

Thomas Middleton, Masculinities, and Embodiment

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which masculinities are imagined, staged, articulated, and problematised as intersubjective in the writings of Thomas Middleton. It considers his representations of and engagements with masculinities that resist containment and fixity, arguing that he persistently tropes masculinity as something processual, contingent, contested, and fragmented. It examines how the precarious reality of the body in Middleton clashes with any stable model of masculinity, tracing the various discourses and practices of unequal interaction between the body and the world that underpin these constructions of gender.

This thesis situates Middleton within a collaborative and mutually influential network of writers and social, civic, and political institutions in early modern London. This thesis is split into three sections. The first ('Collaborations') considers the significance of collaboration as a model for approaching Middleton's texts. The second ('Assembled Subjects') interrogates how materiality and material culture constructs and contests masculinities across Middleton's texts by exploring prosthetics, stage props, and crossdressing. The final section ('Fantasies of Authority') considers how models of masculinity and power are set up and then disrupted by bodily realities in Middleton's writing.

This thesis argues that Middleton resists fortifying individual male agency, and instead draws out the complex role that social, corporeal, and material structures play in constructing embodied masculinities. For Middleton, masculinities are constituted across and between bodies through a relationship of interaction, exchange, and transaction that I argue throughout this thesis is never mutual. By attending to these varied embodiments of masculinity, this thesis will further an understanding of the importance of gender to the Middletonian canon, as well as highlight the significance of Middleton to broader questions surrounding early modern subjectivity, embodiment, and masculinity.

Note on Texts

The following abbreviations are used:

<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
<i>ELR</i>	<i>English Literary Renaissance</i>
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>The Review of English Studies</i>
<i>SEL</i>	<i>Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900</i>
<i>The Collected Works</i>	Thomas Middleton, <i>Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works</i> , gen. ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2007)

Modern, reliable editions of early modern primary texts have been used where available. Quotations from early modern sources retain original spelling, italics, and punctuation. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from works by Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare are made to the following editions, and are cited parenthetically in-text:

Jonson, Ben, *The Cambridge Works of Ben Jonson*, gen. ed. by David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Middleton, Thomas, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Shakespeare, William, *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, gen. ed. by Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

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Introduction

Thomas Middleton's first solo-authored play *The Phoenix* (1604) is concerned with cultivating the adult masculinity that prince Phoenix will embody as the next Duke of Ferrara. The prince's servant Fidelio praises the 'true' Phoenix, who is in effect a transparent cipher for the ascendant King James, as the 'wonder of all princes, precedent and glory' (1.337). But Phoenix is a young prince and future ruler—his manliness is anticipated rather than present. His father commends his 'serious studies' and 'fruitful hours' only in the sense that they promise to 'grow up into judgement' appropriate for a governing man (34-35). He orders Phoenix to travel abroad to gain the 'Experience' necessary to develop 'what is in hope begun' (40-41). By setting out Phoenix's masculinity as something that is in the process of being cultivated as opposed to being fixed, the Duke invokes a notion of masculinity that is itself provisional and anticipates transformation over time. However, Phoenix refuses to travel abroad and decides to stay within Ferrara to 'look into the heart and bowels of this dukedom, and [...] mark all abuses ready for reformation and punishment' (102-04). Phoenix suggests that ruling masculinity is predicated on the surveillance of its subjects' bodies to correct disorderly behaviour. By framing this surveillance through the semiotics of the body, Middleton suggests that Phoenix can uncover and search through the dukedom as if a skilled physician and, by doing so, solidify the authority of his hoped-for masculinity.

Yet Phoenix's journey throughout the play brings him uncomfortably close to the abuses he is supposed to mark. He disguises himself as 'some filthy farmer's son' (8.79) as he travels through the dukedom and encounters an array of corruption that includes thievery, adultery, incest, wife-selling, and attempted murder. Middleton goes further than just having Phoenix witness and expose these vices by making the prince a participant in the citizens' illicit behaviour. The disguised prince undergoes a variety of roles that actively involve him in vice throughout the play: he serves as a legal witness to the selling of Castiza by her husband the Captain, he is mistaken for the Knight and brought into the chambers of the Jeweller's Wife for an adulterous affair, and he is hired by plotting courtier Proditor to become his own assassin. His involvement in these activities makes him more than a distanced witness, even if his

participation is in the context of disguise and role-play. As Phoenix claims in his apostrophe to Matrimony, the distinction between ‘pleasant and legitimately fruitful’ relationships and those of ‘soiled bastardy’ are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish owing to their closeness (169-70). Phoenix contends that the ‘upper parts’ of the social body remain ‘incorruptible’ by the ‘dross’ of the citizens (4.209-11). Yet the play’s structure casts doubt on Phoenix’s assertion. The soiling of institutional law, justice, and marriage in the play have flourished under the Duke’s rule. Following the revelation that the prince has investigated the vices of Ferrara, the Duke claims that where he ‘only saw the knee’, Phoenix looks inward to the ‘heart’ of his people and shows promise in maintaining a stricter social order (15.180). Although Phoenix’s youthful masculinity is figured through a language of anticipation, the authoritative manhood his father attempts to orient him towards has already enabled corruption and vice to run riot throughout the dukedom. Even as the Duke expects Phoenix to develop through a model of masculinity that is open to transformation, the messy reality of bodies that sin and his necessary contact with these bodies disrupt this ideal. By troubling the distance between Phoenix and the abuses of the dukedom, Middleton emphasises that a masculine desire to transform the world entails a bodily vulnerability that can endanger and transform the self too. As is the case with many other male figures across the wider Middleton canon, Phoenix’s masculinity is not owned or fixed as one particular thing but is always being constituted, transformed, and potentially disrupted by his interactions with the world around him.

This thesis considers the ways in which masculinities are imagined, staged, articulated and problematised across Middleton’s works. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how and why he persistently tropes masculinities as processual, contingent, contested, and fragmented. Rather than considering masculinities as rooted and fixed within the individual male body, I explore how Middleton’s writing engages with masculinities that are precariously intersubjective within and across the various bodies in the social, material, and spatial contexts that they occupy. Middleton is especially interested in representing masculine characters who fail to uphold or refuse to adhere to models of masculinity predicated on rigid individualism. His canon is rife with masculinities characterised instead by failures, absences, excesses, slippages, changes and exchanges, and transactionality. A constant refusal to view manhood as

one stable identity leads to the multiplication of precarious masculinities within Middleton's work. In the arguments of this thesis, I explore the embodied multiplicity of masculinities in his writing to emphasise Middleton's significance to our understanding of early modern conceptions of gender, authority, selfhood, agency, identity and the relationships between embodied subjects.

The last thirty years have seen the founding of a critical field concerned with the centrality of the body to early modern literature and culture. The bodily turn of early modern studies has been greatly influenced by the psychological materialism put forth by scholars such as Gail Kern Paster and Michael C. Schoenfeldt.¹ Following the early modern prevalence of humoral theory, this historical phenomenology approach has focused on the role of the humors and passions in constituting selfhood and identity, and has emphasised the openness of the body to the world around it. Through humoralism, as Paster writes, early modern selfhood 'becomes recognizable as a fluid form of consciousness inhabited by, even as it inhabits, a universe composed of analogous elements'.² For example, in his *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life* (1607), Henry Cuffe writes that the image of man's body as a microcosm was more than just a figurative '*analogie*' and emphasises the '*mutual coexistence*' between human bodies and '*the world*' that surrounds those bodies.³ Selfhood was understood to emerge through a reciprocal relationship between the body and the world that was fluid, porous, and mutable. Much scholarship has sought to recover this relational sense of self by similarly historicizing the early modern passions as rooted in an embodied relationship of contact and exchange between the body and its environs.⁴

¹ See Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

² Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 137.

³ Henry Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life* (London: Arnold Hatfield for Martin Clearke, 1607), p. 2.

⁴ See Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. by Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in the Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); David Houston Wood, *Time, Narrative, and Emotion in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Allison P. Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Yet while the interchange between bodies has become a critical commonplace, the overwhelming focus on the humoral body has been rightly challenged. In *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (2015), Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan argue that studies of historical phenomenology and emotion have allowed the predominance of humoralism to ‘obscure[...] how other intellectual and creative frameworks, such as religious and philosophical belief, political performance, or rhetorical and dramaturgical style also shaped cultural beliefs about emotional experience’.⁵ Scholars have also sought to consider how sensory experience, cognitive models, or racial, class, and geographic contexts shape the experience of the early modern body outside of the humoral paradigm.⁶ Even as these various models develop or modify the New Humoralism proposed by Paster and Schoenfeldt, they still share its concern with the material and discursive vulnerability of the body to the world that surrounds it.

There is a distinct shift in scholarship beginning in the mid-2000s where, rather than taking the body of the individual as the primary object of scholarly inquiry, embodiment emerged as a popular critical term to describe the diverse and diffuse ways in which the early modern body emerges through various processes and interactions. To delineate this shift from the body to embodiment as an analytical category, I follow Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman’s proposition to consider ‘embodiment as a constellation of different kinds of sensory and perceptual engagements with the world, rather than as a predicate or object of knowledge’.⁷ Embodiment, then, encompasses and expands the material circumstances of a body by

⁵ Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan, ‘Introduction’, in *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, ed. by Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 1–22 (p. 5).

⁶ Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare’s Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2003); *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth D. Harvey (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Patricia Akhimie, *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁷ Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman, ‘Introduction’, in *Knowing Shakespeare: Senses, Embodiment and Cognition*, ed. by Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 1–29 (p. 3).

attending to the dynamic intersections of bodily practices and experiences. To take embodiment as an analytical framework and category is to view ‘bodies, subjects, and environments [as] relational and interdependent’.⁸ This conception of embodiment emphasises the intersubjective constitution of selfhood, describing not just the embodied subject but the material, social and political structures that actively shape the contours of the body. Embodied subjectivity is ‘located neither in nor beyond the body but between the body and the world’.⁹ By expanding the critical lens by which we approach the early modern body to include bodily practices and interactions beyond the confines of the individual body, early modern body studies may consider more fully the mutually impactful bodily encounters that engender and gender selfhood in early modern literature and culture.

As with criticism of the body, scholars of early modern masculinity have emphasised the significance of relationality. Following Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity, a wealth of psychoanalytic scholarship in early modern literary studies, and the enshrinement of masculinity studies in the 1990s, early modern masculinity has repeatedly been discussed through a model of anxiety or crisis, particularly with regards to men’s relationships with women.¹⁰ Such readings refute the notion that

⁸ Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., ‘Introduction: Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World’, in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1–13 (p. 6). See also David McNinis and Brett D. Hirsch, ‘Embodying Shakespeare’, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Special Issue, 19 (2009) <<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-19/si-19toc.htm#>> [accessed 20 June 2022]; Mary Floyd-Wilson, *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare’s Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind*, ed. by Laurence Johnson, John Sutton, and Evelyn B. Tribble (New York: Routledge, 2014); *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts: Politics, Ecologies, and Form*, ed. by Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); *Geographies of Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁹ Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi, ‘Introduction’, in *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts: Politics, Ecologies, and Form*, ed. by Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1–24 (p. 10).

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990). For an example of such readings of male crisis, see Coppélia Kahn, *Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (London: University of California Press, 1981); Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, Hamlet to the Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992); Laura Levine, *Men in Women’s Clothing: Anti-Theatricality, 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lynn Enterline, *The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in*

masculinity is a stable or inherent trait of men that was equated with patriarchal power, instead emphasising the fear of emasculation and a need to differentiate the masculine from the feminine. Laura Levine, for example, describes the ‘unmanageable anxiety that there is no such thing as a masculine self’, and by the time Mark Breitenberg wrote *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (1996), early modern masculinity was broadly treated as ‘inherently anxious’.¹¹ While the influence of psychoanalysis on these anxious readings risks anachronistically eliding the temporal specificity of early modern masculinities, the wealth of conduct literature aimed at men hoping to shape their gendered behaviour does suggest that masculinity was something to be actively strived for. Henry Peacham’s *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), for example, advises its male readership that ‘all Vertue consisteth in Action, and no man is borne for himselfe’. He further suggests that the ennobling masculinity that his readers can aim for must be actively ‘conferred’ through ‘knowledge, culture of the mind, or by some glorious Action’.¹² In the process of turning masculinity into a category of critical analysis, scholarship discloses the ways in which masculinity was experienced contingently or anxiously by early modern men.

Yet models of masculine anxiety tend to define masculine identity by obscuring the sheer variations of masculinities that were expressed in early modern literature and culture. Catherine Bates specifically takes issue with the anxiety model, stating that ‘masculinity comes to be defined only negatively as that which it is different from or in opposition to’, and resisting the implication that masculine selfhood is only a response to larger structural forces.¹³ All men did not experience the same gender, especially taking into account other intersecting identities and contexts such as rank, social position, race, nation, ability, sexuality, and age. Work by Alexandra Shepard, Thomas A. King and Todd W. Reeser has emphasised the contextual, temporal and cultural contingency of early modern masculinity.¹⁴ Shepard’s description of ‘the

Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997).

¹¹ Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing*, p. 24; Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, p. 2.

¹² Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London: [John Legat] for Francis Constable, 1622), p. 2.

¹³ Catherine Bates, *Masculinity, Gender and Identity in The English Renaissance Lyric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 21.

¹⁴ Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Thomas A. King, *The Gendering of Men, 1600-1750*, 2 vols (Madison, NJ: University of

muddled and pluralised forms which masculinities could appear in that did not necessarily correspond with conventional patriarchal imperatives' suggests the plurality of masculinities that oriented themselves about patriarchal power in different ways.¹⁵ And in early modern literary studies, Bruce R. Smith's influential *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (2000) argues that all masculinities are 'a matter of contingency, of circumstances, of performance'.¹⁶ Many scholars have followed Shepard and Smith to attend to the sheer variety of identities, practices, structures, and institutions that variously constitute precarious masculinity in its specific local and temporal contexts.¹⁷ A shift in the critical language from masculinity to masculinities begins to unpack how the precarious meanings of manhood can signify differently for different people in different contexts at different historical moments.

Yet the notion of reciprocity and contingency shared by early modern body and masculinity studies raises crucial issues about agency and power. If subjectivity is engendered through relationships of exchange, transaction and interaction between the body and the world, then how much agency can we ascribe to the individual gendered subject? Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis note this problem where 'Theories of the body often emphasise how the will does not control the body'.¹⁸ Meek and Sullivan

Wisconsin Press, 2004, 2008); Todd W. Reeser, *Moderating Masculinity in Early Modern Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

¹⁷ See: Amanda Bailey, *Flaunting: Style and the Subversive Male Body in Renaissance England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Christian M. Billing, *Masculinity, Corporality and the English Stage 1580-1635* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008); Jennifer C. Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Anthony Ellis, *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama: Comic Elders on the Italian and Shakespearean Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Edel Lamb, *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies (1599-1613)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); *Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1550-1650*, ed. by Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Ronda Arab, *Manly Mechanicals on the Early Modern English Stage* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2011); Mario DiGangi, *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency, and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); *Violent Masculinities: Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture*, ed. by Jennifer Feather and Catherine E. Thomas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Matthew Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism, and Early Modern English Literature: From the Satantic to the Effeminate Jew* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁸ Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis, 'Introduction', in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 1-12 (p. 6).

similarly argue that the sway of the physiological construction of affect and selfhood often frames feeling as ‘something that happened *to* the body of the passive, receptive subject, who either gave way to these material impulses or attempted to resist them through stoical self-control’.¹⁹ Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi are highly concerned with the role of embodiment in constituting agency and speak to an ecological model of embodiment; that is, the placement of ‘the autonomous and individuated—read sovereign—human subject in a dense web of enmeshed material practices that at once elude human mastery and expand definitions of the social’.²⁰ But limiting the role of human agency in order to emphasise the interrelatedness of body and world risks eclipsing the significance of human actors. Without returning to a model of agency centred on individual self-mastery, I resist the urge to downplay the will of individual subjects in this reciprocal conception of embodied selfhood. By gesturing towards the myriad ways that individual bodies could interact with, exchange, or challenge the larger world in which they are embedded, I emphasise the mutuality of the bodily encounter between the individual subject and the other agents, practices, and structures that constitute their self.

But describing how early modern subjectivity is produced diacritically between bodies and the world does not necessarily erase the significance of the individual subject. Rather, critical focus shifts from the individual embodied self as the most desired or complete form of gendered selfhood towards reading the productive if contingent relationships between bodies that participate in these intersubjective practices of contact and exchange. Joseph Campana describes this in terms of the anti-identarian approach in masculinities scholarship that has turned to thinking more about the structural dimensions of masculinities. Campana writes that the ‘reification of identity’ occludes the contested practices and processes that constitute masculinities ‘for masculinity may not, in the manner of a coherent identity, lodge in one person, one body or one species’.²¹ Drawing on these in-between spaces as where masculinities inhere may prove to be a more productive critical ground to consider the

¹⁹ Meek and Sullivan, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

²⁰ Bailey and DiGangi, ‘Introduction’, p. 8.

²¹ Joseph Campana, ‘Distribution, Assemblage, Capacity: New Keywords for Masculinity?’, *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire*, 22.4 (2015), 691–97 (p. 692).

structural forces and practices that gender selves, rather than atomising the individual body. To a similar end, Amanda Bailey describes early modern manhood as ‘not something that one is but something one has – not as a possession but as a constellation of attachments that arise contingently and are always vulnerable to oscillation and interruption’.²² These notions of masculinity do not necessarily elide the individual subject’s agency but emphasise masculinity as constantly in the process of defining itself through varied bodily practices. If, as Valerie Traub describes, early modern gendered agency might be defined as ‘volition, will, desire, or consent’, then rather than reading agency as the primacy of individual sovereign mastery, we can think of agency as the impulses that move the individual within the broader structures that allow subjects to experience volition, will, desire, or consent.²³ For example, Richard Brathwaite in *The English Gentleman* (1630) describes that a man’s ‘Perfection is not absolute in this life, but graduall’ and orients the manhood he presents to his readers as a process of accumulation that will never truly be ‘terme[d] perfect or complete’.²⁴ While Brathwaite hopes his male readership strives for perfection in their manhoods, he also assumes the fragility of achieving this form of masculinity. Masculinity inheres in those connections and interactions between embodied subjects and the world around them, even as the unequal relations of power underlying these interactions constrain and contest the types of masculinity that they produce.

The significance that these relational constructions of maleness have to the work of Thomas Middleton, and the value that Middleton’s work holds for these scholarly fields, have been hitherto underexplored. The relative critical absence of Middleton from discussions of masculinity, and the lack of attention paid to masculinity in studies of his works, is partly explained by the unfixed and fragmented state of the Middleton canon before the publishing of *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* in 2007. Unlike his contemporaries such as Shakespeare, Ben Jonson,

²² Amanda Bailey, ‘Is This a Man I See before Me?: Early Modern Masculinities and the New Materialisms’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling, and David Gaimster (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 293–305 (pp. 304–5).

²³ Valerie Traub, ‘Introduction—Feminist Shakespeare Studies: Cross Currents, Border Crossings, Conflicts, and Contradictions’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. by Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1–36 (p. 27).

²⁴ Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentleman* (London: John Haviland, 1630), p. 373.

or John Fletcher, Middleton's work was not collected during or relatively soon after his lifetime. As John Jowett has noted, until 2007 Middleton was 'a writer hard to comprehend except in fragments'.²⁵ A history of authorial misattribution and anonymous publishing has left Middleton's writing significantly more scattered than that of most of his contemporaries, and made it difficult to provide an accurate account of the range and complexity of what he wrote.

This practical problem of an ill-defined or patchy canon has helped to reinforce a tendency to read or present Middleton through a Shakespearean lens. This critical trend is exhibited, for example, in Stanley Wells' *Shakespeare & Co.: Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, John Fletcher, and the Other Players in His Story* (2006). Although Wells purports to give the spotlight to Shakespeare's collaborators and contemporaries, they are, as the title suggests, represented as bit players in the larger story of William Shakespeare. And although Wells presents a fine and accessible biography of Middleton and rightly highlights his 'protean' persona and writing style, the framing of his book only locates Middleton as he helps the reader better understand Shakespeare.²⁶ This subordination of Middleton is especially true in studies of gender and the body where Shakespeare's work is often the primary focus.²⁷ And when Middleton is discussed in terms of gender, that discussion tends to focus on his representations of women, especially in terms of sexuality, misogyny, and crossdressing.²⁸ If Middleton does appear in popular culture, he is overwhelmingly presented as the sex-obsessed Jacobean compared to the Shakespearean poet with whom he collaborated. For example, Dominic Arkwright's

²⁵ John Jowett, 'Thomas Middleton', in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 507–23 (p. 507).

²⁶ Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare and Co.: Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, John Fletcher, and the Other Players in His Story* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 193.

²⁷ In major studies of gender and the body in early modern literature, the Shakespearean lens dominates and Middleton usually receives passing references if any. See Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*; Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*; Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*; Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*; Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Paster, *Humoring the Body*.

²⁸ For some examples, see Christine M. Gottlieb, 'Middleton's Traffic in Dead Women: Chaste Corpses as Property in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Lady's Tragedy*', *ELR*, 45.2 (2015), 255–274; Gregory M. Schnitzpahn, 'What the Act has Made You: Approving Virginity in *The Changeling*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 31 (2018), 78–107; and Keri Sanburn Behre, 'Look What Market She Hath Made: Women, Commerce, and Power in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Bartholomew Fair*', *Early Theatre*, 21.1 (2018), 127–44.

radio documentary *The Tudor Tarantino* (2010) portrays Middleton as a darker, ‘bad boy of Renaissance drama’ counterpart to Shakespeare whose work flits between proto-feminism and misogyny.²⁹ This oversimplification of Middleton’s works is rooted in the black comedy and sexual violence within his writing, which Arkwright’s programme explicitly aligns with the filmography of Quentin Tarantino, David Lynch, and the Coen brothers. Yet this popular representation of Middleton as the ‘bad boy’ also has the effect of reinforcing Shakespeare’s position as the norm to which other writers like Middleton inevitably get compared.

With the publishing of the 2007 *The Collected Works*, however, the boundaries and chronologies of the Middleton canon were re-established in an attempt to effectively re-start Middletonian criticism. By reclaiming works previously misattributed to other authors, highlighting the collaborative nature of his writing, and placing his plays alongside his poetry and prose in the same volume, Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino’s edition successfully presented Thomas Middleton as a prolific writer of poetry, plays, masques, pamphlets, city pageants, and Lord Mayor’s Shows. But *The Collected Works* also problematically continued to frame Middleton through the shadow of Shakespeare. Taylor explicitly claims Middleton as ‘Our Other Shakespeare’.³⁰ The opening of the edition also states that ‘Thomas Middleton and William Shakespeare were the only writers of the English Renaissance who created plays still considered masterpieces in four major dramatic genres: comedy, history, tragedy, and tragicomedy’.³¹ *The Collected Works*’ desire to establish Middleton as a writer in Shakespearean terms attempts to privilege Middleton as an individual writer, but in doing so obscures the edition’s aim to promote collaboration as well as the other forms and genres that Middleton wrote in that Shakespeare did not. Lukas Erne states that Taylor’s claims are ‘tendentious and hyperbolic’, even as he concedes that the volume successfully aims at ‘transforming a writer who used to be considered one of Shakespeare’s minor contemporaries into a major one’.³² Similarly, Celia R. Daileader

²⁹ *The Tudor Tarantino*, BBC Radio 4, 11 May 2010.

³⁰ Gary Taylor, ‘Thomas Middleton: Lives and Afterlives’, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 25–58 (p. 58).

³¹ Taylor, ‘Lives and Afterlives’, p. 25.

³² Lukas Erne, “‘Our Other Shakespeare’: Thomas Middleton and the Canon”, *Modern Philology*, 107.3 (2010), 493–505 (pp. 498, 500).

is sceptical of Taylor's valorisation of 'canonicity' which results in 'the critical impulse to read Middleton *through* Shakespeare rather than viewing the two authors as engaging in a dialogue'.³³ While Taylor desires to emphasise the significance of Middleton to our understandings of early modern literary culture, doing so through the framework of Shakespeare ultimately does not do justice to understanding why we might want to read, watch, and study Middleton on his own terms.

The greatest impact of *The Collected Works* by far has been in reinvigorating interest in Middleton as a collaborative writer. Following 2007, a number of sustained studies of Middleton's life and work have been published that all share a keen awareness of Middleton as a collaborative writer who engaged with a variety of literary genres and figures.³⁴ Crucially, throughout these studies, Middleton is considered 'collaborative' as he engages with, moves through, and challenges political, literary, and social institutions and cultural practices. This relational approach to Middleton does not attempt to radically differentiate Middleton from his contemporaries nor subsume him to Shakespearean models but acknowledges the multiple professional, stylistic, and ideological positions that his texts inhabit, as he moves through a variety of interconnected literary and cultural networks. In this thesis, I attend to the collaboration as a key aspect of my study of Middleton, and read across his texts to explore how his masculinities are themselves collaborative. In doing so, I will consider the ways in which Middleton represents changing, conflicting, and oscillating forms of masculinity borne out of the intersubjective ways of becoming in early modern England.

This thesis builds on the limited number of studies that have begun to develop an understanding of masculinities across Middleton's work. Although these studies

³³ Celia R. Daileader, 'Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare, and the Masculine Grotesque', in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 452–68 (p. 453).

³⁴ Mark Hutchings and A. A. Bromham, *Middleton and His Collaborators* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2008); Michelle O'Callaghan, *Thomas Middleton, Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); *Thomas Middleton in Context*, ed. by Suzanne Gossett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); David Nicol, *Middleton & Rowley: Forms of Collaboration in the Jacobean Playhouse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Mark Kaethler, *Thomas Middleton and the Plural Politics of Jacobean Drama* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021); William David Green, *Authorship and Apocalypse: Thomas Middleton, the King's Men, and the Drama of the Thirty Years' War* (forthcoming, 2023).

tend to be shorter articles focusing on single plays, they gesture towards how Middletonian masculinities negotiate the wider contingency of embodied gender.³⁵ Kevin Crawford, for example, outlines a ‘feminine-dependent masculinity’ in *The Lady’s Tragedy* (1611).³⁶ Crawford considers how the play’s Tyrant is himself constituted as feminine even as he engages in misogyny and sexual violence against women. This compromised masculinity is explored more generally across Middleton’s texts by Daileader, who considers how the ‘effeminized, “leaky”, rotten, sometimes smelly [...] and above all penetrable’ men in Middleton explicitly comment on and challenge conventional models of manhood and morality.³⁷ The frequency with which Middleton’s masculinities are intertwined with and embody tropes that are elsewhere coded as feminine suggests how his work explicitly engages with the terms by which masculinity is defined relationally. A similar language of multiplicity is employed by Mark Kaethler who addresses the deployment of plurality in Middleton’s political engagements. Kaethler demonstrates how Middleton challenges James I’s model of unified but singular authority through a deployment of political irony and evocations of collaboration, which insists on masculine authority as ‘provisional rather than solidified’.³⁸ Middleton’s contingent and unruly masculinities refuse to be unified or fixed. They are defined by a shifting plurality that embraces ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions. Yet few studies of Middleton and masculinity develop their points across multiple texts, and even fewer consider the relationship between his plays and other forms of writing that he produced, although Kaethler is a notable exception. This

³⁵ See Theodore B. Leinwand, ‘Redeeming Beggary/Buggery in *Michaelmas Term*’, *ELH*, 61.1 (1994), 53–70; Anita Pacheco, ‘“A Mere Cupboard of Glasses”: Female Sexuality and Male Honor in *A Fair Quarrel*’, *ELR*, 28.3 (1998), 441–63; Aimee Ross-Kilroy, ‘“The Very Ragged Bone”: Dismantling Masculinity in Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy*’, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 33.4 (2010), 51–71; Jennifer Panek, ‘“This Base Stallion”: He-Whores and Male Sexuality on the Early Modern Stage’, *ELR*, 40.3 (2010), 357–92; Trish Thomas Henley, ‘Tragicomic Men’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 264–80; Liberty Star Stanavage, ‘“He Has Both the Cost and the Torment”: Marital Labor and Commercialized Masculinity in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*’, *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 28.3 (2015), 145–53; William David Green, ‘Murderous Distraction and the Downfall of the Tyrant in Thomas Middleton’s *The Lady’s Tragedy*’, in *Kingship, Madness, and Masculinity On The Early Modern Stage*, ed. by Christina Gutierrez-Dennehy (London: Routledge, 2022), p.101-17.

³⁶ Kevin Crawford, ‘“All His Intentions Are Contrary to Man”: Softened Masculinity and Staging in Middleton’s *The Lady’s Tragedy*’, *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 16 (2003), 101–29 (p. 102).

³⁷ Daileader, ‘Masculine Grotesque’, pp. 452-53.

³⁸ Kaethler, *Plural Politics*, p. 56.

thesis considers Middleton's drama alongside his poetry, pamphlets, and civic engagements, as well as how his texts speak to the work of his contemporaries and collaborators to consider more fully his engagement with relational masculinity.

In my consideration of masculinities as borne between the embodied self and the world, I read Middleton with an eye to his versatility as a writer, invested in mutually impactful bodily encounters where contact, exchange, and transactions engender and gender the bodies within these relationships. Middleton's particular significance to this mode of reading lies in his consistent yet varied deployment of irony in his work, which he defines in his masque *The World Tossed at Tennis* (1620) written with William Rowley as 'That with one eye looks two ways at once' (ll. 124-25).³⁹ Unpicking this capacity to look two ways at once lies at the core of much Middleton criticism. My thesis continues to consider Middleton's irony as a trope that allows contradictory ideas and impulses to coexist, even if they are not fully reconciled. His characters continually display and shift their agencies and desires as individuals but are enveloped in complex meshes of social, political, and material relations. This contradictory pull towards plurality both enables and frustrates the will of individuals, with Middleton gesturing always towards the contours of subjectivity constituted between bodies. So too do I embrace the contradiction of focusing on Middleton as a collaborative and embedded writer through the means of what might appear to be a single-author study.

By interrogating masculinities, my work recognises the varieties of mechanisms by which gender is produced as well as the shared and contested experience of masculinities within Middleton's writing. I take Middleton's repeated interest in contradictory, contested, transactional and contingent masculinities to investigate the discourses and representations of bodiliness that underpin early modern manhood. And to acknowledge the collaborative and pluralised canon of writing that characterises Middleton's work, I continually consider his texts in their respective temporal, literary, and cultural contexts. I draw out the relationships between Middleton and his contemporaries and collaborators to more fully distinguish the mutual interactions between the Middleton canon and other writers. By explicitly

³⁹ See Kaethler, *Plural Politics*, pp. 111-52.

drawing on writers such as Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, John Fletcher and William Rowley as counterpoints to Middleton, I aim to flesh out the particular features of his work as a collaborator in early modern London in ways that comparisons to Shakespeare often fail to acknowledge. The shifting terms of masculinity I explore in Middleton's work can be more clearly illuminated by drawing on writers such as Jonson whose career in producing masques and civic performances alongside plays more explicitly overlaps with and provides a comparison to Middleton's own. I argue that Middleton is particularly interested in engaging with broader narratives of maleness and masculinity that valorise the individual sovereign body present in early modern literature and culture. My thesis draws comparisons to his contemporaries in order to highlight the significance of Middleton's distinct and continued concern with male multiplicity. Rather than considering manhood as an identity conferred through and onto the body, I am interested in how the body becomes a site of negotiation where masculinity is constructed as a dynamic process. This thesis will show how Middleton can illuminate these conversations about the experiences of the gendered body as plural and contingent, as well as the significance of masculine embodiment in understanding Middleton's works.

My argument will focus primarily on Middleton's drama as his plays more immediately consider the relationships between bodies as they interact through both space and time. However, I do so while drawing connections across Middleton's canon; his plays are set alongside readings of his civic pageantry, pamphlets, prose, and poetry. I also explicitly place his more well-known works alongside his lesser-known ones. Doing so not only allows for a more illuminating and complex discussion of his writing but also continues the work of refreshing Middletonian criticism following the re-establishing of his authorial attributions in *The Collected Works*. This thesis is organised into three sections: 'Collaborations', 'Assembled Subjects', and 'Fantasies of Authority'. The first considers the relationship between the collaborative experience of Middleton's writing practice and his varied representations of collaboration between characters. By placing Middleton's textual practice in conversation with these in-text collaborations, I think about the shared concerns of bodily reproducibility, commixture, and the tensions inherent to embodied interaction between two or more subjects. By reading his collaborative paratexts and his most

notorious collaborative play *The Changeling*, I explore discourses of hybridity and contested individual subjectivity in the Middleton canon. In doing so, I consider the possibility of reading these representations of collaboration in relation to the authorial questions that frequently attend Middleton scholarship and problematise readings of Middleton that do not consider this multiplicity.

The second section, 'Assembled Subjects', explores how materiality and material culture constitute masculine identities—primarily through disguise, cross-dressing, and role-play, especially in relation to the boy actor. Here I consider Middleton's pervasive interest in surficial and prosthetic masculinities which rely heavily on the interrelatedness of subject and object, as well as wider concerns about the generative potential and limitations of self-fashioning. Chapter Two is concerned with how bodily surfaces become highly determined sites of exchange and representation. I focus on the legibility of the body as a surface, and how masculine subjects attempt to transform themselves through material objects. Chapter Three continues to think about bodily transformation by considering Middleton's treatment of double-crossdressed female masculinities. In exploring both male and female characters, I contest the legibility and 'disguised' nature of crossdressing on Middleton's stage to interrogate the complicated ways that masculinity emerges across a variety of bodies that can pass and not pass as male.

The final section of this thesis considers 'Fantasies of Authority' across Middleton's work. This section explores how models of masculinity are set up and disrupted to trouble the relationship between manhood and authority. By considering Middleton's treatment of masculine power as contingent, this section attends to the representations of bodiliness that both set up and disrupt these fantasies of male authority. Chapter Four reads Middleton's plays and civic pageantry from 1613 to explore the relationship between masculinity and the semiotics of water. By tracing the metaphorical and literal presence of water across these texts, I argue that Middleton is not only interested in masculine uncontrol through discourses of leakiness but the myriad of other ways that water mediates gender and power. Chapter Five thinks through how the voice both facilitates and has the potential to disturb unequal relationships of power between men and women. This chapter explicitly addresses how fantasies of masculine authority are expressed through and constituted by misogynistic

attitudes towards women and their voices. By exploring how issues of consent and sexual violence are intertwined across his tragedies, I argue that the fragile masculinities that Middleton stages ambivalently attempt to assert or fix themselves by encroaching on the agency of women and their voices.

For Middleton, masculinities are constituted across and between bodies through a relationship of interaction, exchange, and transaction that I argue is never mutual. Middleton is interested in those in-between spaces where masculinities accumulate, coagulate, and become contested. The contested and contingent masculinities that frequent Middleton's work continually fail to adhere to normative models set up by the texts themselves, and failure is frequently the mode by which masculinity is considered throughout this thesis. The contradictions of masculine identities are frequently pushed to their extreme by Middleton in order to highlight their precarious and frail foundations. By highlighting the multiple ways that Middleton stages the inequalities of power at play in the plural construction of masculinities, I resist a narrative of gendered individualism to draw out the complicated relationship between individual gendered agency and the wider social and material structures that constitute gendered bodies. For Middleton, the dynamic practices by which masculinities are constituted are liable to disruptions, fail to uphold normative models, and frequently trouble rather than fix embodied male subjects. By reading how Middleton returns to multiplicity as a mode of masculine embodiment, I highlight how this in-between reading of bodies and gender can further our understanding of Middleton's writing as thoroughly interested in the fraught and malleable bodily encounter. Further, this thesis will gesture to the ways in which Middleton's writing is interconnected with that of his long-time collaborators and his contemporaries, and suggest how works by these other writers might be read in conjunction to gain a fuller picture of the stakes of early modern masculinities. And, by undertaking a long study of the various embodiments of masculinity through this relational lens, this thesis also considers how the relationship between men and women might be illuminated by critically considering how gender is constructed between bodies and the world.

Section One: Collaborations

Chapter One: Middleton & Co.? The Canon and Collaborative Masculinities

An Author of good Esteem [...] He was Contemporary with those Famous Poets *Johnson, Fletcher, Massinger* and *Rowley*, in whose Friendship he had a large Share; and tho' he came short of the former two in parts, yet like the *Ivy* by the Assistance of the *Oak*, (being joyn'd with them in several Plays) he clim'd up to some considerable height of Reputation. He joyn'd with *Fletcher* and *Johnson*, in a play called *The Widow* [...] and certainly most Men will allow, That he that was thought fit to be receiv'd into a *Triumvirate*, by two such Great Men, was no common Poet.¹

In a reflection on the literary afterlife of Thomas Middleton in his 1691 dramatic catalogue *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets*, Gerard Langbaine explains the writer's reputation as being a result of his artistic prowess as well as an effect of his friendships and professional relationships with other male playwrights. According to Langbaine, Middleton maintains a double identity: the collaborator 'joyn'd' with his fellow writers and also the individual who endures as 'no common Poet'. Although scholars now generally agree that *The Widow* was penned by Middleton alone, his early reputation as a prolific collaborator clearly encouraged the play's attribution to a writing syndicate.² For modern readers and audiences, Middleton continues to be a literary figure presented through these close relationships with other major writers of the period. Middleton's productive and collaborative canon continually gestures towards the wider interpersonal networks that he is embedded within.

This chapter explores issues of collaboration in the Middleton canon by considering his sensitivity towards the plural and interpersonal aspects of early modern male identity. If using the broadest terms of authorial collaboration—including early modern writing practices such as addition, revision and adaption alongside partnerships of multiple writers—over a third of Middleton's extant works have

¹ Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (Oxford: L.L. for George West and Henry Clements, 1691), p. 370.

² Gary Taylor speculates that this attribution by publisher Humphrey Moseley in his 1652 quarto was intended to capitalise on the success of recent successful publications by Ben Jonson and John Fletcher. See 'Works Included in this Edition: Canon and Chronology' in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 335-443 (pp. 379-82).

multiple authors.³ But collaboration does not just refer to the authorship of texts but also includes interactions between various entities such as playing companies, actors, printers, and playhouses. Even with more restrictive definitions of collaboration, referring only to multiple writers working on the same text at the same time, Middleton still stands as a prolific co-author in long-term partnerships with Rowley and Thomas Dekker, as well as many of his contemporaries including Shakespeare, Anthony Munday, Ben Jonson, John Webster, Michael Drayton and John Ford. As noted in the introduction, a wealth of recent studies following the publication of the Oxford *Collected Works* and *Textual Companion* in 2007 have explored the contours of the characteristically collaborative Middleton canon. Yet Middleton's collaborations lack the cultural weight associated with other major writing partnerships of the period, specifically Fletcher and his work with Shakespeare, Philip Massinger, and Francis Beaumont. Middleton's tendency to collaborate outside long-term partnerships might reflect the working collaborations more commonly undertaken in London's theatre scene also means that it is difficult to separate Middleton from dynamic and interactive network of collaborators that he was embedded within. When writing about the challenge of editing *The Collected Works*, Gary Taylor uses the term 'Middleton et al.' to highlight the significant contribution of collaborators to what we conceive of as the Middleton canon. Rather than being the central figure of his *Collected Works*, Taylor argues that Middleton remains a 'centrifugal force' at odds with models of authorship and scholarship influenced by the shadow of Shakespeare Studies.⁴ Taylor's claim stands starkly compared to Middleton's reception in earlier times when even the more sympathetic critics viewed his extensive collaborations as a kind of deficiency. T. S. Eliot thought he lacked a 'personality' in part because he 'collaborated shamelessly'.⁵ William Hazlitt thought that Middleton was 'not marked by any peculiar quality of his own, but was made up [...] of the faults and excellences common to his

³ Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan discuss Middleton's revisions of Shakespeare's plays for the King's Men that include *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Titus Andronicus* (See Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan, eds., *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 67-106, 278-384.

⁴ Gary Taylor, 'The Renaissance and the End of Editing', in *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, ed. by George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 121-50 (p. 142).

⁵ T.S. Eliot, 'Thomas Middleton (1927)', in *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn (London: Faber, 1999), pp. 161-70 (p. 161).

contemporaries'.⁶ A study of Middleton must necessarily grapple with a canon that continually gestures toward other figures and influences, and how to handle the paradoxical choice to centre Middleton as the unifying object of that study.

This chapter will explore Middleton as a collaborator by attending to the representation of interpersonal and embodied interactions between authorial figures in his collaborative works. This chapter argues that the representations of Middleton's collaborations demonstrate a resistance to the growing individualism of literary self-representation that is evident in the printed works of many of his contemporaries. They offer an alternative framing of masculine authorial identity outside of the 'masterly writing subject'.⁷ In purposefully resisting the equation of masculinity and mastery, my reading considers Middleton as a writer whose style and work persistently intersects with a large number of his contemporaries, further challenging the configuration of the solitary author whose agency is entirely their own. This chapter will first set out the context of male authorship and the representation of collaboration in early modern English texts. Then, I explore how Middleton represents and negotiates collaboration in his printed texts and paratexts with his long-time collaborator, Thomas Dekker, through the pair's self-conscious language of writing-as-labour and composition. Following these discussions, this chapter will engage with the representations of collaboration in Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622)—one of the most notorious collaborations in Jacobean theatre, and probably both Middleton and Rowley's most well-known play. *The Changeling* tropes the frustrated desire to be and be with the other, as the boundaries between bodies and selves become highly contested and fraught sites of interaction. My reading of *The Changeling* explores how these thematic concerns with interpersonal failure and uncomfortable mixtures are reflected and refracted by other forms of formal and structural intermingling in terms of the play's authorship, genre, and plot structure. By taking collaboration as a practice and a theme, this chapter will help to further our understanding of how networked and interrelated masculinities are at stake in Middleton's writing. I also argue that Middleton's identity as a writer emerges

⁶ William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth: Delivered at the Surrey Institution*, 2nd edn (London: J. Warren, 1821), p. 78.

⁷ Bates, *Masculinity, Gender and Identity in The English Renaissance Lyric*, p. 11.

simultaneously as a distinct entity and a collaborator through these embodied interactions with his world and contemporary writers.

1. The Representation of Masculinities and Collaboration in Early Printed Drama

As Middleton began to write for the theatre, the representation of literary and dramatic authorship in print was undergoing a significant shift. Individual writers were beginning to be represented more prominently to market their printed playbooks in a crowded London marketplace, affording them with opportunities to self-fashion authorial identities in print. Playbooks marketing themselves as collaborations typically attempted to represent this partnership as a two-way if contested interaction between distinct writers. However, the relationship these dramatic collaborations have with the emerging pattern of individual literary authorship remains ambiguous and widely debated in scholarship. By locating the representation of Middleton in these printed books, I argue that his collaborative instability suggests the weakness of ‘authorship’ as the determining category that organises his work and representation.

Male authorship in the early modern period was contingent on several distinct discourses figuring the relationship between writer and text through ‘paternity and reproduction, patriarchal-absolutism, [and] classical authority’.⁸ Such discourses invoked and conflated male centrality to filial, domestic, and political relations as the father or husband, the writer as a singular origin of power and influence, and the writer’s historical continuity with earlier writers. Contemporary conduct books attempting to define gentlemanly and courtly masculinity emphasise writing as a masculine discipline and the writer as a masculine source of authority. James Cleland’s *Hērō-Paideia, or The Institution of a Young Noble Man* (1607) acknowledges its deliberate appropriations of the classical style to shield the writer and his work from criticism ‘under the buckler of famous Authors’.⁹ In *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), Henry Peacham asserts that his readers’ ‘style may passe for current’ if they ‘imitate

⁸ Jeffrey Masten, ‘Playwrighting: Authorship and Collaboration’, in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 357–82 (p. 370).

⁹ James Cleland, *Hērō-Paideia, or The Institution of a Young Noble Man* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1607), sig. ¶4r.

the best Authors as well as in Oratorie as Historie'.¹⁰ Considering that contemporary maleness was in a process of redefining itself in relation to classical and chivalric imaginaries,¹¹ such representations of the writer in print attempted to establish a continuity with the past through a shared rhetoric and style to shore up these textual masculinities.

The perceived instability of print evoked wider anxieties about multiplicity troped through imitation and publication. Wendy Wall has argued that the recurrence of the proverbial 'Man in Print' in the arrangement and prefatory material of printed texts is a response to the cultural collision between the printing press and established manuscript practices as male writers attempted to assert singular authorial control over their writing.¹² As the printing press increased the sheer number of texts that could be printed, writers drew on textual anxieties about ownership, stability and reproducibility in their discussions of masculinity. In Dekker and Middleton's *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* (1604), Candido's Wife, Viola, claims that her 'husband is a man in Print for all things' apart from his excessive patience (2.75-76). A man in print could be, like an exemplary book, an object of study and imitation. Candido's excessive patience is a marked failure to act as a model husband, resulting in the comparison to a misprinted or corrupted text. In Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599), the foolish Fungoso wears an old suit from the rapidly-changing wardrobe of affected courtier Fastidious Brisk whereupon his sister responds that he is 'a gallant in print now' (2.3.183). Brisk then enters thirty lines later wearing an updated outfit, marking Fungoso's suit as already out of fashion. Fungoso's attempts to translate the image of 'a gallant in print' onto his own body becomes a failed performance of courtly masculinity. The 'man in print' presents one version of collaboration; that is, a masculinity that emerges and is constituted by these practices of imitation and reiteration, even if these attempts or desires to model themselves after other men are unsuccessful.

¹⁰ Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman*, p. 44.

¹¹ See Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (London: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1986).

¹² Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 1-22. For brief entry on this recurring phrase, see Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1950), M239.

Printed books could also be represented as feminine to establish the masculinity of their multiple authors. The first edition of Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's collaborative play *Gorboduc, or the Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex* (1561) was first printed in 1565 from an unauthorised source, and a second edition followed in 1570 that included corrections by the authors and printer John Day who also supplied an address to the reader. Day's address argues that the first publication was 'exceedingly corrupted' and likens the printer's actions to 'entis[ing] into his house a faire maide and do[ing] her villanie', which only after careful alterations is then suitable for 'honest companie'.¹³ *Gorboduc's* epistle suggests that by corrupting the author's 'pure' text, the first printer had committed the literary equivalent of sexual assault through his failed textual interventions.¹⁴ By problematically associating female chastity with the 'faire' intended text, as opposed to one perversely 'corrupted' by the interventions of other hands, Day's epistle highlights how notions of masculine control and authorship as a unified or singular vision often leads to the exclusion or detriment of collaborative texts.

As a contrast to Middleton's collaborations, Ben Jonson's valorisation of individual authorship presents a more explicit desire to unite both his authorial persona and printed works into bounded entities. Jonson continually engages in a process of 'textual legitimation' both for his printed texts as works of literature and for himself as an individual author of considerable prowess.¹⁵ For instance, *Every Man Out of His Humor* (1599) was the first quarto publication to call its living writer an author on its title-page.¹⁶ The 1616 publication of *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* was the first time a living author collected his writing while including works for the stage.¹⁷ Jonson's

¹³ Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, *The Tragedie of Ferrex and Porrex* (London: John Day, 1570), sig. A2r.

¹⁴ Margreta De Grazia writes about the 'comparisons of mechanical and sexual reproduction' in the early modern printing house in 'Imprints: Shakespeare, Gutenberg and Descartes', in *Alternative Shakespeares. Vol.2*, ed. by Terrence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 63–94 (p. 74).

¹⁵ Timothy Murray, 'From Foul Sheets to Legitimate Model: Antitheater, Text, Ben Jonson', *New Literary History*, 14 (1983), 641–64 (p. 657).

¹⁶ The title-page promised a text close to Jonson's original intentions 'AS IT WAS FIRST COMPOSED by the AUTHOR B.J. / Containing more than hath been Publickely Spoken or Acted' (Ben Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humour* (London: [Adam Islip] for William Holme, 1600)).

¹⁷ See *Ben Jonson's 1616 Folio*, ed. by Jennifer Brady and Wyman H. Herendeen (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1991). For the kinds of authority asserted by the publishing of contemporary folios, see Jane Rickard, 'The "First" Folio in Context: The Folio Collections of Shakespeare, Jonson and King James', in *Shakespeare's Book: Essays in Reading, Writing and*

quartos were typically filled with extensive prefatory material emphasising his skill and reputation as an individual literary author. The Prologue of *Volpone, or The Fox* (1606) claims that the play was written ‘without a coadjutor, / Novice, journeyman, or tutor’ (ll. 17-18). This view of collaboration is one tied into a hierarchy based on social class and experience. By denying the assistance of novices learning the trade, coadjutors sharing the labour of writing, hack journeymen brought in to work on specific parts, or a tutor correcting the work of other collaborators, Jonson’s play is presented as written by the hand of the singular ‘poet’ alone (l. 5). In Jonson’s case, his disdain for collaboration may be warranted. He collaborated on as many as seven plays between 1597 and 1605. Out of these partnerships, *The Isle of Dogs* (1597) with Thomas Nashe, *Sejanus His Fall* (1603) with an unknown partner, and *Eastward Ho!* (1605) with John Marston and George Chapman all resulted in Jonson becoming embroiled with the authorities.¹⁸ Nashe later described *The Isle of Dogs* as an ‘imperfite Embrion’ with neither Jonson nor the players having ‘the least guesse of [Nashe’s] drift and scope’.¹⁹ Jonson’s repeated clashes with his collaborators suggest that something about his notion of individuated literary authorship is difficult to reconcile with the theatrical world of frequent collaboration. By excising traces of his collaborations in drama from his *Workes*, Ben Jonson sought to cultivate a lasting reputation as a literary author without the help of his fellow dramatists.

The collaborative relationship between Beaumont and Fletcher offers a very different model of authorship, but one that still struggles to define itself outside of the model of individuality. In *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (1997), Jeffrey Masten argued that representations of joint-writing share a language of ‘mutual imitation, collaboration, and homoerotic exchange’ with contemporary discourses of male friendship.²⁰ At the centre of

Reception, ed. by Richard Meek, Jane Rickard, and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 207–32.

¹⁸ For an overview of Jonson’s collaborations and the troubles brought on by his involvement with them, see Gregory Chaplin, “‘Divided Amongst Themselves’: Collaboration and Anxiety in Jonson’s *Volpone*”, *ELH*, 69.1 (2002), 57–81 (pp. 57–65).

¹⁹ Thomas Nashe, *Nashes Lenten Stuffe*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by Ronald B. McKerrow and F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), III, 141–226 (p. 153–54).

²⁰ Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 9. For further reading on the affective rhetoric of male-male friendship and its political potential, see Will Tosh, *Male Friendship and Testimonies of Love in Shakespeare’s England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Masten's study is the relationship between Beaumont and Fletcher as represented in their folio collection *Comedies and Tragedies* (1647). In stark contrast to Jonson's *Workes*, the 1647 folio begins with dedicatory epistles and poems praising the duo's harmonious writing partnership as 'one Poet in a paire of friends'.²¹ This echoes the classical ideal of friendship of one soul shared between two bodies and an ideal friend as 'another self'.²² Male friendship was seen to entangle both bodies and minds of the friends involved, as Thomas Churchyard describes it having the power to 'knit the joyntes and mindes of men together'.²³ Henry Hoddesdon similarly evokes this physical and emotional closeness as he writes that true male friends 'liv[e] & breath[e] in two bodies, the one in the other, each in others hart, to live and die together'.²⁴ These descriptions of true friendship emphasise a desire for similitude, unity, and compatibility between men that Masten also ascribes to collaborating writers.

Yet the contours and agency of the embodied individual are repeatedly underemphasised in favour of the social production of texts in Masten's *Textual Intercourse* and much of the prefatory material of the 1647 folio. I disagree that this model encompasses the entirety of early modern collaborative practice. The association Masten draws between collaboration and gentlemanly friendship suits the specific relationship and partnership between Beaumont and Fletcher, and its posthumous representation in their 1647 folio and Masten's broad assumptions have rightly been challenged in scholarship.²⁵ To take the particular relationship between Beaumont and Fletcher as paradigmatic is to over-rely on these images of collaboration and risk misrepresenting the culture of collaboration at work in early modern England. Masten's later work in *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time* (2016), however, continues to think further about the interrelatedness of textual

²¹ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies* (London: Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1647), sig. D1v.

²² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Books VII and IX*, ed. & trans. by Michael Pakaluk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 29. For how classical friendship discourse was repurposed in the Renaissance in terms of gender and selfhood, see Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 1–16.

²³ Thomas Churchyard, *A Sparke of Friendship* (London: [T. Orwin], 1588), sig. B3v.

²⁴ Henry Hoddesdon, *The Forme of Friendship and Love* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1608), p.13.

²⁵ For examples, see Jeffrey Knapp, 'What Is a Co-Author?', *Representations*, 89.1 (2005), 1–29; Hugh Craig, 'Style, Statistics, and New Models of Authorship', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 15.1 (2009) <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/15-1/craistyl.htm>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

production, critical reading, and sexual or bodily practices. Masten here frames male-male textual production as equitable ‘conversation’ rather than equal similitude and more wholly gestures toward the variety of practices that ‘conversation’ might entail—‘*Conversation* can be dwelling in a place or among a group of people; interchange of thoughts and words; commerce, society, intimacy; sexual intercourse or intimacy; or conversion.’²⁶ As the critical vocabulary begins to expand collaboration beyond authorship to include other forms of conversation, co-creativity and interactivity, it is important to resist defaulting to authorship as the model by which we understand the relationships between writers.

Both Jonson’s fantasy of autonomy and the representation of Beaumont and Fletcher in terms of an idealised friendship obscure the working conditions of playwrighting in early modern England. Collaboration was commonplace in early modern theatrical culture. Gerald Eades Bentley’s oft-cited *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare’s Time, 1590-1642* (1971) argues that nearly two-thirds of plays in Philip Henslowe’s Diary were composed by more than one dramatist.²⁷ If, as David McInnis and Matthew Steggle have argued, only a ‘minority’ of plays survive, then it is also reasonable to assume that a significant number of these lost plays written for the commercial playhouses may have also been collaborative.²⁸ Multiple authorship was part of a broader conception of collaboration that included ‘a range of interactions, from the efforts of two writers working closely together to the activities of printers, patrons, and readers in shaping the meaning and significance of a text’.²⁹ This is not to suggest that the individual was not important in the collaborative writing

²⁶ Jeffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare’s Time* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 87.

²⁷ Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare’s Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 199).

²⁸ David McInnis and Matthew Steggle, ‘Nothing Will Come of Nothing? Or, What Can We Learn from Plays That Don’t Exist?’, in *Lost Plays in Shakespeare’s England*, ed. by David McInnis and Matthew Steggle (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1–14 (p. 1).

²⁹ Heather Hirschfeld, ‘Early Modern Collaboration and Theories of Authorship’, *PMLA*, 116.3 (2001), 609–22 (p. 610). See also: Stephen Orgel, ‘What Is a Text?’, in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, by David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 83–87, which argues for the radical instability of early modern dramatic texts by considering the cultures and practices of theatres and printing houses, and Tiffany Stern who explores the patchwork nature of early modern playtexts shaped by theatrical practice in *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

process. Rather, as Gordon McMullan argues, an authorial presence was conceived through the ‘distinctiveness of the individual [collaborator] as an *orchestrator* of voices’.³⁰ Even in McMullan’s conception of collaboration, there remains a tension between the desire to address the interpersonal mode of collaboration and the desire to foreground the individual author. Over twenty years later and with a focus on the material interactions within early modern women’s writing, Patricia Pender and Alexandra Day write that the literary categories of ‘originality, autonomy, and authority’ are strengthened by a focus on the collaborative networks of early modern writers.³¹ For Pender and Day, collaboration does not erase the individual authorial figure in favour of a partnership but instead highlights these moments of exchange, revision, and influence as part of an ongoing process of interaction that define the contours of a writer’s distinct identity. In doing so, they figure the individual writer as a single node within a larger network of collaborative writing activity. The critical desire to think about authorship does not necessarily mean thinking about singular authorship as original, autonomous, or authoritative, and instead can involve tracing the points of interaction between writers and the wider networks of influences and collaborators.

When considered as an individual author or a collaborator, Middleton fits into neither authorial pattern as set forth by Jonson’s and Beaumont and Fletcher’s folios. In comparison to the vast volumes collected of these writers’ works, Middleton’s work suffered from a relative bibliographic ‘invisibility’.³² Apart from Alexander Dyce’s five-volume limited-edition series in the 1840s which though significant is notable for its absences and misattributions, ‘the Middleton First Folio’ was only published in 2007.³³ Before his name appeared on printed dramatic texts in his own time, Middleton was already a presence on London’s theatrical scene. By February 1601, at the age of twenty-one, Middleton had left Oxford and was already known to be ‘daylie

³⁰ Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 155.

³¹ Patricia Pender and Alexandra Day, ‘Introduction: Gender, Authorship, and Early Modern Women’s Collaboration’, in *Gender, Authorship, and Early Modern Women’s Collaboration*, ed. by Patricia Pender (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1–22 (p. 2).

³² Sonia Massai, ‘Invisible Middleton and the Bibliographical Context’, in *Thomas Middleton in Context*, ed. by Suzanne Gossett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 317–24 (p.317).

³³ Gary Taylor, ‘Thomas Middleton: Lives and Afterlives’, in *The Collected Works*, pp. 25–58 (p. 58).

accompaning the players' according to a deposition made by Anthony Snode.³⁴ Middleton's first works for the theatre are the lost *Caesar's Fall* and *Two Shapes* both performed in 1602, as he learned the trade in writing syndicates for the Admiral's Men with Dekker, Munday, Drayton, and Webster.³⁵ Yet it was not until the 1608 quarto of *Your Five Gallants* that 'T. Middleton' was used to market a printed playbook.³⁶ Either through anonymous publishing or authorial misattribution, Middleton's name as a dramatist was absent from London's marketplace until this point.

In the cases of Middleton's early collaborations, this authorial confusion is even more pronounced. *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* (1604) was Middleton's first play written with only one other playwright and the first with Dekker. Possibly due to it being printed at this early stage of Middleton's career, it was only advertised as written by 'Tho: Dekker' in the quarto of that same year and the play's many subsequent editions.³⁷ Dekker and Middleton's second collaboration *The Bloody Banquet: A Tragedy* (1608-09) was first published as 'By T.D.' in 1639, likely having been revised by a third writer in a revival for Beeston's Boys.³⁸ Dekker's prolific output and reputation in producing popular plays in his early years within Henslowe's circles may help to explain these early attributions to Dekker alone. Both *The Life of Timon of Athens* (1608) with Shakespeare and *Wit at Several Weapons* (1613) with Rowley were only published in Middleton's partner's later folios; the former attributed to Shakespeare alone in 1623, while the latter was misattributed to Beaumont and Fletcher in their 1647 folio. It was only following the successful publishing of singularly authored plays for the King's Men and the Children of Paul's that Middleton's collaborative work began to appear in print.

³⁴ Mark Eccles, 'Thomas Middleton a Poett', *Studies in Philology*, 54.4 (1957), 516–36 (p. 530).

³⁵ Philip Henslowe records payment to 'antoney monday & / mihell drayton webester & the Rest myddleton [interlined above Rest]' for *Caesar's Fall* (p. 166), and for *Two Shapes* records payment to 'Thomas dickers drayton mydellton & webster & mondaye' (p. 167) (Walter W. Greg, ed. *Henslowe's Diary, Part I* [London: A. H. Bullen, 1904]). These two titles were identified as the same play by the publishing of *The Collected Works* but have subsequently been acknowledged as separate texts. See 'Caesar's Fall', ed. by Roslyn L. Knutson and others, *Lost Plays Database* (Folger Shakespeare Library, 2015) <https://lostplays.folger.edu/Caesar%27s_Fall> [accessed 20 June 2022], and 'Two Shapes', ed. by Roslyn L. Knutson and others, *Lost Plays Database* (Folger Shakespeare Library, 2015) <https://lostplays.folger.edu/Two_Shapes> [accessed 20 June 2022].

³⁶ Thomas Middleton, *Your Five Gallants* (London: [George Eld] for Richard Bonlan, 1608).

³⁷ Thomas Dekker, *The Honest Whore with The Humours of the Patient Man, and the Longing Wife* (London: V[alentine] S[immes and others] for John Hodgets, 1604).

³⁸ T.D., *The Bloodie Banquet* (London: Thomas Cotes, 1639).

Before 1617, the one collaboration to include a reference to Middleton's authorship was *The Roaring Girl* in 1611 which was 'Written by T. Middleton and T. Dekker'.³⁹ However, in 1617, *A Fair Quarrel* was printed in two issues with Middleton and Rowley explicitly tied together as collaborators. On these quartos, the play's two authors are bracketed together with Middleton's name above Rowley in a shared authorial space—*A Fair Quarrel* was 'Written by {Middleton/and Rowley} Gentl'.⁴⁰ Whereas convention was for collaborators to be placed one after the other on the title-page, this typographic shift was a significant intervention into the representation of collaboration in print. The axis of authorship shifted as Middleton and Rowley now occupied a vertical space within the brackets. The bracketing of the two writers together acknowledges that both Middleton and Rowley share the status of the gentlemanly author. Significantly, the bracketing of the writers together in effect authorises Middleton *and* Rowley as a recognisable and authorial partnership. The 1617 quarto was not only a product of Thomas Middleton working with William Rowley but also of 'Middleton-and-Rowley' as a distinct authorial entity.

In dramatic quartos, the printed brace typically grouped characters of similar class status or familial background in character lists. The only previous extant iteration of the brace on a quarto title-page is for *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607) by Rowley, John Day and George Wilkins. Here, the singular brace signifies the fraternal relationship between its titular brothers—'Sir Thomas / Sir Anthony / M^r Robert} Shirley'.⁴¹ The brace that visually embodied this brotherhood then shifts to represent the shared gentlemanly status of Middleton and Rowley. Douglas A. Brooks argues that the inclusion of the brace was a deliberate choice that 'embodies and reproduces authorial struggle' inherent in collaborative playbooks.⁴² By contrast, Suzanne Gossett's introduction to the play suggests that *A Fair Quarrel*'s 'shared

³⁹ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl* (London: [Nicholas Okes] for Thomas Archer, 1611).

⁴⁰ Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *A Faire Quarrell* (London: [George Eld] for J[ohn] T[rundle], 1617), STC 17911. STC 17911a advertises 'new additions of Mr. Chaughs and Trimtrams roaring, and the Bauds song, never before printed' on its title page.

⁴¹ John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins, *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (London: [George Eld] for John Wright, 1607).

⁴² Douglas A. Brooks, *From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 157.

attitudes and authorship may blur distinctions between collaborators'.⁴³ While Brooks sees the author figure as a dilemma for collaborative texts in print, Gossett concludes that the intertwined partnership between Middleton and Rowley was a positive one that lends itself to discussions of affinity rather than struggle. Gossett does not comment on the title page's significance but concludes that something about the play evokes the tropes of collaboration with its shared gentlemanly authorship, as well as the printed quarto's woodcut depiction of two duellers crossing pen-like swords and the play's thematic concern with male friendship of 'so even and level a degree' in tension with a vertical social hierarchy (1.1.172-73). The blurred mutuality of collaboration described by Gossett stands in contrast to the Jonsonian mode of singular authorship that I have explored above. Middleton and Rowley are represented as both a collaborative pair amounting to a single entity and as separate individuals who jointly produced the written text within the printed playbook.

The 1617 quarto of *A Fair Quarrel* demonstrated a shift in the representation of multiple authorship in print. In the following years, publishers and booksellers eagerly adopted the brace as a pattern to represent two or more playwrights as collaborating authors. Of the ten quartos published under the name of multiple authors between 1590 and 1616, none were bracketed, while between 1617 and 1647 only three plays were printed with unbracketed authors while nine were bracketed.⁴⁴ This shift in the representation of shared authorship in dramatic quartos must have influenced the Beaumont and Fletcher 1647 folio that advertises their plays as 'Written by {Francis Beaumont / and / John Fletcher} Gentleman'.⁴⁵ The brace was a typographic sign that held an ambiguous valency and was not as Brooks suggests 'linguistically silent'.⁴⁶ Thomas Blount's dictionary entry describes the brace as 'two or a couple; but With Printers a Brace is that which couples two or more words

⁴³ Suzanna Gossett, ed., *A Fair Quarrel*, in *The Collected Works*, p. 1212.

⁴⁴ Brooks, *Playhouse to Printing House*, p. 170. Brooks provides a fuller discussion on the typographic history of the brace in "'What strange Production is at last displaid": Dramatic Authorship and the Dilemma of Collaboration' (pp. 140-88). For a thorough discussion of the phenomenon as it relates to Beaumont and Fletcher's partnership in print, see Masten, 'Reproducing Works: Dramatic Quartos and Folios in the Seventeenth Century', in *Textual Intercourse*, pp. 113-155.

⁴⁵ Beaumont and Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies*, sig. A1r.

⁴⁶ Brooks, *Playhouse to Printing House*, p. 159.

together'.⁴⁷ The brace then signified not only the two writers as a coupled entity but the process of coupling itself. For male authors keen to fashion themselves as successful literary figures, this coupling necessarily entailed the entanglement of their reputations with another's. To account for the shared authorial identity of Middleton and Rowley, the bracketing of the two writers in the 1617 quarto produces and reproduces them as interacting agents in the production and presentation of their printed text.

Masten's model of collaboration as a practice that inevitably and mutually blurs bodies and identities together into one authorial entity has limited application to the knottier representations of Middleton's authorship and collaborations. In the quotation that opened this chapter, Langbaine offers a more appropriately ambiguous image of Middleton's collaboration with other playwrights—'like the *Ivy* by the Assistance of the *Oak*, (being joyn'd with them in several Plays) he clim'd up to some considerable height of Reputation'.⁴⁸ Middleton is portrayed as a social climber, exploiting his friendships and partnerships with other playwrights to advance himself. Langbaine's negative association of the ivy is resonant with the plant's semantic valency in broader literary culture. Joshua Poole's wit manual *The English Parnassus: or, A Helpe to English Poesie* (1657) associates ivy with a variety of adjectives including 'fawning', 'clinging', 'uxorious', 'ambitious', and 'encroaching'.⁴⁹ In the tragedy *The Turk* (1610), before killing her daughter Amada for doting on Muleasses in a jealous rage, Timoclea derides her as a usurping 'Ivy nourished at the roote [...] not content to creepe / And feede upon the sap, but stretching up'.⁵⁰ By evoking such imagery of the social climber, Langbaine's description of Middleton-as-collaborator renders this praise of Middleton much more ambiguous. Where Masten thinks about the erotic connotations of collaboration to consider the relationship between textualities and sexualities, the image of the ivy also suggests the inequalities of power within those erotic relations between writers in a way that feels distinctly Middletonian. In his 'To The Reader' prefacing the 1652 quarto of *The Widow*, actor Alexander Gough argues

⁴⁷ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (London: Thomas Newcombe, 1656), sig. G3r.

⁴⁸ Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets*, p. 370.

⁴⁹ Joshua Poole, *The English Parnassus: or, A Helpe to English Poesie* (London: Thomas Johnson, 1657), p. 120.

⁵⁰ John Mason, *The Turk* (London: E[dward] A[l]lde] for John Busbie, 1610), sig. G4v.

that the play's dramatic triumph is because the writers have so successfully 'twist[ed] the Poets Ivy' together.⁵¹ Gough portrays Middleton's collaborations in a more symbiotic manner which invokes the conventional imagery where renowned poets were typically portrayed crowned with garlands of ivy—'the *Ivie* (wherewith Poets are dignified) might be suffered to shuffle in among the Baies which were peculiarly consecrated to victorious Emperors'.⁵² The twisting ivy parallels the printed brace in their shared effect of emphasising the embodied interaction between collaborators coming together into a recognisable entity.

Where the brace necessarily must place one author above the other, the image of ivy twisted together portrays a more intimately enmeshed image of Middleton's collaborations. Considering the ivy's association with social climbers, the two writers and their twisted crowns that dignify their skill are represented with more ambiguity than the victorious masterly writer who totally owns his texts. Yet, bearing a similarity to how Middleton's name and reputation continues to supersede that of Rowley despite their frequent and close collaborations, the Poet's ivy is still not quite as commemorated as the Emperor's bays. The intimacy of collaboration opens the individual to exploitation by the other, while that exploitation is simultaneously mutual between the writers. The echoes of parasitism and erotic familiarity imbued within the imagery of Middleton's twisted ivy undercuts the conventional association of masculine authorial identity with the masterly victor in conquest. Instead, these descriptions of Middleton as an author gesture towards the plurality of his writing in ambiguous terms and place him outside of the paradigm of the singular masterly writer. Middleton the collaborator can be viewed as the centre of a mutual interpersonal network of writing as equally as he can be described as the fawning social climber who can exploit the close intimacy of his contemporaries to establish himself through their reputations.

⁵¹ Alexander Gough, 'To The Reader', in *The Widow: A Comedie* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1652), sig. A2r.

⁵² Levinus Lemnius, *An Herbal for the Bible* (London: Edmund Bollifant, 1587), p. 175.

2. Negotiating Authorship in Middleton and Dekker's Printed Collaborations

Middleton rarely collaborated in group syndicates, tending to work in partnership with one other writer. The two exceptions to this were at vastly different stages of Middleton's career—his first known foray into writing for the stage, *Caesar's Fall* and *Two Shapes* with Munday, Drayton, Dekker and Webster, and his last collaborative play, *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623) with Rowley, Dekker and Ford. Between these two group collaborations, we see the relationship between Middleton and his long-time collaborator Thomas Dekker shift. As he began writing for the commercial stage in their initial partnerships, Middleton was still Dekker's junior. Yet by the time of *The Spanish Gypsy*, Middleton was the senior collaborator in charge of coordinating the strands of writing produced by the various writers involved.⁵³ I argue that Middleton's early collaborations with the more experienced Dekker directly influenced the ways Middleton wrote and considered his playwrighting as part of a professional, labouring identity. To do so I explore how the representation of plural authorship shifts through the language of labour in the paratexts of *News of Gravesend* (1604) and *The Roaring Girl* (1611). Both texts signal ongoing negotiations between the two writers as they think about the relationship between singular authorship and the plural nature of early modern writing practice. Exploring the significant influence that Dekker had on Middleton in these early writing partnerships will enhance my discussion of how Middleton's own authorial identity should never be thought of solely in the singular.

Thomas Dekker was a prolific and capable co-author with Middleton. The two together produced three plays (*The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* [1604]), *The Bloody Banquet* [1608-09] which was later revised by an unknown adapter, as well as *The Roaring Girl* and two pamphlets (not only *News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody* but also *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary; or, The Walks in Paul's* [both 1604]), as well as working together on three texts in different writing syndicates (the aforementioned *Caesar's Fall*, *Two Shapes*, and *The Spanish Gypsy*).⁵⁴ Across and

⁵³ While Dekker and Ford are identified as having done more of the writing of the play, Middleton is generally agreed as being the 'composer' of the plot. See Suzanne Gossett, ed. *The Spanish Gypsy*, in *The Collected Works*, p. 1723.

⁵⁴ This number rises to four if one includes Middleton's contribution to James I's royal progress as a collaborative effort (see below). Middleton may have also contributed to *The Witch of Edmonton*

outside of their collaborations, Dekker and Middleton were also embedded within the civic life of the City of London, which can be seen by their prolific output of satiric city comedies and pamphlets alongside their official civic engagements. They both produced Lord Mayor's Shows for the livery companies of London—Middleton's first Show, *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613), for the Grocers was performed the year following Dekker's, *Troja-Nova Triumphans* (1612). Dekker and Middleton also assisted in writing speeches for James VI and I's royal entry into London in 1604.⁵⁵ Dekker appears to have developed an appreciation for his junior's skill as a writer. On Middleton's speech for *The Whole Royal and Magnificent Entertainment of King James Through The City of London* (1604), Dekker writes that 'If there be any glory to be won by writing these lines, I do freely bestow it (as his due) on Thomas Middleton [...]: *Quae nos non fecimus ipsi, vix ea nostra voco* [That which we do not ourselves make we will never call ours]' (ll. 2182-85). In their civic texts, Middleton and Dekker were particularly invested in acknowledging their collaborations with craftsmen—men such as Garret Christmas, Jacob Chaloner, and Rowland Bucket—in ways that bear a similarity to Dekker's praise of Middleton for the royal entry. Taylor suggests that the two writers 'testify to a livery ethic of occupational sociability and shared labour'.⁵⁶ Even as early as *The Whole Royal and Magnificent Entertainment*, it is clear to see how Middleton and Dekker's views on writing are being influenced by and imaged through the professional discourses of trade and work.

While fashioning an authorial identity may have been a priority for Dekker, Middleton seldom authorised his drama in this way until later in his career. Many of Middleton and Dekker's early collaborations were either attributed to Dekker alone or published anonymously. One of the few extant dedicatory epistles for Middleton's sole-authored works for the stage survives in a presentation manuscript of *The Witch* (1614), gifted to Thomas Holmes in the hand of Ralph Crane, professional scribe to

(1621) with Dekker, Rowley and Ford. See Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. by Lucy Munro (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2017), pp. 23-26.

⁵⁵ Dekker had a larger organisational role across multiple pageant arches with Ben Jonson and Stephen Harrison, while Middleton's contribution was a minor speech for the personification of Zeal during the sixth pageant (ll. 2122-81).

⁵⁶ Gary Taylor, 'The Order of Persons', in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, pp. 31-74 (p. 41). For a survey of the professional theatre as an 'artisanal workplace', see Michelle M. Dowd, 'Shakespeare and Work', *Literature Compass*, 7.3 (2010), 185-94 (p. 185).

the King's Men.⁵⁷ Middleton's epistle apologises for gifting 'this (ignorantly ill-fated) labour of mine', addressing the play's poor reception in performance (ll. 4-5). The lack of authorial self-fashioning in his epistles is stark in comparison to Dekker who was far more assertive of his identity as a craftsman poet. Not only does Dekker describe his writing as 'workman-ly done',⁵⁸ but he was invested in the ways that his and others' 'light commodity of words' were sold on the 'Poets Royal-Exchange'.⁵⁹ Middleton's seeming reluctance to articulate his own authorial identity in paratext can be seen refracted in the mock-commendatory verse for his mock-almanack *Plato's Cap* (1604). The poem supposedly authored by 'Mihell Mercury' (36) explicitly denies the writer a named identity and praises his anonymity—'To commend the book, / But not meddle with the writer' (59-60). Mihell Mercury's assertion that he 'know[s] not the poet' still suggests that there is a poet behind the book even if he is not identified explicitly (45). A kind of authorly identity is asserted *through* this anonymity, gesturing instead to the materiality and pre-eminence of the printed text.⁶⁰ The relative non-presence of Middleton in these early works makes it difficult to know how he negotiated his authorly identity at the beginning of his career. However, it is apparent that Dekker's influence encourages Middleton's later adoption of authorial strategies that consider his relationship to his printed works.

The anonymously published plague pamphlet *News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody* (1604) provides an insight into how the two negotiated and represented their partnership during their intense period of collaboration between 1603 and 1604, as noted above. Even though Dekker was most likely the primary compositor of the pamphlet with Middleton contributing a smaller portion, the text itself frequently engages with a playful multiplicity with its fictional anonymous writers. *News from Gravesend* contains a lengthy epistle dedicating the work to 'Sir Nicholas Nemo, alias

⁵⁷ On Crane's role as anachronic collaborator who worked to assert the literary status of professional drama, see Amy Bowles, 'Dressing the Text: Ralph Crane's Scribal Publication of Drama', *RES*, 67.280 (2016), 405–27.

⁵⁸ Thomas Dekker, *News from Hell* (London: R. B[lower, S. Stafford, and Valentine Simmes] for W. Ferebrand, 1606), sig. A3v.

⁵⁹ Thomas Dekker, *The Gull's Hornbook* (London: [Nicholas Okes] for R. S., 1609), p. 27.

⁶⁰ Masten argues that anonymity allows a 'space for identity' which itself acts as an author function in *Textual Intercourse*, p. 12. For a broader study on anonymity and authorship in the early modern period, see Marcy L. North, *The Anonymous Renaissance: Cultures of Discretion in Tudor-Stuart England* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Nobody', the last good patron left in London (l. 9). This dedicatory epistle portrays its author as a discrete, authorial entity—'Devoted to none but thyself, / Somebody' (439-40). There is a tension between the pamphlet's obfuscating anonymity, the vague authorial persona of Somebody, and the two writers who collaborated on the pamphlet as a whole. This playful ambiguity between the text and its plural authorship complicates the conventional purposes of an opening epistle. Typically, early modern printed books' paratextual material, epistles dedicated to readers and patrons, marginal notes, illustrations, or commendatory verses, construct a fluid and interactive relationship between writers, readers, and the printed object.⁶¹ The dedicatory epistle in *News from Gravesend* uses the flexibility of its paratextual status and the anonymity of the printed textual object to locate other forms of identification outside of the limits of authorship and reflect on its authorial plurality.

In the pamphlet's epistle, Somebody notes that for the following verse comprising the rest of the text they have 'hire[d] three or four ballad-makers who' will 'turn all this limping prose into more perfectly-halting verse' (433-35). While the epistle uses the ambiguously singular Somebody to somewhat fix its authorship status, the verse section's authorial origin is increasingly obfuscated. The epistle even suggests that the verse will be an improvement over the 'limping prose' *because* of the multiple hands working on the lines (434-35). The epistle's suggestion that the prose was produced by one writer while the verse was written by a collaborative team reflects the division of labour between Dekker and Middleton. The verse was composed primarily by Dekker with a concentrated contribution of at least a hundred lines by Middleton (972-1078) with the prose epistle added on later by Dekker alone, although Taylor has suggested that the writers may have collaborated more closely than previously thought.⁶² In the prose epistle, there are eighty uses of first-person singular pronouns (e.g., 'I', 'my'), while plural singular pronouns (e.g., 'we', 'ours') are used only seven times. Yet in the poem, first-person singular pronouns are used seven times

⁶¹ On the relationship between materiality and paratexts in the early modern period, see *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. by Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶² Taylor speculates on the possibility of mixed writing throughout the pamphlet considering Middleton and Dekker's close collaborations elsewhere in 'Early Modern Authorship: Canons and Chronologies', in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, pp. 346-48.

while plural pronouns are used fifty-seven times.⁶³ The verse section emphasises its multiple authorship with frequent references to writing in the plural—for example, ‘our verse’ (476, 948), ‘our tragic song’ (480), ‘our strong verse’ (508), ‘we will write’ (512), ‘our ink’ (514), ‘our lines’ (516), ‘Inspire us therefore how to tell’ (520), ‘our panting muse’ (701), ‘blot all the lines we write’ (935), ‘our muse’ (1089), ‘our prophes’ing pen’ (1160). By contrast, only one of the plural pronouns in the prose epistle refers to multiple authors, and that reference is to the collaborative authorship of the verse— ‘Accept therefore (for hansel-sake) these curtal rhymes of ours’ (251-2). The epistle is largely claimed as singularly ‘my labours’ (265-66) that a lone writer claims to ‘have boiled in my leaden inkpot for thine own eating’ (23-24). Although the pamphlet as a whole plays with and celebrates its multiple authorship, the claim of the epistle to be composed by an individual stands in tension with its collaborative and collective tone. This tension does not necessarily elide the significance of the text as a collaborative effort but rather signals that the writers viewed themselves as distinct entities negotiating with each other in the process of the pamphlet’s textual production.

The frequent references to collaborative authorship in *News from Gravesend* strategically locate the embodied labour of writing with a wider working community of London’s citizens. The writers of the pamphlets claim that their ‘ink’ shall be ‘mix[ed] / With tears of widows’ (514-15), evidently seeing their work as deeply connected and mingling with the loss and suffering of a larger urban community during the outbreaks of plague. The epistle dedicates the pamphlet to Nobody, a ‘gracious, munificent, and golden rewarder of rhymes, singular paymaster of songs and sonnets’ (3-5); in other words, the ideal literary patron. Of course, Nobody is an ironic fiction highlighting the absence of such wealthy patrons remaining ‘under the weather-beaten colours of Apollo’ in the plague-struck city (146-47). Somebody describes how the remaining writers form their own livery fellowship in praise of Nobody—‘all the rhymesters, play-patchers, jig-makers, ballad-mongers, and pamphlet-stitchers (being the yeomanry of the company) together’ (154-57). The epistle describes various authorial identities within this fraternal, company-like structure which are posited against the singular poet. Poets are ‘the greatest and greediest beggars’ as the pamphlet

⁶³ MacDonald P. Jackson, ‘Early Modern Authorship: Canons and Chronologies’, in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, pp. 80–97 (p. 346).

ridicules the notion of a masterly, self-sufficient author (100). Somebody ironically suggests that their deaths are linked to their ineffectual writing during plague—poetical ‘aphorisms proved a mockery’ (487) when the ‘Th’infection’ stayed ‘above art’ (492). The epistle addressing Sir Christopher Clutchfist in one of Middleton’s other anonymous pamphlets, *Father Hubburd’s Tales* (1604), has an equally derogatory attitude towards such writers as well as the patron who ‘never give[s] the poor muse-suckers a penny’ (l. 42). Middleton’s epistle mocks the ‘Poor Knights of Poetry’ (1151), who since ‘rank money masters’ control their coin are unable to sustain themselves (1176). While poets used to be able to maintain themselves ‘better upon poems than many upon ploughs’ (1155-56), they cannot adapt their writing to the practices of the city. The treatment of authorship in *News from Gravesend* goes further by invoking the company-like fellowship of collaboration to position this plural and communal mode of writing against the greedy and ineffectual writing of the individual poets.

Middleton and Dekker consider writing alongside other forms of labouring and living in London to gesture towards more communal forms of identification and collaboration. Thomas Rutter argues that the Elizabethan period saw a rise in ‘vocation’ as a model of work, which included social labour as well as actual work.⁶⁴ Writing and authorship too became implicated in broader discussions about labour and social identity. Dekker and Middleton’s literary careers were both intertwined with the city’s livery companies and the commercial life of those within them.⁶⁵ As the senior collaborator, Dekker modelled a way of writing adopting the language and prestige of the livery companies in the city that is particularly noticeable throughout *News from Gravesend*. This desire to professionalise their status as writers emerges in their emphasis on skilled craft, possibly reflecting the production of their plague pamphlets as a response to the loss of money earned from the closed theatres and absent literary

⁶⁴ Thomas Rutter, *Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3. For further discussion on the theatre’s relationship to the discourses and representations of labour, see *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. by Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

⁶⁵ Middleton chose not to follow in his father William Middleton’s footsteps, who was a freeman of the Honourable Company of Tilers and Bricklayers, nor those of his stepfather Thomas Harvey, who was a citizen and a member of the Company of Grocers. For a contextual reading of the relationship between Middleton and work, see Natasha Korda, ‘Trade, Work, and Workers’, in *Thomas Middleton in Context*, pp. 75–82.

patrons. The two collaborators are ‘like bees’, and their pamphlet a kind of medicine that can bring ‘sweet and wholesome juice to men’ (1097-100). By drawing on the association of bees with work and profitability, Dekker and Middleton highlight their labours while figuring themselves within a wider network of working relationships within the community. Bees were heavily associated with profit and work in the early modern period. An anonymous book of jests, *The Demaundes Joyous* (1511) poses the question ‘which [animal] is the most profytable best & that men eateth least of’ to which the answer simply says, ‘That is bees’.⁶⁶ Notably, the bees themselves were not objects of great value but the producers of value through their work. Yet Dekker and Middleton’s invocation of bees also brings their early modern association with hierarchies. While beekeeper Charles Butler was fascinated with the beauty of the bee as the ‘Muses birds’ in his treatise *The Feminine Monarchie* (1609), the strict hierarchy of the bees living under a queen too brings with it the association of ‘order’ rather than equity between individuals.⁶⁷ So too, by figuring the collaborating writers as bees, does *News from Gravesend* evoke the ‘tow’ring minds’ of poets within the ‘yeomanry’ of the company of writers (1094, 156). Although they locate the collaborative writers of the pamphlet within a working community, their presentation of this particular writing partnership resists fully sublimating the unequal tensions of this relationship. Dekker and Middleton present their collaborative partnership as neither a distinct authorly entity nor as an equal partnership. They frame their text as an intermingling of their labour, denying a fixed origin of intention and identity. While separated from the company of writers stitching together the pamphlet’s verse, Somebody’s epistle obliquely suggests that his epistle is still thoroughly implicated in interpersonal interactions of labour and work. The plurality of a collaborating writing community championed and made strange by the continual return to the conditions of composition in *News from Gravesend* raises tensions between the embodied labour of collaboration and encroaching notions of masterful authorship.

⁶⁶ *The Demaundes Joyous* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1511), sig. A1v.

⁶⁷ Charles Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1609), sig. A2v. The 1623 edition printed by John Haviland and Roger Jackson further includes a woodcut of a honeycomb on its frontispiece with the Latin motto ‘SOLERTIA ET LABORE [skill and hard work]’ underneath.

By the time of the 1611 quarto of *The Roaring Girl*, it was clear that the relationship was no longer between a senior and junior collaborator. The quarto was the first collaborative play for the commercial theatre to name Middleton on its title page, with his name preceding Dekker's in defiance of alphabetical logic. This suggests that there was a shift in the now-printed representation of their professional relationship. After 1611, Dekker was never printed as the first author in another collaboration and is a noticeable absence from the 1653 quarto of *The Spanish Gypsy*.⁶⁸ Perhaps this ordering of collaborators was because the 1611 quarto was the first time that Middleton was directly involved in the printing process with Nicholas Oakes.⁶⁹ Yet the material printed on the quarto's title page frames the playbook as a product of collaborative work between Middleton and Dekker. Running up the left border of the striking woodcut of Moll Frith in male clothing smoking a pipe is a printed annotation stating that 'my case is alter'd, I must worke for my living'.⁷⁰ While this may refer to the cross-dressed heroine in the illustration, the annotation could easily describe the shift in Middleton and Dekker's working relationship. As Middleton gained more experience with his collaborator as well as in his singularly-authored works, his collaborations with Dekker saw 'a less formal, freer division of responsibilities'.⁷¹ While their work in *News from Gravesend* is seemingly more delineated, *The Roaring Girl* more clearly has extensive collaboration within scenes. By this point in their working relationship, Middleton and Dekker's apparent closeness in working within scenes would suggest that the two shared a more mutual kind of interaction as part of the writing process.

Yet this shared interest in what the category of a literary 'writer' might mean for collaborating playwrights continues to be negotiated in the printed paratexts of the 1611 quarto. *The Roaring Girl* is significant for having the only printed dedicatory epistle in Middleton's collaborative canon. The address 'To the Comic Play-readers'

⁶⁸ This decline in Dekker's printed reputation coincides with his seven years spent in prison for debt between 1612 and 1619. See Cyndia Susan Clegg, "'Twill Much Enrich the Company of Stationers': Thomas Middleton and the London Book Trade, 1580-1627", in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, pp. 247-59 (p. 53n26).

⁶⁹ Clegg, 'Middleton and the London Book Trade', p. 43.

⁷⁰ Middleton and Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, STC 17908.

⁷¹ Paul Mulholland, 'Introduction' in *The Roaring Girl* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 9.

signed singularly by Thomas Middleton is one of the earliest epistles to address play-readers as a category, rather than a patron or the general reader (p. 726). Instead of using this space to assert an authorial identity or ownership over the play, the epistle is primarily concerned with the specific labour of writing a play. Like *News from Gravesend*, the dedicatory epistle of *The Roaring Girl* reflects on its own textual construction. The epistle claims that the play will be able to correct poorer representations published before it—‘Worse things [...] the world has taxed her for than has been written of her; but ‘tis the excellency of a writer to leave things better than he finds ‘em’ (l. 20-23). The skill of crafting a play is invoked as being able to provide a heightened version of the ephemeral gossip surrounding the urban legend of Moll Cutpurse. Middleton’s epistle does not imply a sense of the autonomous or atomised ‘writer’ as a single entity but gestures towards an intertextual one. By evoking the writer’s ability to build on and improve previously existing stories and narratives, Middleton emphasises the writer as a skilled craftsman against the ‘obscene fellow, that cares not what he writes against others’ (25-26).

The skill of the individual writer-as-craftsman was a powerful rhetorical construct even in discourses of early modern collaboration. More particularly, the published quarto compares the ‘fashion of playmaking’ (1) to the work of the tailor in the ‘alteration in apparel’ (2). The epistle’s extended metaphor associates tailoring and authorship through the skill of crafting a material object. *The Roaring Girl*’s metaphor of stitching evokes an earlier reference in *News from Gravesend*. One group of the company of writers mentioned are the ‘play-patchers’ (154). Play-patching was the practice of piecing together ‘artifacts of discrete and separate pieces’ to stitch together a whole play, which was never fully unified.⁷² Like the term playwright before it, a play-patcher was a generally pejorative term that directly contrasted these writers with more gentlemanly poets. More often than not the word was associated with collaborators attempting to fit all of the writers’ ‘patches’ into one piece.⁷³ This attitude

⁷² Stern, *Documents of Performance* p. 1. For further reading on the patchwork nature of early modern drama and the development of play-patching, see Tiffany Stern, ‘Re-Patching the Play’, in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 151–80.

⁷³ See, for example, the problem of Jonson not understanding Nashe’s ‘drift’ that I describe earlier in this chapter.

appears to emerge in Jonson's *The Staple of News* (1626), a comedy deeply concerned with 'diverse men's opinions' (1.5.51). Canter castigates Madrigal's shoddy rhymes as rendering the 'ever-living garland' of the poet 'pieced and patched of dirty, withered flowers' (4.4.166-68). Jonson's 'patched' poet is starkly pejorative compared to Middleton and Dekker who are more obviously sympathetic to the implications of the poets-as-labourers. In Dekker's *News From Hell* (1606), he describes a writer as a 'Cobler of Poetrie called a play-patcher'.⁷⁴ Like a shoemaker, a playwright honed their craft to cobble together material objects. The play-patcher in Dekker and Middleton's pamphlet is not nearly as derisive as when deployed by Jonson, indicating a sympathetic appreciation of the patchwork-nature of collaborative texts. In his epistle, Middleton wryly comments that the 'niceness of our garments' follows the current trends for 'single plots, quaint conceits [and] lecherous jests dressed up in hanging sleeves' (7-9).⁷⁵ Yet the wittiness that Middleton highlights within his and Dekker's 'quaint conceits' far outweighs the overstuffed nature of such other 'huge bombasted plays quilted with mighty words for lean purpose' (3-4). In a slight to some of their contemporaries' printed playbooks, Middleton and Dekker compare their skills as collaborative writers to those of a tailor. That clothing was one of the significant 'silent languages' of the early modern city (which I discuss in detail in Chapter Two) underscores how the material objects produced by both tailors and writers were considered more valuable from their association with skilled craftsmen.⁷⁶

The Prologue and Epilogue of *The Roaring Girl* continue this attention to the play's status as a crafted, printed object by presenting the audience as unruly collaborators. The Prologue states that each member of the theatrical audience and the printed text's readers 'comes and brings a play in's head with him (3-4). Although identifying audiences and readers as active participants in the playmaking process can be considered a form of collaboration, Middleton and Dekker are keen to portray these participants as disruptive.⁷⁷ They invoke the audience who loudly 'mews' if they

⁷⁴ Dekker, *News from Hell*, sig. H1v.

⁷⁵ *The Roaring Girl*, like many contemporary plays, does not follow a single plot, hence Middleton's comment is likely ironic.

⁷⁶ See Mary Hazard's discussion of the function of textiles in the early modern period in *Elizabethan Silent Language* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp. 77-108.

⁷⁷ Alison P. Hobgood refers to the early modern audience as 'conscious, collaborative co-creators' in creating the felt experience of the early modern theatre in *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern*

dislike the play's narrative (6). While they suggest the audience expects 'that each scene should be a book, / Composed to all perfection' (2-3), the irony is that with the Prologue now being set down in the printed play Middleton and Dekker have now been able to effectively remove these undesired attempts at co-creation from a live audience. This conceit continues in the epilogue's description of the play as a painting hung out to sell and of attempts to rework the painting according to advice from unskilled critics. Middleton and Dekker highlight that if the play were to bend to all expectations and criticisms the resulting effort of the 'workman' (10) playwright would be 'monstrous and ugly' (14). The learned and embodied skill of writing done by the workman is thus wholly opposed to the ugliness of an object shaped by the unskilled public 'in hope to please all' (12). However, the skilled artisan is not necessarily plural. The epilogue also contains several pronoun slippages similarly to *News from Gravesend*. While in the epilogue the two authors claim that 'we doubt' that the poor painting resulting from these unwanted collaborations will be 'our comedy' (15-16), they also complicate this polyvocality through the singular 'workman' and 'writer' as the figures for the play's authorship. Middleton and Dekker do not claim to have produced a seamless play; rather, they admit that 'such faults, as either the writers' wit / Or negligence of the actors do commit, / Both crave your pardons' (31-33). Here, the printed text is presented as a co-creation, intentional or otherwise, between multiple writers and actors. In signalling the presence of multiple 'writers' here, Middleton and Dekker accept that 'faults' or seams are inevitable in the process of collaborating with other parties. Compared with the discomfort Nashe and Jonson displayed over the seams of their collaboration, Middleton and Dekker acknowledge that faults are a likely, even inevitable, part of the dramaturgical process. The paratexts of *The Roaring Girl* disrupt the fantasy of autonomous authorship by suggesting a flexible and mutable relationship between writers and their work. Yet Middleton and Dekker still insist on an authorial identity based upon learned embodied skill. The plurality of that skill invokes specific and desired forms of collaboration between writers and the unwanted collaborations with untrained audiences. Although the image of the singular painter

England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 6. It is difficult to say whether Middleton or Dekker wrote the Prologue and the Epilogue due to their close style of collaboration and tendency to revise the other's work. See Mulholland, 'Introduction', pp. 8-12; and Coppélia Kahn, 'Canon and Chronology', pp. 370-71.

brings the rhetorical force of the singular author into the play's paratexts, it is dismissed as unsuitable for the plural and more patchwork labour of collaborative writing.

More broadly, the paratexts of Middleton and Dekker's printed collaborations interrogate the poet as a paradigmatic authorial category. The embodied act of writing is revealed as labour to provide alternative ways of fashioning authorial identity. Middleton and Dekker's paratexts reveal a significant interest in negotiating questions of authorship *as* collaborators. While the gentlemanly, masterly status of the poet continues to be invoked, authorial rhetoric continually unfolds into multiplicity and interactivity between multiple persons. In charting the kinds of authorship discussed in these collaborations, Dekker's influence on Middleton's style of publishing and framing of his texts become apparent. The sympathies both writers held for civic life and labour in the city enable an evolving sense of how Middleton comes to engage with writing and collaboration as part of a professional identity. The paratexts of *News from Gravesend* and *The Roaring Girl* reveal an interest less in the fashioning of a singular authorial identity than in the plural, communal identification of working fellowship. As an explicit challenge to the singular, masterly style of the author, Middleton and Dekker articulate images of writing implicated with fellowship, communal sympathies, working interaction, and embodied labour as important methods by which writers and collaborators were able to define themselves and their work.

3. *The Changeling*: Middleton and Rowley's Indistinct Collaboration

The Changeling retains a central position in Middleton's, Rowley's, and Middleton and Rowley's canons. It is one of the few Middleton plays, and certainly the only one by Rowley, to have a substantial performance and critical history.⁷⁸ By the time of *The Changeling*, Middleton and Rowley had already worked together on three plays and

⁷⁸ For a sustained critical study of *The Changeling*'s modern history in editing and performance, see Nora J. Williams, 'Between Performances, Texts, and Editions: *The Changeling*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2016). See also Kate Lechler, 'Thomas Middleton in Performance 1960-2013' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Florida State University, 2014), which broadly studies Middleton's modern performance history with frequent references to *The Changeling*.

one masque between 1613 and 1622, and would continue in the writing syndicate for *The Spanish Gypsy* one year later.⁷⁹ Building on the language of vocational fellowship and hierarchy Middleton developed with Dekker, Middleton and Rowley's play self-consciously engages in a more ambiguous aesthetic of collaboration. *The Changeling* is notorious for its resistance to clearly defined generic structures and divisions of authorship. Middleton and Rowley harmonise and reflect the other's work as much as they clash with each other's presumed style and aesthetic. The play's persistent troping of indistinction and the tensions that arise from bodies that resist intermixture self-consciously enacts and plays with the intersecting yet not fully cohesive multiple plots. As individual characters have their bodies repeatedly infringed upon, merged, and possessed by others, this thematic encroachment of power mirrors and complicates the structural indistinction surrounding the play's collaborative authorship. Carried through the multiple plots of *The Changeling* is an overwhelming sense that the external signs of selfhood are unstable and unreadable, enabling and hindering the physical, moral, and poetic transformations occurring across and between characters, scenes and authors. In this final section, I argue that the aesthetics of collaboration as well as the representations of frustrated interpersonal relationships staged in Middleton and Rowley's play resist grand narratives surrounding thematic and dramatic unity and mutuality that are typically adopted or desired in studies of collaboration. What makes *The Changeling* such a significant text in the Middleton canon is its status as a mixed, indistinct, and contradictory collaboration that gestures toward the influence and exploitation of interpersonal interaction.

Many critical approaches to *The Changeling* have attended to its thematic and structural mixing. Twentieth-century critics and editors have generally followed Pauline Wiggin's division of the play's authorship with Rowley responsible for the hospital plot as well as the first and last scenes of the play and Middleton writing the middle parts of the castle plot.⁸⁰ However, it has also been suggested, as was the case

⁷⁹ These dramatic works are *Wit at Several Weapons* (1613), *A Fair Quarrel* (1616), *An/The Old Law* (1618-19) with Thomas Heywood, and *The World Tossed at Tennis* (1620).

⁸⁰ Pauline G. Wiggin, *An Inquiry into the Authorship of the Middleton-Rowley Plays* (Boston: Ginn, 1897), pp. 42-51. Wiggin's divisions have been generally confirmed by later bibliographical work. See David J. Lake, *The Canon of Thomas Middleton's Plays: Internal Evidence for the Major Problems of Authorship* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 204-5, and MacDonald P. Jackson, *Studies in Attribution: Middleton and Shakespeare* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und

with Dekker later in their partnership, that Middleton and Rowley wrote much more closely and likely collaborated within scenes.⁸¹ Richard Nochimson argues that this ‘interweaving’ and ‘intertwin[ing]’ has been downplayed in favour of attributing pieces of the play to either Middleton or Rowley, and thereby repeatedly associating Middleton with the purely tragic elements of the play and Rowley with the comic.⁸² Doing so risks readings that simplify or underplay the blurred and self-contradictory aesthetic of collaboration at the centre of this play. The castle and madhouse plots intermingle throughout and resist fully integrating into a cohesive whole, and this resistance is refracted through the characters’ own changeability. Beatrice-Joanna’s initial aside on seeing Alsemero has her worry that she shall ‘change my saint, I fear me; I find / A giddy turning in me’, foreshadowing her instability as well as that of her narrative (1.1.158-59).⁸³ Likewise, Alsemero figures his own giddy turning through the conceit of a ‘contrary’ (15) wind that can cause ‘The temple’s vane to turn full in my face’ (20). Yet his ironic declaration of love to Beatrice-Joanna initially appears to contest these turns and contradictions by insisting on their sameness:

[...] We’re so like
In our expressions, lady, that unless I borrow
The same words, I shall never find their equals. (2.2.12-14)

In their collaboration, Middleton and Rowley too likely borrowed the other’s words and characters in their close working relationship. But here Alsemero fundamentally mistakes Beatrice-Joanna’s appearance as signalling some immutable sense of selfhood, believing in their supposed similarity and compatibility with each other. He assumes that he can pursue and do ‘service’ (26) to Beatrice-Joanna by issuing a

Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1979), p. 124. For more on Middleton and Rowley’s ‘framing’ technique, see Michael E. Mooney, “‘Framing’ as Collaborative Technique: Two Middleton-Rowley Plays”, *Comparative Drama*, 13.2 (1979), 127-41.

⁸¹ Evidence of close collaboration has been argued to be in 4.2 by Cyrus Hoy, ‘The Shares of Fletcher and His Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (V)’, *Studies in Bibliography*, 13 (1960), 77–108 (pp. 87–88); 5.3 by R. V. Holdsworth, ‘Notes on *The Changeling*’, *Notes and Queries*, 36.1 (1989), 344–46 (pp. 345–46), and in the first scene of the play as well by Douglas Bruster, ‘Early Modern Authorship: Canons and Chronologies’, in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, pp. 80–97 (p. 423).

⁸² Richard L. Nochimson, “‘Sharing’ *The Changeling* by Playwrights and Professors: The Certainty of Uncertain Knowledge about Collaborations”, *Early Theatre*, 5.1 (2002), 37–57 (p. 50).

⁸³ On asides and who they are performed for in *The Changeling*, see Nora J. Williams, “‘Cannot I Keep That Secret?’: Editing and Performing Asides in *The Changeling*”, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 34.1 (2016), 29–45.

‘challenge’ to Alonzo publicly (28). Contrastingly, Beatrice-Joanna’s assumption and repetition of the word ‘service’ (26) involve the arranged murder of Alonzo by De Flores, to whom she refers as ‘The ugliest creature / Creation framed for such use’ (43-44).⁸⁴ The gap between these two understandings of ‘service’ is exacerbated during Beatrice-Joanna’s prolonged asides during this scene, one of which Alsemero interrupts to say that ‘you hear not me’ to which she responds that ‘I do especially, sir’ (58). As these characters endlessly mistake and wrongly assume the signifiers of spoken language, the reverberating hypallage across their language instead reveals how they cannot fully understand each other as stable subjects. In doing so, language continually and conflictingly transforms as it passes between different speakers.

This incoherent aesthetic exemplifies the structural frictions that cannot neatly separate the play’s plots, genres or authors. While it is typically described as a domestic tragedy in contemporary anthologies,⁸⁵ Middleton and Rowley play with generic convention, unsettling the neat categorisation of their ‘generically hybrid’ collaboration.⁸⁶ David Nicol and Roberta Barker have charted a history of negative reactions towards *The Changeling*’s multiple plots and resistance to generic expectations.⁸⁷ As Michael Slater argues, the play’s ‘generic instability’ is often attempted to be reconciled by associating it with its mixed authorship; that is, critics and editors associate the castle plot entirely with Middleton the tragedian and the madhouse with Rowley, the clown.⁸⁸ The central figures of generic disruption in the play are all men who appear to belong to a different genre of play and pass between the play’s collaborators: Tomazo is a parody of the early modern revenger, Alibius

⁸⁴ For more on the play’s rhetorical antithesis, see Ann Pasternak Slater, ‘Hypallage, Barley-Break, and *The Changeling*’, *RES*, 34.136 (1983), 429–40.

⁸⁵ By adopting Shakespearean folio conventions, Taylor and Lavagnino categorise *The Changeling* as a tragedy (*The Collected Works*, p. 11). See also Jeremy Lopez, *Constructing the Canon of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), which describes *The Changeling* as the ‘touchstone of the modern anthology’ but privileges ‘Middleton’s tragic mode’ as the ‘victor’ with no attention to Rowley or the generic instability of the play’s genre (p. 89).

⁸⁶ Michelle O’Callaghan, ‘Thomas Middleton and the Early Modern Theatre’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Contemporary Dramatists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 165–80 (p. 173).

⁸⁷ David Nicol and Roberta Barker, ‘Does Beatrice Joanna Have a Subtext?: *The Changeling* on the London Stage’, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 10.1 (2004), 1–43 <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/10-1/barknico.htm>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

⁸⁸ Michael Slater, “‘Shameless Collaboration’: Mixture and the Double Plot of *The Changeling*”, *Renaissance Drama*, 47.1 (2019), 41–71 (p. 50).

belongs to a comedy of cuckoldry, and Alsemero plays a romantic lead forced to be a revenger more straightforwardly than Tomazo but nevertheless remains ambiguous. Tomazo's ineffective revenging largely comes down to his 'ignorance' in whom my wrath should settle' (5.2.5), and ultimately takes no action to further his vengeance despite his claims to be 'satisfied' at the play's conclusion (190). The 'state of ignorance' (5.2.46) Tomazo inhabits throughout the play even leads to ironically comical moments where he contemplates how 'A brother may salute his brother's murderer' (47) to Alonzo's murderer, De Flores.⁸⁹ Alibius's test of his wife's faithfulness constantly veers to the edge of tragedy. The similarities drawn between Isabella's plight and the women of the castle plot make clear the extent to which the narrative teeters towards the same violence that ultimately kills Beatrice-Joanna: 'his injunction / For me enjoying shall be to cut thy throat' (3.4.261-62). Indeed, the revelation in the final scene that Alibius will 'never keep / Scholars that shall be wiser than myself' suggests that he will continue to keep Isabella under strict surveillance rather than resolving the central conflict within their plot (5.2.214-15). These moments of generic disruption are typical of the play's interlocking and interloping plots. Yet the complicated and layered generic tone also frustrates and resists attempts to neatly associate Middleton with tragedy and Rowley with comedy. Their resistance to a generic categorisation enables the structural and generic indistinction upon which the play's central logic depends.

Instead of these interactions and indistinctions between the play's multiple plots being a sign of the play's poor crafting, *The Changeling's* significance lies in its refusal to unpick or distinguish its incongruent parts. Much previous criticism has judged the play through a framework of appraising its aesthetic unity; or as Cyrus Hoy argues, 'how satisfactorily the multiple dramatic visions have fused into a single coherent one'.⁹⁰ Yet these aesthetic appeals to the singular, dramatic vision elide the

⁸⁹ Compare Tomazo's contemplation of revenge with Hamlet's conflict between 'burst[ing] in ignorance' and his drive to 'sweep to [his] revenge' (William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, 4.47, 5.31).

⁹⁰ Cyrus Hoy, 'Critical and Aesthetic Problems of Collaboration in Renaissance Drama', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 19 (1976), 3-6 (p. 6). See also Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), which agrees with Hoy's privileging of a unifying dramatic aesthetic (p. 439) while appearing to hold a generally poor opinion of collaborative drama on the basis that '[u]nity is indeed a rare commodity in co-authored plays' (p. 29).

clashes, contentions, and frustrations that *The Changeling* purposefully and persistently creates. More recently, Nicol has emphasised ‘disunities’ as the play’s dominant aesthetic mode.⁹¹ Gordon McMullan similarly describes the structural and generic ugliness at the heart of the ‘hybrid, multiple, [and] grotesque’ dynamics of the play.⁹² As an example, following Alonzo’s murder Vermandero orders the capture of Franciscus and Antonio who have been disguised in the madhouse plot pursuing Isabella. The command he gives for their imprisonment echoes the grotesque language of ugliness as their capture will ‘either wipe / The stain off clear, or openly discover it’ (4.2.4-15). However, when the courtier Tomazo enters declaring a desire to avenge his brother, Vermandero claims he is ‘set on again’ (17), as if harassed by the mixing of two plots within one scene. When the castle plot intrudes on the madhouse plot, it is figured as an ambivalent stain that refuses to be plainly discovered or wiped away fully. As argued by McMullan, the stain embodies these discourses of ugliness in its movement ‘from object to subject, from the stain to the perceiver of the stain’.⁹³ The characters themselves are concerned about the mobility of ugliness in transferring or spoiling by proximity. Yet the double-bind of the ‘frightful pleasure’ enacted by the madmen’s masque who entertain Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero’s wedding exemplifies the capacity of the ugly to refuse to distinguish its potentially paradoxical components (3.4.281). The interacting and generically hybrid plots come together into one stained whole. Although the comedy and the tragedy are difficult to reconcile entirely, their knotty union represents the aesthetic of discordance that Middleton and Rowley are interested in playing with.

When considering *The Changeling*’s unevenness in tone and structure, I consider the relationship between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores to be one of collaborators. Not only do they conspire together in the death of Alonzo but they also see their embodied selves encroached into and conflated with the other. The structural and generic issues of unequal ugliness that I have discussed above are also staged

⁹¹ Nicol, *Middleton & Rowley*, p. 37.

⁹² Gordon McMullan, ‘*The Changeling* and the Dynamics of Ugliness’, in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 222–35 (p. 222). McMullan’s argument builds on his discussion of collaboration as ‘infection, contamination, compromise’ in *The Politics of Unease*, p. 155.

⁹³ McMullan, ‘*The Changeling* and the Dynamics of Ugliness’, p. 225.

through De Flores. He is variously described as an ‘ominous ill-faced fellow’ (2.1.53), a ‘standing toad-pool’ (58), a ‘scurvy’ (2.2.77), a ‘dog-face’ (18), and a ‘viper’ (3.4.169), among other things. Naomi Baker has shown that representations of ‘unruly corporeality’ ascribed to the ugly body outline a routine failure ‘to maintain a discrete, clearly defined identity’.⁹⁴ So, when the ugly De Flores is considered a dangerous ‘pest-house’ (5.2.12), where ‘the very sight of him is poison’ (4.2.99), his ugliness refuses to be contained in a single body and threatens to move outward. The creeping porosity of ugliness is illustrated in the much-discussed scene where De Flores picks up a glove that Beatrice-Joanna has dropped as an ironic token of her love and disgust. Fearing that the glove, acting as an extension of her skin, now exposes her to that ‘thing most loathed’, she throws away her second glove (2.1.72).⁹⁵ She curses him to use the gloves to ‘draw thine own skin off with’ (1.1.234). Beatrice-Joanna imagines the flaying of De Flores to prevent him from making contact with her body, reviling the infectious stain of his ugliness. The grotesque imagery of skin, however, comes to symbolise the two’s intertwined and unruly bodies. De Flores notes how Beatrice-Joanna would ‘rather wear my pelt tanned / In a pair of dancing pumps’ (236-37). He then ‘thrust[s]’ his fingers into the glove’s sexualised ‘sockets’ (237-38). De Flores displays a contradictory impulse to dominate and also be violently dominated by Beatrice-Joanna through these interactions with her leather gloves. If, as Jan Zysk argues, the play’s tragedy ‘stems from the fact that [the] body’s semiotic and somatic contours are manipulated at will and thus notoriously hard to pin down’, then De Flores’s desire to be objectified and subjected in this instance also signals his increasingly masochistic desire to be in or on the same body as his mistress.⁹⁶ As De Flores works in Beatrice-Joanna’s service through the play, she begins to mirror his ‘swine-deformity’ and becomes morally, if not physically, ugly (2.1.43). Despite Beatrice-Joanna’s initial repulsion, a poison-like transference still occurs between the

⁹⁴ Naomi Baker, *Plain Ugly: The Unattractive Body in Early Modern Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 2. For more on the discontinuity between behaviour and appearance in this play, see Cole Jeffrey, “‘Here’s Beauty Changed to Ugly Whoredom’: Calvinist Theology and Neoplatonic Aesthetics in *The Changeling*”, *Renaissance Drama*, 47.1 (2019), 21–39.

⁹⁵ See Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, ‘Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe’, *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 114–32 (pp. 127–28); Patricia Cahill, ‘The Play of Skin in *The Changeling*’, *postmedieval*, 3.4 (2012), 391–406. Issues of masculinity and skin are developed further in Chapter Two.

⁹⁶ Jay Zysk, ‘Relics and Unreliable Bodies in *The Changeling*’, *ELR*, 45.3 (2015), 400–424 (p. 400).

two. De Flores, as an ugly stain whose mobility threatens to cross over the defined boundaries between bodies reflects the ugliness of the play's aesthetic that McMullan argues has 'infect[ed] *The Changeling* at the level of authorship'.⁹⁷ In a reversal of the Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores dynamic where the staining character is the dominant De Flores, the stain on the play's dramatic unity and coherence is frequently associated with Rowley and his plot of comic fools, somehow lessening the tragedy of aristocratic lust and violence of the Alicante plot typically ascribed to Middleton.

The frustrated legibility of the body is continually evoked to emphasise the difficulty with which characters in *The Changeling* can actually read and understand each other. When Beatrice-Joanna asserts that the 'eyes are sentinels unto our judgements' (1.1.72-73), she signals a deep mistrust of the body's external signifiers:

But they are rash sometimes, and tell us wonders
Of common things, which when our judgements find,
They can then check the eyes, and call them blind. (74-76)

The readability of these 'common things' is always gendered. The ugly male body, as Baker suggests, maintains a 'misleading veneer, concealing rather than revealing the nature of the self within'.⁹⁸ Beatrice-Joanna says that the '[h]ardness' of De Flores's face 'argues service, resolution, manhood' (2.2.93-94). Although she is likely lying to flatter De Flores into her service, her words speak to an underlying assumption that ugly subjects were not defined by their ambiguously readable bodies. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton upholds this belief in the potential for change and self-assertion—'Thou art lame of Body, deformed to the eye, yet this hinders not but that thou maist be a good, a wise, upright honest man'.⁹⁹ De Flores shows awareness that his body, through difficult to read, is not the true barrier to social advancement as his 'foul chops / May come into favour one day 'mongst his fellows' (2.1.85-86). The opacity of women's bodies, however, generates a deeper mistrust. De Flores talks about the 'slimy and dishonest eye[s]' of deceitful women (2.1.45), while Beatrice-Joanna's murderous actions lead to Alsemero's claim that she is 'changed / To ugly

⁹⁷ McMullan, 'Dynamics of Ugliness', p. 229.

⁹⁸ Baker, *Plain Ugly*, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 3 vols (Oxford: John Lichfield and James Short for Henry Cripps, 1621), II, p. 386.

whoredom' (5.3.198).¹⁰⁰ While their outward appearances both conceal, Beatrice-Joanna's beauty is viewed as particularly difficult to comprehend. The frustrated desire to read these bodies covered with thick, deceptive surfaces leads to Alsemero's violent threat that he shall 'all demolish, and seek out truth within' Beatrice-Joanna (5.2.36). It is important to remember that Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores's collaboration, which renders their bodies as indistinct objects of scrutiny, is not mutual, instead playing with the unequal and shifting relationships of power between the two.

Through the figure of the conscience, *The Changeling* most explicitly addresses the unequal forcing of wills and agency between its characters. Camille Wells Slight argues that the early modern conscience was shaped by social and cultural forces so any 'genuine private reality' the self may hold could only be known to others 'mediated through misinterpretable and imitable signs'.¹⁰¹ Beatrice-Joanna assumes De Flores will be suited to the deed of murdering Alonzo as '[b]lood-guiltiness becomes a fouler visage' (2.2.40). However, this is shown to be demonstrably more ambiguous when the act reveals her as or transforms her into 'a woman dipped in blood' (3.4.129). Yet the parallels drawn between De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna do not emphasise their similarity. Rather, the ugliness of the two is shown to uncomfortably blur together in the manner that 'the ugly consumes all, thereby making identical that which is ostensibly differentiated'.¹⁰² After murdering Alonzo on her command, De Flores calls for Beatrice-Joanna to 'Look but into your conscience; read me there. / 'Tis a true book; you'll find me there your equal' (3.4.135-36). Appearing seven times in the text of the play, the conscience too becomes a grotesque means by which selves are rendered indistinct. Beatrice-Joanna is warned that the money she offers De Flores for his service will 'hardly buy a capcase for one's conscience, though, / To keep it from the worm' (46-47). The guilt of the act is shared

¹⁰⁰ Compare with Bosola berating the Old Lady for her 'scurvy face-physicke' in John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, in *The Works of John Webster: An Old Spelling Critical Edition*, ed. by David Gunby, David Carnegie, Anthony Hammond, and Doreen DelVecchio, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), I, 2.1.23.

¹⁰¹ Camille Wells Slight, 'Notaries, Sponges, and Looking-Glasses: Conscience in Early Modern England', *ELR*, 28.2 (1998), 231-46 (p. 238). For example of plays that invoke the externality of the conscience, see how Hamlet 'observes' his uncle's reaction to *The Mousetrap* (*Hamlet*, 8.492-93); and the Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi* who describes his guilty conscience as looking into 'Fish-ponds, in my Garden' (5.5.4-7).

¹⁰² McMullan, 'Dynamics of Ugliness', p. 231.

between the two, but De Flores is the one intruding into the coffin-like case of her mind within which she may try to enclose her guilt. When the ghost of Alonzo walks across the stage in the final act, De Flores dismisses its presence as a 'mist of conscience' (5.1.60). Alonzo's ghost is a personified, ugly stain on the stage that embodies the indistinct, wandering portrayal of conscience in *The Changeling*. Yet the dismissal of the spectral Alonzo as a mere 'mist' compared with the forceful 'worm' boring into Beatrice-Joanna reveals that these indistinctions are not created passively but enable a relation of power where De Flores can possess her entirely. While the two are supposedly sharing a conscience, it is De Flores who becomes the dominant collaborator. By purposefully exploiting their shared guilt, De Flores can exploit their increasingly conflated embodied selves to subjugate and manipulate his mistress, which leads to her eventual sexual assault (4.1.1-4). The solidity of their bodies nevertheless resists a complete merging of multiple subjects into a discrete whole, which suggests that the unity of collaborators discussed earlier in this chapter might be read as much more ambiguous.

Yet it is Alsemero that remains the play's conceptually central character through his resistance to changeability. Like Beatrice-Joanna, at his first entrance he too first appears as virginal and honest. Jasperino is shocked that his friend kisses Beatrice-Joanna upon greeting her: 'Where learnt he this? And does it perfectly too; in my conscience he ne'er rehearsed it before' (1.1.60-61). Alsemero's similar claim that this is his 'first sight of woman' (5.3.12) is later undercut by his closet containing the virginity test that he insists 'ne'er missed, sir, / Upon a virgin' (4.2.140). The fraudulent virginity that Alsemero insists upon, which even close friends believe in, highlights his emphasis on the visible legibility of the body and not his feelings of a 'hidden malady' that he does not understand (1.1.24). His assertion that 'Modesty's shrine is set in [Beatrice-Joanna's] forehead' is immediately turned ambivalent when he admits that he 'cannot be too sure, though' (4.2.126-127). Despite his own body reading differently from his action, he insists that Beatrice-Joanna's 'black mask' (5.2.3) covers something 'so seeming bottomless' (5). Alsemero's own changeability is projected and displaced onto the more fluid female body. His final lines at the play's conclusion demonstrate the extent to which this embodied instability has suffused the

play. Over the body of his murdered daughter and her murderer, Vermandero is urged by Alsemero to forget and smile again:

Sir, you have yet a son's duty living;
Please you accept it. Let that sorrow
As it goes from your eye, go from your heart;
Man and his sorrow at the grave must part. (5.3.216-19)

The advice to leave all negative emotions here at the conclusion appeals to a darkly tragicomic sense of frustrated resolution. The emotional and moral stain left on stage at the end of the play is urged to be 'blotted out' by Alsemero (182). The evidence suggests that this final scene was penned primarily by Rowley, whose propensity for clowning and physical humour may clash with our expectations of who should write the final lines spoken by the leading male of the castle plot.¹⁰³ Drawing a parallel between the kinds of indistinction that surround Alsemero and Rowley in the final scene can help to illuminate the blurring of selves, and of collaborators, occurring throughout the play.

The Changeling ends with a series of revelations that successively reveals the changeability of its characters, and the play's own hybrid genre and authorship. The stains and indistinction which refract throughout the play bring the problems of collaboration to their dramatic resolution. Emerging wounded from the closet, Beatrice-Joanna's moral ugliness is finally revealed. Dying, she denounces her own body as an infectious stain:

O come not near me, sir. I shall defile you.
I am that of your blood was taken from you
For your better health. Look no more upon't,
But cast it to the ground regardlessly;
Let the common sewer take it from distinction. (5.3.149-53)

The extended metaphor of phlebotomy and purgation transforms the distinct body of Beatrice-Joanna into a corrupted, liquid state.¹⁰⁴ However, after Beatrice-Joanna's

¹⁰³ For a reading of Rowley's work in tragedy, see Nicol, *Middleton and Rowley*, pp. 37-47, and "My little what shall I call thee": Reinventing the Rape Tragedy in William Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust*, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 19 (2006), 175-193.

¹⁰⁴ See Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, pp. 64-112.

death (179), a significant amount of lines give space to other characters' reconciliations and descriptions of their own 'changes'. In these acts of identifying with their changes, all of the characters remaining alive on stage *do* distinguish themselves. Tomazo transforms from an 'ignorant wrath / To a knowing friendship (202); Antonio 'was changed too, from a little ass as I was, to a great fool as I am' (204-05); and Franciscus identifies with Antonio through their shared disguise plot 'from a little wit to be stark mad, / Almost for the same purpose' (208-09). These changed identities are identified by their relation to the other but each affirms a solid category of personhood. Significantly unlike Beatrice-Joanna and Isabella, Alsemero is allowed to remain unchanged by the play's end. He refers to himself as a 'supposed husband' referring to the bed-trick played on him using Diaphanta as 'changed embraces / With wantonness' (200-01). Whereas the duplicitous Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores lie dead and the characters of the madhouse plot announce that they have changed, Alsemero privileges his stasis—'innocence is quit / By proclamation, and may joy again' (185-86). Where the other characters can distinguish themselves through the web of interpersonal relations, Alsemero maintains the solidity of his body in terms that deny the influence of others upon his own. His reference to the 'opacous body' of the moon serves to highlight his resistance to revelation, compared to the other narratives of transformation at play in the rest of the scene (196). Middleton and Rowley's play highlights how characters mix and exploit each other to ultimately influence a change in the other's self. This final refusal of change in the end scene represents an ambivalent discomfort with the capacity of the interpersonal to define Alsemero's character. As the final assertion that 'all griefs are reconciled' is made by Alsemero (Epilogue, l. 8), it continues to evoke this uncomfortable mixture as these lines are spoken over the corpses of Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores. The changeability at the heart of Middleton and Rowley's play invokes a way of looking double at collaboration—being a necessary way to make the contours of individual selves distinct while also containing a dangerous capacity for exploitation or being subsumed by the other. The ugliness that repeatedly emerges as a framework in which interactions between individuals occur refuses to comfortably be reconciled into a whole, and neither should the uncomfortable structural tensions that drive the

dynamism of *The Changeling* be entirely distinguished lest the ugly aesthetic of the play risk being overly simplified.

In resisting easy narratives about collaboration and authorship, namely of the masterly, singular dramatic vision, Middleton and Rowley navigate how plurality as a thematic and structural motif is inherently messy and deceptive. Of course, using *The Changeling* to read the parallels between mixed authorship and thematic mixing is not to suggest the relationship between Middleton and Rowley can be defined through this play alone. Rather it presents an aesthetic of collaboration that revels in mixture and ugliness to an extent that troubles a unified reading of dramatic collaboration. As Slater argues, there is ‘no compelling basis to disentangle [Middleton and Rowley’s] respective shares’ despite evidence which can suggest to us the division of authorship.¹⁰⁵ As with the frequent bracketing of Middleton and Rowley together on their dramatic quartos, *The Changeling* proposes mixture as a method to think about the interactions between characters that cannot be pulled apart. In a very different manner from Middleton’s relationship with Dekker, the specific case of *The Changeling* provides a negative view of power which demonstrates how moments of interaction, interchange, and collaboration always entail inequality. The indeterminacy, ambiguity, and discomfort about the extending of selves in Middleton and Rowley’s play suggest a kind of exploitation at the heart of collaboration. Even now, the disparaging of the madhouse plot, and indeed any part of the play which is assumed to be related to Rowley’s presence and influence on an otherwise ‘Middletonian text’, continues.

Conclusion

By considering Middleton’s representations and discussions of collaboration, I have argued that the practices of shared authorship sit alongside other interactions between bodies, and that Middleton’s collaborations especially emphasise the distinctions and collisions between bodies rather than subsuming them into a unified whole. Middleton’s earlier collaborations with Dekker emphasise the optimistic ethics of communal labour, even as these collective sympathies invoke hierarchies of livery

¹⁰⁵ Slater, ‘Shameless Collaboration’, p. 71.

companies and distinctions between skilled and unskilled labour. The categories of the individual ‘poet’ and ‘painter’ to describe authorship are destabilised in favour of a mode of textual production that is inherently social and unstable. While emphasising the role of style and skill in distinguishing individual writers, Middleton and Dekker’s close collaborations demonstrate how sympathy and interpersonal contact can engender and reinforce authorial identities. Middleton and Rowley’s representation of negative interaction in *The Changeling* is deeply interested and invested in the ugly aesthetics arising from the clash between distinct embodied selves. The play presents the legibility of the embodied self as a problem for collaborators, both in the sense of writers working together who mix their identities and of conspirators who are explicitly invested in concealing their collaboration. But, as my exploration of Middleton’s representations of collaboration has shown, these interactions are never entirely mutual. The invocation of mutuality serves to confirm already existing assumptions; see how the modern critical reception of Middleton and Rowley’s partnership frequently refers to their collaboration as mutual while actually prioritising the role and contributions of Middleton.¹⁰⁶ The parasitic, exploitative descriptions of Middleton as the socially climbing, collaborator I have discussed earlier would appear to hold for his relationship with Rowley. Yet despite Dekker and Middleton’s sympathies for a more equal collaboration through the invocation of craft and fellowship, this relationship too invokes the dissimilarities between the two at different stages of their respective careers. Middleton was still learning the craft of writing and carving out a reputation for himself in the theatre during these early collaborative texts, and so inherently subjugates himself as novice to Dekker’s experience. These earlier points of collaboration provided a plural model of writing and representing authorship that we can see develop into the uncomfortable kinds of interpersonal relations at play in *The Changeling*.

Through these constructions of his collaborative authorial persona, Middleton stands as a significant contrast to the Jonsonian style of individualism traditionally associated with literary authorship. The claims that Taylor and Lavagnino’s *Collected Works* will explore the social modes of textual production and the ‘general authorial

¹⁰⁶ Nicol provides a corrective to this tendency throughout *Middleton & Rowley*.

interpenetration characteristic of Middleton et al.’ are significant to presenting the individual Middleton as continually gesturing towards his collaborations, interactions, and exchanges.¹⁰⁷ While recent criticism frequently argues against this ‘canonical yardstick’ applied to Middleton as an early modern dramatist, the frequency and extent of Middleton’s collaboration define his canonical work as something different.¹⁰⁸ Peter Kirwan describes Middleton as a ‘motif or meme in his own book, acting as a link rather than a tyrannical bordering presence’.¹⁰⁹ At the heart of the attempts to bound Middleton in terms of canonicity that insist on an individual author to tie the works together is the contradiction that his practice and writing continually gesture to his interactions with other writers, texts, and, as will be explored through this thesis, with objects and spaces. But, then, how should one describe Middleton’s distinctive persona beyond simply describing him as a collaborator? I return to Langbaine’s description of Middleton as ivy, and its attendant associations of creeping tendrils and parasitic interdependence. Through discussing the two long-term writing partnerships that he has engaged in, Middleton appears keenly aware of and invested in playing with the unequal relationships and resistance to unity that accompany his collaborations. Middleton’s collaborations reveal a distinctive interest in exploring difference, that being the irreconcilable disparities between collaborators or the contradictions of defining a bounded individual who is constituted by exchange, influence and intersubjective contact. Within Middleton’s collaborations, the individual remains at the centre but is continually gesturing towards, influenced by, and interacting with the world within which it is embedded. The potential for adapting, incorporating, and even actively resisting the influence of the other at these points of contact is exploited within the canon of Middleton et al.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, ‘End of Editing’, p. 142.

¹⁰⁸ Andy Kesson, ‘Shakespeare as Minor Dramatist’, *Before Shakespeare*, 2019 <<https://beforeshakespeare.com/2019/06/10/shakespeare-as-minor-dramatist/>> [accessed 15 January 2020].

¹⁰⁹ Peter Kirwan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Apocrypha: Negotiating the Boundaries of the Dramatic Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 185.

Section Two: Assembled Subjects

Chapter Two: Men of Parts: Superficial Masculinities and Material Surfaces

In Middleton's poetic satire *Microcynicon: Six Snarling Satires* (1599), the prodigal Zodon adopts a grandiose style of masculine exhibitionism:

Suit upon suit, satin too too base,—
Velvet, laid on with gold or silver lace,
A mean man doth become, but he must ride
In cloth of finèd gold, and by his side
Two footmen at the least, with choice of steeds,
Attirèd when he rides in gorgeous weeds. (ll. 2.17-22)

Rather than wearing clothes that 'become' his social position (19), Zodon chooses to display himself 'triumphing [...] In pure white satin' (24-25). His elaborate clothing ironically recalls the elaborate costumes of the annual Lord Mayor's 'progress day' (26). His expensive 'finèd gold' fabrics (20) make his body appear 'gilded o'er' like the chariot that he paints over in gold (24). This parodic construction of surface reveals Zodon to be one of the fashionable young gallants exploiting the emerging commodity culture of the London marketplace, using clothing, accessories, and other exchangeable objects to assemble new embodied and gendered selves.¹ However, as Middleton's satire makes clear, these constructed surfaces were not solely products of self-fashioning. Despite, or even because of, Zodon's extravagant clothes, his status as the 'base born issue of a baser sire' is made clear (33). The tackiness of Zodon's surficial and prosthetic assembly of masculinity ostensibly satirises the discontinuity between his outward presentation and social position. While the decoration of Zodon's body is ridiculed in *Microcynicon*, the body as a surface upon which gendered identities were produced is a notion to which Middleton continually returns.

This chapter considers how Middleton stages these surficial masculine fictions as produced by a social reality where interpersonal contact and exchange between male bodies was becoming increasingly commodified and contested. Throughout Middleton's literary works, masculinities are repeatedly shown to be mutually

¹ For a critical overview of the affordances of early modern material culture for identity formation, see Joyce de Vries, 'Fashioning the Self in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Consumption, and Material Culture', *Journal of Women's History*, 23.4 (2011), 187–97.

constituted between bodies and the material world. Recent criticism has done much to articulate how materiality and material culture conferred masculinities in the early modern period.² As Jennifer C. Vaught has discussed, ‘[c]lothing or other bodily ornaments were focal markers of various kinds of masculinity in the Renaissance and reflected shifts in perceptions of acceptable gender roles’.³ Yet while these studies may refer to Middletonian plays, they do not pay sustained attention to the role his irony plays in this contingency of identity and how this reflects on the broader assembled construction of masculinities. Middleton’s attention to the gap between appearance and reality is reflected in his favoured dramatic styles of extremity—‘burlesque, parody, travesty and other low forms of carnivalesque’.⁴ Further, Middleton’s material interests have yet to fully be considered in light of the recent surge in surface studies of the early modern period that, as Elizabeth Oakley-Brown and Kevin Killeen argue, reads the Renaissance as ‘all surface, decorative, gilded, cosmetic’.⁵ My concern with Middleton’s masculine surfaces, therefore, lies in the visible bodily exteriors, the assembling and layering of materials onto those surfaces, and the susceptibility of such surfaces to the outer world they face. Attending to these surfaces as points of contention and interaction will build on critics of early modern masculinities such as Mark Breitenberg, Bruce Smith, Alexandra Shepard and Will Fisher. These critics have developed Judith Butler’s theory of gendered embodiment, which suggests the ways that gender and the body come into being as a constant process—‘the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over*

² See David Kutcha, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550-1850* (London: University of California Press, 2002), which traces the development of the suit as part of a wider political project of articulating masculinity in terms of political, moral, and economic authority emerging in the seventeenth century; Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, which explores how masculinity comes into being and gains significance by modifying the body with prosthetic parts such as the beard and the codpiece; and Eleanor Rycroft, *Facial Hair and the Performance of Early Modern Masculinity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), which considers how ideologies of bearded masculinity were constructed and articulated in relation to the early modern stage.

³ Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion*, p. 79.

⁴ O’Callaghan, *Thomas Middleton, Renaissance Dramatist*, p. 2.

⁵ Elizabeth Oakley-Brown and Kevin Killeen, ‘Introduction: Scrutinizing Surfaces in Early Modern Thought’, *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, 8 (2017), para. 2
<<https://www.northernrenaissance.org/introduction-scrutinizing-surfaces-in-early-modern-thought/>>
[accessed 20 June 2022]. For further reading on surfaces in the early modern period, see Hazard, *Elizabethan Silent Language*, pp. 77–108, which considers the graphic and non-verbal ways that objects signify alongside written and oral language. For a broader, transhistorical study of human-surface interactions, see Joseph A. Amato, *Surfaces: A History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013).

time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface'.⁶ Situating Middleton's burlesque treatment of masculinity at the outermost boundaries of the body will illuminate how his assembled, layered, and connected constructions of manhood operate in the theatrical language of bodily surfaces and exteriority.

Taking the surface as the site of contact, exchange, and representation, I will explore Middleton's theatrical interrogation and parody of masculinities that privilege style, appearance, and the exterior. Male identities were constructed at the surface on the early modern stage by way of costumes, props, gestures, and other prosthetic effects which mapped onto but did not necessarily follow on from the body of the actor. This chapter begins by exploring this layering of masculinity by attending to the uses of prosthetic beards in the plays of the Children of Paul's, for whom Middleton wrote many city comedies early in his career. By considering how all adult masculinities performed in the Children of Paul's plays were visually prosthetic, I locate Middleton in a metatheatrical culture that exploited the flexible representational strategies of male adolescence on stage. I then move to Middleton's developing engagement with masculine superficiality through clothing and fashion. Taking *Michaelmas Term* (1604) and *Your Five Gallants* (c. 1606-07) as exemplary case studies, I consider the satires of superficial gallantry in Middleton's comic theatre. In the chapter's concluding section, I address how male honour and reputation were made legible on the body beneath the clothes in two plays written for the Prince Charles' Men—*A Fair Quarrel* (1616) written with William Rowley and *The Nice Valour; or, The Passionate Madman* (1622).⁷ Through the languages of wounding and bruising at work in these plays, Middleton confronts and mediates the practices and representations of interpersonal male violence through the marking of skin. This chapter reflects on the layered and interdependent surfaces that shape the bodies at the centre of Middleton's worlds of masculine superficiality. By exploring the simultaneous assembly and vulnerability of male identity produced at the body's

⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 10. Significant works for early modern masculinity studies that builds on Butler's emphasis on gender as being continually materialised include Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*; Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*; and Fisher, *Materializing Gender*.

⁷ Gary Taylor argues that the internal evidence of *The Nice Valour* points to this play as performed by the Prince Charles's Men and presents the critical debate around the play's possible co-authorship with John Fletcher in 'Canon and Chronology', pp. 423–27.

exteriors, I shall illustrate how Middleton's significant interest in the language and matter of surfaces stages masculinities that are dynamically constituted with and against the surfaces of the world they inhabit.

1. Performing Metatheatre and Manhood in the Children of Paul's Repertory

Middleton's early writing for the theatrical stage largely consisted of city comedies performed for one company of boy actors, the Children of Paul's. Between 1603 and 1608, Middleton wrote six plays for the company, essentially becoming their principal playwright for the company's later years.⁸ These plays include *The Phoenix* (1603-4), *Michaelmas Term*, *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605), *A Mad World, My Masters* (1605) and *The Puritan Widow* (1606), and *The Patient Man* and *The Honest Whore* (1604) written with Thomas Dekker. Andrew Gurr argues that Middleton was the company's 'chief agent in the turn to citizen interests' in the repertory of the Children of Paul's.⁹ Throughout these city comedies, masculinity is repeatedly troped as something that can be worn, cast off, and moulded through costume, props, and other objects layered onto the body of male characters as well as the adolescent boys performing in the theatre. The use of prosthetic facial hair in the plays of children's companies at once produced the theatrical fiction of adult manhood and highlighted the boy player's own actual and cultural beardlessness. This beardlessness was frequently played with through the metatheatrical conventions deployed in the Children of Paul's repertory. By tracing the burlesque uses of prosthetic beards in Middleton's plays in these early city comedies, I explore how this assembling of masculinity onto the body of the boy player is illustrative of his developing interest in the visual, material, and corporeal signifiers that constituted age, degree, and masculinity.

Within the theatre of the children's companies such as the Children of Paul's, the youthful masculinity of the adolescent players offered a pliable surface onto which

⁸ For further studies of the company and their repertoire, see Reavley Gair, *The Children of Paul's: The Story of a Theatre Company, 1553-1608* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), and Roger Bowers, 'The Playhouse of the Choristers of Paul's, c. 1575-1608', *Theatre Notebook*, 54 (2000), 70-85.

⁹ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 342.

character types of various ages would be discursively or materially assembled. Recent criticism on the boy player has considered how adolescent boys performing in such companies accumulated a certain gendered elasticity.¹⁰ In Harry R. McCarthy's study of the boy players of the Children of the Queen's Revels, the age of the boys 'situat[ed] both actor and character on the ever-oscillating continuum between subordinate youth and authoritative manhood: the continuum, that is, of early modern youth'.¹¹ Edel Lamb similarly notes how the 'changing body of the boy cannot indicate a definitive gender identity; it is always in transition'.¹² Such descriptions of boyhood echo the contemporary portrayals of youthful masculinities that resisted easy categorisation. The androgyny of the disguised Viola-as-Cesario in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601-02) is attributed to their boyish youthfulness, and Cesario is considered to be 'Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy' and as 'the standing water, between boy and man' (1.5.128-30). Importantly, distinctions along these spectrums of age were not made between ungendered children and adults but between young boys and adult men through a language of indistinction and transition.

Male character types were built around the culturally elastic, in-between adolescent bodies of the players, which were often incorporated into the plays themselves. In the Induction of John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (1599), the principal characters perform a mock-rehearsal being 'ignorant in what mould we must cast our Actors', suggesting that the variously gendered theatrical characters will 'frame [their] exterior shape' around the body of the young players.¹³ This characterisation is typical of broader notions of youth as a time when the body and

¹⁰ See Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Theorizing Age and Gender: Bly's Boys, Feminism, and Maturity Masculinity', in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, ed. by Judith Kegan Gardiner (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 90–118, asks what it meant to act both an age and gender; Edel Lamb, *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies (1599-1613)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), explores how age and childhood were broadly considered in the performances of boy players; and Blaine Greteman, 'Coming of Age on Stage: Jonson's *Epicoene* and the Politics of Childhood in Early Stuart England', *ELH*, 79.1 (2012), 135–60, who explores the instability of child actor's bodies that resists fixed gender categories.

¹¹ Harry R. McCarthy, 'Men in the Making: Youth, the Repertory, and the "children" of the Queen's Revels, 1609-13', *ELH*, 85.3 (2018), 599–629 (p. 622).

¹² Edel Lamb, 'Becoming Men: The Child Player in Jonson's *Epicoene*', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 15.2, 175–93 (p. 30).

¹³ John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida* (London: [R. Bradock] for Matthew Lownes and Thomas Fisher, 1602), sig. A3r.

mind were particularly receptive to the material worlds with which they interacted. As Richard Brathwaite suggests, boys were considered to be ‘the *Philosophers rasa tabula* [...] apt to receive any good impressure’.¹⁴ This culturally-constructed blankness was, of course, a social fiction that ignores the various ways in which adolescent boys were gendered by the world around them, and rather gestures towards the boys’ lack of manhood in social, sexual and material terms. Yet this readiness to be inscribed is continually troped in the early modern theatre. Plays frequently attempted to draw their audience’s attention to the material objects and props used to signify adult manhood on these boys. The production of gendered character on the body of the boy player was effectively ‘prosthetic’ signified by ‘the addition (or subtraction) of detachable (or growable/cuttable) parts’.¹⁵ Adult masculinities in the theatres were largely effected by this material assembling of bodies, props, and objects, such as doublets, cloaks, beards, wigs and codpieces, which outwardly conferred masculinity. This kind of assembling is exemplified by William Cricket of the anonymous *Wily Beguiled* (1606) who draws attention to his masculine features while emphasising the parts assembled to form a ‘proper man’—‘a sweet face, a fine beard, comely corps, And a Carowsing Codpeece’.¹⁶ Cricket’s portrait of manhood gestures toward the body of the boy playing him whose beard and codpiece, as signs of sexual maturity, highlighted the gendered difference between the performing boy and the older character. The material signifiers of manliness worn by the boy player transform into the image of a ‘proper man’ through this materialisation even as the metatheatrical gestures of the play reveal that image of manhood to be a surface effect of material objects.

The metatheatrical possibilities of prosthetic facial hair are commonly exploited across the Children of Paul’s plays. Will Fisher, Mark Johnston and Eleanor Rycroft’s work on early modern facial hair include many examples of the beards used in the repertory of the Children of Paul’s.¹⁷ The wider culture of the children’s

¹⁴ Brathwaite, *The English Gentleman*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 208.

¹⁶ *Wily Beguilde* (London: H[umphrey] L[ownes] for Clement Knight, 1606), sig. G1v.

¹⁷ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, pp. 83–129; Mark Albert Johnston, *Beard Fetish in Early Modern England: Sex, Gender, and Registers of Value* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 103–58; Rycroft, *Facial Hair*, pp. 23–64.

companies generally ‘invit[ed] audiences to be self-aware about the stage pictures being put before them’, and to see such stage props as theatrical fictions layered over the body of the players. Prosthetic beards were closely associated with ‘tropes of subversion, transgression, and rebellion in early modern texts’, frequently deployed in plots centring on a disguise or disguises.¹⁸ In the Children of Paul’s especially, beards that aimed to disguise characters also directed attention to the youthfulness of the performers, who, whether or not they actually had facial hair, maintained a cultural beardlessness along a spectrum of age. When Balurdo enters the stage ‘with a beard, halfe on, halfe off’ in Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (1601), he draws attention to the performance of bearded masculinity by suggesting his beard was haphazardly stuck on in the theatre’s tiring house—‘one tolde me that my wit was balde [...] the tiring man hath not glewd on my beard halfe fast, enough. Gods bores, it wil not stick to fal off’.¹⁹ In John Lyly’s *Midas* (1590), the titular king’s golden beard takes centre stage in the comic sub-plot. Once the king’s ‘badge of hair’ is shaved off, the golden beard is then repeatedly fought over and exchanged between the barber Motto and the Pages.²⁰ The prosthetic beard in these plays discloses the artificiality of the bearded masculinity assembled onto the adolescent performers even as it constituted that masculinity. The false beard embodies Jonathan Gil Harris’s description of the power of stage properties to ‘potentially disrupt even as they foster illusion’.²¹ The theatrical possibilities afforded by the youthful contours of the boy player’s body frequently address the beard as a site of visual doublings where the performance of bearded manhood, and as the performers prosthetically transformed into such men on stage, are simultaneously present.

Middleton persistently exploits this burlesque metatheatre that takes the false beard as a site of play and disruption. When he effectively became the company’s principal playwright, he built on the metatheatrical conventions that the previously central playwrights, Lyly and Marston, had developed within the company’s repertory.

¹⁸ Rycroft, *Facial Hair*, p. 46.

¹⁹ John Marston, *Antonio’s Revenge* (London: [R. Bradock] for Thomas Fisher, 1602), sig. C3v.

²⁰ John Lyly, *Midas* (London: Thomas Scarlet for J[ohn] B[roome], 1592), sig. C3v. See also Johnston, *Beard Fetish*, pp. 103–58, which discusses this plot in depth.

²¹ Jonathan Gil Harris, ‘Shakespeare’s Hair: Staging the Object of Material Culture’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52.4 (2001), 479–91 (p. 490).

In *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605), the young Theodorus Witgood is described as having a ‘thrum-chinned face’; or, that his facial hair is hanging like loose, unwoven threads on his face (4.3.9).²² His prodigality is suggested by his thin and slack facial hair that is far from the image of a full and proper beard. Witgood’s facial hair also appears to look like fabric and so seemingly artificial and prosthetic, echoing the attachment of prosthetic beards with string onto the actor’s face.²³ These tropes are also staged in Middleton’s earliest play for the company *The Phoenix* in the journey of the disguised prince Phoenix.²⁴ Reavely Gair argues that this ‘largely nostalgic’ Middleton play sought to remind its audiences of the company’s previous performances, some of which I have glossed above, that included the comedy of false beards.²⁵ In the play, the corrupt Justice Falso maintains a gang of criminals who wear false beards to commit robberies. However, when his men enter the stage, they echo Balurdo’s hastily applied facial hair when they ‘*tumbl[e] in, in false beards*’ (10.9 SD). The thieves claim to ‘forget our beards’ were still stuck on (18). When they forget to remove their false facial hair, Falso fails to recognize them. He states that his men would ‘scorn to have beards’ (17), rendering the beard as simultaneously a flimsy and total disguise. Ironically, Falso later falsely accuses a constable of disguising himself—‘I see through thy false beard, thou mid-wind-chined rascal!’ (73-74). The prosthetic beard is at once too real, obscuring the identity of the wearer, while also remaining completely transparent for certain characters and audiences.

As Middleton enshrined city comedy as his main dramatic output for the company, the visual ambiguity of the false beard returns in *A Mad World, My Masters*. The play’s main plot concerns a masculine conflict between older and younger generations. Dick Follywit is characterised by his grandfather, Sir Bounteous Progress, as an ‘*Imberbis iuvenis* [a beardless youth]’ (2.1.138). Follywit’s money has been withdrawn by Bounteous Progress owing to his immoderate prodigality, which his

²² See ‘thrum, n.2.’, in *Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <www.oed.com/view/Entry/201432> [accessed 20 May 2020].

²³ See the stage direction calling for Rafe Roister and Tom Tosspot to enter with ‘a night Cap because the strings of the beards may not be seen’ in Ulpian Fulwell, *A Pleasant Enterlude, Intitled, Like Will to Like* (London: Edward Allde, 1587), sig. D4v.

²⁴ Disguised ruler plays recur throughout the Children of Paul’s repertory. For other examples, see Lording Barry’s *The Family of Love* (1605) and Marston’s *The Fawn* (1605).

²⁵ Gair, *The Children of Paul’s*, p. 153.

grandfather associates with his juvenile beardlessness. Disguising himself ‘like a lord’ (1.1.176), Follywit becomes the foppish Lord Owemuch using ‘A French ruff, a thin beard, and a strong perfume’ in a multisensory disguise (78). Middleton engages in what Will Fisher calls a ‘boy/man transvestism’ as the young Follywit self-consciously styles himself in the guise of adult manhood.²⁶ But his disguise also displays masculinities arranged across a spectrum of age, class and nationality.²⁷ The thinly-bearded Lord Owemuch disguise stages a highly affected style of French bearded manhood, which is then layered over the body of the youthful Follywit and the adolescent boy player. The boy/man transformation mediated by the prosthetic beard relies on the visible layering of a youth’s body with prosthetics, and also works with the clothing and perfume used for the disguise. The beardedness of the Owemuch disguise is essential in not only disguising Follywit’s identity but also his beardlessness that is culturally inscribed upon his youthful body. Middleton’s metatheatrical burlesque of beardedness plays on the self-consciously prosthetic nature of disguise to suggest that the false beard is both essential and disruptive for these performances of adult masculinity.

Yet Follywit’s beardlessness is not neatly contrasted against bearded masculinity. As Victoria Sparey argues, beardlessness in male adolescence could indicate ‘awaited beards’ along a broader continuum of age that promised ‘vitality’ to come later rather than a simple absence of bearded manhood.²⁸ The absent-beard signalled an emerging bearded or adult masculinity-to-come across a spectrum. The transitional nature of boyishness is reflected in the gradual growth of beard hair, as suggested by the burgeoning ‘three or foure little haire[s]’ on Sir Tophas’s chin that gestures towards a future ‘when this young springe shall growe’ in Lyly’s *Endymion* (1588).²⁹ Upon meeting his then-disguised grandson, Bounteous Progress comments on Follywit’s youthful appearance as promising a fuller beard than the thin one currently adorning his face— ‘his chin has no more prickles yet than a midwife’s: there’s great hope of his wit, his hair’s so long a-coming’ (2.1.138-40). The thin-but-

²⁶ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, p. 89.

²⁷ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, p. 89.

²⁸ Victoria Sparey, ‘Performing Puberty: Fertile Complexions in Shakespeare’s Plays’, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 33.3 (2015), 441–67 (p. 448).

²⁹ John Lyly, *Endymion* (London: J. Charlewood for the Widowe Broome, 1591), sig. H4r.

present beard of Owemuch is contrasted with Follywit's present wit, which anticipates a future adulthood in which he may grow a full beard. This layering of bearded and beardless masculinities is further complicated in Follywit's cross-dressed disguise as the Courtesan. To complete this disguise, Follywit wears 'a mask and a chin-clout' (3.3.86). While the prosthetic beard is used to primarily cover Follywit's bare chin, the chin-clout conversely works to conceal any presence or absence of facial hair in this female disguise. Although he is defined by a cultural beardlessness by his grandfather, his anticipated adulthood still suggests a beard-to-come on his chin that requires concealment, even if that facial hair is not materially present. The transitional state of Follywit's youthful masculinity still positions him as being too-bearded to be read in feminine terms even as he is explicitly excluded from bearded manhood.

The false beard's centrality to the play's generational conflict between Follywit and Bounteous Progress shows Middleton's play to revel in the theatrical fictions of masculinity propped up by prosthetic and material objects. When Bounteous Progress praises Follywit's 'wit' to Owemuch (2.1.146), he confirms Follywit's bearded disguise as successfully witty enough to fool his grandfather. The significance of wit to Middleton's city comedy has been long recognised but it is the illusion of beardedness that makes this wit legible, representable, and material.³⁰ This trumping of corporeal reality by theatrical illusion is encapsulated by Follywit's play-within-a-play, *The Slip* (5.1.77). In the guise of a player, he manages to steal a ring, chain and watch from his grandfather, as well as binding and gagging a real Constable who is attempting to arrest him, which Bounteous Progress takes for part of the performance—'I am deceived if this prove not a merry comedy and a witty' (5.2.132-33). Despite Bounteous Progress's ironic insistence that no player can be 'certain' (32), he takes Follywit's various disguises for reality and the real action of the play to be theatrical. Follywit is undone when a stolen watch rings mid-performance and it is revealed he has been tricked into marrying the Courtesan, his grandfather's mistress, whereupon he says that 'you may be seriously assured of my hereafter stableness of life' (282-83). They leave the play for a feast when Bounteous Progress merrily notes that 'When he has gulled all, then is himself the last' (316). Middleton's comedy thus

³⁰ See O'Callaghan, *Thomas Middleton, Renaissance Dramatist*, pp. 35–42.

ends with an abrupt good-natured reconciliation between Follywit and Bounteous Progress. The subversive indeterminacy of the false beard becomes part of the play's revelling in the temporary 'comic flashes' of masculine youth and theatrical illusion (1.1.103). Middleton underscores his ostensibly reconciliatory ending with the irony that both men have been undone by the theatrical playfulness of witty, disguised masculinity. The assemblage of body and objects layered onto that body, through the play's self-reflexive aesthetic, stages masculinity as a shared fiction of fixed bodily reality even as men can perform and contest the visual signifiers of that fiction.

The theatrical beard indicates a wider concern with the gendered difference between boys and men while playing with the layered construction of theatrical fictions onto corporeal reality. The theatre of the Children of Paul's provided an environment where such gestures were commonplace as part of the comedy and theatrical practice. The emphasis on exteriority, as seen by the prosthetic beards used by the boy players to play adult men, rendered corporeality as the dominant signifier for adult manhood. Yet the bearded masculinities performed in these boys' plays illustrate the disruption that attention to stage props brings. The fashioning of masculinities as a social and theatrical fiction relies on a construction of surface where the bodily exterior is composed of parts that are not necessarily wholly incorporated into that body. Middleton highlights that these bodies contain a certain material changeability which, as this chapter argues, engenders a theatrical language of male display and superficiality. And Middleton would continually return to the self-conscious staging of masculine surfaces and the materiality of these assemblages throughout his drama.

2. Fashioning Gallantry and Sartorial Surfaces in *Michaelmas Term* and *Your Five Gallants*

In his city comedies, Middleton frequently stages young gallants about London who operate within the visual languages of sartorial display and superficiality. These characters refracted the types of men in Middleton's audiences who similarly transformed themselves into objects of sartorial display to see and be seen in the city.³¹

³¹ See Bailey, *Flaunting*, pp. 3–22.

Scholars have continually discussed the significance of clothing in producing the shifting constructions of identity in Middleton's theatre.³² As a metonymy for the identity of its wearers but also as exchangeable objects that can be taken on and off, clothing resists even as it constructs selfhood on the body's exterior. How these materials layer onto the body to effect and disrupt the legibility of masculine identities in Middleton's theatre is the focus of this section. I will consider the language of superficiality and masculinity in two of Middleton's city comedies—*Michaelmas Term*, performed by the Children of Paul's, and *Your Five Gallants*, performed by the Children of the Chapel at the Blackfriars. These two plays depict fashionable masculinities that are vulnerable to the same public scrutiny that enables their material assembling in the first place. By dramatising sartorial self-fashioning in these plays with a pronounced ambiguity about the relationship between clothing as a metonymy of masculine identity and the body beneath, Middleton considers the limits of self-fashioning.

In *Michaelmas Term*, Middleton satirises a London where the function of clothes as external signifiers of social position and gender are increasingly unreliable as the play stages a symbolic battle between appearance and reality across its multiple plots. Ephesian Quomodo, a cozening cloth merchant, designs to trick the country gull Richard Easy out of his newly-inherited Essex lands; Scottish upstart Andrew Lethe (née Gruel) competes with rival gallant Rearage to court Quomodo's daughter, Susan; and Lethe's mistress, the Country Wench, transforms herself into a London gentlewoman. Quomodo's connection with cloth brings these plots together in their concern with how identity materialises as a surface. His utopian fantasy of becoming a 'landed man' (3.4.5) includes riding in a carriage with his wife and his 'son and heir, Sim Quomodo, in a peach-colour taffeta jacket' (4.1.80-81). Quomodo's definitions of male success combine the sexual and the material; his son wearing expensive taffeta is as important as securing a lineage. The fabric that Quomodo sells to achieve this is

³² *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton* has two chapters relating to Middleton and clothing, one by Eleanor Lowe, "'My Cloak's a Stranger; He Was Made but Yesterday': Clothing, Language, and the Construction of Theatre in Middleton", pp. 196–209, and Mary Bly, "'The Lure of A Taffeta Cloak': Middleton's Sartorial Seduction in *Your Five Gallants*", pp. 588–604. See also Melanie Ann Russell, "'The Fashion of Playmaking': Cloth in Middleton's City Comedy' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2019).

presented as deceitful—he instructs his man Falselight to ‘make my coarse commodities look sleek, / With subtle art beguile the honest eye’ (1.2.86-87). By exploiting the visual and haptic surfaces of his textiles, Quomodo attempts to fashion himself this new identity. As the coarse fabrics are made to appear more extravagant, the material gains a deceptive agency that continues his performance of ‘reducing substance to appearance’.³³ As part of his swindle, Quomodo tricks Easy into accepting a loan of two-hundred pounds worth of cloth by imploring him to ‘Feel’t, nay, feel’t and spare not, gentleman; your fingers and your judgement’ (2.3.239-40). Gullible Easy believes that touching the cloth assures its quality, without knowing Quomodo’s underlying intentions—‘By my troth, exceeding good cloth; a good wale [texture] ’t’as’ (24). In the deceptive space of Quomodo’s shop, all surfaces are made of illusory substance, extending to Quomodo’s own persona. Upon learning of Quomodo’s feigned death, the liveryman of the Woollen Company derisively refers to him as ‘*Merely* enriched by shifts / And cozenages’ (4.4.179-80, emphasis added). At his staged funeral, he hires a coat of arms ‘Feigned from his ancestors’ to pretend that he has gentlemanly lineage (5.3.7). By concealing his ancestry and forging the fictitious façade of another, Quomodo’s self-fashioning attempts to rewrite his past to foreground the appearance of masculine success on his textile and corporeal surfaces.

The London that Quomodo inhabits is a city of ‘gallants of all sizes, of all lasts’ (1.2.48), who are themselves a vulnerable commodity ‘somewhat too open’ to exploitation (5). This vulnerability to urban commodification and gulling is manipulated by Quomodo’s ‘*two spirits*’ (79 SD), Falselight and Shortyard, who disguise themselves to drive Easy into debt. While Shortyard largely maintains the single persona of Master Blastfield, Falselight undergoes various disguises either alone as the ‘*porter*’ (2.3.347 SD) and ‘*Master Idem*’ (3.4.466 SD) or together with Shortyard as ‘*a Sergeant and a Yeoman*’ (3.3.0) and ‘*like wealthy citizens in satin suits*’ (3.4.192 SD). The rapid putting on and off of these disguises emphasises their own temporary and artificial selves. Quomodo’s command for Shortyard and Falselight to ‘[s]hift thyself speedily into the shape of gallantry’ is taken quite literally

³³ Mathew Martin, ‘[B]egot between Tirewomen and Tailors’: Commodified Self-Fashioning’ in *Michaelmas Term, Early Modern Literary Studies*, 5.1 (1999), para. 14 <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/05-1/marttail.html>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

as they repeatedly shape their bodies through these quick costume changes (1.2.122). The reference to them as spirits implies that their bodies are like immaterial and pliable matter. Their lack of depth or solidity reflects Oakley-Brown and Killeen's description of the early modern period as one 'attuned to the vertigo of depthlessness'.³⁴ Many contemporary writers similarly portray such young urban gallants as superficial; Richard Brathwaite, for example, describes men whose 'sincerity consists onely in dimension'.³⁵ James M. Bromley explores the devaluing of superficiality by contemporary scholars and early modern writers alike by suggesting that such 'sartorial extravagance' offered possibilities for constructing urban selfhood through objects to navigate the superficial semiotics of the city.³⁶ This depthlessness is repeated throughout Middleton's play, such as when Easy fails to recognise Shortyard and Falselight disguised as sergeants and, instead, the two men are ambiguously dismissed as being 'whatsoe'er they are' (3.4.193). The increasing ambivalence towards ascribing them a solid identity—'whatsoe'er' they are rather than 'whosoever' they are—suggests the uncertainty that the commodification of the surface represents in Middleton's city. His burlesque insistence that there is no depth to either Shortyard or Falselight illustrates the bodily exterior as a surface which is not only superficial, consisting in only surface, but potentially fraudulent in the competitive urban marketplace.

Middleton's satire of men who failed to understand the urban language of sartorial superficiality is realised in Andrew Lethe. Originally Andrew Gruel, a Scottish 'tooth-drawer's son' (5.3.158), Lethe has now suitably fashioned himself a name punning on the mythical river of forgetfulness.³⁷ The Induction of the play anticipates men like Lethe arriving into the city as 'Shrugging for life's kind benefits, shift and heat, / Crept up in three Terms, wrapt in silk and silver' (1.1.33-34). Lethe literalises Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass's assessment of Renaissance clothing

³⁴ Oakley-Brown and Killeen, 'Scrutinizing Surfaces', p. 16.

³⁵ Brathwaite, *The English Gentleman*, p. 6.

³⁶ James M. Bromley, *Clothing and Queer Style in Early Modern English Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 113.

³⁷ Lethe was a recurring early modern trope intertwined with forgetfulness. For literary examples, see Ben Jonson's masque set on the banks of the river Lethe, *Lovers Made Men* (London, 1617), or the various interpretations of classical mythology presented in Alexander Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus* (London: Richard Whitaker, 1647), sigs. L1v-L2v.

as performing the ‘making or fashioning of a person’ as he purposefully forgets his old identity while fashioning a new one.³⁸ Yet his newly-fashioned identity resides in clothing that is visibly second-hand: ‘like ditches, / ’Twas cast before he had it (1.2.67-68). The clothes are visibly dissonant on Lethe, still containing the memories of their previous wearers. John Sutton has argued that the memories of identity signalled by clothing stood ‘in complex and more-or-less coupled and tangled relations to different embodied human wearers’.³⁹ The inability of Lethe to properly decouple himself from his social origins or his outfit from its previous wearers signals the stubbornness of certain items of clothing, rather than their malleability for self-fashioning. Clothing is significant in that it can signal who its wearers are and who they are not at the same time, as with Lethe’s second-hand clothing carrying the dirt of the previous wearer while also allowing Lethe to ‘shine[...] bright / In rich embroideries’ in his new persona (1.2.68-69). The limits to Lethe’s attempts at forgetting recur as other characters repeatedly draw attention to his obvious sartorial transformation. Rearage says that ‘He forgot his father’s name, poor Walter Gruel’ (151), while Salewood questions whether he can still ‘pass for Lethe’ (156). This tension between social mobility and the limited concealing power of Lethe’s new clothes suggests the fragility of his self-fashioned identity. Lethe is a ‘gentleman of most received parts’ meaning that this new identity is visibly constructed at his bodily surface, collected from scattered parts than forming an imaginary whole (158). In the ‘confuse[d] mingle mangle of apparel’, as Phillip Stubbes wrote in his repeatedly printed antitheatrical tract *The Anatomie of Abuses*, ‘it is very hard to know, who is noble’.⁴⁰ Lethe is himself difficult to read and his attempts at self-fashioning are more confusing than transformative. The problem of making Lethe’s body legible is partly derived from the general sense of uneasiness about reading the body brought on by the culture of urban commodification and exchange.

³⁸ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, p. 269.

³⁹ John Sutton, ‘Spongy Brains and Material Memories’, in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 14–34 (p. 25).

⁴⁰ Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London: [John Kingston for] Richard Jones, 1583), sig. C2v.

Lethe's biggest failure is his own misreading of the sartorial language of the city. His social ineptitude is emphasised by his lack of rhetorical or sartorial skill. Quomodo's wife Thomasine describes Lethe's transformation from a roughly-textured 'suit of green kersey' to wearing a 'white satin suit' as if he were 'a maggot crept out of a nutshell, a fair body and a foul neck: those parts that are covered of him looks indifferent well, because we cannot see 'em' (2.3.12-16). Thomasine can read him as a textile and visual text, unpicking his poorly constructed suits that cannot conceal his embodied identity. On the other hand, Lethe himself can 'scarce write and read' (1.2.300), evinced when, unlike his gallant companions or *Mad World's* Follywit, he cannot find a 'rhyme' for his own line endings (197). While Lethe's bodily exterior could be ornamented and decorated, because he lacks the wit to make his clothes 'suit' him, he becomes a figure of ridicule. Lethe's attempts to ingratiate himself into London where 'Esteem is made of such a dizzy metal' reveal his complete inability to adapt to the superficial visual semiotics of the city (180). His obliviousness leaves him significantly socially detached from those around him because while he receives 'many, gifts o'er night' the gifters are 'forgot ere morning' (180-81). Lethe, who cannot comprehend the urban semiotics, is not one of 'the self-conscious deceivers [who] achieve credit' by creating 'believable fictions around them' in Middleton's city comedies.⁴¹ Instead, Middleton draws on an image frequently repeated in satires of upstart men about the city, as seen in Robert Greene's portrait of such gallants, which observes that 'the peacocke wrapt in the pride of his beauteous feathers is knowne to be but a dunghill birde by his foule feete'.⁴² While clothing can be a bearer of memories, the body too carries history which Lethe is unable to convincingly manipulate. Lethe's outward self appears as a noticeably prosthetic and knotty surface with his body and outward clothing working in uneasy tension.

Lethe's forgotten history is materialised by Mother Gruel's journey into London. Lethe wonders whether his mother's physical presence will spoil his newly constructed image. He worries that Mother Gruel's arrival will 'betray my birth, and cast soil upon my new suit' (249-50) and 'drop my staining birth upon my raiment'

⁴¹ Aaron Kitch, 'The Character of Credit and the Problem of Belief in Middleton's City Comedies', *SEL*, 47.2 (2007), 403-26 (p. 403).

⁴² Robert Greene, *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (London: John Wolfe, 1592), sig. A3v.

(288). Lethe's concern that his family history will muddy his newly constructed and fragile persona further suggests the fragility of this surface. Yet Mother Gruel is incapable of recognising her son because of his 'glorious suit' and greets him as if a stranger claiming that she 'knows [him] not' (281-2). Lethe's tailoring of identity involves a process of purposeful amnesia, and is invoked by the pander Helgill upon seeing the transformation of the Country Wench— 'You talk of an alteration; here's the thing itself. What base birth does not raiment make glorious?' (3.1.1-2). The alienation of birth and parentage through clothing invokes these constructed sartorial identities as 'deluding shadows, begot between tirewomen and tailors' (6-7). Helgill's comments on the Country Wench's alteration ironically reflect on Lethe, whose superficial self fails to construct a legible identity or to fully erase the memories of his past. Notably, his invocation of the 'between' space as where these identities are constructed further highlights these newly-fashioned characters' lack of stability and singularity. Mother Gruel's presence in the play is repeatedly characterised as 'a pestilent, wilful, troublesome sickness' that threatens Lethe's attempts at constructing a version of himself sanitised of his lineage (235-36). In a play of irony, to avoid being publicly shamed by his oblivious mother, Lethe employs her as his 'private drudge / To pass my letters and secure my lust' (1.3.285-86). His superficial change in identity is at risk from a physical, bodily kind of pollution brought about by Mother Gruel's presence. Even as he self-fashions a new persona through his new suits, Lethe's fragile surface is still vulnerable to the world it displays itself towards. Middleton reveals the paradox of this sartorial self-fashioning—while clothing can act as a covering of the body, it too becomes another exposed surface of the body if not manipulated skilfully.

The conclusion of *Michaelmas Term*, at first appearing to enforce a language of depth wherein identity is singular and stable, satirises those men who have failed to understand the language of superficiality. In the final scene of judicial reformation, a Judge tries the men who have been false, counterfeit, or appearing as something other than who they are; namely Quomodo, Shortyard, Falselight, and Lethe. Quomodo is affirmed as 'thine own affliction' to rebuke the self-fashioning undergone at Easy's expense (5.3.170).⁴³ Yet, in Lethe's case, he is not his own affliction at all. His

⁴³ Compare with Middleton's reformation of Witgood as a 'reclaimed man' at the conclusion of *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (5.2.202).

transformation from Gruel to Lethe was afforded by a change of clothes. The punishment Lethe faces is primarily because of a letter that his rival for the affections of Susan Quomodo, Rearage, sends to Quomodo, which leaves him publicly ‘whipped [...] in a white sheet’ and leads to his arrest (3.5.3-4). Susan then finds that the ‘difference appears too plain / Betwixt a base slave and a true gentleman’ (5.2.10-11). This change between ‘base slave’ and ‘true gentleman’ hinges on how Lethe ‘appears’ to Susan, rather than being something that Lethe himself has agency over. Mother Gruel cannot recognise her son until she is forced to do so by the Judge—‘Then know him for a villain; ’tis thy son’ (5.3.154). Lethe gains a legible identity not through clothing but through this final act of judicial interpellation. Like his clothes, Lethe’s identity was never fully his own to fashion. Matthew Martin argues that this conclusion displays ‘authority’s failure to transcend appearances even as it gives them a kind of fixity through the exercise of power’.⁴⁴ Middleton’s ending refuses the body beneath as a determining signifier of identity, gesturing instead to the exterior as partly fashioned by the perspective and influence of outside forces. That Mother Gruel ‘loathes to know [Lethe] now, / Whom he [himself] before did as much loathe to know’ evokes this kind of dizzying superficiality which involves a continual forgetting of the body beneath (151-52). Lethe embodies a wider assumption held by characters in the play that appearances can be tailored, but the broader anxieties about the interpersonal vulnerability or pollution generated at the body’s surface that his plot exposes are left unchallenged.

Middleton continued this refutation of clothing as conferring identity onto the bodies beneath the clothes and revels in staging artificial display in *Your Five Gallants*. The play’s loose plot involves the gentleman Fitzgrave disguising himself as Bowser the scholar to compete for Katherine’s affections against the five gallants of the title, each a parodic personification of stock gallant vices—Primero, the bawd-gallant; Fripp, the broker-gallant; Tailby, the whore-gallant; Pursenet, the pocket-gallant; and, Goldstone, the cheating-gallant. Middleton gave his audience at the Blackfriars a dramatic introduction to these gallants in his Prologue. The presenter introduces them while describing their actions before the play opens in Fripp’s pawnshop:

⁴⁴ Martin, ‘Commodified Self-Fashioning’, para. 23.

Passing over the stage: the bawd-gallant, with three wenches gallantly attired; meets him the whore-gallant, the pocket-gallant, the cheating-gallant; kiss these three wenches and depart in a little whisper and wanton action. (Prologue, ll. 1-5)

The prologue presents a wider problem of the play in general that, as Ralph Alan Cohen writes in his introduction, it simply ‘plays better than it reads’.⁴⁵ The visuality of the play, as expressed through its self-referential metatheatre and interest in complex stagecraft, is hard to fully grasp outside of performance. Eleanor Lowe’s response to this beginning ‘show’ of gallants in the prologue assumes the players would take up ‘physical tics and personal properties’ to make each gallant and the vice they embody visually distinct in performance.⁴⁶ The inclusion of the wenches ‘gallantly attired’ does suggest the significance of material objects in effecting this gallant style on stage (2). The distinct styles of clothing would be necessary to tackle, as Fripp notes, the difficulty in ‘distinguish[ing] spirits and put[ting] a difference between you and others’ on stage (1.1.199-200). Further, when Fitzgrave disguises himself to ingratiate himself with the group of gallants, he describes the ‘shape’ of his disguise as ‘Some credulous scholar, easily infected / With fashion, time, and humor’ (1.2.91-93). By interpreting the gallant fashions as infectious or polluting, Middleton evokes the mobility of the clothes that shape their sartorial styles and, therefore, identities. The easiness with which these gallants might be indistinguishable from each other also suggests the contingency of their public personas that can be continually reshaped and interpreted.

Middleton’s stress on the gaze of scrutinous gallants eyeing out each other’s reputations and clothing is redoubled by his knowing inclusion of the gaze of his audience. Amanda Bailey has shown that the theatre was ‘a site of flamboyant display where mean young men, on stage and off’ could be seen and see others as objects of sartorial extravagance.⁴⁷ Mary Bly argues that the rich fashionable men who populate

⁴⁵ Ralph Alan Cohen, ‘Introduction to *Your Five Gallants*’, in *The Collected Works*, pp. 594-96 (p. 594).

⁴⁶ Lowe, ‘The Construction of Theatre’, p. 198.

⁴⁷ Bailey, *Flaunting*, p. 26. See also Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen’s Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 65; and, Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry, and William Ingram, *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 507.

the stage of *Your Five Gallants* are evidence of Middleton 'aiming directly at that audience'.⁴⁸ Antitheatrical writers were critical of these gaudy displays and associated the male exhibitionism within the theatres with other vices. William Prynne, for example, writes of the 'strange variety of effeminate, lewde, fantastique, outlandish apish fashions, (or disguises rather) at the Play-house'.⁴⁹ Yet Middleton's interest in exploring these fashions as a kind of visual theatre in themselves directly alludes to the typical Blackfriars clientele. Middleton sets scenes in Act 4 in the familiar middle aisle of St. Paul's Cathedral, where the same young men who might attend a performance at the playhouse would strut and display their bodies.⁵⁰ Pursenet and his boy plan to rob the gentleman Piamont and wait for him to strut down in the middle aisle—'See, here he walks; I was sure he came into Paul's' (4.3.6-7). In this space, clothing, gesture and general bodily comportment became a readily-available surface for fellow men to read and assess according to fashion. Tailby attempts to have two constables arrest Goldstone for stealing his pearl chain while they are in the middle aisle: 'Look you, that's he; upon him, officers' (4.7.53). Yet the constables are confused: 'He's a thief, sir? Who, that gentleman i'th'satin?' (56-57). The gallants protest that their public reputations, implied by their expensive fashions, aren't worthy of suspicion as 'does any appear like a thief in this company?' (180). Pursenet's protestation at Tailby's accusation shows the contingency of these artificial appearances of gallantry: 'Why should you be so violent to strip naked / Another's reputation to the world, / Knowing your own so leprous?' (123-25). The visual scrutiny deployed in these fashionable spaces attests to the perceived veracity of the identities assembled by such objects. This self-reflexive vision encourages an ironised perspective which represents the skill of these gallants in manipulating the urban world of the superficial while also revelling in the entertainment value of staging such displays as familiar to the audience.

Middleton's play is deeply invested in continually circulating items of clothing as objects that transfer perceived identity between bodies. Fitzgrave's cloak is

⁴⁸ Bly, 'Middleton's Sartorial Seduction', p. 590.

⁴⁹ William Prynne, *Histrion-Mastix* (London: E[dward] A[l]lde, Augustine Matthews, Thomas Cotes] and W[illiam] J[ones] for Michael Sparke, 1633), p. 218.

⁵⁰ See Bailey, *Flaunting*, pp. 103-128.

repeatedly exchanged on stage after being stolen by Goldstone (4.1.22 SD). Fripp is then mistaken for Bowser and attacked by Pursenet for wearing the cloak in the following scene (4.2.16 SD). While the cloak is ‘a stranger, he was made but yesterday’ (4.1.32-33), it is likely the cloak visually indicates the distinctive style of Fitzgrave’s disguise, which leads to this case of mistaken identity. The cloak complicates the assumption that clothing acted as ‘the means by which a person was given a form, a shape, a social function, a “depth” [...] permeat[ing] the wearer, fashioning him or her from within.’⁵¹ Rather than depth as the primary constituent of identity and subjectivity, I am more interested in Middleton’s consideration of this process of permeation, and of the notion of identity as diffused, spread or even saturated across the surfaces of multiple embodied subjects.⁵² This can be seen in Fitzgrave’s unease about the cloak which he does not ‘trust [...] alone in company’ (34), anxious that the cloak has the power to confer identity to another out of his control. While the cloak maintains some shape moulded by its proximity to the ‘skin, sweat, and posture’ of Fitzgrave’s body,⁵³ the cloak itself both constitutes and transfers the identity of Bowser. This exchange reveals the gallant masculinities of the play to be suspiciously detachable, echoing Thomas Overbury’s portrait of a young gallant as ‘a confederacy between him and his clothes, to be made a puppy’.⁵⁴ The identities assumed through the cloak are all shown to be shared and transferred between bodies and the mobile objects that attach to these bodies.

In this context, Fripp’s fashioning of sartorial selfhood through the accumulation of pawned clothing renders his body as the site where multiple material identities converge. The pawn-gallant is introduced lavishly listing a cascade of pawned items that recognisably belong to other people, such as the velvet jacket of ‘Justice Cropshin’ (1.1.9) and the taffeta cloak of ‘Sir Oliver Needy’ (15). Fripp takes these clothes for himself, incorporating them into his own gallant sartorial display. Like Lethe, Fripp undergoes sartorial amnesia, ‘striv[ing] to forget the days of my serving’ (294).

⁵¹ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, p. 2.

⁵² Compare with Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan’s intersubjective model for relations between body and environs in ‘Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World’, pp. 6–7.

⁵³ Lowe, ‘The Construction of Theatre’, p. 201.

⁵⁴ Thomas Overbury, *Sir Thomas Overbury His Wife* (London: Edward Griffin for Laurence L’isle, 1616), sig. K1r.

However, unlike Lethe, Fripp has the knowledge to operate successfully within the visual language of the city. This is seen by his continual retailoring, such as when his '*wretched cloak*' (Prologue, 1.8 SD) is removed to reveal colourful, expensive clothes underneath with the command of 'Vanish, thou fog, and sink beneath our brightness' (1.1.279).⁵⁵ This transformative fashioning distinguishes him from the other gallants—'You can appear but glorious from yourselves, / And have your beams but drawn from your own light; / But mine from many, many make me bright' (284-86). Fripp's outward gallant identity is always contingently constructed by choosing 'whose cloak shall I wear today to continue change' (313-14). Significantly, Fripp invests in a relationship between clothing and identity that emphasises plurality. The language of inwardness ('glorious from yourselves', 'drawn from your own light') is insufficient for the urban gallant who prioritises sumptuous display. The assemblage of clothing items signals a parasitic relationship with the clothing's previous owners, reflecting the operations of a predatory city. Tailby's description of Fripp as 'a necessary hook to hang gentleman's suits' further gestures toward the outermost surface as the layer from which the ambiguity surrounding who exactly the wearer is arises (4.7.144). Fripp's continual putting on and removal of other men's pawned clothing to constitute and reshape his outward self suggests the limits of these materials as references to any inward self at all. While the gentleman Fitzgrave bemoans that the counterfeit gallants about the city ensure that 'The brightness of true gentry is scarce seen' (3.1.180), Middleton's play usurps a stable or 'true' notion of selfhood with his interest in the materialistic, pluralistic and mobile gallants who employ their sartorial displays to fashion themselves new identities.

This visual fascination with clothing layered onto the body is further staged in the Mitre Tavern in Act 2, Scene 4. During the dice game, Tailby slowly continues to lose money and pawns his clothing to Fripp, removing layers of clothes while saying that 'I never have any luck, gallants, till my doublet's off' (2.4.311-12). He complains that these losses of dice and clothing leave him 'half-searched already', forgoing his doublet, beaver hat, rapier, daggers, hangers, belt, and even possibly his britches (379). In the play's Interims, Tailby is reported to have already 'played away half his clothes'

⁵⁵ Lowe suggests that the brightness of Fripp's clothes may come from jewels embroidered into the fabric ('the Construction of Theatre', p. 201).

(Interim 1, ll. 7-8), leaving him with only his ‘shirt’ (26), which, as Robert Lublin has shown, fashion dictated was commonly worn as ‘an undergarment not visible under the doublet until 1625’.⁵⁶ Whilst children’s company’s plays did stage adult men entering ‘in his shirt’, these moments were most often set in bedrooms or other intimate spaces.⁵⁷ Tailby’s state of undress shares with these other plays this staging of corporeal vulnerability, but, crucially, is set in the public space of the tavern. Middleton thus presents the public removal of the sartorial signs of masculine adulthood from the character and actor’s body, revealing Tailby’s identity to be assembled from detachable parts. Yet Tailby quickly receives a ‘new satin suit’ (10-11) from one of his mistresses and is then seen with his servant ‘trussing him’ into it (Interim 2, ll. 0.2). Tailby’s body dresses and undresses due to his gambling vices, in contrast to Fripp’s body whose style is accumulated from other people’s clothes. In this difference, Middleton reveals an ambivalence toward these outwardly and contingently constructed identities. Gallantry becomes a slippery and superficial effect that must be continually refashioned in the moment.

Middleton’s concern with superficial gallantry is staged in the play’s concluding masque. The gallants unknowingly employ Fitzgrave, their rival for Katherine’s affections, to be the ‘poet’ of the masque (4.7.226), aiming to ‘present[...] our full shapes’ in their elaborately decorated performance (222). But, owing to the gallants’ lack of wit and Latin, Fitzgrave tricks the men into revealing their respective vices to Katherine. The masque has been discussed as revelling in the iconography and performance of masquing culture, particularly for how Middleton ‘burlesques the pretentious passion for emblems and the self-mythologizing entailed in both the *impresa* and the court masque’.⁵⁸ Fitzgrave hires a painter to design ‘five shields’ that will display the vices of each gallant as emblems to the masque’s audience (5.1.76).

⁵⁶ Robert I. Lublin, *Costuming the Shakespearean Stage: Visual Codes of Representation in Early Modern Theatre and Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 11.

⁵⁷ For examples of male characters in children’s plays entering ‘in a shirt’, see Thomas Dekker, *Blurt Master-Constable* (London: [Edward Allde] for Henry Rockytt, 1602), sig. F2v; John Marston, *The Malcontent* (London: V[alentine] S[immes] for William Aspley, 1604), sig. D2v; and Lording Barry, *Ram-Alley, or Merry Tricks* (London: G. Eld for Robert Wilson, 1611), H4r.

⁵⁸ Caroline Baird, ‘From Court to Playhouse and Back: Middleton’s Appropriation of the Masque’, *Early Theatre*, 18.2 (2015), 57–85. See also Sharon J. Harris, ‘Masqued Poetics in *Your Five Gallants*: Middleton’s Response to Jonson’, *Ben Jonson Journal*, 25.2 (2018), 242–76, who identifies the sources for Middleton’s metadramatic masque as Ben Jonson’s *Cynthia’s Revels* as well as the anonymous *The Masque of the Knight*.

These painted shields are a mnemonic surface to be read visually, alongside a spoken Latin phrase. For example, Fripp the pawn gallant is represented by ‘a cuckoo sitting on a tree’ which Fitzgrave explains means “‘*en avis ex avibus*’—“one bird made of many”” (109). This emblematic display is not an unmasking but a confirmation that the gallants are what they have always appeared to be: one-dimensional personifications of vice. Middleton uses the masque to show that Fitzgrave’s obscure riddles and emblems ‘encode only the open secret of their baseness’.⁵⁹ Nothing is truly revealed that is not already legible on the gallants’ bodies.

Yet Middleton’s five gallants were not written to have a singular identity beyond superficial theatrical fiction. Katherine ratifies their superficiality when she realises that the gallants are ‘all as the speech and shield display you’ (5.2.24). Echoing Fitzgrave’s early reference to the gallants as made of ‘mist’ (3.1.179), Katherine derides the masquing gallants, and by extension the players themselves, as ‘fair-appearing shadows’ (5.2.54). They are men with no substance or solid form. Middleton’s use of the masque at the conclusion indulges in the theatrical display of vice; there is no deceptive layer to peel back for they are all superficially constructed. The various gallants’ vices and parodic characterisations have been readily apparent on stage to the audience. The gallants are supposedly punished by being married off to courtesans, but Goldstone’s final lines promise that they will continue to live spuriously and encourage their new wives to do the same—‘’tis our best course to marry ’em: we’ll make them get our livings’ (79-80). As John McElroy argues, in this final scene Middleton ‘drops here even the pretense of seriousness’ that his comedy might take a conventional ethical stance against such vice.⁶⁰ Middleton’s gallant fictions are superficial in that they exist primarily, if not totally, in order to stage an urban type of masculinity as it was outside of the theatre: a display of the body and its sartorial ornamentation.

The comedy that each of the Middleton plays I have discussed makes of superficial gallants about the city responds to a growing concern with young men’s

⁵⁹ Jeremy Lopez, ‘Fitzgrave’s Jewel’, in *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558-1642*, ed. by Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 189–204 (p. 203).

⁶⁰ John F. McElroy, ‘Middleton, Entertainer or Moralizer? An Interpretation of *The Family of Love* and *Your Five Gallants*’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 37.1 (1976), 35–46 (p. 46).

capacity to reshape how their body appeared to the world. *Michaelmas Term* emphasises the vulnerability that arises from constructing identity on the outward contours of the body. The parodic figures of city vices in *Your Five Gallants* similarly reveal such fashioned identities to be produced out of the interdependence between bodies and material objects. The manifestations of superficial masculinity that emerge in these two plays show Middleton's interest in the body as the crucial signifier in the urban language of display. Yet that bodily surface as a layering of corporeality and material objects never fully adheres to the boundaries or wills of an individual subject. It is this attention to the physical body and material objects as dynamic, mutual surfaces that Middleton develops as he later moves from writing primarily city comedies to tragicomedies, which I explore in this chapter's final section.

3. Marking the Skin in *A Fair Quarrel* and *The Nice Valour*

Two of Middleton's late tragicomedies for the Prince Charles's Men grapple with the power of surfaces to conceal and reveal masculine subjectivities through their consideration of male skin—*A Fair Quarrel*, jointly composed with William Rowley, and *The Nice Valour*, possibly co-authored to some extent with John Fletcher.⁶¹ In these two plays, Middleton stages male skin as another malleable surface alongside clothing that can be discursively and physically marked. The multivalency of skin has been increasingly explored in early modern scholarship, particularly in skin's capacity to bear the weight of representation and its status as thinking and feeling bodily boundary.⁶² In this final section, I consider how the marking of skin in these two plays mediates masculinity's relationship to violence by making anxieties about physical or social vulnerability legible on the body. By considering how *A Fair Quarrel* and *The Nice Valour* materialise tropes of violent masculinity by making them legible through marks and wounds on the skin, I approach the skin as 'a spatiotemporal site through

⁶¹ For a discussion of *A Fair Quarrel*'s mixed authorship and genre, see Nicol, *Middleton & Rowley*, pp. 92–119. On the authorship of *The Nice Valour*, see Taylor 'Canon and Chronology', pp. 423–27.

⁶² For example, see Evelyn Welch and Hannah Murphy, *Renaissance Skin* (2022) <<https://renaissanceskin.ac.uk/>> [accessed 20 June 2022]. For a broader overview of recent critical skin studies, see Marc Lafrance, 'Skin Studies: Past, Present and Future', *Body & Society* 24.1/2 (2018), 3–32.

which relations and materialities become visible, or not'.⁶³ By thinking through the marking of corporeal surfaces as manifesting masculine identities through the convergence of multiple bodies, I build on my previous assertions about Middleton's interest in the surficial to argue that the skin acts as another dynamic, shared and legible surface.

Wounds were multivalent signs and their legibility is largely contingent on their visibility or absence on the skin. While the staging of bodily fragmentation has attracted more attention from modern scholars, the ways that the early modern theatre utilised stage blood and cosmetics provide a useful glimpse into how scars and wounds may have been applied to the performers' bodies.⁶⁴ Farah Karim-Cooper's account of the tiring house demonstrates the speed at which stage paint could represent wounds during a performance, and so suggests that scars or wounds could be painted on before or during a performance.⁶⁵ In the revised prologue of *Every Man in His Humour* included in the 1616 *Workes*, Jonson scorns audiences who prefer the spectacles of violence over the poetry when 'the tiring-house bring wounds to scars' onto the bodies of performers (l. 12). Jonson's comment on the spectacle of wounds suggests their popularity as an expected convention of the theatre. His implication that wounds turn to scars during performance also evokes a temporal collapse as bodies can appear to heal and transform over the course of a play. The technologies of performance that enable the staged representation of wounds might have also suggested to the audience the prosthetic nature of such bodily markings, which could be reshaped or altered through the malleability of both skin and stage paint. In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1609), perhaps the most notable early modern 'scar-text', Caius Martius is suspicious of 'show[ing the populace] th'unaching scars which I should hide' (2.2.142), suggesting an anxiety that displaying his wounds will make them legible and therefore

⁶³ Rebecca Coleman and Elizabeth Oakley-Brown, 'Visualizing Surfaces, Surfacing Vision: Introduction', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 34.7–8 (2017), 5–27 (p. 6).

⁶⁴ For further reading, see Andrea Ria Stevens, 'Blood: Enter Martius, Painted', in *Inventions of the Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 49–86, which considers stage blood in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*; Lucy Munro, "'They Eat Each Other's Arms': Stage Blood and Body Parts", in *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. by Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 73–93, which focuses on the performance technologies used to stage blood and severed limbs.

⁶⁵ Farah Karim-Cooper, "'This Alters Not Thy Beauty": Face-Paint, Gender, and Race in *The English Moor*', *Early Theatre*, 10.2 (2007), 140–49 (p. 147).

manipulable by the public world around him. This superficial representation of wounds recurs across Middleton's drama, where male scars become a site of potential duplicity and ambiguity. The decayed knight and con-man Sir Ruinous Gentry in Middleton and Rowley's city comedy *Wit at Several Weapons* (1613) claims his scars are 'in those parts where nature and humanity bids me shame to publish' as part of a confidence trick that notably excuses him his lack of visible wounds (1.2.189-91). General Andrugio, also disguised as a poor soldier in *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (1614) in his pursuit of Aurelia, similarly suggests that he 'could show many marks of resolution, / But modesty could wish 'em rather hidden' to gain entry to the Governor's fort (2.3.5-6). While in these two instances the men refuse to display their skin, they invoke the legibility of wounds as part of a wider assemblage of masculine embodiment to shore up their disguises. These refusals to represent injury resonate with Jonson's comment about the triviality of theatrical wounds, but, significantly, Middleton's deployment of scars that can be faked, even if they are hidden, suggests the similarity of bodily wounds to cosmetic or prosthetic attachments.

Moreover, the bruise in early modern drama materialised and memorialised violent encounters between bodies at the surface of the skin. The ephemeral and seemingly inconsequential place on the skin has led to the bruise being overlooked in the recent trend of skin studies in early modern literature and culture more broadly. As Catherine Loomis argues, rhetorically the bruise 'functions as a polyptoton, a figure of speech in which a word—a strike—returns in a different grammatical form—stricken'; the instance of bruising becomes a bruise, a visible and material but ephemeral memory of violent contact on the body's surface.⁶⁶ Yet when bruises appear in early modern drama, they frequently work to highlight the role of violence in materialising and enforcing the social hierarchies of class, gender and race. Patricia Akhimie has interrogated the racial ideologies of *The Comedy of Errors* (1594) to consider the bruise as 'evidence of pain or oppression that is justified in the eyes of a society by the presence of a stigmatized mark, located on the body'.⁶⁷ In making

⁶⁶ Catherine Loomis, "'Sore Hurt and Bruised": Visual Damage in *Othello*', in *Stage Matters: Props, Bodies, and Space in Shakespearean Performance*, ed. by Annalisa Castaldo and Rhonda Knight (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), pp. 73–88 (p. 75).

⁶⁷ Patricia Akhimie, 'Bruised with Adversity: Reading Race in *The Comedy of Errors*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. by Valerie Traub

violence intelligible on the skin, bruises afforded marginalised and beaten bodies the opportunity to reconfigure the meanings of the violence they suffered. The chain of violence from masters to servants, for example, was another common trope. Mark Thornton Burnett describes abuses experienced by apprentices that include being ‘trodden upon, kicked in the ribs and belly, beaten with spurs, flogged with cords and rods, flung against posts, and stabbed in the arms’.⁶⁸ In drama, violence that bruised was often especially reserved for those of a lower status who tried to advance themselves. The lowborn scholar Laureo in Thomas Dekker’s *Patient Grissil* (1600) is starkly warned that ‘Those that doe strive to justle with the great, / Are certaine to be bruz’d or soone to breake’.⁶⁹ For aspiring above his standing in *Twelfth Night*, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew conspire to publicly shame the pompous steward Malvolio by ‘fool[ing] him black and blue’ (2.5.8-9). Rather than challenge him to a duel as an equal, the two men seek to humiliate and beat the steward instead. Alison Hobgood has argued that Malvolio’s body evokes bruises by bringing ‘spectators back to the materiality of humiliation’ where both the spoken and physical violence enacted onto his body is enshrined as a ‘visual record’.⁷⁰ In the case of Malvolio, his ‘injuries [are considered] justly weighed’ against his ambitions and self-regard (5.1.347). While, as this section argues, representations of the bruise and the wound were thought of and staged in different contexts, they share an emphasis on the skin as a malleable surface on which gendered identities may be negotiated and made legible. By attending to marked skin and the marking of skin as a determined site where masculinity is produced by being made legible, I will explore how Middleton negotiates male subjectivity as shared and exchanged through bodily encounters.

Middleton and Rowley’s satire on the rash violence of masculine duelling culture considers this relationship between reputation and skin. While the numerous plots of *A Fair Quarrel* deal with various manifestations of gendered honour, the wounding that occurs in the duel between Captain Ager and the Colonel stages the

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 186–96 (p. 187). See also Ania Loomba, ““Break Her Will, and Bruise No Bone Sir”: Colonial and Sexual Mastery in Fletcher’s *The Island Princess*”, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 2.1 (2002), 68–108.

⁶⁸ Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 34.

⁶⁹ Thomas Dekker, *Patient Grisill* (London: [E. Allde] for Henry Rocket, 1603), G4v.

⁷⁰ Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing*, p. 153.

centrality of the skin to their elite martial masculinities. The quarrel arises between the two men as they argue about the problem of ‘Compar[ing] young Captain Ager with the Colonel’, and satirises the potentially deadly conclusions of honourable matters in a masculine duelling culture (1.1.38).⁷¹ The Colonel repeatedly tests Ager’s patience with escalating insults, the most injurious being that Ager is ‘the son of a whore’ (347), cutting the Captain as a wound which ‘rages / More than a common smart’ (2.1.99-100). Ager, concerned about the Colonel’s insult against his mother, is misled by Lady Ager into thinking that the insult is real, though this a ploy to manipulate Ager whose honour will not allow him to reply to the insult with violence if he believes it to be true. The quarrel escalates when the Colonel calls Ager a ‘base submissive coward’ (3.1.112). His martial valour doubted, Ager has found a justification for repaying the insult with violence. In the play’s parody of elite duelling culture, ‘words begets swords’ as they damage reputation which has become as fragile and public as skin (1.1.95).

In the duel following their argument, the Colonel loses to Ager and is struck down, apparently fatally. He cries out that ‘heaven has found me / And turned the stings of my too hasty injury / Into my own blood’ (3.1.175-77). The Colonel is later ‘discovered in bed’ in what he and his sister believe is a state of near-death (4.2.0), with his wound having grown ‘almost to a convulsion’ (5.1.402). In contrast to the kinds of surfaces discussed previously in this chapter, the play here presents ‘the uncertainty provoked by [a ruptured] body – or abject body – whose borders have collapsed’.⁷² Middleton and Rowley stage the rupture of the skin that threatens the Colonel’s corporeal integrity, resonating with Helkiah Crooke’s contemporary description of the skin as a thin and exposed boundary—‘there is betwixt us and our dissolution, not an inch board, but a tender skinne, which the slenderest violence even the cold aire is able to slice through’.⁷³ Yet this wounded body would not be fully visible, hidden by bedsheets on stage. The gaping opening in the Colonel’s skin is later

⁷¹ The play’s mixed authorship between Middleton and Rowley is apparent throughout but especially in the opening and closing scenes where the two collaborated within scenes. See Jackson, ‘Canons and Chronologies’, p. 399.

⁷² Sarah Covington, *Wounds, Flesh, and Metaphor in Seventeenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 9.

⁷³ Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrosmographia a Description of the Body of Man* (London: William Jaggard, 1615), p. 60.

repaired by the surgeon—the wound was ‘a deep one, but / I closed the lips on’t with bandages and sutures’ (396-97). The captain should be left with a scar, a physical mark on his skin to memorialise this encounter. The surgeon tells how the ‘wound was fain to be twice corroded’ (395-95), suggesting it has left a lasting impression upon the Colonel’s skin. The duelling plot centres on the moment of wounding but the play curiously avoids visibly representing marked skin, either in the act of violence or in the staged recovery in the play’s later scenes. The Colonel’s wound is described by the Surgeon as a ‘plain gastrolophe’ (396), which bears similarity to the large stomach sutures described in Peter Lowe’s medical treatise *The Whole Discourse of Surgery* (1597).⁷⁴ The Colonel’s gaping stomach wound is an absent presence, constantly discussed but never staged, as it is covered either by clothing or bedsheets in the course of his recovery. The invisibility of wounds is invoked as a critique of a masculine honour system that refuses to articulate pain and harm. Lady Ager worries whether her son was injured in his duel with the Colonel and is simply too proud to ‘confess’ his wounds (4.3.24). She attempts to persuade him that physical injuries would not affect his reputation—‘a wound’s honourable, / And never shames the wearer’ (26-27). Yet Ager ‘came off untouched’ and uninjured in the duel (28). Through play’s wounds being hidden or falsely imagined, this problem of visibility in *A Fair Quarrel* problematises the readability of bodily surfaces. While the wounds themselves seem to be hidden more than present on stage, the damage to the men’s egos and reputations seems to be enough to suggest the fragility of their elite, martial masculinity.

Middleton and Rowley stage male woundedness as a direct consequence of an elite masculine culture highly invested in reputation, and show how this form of masculinity can reconcile bodily harm in order to perpetuate itself. Near the play’s end, the Colonel calls on Ager to marry his sister and claim his inheritance while sitting in his supposed death-bed. His closed wound is described as ‘a conjunction of the parts separated against the course of nature’ (5.1.398-99). While the Colonel claims to have ‘Recovered!’ at the conclusion (410), he still feels the ‘shame’ against his honour far more than the rupture in his actual skin so that he ‘dare not see’ Ager (417-18). The Colonel worries more against the ‘wrong’ he has done to Ager’s ‘fame’ than his own

⁷⁴ Peter Lowe, *The Whole Course of Chirurgerie* (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1597), sig. S2v.

physical injuries (416), which have been repeatedly described in terms that suggest major bodily trauma and so would also linger through scarification. Tanya Pollard has argued that early modern drama repeatedly stages ‘impenetrable skin as a magnificent fantasy, but repeatedly point[s] out its failures’.⁷⁵ Middleton and Rowley stage and satirise a paradox of masculine violence that invokes the fragility of skin to gesture to the ridiculousness and rashness of its elite male characters. And while skin itself repeatedly becomes ruptured, the play conversely shows relationships between men to be strategically resilient. The play’s final lines assert that the two men’s ‘fair quarrel’ has made them ‘happy friends’ (448). The violence of the duel, which led to the Colonel on his apparent death bed, is rendered ‘comical in the context of this romantic comedy but potentially tragic outside it’.⁷⁶ The Colonel’s description of their quarrel as ‘fair’ invokes the violence and reconciliation that are a proportionate and ‘fair’ response to insults in the upper-class system of masculine honour. ‘Fair’ might also evoke how the Colonel’s skin is now a ‘fair’ surface, meaning complete if not unmarked. While a physical scar was likely not visibly staged, his survival does the symbolic work of scarring which ‘closes the body’s narrative and reinvests it with authority’.⁷⁷ With his masculinity restored through the reconciliation between the men, the violence of the play is shown to be temporary and eventually subdued by the reinstatement of Ager and the Colonel’s ‘blessed alliance’ (446). The play is not concerned with staging real, damaged skin. Instead, Middleton and Rowley demonstrate how marked skin can function as a symbol that violence can be recuperated and mediated as part of male identity.

The aftermath of the duel, then, takes this conflation of skin and honour to reveal how the marking of both can be recuperated into masculine identities. Russell’s warning that women’s reputations are ‘a mere cupboard of glasses, / The least shake breaks or cracks ’em’ (1.1.8-9) would at first appear to apply to the women and the

⁷⁵ Tanya Pollard, ‘Enclosing the Body: Tudor Conceptions of the Skin’, in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. by Kent Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 111–22 (p. 121).

⁷⁶ Jennifer A. Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 110.

⁷⁷ Jeffrey Sychterz, ‘Scarred Narratives and Speaking Wounds: War Poetry and the Body’, *Pacific Coast Philology*, 44.2 (2009), 137–47 (p. 140).

men in the play.⁷⁸ Lady Ager and Jane Russell do suffer harm to their reputation. Jane, pregnant with Fitzallen's child out of wedlock, is threatened with having her pregnancy revealed by the Physician to 'public penance' (5.1.28), though a defiant Jane claims she'll have a 'clean sheet' as she has been secretly married to Fitzallen already (29). Lady Ager, however, is not a citizen character and is more closely bound up in the elite male honour system. She risks her reputation that 'is so hardly [hers], with such pain purchased' (3.3.30). Her sexual reputation becomes an object by which Ager's own male honour orients itself, and limits her own agency—'ever [her] desire to intend well / But have no fortunate way in't' (4.3.85-86). Female honour can be recovered only if the men are able to negotiate their own masculinity in relation to it; Russell's honour is restored when his pregnant daughter has had a husband all along, and Ager's when he confirms the chastity of his mother. The men, however, can recuperate their own and each other's reputations. While the initial argument between Ager and the Colonel arose from their disagreement about their respective reputations being 'so even and level a degree / It will admit of no superlative' between the two (72-73), their reconciliation after the duel reveals the resilience of elite male friendship, at the expense of their bodily wholeness and women's agency. The Colonel endows Ager with his property, as well as his sister to marry, and the two embrace as friends again. David Nicol reads this scene as continuing the critique of honour across the play as the Colonel's sister is forced to silently agree to marry Ager.⁷⁹ For the men in *A Fair Quarrel*, their surfaces are resilient. The marks they bear may incur damage to reputations, but this is recovered by the shared elite masculine sensibility of Ager and the Colonel. Elite male skin bears the marks of critique and of actual violence, concealing and revealing the vulnerability of the male body in its often violent interactions with the world it inhabits. Yet the resilience of both the male characters and the violent system of masculine social relations show that certain forms of masculinity can recover and recuperate the violence of these marks in the long term.

Middleton would develop this relationship between violence and the skin in his later tragicomedy *The Nice Valour* where bodies behave like textual surfaces. The play

⁷⁸ For more on the play's treatment of female honour, see Pacheco, 'A Mere Cupboard of Glasses'; Nicol, *Middleton & Rowley*, pp. 106-17.

⁷⁹ Nicol, *Middleton & Rowley*, pp. 110.

presents the narcissistic men of the Genoan court who each embody ‘a single hyperbolic masculine trait’.⁸⁰ The ‘nice valour’ of the play’s title is likely Chamont, the duke’s favourite who adheres to a system of strict honour codes. Chamont’s ‘valour’ is noted by another gentleman at court as being ‘No virtue, and not fit for any courtier’ (1.1.31-32). It is this precise sense of honour and place that enables the disruptive events of Chamont’s plot. When Chamont is distracted speaking to himself, the Duke ‘*gives him a touch with his switch*’ to get his attention (2.1.222 SD). Although there is no physical mark on his skin, Chamont exiles himself from the court to escape the ‘shame’ of that physical contact, which is imagined as ‘stripes’ on his person (97-98). The damage to his pride is like a scar, ‘and a deep one, / Which neither argument nor time can alter’ (102-03). The contradictions between competing ideals of loyalty and individual honour threaten his male identity. Although the tap does not mark the skin, it publicly demonstrates his own submission and damages his pride. Chamont, owing to his sense of loyalty and place within the court’s social relations, cannot challenge the Duke for the ‘satisfaction of revenge’ and is left with no option but to exile himself from the court (236). Chamont’s thin-skinned honour is a surface where ‘Base things are felt / More by their shames than their hurts’ (1.1.108-09). Chamont’s skin becomes a highly-determined surface onto which the casual interpersonal violence that articulates masculine hierarchy is projected. The pain of the Duke’s casual strike is negligible but the touch of the switch—whether it leaves a physical mark or not—becomes a hypervisible mark of shame.

In stark contrast, the clownish and masochistic author Lepet willingly submits to such beatings and collects bruises from them, which he then proudly displays on his body as badges of honour and signifiers of his more lowly courtly position.⁸¹ He has ‘not been so long a gentleman’ like the other men at court (1.1.141), having bought his status with money left when ‘a rich uncle died and left me chattels’ (4.1.267). Lepet’s unique position is shown in his willingness to ‘endure as much / As can be laid upon him’ in regular and frequent beatings from his fellow men (1.1.93-93). He is frequently defined by the bruises that he visibly displays on his body. Upon seeing Lepet’s arms,

⁸⁰ Henley, ‘Tragicomic Men’, p. 264.

⁸¹ Taylor has suggested that it is likely that Lepet was played by William Rowley if the play was performed by the Prince Charles’s Men. See ‘Canons and Chronology’, p. 427.

Chamont angrily exclaims ‘How black and blue they are?’ Is that your manifestation?’ (135-36). Chamont’s fragile sense of honour views these bruises as physical marks that disclose or reveal Lepet’s degradation. Lepet’s willingness to openly fashion himself through such violence makes him a figure of disgust and ridicule for the other gentlemen, and possibly even the play, typified by Chamont’s exclamation that Lepet’s submissiveness ‘is so abject’ (3.2.95). Chamont’s code of masculine honour refuses the physical markings of violence that Lepet’s display of willing submission embraces.

Yet Lepet interprets and displays these bruises as marks of honour, refuting their shameful associations:

What honour a man loses by a kick.
Why, what’s a kick? The fury of a foot,
Whose indignation commonly is stamped
Upon the hinder quarter of a man
Which is a place very unfit for honour. (3.2.2-6)

Lepet argues that, unlike Chamont, his sense of masculine honour is not necessarily attached to the interpersonal blows dealt between men at court; the beatings are just beatings. In Lepet’s conceit, holding honour in those parts of the body that other men deem to kick is a ridiculous notion. Susanne Paterson describes Lepet’s bruises as ‘fissures’ of power that enable the ‘bruised person a way to display his injuries as marks signifying a certain power over the person who beat him’.⁸² The bruises stand as a testimony of the violence endured between these men who continually use beatings to produce social networks predicated on the value of honour and mastery over self and others—‘Blows should have marks, or else they are nothing worth’ (4.3.310). When asked why he takes this beating, Lepet clarifies that his submission is dependent on maintaining a courtly relationship mediated through physical contact: ‘I would not, sir, / Unless ’twere offered me; and if from an enemy—/ I’d be loath to deny it from a stranger’ (1.1.115-17). Lepet exploits the expected beatings associated with his social position to translate these into a form of self-fashioning, where the

⁸² Susanne Paterson, ‘Exchanging Blows and Courtesies: Status and Conduct in *Bonduca*, *A King and No King*, and *The Nice Valour*’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2001), p. 252.

shame of bruises instead become badges of honour. Bromley explores this positive display of identity suggested by the bruise, arguing that Lepet's marked skin comes to signify 'the encounter between bodily surfaces' which in turn 'confer[s] on him the status of courtier'.⁸³ Acting as surficial 'points of connection and interaction' between his body and the court, the bruises are shown to be a sign of survival and negotiation.⁸⁴ Lepet's sense of masculinity, borne out of the violent homosocial relations at court, relocates identity and its production to the surface of the body as the site of interpersonal relations.

The logic of subordination associated with the bruise visibly marks Lepet's bodily surface with a form of otherness. The First Gentleman invokes foreignness to connect degrees of racialised skin pigmentation with Lepet's bruises: 'His buttock's all black lead; / He's half a negro backward. He was a past Spaniard / In eighty-eight, and more Egyptian-like' (4.1.219-21). Bromley argues that this 'hierarchy' which presents blackness by degrees from a 'Spaniard' to a 'negro' produces 'blackness [a]s a surface feature' on Lepet's body.⁸⁵ Akhimie argues that the somatic bruise under racial ideology grouped people based on 'the perceived indelibility of such bodily markers', where marks of violence on certain bodies reflected a marked racial difference.⁸⁶ However, Lepet's physical blackness produced by the bruises is temporary. Unlike scars left by sword wounds, bruises fade over time. Lepet encourages this temporary bruising because in the long term 'a man may be well beaten, / Yet pass away his fourscore smooth after' (3.2.29-30). Lepet's skin will eventually forget the violence marked onto it and return to a fantasy of unmarked, white skin. The temporality of these specifically black bruises could also be staged in the early modern theatre. It is possible to speculate that these bruises could be staged with the same black pigments used for painting white actors' faces black.⁸⁷ Considering the early modern's stage wider preoccupation with conflating bruises and

⁸³ James M. Bromley, 'Social Relations and Masochistic Sexual Practice in *The Nice Valour*', *Modern Philology*, 107.4 (2010), 556-87 (p. 569).

⁸⁴ Joseph A. Amato, *Surfaces: A History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), p. 19.

⁸⁵ Bromley, 'Social Relations and Masochistic Sexual Practice', p. 574.

⁸⁶ Akhimie, 'Bruised with Adversity', p. 187.

⁸⁷ For examples of black characters having their skin conflated with bruising, see William Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, 1.5.28; William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 1.2.352, 5.1.276; Philip Massinger, *The Bondman* (London: John Harison and Edward Blackmore, 1624), sig. E1r.

racialised blackness, bruises may well have been staged using similar materials as blackface make-up, such as burnt almond shells, soot, or charred cork, which themselves could be applied or washed away during a performance just as ephemerally as literal bruises fade from the body.⁸⁸ If such black pigments or paints were applied in the theatre to materialise these bruises, Lepet's lines may gesture towards the cosmetic or graphic status of the bruise itself – though whether bruises were made visible on the body of the actor playing him or not remains ambiguous. Willingly submitting to the violence intended to humiliate him allows Lepet to acquire bruises as a surface feature which he displays as marks of a submission that is associated with a racialised blackness. Displaying this marked difference as a sign of pride on the surface of his skin explicitly works against the other ideologies of male rank and honour that are adopted by the rest of the Genoan court.

Lepet's book explicitly articulates this alternative model of submissive masculinity that locates his bruises in a complex mesh of bodies and codes of behaviour. Sitting somewhere between conduct book, fighting manual and anti-duelling tract, his *The Uprising of the Kick, / And the Downfall of the Duello* promotes the taking of bruises as a way to prevent the violence of fatal duels at court, selling this model of submission to other men hoping for similar advantages (4.1.327-28). Through *The Uprising of the Kick*, Lepet hopes to reform the systems of violence and 'move most gallants to take kicks in time' (3.2.11) in a step towards the 'dissolution of all bloodshed' spilt in an elite duelling culture (21). Significantly, Middleton uses a shared language of display for the bruises on Lepet's body and the ink stamped in his book. When Lepet enters with book proofs, he describes the type used for his corrections as if they were being physically beaten onto the page, a form of typographic performance: 'put all the thumps in pica roman—And with great T's, you vermin, as thumps should be' (4.1.237-38). While poring over the proofs, Lepet and Galoshio make it clear that the typefaces symbolise and physically reflect the stances of different forms of beatings. Lepet complains that the 'wherret and this bob' were not printed in the correct pica roman font, decrying that the printer instead of showing

⁸⁸ See Karim-Cooper, 'This Alters Not Thy Beauty', p. 146. See also Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 77–8.

the words to be ‘pikèd Romans [...] has made ’em Welsh bills [a halberd-like weapon]’ (313-15). The formatting of the book also mimics the violence of certain kinds of strikes. The ‘bastinado’ has been set ‘far off’ from a general paragraph to ‘allow room to lay about him’ (319-20). Some of the ‘spurns’ [parts of the type which descend below a line] are intentionally set ‘lower’ than others to signify the magnitude of different beatings—‘this signifies one kicked down stairs, sir; / The other, in a gallery’ (321-23). The violent language of printing associates Lepet’s bruises with the typeface and layout of the proofs, both graphic marks impressed onto the surface of the skin or sheet. Reading these proofs on stage, Lepet instructs his clownish servant Galoshio to ‘mark the postures’ of the ‘blows and blow-men whatsoever, / Set in their lively colours’ (336-38). Violence is suggested not only by the typeface of Lepet’s book, then, as it also serves as an illustrative guide containing postures to show its male readership how to be the ‘givers’ or ‘takers’ of violent beatings (336).

Middleton repeatedly refers to bruised bodies in the same terms as ink stamped in paper and books. For example, after Galoshio greets Lepet with a kick, one cheerfully returned in kind, the clown hopes to enter into Lepet’s service. He does so by referring to his own body as having ‘endured as much / As mortal pen and ink can set me down for’ (3.2.134-35). In an expression of bruised solidarity, Lepet notes that Galoshio’s beaten body provides another living example of his printed model of submission: he ‘fits me, / And hits my wishes pat [exactly]’ to be employed in his service (138-39). While there is a letter that recommends the clown to Lepet, it is the bruises that attest to his social position far more strongly—‘I have it under black and white already; / I have no pen to paint me out’ (137-38). Despite the claims for his book to be conflated with the text of his own body, Lepet refutes the power of another’s written letter, preferring the bodily textuality that Galoshio’s beatings have impressed onto him. Galoshio’s letter of recommendation contains the assumption of an unequal master-servant relationship between the two, that both letter and Galoshio are objects to be assessed and possessed by Lepet. Yet by acknowledging the bruises which manifest the clown’s previous experiences of violence, pain and service, Lepet reflects ambiguously on the capacity for printed objects to reflect the bodily pain of beaten subjects. The letter of recommendation as a staged and symbolic object is looked over in favour of the marked bruises on the clown’s skin. The readability of the bruised

body as a text ultimately trumps the capacity of printed objects to represent the experiences of violent male embodiment.

Lepet successfully manages to exploit the process by which male identity insists upon itself as a surface that can be manipulated, pressed upon and read. This reconfiguration of the bodily surface is detailed in Lepet's book which, by the play's end, has been selling 'gallantly' (5.3.7). It has sold so well that 'two impressions' have been printed (5), making Lepet enough money that an aghast Duke accuses him of 'disclaim[ing] his gentry for mere gains' (72). While possibly a satire of the number of men who would happily take a beating to advance themselves socially, the commercial success of Lepet's printed book suggests a readership willing to adopt masochistic stances to confirm their social advancement through bruising. To help teach his audiences the best positions in which to take beatings as recommended in his book, Lepet organises a public dance at the court. The postures the dances moves through may well be the same illustrations that he includes in *The Uprising of the Kick*, which includes the 'twinge', the 'souse upon souse', the 'jostle sides', the 'knee belly', the 'kicksy buttock' and the 'down derry' (5.1.80-86). By staging these various postures that emulate the body as being beaten, Middleton plays out the contents of Lepet's book on the stage. Lepet's submissive survival strategy not only mediates his bruises through the marks on the page but, as this dance shows, presents these bruises as something that can be shared across the multiple bodies that mimic taking these beatings. Lepet's strategy of transforming the marks such beatings cause on his body into signs of self-fashioning produces a blackly-comic fantasy of masculinity embracing the contradictions of masochism. He exploits the processes of interpersonal violence which marks itself on his skin through the manipulation of bruises as a graphic, textual surface. The staged proofs, letters and book that accompany his bruises demonstrate Lepet's conscious management of his body as a surface to be pressed upon and then read. His bruises are emphasised as temporary, like his proofs which he corrects on stage, while his printed book which sells 'gallantly', reproduces these bruises and their signification of submission more permanently throughout the court. Even as a figure of abject ridicule, Lepet negotiates violence through his bruises—which themselves become marks of authorship as he writes the bruises impressed onto

his own body—in order to materialise a masochistic masculinity that confronts the inherent inequalities of power in social relations.

Both *A Fair Quarrel* and *The Nice Valour* share a distinct interest in the ways that masculinity is constituted on bodily surfaces through strategies that reveal, conceal and remember marks made on the skin. The satire of superficial masculinity between Ager and the Colonel shows the body's surface to be a fragile one upon which they construct a sense of masculinity that is shown to be precariously vulnerable to physical or verbal injury. Yet Middleton's later development of this superficiality in Lepet reveals an investment in masculine superficiality as an alternative mode of being, by accepting the temporary bruising of his skin. His sense of masculinity embraces the contradictions of self-fashioning by submitting to such beatings. Lepet accepts his lower status in the court hierarchy as made legible through the bruises but uses these bruises to fashion himself as an author whose alternative framework of performing masculinity refutes this same hierarchy. Through the legibility of Lepet's skin as a textual surface, Middleton interrogates the connected system of male violence and subordination that leaves its mark only on certain bodies. The extreme case of Lepet demonstrates the inequalities in masculinity that can be generated through and inflicted on surfaces. Yet his willingness to turn this violence and humiliation to his advantage demonstrates Middleton's own interest in the ways that compromised surfaces, be they skin, clothing or other prosthetic attachments, allow men to navigate social ecosystems that emphasise outward displays of masculinity.

Conclusion

By considering the language of exteriority embraced in the rise of critical surficial studies, I have argued that masculinity in Middleton's plays is expressly articulated and contested on bodily surfaces. Embodied tropes of masculine identity in Middleton are constructed through a layering of surfaces, whether these be corporeal, material, linguistic or a combination of the above, and it is the surface which creates form and difference. Moments where surfaces are potentially compromised or marked more often than not enable alternative and malleable masculinities to emerge which play with the readability of the body through activities such as the fading of bruises, the exchanging of cloaks, or the purposeful concealing of the body. Middleton's plays for

the Children of Paul's show an early interest in the male body as an assemblage of the material and corporeal. He later developed this treatment of surface to explore burlesque stock masculinities, which are unable to manipulate such surfaces to their own advantage. Ager, the Colonel and Chamont all share a rigid sense of reputation and honour about the individual body which, perhaps inevitably, stands in tension with the marks of interpersonal male violence. Similarly, Lethe's failure to adapt to the superficial language of display arises from his belief that self-fashioning is achievable entirely by the individual. Through these characters, Middleton satirises the valorisation of self-control over the individual body by drawing attention to the various ways in which their various surfaces repeatedly are shown to be interpersonal spaces.

Lepet's lack of concern about the opinions of the men around him makes him a figure of abject mockery even as his indifference reveals other 'contradictions within patriarchal ideology'.⁸⁹ His success lies in recognising that 'self'-fashioning is largely interpersonal, and exploiting his own inferior social positions through the beatings he receives. The marks of masculinity on the surface of an individual body gesture toward a shared masculine unease about appearance. Lepet's display of bruises confirms his position at court. While clearly an extreme satire of masculinities that locate identity out of their deference to others based on lineage, rank and honour, Lepet has adopted a compromised masculinity which enables him to find success and advancement. Refusing to recognise the shame that other men read from these markings places him outside of the amorphous categories of lineage, rank, and honour and into a more market-based economy of shared bodily connectivity through his authorship. Likewise, the various personifications of masculine vice in *Your Five Gallants* refuse the fantasy of male individualism. The interchangeability, multiplicity and ethical ambiguity with which Middleton presents these gallants demonstrate a theatrical investment in masculine display. Here, the self-reflexive surface of Middleton's metatheatre reveals that it never changes these gallants at all: they are constructed by surfaces they do not fully understand. This plurality, frequently staged throughout Middleton's drama, shows masculinity to be already compromised and suffused with the language of exteriority.

⁸⁹ Henley, 'Tragicomic Men', p. 279.

Middleton's propensity for staging scenes where the substance or essence of the surface is revealed has implications for my broader argument on the in-between and interpersonal mode in which he writes. This chapter has represented the material and corporeal investment in surfaces repeated throughout Middleton's tragi- and city comedies. The failure of self-fashioning in these plays shows the limits of individual will within a system of exteriority, while also showing that those who succeed can, to some extent, allow themselves to be shaped by the world they inhabit. Male characters like Lepet who allow themselves to be shaped by others and can turn this vulnerability to their advantage continually appear in Middleton's work. Treating subordination, compromise, and interruption as potentially constructive, they revel in the interpersonal relationships that figure and might otherwise constrain aspects of early modern masculinities. By reading his men as made up of a plurality of connected parts and surfaces, this chapter proposes an alternative approach to the treatment of the relationships between appearance and reality that often accumulate in readings of Middletonian texts. In these plays, Middleton's men produce and reproduce a shared sense of manhood which, by being constituted on the body's surfaces, is made vulnerable, mutable, and transferable by its very legibility. Although this chapter has focused on challenges to male self-fashioning through material objects, Chapter Three considers how female masculinities are materialised on Middleton's stage in order to continue expanding and challenging the terms by which masculinities assembled themselves on stage.

Chapter Three: Manly Gentlewomen: Double-Crossdressing Conventions and Female Masculinities

A proper woman turned gallant! If the widow refuse me I care not if I be a suitor to him. I have known those who have been as mad and given half their living for a male companion. (*No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*, 4.190-93)

In Middleton's 1611 comedy *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*, the foolish Weatherwise has an immediate attraction to Kate Low-Water who is disguised as a fellow male suitor to the widowed Lady Goldenfleece. Unable to see through the disguise, Weatherwise expresses his desire to keep this womanish young man as a 'male companion' (193). Yet the ambiguity raised by a 'proper woman turned gallant' (190) also makes possible other kinds of queer readings. Weatherwise may indeed see through the disguise that elicits his transgressive desire for a crossdressed woman, or, at the very least, the text signals to an audience the comedic and erotic charge of the double-crossdressed male actor playing the female Kate playing a gallant. The desirable appeal of Kate's disguise is further emphasised by Lady Goldenfleece's 'thirst' for the effeminate gentleman (217). Kate exploits the widow's attraction, wooing and marrying her to redress the financial ruin the widow's late husband had enacted on the Low-Waters. She compares her convincing performance of maleness to the physical skill of a bowler—'Yet if my bowl take bank, I shall go nigh / To make myself a saver. / Here's alley-room enough' (6.84-86). Kate's metaphor emphasises the physicality of the performance required in the 'game' of Middleton's witty crossdressing plot, which hinges on theatrically doubled role-play from Kate and the male actor playing her, and undergirds the skills involved in both acting and bowling.¹ Considering Kate's crossdressing as both skilled and playful can illuminate how Middleton reiterated, remoulded, and multiplied masculinities across a variety of bodies in his theatre.

Crossdressing drew attention to the relative flexibility of gender categories on and off the early modern stage. The frequency that crossdressing appears in the

¹ Tom Bishop describes 'theater as a form of play or an event which includes various kinds of games or play-routines' in 'Shakespeare's Theater Games', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 40.1 (2010), 65–88 (p. 66).

literature of the period reflected a desire to comprehend and, frequently, seek to regulate how gender is signified through the body, gestures, language, clothing and other prosthetic attachments.² The use of crossdressed boy actors in female roles helped to produce a ‘spectrum of theatrical artificiality’ along which various degrees of male and female performances could materialise.³ Middleton regularly exploits the ironies of sexual disguise and crossdressing in his comedies, particularly when boy actors play women who then disguise themselves as men. What makes Middleton ‘the playwright who always takes things too far’ is his tendency to refer explicitly to the artifice of all genders in his theatre through his extreme staging of double-crossdressing tropes.⁴ As Michael Shapiro has observed, the layering of genders through crossdressing allowed for ‘skilful and precise oscillations between them’, as the bodies of male actors and female characters overlapped and intermingled with each other on stage.⁵ However, there is a further need to address Middleton’s theatre as interested in how gender disguise and nonconformity are constructed by more than clothing. Marjorie Rubright’s recent work on the philology of gender multiplication in *The Roaring Girl* highlights how ‘the play refuses to produce classificatory clarifications regarding gender’, which I take up more broadly to adopt a critical model that avoids foreclosing the radical potential of gendered plurality in Middleton’s

² See Jean E. Howard, ‘Power and Eros: Crossdressing in Dramatic Representation and Theatrical Practice’, in *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 94–130; David Cressy, ‘Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 35.04 (1996), 438–65; Tracey Sedinger, ‘“If Sight and Shape Be True”: The Epistemology of Crossdressing on the London Stage’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48.1 (1997), 63–79; and Simone Chess, *Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Early Modern English Literature: Gender, Performance, and Queer Relations* (London: Routledge, 2016).

³ Courtney Bailey Parker, *Spectrums of Shakespearean Crossdressing: The Art of Performing Women* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 2.

⁴ Gregory M. Schnitzspahn, ‘Teaching Cross-Dressing Comedy with Thomas Middleton’s *The Widow*’, *This Rough Magic*, 2016, para. 8
<<http://www.thisroughmagic.org/schnitzspahn%20article.html>> [accessed 20 June 2022]. There is a substantial body of scholarship on Middleton’s use of crossdressing, especially with respect to *The Roaring Girl*. For example, see Susan Zimmerman, ‘Disruptive Desire: Artifice and Indeterminacy in Jacobean Comedy’, in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. by Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 39–63 (pp. 74–80); Farah Karim-Cooper, ‘Disguise and Identity in the Plays of Middleton’, in *Thomas Middleton in Context*, ed. by Suzanne Gossett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 279–86; Lowe, ‘the Construction of Theatre’, pp. 205–6; and Chess, *Male-to-Female Crossdressing*, pp. 5–6, 74–80.

⁵ Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 7.

theatre.⁶ Middleton's self-consciously metatheatrical treatment of gender renders his crossdressed characters as both known and disguised, never fully settling into either category nor neatly oscillating between the two. Amidst the tonal and formal ironies in his work more broadly, Middleton's playful treatment of crossdressing conventions requires what Scott McMillin calls the 'canny eye [...] prepared for the pleasure and uncertainty of doubleness, reversal and surprise, not the eye which looks for the security of settled identities'.⁷ By paying close attention to the construction of female masculinity in this chapter, I propose a view of Middleton's double-crossdressing plots where gender is produced through a contingent process of negotiation between the signs and practices of masculinity and femininity.

This chapter will explore how Middleton engages with female masculinities that are constituted through the theatrical multiplicity of female-to-male crossdressing conventions. Taking Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, performed by Prince Henry's Men at the Fortune Theatre in 1611, as a starting point, I explore how Moll Cutpurse's distinctive and extreme manipulation of masculine and feminine signifiers stages a resistance to identarian impulses surrounding female masculinities. I then consider two of Middleton's solo-authored comedies for the King's Men that build on this crossdressed doubleness. In *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (1614), Middleton represents the pregnant Page as a figure who simultaneously embodies the skilled physicality of the boy actor and the crossdressed performance of the pregnant body. Middleton pushes the legibility of masculine or androgynous women through the double-crossdressed Page who is gendered through an interplay of youthful masculinity and effeminacy. This interest in the representation of female masculinities and the mode by which that representation materialises is continued in *The Widow* (c.1615-16) where the playfulness and playing of gender is at the forefront. The figure of Ansaldo frustrates the legibility of female-to-male crossdressing by 'passing' as male up until the play's last dramatic turn where his established maleness is shown to be a gender disguise.⁸ Both *More Dissemblers* and *The Widow* develop Middleton's

⁶ Marjorie Rubright, 'Transgender Capacity in Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (1611)', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 19.4 (2019), 45–74 (p. 48).

⁷ Scott McMillin, 'Middleton's Theatres', in *The Collected Works*, pp. 74–90 (p. 85).

⁸ For more on passing in the early modern period, see *Presenting Gender: Changing Sex in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Chris Mounsey (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001).

interest in staging gendered doubleness by considering the gendered traces that remain after the unmasking of crossdressed disguises, which disquietingly work against the conventional enclosures of meaning the plays engage in. By bringing Middleton's specific uses of play and playfulness regarding the tropes of female crossdressing into conversation with his wider interest in the extended and embodied construction of masculinity, I explore the multiplicity of masculinities that can be shared, challenged, and negotiated beyond the bounds of the individual male body. Doing so will illuminate how masculinities in Middleton's drama are intertwined with a concern about the fissures that lie between the fantasy and physicality of representation.

1. Materialising Moll's Masculinity in *The Roaring Girl*

Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* is significant to both the cultural memory of and critical debates surrounding early modern female crossdressing. The play builds on the persistent attention to the relationship between gender, dress and urban mobility that recurs in their respective works. Middleton and Dekker's Moll Cutpurse particularly resonates with the figure of Bellafront in their earlier collaboration for the Prince Henry's Men, then known as the Admiral's Men, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* (1604). Partly drawing on the notoriety of crossdressing criminal Mary Frith, Middleton and Dekker double the play's gender confusion by explicitly making their Moll's masculine crossdressing not part of a disguise. Their Moll is adept at manipulating the outward signifiers of both masculinity and femininity to foreground her own autonomous and mobile selfhood. She is defined by a plurality of gendered signifiers that portray her as inhabiting several gender positions at once. By attending to Moll's gendered multiplicity, I explore how her female masculinity generates a tension between the social construction of urban masculinity and the materialisation of the autonomy that Moll associates with that masculinity.

The frequency with which female masculinities appear in the literature and culture of the 1610s and 1620s demonstrates a contemporaneous awareness of the materially and socially constructed status of masculinity. Women's growing social and economic autonomy provoked cultural anxieties of emasculation, embodied by the fantasy of the unruly crossdressed woman. Pamphlets such as Joseph Swetnam's *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle and Unconstant Women* (1615) were uneasy about the

erosion of sex difference brought about by the presence of these masculine women. Swetnam scolded such women for defying the binarist principle that women were ‘nothing else but contrary to man’.⁹ Women dressing and behaving in masculine fashions were also the subject of notorious debates across *Hic Mulier*, *Haec-Vir* and *Mulde-Sacke*, a series of pamphlets published in quick succession in 1620.¹⁰ These pamphlets took crossdressed women to be ‘most Masculine, most mankinde, and most monstrous’ by their transgressive adoption of male apparel.¹¹ This broadly negative reaction to the phenomenon of female crossdressing is described by Marjorie Garber as ‘not just another category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of “category” itself’.¹² Yet the endless debates surrounding the female crossdresser indicate instead an increasing number of ways to refer to and talk about gender in the early modern period. The chiasmatic crisscrossing of gendered nouns and adjectives that pervade these pamphlets gives rise to an increasing variety of terms to describe gender variance and nonconformity. This multiplication of genders is taken up by John Taylor’s poetical satire *Superbiæ Flagellum* (1621) which articulates a variety of ambiguously gendered terms such as ‘The Woman-man, Man-woman, choose you whether / The Female-male, the Male female, both, yet neither’.¹³ Another fictional Mall (or Moll) Cutpurse appears in Nathan Field’s *Amends for Ladies* (c.1610-11) who similarly is described by Grace Seldom as being ‘both / Woman and man, but I thinke rather neither’.¹⁴ The visible doubleness in these descriptions, the recurring idea of being both yet neither, emphasises how female masculinity eludes neat categorisations of gender. Yet, both Taylor and Field’s descriptions of that doubleness suggest that the masculine women are outliers rather than figures that threaten the intelligibility of gender categories. While the categories of woman and man are still intelligible when

⁹ Joseph Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Vnconstant Women* (London: Printed by George Purslowe for Thomas Archer, 1615), p. 33. See Anna Bayman, ‘Female Voices in Early Seventeenth-Century Pamphlet Literature’, in *Women and Writing c.1340-c.1650: The Domestication of Print Culture*, ed. by Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillipa Hardman (York: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), pp. 196–210.

¹⁰ See Sandra Clark, ‘*Hic Mulier*, *Haec Vir*, and the Controversy over Masculine Women’, *Studies in Philology*, 82.2 (1985), 157–83; Chess, *Male-to-Female Crossdressing*, pp. 43–50.

¹¹ *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman* (London: [Eliot’s Court Press] for J. T[rundle], 1620), sig. A3r.

¹² Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 32.

¹³ John Taylor, *Superbiæ Flagellum, or, The Whip of Pride* (London: G. Eld, 1621), sig. C6r.

¹⁴ Nathan Field, *Amends for Ladies* (London: G. Eld for Math. Walbancke, 1618), sig. C2v.

faced with the female crossdresser, the stability of clothing and other signifiers that shape and sustain these categories is unsettled by this doubleness.

The choice to depict Moll as a conventional female crossdresser on the woodcut fronting Nicholas Okes's 1611 quarto of *The Roaring Girl* is significant considering Moll's gendered fungibility. The woodcut depicts Moll as a woman wearing visibly masculine garments and showy accessories, namely wide-cut breeches, garter ribbons, shoes decorated with flowers, a wide-brimmed hat adorned with a flowery brooch, a lit pipe and a sword.¹⁵ Jane Baston has argued that the woodcut undercuts the transgressive potential of Moll's crossdressing for 'although wearing full male dress, Moll looks like a woman dressed as a man'.¹⁶ Out of all the costume changes Moll undergoes, perhaps this Moll is the most legible to the early modern reader these quartos were marketed towards. Depicting Moll in this specific costume aims to make sense of her gender fluidity by imaging her as a conventional crossdresser. What may further complicate this gender fungibility is that Moll's crossdressing also intersects with the real Frith who may have sat on stage during or even performed on stage before, after, or during the play.¹⁷ While the actual role that Frith may have had in a performance of *The Roaring Girl* is unclear, Middleton and Dekker's play still relies on that 'slackness of truth' between the male actor portraying a fictionalised Moll and the real performing celebrity Frith (Epistle, l. 31). The woodcut attempts to fix Moll's gender as she both embodies and resists the conventional expectations of the female crossdresser as expressed by pamphlets such as *Hic Mulier*. The possibility of the real Frith within the playhouse, or at the very least in the broader city space, further emphasises that the constant changes and movements in the fictional Moll's dress are much more vibrant and shifting than conventional literary representations of female crossdressing.

Ironically, Middleton and Dekker refuse the fixity implied by the quarto's woodcut in their depiction of Moll in the play itself. More attuned to the plurality of gender categories described by Taylor and Field, Middleton and Dekker's Moll

¹⁵ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl* (London: [Nicholas Okes] for Thomas Archer, 1611).

¹⁶ Jane Baston, 'Rehabilitating Moll's Subversion in *The Roaring Girl*', *SEL*, 37.2 (1997), 317–35 (p. 323).

¹⁷ See Mark Hutchings, 'Mary Frith at the Fortune', *Early Theatre*, 10.1 (2007), 89–108 (p. 96).

consciously participates in this gendered multiplicity by undergoing various costume changes that move across neat distinctions between masculine and feminine. Echoing Field's language surrounding his version of Moll, Alexander Wengrave explains to his son Sebastian that Moll Cutpurse is 'more woman than man, / Man more than woman', shaping the audience's expectations of how Moll will later enter the stage as an excessive presence (2.132-33). When Moll appears in the next scene, her costume combines a '*frieze jerkin*' and a '*black safeguard*', or a masculine short coat combined with an outer skirt typically worn by women when horse-riding (3.180 SD). Moll's criss-crossing of gendered signifiers is not confined to a single instance, repeatedly unfixing what her crossdressing signifies as she undertakes several costume changes throughout the play. The Tailor Moll hires to make her a suit of male apparel comments that she 'change[s] the fashion' in adopting a 'great Dutch slop', the wide-cut baggy breeches depicted on the quarto's woodcut (4.88-89). Trapdoor's account of Moll's sartorial transformations explicitly frames these breeches as replacing her skirt when 'Her black safeguard is turned into a deep slop' (7.26-27). This processual construction of masculinity occurs across the duration of the play's performance—Moll transforms 'the holes of her upper body to buttonholes, her waistcoat to a doublet, her placket to the ancient seat of a codpiece' (7.27-29). Further, Middleton and Dekker use Laxton's rendezvous with Moll at Gray's Inn Fields to play with his memory of her clothing against Moll's own in-process identity. He remembers her wearing 'a shag ruff, a frieze jerkin, a short sword, and a safeguard' (5.35-36). Then, when Moll enters '*like a man*' (37 SD), Laxton misremembers Moll as wearing both men's and women's clothing so thinks she is now 'some young barrister' (49). This scene also tells us that Moll is wearing a '*cloak*' that she removes to engage in sword-fighting (61 SD), as well as a doublet which Laxton encourages her to 'untruss' (62). Much of this scene's comedy comes from Laxton's misreading of Moll's undressing to fight as an enticing strip before being thoroughly and 'gallantly' wounded (126). The multiple and indeterminate gendered items of clothing that Moll accumulates and removes self-consciously participate in the prosthetic masculinity I have discussed in the previous chapter where such objects are both essential and detachable. As Moll's gendered costume shifts throughout the play, a specific understanding of how or what her

crossdressing signifies becomes increasingly ungraspable by the characters around her.

Moll uses other prostheses and behaviours that shape her urban masculinity alongside her wearing of male garb. Her smoking, canting and sword-fighting have been the focus of various readings of Middleton and Dekker's play that seek to understand how Moll utilises a masculinity that she associates with urban autonomy and mobility.¹⁸ Moll's first appearance on stage foregrounds behaviours typically associated with fashionable urban gallantry. She displays her connoisseur-like knowledge of tobacco when assessing Goshawk's 'gear' (3.178), banters with the citizens and shopkeepers with 'a voice that will drown all the city' (196-96), and sees off a fellow who had wronged her with a strike said to be 'Gentlemanly performed [...] and manfully!' (271). Moll's behaviour is also crucially not confined to one space. Alexander describes Moll as a 'blazing star' who moves through London's streets and 'draws more eyes after' her own body as a display of masculinity (2.135-36). Moll's performance of masculinity is constructed by the act of crossing not only gendered sartorial categories but also, and perhaps more unsettlingly, the social and geographical boundaries that produce manliness in the early modern imagination.

Moll's habit of using boys and boyish figures as accessories further emphasises her reproduction of gallant behaviour. Amanda Bailey has argued that an urban manhood that used boys as prosthetic 'display items' formed over the seventeenth century.¹⁹ Texts such as Dekker's *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609) satirically portray fashionable gallants who 'kéepe an Irish hobby, an Irish horse-boy, and himselfe (like a gentleman)'.²⁰ In *The Roaring Girl*, Middleton and Dekker's depiction of how such of the figure of the boy unsettles this relation by interrogating who precisely is doing

¹⁸ Craig Rustici, 'The Smoking Girl: Tobacco and the Representation of Mary Frith', *Studies in Philology*, 96.2 (1999), 159–79; Jennie Votava, "'The Voice That Will Drown All the City': Un-Gendering Noise in *The Roaring Girl*", *Renaissance Drama*, 39 (2011), 69–95; Matt Carter, "'Untruss a Point"—Interiority, Sword Combat, and Gender in *The Roaring Girl*', *Early Theatre*, 21.1 (2018), 87–106.

¹⁹ Amanda Bailey, "'Bought My Boye": The Boy as Accessory on the Early Modern Stage', in *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, ed. by Bella Mirabella (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), pp. 308–28 (p. 309).

²⁰ Dekker, *The Gull's Hornbook*, p. 18.

the accessorising with the other's body.²¹ This accessorising is clear in the figure of Ralph Trapdoor who is originally employed by Alexander to enter Moll's service and to 'follow her as her man' throughout the city (2.234). In this guise, Trapdoor insists that his feigned allegiance to Moll is tied to her 'go[ing] in breeches' (234) which frames Trapdoor's subordinate boyishness as an extension of Moll's female masculinity, even as he works to extend Alexander's patriarchal control over her body and agency. Despite Trapdoor's service being enabled or set up by Alexander, Moll exploits Trapdoor's servility in ways that the men did not intend. When Moll puts Trapdoor into her own 'gentlewoman's service' (3.371), he acts as her 'second' in her masculine grandstanding in the streets and her duel with Laxton (388). Trapdoor's service comes to show Moll's knowledge of the urban man as a witty trickster figure as she claims agency over her serving man's masculinity. Moll seeks to enquire whether 'he seems / A man without; I'll try what he is within' (5.149), ironically quipping that a distinction may lie between his inward and outward appearances that Moll's gallantry itself undoes. By insisting she can uncover Trapdoor's masculinity within him Moll demonstrates the primacy of her gendered authority over her serving-man. Yet his outward masculinity is also ultimately Moll's to manipulate. When Trapdoor suggests he has no suits to wear, Moll offers the next outfit she will 'cast off' that he 'may creep into't' (193-94). While her sartorial transformations offer her the power to continually fashion herself, the hand-me-downs she offers Trapdoor only signal his service to Moll, which he creeps into and inhabits rather than possesses. Through her agency over and possession of Trapdoor, Moll manages to establish and retain power over her visible style of masculinity as well as the body of the boy in her service.

Moll's use of the crossdressed Mary Fitzallard functions as a different kind of accessorising that highlights Moll's distinctive masculinity. Mary enters '*like a page*' as part of her and Sebastian's plot to marry against his father's wishes (8.38 SD), and, similarly to Trapdoor's position as serving-man, her pagely appearance helps to produce Moll's gallant masculinity. Crucially, as Ryan Paul Singh has argued, Mary

²¹ While 'boy' itself was a multivalent term, I refer to the *OED* definitions of 'boy' as it relates to a 'servant' or male service in the case of Trapdoor and its attendant implication of 'relative youth' for Mary. See 'Boy, n.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22323>> [accessed 4 November 2020].

is the play's first conventionally crossdressed woman, highlighting Moll's own distinctiveness.²² Mary adopts a conventionally romantic male disguise as a young page, where previously she has also disguised herself in the 'strange shape' of a sempster (1.63). Moll's crossdressing, by contrast, more closely resonates with urban male gallantry as she 'seeks not to conceal her sexual identity' as a woman 'but rather to display it'.²³ Further, Moll tells Sebastian that '[her] tailor fitted' Mary for the page disguise (8.69), highlighting her possession of Mary-as-page as well as the clothes that constitute this costume. Moll would likely have been played by a more senior boy actor whose experience afforded the more experimental gendered performance in her character, not least because of the physical demands of sword-fighting, singing, playing the viol, and a large amount of dialogue. By contrast, a junior apprentice would have suited the role of Mary as a stock romantic 'sweet damsel, emblem of fragility' (1.2-3). She speaks only 36 lines throughout the play and when she does it is rarely to dissent or conflict with another character. Even when dressed as a boy, her crossdressing does not afford her 'masculine powers or privileges' like Moll.²⁴ The kiss between Sebastian and the crossdressed Mary further brings the masculinity of the actors to the fore when Moll comments 'How strange this shows, one man to kiss another' (8.45). Middleton and Dekker present an array of masculinities in this scene—Moll's female masculinity, Mary disguised as a boy, Sebastian's young manhood, and the boy players performing all of these parts. By employing Mary as her boyish accessory, Moll not only solidifies her gallantry but also distinguishes her masculinity from the more conventional crossdressing that Mary represents.

Through a refusal to contain gender in the bounded individual body, Moll's masculinity resists a reductive physicality, delineated by the play's recurrent interest in the codpiece. Although she is not mentioned as physically wearing one in the play, Moll is frequently imagined as wearing one or, at least, possessing the assertive masculinity that the codpiece represents. The codpiece simultaneously concealed and

²² Ryan Singh Paul, 'The Power of Ignorance in *The Roaring Girl*', *ELR*, 43.3 (2014), 514–40 (p. 535).

²³ Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 65.

²⁴ Lorraine Helms, 'Roaring Girls and Silent Women: The Politics of Androgyny on the Jacobean Stage', in *Themes in Drama 11: Women in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 59–73 (p. 63).

drew attention to the genitals, and asserted the phallic power imagined residing there whether empty or not by its noticeable protrusion. Fisher's work on the codpiece has shown that the 'transferability' of material codpieces produced a culturally constructed masculinity that was portable and 'disarticulate[d]' from a physical body.²⁵ This awareness of masculinity as essential yet detachable became even more present in the case of crossdressed women. Alexander worries about bringing up Sebastian to marry 'a codpiece daughter' (4.100). His focus on Moll as a hermaphroditical 'monster with two trinkets' imagines Moll as holding a threatening sexual doubleness that may interrupt his desired marriage for his son (4.832). Alexander's invocation of the hermaphrodite also plays on Moll's theatrically doubled gender—she wears male clothing to appropriate masculine authority but is also necessarily played by a boy who himself maintained an ambiguous relation to adult manhood. Therefore, Moll visibly does embody something of two genders, which the codpiece shows both to be culturally and theatrically constructed. Christian M. Billing has argued that Moll's association with the codpiece represents her appropriation of a conventional 'paradigm of assertive and aggressive masculinity'.²⁶ The emphasis on symbolic or social castration by transgressive female masculinity is broadly associated with the codpieces worn by female-to-male crossdressers. John Marston satirises men who wore codpieces to openly 'disclose / What sexe they are', contrasting them with women in codpieces who are mere '*Protean* shadowes [that] so delude our sights'.²⁷ Marston's assertion appears ironic considering the frequency with which clothes and crossdressing did not guarantee to materialise any particular gender in *The Roaring Girl*, theatre, or culture more broadly.²⁸ Moll's status as 'codpiece daughter' is significant in that it embraces the contradictions of the codpiece which 'did not 'show' anything; on the contrary, its purpose [...] was to conceal'.²⁹ Whether the protruding

²⁵ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, p. 78.

²⁶ Billing, *Masculinity, Corporality and the English Stage*, p. 149.

²⁷ John Marston, *The Metamorphosis of Pigmaliions Image And Certaine Satyres* (London: [James Roberts] for Edmond Matts, 1598), pp. 46–47.

²⁸ My discussion of Middleton's work on masculinity and his drama for the Children of Paul's in the previous chapter is relevant here also for Marston's work, who enjoyed a close relationship with the company as well. For further reading on the slippery constructions of gender in Marston's works, see Sukanya B. Senapati, "'Two Parts in One": Marston and Masculinity', in *Drama of John Marston: Critical Revisions*, ed. by T. F. Wharton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 124–44.

²⁹ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, p. 68.

codpiece was full or empty on men or women was somewhat ambiguous. In asserting her own body and autonomy, Moll's outward display of masculinity subverts the concealing ambiguity of the codpiece to construct a feminised masculinity that recasts the contours of the material body.

Yet by 1611, codpieces had all but fallen out of general use.³⁰ Thomas Nashe's earlier prose work *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) comments on the codpiece as an outdated accessory. When a character appears with a 'codpéece in his deuills bréeches', protagonist Jack Wilson is compelled to remind readers that 'they were then in fashion' at the time.³¹ When codpieces appeared on the stage, their 'comic deployment served as signs of emasculation' set opposite a fantasy of coherent, virile masculinity.³² Lucetta's concern that Jessica's page disguise is 'not worth a pin, / Unless you have a codpiece to stick pins on' in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentleman of Verona* (1594) could then be interpreted as a misunderstanding of masculine fashions (2.7.55-56). Yet Moll has no intent to disguise her gender. The bawdy exchange that Moll has with her Tailor does, however, suggest her clothes emulate that masculine display of power materialised by codpieces. Moll's baggy breeches 'stand round and full' (93) whereas her previous pair were 'somewhat stiff between the legs' (95-96). The breeches give space between Moll's legs that effectively functions as a codpiece, a space that Moll's anatomy may or may not fill. Moll's deliberate detachment of masculinity from the male body gives her a protean doubleness which is what establishes Laxton's attraction to her in the first instance; he observes that 'she might first cuckold the husband and then make him do as much for the wife' (3.218-19). Laxton imbues Moll with a doubleness that can know and please both men and women, and that allows her to be 'simultaneously unknowable and in the know'.³³ Moll's refusal of Laxton's advances, alongside her physical sword-fighting, identifies in solidarity with 'Distressed needlewom[e]n and trade-fallen wives' but asserts that her exaggerated performance and embodiment of masculinity is a response to a wider

³⁰ See Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, p. 74-79; Lublin, *Costuming the Shakespearean Stage*, p. 26.

³¹ Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller* in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by Ronald B. McKerrow and F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), II, 178-328 (p. 223).

³² Lublin, *Costuming the Shakespearean Stage*, p. 27.

³³ Heather Hirschfeld, 'What Do Women Know?: *The Roaring Girl* and the Wisdom of Tiresias', *Renaissance Drama*, 32.2003 (2003), 123-46 (p. 123).

patriarchal pressure on women as ‘Fish that must needs bite or themselves be bitten’ (5.95-96). Through her wit and physical skill in combat, Moll defeats the conventional city comedy in the form of the jealous father (Alexander) and the lewd gallant (Laxton). Matt Carter’s work on Moll’s sword-fighting has argued that ‘Moll’s sword training allows her to hide — and therefore protect — a female subjectivity, fully possessed of sexual agency beneath an impenetrable, youthfully masculine shell’.³⁴ By invoking the codpiece alongside this behaviour, Middleton and Dekker show Moll’s masculinity to be a conventional performance of male self-determination that remains opaque to the rest of the play’s characters. Like the codpiece itself, Moll’s masculinity is both concealed and revealed by its self-consciously prosthetic construction through various material, verbal and gestural means.

The impossibility of Moll inhabiting a singular, cohesive, and decipherable gender is exemplified by the problem of naming her repeatedly expressed throughout *The Roaring Girl*. Moll’s crossing of genders renders her as ‘a thing / One knows not how to name’ (2.130-31). Rubright has written on this problem of semantics, arguing that the play is ‘producing and/or sustaining semantic opacities that refuse to render the body an ontological site of decipherability, an object of certain knowledge’.³⁵ Sebastian notes that who or what Moll identifies as is a frequent topic of gossip as ‘a whole city takes / Note of her name and person’ (1.103-04). The paradoxical conception of Moll as at once unknowable but widely known creates a ‘fantasy of legibility’ where she can be understood coherently even as the other characters struggle to fully grasp the gendered semiotics in which she engages.³⁶ This is amplified by the contrast between the gallant Moll and submissive Mary which sets up Middleton and Dekker’s Moll in relation to the real Mary Frith and Mary Fitzallard. Moll is the exception, as seen by Alexander noting of the common nickname Moll that there are ‘More whores of that name than of any ten other’ (4.1.62). Moll decisively rejects these sexual connotations of her independence as well as the subordinate ‘obedi[ce]’ that she associates with a woman’s place in marriage in having ‘no humour to marry’

³⁴ Carter, ‘Untruss a Point’, p. 90.

³⁵ Rubright, ‘Transgender Capacity’, p. 48.

³⁶ Heather Easterling, *Parsing the City: Jonson, Middleton, Dekker, and City Comedy’s London as Language* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 81.

herself (37-39). In Middleton and Dekker's Moll's refusal to marry or submit to men, she perhaps recognises herself as an outlier—'I please myself and care not else who loves me' (10.361). The pretended marriage to Sebastian at the play's conclusion embodies the double-bind of her female masculinity, which emphasises her difference from other Marys and Molls of the city as well as the men. Alexander is told by Moll that he 'should be proud of such a daughter—/ As good a man as your son!' (11.152-53). In response Alexander reiterates that Moll is a 'monstrous impudence' (153) and a 'devil rampant' (162). Both insults call back to Alexander's previous assertion that Moll is a hermaphroditical 'bouncing ramp' or 'masculine ramp' [a bold, vulgar woman] (7.8, 11.13), suggesting that Moll's transgressive autonomy verges on monstrosity.³⁷ The confusion the other characters face in defining Moll's gendered transgressions provokes this problem of naming, where the lexical multiplication of masculine and feminine terms attempts to define and fix Moll's gender.

Yet Moll's vision of utopia at the play's end opens up an in-between space that she inhabits. Moll says that she will marry 'When you shall hear / Gallants void from sergeants fear' and other possibilities that are improbable (217-18). Moll's utopia presents the fantasy of patriarchal dissolution, refusing to marry until there is a world with 'Woman manned but never pandered' and 'Vessels older ere they're broached' (220-22). These two lines gesture toward women's agency and bodily autonomy, which Moll associates and effects in her own body through her masculinity. Upon hearing this potential utopia, Lord Noland responds that 'This sounds like doomsday' (224). The same resistance to the static singularity of gender categories that offers Moll her utopia is Noland's doomsday. Both these perspectives, however, exist as a deferral, 'outside of narrative control, somewhere on the horizon, just out of sight'.³⁸ The theatricality of Moll's crossdressing is a temporal slipperiness as well as a visual one. Significantly it is the men who reform their attitudes toward Moll and not Moll herself at the play's conclusion—Alexander admits that he is 'sorry now / The opinion was so hard I conceived of thee' (227-28). Moll occupies a gendered position that ties together

³⁷ The *OED* also uses the modern 'tomboy' to define ramp. See 'ramp, n.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) < www.oed.com/view/Entry/157856 > [accessed 4 March 2020].

³⁸ Melissa Welshans, 'Queer Time and "Sideways Growth" in *The Roaring Girl*', in *Queering Childhood in Early Modern English Drama and Culture*, ed. by Jennifer Higginbotham and Mark Albert Johnston (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018), pp. 79–98 (p. 93).

her desire for female agency and the refusal of male control through marriage, where these desires manifest as transgressive potentialities through her crossdressing. Moll's gendered doubleness is associated with her explicit desire for autonomy, to 'lie o' both sides o'th'bed myself' (38). Through Moll's theatrical embodiment and articulation of her transgressive female masculinity, Middleton and Dekker stage a series of conflations, tensions, and doublings that never pin down a singular meaning of Moll's gender. Moll's challenge to the patriarchal control that relies on the stability and intelligibility of gender categories is sustained as she shows masculine autonomy to be materially and socially constructed through her self-conscious and transgressively doubled performance of female masculinity.

Moll participates in *The Roaring Girl's* wider concern of showing the contingent construction of gender through her self-conscious process of materialising and performing female masculinity. Her masculinity is assembled by more than just her clothing and articulates a plural style of masculinity that moves beyond a singular, self-contained male body. This doubleness of gender in Moll's masculinity that insists on a crossdressed female identity is doubled again as another theatrical construction by a male actor. Further, Moll's shifting multiplicity suggests that her goal of resisting patriarchal prescriptions for women's behaviour is bound up in a view of masculinity as malleable, mobile, and dependent upon prostheses. Moll's success in the play is to show the constructed nature of masculinity and the changing attitudes of her main rival Alexander toward her evidence this. Moll's self-conscious female masculinity shows all maleness to also be a contingent and constructed process, which has a disquieting effect on the men in the play. The theatricality of Moll's female masculinity gestures toward the plural possibilities of female masculinity as it frames masculinity in the play more broadly as something negotiated across multiple bodies, objects and spaces in a close and continual process of negotiation. It is this interest in staging female crossdressing as a problem of making female masculinity legible that I explore in the rest of this chapter.

2. Metatheatricality and the Pregnant Page in *More Dissemblers Besides Women*

More Dissemblers Besides Women explores the representational limits of double-crossdressing tropes—that is when boy actors play women who disguise themselves

as men or boys—as they are deployed in the romantic plots of early modern English comedy. Middleton tests the opacity of crossdressed disguises through various love plots that play with the visual semiotics and the legibility of dissembling and disguising as a theatrical convention. The play’s treatment of these tropes pushes the boundaries of representation by self-consciously playing with the metatheatrical ironies of crossdressing. Male disguises are shown to be ambiguously transparent as characters see through disguises and the play also encourages its audiences to see the boy actor ‘disguised’ as a woman too. The conflation of effeminacy and boyishness in these double-crossdressed disguises is made explicit and then self-consciously interrupted in the figure of the pregnant Page. By attending to the theatricality of crossdressed disguise in this play, I consider Middleton’s interest in testing the boundaries of staging and representing female masculinity. As the double-crossdressing of the Page is continually and self-consciously brought to the fore, the staging of the Page’s eventual on-stage crossdressed labour problematises the maintenance of such doubled female masculinity on the early modern stage.

The convention of romantic heroines disguising themselves as boys, men or pages was commonplace in early modern comedy by the time that Middleton wrote *More Dissemblers*. Barbara Hodgdon has argued that the popularity of crossdressed disguise plots demonstrated a view of gender performance that ‘turns on performing bodies, and on a kind of “if” between staged bodies and what the plays sought to represent’.³⁹ The ‘if’ in question asked audiences to see gender in the plural as performing bodies layered the genders of crossdressed disguise through stage properties and costume, gesture and bodily comportment, and metatheatrical dialogue such as punning and double-entendre. The gendered bodies of fictional and real performers often overlapped. The frequent use of self-referential punning draws attention to the complicated conflation of the two, as seen in *Twelfth Night* where Viola’s aside that ‘A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man’ draws attention to her disguise as the male Cesario as performance as well as the body of the male actor playing Viola (3.4.95-96). The flexibility of such double-crossing

³⁹ Barbara Hodgdon, ‘Sexual Disguise and the Theatre of Gender’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. by Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 179–97 (p. 195).

relies on the similar social and erotic positions assigned to women and boys. Although it is important to note that ‘boy’ itself was a flexible term that referred to a spectrum of ages and social roles,⁴⁰ the association of womanhood with boyishness was significant and widespread in early modern drama and culture.⁴¹ Mark Albert Johnston has written that the cultural beardlessness of boys did not ‘disrupt categories but rather conflate[d] them’ as they gestured to the boy/man continuum I have discussed previously as well as a ‘fantasy of sex and gender mobility’ in the crossdressed theatre of the period.⁴² The crossdressed and double-crossdressed boy actor can manipulate a gendered spectrum of gesture and dress in which the player can access masculinity and femininity in performance.

In *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, Middleton self-consciously plays with, teases, and frustrates the popular tropes of double-crossdressed women to consider what kinds of masculinities can be staged in performance. These experiments take place in the plots surrounding Lactantio who pretends to be chaste in the Milanese court under the watch of his uncle, the Lord Cardinal, who ‘not endures the sight of womankind’ (1.1.151). In reality, Lactantio is a womaniser who has hidden his various affairs at court by having his lovers disguise themselves as men, namely Aurelia and the pregnant Page.⁴³ Aurelia’s male disguise is, at first, suggested to be a conventional romantic endeavour as ‘Virginity / Has been put often to those shifts before thee’ (1.1.44-45). Aurelia’s ‘blush’ at being asked to dress in male clothing exemplifies her conventional chastity as the romantic heroine, though Lactantio assures her that her embarrassment at being in men’s clothing will go ‘away / After a qualm or two’ (43-44). Her crossdressing resonates with Jessica in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (c.1596) who similarly notes that ‘Cupid himself would blush / To see me thus transformèd to a boy’ (2.6.38-39). Yet Middleton’s conventional use of crossdressing tropes is complicated by the pregnant Page. The Page left Mantua to seek ‘promised present marriage’ (3.1.15) with Lactantio and continually reminds him to ‘Think of

⁴⁰ See Munro, *Children of the Queen’s Revels*; Edel Lamb, *Performing Childhood*.

⁴¹ See Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴² Johnston, *Beard Fetish*, p. 155.

⁴³ Although the disguised Page is referred to as ‘Antonio’ fleetingly near the play’s end (4.3.67), Middleton never reveals her actual name.

your shame, and mine' as her pregnancy becomes more urgent (1). In Act 1, Scene 2, the Page is even used by Lactantio to 'admit' Aurelia who enters in the disguise of a Roman gentleman (1.2.149). Lactantio's neglect of the pregnant Page undercuts the romance of Aurelia's own crossdressed disguise and foreshadows his later abandonment of Aurelia to pursue the Duchess. As Lisa Geller has written, the conventional romance of the crossdressed disguise is transformed from 'the stratagem of youth against age and becomes the practised line of an experienced libertine who has introduced one mistress into his uncle's chaste household and is about to introduce another'.⁴⁴ The subversion of expectations by undercutting the romance of the female-to-male disguise in an ostensibly romantic plot signals Middleton's desire to set up and then disrupt the intelligibility of how crossdressing operates in such conventional romantic plots.

Middleton plays with the legibility of crossdressing as a disguise. As Peter Hyland argues, theatrical 'disguise had to be entirely opaque to characters on the stage and entirely transparent to the audience. The disguiser was thus a constant generator of dramatic irony'.⁴⁵ But of course, Middleton's crossdressing sought to test the limits of that irony as it related to the materialisation of crossdressed disguise. When Aurelia enters '*like a gentleman*' (158 SD), her father immediately recognises her. Aurelia cannot pass as an adult gentleman which is seen as an improper 'shape for reputation / And modesty' (204-05), whereas the Page's disguise passes successfully by playing on the cultural associations between boyishness and femininity. Passing in early modern comedy, to follow Jennifer Drouin's definition, involves 'a subversive infiltration of normativity in which the performance of gender itself is disguised'.⁴⁶ Aurelia's female-to-male crossdressed disguise appears to emphasise the femininity she wishes to disguise by signalling toward the stereotype of the hypersexual woman, as seen by her father's specific insults '*strumpetkin, bold harlotum, queaninisma,*

⁴⁴ Lisa Geller, 'Widows' Vows and *More Dissemblers Besides Women*', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 5 (1991), 287–308 (p. 301).

⁴⁵ Peter Hyland, 'The Performance of Disguise', *Early Theatre*, 5.1 (2002), 77–83 (p. 79).

⁴⁶ Jennifer Drouin, 'Cross-Dressing, Drag, and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy', in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, ed. by James C. Bulman (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), pp. 23–56 (p. 23).

whoremongeria' (203).⁴⁷ On the other hand, the Page is conventionally feminine and childish—she has a diminutive stature and is modest, fearful and delicate, with a similarly conventional tale of being orphaned by shipwreck. Her continued weeping suggests a kind of youthful ambiguity, seen in the Lord Cardinal's comment that 'he is so soft th'unkindness of a word / Melts him into a woman' (3.1.135-36). Complicating the notion of a 'real' gender disrupting the female-to-male disguise, Sandra Clark writes that 'the 'natural' sexuality of the girl which cannot be hidden when she attempts to mimic a boy is actually the construction of the male actor'.⁴⁸ Despite her visible effeminacy, the Page is still addressed as a 'pretty boy' by the Lord Cardinal (132). Her servile boyishness becomes conflated with a girlishness that does not register with other characters as distinct from youthful androgyny. On the other hand, the references to the Page as a boy may also signal to an audience the boy actor who is playing the part as they can simultaneously see and see through the disguise on stage. The Page's continual effeminate weeping and physical stature provide many opportunities for crossdressing puns but never questions the Page's masculinity as anything other than an expected, effeminate masculinity for the other characters.

The opacity of the Page's disguise, however, is not experienced in the same way by the reader or audience who are privy to the Page's womanhood which continually threatens to disrupt the disguise. Dondolo, a clown and Lactantio's page, resents the Page for lacking 'good fellowship' (3.1.92) by refusing to swim with him naked or sing 'the song you sung to my master last night when he went to bed' (1.4.20-21). Dondolo chastises the Page through various images that suggest sodomy and sexual assignation, for example complaining that he 'could never get that little monkey / Yet to put off his breeches' (3.1.96-97). On one level, the male clothing disguising the Page is essential to his masculine disguise and so cannot be removed. Yet Dondolo expresses his frustration at the Page by calling her a 'tender, puling, nice, chitty-faced squall' (98). The term 'squall' was usually associated with young women or 'a small person or girl' and so highlights the Page's erotic vulnerability as a boy and a

⁴⁷ On the perceived relationship between sexual deviance and female crossdressing, see Jean E. Howard, 'Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39.4 (1988), 418-40 (pp. 420-21).

⁴⁸ Sandra Clark, *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher: Sexual Themes and Dramatic Representation* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 58.

crossdressed girl.⁴⁹ Dondolo refers to the Page's 'smockified shirt, or shirted smock' to openly identify the Page with the clothes she will not remove, as well as gesturing to her slippery gender position (1.4.105). Further, Dondolo's frustration with the Page's refusal to be intimate with him in the same way she is with Lactantio causes him to question why 'a boy should so keep cut with his mother and be given to dissembling!' (1.4.38–39). By referencing the feminine influence in the cut of the Page's clothes as well as the vaginal pun on 'cut',⁵⁰ Middleton highlights the game of double-crossing enacted by the Page's effeminate masculinity. That game is further complicated by the Page's pregnancy. The Page is told that she 'look'st so pale' (1.2.142), and Lactantio worries about her growing belly disrupting the disguise for 'When she grows so big / Those masculine hose will shortly prove too little' (3.1.23–24). His anxiety appears unfounded as the diminutive Page is 'not big enough to air a shirt' throughout (1.4.4–5), whereas other women whose pregnancies are major plot points tended to be staged or described by the size of their swelling bellies.⁵¹ Instead, Middleton draws on the dramatic irony of the Page's disguise as ambiguously youthful. The Page is 'thick'ith'chest' which ambiguously could suggest either developing broad shoulders as part of the male disguise or her breasts (4.3.84). By sustaining the ambiguity of the Page's appearance, Middleton stretches the dramatic irony of her disguise to play on her conflated effeminacy and femininity which nevertheless remain opaque to other characters within the play.

Middleton draws attention to the skilled physical bodies which materialise these doubled gender performances on stage, placing the Page and the boy actor playing her on a spectrum of age that saw them as men in the making. The Duchess, taking pity on the Page, instructs the child to be instructed in singing and dancing. She 'hope[s]' for these exercises to transform the Page from a 'meeker, gentler youth, / Yet made for man's beginning' towards an acceptable form of manhood (4.3.62–66). The Duchess shows that the Page's effeminacy anticipates a hoped-for manhood that may

⁴⁹ Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (London: Athlone, 1994), p. 750; Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 109–10.

⁵⁰ See Williams, *Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery*, p. 358.

⁵¹ See Sara B. T. Thiel, "'Cushion Come Forth": Materializing Pregnancy on the Stuart Stage', in *Stage Matters: Props, Bodies and Space in Shakespearean Performance*, ed. by Annalisa Castaldo and Rhonda Knight (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), pp. 159–70.

be guaranteed through her ‘enskilment’ in singing and dancing, exercises inducting the Page into the demands and skills conventionally expected of early modern boy actors.⁵² Contrary to the Duchess’s expectations, the Page fails successfully—or, rather, manfully—to perform these skills. The exercises are carried out on stage where the Page is under increasing physical stress and the crude sexual language highlights her failure physically to perform the expected theatrical masculinity. The Page is admonished by Crochet the singing tutor for her ‘pretty, womanish, faint, sprawling [singing] voice’ (4.3.79) which, in singing the ‘prick-song’, is ‘somewhat dull’ (5.1.95-96). Her dancing is equally criticised for being ‘like a chamber maid’ (180) and Cinquepace the dancing master despairs that ‘I shall never teach this boy without a screw; his knees must be opened with a vice, or there’s no good to be done upon him’ (201-4). The joke is repeated as he commands the Page to ‘Open thy knees, wider, wider, wider, wider! Did you ever see a boy dance clenched up?’ (5.1.190-91). He further complains the Page will not ‘cast thy leg out from thee’ and that ‘his knees are soldered together, they’re sewed together’ (197-199). The leaping exercises Cinquepace demands the Page carry out as well as the focus on spreading her knees mimetically anticipate her throes of labour and recall the act that got her pregnant in the first place, as well as Dondolo’s desire for intimacy with the Page. The violent sexual language aimed at the Page highlights her inability to inhabit her pregnant womanhood and the Page disguise simultaneously. Ironically, the ‘staged ineptitude’ of the Page was a popular stage convention that highlighted the ‘normally hidden skills of stage presence, wit aptness and quickness.’⁵³ The pregnancy whose presence is increasingly referred to by these dancing exercises is embodied by the male actor’s skilled capacity to perform this ineptitude, which also gestures to the actor playing the Page who would normally be expected to be mastering these exercises. The inherent violence of the language addressed to the Page by the dancing and singing tutors highlights her vulnerability within the world of the play as she is forced to hide to protect Lactantio’s reputation. The Page’s exhaustion and bad dancing draw attention

⁵² Evelyn Tribble, ‘Pretty and Apt: Boy Actors, Skill, and Embodiment’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. by Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 628–40 (p. 631).

⁵³ Tribble, ‘Pretty and Apt’, p. 633.

to the heightened and thin artificiality of the disguise. Rather than enacting the Page's double-crossdressing through purely material means, Middleton uses failure to construct a body that both fails to look and perform entirely as a singular static gender, be that of pagely masculinity or pregnant womanhood.

Yet Middleton's attention to the doubled staging of the Page's crossdressed body complicates what that failure means when she goes into labour on stage. The physical strain of the dancing proves too much and she collapses calling for a 'midwife' (5.1.222). Before carrying the Page off-stage to give birth, Cinquepace expresses his confusion:

A midwife? By this light, the boy's with child!
A miracle! Some woman is the father.
The world's turned upside down. Sure if men breed
Women must get; one never could do both yet.
No marv'l you danced close-knee'd the cinquepace.
Put up my fiddle; here's a stranger case. (223-28)

The pregnant Page's labour gives rise to a world of dizzying gender confusion for Cinquepace. In a pronounced case of dramatic irony, he fails to understand that the Page's labour is at odds with her male persona, leading to his wonderment at a boy being pregnant. On the other hand, for an audience who is aware of the Page's situation, Cinquepace's image of the world turned upside down reveals the limits of the male actor in performing pregnancy and childbirth. The pregnant boy and the boy actor whose capacity to perform that pregnancy is incomplete exist together paradoxically here in a compelling image of masculine pregnancy which has not 'yet' arrived outside of the fantasy of crossdressed theatre (226). This 'yet' resonates with the 'not yet here' elaboration of queerness proposed by José E. Muñoz,⁵⁴ as well as the counterfactual spaces of sex described by Kathryn Schwarz as 'conditional trajectories structured by a speculative what if'.⁵⁵ Through Cinquepace's confusion, Middleton calls attention to his theatrical construction of pregnant masculinity and to the artifice

⁵⁴ José E. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Kathryn Schwarz, 'Death and Theory: Or, the Problem of Counterfactual Sex', in *Sex Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*, ed. by James M. Bromley and Will Stockton (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. 53–88 (p. 59).

of representation itself. The audience, aware of the Page's crossdressing and familiar with the conventions of romantic disguise, may appreciate the comedy of Cinquepace misreading the circumstances as well as the doubled staging which produces this potential for gender confusion. The Page's labour suggests the similarities of performing manly exercise and childbirth on-stage by visually conflating these two physical practices, evidenced by the continued attention to the Page's knees. In a reversal of the Page's failure to dance, where her hoped-for masculinity is disrupted by her pregnancy, this performance of labour exposes the limits of what the male actor playing the Page can physically enact. Of course, this could simply be a joke where Cinquepace does not realise the Page is a woman. Following the exit of the Page, the Usher notes that pregnant women may 'not venture now for fear of meeting / Their shames in a coranto', framing the previous events as a simplistic unmasking of a crossdressed pregnant woman (233-34). But, as Simone Chess argues, crossdressed drama also invites audiences to 'push past the joke' to 'showcase the work of making and maintaining gender'.⁵⁶ Middleton unsettles the Page's male disguise by making what is readily apparent to the audience—that is, it is a disguise—impossibly opaque for Cinquepace. The gap between the two identities pried open by Middleton's extreme irony shows the youthful masculinity of the disguise and the pregnant femininity to be in a contested and contingent negotiation, rather than easily conflated in the figure of the double-crossdressed page.

Following the Page's unmasking, traces of her past masculinity continue to inform her new feminine identity. The final scene gathers all the play's dissemblers to reveal their duplicity in appearing as not what they are. The Page enters in woman's clothing holding her child with Lactantio as it is revealed to the Lord Cardinal that his nephew 'contracted with her in man's apparel, / For the more modesty' (5.2.219-20). With the appearance of the un-breeched Page, the Duchess remarks that 'No page serves me more that once dwells with you' and forces Lactantio into marriage with the gift of a dowry (265). George Rowe Jr. has argued that the gender confusion that precedes this 'ushers in a final scene in which the Duchess appropriates traditional

⁵⁶ Simone Chess, 'Male Femininity and Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Shakespeare's Plays and Poems', in *Queer Shakespeare: Desire and Sexuality*, ed. by Goran Stanivuković (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), pp. 227–44 (p. 232).

patriarchal authority' when she sets in motion her 'conscionable justice' (238).⁵⁷ Similarly, Amanda Zoch argues that this is a 'maternal revision' in which the Page undergoes a 'transformation of an unruly or fearful pregnant body into an idealized performance of motherhood'.⁵⁸ Middleton's maternal revision, however, is not a total erasure of the Page's doubleness. This is reflected in the character lists for printed editions of *More Dissemblers*, which do not give her a name and describe her in terms of her page disguise. The first description of the Page in *Two New Playes* (1657) calls her 'Page, *Lactantio's* old Sweet-heart disguised', while John Jowett's edition in the Oxford Middleton similarly refers to her as '*Lactantio's* former mistress disguised as a Page'.⁵⁹ These descriptions of the Page suggest that her identity is ambiguously doubled, and has little depth beyond the disguise. Moreover, *Lactantio* scolds the Page as he is forced to marry her by, once again, drawing attention to the affective and gendered significance of clothing—'what have you done with the breeches? We shall have need of 'em shortly. [...] My son and heir need not scorn to wear what his mother has left off' (5.2.249-53). Jones and Stallybrass have argued that in the early modern period 'clothing is a ghost that, even when discarded, still has the power to haunt'.⁶⁰ If the prop infant at this play's conclusion maintains what Sophie Duncan calls the 'archival potential' of such body-like props to embody 'portable, spatially defined memories', then the physical staging of the child not only recalls the physical comedy of the Page's on-stage labour but also associates the handed-down clothes with the same memorial capacity as the baby.⁶¹ By suggesting that *Lactantio's* son can eventually wear the breeches the Page wore, Middleton ensures that the Page's gendered doubleness carries on through both bodily and material traces and cannot be neatly enclosed. The breeches return to haunt the Page's performance of motherhood. While the Duchess's final warning that there are 'more dissemblers than of

⁵⁷ George E. Rowe, *Thomas Middleton and the New Comedy Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 172.

⁵⁸ Amanda Zoch, 'Maternal Revision in Middleton's *More Dissemblers Besides Women*', in *Stage Matters: Props, Bodies and Space in Shakespearean Performance*, ed. by Annalisa Castaldo and Rhonda Knight (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), pp. 159–70 (p. 163).

⁵⁹ Thomas Middleton, *Two New Playes* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1657), sig. A4v; Middleton, *More Dissemblers*, p. 1037.

⁶⁰ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, p. 4.

⁶¹ Sophie Duncan, *Shakespeare's Props: Memory and Cognition* (Routledge: London, 2020), pp. 160, 159.

womankind' more overtly refers to Lactantio (266), it also includes the Page, whose male disguise lingers and means that she is also possibly more than womankind. Through this haunting focus on the breeches, Middleton self-consciously draws attention to the doubleness of staging gender through crossdressing that cannot simply be withdrawn or revised.

The self-conscious staging of female masculinity in *More Dissemblers* demonstrates how Middleton's theatrical representation of gender is contingent and fragile. The Page's slippery genders move between effeminate pageliness and pregnancy, which become more incongruent with each other as the play continues. The contingency of the Page's female masculinity is further complicated by the metatheatrical references to the skills of the boy actor, the medium by which this female masculinity is produced in performance. The pregnant Page emblematises the ways in which maintaining crossdressed masculinity is a precarious process that can continually fray the representation of gender it wishes to construct. Middleton asks his audience to rethink the play's crossdressed disguises but doing so with the extreme example of the Page's pregnancy and labour then undermines the process of unmasking the disguise. The Page is defined by her male disguise and is never fully unmasked as a woman or mother, as Middleton also draws attention to the limits of the boy actor in performing pregnancy alongside the limits of the Page performing youthful masculinity. By making a spectacle out of the artifice of double-crossdressing with the extreme example of the Page's pregnant body, Middleton exposes the playful and contingent qualities of female masculinity in the theatre, and disrupts the conventional association between women and boys in the theatre. Middleton continued to interrogate the intelligibility of gender impersonation in his next play for the King's Men, further exploring how young male actors complicate rather than simplify the performance of women and female masculinity in the theatre.

3. Ansaldo and Passing Masculine in *The Widow*

Whereas in *The Roaring Girl* and *More Dissemblers* female masculinities are staged through highly visible and self-referential gestures towards the conventionality of theatrical crossdressing, *The Widow* only reveals its engagement with female-to-male crossdressing through the character of Ansaldo at its conclusion. While he appears as

a young man throughout the play, it is in the play's surprising final turn that Middleton reveals Ansaldo to be Marcia, the daughter of one of Valeria's suitors. When the play was first published in 1652, Ansaldo was presented in the character list as 'ANSALDO, MARTIA *disguis'd*', giving readers advance knowledge of Ansaldo's double-crossdressing.⁶² Yet in *The Collected Works*, Gary Taylor and Michael Warren's edition of the play chooses to hide or elide this hidden identity in the character list, simply noting that Ansaldo is a 'handsome youth' with no mention of his disguise or crossdressing.⁶³ Unlike Moll or the Page, Ansaldo successfully passes as male within the fiction of the play with little hint to an audience that he may also be Marcia.⁶⁴ By maintaining the opacity of Ansaldo's gender disguise up until its final moment, *The Widow* unsettles the notion that female crossdressing is always hyper-visible and readily legible. Through the revelation that a woman has been passing masculine, even as she also passes as a crossdressed woman within this male disguise, Middleton's play further unsettles how female masculinities can be differentiated from male masculinities. Middleton self-consciously explores how notions of sport and fantasy produce gender on stage, the former through the skilled and laborious physicality of actors and the latter through the imaginative force of the theatre space itself. While *The Widow* does engage in self-consciously theatrical crossdressing and gender play conventions, it is the normalised masculinity of Ansaldo that upends the conventional transparency of crossdressing and female masculinity so significantly at the play's end. In this final section, I will consider how the notions of passing and the work of maintaining gender emerge in Middleton's play through careful and sustained attention to the positions of the male actor in female impersonation.

Through Ansaldo, Middleton highlights what kinds of crossdressing can be made visible on stage. Ansaldo's various costume changes play with who can and who cannot see through the disguise: he is mistaken for Francisco, a handsome young gentleman in love with Philippa, while caught in a state of undress; dresses up in the old clothes of Brandino, the old Justice and Philippa's husband, and is mistaken for

⁶² Middleton, Jonson, and Fletcher, *The Widow*, sig. A2v.

⁶³ Thomas Middleton, *The Widow*, ed. by Gary Taylor, annotated by Michael Warren, in *The Collected Works*, p. 1078.

⁶⁴ For this reason, I will be referring to Ansaldo/Marcia as Ansaldo and using he/him pronouns throughout.

him; his disguise as the unnamed gentlewoman takes up much of the final act; and, in the final dramatic turn Middleton reveals that Ansaldo is Marcia disguised as a man. These gender disguises ‘conceal the “not quite” in order for the subject to signify “just enough the same” to avoid detection’ and pass.⁶⁵ With minimal prior hint toward Ansaldo being Marcia, Middleton undermines the certainty with which audiences perceived male and female characters in the all-male English theatre. Other plays in the King’s Men’s repertory similarly engage with this metatheatrical crossdressed disguise. Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *Philaster* (1610) has the page Bellario revealing herself to be Euphrasia in male disguise. She un.masks herself while acknowledging the closeness of her femininity and boyish disguise as there is ‘such strange resemblance’ between the disguised boy and undisguised woman personas that ‘we two / Could not be known asunder, dressed alike’.⁶⁶ As in *More Dissemblers*, Bellario’s frequent crying may foreshadow his male identity being a disguise to audiences savvy to the theatrical conventions associating abundant crying with crossdressed pages. In *The New Inn* (1629), Ben Jonson stages a multitude of concealed identities and disguises as part of a day of ‘sports devised ‘i’th’inn’ (1.6.44). In a series of revelations bearing close similarity to Middleton’s own earlier plot in *The Widow*, the Host’s son Frank is dressed as a Lady to be married to Lord Beaufort but it is then revealed that Frank is the ‘daughter and co-heir to the Lord Frampul’ Letitia (5.5.70).⁶⁷ Yet Jonson goes further than Middleton with his revelations—the Host is also Lord Frampul and his wife is disguised as an Irish nurse who then further disguises as a Welsh herald. Bellario’s effeminacy plays up to the conventional page archetype and so is more easily translatable than Ansaldo, whereas Jonson’s wider thematic staging of disguise and carnival is reflected in his play’s multiple unmaskings. Middleton’s play, however, reveals only Ansaldo to be in disguise, which is clearly meant to be a surprising revelation.

⁶⁵ Drouin, ‘Slippages’, p. 31.

⁶⁶ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Philaster, or, Love Lies a Bleeding*, ed. by Suzanne Gossett (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2009), 5.5.99-100.

⁶⁷ Although performed by the Children of Her Majesty’s Revels, Jonson’s *Epicene, or the Silent Woman* (1609-10) is also a useful comparison to *The Widow* as it performs the revelation of disguise in reverse. Here, the titular Epicene is presented as a woman throughout to characters and audience until the wig is removed and it is revealed that Morose ‘ha[s] married a boy’ (5.4.166).

The various states of dress and undress in which Ansaldo appears throughout the play emphasise the capacity for young male actors to embody both masculinity and femininity. Violetta calls Ansaldo a 'Sweet youth' and the 'Proper'st young gentleman', emphasising his boyishness and associating it with the gendered flexibility of the boy actor (3.3.37-38). At one point, Ansaldo enters the stage 'in his shirt' (3.2.49 SD) after being stripped by thieves and is mistaken for Francisco by Philippa and Violetta, and for a ghostly apparition by Francisco himself. The shirt was an undergarment that could signal the spiritual or ghostly nature of the character, hence Francisco mistaking the undressed Ansaldo for a 'prodigious' apparition (85). Shirts could be worn by men or women; Violetta notes that this shirt could also be a smock for 'gallants wear both nowadays' (3.3.29). Her remark draws on the cultural effeminacy associated with young gallants, whose perceived lack of self-control was constructed as effeminate by 'imitat[ing] women in giving themselves up to pleasures of all sorts'.⁶⁸ Philippa says that she will 'make much on him' as they 'furnish his distress' to show Ansaldo 'Full of fair and promising courtship' (51-52). This language is later echoed when Philippa orders that Violetta 'dress him up in one of my gowns and headtires. / His youth will well endure it' (5.1.76-77). Ansaldo's youthful beauty and links with effeminate gallantry in this state of undress give him the potential to be shaped into something else, a handsomeness that increases the efficacy of his male disguise as well as the later gentlewoman disguise. Susan Zimmerman has argued that Ansaldo's body functions as 'erotic object(s), as playground for comic deception'.⁶⁹ The masculinity that Ansaldo embodies is more than a crossdressed disguise as his female masculinity is visibly indistinguishable from male masculinity in this moment of undress. Both Ansaldo and the actor taking this part play a double-game of revealing and concealing female masculinity which materialises in the same fashion as a highly-theatricalised but recognisable youthful masculinity.

Yet Middleton goes further by making the work of maintaining Ansaldo's masculinity visible. This complicates the notion of 'passing' as a passive, natural or assumed state of gender ambiguity by attending to the processes that produce

⁶⁸ Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 180. See also Bailey, *Flaunting*, pp. 23-50.

⁶⁹ Zimmerman, 'Disruptive Desire', p. 50.

masculinity and femininity that pass in the English crossdressed theatre. Passing requires the trained or experienced labour of performers in the playhouse which allowed them to represent men or women on stage through displays of skilled physicality such as singing or dancing. To think of Ansaldo's female masculinity in these terms, alongside a practised effort of passing masculine as well as an androgynous affect, acknowledges the complex 'labour of constructing a habit (of clothes but also manners) that "passes"'.⁷⁰ The boy actor was not a blank canvas onto which masculinity or femininity were projected; rather, the male performer must develop the skills required to construct and layer these genders on stage through laborious training. Both Ansaldo's female and male crossdressing are self-consciously associated with the virtuosity and protean capacity of the trained actor. Philippa and Violetta 'dream of admirable sport' in their scheme of dressing Ansaldo as the unnamed gentlewoman (5.1.176), suggesting the physical skill required in their playful game of crossdressing. Ansaldo's various singing episodes further exhibit the skilled labour he undergoes to pass as male. Latrocinio marvels how Ansaldo 'kept time, methought, / Pretty and handsomely with your little hand there' (3.1.12-13). The reference to Ansaldo's small hand may draw on the conflation of women and boys in the early modern theatre. Yet the focus on Ansaldo's competence in keeping time with music shows the theatrical 'skill' that lends itself to successful gender impersonation (14). Ansaldo becomes an analogy for the actor-in-training, overtly drawn on when he wears Brandino's clothes as a kind of theatrical revival and the thief Occulto sees him as '*The Second Part o'th' Justice*, / 'Newly revived'—with never a hair on's face' (4.2.66-67). Further, Occulto describes Ansaldo as something new, or in the extension of the conceit, a prequel—'But I ha' known *The First Part* written last' (69). Ironically, the costume change also means that Occulto now recognises Ansaldo as 'the young gentleman / We robbed and stripped' (70-71). Through this conceit, Ansaldo first appears to personate Brandino, then becomes a new version of Brandino, before exceeding the clothes completely. In this short exchange, Ansaldo's female masculinity is explicitly aligned with the formidable and adaptable theatrical skill of

⁷⁰ Sawyer K. Kemp, "'In That Dimension Grossly Clad'": Transgender Rhetoric, Representation, and Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Studies*, 47 (2019), 120–26 (p. 122).

the actor whose production of gender exceeds a simple relation between body and clothing.

The character of Francisco acts as a foil to Ansaldo's theatricalised female masculinity to stage *The Widow's* wider thematic interest in the relationship between skilled bodies and the fantasy of gender representation. In Act 1, Scene 2, Francisco and his friend Ricardo take turns to role-play as women to practise talking to women to try and win Philippa and Valeria respectively, while Attilio silently watches. First Ricardo plays the woman, noting that he will not crossdress as if he 'should put on a farthingale [a hooped petticoat], thou woudst never have the heart to do't' (1.2.84-85). Ricardo implies that his performance of the 'condition' (80) of womanhood would be too intimidating for the virginal Francisco (86). Dissatisfied with Ricardo's performance, Francisco insists he takes the role instead: 'Come, come, I'll play the woman; that I'm used to. / I see you ne'er wore a shoe that pinched you yet' (111-12). Francisco's words reference the actor playing him who may have notably and recently played women's parts on stage, a point that I shall return to below. Ricardo notes that he may 'laugh' at Francisco's performance because of the oddness of his impersonation being done without wearing women's clothes too (87). Yet Ricardo is so taken with Francisco's imitation of a scornful 'pestilent quean' (134) that he is overcome and tries to kiss him as if 'i'th' fairest dream' (144). The verisimilitude of Francisco's representation of the woman overcomes Ricardo's explicit knowledge of the reality of his friend's female impersonation. Where Thomas Heywood's description of crossdressed actors playing women describes 'youths attired in the habit of a woman [...] to represent such a Lady at such a time appoynted', Francisco can use his impressive theatrical skill to represent a lady without the clothing outside of the appointed time.⁷¹ Returning to the idea of habit as gestural and affective, the oddness of Francisco's role-play without the clothes further illuminates the ways the physicality of a skilled actor could achieve gender crossings without crossdressing. Ricardo explains that he was compelled to kiss Francisco as he was 'like the actor that you spoke on: / I must have the part that overcomes the lady' (148-49). The apparent reference to the young romantic roles the actor playing Ricardo would usually play

⁷¹ Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1612), sig. C3v.

also suggests that Francisco's female impersonation is recognisably conventional, and so Ricardo's response is part of the expected script. Francisco's protests at his friend's attempts to kiss him are refuted, as Ricardo's ambiguous response that Francisco has created a 'strange way' highlights the oddness of his gender impersonation while not crossdressed as well as the strangeness of the effects on Ricardo (146). Callan Davies writes that the strange in early modern drama 'indicate[s] a pervasive concern with the complexities of theatrical representation' suggesting that sometimes 'words fail to capture the essence of theatrical performance or its myriad moral possibilities'.⁷² Something of Francisco's female impersonation exceeds both his dress and language. Francisco and Ricardo's female impersonations suggest a construction of gender that is shared by Ansaldo, where the conflation of youthful masculinity with protean potentiality grants them access to a range of methods by which to construct and maintain different gender performances.

Middleton's references to Francisco's previous women's roles appear especially resonant considering *The Widow's* place within the King's Men's wider repertory. The metatheatrical gesture to the experience that the actor playing Francisco has in 'play[ing] the woman' (111) is likely referencing Richard Robinson, a member of the King's Men with a public reputation for his female impersonation.⁷³ Robinson had previously starred as the Lady in Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611), Fulvia in Jonson's *Catiline* (1611), and the Duchess in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613). These kinds of roles share a similar style to Francisco's woman who is repeatedly referred to as a 'lady' (135). Robinson was particularly noted for his 'quasi-aristocratic elegance' in imitating ladies or nobility.⁷⁴ If Robinson did indeed perform in *The Widow*, it would be at a point during his transition from playing women to younger male leads, which Middleton could draw on in this metatheatrical nod to the cultural memory of the young male player's previous female parts. *The Widow's* winter 1615-16 performance puts it near Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* (late 1616),

⁷² Callan Davies, *Strangeness in Jacobean Drama* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 3–4.

⁷³ Lucy Munro, *Robinson, Richard (c. 1595–1648), Actor*, in *ODNB* [online] <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/75572>> [accessed 5 June 2021]. See also David Kathman, 'How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?', *Shakespeare Survey*, 58 (2005), 220–46.

⁷⁴ Roberta Barker, 'The "Play-Boy," the Female Performer, and the Art of Portraying a Lady', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 33.1 (2015), 83–97 (pp. 89–90).

which directly references Robinson, who also likely played its young gallant Wittipol.⁷⁵ Here, Robinson's Wittipol engages in conversation with a silent Frances Fitzdottrel by speaking as if he were her and replying to himself, 'To make your answer for you, which shall be / To as good purpose as I can imagine' (1.6.146-47). Jonson stages Robinson's talents for impersonating women while, as in Middleton's play, not crossdressed at all. Simone Chess has written on the 'queer residue' of boy actors where queer, feminine or androgynous affects follow the boy actors even after their transition into adult roles which, even then, is not a stark transition but a kind of continuum where they 'continued to be cast in queer and gender-variant ways well after they transitioned to playing adult male roles'.⁷⁶ Robinson's queer residue is certainly clear in *The Devil is an Ass* but also, I argue, in *The Widow*. These embodied affects of the crossdressed actor extend beyond a singular crossdressed role or body. Even though Robinson's role in Middleton's play is speculative, it nevertheless opens up the potential for reading for the traces of a theatrical masculinity that is both skilled in impersonation and attempting to negotiate its relationship with femininity. If, then, Ansaldo was played by the King's Men's second apprentice George Birch, Robinson's own queer presence and playfulness with gender as Francisco may anticipate the other forms of queer play that Birch could learn from and engage in as Ansaldo.⁷⁷ The metatheatrical attention to the art of skilled gender impersonation and the presence of an accumulated queerness of the actor's body continually makes the masculinities of these bodies intertwined with and dependent on their relationship with female impersonation.

Through the series of revelations about Ansaldo's gender identity at the play's conclusion, Middleton calls attention to the level of skill required for Ansaldo's role. Philippa and Violetta plot to disguise Ansaldo as a gentlewoman to protect him from his pursuers. Francisco falls in love with the disguised Ansaldo who, going along with

⁷⁵ In Jonson's play, Engine recounts an anecdote about the real-life 'Dick Robinson, / A very pretty fellow' (2.8.64-65) who attends a dinner party while crossdressed as a 'lawyer's wife' (70).

⁷⁶ Simone Chess, 'Queer Residue: Boy Actors' Adult Careers in Early Modern England', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 19.4 (2019), 242-64 (p. 234). For a study which traces the 'portability and memorability' of celebrity male actors across companies and repertories, see Harry R. McCarthy, 'The Circulation of Youthful Energy on the Early Modern London Stage: Migration, Intertheatricality, and "Growing to Common Players"', *Shakespeare Survey*, 73 (2018), 43-62 (p. 59).

⁷⁷ Birch played women's roles in the King's Men until 1619. See Kathman, 'Shakespeare's Boy Actors', pp. 232-33.

the women's plan to humiliate Francisco, agrees to marry him. After Francisco returns to the stage with his new wife, the women reveal that he has married Ansaldo, before the First Suitor reveals that Ansaldo is Marcia. Playing Ansaldo required the performance of a masculine woman who passes as male and then will later dress as the unnamed gentlewoman and 'real' Marcia. When Philippa invites Martino, Brandino and Francisco to look upon Ansaldo as the unnamed lady, she asks them to 'Look you, your judgements, gentlemen—yours especially, / Signor Francisco, whose mere object now / Is woman' (5.1.141-43). Philippa appears to draw attention to the practice of male-to-female crossdressing where Ansaldo's 'mere' performance as a woman is supposedly artificial compared to Philippa and Violetta's naturalness, ironically undercut by the all-male cast. The revelation that Ansaldo is Marcia casts doubts that distinct 'judgements' between these categories are possible at all (141). Although Ansaldo-as-Marcia's femininity is little commented upon, his crossdressing as the unnamed gentlewoman provides many opportunities for double-entendre. When Philippa and Violetta ask the men if Ansaldo makes 'a good manly gentlewoman' (148), it suggests that the maleness of Ansaldo and the actor is at once recognisable enough to pun on but subsumed enough in the disguise for the women to openly joke about. Michael Warren and Gary Taylor's note that 'manly' here could also mean descriptions such as 'independent, courageous' alongside the blatant pun on crossdressing to those in the know.⁷⁸ Ansaldo's female crossdressing is designed to be comical as Violetta warns that she may 'burst with laughing' when Francisco woos the crossdressed Ansaldo off-stage (212). The joke plays on the mistaken identity of the disguise that has led to two men flirting, but also on Ansaldo's masculinity making the 'manly' gentlewoman disguise appear ill-fitting or at least ludicrously visible to the women. Yet the irony of Ansaldo's masculinity being Marcia's female masculinity can only be applied retrospectively. Writing on Bellario in *Philaster*, Jeffrey Masten argues that by not preparing the audience sufficiently for the reveal that his boyishness was a crossdressed performance of boyishness by a woman Fletcher's play 'lacks the potential prophylaxis, the protection in advance'.⁷⁹ Middleton's play similarly allows its gender disruption, which is also a naturalising association of femininity and

⁷⁸ Middleton, *The Widow*, p. 1117n148.

⁷⁹ Masten, *Queer Philologies*, p. 116.

boyishness once again, to unsettle its conventions without prior preparation. Yet, as Taylor argues, Middleton's 'discovery undoes a cruel practical joke, it enables marriage and it insists upon pretence'.⁸⁰ Middleton resists essentialising gender to just dress; the unmasking of Ansaldo as Marcia is not done by removing clothing or adding new pieces but through the First Suitor's words that Ansaldo is Marcia. Where Moll or the Page's crossdressing is suffused with self-referential punning and awareness of a difference between performance and reality, *The Widow* uses Ansaldo and his performance of femininity to gesture toward a crossdressing practice that unsettles the knowledge of such practice as crossdressing at all.

At the heart of Ansaldo's gender presentation is a sense of reflexive playfulness surrounding the performance of masculinity and femininity. As part of the joke on Francisco, Philippa and Violetta conspire for Francisco to marry another man to humiliate him. They encourage the double-crossdressed Ansaldo to 'let a consent / Seem to come from you' (5.1.245-46). Their reminder for Ansaldo to 'bear / Yourself most affable to his purposes' (247-48), is laden with the double entendre that their ruse could extend to a night of 'noble sport' (246). Ansaldo is a willing participant in the deception and replies ambiguously to Francisco's propositions that 'We cannot be choosers, sir, in our own destiny' (181-82). Ansaldo's lines appear to both acknowledge that his disguise as the unnamed gentlewoman might well be Marcia but undisguised, which itself is still seen as a disguise for the characters and audience who only recognise Ansaldo, as well as his complicity in deceiving Francisco who does not fully know the choice he is making. When Ansaldo and Francisco re-enter married, Philippa and Violetta reveal their scheme publicly:

VIOLETTA Here they come, one man married to another!
VALERIA How, man to man?
VIOLETTA Ay, man to man, i' faith.
 There'll be good sport at night to bring 'em both to bed.
 Do you see 'em now? Ha ha ha! (408-11).

In the manner of the marriage of two women enabled by crossdressed disguise in *No Wit*, Middleton presents the marriage of two men. This spectacle is complicated by the

⁸⁰ Gary Taylor, 'Introduction to *The Widow*', in *The Collected Works*, pp. 1074-77 (p. 1076).

gender play engaged in by the multiple layers of crossdressing. The seeming completeness and effortlessness of Ansaldo's woman 'disguise' is just as passable as the male persona that has been adopted throughout the play. Further, the seeming naturalness of the female persona is also another theatrical construction of the male actor playing Ansaldo. There is no 'natural' woman emerging in the disguise, just another theatrical construction of gender. As the women's joke highlights Ansaldo sharing the same stage space as the male actors dressed as the women, it also then highlights Marcia's dressing as a man in terms of drag rather than passing because of drag's 'tendency to draw attention to its own artificiality, in contrast to passing's need to disguise it'.⁸¹ This joke on the artificiality of gender would be exaggerated further through Francisco's effeminacy within the play, as well as the possible presence of Richard Robinson playing Francisco. The double-game of concealing Ansaldo's disguise to the extent that it is difficult to read *as* crossdressing while later revealing the nature of the disguise in a carnivalesque spectacle of doubled-gender reveals the extent of masculinity's potential pliability.

Yet the second reveal that Ansaldo is Marcia is altogether more ambiguous on the place of Ansaldo's female masculinity at the play's resolution. Violetta's verbal unmasking of the gentlewoman disguise is followed by the First Suitor's unmasking of Ansaldo as his daughter. In a reversal of Ansaldo being simultaneously disguised as Brandino while recognised as himself when wearing the latter's clothing, the gentlewoman disguise suddenly materialises Marcia as an embodied female subject through this verbal, paternal recognition. The double revelation takes the sudden potential for marriage between men and transforms it into a parodic image of conventional heterosexual marriage. But to simplify it as a return to convention ignores the playfulness with which Middleton takes Ansaldo's masculinity to be 'ludic and fluid'.⁸² After being revealed by the First Suitor, Ansaldo asks for forgiveness for his 'disobedien[ce]', pleading for 'reconcilement from above / In peace of heart, the next (I hope) 's your love' (414-18). The conventional and repentant passivity is a stark contrast to the playful agency that Ansaldo has maintained through the play so far.

⁸¹ Drouin, 'Slippages', p. 30. Drouin draws from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, especially pp. 174-94.

⁸² Hyland, 'Performance of Disguise', p. 82.

Ansaldo has been going along with cruel tricks, travelling alone across the countryside and confronting bands of thieves. Ultimately it is his propensity for masculine role-play that frames this unmasking as yet another gendered performance by Ansaldo that mimics conventional expectations of femininity. This could be a protective strategy following his dramatic fleeing of ‘a happy fortune of an old man’ in marriage at the start of the play (420). Middleton may hint at this earlier when Francisco takes the crossdressed Ansaldo offstage to marry; in a moment of possible confession that also verges on a parody of an anxious virgin, Ansaldo asks Francisco to ‘Blame me not. / I am a maid, and fearful’ (268-69). Middleton repeatedly shows that Ansaldo can enthusiastically and successfully role-play womanhood, and so exaggeratedly performs as the clichéd timorous lover on his wedding night. The extended focus on Ansaldo’s exaggerated feminine performance suggests that Ansaldo may here be playing the fearful maid to survive the repercussions of earlier running away from the arranged marriage by asking for forgiveness from the First Suitor.

Ansaldo’s female masculinity resonates with Judith Butler’s argument that ‘drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality’.⁸³ Marcia’s claim to naturalness and originality is disputed by Ansaldo’s quicksilver and passable masculinity, and *The Widow*’s larger interest in displaying the skilled gender impersonations of its actors. Compared to Ansaldo’s relatively undetectable if theatrically-inflected masculinity, the relatively conventional presentation of Marcia has the air of another impersonation enacted by Ansaldo. Ansaldo’s masculinity and femininity are neither natural nor original; it is Middleton’s generic construction of the maid at *The Widow*’s conclusion that constitutes femininity through performance for Ansaldo. There is no guarantee that this final performance of filial revision, to paraphrase Zoch on the Page in *More Dissemblers*, is fixed or without ambiguity.⁸⁴ The reconciliatory tone of the play’s ending disrupts the laughter of the cruel joke and deception instigated by Philippa and Violetta who have ‘much ado / To forbear laughing now’ (435-36). By refusing to announce his female-to-male crossdressing as crossdressing, Ansaldo’s ease of performing masculinity and

⁸³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 125.

⁸⁴ Zoch, ‘Maternal Revision’, p. 163.

femininity gestures towards the artifice of female masculinity as represented by an all-male theatre. The difficulty of fitting Ansaldo back into conventional femininity, indeed to any stable category of ‘woman’, not only highlights the laborious and often subtle work of passing masculine but also gestures towards a wider complication of how masculinity materialises as separate from manhood in the theatre.

In *The Widow*, Middleton stages a series of revelations and concealments that illuminate a complex negotiation between male femininities and the role of gender impersonation. Ansaldo’s slippery gender position is hard to pin down. The actor playing Ansaldo treads a fine line between personating the malleable potential of a male youth and the somewhat more ungraspable semiotics of a female masculinity that is functionally indistinguishable from male masculinity on stage. The figures of Francisco and Richard Robinson also interrogate the significance of male femininities and female impersonation beyond crossdressing. The queer traces throughout *The Widow* suggest Middleton’s self-conscious exploration of the skilled negotiation of gender beyond the confines of a singular, static body. While passing has the same mobile and temporal charge as crossdressing—one body passing as another and through different identities—Middleton uses Ansaldo’s male passing to play with the ways that all gender is materialised on stage. Whereas the previous plays announce their playfulness with crossdressing convention, Ansaldo’s unmasking as Marcia undermines the certainty with which maleness is secured through male bodies. The prosthetic and unfixed nature of masculinity, something in-process and potentially fragile, is emphasised by the gestural and affective resonances with which Ansaldo’s female masculinity fixes itself as masculine. By setting up and then subverting the production of crossdressing as a visible practice, Middleton stages a series of recognitions and revelations about Ansaldo’s female masculinity that is shown to be processual and tenuous yet theatrically flexible.

Conclusion

Through the series of plays I have discussed, Middleton develops and complicates the cultural and theatrical fantasy that conflates youthful boys with women and underpins the double-crossdressing plot in early modern English theatre. Rather than assuming a natural affinity between women and boys, Middleton stages masculine women in a

way that makes visible the continual and skilled work that materialises their representation through gestures, stage properties and costume, double-language, and manipulation of bodily affects. The youthful masculinity of the players who impersonated women sets up the opportunity to explore the contingency of masculinity that Middleton readily exploits in his metatheatre. While the pregnant Page's conventionality would at first appear to conflate the youthful effeminacy of her disguise with her womanhood, the blackly comic extremes of staging her labour while crossdressed demonstrate Middleton's willingness to push exactly what or how masculinities are being materialised in these roles by younger male actors. The more general doubleness that accompanies Moll's character is emphasised by her use of masculinity to enshrine her autonomous womanhood. Moll and the Page's masculinities are variously shown to be defined by voluntary and involuntary slippages between masculinity and femininity, which demonstrate Middleton's wider interest in masculinity as contingent and prosthetic. His staging of Ansaldo takes this mercurial conception of masculinity further by revealing the theatrical nature of his male persona and thus playing with the legibility of the boy player's body that these double-crossdressed plots draw attention to and depend upon. The series of unmaskings at *The Widow's* conclusion work to give retroactive significance to the subtle moments where Ansaldo's elastic boyishness goes further in appearing normative than the effeminacy associated with other youths such as Francisco. Middleton, however, is far more interested in pushing the boundaries of theatrical ambiguity that such passing generates, which suggests that masculine women can be indistinguishable from adult men as well as younger effeminate boys.

What the various plots of Moll, the Page and Ansaldo demonstrate is a broader playfulness that Middleton engages in surrounding female masculinity. These characters are compelled to comply or grapple with their non-normative gender positions engendered by their crossdressing, even though these representations of female masculinity are represented by an all-male theatre. These characters inhabit masculinity in various guises that these plays then try to situate in endings where other characters or aspects of the play attempt to impose normative gendered bodies and behaviours. The outright hostility many characters hold towards Moll is mitigated by the play's insistence that she remains an outlier. Moll's emphasis on the individualism

and autonomy that masculinity affords her, however, ultimately undercuts the other male characters' claim to a singular or natural masculinity. While the pregnant Page's errant disguise erupts through and questions the opacity of female-to-male disguise as theatrical artifice, the material presence of the infant whose labour was acted out on stage in male clothes and breeches that carry the materially queer traces of this gender disruption resists the return to conventional maternal femininity. Middleton developed this further in *The Widow* by, ironically, turning that excess into a subtle metatheatrical play with how women disguised as men must be represented by male actors. Ansaldo and the play's other young gallants are undifferentiated in their gender presentation for most of the play, refuting any clear distinction between youthful effeminate gallants and the crossdressed Ansaldo.

Through the personas these women adopt and their varying claims for these personas to be transparent or opaque instances of crossdressing, Middleton demonstrates the flexibility and skill of the male actors who were able to accommodate and perform gender variance. In doing so, these plays illuminate the constructedness, slipperiness and contingency of gender identity more broadly. The attention this chapter has paid to masculine women has further highlighted how early modern masculinity materialised itself through a continual process of concealing and revealing between human bodies, material objects and pliable language. This sense of trajectory is articulated in Joseph Gamble's description of an early modern trans philology where the wide interest in 'trans' prefixes offered early moderns a way to think of gender as the movement or orientation of bodies towards certain models or modes of being.⁸⁵ As an example, Gamble charts the trajectory of 'transexion' and, significantly, 'transfeminate', where the latter is defined by Thomas Blount as 'to turn from woman to man, or from one sex to another'.⁸⁶ I highlight this particular intervention from the recent critical interest in early modern trans studies as it illuminates a specific interest in process and movement that the terminology of crossdressing and passing that I have been exploring invokes. Middleton's double-crossdressed plots invoke this particularly resonant view of masculinity and femininity as both processual and fluid

⁸⁵ Joseph Gamble, 'Toward a Trans Philology', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 19.4 (2019), 26–44 (p. 35).

⁸⁶ Blount, *Glossographia*, sig. Rr5v.

in the ways that they inhere in a metatheatrical theatre of doubleness. By impersonating and inhabiting manhood through their crossdressing, these women demonstrate the limitations and capacities of masculinity in Middleton's writing as something that can be oriented towards and strived for. Further, the role of the boy actor in these plays is continually drawn upon to question the youthful male body as an unproblematic surface for gender impersonation. Although skilled actors may be able to temporarily 'transfeminate' themselves in performance, their masculinity remains present. The attention drawn towards or away from their masculinity-in-process becomes a valuable resource for playwrights like Middleton who were interested in testing the limits of theatrical representation and gender by playing on the boy actor. The three cases I have presented of Middleton's double-crossdressing plots in this chapter negotiate a theatrical culture that readily played with female masculinities on stage, one where gender is never fully possessed by those who strive to embody it. Middleton's extreme pushing of the boundaries of the theatre's capacity to represent female masculinities through crossdressing illuminates the lability of masculinity and gendered embodiment more broadly in early modern theatrical culture.

Section Three: Fantasies of Authority

Chapter Four: Bodies of Water: Civic Authority and Water Supply in Middleton's London, 1613

[...] There's a kind of bold grace expected throughout all the parts of a gentleman. Then, for your observances, a man must not so much as spit but within line and fashion. I tell you what I ha' done: sometimes I carry my water all London over, only to deliver it proudly at the Standard; and do I pass altogether unnoted, think you? No, a man can no sooner peep out his head, but there's a bow bent at him out of some watchtower or other. (*Michaelmas Term*, 2.1.105-13)

In *Michaelmas Term*, the disguised Shortyard engages in a scheme to gain the confidence of new-to-London Richard Easy, claiming to have 'credit very spacious here i'th'city' as an established gentleman (2.1.102). Shortyard's appeal to the masculine authority of the urban gallant figures his body in watery terms as he spits according to fashion and only urinates proudly and publicly at the Standard, a water conduit in the commercial district of Cheapside. The spaces of London's water supply become implicated in the processes of masculine self-fashioning. For Shortyard, being able to manipulate one's bodily comportment—especially in mastering and boldly displaying his somatic flows—is the sign of a graceful gentleman and constitutes his claims to masculine authority through the semiotics of water.

Throughout Middleton's literary career, water is used to evoke wider tensions about gender, power, capital, sex, space, control, and the relationship between the individual and wider community. More broadly, Gail Kern Paster's influential *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (1993) contended that early modern English literature and culture used discourses of moral and somatic incontinence to establish hierarchical systems of gender difference where women were figured as 'leaky vessel[s]'.¹ However, critics have since challenged Paster's assertions about early modern cultural conceptions of gendered leaking and flow.² One particular challenge to Paster emerges when shifting focus

¹ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 24.

² Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves* argues against Paster's pathologizing of the leaky body, emphasising the role of somatic regulation in producing subjectivity; Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion* (2008) considers positive male alliances with women based upon these displays of empowering and

specifically to Middleton's work. As Cynthia R. Daileader argues, Middleton's literary oeuvre is distinguished by its propensity towards representing 'traditional tropes of feminine bodily incontinence, corruption, and vice emerg[ing] in masculine embodiments'.³ Middleton's professional engagement with London's water supply, particularly through his entertainments connected to the construction of the New River, situate these grotesque and liquid representations of masculinity within a shifting urban landscape that was becoming increasingly commercialised.⁴ While the importance of bodily incontinence to Middleton's works has been recognised, critics still understate the complex and gendered semiotics of water in Middleton's writing.

By exploring the association between masculine images of authority and the water supply of early modern London, this chapter considers the significance of the New River project to Middleton's representations of urban masculinity. Construction on the New River Project began in 1604 and, despite experiencing frequent interruptions, was finally completed in 1613. Throughout this year, Middleton wrote civic entertainments in connection with the public sponsors of the project as well as satiric city comedies playing with and challenging the popular representations of festive, riverine space.⁵ Across *The Manner of His Lordship's Entertainment* and *The Triumphs of Truth*, Middleton negotiates the ways in which merchants fashioned masculine identities through his staging of the city's water supply. By bringing these

feminised emotional display; Ronda Arab also challenges Paster's restricted analysis of the masculine ideal of bodily enclosure by focusing on representations of male manual workers in *Manly Mechanicals*, pp. 16-17; Lisa Wynne Smith, 'The Body Embarrassed? Rethinking the Leaky Male Body in Eighteenth-Century England and France', *Gender & History*, 23.1 (2011), 26-46, criticises Paster's anachronistic concern with sexual difference, emphasising the control over somatic leakage in discourses of early modern manhood.

³ Daileader, 'Masculine Grotesque', p. 452. For further readings of Middleton's irony as exposing male misogyny and patriarchal culture, see Steven Mullaney, 'Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600-1607' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45.2 (1994), 139-62, and Ronald Huebert, *The Performance of Pleasure in English Renaissance Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2003), pp. 129-55.

⁴ For an overview of Middleton negotiating celebration and critique of the New River across his pageantry and drama see Su Mei Kok, "'How Many Arts from Such a Labour Flow": Thomas Middleton and London's New River', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 43.1 (2013), 173-90.

⁵ Following the unexpected death of Prince Henry in 1612 and the marriage of Princess Elizabeth on the 14th February, the year 1613 saw an outpouring of literary production as well as political and cultural transformation. See David M. Bergeron, *Shakespeare's London, 1613* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018). Bergeron has argued elsewhere that 1613 particularly energised Middleton's literary output ('Thomas Middleton, Thomas Middleton in London 1613', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 27 (2014), 17-39).

civic entertainments into conversation with his city comedies of that same year—*Wit at Several Weapons*, co-authored with William Rowley, and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, one of Middleton's best-known works—I consider how Middleton navigates rhetorical and embodied liquidity. In doing so, I address the tension between Middleton's ideal visions of a masculine authority constituted within urban watery spaces and the frequent failure of men to embody these models. My consideration of the interplay between the masculine 'leaky vessel', to which Middleton frequently returns, and the civic images of authority constructed around the city's water supply in his 1613 writing will highlight the multivalent semiotics of London's bodies of water, the significance that these spectacles of water supply held in early modern culture, and how men could exploit these discourses to fashion masculine authority in the city.

1. Performing Gender and Water Supply in Early Modern London

Before addressing the engagement with masculine self-fashioning and London's water supply in Middleton's texts, we need to understand how the production of gendered meaning within these spaces is contingent on specific temporal and spatial contexts. London's water was supplied by an interconnected system of rivers (including the Thames), conduits, cisterns, fountains, wells, tuns, and waterworks. William Hardin has argued that the material and symbolic landscape of the city's water supply was 'intimately connected to an essential civic identity and stability' in both the popular literary and cultural imagination.⁶ Yet the significance of water and liquidity as a metaphor in early modern English literature and culture stands in its very malleability and slipperiness. The watery terms in which a civic body articulates itself also contain the potential for its disruption into uncontrollable fluidity. By considering how metaphors of water signify gendered authority and its dissolution, I demonstrate the importance of attending to the various bodies of water that populate early modern writing as a highly determined constituent of gendered identity and power. In

⁶ William Hardin, 'Spectacular Constructions: Ceremonial Representations of City and Society in Early Stuart London' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995), p. 50.

exploring the role that the city's water supply played in articulating cultural constructions of gendered liquidity, I contemplate the significance of space and geography in figuring masculine incontinence outside of dualistic frameworks of male and female water.

The 'semantic ambivalence' of water metaphors is epitomised by the figure of the conduit.⁷ While most commonly referring to the public fountains within the city walls, conduits could also be the sources of water from which these fountains drew as well as the pipes conveying the water between source and fountain. This semantic doubling is evoked in George Peele's biblical drama *David and Bathsheba* (c.1592-94) when Ahimaaz weeps for the lost city of Jerusalem— 'Oh, would our eyes were conduits to our hearts / And that our hearts were seas of liquid blood'.⁸ By conceiving of the eyes as conduits, Peele figures the eyes as channels that allow inward feeling to manifest as displays of emotion but also gestures towards the desire for human affections to be liquid and so able to be easily channelled across the body to properly express emotions such as grief. Conduits could also evoke the vulnerability of water supply to foreign influences, as they necessarily enable the mobility of water across boundaries. Looking over the pipes through which Campeius enters the city in the dumb show of Thomas Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon* (1607), Time declares that these 'conduit-heads of treason' are 'con[veying] / Conspiracies, scandals, and civill discord' into Fairyland.⁹ Nashe's antisemitic portrayal of the Jewish doctor Zadoch in *The Unfortunate Traveller* similarly evokes the vulnerability of the water supply, warning that he will 'poyson their springs & conduit heads, whence they receive all their water round about the citie'.¹⁰ While Ahimaaz's desire to open up his body relies on the conduit as a vehicle for mobility and connectivity, Dekker and Nashe's evocation of water and the conduit's porosity evokes an opposing apprehension about this constant osmosis with the external world. The conduit symbolised the necessary

⁷ Jonathan Gil Harris, 'This Is Not a Pipe: Water Supply, Incontinent Sources, and the Leaky Body Politic', in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. by Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 203–28 (p. 207).

⁸ George Peele, *David and Bathsheba*, ed. by Mathew R. Martin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 10.30-31.

⁹ Thomas Dekker, *The Whore of Babylon* (London: Nathaniel Butler, 1607), sig. G3r.

¹⁰ Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, p. 311.

means by which communities organised and sustained themselves, as well as the potential of these watery networks to take up and spread disorder.

Yet conduits and their attendant associations of disorder are also gendered. In *The Body Embarrassed*, Paster observes that a medical model of the humoral body saw ‘an internal hierarchy of fluids and functions within the body that is fully assimilable to external hierarchies of class and gender’.¹¹ She later expands on this to describe a reciprocal ‘fluid form of consciousness inhabited by, even as it inhabits, a universe composed of analogous elements’, highlighting an ecological relationship between ‘the microcosm’s shifting interaction with a continuously changing macrocosm’.¹² Within this cultural model of liquid embodiment, uncontrolled bodies that flowed—either literally with excessive sweating, urination or bleeding, or metaphorical flows such as excessive speech or sexual behaviour—were figured as ‘open, permeable, effluent, leaky’.¹³ Paster argues that these uncontrolled bodies were largely gendered feminine. The anonymous broadside *Tittle-Tattle; Or, The Several Branches of Gossiping* (c.1600) illustrates how representations of conduits engaged in these cultural fantasies of leaky women. Depicting many spaces where women congregated to gossip, the broadside depicts one group of women ‘[a]t the Conditte’ gossiping and ‘striving for their turn’ until ‘one another beat’ at the illustration’s centre.¹⁴ Yet this simple dualism that codes women’s unruliness as leaky risks simplifying the intersecting forces that render particular bodies through images of grotesque liquefaction. The constant verbal assaults of the titular character of Ben Jonson’s *Epicene, Or The Silent Woman* (1609) toward Morose provoke him to call her ‘a conduit-pipe that will gush out with more force when she opens again’ (4.4.64-65). Jonson associates the socially disruptive tirades of an unruly wife with more uncomfortable images of fluid uncontrol. Yet the figure of this uncontrollability comes in the form of a cross-dressed boy playing up to exaggerated misogynistic tropes.

¹¹ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 19.

¹² Paster, *Humoring the Body*, p. 137; Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson, ‘Introduction: Reading the Early Modern Passions’, in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. by Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 1–20 (p. 18).

¹³ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 92.

¹⁴ *Tittle-Tattle; Or, The Several Branches of Gossiping* (London, c.1600), British Museum, BM Satires 61, 1973,U.216.

Middleton's satirical mock-almanac *The Owl's Almanac* (1618) predicts that widows will 'weep out so much water as may serve to wash another wedding smock' but the 'joy' of remarrying will 'dry the conduits of their eyes' (ll. 1392-94). While initially appearing to engage with the stereotype of the 'lusty widow' characterised as leaky through these excessive tears that quickly dry,¹⁵ this passage is part of a larger section detailing all manner of gendered overflowing bodies. Middleton's description of the widow is quickly followed by a description of 'rich heirs and executors' who hold onto 'onions' to fake tears and appear mournful (ll. 1395-96). While the widow may appear excessively leaky, the duplicitous male heirs hoping to feign these tears are viewed as equally suspicious in their lack of water. The repeated references to incontinence through the conduits, while at first engaging with the fantasy of feminine uncontrol, rather gesture towards watery spaces and flows as potentially dangerous and manipulable in ways that are not straightforwardly gendered.

The multivalency of water metaphors more broadly imbue the conduits—that can simultaneously be sources, channels, and orifices—with a significant civic power to organise urban space. In the 1594 edition of Nashe's *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem*, for example, London itself is figured like a conduit, described as 'the wellhead of the land' which ought to 'send foorth whollsome springs' to the whole nation.¹⁶ Nashe's ideal city is figured not only as the origin of powerful and virtuous waters but also as a model for how power and virtue are distributed beyond the city walls. However, this passage is an amendment appearing in the second edition of *Christ's Tears*. In the original 1593 text (reinstated for the 1613 edition, the same year as the New River's completion), this passage was an inflammatory comment on the city's propensity for sin. Nashe charges London as 'the Sea that sucks in all the scummy channels of the Realme'.¹⁷ This change in meaning turns on the same metaphorical vehicle of the City of London as a fountain or sewer that enables the mobility of water within and across boundaries. Nashe's formulation of urban space as closely intertwined with its water

¹⁵ For further reading on the paradoxical cultural fantasies of the widow, see Jennifer Panek, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially pp. 157-201.

¹⁶ Thomas Nashe, *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by Ronald B. McKerrow and F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), II, 1-186 (p. 158n28).

¹⁷ Nashe, *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem*, p. 158.

supply networks echoes John Stow's chorographical *A Survey of London* (1598, 1603) which similarly enshrines the importance of water at the beginning of the book. Stow emphasises the paternalism of 'good and charitable Citizens' whose financial contributions construct the fountains that benefit the whole 'Communalitie'.¹⁸ However, specific structures and spaces still maintain the potential to be reinscribed by their use. The conduit in Cornhill is noted for its history as a jail for 'not onely night walkers' but also those suspected of 'spirituall and temporall [...] incontinecie'.¹⁹ Pursenet in *Your Five Gallants* threatens to catch romantic rival Fitzgrave when he is drunkenly 'reel[ing] from a tavern late, / Pissing again[st] a conduit', the fountain being an opportune place to assault a drunken man urinating (3.2.21-24). The conduit evokes a moral or bodily vulnerability to incontinence, made literal by Middleton's urinary reference to the space's heightened openness. The conduit, as a means to figure the boundaries and networks of urban space, was emblematic of a broader civic body that was always seen as fluid or containing the potential to slip into social disorder.

Royal bodies took advantage of these urban discourses of liquidity to fashion themselves as fonts of virtue, albeit in specific and gendered ways. The cult of Elizabeth that grew around Elizabeth I's strategies of self-representation habitually figured her as a pure fountain, which proved a pliable image for her patronage, favour, power, and Protestant spirituality.²⁰ In his political writings, King James VI and I posited himself as a vessel and source of royal and literary authority, or '*the fontaine and the very beeing of trueth*' where the ideal image of the king's body flowed virtuously into the commonwealth.²¹ Such images were reflected in the drama of the period. John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (c.1612-13), for example, begins with Antonio asserting the virtuous 'Princes Court / Is Like a common Fontaine, whence

¹⁸ John Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. by Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), I, p. 18.

¹⁹ Stow, *A Survey of London*, I, p. 188.

²⁰ On the interaction between literary and physical fountains in the early modern period, see Hester Lees-Jeffries, *England's Helicon: Fountains in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 103-22, 218-33.

²¹ James I, King of England, *Basilikon Dōron. Or His Maiesties Instructions to His Dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince* (London: E. Alde for E. VV[hite], 1603), sig. B1r. For further reading on the fundamental anxiety driving James's fluid self-representation, see *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VI and I*, ed. by Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002); and Jane Rickard, *Authorship and Authority: The Writings of James VI and I* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

should flow / Pure silver-droppes'.²² That the court *should* flow like a fountain drew stark contrast not only to the debased courtiers present in Webster's play but also to the emergent and increasingly prevalent perception of corruption and profligacy within James's court.

James's royal entry exploited London's conduits as materialisations of his royal power, detailed in *The Whole Royal and Magnificent Entertainment of King James through the City of London* (1604), to which Middleton contributed a minor speech for the personification of Zeal, in collaboration with co-authors Jonson and Dekker and joiner Stephen Harrison. During the procession, the king's party stopped at elaborately designed arches, many situated at public water fountains. The entry's printed text highlights that the 'conduits of Cornhill, of Cheap and of Fleet Street that day ran claret wine very plenteously' (ll. 2766-67).²³ The celebratory issuing of wine from the city's fountains was a repeated spectacle of royal ceremony. Stow's *Survey* notes that outside Westminster Palace 'standeth a fontaine, which at the Coronations and great triumphes is made to runne with wine out of diuerse spoutes'.²⁴ Elaborate displays of the wine-fountain device helped to construct a historical continuum of triumphant occasion and ceremony. As Hester Lees-Jeffries argues, the conduits became 'a vital point of contact not only between past and present London, but between real and ideal London'.²⁵ By staging royal figures as manipulating the conduits, city entertainments sought to enmesh the king's body into the watery fabric of the urban landscape. This vision of liquid authority is realised at the arch erected at Soper Lane depicting the '*Founte of Arete* (Virtue)' from which 'sundry pipes (like veins)' emerge 'branching from the body' (1414-17). The Fountain of Virtue which '*late ran deep and clear*' requires the king to replenish its water as it '*Dries and melts all her body to a tear*' (1469-70). Yet James only refills the fountain through his '*glorious presence*' with no mention of physical labour or performed actions (1518). When the royal procession approached the arch, a 'strange and heavenly music' blasted (1483-4), whereupon the fountain began 'flowing fresh and abundantly

²² Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, 1.1.11-13.

²³ Middleton's contribution occurs at the sixth out of eight pageants the King encountered (ll. 2122-81).

²⁴ Stow, *A Survey of London*, II, p. 122.

²⁵ Lees-Jeffries, *England's Helicon*, p. 109.

through several pipes, with milk, wine and balm' (1488-90). Whereas Elizabeth actively participated in displays of gift-giving at the conduits, James maintained his status as the observer whose mere presence ensures the running of virtuous waters through the city's pipes.²⁶ As Harris asserts, strategies of enclosure 'ranging from straightforward physical containment to the encircling trajectory of the royal gaze' were imposed to regulate the slippery flows of water. Although these enclosures could only ever be 'partially successful', attitudes toward the sources and channels of public water remain 'ambivalent and contradictory'.²⁷ The staging of the king's body before the Soper Lane arch materialises his symbolic representation as a fountain, while simultaneously signalling an ambivalent expectation of a kind of passivity to let virtue flow outward from his body-as-source.

London in 1613 saw two significant city entertainments performed on the River Thames: the opening water procession and pageantry of that year's annual Lord Mayor's Show (discussed in detail later in this chapter), and the *naumachia* (a mock sea battle) that served as the culmination of the marriage celebrations for Princess Elizabeth Stuart and Emperor Frederick V.²⁸ These waterborne entertainments exploited the river as a 'stage' both 'natural and constructed'.²⁹ The Lord Mayor's Shows typically began with the mayoral party proceeding by water to Westminster to take his oath of office and after he left Guildhall in the morning the show began with the water procession across the Thames. In the text for his 1632 show *Londons Fountaine of Arts and Sciences*, Thomas Heywood describes the mayoral party sailing on 'Barges, strong, / And richly deckt', accompanied by the persistent sound of cannon, fireworks, and the crowd.³⁰ This water show was noisy, celebratory, and

²⁶ James was more static in his public appearances and pageantry, whereas Elizabeth purposefully put herself in reciprocal dialogue. See David M. Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), p. 75.

²⁷ Harris, 'This Is Not a Pipe', p. 206.

²⁸ The day's events and in particular the mock sea battle are described in detail in John Taylor's pamphlet *Heavens Blessing and Earths Joy* (London: [E. Allde] for Joseph Hunt [and H. Gosson], 1613). For a discussion of the theatricality of naumachia, see Maria Shmygol, 'Jacobean Mock Sea-Fights on the River Thames: Nautical Theatricality in Performance and Print', *London Journal*, 47.1 (2022), 13–35.

²⁹ Margaret Shewring, 'Introduction', in *Waterborne Pageants and Festivals in the Renaissance: Essays in Honour of J. R. Mulryne*, ed. by Margaret Shewring (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 1–8 (p. 6).

³⁰ Thomas Heywood, *Londini Artium & Scientiarum Scaturigo. Or, Londons Fountaine of Arts and Sciences* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1632), sigs. A1v-B1r.

chaotic. Dekker's ambivalence towards the disordered soundscape of the water show is clear in the printed text for his 1612 Lord Mayor's Show *Troja-Nova Triumphans*: 'Their thunder (according to the old *Gally-Foyst-Fashion*) was too lowd for any of the *Nine Muses* to be bidden to it'.³¹ The report from Russian ambassador, Aleksei Ziuzin, describes the pomp of the beginning water show of Middleton's *Triumphs of Truth* in lavish detail otherwise absent from Middleton's printed text. The mayoral barge is described as one of many abundantly 'decorated ship[s], small, painted in all sortes of various colours' sailing 'over the whole river'.³² The river itself was dressed through this crowded, waterborne ornamentation 'manifest[ing] the ways in which literary and material ideas of landscape operated, often simultaneously'.³³ The liquid advantages of river space were drawn on to physically stage the symbolic operations of royal and civic power, making visible the watery rhetoric that fashioned authority within the urban landscape.

The role of the river itself in the Lord Mayor's Shows has, as Tracey Hill notes, 'lost its original significance for modern commentators'.³⁴ The water show's relative absence from criticism owes in part to extant texts' ambivalent framing of these proceedings. Dekker was particularly dismissive of the opening water show in the printed text of *Troja-Nova Triumphans*, acknowledging the discrepancy between the title page 'mak[ing] promise of all the *Shewes by water*' and its textual elision in print wherein he wishes the shows 'dye by that which fed them [...] *Powder and Smoake*'.³⁵ The noise and pyrotechnics of the water show were derided as ephemeral and unstructured, reflected in Jonson's *Epicene* where Morose berates Daw for bringing

³¹ Thomas Dekker, *Troja-Nova Triumphans* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1612), sig. D1v.

³² Aleksei Ziuzin, 'An Account by Aleksei Ziuzin', ed. by Maija Jansson and Nikolai Rogozhin, trans. by Paul Bushkovitch in *The Collected Works*, ll. 79-80, 86. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given parenthetically.

³³ Julie Sanders, *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama, 1620-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 13; for a broader discussion on the theatricality of riverine space, see Julie Sanders, 'Staging the River', in *Royal River: Power, Pageantry & the Thames*, ed. by Susan Doran and Robert J. Blyth (London: Scala, 2012), pp. 33-37, and Jemima Matthews, 'Inside out and Outside in: The River Thames in William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *Shakespeare*, 15.4 (2019), 410-27.

³⁴ Tracey Hill, *Pageantry and Power: A Cultural History of the Early Modern Lord Mayor's Show, 1585-1639* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 155. Although Hill's discussion weaves examples of water pageantry throughout, only five pages are devoted to a sustained analysis (pp. 155-160).

³⁵ Dekker, *Troja-Nova Triumphans*, sig. D1v.

‘noise and tumult [...] begot on an ill *May*-day, or when the Gally-foist is a-floate to *Westminster*’ into his home (4.2.124-26). These contemporary and critical accounts evolve out of the differences between more literary conceptions of allegorical water-pageant devices and the transient, chaotic staging of the opening water show.

The idealised discourses of water and civic authority were also available to those wishing to profit from supplying London’s water. It is this commercialisation that concerns Middleton in his river texts of 1613. London’s rapidly increasing population exacerbated the inadequacy of the city’s water supply during the early seventeenth century.³⁶ The New River project aimed to replenish these supplies through the construction of a 40-mile canal, a waterhouse and a system of pipes conveying water from the Chadwell and Amwell springs near Ware in Hertfordshire. While construction began in 1604, the project’s charter transferred into the hands of Welsh goldsmith Hugh Myddleton in 1609, who arranged the financing in return for a share of eventual profits. However, frequent financial issues and organised legal opposition from local landowners halted construction until 1611. A 1610 petition accused city officials of paying the ‘whole interest in fee simple to Mr Middleton [...] for his private benefite’, angry at this bypassing of public utility.³⁷ After construction costs rose far higher than estimated, the crown intervened in Hugh Myddleton’s favour, financing half the total construction costs in return for half of the shares in the New River Company. In 1613, the New River officially opened.

Later writers often celebrated the impact of the project. Richard Brathwaite’s *Barnabee’s Journal* (1638) recollects the pageantry commemorating the New River in his short verse on the Ware reservoir as an event which ennobled its water— ‘mightily these did delight me; / O I wish’d them *Aqua Vitae*’.³⁸ Even Hugh Myddleton himself was remembered more fondly as time passed as a ‘worthy man’ who ‘quench[ed] the thirst of thousands in the populous City of *London* [...] at his own cost’.³⁹ In contrast, contemporary public debates erupted over the commercial aspirations of Hugh

³⁶ For an overview of the changing ecologies of London, see Bruce Boehrer, *Environmental Degradation in Jacobean Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-27, and Bernard Rudden, *The New River: A Legal History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 7–11.

³⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 98, fols. 47r-49r, 113r.

³⁸ Richard Brathwaite, *Barnabees Journall* (London: John Haviland, 1638), sig. N6r.

³⁹ Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (London: J.G.W.L. and W.G. for Thomas Williams, 1662), fol. Fffff2v.

Myddleton and his financiers, emblematic of wider cynicism about the merchant class's commitment to upholding civic values. The New River project marked a change from established patterns of municipal projects that supplied water to the city financed by individual benefactors or craft guilds. The piping of water into private households disrupted the need for communal water fountains and the network of water bearers, thereby 'transform[ing] the relations by which an urban household was sustained'.⁴⁰ While the New River was a necessary public utility to supply the growing population and maintain clean drinking water, its construction and commercialisation provoked anxieties about the erosion of urban neighbourliness and the increasing encroachment of capital into everyday urban life.

Literary and cultural images of bodies of water and liquid bodies varied widely in the types of gendered authority they could express. The potential collapse of that authority was often expressed through the propensity of water toward leaking, overflowing and dispersing beyond controllable bounds. However, its usefulness and pliability as a literary or rhetorical device can be seen in the royal and civic entertainments which drew on the symbolic and material operations of water to foreground various forms of gendered power. As I explore in the rest of this chapter, Middleton harnesses the semantic slipperiness of water as another means of untangling how masculine identity and power are contingently and precariously produced.

2. Middleton's River Entertainments: *The Manner of His Lordship's Entertainment* and *The Triumphs of Truth*

In 1613, Middleton wrote two civic entertainments relating to the New River project that negotiate the fashioning of masculine authority through London's water supply: *The Manner of His Lordship's Entertainment*, commissioned by Myddleton to celebrate the project's completion, and *The Triumphs of Truth*, the Lord Mayor's Show commemorating the election of Hugh's brother Sir Thomas Myddleton. The close relationship between the entertainments is emphasised by the second printed issue of *The Triumphs of Truth* by Nicholas Oakes where *His Lordship's Entertainment* is

⁴⁰ Mark S. Jenner, 'From Conduit Community to Commercial Network? Water in London, 1500-1725', in *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London*, by Paul Griffiths and Mark S. Jenner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 250-72 (p. 259).

added to the book as a separate, supplementary quarto sheet.⁴¹ In this section, I explore how physical and symbolic masculine bodies are staged as replenishing the virtuous waters of the city while also drawing attention to the ways that civic and economic interests in water intersect in Middleton's writing.

Middleton wrote the brief *The Manner of His Lordship's Entertainment* for Hugh Myddleton's official opening of the New River on 29th September 1613, the same afternoon as Myddleton's brother's election to Lord Mayor. Middleton's speaker welcomes the gathering of aldermen and city dignitaries at 'that most famous and admired work of the running stream, the cistern better known as the New River Head in Islington' from which pipes circulated water throughout the city (ll. 7-8). The staging of Middleton's celebration at such a central site to the city's water supply emphasises the virtuous aims of the project's sponsors in supplying water 'for the general good of the city' (11). The rhetoric of charity and civic duty is compounded by the sense of occasion afforded by the performance on election day. Middleton adopts the conventional language of civic ritual and public utility to represent the project's financier as a paternalistic benefactor. The portrayal of the New River water house as a 'civic monument' attempts to enmesh Myddleton's project within the wider cityscape.⁴² By insisting on the New River Head as a municipal monument and Hugh Myddleton as a civic patron, Middleton exposes the patterns of city ceremony that could be appropriated to portray the New River as a virtuous, civic achievement.

Middleton adopts the expected 'praise for the civic good works of merchants and personified virtues' that were conventional in the performance of city pageants.⁴³ The entertainment entailed a 'troop of labourers' who before the speech '[march] twice or thrice about the cistern' (29, 32-33). These labourers bore 'in their hands the symbols of their several employments', exhibiting their communal labour and membership of the companies in line with the exhibitionism expected of urban ceremony (30-31). Middleton's entertainment makes literal '*how many arts from such a labour flow*' through its depiction of the labourers (64), which also associates the

⁴¹ While in STC 17903 *The Triumphs of Truth* was printed by itself, STC 17904 also contains *His Lordship's Entertainment*.

⁴² Kok, 'Middleton and London's New River', p. 176.

⁴³ Ceri Sullivan, 'Thomas Middleton's View of Public Utility', *RES*, 58.234 (2007), 167-174 (p. 169).

constructedness of the staged rituals of pageantry about the New River with their virtuous industry. The regalia of marching bodies and the anonymous speaker metonymically invoke the bodies of the labourers not present at the performance but still able to be imaged as part of a larger labouring body. The physical presence of water is taken up by Middleton's speaker as 'the fruits' of the project's labour issuing into the New River Head (80). Both the art of the pageantry and the industry of construction are rendered through languages of liquidity that in turn figure Hugh Myddleton as a civic fountain.

Middleton's celebratory enclosure of the New River in this text stands at odds with the hostility toward an acquisitive merchant elite in many of his contemporaries' responses to the project. Ben Jonson parodies Myddleton's mercantile aspirations in *The Alchemist* (1610) when Sir Epicure Mammon proposes, rather than eradicating plague, to 'serve th' whole city with preservative, / Weekly, each house his dose, and at the rate' to which Surly replies 'As he that built the waterworks does with water' (2.1.74-76). Flamineo in John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612) asks 'Why we should wish more rivers to the Cittie, / When [women] sell water so good cheap', associating the excess of waterways in the city with the excessive fluidity of women's bodies.⁴⁴ John Fletcher's *Wit Without Money* (c.1614) presents the insalubrious Valentine who threatens 'Waterworkes, and rumours of new Rivers' will 'runne you into questions who built the [Thames]', connecting the project with a dissolution of substantial history.⁴⁵ Jonson narrates a journey through London's polluted Fleet Ditch in 'On the Famous Voyage'—the longest poem in *Epigrams* (1616)—concluding that 'The city hath since raised a pyramid' with the New River Head at Clerkenwell (l. 194).⁴⁶ The monumental imagery used by Jonson underscores the New River's solid interruption into the space of the landscape and the poem.

⁴⁴ John Webster, *The White Devil*, in *The Works of John Webster: An Old Spelling Critical Edition*, ed. by David Gunby, David Carnegie, Anthony Hammond, and Doreen DelVecchio, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), I, 5.3.128.

⁴⁵ John Fletcher, *Wit Without Money* (London: Printed by Thomas Cotes, for Andrew Croke, and William Cooke, 1640), sig. H1v.

⁴⁶ There is evidence Jonson composed the poem prior to 1616, proximate to the New River's construction. For evidence of a 1612 print edition of *Epigrams*, see Tara L. Lyons, 'New Evidence for Ben Jonson's *Epigrammes* (ca. 1612) in Bodleian Library Records', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 113.3 (2020), 343-364.

Middleton exploits the conventions of civic ritual to emphasise the musical and symbolic harmony of the river pageant. In *His Lordship's Entertainment*, Middleton's speaker declares that the waters of the New River will '*loudly sing*' and bring '*comfort*' to the city with '*thy crystal murmurs*' (82-83). The melodious language in which the project is framed presents the anticipated water as harmonious with the landscape and citizens, rather than as a chaotic intrusion. The acoustics of urban ceremonies took 'thematic advantage of running water' at the conduits and the Thames as part of the process by which 'the city was made to speak' in civic ritual.⁴⁷ In Middleton's pageant, the river itself is said to be singing and murmuring in conjunction with the speeches, 'drums' and 'trumpets' that punctuate the performance (20-21). Presenting the project and the merchants behind its construction through the language of harmonious musicality, Middleton's entertainment exploits the soundscapes of urban ceremony to purposefully contrast it with popular representations of the project as physically and socially disruptive. By enveloping both the commercial aspirations of the project and its sponsors within the languages and performance practices of city pageantry, Middleton presents a version of London in which 'market-practices were as constant and timeless as any civic ritual', justifying Hugh Myddleton's commodification of water.⁴⁸

The entertainment's final moment combines the mechanical, aural, and symbolic mechanisms of the New River in Middleton's literary appropriation of pageant conventions. The speaker's final lines command the water to spill into the cistern: '*flow forth precious spring*' (80). On these words, 'the flood gate opens, the stream let into the cistern', accompanied by 'triumphant welcomes' played on 'drums and trumpets' (85-87). The speaker's ordered verse and the marching of the labourers suddenly transition into triumphant welcomes accompanied by the sound of water rushing into the cistern. The sound of the cistern filling symbolically, and possibly literally, drowns out the 'malice, calumnies, and slanders' aimed at Hugh Myddleton's role in the New River's construction (24-25). Contrastingly, Middleton's speaker

⁴⁷ Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, p. 70.

⁴⁸ William Hardin, "'Pipe-Pilgrimages" and "Fruitfull Rivers": Thomas Middleton's Civic Entertainments and the Water Supply of Early Stuart London', *Renaissance Papers* (1993), 63-73 (p. 64).

praises the ‘*cost, art, and strength*’ required of Myddleton to complete the project (38). This three-word figuration is echoed in Anthony Munday’s revision of Stow’s *Survey of London* (1618, revised 1633), which commemorates the ‘admirable Art, paines and industry’ undergone by the project’s sponsor.⁴⁹ These repeated groupings of three words praise Myddleton’s financial backing of the project (‘cost’), his skill in managing the construction of the New River (his ‘art’, repeated in Middleton and Munday), and figure his patronage in terms that associate his credit with physical labour (‘*strength*’, ‘paines’, ‘industry’). . Hugh Myddleton is simultaneously a paternal and paternalistic figure— ‘the father and master of this famous work’ (14-15)—in the replenishing of London’s water supply. This patronage of *His Lordship’s Entertainment* is aligned with his sponsoring of the New River, and is positioned as a masculine benefactor to both. The virtue of the water flowing through it is then contingent not only upon the successful perfection of the entertainment’s performance but also on the virtues that Myddleton himself possesses. Middleton figures Myddleton’s financial backing of the New River as a kind of labour, which is further emphasised by the presence of the actual workers of the project marching around the cistern bearing ‘the symbols of their several employments’ (31). While Middleton’s entertainment works to manage the public image of his sponsor within a model of civic responsibility and celebration, this method stands in tension with the other contemporary criticisms of Myddleton’s private gains.

One month after the opening of the New River, *The Triumphs of Truth* was performed to receive Sir Thomas Myddleton of the Grocers’ company as Lord Mayor. Middleton’s show was born out of collaboration among multiple artificers and performers, but he was responsible for the show’s overall direction and speeches.⁵⁰ The Show was ‘unparalleled for cost, art, and magnificence’ (1-2). The total cost to the Grocers’ Company reached £1,300, making it the most expensive of the early

⁴⁹ John Stow and Anthony Munday, *The Survey of London* (London: Elizabeth Purslow, 1633), p. 13.

⁵⁰ *The Triumphs of Truth* acknowledges the work of a number of Middleton’s collaborators— the ‘firework being made by master Humphrey Nichols’ (782), the construction of the triumphal devices ‘artfully and faithfully performed by John Grimkin (785-86), and ‘those furnished with apparel and porters by Anthony Munday, gentleman’ (786-87). For an evaluation of Middleton and Munday’s collaborative relationship throughout his Lord Mayor’s Shows, see David M. Bergeron, ‘Thomas Middleton and Anthony Munday: Artistic Rivalry?’, *SEL*, 36 (1996), 461–79.

modern Lord Mayor's Shows.⁵¹ *The Triumphs of Truth* presents a sustained allegory of Truth coming out of Error staged in the style of a medieval morality play across the city's streets and waterways. Middleton's Lord Mayor's Show explicitly considers the vulnerability of the magistrate's office to financial corruption, brought on by the commercialisation of water as part of the New River project. The liquid landscape of the Thames and its conduits become spaces in which emblematic devices are presented to the mayoral party, anticipating and testing Sir Thomas Myddleton's capacity to withstand moral and financial corruption.

By staging devices *on* the river, Middleton exploits the river's potential to articulate masculine authority—displaying the mayor's outward splendour as a means to assure his civic virtue to maintain the city properly. Lawrence Manley contends that the initial water show 'produce[d] a scene so chaotic that Middleton usually declined to lay his hand to the water pageant, leaving it instead for [his collaborator] Munday'.⁵² However, Hill has countered this argument maintaining that *The Triumphs of Truth* 'presents the water show in more detail than is often the case'.⁵³ The song welcoming the mayoral procession at Soper Lane claims that the waiting crowd eagerly awaits '*To see him rise / With glory decked*' (109-10). The river itself is transformed to appropriately receive the mayor, its lavish water pageant devices emphasising the mayor's virtuous presence:

the river decked in the richest glory to receive him; upon whose crystal bosom stand five islands, artfully garnished with all manner of Indian fruit trees, drugs, spiceries, and the like; the middle island with a fair castle especially beautified. (198-202)

The rich decoration of the waterborne islands with fruits and spices emphasises the Grocers company's role in international trade, spectacularly 'decked' like the mayor himself. The extravagant ornamentation of the waterborne devices contributes to what Susan Anderson has identified as 'an ethics of wealth whereby the flow of bounty is a circuit whose completion guarantees the virtue of the wealthy elite' within Middleton's

⁵¹ Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry*, p. 179.

⁵² Lawrence Manley, 'Scripts for the Pageant: The Ceremonies of London', in *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 212–94 (p. 283).

⁵³ Hill, *Pageantry and Power*, p. 159.

Show.⁵⁴ The elected mayor's suitability to govern virtuously is displayed and worked out through the material construction of the pageantry, the highlight being the lavish expense put towards the ships and waterborne devices. Middleton's islands localise the Grocers' work in domestic and international trade into the present event on the Thames, linking the city to national water networks as well as looking outwards across the sea.⁵⁵ The dressing of the river to receive the mayor through these decorative and exoticised waterborne islands worked to aggrandise the mayor's civic achievement. Middleton's show transforms the river itself into a commodity that is offered up to the mayor on this occasional day, foregrounding London's water supply as a stage and prop through which masculine civic power is articulated.

Middleton's fluid interplay between chaos and order at the conduit space continually refers to the tensions inherent in the civic idealisations of the mayoralty. At the space of London's conduits, the mayor's ability to resist corruption is tested through echoes of the boisterous water show that began the processional day. When the mayor is received at the waterside at Baynard's Castle, Truth's Angel warns him that he '*wilt be assaulted*' (234). At Paul's-Chain, the appearance of Error realises this assault. Error promises that the mayor can '*know what wealth is, and the scope / Of rich authority*' by abusing his position for personal profit (288-89). Error perhaps drew an uncomfortable parallel to Hugh Myddleton's role in the construction of the New River. Error's chaotic, verbal assault echoes the conduit's susceptibility to contagious forces. The mayor is warned by the personification of London against Error's promises of wealth and power that are '*a dangerous sea which must be sounded / [...] or man soon runs on / 'Gainst rocks and shelves to dissolution*' (591-93). By invoking the chaotic fluidity of potentially corrupting power as a sea whose depths must be ascertained, London's speech suggests the ideal figure of mayoralty should be like a knowledgeable navigator. London's conceit also invokes the rough seas of the opening river devices with their layered spectacles of music, cannon-fire, pyrotechnics, and the

⁵⁴ Susan Anderson, 'Generic Spaces in Middleton's *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613) and *Michaelmas Term* (1607)', *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 88.1 (2015), 35-47 (p. 41).

⁵⁵ See Andrew McRae, 'Rivers', in *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 21-66, which argues that rivers are 'figures of mobility' in the early modern period, p. 22. For further reading on the material and literary significance of drama on rivers, see Sanders, *Cultural Geography*, pp. 18-64.

background noise of the crowd and waterways, which become the fluid soundscape that the mayor must steer through. Middleton's water metaphors stress the virtues of the masculine reason the mayor must employ to repel Error. Yet the embeddedness of the mayor-as-listener within the acoustic environment repeatedly invaded by Error reveals his vulnerability to the corruption emerging in the pageant's shifting soundscape. Despite his status as an extension of the King's body and order, the mayor cannot exploit the conduits in the same manner as the monarch. The physical performance of Error's speech effectively '*enacts* the temptation of the magistrate', pulling him towards the possibility of unlimited wealth that he must resist.⁵⁶ In not reacting to Error's words at the conduit, Sir Thomas fulfils his expected obligations during the procession by performing stoical resistance.

Yet the reappearances of Error and their accompanying mists at other conduits along the processional route suggest this resistance must be continually and constantly performed. The personification of London warns the mayor to maintain '*the king's chamber*' where '*all pollution, / Sin, and uncleanness must be locked out here*' (188-89). London expects the mayor to prevent physical and spiritual contamination, allegorized in Error's repeated corruption of the conduit space. When the mayoral party arrives at the Little Conduit, they encounter a magnificent 'mount triumphant', a grand pageant wagon representing a mountain, which has been 'overspread with a thick, sulphurous darkness, [...] a fog or mist raised from Error' (493-96). Error's '*sulphurous cloud[s]*' (634) are a motif repeated throughout the whole show, where the artificial fogs are repeatedly staged at the conduits until the procession reached the Standard. The mists obscuring the conduit device brought on by Error's violating presence would resemble or even be composed of the same 'foul-smelling ingredients' as the crude pyrotechnics that produced smoke in the playhouses such as gunpowder, brimstone, coal, or saltpetre among others.⁵⁷ Middleton's evocation of odorous sulphur draws upon a contemporary 'politics of waste management that linked olfactory

⁵⁶ Sergei Lobanov-Rostovsky, 'The Triumphes of Golde: Economic Authority in the Jacobean Lord Mayor's Show', *ELH*, 60.4 (1993), 879-98 (p. 888).

⁵⁷ Jonathan Gil Harris, 'The Smell of Macbeth', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58.4 (2007), 465-86 (p. 466).

hazards with other urban dangers'.⁵⁸ With the conduits visually and olfactorily shrouded by Error's fog, this pollution threatens to spread out and corrupt the city's water supply.

Ironically, the pollution in the city's waterways would have been a physical presence on the processional day. As a result of the city's growing population, the marshlands in Moorfields were 'environed and crossed with deepe stincking ditches, and noysome common sewers [...] loathsome both to sight, and s[c]ent'.⁵⁹ Venetian Ambassador Orazio Busino's account of Middleton's *The Triumphs of Honour and Industry* (1617) describes the 'soft, fetid mud' lining the streets, causing him to sneer that 'this city would better be called '*Lorda*' [filth] than '*Londra*'.⁶⁰ Similarly, Jonson's 'On The Famous Voyage' presents 'the Lord Mayor's foist' as an ambiguous intrusion into the city's polluted water 'one day in the year' (ll. 119-20).⁶¹ By punning on the various meanings of foist—as a boat, a rogue, to grow musty, or to fart—Jonson associates the mayor with the filthy water, where faeces 'swam abroad in ample flakes' (138). The Lord Mayor's capacity to resist or allow the pollution to continue is negotiated in *The Triumphs of Truth*. The virtue within Middleton's Show comes not from the mayor but from Middleton's personification of Truth, which Sir Thomas Myddleton is instructed to 'imitate [...] and there lie bounded' (589). The association of the failures of proper and virtuous civic government with the mayor's capacity to see hinges upon the presence and removal of Error's staged fog. Yet these processional scenes remain consistently suspicious about the mayor's capacity to uphold the supposedly virtuous clear waters of these conduits. Truth observes that '*if [she] a while but turn her eyes / Thick are the mists that o'er fair cities rise*' (513). Without her surveilling authority and granting of clear sight, Truth suggests that Error's thick mists will continue to hang in the city's air.

⁵⁸ Holly Dugan, 'Coriolanus and the "Rank-Scented Meinie": Smelling Rank in Early Modern London', in *Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1550–1650*, ed. by Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 139–60 (p. 140).

⁵⁹ John Stow and Edmund Howes, *The Annales, or a Generall Chronicle of England* (London: [Thomas Dawson] for Thomas Adams, 1615), p. 945.

⁶⁰ Orazio Busino, 'Orazio Busino's Eyewitness Account', in *The Collected Works*, trans. by Kate D. Levin, pp. 1263–70 (ll. 133–134).

⁶¹ For further reading on the urban spatiality of Jonson's poem, see Andrew McRae, "'On the Famous Voyage': Ben Jonson and Civic Space', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 4 (1998), 1–31 <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/04-2/mcraonth.htm>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

In the cyclical battles between Truth and Error, *The Triumphs of Truth* represents the idealised virtues of mayoralty in tension with the imperfection of the men embodying them. Middleton's Truth argues that the mayor's 'corruptions' may now be 'clearly read' by the population he governs because he has risen to a higher state (735). Error's fogs repeatedly hang themselves around the city's conduits, obscuring the idealised vision of Truth. In turn, Truth repeatedly commands '*Vanish, infectious fog*' to make visible '*This city's grace*' by removing Error's mists from the triumphal mounts about the conduits (522-23). Similarly, the personification of Perfect Love '*banish[es]*' the sins of '*excesss, epicurism, both which destroy / The healths of soul and body*' from the revelries of the Lord Mayor's Show (666-68). While the show's structure emphasises the instructive qualities of its allegorical scenes, the management of the city's water supply is left to Middleton's abstract personifications of virtue rather than the mayor himself. Whereas the mayor's inactivity in resisting financial corruption is the cause of praise, ultimately the mayor does nothing to actively regulate the city. At the conduits, Sir Thomas Myddleton becomes a passive figure who is instructed to observe and learn from the battle between Truth and Error. As Sergei Lobanov-Rostovsky asserts, the transformation of the mayor from 'ideal spectator to actor' in Middleton's Lord Mayor's Show effects 'a subtle, but very public usurpation' of civic authority.⁶² The ritualistic role of water in articulating these anxieties is important in showing the mayor's inability to banish the personifications of corruption as an individual, contrasting with the King's ability to refill the waters of the Fountain of Virtue in his royal entry by his presence alone. Middleton's staging across the city's fountains implies an almost inevitable slippage into filth and pollution due to the corruptible men taking up the mantle of mayor.

The presence of the New River haunts the staging of *The Triumphs of Truth*, even as Middleton celebrates the Myddleton brothers in his city entertainments. The landscape of London was changed and the New River was a conspicuous construction that marked this change. The ambivalence Middleton himself held toward the commercialisation of the New River is made clear through the Lord Mayor's Show which undercuts the attempts to transform public perceptions of the project presented

⁶² Lobanov-Rostovsky, 'The Triumphes of Golde', p. 892.

in *His Lordship's Entertainment*. Middleton responded fluidly to the demands of the Jacobean literary marketplace, seizing an opportunity to flatter the Myddleton brothers and begin a professional career writing pageantry for the city. He depicts the brothers as singular figures of civic achievement, whose efforts to supply the city figure them through a paternal and paternalistic relationship of male benefaction. Yet, as my exploration of the tensions between ideal and embodied virtue in *The Triumphs of Truth* has shown, the commercialisation of the city's water epitomised by the construction of the New River undermined any attempts to celebrate these men as civic heroes by invoking their exploitation of London's water supply. Moreover, the conduits invoked a specific vulnerability of the water supply to both literal pollution and metaphorical corruption. The Myddletons brothers' desire to fashion themselves as benevolent sources of water within these city entertainments reveals their overlooking of how these watery spaces could yield very different perceptions of them, a fact that Middleton appears keenly aware of.

3. Fluid Bodies: *Wit at Several Weapons* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*

Wit at Several Weapons, Middleton's first of many collaborations with William Rowley, and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* continue Middleton's exploration of the interplay between masculinities and the commercialised images of London's water supply. In *Wit at Several Weapons*, Pompey Doodle maintains an anachronistic belief in codes of honour and love but is repeatedly sent away to wait at the riverside while the tricking plots take place on stage. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*'s concern with production and reproduction is reflected in the wealth of criticism surrounding the play's representation of fertility, bodily fluids, and discourses of somatic uncontrol.⁶³ Gendered bodies in Middleton's Lenten Cheapside are transformed as male seminal fluid (a highly determined emblem of fertility) circulates and disrupts symbolic and

⁶³ Much criticism on *Chaste Maid* has centred on the relationship between embodied subjectivity and fluid notions of space. For example, see Sallie Anglin, 'Subject Formation in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*', *Rocky Mountain Review*, 66.1 (2012), 11–31, and Gail Kern Paster, 'The Ecology of the Passions in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *The Changeling*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 148–63.

actual structures shoring up patriarchal households.⁶⁴ By attending to how the tensions present in Middleton's celebration of the New River find their dramatic realisation in the commercialised, fluid embodiments of his 1613 city comedies, this section explores Middleton's fascination with liquidity as a readily available metaphor. His plays draw our attention to the highly determined moments of osmotic contact between incontinent bodies and communal bodies of water.

Middleton and Rowley's *Wit at Several Weapons* continues Middleton's disquieted vexation with the 'profit-oriented social relations' enveloping London through its multiple plots about acquiring capital, comestibles, and honour through deception.⁶⁵ Criticism of this play tends to centre on questions of authorship, collaboration, or dating, frequently revolving about its topical references to the New River.⁶⁶ These references relate to the play's clown, Pompey Doodle, likely played by Middleton's collaborator Rowley who would also have a part in writing this character's scenes. Pompey's nostalgic codes of masculine honour and courtship are at odds with a world where social and class obligations give way to more fluid forms of 'living by [one's] wits' (1.1.3). The play features two parallel plots set up by Sir Perfidious Oldcraft, who challenges his son Wittypate and his Niece to wrest their respective inheritance and dowry from him through their wits. The Niece manipulates the naive clown Pompey Doodle, Sir Gregory Fop's servant who lives by his belief in 'ladies' honours' (3.1.101), into wandering the streets and riversides of London to rile the affections of her true love-interest, the penniless Cunninggame. Pompey represents an 'archaic belief in chivalry', separated from the competitive gulling deployed throughout the play.⁶⁷ The clown holds an oath of silence to protect what he sees as

⁶⁴ Studies of bodily (re)production and appetite in *Chaste Maid* include Coppélia Kahn, 'Whores and Wives in Jacobean Drama', in *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991), pp. 246–60; Huebert, *The Performance of Pleasure*, pp. 129–55; and Karen Newman, "'Goldsmith's ware": Equivalence in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71.1 (2008), 97–113.

⁶⁵ Kok, 'Middleton and London's New River', p. 183.

⁶⁶ See Iain Sharp, ed., *Wit At Several Weapons: A Critical Edition* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Auckland, 1982) for a detailed history of the play's recovery from the Beaumont and Fletcher canon after its misattribution in the 1647 folio (pp. 19–33) and its dating partly done through detailed allusion to the New River (pp. 33–42); and Nicol, *Middleton & Rowley*, pp. 66–91, which discusses Rowley's clowning in relation to questions of authorship and authority.

⁶⁷ Sharp, *Wit at Several Weapons*, p. 52. For a broader discussion on the contemporary chivalric revival, see Richard McCoy, *The Rites of Knighthood: The Literature and Politics of Elizabethan Chivalry* (London: University of California Press, 1989).

the Niece's honour—'I say she is virtuous and honest, and I will maintain [the vow] as long as I can maintain myself with bread and water' (2.3.23-24). Yet his belief in romance leaves him vulnerable to the machinations of the Niece and Cunnigame. When he first leaves the Niece's company at her request he '*Exit[s] humming "Loath to depart"*' (2.2.248 SD), a popular tune of valediction demonstrating that his reluctance to leave is overcome by his chivalric need to obey the word of his lady. Pompey's representation as a 'piece of puff-paste' in the List of Persons further aligns his chivalrous notions of romance as frivolous, flaky, and insubstantial as pastry (1.1.0.7). This pulpy formlessness underscores his ignorance of and vulnerability to the operations of city comedy—he is chewed up and spat out.

Pompey is repeatedly sent away to wait at 'the New River by Islington' by the Niece (4.1.361), spending his time on 'solemn walks' to await a 'token' of her love (321-23). As Adam Zucker has argued, the humour of many city comedies emerges in these 'distances separating those in the know from those who stand in definitive contrast to them'.⁶⁸ The separate space in which Pompey moves off-stage at the New River highlights his misunderstanding of the rules in Middleton and Rowley's London. This conceit is emphasised most powerfully in Oldcraft's view of the world as a struggle to keep afloat using one's wits '[m]uch like the art of swimming' (16). In stark contrast, Pompey proudly recalls the story of him swimming 't'other day on my back' and becoming 'tangled up in the flags [irises growing in the shallows]', causing the women he attempted to impress to cry out—'help the man for fear he be drowned' (2.2.188-93). In his attempts to inhabit the languages and spaces of water, Pompey Doodle is shown to be ridiculously out of his depth as the Niece's feminine wit overtakes his male foolishness.

The tradition of courtly love thus becomes associated with a lonely clown walking the city's waterside. Pompey is 'kept out o' town these two days, o' purpose to be sent for', idly waiting for a love token outside of the play's main structure (4.1.347).⁶⁹ The New River functions as a space where Pompey's aimless wandering

⁶⁸ Adam Zucker, *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 1.

⁶⁹ For discussion of clown roles as 'separate' from main plotting and structure, see David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 99-115.

makes visible his missteps with the changes in London's social relations. The clown's presence offstage is separated from the shared 'spatial conventions' localised by the represented world on stage.⁷⁰ The sheer amount of time that Pompey spends offstage shows that Middleton and Rowley are playing with the 'double-time' scheme of early modern drama—the time of events offstage passes differently from that represented on stage.⁷¹ Pompey's name compounds this dual temporality. The clown's name is said to be a corruption of the 'right' name 'Pumpey' as christened by 'one goodman Caesar, a pump-maker' (3.1.292-93). The misinterpretation of 'Pumpey' as 'Pompey' draws an ironic association between magnanimous Roman emperors and the sewers. This comparison was not unique; Emily Gowers has discussed Rome's central sewage system which was venerated as a model for other cities, while Holly Dugan notes the emphatic failure of London to live up to Roman sanitation models in her discussion of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1608).⁷² Pompey Doodle's comic delusions of nobility emerge out of this contradictory interplay between London's sewage network, which falls short of classical models and the contemporary 'st[i]nk' of urban life (294). He also sets up his pursuit of the Niece as a 'trial of her love' and so ironically figures himself as a chivalric knight in terms of courtly love (2.2.245). This is further drawn out when he refers to Gregory Fop as a 'false knight' who is 'False both to honour and the law of arms' for supposedly stealing a jewel and scarf meant for the clown (4.1.339-40). Although Pompey might be referring to his sense of honour, the mention of the 'law of arms' is out of place as it refers to a specific system of bearing heraldry. As Alex Davis argues, chivalry is itself a constant referral to a historical vision of the medieval past and dramatic parodies of chivalric masculinities emphasise the 'suffer[ing] from a lack of connection to the real world, because that world is assumed to have left them behind'.⁷³ This out-of-step temporality echoes Shakespeare's description of chivalric romances as 'chronicle[s] of wasted time' in 'Sonnet 106'

⁷⁰ Tim Fitzpatrick, *Playwright, Space and Place in Early Modern Performance: Shakespeare and Company* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 10.

⁷¹ For further reading on embodied subjectivity and temporalities, see David Houston Wood, *Time, Narrative, and Emotion in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

⁷² Emily Gowers, 'The Anatomy of Rome from Capital to Cloaca', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 85 (1995), 23–32; Dugan, 'Smelling Rank', pp. 139–60.

⁷³ Alex Davis, *Chivalry and Romance in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), p. 237.

(c.1599-1609), wasted time referring both to the frivolity of reading chivalric romance and the themes of such narratives as themselves out-of-time (l. 1). Pompey is similarly defined by time wasted on the solemn excursions on the New River offstage, and the riverine space is continually invoked to emphasise his out-of-time adherence to chivalric models of masculinity. Pompey's untimely chivalric notion of romance contests and complicates the New River's associations with nascent civic mercantilism and profit.

Rowley's love-struck Pompey is both out of time and place with the rapacious cast of characters in the play, most visible by his absence from the on-stage events. Pompey spends his time offstage 'looking upon the [New River] pipes and whistling', suggesting that water has yet to start flowing over the open mechanical structure (4.1.362). Yet he also tells the Niece that he will 'be found angling, for I will try what I can catch for luck's sake' walking 'upon the dry bank' (5.1.254-59). Although this may relate to Pompey's desire to catch the Niece's love, the aquatic imagery brings forth an image of the New River full of marine life. Iain Sharp's dating of the play notes that Pompey's descriptions of the bare pipes, fish, dry banks, and running water are somewhat contradictory, emphasising the artificiality of water which is both dry and flowing.⁷⁴ Middleton and Rowley partly draw on the protracted and troubled construction of the New River itself, fuelling the perception that Pompey is out of step with the movements of contemporary London. Pompey may have been waiting so long that the floodgates opened between him setting out and his final return. The clown's drawn-out 'meditation' at the New River transforms this time spent off-stage into a kind of stasis (254). The out-of-time representation of the riverscape emphasises just how dislocated Pompey's belief in an outdated version of masculinity has become in Middleton and Rowley's London.

Through this clown persona and his ambivalent association with the New River Rowley may be making a direct comment on his collaborator's work in producing city pageantry for the Myddletons. Michael Dobson asserts that this may be simply a 'quiet in-joke' between the two collaborators.⁷⁵ However, as Richard Preiss has argued, clown roles in early modern drama were associated 'intimately with the organizing

⁷⁴ See Sharp, 'Wit at Several Weapons', pp. 35-37.

⁷⁵ See Michael Dobson's introduction to the play in *The Collected Works*, pp. 980-82 (p. 981).

agency of the theatrical event'. The theatrical authority invested in the stage clown extended beyond the playhouse into a lasting 'cultural memory', gesturing towards a world that extends beyond the bounded structure of the play itself.⁷⁶ Whether Rowley's continuing ambivalence towards the New River was a good-humoured snipe at his collaborator or not, Middleton at some point in the writing process would have been aware of and approved these lines. When Pompey renounces his master, he promises a festive world where 'a Servingman may be as good as a Sir, a *Pompey* as a *Gregory*, a *Doodle* as a *Fop*' (2.3.50-51). The topsy-turvy world that Pompey envisions brings forth a perilous social mutability, echoing the political and civic ambitions of Hugh Myddleton through the construction and commemoration of the New River. Rowley's satirical clowning had its own particular synergy with Middleton's writing style.⁷⁷ Therefore, considering Rowley-playing-Pompey as the satiric centre of this collaboration between Middleton *and* Rowley together can allow a deeper understanding of the New River space he inhabits as epitomising a shared suspicion towards the project's motivations.

Despite Pompey's romantic motivations supplanting financial ones, the New River space is intimately associated with his continued gulling by the Niece and Cunninggame. Pompey maintains that the New River will 'ne'er be a true water' (5.1.46), suggesting that its artificiality deprives its water of any virtuous qualities—despite its name, the New River was a canal after all. Pompey's deception by the Niece associates him with the 'sticklebacks' and 'gudgeons' moving through the waters of the New River, fish typically used as bait (44-45). In the final scene, the Niece successfully tricks Gregory into marrying the much poorer Mirabell, which Pompey witnesses and assures the audience that the 'gullery of [his] master will keep [him] company' during his final trip to the New River (5.2.255). However, upon seeing the Niece and Cunninggame's marriage, Pompey's mirth turns to a deep sadness. His 'good at heart' festivity turns to a melancholic realisation of what has been occurring throughout the play— 'O, lady, thou tak'st down my merry part' (5.1.261-62). Nicol

⁷⁶ Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 6, 214.

⁷⁷ See Robert Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2009), p. 186.

writes that Pompey's sudden sadness 'invades the [otherwise] happy ending' enjoyed by the rest of the cast.⁷⁸ Yet the sad or crying clown was a conventional trope in early modern drama. The weeping Launce in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentleman of Verona* 'lay[s] the dust with [his] tears' (2.3.24) at the prospect of leaving, and in Richard Brome's *A Jovial Crew* (1641) the boorish Tallboy is comforted with a 'suck-bottle of sack' over his own lost chances at love.⁷⁹ Sad clown roles 'confound[ed] tears and laughter' to produce gentle sympathy for their plight in conjunction with humour at their expense.⁸⁰ Pompey collapses into an emotionally labile state, provoked by this sudden loss of hope. The tensions between the clown's chivalric code of honour and the competitive urges of the Niece are played out in the New River space, producing a sympathy for a past that appears foolish in the context of the play's action. For Pompey, the New River represents hope for a hopeless chivalric romantic plot with the Niece that can never be realised.

Pompey's clownish optimism no longer fits in a world of competitive urban scams and rampant commodification. His final emotional turn occurs in the concluding banquet scene, which Oldcraft declares will 'furnish our guests / With taste and state enough' (25-26). Pompey simply does not fit into this concluding banquet which is made especially prominent in that he is the only character present not to be married. Throughout the course of the play, he has been 'starved with walking' at the New River (4.1.348), continuing in this final scene where he is 'starved with love and cold' (5.1.38). The lower-class clown hungers for idealised notions of romance rather than capital. Pompey's failure to win the affections of the Niece is metaphorically rendered into bodily starvation at the play's concluding banquet. The irony of this on stage would be marked as Rowley's clown persona often played with his large stature for tongue-in-cheek or satirical purposes.⁸¹ Yet even Pompey becomes aware of his exclusion from the festive ending of the play, remarking that "'Tis a strange thing, I have no taste in anything' (5.1.52). By creating an ironic distancing between Pompey's

⁷⁸ Nicol, *Middleton & Rowley*, p. 89.

⁷⁹ Richard Brome, *A Jovial Crew, Or The Merry Beggars*, ed. by Tiffany Stern (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2014), 5.1.541.

⁸⁰ Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*, p. 125.

⁸¹ See Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition*, pp. 186–96, who explores the Puritan context of Rowley's corpulent clown roles.

hunger and the intentions of the New River to supply the citizens of London with water, Middleton further emphasises the clown's physical and rhetorical exclusion from the play's wider community.

Returning to the play's world from the New River, Pompey rages at the marriage between Cunnigame and the Niece, questioning 'are ladies things obnoxious?' (5.2.221-22), his belief in chivalric honour and romance crushed. Pompey's sadness and fury mix together as he 'almost cr[ies] for anger' (282) from seeing the Niece's betrayal of their (faked) romance. The volatility of his unboundedly fluid passions contrasts heavily with the stasis he has been experiencing at the New River. As David Houston Wood argues, the 'suddenness' of these affective turns is informed by 'that subjective experience of time so essential to [embodied emotional] volatility' with potentially 'disastrous' results.⁸² The whiplash of Pompey's embodied emotionality concurs with his eruption into the play's main structure. His idleness, which informs much of our understanding of his character and comedy, is unsettled as the uncontrollable fit of emotions breaks out on stage. The encounter between Rowley's romantic innocence and Middleton's satirical cynicism effects an emotionally-charged transformation of the play's clown at its climax, centring on the transformative power of the New River. Where Myddleton's project was designed to replenish the city's water supply for the general good of its citizens, Rowley's clown is left hungrier, alone, and unsettled because of his association with its waters. Pompey's social exclusion through his adherence to failed notions of chivalric romance transforms and unfixes the civic ideal of the New River space as presented in Middleton's civic pageantry. By associating outdated notions of medieval masculinity here, Middleton and Rowley's play suggests that, like the witty characters of their play, the commercial aspirations of the New River project and its sponsors place the shrewd acquisition of capital above all other bonds.

The satiric treatment of the New River space in *Wit at Several Weapons* is continued in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Middleton negotiates contemporaneous discourses of production and reproduction in the representation of gendered water in this play. By focusing on the play's constructions of masculinity and gendered

⁸² Wood, *Time, Narrative, and Emotion*, p. 83.

liquidity, I expand upon Paster's exploration of primarily female somatic fluxes as 'shameful tokens of uncontrol'.⁸³ The christening at the Allwit's home in Act 3, Scene 2, with its abundant images of childbirth, gluttony, gossiping, and urination, has become central to these critical debates. Allwit and Tim's revulsion at the women's liquidity—especially the latter's horror that Lady Kix 'wets as she kisses'—has been challenged as not representative of Middleton's own viewpoint (3.2.160-61). Allwit and Tim's 'violation' of the post-partum lying-in period feminine space is emphasised by their repulsion towards the women's liquidity thereby revealing the 'discomfort of the male voyeur'.⁸⁴ Middleton's interest in bodily incontinence sits alongside a language of liquidity, which constitutes all gendered bodies in his Cheapside, and satirises both the merchant class and landed gentry. Partly, the childbirth scene consolidates and commemorates a patrilineal socioeconomic system; or, as the infertile Sir Oliver Kix declares when his wife becomes pregnant—'The child is coming and the land comes after' (5.3.14). The female Puritan attendees are equally concerned with producing virtuous and healthy 'well kersened' children (3.2.3), who shall be 'mettled, like the faithful' (16). The Puritan's use of mettle simultaneously refers to a language of psychophysiology, where one's temperament was constituted out of bodily stuff, and to mettle as seminal fluid. Compare Middleton's use here to Nathan Field's *A Woman is a Weathercock* (first performed c.1609-10) in which Katherine derides Captain Powts as the 'man that wantes the mettall of Generation; since that is the blessing ordain'de for Marriage, procreation the onely ends of it'.⁸⁵ Middleton's punning on mettle suggests the extent to which all bodies are gendered and engendered in liquid terms in his play. By reading *Chaste Maid* in dialogue with the New River texts discussed above, we can see Middleton's distinctive concern with civic

⁸³ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 52. Specific rebuttals of Paster's claims include: Swapan Chakravorty, *Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 86–106 (p. 100); Janelle Jenstad, "'Smock-Secrets': Birth and Women's Mysteries on the Early Modern Stage", in *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, ed. by Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn Read McPherson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 87–100 (p. 88); and Daileader, 'Masculine Grotesque', p. 456.

⁸⁴ Jenstad, 'Smock-Secrets', p. 92.

⁸⁵ Nathan Field, *A Woman Is a Weathercock* (London: [William Jaggard] for John Budge, 1612), sig. C3v. For further reading on the emotional discourses of geohumoralism about the use of mettle, see Mary Floyd-Wilson, 'English Mettle' in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 130-146.

community and (re)production under attack by the commodification of water within his cityscape.

In *Chaste Maid*, Paster contends that Middleton ‘present[s] male potency in so exaggerated a form that it starts to resemble the loss of self control’.⁸⁶ The poor but procreative gentleman Touchwood Senior and his wife refrain from having sex as their ‘desires / Are both too fruitful for [their] barren fortunes’ (2.2.8-9). On the other hand, Sir Oliver and Lady Kix are concerned that their ‘dry barrenness’ will mean their fortune will be inherited by the prodigious Sir Walter Whorehound (156). The production of children and the resultant securing of financial and familial stability are closely linked in Middleton’s play, and are troubled by the fact that male bodily fluxes appear only in extremes. Touchwood Senior is known to have already got ‘Nine children by one water’ outside his marriage (2.1.180), and has set aside ‘two or three gulls in pickle’ to marry these women when he tires of them (81-82). His virility comes at the cost of financial ruin, the overproduction of bodies in fathering bastard children during ‘this strict time of Lent’ reflecting this irony (108). *Chaste Maid* was performed at the Swan by the Lady Elizabeth’s Men, who had recently merged with the Children of the Queen’s Revels in March 1613, creating a larger cast of boy actors able to perform women and younger male roles to manifest Middleton’s exploration of fertility.⁸⁷ The staged presence of Allwit’s ‘whoresons’, Nick and Wat, makes visible the consequences of the male water transferred across Middleton’s stage (1.2.117). The children are presented as legitimate to secure specific patrilineal lines of succession but are fathered by Whorehound. Whorehound asserts that his bastards must ‘not mingle / Amongst my children that I get in wedlock’, instead desiring to ‘prentice’ them to a ‘goldsmith’ and a ‘vintner’ (121-27). *Chaste Maid*’s unmoderated male water becomes increasingly ridiculous as the number of illegitimate offspring in Middleton’s Cheapside multiplies.

Chaste Maid’s repeated allusions to the Welsh, gold, and paternalism further echo the role of Hugh Myddleton in the construction of the New River. Sir Walter Whorehound arrives in London with his mistress, where she is referred to as his ‘ewe-

⁸⁶ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 58.

⁸⁷ The amalgamation of the two playing companies is discussed in Munro, *Children of the Queen’s Revels*, p. 23, 166.

mutton' to emphasise his Welshness and perhaps suggests an ironic association between his own desire for flesh and the Welsh Myddleton's desire for capital (1.1.144). Repeated references to monuments establish a referential link between Myddleton's desires to transform the New River project into a civic monument and the gendered relationships of familial honour in Middleton's play (4.4.50, 5.3.12). These references become more apparent in the relationship between the wittol Allwit and the insalubrious Whorehound. Allwit's house is '[m]ade up with Kentish faggots, which o'erlooks / The water-house' (28-29), which directly invokes the New River project. As the 'founder' of the Allwit household (as in, furnishing the family in exchange for sleeping with Allwit's wife), Whorehound's illicit male water is tied into the maintenance of a purportedly traditional family structure, a grotesque patron to the Allwits (1.2.14). Allwit associates this relationship with the sponsoring of a civic entertainment. He must 'fit all these times, or there's no music', playing in harmony with Whorehound's subversion of his family structure for fear of causing social disorder (2.3.23). At the christening scene, Allwit's frustration at the women's incontinence—that 'some of them had need of other vessels'—forces him to try and move them outside, promising them the 'bravest show' (3.2.181). He ultimately sends the women to the public 'Pissing-Conduit / With two brave drums and a standard bearer' (183-84). In translating the scene of female festivity into an echo of the annual Lord Mayor's Show, Middleton draws these urinating bodies into a ceremonial spectacle about the conduit space. While Su Mei Kok sees this scene as a reprisal of Middleton's pageant devices 'celebrat[ing] the magnanimity of the New River's founding father', her analysis glosses over the christening's commemoration of Whorehound's illegitimate bastard, which drives the comic force of the scene.⁸⁸ Whorehound's gifts of 'a fair high standing-cup / And two great 'postle-spoons' also evoke the props of city pageant, exhibiting his own wealth at the expense of Allwit's ridicule in the eyes of the audience (43-44). The innuendo in Whorehound's phallic choice of gifts underlines the interplay between his parenting of the Allwit children and his role as the paternalistic sponsor of the household. *Chaste Maid* associates pretences to charitable paternalism with more disordered forms of male water and

⁸⁸ Kok, 'Middleton and London's New River', p. 181.

fertility by invoking the visual languages of civic spectacle and sponsorship that characterised the New River's commemorative entertainment.

However, Allwit figures himself as a 'wittol' who is apart from the physical exchanges of fluid and pressures of commercial and marital labour (1.2.1). Instead, Allwit evocatively describes his leisurely mornings spent at his house 'which o'erlooks / The water-house' (28-29). While these choices ensure financial security for the Allwit family, they also 'render [Allwit himself] morally and socially ridiculous'.⁸⁹ This laughter at Allwit's expense is seen clearly in a scene where he 'protest[s]' at Whorehound's implication he has been 'off'ring / To go to bed' with his own wife (101-103). Outside of the arenas of physical and sexual labour, Allwit is a man of leisure 'tied to nothing' but 'recreation' and the micro-management of his finances (4-5). Allwit singing to himself '*La dildo, dildo la dildo, la dildo dildo de dildo*', provokes a disparaging remark from his servant that he's 'out of work, he falls to making dildoes' (56-58). Ridiculing Allwit as a dildo is clearly aimed to figure him as 'like a man' rather than just 'a man' (12). The servant's slanderous aside also figures Allwit as lacking the flow of male semen. Yet Allwit's dedication to pleasure, albeit not sexually, remains. The irony of referring to Allwit as a dildo suggests that he can both lack a fleshy sexuality while still being satisfied with his position as head of the household.

Allwit's willingness to 'smile and pin the door' as Whorehound sleeps with his wife negates the expected feelings of anxiety and jealousy (30). Mark Breitenberg has shown that male anxiety endures as 'a constituent element of masculinity [...] deployed in positive ways' to perpetuate patriarchal cultural work.⁹⁰ Allwit's unsettling readiness to abandon that anxiety proves a successful strategy to further his financial success. He describes the dissolution that jealousy effects in male bodies, proudly declaring his aversion to being '[e]aten with jealousy to the inmost bone' (46) while the anxious Whorehound's 'marrow melts' (88). Allwit's description resembles the jealousy portrayed by Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) as 'a wandring extravagant, a domineering, a boundlesse, an irrefragable passion' which

⁸⁹ Stanavage, 'Marital Labor and Commercialized Masculinity', p. 145.

⁹⁰ Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, p. 146.

overwhelms the man.⁹¹ Being ‘like a man’ does not appear to be a concern or even desirable for Allwit, who embraces the ‘muddled’ and ‘contradictory’ pressures of patriarchal manhood by actively participating in his cuckoldry.⁹² While initially the servant’s words are deployed as an insult which the audience will laugh along with, the lack of solely positive masculine representations in *Chaste Maid* would suggest that masculinity is undergoing strenuous redefinition. Compared to the uncontrollable bodily flows of the play’s gentry, Allwit’s negotiated agreement with his wife and Whorehound comes to resemble a successful business transaction.

The crux of *Chaste Maid*’s dramatic action centres on the work of the Watermen in Act 4, Scene 3. As ‘dynamic agents of the Thames and its environs’, they signal a deep connection between water and labour within the cityscape.⁹³ The Watermen ferried wealthy patrons across the Thames to the theatres at Bankside such as the Swan where *Chaste Maid* was performed, but also played a crucial part in executing the waterborne devices in the Lord Mayor’s Shows.⁹⁴ Moll’s escape from the Yellowhammer home into the city is far from romantic, however, as she has to travel through the slimy ‘gutters and strange hidden ways’ assisted by the Watermen (3.3.30-31). Their association with the more salubrious passageways of the city is accompanied by the repeated insistence on their trustworthiness; Touchwood Senior recalls the ‘honest watermen’ being ‘the forwardest to help’ him escape from pursuing ‘varlets’, quickly ferrying him across the water (4.3.2-7). The Watermen similarly assist in Moll and Touchwood Junior’s escape across the river away from the Yellowhammers’ desire to marry Moll to the insalubrious Whorehound. Touchwood’s command to ‘Row [Moll] lustily’ towards ‘Barn Elms’ gestures toward the expansive water networks available off-stage (22). Their travel across the river offstage supported by the watermen expands the scope of Middleton’s Cheapside, as well as the social possibilities presented by the romantic plots of the play. As Sanders argues, the

⁹¹ Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, III, p. 540.

⁹² Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, p. 1.

⁹³ Christi Spain-Savage, “‘An Honest Pair of Oars’: Players, Watermen, and *A Chaste Maid* in Cheapside”, *Early Theatre*, 19.2 (2016), 167–77 (p. 168).

⁹⁴ In July 1613, the Grocers received ‘the petition of John Kellock and Thomas Stiles watermen for setting forth of the Galley foyst and suchlike shewes on the water’ for their upcoming Show (*A Calendar of Dramatic Records in the Books of the Livery Companies of London, 1485-1640*, ed. by Jean Robertson and D. J. Gordon (Oxford: The Malone Society, 1954), p. 86).

Watermen signal a larger world ‘richly suggested, yet never quite there’.⁹⁵ The Watermen bring together places of leisure and romance with the waterborne voyages which enable these escapes and removals in the first place. *Chaste Maid*’s 1613 performance at The Swan so close to the Thames would perhaps itself figure such an escape, invoking Middleton’s description in his 1604 pamphlet *Father Hubbard’s Tales* of urban gallants ‘ventur[ing] beyond sea, that is, in a choice pair of Nobleman’s oars to the Bankside where he must sit out the breaking up of a comedy or the first cut of a tragedy’ (556-59). The watermen in Middleton’s Cheapside would then invoke the space of the river in *Chaste Maid* as explicitly transformative, in some parts to the detriment of Moll who emerges ‘wet’ after falling into the Thames (4.4.22).

The carnivalesque ending of *Chaste Maid* produces fluid, parodic notions of familial relations. In line with conventional endings of city comedy with the union of a family unit, Touchwood Junior and Moll’s funeral turns into a celebratory wedding as they ‘*rise out of their coffins*’ to the surprise of most attendees (5.2.29 SD). However, Middleton’s ‘genuinely festive comedic’ gestures are fraught with ‘frequently serious ethical concerns’ about the corruption of social relations by money and desire.⁹⁶ The landed gentry remains the play’s most central subject of satire. The Kixes exhibit a ridiculous picture of the family unit at the play’s end. Sir Oliver is joyous about his wife’s pregnancy, declaring himself a ‘man for ever!’ (5.3.1). Yet he knows his claim to masculinity through fatherhood is indebted to Touchwood Senior (though not by the liquid remedy he was provided)— ‘We must remember still from whence it flows’ (5.2.12). Sir Oliver’s figuration of Touchwood Senior as a grotesque fountain demonstrates a complete subversion of the purportedly virtuous King James or Hugh Myddleton. Masculinity is figured through almost pathologically uncontrollable male flows and mismanaged fatherhood in *Chaste Maid*. Yet Allwit’s mercantile-like approach to his extra-marital arrangements mirrors the commercial aspirations of the New River project. That Allwit is a figure of success complicates a straightforward interpretation of the play’s liquid masculinities. Middleton’s grotesque spectacle of masculine liquidity conflates the exploitation of London’s water supply

⁹⁵ Sanders, *Cultural Geography*, p. 21.

⁹⁶ Derek B. Alwes, ‘The Secular Morality of Middleton’s City Comedies’, *Comparative Drama*, 42.2 (2008), 101–19 (p. 102).

with a rampant commodification of bodies and their flows. By troubling the relationship between male sexual potency and financial success, and considering how *Chaste Maid's* interests in masculine liquidity refract the mercantile masculinities of the Myddleton brothers, this chapter has explored how Middleton used the New River space to contest ideas about civic self-fashioning and male success.

Conclusion

The metaphors of fluidity throughout Middleton's texts focus on the commercialisation of space and bodies in an increasingly mercantile urban world. The gendered and civic nature of the images of authority drawn from the city's water supply drew on the multivalent operations of water as a rhetorical device. The material and symbolic power of water came from its very malleability—the semiotics of liquidity could engender positive interconnections between bodies and environments as well as the more ambiguous slipperiness that such relations necessarily entailed. Metaphors of fluidity and the watery spaces from which they drew their potency significantly constituted gendered authority in a variety of contexts. Yet the bodies that inhabited these spaces bring forth a particular capacity for incontinence that places the virtuous capacity of fountains, rivers, and pipes in tension with the inherent uncontrollability of watery flows. As mercantilism held greater and greater sway over the city's water supply, the New River symbolised a transformation of civic, neighbourly ethics towards a process of proto-capitalist accumulation. Middleton's official performances attempt to frame this shift still in terms of public utility even as the project aimed towards private profit.

The New River became a central feature of Middleton's writing in 1613 not just because of his role in commemorating its construction as a civic undertaking but because of the hostile response engendered by its construction which he attempted to negotiate across his civic entertainments and city comedies of that year. In *His Lordship's Entertainment* and *The Triumphs of Truth*, Middleton couches the New River within the languages of masculine civic authority invested in London's water supply by emphasising the staging of their pageantry *on* and about the riverscape. These entertainments highlight the civic aspirations of Hugh Myddleton and the sponsors of the New River project as well as revealing Middleton's own professional

aspirations to write *for* the city by producing official entertainments, a form he would continue to write in for the rest of his literary career. While Jonson and other contemporary writers openly and repeatedly made disparaging references to the project, Middleton's portrayal of the New River was much more ambiguous and complicated, partly owing to his employment by the project's sponsor.

As the undercurrents of suspicion present in *The Triumphs of Truth* indicate, the marketisation of the conventions of civic ritual surrounding the public water supply of London was something that deeply concerns Middleton's writing, however constrained he may have been by his official employment by the Myddleton brothers. *Wit at Several Weapons* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* evoke visions of London where the fluid spaces of the city cannot operate outside of the economic terms of the market, the terms of masculine self-fashioning having been transformed by the rampant commodification of many aspects of early modern life. This theme continued to vex Middleton, as seen seven years after the construction of the New River in one of the *Honourable Entertainments* performed 'Upon the renewing of the worthy and laudable custom of visiting the springs and conduit heads' in 1620 (ll. 3.1-2). At this entertainment performed at the conduit head near the Westminster banqueting house before the new Lord Mayor Sir William Jones, a nymph rose out of the ground to sardonically castigate the mayoral party for neglecting the annual visit to Tyburn Springs since 1613. Middleton explicitly links civic decline with the neglect of attending to the city's water supply which has been 'forsaken, quite forsook' (3.12). Considering Middleton's professional engagement with the New River, his nymph in this entertainment appears to highlight the actual behaviour of the merchant oligarchy in contrast to the idealised notion of civic duty present in the artifice and pageantry. While masculinities continually articulate themselves in liquid terms across Middleton's writing, the nymph's speech makes clear how the communal associations of these discourses can be exploited. Hugh Myddleton, Touchwood Senior, and the personification of Error all figure as fountains in Middleton's 1613 texts, playing with the virtuous idealised fountain articulated in James's own writing, as well as by city entertainments and contemporary writers. Yet in my considerations of the New River as a contentious space of gendered, civic authority, it is Pompey who appears to encapsulate the contradictions of Middleton's relationship to the project's public: the

repeated refutation of Pompey Doodle's nostalgic belief in chivalric love and romance reveals not only that it is impossible to imagine city space untouched by the city's rampant commercialism but also that nostalgia for community still remains.

Chapter Five: Loose-tongued Men: Masculinity, Authority, and the Voice in Middleton's Tragedies

Middleton's disguised-ruler play *The Phoenix* (1603-4), with which this thesis began, concludes with a series of judgements and reformations undertaken by Prince Phoenix against the citizens of Ferrara who have committed abuses against each other and the dukedom. One such case is the pedantic lawyer Tangle whose extensive lawsuits are identified with his excessively loose tongue. In a mock-duel with the justice Falso, the two men's swords are absurdly figured as legal concepts. Tangle's final thrust is translated to 'a writ of execution—a *capias utlagatum* [a writ impressing an officer to capture an outlawed person] gives you a mortal wound' (9.249-50). By the play's conclusion, Tangle has become 'law-mad', unable to stop spouting contextless legal jargon (15.275). Prince Phoenix then oversees a bloodletting of Tangle as part of returning the overly litigious lawyer to his senses, restoring his unruly body and speech as well as demonstrating Phoenix's authoritative masculinity. Only when purged does Tangle become 'quieter' (315). Tangle's lack of verbal self-mastery contrasts with and demonstrates Phoenix's own royal authority in front of his father the Duke. The Duke of Ferrara observes and commends Phoenix's sound judgement: 'He's fit to reign whose knowledge can refine' (182). Demonstrating a promise of future social and political reformation in vocal terms, Phoenix declares at the play's conclusion that 'when all the hearts are tuned to honour's strings, / There is no music to the choir of kings' (349-50). Phoenix is shown to be a capable monarch who both listens and speaks with authority, figuring his own masculinity between the production and reception of speech in this final metaphor of aural harmony. Yet, despite the play's ultimate deferral to the authority of kingship, Middleton's exploration of the ways masculine subjects are figured as speakers and listeners reveals their entanglement with other bodies and their unruly tongues.

The fantasy of the authoritative male voice is continually complicated by a specifically masculine impulse to boast, prattle, lust after, gossip, and silence others in Middleton's drama. The early moderns expected men to exhibit vocal control alongside other bodily regimens that emphasised the centrality of masculine self-mastery through moderation and regulation, and thereby 'authorize[d] individuality'

for certain men.¹ As Gina Bloom has suggested, the figure of ‘the controlling voice—their own as well as those of subordinates (children, servants, and women)—often functioned as a signifier of manly identity’ in this period.² Speech was implicated in questions of agency, representation and identity, but these issues were complicated by the material and embodied qualities of the voice, which contained the potential for compromising the perceived wholeness of the subject. Bruce R. Smith emphasises the reciprocal relation within which speaking subjects are embedded, figuring the voice as ‘an *environmental* gesture [that] seeks resonance from without’.³ Vocal authority is predicated on how speech is heard and interpreted, and how well that speaker listens and responds to others. Middleton’s interest in the unruly male voice thinks through moments where masculinity is expressed and obfuscated in the interactions between speaking and listening subjects. If, as Bloom has suggested, the voice functioned as another kind of ‘prosthetic’, then attending to the ways in which the voice ‘is temporarily attached, released, and exchanged by bodies’ offers a fresh perspective to read the speaking subject as necessarily entangled with and complicated by the world in which it speaks.⁴ By reading the voice as mediating the relationships of power between embodied subjects, I explore how Middleton’s masculinities are rendered precarious by voices that never fully inhere in the individual body. Through a discussion of Middleton’s representations of men troped through their loose tongues and as poor listeners, this chapter demonstrates how these unruly male speakers are used to complicate various ideals of masculine vocal authority.

The chapter focuses on Middleton’s tragedies. While tragedy was not Middleton’s dominant generic interest, he continually returned to tragedies throughout his dramatic career.⁵ Critics have noted how tragedies on the early modern stage self-consciously consider how gendered authority is upheld or undermined through

¹ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, p. 11. See also Reeser, *Moderating Masculinity*.

² Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 8–9.

³ Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, p. 14.

⁴ Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, p. 16.

⁵ Taylor and Lavagnino identify 10 plays between 1602 and 1622 as tragedies, although this number increases to 12 if we include *A Chester Tragedy* and *Hengist, King of Kent* which they categorise as history plays. See *The Collected Works*, pp. 11-12.

speech.⁶ Although Middleton's work more broadly is interested in representing and interrogating how men interact and speak with each other, this impulse is amplified in his tragedies where heightened attention to gendered vocality becomes a powerful tool to articulate or destabilise different forms of masculine authority, often through violently forceful or persuasive speech. This chapter will focus on three of Middleton's tragedies that each attend to masculinities that are problematised by unruly voices. In this chapter's first section, I will consider how masculine authority in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, performed by the King's Men in 1606, is complicated by variously gendered representations of verbal incontinence. Alongside the Duke and his court whose corruption is associated with imagery of mouths, Vindice both identifies with and castigates the feminine associations of excessive talking and persuasion. Then I explore how Middleton and Dekker's *The Bloody Banquet* (1608-09) represents two extremes of unruly masculine speech along a spectrum of age.⁷ The Tyrant's jealous rages, which are exacerbated by his old age, and young Tymethes' tendency to boast problematise their access to masculine authority through speech. In the final section, I turn to another King's Men play, the generically hybrid *Hengist, King of Kent*; or, *The Mayor of Queenborough* (1620), to consider the relationship of masculine vocality to other forms of noise and silence. Middleton's various representations of male refusals to listen or to properly comprehend silences feed into *Hengist's* wider interrogation of how certain bodies become authorised to speak on the behalf of others or, indeed, on behalf of the wider social body. By discussing how unruly and violent speech functions in these plays, I argue that Middleton's men are increasingly fractured and vulnerable to the world that they speak within. In demonstrating how Middleton challenges the association of excessive speech with femininity, aligning it instead with unruly masculinity, this chapter considers the contingency and precarity of the speaking subject on the early modern stage.

⁶ See Blair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy?: Theory and the Early Modern Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Tanya Pollard, *Greek Tragic Women on Shakespearean Stages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); *Revenge and Gender in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. by Lesel Dawson and Fiona McHardy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

⁷ *The Bloody Banquet* is a play of uncertain date and playing company, and also contains the hand of an anonymous adapter who is likely responsible for the induction, choruses, and dumb shows. See Gary Taylor and Julia Gasper, 'Canons and Chronologies', p. 364; Martin Wiggins, in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533-1642: A Catalogue, Volume VI: 1609-1616* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), vi, p. 91.

1. Strange Tongues in *The Revenger's Tragedy*

In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, male speech is repeatedly represented as a disorderly force undermining rather than sustaining gendered authority. The tongue becomes a physical manifestation of the sexualised and politically corrupting speech circulating throughout the play. As the central revenger, Vindice claims to be authorised to speak for those who have been violently silenced by the Duke and his court. But his speech is identified with both masculine and feminine excess that Carla Mazzio locates in the 'unruly organ' of the tongue.⁸ The expectations for authority and stability from the voice are repeatedly undermined by the slippery androgyny of unruly voices. I consider how Middleton tropes the lability of the masculine voice through Vindice and the Duke's leaky male tongues. Taking the gender issues at stake in the voice as its primary focus, this section also considers how tragic conventions shape and are shaped by Middleton's representations of male voices that cannot be fixed.

The political and sexual corruption filling the court of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is identified as a problem of unrestrained male voices that speak over others. Vindice describes how the Duke poisoned his now-deceased lover Gloriana for not 'consent[ing] / Unto his palsy lust' (1.1.32-33). Further, he claims his own father 'died / Of discontent' after being persecuted by the Duke (126-27), which Vindice later blames on an inability or failure to speak for 'He had his tongue, yet grief made him die speechless' (3.5.172). The deaths of Gloriana and Vindice's father are connected to their inability to speak without meaningful power, a silence that is given material presence in the play's opening scene as Vindice speaks these lines to Gloriana's unspeaking skull. The Duke's refusal to give voices to these marginal figures in his court follows from his own sexualised tongue that 'would not be contained, he must fly out' (1.1.84). Drawing on wider early modern traditions that link the tongue to sexual excess and political corruption, J. L. Simmons reads the tongue as embodying a slippery slackness in its 'fiendish urge to wag powerfully'.⁹ *The Revenger's*

⁸ Carla Mazzio, 'Sins of the Tongue', in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, by David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 53-79 (pp. 100-101).

⁹ J. L. Simmons, 'The Tongue and Its Office in *The Revenger's Tragedy*', *PMLA*, 92.1 (1977), 56-68 (p. 56).

Tragedy's repeated imagery of tongues is significant as it functions as not only an embodied synecdoche of speech and voice but as 'a somatic manifestation of all that resists containment'.¹⁰ The Duke's unruly tongue embodies this verbal excess, which is also conflated with sexual and political impotence. When he refuses to pardon Junior's rape, the Duchess decries the 'old cool duke' who is 'as slack in tongue as in performance' (1.2.74-75). The sexual ineffectualness of the Duke's tongue is tied to other forms of vocal impotence that are associated with his uncontained speech and desires. While the First Judge praises the Duke for '[speaking] like to your silver years, / Full of confirmed gravity' (1.2.12-13), the conspicuous absence of this political gravitas, which is associated with other signs of mature masculinity, from Middleton's play is significant. The Duke prefers to spend his time seeking out 'the time and common rumour' rather than listening to official counsel (1.1.70). His interest in trivial gossip alongside his overflowing speech comes to embody the excesses of the masculine tongue that refuses or is unable to control itself. His refusal or failure to speak authoritatively as the patriarch of his family and as head of state continues even after his death, as his sons—characterised as a 'nest of dukes'—vie for control (5.3.125). Lussurioso's dying words that his 'tongue is out of office' similarly evoke his father's political impotence, emphasises that loose tongues cannot inhabit or embody the proper authority of good governance through the voice (76). Manly identity begins to become undone through the excessive tongues and, rather than signifying authoritative masculinity, the voice becomes the means that the poor self-moderation of these men is most explicitly staged.

Middleton's figuration of the Duke's tongue as a site of masculine unruliness disrupts the binary of measured manly speech and excessive womanly blabbing. The relationship between masculinity and misogyny throughout *The Revenger's Tragedy* has been a frequent topic of critical discussion, especially considering the play's generic strangeness.¹¹ As discussed in Chapter Four, effeminacy and excessive verbal fluency were frequently associated with other forms of bodily incontinence. The unruliness of the tongue exemplified by 'excess of speech or overabundance of the

¹⁰ Mazzio, 'Sins of the Tongue', p. 54.

¹¹ For discussions considering this play's genre in relation to gender, see Mullaney, 'Mourning and Misogyny', and Ross-Kilroy, 'The Very Ragged Bone'.

lingual' was frequently gendered as effeminate, womanly, or ambiguous.¹² Although the opposition of controlled and excessive speech frequently framed women through 'a dominant gendered ideal of active, shaping power as male and passive receptivity as female', this binary offered models of female self-containment through discourses of feminine chastity.¹³ Middleton's play resists the prevalent cultural association between women and excessive undisciplined speech as expressed through 'meaningless sound, babbling, prating, chattering'.¹⁴ Vindice initially proposes that masculinity is associated with verbal containment—'Why are men made close / But to keep thoughts in best?' (1.3.82-83). Yet the play emphasises Vindice's ironic unreliability as a commentator figure in his castigations of female garrulity. Vindice as Piato warns Lussurioso against the excesses of speech in misogynistic terms, telling him that if he 'Tell but some woman a secret over night, / Your doctor may find it in the urinal i'th' morning' (84-85). As I have argued, the vocal incontinence that Vindice displaces onto women is primarily embodied by men in this play, not only in the Duke's excessive desires but also in Vindice's persuasive tongue. Vindice has an obsessively misogynistic concern with protecting his mother Gratiana and sister Castiza from verbal assaults on their chastity, even as he works to test and violate that chastity with his persuasive speech when disguised as Piato the pander. Gratiana appears to play up to these misogynistic stereotypes of feminine permeability, decrying her feminine susceptibility to speech in noting that 'We are so weak their words can overthrow us' (2.1.105). Castiza, however, resists these persuasions and Vindice praises the aural defence of his 'Most constant sister' (45) that 'it is not in the power of words to taint thee' (49). Yet Vindice's cynical remark 'That woman is all male whom none can enter', casting Castiza's aural resistance in masculine terms, suggests the impossibility of such self-contained female chastity (110). He venerates fantasies of bodily closure as specifically masculine, even when they are seemingly only enacted by the play's women and undermined by men, especially the Duke. The play maintains

¹² Patricia Parker, 'On the Tongue: Cross Gendering, Effeminacy, and the Art of Words', *Style*, 23.3 (1989), 445–65 (p. 447). See also Lynda E. Boose, 'Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42.4 (1991), 179–213.

¹³ Christina Luckyj, *'A Moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 43.

¹⁴ Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 210.

a contradiction between Vindice's insistence on women as the source of leaky and excessive speech and the staging of such speech as a primarily masculine trait. This moment where Vindice locates an ideal of masculine enclosure in the female body anticipates the ways more broadly that the play explores the gendered ambiguity of unruly speech.

Vindice's excessive talking itself becomes a point of gendered instability that demonstrates the performative force of the voice. Vindice notes his initial belief that his mother would not be persuaded to pander Castiza as 'A siren's tongue could not bewitch her so' (53). But his sufficiently convincing speech does persuade Gratiana, who later blames her temptation on Vindice's powerful tongue, for 'No tongue but yours could have bewitched me so' (4.4.34). Middleton suggests that Vindice's slippery male tongue is more powerful than the female siren's song as his confidence in the fantasy of female chastity is broken down by his own malleable, overreaching tongue. This is not the only time that Vindice's speech takes on supernatural qualities: Lussurioso orders a disguised Vindice to 'with a smooth enchanting tongue / Bewitch [Castiza's] ears and cozen her' (1.3.113-14), while Vindice later acknowledges his supernatural speechcraft in referring to Piato as a 'witch' (5.3.118).¹⁵ Vindice's witchy tongue appears to sway those with otherwise strong resolves, highlighting his own words as slick, seductive, and deceptive. The male tongue is associated with witchcraft elsewhere in Middleton's work too. In *The Roaring Girl*, Moll describes the 'golden witchcrafts' of male speech that 'entangle the poor spirits of fools' (5.94-95). These repeated references in *The Revenger's Tragedy* that figure Vindice's power of persuasion in supernatural terms exemplify a broader concern about what Jonathan Gil Harris calls the 'socially poisonous tongue' as a site of satanic infiltration and disease'. However, where Harris maintains that this tongue is 'feminine', I contend that it is gendered in the sense that it emerges at times of troubling gender confusion and

¹⁵ The term 'witch' was not exclusively feminine and could refer to men or women in the early seventeenth century, although it usually appeared at moments of gendered instability. See Lara Apps and Andrew Colin Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 8-9; Jennifer Linhart Wood, 'Listening to Black Magic Women: The Early Modern Soundscapes of Witch Drama and the New World', in *Gender and Song in Early Modern England*, ed. by Leslie C. Dunn and Katherine R. Larson (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 47-62 (p. 60).

subversion but is not necessarily always coded female.¹⁶ George Webbe, for instance, wrote in 1619 that ‘the *tongue* is a *Witch*’, aligning it with ungendered and unsettling duplicity.¹⁷ Vindice’s tongue—being the somatic manifestation of his speech—goes further than testing his mother and sister by acting as a pander to Lussurioso. His tongue also exemplifies the way that his body is similarly moulded by and vulnerable to the influences of the Duke’s corrupt courtly environs. Lussurioso notes that Vindice while disguised as Piato is ‘e’en shaped for my purposes’ to induct him to the ‘world’s strange lust’ (1.3.57-58). Vindice is aware of his own shifting persona as a revenger and locates this capacity to be shaped in his tongue: ‘I must suit my tongue to his desires, / What colour soe’er they be’ (4.2.10-11). Middleton suggests a slipperiness to Vindice’s speech that blurs distinctions between his identities as it takes on these witch-like supernatural qualities. If, as Judith Haber argues, Vindice’s masculinity is articulated through a series of ‘self-defeating paradoxes’, where women come to stand for specifically male ‘anxieties and desires’, then his own tongue proves the malleability of his masculinity.¹⁸ While Vindice’s masculinity is neither whole nor secure, it is repeatedly identified with sirens, witches, and other figures of variously gendered verbal persuasion. Vindice’s ironic self-awareness over his own tongue’s slipperiness stands in uneasy tension with repulsion by that same duplicity when it emerges in women or the Duke.

Vindice’s excessive talking is also imagined in distinctly masculine ways that comment on his role of revenger. The first scene of the play establishes Vindice’s position as a revenger who rants and rails against the corrupt court of the Duke. He repeatedly makes vows of revenge and curses that repeat the cry of ‘O’: ‘O that marrowless age’ (1.1.5), ‘O God, one / That has scarce blood enough to live upon’ (9-10), ‘O accursèd palace’ (30), ‘O thou terror to fat folks’ (45). These repeated cries punctuating Vindice’s speech demonstrate his self-awareness in playing the revenger

¹⁶ Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 48.

¹⁷ George Webbe, *The Araigment of an Vnruly Tongue* (London: G. P[urserlowe] for John Budge, 1619), p. 20.

¹⁸ Judith Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 69.

who carries a verbal ‘impulse to castigate vice and corruption’.¹⁹ Vindice addresses Vengeance, whose name his own puns on, as the ‘tenant to tragedy’ suggesting his self-awareness in inhabiting this role (40). The excessive cries associate Vindice with the conventional ghost of revenge tragedies, such as the ‘filthie whining ghost’ described by the personification of Tragedy in *A Warning for Fair Women* (likely first performed 1597, printed 1599) who ‘scream[s] like a pigge half stickt, / And cries *Vindicta*, revenge, revenge’.²⁰ Comparatively, the play’s other revengers appear to have the opposite problem of not knowing how to articulate their revenge. Vindice’s brother Hippolito describes his ‘grief too, that yet walks without tongue’ (1.4.22). Antonio whose wife had recently killed herself following her rape by Junior similarly describes a problem of putting ‘Long grief into short words’ (26), and that the assault still brings with it an inarticulable revulsion—‘O vicious minute, / Unfit, but for relation, to be spoke of!’ (39-40). Despite his self-awareness of his role as a revenger, Vindice similarly delays his revenge to the point of parody by waiting ‘nine years’ to undertake action (3.5.122). Yet he acts his revenge in an extremely rushed manner, insisting that the play itself must ‘hurry, hurry, hurry’ (2.1.200) and move on ‘apace, apace, apace’ (2.2.140). Sarah Lewis describes this uncontrolled excitement that Vindice displays as a contradictory embodiment of ‘the patient inaction of his remembrance and impatient actions’ of revenge.²¹ Lewis’s framing of Vindice as living in this temporality of revenge suggests that we can read his excessive talking as embracing the contradictory impulses for articulating grief and calling for swift justice. I would add that this rushed urge to speak exemplifies the impulsiveness that produces his unfiltered vows and curses. His portrayal as a self-aware revenging ghost and narrator as well as the protagonist of the revenge itself is done by figuring his speech as a dynamic process that through its ironic excess holds together these contradictions.

The staging of Vindice as an ironic, excessive revenger is further complicated by considering the malleability of his speech and self. Many of the contradictions that

¹⁹ Gabriel A. Rieger, ‘Satiric Tragedy: *The Revenger’s Tragedy*’, in *The Genres of Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. by Daniel Cadman, Andrew Duxfield, and Lisa Hopkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 115–31 (p. 119).

²⁰ *A Warning for Fair Women* (London: Valentine Simmes for William Aspley, 1599), sig. A2v.

²¹ Sarah Lewis, *Time and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 4.

underpin his identity stem from his strong capacity to dissemble that in turn prevents him from ever materialising a solid subjectivity. When he meets Lussurioso as himself, rather than in his Piato disguise, Hippolito advises him to ‘change tongue’, which Vindice then takes up to ‘bear [himself] in some strain of melancholy / And string myself with heavy sounding wire’ (4.2.26-28). Vindice ascribes musical qualities to his speech here as he changes his outward persona from disguised pander to malcontented courtier. Lussurioso comments on this malleability of self, describing Vindice as ‘the best clay to mould a villain of’ (4.1.49). The lack of solid identity or manner of speaking becomes an advantage in the world of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* where Vindice’s changeable speech can quickly adapt as he displays his skills in the arts of persuasion and dissembling. Aimee Ross-Kilroy suggests that his emphasis on flexible speech ‘validates a self that is outward rather than inward, a self that depends on artifice and acting to exist’.²² This external production of self at the site of his verbal exchanges seems to increasingly gesture at Vindice’s denial of self beyond the realm of portable language. He insists that he is in control of what he speaks, even while disguised as Piato, contrasting himself with the man who ‘brates / His secrets, his heart stands o’th’ outside’ (3.5.10-11). Against this image of leaky masculinity, however, Vindice cannot articulate his thoughts properly to other characters. Hippolito must remind Vindice that he had promised to ‘give me share to every tragic thought’ to counsel each other on their plots (6). Although Vindice resolves to ‘divide’ his thoughts (8), this verbal vulnerability is never fully realised and he remains distanced from his brother. Vindice outwardly loathes the prating man who cannot keep secrets, and is unable or refusing to allow himself to be vulnerable by confiding or sharing his thoughts with Hippolito. He is asked to expand on his plan for the Duke’s death and again refuses to counsel his brother: ‘O, at that word / I’m lost again; you cannot find me yet; / I’m in a throng of happy apprehensions’ (28-30). Vindice’s relish at the thought of murder is inarticulable owing to his self-conscious refusal to leave himself vulnerable by giving these feelings verbal form. His malleable sense of self embodies the ironic contradiction that attends to male speech across the play more broadly: although the outward nature of male identity as constructed through the voice

²² Ross-Kilroy, ‘The Very Ragged Bone’, p. 62.

necessarily entails reciprocity with the world through relations of speaking and listening, Vindice refuses to participate in such relations, for fear that he mirrors the leakiness of the men he wreaks vengeance upon.

Vindice's revenge against the Duke can be read as an attempt to fix the unruliness of masculine speech by making aural violence physical. Vindice tricks the Duke into kissing the masked poisoned skull of Gloriana, holding the skull so it shall 'kiss his lips to death. / As much as the dumb thing can' (105-06). As a contrast to the unruly men and their excessive speech, Gloriana's conspicuously silent skull becomes the focal point of Vindice's revenge. Speaking for Gloriana, he gloats that her poisoned 'mouth' is designed to punish the unruly tongue of the Duke, evoking images of masculine verbal incontinence as he declares that the poison is enough to 'make a swearer tremble, / A drunkard clasp his teeth' (58-59). As revenge for the Duke's unruly mouth, the poison eats away at his teeth until they are 'eaten out' and removes his ability to verbally articulate (160). Rather than being silenced though, the Duke's unruly mouth continues to make noise. From the moment the Duke is poisoned, he never utters a full line of verse. He does, however, utter half-lines and exclaims 'O!' nine times. These 'O's are wordless utterances whose sounds mark an aural contrast to Gloriana's silent mouth on stage. As John Hart writes, making the noise required for 'O' involves articulating the mouth 'by taking awaye of all the tongue, cleane from the teeth or gummes [...] and thrusting forth of a sounding breath'.²³ Heidi Brayman Hackel has noted that these wordless groans demonstrate how 'speech—signified by the tongue—becomes shaped breath'.²⁴ The transformation of speech to breath realises the lack of control the Duke has had over his desires and speech. Vindice calls him a 'slobbering Dutchman', associating this leaking of breath with the inarticulate slurring of words (164). Significantly, while the poison does not silence him, it exacerbates the Duke's already existing verbal incontinence. The Duke is not properly silenced until Vindice 'invents a silence' by nailing down his tongue (193). It is not enough for the Duke's words to be stopped. Even without teeth and tongue, the Duke's wordless

²³ John Hart, *An Orthographie Conteyning the Due Order and Reason, Howe to Write or Paint Thimage of Mannes Voic* (London: William Seres, 1569), sig. H3v.

²⁴ Heidi Brayman Hackel, 'Staging Muteness in Middleton', in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 330–45 (p. 341).

groans and slobbering sounds come to signify the leaky and unruly speech he has previously enacted with his voice, and foregrounds the uncontrollable sonorous excess of masculinity that has permeated his corrupt court.

The proliferation of vocally unmoderated men in the play's court is pushed to the point of collapse following the death of the Duke through a shifting consideration of how the tragic conventions of confession and revelation signify. After the final murders of Lussurioso and his court in a masque with no living witnesses, Vindice boasts about his revenge plot. He says that he 'may be bold / To speak it now' and reveals his and Hippolito's involvement in the murders (5.3.96-97). This startling revelation implicates the two in a crime that may have otherwise gone unnoticed, as earlier in that scene Vindice forced two Lords to 'confess' to the murders in their place (64, 69). Steven Mullaney argues that this verbal incontinence aligns Vindice more with the feminine 'leaky vessel he thought to distinguish himself from, dribbling away his secret, his carefully constructed maleness, and his life'.²⁵ Ross-Kilroy combines a gendered reading with a generic one, seeing Vindice as 'joyfully imploding' the stereotypical masculinity of the revenger when his 'seemingly inexplicable confession displaces the conventional eulogy over a tableau of dead bodies the audience must have expected at this point'.²⁶ Both Mullaney and Ross-Kilroy agree that this is a crucial moment of self-annihilation, but I follow the latter in noting that Vindice's verbal babbling dismantles his masculinity, which has never fully been constructed as a solid or stable thing. This moment crucially works to differentiate the kind of verbal excess that Vindice embodies from that of the Duke and his sons, even if Vindice's revelation also leads to his 'speedy execution' when he is quickly escorted offstage afterwards (101). While the Duke dies in an enforced wordlessness, Vindice's final babbling memorialises his revenge—'If none disclose 'em they themselves reveal 'em. / This murder might have slept in tongueless brass' (110-11). Seeing Hippolito's shocked reaction to his confession, Vindice asks him if they are 'not revenged?' before declaring that "'Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes' (107-08). With no other bodies to enact violence on, he chooses to foreclose his capacity for spectacular violence, even as this gesture for control is ironically made through the verbal excess

²⁵ Mullaney, 'Mourning and Misogyny', p. 161.

²⁶ Ross-Kilroy, 'The Very Ragged Bone', pp. 64, 62.

that he has denounced throughout the play. While on the one hand, Vindice appears to nod to revengers succumbing to what Allison K. Deutermann calls the conventional ‘paroxysms of confession’ at the play’s end, his revelation also functions to reclaim his vocal agency in contrast to the Duke who does die ‘tongueless’ (111).²⁷ Middleton underscores Vindice’s confession with the contradiction that it is both impulsive and a purposeful reclamation of control. Vindice’s claim following his revelation that ‘we’re well’ supports the notion that this confession is controlled as part of his metatheatrical awareness about the structure of revenge tragedies (124). When he reaches the end point of the play, Vindice himself seems to realise that the trappings of revenge tragedy demand a confession or revelation that, considering he has killed all witnesses, he then provides for the play’s generic structure. The plurality and slipperiness of the tongue throughout the play continually disarticulates the stability of those men who cannot manage their speech. Following the absence of male wholeness and singularity throughout *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Vindice’s ‘we’re well’ attempts to supplant these forms of authority with a self-aware dramatic authority.

Middleton considers how the slipperiness of speech, and the physical tongue that materialises this speech, can be specifically coded as a masculine issue. Although the images of loose tongues that permeate through this play are figured as feminine by the characters, the figures who cannot moderate their tongues or mediate their positions as listeners are men. Vindice is implicated in projecting the anxieties of excessive and grotesque speech onto women while embodying these tropes of unrestrained speaking as part of his persona. A lack of any form of ideal masculine authority in this play demonstrates Middleton’s fascination with the irony that underscores Vindice’s desire to foreground his masculinity through various forms of verbal control and projection even as he is defined by an excessive and unruly tongue. The problem of defining and exploring the masculinities that embody these verbal excesses is one that, as I shall explore, Middleton expands to other forms of male speech in his later tragedies.

²⁷ Alison K. Deutermann, ‘Hearing Iago’s Withheld Confession’, in *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, ed. by Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 47–63 (p. 48).

2. Blustering and Boasting in *The Bloody Banquet*

Middleton and Dekker's *The Bloody Banquet* represents a court whose idealised vision of authority based on moderation is usurped by excessive desires and unruly speech.²⁸ While the play has received surprisingly sparse critical attention, the criticism it has received has focused on its spectacles of mouths, appetites, and cannibalism.²⁹ In this section, I will further tease out the play's concerns with orality by considering its construction of the unruly male voice. Early modern conduct books make frequent reference to the masculine moderation of the passions, exemplified by Henry Cuffe who notes that 'the moderation of our affections' is necessary for a 'long life'.³⁰ As Lynn Enterline has demonstrated, vocal training was closely linked to this moderation and enabled those disciplined enough in their voices to exercise and experience a 'highly mediated relation to emotion'.³¹ The elderly Tyrant and Tymethes, the young son of the rightful king the Tyrant has overthrown, are compelled to unrestrained passionate raging and boasting that disorders their masculine personas. Their respective lack of moderation in their speech realises the contingency of their masculinities across a spectrum of age. In my reading, I follow Gina Bloom in thinking of manhood in terms of 'the capacity for physiological *and* emotional control, both of which would be manifested not in a deep or loud but a stable, manageable voice'.³² The excessive vocality associated with Tymethes's youth and the Tyrant's old age is staged against the powerful agency that the Queen asserts through her voice. By considering excessive vocality as a distinctively male problem in this play, I argue that Middleton and Dekker are interested in deconstructing the relationship between idealised visions of manhood based on vocal authority and the precarious reality of speech that spreads out of the control of the speaker.

²⁸ Although, as noted in Chapter One, there is likely to be collaboration across or within scenes to an extent, the majority of the Tymethes plot that I am concerned with in this section is likely to have been largely written by Middleton. See Julia Gasper and Gary Taylor, 'The Bloody Banquet: A Tragedy [Textual Introduction]', in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, pp. 1020–28 (p. 1020).

²⁹ See Gary Taylor, 'Gender, Hunger, Horror: The History and Significance of *The Bloody Banquet*', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 1.1 (2001), 1–45.

³⁰ Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life*, p. 98.

³¹ Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*, p. 25.

³² Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, p. 37.

Middleton and Dekker repeatedly stage men whose precarious positions in the early modern life cycle leave them more vulnerable to the effects of speech and their passions. Moderated masculinity is invoked as a precarious but active process that involves the constant ongoing need to exercise vocal and aural discipline. The play shows men to be vulnerable to the power of duplicitous speech through the characters of the old King of Lydia and his nephew Lapyrus. The action begins with the King's usurpation by the 'dissembler' Tyrant who had assisted him in their war against Lycia following Lapyrus' betrayal (1.1.15). After falling for the persuasions of the Lycian king who '*offer[ed] his daughter Eurymone*' in exchange for his betrayal of the old King (Induction SD), Lapyrus in turn showed 'false breath' in turning traitor (1.3.38). While the King had expected 'honesty, honour, / Assistance from' the Tyrant and his nephew, he instead is faced with broken vows and alliances (14-15). After these unexpected betrayals, the King attempts to re-establish his masculinity by reorienting his relationship with speech. To do so, he practises what Keith M. Botelho describes as judicious listening. Botelho notes that early modern drama repeatedly tropes 'male characters who fail to practice earwitnessing threaten[ing] their own masculine authority'.³³ When he is exiled from Lydia, the King's servant Fidelio tries to reassure him that many of his servants remain loyal, even as Fidelio and Amorpho are the only ones to voice their support. The King shuts down these empty words, noting that he is 'not worth the flattering. I am done, / Old and at set' (78-79). He refuses to ascribe speech meaningful value unless he can be sure that words are spoken without a 'politic' duplicity (16). Yet the King's steadfast belief in the singularity of speech is naïve, as words that he believed without scrutiny gave way to dissembling and tyranny.

Middleton and Dekker repeatedly draw on the imagery of penitence to highlight the active and ongoing nature of vocal and affective discipline. Lapyrus's fall from grace is an explicit allegory of Christian redemption. He considers killing himself by asking for the 'Earth' to 'stretch thy throat' and consume him to 'take down this bitter pill' (5). He later sees a 'Blessed tree' bearing 'fruit' and cries out to 'taste it' before falling into a pit on stage (2.3.12-13). Yet Lapyrus's repentance is most solidly compounded with acts of judicious listening that enable him to redeem himself.

³³ Keith M. Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses: Rumour and Early Modern Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 5.

In the woods, he meets the Old Queen that he betrayed and offers to let her kill him. After listening to his ‘penitent sighs’ (1.3.69), the Old Queen instead offers him mercy with her ‘word’ and he enters her service in exile (85). Gina Bloom argues that such moments of ‘aural salvation’ on the early modern stage can only occur when men ‘desist from disruptive deafness and open their ears’.³⁴ Lapyrus achieves this redemption by offering himself as a vulnerable listener, transformed from a traitor being swallowed up by the earth to a gracious listener and penitent speaker. Middleton and Dekker stage the King and Lapyrus having failed in their duties as masculine rulers and subjects but being able to achieve redemption by transforming the ways they listen and speak. By the end of the play, the King declares that he is ‘so borne betwixt the violent streams / Of joy and passion, I forget my state’ before returning to his proper duties and restoring ‘happy government’ (5.3.222-23, 26). The reparative and restorative power of aurality is made clear in the play’s final declaration that there is ‘No storm of fate so fierce but time destroys, / And beats back misery with a peal of joys’ (247-48). These portrayals of aural redemption suggest that proper earwitnessing must sit alongside disciplined ways of speaking to restore and sustain male identities predicated on the subject’s vocal agency.

However, *The Bloody Banquet* is equally interested in staging the excessive speech and desires associated with the unpredictable male body. The play’s Machiavellian Tyrant comes to exemplify this bodily and aural unruliness. As with the Duke of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, the Tyrant is characterised by his immoderate appetite—when asked what the limits to his desires are, he curtly replies that ‘Without all, nothing’ (1.1.30). By usurping the throne, the Tyrant prioritises his position and power over alliances and friendships. His refusal to ‘unload victory’s honey thighs / To let drones feed’ characterises his tyranny through a hungry desire to consume and locates the struggle for power at the mouth (26-27). He views himself as the master over the sexualised and effeminated drones under his rule. While Rebecca W. Bushnell has rightly explored how the early moderns cast tyranny in terms of effeminacy through the ‘cultural association between femininity and the desire for pleasure [...] irrationality, appetite’, Middleton and Dekker’s Tyrant displays more of an excessive

³⁴ Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, p. 126.

patriarchal desire for control over other bodies while his own ripples with lust and ambition.³⁵ His 'Hunger and lust' are gossiped about within his court (1.4.27), while his jealousy extends to allowing his Queen to 'taste no other sustenance, no nor airs' (5.1.180). Yet the Tyrant's behaviour is said to be a recent 'strange alteration' (126). His daughter Amphridote ascribes his increased irrationality to his 'grey hairs' where he now 'turn[s] tyrant to his friends' (126-28). While the Old King's age does not preclude his access to rationality and temperance, the Tyrant is 'Wasting his penitential time in plots' (1.1.129). The Tyrant's son, Zenarchus, also begs his father to use his 'manly temper and considerate blood', baulking at his father's increasingly extreme behaviour throughout the play (5.1.24). His grey hairs invoke the cultural association of old age with uncontrol. By thinking of the Tyrant in terms of his older age where he is unable or unwilling to moderate his desires, Middleton and Dekker invoke elderly masculinity as an extreme time when men were considered more likely to be 'fastidious, testie, froward, and never contented'.³⁶ Yet by contrasting the Tyrant's stasis with the Old King's active attempts to change, the play does suggest that aural and vocal salvation are possible through proper self-reflection and listening. This serves to highlight the Tyrant's excessive temper that overreaches his bodily bounds and refuses to be properly contained.

The Tyrant's lack of moderation in terms of his voice serves as the clearest evidence of his inability to properly mediate his passions. His increasing paranoia about the Queen's infidelity causes him to become 'o'erworn with jealousy' that is 'fair unworthy a king' (1.4.6, 11). His jealousy accompanies the Tyrant's aural vulnerability to the persuasions of others. Zenarchus nearly convinces his father to return the kingdom to the old King, the Tyrant himself admitting that 'The boy hath almost changed us' (1.1.42). However, he is then quickly dissuaded again by his advisor Mazares. It is his constant fuelling of the Tyrant's jealousy by feeding him gossip and rumours that causes Roxano, the Queen's keeper, to describe Mazares as

³⁵ Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 20.

³⁶ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (London: Valentine Simmes [and Adam Islip] for Walter Burre [and Thomas Thorpe], 1604), p. 39.

‘the King’s bosom: he blows his thoughts into him’ (3.1.54-55).³⁷ Zenarchus similarly earlier called Mazerus ‘that court fly’ whose persuasions ‘could on / The virtues of the King blow such corruption’ (1.1.103-04). Middleton and Dekker’s representation of Mazerus echoes the breathiness of the voice that Thomas Wright evokes when describing the art of persuasion as ‘the wind a trumpeter bloweth in at one end [...] and issueth forth at the other [...] so the passion proceedeth from the heart, & is blowne about the bodie, face, eies, hands, voice’.³⁸ These references to Mazerus’s verbal influences on the King suggest the poor self-control the Tyrant has in his capacity to externally change through words. The evocation of breath’s centrality to this relationship evokes what Gail Kern Paster has called the ‘pneumatics of power’ at play in ‘the movements of breath and air between characters as signalling relations of power and preeminence— especially as breath is expended aggressively in laughter, anger, or scorn’.³⁹ By associating persuasive words with breath and air, Middleton and Dekker invoke the material force of breath that carries words from their speakers, and how this mobile speech can travel between bodies in ways that are not always controlled. As in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, the Tyrant’s poor ‘earwitnessing’ fails to counter the infectious breath of another’s ‘male loose speech’.⁴⁰ The ironic warnings that Mazerus gives the Tyrant that ‘the sway’s yours. / Be not bought out with words’ underscores the latter’s complete lack of proper aural judiciousness (46-47). The descriptions of the Tyrant’s ‘Fruitless suspicion, sighs, ridiculous groans’ suggest that his vocal agency is further compromised by the unmediated breathiness of his loose jealousy (1.4.26). Mazerus claims that ‘the kingdom, Lydia. / All pant under your sceptre’ (1.1.45-46), creating the image of an oppressed breathy wordlessness to assuage and prioritise the agency and breath of the Tyrant himself. The pneumatics of power at play between the Tyrant and Mazerus reveal the capacity of speech, as well as wordless utterances, to entangle the agency of speaker and listener.

³⁷ Compare this to the recorder scene in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, where the Prince notes that Gyldensterne may ‘Call me what instrument you will, though you fret me, yet you cannot play upon me’, giving the vocal authority of breath precedence (9.327-28).

³⁸ Wright, *The Passions of the Minde*, p. 174.

³⁹ Paster, *Humoring the Body*, pp. 232, 231.

⁴⁰ Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses*, p. 5.

The untampered emotions of the Tyrant are staged in an ironic turn towards the fantasy of forceful masculine speech. The blustering rage of the Tyrant is compared to a storm, tempest or a 'whirlwind [...] Ready to tear the frame of my mortality' (4.2.42-43). These references implicate his rampant voice with his excessive appetites as 'Hunger and lust will break through flesh and stones, / And like a whirlwind blows ope castle doors' (1.4.26-28). The Tyrant's voice is likened to a storm, emphasising the material force of his words as well as his lack of rational control over these words. This description of his rage echoes the raging style of the 'tyrant's vein' (2.33) that Bottom describes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c.1595) that 'breaks the locks / Of prison gates' (26-27).⁴¹ Robert Herrick in his epigram 'Upon M. Ben Johnson' similarly criticises histrionic players whose excessive 'temper flew from words; and men did squeake, / Looke red, and blow, and bluster'.⁴² The poor emotional control suggested by these kinds of blustering speech would compare the Tyrant to a bad actor, unable to properly speak outside of a stylised and excessive rage. These parallels also suggest that such brash speech is ineffectual and makes the Tyrant who speaks this way look ridiculous. On discovering the Queen's affair with Tymethes, the Tyrant declares that he is 'lost by violence through all my senses. / I'm blind with rage [...] I tread in air, and see no foot nor path' (4.2.62-63). His wordless sighs, groans and blustering anticipate this synaesthetic thickening of air that leaves him unable to apprehend his senses. The air that enacts these transformations is suggested to be from the Queen and Tymethes's 'whispering', which the Tyrant feels through his sight as it 'stick[s] in mine eye' (4.3.206-08). These synaesthetic descriptions confuse sight and hearing, evidencing the fundamental bodily transformations the Tyrant undergoes in his rage—'I am not the same flesh; my touch is altered' (45). These raging passions culminate in the Tyrant having to purge these tempestuous feelings out of his body by symbolically spitting them out as he describes "'Tis springtide in my gall. All my blood's bitter—/ Puh, lungs too' (4.2.48-49). The 'Puh' acts not only as what Matthew Steggle calls an 'implied stage direction' that instructs the actor to spit but as a

⁴¹ For more on the performance of tragedy and the voice, see Tiffany Stern, 'Early Modern Tragedy and Performance', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. by Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 489–504 (pp. 494–503).

⁴² Robert Herrick, *Hesperides, or, The Works Both Humane & Divine of Robert Herrick, Esq.* (London, 1648), sig. M7r.

distinctively Middletonian curse or interjection.⁴³ Susan L. Anderson reads these kinds of oaths and exclamations as inhabiting ‘a liminal status on the edge of speech, communicating aspects of a character’s response or emotional state beyond what is expressible in grammatical speech’.⁴⁴ The non-semantic response of the Tyrant to his tempestuous rage demonstrates the limits of his speech to grapple with the extremities of his passions. Instead of being able to articulate his emotions and solidify his position of ruling authority, the Tyrant’s unmoderated rage and appetites simply dissolve his bodily agency into these various forms of vocalised noise.

The boasting of the youthful Tymethes is staged as another version of excessive male speech. Tymethes is repeatedly characterised as a ‘hapless boy’, as Gary Taylor has noted, where his youthfulness is stressed compared to other men (4.3.124).⁴⁵ Both young and old men were thought to risk ‘an inability to regulate their passions [...] that compromised their standing as rational subjects, and, thus, their masculinity’.⁴⁶ Victoria Sparey has written about male adolescence in particular as a time ‘as much about expected and desired change as it was about self-destructive behaviour’, and male youths were in particular challenged by their excessive passions that ‘promoted heat-fuelled acts as venery, argument, and violence’.⁴⁷ The management of the male emotions through the voice was not guaranteed but was something to be strived for through training or discipline. Richard Mulcaster, for example, describes a variety of vocal exercises to ‘moderately’ train boys to manage their bodies and passions, such as loud speaking, singing, reading aloud, laughing and weeping, holding in breath, and practising silence, warning against the ‘daunger’ of excessive speaking.⁴⁸ The voice at once becomes the means by which boys could strive for manly moderation, even as the ever-present danger of excessive speaking threatens this ideal. For Tymethes, this

⁴³ Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Susan Anderson, *Echo and Meaning on the Early Modern English Stages* (Cham: Palgrave, 2017), p. 109.

⁴⁵ Taylor, ‘Gender, Hunger, Horror’, p. 37n29.

⁴⁶ Ellis, *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Victoria Sparey, ‘Performing Puberty’, pp. 441–42. For more on the relationship between young men and excessive noise on the early modern stage, see Daniel Gates, ‘The Roaring Boy: Contested Masculinity on the Early Modern Stage’, *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 46.1 (2013), 43–54.

⁴⁸ Richard Mulcaster, *Positions Wherin Those Primitiue Circumstances Be Examined, Which Are Necessarie for the Training vp of Children* (London: Thomas Vautrollier for Thomas Chare, 1581), p. 55.

excess manifests in his boasting and inability to keep certain conversations private. Initially, he is allowed to remain in the Lydian court as the Tyrant recognises he is not a political threat as he 'little frights our thoughts: / He's young, and given to pleasure, not to plots' (1.1.93-94). When Tymethes first meets the Queen in the court, he inappropriately flatters her and pledges her in public, practically confirming the Tyrant's assessment. He calls her the 'Supremest of your sex in all perfections' (1.4.50), leading the Queen to reprimand him as being 'forgetful' of his 'place' (50-51). Yet Tymethes insists on the primacy of his speech despite the warnings he receives from his friend Zenarchus, 'I speak my affection' (9). After his affair with the Queen, Tymethes brags to Zenarchus about the 'subtlety' of the encounter (4.1.1), while his friends must remind him to 'blow this over' more quietly when Amphridote enters the stage (22). The boyish, unrestrained speech of Tymethes is a continual worry for the Queen who is far more concerned about maintaining secrecy. Roxano even warns the Queen to be careful of pursuing Tymethes as he is one of those 'young gallants' who 'are of that vainglorious and preposterous humour that if they lay with their own sisters you should hear 'em prate on't' (1.4.208-11). While arranging their sexual encounter, the Queen has Tymethes 'hoodwinked' and herself masked to hide as many details of the affair as possible from him (4.1.2). Despite the many warnings, Tymethes continues to pursue her and discover her identity, knowing full well that his behaviour will fatally 'change him into fire and air' (3.3.132). His failures to listen to the warnings given to him echo the Tyrant's irrational pursuit of pleasure and emotional extremities. By characterising the consequences of his verbal effusions as ephemeral heat and wind, Middleton and Dekker portray Tymethes's youthful passions in terms of material speech, even as this airy speech is constituted by its fleeting temporality.

While the play represents the Tyrant and Tymethes as excluded from the idealised model of moderated verbal and emotional authority by their unruly speech, it goes further by giving the Queen a vocal agency that threatens the authority of both men. Contrasted with Tymethes's public pledging in their initial encounter, the Queen encloses her 'loose thoughts' in asides and maintains a public silence about her own desires (1.4.60). After she refuses to pledge him, Tymethes leaves her alone on the stage without saying another word. In a soliloquy, the Queen then notes that Tymethes

'took leave in silence, but left me / To speak enough both for myself and he' (83-84). While Tymethes's arrogant public pledge followed by a frustrated silence suggests his immaturity in speechcraft, the Queen's claim to speak for them both emphasises her agency as well as her awareness of appropriate speech. Most notably when arranging her sexual encounter with Tymethes, she authorises other bodies or objects to speak for her. Although Roxano is appointed as one of the Queen's 'smock-sentinels' to guard her chastity (1.4.125), she is able to turn him into her 'pander' with money to deliver letters and messages to Tymethes (2.3.85). To attempt to contain her other servants' loose speech, she has them sworn to 'secrecy' over a Bible and infuses their bodies with her voice, stating 'I pour my life into your breasts' (3.2.11-12). Yet her attempts to authorise these men to speak for her also disclose a general distrust of male speech. As Tymethes himself suggests, '[Women] never do their easy sex more wrong / Than when they venture fame upon man's tongue' (3.3.30). The Queen's distrust of male verbliness is suggested by her repeated attempts to root speech in physical objects, such as suggesting that she can 'wear' these servants' 'vows' as if they were 'Like jewels' (3.2.23). During the encounter itself, she remains silent, and instead communicates to Tymethes through a letter that reminds him to 'keep safe your breath' (3.3.111). This material reminder about the danger of his voice is accompanied by a number of other techniques designed to obscure her identity as much as possible from the young man, including the hoods covering his face, her mask, and a perfumed 'mist' (4.3.187). The Queen uses her female authority, and privileged position within the household, to either remove the possibility of men's tongues wagging or to assert her agency over these men's voices when they do speak for her.

Yet male speech still refuses to be fully controlled, as is shown by the prevalence of gossiping, boasting and deception. The Queen's strict control over their sexual encounter stems from her deep anxiety about the looseness of male speech. She acknowledges that 'Men are apt to boast' and 'in full cups blaze and vaunt' about their sexual behaviour (1.4.95-96). This anxiety becomes more prescient when Roxano, following urging by a jealous Mazerus, leads Tymethes to the Queen's bedchamber and discovers her identity. Realising that she will be unable to prevent Tymethes from boasting, she then curses the 'misery of affection built on breath' as that ungraspable kind of speech is deeply coded as male (4.3.59). Compared to the material security of

her written letter, his male speech is rendered increasingly out of control. The Queen implores Tymethes to repent for ‘all / Your hasty youth stands guilty of’, echoing the earlier scene between Lapyrus and the Old Queen (69-70). He kneels and prays ‘With heart as penitent as a man dissolving’ before the Queen shoots him dead with two pistols (93). Whether or not his penitent final lines carried the same true repentance that Lapyrus offered for his own rashness, the Queen’s ultimate mistrust of the sincerity of male speech means that she must silence Tymethes’s tongue permanently. She further curses him for believing ‘by oaths to have thy deeds well borne’ (114). Her lack of faith in Tymethes’s words of penitence follows his ‘breach[ing]’ of his previous vow not to seek out her identity (116). Not only does his boasting have an unsettling mobility to threaten to unveil the Queen’s hidden affair in the court, but his words are also increasing meaninglessness as he knowingly breaks his promises, oaths, and vows of secrecy. The precarious breathiness of Tymethes’s speech is ultimately what leads to his silencing by the Queen in death. By problematising the young Tymethes’s control over his passions and therefore vocal agency in terms of volatile air, the play foregrounds the authority and agency of the Queen.

Loose speech and desires are closely intertwined for the men of *The Bloody Banquet*. Yet this is not necessarily true with the Queen who still demonstrates vocal restraint, even as she has similarly excessive desires. Despite her efforts to silence Tymethes, the Queen is found out when Mazeris spills her secret to the Tyrant. This then leads to the play’s final scene where her mouth becomes the epitome of the play’s tragedy even as it relies on her own silence. This enforced silence attempts to displace the link between immoderate speech and desires displayed by the men onto the feminine mouth of the Queen. She is brought out to an audience of the Old King’s followers disguised as pilgrims and forced by the Tyrant to eat Tymethes’s flesh and drink from his bloody skull while his dismembered limbs hang about the stage. The Tyrant delights in gloating about his revenge against her and describing her cannibalism—‘The lecher must be swallowed rib by rib. / His flesh is sweet; it melts, and goes down merrily’ (5.1.2-3-05). The loose and immoderate desires of the play’s men are projected onto her body and result in this violation of the female mouth. As the Queen is forced to ingest Tymethes’s bodily fragments, the Tyrant attempts to mix the unruly male and female voice at her mouth, as predicted when Roxano who noted

that the young prince's rashness will lead him into 'horror's jaws' (4.1.68). And ultimately the Queen is silenced. Her final appearance on stage for fifty-four lines involves no dialogue on her part, only eating and drinking the body parts of her former lover. Following this silence, she is then killed by the Tyrant who utters 'Break, vow; bleed, whore', conflating her unruly and womanly tongue and sexuality (5.1.209). While the Tyrant tries to displace the source of loose speech and appetites onto the Queen's mouth in her murder, the staging of this final scene makes clear that it is male voices and violence that are the play's central concern. The Tyrant becomes increasingly irrational as he boasts about his actions to the court, the Old King noting that 'Sin's boast is worse than sin' (194). This associates the Tyrant's own excessive speech with Tymethes, where verbal incontinence equally affects both the young and old men.

When the Tyrant is eventually killed, he is not silenced in the same manner as the Queen. After killing the queen, the Tyrant laughs wordlessly 'ha, ha, ha!' recalling *Revenger's* Duke's dying 'O's' (216).⁴⁹ He is then shot by the Old King and his followers. However, unlike the Duke in *The Revenger's Tragedy* or the Queen, after being shot he is given two last lines of verse to speak while dying: 'So laugh away this breath. / My lust was ne'er more pleasing than my death' (217-18). While his earlier spitting tropes his immoderate anger into wordless utterance, these final two lines spoken by the Tyrant transform his excessive desire into a defiant moment of violent speech. And unlike the Duke of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, he still retains his vocal agency over his own body while enforcing the silence of the Queen in her forced cannibalism. Whereas the Queen and the Tyrant stage different ways that the agency of the voice can be disrupted or distorted, they do not witness the repentance of the old King and traitorous Lapyrus. When the King takes back the kingdom of Lydia, Lapyrus asserts that the ruler is 'As full possessed as ever, and as rich /In subjects' hearts and voices' (220-21). To demonstrate his renewed social and political authority, the King also notes that while he is 'betwixt the violent streams / Of joy and passion' he is able to moderate these to act as the representative of the 'state' (222-23). While further emphasising that the old King is actively working to moderate his passions and

⁴⁹ On 'ha, ha, ha' as a particular instruction to laugh and its multiple meanings in early modern playtexts, see Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*, pp. 26-30.

how they interact with his political position, neither the Tyrant who exacerbates his own lust and jealousy nor the Queen who is figured through the Tyrant's misogynistic fantasies are able to engage in these discourses of active penitence and self-improvement. And while the male Tyrant is still granted a form of agency in a fantasy of the forceful male voice, even as that fantasy dissolves into excessive passion, the Queen is refused any form of self-possession. Further, the play's lasting image of forceful male voices is of the Tyrant forcing the Queen to eat Tymethes while the old King and his followers speak only in asides and watch in horror. If the unruly speaking and listening by Lapyrus and the old King can be reformed and returned into more ideal forms of moderation, then this redemption comes at the exclusion of the Queen whose forced silence reveals the violent excess that surrounds these moderate ideals.

The precarity of male authority is staged by Middleton and Dekker through the slippery qualities of the voice that refuse to straightforwardly grant agency to the speaker. *The Bloody Banquet* dramatizes the excessive desires and emotional volatility that are expressed through blustering and boasting, which are explicitly and almost exclusively coded as male. Middleton and Dekker continually trope riotous and leaky speech in primarily male embodiments and stage the excesses of this vocal disorder. The discourses of active penitence and discipline offer some of the men access to a fantasy of control over their vocal and emotional agency. The framing of the Tyrant and Tymethes's excessively emotional voices through images of heat, storms and wind parodies the fantasy of the forceful masculine voice by transforming these images into formless breath. The fraught mobility of speech repeatedly opens up the individual body and its agency to the influence of other speakers, tragically staged in the violation of the Queen's mouth. The ways that the powers of the voice both enabled and accompanied excessive and disturbing acts of violence is a prominent trope that Middleton would continue to return to in his later tragedies.

3. Violent Noise in *Hengist, King of Kent*

Hengist, King of Kent stages the fantasy of powerful male voices in tension with both the seeming uncontrollability of unruly noise and the alternative forms of agency proffered by meaningful silences. While the play has historically attracted more attention for its comic plot concerning the rise of tanner's apprentice turned Mayor of

Queenborough Simon, I am concerned with the tragedy and chronicle history style plot that deconstructs the patriarchal violence reinforced by and enacted through the male voice. Whereas *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Bloody Banquet* push their figures of male violence to a parodic—if not almost comic—excess, there is a noticeable tonal shift in *Hengist* as Middleton takes a more serious approach to the vicious and palpable consequences of male violence. Set during the Saxon invasion of Britain in the fifth century, Middleton's play stages a series of short-lived rulers each failing to maintain control of the throne. Following the death of King Constantine, his monastic eldest son Constantius is unwillingly crowned. He is quickly assassinated by the ambitious British lord Vortiger who then assumes the throne. After making an alliance with Hengist and the Saxons to defend his throne from rebellions and marrying the pagan Saxon princess Roxena, Vortiger is then overthrown by British rebels and replaced by his son, Vortimer. Vortimer is then poisoned by Roxena and Vortiger takes the throne again. The play ends with Constantius' two sons and rightful heirs, Aurelius and Uther, returning to overthrow Vortiger, who dies in a battle with the Saxon captain, Hersus. The play largely follows Vortiger, whose extreme fantasy of the fully self-possessed masculine voice is shown to be inconsonant with the ideals of kingship, and whose brutish aggression similarly marks him as unsuitable for the throne. Voices that do not conform to his vision of the forceful male voice as the perfect embodiment of political authority are silenced or dismissed as unruly noise. As such, the unruly male voices in the tragedy of *Hengist* are mobile and potentially destructive forces in the social web of the play that engender violent consequences. By attending to speech as it is implicated in the political and patriarchal models of masculine rule, I explore Middleton's interest in who is afforded the power to speak and how their words are heard.

The authoritative masculine voice in *Hengist* is an unrepresented ideal associated with the man who can moderate his desires and ambitions with the political wiliness to listen and appeal to the wider population. Bruce R. Smith has argued that '[t]he *embodiedness* of an oral performance [...] embraces not only the individual performers' bodies but the social body as well'.⁵⁰ It is this relation that Middleton's

⁵⁰ Smith, *Acoustic World*, p. 24.

play dramatises as a conflict between a series of failing political figures who prioritise their desires and ambitions over the collective needs of the crowds to which they speak. The closest to an ideal masculine vision of authority comes in the form of the invading Saxon Hengist. He garners popular support in Britain by shrewdly listening and appealing to the British ‘clamours’ (3.3.16). Hengist recognises that their voices ‘Are the foundation of a lofty work; / We cannot build without them and stand sure’ (26-27), noting that his invasion and political project is dependent on the supportive voices of the people. He repeats the image of the citizens as a ‘foundation’ (2.4.126) for political ambitions throughout the play and is shown to listen to the concerns of petitioners and labourers whom he sees as the ‘foot’ that ‘He that first ascends up to a mountain’s top’ must rely on (3.3.28-29). By figuring Hengist as a man who listens to and appeals to the populace, Middleton aligns him with Shakespeare’s Bolingbroke in *Richard II* (1595) whose ‘courtship of the common people’ (1.4.23) eventually leads to his public ceremonial parading of the captured King where ‘the very windows spoke’ his praises (5.2.12). To think of Hengist as a Bolingbrokean archetype necessarily entails reflecting on the ways that he can appeal to and win over the voices of the wider social body. Hengist also self-consciously moderates his desires so as not to provoke anger from a starving population that has been neglected by the British rulers, in his words, without ‘house nor food’ (2.4.138). In a soliloquy, he maintains that in his Kent castle he has ‘yet contained myself / Within my limits, without check or censure’ and distinguishes himself from the men of excess previously discussed in this chapter by keeping his ambitions for power out of the public eye (3.5.5-6). Importantly, Hengist is one of the few characters in the play who listens to and engages meaningfully with the comic citizen plot as well as the tragic chronicle history plot. Displaying his political canniness with a capacity to both listen and speak to the British citizens, Hengist makes his claims to speak *for* the British citizens and solidifies his political power as articulated through his voice.

By contrast, the British Lord Vortiger’s distaste towards the general population is made clear in his dismissal of social unrest as unregulated noise. Following the death of King Constantine, Vortiger enters the stage holding a crown and reviling the popular revolt against his ambitions to be king manifested by repeated offstage ‘*shout*’s (1.1.0, 54 SD). Middleton’s offstage crowd voice their

dissatisfaction, mirroring the shouts of the ‘rabble’ (15.99) in *Hamlet* who use their ‘caps, hands, and tongues’ as they call for Laertes to be named king (104). In keeping these shouts as disembodied offstage noises, Middleton allows them to metonymically embody the wider upset against Vortiger’s Machiavellian ambitions. Yet while the voices of the political actors on stage are privileged in their capacity to articulate their desires and agency, the sonic presence of the shouting crowds makes clear that any vocal agency established on the stage is dependent on a wider social body. Vortiger’s opening lines where he sets out his political desires are set against a vocal crowd that he characterises as unruly and noisy. He calls for their silence, asking ‘Will that wide-throated beast, the multitude, / Never lin [cease] bellowing?’ (1-2). His complaint echoes the ‘request[s] for silence from the chattering playgoers’ conventionally given by Prologue figures in history plays, and so implies that the angry crowd are like the ‘chattering playgoers’ that the actors have to hush.⁵¹ Yet Vortiger’s frustration and inability to quiet the political multitude reveal a lack of properly exercised vocal authority. Although his lines are not the play’s first, as Middleton opens the play proper with a Prologue by the play’s presenter figure Raynolph Hidgen, they represent the struggle for authority at the heart of the play’s concern with the voice. Vortiger speaks with what Robert Greene calls ‘the swelling bombast of a bragging blank verse’ that characterises his speech as a bellowing force.⁵² His opening speech foregrounds his skills as a speaker while also demonstrating the extent that he denies the vocal agency of the citizens:

How near I was to a sceptre and a crown!
Fair power was ever upon me, my desires
Were tasting glory, till this forked rabble
With their infectious acclamations
Poisoned my fortune. (1.1.5-9)

Vortiger centres himself within his vision by distorting the political voices of the commoners as noise. Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus* (1603-04) similarly has male characters

⁵¹ Ian Munro, *The City and Its Double: The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 128.

⁵² Robert Greene, *Greenes Arcadia, or Menaphon* (London: W. Stansby for I. Smethwicke, 1599), sig. A2v.

whose distaste for the ‘common mouth’ emerges in their representation of the popular voice as mere ‘Fears, whisp’rings, tumults, noise’ (2.492-93). Whereas Hengist listens to these anxious voices of the citizens and recognises their political value, Vortiger cannot ‘Forbear’ them (4.1.15). Vortiger’s contempt for the crowd is clear in his description of them as ‘trunks, that have no other souls / But noise and ignorance’ and complaints that they will not ‘quiet’ (20-21). The popular opposition to Vortiger’s ascension is classed by him as an unruly noisy mob. This characterisation of the crowd reveals Vortiger’s ambitions and lack of awareness that he is simply not liked by the general population. The reciprocated hostility demonstrated between him and the crowd places limits on his ambitions as a political actor that Vortiger is unable to recognise.

By portraying the crowd as a noisy, empty and objectified entity, Vortiger attempts to legitimise his speaking position. Ian Munro has written that the figure of the crowd in early modern literature and culture was represented as ‘a form of excessiveness and/or superfluosness’ whose legibility was inscribed in terms of its mobility and ungovernability.⁵³ Conventional images of the population as an unruly mob similarly appear in *Richard II* where the Duchess of York expresses distaste over the public behaviour of the ‘rude misgoverned’ (5.2.5), and in *Sejanus* when Terentius comments on the apparent emotional lability of the ‘eager multitude who never yet / Knew why to love, or hate’ (5.749-50). Although it might be politically unwise to listen to the desires of an unruly mob, Middleton contrasts Vortiger with Hengist’s appearance of a listener to make it clear that the British lord is purposefully portraying the populace as a mob in order to continue to legitimise his aspirations for the throne. He characterises them as emotionally labile, decrying their ‘mutable hearts’ (2.3.16). He further decries the ‘inconstant rabble’ by invoking their ‘fits’ as a further reason that they escape his control (4.1.17). Vortiger’s hatred of the populace signals his unsuitability to rule within the play, and these repeated evocations of the crowd and its excessive figurations demonstrate a frustration that strong speeches alone cannot easily sway their wills. When Lord Devonshire informs Vortiger that he cannot become king, he notes that ‘nothing will appease’ the population as ‘Good speeches

⁵³ Ian Munro, *The Figure of the Crowd*, p. 1.

are but cast away upon 'em' (1.1.23-24). Vortiger and his supporters fail to sway the population with their voices and so continue to assert unruliness as a quality particular to the commoners. As James I writes in advice to his son in *Basilikon Doron*, the ideal ruler and man would be able to both speak and be heard clearly and forcefully, as well as practising his judicious listening: the ideal ruler would, for example, be able to mediate interpersonal disputes for he has 'two eares, signifying patient hearing, and that of both the parties: but ye have but one tongue, for pronouncing a plaine sensible, & uniforme sentence'.⁵⁴ Vortiger's brutish arrogance in his single-minded ambition for the throne is at odds with James's vision of masculine authority as expressed through patient listening and clear speech. Instead, the British Lord is presented as a Machiavellian figure who uses 'policy' to 'choke [the] expectations' of the crowd (16-17). Vortiger's failures to apprehend the vocal agency of the citizens as well as his ambitions that remain shrouded in secrecy reveal him as unfit for the crown that he desires.

Through Constantius, the rightful but monastic heir to the throne, Middleton depicts the opposing extreme of male quietness to be equally unsuited to uphold the fantasy of the authoritative masculine voice so closely associated with kingship. Where Vortiger embodies an excessive ambition, Constantius prefers the spiritual over the political, seen in his description of a 'true kingdom' as one that is 'still and silent' (1.3.121). His father Constantine had previously said that Constantius was 'unfit for government and rule' and sent him to enjoy the 'peace' of a monastic life (1.1.97, 109). His refusal to use his voice as a political force leaves him open to the machinations of Vortiger. Having taken a vow of perpetual chastity (130), Constantius refuses to align his mode of speaking with that of a ruler by asking 'What necessity / Can be i'th' world, but prayer and repentence' (53-54). By emphasising his excessive refusal to lend his voice to political matters, Middleton shows Constantius to be equally unfit for rule. For Constantius, the peace and silence of the monastery is preferable to the disruptive noise of earthly politics. Constantius' refusal to speak as per the political model of masculine vocal agency ends up becoming a parody of masculine silence, which instead of implying 'presence and possession' creates a political vacuum within the

⁵⁴ James I, *Basilikon Dōron*, p. 151.

play.⁵⁵ On being asked to govern Britain, he bemoans that the duty will send him ‘groaning downwards into earth again’ (48). This naivety then allows Vortiger to act as his ‘faithful servant’ and mediate Constantius’s relationship with the people (124). Vortiger manoeuvres his position by taking on the ‘noise and pains, / Clamours of suitors, injuries and redresses’ that the King cannot, suggesting that Constantius cannot handle the ‘Millions of rising actions with the sun’ (129-31). Not only does Vortiger suggest that Constantius views any kind of political speech as unwanted noise, but his pun on sun/son further implies that the King’s lack of desire to perform ‘rising actions’ highlights both his sexual and patrilineal failures to live up to the model of an ideal, authoritative ruler.

Moreover, Vortiger manipulates the emotive and mobile force of noise associated with the demands of the people against Constantius. While angry that his ambitions to ‘sing under that burden’ of the crown have been stymied (174), Vortiger decides to torment Constantius by exploiting the monastic ruler’s dismissive attitude toward the speech of the citizens. Vortiger strives to ‘make quietness / As dear and precious to him as night’s rest’ by redirecting several petitioners directly to the King rather than acting as his mediator (1.3.21-22). The three petitioners bear similarity to the bellowing multitude that Vortiger castigated at the beginning of the play, as seen by their similar possession of ‘throats wide enough’ (1.1.193). But these petitioners are represented on stage and act as embodied synecdoche of the popular unrest. Further, as these petitioners are metonymic representatives of the crowds they speak for, he can persuade them to some extent to ‘be loud and bold enough’ to Constantius (191), bringing those offstage shouts onto the stage as speech. Vortiger attempts to ensure that these petitioners still contain some of the lability that he associates with the multitude. The frenzy of their noise is emphasised as their unruly voices are likened to a ‘violent storm’ to be weathered (108), drawing again on meteorological metaphors to underscore the powerful disruptive qualities of their words. Vortiger unseriously claims to have ‘proved them with such words, but all were fruitless; / Their sturdy voices blew ’em into clouds’ (137-38), insisting that these petitioners would listen to his speech. By invoking the uncontrollability of weather and storms against which

⁵⁵ Luckyj, *A Moving Rhetoricke*, p. 45.

Vortiger's voice is drowned, Vortiger hopes to further emphasise the vocal absence that Constantius represents. Yet Constantius' refusals to answer the petitioners are successful. He denies their supplications, instead asking them to 'Make your request to heaven, not to me' (95). The lack of answers eventually drives the petitioners away, as the petitioners say that they 'may spend all our mouths like a company of hounds in the chase of a royal deer', an impossibility as royal deer could not be hunted (1.3.114-15). Figuring the petitioners as the onstage equivalent of the shouting crowd's political voice, Middleton shows that Vortiger can recognise the agency that their voices can exercise in that he is willing to manipulate their noisy disruptiveness against Constantius. The excessive desires for peace and silence embodied by Constantius are figured as a kind of lack through the absence of a political will or forceful speech. As the two men both characterise the voices of the citizens as noise, they disclose the capacity to be both judicious speaker and listener as one of the ways that masculine authority could be constituted.

The association between the voice and political or sexual ambitions is made explicit in *Hengist* through a series of doublings and relationships between the play's men and women. Compared to the more playful subversions at work in the two previous plays in this chapter, *Hengist's* women are depicted through an altogether more conventional 'cultural equation of chastity and obedience with silence, and eloquence or action with promiscuity'.⁵⁶ This is seen most explicitly in the comparisons of Vortiger's wife, the chaste and allegorically named Castiza, and his mistress, the Saxon princess and daughter of Hengist, Roxena, who is repeatedly figured as a 'whore impost'rous' by the men (2.4.239). She follows her father to Britain and plots to become Vortiger's wife and queen, while maintaining her affair with the Saxon captain Hersus. During the Saxon's first meeting with Vortiger, Hersus feigns a fit of 'epilepsy' and swoons while she claims to heal him with the touch of a 'pure virgin' (222, 225). While Hersus stays on the ground, the two converse in asides for twenty lines about their plots and Roxena's 'cracked virginity' (235). Middleton shows Roxena's skilful dissembling and explicitly associates it with her promiscuity. Her words themselves take on poisonous mobility. She notes privately to Hersus how

⁵⁶ Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England: Unbridled Speech* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 3.

‘A strong-diseased conceit may tell strange tales’ (3.1.59), and she is shown actually ‘poison[ing]’ Vortimer in a dumb show (4.3.4). Tanya Pollard explores how the ‘shared semiotic unreliability of language and poison makes poison an apt figure for the capacity of language to assume material powers, to act upon the body’.⁵⁷ Roxena refuses a model of femininity that equates chastity and silence with her poison-like words and ambition. Middleton invokes poison with this specific type of duplicitous femininity in order to set up her speech as repeatedly unruly and untruthful.

While Roxena’s words take on the secretive and infectious qualities of poison, Castiza is instead characterised by her vows of chastity and the attempts of men to make her break these vows. If Roxena plays the conventional figure of female promiscuity, then Castiza lives up to her allegorical name as surmised by Aurelius at the play’s conclusion, who praises her ‘modesty and to the firmness of / Truth’s plantation in this land forever’ (5.2.227-28). Castiza is initially betrothed to Vortiger who then forces her to become the wife of the legitimate king Constantius whereupon she is inspired by his abstinence to take a similar vow of chastity and seclude herself in a ‘monastery’ (2.1.22). Following Constantius’s assassination, Castiza is forcibly removed from the monastery to marry Vortiger as Queen. Playing out in dumb show, Middleton’s elaborate stage directions make clear that this marriage is coerced. Castiza ‘*seems to be brought in unwillingly*’ and agrees to marry him under ‘*constrained consent*’ (2.2.0 SD). The repeated attempts to force her consent here and elsewhere in the play highlight that the agency of male speech is established by the denigration of women’s. Like Roxena, Castiza is tested on her chastity. But unlike Roxena’s performance of the healing touch, Castiza’s tests are always done verbally. When she presents herself to Constantius he asks if she is a ‘virgin’ to which she replies that she is ‘never yet, my lord, / Known to the will of man’ (1.3.160-61). Her virginity is questioned again publicly at a banquet by Vortiger after she has been raped by him, as he continues to elicit an admission that she has broken her vow of chastity. Vortiger baits her by praising her ‘over-holy fearful chastity, / That sins in nothing but in too much niceness’ (4.2.117-18) to force her into confessing that her chastity and vows have been ‘constrained’ by his assault (153). Her confession is swiftly followed by

⁵⁷ Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 135.

Roxena's false 'oath' that she is a virgin (212). The issue of Castiza's consent is especially prominent as Middleton's language makes evident that her marriage is first enforced before her body and vows of chastity are assaulted. By framing Castiza's vulnerability to the violence of men through acts of forced speech, Middleton demonstrates that her power to withhold or grant consent is continually negated by the men around her.

The extent to which these male voices can articulate or cause harm is staged and explored in Middleton's treatment of Castiza's rape. Plotting to divorce Castiza and marry Roxena, Vortiger with the assistance of Hersus arranges to 'make a rape of honour without words' in disguise to accuse her of infidelity and breaking her vows (3.1.172). Her cries of 'treason' are interpreted as mere 'noise and clamour' by the men, echoing the previous descriptions of the unruly crowds and political petitioners that have obstructed Vortiger's political ambitions (3.2.26-27). The staging of Vortiger and Hersus further registers the extent to which the men exercise their vocal authority as they constrain Castiza's agency. The blindfolded Castiza is carried offstage where the assault is performed by the silent Vortiger, but the abduction and dialogue that precedes the rape is spoken by Hersus. This act of grotesque ventriloquism disguises Vortiger's involvement in the assault while enabling the two men to continue to try and elicit Castiza's verbal consent. Hersus attempts to convince Castiza of her guilt as her vows of chastity show that she holds 'Contempt of man' (34). While Vortiger performs a physical rape, Middleton stages Hersus as first performing a verbal one as he repeatedly attempts to force her 'consent' (72, 95). Hersus's aural assault against Castiza's chastity evokes the vulnerability of the ear that Richard Brathwaite describes as being 'open to receive' words in 'a kinde of enforced delight'.⁵⁸ This vulnerability of the ear is horrifyingly realised when Hersus reveals that the abduction is a means to rape her—'To strip my words as naked as my purpose, / I must and will enjoy you' (53-54)—whereupon Castiza immediately faints. When she revives, Hersus repeatedly attempts to elicit her 'consent' to the forthcoming rape (77, 95). Middleton's play addresses the difficulty of representing harm in the case of marital rape, even though this concept could not be legally articulated at the point of the play's writing. When

⁵⁸ Richard Brathwaite, *Essaies Vpon the Fiue Senses* (London: E. G[riffin] for Richard Whittaker, 1620), p. 6.

Castiza is taken offstage by Vortiger, Hersus appears to describe further some of the action out of sight of the playhouse audience. He describes her ‘anguish’ and laughs at her being ‘So mocked into false terror!’ that she does not know that it is her husband assaulting her (102). By describing the marriage itself as enforced and constrained, Middleton also enacts the violation of Castiza’s agency and voice. This is further emphasised when Middleton stages Vortiger’s public humiliation of Castiza at a banquet in Hengist’s castle. With a series of public praises of her chastity, he forces her to reveal that she cannot swear on her chastity. Vortiger suggests the fantasy of feminine chastity ‘blows truth into fruitfulness’ while false women speak ‘curses / That with their barren breaths blast perjury’ (4.2.123-24). By drawing on this breathy imagery, Vortiger frames women’s speech as especially fragile and changeable to suggest that Castiza’s vows are but airy nothings. In showing these attempts to elicit certain kinds of speech and consent from Castiza and justify Vortiger’s rape, Middleton shows how undermining certain speech acts as noise typically empowers certain gendered subjects while disempowering others, most commonly authorising men at the expense of women.

Middleton ends the play by considering how words themselves can evoke the violent forces of power and the fragility with which that power can be upheld or upturned. Following Vortiger’s assault of Castiza, the play shows his increasing refusals or inability to listen or properly interpret the political speech surrounding him. Take, for example, his aural confusion at the Saxon betrayal of the British lords at Stonehenge. Hengist tells the Saxons to draw out their knives by crying out ‘*Nemp your sexes*’, an untranslated and mangled fragment of Old English meaning roughly ‘take your daggers’ (4.4.50).⁵⁹ The surprise of this betrayal, as Hengist threatens Vortiger, ‘will hold you prisoner /As fast as death holds your best proper in silence’ (57-58). Vortiger’s silent astonishment is redoubled by the strangeness of Middleton’s choice to have the Saxons announce their betrayal in Old English. This phrase signals the ‘foreignness’ of the Saxons, but, as Lucy Munro has argued, it also functions as a ‘moment of aural dissonance, what a playhouse audience hears is the ancestor of its

⁵⁹ I borrow this translation from Lucy Munro, “‘Nemp Your Sexes!’: Anachronistic Aesthetics in *Hengist, King of Kent* and the Jacobean “Anglo-Saxon” Play’, *Modern Philology*, 111.4 (2014), 734–61 (p. 734).

own language'.⁶⁰ Vortiger and the playhouse audience are confronted with a language to which they have little to no access. By threatening Vortiger with enforced silence, Hengist's words threaten to undo Vortiger's vocal agency. The British Lords cries of 'Treason, treason!' (49) when they are ambushed explicitly mirror Castiza's own cries of treason (3.2.27), while Vortiger pleads with Hengist to 'Take me not basely when all sense and strength / Lies bound up in amazement at this treachery' (4.4.53-54). In evoking the vulnerability of the body to words, Vortiger is confronted with the contingent power of vocal agency. He is out-dissembled by Hengist who embodies a powerful fantasy of forceful speech as Hengist speaks with 'Such thunder from [his] voice' (66). Vortiger sees this act as retribution for his violent actions with the imagined tragic chorus of the victims of his violence re-emerging at this moment:

Methinks the murder of Constantius
Speaks to me in the voice on't, and the wrongs
Of our late Queen slipped both into one organ. (115-117)

After the Saxon betrayal and the assault of his castle by Aurelius and Uther, Vortiger makes one desperate final appeal to the common people he has dismissed as noise throughout the play: 'I speak to those alone / Whose force makes yours [Aurelius's] a power' (53-54). After hearing their rebuttal concerning his marriage to Roxena and betrayal of Castiza Vortiger completely loses control of his vocal authority. Finding out that he has been cuckolded by his Captain Hersus, Vortiger echoes the Tyrant of *The Bloody Banquet* as he cries that this news 'Burst[s] me open; / Your violence is whirlwinds' (98-99). Further, his reaction to the aural assault against him is that it 'Deafen[s] me, / Thou most imperious noise that starts the world!' before the two stab each other to death (101-02). The violent descriptions of speech against Vortiger in this final scene echo his disgust at the noise of the popular unrest against him in the opening scene. In wishing to isolate his ears from the unwanted noise, Vortiger undergoes a crisis of realising that his personal political ambitions have become undone through the actions and speeches of other men who can similarly exploit their vocal powers. Vortiger's ambitions to enforce patriarchal control over the bodies and

⁶⁰ Julia Briggs, 'Middleton's Forgotten Tragedy *Hengist, King of Kent*', *RES*, 41.164 (1990), 479-95 (p. 489); Munro, "'Nemp Your Sexes!': Anachronistic Aesthetics in *Hengist, King of Kent*", p. 748.

voices of others is turned upon him, as speech itself gains a violent quality. Following his own violent and violating deployments of words through *Hengist*, and similarly to his opening railing against the mob, Vortiger is left futilely raging against other voices that he cannot fully control.

Throughout *Hengist*, Middleton translates the gendered political crisis of what makes a man a good ruler into a crisis of speech. The vocal agency of the people is denigrated as noise by the usurper Vortiger and the zealous Constantius, revealing their unsuitability to rule and speak authoritatively. However, Middleton's play is also interested in staging the violence of the male voice as it silences or violates other persons. Castiza's rape plays a central part in this consideration as its evocation of the voice as destructive reveals the inequalities at the heart of the fantasy of the forceful male voice. By considering the unruliness of speech and its frequent tension with the agency of silence, Middleton questions the authority that relies on the articulation of masculinity through speech and to what extent that authority is reliant on the suppression of alternative forms of vocal agency.

Conclusion

The three plays discussed in this chapter stage male voices in a variety of leaky, unruly, and excessive positions that undermine rather than secure fantasies of masculine agency. While the reciprocity of speech requires men to function as both speakers and listeners, Middleton's interest in the voice emerges in his representations of the precarious male body whose speech and desires are both unruly. The plays I have considered stage the enmeshed and vulnerable quality of the male body to the world that it inhabits with attention to the interpenetrated nature of the voice and vocal agency. Further, the centring of the desires, ambitions, and subjectivity of individual men is expressed most clearly in their refusals to listen and or moderate their desires, leading to the violent tragedies that occur across these plays. Through the three plays, Middleton continually tropes male speech through sexualised images of unruly tongues and violent metaphors of bodily violation. By considering male voices in these terms, he underscores the sometimes literal and sometimes more metaphorical ways that speech and language are used by men to enforce power as well as constrain the agency of others. To think of male voices as interconnected and necessarily linking

bodies together in dialogue, however uneven that dialogue may be, is to reconsider how Middleton's men repeatedly and violently stage questions of whose voices are being heard and for whom they speak.

The combined issues of genre and gender in Middleton's tragedies are made explicit by focusing on the voice and its representations across these three plays. In *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Bloody Banquet*, Vindice and the Tyrant embody different kinds of parodic excess that lean into the tragic tone enabled by duplicitous and unrestrained speech. Vindice's notably slippery tongue enables the final confessions that wrap up the generic ending of the play, though its impulsive spilling continues to refuse to be read uniformly. With the Duke also loosening the unrestrained desires that become imbricated with unruly voices, *Revenger's* presents an absence of any stable vocal authority. Middleton develops these representations of impulsive modes of male speech by way of *The Bloody Banquet's* Tyrant, whose excessive hungers and jealousy erupt into blustery uncontrolled rages. The fragility and precarity of these voices that Middleton stages veer into parody, displaying what Nicholas Brooke calls the 'horrid laughter' of Jacobean tragedy as Middleton manipulates the conventional rhetoric of the genre.⁶¹ Yet this ironic playfulness is much less present in *Hengist, King of Kent*, where it is replaced by a more serious tone that mixes the tragedy with chronicle history. While the Saxon plot quickly descends into a more straightforward exploration of male lust, ambition and power, the interpenetration of genres continues to self-consciously explore the representations of excessive male speech. Vortiger's framing of the speech of the common people and Castiza as mere noise not only reveals his own lack of political guile but renders a portrait of self-serving masculinity that is either unable or unwilling to participate in a wider communal social body. This tonal shift develops from the two earlier plays by re-examining the violence that has underscored each of these men's claims to authority by way of their voices, and further disarticulating the fantasy of male authority from the messy, embodied reality of the undisciplined voice.

What is also apparent across the interrogation of male voices in all three of these plays is the role that women play in Middleton's tragedies. While the critical

⁶¹ Nicholas Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979).

adage still broadly views Middleton as locating ‘the tragic experience mainly in women’, this should be complicated by understanding that his fixation on female voices is tied into the ways that male characters and power structures violently decide who has a right to speak.⁶² By reading how the male voice is unruly across all three of these plays, this chapter has also necessarily explored male attempts to displace male disorder onto women. The Duke, the Tyrant and Vortiger violently enact their agency through murder, poison, forced cannibalism, rape, and public humiliation of women. The fantasies of male authority that Middleton considers are pursued at the expense of women. These tragedies repeatedly evoke the violation of women’s bodies and voices through representations of violence and violent male speech, which help to shore up the fantasy of solidified male authority. The fundamental inequalities at stake in who has a right to speak within these plays becomes more apparent as Middleton develops and takes more seriously the violence enacted against women’s voices through these three plays. Each of these plays contains scenes where women are vocally disempowered: Vindice speaks for and with Gloriana’s skull in the Duke’s poisoning, as well as attempts to persuade and pander his sister Castiza; the Tyrant gloats about the Queen’s excessive desires while forcing her to silently cannibalise Tymethes; Vortiger rapes Castiza offstage while Hersus revels in the assault in soliloquy. Middleton takes these repeated instances of men claiming to have authority to speak for or over women to reveal the opposite—that his male characters, with their unruly and excessive desires undergirding their unrestrained vocality, are loose, leaky, and violently undisciplined subjects.

By reading the treatment of the masculine voice across these three plays, this chapter has revealed the disjunctures at work in the representations of the male voice in Middleton’s writing. Middleton not only unpicks the ways that unruly men deflect and displace their own unruliness onto women by way of their voices but also interrogates the verbal relations of power that enable these displacements through the excessive violations and violence of the body. The ways that voices evoke the vulnerability of bodies, as both speakers and listeners, also suggest how speech can encroach onto the subjectivity of others. As noted in previous chapters, Middletonian

⁶² T. McAlindon, *English Renaissance Tragedy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), p. 193.

masculinities are defined by their tendencies towards compromise, interruption, and contingency. This chapter's discussion of the voice has suggested ways in which this multiplicity often emerges at the expense of others' bodies. The interpersonal construction of masculinity is not undertaken equally but often perpetuates or continues already existing social inequalities. Rather than solidifying the position of the speaker, my exploration of Middleton's male speech across these plays has shown that masculine voices tend to gesture towards disorienting and violating experiences of selfhood, experiences which also constitute that masculinity as labile and provisional.

Conclusion

In 1986, Howard Barker's 'collaboration' with Thomas Middleton on a new text of *Women Beware Women* was performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London. Barker saw his revisions as a challenge to the sexual and gender politics of Middleton's play: 'Middleton knew the body was the source of politics. He did not know it was also the source of hope'.¹ Barker further suggests that his new text will 'redeem [Middleton's] lost souls [...] his rotted kindness', continuing the vein of viewing Middleton as a pessimistic Calvinist whose sexual politics need to be recovered, an attitude I gestured towards in my introduction.² Barker's text does develop on Middleton's sardonic outlook on the commodification of bodies and the uneven hierarchies of gendered violence, even as it seeks to reshape this pessimism to Barker's interpretation of modern sensibilities. Although Barker purports to expand or revise some of Middleton's attitudes surrounding gender much of this gendered and bodily plurality is, as this thesis has argued, already present in Middleton's canon. As Barker's Livia warns Bianca, 'we have the same sex but are not equally women. It's a false sisterhood you seek in me'.³ Despite Barker's claims, Middleton clearly also saw the body as 'the source of hope' as well as politics. Middleton's version of 'hope', however, is not necessarily a revolutionary force, but an opportunity to refashion, revise, and reform the self through the intersubjective fact of being embodied, even if that refashioning is limited by a variety of external factors. Moreover, Middleton's men do not experience masculinity in the same way and continually negotiate these unequal masculine relationships throughout his canon; or, to paraphrase Barker, they have the same gender but are not equally men. And, as this thesis has demonstrated, to redeem Middleton for modern sensibilities occludes the ways that his canon invokes the body and its embeddedness in the world around it as the place where subjectivity emerges.

¹ Howard Barker, 'Barker on Middleton', program for *Women Beware Women* at Glendon College, Toronto, Canada, 1991, p. ii < <http://hdl.handle.net/10315/9960> > [accessed 5 June 2022]

² Barker, 'Barker on Middleton', p. ii. Barker also wrote a dialogue with a fictional Middleton on the occasion of the play's performance, which also suggests that Middleton's text and characters are in need of 'redemption' ('The Redemptive Power of Desire', *The Times*, 6 Feb 1986, Arts and Sports, p. 15).

³ Thomas Middleton and Howard Barker, *Women Beware Women* (London: Calder, 1986), p. 33.

This thesis has considered the ways in which Middleton's masculinities are defined by contradictions, compromises, and collaborations between the body and the world. By exploring the provisional, and often ironic, ways that masculinities are constituted across Middleton's work, I have demonstrated how he repeatedly returns to the interrelatedness of embodied gendered subjects. In doing so, I have resisted a pull to consider masculinity as the possession of individual men, instead gesturing towards the various interactions between bodies where masculinity is brought into being, maintained, and contested. Further, I have sought to distinguish Middleton's tendency to represent masculinities as thoroughly relational. Attending to these varied embodiments of masculinity furthers an understanding of gender across the Middletonian canon, as well as highlighting the significance of Middleton to broader critical questions surrounding early modern subjectivity, embodiment, and masculinity. By engaging with the various ways that masculinities are constituted as a dynamic process, I also demonstrate Middleton's significance as a writer interested in overlaps, in-betweens, and relational selves in the context of his collaborators and contemporaries in early modern literature and culture.

Rather than adhering to definitions of masculinity that consider it a solid or stable construct, Middleton continually invokes bodily plurality and contingency to disrupt or complicate masculine selfhood. The three sections of this thesis ('Collaborations', 'Assembled Subjects', and 'Fantasies of Authority') have explored Middleton's intersubjective masculinities by attending to the proliferation of relations and interactions that shape gender in his work. By considering discourses and practices of collaboration, I continue the work of contemporary scholarship in challenging the primacy of the individual, not only in terms of thinking about early modern writers but of early modern gendered subjectivity more generally. Middleton's masculinities are also constituted through his uneven and conditional relationships with other writers. As my frequent invocation of Jonson and many other contemporaries has gestured towards, Middleton engaged with, responded to, and developed his own writing as enmeshed within a larger network of early modern writers. In light of the discussions of this thesis, Langbaine's description of Middleton as the '*Ivy*' who entangles and advances himself through his parasitic relationships with others, as noted in Chapter One, becomes highly significant. Rather than seeking to defend Middleton's reputation

or debate the accuracy of Langbaine's assertion, I would instead expand these ivy-like qualities of encroaching, twisting, and clinging that are ascribed to Middleton to include the masculinities which recur across his texts. Throughout Middleton's work, characters are repeatedly shown to reproduce or perpetuate unequal relationships of power, even as they are drawn or conflated together, as they define their own identities.

The complications surrounding self-fashioning and individual agency that this intersubjective mode of becoming entails are directly addressed in Chapters Two and Three. By exploring how Middleton confronts the ways in which objects and clothing can transform the self, I emphasised the body's susceptibility to material culture and the volatility of the exterior. While it is certainly clear that Middleton engages with materiality to expand the terms by which masculinities are engendered beyond the individual male body, his writing tends to represent the unruliness of such constructions. In the case of his city comedies, characters like Fripp or Andrew Lethe attempt to refashion themselves new identities through sartorial means. Yet the objects that they hope to manipulate end up compromising their agencies, frequently through the memories that these objects themselves hold. Like Beatrice-Joanna's attempts to assert herself against the will of De Flores in *The Changeling*, these men are confronted with intersubjectivity that is unfixed and just as liable to effect unexpected changes in their own selves. Moll Cutpurse's self-consciously theatrical female masculinity does somewhat successfully exploit this changeability through her doubling of gendered signifiers, but her crossdressing also reveals her masculinity as a negotiation that is never entirely her own. If Middleton's collaborative writing career is positively enabled by the influence of the other writers he worked closely with, then his work repeatedly stages the dangers and anxieties of the interpenetrated fact of early modern embodiment. Middleton's insistence on presenting concerns about multiplicity through ironic turns, parody, and satire presents the desire to constitute intersubjective masculine selfhood as a contradiction in itself.

Yet Middleton's work is distinctly interested not in reconciling contradictions that shore up masculinities but in exploring how logical inconsistencies and ambiguities can be embodied simultaneously. As I have argued throughout this thesis, Middleton's masculinities are frequently troped as fragmented, piecemeal, and unbounded, and his reflections on and representations of collaboration repeat this

tendency. While his partnership with Dekker invoked images of fellowship and cooperative labour, such images also evoked the hierarchical structures of livery companies that suggest that these claims to fellowship entail unequal positions of power and skill between the partners as well. Following on from this, my discussion of Rowley and Middleton's work on *The Changeling* explored the noticeable edges and infidelities of the text and its characters, and how the play is interested in indistinction as not necessarily subsuming two distinct selves or parts. These contradictions also manifest across Middleton's wider work. My consideration of his 1613 texts placed his civic engagements alongside his more satirical drama in order to explore the ambiguities that emerge when they are read together. By investigating the conflicts that these texts present between rampant commercialism and nostalgic longing for community, Middleton suggests the futility of disentangling the two through the purposeful exclusion of Pompey Doodle from the final festivities at the end of *Wit at Several Weapons*. By noting the varied ways in which Middleton exploits discourses of collaboration and community in his representations of masculinities, I have argued that the malleability of his masculinities enables them to embrace the contradictions that in other writers' work might lead to their dissolution.

One significant facet of Middleton's work is that he represents male characters who succeed *because* they compromise their masculinity. While he does frequently trope masculinity as leaky, unruly, and frail, this thesis has revealed some of the ways in which Middleton is concerned with staging masculinities that embrace their failures to adhere to a coherent ideology of manhood. Whereas the Colonel and Captain Ager in *A Fair Quarrel* risk their bodies to maintain male imperatives of honour and reputation, *The Nice Valour's* Lepet emerges as a figure of success through his adopting of abjection. As Trish Thomas Henley notes, it is his 'willingness to lose' that encompasses Lepet's curious resistance to being completely downtrodden by a patriarchal ideology which valorises the individual man.⁴ By adopting masochism and submission as a survival strategy, Lepet achieves financial and social success. The ridicule the play and the characters aim at him is balanced out by his knowledge and exploitation of this ridicule as part of his identity. Similarly, *Chaste Maid's* Allwit

⁴ Henley, 'Tragicomic Men', p. 279.

allows himself to be cuckolded to secure his place as the head of his household. While he compromises one model of masculinity based on sexuality, Allwit willingly embraces cuckoldry to define his masculinity through leisure and capital instead. Lepet and Allwit both figure as parodic men who despite, or rather because of, the ridicule at their expense can transform their subjection to construct their compromised masculinities. The character of Ansaldo is slightly more complex in this regard. Though his successful embodiment of youthful masculinity is maintained throughout the play, the surprise reveal at *The Widow's* conclusion unsettles the other forms of masculinity that have been accepted as natural in the play. Ansaldo's status as a joke character, whose gender reveal serves to shock both the audience and other characters, is upended by Middleton's use of the reveal which in turn undoes Violetta and Philippa's cruel joke against Francisco. The contingency of masculinity is revealed as *The Widow* shows all gender to be potentially unfixed. Ansaldo's mercurial masculinity that can be cast on and off as needed also suggests the lability of gender identity more generally, which this thesis has developed throughout its various chapters. Together these masculine characters expose the contradictions of manly imperatives through their ironic exploitation of the intersubjective relations that they are embedded within.

Middleton's masculinities are also shown to engage in a reciprocal relation with femininity, although this is usually done to the detriment of his female characters. As Kaethler has noted, 'Although Middleton is keen to critique systems of patriarchal power and playfully dismantle their dominant and adroit representations, he frequently does so at the expense of women whom he renders targets of satire or misogyny'.⁵ The multiplicity of Middleton's masculine characters is undergirded by the misogyny and sexual violence that aims at women for expressing this same plurality. While Moll might be able to assemble herself as a masculine character, it is repeatedly stressed that she is an exception to the general rule. The pregnant Page of *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, for example, struggles to present as a boy, and Middleton's play delights in making her a target for ridicule and harassment. In the case of the Page, the play repeatedly insists on the inescapability of the female body through the degrading

⁵ Kaethler, *Plural Politics*, p. 33.

exercises and sexualised puns directed towards her. Sexual violence against women is also common in Middleton's tragedies and tragicomedies. *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Bloody Banquet* do maintain a slightly ironic edge in their treatment of women. Vindice's identification with women runs alongside his misogynistic castigations against female sexuality, while Middleton and Dekker's *Queen* is shown to be the only character whose excessive desires are not tied up with the unruly voice, even if she is punished by the Tyrant for her perceived transgressions. On the other hand, *The Changeling* and *Hengist, King of Kent* are more ambiguous. Beatrice-Joanna's agency and sense of self are compromised and conflated with De Flores', and, as I have argued, it is his will that encroaches onto and overcomes her identity. In the case of *Hengist*, Middleton presents two extreme female tropes of the chaste, silent woman and the duplicitous 'whore' (2.4.239) in Castiza and Roxena. Rather than challenging the patriarchal ideology that might set up this dichotomy in the first instance, Middleton is more interested in showing how unruly masculine tyranny leads to violence, and how violence sustains unruly masculine tyranny. The rape of Castiza reveals the male relations of power that cause consent to be coerced and for certain voices to be denigrated. While Barker's idea of redemption that started this conclusion might be tempting as a way to erase the misogyny and sexual violence that often emerges out of Middleton's gender politics, the violence is inseparable from the questioning of individual male sovereignty that pervades Middleton's work. The sexual violence against women that Middleton represents in his plays suggests one of the ways in which the plural masculinity that this thesis has described exploits and perpetuates already existing violations, inequalities and oppression.

Of interest to Middleton, as I have sought to address in this thesis, is how masculinities are precariously constructed between the body and the world. While my thesis has largely focused on his drama, partly owing to the ways that the theatre stages bodies interacting, I have argued that Middleton studies can benefit by attending to the failures, slippages, and exchanges that characterise Middletonian men across his plays, pamphlets, poetry, and civic pageantry. The range of texts discussed in this thesis also gestures toward Middleton's refusal of singular meanings, models and methods. His collaborations demonstrate a keen awareness of the intersubjective and intertextual constitution of early modern masculinity and establish a reciprocal relationship of

influence between Middleton and his collaborators and contemporaries. My consideration of Middleton's work has emphasised the uneven reciprocity between bodies and the world. The contingent and provisional tendencies of masculinities across Middleton's texts suggest how gender inheres and reiterates itself in early modern literature and culture. Middleton's work is significant in this regard, as he repeatedly acknowledges the imbalances between bodies that such interpenetrated selfhoods engender and then pushes those contradictions to their extremes through irony, parody and satire. The relational masculinities that Middleton continually returns to refuse a singular point of reference for gendered subjectivity; rather, his masculinities are plural things that arise through the contacts and connections that comprise the experience of living in a body, along with the attendant unpredictability and susceptibility to the world that surrounds them. It is this attitude towards gender and embodied selfhood as compromised and steeped in ironic multiplicity in his work that continues to draw readers, audiences, and scholars to Middleton. By taking seriously what elsewhere might be ridiculous or pushing norms and conventions to their grotesque extreme, Middleton seems far from what Gary Taylor tries to assert is 'Our Other Shakespeare', especially in light of the cultural associations between Shakespeare and individualism. Although the *Collected Works* helped to establish the canonicity of Middleton, there is still much work to be done in defining the contours of his distinctive style and canon. What this thesis proposes is that part of the answer to what may make Thomas Middleton 'Our Only Middleton' is recognising the tensions and differences forming out of his collaborative and contradictory canon, and eschewing the fantasy of unity to look two ways at once.

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