to virtue and eschew vice. Hence, Myddelton acts on the city’s stage for the “many people, men, women, and children—the whole City” who, Ziuzin reports, “watched this ceremony” (143-44).

Middleton thus communicates his middle way both visually for the people and with verses for the mayor and his train, but his descriptions also manage to disrupt an entirely unified perspective for the reader. Like the Lord Mayor, the reader again and again confronts Error, even after Truth has commanded him to vanish. The following description is provided for the reader after Perfect Love has delivered his verse:

This speech so ended, his lordship and the companies pass on to
Guildhall; and at their returning back, these triumphs attend to
bring his lordship toward St Paul’s church, there to perform those
yearly ceremony rites which ancient and grave order hath
determined; Error by the way still busy and in action to draw
darkness often upon that Mount of Triumph, which by Truth is as
often dispersed. (682-89)

Middleton’s account positions the reader in relation to the traditional sequence of events, wherein the company moves from place to place through the city, as was customary. These regular motions in concordance with the “ceremonial rites” at Paul’s lend a degree of stability to
the reader’s experience, as he or she would have been familiar with such annual practices and routines. The customs are disrupted, however, by the intrusion of Error within the same sentence, who remains “busy and in action.” The previous conflict between Truth and Error is heightened here with the fact that we only know that Error’s “darkness” is brought about “as often” as it is “dispersed,” leaving the reader to imagine any number of times that this oscillation occurs. Even if the printed book fulfills the desired reception of his dramatic narrative, the visual (re)imagining of events that Middleton’s text promotes still encourages perpetual renovation.

The conclusion to Middleton’s work also suggests ongoing work and an unsettling of conventional power dynamics with the lingering threat of Error. The Lord Mayor nevertheless remains virtuous and the text upholds its faith in the abilities of the mayor:

This proud seat of Error lying now only glowing in embers—
being a figure or type of his lordship’s justice on all wicked
offenders in the time of his government—I now conclude,
holding it a more learned discretion to cease of myself than to
have Time cut me off rudely: and now let him strike at his
pleasure. (788-93)

Having been incinerated by Zeal’s flame, Error, his companions, and his chariot have now almost been extinguished, representing the conquest of the Lord Mayor and his companions during their time in office. Still, Middleton chooses to describe these embers as “glowing,” indicating a considerably dimmed power but one that remains in spite of this weak condition. The reference to “the time of” Myddelton’s government also foreshadows the year ahead instead of suggesting that Error has already been thoroughly vanquished, meaning that this work still lies ahead for Londoners. Even at the year’s conclusion, Error may rise out of his ashes in some new
form, for Londoners would know that they would have another Show with new evils to vanquish in the year to come. Middleton finishes his printed record with "FINIS," but given the forecast of perpetual renovation ahead, the Lord Mayor’s work appears to have just begun. Middleton’s text, however, would have been read by Myddelton’s fellow Londoners as well, and the author subtly draws attention to these citizens’ future actions in his final statement. In mentioning “wicked offenders” during Myddelton’s year in office, the text serves as a warning to citizens to remain vigilant as well and to watch for criminal activity. We advance to a richer investigation of citizen politics in the next chapter on Middleton and Rowley’s *The World Tossed at Tennis.*
Chapter Three: Tossing \textit{The World Tossed at Tennis} Around London

\textit{The World Tossed at Tennis} is a stage oddity. Initially intended for Charles and James, the masque was altered to suit the commercial theatre, and adjustments and reattachments were later made before it was circulated in the press. As the work was tailored to serve its commercial purposes, I argue that its political irony also accommodated its new audiences. What unites the three versions of \textit{The World Tossed at Tennis}, traces of which are found in the surviving palimpsestic printed book, is a shared knowledge of the Thirty Years’ War and the competing attitudes concerning whether or not England should take action in the matter.

Even though the performance at court never occurred, Middleton’s, Rowley’s, and/or the publishers’ decision to include portions that were meant for court performance but would not have been staged in the playhouse encouraged book buyers to imagine the performance intended for a royal audience, prompting them to draw conclusions about the lessons that the playwrights conveyed to their king and prince. Readers are thus guided to imagine the dramatic work as a
courtly spectacle, but they are also drawn to envision it as a play staged in a theatre, given the inclusion of a Prologue and Epilogue that were devised in order to convert the masque into a play. The reader is thus privileged with the ability to experience the *opera basilica* initially planned for James and Charles while also (re)imagining the alternative role these would serve in the playhouse performance that the book guides its readers to concoct in their minds. Through these multiple performance histories made available to them, readers are led to observe the multiple ways in which this stage oddity was “tossed” around London.

This chapter attends to the various kinds of political irony that these three versions produce for their respective audiences, but it first investigates the years between Middleton’s first Lord Mayor’s Show and *The World Tossed at Tennis* by briefly touching upon his satire *The Witch* and the ways in which its allegory inspires a sense of interpretive responsibility in its audience at Blackfriars. In alluding to the Frances Howard and Robert Carr scandal involving Howard’s annulment of her marriage to the Earl of Essex, her ensuing marriage to Carr, and the couple’s murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, Middleton creates a loose allegorical framework that exhibits the ineffective nature of Jacobean governance. The king’s dissolution of Howard and Essex’s marriage in 1613, which he had initially sanctioned in 1606, and his later pardoning of Howard in late 1615 for her part in the murder of Overbury demonstrated James’s questionable governance. Middleton’s tragicomedy plays upon the suspicious nature of James’s mercy by staging the comedic ending as an abrupt and disjointed event. By portraying *The Witch’s* Duke as absurd in the comedic (and comical) politics with which he closes the play, Middleton subtly

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79 John Astington indicates that the title page provides readers with incentive to imagine the text in performance, specifically at court: “The curtain has always attracted interest in commentary on this print, and it may indeed have been specified by designer(s) as a visual reminder that this fiction was made for the royal stage rather than the commercial theatre” (237). Even though the masque was never performed for James and Charles, such a visual cue in tandem with the inclusion of the Induction prompts the reader to imagine the work as it was intended for royalty.
remarks upon James’s recent actions and causes playgoers to maintain their faith in divine
providence by directing them to look to God rather than their rulers for renewed stability. By
establishing ties with the political literature of verse libels, which the scandal had fomented, The
Witch enters a public discourse, but it distinguishes itself from these oral and print tracts by
leaving matters open to interpretation rather than advancing a distinct agenda. The play’s plural
yet poignant structure speaks to the political irony that Middleton and Rowley express in The
World Tossed at Tennis and thus serves as an important point of entry to discuss the masque-
turned-play’s multifarious political irony.

The ironia that the playwrights describe in The World Tossed at Tennis is, of course,
originally crafted in the tradition of presenting the monarch with opera basilica. To analyze
these lessons, I first provide an overview of the early stages of the Thirty Years’ War,
specifically James’s proclivity to cling to his peacemaking agenda and Charles’s brash militant
attitude. Having contextualized this matter, I interpret what the playwrights had intended to
present for their king and prince. The strange Induction to the masque features Charles’s
speaking properties, including the building in which the masque was supposed to take place, and
I argue that the theme of seasonal change and the shifting habits of the buildings in this segment
closely resemble the ensuing dialogue between a Soldier, representing Charles, and a Scholar,
serving as an allegorical configuration of James. Pallas provides the ironic middle ground
between them and expresses the need to meld their habits in order to govern their kingdom
properly. Challenging criticism to date, which has tended to claim that the playwrights favour
Charles over James, I examine the ways in which The World Tossed at Tennis questions the
abilities of both royal figures, suggesting that the playwrights attempt to persuade their leaders to
establish a middle ground.
The double focus on James and Charles destabilizes the centrality of the monarch as the decider, and this plurality takes on a more subversive quality as the masque transmutes into a play and is later circulated in printed form. Looking both to their current and their future king, audiences and readers see governance as a plural endeavour and are invited to assume the position of these ruling figures temporarily by viewing the opera basilica that the Prologue tells them were intended for a court performance. By staging a courtly performance in the commercial theatre, the playwrights and the acting company appeal to popular taste, as David Nicol suggests in his perception that *The World Tossed at Tennis* is an example of what Paul Yachnin calls “populuxe theatre” (136). The theatre, Yachnin argues, offered a “populuxe” market that “afforded the cultural consumers of Shakespeare’s time an opportunity to play at being their social ‘betters’ and a limited mastery of the system of social rank itself” (“The Populuxe Theatre,” 41). While these entertainments were pleasurable, I contend that with the development of a burgeoning news culture, which I elaborate upon later in this chapter, audiences experienced a critically interpretive pleasure as well by having been informed of political affairs abroad through printed materials.\(^8\) As with *The Witch*, Middleton and Rowley’s play creates plural and inchoate politics while portraying their audience’s monarchy as fallible. The chapter ends by presenting a case for the ways in which Middleton and Rowley continued to fashion their work as a plural and subversive piece of writing. In this final segment I examine the manner by which the text changed while also illustrating the ways in which it retained an interrogative dynamic of reception in the transition from the stage to print, and I suggest that Middleton looked to the

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\(^{8}\) In this capacity *The World Tossed at Tennis* would have been of interest to at least one of its publishers, John Trundle, who regularly purchased dramatic and news-related materials. As C.E. McGee points out in his editorial notes to Middleton and Rowley’s work, the masque “suit[s] the interests of John Trundle, a London bookseller who regularly invested in ‘ballads, news-books, plays and ephemeral literature’” (667).
current Lord Mayor and his regular patron at the time, Sir Walter Cockayne, as a fit model for citizen politics.

**Libel Play: The Frances Howard and Robert Carr Scandal and The Witch**

Dating *The Witch* has led to complications, speculations, and debate, but in recent years scholars seem to have arrived at a consensus that the play was likely performed in 1616. Allusions to the political scandal involving Frances Howard and Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset, have allowed scholars to assess with considerable accuracy when the play was likely composed and performed. Desiring to wed Carr, Howard claimed that her marriage to the Earl of Essex, which James had arranged in 1606 as a way to unite their factional families, had not been consummated, so “[w]ith the king’s support, she obtained an ecclesiastical annulment [on 25 September 1613] after a salacious public hearing which branded Essex as impotent. The verdict was widely seen as reflecting badly on James (who had enthusiastically involved himself in the case, opposing Archbishop Abbot) and on the immoral behaviour of his whole court” (Croft 89). James’s irresponsible governance continued when Howard and Carr were found guilty in late 1615 of poisoning Sir Thomas Overbury, who was imprisoned in the tower in April 1613 and died there in September 1613. The king pardoned Howard shortly thereafter and exiled Carr, later issuing his pardon “in 1624, about four months before the death of James” (Matter 256). News of these events was widely disseminated to Londoners, English citizens, and Europeans abroad.

81 The exact date remains unknown, leaving a degree of speculation. However, 1616 seems to be accepted as the most likely year in which *The Witch* was performed. In his recent book, for instance, Stephen Wittek dates the play as 1616 (63).

82 Overbury was Carr’s political advisor. He took a dislike to Howard and in turn the pair (and the king) generally grew to despise him. He was imprisoned in the Tower for refusing “a pressing royal offer of an ambassadorship abroad” (Croft 89).
Anne Lancashire was the first to examine the implications of the Frances Howard and Robert Carr scandal in relation to Middleton’s *The Witch*. Her findings resulted in the conclusion that “Middleton deliberately based *The Witch*, some time between 1610 and early 1613 (probably in spring 1613), on a developing real-life situation” (168). Marion O’Connor’s recent edition provides further historical context that allows us to presume a 1616 performance. Her findings expand upon Lancashire’s analysis of Antonio’s “selective impotence” (which corresponds with Essex’s supposed claim that he was unable to consummate the marriage but could copulate with women other than Howard) and her explication of the character Francisca’s name as “homophonous with Frances Carr” (1125). O’Connor also deduces that “Middleton made adjustments” to Machiavelli’s *Florentine History* (the source material for *The Witch*), particularly the “Duchess’s resort to a witch for poison” (1125). This point in particular is revealing, given that Paul Yachnin has noted Middleton’s and other authors’ frequent use of the impotence trope around this time (“Populuxe Theatre,” 52). O’Connor’s extension of Lancashire’s work has brought academics to a consensus that *The Witch* was most likely performed in 1616. We can thus safely presume that the Howard and Carr affair and their murder of Overbury inform Middleton’s play.

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83 Some examples of the various texts that disseminated news of (and capitalized on) the murder include *The bloody downfall of adultery, murder, ambition at the end of which are added Westons, and Mistris Turners last teares, shed for the murder of Sir Thomas Ouerbury…* (1615), *A VVife novv the vvidovv of Sir Thomas Ouerburie…* (1614), and *Sir Thomas Overbury, or, The poysoned knights complaint* (1614).

84 O’Connor’s attention to this deliberate alteration to the original source indicates an intention on Middleton’s part that clarifies Yachnin’s supposition that Middleton perhaps wrote *The Witch* with Howard and Carr in mind and then incidentally wrote the scene that echoes the couple’s murder of Overbury (“Scandalous Trades,” 220-21).

85 O’Connor substantiates R.C. Bald’s earlier claim that “there is a clear allusion to the notorious Essex divorce case of 1613, but the play is more likely to date from about 1616, as the parts played by Simon Forman and Mrs Turner in aiding the Countess of Essex were not disclosed until the Overbury murder trials at the end of 1615” (41).
What is less easy to determine is the purpose or effect of Middleton’s loose allegory of these widely publicized events. Although Lancashire makes an astute discovery in locating the allusions that are necessary to situate the play historically, her ensuing reading compares the play to masques, specifically Jonson’s *Masque of Queens* (171-72), arguing that there is a specific moral intent to Middleton’s play that directly coincides with the didactic framework found in courtly masques. As with readings of *The Phoenix*, this stark moral interpretation is met with an equally extreme position in later criticism that the play is a polemical satire. A.A. Bromham and Zara Bruzzi claim that *The Witch* “exudes a sense of disgust that is barely held in control by the dramatist” (25). Their reading is complicated not only by this loose reading of authorial intention, but also by an interpretation that Middleton’s play deliberately aims to incite “riot” from its audiences with Fernando’s reference in the text to such measures (25-26). Yachnin approaches Fernando’s speech instead with the commercial theatre in mind, taking it as “a theatrical as well as a courtly form of transgression, an overflowing entertainment” (“Populuxe Theatre,” 56). By undermining interpretations that Middleton is attempting to inspire real political action from his audience, Yachnin rescues “Middleton’s satire from allegorical readings of the play as a proto-democratic message to the king or plebeian protest against aristocratic corruption” (“Populuxe Theatre,” 50). Although the play does not advocate modern understandings of protest or democracy, as Yachnin is correct to assert, its portrait of governance, especially given that we can now ascertain *The Witch*’s date with relative certainty, tacitly positions an attuned audience in a vantage point that is superior to that of their monarch.

While audiences at Paul’s probably had a similar experience in watching Middleton’s satire of James’s knights in *The Phoenix*, several developments had occurred in the twelve years between these plays that augmented Londoners’ willingness to critique their monarch and to
develop their own understanding of political affairs. In recent years, James’s reluctance to collaborate reinforced his image as the decider. In addition to his involvement in the annulment of Howard’s marriage and subsequent intervention in her and Carr’s trial, James reunited parliament on 5 April 1614, having dissolved it in 1611, only to dissolve it again on 7 June 1614. The Addled Parliament of 1614 provides a later development of James’s increasingly centralized power. Speaking with Spanish ambassador Sarmiento, James lamented:

The House of Commons is a body without a head. The members give their opinions in a disorderly manner. At their meetings nothing is heard but cries, shouts, and confusion. I am surprised that my ancestors should ever have permitted such an institution to come into existence: I am a stranger, and found it here when I arrived, so that I am obliged to put up with what I cannot get rid of. (qtd. in Clucas and Davies 3)

Although parliament does not figure in *The Witch*, this history contributes to the plural and resistant voices that began to take shape in early modern London’s literary culture. Verse libels, for example, emerged out of the Frances Howard and Robert Carr scandal. As Michelle O’Callaghan points out, supporters of the Essex circle responded with libels “undermining the reputation of Carr and Howard” in response to the dishonour to Essex that the annulment had brought (64). By targeting and defending aristocrats, libels were not merely popular, “if the term popular is being used in opposition to the elite,” since “verse libels crossed social boundaries and attracted audiences from a range of social classes, including the non-literate” (O’Callaghan 64). Although the idea of the public sphere would not be developed until much later, Michelle

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Sarmiento is also known as Count Gondomar and, as we will see in chapter four, became the main target of Middleton’s satire *A Game at Chess*. 
O’Callaghan correctly perceives that the Frances Howard and Robert Carr scandal effectively created a public discourse around the event that libels effectively spread in print and oral forms across the city, country, and continent (65). This is not to say that we encounter a proto-democratic energy that is akin to our modern-day conception of the term, but that we see the development of an interpretive commercial network that engaged Londoners in political discourse. ⑧

_The Witch_ involves itself in this public event by satirizing its primary figures and their monarch. As David Lindley suggests, Middleton’s play engages with libel literary culture by replicating the news it circulated. Picking up on a libel that was defensive of Essex’s impotency by claiming that he was able to copulate with women, just not Howard, Lindley shows how Middleton loosely represents this narrative with Antonio’s ongoing “sexual relationship with his long-time whore, Florida” (98). Unlike verse libels, however, Middleton’s play does not promulgate a particular opinion on the issue nor does it stake an allegiance. As O’Connor points out, such matters are “dispersed across three plots” to ensure “that no single figure or configuration would run the risk of being cited as a representation of the crimes of his social superiors” (1126). Hence, Londoners do not receive a specific moral or political purpose, for Middleton did not engineer _opera basilica_ for persons incapable of enacting politics. Instead, playgoers take pleasure in spotting allegorical correspondences with the political affairs they are already informed of through libels and other texts. While the entertainment gives the audience gratification by allowing them to feel in the know, there are deeper implications to their

⑧ By resisting narratives of unity and social order, libels prompt political awareness. By approaching these topical issues, _The Witch_ contributes to this dialogue, but presents a dialogic rather than an oppositional view in its satire. Inga-Stina Ewbank, for instance, points out _The Witch_’s sceptical tone and qualities, which speaks to other plays from the middle of Middleton’s career; however, I suggest that this scepticism is framed by a sense of duty to arrive at an interpretation of matters that is steered by faith (156).
interpretive practice that would concern conscientious Christians. The moral dimension of this theatrical experience places them in a superior stance to their sovereign and the aristocrats involved, who have committed folly; however, the audience’s anxiety is piqued by their awareness that their superiors are unable to manage the state in a dutiful fashion. Those attuned to the asymmetrical relation of the player king’s enforced comedic conclusions to what has transpired are able to grasp *The Witch*’s unsettling portrait of Jacobean governance.

The play’s tragicomic genre functions as a way to communicate this uneven political irony through theatrical conventions that corresponds with political events. In contextualizing James’s royal pardon of Howard and Carr during their trial and applying it to the tragicomic ending of *The Witch*, O’Connor suggests such a connection:

> Lord Ellesmere, acting as Lord High Steward, virtually assured the Countess of a royal pardon with the same breath—indeed, in the middle of the same grammatical sentence—as he pronounced legal sentence of death upon her. The conclusion of *The Witch* is analogously outrageous: to attempt to explain all the unexpected revelations and reversals solely as tragicomic conventions, or even yet as parodies of those conventions, is to overburden generic expectations. (1125-26)

The Duke’s final statement, “in all times, may this day ever prove / A day of triumph, joy and honest love” (136-37), enforces a conclusion that is at odds with the Duchess’s actions over the course of the play, especially given that the Duke’s proclamation that she will “[l]ive a duchess”

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88 O’Connor’s interpretation coincides with Elizabeth Schafer’s. In her New Mermaids edition of the play, she states: “the forced happy ending of *The Witch* could be understood as reflecting on the happy ending engineered for the aristocratic criminal Frances, who retired to live in some splendour in the Tower while her accomplices were executed” (xviii).
occurs in the same line as the Lord Governor’s decree that she will die “a murd’ress” (5.3.125). This extemporaneous scenario, in which the Duke suddenly and mysteriously revives and denounces the charges against the Duchess with no valid reasoning, points to the questionable nature not only of the play world’s rulers, but also of James.

Theatregoers are left then with a universe in which their fate is governed by divine providence and its mysterious machinations. Although playgoers cannot enact opera basilica and are therefore powerless to alter their country’s politics, Middleton’s political irony nevertheless establishes an interrogative text that inspires citizens’ faith in spite of faulty governance. The tragicomic stage draws conclusions that seem at odds with the Duchess’s ostensibly just deserts, but it also brings about Antonio’s death, which appears to draw matters to a more harmonious closure. Despite God’s absence from the stage and the world with which it was often associated (i.e., theatrum mundi), the audience members are led to maintain their faith that He manages it.

In The Witch, we see a nascent example of Middleton’s interpretive democracy critiquing James’s policies and methods. The dramatist thus offers a tragicomedy in which the theatre of coincidence and its questionable governor could represent divine providence’s grace or could be the result of sinful actions. This lingering uncertainty in which the audience continues to look two ways at once is a central component of Middleton’s political irony, but the audience, unlike

89 The stage’s technology seems to enact this justice literally. Antonio’s death is not performed onstage, but Hermio relays to the audience that “a false trapdoor” was the culprit (5.3.30). Melissa Walter remarks upon the power of the trapdoor when she states that it “apparently act[s] on its own [and] creates an even more radical picture of an animated object functioning to punish a misguided patriarch” (101). Since the culprit is Antonio’s misguided blindness, a result of his “wrath and jealousy” (5.3.29), the suggestion seems to be that audiences must be wary of their environs and remain vigilant in order to avoid the perils and traps of this world.

90 In a 1606 epigram, for example, John Owen likened humanity’s uncertain state to a tragicomedy: “Mans Life’s a Tragicke Comedie, / Hope is his Argument; / The Prologue Faith; the Acts are Love, / The Stage Earths Continent” (sig. D2v). From this perspective, the tacit hope is that God leads him through these motions.

91 Footnote 8 provides a detailed explanation of the ways in which this dissertation is defining and applying “interpretive democracy.”
their Lord Mayor or king, are helpless to alter the situation. However, they are encouraged to remain vigilant in their individual interpretations of this representation of their reality, and in doing so, they uphold their collective faith.

The Outset of the Thirty Years’ War: Prince Charles the Soldier and King James the Scholar

James’s inability to contain and order his court and justice system represents a small affair when compared to the global matter that would haunt the king until his death and would increase public dissent concerning his policies and governance. What is now known as the Thirty Years’ War began in 1618 and outlasted the Jacobean era. James was expected to hold an important role in these events, considering that they directly affected his daughter Elizabeth and her husband Frederick, whose claim to the Bohemian throne by election was the principal cause for the war. James had precipitated his own involvement in this matter by arranging the marriage of Elizabeth and Frederick: “The Bohemian project was…known to all those who signed the alliance, but while the Elector’s advisers assumed that the English king would help them to put it into action, the King had equally assumed that these remote German follies would never enter into the actual politics of Europe” (Wedgwood 52). The resulting situation James found himself in was not the history he had presumed would unfold:

…the international situation changed…after 1618, when a Protestant rebellion attempted to transfer the crown of Bohemia from the Habsburgs to James’s son-in-law, the Elector Palatine.

The Elector’s acceptance of this offer precipitated a crisis that escalated, over the next three years, into a confessional war in which Spanish troops helped conquer the Palatinate itself. The king and his Council therefore faced an increasingly stark choice:
between entering the war on the Protestant side or maintaining a
neutrality that benefited Habsburg interests, in the hope that an
Anglo-Spanish marriage alliance might also lead to a negotiated
settlement on acceptable terms. (Smuts 382)

Middleton and Rowley’s masque plays upon this tension and the ways in which James held to his
mission as a peacemaker whereas Charles was eager to go to war.

James was more conflicted than the simple representation of the king as a peacemaker
would have us believe, but it is clear that he did not wish to waver from his peaceful stance.

According to S.R. Gardiner, “the foremost Victorian historian of Stuart England” (Houlbrooke
180), James

…proved quite unequal to the fresh challenge posed by his son-in-
law’s acceptance of the Bohemian throne and the subsequent
outbreak of war in Germany. Irresolute, James shifted his ground
from day to day, yet proved over-confident of his ability to act as a
peacemaker. He could not appreciate the complexities of the
international situation, and his efforts to end hostilities in Germany
exposed him to ridicule. Despite his laudable love of peace and
justice, and desire to prevent religious conflict, he “sowed the seeds
of revolution and disaster.” (Houlbrooke 181)

Gardiner’s views are influenced by the anti-Stuart discourse that followed the English Civil War; however,
Houlbrooke points out that Gardiner’s points remain correct and address the doubts and counterarguments that
revisionist historians face in their efforts to historicize James’s rule from a non-biased perspective: “Such doubts are
fed, above all, by the effects of the protracted crisis that followed Frederick’s acceptance of the Bohemian crown.
This crisis cruelly exposed the limitations of James’s rule. It frustrated his hopes of international harmony, destroyed
his prospects of solvency, upset the balance of his ecclesiastical policy, and above all underlined his lack of kingly
authority over the men closest to him” (190). While I would claim that the Frances Howard and Robert Carr scandal
already achieved this feat, the much wider impact of the Thirty Years’ War effectively showed James’s inability to
regulate the wider kingdoms to which he claimed to be a peacemaker.
The people and their political officials discouraged the king from his efforts to make peace, especially since these negotiations involved an alliance between Anglo and Spanish forces in order to halt the war in Bohemia. Such efforts occurred early on and drew attention to James’s previous pledges in order to expose his hypocrisy: “in 1618, at the outbreak of the Thirty Years War, Archbishop George Abbott directed James himself back to his own earlier *Paraphrase upon the Reuelation*, thereby suggesting that James should carry out the role of the militant Protestant king he had once assigned himself” (Rickard 199-200). The king did make some efforts to assist his son-in-law, but overall “Frederick…gained almost nothing from his pleas for assistance. His father-in-law, King James I of England, provided only a loan, and the other Protestant powers of Europe followed his lead and did even less” (Helfferich 8).

Charles, on the other hand, was eager to follow the trend of war. From 1618 onward, Charles showed great interest in “foreign policy where he continued to take a much more bellicose line than his father. He put himself forward as principal champion of the cause of his sister and brother-in-law” (Cust 10). Charles’s loyalties to his sister and her husband’s cause are evident in a letter from Elizabeth to Charles dated 25 September 1620:

> My only dear brother, I am sure you have heard before this, that Spinola hath taken some towns in the Lower Palatinate, which makes me to trouble you with these lines, to beseech you earnestly to move his majesty that now he would assist us; for he may easily

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93 There are exceptions, however, to this general statement. For example, James gave 25,000 men to Frederick’s cause as Spinola set out from Flanders to confront the Protestant army: “amidst scenes of such devout enthusiasms that many compared the campaign to a new Crusade. As the head of the column advanced towards the Rhine, the Prince of Orange, afraid to break the truce and powerless to intercept the army, appealed in despair to the King of England. At this eleventh hour, James permitted a regiment of two thousand volunteers under Sir Horace Vere to put out from Gravesend for the Low Countries. At the same time, he wrote to the government at Brussels demanding to know the destination of their army, and on August 3rd he received the disingenuous reply that they did not know” (Wedgwood 121).
see how little his embassages [embassies] are regarded. Dear brother, be most earnest with him; for, to speak freely to you, his slackness to assist us doth make the Princes of the Union slack too, who do nothing with their army; the king hath ever said that he would not suffer the Palatinate to be taken; it was never in hazard but now. (qtd. in Wilson 52-53)

While there remained some nuances to the positions the king and prince took on the matter, their overall stances during the early years of the Thirty Years’ War were polarized, as Elizabeth’s letter to her brother makes clear. By advancing opposing politics at this time, James and Charles were not warring factions, but their differing ideas concerning the world’s governance revealed that the English monarch and prince were looking in opposite directions. Middleton and Rowley’s work capitalizes upon these events, but steers the rulers to look toward an inchoate middle ground.

Looking Two Ways at Once: Ironia’s Perpetual Renovation

The induction to the masque celebrates the king’s central position in the entertainments, which is a common convention in Jacobean masques. The segment concludes with Denmark House welcoming the king as her primary guest:

…first, to you, my royal royal’st guest,
And I could wish your banquet were a feast;
Howe’er, your welcome is most bounteous,
Which, I beseech you, take as gracious.
To you, my owner, master, and my lord,
Let me the second unto you afford,
And then from you to all, for it is you
That gives indeed what I but seem to do.
I was from ruin raised by a fair hand,
A royal hand; in that state let me stand
For ever now…
…knit and joint my new re-edified frames,
That I shall able be to keep your names
Unto eternity. Denmark House shall keep
Her high name now till time doth fall asleep
And be no more. Meantime, welcome, welcome,
Heartily welcome!—but chiefly you, great sir,
Whate’er lies in my power, command me all,
As freely as you were at your Whitehall. (72-82, 88-95)

Denmark House repeatedly refers to James as the prime figure, and she gives welcome mainly to James, who is given leave to direct her in all things. However, the speech divides praise between James and Charles. The repetition in her praise of James as “royal royal’st” indicates the need to stress James’s greater role, albeit almost absurdly, in order to distinguish which royal figure she addresses. In doing so, Denmark signals a competitive tension between the two, which will predominate in the masque’s plot. She augments the double focus further by welcoming Charles as her “owner, master, and…lord.” She continues to disrupt the masque’s traditional address to a single authority by directing attention not only away from James but also toward Charles. The masque’s split allegiance makes sense given James’s recent illness, which would have caused Londoners to begin to recognize their current king as frail and to look toward their next king.
Nicol contextualizes this matter in his discussion of Middleton and Rowley’s *The Old Law*: “in late March 1619, shortly after the death of Queen Anne, James became seriously ill for over a week, suffering from bladder stones, ulcers, and diarrhoea. Convinced he was about to die, James gave Charles a speech on protecting the Church and taking good counsel” (139). These events more than likely contributed to Middleton and Rowley’s decision to counsel plural governors, thereby disrupting a unified or central authority.94

The playwrights use the occasion of the masque not only to look simultaneously to Charles and James but also to remind both rulers that their power is limited to their worldly station. The masque decentres the royal figures’ magnificence by drawing attention to their transitory nature and their dependence upon external persons and edifices to glorify their memory. The rulers’ legacies depend upon more than themselves, a fact elucidated by the shift in focus and power away from the rulers and toward Denmark House, who voices the fragility and tenuousness of their governance when she states that she will be able “to keep” their “names / Unto eternity,” so long as they continue to sustain her foundation. In the midst of the conventional grandiose compliments of her royal patrons, Denmark House reduces their importance by revealing their precarious position in the greater scheme of time. In this grander scope, her edifice will endure long after the bodies of these mortal men have decomposed. Hence, Middleton and Rowley communicate that governance is ongoing and provisional; it can be preserved and inscribed only through collective memory, which takes shape in local monuments. Denmark House’s articulation of this process—as a building—establishes the most prominent instance of perpetual renovation that we have encountered thus far in the Middleton

94 Their action, however, is not entirely unique. Martin Butler notes that Jonson accomplishes a similar double effect in his masque *Oberon* (1611), given the competition for attention between Prince Henry and James that Jonson stages (188).
canon. Custom allocates prominence to James, but Denmark House’s welcome subtly undermines the locus of this power by pointing to transition, circulation, and commitment as inevitable and necessary qualities in order to maintain the courtly system.

The wider space toward which Middleton and Rowley desired to draw their princes’ attention shows the rulers their powerless effect when their limited politics are compared to the world’s grander scope. *The World Tossed at Tennis* encourages a providentialist outlook by accentuating the macrocosm within which the royal figures operate, directing their attention to the greater forces that control Denmark House and, in turn, them. Charles had obtained ownership of Richmond and St James’s when he became Prince of Wales and later took possession of Denmark House, which commemorated the death of his mother, Queen Anne. This is why the buildings repeatedly refer to Charles as their primary owner or governor in the Induction’s bizarre narrative. The Induction entails a dialogue between St James’s and Richmond that revolves around the anxiety of falling out of use or favour as a result of the newly built Denmark House. She calms Richmond and St James’s by reassuring them that they will not be neglected, but the scope of the segment is augmented by Denmark House’s use of the seasonal shifts to show that they bear more sway than does her new and fresh appearance. In directing their attention to the wider cosmos, she reassures them that each will have her time and place:

…the round year

In her circumferent arms will fold us all
And give us all employment seasonable.
I am for colder hours, when the bleak air
Bites with an icy tooth. When summer has seared
And autumn, all discoloured, laid all fallow,
Pleasure taken house and dwells within doors,
Then shall my towers smoke and comely show;
But when again the fresher morn appears,
And the soft spring renews her velvet head,
St James’s takes my blest inhabitants,
For she can better entertain them then
In larger bounds, in park, sports, delight, and grounds.
A third season yet, with the western oars,
Calls ‘Up to Richmond!’ when the high-heated year
Is in her solsticy; then she affords
More sweeter-breathing air, more bounds, more pleasures:
The hounds’ loud music to the flying stag,
The feathered taloner to the falling bird,
The bowman’s twelve score prick, even at the door,
And to these I could add a hundred more.
Then let not us strive which shall be his homes,
But strive to give him welcome when he comes. (46-68)

The year wraps the buildings in her personified limbs, suggesting time’s greater power through this personification. The year’s seasons celebrate a circular motion that cycles royalty through the buildings and moves the rest of the world, humbling the royal audience by means of the transitions and the mortal condition with which the seasons are commonly associated in popular discourse. The speech, moreover, celebrates Charles over James, emphasizing his journey through the properties over the year as their master. The buildings establish a shared agenda to
“give him welcome when he comes” rather than attempting to become the passive and static place where he will reside. In championing the prince’s rather than the king’s arrival and sharing him, the buildings articulate mutual governance, which assuages St James’s and Richmond’s fear that Denmark House will have an advantageous edge in achieving prominence.

Middleton and Rowley double the theme of anxiety about obsolescence, which the buildings’ dialogue establishes, with a complementary second narrative involving a Scholar and a Soldier deliberating over the merits and failures of their stations, much like Richmond and St James’s had done previously. As aforementioned, these characters stand for James’s and Charles’s respective approaches to the outbreak of war in Bohemia. Instead of reinforcing an oppositional binary, Middleton and Rowley frame these politics with the same seasonal metaphor they had invoked in the buildings’ dialogue. The Soldier, for instance, also uses seasonal discourse to describe the purposes of different vocations:

When there’s use for me,
I shall be brave again, hugged and beloved.
We are like winter garments, in the height
And hot blood of summer, put off, thrown by
For moth’s meat, never so much as thought on
Till the drum strikes up storms again[.] (42-47)

The Soldier’s language conveys images of decay and transition that are associated not only with vocations or clothing but also with their wearers. As with the buildings, persons serve a purpose related to a greater cause than their individual concerns, and it lies outside of the scope of their

95 The characters, of course, are not exact representations of the king and prince. The Soldier, for example, remarks upon the Scholar’s “canina facundia” or “dog eloquence,” indicating a snarling, satiric rhetoric that does not readily correspond with James’s habit (23; McGee 1413).
limited, personal purview to determine that their policy is the correct habit. They must instead look to the times, as a tailor would, to ascertain what the right fit is for the body politic. This lesson carries through into matters of governance given that James adamantly clung to his peacekeeping agenda despite the fact that his daughter’s country was at war with his nation’s rivals. The entrenched and intransigent politics stemming from James’s singularly imposed policies do not work when the world is at war.⁹⁶

The unsettling and double nature of Middleton and Rowley’s political irony portrays an inchoate world that disavows attempts to solidify politics with any sense of longevity. Looking again to the metaphor of fashion and vestments as a symbol for change, the playwrights have the Scholar describe the method of the “devout weaver” (110). This tailor’s actions resemble the patchwork that the playwrights have woven in the Induction and again in the dialogue between the Soldier and the Scholar:

…by

His deep instructive and his mystic tools,

The tailor comes to be rhetorical…

By his needle he understands ironia,

That with one eye looks two ways at once[.] (116-18, 124-25)

McGee provides a contextual reading of ironia as a “figure of speech in which the literal meaning is opposite to the intended one; the first syllable punning on ‘eye’” (1415). But as

⁹⁶ This is not to say that Middleton never agreed with James’s mission. His pamphlet The Peacemaker; Or, Great Britain’s Blessing (1618) commended James’s ambition as a peacemaker: “My subject hath her being in heaven, her theory in holy writ, and her practice in England, insula pacis: the Land of Peace, under the King of Peace” (34-36). Two years later, however, Middleton’s politics shifted to coincide with current political affairs, whereas James’s remained intransigent.
discussed in the introduction, Middleton and Rowley provide a more complex understanding of irony here than the traditional rhetorical usage.

If we look to other early modern texts for variations of the term *ironia* or irony, nothing readily equates with Middleton and Rowley’s definition; however, the notion that one “looks two ways at once” is not only found elsewhere in the Middleton canon but also in the Puritan teachings of Stephen Jerome and Thomas Adams. Jerome’s and Adams’s applications, however, do not coincide with Middleton and Rowley’s use of the phrase; the Puritan authors dissuade the reader from pursuing such a double vision. In 1614, Stephen Jerome paraphrased Matthew 6:24 to advance such a polemic, arguing that one could not pursue both God and the world because “one man” cannot “serue two Masters” and “one Riuer, by one streame,” cannot “runne two wayes at once” (259). Middleton and Rowley suggest otherwise, as their masque presents two masters, James and Charles, and two streams, war and peace, suggesting a *via media*, but one with a sustained *via diversa*. The playwrights’ art also counters Thomas Adams’s claim that a bifurcated outlook leads to folly for those who have vowed to pursue a Monkish life: “Vnlesse they haue squint-ey’d soules, that can looke two wayes at once. But I rather think, that like watermen, they looke one way, and Rowe another: for hee must needs be strangely squint-ey’d, that can at the same instant fasten one of his lights on the light of glory, & the other on the darknes of iniquitie” (291). But we do not see such a complicated path in *The World Tossed at Tennis*; instead, the playwrights challenge such Puritan polemics by elucidating plural pursuits (scholarship and military duty) as righteous. For Middleton and Rowley, the rower of Adams’s and Jerome’s metaphorical boat is able to maintain a steady course toward virtue, paddling the oar on either side of the boat in order to arrive at that destination.
The entrance of Pallas provides the embodiment of this particular use of the *via media* that retains elements of *via diversa*. The stage directions, “*Music. Pallas descends*” (148), indicate that Pallas is lowered from the heavens, appearing as gods and goddesses did on the early modern stage. Her speech addresses the fact that neither the Scholar nor the Soldier is currently suited to govern the world or to resolve the crisis at hand. Unlike Denmark House, Pallas does not assuage their anxieties to create an ameliorative bond; rather, she establishes her superiority by announcing herself as a “patroness unto ye both” and calling the Scholar and the Soldier “ignorant / And undeserving favourites of my fame” (155-56). Having informed the Soldier that to him she is also known as “Bellona” (159), she turns to the Scholar and begins her speech:

To thee I am Minerva,

Pallas to both, goddess of arts and arms,

Of arms and arts, for neither has precedence.

For he’s the complete man partakes of both,

The soul of arts joined with the flesh of valour,

And he alone participates with me.

Thou art no soldier unless a scholar,

Nor thou a scholar unless a soldier.

You’ve noble breedings both, worthy foundations,

And will ye build up rotten battlements

On such fair groundsels?—that will ruin us all.

Lay wisdom on thy valour, on thy wisdom valour,

For these are mutual coincidents. (161-74)
The fusion of scholarly and military prowess points toward an improved model of governance. The duality of this ironic coupling is foregrounded by its articulation by a goddess, a non-worldly figure who claims to exhibit a “complete” image of governing authority. Pallas remains ethereal rather than earthly, meaning that this identity cannot be fully realized. The conclusion of her lesson articulates this message when she advocates “mutual coincidents” in place of definitive answers. Governance for Pallas is mutually devised and executed, encouraging coexistence and shared rule, as mortals are unable to achieve the perfection she possesses as a goddess.

Although critics have recently upheld Charles over James as a target of Pallas’s and Jupiter’s (and by extension, Middleton and Rowley’s) praise in the masque, the irony remains double rather than inflected toward the heir apparent. McGee is correct to note the various points at which *The World Tossed at Tennis* disrupts James’s comfortable image of himself as superior to all other worldly agents, but leans too heavily on Charles, presuming that the playwrights favour him because the Prince’s Men staged the masque: “this prominence given to Charles, particularly the valiant Charles, implies support for his policies, specifically for the valorous exercise of arms in Europe” (1407). Nicol supports this claim by examining the same speech from Pallas in conjunction with the ending to the masque, but arrives at a very different conclusion from mine:

97 The dynamic Middleton and Rowley create in which Pallas represents an ideal form that lies beyond the attainment of the mortal rulers resembles the early modern concept of the new man, not to be confused with the Roman *novus homo*. In a 1590 sermon, the popular London preacher Henry Smith asserted that “to put on Christ, is to put on the new man with all his virtues, vntill we be renewed to the Image of Christ, which is like a new man amongst men” (qtd. in Streete 15). Adrian Streete notes that religious writers like Francis Clement and John Calvin advocate that Christ functions as a means to self-fashion the body from its innate vileness to a religious purity (15, 95). These writers do not make Christ’s perfection attainable, however, and rely upon rhetorical figures like synecdoche—which Middleton and Rowley refer to shortly after they define *ironia* (127)—which reduce humanity’s significance in light of a God they cannot entirely comprehend and never fully emulate (Streete 95). James Knowles perceives Middleton’s fascination with this concept in *The Masque of Heroes*, adding that the new man “also defines a Pauline spiritual metamorphosis for individuals and for the nation” (1323).
Under normal circumstances this would be an innocuous moral, but as McGee notes, in 1620 it could have been read as an attack on the scholarly James’s failure to support Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine militarily. Not only that, the masque goes further by overtly promoting Charles, not James, as the ‘complete man’: Pallas announces that ‘the Prince of Nobleness Himselfe, / Proves our Minerva’s valiant’st, hopefull’st Sonne, / And early in his Spring puts Armor on’ (865-7), probably referring to Charles’s first tilt on 24 March that year. (135)

Jupiter, however, rather than Pallas delivers lines 865 through to 867, and I am hesitant to read these lines as confirmation that Charles is the complete man. First of all, the lines point toward a future event, establishing a projected outcome rather than a present state. Given James’s associations with wisdom and scholarship, “our Minerva’s…Sonne” could also refer to him and his associations with the Scholar rather than Pallas; therefore, it is unclear whether or not Charles is represented as possessing scholarly wisdom, only that he must aspire to achieve a double identity that comprises military and mental activity: “Scholar and soldier must both be shut in one; / That makes the absolute and complete man” (870-71). The recent historical circumstances of the king’s health would have provoked the people and the country to look to their next ruler, but Middleton and Rowley do not go so far as to discredit James’s current station, wisdom, or position; the playwrights merely question the king’s stubbornness and his son’s capacity to exhibit similar behaviour.98

98 As McGee puts it, “The main thrust of Tennis opposes any ruler who, like James in 1619-20, would take advice ‘from no one but himself”’ (1407).
What goes unnoticed in previous readings is that the masque contains criticisms of the Soldier as well as the Scholar. While the Soldier is given several lines that favour his character by having him voice and support central thematic issues like the connection between seasonal change and political action, the Scholar articulates the masque’s rhetorical function. Like the Scholar, the Soldier is critiqued by the greater powers that attend on them; however, whereas the Scholar is chastised for being intransigent, the Soldier is reprimanded for his upstart character. The Soldier interrupts the main masque they are watching to proclaim that it is his time, but Jupiter reminds him of his place:

SOLDIER

Now ’tis the soldier’s time, great Jupiter;
Now give me leave to enter on my fortunes.
The world’s our own.

JUPITER Stay, beguiled thing, this time

Is in many ages discrepant from thine.
This was the season when desert was stooped to,
By greatness stooped to, and acknowledged greatest;
But in thy time, now, desert stoops itself
To every baseness and makes saints of shadows.
Be patient, and observe how times are wrought,
Till it comes down to thine, that rewards naught. (615-24)

Through his outburst, the Soldier attempts to master the time of the play and with it his reality, with which he foolishly believes it directly correlates. Jupiter clarifies that “this time,” or that of the play world, is “many ages discrepant from” that of the Soldier, thereby directing him, and by
implication Charles, to see that there is a disjunction between his present moment and the past age that he witnesses. In seeing what he believes is “the soldier’s time,” the Soldier thus instead witnesses a soldier’s moment, which is passing rather than constant. Jupiter’s requests for the Soldier to “stay” and to be “patient,” calling him a “beguiled thing,” indicate that the playwrights were just as concerned with disrupting comfortable praise of their patron as they were of their king.

As with The Triumphs of Truth, Middleton criticizes governors’ capacity to assume inherent and righteous mastery by presenting them with the figure of Time. According to the Soldier, Time enters weeping and asks the Scholar, the Soldier, Pallas, and Jupiter,

Who [is] more wronged than Time? Time passes all men
With a regardless eye at best. The worst
Expect him with a greedy appetite[.] (311-13)

Having lamented the world’s ignorance of him and listed the many ways in which its inhabitants pervert or dismiss him, Time unloads his personal burden:

Even Time itself, to number all his griefs
Would waste himself unto his ending date.
How many would eternity wish here,
And that the sun, and time, and age, might stand,
And leave their annual distinction,

99 There are historical reasons that would likely influence this discretion. Richard Cust provides important context on Charles’s rash nature as well as James’s ability to temper the young prince with his wisdom: “According to Peter Heylyn, the Laudian polemicist, when James lay in the grip of his near-fatal illness at Royston in 1619, [Lancelot] Andrewes approached his bedside and expressed his concern about the church’s future in the hands of a prince who was ‘not well principled by those which had the tutelage of him, either in the government or liturgy of the Church of England’. James acknowledged this and promised that, if he recovered, he would make amends. He was apparently as good as his word. Years later Charles remarked with some pride that the chief ‘instructor’, ‘who laid in me the grounds of Christianity’, had been his own father” (Cust 15). The Prince was therefore not necessarily an ideal alternative to James and was seen to be in need of James’s scholarship and wisdom if he were to govern adeptly.
That nature were bed-rid, all motion sleep?

Time, having then such foes, has cause to weep. (350-57)

Time’s adversaries wish to end the cyclical processions of the day, thereby erasing “distinction” and ending “motion.” James’s fervent demands for peace at a time of war and Charles’s overzealous commitment to military action pronounce their individual conceptions of what the time and age should be rather than conscientiously realizing that they operate within a dynamic environment that is based in change. Middleton and Rowley’s masque thus makes efforts to entice James and Charles to recognize their folly in demanding that the world fit their own fashion; instead, the rulers must tailor a suit for the body politic that embodies multiple habits and trends.

News and the Commercial Theatre: Citizen Politics

The main masque, as we will see, metaphorically and materially conveys through ironic means the impossibility of total control, but the rulers never witnessed Middleton and Rowley’s opera basilica. Citizens, however, did. With the cancellation of the intended performance at Denmark House, the playwrights and/or the acting company chose to convert the masque into a play. Their rationale for this was likely two-fold: the courtly aspects of the original masque, which are introduced in the Prologue, would have generated an intriguing “populuxe theatre,” and the entertainment would have made sense to theatregoers because news concerning the onset of the Thirty Years’ War was widely distributed at the time. As Curtis Perry suggests, the event

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100 In his essay “Of Seditions and Troubles,” Sir Francis Bacon communicates a similar argument by framing monarchs as planets that are greater powers but not ultimate deciders. Stillness, for Bacon, resides only with God: “the motions of the greatest persons in a government ought to be as the motions of the planets under primum mobile (according to the old opinion), which is, that every of them is carried swiftly by the highest motion, and softly in their own motion. And therefore, when great ones in their own particular motion move violently, and as Tacitus expresseth it well, ‘liberius quam ut imperantium meminissent’, it is a sign the orbs are out of frame. For reverence is that wherewith princes are girt from God; who threateneth the dissolving thereof: ‘Solvam cingula regum’” (367).
ushered in public interest in recent developments and quickly became a topic in literature of the period:

…interest in the diplomatic negotiations precipitated by [the contentious debates over the right to the throne of Bohemia]…was fed by a burgeoning news culture. Jonson’s masque […] News from the New World Discovered in the Moon,] composed during the final months of 1619 when these events were at a boiling point, criticizes the excessive circulation of unauthorized political opinion and exhorts the court to follow James’s lead regarding the crisis in Europe. (210)

Much like the verse libels, news proliferated opinion on topical matters, generating resistance to James’s peacemaking:

The growing public interest in current affairs was not viewed with any great warmth by the recently imported Scottish king, James VI and I. The latter half of his reign, in particular, was a difficult time for English foreign policy. The gathering storm in Germany inspired widespread enthusiasm for the Protestant cause. The cautious king, unwilling to be stampeded into military action, had no wish that this enthusiasm should be fuelled by incessant printed reports of the unfolding situation. (Pettegree 194)

The proliferation of news eventually led James to attempt to censor widespread opinions. In a proclamation from 24 December 1620, for example, James attempted to command those publishing news to halt their actions: “every one of them, from the highest to the lowest,” should
“take heede, how they intermeddle by Penne, or Speech, with causes of State and secrets of Empire, either at home, or abroad.” However, these efforts were ineffective, for as Stephen Wittek points out, “almost every single news story reported in surviving English corantos and periodical news-books from 1620 to 1640 connects back to the Thirty Years’ War in one way or another” (The Media Players, 63). Corantos served as a medium for disseminating information, but we should “not forget, that coranto editors showed strong pro-Protestant sympathies” (Kalinowska 56). Indeed, a great deal of the news circulated during this time is highly polemical.\footnote{Thomas Scott’s \textit{Vox Populi} parts one and two as well as his \textit{Vox Dei} represent popular later examples of news reports’ tendency to advance a militant message. Scott’s work would later influence Middleton’s \textit{A Game at Chess}.} Middleton and Rowley’s masque-turned-play, however, does not take a firm stance on the issue. As discussed in the previous segment, the playwrights critique both James’s obstinacy in acknowledging his inability to exert his peacemaking policy and Charles’s upstart, militant Protestantism. As Middleton did with \textit{The Witch}, he and his collaborator in \textit{The World Tossed at Tennis} leave matters of interpretation up to their audience members, but nevertheless signal their awareness that these political matters are of great importance. Although their \textit{opera basilica} failed to court a royal audience, Middleton and Rowley’s capitalization upon a burgeoning news culture allowed their social message to reach a different kind of audience: one unable to enact politics, but one that was clearly invested in them.

\textit{From Masque to Play: Transforming the Theatre}

By bringing the masque into the commercial theatre, the playwrights imbued the space with the prestige and responsibility that is associated with the court, and in so doing the playwrights and the acting company transformed not only their masque into a play, but their commercial and popular theatre into an esteemed and regal space. The specific theatre at which the audience saw the play is uncertain, but the remaining evidence points toward the Swan.
know from the Stationers’ Register that *The World Tossed at Tennis* was performed at the Prince’s Arms. E.K. Chambers and G.E. Bentley provide two possible candidates for the location: “Rendle, in *Antiquarian Magazine*, vii. 211, notes a ‘licence for T. B. and three assistants to make shows of Italian motion, at the Prince’s Arms, or the Swan’ in 1623; cf. Herbert, 47” (Chambers 2.414, n.1); “Mr. W. J. Lawrence says (*T.L.S.*, 8 December 1921) that the company performed at the carriers’ inn in Leadenhall Street called the Prince’s Arms” (Bentley 1.201, n.2). Bentley, however, in a later volume of his survey presents Lawrence’s claim as highly unlikely; he supports W.W. Greg’s suggestion that the Prince’s Arms is a reference to the Swan, which aligns with that of Rendle and later Chambers (4.910). Chambers’s other historical inquiries into the Swan theatre reveal that it was being used at around the time that *The World Tossed at Tennis* would have been performed for the public: “The accounts of the overseers show one more payment from the ‘players’ in 1621, which perhaps supports the statement contained in one of Malone’s notes from Sir Henry Herbert’s office-book, that after 1620 the Swan was ‘used occasionally for the exhibition of prize-fighters’” (2.414). Regardless of whether or not Malone is correct that prizefighters were exhibited on the Swan’s grounds, the oppositional energies of war and peace likely found a place on its stage, leading to the probable conclusion that the Swan was the theatre “on the Bankside of Helicon” to which Simplicity refers in the Epistle (11).102

The masque underwent a transformation in this environment. It no longer contained the Induction; a Prologue and an Epilogue were added to explain what the people would be seeing and experiencing; and its lessons in governance were transformed into populuxe theatre that generated citizen politics. Bentley returns to Lawrence, following his suggestion that the

102 Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613) is the only play that we know was performed at The Swan. Middleton’s familiarity with the space may have contributed to the decision to move the play there.
converted format fashioned *The World Tossed at Tennis* into something new: “Lawrence thought that a further step in the development of non-dramatic entertainment at the theatres during Lent was the evolution of what he called the ‘substantive theatre masque’, of which *The World Tossed at Tennis, The Sun’s Darling,* and *Microcosmus* are examples” (7.6). My interest is less in the dedicated purpose that these texts serve (for Lawrence this constitutes Lent celebrations) and more in their delivery of courtly dramatic elements to an audience that was informed of the issues and led to interpret *opera basilica* as citizens. David Nicol’s definition of populuxe theatre observes the ways in which the masque “gives a lower-class audience the feeling of having experienced the lifestyle of aristocrats,” but unlike a traditional courtly scenario the originally intended didactic style of *The World Tossed at Tennis* and its questioning of the English royalty’s methods make the leaders common figures and decentre their superiority (136). Playgoers were thus able to experience the luxury goods of a court performance, as suggested by the extravagant stage prop of the World featured on the title page, but they could also assume a vantage point that mimicked the intended courtly audience. Hence, their enjoyment also derived from the dialogic lesson intended for their betters, giving them a fleeting sense of superiority in interpreting the *ironia* centred upon their rulers’ deficiencies.

Although the entertainment is hardly radical, the audience’s limited participation in this royal game still entails controversial pleasures. The playwrights call attention to the masque’s populuxe quality in the Prologue, and also hint at its subversive pleasures. The Prologue serves to prepare the audience for an anomalous courtly entertainment:

This, our device, we do not call a play,

Because we break the stage’s laws today

Of acts and scenes. Sometimes a comic strain
Hath hit delight home in the master vein—
Thalia’s praise. Melpomene’s sad style
Hath shook the tragic hand another while.
The muse of history hath caught your eyes,
And she that chants the pastoral psalteries
We now lay claim to none, yet all present,
Seeking out pleasure to find your content.
You shall perceive by what comes first in sight,
It was intended for a royal night.
There’s one hour’s words, the rest in songs and dances.
Lauds no man’s own; no man himself advances,
Say he could leap, he lights but where he stands.

Such is our fate: if good, much good may’t do you,
If not, sorry, we’ll lose our labours wi’you. (1-18)

Their mention that the play was meant for royalty indicates that playgoers are experiencing something that has been written and crafted for James and Charles. They are able to take in the lavish spectacles and props, but they are also made aware that the instructive quality of the masque was intended for their governors. The playwrights’ staging of the Scholar and the Soldier, given the news of war in Bohemia, makes the line in which Middleton and Rowley admit, “we break the stage’s laws today,” carry more weight than the ensuing reference to “acts and scenes” indicates.

The law stated that players could not stage any living monarch, a command Middleton would later overtly disobey in A Game at Chess. In his introduction to an early form of this play,
Gary Taylor summarizes the fears monarchs had concerning theatre’s potential to reveal the illusory nature of sovereignty:

Power is dependent on the perception of power: in the formula of Clifford Geertz, ‘the real is as imagined as the imaginary’. That is why Queen Elizabeth banned cheap reproductions of her portrait, and why King James prohibited actors from portraying living kings: both monarchs tried to limit and control the external circulation of representations of sovereignty. (1778)

Whereas the populuxe marketplace augments the power of the court by making it a coveted yet still distant realm, its ability to make sovereignty into a similar performance entails a threatening unravelling of the crown’s claims to true power. Although The Phoenix provides a similar dynamic by staging the monarch, The World Tossed at Tennis entails a more provocative allegory, as it clearly challenges the king’s peacekeeping agenda and divides attention between James and Charles, both of whom have work to undertake and both of whom are loci of power. The Prologue’s statement that it will be clear from “what comes first in sight” that it was intended for James and Charles draws attention to the fact that the topical material would be evident to the audience who attended the performance, and the pronouncement that it “[l]auds no man’s own” shows from the outset that the masque “praises no individual” in particular (McGee 1410).

The combination of topical subject matter and plural interpretive pathways does not generate something akin to modern democracy, nor does it enforce citizens to take action; their pleasure is gained both from occupying the imagined seat of privilege that the envisioned royal spectators held and from gaining a shared, fallible humanity with their superiors by seeing their
rulers’ ineffectual governance. The political irony’s disruption of unified and centralized politics and the playwrights’ decision to stage allegorical representations of the king and prince facilitate this pleasurable social levelling. The dialogue between the Soldier and the Scholar, however, leads into the final masque of an era past, which Jupiter stages for them. The metadrama that Middleton and Rowley established for James and Charles’s viewing, in which they would have observed themselves as the Soldier and the Scholar watching the play, transmutes into a dynamic wherein the spectators see representations of James and Charles watching the play. The Prologue sets up the audience to see their rulers allegorically represented onstage, but the ironic structure of the masque does the rest of the work, allowing them to see a dialogic relationship between their rulers. The audience’s pleasure derives from seeing loose representations of their intransigent king and upstart prince learning through watching a world that reflects their country’s present dilemma.

*The World Tossed at Tennis* derives its name from this final part of the masque. Jupiter presents this performance within a performance to the Soldier and the Scholar, whom the audience observes watching this drama concerning the World and its various possessors over the ages. The narrative begins *in medias res*, as the figure of Simplicity—played by Rowley—happens upon the World after having left it alone for an indeterminate period of time (419-34).\(^{103}\) He comments that it has changed since he last left it. By having Simplicity begin with surprise over the condition of the World he is responsible for guarding, Middleton reveals that the World’s original ruler is not entirely in control of the thing he governs. The dialogue that ensues after the King’s entrance upon the scene, however, suggests that such ineffectual control pertains

\(^{103}\) Nora Johnson states that “Simplicity the clown” was “Rowley’s part” (152).
not only to Simplicity, for the King also exhibits a relative ignorance. He must seek Simplicity’s
counsel in order to gain the necessary knowledge to govern adeptly:

KING

Look, what are those?

SIMPLICITY Tents, tents. That part o’ the world

Shows like a fair, but, pray, take notice on’t,

There’s not a bawdy booth amongst ’em all.

You have ’em white and honest as I had ’em.

Look that your laundresses pollute ’em not.

KING

How pleasantly the countries lie about,

Of which we are sole lord. What’s that i’ the middle?

(539-46)

The scene absurdly comments upon the limits of governance, for one cannot stand outside of the
World and experience or know it, but beyond these comic effects the exchange between the two
speakers reveals the King’s dependency upon a simpler subject in order to gain an understanding
of the realm he ostensibly governs. Simplicity directing the monarch’s gaze toward military tents
perhaps indicates that James should be attending to the wars that are actually occurring in the
world. The scene both refers to and undermines his supremacy as a little god. Having stated that
he is the “sole lord” of the countries that lie so pleasantly about, the King asks “[w]hat’s that i’
the middle?” again revealing his dependency upon Simplicity. The mutual governance
represented in this scene establishes what would likely have been a pleasurable experience for
audiences—seeing their current and future monarchy educated by a subject.
Middleton and Rowley’s *opera basilica* reject the model that James had set out in *God and the king* (1616), whereby “all higher powers, and especiallie such as haue Soueraigne authority, as the Kings and Princes of the earth” should hold the same unwavering power over subjects as fathers do over their children (sig. B1v). Although it is written as a prose dialogue, James’s tract still perpetuates the hegemonic relationship that the king communicates in his earlier works; however, in this text James does not merely metaphorically associate himself with fathers but demands that his subjects worship him above their fathers—a lesson that is particularly relevant given that the king desired that the text be taught to all young scholars, publicly or privately. The audience at the Swan could take pleasure in seeing their king reduced to a member of the company, a move that Middleton and Rowley carefully manoeuvre by tempering this satire with praise of James’s stature. Near the end of the masque, when the Devil and Deceit chase after the other actors in an attempt to seize the world, the King commands that he and his fellow governors—with whom he has previously shared the World—move in a collective fashion to secure the globe from their foes:

KING

Let this be called the sphere of harmony,

In which, being met, let’s all move mutually.

OMNES

Fair love is i’th’ motion, kingly love. (811-12)

The success of the group and the failure of the Devil and Deceit both depend upon mutual motion. Kingly love in this event entails collaborative governance, making the “sphere of harmony” one in which tension and oscillation still occur, as the World must be passed from one member to the next in order to elude the Devil and Deceit. Through these motions, the final
masque enacts the mutual governance that the playwrights’ ironic induction and earlier dialogue between the Soldier and the Scholar theorize. Although the players all allocate authority only to the player King and give him the World at the conclusion of this climactic dance (19), the Flamen’s ensuing words suggest a contractual rather than determined outcome:

That if the world form itself by the king,

’Tis fit the former should command the thing.

(821-22, my emphases)

As with The Phoenix, the audience is given an interrogative ending that suggests an unresolved matter concerning the Soldier and the Scholar and, by implication, Charles and James. While the audience members at the Swan were by no means encouraged to enact such conclusions in their everyday lives, as James and Charles were, they likely enjoyed such an unsettling image of their monarchy, which was presented as dependent upon them and as needing to learn.

Despite these provisional moments, Middleton and Rowley nevertheless project an image of unity, but one that preserves difference and tension. The Soldier and the Scholar make amends and allegiances in order to move forward together and consolidate to form an ideal governance with the Soldier fighting “the most glorious wars / That e’er famed Christian kingdom” (878-79) and the Scholar peacefully settling “Here, in a land of a most glorious peace / That ever made joy fruitful” (880-81), presumably England. The joint effort is symbolically framed onstage with the request made by the Soldier to the Scholar: “Give me thy hand” (884). With these words the two characters presumably join hands, and then speak the following words:

SOLDIER…

Prosperity keep with thee.

SCHOLAR And the glory
Of noble action bring white hairs upon thee.

Present our wish with reverence to this place,

For here’t must be confirmed or ’tas no grace. (884-87)

The change in venue complicates these lines, making “this place” no longer Denmark House but instead the commercial playhouse. The audience at the theatre would not have been expected to feel the imminence of the playwrights’ words, which were intended for their monarchs’ ears, because they did not have the ability to make these events occur. The final lines of the masque do, however, imbue the space of the theatre with the same degree of “reverence” as Denmark House. In this manner, the populuxe theatre transmutes the popular space of the theatre into the respectable atmosphere of the court. The play’s initially intended performance for royalty thus changes the techniques of reception from common enjoyment to interpreting the opera basilica written for James and Charles. This remains a pastime rather than an obligation for citizens, but nevertheless sparks political consciousness in the theatre. While the Epilogue only clarifies and apologizes that masques are rare and not commonly seen (ironically framing this rarity as an inconvenience when it is in fact the drama’s main attraction), it finishes by asking that the audience not “soon forget” what they have experienced (9). Its opening address to “Gentlemen” also allocates them a degree of respect that draws attention to their station and thus their duty.104

104 The Prologue to Middleton’s No Wit, No Help Like a Woman’s (1611) illustrates an earlier desire to inspire various forms of theatrical responsibility. Although Middleton does not demand or command such a model from his audiences—his purpose is to please a general audience—he nevertheless encourages such a reception, particularly in relation to class: “How is’t possible to please / Opinion tossed in such wild seas? / Yet I doubt not, if attention / Seize you above, and apprehension / You below, to take things quickly, / We shall both make you sad and tickle ye” (10-14). John Jowett’s annotation points to the way in which Middleton divides his focus between the lower class in the pit “below” and the wealthier members of society who are able to afford seats “above.” He nevertheless prompts “apprehension” or “attention” from both social groups, indicating that pleasure could derive from decoding the complexities of drama (783). This theatrical “duty” takes on a political dimension in The World Tossed at Tennis by combining it with opera basilica intended for the court.
Middleton and Rowley thus imbue their commercial theatre audience with responsibility, even if playgoers are unable to accomplish the same work the playwrights had set out for their rulers.

**Model Citizens**

Middleton’s dedication of the printed work to noble persons points in a similar direction. He presents the text to Charles Howard and Mary Effingham as a belated wedding gift. Effingham’s father was Sir William Cockayne, who was Middleton’s frequent patron during this time. Middleton composed a Lord Mayor’s Show for him, *The Triumphs of Love and Antiquity* (1619), and followed up with a series of performances, *Honourable Entertainments* (1620). Howard’s father “secured his renown by leading the English forces against the Spanish Armada in 1588 and at the capture of Cadiz in 1596” (McGee 1409). Middleton seems to dedicate his and Rowley’s work to the children of great military leaders, after its failure to gain a royal audience:

To whom more properly may art prefer  
Works of this nature, which are high and rare,  
Fit to delight a prince’s eye and ear,  
Than to the hands of such a worthy pair? (7-10)

As McGee notes, the masque was printed in “July 1620” and the couple’s marriage had taken place on “22 April 1620.” The gap between these events makes the dedication seem odd, but Middleton’s characterization of Charles as “truly noble” and Mary as “virtuous and worthy” would seem to make them exemplary figures (1, 2). The appositive clarification that the piece is a masque that was “[f]it to delight a prince’s eye and ear” seems odd, however, given that it is being dedicated not to royalty but to nobility. While the dedication was likely intended as part of Middleton’s ongoing commitment to his regular patron, the inclusion nevertheless unsettles royal
claims to centrality by remarking that the masque is better suited to a noble rather than a royal readership.

Middleton evidently saw one noble person, Cockayne, in particular as worthy of the habit of governance that he and Rowley framed in their masque. In *Honourable Entertainments*, a series of performances that were composed and performed in the same year as *The World Tossed at Tennis*, Middleton has Pallas praise Cockayne. Unlike the Soldier or the Scholar, Cockayne is able to blend military and scholarly pursuits to embody the fit governor:

> Why, here’s my wish, the joy I live upon,
> Wisdom and valour when both meet in one.
> Now ’tis a field of honour, fame’s true sphere;
> Methinks I could eternally dwell here.
> Why, here’s perfection, ’tis a place for me,
> Pallas delights in such community. (5-10)

As Pallas clarifies later in her speech, Cockayne is able to possess both of these traits by virtue of his double duty and “present state” as “Field-general and city-magistrate” (17, 18). The permanence that her earlier lines indicate is in fact fleeting, given that Cockayne temporarily bears the title of Lord Mayor until his term concludes. Pallas’s “community” is also not as unified and ordered as the word might suggest, for war and peace simultaneously hold sway, as evidenced by Pallas’s observation that her and Cockayne’s crests fit “both war and peace” (15). Governors thus remain tenuous, for the world they regulate is riddled with tension. However, Cockayne’s affiliation with military and civic duties allows him to look two ways at once in
order to determine the appropriate course of action. The dual actions that Pallas commends in *The World Tossed at Tennis*—to take up “arts and arms” and “arms and arts”—encourages the governor to look two ways at once, generating an ironic perspective that entails a broader scope and a humbler disposition, both of which Middleton locates in Cockayne. In this manner, Middleton again dissuades governors from singular approaches in order to consider communal outlooks. Cockayne approximates what James and Charles have failed to achieve. The dedication in *The World Tossed at Tennis* thus indirectly points the reader’s attention to better examples of governance.

This is not to say that Middleton and Rowley use their masque to voice a distinct polemic in the theatre or the press; rather, the drama and its political irony take on various functions as a result of the commercial interests that inform its circulation around London. I suggest that it is for these reasons that the playwrights take special care to stress the powerless quality of a text that has subversive potential. Simplicity frames the work for the reader as a moderate piece, but one with suggestive critical undertones. He speaks of the playwrights’ work as a young boy they conceived:

> First for his conception, he was begot in Brentford, born on the Bankside of Helicon, brought up amongst noble, gentle, commons, and good scholars of all sorts, where, for his time, he did good and honest service beyond the small seas. He was fair-spoken, never accused of scurrilous or obscene language (a virtue not ever found

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105 This observation coincides with McGee’s statement that “the main political point” of *The World Tossed at Tennis* is that “good governance depends upon the cooperation of the various professions” (1407).

106 His responsibilities, of course, differ from those of his king or prince, and unlike these royal figures, Cockayne was elected into his office.
in scenes of the like condition), of as honest meaning reputed as his words reported, neither too bitterly taxing nor too soothingly telling the world’s broad abuses, moderately merry as sententiously serious, never condemned but for his brevity in speech, ever wishing his tale longer to be assured he would continue to so good a purpose. (10-22)

Simplicity’s description of *The World Tossed at Tennis* oscillates between extremities in order to develop a middle ground; for example, he describes the masque as neither “bitterly taxing nor too soothingly telling the world’s broad abuses.” Simplicity’s Epistle frames an ironic interpreive experience that must be described as harmless in order to avoid provoking ire or censorship. The *opera basilica* that James and Charles would have observed are transferred not only to playgoers but also to readers. Middleton and Rowley attempt to prompt a sense of duty when they warn them “that Deceit is entering upon you (whom I pray you have a care to avoid)” (28-29). Readers are left to imagine the same dramatic effects that were intended for James and Charles and were actually staged for public audiences (of which they might have been part), but the implications remain the same for them as they were for their royalty: there is work to be done.
Chapter Four: *A Game at Chess* and Citizen Politics

Middleton’s *A Game at Chess* had a short run on the stage, but it was also the greatest commercial success of the early English theatre. Staged while James, Charles, and other powerful members of the court were touring the countryside, Middleton and the King’s Men put on a satire of the English and Spanish courts by staging them as the White and Black Houses, respectively, of a chess game. This event loosely depicted the recent historical event we now commonly refer to as the Spanish Match, namely the negotiations between England and Spain concerning the marriage of Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta. The discussions began in 1614 as part of James’s peacemaking ambitions, but interest in them decreased significantly after the outbreak of war in Bohemia. Still, James managed to persuade Parliament in 1621 “to apply pressure on Spain to conclude the marriage negotiations and withdraw from the Palatinate” (Kishlansky and Morrill). This tactic on James’s part helped to convince Charles of the marriage’s importance, given the Prince’s desire to assist his sister and brother-in-law. Charles’s emotions, however, fluctuated between extreme ire and melancholy as a result of the prolonged marriage negotiations as well as his conflicted sentiments regarding Spain: “Charles had followed the torturous negotiations with fluctuating emotions. Advances made his heart soar, retreats caused visible depression. In October he was ready to go to war, in November he was being tutored in Spanish and learning the latest continental dance steps” (Kishlansky and Morrill). While these actions might suggest that Charles adhered to his father’s plans for the sake of his sister and brother-in-law, it is equally likely that he desired the Infanta, whom he was desperate to meet. The Infanta, however, was kept out of his sight. It would seem that Charles’s
affections resembled his feelings insofar as he experienced emotional extremities that did not allow him to rest comfortably with a decision.\textsuperscript{107}

Desiring to expedite the negotiations, “on 17 February 1623 Charles and Buckingham left, in disguise, for Spain” and arrived on 7 March 1623 to the surprise of King Philip and the rest of the Spanish court (Gossett \textit{The Spanish Gypsy}, 1725). Although their venture may seem to have run counter to the people’s interest, Charles and Buckingham’s incognito journey and its goal to solidify ties between the Protestant and Catholic countries speak to England’s fascination with Spanish culture in the early 1620s. Charles’s and many Londoners’ general interest in Spanish culture generated a cosmopolitan attitude of Hispanophilia; however, this trend was also met with fervent xenophobia and generated the concept of “English Gypsies” (Gossett 1725).\textsuperscript{108}

The conflicting fetishism and phobia of Spain resulted in repeated portrayals of the court’s appropriations of what it perceived as exotic. Literature from the period, such as Jonson’s \textit{The Gypsies Metamorphosed} (1621) and Middleton and Rowley’s \textit{The Spanish Gypsy} (1623), both celebrated and critiqued Anglo-Spanish relations. Charles’s tendency to adopt Spanish fashion during this time thus highlights the Prince’s desire to become Spanish.\textsuperscript{109} Critics who claim that

\textsuperscript{107} Critical efforts to attribute Charles’s interest in the marriage solely to his militant Protestantism nevertheless persist: “Despite his martial inclinations, his Calvinist training, and his identification with European protestantism, Charles came to support the match as a sacrifice for the benefit of his sister and brother-in-law: ‘at bottom this concerns my sister’, he informed Count Gondomar, Spanish ambassador to England” (Kishlansky and Morrill). While this statement to Gondomar might have been true in 1620 when Charles voiced it, the prince would go on to embrace Spanish culture by learning the language and dances. It is therefore reductive to presume that Charles’s only motivation for pursuing these negotiations was to establish peace in Bohemia.

\textsuperscript{108} While paying attention to the general mockery and dislike of Spain that Londoners exhibited, Trudi L. Darby points out that Spanish texts, such as translations of \textit{Don Quixote}, were popular at Paul’s and that there was a general desire to learn Spanish (145-46). The 1620s are thus characterized by competing sentiments of Hispanophilia and Hispanophobia.

\textsuperscript{109} This habit, of course, was repeatedly pitted against Charles’s zealous Protestantism concerning the religious wars between Spain and the Palatinate. The Prince’s fluctuating sentiments toward Spain led Charles to develop a proclivity to polarize his identity in relation to Spain. Charles would either become Spanish or reject the Catholic nation wholeheartedly.
Middleton establishes an idealistic image of Charles as the White Knight in *A Game at Chess* neglect the fact that Charles’s ambitions were brash, personal, and conflicted as well as politically motivated. Charles’s character was questionable not only to the English people, who were anxious about his wavering concern for the security of their Protestant nation, but also to the Spanish, given that they perceived Charles’s behaviour toward the Infanta as aggressive. In her introduction to *The Spanish Gypsy*, Gossett notes that once Charles was “in Madrid the twenty-two-year-old…, having persuaded himself he was in love, was annoyed by the protocol that kept him from the Infanta; in June he leapt the wall of the Casa del Campo, where the Infanta was taking the air, and ‘advanced towards his lady-love, who responded by running in the opposite direction, shrieking for her virtue’” (1725). It is extremely difficult to equate the romantic or lustful prince’s rash actions with the calculated strategies of the virtuous White Knight in *A Game at Chess*, especially given that the White Knight deliberately voyages to the Black House in order to overthrow the Black House by discovery whereas Charles ostensibly travels to Spain in order to expedite a union between the adversarial countries.

The Duke of Buckingham, Charles’s friend and James’s favourite, nevertheless described his journey with Charles as a heroic Protestant conquest upon their safe return to London. Stephen Wittek discovers Buckingham’s asymmetrical history that informs Middleton’s play: “In a move calculated to capitalize on public sentiment and cover up the failure and naïveté of the trip to Spain, Buckingham concocted a version of events that cast himself and Charles as religious heroes” (*Media Players*, 65-66). The militant Protestantism with which Charles and Buckingham fashioned their politics after the Spanish Match corresponds with elements of Charles’s habit before entertaining the marriage. Indeed, we have already observed Middleton and Rowley casting Charles as the Soldier in 1619-20, but Buckingham’s account ignores the
Spanish customs that Charles assumed between late-1620 and mid-1623, which also inspired his clandestine journey to Madrid.\textsuperscript{110} Although Middleton’s play certainly celebrates the Prince’s homecoming and the anti-Spanish zeal it brought about, it does not adopt these sentiments wholeheartedly. Behind the satire of Count Gondomar as the Machiavellian Black Knight and the more subtle mockery of the White King (James), who is staged as a dupe to the Spanish, is a wider political irony, which speaks to Wittek’s recognition of the way in which “Middleton effectively depropagandized the discovery narrative by bringing it into conversation with competing viewpoints” (\textit{The Media Players}, 66). Wittek, however, does not fully consider the perspective that the pawn plot generates, which was of prime concern to an audience whose faith and safety were in the hands of Catholic colluders. The anxiety that underlies the pawn plot affects playgoers who manage to pick up on the fragility of their kingdom in the midst of this game. With frequent references to Anglo-Spanish conflicts from 1588 to the present day and a two-plot scheme,\textsuperscript{111} Middleton concocts a loose allegory of the Spanish Match that resounds with

\textsuperscript{110} Charles’s earlier militant Protestantism can be said to have influenced his travels as well, given that the Spanish Match would hopefully lead to a peace between the religious nations and end the crisis that afflicted his sister and brother-in-law. These projected outcomes likely enticed Charles to see the union as beneficial for Protestants.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{A Game at Chess} contains a reference to the Spanish Armada of 1588 near the end of the play when the White Duke, representing Buckingham, reports to the White Knight, Charles: “Sir, all the gins, traps, and alluring snares / The devil has been at work since ’88 on / Are laid for the great hope of this game only” (4.4.5-7). There are also several allusions to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Ignatius’s name resonates with the idea of igniting something, and he establishes a link between himself and the plot by punning on his name: “My wrath’s up, and methinks / I could with the first syllable of my name / Blow up their colleges” (\textit{Induction}, 33-35). Later allusions to the Gunpowder Plot in the play include the Jesuitess Black Queen’s Pawn’s comment to the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn—“I spied / A zealous primitive sparkle but now flew / From your devoted eye / Able to blow up all the heresies / That ever sat in council with your spirit” (1.1.26-30)—and Gondomar’s following passage: “Pray, let’s see’t, sir. / ‘To sell away all the powder in the kingdom / To prevent blowing up.’ That’s safe; I’ll able it” (2.1.209-11). The Fat Bishop reminds the audience of two other historical events that were considered Spanish or Catholic plots when he seeks a means to pardon the Gelder Pawn for his crimes: “‘Promised also to Doctor Lopez for poisoning the Maiden Queen of the White Kingdom, ducats twenty thousand’” (4.2.116-8); “‘a gratuity for killing of an heretical prince with a poisoned knife, ducats five thousand’” (4.2.112-4). The latter refers to the assassination of Henry IV of France, which James ordered not to be mentioned in England, and the former reminds the audience of Elizabeth’s physician Dr. Lopez, who was rumoured to be attempting to poison her. These numerous historical allusions augment the anxiety of the recent history that the play stages, keeping audiences engaged and aware of this history that their governors seem to have ignored.
national anxieties and produces multiple histories of what occurred. In calling attention to Jacobean governors’ inability to manage foreign affairs with English Protestantism in mind, *A Game at Chess* inspires citizen politics by encouraging playgoers to maintain their faith in God when their rulers fail to do so.

*The Wider Janus Face: News, Full Allegory, and Works for Citizens*

If *The World Tossed at Tennis* profited from the burgeoning news culture of the Thirty Years’ War, then *A Game at Chess* intervenes directly in it. In her article on the play’s relation to the news culture of its time, Lena Steveker perceives that *A Game at Chess*

…is a political play, not only because it caused diplomatic tensions between England and Spain, but also because it originated in the context of the Anglo-Spanish conflicts at the outset of the Thirty Years’ War, which focalized in the Spanish Match and the Bohemian crisis. Its particular historical context also makes *A Game at Chess* a play that is linked to the burgeoning news industry of the 1620s and its conflicted relationship with the English Crown. (216)

Indeed, James’s 1620 proclamation censoring the circulation of news and his later ban on public outcry to his arrangement of the Spanish Match suggest that the play was a political event. Referring to the 1620 proclamation, Wittek contends that *A Game at Chess* worked in tandem with various facets of news culture to function as a “direct challenge” to the king’s decree, making “public participation seem possible not only for theatregoers but also for English society at large—for anyone who heard news that the ‘play of Gondomar’ existed” (“Making of a Theatrical Public,” 440). The predominant concern of the play, of course, is its overt satire of
Spain, which appealed to its audience’s Hispanophobic sentiments. The primary target of this xenophobia is Gondomar, depicted as the Black Knight, who was a primary engineer of the Spanish Match. The audience’s recognition of the actor’s impersonation would have given them a sense of pleasurable mastery over the events. They could also gradually spot other familiar political figures who were not impersonated and therefore not readily identifiable. Their knowledge of what would loosely transpire in the play—given the widespread knowledge regarding the events leading up to the failure of the Spanish Match—would have added to their enjoyment, allowing them to laugh at Spain’s expense and gloat in their Protestant victory. However, the play also mocks James’s and Charles’s support of the Spanish Match, suggesting that Gondomar functioned as the butt of Middleton’s jokes in order to make more subtle commentaries on English authorities. Although some may claim that the content was included for the sole purpose of generating substantial capital for the theatre, there are other draws that

112 Sarmiento or Count Gondomar first “came to London late in 1613” as the Spanish Ambassador to England (Willson 362). Gondomar served as the primary instigator and player in arranging the Spanish Match between 1614 and 1623. His ability to persuade James during this time “of crisis,” namely the Thirty Years’ War, demonstrated his skill in handling “the king with a masterly combination of subtle tact and overpowering firmness” (Willson 363). During the course of the early 1620s especially, Gondomar managed to convince James that the Spanish Match was worthwhile even after the monarch made “a formal declaration [in early fall of 1620] that he would defend the Palatinate” (Stewart 307). Gondomar’s tactical manipulation of James led the court to become “outraged” with their king (Stewart 307). Gondomar’s actions resembled those of a Machiavellian villain, an image which was popularized in Thomas Scott’s Vox populi (1620): “we are met now by his Majesties [“our Catholique” King’s] command to take account of you (Seigneur Gondomar) who have been Ambassador for England, to see what good you have effected there towards the advancement of this work [establishing a universal Church]” (sig. A4v).

113 The actor’s impersonation of him drew a crowd and likely generated a cacophony of laughter. Janet Clare summarizes what the accounts tell us of his stage persona: “John Chamberlain, in a letter to Dudley Carleton on August 21, 1624, referred to Middleton’s play not as A Game at Chess but ‘our famous play of Gondomar,’ and describes how Gondomar was counterfeited ‘to the life, with all his graces and faces’ and that the actor had a discarded or replica costume (‘a cast sute of his apparel for the purpose’) and rode in his litter” (181).

114 Yachnin suggests that the play is critical of Spain, James, and Charles (“Middleton’s Praise of Folly”).

115 How much profit the play garnered is uncertain, but it stands to reason that it might have been as much as £1500. Commenting on the anonymous manuscript record inscribed within a quarto of A Game at Chess, Sara Jayne Steen states: “In part because fifteen hundred pounds seemed an outlandish figure, some scholars argued that the note was a later forgery, but the discovery of a Renaissance commonplace book with the poem increased the likelihood that the comment in the quarto is, if not accurate in its information, at least authentic” (51).
Middleton’s political drama utilizes to captivate its audience. Popular news pamphlets at this
time advocated a zealous Protestant attitude toward the Spanish Match insofar as they slandered
and demonized Catholics, promoting their readers as inherently righteous as a result of their
spiritual beliefs. Middleton’s play differs from this convention, for as we will see, it inscribes
a political irony that does not allow its interpreters to rest comfortably in a reaffirmation of their
beliefs, safety, and governance.

The play’s allegory complements this inchoate vision with figurations that are easily
discernible and others that are impossible to pinpoint, leaving the audience with a play world that
distinctly resembles their own history but cannot be fully identified. Although various attempts
have been made to ascertain the possible political persons corresponding with the various chess
pieces, it is important to heed T.H. Howard-Hill’s advice concerning scholars’ efforts to map the
fictional game’s characters fully onto Jacobean reality. Howard-Hill’s caveat claims that such

116 Scott’s pamphlets Vox populi, parts one and two, and Vox Dei are the most popular examples of this trend and
were widely circulated. Subtlety was not Scott’s strong suit; the title page of The second part of Vox populi (1624)
features an illustration of Gondomar and his customized seat which served to reduce the pain of his anal fistula.
Although Scot’s works clearly influenced A Game at Chess, Middleton’s approach to the matter remained less
polemical.

117 As with any other play we have surveyed thus far, it is possible that the political irony would go unnoticed. As
we will see, in fact, several Puritans overwhelmingly approved the play’s condemnation of the Spanish, especially
Gondomar, and seem to have missed the ways in which Middleton critiqued their king, prince, and court. Such
interpretive practices correspond with Puritans’ reading habits with respect to the news. As Jayne E.E. Boys points
out, “the puritan Wallington...read...the news...[to] reflect...on its meaning...He used the news to look for the
working out of God’s will in public events and interpreted what he read in a way that reinforced his beliefs” (191).
By looking to reinforce his own beliefs rather than to obtain a different perspective, Wallington, like Middleton’s
Puritan audience, missed the wider scope of A Game at Chess’s social commentary.

118 For example, while the Black Knight is clearly Gondomar, the pawns remain general or collective allegorical
figures instead of representations of specific persons. The exception is the White King’s Pawn. Unlike the other
pawns, he only occupies the plot concerning the primary chess pieces. Howard-Hill gathers from Holles’s account
that the pawn was identified as John Digby, Earl of Bristol, but also lists a host of other possibilities, thereby making
the White King’s Pawn “a pastiche of topical allusions” (“Unique Eye-Witness Report,” 173). In a later work,
Howard-Hill adds yet another allegorical layer to this character by suggesting that he might also be Sir Toby
Matthew, who was exiled for refusing to swear the oath of allegiance (Vulgar Pasquin, 36). Suffice it to say,
Middleton’s pawns may connote real persons, but unlike the Black Knight or White King it is not easy to deduce
with certainty their singular allegorical matches, spurring a full allegory of perpetual doubling.
critics illustrate “a prevalent tendency among readers of A Game at Chess to take it as a puzzle that will yield its secrets if only the right key can be found” (“Political Interpretations,” 227). Any political interpretation of the play should acknowledge this warning as well as Paul Yachnin’s point that the play invites multiple interpretations rather than offering a specific or unified political intention. Examining it in comparison to Jonson’s Neptune’s Triumph (1624), which also broached the aftermath of the Spanish Match (though at court and with clearly didactic intentions), Yachnin concludes: “Middleton’s play is directed in part toward King James, in part toward the prince, in part toward that segment of the audience for whom Prince Charles represented the hope of England, and in part toward those who believed that the king and prince were fools indeed” (“Middleton’s Praise of Folly,” 116). Whereas Middleton and Rowley initially had a royal audience in mind for The World Tossed at Tennis and then transferred their drama to the public theatre, A Game at Chess, unlike Jonson’s or Middleton’s masques, begins as a public drama. In this way it presents a wider ironic perspective that Yachnin explains with recourse to the Janus face metaphor. Like Yachnin, I see the play as two-faced in its praise and mockery of James and Charles; however, I extend his critique by paying particular attention to the ways in which the pawn plot and the royal plot create a political irony that presents attuned audience members with a model of perpetual renovation that closely resembles the opera basilica Middleton previously presented for citizens’ governors. This broader Janus face encompasses multiple and competing histories that project ongoing matters and tension rather than a climactic event. Although audience members and the theatre remain powerless to effect social change, the Globe facilitated an early form of political consciousness and responsibility by

119 Yachnin identifies the play’s doubleness in a long literary history that precedes and extends from Middleton’s A Game at Chess: “Like Erasmus before him and Swift after him, Middleton learned the art of seeming to praise the thing he meant to mock” (“Middleton’s Praise of Folly,” 108).
directing theatregoers to perceive the incongruity of the play’s propaganda and history. The interpretive community that was aware of this political irony recognized their English Protestant faith as their saviour rather than seeing their rulers as heroic.

The play’s shifting back and forth between what I call “the royal plot,” which involves the main chess pieces, and “the pawn plot” creates an ironic tension between two competing histories of the Spanish Match. The chapter approaches the royal plot as a “mixed allegory” in which audiences take pleasure in drawing connections between allegorical chess pieces and their corresponding political players. Although the royal plot has often been interpreted as the basis of the radical and subversive pleasure of A Game at Chess, given that it overtly stages living monarchs and recent political events, I argue that such scandal operates as a buffer to the pawn plot, the complicated nature of which makes it the play’s greatest challenge to the status quo.

People crowded the Globe to witness the play of Gondomar, but the wider game of chess communicated a different kind of entertainment. The pawn plot’s nature as a “full allegory” provides an incomplete representation of recent political affairs, but its main character is sought after and threatened by agents of the Black House, making the pawn important rather than expendable. The pawn narrative is a full allegory insofar as it does not allow its audiences to

120 In this manner, the Janus face I examine correlates with Middleton’s political irony insofar as it entails seeing multiple habits of thought in perpetual renovation. Unlike Yachnin’s attention to the Janus face as a means for Middleton to seem as though he is praising the English crown, when in fact he is mocking his rulers, my examination of Middleton’s Janus face involves perceiving history as plural. Middleton’s work thus anticipates George Wither’s 1635 description of the Janus face: “in a Morall-sense, we may apply / This double-face, that man to signifie, / Who (whatsoever he undertakes to doe) / Lookes, both before him, and behinde him, too” (138).

121 As Brian Cummings notes, mixed allegory occurs “when the author glosses his own allegorizing and offers an interpretation of the meaning of the figure even in the act of making a figure his meaning” (186).

122 Cummings describes “full allegory” as a narrative in which “everything is left to the reader’s imagination and conjecture” (186). One cannot master the allegory in these circumstances, prompting awareness that there is something greater than the interpreter. Such an event inspires a providential allegory in which “God or the One, true goal, cannot accept predication and, therefore, must remain concealed” (Murrin 167). The primary player of Middleton’s game remains unseen, but the nature of rulers as chess pieces instead of players makes us constantly aware of the greater forces that move them.
associate the pawns directly with particular persons. Unlike audiences’ responses to the mixed allegory of the royal plot, then, they cannot master the circumstances that transpire in the pawn plot, for they do not have a definitive knowledge of who the pawns represent in their political reality, if the pawns are meant to signify anyone. The pleasurable experience of laughing at their governors’ folly or mocking the Spanish court no longer applies. The audience’s superior gaze is replaced with the intrigue of a loose allegorical chronicle of playgoers’ recent anxieties, for they have been the powerless pawns in their governors’ political game. By channelling the fears and emotions related to an impinging Catholic nation through the central allegorical figure of the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn, Middleton establishes an ambiguous identity for the multitude and its Protestant body politic. The political irony Middleton produces by overlaying these two narratives creates two competing histories of the Spanish Match: the mixed allegory presents Charles as England’s saviour, whereas the full allegory strips the English monarchy of this power in favour of coincidence as the country’s saving grace. The incongruity of the pawn plot and the royal plot creates a discomforting experience for those able to recognize the uneven mesh of the narratives, unsettling comfortable illusions of militant-Protestant or proto-nationalist sentiment for the early modern audience and debunking the essentialist binaries that have predominated in scholarship on A Game at Chess.¹²³

By paying closer attention to the pawn plot, we can deduce that the text suggests that Londoners were saved by coincidence rather than by the strategies or tactics of their rulers.

¹²³ Critics are not incorrect in their readings of the play’s binary nature, but their inclination to halt their inquiries at that point makes their claims reductive. Ian Archer, for example, argues that by “presenting the struggle as a cosmic battle between black and white, Truth and Error,” Middleton “was presenting the binary view of Catholicism as the antireligion. While the actions of the white pieces are guided by the Christian God, the black pieces are doing the Devil’s work” (143). Janet Clare likens A Game at Chess’s characters to those of a moral play, but simplifies the meaning of the medieval tradition in Middleton’s play: “In its allegory and abstractions, evoking English Protestantism threatened by European Catholicism, Game is closer to a morality drama than it is to Middleton’s psychologically probing tragedies or to the material world of his comedies” (181).
Charles traveled clandestinely with Buckingham to Spain to expedite the marriage negotiations rather than to serve as England’s hero. Although his choice can be construed as an effort to save the Protestant nation, it is equally foolish, given that it was an attempt to affiliate further with what the majority of Londoners regarded as their enemy. Charles’s competing interests and conflicted sentiments do not present a unified narrative of Anglo-Spanish relations or the crown’s religious allegiances. If *A Game at Chess* is a history play, then it contains multiple histories, as evidenced by its double plot of pawns and major pieces. As Taylor observes in his discussion of the play, “History is not just big institutional official time; it is also small, personal, private time, the time of pawns as well as bishops” (“History,” 54). The royal plot upholds Charles as the victorious saviour of the Protestant nation, reading every action between the Spanish Armada of 1588 and the Spanish Match as leading to this climactic moment. David Glimp is correct to identify an emergent history in *A Game at Chess* that sees the present problem as the pinnacle rather than one matter in a larger continuum (372). However, the pawn plot counters this narrative by producing a kind of history that resonates with the emphasis on perpetual renovation that we have surveyed thus far in Middleton’s drama. By having the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn avert tragedy only by the coincidental fact that the Jesuitess Black Queen’s Pawn’s desires happen to align with the needs of the Virgin Pawn, Middleton presents her avoidance of sin as either luck or divine providence. Her chastity is therefore not the result of any intentional or calculated action on the part of the White House. The pawn plot thus shows us that divine grace has saved London, implying that the failure of the Spanish Match is a tragicomic or an averted tragedy at best rather than a final battle between good and evil, especially given that the actions of an “evil” character (the Jesuitess Black Queen’s Pawn).

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124 Although *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* labels *A Game at Chess* as a history play, Suzanne Gossett questions the viability of this category (“Middleton and dramatic genre,” 238-40).
precipitate the fortunate outcome for the White House. Playgoers can choose the history they wish to see, but the political irony that informs the two competing historical allegories produces anxiety for savvy Londoners, who become aware of their conflicted past. Those perceptive of this uneasy state that Middleton’s political irony leaves them with are imbued with a sense of hermeneutic political duty or responsibility that translates opera basilica into citizen politics.

**The Royal Plot**

Before discussing the pawn plot, it is necessary to contextualize the historical circumstances further and to pay attention to the royal plot, as it was the main draw for Londoners. For some time, James had been attempting to finalize marriage negotiations between England and Spain, furthering his mission as peacemaker that had begun with the peace treaty between England and Spain in 1604. His actions spurred public anxiety over the possibility of a closer tie with the powerful Catholic nation. James, however, did not allow his opponents a platform or medium to voice their grievances. As Gary Taylor states, James’s proclamations banned dissent over the Spanish Match; effectively “‘castrating’ the Protestant opposition, King James was widely perceived as a dupe and agent of Spanish Catholics” (*Castration*, 82). Like many other plays of the period, however, *A Game at Chess* did not incite radical political action or have a deliberate intent. This means that the play was not as zealously binary as its Puritan supporters would have liked to believe it was; it merely spurred their ire. The Globe certainly profited from the vibrant depiction of Gondomar, who is the most memorable figure of the play. Middleton and the King’s Men went to great lengths to recreate the ambassador’s habit. But Puritans and some modern critics have taken this characterization as revealing a militant Protestantism that seems at odds with the play’s multi-facetedness. In William Heminges’s “Elegy on Randolph’s Finger” (1632), Thomas Randolph, also a poet and close friend of Ben
Jonson, identifies the ways in which Puritans gravitated to Middleton’s defamation of Gondomar and despised Jonson for his portraits of Puritans:

Thay Quakte at Iohnson as by hym thay pase
because of Trebulation Holsome and Annanias,
But Middleton thay seemd much to Adore
fors learned Exercise gaynst Gundomore. (qtd. in Steen 54)

The reference in the second line to Tribulation and Ananias, from *The Alchemist* (1611), points to Jonson’s satirical portraits of two Puritans. In the play’s final scene, Jonson depicts these two characters recounting to Lovewit what has transpired in his home during his absence. The Puritans vehemently lambast the crooks who have committed vice and trickery while overlooking their own involvement. Although they bring justice to light, Jonson mocks their fundamental righteousness and hypocrisy, particularly Ananias’s. Lovewit addresses Ananias as “Good zeal,” but asks him to “lie still / A little while” (5.5.23-24). He acknowledges Ananias’s virtue when he commends him—“Mine earnest vehement botcher, / And deacon also, I cannot dispute with you” (5.5.105-6)—but immediately threatens him thereafter, showing that he does not tolerate his intransient nature and hypocrisy: “But if you get you not away the sooner, / I shall confute you with a cudgel” (5.5.107-8). While Protestant zeal is not discouraged in Middleton’s work, it is certainly tempered. We need only recall the episode at the end of *The Triumphs of Truth* where Zeal awaits Truth’s permission in order to ignite Error and his company in flames. Like Jonson, Middleton values considered judgment rather than vehement righteousness. It is reasonable to deduce that the Puritans fixated upon what they desired to see
in the play rather than attending to its broader scope. This makes sense, given that the binary nature of the chessboard and the play’s depictions of Catholics would have been its major appeals.

There nevertheless remain moments in which we can perceive a degree of directed satire toward the Puritan sect. The figure of the Gelded White Bishop’s Pawn, for instance, loosely represents the nation’s Protestantism. Taylor describes him as “[a]n English Puritan minister; formerly betrothed to the White Queen’s Pawn, before he was castrated by his romantic rival (the Black Knight’s Pawn)” (Castration, 25). Moreover, the Gelded Pawn and his assailant are both referred to by the Black Bishop’s Pawn as “inhuman enemies” (206). The two characters are extreme opposites and while the Gelder Pawn is certainly more reprehensible, the Gelded Pawn is not highly esteemed, nor is he a source of identification for the audience. In this fashion, Middleton slightly mocks Puritans and other outright challengers to the Spanish Match by displacing the emasculation generated by James’s censorship of counterblasts to the Spanish Match onto their habit of thought. The Gelded Pawn does, however, have some sense of theatricality after losing his “manhood.” He speaks aside, for instance, of his plan before accepting his mutilator’s offer to converse regarding a reconcilement:

No truth or peace of that Black House protested
Is to be trusted; but, for hope of quittance
And warned by diffidence, I may entrap him soonest.

—I admit conference. (238-41)

But the pawn never manages to pull off a successful revenge. The Puritan habit is repeatedly undermined by the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn’s naivety, which continues until she is able to

125 Puritans, of course, generally rejected the theatre for its secular content; however, Randolph’s remarks suggest that they saw or were familiar with A Game at Chess. See footnote 117 for more on Puritans’ interpretive practices.
understand how the game is played. As James Doelman observes, “her religious strengths—she is ‘zealous,’ ‘primitive,’ and ‘devoted’ (1.1.27-8; cf. 2.1.31-40), all terms valued by Protestants—are…used against her, as the black characters work ‘to catch / Her inclination’ (1.1.108-9), and her novice-like zeal for more opportunities for obedience (cf. Isabella in Measure for Measure) leaves her vulnerable” (“Claimed by Two Religions,” 338). Middleton’s play is not as kind to Puritans as they believed it to be, which perhaps points to their inability to interpret his political irony.

The Puritans’ admiration of Middleton’s depiction of Gondomar points to their fixation upon easily identified personages, as Gondomar is clearly malevolent. Despite his malicious nature, his character would likely strike a public audience as harmless, given his hyperbolic theatricality and the audience’s knowledge that his scheme, namely the Spanish Match, will not succeed. He is a Machiavel, a stock villain of the early modern theatre, and the Black Knight proudly and overtly associates himself with this common figure. The Black Knight also resembles traditional evil characters such as Deceit and the Devil from The World Tossed at Tennis and echoes them when he recounts his past efforts and ongoing central aim:

But let me a little solace my designs
With the remembrance of some brave ones past
To cherish the futurity of project
Whose motion must be restless till that great work
Called the possession of the world be ours. (3.1.82-86)

The phrase “possession of the world” correlates with the universal mission of the Catholic Church, which is global conformity to its religion. As Taylor surmises, “The monsters, for Middleton, are those who want to impose a ‘universal monarchy.’ A Game at Chess champions
localism against the assaults of a global unifying imperialism, dressed up in the vestments of ‘monster holiness’” (*Castration*, 232). As their prime deceiver, Gondomar dominates the stage as a master manipulator and the play’s main foil. Middleton’s creation of Gondomar’s persona leads Paul Yachnin to compare him with the Vice of medieval drama; Barbara Fuchs to note that Gondomar resembles Marlowe’s Barabas in “his dreams of world domination and unlimited power”; and T.H. Howard-Hill to see “him as…Richard of Gloucester in [Shakespeare’s] *Richard III*” (Yachnin “Literary Contexts,” 32-7; Fuchs 406; Howard-Hill *Vulgar Pasquin*, 74). Gondomar belongs to this list of villains from medieval and Elizabethan drama, all of whom are theatrically and comically attractive while nevertheless incorrigible in their diabolical motives. Hence, Middleton presents Gondomar as wonderfully entertaining while repulsively vile in his machinations. Like Barabas, Richard, and the Vices that influence them, Gondomar occupies a liminal threshold of theatrical pleasure while exhibiting immoral conduct that will ultimately fail according to the moral tradition as well as recent history. Through the actor’s impersonation of him, Gondomar is the most real and proximate figure in the play; however, he remains ineffective as a threat to the audience, as they already know that his plots and schemes will collapse.

The Protestant audience’s superiority to the Black Knight and his followers is made all the more prominent by the eminence Gondomar holds in relation to his pawn. His dialogue with the Gelder pawn stretches his theatrical villainy to absurd proportions, but it also directs the audience’s attention to the need to understand such Machiavellian strategies. Knowledge of the theatrical conventions associated with Gondomar’s character would have allowed early modern Protestants to spot these faulty and malicious politics, for spectators would have noted the same correlations with his forebears that Yachnin, Fuchs, and Howard-Hill identify. The theatre thus
functions as an institution that can teach audiences about corrupt politics. Like Gondomar’s pawn, the Protestant audience is helpless to effect political change, but their faith contrasts with his uninformed Catholic ignorance:

BLACK KNIGHT GONDOMAR

Thou hast seen

A globe stands on the table in my closet?

BLACK KNIGHT’S PAWN GELDER

A thing, sir, full of countries and hard words?

BLACK KNIGHT GONDOMAR

True, with lines drawn some tropical, some oblique.

BLACK KNIGHT’S PAWN GELDER

I can scarce read; I was brought up in blindness.

BLACK KNIGHT GONDOMAR

Just such a thing, if e’er my skull be opened,

Will my brains look like.

BLACK KNIGHT’S PAWN GELDER

Like a globe of countries.

BLACK KNIGHT GONDOMAR

Yes, and some master politician

That has sharp state-eyes will go near to pick out

The plots and every climate where they fastened;

’Twill puzzl’em too. (3.1.132-42)
The intricacies of Gondomar’s brain would have confused even the best governor, suggesting that Gondomar projects and proliferates schemes onto the world that exceed the lines and “hard words” of the globe in his room, words which the Gelder Pawn cannot discern. The reference to a globe, however, also directs our attention to the Globe theatre, which was a place where Londoners could be informed and learn. On the topic of hard words, for example, the English theatre served as a space in which audiences could learn hard words by their auditory proximity to more common words. The ignorant Catholic “brought up in blindness” is effectively contrasted with the English playgoer who gains knowledge of hard words and politics from a conscientious interpretation of the theatre. Gondomar retains a superior stance over his subordinate pawn by retaining the knowledge he possesses for himself and gloating over his unfathomable intelligence and its ability to concoct thousands of plots.

The audience’s monarch, however, has also confined his subjects to silent complacence. In addition to the aforementioned 1620 proclamation that attempted to censor popular opinion, James composed a poem in 1623 that condemned public outcry over the Spanish Match. The poem, “O stay your teares yow who complaine,” is a direct response to “The Common’s Tears,” a rejoinder (now lost) to an unspecified matter of state at the time. Although it is uncertain what the primary issue or issues were that preoccupied the rejoinder, James does refer figuratively to the Spanish Match:

…to noe use were councell tables

If state affaireis were publique bables.

I make noe doubt all wise men knowe

126 In her chapter from a forthcoming collection of essays that I have co-edited with Janelle Jenstad and Jennifer Roberts-Smith, Elizabeth Bernath observes that Shakespeare often follows a hard word with more common words, which assists in making these words more familiar to an audience.
This weere the way to all our woe

For Ignorance of causes makes

Soe many grosse and fowle mistakes

The moddell of our princely match[.] (79-85)

For James, the proliferation of public opinion is akin to the biblical story of Babel, which echoes early sentiments about democracy as a viral and monstrous political force. The implied message of James’s poem is that the singular voice of the king leads to order since he knows best what course of action to take. His “princely match,” i.e., the Spanish Match, is therefore justified, and he does not need to heed public sentiments that run counter to it. Once again, James looks one way instead of two. The ensuing lines accentuate his earlier statements that governance is his domain and his alone:

Take heed your paces bee all true

And doe not discontents renewe

Meddle not with your princes cares

For who soe doth too much: hee darrs. (95-9)

According to the monarch, then, virtue follows the direction the monarch sets out for the country. But his course is in league with the Catholics. As the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn states, “[i]f this be virtue’s path, ’tis a strange one” (2.1.76). Despite her naivety, the Virgin Pawn is nevertheless able to intuit what James cannot: that an allegiance with the Black House defies the rules of the game and can lead to corruption. Middleton is not radically encouraging his audience to look to or to demand a new king, but he is portraying James’s historical mistake of leading his kingdom astray from the Protestant faith.
This is not to say that the play condemns James or portrays him as a villain. I am suggesting only that Middleton scrutinizes the king’s earlier actions by staging what was already popular opinion: that James was a weak king. In his introduction to *A Game at Chesse: An Early Form*, Taylor contextualizes this view of James:

In 1621, James was outraged by a Parliamentary speech which compared his ministers to those of Edward II: “To reckon me with such a prince is to esteem me a weak man” (and—though neither he nor his critics dared openly say so—a sodomite). In *A Game at Chess*, James is again “paralleled and scandalized”, and weakness—the accusation he found most intolerable—suffuses the portrait. (1777)

Taylor’s suggestion that James appeared weak also directs attention to the king as a chess piece. Although pawns are not able to carry out much action and are typically perceived as collateral in the grand scheme of the game, the king is not exactly a versatile or agile piece, despite being the most important item on the board. And in Middleton’s game, the Black House does not seem interested in the king at all. They aim to possess the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn, to coerce the White Knight to their side, and to capture the White Queen, but they never indicate the slightest desire to take the king. Overall, James seems unsought and passive in *A Game at Chess*.

James’s unimportant role in the play is not the only unflattering portrait of the ruler that Middleton painted, given that letters and accounts from ambassadors also suggest that the king was impersonated. Janet Clare follows her overview of John Chamberlain’s account of the players’ impersonation of Gondomar by claiming that they did the same with James: “But, adds Chamberlain, even more seriously the actors had played ‘somebody else,’ whom we can infer to
be James as [represented by] the White King… There was, needless to say, a tacit understanding that the reigning monarch was not represented on the stage” (181). Alvise Valaresso, the Venetian ambassador, likewise provides an account that suggests that James might have had more to worry about concerning *A Game at Chess* than just the Spanish uproar concerning Middleton’s mockery of Gondomar: “the king’s reputation is affected much more deeply, by representing the ease with which he was deceived” (qtd. in Alt 130). It was evident to playgoers—English and non-English—that Gondomar was not the only character whose actions are satirized in *A Game at Chess*.

The ambassador’s description of James’s naivety likely speaks to Sir John Holles’s reference to James as a clock. A.R. Braunmuller draws our attention to this description, specifically his mention of the way in which Holles describes the White King moving back and forth like a clock between belief and unbelief. Since the White King is never referred to as a clock in the extant texts, Braunmuller provides further context of what Holles likely means: “Middleton [does not] use the clock metaphor: perhaps Holles is here responding to the actor’s gestures, perhaps the actors spoke and did more than was set down for them” (347). Even though the text never refers to the White King (James) as a clock, I wish to propose that Holles’s account correlates with the speech in which James begins by voicing support for the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn but swiftly shifts to side with the Black House after Gondomar protests the charge. Having been previously threatened by the Jesuit Black Bishop’s Pawn, the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn pleads with the White King to provide her with safety and to chastise him for his actions. The Black Knight, Gondomar, however, claims to have evidence that her assailant has not been in the country during the time she claims he has attempted to rape her. James’s question to Gondomar on this matter is comical: “Can you make this [evidence] appear?” (2.2.203). The
words conjure a picture of magical devilry that correlates with theatrical illusion; the king practically asks to be duped. The audience’s real king maintained a close bond with Gondomar, which Middleton subtly indicates led to such blind collusion. Middleton’s allegory thus loosely but effectively mocks James when the White King demonstrates his inability to interpret the Black Knight’s fraud. The White King’s reflection upon the Black Knight’s information demonstrates his inability to interpret theatricality:

Behold all,

How they cohere in one.

I always held a charity so good

To holiness professed, I ever believed rather

The accuser false than the profession vicious. (2.2.216-20)

The words “Behold all” presumably hail to attention not only the characters onstage but also the audience at the Globe, fashioning the White King into an ignorant overseer who is unable to see the truth. The dramatic irony with which Middleton frames the King in relation to the audience shows their ruler’s inability to interpret either politics or theatre. The coherence James projects at this moment is as foolish as Gondomar’s desire for global domination: both, albeit for vastly different reasons, demand and impose singular unity onto a conflicted world. In fact, the White King’s allegiances have wavered. He claims that he “ever believed” that the Virgin Pawn was misguided, thereby siding with the “holiness” of the Black Bishop. The Black Knight’s ability to dupe the White King into forsaking his own house and religion resembles Gondomar’s manipulation of James over the course of the Spanish Match. James’s friendship with Spain and his fervent desire for peace blind him to deceit. In this scene, then, James, as the White King, moves between belief and un-belief of the Virgin Pawn’s complaint.
The White King’s singular mindset differs from the collaborative and theatrical tactics of the White Knight, who devises a mutual model of governance. When the Virgin Pawn despairs that she is forsaken and “left a prey / To the devourer” (2.2.227-28), the White Knight interjects with words of consolation:

No, thou art not lost.

Let ’em put on their bloodiest resolutions,

If the fair policy I aim at prospers.—

Thy counsel, noble Duke? (2.2.228-31)

Although the White Knight imposes a “policy,” he recognizes that his aim could go amiss, suggesting an improvisatory preparation for failure. He also depends upon the “counsel” of the “noble Duke,” a figure representing Charles’s friend Buckingham, demonstrating his interdependence with others in enacting governance. Like Phoenix, the White Knight works well with others to exact his politics, depends upon clandestine methods to do so, and conscientiously reflects upon the means by which he creates virtuous conclusions: “What pain it is / For truth to feign a little” (4.4.16-7).

The Prince’s dislike for the subterfuge he deploys correlates with Prince Phoenix’s reluctance to disregard his father’s orders. James, on the other hand, has become the Old Duke of The Phoenix who is unable to see into his people’s hearts and can only observe and demand their devotion. It would seem as though Middleton promotes the heir, Charles, as the people’s champion.

**The Pawn Plot**

There is a problem with this interpretation, however, which is that the circumstances of the play’s allegory do not mesh evenly with the history of what actually occurred. As aforementioned, this segment of the play correlates with the secret journey Charles and
Buckingham took to Spain in a failed effort to court the Spanish Infanta when the marriage negotiations became too protracted. However, the history surrounding Charles’s actions does not readily align with the White Knight’s plot to save the Protestant nation from peril. This is not to say that the people did not rejoice at Charles’s return from Spain. Ian Munro provides an overview of London’s reaction to this event:

The celebration on Charles’s return...was the closest thing early modern England produced to a spontaneous national demonstration of public opinion, and had its own subsequent print dissemination through correspondence, diary, and occasional poem. Describing the huge crowds and holiday atmosphere of this event, John Chamberlain wrote, “I have not heard of more demonstrations of public joy then were here and everywhere from the highest to the lowest,” an opinion shared by many other observers. (“Making Publics,” 210)

However, this sentiment can be said to be less a celebration of Charles’s or James’s agenda and more of their failed politics, as England had safely evaded a marriage with its enemy. Discussing a court performance of Middleton and Rowley’s The Changeling for Charles in 1624, Mark Hutchings contextualizes these recent affairs: “the prince had only returned from Madrid a matter of weeks before, his father’s foreign policy in ruins, and he himself an unlikely hero in English Protestant eyes” (26-27). This is not to say that playgoers would not have been affected by the Prince’s return or that the play’s denouement would not have effectively allowed them to relive this collective sentiment, but to those who were cognizant of their recent history and were paying attention to what transpired onstage regarding the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn’s safety,
there is a lingering tension concerning these events that disavows Protestant victory as a result of their Prince’s or King’s action alone.

Before attending to these matters, it is important to consider the ways in which the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn functions in the play and how Middleton uses her to inspire a collective but diverse political consciousness. We can safely presume that the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn represents the collective Protestant identity of Londoners. She becomes an allegorical protagonist who undergoes threats from those chess pieces affiliated with Spanish Catholicism, whose ideological forces have likewise threatened to penetrate the audience’s nation. The pawn functions in this context as the moral locus for Londoners, whose king has led them away from divine grace and into the hands of their devilish foe. Gary Taylor, in his textual note on the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn, in *A Game at Chesse: An Early Form*, provides a compelling description of her similarity to the protagonist of a moral play, a view that aligns with my interpretation of her:

> There is nothing in the text, the sources, or early responses, to suggest that the character impersonated an identifiable historical figure, or was understood allegorically as anything other than a young Protestant Englishwoman, vulnerable to temptation by

127 It is important to note that I am not conflating or equating the trauma of rape victims with xenophobia concerning Catholic infiltration. My reading adheres in some ways to Karen Britland’s contextual reading of the ways in which early modern people would interpret the sexual violence and mutilation depicted in the play as representative of political power dynamics. I agree with Britland that in *A Game at Chess* “[r]ape becomes a means of political domination,” but disagree with her suggestion that “castration, like that performed on the White Bishop’s Pawn, is a mode of political, as well as sexual emasculation,” unlike rape, which she sees as only political (548). Middleton certainly sexualizes rape by associating it with a piece being taken in a game of chess, which is, of course, problematic from our modern standpoint. This sexualisation applies to the Virgin Pawn as well as to male figures in the play. An additional passage involving three male pawns, which was “omitted in performance” (leading Taylor to append the scene to his *Later Form* of the play), aligns a piece being taken in chess with “firking,” an act Taylor notes “often suggest[s the]…modern [euphemism to] ‘screw’” (1884, 1885). While there is insufficient room to elaborate on these ideological implications, it is important to note that I recognize the sexualisation of rape in Middleton’s play but focus on its politicization for the purposes of interpreting his allegory’s political irony.
Catholics. Like any fictional character, she can be understood as “representative”, in this case perhaps—with the morality play tradition—as “Everyman”. Here “Everyman” is “Everywoman”: in the frontispiece of the 1611 edition of Richard Hooker’s *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, the divine light falls on the King, the Church, and a female figure apparently representing the individual soul. However, the chess framework gives Every(wo)man here a specific social status (as pawn, commoner) and a political identity (as Protestant and English). (1783)

Following Taylor’s suggestion that she connotes Protestant England as an “Every(wo)man,” I focus on the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn as the central figure of the pawn plot. By concentrating my attention on her role, which is often neglected in scholarship on the play, I discover that her true “saviour” is not the White King (James), nor the White Knight (Charles), but the Jesuitess Black Queen’s Pawn. The Jesuitess is a multivalent figure who is lascivious and represents the Jesuit order but also utilizes theatricality, a talent that the Virgin Pawn must learn in order to avoid sin. Jane Sherman has also drawn from the moral tradition to suggest that the Virgin Pawn represents a collective rather than a singular body. As Dessen does in his discussion of *The Phoenix*, Sherman looks to the estates play as a way of interpreting the allegory. She claims that the pawn’s complaint to the White King is “strongly reminiscent of the ‘forensic rather than dramatic’ central situation of the ‘estates’ morality play, where a figure representative of the people or the national good complains in distress to the monarch who summons the Three Estates in Parliament and calls on them to account for their misdeeds or take corrective action” (153). In this case, however, the White King values the Black Knight’s word over his queen’s
pawn, accentuating the Black Knight’s claim that the “court has held the city by the horns / Whilst I have milked her” (3.1.110-11). The play challenges James’s singular claims to authority by upholding divine providence in place of royal authority, inviting audience members to develop a sceptical view of their world and governor.

The sovereign’s inability to control fate and his decision to form an alliance with the people’s foes prompt the audience to question whether or not divine providence aligns with the king’s will. In other words, is James still the decider if his decisions are foolish? Although we have observed such a critique at work in Middleton’s other dramatic writings, in A Game at Chess it is much more severe, for as Christina Marie Carlson has recently pointed out, God’s providential support of English Protestants in the play is not automatically given:

Providentialism suggests the possibility of continued divine favour and memorializes instances of divine intervention to reinforce the idea that God favors England and Protestantism exclusively. But Middleton warns against easy and unthinking acceptance of this dictum. Providence can favour, but Providence can also exert God’s vengeance and wrath. It is up to individual actors, and especially the Parliament and the king, to ensure that the narrowly averted crisis over the Spanish Match does not recur, possibly with different and more tragic consequences. (1226)

The looming threat that the White House could lose favour in the future unsettles the idea that the monarchy or the English nation is a predetermined victor and broadens the span of responsibility. Providence’s capacity to level social hierarchy finds in chess a metaphor to promote such thinking. James Doelman has recently located a passage from James Cleland’s
sermon *A Monument of Mortalitie* (1624) that illustrates the chess game’s metaphorical ability to dismantle hierarchical rank through the levelling power of death. By pointing to the shared mortal condition of a king and a pawn, Cleland, like Middleton, reveals that no one is able to ascertain providential will:

All, both good and bad are *Actors* on this stage of *Mortalitie*, every one acting a part…some of lesse, some of greater dignitie; and the Play being ended *Exeunt omnes*, every one goes off the stage, and as Chessmen without difference they are swept from the table of this World, wherein one was a *King*, another a *Queene*, a third a *Bishop* or *Knight* into Earths bagge; onely this distinction being betwixt good and bad, that the good are *Actors* of a *Comedie*.[

(qtd. in Doelman “Another Analogue,” 418)

Cleland’s image of inevitable decay speaks to the ironic energies of Middleton’s final play, which augment the binary division between England and Spain, Protestantism and Catholicism, or truth and error, while troubling comfortable illusions of perspicuous control or intransigent righteousness. Moreover, Middleton’s game reflects the stage of mortality by making the pawn, typically expendable, the prize and the king of little interest to the opponents. If Middleton was familiar with Cleland’s sermon, then he would have likely identified with it, given that its imagery of common mortality echoes the sentiments from *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased*, which were discussed in the dissertation’s introduction. Cleland provides a theatrical outlook on the social levelling that death precipitates but in the form of a chessboard rather than the common trope of *theatrum mundi*. From this perspective, success becomes comedic and failure

128 While the chessboard upholds binaries, its rules are warped in Middleton’s play, given that characters turn allegiances or are lured in such a direction, as is the White Knight by the Black Knight and Black King.
translates to tragedy in the chess game of life. Cleland’s sermon cautions its audience with the same message that Middleton’s drama presents: ultimately, we are not players but pieces. The director of life’s chess game is God, and we cannot be entirely certain of his desired outcome. Middleton expresses similar ideas in the texts we have previously explored, but with *A Game at Chess* he stages the English royalty as fallible and ineffective as well as not entirely in control of events, despite presenting them as the game’s victors. By teaching the people (instead of their rulers) that the way to elude vice is to understand not only vice but theatricality, Middleton provided Londoners with lessons in political action, fashioning an embryonic citizen politics.

I have previously associated citizen politics in *The Witch* and *The World Tossed at Tennis* with conscientious and responsible interpretations of political affairs that inspire individual assessments of topical matters, but the concept is more developed in *A Game at Chess*. The play’s establishment of what recent scholarship has called a “public” provides a means for situating my claim that Middleton heightens the importance of establishing an interpretation of recent histories. By positioning Londoners loosely as pawns within the public that *A Game at Chess* facilitates, Middleton indicates that the audience have participated in these historical events and ought to assess the competing narratives of what transpired in order to arrive at their own conclusions.

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129 Doelman’s work on Cleland builds upon an earlier *Notes and Queries* piece by Jeanne Shami, who notes a similar analogy between life and a game of chess in a sermon by Robert Harris for Sir Anthony Cope’s funeral. The sermon compares Cope to Samuel and names him “‘a good Christian, a good Church-man, a good States-man’” (qtd. in Shami 368). As Shami points out, the sermon was quite popular; Harris “delivered the sermon at Cope’s funeral in 1614, but the sermon was republished in 1618, 1622, 1626, 1629, and again in 1630” (367). The connection of chess not only with providence but also with political contributions beyond those of royalty, given that Cope is celebrated as a “States-man” as well as for his religious duty, would appear to pervade the later Jacobean era and persist into the Caroline period.

130 Theatrics are associated with vice, but are not necessarily vicious. Middleton’s depiction of trickery in *A Game at Chess* thus corresponds with my earlier application of Shuger’s *dolus bonum*, or good trick, to Middleton’s *The Phoenix*. 
The majority of scholarship on the concept of publics in the early modern theatre focuses on the pleasure audiences experience in their shared knowledge of a cultural phenomenon, but my application of this research seeks to address the ways in which this atmosphere generates plural responses and histories of the Spanish Match. Yachnin defines a “public” as follows: “The playhouse public is not a mere fantasy, but it is hardly an undoubted reality either. It is in the realm of make-believe in as much as the theater represents itself as the purveyor of fiction and as powerless to effect any social ends except recreational ones” (“Hamlet and the Social Thing,” 86-87). Middleton’s political irony, however, inspires a serious kind of play. Although the theatre does not actually encourage playgoers to create politics, it does comment upon their realities through “make-believe.” The contrast of the two histories that the royal and pawn plots produce is an ambiguous representation of what occurred with the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn’s narrow escape, which comments upon the “make-believe” nature of the zealous celebration of the White House’s victory at the play’s conclusion. Although the finale can be celebrated as an early form of jingoism, it can also be interpreted as a satire of the English monarchy, if the audience has paid attention to the pawn plot. Such an outlook tempers Yachnin’s reading of A Game at Chess’s creation of a public. Yachnin claims that in “the case of A Game at Chess, the playgoers enjoyed the ‘pleasure of seeing the whole’—seeing the political world as a legible text and seeing themselves as a politically meaningful gathering” (“Playing with Space,” 38). This statement is true of the mixed allegory, but if we look two ways at once (to the royal plot’s version of history and to the pawn plot’s account of recent affairs), the audience’s role in A Game at Chess’s public changes. Middleton’s political irony retains the pleasure of viewing the entirety of the public discourse and its players, but it also places the Protestant multitude within that whole through the allegorical figure of the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn. In this manner,
Middleton denies the interpreter comfortable mastery of the events onstage and instead prompts citizens to see themselves as part of a wider whole that they are responsible for interpreting.

Although Yachnin pays attention to the Black Knight’s speech, as I too have done, the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn also regularly draws attention to the public dimension of the play and does so as a central figure who represents the citizens in attendance. In a work on publics in *A Game at Chess* that precedes Yachnin’s work, Ian Munro sees the Virgin Pawn as a central figure who leads the theatre’s gathering. He examines the following early passage from the Virgin Pawn to make his point:

I must confess, as in a sacred temple
Thronged with an auditor, some come rather
To feed on human object than to taste
Of angel’s food;
So in the congregation of quick thoughts
Which are more infinite than such assemblies
Some have been wanderers, some fond, some sinful—
They’d small encouragement to come again. (1.1.130-39)

Munro suggests that the pawn’s speech alludes to the same issue Hamlet points to (1.5.96-97), namely the inability of the theatre to unify a distracted Globe, while nevertheless establishing a communal space:

…the image of “a sacred temple / Thronged with an auditory” also connects the space of the mind with the space of the theater itself, and suggests a parity of sorts between theatrical space and the religious space of the temple. This repositioning of theatrical space
works also through the audience: while some may have come for
entertainment, there is a more important purpose at work here.

(“Making Publics,” 220-21)

Munro is correct in his claim that the speech encourages dutiful engagement from its audience. The Virgin White Queen’s Pawn’s mention of “wanderers” indicates that, regardless of the space’s identity as a church or a theatre, the audience could be equally distracted and their eyes could “feed on human object[s]” rather than metaphorically ingesting “angels’ food.” The Virgin White Queen Pawn’s early statement is important for guiding the audience’s interpretive approach to the play, but the vehicle of the church is not necessarily what communicates its severity.

Later on, we see the broader capacity of the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn to construe a public by drawing attention to the theatre itself as a public, meaning that spaces other than sites of devotion can configure a public. While still upholding virtuous conduct, the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn delivers the following statements after having gained knowledge of vice and seen the perpetrators for what they really are. Speaking to the Black Jesuit Bishop’s Pawn, she states:

For decorum’s sake, then,

For pity’s cause, for sacred virtue’s honour,

If you’ll persist still in your dev’lish part,

Present him as you should do, and let one

That carries up the goodness of the play

Come in that habit, and I’ll speak with him.

Then will the parts be fitted, and the spectators

Know which is which; they must have cunning judgements
To find it else, for such a one as you
Is able to deceive a mighty auditory.
Nay, those you have seduced—if there be any
In the assembly—when they see what manner
You play the game with me, they cannot love you. (5.2.24-36)

Here, more than before, her speech implicates the audience. She commends them by referring to “a mighty auditory” while also reminding them that “they must have cunning judgements” in order to deduce the truth. The Virgin Pawn, however, does not possess such perceptive abilities at this moment. As Wittek deduces, her ensuing question of why the Black Bishop’s Pawn is smiling at this statement is her “hopelessly naive” demeanour: “She longs for a world that operates like morality plays, where devils look like devils and priests look like priests, and spectators do not have to exercise ‘cunning’ judgment to tell the difference” (The Media Players, 73). The dramatic irony of this moment shows the audience that the abilities to interpret theatre and politics are intertwined, for she is unable to gain an advantageous position because of her inability to discern her ironic circumstances. As Wittek states, she is naive, but the audience do not wholeheartedly side with the Black Bishop’s Pawn in his mischievous grin: they know that he has been duped by the Jesuitess Black Queen’s Pawn, and they empathize with the Virgin Pawn, whose state reflects their political state.

The Virgin White Queen’s Pawn eventually learns to enact citizen politics; however, she gains this talent by virtue of luck, in the form of the Jesuitess’s actions. It is only after circumstances lead to the Virgin Pawn’s averted tragedy that she sees things in retrospect for what they are. The Jesuitess is the Virgin Pawn’s ironic saving grace not only when she

131 Her previous use of “auditory” in Act 1, Scene 1 to describe a place of worship further supports my point that the formation of a public is not dependent upon the space being sacred.
inadvertently assists her in dodging her would-be rapist, but when she does so earlier on in the play as well. Before he is about to force himself onto the Virgin Pawn in Act Two, Scene One, for example, the Bishop’s Pawn suddenly hears a noise that causes him to halt his advance, providing the Virgin Pawn with time to escape (2.1.142-3). The Jesuitess later enters and explains that she has “spied a pawn of the White House walk near us, / And made that noise on purpose to give warning” (2.1.156-7); however, in what is clearly an aside, she reveals that she has done so for her “own turn, which end in all [she] work[s] for” (2.1.158). Although the Jesuitess diverts the impending tragedy at this moment, it is not out of any moral compunction or alliance with the Virgin Pawn. Rather, she acts according to her own advantage in the game.

The Jesuitess’s success is predicated upon mastery of the theatrical conventions of the aside, disguise, and offstage sound effects. Such tactics allow her to thwart the Bishop’s Pawn after she has assisted him in luring and deceiving the Virgin Pawn into experiencing a fatal attraction for him. Her governance of the dumb show that constitutes Act Four, Scene Three demonstrates her mastery as a director occupying a privileged seat of theatrical authority in relation to the Virgin Pawn and the Black Bishop’s Pawn:

\[Enter the Jesuitess Black Queen's Pawn with a taper in her hand,\]
\[as conducting the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn in her night attire to one chamber, then—fetching in the Black Bishop’s Pawn (the Jesuit), in his night habit—conveys him into another chamber; puts out the candle, and follows him.\]

The stage direction presents a bed trick that allows the Virgin Pawn to elude her deceitful suitor unknowingly while the Jesuitess exacts her pleasurable revenge upon him, besting him at his own game. Christian morality or ethics have nothing to do with the Jesuitess’s ambition. As
before, her own “end” serves her in this scene, too. Although the Black House’s individualistic, selfish ambitions depict it in a state of civil unrest, it is equally crucial to note that this wayward energy precipitates the safety and well being of the White House. Indeed, the play’s staging continuously aligns the playgoers with the Jesuitess in her witty manipulation of the characters onstage.

Londoners’ connection with the Jesuitess is fully revealed in her final exchange with the Bishop’s Pawn prior to the White Queen and the Gelded Pawn taking the two of them. In this moment, blame is displaced from the Jesuitess onto the Jesuit Black Bishop’s Pawn:

JESUITESS BLACK QUEEN’S PAWN
Can five years stamp a bawd?—Pray, look upon me, sir;
I’ve youth enough to take it.—’Tis no more
Since you were chief agent for the transportation
Of ladies’ daughters, if you be remembered;
Some of their portions I could name, you pursed ’em, too.
They were soon dispossessed of worldly cares
That came into your fingers.

JESUIT BLACK BISHOP’S PAWN
Shall I hear her?

JESUITESS BLACK QUEEN’S PAWN
Holy derision, yes, till thy ear swells
With thy own venom, thy profane life’s vomit.
Whose niece was she you poisoned with child, twice?
—Then gave her out ‘possessed with a foul spirit’?
When ’twas your bastard. (5.2.95-106)

As Gary Taylor explains, the reference to the Bishop’s Pawn as the “chief agent for the transportation / Of ladies’ daughters” reflects the topical anxiety of the Jesuits “helping aristocratic young women secretly leave England to go to nunneries in Catholic countries” (1876). Caroline Bicks elaborates upon this notion; her exploration of Jesuits in London at the time illuminates the ways in which Jesuits utilized women and theatricality to lure Londoners to the Jesuit religion (464). Although the Jesuitess’s character embodies the cultural anxiety regarding conversion, she simultaneously operates in this instance as the saving grace of the Virgin Pawn. The equivocal nature of the Jesuitess is heightened when we consider the fact that these references in the play align her with English women who have fallen victim to the Jesuit order. Like the White King’s Pawn who changes his allegiances and is remarked upon as being half-black by the Fat Bishop, the Jesuitess retains a degree of ambiguity. This is not to say that the character is ethical or moral, but simply that her revenge upon the Bishop’s Pawn happens to coincide with the needs of the White House, making her more equivocal than meets the eye.

The Black Bishop’s Pawn reference to the Jesuitess as “[t]hou whore of order” encapsulates the conundrum she embodies (5.3.112). Taylor notes in his edition that this contradictory phrase fashions the Jesuitess into a sex worker, but that the line has several connotations: “(a) of a religious order (b) on demand (c) of ordure, excrement, filth (but also a complex paradox, since ‘whore’ epitomizes sexual and moral disorder)” (1877). I suggest that the “complex paradox” of the Jesuitess is situated in her inadvertent ability to derive order from vice in mysterious ways. The Bishop’s Pawn draws attention to this fact since she, rather than the White House, is the true saviour of the Virgin Pawn. This oddity reveals the reliance upon theatricality in order to execute virtue. Without a working knowledge of the theatre, the Virgin
Pawn remains vulnerable to and helpless in the face of corruption by deceit, leaving her salvation to arrive ironically with the crafty performer of the Jesuitess, who happens to have ambitions that align with the Virgin Pawn’s interests.\(^\text{132}\)

The Virgin Pawn’s final movements and speech highlight this necessary transformation. Having been ostensibly saved by the Gelded Pawn, who takes the Black Bishop’s Pawn, the Virgin Pawn, in turn, saves him from the Black Knight’s Pawn Gelder:

BLACK KNIGHT’S PAWN GELDER \textit{[aside]}

Yonder’s the White Bishop’s Pawn. Have at his heart now!

VIRGIN WHITE QUEEN’S PAWN

Hold, monster-impudence! Wouldst heap a murder

On thy first foul attempt? O merciless bloodhound!

’Tis time that thou art taken.

[\textit{White Queen’s Pawn takes Black Knight’s Pawn}]

BLACK KNIGHT’S PAWN GELDER

Death! prevented?

VIRGIN WHITE QUEEN’S PAWN

For thy sake, and yon partner in thy shame,

I’ll never know man farther than by name. (5.2.113-18)

In terms of action, this episode illustrates that the Virgin Pawn has learnt how to manoeuvre politics, and in turn the world, thereby preserving her innocence and chastity. Taylor’s choice to frame the Black Knight’s Pawn Gelder’s intentions in an aside shows that the Virgin Pawn has learnt how to perceive the vicious from the virtuous, since she is able to anticipate the Gelder’s

\(^{132}\text{This outcome might also be the result of divine providence; however, the circumstances that transpire onstage lead us to see the Jesuitess as the unintentional deviser of the Virgin Pawn’s narrow escape.}\)
assault upon the Gelded Pawn. The Virgin Pawn’s assessment of the Gelder’s character and actions, as well as her subsequent decision to attack him, amplifies her intuitive capacity to predict the Gelder’s motions, since she does not require overt knowledge of his actions in order to map them out in advance of the outcome. Her superior mastery of the event is heightened by the Gelder’s inability to anticipate her move, which is evident given that his charging cry of “Death!” is quickly and comically replaced by “prevented?”, suggesting that the stage direction that she takes him ought to occur between these words. Her speech prior to her apprehension of the pawn denotes a change in her comportment. She is no longer the meek and helpless figure we have seen throughout the play. Here she becomes the hero to the Gelded Pawn instead of the locus of anxiety.

Citizens’ Perpetual Renovation

The averted tragedy of the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn reveals that the White Knight’s plot was not as effective as he believed it would be. Although he and his Duke manage to deceive the Black House and win the game, their representative, the Gelded White Bishop’s Pawn, is relatively ineffective in “saving” the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn. After the Virgin Pawn has successfully evaded rape, thanks to the Jesuitess’s private scheme, the Gelded White Bishop’s Pawn suddenly enters with the White Queen. At this point, the Jesuitess and the Black Bishop’s Pawn are in the midst of heated dialogue. Sufficiently distracted, the Gelded Pawn takes the Black Bishop’s Pawn. The Virgin Pawn, however, is not threatened at this point and has held her ground in debate with the Black Bishop’s Pawn over the course of this scene. Neither the White Queen nor the Gelded White Bishop’s Pawn allegorically represents a figure of the English state. As previously noted, the Gelded Pawn is most likely the muted Puritan faith; the White Queen most likely corresponds loosely with Elizabeth of Bohemia, given that Queen
Anne had died in 1619. These forces are associated with English faith rather than the English crown. Thematically, then, Middleton’s narrative suggests that English faith rather than English politics has overcome threats to the national body, if we desire to locate any determinate cause. What remains clear is that this event is not a *deux ex machina*, as it arrives after the Virgin Pawn has already evaded peril. The Jesuitess remains the actor who engineers the event that saves her. The Virgin Pawn’s salvation is not the Jesuitess’s intention, of course, which is why coincidence is her saviour.

These matters are important to keep in mind as we read the White King’s concluding speech. Having originally befriended members of the Black House and made serious errors in judgment, he is nevertheless allocated the final remarks, which seem to suggest closure, both figuratively and literally:

So let the bag close now (the fittest womb

For treachery, pride, and malice),

[The bag closes]

whilst we winner-like

Destroying through heaven’s power what would destroy,

Welcome our White Knight with loud peals of joy. (5.3.217-20)

While the medieval imagery of the chess bag as a hell-mouth seems fitting, it is also rather simple. Underlying James’s commands is providential language; the White House are “winner-like” rather than the game’s actual victors, and they destroy “through heaven’s power” instead of their own. The king’s commands in this scene are still effectively those of an instrument, an actor, a chess piece, rather than of a sovereign player or decider of the political game.

Thomas Cogswell points out that the White Queen is “a character clearly resembling Elizabeth of Bohemia” (133).
The White Knight, who is celebrated with “peals of joy,” is also the master dissembler who achieves “checkmate by / Discovery…the noblest mate of all” (5.3.160-61). As Taylor notes, discovery is one of the most impressive chess moves a player can pull off in the game, but it is also the “public exposure (of [his or her] lies and other vices)” (1881). This is not what Charles actually accomplished in Spain, but what the public wanted to imagine that he did, given that his militant Protestant zeal piqued again after his failure to finalize the marriage negotiations during the course of his visit. Although Thomas Cogswell claims that “Middleton was highlighting, and the audience applauding, the cunning and valor of Charles—and Buckingham,” the prince’s use of dissemblance remains equivocal as well (278). The actor becomes the symbolic vehicle through which to communicate the collective use of deception by all political parties, as indicated when Gondomar tells the White Knight, “What we have done / Has been dissemblance ever” (5.3.157-58), and when the White Duke reiterates a similar message after the discovery: “Dissembler!—that includes all” (5.3.164). As Taylor states:

the play rejects dissemblance, but depends upon it. Actors are, by definition, people who deliberately pretend to belong to categories to which they do not really belong. When the Black Knight says, “What we have done Has been dissemblance ever” (5.3.157-8), he speaks for both the character and the actor. In this sense, all the actors, on both sides of the chessboard, belong to the Black House.

(1829)

Like pieces in a game of chess, all the actors leave the stage at the end of the play after the game is finished. Although the Black House exits into the bag, whereas the members of the White House presumably exeunt as actors traditionally would, Taylor’s observation points out that they
have all served as pieces or instruments that are moved by greater forces. The grandiose conclusion of good trumping evil is therefore not as simple as it would seem.

We remain uncertain of the play’s intentions; it supports a black and white binary framework through its chess allegory, but also troubles its construction. The Induction, in which Ignatius wakes Error from his slumber and dictates how he would have the game of chess played, offers an ironic method for Middleton to wash his hands of any culpability by making all the play a dream of Error, and yet even this decision remains unclear. If the play depicts the events of the Spanish Match, then was this not James’s dream? The characterization of Ignatius does resemble James’s projected image as the kingdom’s decider:

IGNATIUS

Pawns argue but poor spirits and slight preferments,
Not worthy of the name of my disciples.
If I had stood so nigh, I would have cut
That Bishop’s throat but I’d have had his place
And told the Queen a love tale in her ear
Would make her best pulse dance. There’s no elixir
Of brain or spirit amongst ’em.

ERROR

Why, would you have ’em play against themselves?
That’s quite against the rules of the game, Ignatius.

IGNATIUS LOYOLA

Push! I would rule myself, not observe rule.

ERROR
Why then you’d play a game all by yourself.

IGNATIUS LOYOLA

I would do anything to rule alone.

It’s rare to have the world reined in by one. (Induction, 62-76)

While the Black House’s failure can be attributed to Ignatius when he says that he would have the pieces battle amongst themselves—as the Jesuitess battles the Black Bishop’s Pawn—Ignatius also ignores the merits of pawns. Ignatius’s plots concerning the wooing of the Queen and the murder of a Bishop resemble those of the Machiavel Gondomar, but his statement that he “would do anything to rule alone” echoes James’s insistence in his writings that he was solely appointed and responsible for governing the kingdom, not to mention his repeated dissolutions of parliament. Through these possible allusions to James, the Induction prepares audiences for what they must attend to, as it presents Ignatius as the counterpoint to an ideal interpreter. In contrast to what the originator of the Jesuit faith states, pawns are important; politics, like theatre, should be collaborative; and no one is a player alone.

The beginning of the play has prepared the audience for these exercises, and its Epilogue establishes an ambiguous continuing course of action for them. The White King’s final speech is thus succeeded by the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn, as she delivers the Epilogue:

My mistress, the White Queen, hath sent me forth
And bade me bow thus low to all of worth
That are true friends of the White House and cause,
Which she hopes most of this assembly draws.
For any else—by envy’s mark denoted,
To those night glow-worms in the bag devoted—
Where’er they sit, stand, and in concerns lurk,

They’ll be soon known by their depraving work.

But she’s assured, what they’d commit to bane

Her White friends’ hands will build up fair again. (1-10)

The audience are not drawn to celebrate either Charles or James, but rather the White Queen, an allegorical representation of Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia. Given that Queen Anne was dead, it makes most sense that Elizabeth is the political figure being referred to here. The pawn’s public call to “this assembly” divides it betwixt those who support the Protestant faith and closet Catholics. Worth correlates with faith rather than social rank. Upright citizens are those who do not possess “envy’s mark,” which can be found in those who “sit, stand, and in corners lurk.” Envious playgoers are devoted to the Black House, whereas upright citizens have a political responsibility to uphold their nation’s faith. By splitting the audience between Protestants and Catholic sympathizers, Middleton conflates class relations in the Globe by dividing “all of worth” from all of naught. Status dissolves into faith and the ability to interpret the chessboard of life that he and others such as Cleland portray is what determines merit. Londoners cannot promote, alter, or exact politics, but the pawn does indicate that they nevertheless ought to undertake perpetual renovation, which is contrasted to the “depraving work” of Jesuits. Playgoers’ “hands” support the Protestant cause, indicating that their applause or theatrical participation helps to “build up” any ill that their enemies have done. This faithful commitment and theatrical participation establishes citizen politics through charging theatregoers to remain
vigilant, having ascertained that their governors do not always act in the interest of their collective faith.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{134} It is worth noting that “hands” appears as “loves” in other early extant editions of \textit{A Game at Chess}. Although I have followed Taylor’s editorial decision, which adheres to the traditional formula of Epilogues requesting applause, the variant “loves” perhaps provides some indication of the way in which Middleton conceived of this request, namely that the audience’s approval reflected their devotion to the Protestant cause. Although audience members are celebrating the image of history that Buckingham promoted, thereby cheering the White Knight and White Duke as victorious in their journey to Spain, theatregoers are primarily paying homage to the White Queen, whose pawn delivers this Epilogue. Moreover, it is the White Queen who is “assured” that “[h]er White friends’ hands” will be able to restore what the White King and others have allowed to transpire. They therefore remain committed to their God rather than to their governors.
Conclusion

Following a warrant released on 30 August 1624 for Middleton’s arrest concerning his composition of *A Game at Chess*, the playwright penned a short poem “To the King,” which, as its title suggests, was written for James. Having incurred censorship mainly as a result of complaints from the Spanish ambassador, the King’s Men received a nominal reprimand, but the author was to incur more severe punishment. Eventually it came to light that he had written the play, resulting in his incarceration. “We do not know when Middleton was found, or how long he was imprisoned” (Taylor *Occasional Poems*, 1895), but we do know that he wrote this poem in an effort to evade chastisement:

> A harmless game, raised merely for delight,
> Was lately played by the Black House and White.
> The White side won, but now the Black House brag
> They changed the game and put me in the bag—
> And that which makes malicious joy more sweet,
> I lie now under hatches in the Fleet. (1-6)

Middleton refers to his work as harmless, only intended for the public’s pleasure; moreover, he plays the humble subordinate who is at the mercy of the king and the victim of circumstance, given that it is the Black House rather than James who has brought about his unfortunate predicament. Despite the poem’s structure as a plea, Middleton utilizes his subordinate and lowly status to move the king:

> Use but your royal hand, my hopes are free;
> ’Tis but removing of one man—that’s me,

Tho. Middleton (7-8)
Middleton plays the pawn, but is in fact the player who moves the king, given that the poem was ostensibly effective or at least comments upon the success Middleton had in avoiding serious penalty. The sovereign remains in control since he chooses the author’s fate, but Middleton’s rhetoric subtly provides the king with *opera basilica* in the disguise of a plea for mercy. Although Middleton feigns that *A Game at Chess* signified nothing beyond satirical enjoyment, his poem remains an example of the ways in which a citizen is able to enact politics, for the playwright managed to gain James’s mercy. Despite the fact that James remains the decider, the dramatist provides the stage directions for the king’s decisions, thereby demonstrating the power of Middleton’s political irony and its *opera basilica*.

Middleton’s use of chess allegory to execute his escape plan speaks to the anxieties James expressed over Londoners’ knowledge of the game, for the poem demonstrates the ways in which a citizen can learn to manipulate the king’s politics to his advantage through the discourse of chess. As Paul Yachnin has shown, James regarded chess as an activity that metaphorically represented the role of governors, but he saw the game as a foolish pastime when it came to his subjects, or pawns (“Chess Allegory,” 317). Yachnin observes two instances in which James allegorizes his role in relation to the game of chess. The first is in *Basilicon Doron*, where the king links his subjects’ act of playing the game with philosophical folly: “For where all such light playes, are ordained to free mens heads for a time, from the fashious thoughts on their affaires; it by contrarie filleth and troubleth mens heads, with as many fashious toyes of the play, as before it was filled with thoughts on his own affaires” (qtd. in Yachnin “Chess Allegory,” 317). This first passage indicates that James would prefer that his loyal subjects’ minds are preoccupied with their own affairs instead of having “free mens heads” concoct strategies. For James, chess is a distraction from necessary tasks that allows too much freedom in
everyday life. This suggests the king’s wariness of his subjects’ ability to recognize their individual power to manipulate political scenarios, a skill that Middleton clearly developed. The king’s later reference to chess comes from his speech to parliament in 1609, when James asserted that he had the “power to exalt low things, and abase high things, and make [his] subjects like men in Chesse; A pawne to take a Bishop or a Knight, and to cry up, or downe any of his subjects” (qtd. in Yachnin “Chess Allegory,” 317). This quotation allocates James the power of the decider, for he claims supremacy over the game by stating that as a king he is able to command his people in the same way a player rules over a chessboard. James, however, ignores the fact that in his kingdom he is a prominent piece rather than the ruling player of the chess game, who is ostensibly God.

Middleton’s poem nevertheless carefully positions James as the player of the game, complementing the manner in which the king saw himself, but the author doubles his own role as a pawn that James ought to move, thereby pardoning him, and a greater authority, who moves James to move him. Hence, although the poem demonstrates Middleton’s humility toward James, it simultaneously illustrates a presumptive subject attempting to direct the king. The playwright’s deployment of flattery in order to sway the monarch could be said, then, to reveal Middleton as the conventional ironist who gains mastery by feigning that he is ignorant and helpless.  

135 Socrates, for example, infamously claimed that he knew nothing when he was in fact extremely wise. This ironic habit resembles the Janus face that Yachnin applies to A Game at Chess, in which the ironist feigns to do one thing overtly in order to accomplish something far more subversive beneath the surface. Although Middleton adopts this ironic conceit here and in A Game at Chess, the playwright’s poem enacts politics as well in its manipulation of the decider.
middling identity between player and piece. Middleton does not play God but instead subtly coerces the monarch to rescue him by carefully navigating a middle state between control and submission.

Middleton at once ruling and obeying James reminds us of the old Duke’s admiration of Phoenix for being able to adhere to Aristotle’s maxim. In this regard, the poem’s handling of the king is not sardonic; instead, Middleton practices what he preaches by acting obeisant toward his monarch while making requests of him, as he has previously counselled James to do through the *opera basilica* of *The Phoenix*. Although political authority and decisions remain the king’s business, then, this dissertation has shed light on the ways in which Middleton’s canon questions the inherent uprightness and superior abilities of the ruler. In offering such an alternative to studies of political theology in early modern drama, I have shown Middleton’s drama’s capacity to challenge James’s image of himself as a decider. However, it is important to remark that Middleton is not an entirely unique exception to this critical trend. As Jonathan Dollimore has pointed out, *The Roaring Girl*, Middleton’s collaboration with Dekker, establishes mutual power dynamics that resist centralized authority. Furthermore, this dissertation bases its definition of political irony upon Middleton’s collaboration with Rowley, suggesting that even if Middleton did define *ironia* entirely on his own, Rowley still served as his co-creator, agreeing with and expanding upon his dramatic vision. Although it is important, then, to avoid establishing Middleton as an innovative and isolated genius, given that his drama was devised collectively

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136 While Middleton provides a conundrum to this common view of the sovereign in political theology, he also challenges the tradition in early modern criticism to see power dynamics as oppositional. The shifting and sharing of power between persons offers a challenge to the subversion/containment model and advocates a complex interrelation that Dollimore identifies in *The Roaring Girl*: “subversion and containment are always in play, each an intrinsic dimension of social process and in a dynamic interrelationship which their binary conception misconstrues” (*Sexual Dissidence*, 299). His political irony’s ability to focus attention on the middle disrupts aims to control circumstances or to achieve pure transgression, which Dollimore posits is unrealizable, establishing a common middle ground instead that involves a fallen and fallible condition that authorities and their subjects share.
with contemporary playwrights, this study has arrived at the conclusion that Middleton’s political irony’s ability to draw upon the topicality of a rich and textured culture in a manner that produces responsibility out of its plurality is a regular and important feature of his canon. We can therefore revisit T.S. Eliot’s critique of the author’s dramatic output by observing that Middleton’s lack of intent reveals his inclination to allow royal and civic audiences to derive their own messages from his polychronic account of the times.\textsuperscript{137}

This study has re-evaluated Eliot’s observation that Middleton was a chronicler of everyday topical matters by addressing his political drama’s projected and conflicted constructions of English history and politics. As we have seen, Middleton situates his political irony in sustained or deliberately fractured allegories that implicate their audiences in didactic narratives that are formed by topical events and extend beyond the dramatic action. By leaving the outcome open-ended, Middleton prompts governors to establish politics to deal with the emergent problems and provides regular playgoers with plural perspectives of topical subjects that they are left to reconcile in their own minds. These dramatic structures consistently ascribe an adamant pursuit of Protestant faith and virtue, but remind spectators that they remain in a middle state of perpetual renovation so long as they operate in an earthly sphere. Whether Middleton paints a loose picture of James as a fresh monarch in \textit{The Phoenix} or as a stubborn scholar in \textit{The World Tossed at Tennis}, his allegories repeatedly draw the living sovereign into his allegorical portrait of current affairs, thereby bringing the monarch into the body politic that he governs. Hence, Middleton’s allegorical visions and the political irony they frame deters from the comfortable and superior reception that is typical of the ironic theatre; instead, he encourages the king to see himself working with and within his polis to enact effective politics. This

\textsuperscript{137} Eliot’s claim that Middleton had no message and was merely a chronicler should not cloud his otherwise glowing account of the dramatist’s work, which he sees as comparative in quality to Shakespeare’s canon.
reception is not limited to James; the Lord Mayor of London becomes an Everyman in Middleton’s psychomachia allegory and theatregoers witness their collective Protestant faith in jeopardy with the situation of the Every(wo)man of the Virgin White Queen’s Pawn in A Game at Chess. The comfortable closure that these didactic traditions often establish are dispelled in Middleton’s theatre, lending a dynamic quality to these archaic forms and reinventing them in the process. By elucidating that his audience’s work remains incomplete, Middleton’s dramatic works advocate perpetual renovation that regards politics as a coexistent enterprise that is never fully resolved but of importance to all members of the body politic.

This dissertation has thus approached Middleton’s political irony as a way of revisiting politics in early modern drama in order to understand the ways in which early modern drama can instigate political thought without perfectly disseminating a particular message to its audience. In the process of elucidating that the theatre is a political rather than powerless space, this work has also provided new insights into the conflicted attitudes toward Middleton’s oeuvre as either starkly moral or satirical. By observing the allegories Middleton frames as dynamic in their didacticism, the dissertation provides a means for thinking of the playwright’s political dramatic works as offering praise of the monarchy and its politics in conjunction with social critique in order to show that the polis can never achieve perfection. The middle state that Middleton repeatedly leaves his audience to wrestle with reveals that there remains work to be accomplished. Whether these tasks entail opera basilica or citizen politics is dependent upon the audience and the degree of political control they possess. In both cases, however, Middleton frames these works as ongoing to show citizens and their leaders that their body politic is perpetually renovated; this message is perhaps the only intention we can ascribe to Middleton’s political dramatic output, which continues to look two ways at once.
In concentrating on irony as offering plural perspectives in political drama, I have not offered nor aimed to provide an in-depth examination of the various kinds of irony at work in Middleton’s canon. I have not, therefore, developed an all-encompassing or definitive style that befits Middletonian irony. The study’s investigation of political irony thus provides room for further discussion of Middleton and Rowley’s definition as a means for theorizing trans-historical discourse on irony. Deriving out of early modern rhetorical thought, which correlates with common modern conceptions of irony, Middleton and Rowley’s understanding of the trope presents a break from early modern tradition, even though it is indebted to it. The split that the trope precipitates between an inferred and a literal meaning likely inspired the pair’s notion that irony involves looking two ways at once. Likewise, our modern understandings of devices such as structural irony (also known as sustained irony), anticipatory irony, or situational irony resemble Middleton and Rowley’s concept in some ways: their political irony is framed by a sustained allegorical framework; it projects a future trajectory; and its topical circumstances allow audiences to recognize its presence. Such applications are useful for thinking about the ways in which Middleton’s ironic drama corresponds with modern performance techniques and rhetorical tropes; however, this dissertation’s aim has been to gain an appreciation for Middleton’s political irony by adopting the terms he and his contemporaries were familiar with or coined rather than applying our modern concepts. It is nevertheless important to consider the ways in which Middleton and Rowley perhaps provide us with a better understanding of various ironies’ origins, given that their definition might have served as an early inspiration for the similar rhetorical concepts we have concocted over time. Unlike these modern tropes, however, Middleton and Rowley’s irony extends beyond the interpretive engagement with literature, thereby revealing irony’s political potential. Structural and anticipatory ironies typically
culminate within the work of art either through the anticipated closure of an ironic circumstance or through the interpreter’s overall experience of it. Instead of leaving interpreters with the satisfaction of and sense of superiority for having comprehended a supposedly sophisticated meaning, Middleton and Rowley’s political irony gives audiences problems to wrestle with and works to accomplish, showing that irony can spur a sense of duty or responsibility on the part of interpreters despite their inability to ascertain what the ironist(s), Middleton (and Rowley), intended.

It is fitting to end this dissertation by concluding in the same manner that Middleton finished his career as a writer: by continuing to direct our attention to the political middle state we remain enmeshed within through life. The new sovereign, however, followed in his father’s footsteps by ignoring Middleton’s political irony. After James died on 27 March 1625, Charles took the throne, but only cemented the division between king and kingdom. Plague again delayed the performance of the king’s processions through the streets of London, but when the opportunity to stage the pageants came about, Charles opted to cancel the royal entry altogether: “The pageants were to be torn down because they were obstructing traffic flow for London’s wealthiest inhabitants” (Taylor “Lost Pageant,” 1900). As Taylor points out in his account of the lost pageant for Charles I, “Middleton is the only writer ever named in connection with these pageants, intended to equal The Whole Royal and Magnificent Entertainment, which had officially welcomed James I into London” (1898). He received no further compensation for his pains and efforts beyond whatever he might have initially received to pen these lost pageants:

On 6 June, the London Aldermen ruled that “Mr Christmas and Mr Middleton referring themselves to this Court, no further moneys shall be paid unto either of them, but that Mr Christmas shall
forthwith cause the said pageants to be taken down, and to have the
same for his full satisfaction.” Christmas was allowed to sell off the
building materials, by way of reimbursement; Middleton got
nothing, although “no further moneys” indicates that he had been
paid earlier, presumably for writing the speeches that should have
been delivered, and perhaps for inventing the symbolism of the
pageants themselves. (“Lost Pageant,” 1900)

Charles augmented the division between crown and kingdom, lost the people’s love (“Lost
Pageant,” 1900), and voided the mutual and contractual bond between king and people that
Middleton had championed with both James and Charles. The dramatist’s political irony and its
opera basilica failed to achieve a royal audience yet again.

The cancellation, however, did not stop Middleton from attempting to instruct his betters.
The final text and only extant Caroline work of Middleton’s, The Triumphs of Health and
Prosperity (1626), continues to focus on the middle way that the playwright has consistently
mapped out in his political drama. In this Lord Mayor’s Show, Middleton portrays this course
with the common narrative of a sea journey: “The world’s a sea, and every magistrate / Takes a
year’s voyage when he takes this state” (106-7). The city’s journey, like the ship’s voyage,
always threatens to be perilous no matter how many times it safely eschews the hazards and
problems that oppose the safety of its mission. Middleton reminds him that it is temporary (“a
year’s voyage”) as well as a situation applicable to any “magistrate” in the world. Even at the
end of his career, Middleton continues to encourage governors to remain vigilant and to observe
a course of perpetual renovation that extends beyond their reign. Like these rulers and the
dramatist who crafted works for them, we remain in the midst of a turbulent sea, struggling to
maintain balance as new political problems emerge out of a perpetual sea of troubles.

Middleton’s political irony, however, does not mock our obligation to face these perils, for its creator shares this journey; instead, its uneven influences of the *via media* and the *via diversa* suggest that a conscientious responsibility is required to deal with these issues collectively and in an ongoing manner. This dissertation likewise encourages its readers to be vigilant in interpreting their own political world, for although our middle state and world is radically different from Middleton’s, we still have our own ethical work to accomplish.
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