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THOMAS MIDDLETON IN PERFORMANCE 1960-2013:
A HISTORY OF RECEPTION

By

KATE LECHLER

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Kate Lechler defended this dissertation on March 28, 2014.

The members of the supervisory committee were:

Celia R. Daileader

Professor Directing or Co-Directing Dissertation

Mary Karen Dahl

University Representative

Gary Taylor

Committee Member

Bruce Bohrer

Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

For my parents, Jon and Ruth Lechler

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	vi
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. SEX TRAGEDIES AND THE SUMMER OF LOVE	12
3. ‘QUESTION AUTHORITY’: MIDDLETON IN THE ‘80S AND EARLY ‘90S.....	44
4. ‘TASTE THE WELCOME OF THE CITY’: MIDDLETON’S COMEDIES AND ORIGINAL PRACTICES	71
5. MIDDLETON! THE MUSICAL: POSTMODERN ADAPTATIONS	107
6. ‘TIL MY NEXT RETURN’: SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT MIDDLETON.....	139
APPENDICES	147
A. LISTS	147
B. SELECTED PRODUCTIONS.....	156
REFERENCES	176
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	194

ABSTRACT

This is a history of reception of Thomas Middleton. Literary critics and theater directors in the US and the UK have responded to a growing interest in Middleton by publishing and producing more Middleton-related work in the past 50 years. However, there is as yet no comprehensive stage history of his plays that is informed by the recent scholarship. My project, using archival production records such as video, photography, design sketches, prompt books, playbills, and reviews, fills this significant gap in current Middleton scholarship. I argue that, during the five decades that comprise Middleton's modern revival, theater companies respond to Middleton's texts in ways that strongly correspond with both social and artistic movements of their cultural moment. In the sixties and seventies, productions of Middleton's plays focused strongly on the female sexuality displayed in *The Changeling*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *Women Beware Women*. In the eighties, directors utilized productions of these plays and *The Roaring Girl* to subvert other structures of authority beyond gender, such as class and race. In the last twenty years, the interest in recreating early modern staging has resulted in several Middleton Original Practices productions; I examine several OP productions of *A Mad World*, *My Masters*, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, *The Honest Whore*, and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Finally, more recently, directors and playwrights have used Middleton's plays as springboards for adaptations and original works of their own, resulting in a musical adaptation of *The Roaring Girl* and a jazz opera based on *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“It is impossible to criticize this play by any laws of literature as they exist now; as it is also absurd to judge it by the taste of the present age.”—Anthony Trollope, commenting on The Widow, by Thomas Middleton

“How is ’t possible to suffice so many ears, so many eyes? . . . How is ’t possible to please opinion tossed on such wild seas?”—Thomas Middleton,

No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s

For many viewers and voters during the 2012 United States Presidential election, the political disagreements about unemployment, tax reform, universal health care, and abortion came down to issues of how the government deals with inequity between groups of people. Marginalized groups like the poor, racial minorities, gays, and women struggle for access to the same governmental benefits afforded straight, white, middle-class men, and this struggle was made manifest in electoral rhetoric. Entire groups of people were used as props to further political careers. We saw these issues being debated in such a way that political discourse yielded to political theater. As ridiculous as the spectacle became, it was nothing new; the plays of Thomas Middleton staged similar issues of social inequity for public consumption almost four centuries ago.

Today, after a hiatus of three hundred years, Middleton’s plays again enjoy a stage presence—and a growing stage history. While Marilyn Roberts demonstrates that Middleton’s plays were staged by amateur and university theater companies as early as the 1920’s, beginning in the late 1950’s, professional productions of Middleton’s most famous tragedies—*Women*

Beware Women, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *The Changeling*—took the stage to great acclaim. Now, more than fifty years later, a dozen of his plays have been staged by professional companies, totaling over 125 productions in the US and the UK. In April 2014, the Royal Shakespeare Company, one of the most prestigious English language theaters in the world, will open its second production of *The Roaring Girl*—just under a year after staging another Middleton comedy, *A Mad World, My Masters*. It's safe to say that, outside of his own lifetime, Middleton has never gotten more attention.

The big question is, why Middleton? And why now?

Middleton's Modern Relevance

To the browser on Amazon, Middleton may seem strictly Jacobean, in the worst sense. His plays contain all the hallmarks of that age: unrealistic characters, stilted language, unfamiliar locales, and frankly ridiculous plot devices. Give one of his plays a quick scan and you might dismiss him, as Anthony Trollope and many other critics have, as a second-tier Jacobean playwright. But observing his plays in performance, particularly in recent productions, offers other perspectives on Middleton's current cultural value and relevance. He seems to straddle the line between early modern and modern. In 1928, T.S. Eliot remarked upon Middleton's cultural relevance, saying that, when we read *The Changeling*, we “discover that we are looking on at a dispassionate exposure of fundamental passions of any time and any place” (141). The same remains true today. In 1998, a reviewer for the *Daily Telegraph* called *The Honest Whore* a “marvelously dark, surprisingly modern work about sexual betrayal and emotional violence.”

Because of the ease with which today's audiences can understand Middleton, added to the strikingly modern attitude his plays take toward sex, gender, urbanity, and the middle class, the plays make for exciting contemporary productions. In a move that seems familiar, given our

current concern for political correctness, Middleton often takes the point of view of the disenfranchised. He writes about the poor and the rising early modern middle-class as often as he writes about the dukes, counts, dauphins, and kings that appear so often in other early modern plays. Middleton's comedies, too, overflow with incisive satire of the rich and royal; they abound with trickster figures and carnivalesque characters that turn established social mores on their heads. Middleton also exhibits a more egalitarian, less misogynistic attitude toward women than many of his contemporaries. Readers familiar with early modern playwrights such as Shakespeare, Jonson, Webster, or Marlowe are often surprised by the wit and guts of the female characters—many not from the upper class, but prostitutes, shop-keepers' daughters, and roaring girls—in Middleton's plays¹.

Middleton's language, too, feels current to today's audiences. In performance, his dialogue takes on a freshness and casualness very different from the formal poetry we have come to associate with the English Renaissance. Part of this is his use of contractions and shorter lines, which sound more realistic to our ears². Attend a performance of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and hear audiences laugh in surprise and delight at lines like, "Old dad dead?" and "Whose head's that, then?" delivered as offhandedly as any line from a Neil Simon play. But it's not only Middleton's dialogue that makes his plays seem modern. He writes with the moral ambiguity that we have come to expect from art. In 1961, reviewing Tony Richardson's production of *The Changeling*, W.A. Darlington noted a correspondence "between the disillusioned people of the Restoration and our disillusioned selves." Middleton's characters, far from being pure of heart,

¹ "**roaring girl** *n.* the female counterpart of a roaring boy; a noisy, bawdy, or riotous woman or girl, esp. one who takes on a masculine role" (from the *Oxford English Dictionary*).

² For more about Middleton's stylistics, specifically the word choices he routinely uses that set him apart from other writers, see Macdonald P. Jackson's essay "Early Modern Authorship: Canons and Chronologies" in *Thomas Middleton: the Companion*, esp. 87-92; and Jonathan R. Hope's essay "Middletonian Stylistics" in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*.

do not always deserve their happy endings; they are not strictly bad or good, but an ambiguous mixture of the two. Like the modern filmmaker Quentin Tarantino, to whom he has often been compared, Middleton writes quirky, larger-than-life characters and big, campy violence to unsettle us. Instead of providing easy answers, his plays provoke difficult questions, not least about our own complicity as we enjoy his scenes of bloodshed and debauchery.

These characteristics of Middleton's plays, attractive to modern audiences, are exactly what made them so repellent to audiences and readers during Trollope's day. Trollope's quote, which I use as my epigraph, has become obsolete; today's tastes and literary laws are exactly the kinds of values by which to judge Middleton's works (qtd in Steen 124). Because of these factors, Middleton resonates better with our culture today than he did a century ago. Current directors such as Melly Still and Brigid Larmour highlight Middleton's interest in strong female characters. Others, like Di Trevis and Robert Woodruff are drawn to the amoral attitude toward sex and violence in his tragedies. Still others, like Barry Kyle and playwright Howard Barker, appreciate the undercurrent of class conflict running through his plays. These directors, producers, and playwrights draw explicit connections, both onstage and in the theatrical paratext of marketing materials, between Middleton's themes and current events.

This renewed theatrical interest has fed, and is fed by, a simultaneously growing critical interest. Today, Middleton studies represent a vibrant and growing section in the field of early modern drama. This rise has only increased with *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton* and *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, which were announced in 1994 and published by Oxford in 2007. This seminal pairing, the first of its kind produced on Middleton, drew on the combined knowledge of over sixty scholars from a variety of disciplines. It has made it easier than ever to study, teach, and produce his plays,

creating a sort of Middletonian second-wave. As part of this second-wave, literary critics, stage historians, and performance scholars are paying greater attention to modern-day productions of Middleton³.

Methodology

Although Middleton's stock is booming both on the page and on the stage, there has been, until now, no book solely dedicated to examining Middleton on the modern stage. Lucy Munro notes that, for most of Shakespeare's contemporaries, "there is little or no performance tradition." She describes most modern-day revivals of works by these playwrights as "start[ing] from zero, often eliding or simply ignoring any previous productions" (35). My aim is to provide such a production history for Middleton's works in the twentieth and twenty-first century. I examined records (reviews, playbills, photos, director's notes, actor/director interviews, and video records) of professional productions of Middleton's plays from 1960-2013. In this manuscript, I excluded productions for which I could not access at least two different sources. Using this data, I present a more complete vision of how Middleton's plays are being produced, adapted, and received by modern theaters and audiences.

At the same time, I read these productions not only as interpretations of Middleton's texts, but also as texts in their own right, with their own historical context. While examining the data I cover, I noticed patterns of emphasis that roughly corresponded with important cultural or theatrical trends. I have attempted to categorize the productions by these trends, recognizing that sometimes the dates I cover in different chapters may overlap. By historicizing these

³ For some scholarly discussions of Middleton on the modern stage, see Michelle O'Callaghan, *Thomas Middleton, Renaissance Dramatist*; Annaliese Connolly, "In the Repertoire: *Women Beware Women* on Stage,"; Innes, Paul, "Out of the Repertoire: *Women Beware Women* and Stage History"; Diana E. Henderson, "Afterlives: Stages and Beyond,"; *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, eds. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley; and *Performing Early Modern Drama Today*, eds. Pascale Aebischer and Kathryn Prince.

productions, I provide a picture of Middleton's place in twentieth- and twenty-first-century society, underscoring his continued artistic and cultural significance.

Detailed descriptions of the ways in which directors and actors have tackled certain aspects of these plays will serve as a helpful handbook for theater professionals with questions about how to produce Middleton's works. For instance, how have directors staged the various masques in these plays? How have actors represented De Flores' otherness/deformity on stage? How have various productions updated the plays' use of music and dance? However, the relevance of this project is not limited to the theater community. Literature scholars should welcome a study that examines these texts in their original *métier*—the stage. Using this study, teachers of Middleton's texts in either literature or drama classrooms will be able to include discussions of the way these scripts actually translate on stage. Furthermore, as I demonstrate in Chapter Two, common theatrical interpretations become, over time, accepted literary interpretations. A deeper familiarity with the ways in which his plays have been understood by directors and actors (and received by audiences) may open literature scholars' eyes to oft-repeated misunderstandings while at the same time inspiring new interpretations.

There are gaps in my production history—both intentional and unintentional. For instance, I do not attempt to cover the handful of plays where the *Oxford Middleton* claims Middleton has collaborated with Shakespeare. As “Shakespeare” plays, productions of these works have received plenty of attention already. And, except for in rare cases, theater companies do not acknowledge collaboration with Middleton in their marketing materials for works that are primarily known as written by Shakespeare⁴. My conclusion from this is that these theater

⁴ One exception is the recent Hoosier Bard production of *Measure for Measure*, which performed the original 1604 Shakespeare version back-to-back with the later 1621 adaptation of the play by Middleton.

companies do not reference Middleton studies much in the dramaturgy or staging, either. Even at Shakespeare's Globe, the premier British theater that prides itself on rigorous research to historicize the plays, Middleton's influence on Shakespeare's works is not a subject of interest⁵.

I also do not attempt to document the large body of productions that have occurred at the university level, although Middleton began to be played on university stages long before he made it to the professional stages. University theaters often serve as testing grounds for plays that have not yet made it to professional venues, because they have less to lose than well-established theaters invested in canon and authority. However, successful university productions of underperformed plays may provide the impetus for a later, professional, revival, as with Brigid Larmour's production of *The Roaring Girl* in 1980 (see Chapter Three). After a few decades of familiarity with these plays on university campuses, we begin to see Middleton played more often in other, extremely authoritative spaces⁶.

Finally, the scope of my project was limited by availability. Many seminal productions of Middleton plays were produced by relatively small (or, in some cases, defunct) theater companies. Tracking down records for these productions was generally not very rewarding. For instance, I spent hours online trying to contact someone who could put me in touch with Diane West, who directed the only modern day production of *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* of which I am aware. When I finally tracked her down (by creating an account on the social media network,

⁵ During the run of the Globe's 2010 *Macbeth*, Brent Griffin was on staff as a dramaturgy intern. He argued for Middleton's influence on the play but ultimately his ideas were passed over for other thematic concerns that interested the director and actors more. Middleton's efforts are not mentioned in the program for that production.

⁶ For a discussion of the university theater role in reviving early modern dramatists, see Jeremy Lopez's essay "The seeds of time: student theatre and the drama of Shakespeare's contemporaries," included in *Performing Early Modern Drama Today*, eds. Pascale Aebischer and Kathryn Prince.

LinkedIn) and interviewed her, I was disappointed at how few records existed of this production. However, even records at major theater companies can be erased or corrupted. When I visited the American Shakespeare Center archives in Staunton, VA, I was heartbroken to learn that the only DVD recording of their production of *The Witch* was unwatchable. Interviews with actors were little help in this regard, as five years had passed and they did not remember very much about the show. In these cases and others, what information I could glean about the production will be found in Appendix B, where I provide short descriptions of productions that I find noteworthy. Instances like these demonstrate how daunting it can be to document theater history. At the same time, there is some poetic justice in the idea that the most detailed records of a theater production, itself mutable and transient, are themselves only partially complete. The truth of theater is in the experience.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two, “Sex Tragedies and the Summer of Love,” begins the exploration of contemporary productions with the 1960’s when Middleton experienced a comeback in London, starting with the Royal Court Theatre’s 1961 production of *The Changeling*. During this time, the plays most frequently produced were his darker, highly sexualized tragedies, such as *Women Beware Women*, *The Changeling*, and *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (usually attributed to Cyril Tourneur in this period). In this chapter I examine the portrayals, in these three plays, of sexually active women. Each plot shows women using their sexuality in order to rise above their limited social roles. To the normative Jacobean audience-goer, these actions would have been seen as reprehensible, another example of how Eve’s sin perpetuated itself in the lives of morally loose women. However, during the sexual revolution, theaters used Middleton’s frank, gritty attitude towards sex to respond to the changing gender and sexual politics of the time. In some cases,

directors and actors even “sexed-up” the female characters, resulting in new, highly controversial interpretations.

Chapter Three, ““Question Authority’: Middleton in the 80’s and 90’s,” traces a gradual shift in the next two decades of Middleton’s modern stage history. While maintaining an interest in women and sexuality, productions during these years began to challenge other systems of power, notably those based on class and race. For instance, Howard Barker’s 1986 adaptation of *Women Beware Women* gained attention from critics for using the play as a springboard to showcase Barker’s “deliberately provocative” socialist values, “in opposition to the new morality of Reagen (sic) and Thatcher” (Howard). In 1988, Richard Eyre took a different approach by claiming that *The Changeling* is about a failed challenge to strict social order. To highlight this theme, he transposed the action to a 19th century Spanish slave colony, and layered racial conflict onto the sexually charged relationship between the leads by casting black actors as De Flores and Diaphanta. Other productions in this period used a punk aesthetic to suggest a subversive attitude towards corrupt institutions. These productions, so invested in questioning authority, also challenged the author/ity of Middleton himself by drastically modernizing the messages of the plays.

In the fourth chapter, ““Taste the welcome of the city’: Middleton’s Comedies and Original Practices,” I discuss original practices (OP), a trend in contemporary classical theater that was popularized by both Shakespeare’s Globe in London and the Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, VA. OP productions attempt to recreate early modern stage practices in performance, specifically by using universal lighting, cast doubling, cross-gender casting, spare sets, and live music. At times, too, they attempt to rehabilitate plays by Shakespeare’s contemporaries by producing them (some for the first time in centuries) and bringing them to the attention of the

public⁷. This chapter focuses narrowly on five OP productions of Middleton's city comedies at both the Globe and the Blackfriars. These productions reach backwards towards an older, more authentic way of seeing these plays while at the same time mirroring the chaotic, heteroglossic modern city back to itself.

Chapter Five, "Middleton! The Musical: Postmodern Adaptations," examines adaptive strategies that theater companies have used when engaging with Middleton's texts. Beginning in the mid '90s and continuing to the present, these productions seem to explode with creativity as directors, producers, and even songwriters take Middleton in unexpected directions. Some directors, such as Jesse Berger of Red Bull Theater, create subtle adaptations by introducing other early modern voices, such as Bacon, Donne, or Webster, into Middleton's texts. Others use modern technology such as a revolving stage or intercut video segments to affect the narrative flow. One emerging adaptation strategy is the musical; I cover three different Middleton-based musicals in the last section of this chapter.

Finally, the concluding chapter, "'Till my next return': Some Conclusions about Middleton," examines the influence Middleton's recent productions have had on his fraught place in the canon. In it, I link the long history of literary criticism of Middleton to the recent performance criticism of his works on stage. Critical opinion of Middleton's plays has always seemed a bit schizophrenic⁸. Thomas Heywood considered him among the writers of quality of his age, and Ben Jonson called him a "base fellow" (Steen 56; 35). In the eighteenth century,

⁷ This was the explicit goal of the *Read, not Dead* series at Shakespeare's Globe. Under Mark Rylance, the first artistic director of the Globe, that particular theatre saw three Middleton productions in two years.

⁸ This phenomenon has been amply documented by Steen, as well as in Gary Taylor's introductory essay to the 2007 Oxford *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* and the collaborative introductory essay to 2012 *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, eds. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley.

Charles Lamb compared his characters to those of Chaucer for their “air of being an immediate transcript from life” (82); but Henry Hallam said that Middleton’s characters “are all too vicious to be interesting” (99). Today’s critics are not much different; Middleton’s reputation still hangs in the balance between genius and hack. Gary Taylor, one of the editors of the *Oxford Middleton*, famously considers Middleton “our other Shakespeare.” But F.L. Lucas, another Middleton editor (albeit accidental) remarked scathingly of *Anything for a Quiet Life*, “It would have given me great pleasure to suppress this play: it has certainly given me none to edit it.”⁹ While many theater critics such as Michael Coveney and W.A. Darlington praise theater companies for keeping Middleton alive, others like Jeremy Kingston doom his plays “back to obscurity,” or, like Sam Marlowe, state that “when a text is lost in the mists of time . . . , there’s almost always a good reason for it” (rev. of *Honest Whore*; rev. of *Mad World*).

The Conclusion of this dissertation also looks at recurring language in theater reviews and marketing materials for Middleton productions. The most common theme is a direct comparison between Middleton and Shakespeare. This and other repeated comparisons tend to rhetorically diminish Middleton’s importance as an author. Despite this, theater professionals evince sustained excitement for and engagement with his texts, citing their unique voice and egalitarian perspectives as sources of modern appeal. Finally, I examine what the continuing Middletonian second-wave means for the canon. Theatrical productions and academic discussions of his works continue to attract audiences in greater and greater numbers. This phenomenon challenges all of us—theater professionals, historians, literary critics, and cultural theorists—to continue reformulating the literary and theatrical canon and, indeed, to ask what forces shape the canon to begin with.

⁹ This commentary appears in Lucas’s *John Webster: The Complete Works*, vol. 4., where he was editing the play as part of Webster’s canon.

CHAPTER TWO

SEX TRAGEDIES AND THE SUMMER OF LOVE

List of Productions

- 1961, *The Changeling*, dir. Tony Richardson, Royal Court Theatre, London
- 1962, *Women Beware Women*, dir. Anthony Page, New Arts Theatre (for RSC), London
- 1964, *The Changeling*, dir. Elia Kazan, ANTA Washington Square Theater, New York
- 1965, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, dir. Brian Shelton, Pitlochry Festival, Scotland
- 1966/67, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, dir. Trevor Nunn, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon (transferred to Aldwych, London in 1969/70)
- 1969, *Women Beware Women*, dir. Terry Hands, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1978, *The Changeling*, dir. Peter Gill, Riverside Studios, London
- 1978, *The Changeling*, dir. Terry Hands, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon

“Middleton understood women . . . better than all the Elizabethans—save Shakespeare alone”—T.S. Eliot

Imagine yourself sitting in a seat in a darkened theater. A statue stands upstage right, softly lit. Twenty feet tall, it is a female nude whose hands cover her breasts and pudenda. Other than the stage floor itself, which is checkered in black and white, this statue is the only decoration. Suddenly, strobe lights flicker over the figure. Are you “mocked with art,” or does the statue, like Hermione at the end of *A Winter's Tale*, begin to stir? (5.3.68). At this moment,

though, actors enter the stage and the spell is broken. The play begins and, unlike Hermione, this statue remains lifeless for the remainder of the show.

This is the way the 1969 Royal Shakespeare Company began their production of Thomas Middleton's celebrated tragedy, *Women Beware Women*. And, like the title of the play, the statue raises questions, suggests opposing interpretations. Is she inert, a passive object, or does she move of her own accord? Does her gesture connote protective modesty or emphasize her sexuality? Is she a chess piece or a chess player? What is certain is that women and sexuality figure heavily, not only in this production, but also in all of the earliest professional revivals of Middleton's plays in the twentieth century.

Consistently central to Middleton's drama, as T.S. Eliot recognized, are complex representations of women¹⁰. His works, sometimes labeled misogynistic for their frank portrayal of female sexuality, include female characters of all kinds in a variety of states and positions—powerful and weak, pure and corrupt, brilliant and inane, rich and poor. One characteristic, though, that ties many of Middleton's women together is that they engage in transgressive sexuality, whether adultery, incest, May-December relationships, or garden-variety premarital sex. Furthermore, they consciously use and identify with sexual desire and experience. Instead of just lying there and taking it, they take control of their sexuality, wielding it to achieve their own ends. By saying this, however, I do not mean to valorize all of Middleton's female characters as

¹⁰ A quick comparison of Middleton's titles to those of his contemporaries provides an interesting illustration. As Celia R. Daileader has outlined, Middleton's canon contains eleven major works with women in the title. Marlowe's canon includes two. Jonson's includes six (one of which, *The Silent Woman*, ultimately refers to a man). Shakespeare's canon has seven. Furthermore, Shakespeare's plays usually include the woman as a part of a heterosexual couple: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Antony and Cleopatra* ("Thomas Middleton" 466). Middleton's play, co-written with Dekker, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, is the only one that references a man and a woman in the same title. Not all of Middleton's titles are unambiguously woman-positive: cf. *The Witch*, *Women Beware Women*. But Shakespeare does not have anything like *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*.

proto-feminist role models, nor whitewash every sexual episode included in his plays. His world is by no means a feminist utopia where women band together in support of each other. His women use sex often for selfish ends, sometimes against each other. While Middleton shows us the exhilarating power that comes with sexual freedom, he also portrays the danger and chaos that accompanies female sexual transgression in a repressive, patriarchal society.

The joys and terrors associated with female sexuality appear frequently in the first modern professional revivals of Middleton's plays in the 1960s and 1970s. For the first two decades of this Middletonian second-wave, the stage was dominated by his three celebrated sex tragedies, *The Changeling*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *Women Beware Women*, in the 1960s and 1970s. I use the term "sex tragedy" to group these plays together because, while *Revenger's Tragedy* certainly conforms to the genre of revenge tragedy, the other two plays do not fit that category¹¹. However, what they each have in common is the cause of the tragedy: sex. Heterosexual desire, usually misplaced, causes a chain of events that leads to death, often with female characters suffering disproportionately. The first two decades of Middleton revivals use these sex tragedies to discuss the threats and delights of female sexuality. They raise questions about whether a woman can be innocent and sexually aggressive (or even sexually active?) at the same time. They portray the dangers of living without boundaries in a rule-bound culture. And finally, they expose the blinding hypocrisy of the patriarchy—that men can and do seek out transgressive sexual encounters while avoiding the penalties imposed on women—without offering pat or easy conclusions about how to change a corrupt society.

¹¹ I am not the first to use this term; see also William Barksted and Lewis Machin's *Four Jacobean Sex Tragedies*, which includes Middleton's *The Maiden's Tragedy*.

Sex and Jacobean Culture

During Middleton's lifetime, if anyone could be said to be experiencing a sexual revolution, it would be the members of the Jacobean court. Lawrence Stone writes that during the reign of James I, sexual morality in the English court "reached its nadir and became a public scandal" (504). One of Middleton's own plays, *The Witch*, was influenced by one such scandal, the divorce of Frances Howard and Robert Devereaux, the Earl of Essex, and her later marriage to Thomas Carr, the Earl of Somerset. The sordid story involved charges of impotence, adultery, witchcraft, and ultimately murder. The three plays examined in this chapter functioned as critiques of a morally and sexually corrupt noble class such as that which surrounded James I.

Attitudes towards sexual liberation were not universally negative, though. The court's winking attitude towards lasciviousness was sometimes adopted by literature and other public entertainments, which often portrayed all sorts of debauchery without negative consequences for the characters. Linda Woodbridge catalogues several comedies from 1610-1620 which demonstrate a celebratory attitude towards female sexuality, in which women actively court men instead of the other way around (245). In some plays, such as Middleton's *A Chaste Maid at Cheapside*, adulterous affairs such as that between Touchwater Sr. and Lady Kix have only positive outcomes. Literary romances, considered primarily a women's genre, featured powerful sexual attractions—and sometimes consummations—between heterosexual couples (Woodbridge 120). Middleton himself seems to bridge both attitudes, gesturing toward the court's sex scandals on one hand while on the other hand offering incisive critiques of the sexual double standard (via, for instance, Livia in *Women Beware Women*).

Despite the licentious behavior displayed at court, in literature, and on the stage, women's freedom to express and act on sexual desire was highly restricted during this period.

The status and rights of wives, widows, and unmarried women were in decline, partially, Stone argues, because of the downfall of the Catholic Church. The subsequent rejection of the cult of the Virgin Mary did not entail a wholesale rejection of the ideal of virginity. Instead, Helen Hackett argues that virginity “continued to carry a powerful mystique after the Reformation” (qtd. in Haynes 72). Indeed, upper-class women were still held to the double standard of sexual behavior; men were expected to have sexual experience before marriage, but brides should be virgins. While they were expected to maintain a pure mind and body, women were at the same time supposedly in possession of a dangerously high libido. “Both fornication and adultery were exclusively male prerogatives at this social level, despite the fact that in current physiological theory and folk tradition women were regarded as more lustful in their appetites . . . “ than men (Stone 501-2). The predominant social discourse about women blamed their carnal lust for all sorts of social evils, such as physical emasculation (cf. the myth of the *vagina dentata*), witchcraft (as in Frances Howard’s case), and, of course, the doctrine of original sin¹². According to medieval Christian theology, the Fall occurred because Adam succumbed to Eve’s sexual temptation; woman, but more specifically female sexuality, was to blame for the Fall. Thus, a kind of cognitive dissonance occurred when women were told that their natures resembled Eve, but they were expected to behave like Mary.

Stone sees the history of sexuality in the England as a series of waves of revolution and repression, each of which is connected to cultural and religious change and lasts about a hundred years. In 1870, he argues, the Victorian wave of repression receded, issuing in “a new period of permissiveness that has perhaps reached its apogee in the 1970s” (545). Whether or not that

¹² See Linda Woodbridge’s discussion of the “woman question,” i.e. the attempt to discover the true nature of woman, in *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620*.

period of permissiveness is on its way out is up for debate; what is certain is that the Jacobean era was a time of contradictory beliefs and expectations regarding women's sexual roles, echoed in the twentieth-century sexual revolution.

Over three hundred years later, the conversations about gender and sexuality were again dominating Britain and the U.S. In the early 1960s, attitudes towards sex and women were undergoing rapid changes. It was the beginning of what has come to be known as the Sexual Revolution. The emergent women's liberation movements shifted relations between women and men, challenging the dominance of marriage as an institution. Reforms in the legal and medical regulation of sexuality allowed the Pill to be approved for contraception by the Food and Drug Administration in the US in 1960, and by the Family Planning Association in the UK in 1961. Laws against homosexuality and abortion were overturned in the UK in 1967; in 1973, the US Supreme Court passed its ruling on *Roe v. Wade*. Scholars and scientists, too, evinced a growing interest in sex and sexuality. The work of Alfred Kinsey in the '40s and '50s inspired the sexuality research of Masters and Johnson, who published the now-classic text *Human Sexual Response* in 1966. Censorship laws were challenged as the unexpurgated version of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was printed in both countries in the space of a year¹³. The magazines *Playboy* and *Penthouse* became mainstream publications and *Sex and the Single Girl* championed single women taking control of their own sexual fulfillment in 1962.

Middleton in the 1960s

During this time, three of Middleton's darkest tragedies—which deal out the pleasures and terrors of sex evenhandedly—began to take the UK stage regularly. Middleton's revival after so long a period is due, of course, to several factors beyond the sexual revolution alone. In the

¹³ 1959 in the US and 1960 in Britain.

theatrical world, the stage had been set for the revival of a long-forgotten playwright whose plays reflected a society poisoned by the simmering resentment of oppression and repression. Critics and readers of Middleton's plays permitted the power of the stage to explore cultural concerns as violence, morality, materialism, and racial and gender-based inequality. When censorship laws were abolished in England in 1968, fringe theater companies who were critical of social and political institutions began to pop up in London; similar theatrical movements occurred in New York. At the same time, many established theater companies wanted something to shake up the interminable diet of Shakespeare. While dabbling with political theater and Theatre of Cruelty in its interpretations of Shakespeare, The Royal Shakespeare Company included in its mission statement the desire to produce plays by neglected playwrights; a few years later, the newly founded National Theatre followed suit.

Why did theater companies turn to *The Changeling*, *Revenger's Tragedy*, and *Women Beware Women* specifically? These plays were among Middleton's most highly regarded for the quality of their verse; in addition, they had received an enormous amount of attention from literary critics. However, I believe these plays were attractive at the time both for what they say and what they don't say. Each offered timely and relevant insights into the cultural moment. At the same time, these works do not contain clean judgments or easy answers; or, when they do, the answers are shown to be unworkable. Their moral ambivalence was appealing to a post-war worldview. As Annabel Patterson says in her introduction to *The Changeling* in the Oxford Middleton, the play works on "ethical undecidability, an experience much attested to in the seventeenth century and almost endemic today" (1635).

The Revenger's Tragedy follows its titular character, Vindice, as he revenges the murder of his fiancé, Gloriana, by an Italian Duke and his corrupt family¹⁴. After engineering the deaths of “a nest of dukes,” Vindice and his brother Hippolito are put to death by the incumbent ruler, Lord Antonio (5.3.125). The play also tells the stories of five women—three living and two only shown after death—whose lives are circumscribed by the sexual choices they, and others, make. Before the action of the play begins, the aforementioned Gloriana was poisoned for refusing the advances of the Duke; Vindice carries her skull with him to remind him both of her purity and the Duke's lechery. Alongside Gloriana sits the Lady Antonio who is raped by the Duchess's youngest son before the beginning of the play; she kills herself early in the play and only appears in the text as a dead body mentioned in a stage direction. Even though these women do not speak, their presence haunts the play with a vision of idealized female chastity: women who would die rather than give up their most highly regarded attribute—sexual virtue—to lust.

At the other end of the spectrum of female virtue is the Duchess, the Duke's wife who cavorts on the side with his bastard son, Spurio. The play presents her desire for Spurio as real; she woos him with jewels and letters. At the same time, the relationship is calculated to give the most pain to her husband, whom she hates. Here is a woman who, like the “bald madam, Opportunity” seizes a chance for pleasure and revenge when she sees it, regardless of the social or moral stigma attached (1.1.55). She does not measure herself in terms of sexual virtue, but uses the fact that others do to her advantage.

¹⁴ Michael Neill suggests that Middleton might have had a different title in mind for this play; according to Holdsworth, Middleton submitted a play entitled *The Viper and Her Brood* to the Queens Revels company in 1606 which Neill suggests may have ended up as the play we now know as *The Revenger's Tragedy*. If this title had been passed down instead of the current one, how might our evaluation of the play and its themes been altered, specifically, in light of the apparently female viper of the title, its attitude toward women and morality?

In the center of the spectrum is Gratiana, Vindice's mother, who is caught between poverty and religion. Testing his mother's virtue in disguise, Vindice offers money if she will convince her daughter, Castiza, to give up her virginity to Lussurioso, the Duke's son and heir. Gratiana capitulates quickly, citing "advancement, treasure, the Duke's son," but repents later (2.1.155).

The fifth woman, Castiza, is a "crystal tower" of virginity, unyielding to the advances of Lussurioso, her brother, or her mother (4.4.152). However, her ultimate fate, and the fate of women like her, is still held in the balance by the play's surviving men. As the tragic deaths of Gloriana and Lady Antonio demonstrate, and as the poverty of Gratiana shows, patriarchal society may claim to value female chastity, but it does not. Macdonald P. Jackson has illustrated that the biblical rhetoric of *The Revenger's Tragedy*—its repeated appeals to spiritual forces of heaven, hell, the devil, and sin—creates "a moral framework" that dooms those whose actions fall outside of that framework (546). In other words, damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Women Beware Women does not show us any idealized paragons of female virtue. All of its women are corrupt, or corruptible, and the play's most cunning character (and the character with the most lines) is a woman. Livia, the sister of the Duke of Florence, acts as a pander for both her brothers, abetting them in both incest and adultery. In Act 2, scene 1, she convinces her niece, Isabella, that they are not related in order to allow Hippolito, the girl's uncle, a chance to woo her. Isabella believes the lie and goes to bed with her uncle. In the following scene, Livia positions Bianca where the Duke can seduce (or, in some interpretations, rape) the beautiful young girl, who then leaves her husband, Leantio, to marry the Duke.

Livia's sins, until this point, seem to be good-natured; she loves her "brothers' ease above [her] own honest[y]" (2.1.71). However, she succumbs to sexual desire herself when she sees the

cuckolded Leantio at court. Like the Duchess in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Livia sets about to woo a younger man with riches. When Hippolito kills Leantio, Livia turns vengeful and works to ruin his happiness by murdering Isabella.

Although they were deceived, Isabella and Bianca are not innocent of sexual desire. As soon as Isabella learns that she is not related to Hippolito, she admits to her attraction to him, offering him a kiss “full o’th’ grape” (2.2.203). Furthermore, she moves forward in her plan to marry the Ward, a boorish fool, so that she can carry on her affair with Hippolito in private. Similarly, before they meet, Bianca expresses a fantasy that the Duke looks at her in the street (1.3.105). After her initial encounter with the Duke, she blames Livia, calling her “a damned bawd,” but quickly proves dissatisfied with her marriage to Leantio. While his relative poverty may be the primary cause, Bianca also admits to “wand’ring thoughts . . . a great desire to see flesh stirring again” (4.1.32-3). The text gives no indication that she is not, ultimately, happy with the Duke; indeed, stage directions and other characters refer to them kissing repeatedly (3.2.34, 236; 4.3.70).

Ultimately, Isabella plots to kill Livia after learning about her deceit, Bianca attempts to kill the disapproving Cardinal, and all three women die of various causes at the wedding masque. In *Women Beware Women*, the female characters are easily aroused to both desire and revenge.

The Changeling deals specifically with the “overvaluation” of virginity, via the characters of Beatrice-Joanna and her husband, Alsemero (Patterson 1633). When they first meet, Beatrice-Joanna is already betrothed to another man, Alonzo de Piracquo. She is, however, overcome by an instant desire for Alsemero and arranges to have Piracquo killed. She hires the hated De Flores, her father’s servant, who agrees to carry out the murder because he is desperately in love with her and hopes for a sexual reward. When she offers him money, he refuses, threatening to

expose her as a murderer unless she grants him his wishes. She accedes to his demands and the two begin an illicit sexual relationship. However, when it comes time for her marriage to Alsemero, Beatrice-Joanna must make certain that her virginity is not called into question. She both fakes a virginity test and sends her servant, Diaphanta, to her marriage bed in her place. However, Alsemero is soon alerted to his wife's unfaithfulness and shuts Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores into a closet together. While Alsemero tells everyone what has happened, cries emanate from the closet. Whether the O's are merely violent or also sexual in origin is ambiguous in the text and left up to interpretation in performance. What is certain, however, is that when De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna emerge from the cupboard, she is fatally wounded and he soon kills himself.

Beatrice-Joanna's ultimate feelings for De Flores are a matter of debate. As Roberta Barker and David Nicol demonstrate, some scholars argue that she comes to be sexually infatuated with him, while others maintain that her disgust is real and that their relationship is only a result of blackmail. However, Beatrice-Joanna's capacity for strong sexual desire is clear from the beginning of the play, when she meets Alsemero and finds "a giddy turning" in herself (1.1.159). The play also gives us two other lusty women in Diaphanta and Isabella. Diaphanta's attraction to Alsemero is evidenced when she reacts to Beatrice-Joanna's substitution plan with joy and relish. "I shall carry't well, because I love the burden," she says of the prospect of a night with her mistress's husband (4.1.125). Isabella, the female protagonist of the subplot, is also capable of red-blooded desire. The pent-up wife of the asylum keeper, she avoids infidelity with Antonio, a man pretending to be mad on purpose to seduce her. Although she keeps chaste, she enjoys looking at him: "What a proper body there was without brains to guide it," she says

(3.2.26-7). The play even suggests that she considers a dalliance with him, only to be put off when he proves not to be “a quick-sighted lover” (4.3.139).

These three tragedies reflect and stimulate a growing concern with the relationship between society and sexual behaviors. In *The Changeling*, we see the Jacobean theater’s only portrayal of a woman cheating an early-modern virginity test to elude the consequences of her sexual behavior. This moment must have rung true for twentieth-century audience members who worried about, and those who celebrated, the rise of reliable contraception, an invention that allowed people to cheat the system, a free pass to have as much sex as possible. The sexual revolution that arose from innovations like contraception would have been a dream for some, a nightmare for others. In *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, we see such a nightmare on stage:

Lussurioso’s loose bohemian attitude, his den of iniquity, and the entire corrupt and sex-crazed court could be played on stage as a mocking reference to the Summer of Love lifestyle cultivated in San Francisco in 1969¹⁵. But in this play, it isn’t only the rich and the young who accept the new lifestyle; Vindice’s mother Gratiana is willing to accept a looser moral and sexual code than her daughter Castiza. We again encounter an older woman prompting a younger woman to act out sexually in *Women Beware Women*, when both the Widow and Livia pave the way for Bianca (and, in Livia’s case, also Isabella) to commit transgressive acts.

In all three plays we see women who hope to rise above the roles attributed to them by society—faithful wife, obedient daughter, chaste fiancée, pious widow—by using sexual acts. Beatrice-Joanna rebels against an arranged marriage, using sex to change her situation and then faking a virginity test, falsifying the institution that is supposed to keep her guarded and within

¹⁵ Pamela Dean’s novel *Tam Lin* takes place in the sexually charged atmosphere of a 1970’s university campus and deals with the sexual awakening of a young woman. One of the central plot devices of her novel is a university production of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*.

boundaries. Gratiana decides to act as a pimp for her daughter if it will raise their financial situation. Both Bianca and Isabella rail against the strictures of male authority figures. In short, these plays portray moments that audience members, old and young, could see in their daily lives—the frustration of communicating across a generation gap; the failure of law, medicine, and religion to control sexual behavior; and the challenges that accompany defying sexual norms.

The Productions

Between 1960 and 1980, there were at least 40 productions of plays by Middleton in the US and the UK; I examine eight of the largest, most influential, or otherwise noteworthy in this chapter. These productions evince the growing fascination of the '60s and '70s with the consequences of female sexual misbehavior. Indeed, as the two decades progress, directors use staging to underscore themes of desire and repression. These productions are “tarted up,” so to speak, with revealing costumes for the primary actresses. Comments by the directors and program notes further emphasize their sexual subtext. Critics responded to this by commenting more and more about the plays’ relevance to the period, specifically as regards women’s sexual roles.

But perhaps the most significant aspect of the collective dramaturgy of these productions is the tendency to interpolate extratextual sex scenes. Celia R. Daileader notes that the text of these plays prompt questions “about what we see onstage, but also, more subtly, about *what we do not see* onstage” (*Eroticism* 23). Sexual acts are, of course, suggested by the plots of *The Changeling*, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and *Women Beware Women*. However, nowhere in the text of the plays are these acts explicitly depicted. The characters reference them but the stage directions do not provide instructions for the actors. For instance, De Flores in *The Changeling*

coerces Beatrice-Joanna to surrender her virginity to him; we know this because the characters refer to it several times. However, the stage directions only show the two kissing, Beatrice-Joanna kneeling to De Flores, and then, in an act that can be supposed to be an embrace, “shroud[ing her] blushes in [his] bosom” (3.4.170). In the final scene, the two are locked in a closet together, from which repeated “O”s emanate. These are, as Douglas Bruster notes in his edition, “strategically unclear”¹⁶; they might be sexual or violent. Only after they are released does the audience realize that Beatrice-Joanna has been mortally wounded. Her cries were certainly cries of pain and fright, and only perhaps carried the additional implication of carnal pleasure. *The Revenger’s Tragedy* includes similar off-stage obscuring of sexual acts. The Bastard Spurio kisses the Duchess in 3.5; later on, in 4.3, he “seemeth lasciviously to her.” However, during 3.6, the scene that directors most often choose to interpolate a sex scene between the Duchess and Spurio, the text only says that they are going to a feast, accompanied by musicians and attendants. Nowhere in the play is their copulation depicted; similarly, the rape of Lady Antonio is only mentioned after the fact. Reading between the lines of dialogue in *Women Beware Women*, Daileader’s analysis labels the initial sexual encounter between the Duke and Bianca as a rape even though we do not, as readers, actually witness a rape. Instead, the dialogue requires that the Duke appears behind Bianca and then takes hold of her in 2.2; later on, in 3.3, the Ward “ducks down to peep at [Isabella’s] legs.”

These are only a few of the several sexual encounters hinted at by the stage directions but confirmed by the text of these plays. As we will see in the description of the productions, though, these moments, which occur offstage in the text, are usually depicted on stage in modern productions. These extratextual presentations of the implied sexual encounters represent

¹⁶ In *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, 1676.

directorial interpolations—in other words, modern-day additional material that does not appear in the text and would not have appeared in original Jacobean stagings of these plays. These moments of modern interjection significantly impact not only theatrical concerns but also theoretical implications which, when examined alongside the social context of the revivals, dramatically change our interpretations of the plays.

Tony Richardson directed *The Changeling*'s first major twentieth-century revival in 1961 for London's Royal Court Theatre. Despite garnering some harsh reviews—Bernard Levin called it a “tissue of absurdities,” the reviewer for the *Tribune* called it “a bad and silly play,” and Milton Shulman said that it could not even “touch the hem” of Shakespearean tragedies—other reviewers praised it. The reviewer for the *Plymouth Independent* said that “it was, simply, worth doing,” and the reviewer for *Lady* reveled in “the livid splendor of Middleton's dialogue.” Even here, however, reviewers could not get away from seeing the play as a “collector's piece” (*Lady*). Most of the reviews mentioned the centuries the play had gone unstaged. But a few reviewers saw the production as relevant to modern culture. W.A. Darlington compared “the disillusioned people of the Restoration” to “our disillusioned selves.” The *Tuesday Times* reviewer said:

In reading the *Changeling* we may think, till almost the end of the play, that we have been concerned merely with a fantastic Elizabethan morality, and then discover that we are looking on at a dispassionate exposure of fundamental passions of any time and any place.

Richardson's staging, set (as the play is) in early modern Spain, did not modernize or update the play. However, Richardson did attempt to emphasize the madness beneath the refined noble culture. He saw the conflict in the play as essentially one between the superego and the id, a strict code of morals and the vein of sex and violence which runs beneath, a conflict he saw in

the art of Francisco Goya as well (“Why we revived *The Changeling*,” qtd. in Holding 193). To emphasize this duality, he used Goya-esque set and costume designs and, in doing so, set a trend of connecting *The Changeling* and Goya which continued in several later productions. He worked to relate the castle to the madhouse by bringing Lollio and Alibius into the main plot, and having the dance of madmen and fools at the end of Act 4 mime and foreshadow the discovery of Antonio and Francisco as counterfeit madmen.

The set was comprised of bare walls, with an archway entrance at the back outlined in carved Spanish tracery. In the madhouse scenes, Richardson used a trapdoor and a railing that doubled as prison bars and the railing of a staircase. The lighting design used lots of light and shade across these walls. Richardson’s vision emphasized Spanish elements because he associated both the grave, dignified poetry of the play and the stiff, upright sense of honor evinced by several of the characters with a stereotypically Spanish mindset.

The stark light and shadow used in this production served to emphasize a dualistic thinking as well as the light and dark of the purity/corruption binary. Mary Ure was cast as Beatrice-Joanna; her paleness stood out among the rest of the cast as she wore a cream dress and a white mantilla, and they wore dark, military costumes. Robert Shaw played De Flores as a combined “romantic hero” and “grotesque villain” (Holding 219). He wore an S-shaped scar on his face and a rough beard; Felix Barker mentioned his “red-rimmed eyes” in performance. Alsemero was played by Jeremy Brett (later famous for playing Sherlock Holmes); Barker described him as “the sort of handsome prig who would carry a phial of chemical . . . to test the virtue of his intended.”

Mary Ure’s critics, however, began what was to become a tradition for reviewers of *The Changeling*. As Roberta Barker and David Nicol establish, starting with this production, critics

expected to see a passionately sensual Beatrice-Joanna, especially in her scenes with De Flores. Ure's air of innocence was a drawback for many critics who could not sense in her the requisite sensuality for the character. According to the *Easter Daily Press*, Ure "lack[ed] the vitality really required by such a full-blooded . . . piece of theatre." Critics compared Ure to a doll, a schoolgirl, and even an android (Hope-Wallace, *Sunday Telegraph*). In one memorable phrase, Kenneth Tynan called her "a meringue miscast as a hamburger" (qtd. in Barker and Nicol par 5).

Despite not finding Ure's performance sexy enough, no fewer than four reviewers mentioned her breasts. The *Glasgow Herald* summed up the play by saying that it was "concerned with the era of deep cleavages in women's gowns." Bernard Levin, while criticizing Ure's pronunciation of vowels, commented at length on her décolletage, while Robert Muller said that her costume "raised hopes in even the soberest spectator." A small piece ran in the *Daily Mirror* all about her neckline, and nothing else. Given this kind of sexist objectification, perhaps *The Changeling* was revived at the right time, even if its relevance to the sexual politics of the '60s was only later recognized.

The next year, in 1962, the first revival of *Women Beware Women* debuted at New Arts Theatre Club, directed by Anthony Page. Similar to Richardson's *Changeling*, this production garnered mixed praise and censure. It was conceived as part of an experimental season put on by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the small London venue. Despite its small budget and off-putting final act, the production was seen as justification for the theatre to remain open. It inspired both Philip Hope-Wallace and Kenneth Tynan to endorse the RSC and the New Arts Theatre Club in their reviews as institutions that needed to be kept alive and running. Hope-Wallace appreciated the RSC's "virile and enlightened artistic policy" and Tynan pleaded with

the Arts Council to continue to provide funding for existing London theaters “partly because of the RSC’s striking revival of Thomas Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*” (Connolly 60).

The production, and the theatre itself, were under financial pressures which caused its closure and the production was not ultimately transferred to the West End as originally planned. The costumes were old and noticeably worn; this, combined with the set’s sparseness, caused many critics to deride the production as being shabby and thrown together. The Jacobean-style costumes were, with two exceptions, dark-colored with lots of lace, velvet, and leather. Only the Ward and the masquers in the final scene wore light-colored clothing. The set, designed by Sally Jacobs, was bare timber, consisting of a spare acting area in front of what Holding describes as a “two-tiered wall made from six boxed-in cubicles” (238). The adaptability of the set allowed actors to occupy different levels, which was used in the final act. During the masque, the court sat upstage, while the Duke, Bianca, and the Cardinal have their own boxes in the back wall (267). The production was panned for its presentation of this act. The poisoned incense Livia used to kill Isabella turned the stage smoky and the masque itself was disappointing. Holding described it as “a confusion of smoke and gold tinsel during which a great many bodies stacked up on stage” (267).

The production established itself with the understated, realistic acting style that Page demanded of his actors. T.C. Worsley called the production “very quiet, insistent, low-voiced tone” (qtd in Holding 238). Kenneth Tynan appreciated the “muted intensity” of the acting, and praised the actor playing Leantio especially for “finding a psychological justification for every word he utters,” saying that it was proof that, “even in blank verse, the Stanislavsky method works” (qtd. in Connolly 60). This psychological realism brought a modern feel to the play

commented upon by several critics; Irving Wardle said that the performance released “a forgotten voice stonily telling the unchanging truths about human affairs” (qtd. in Connolly 61).

However, the “forgotten voice” in Page’s production turned out to be the Cardinal, whose “unchanging truths” about the corrupting power of lust and loose women seemed to be the message of the production. Ernest Milton, playing the Cardinal, delivered the tirade about his brother’s corruption (found at 4.1.187-90) in a style of grand oration which drew applause from the audience. Page cut lines which suggested any moral ambiguity on the part of the Cardinal, such as Bianca’s reminder that he is the next heir; his final lines stood as the moral of the play (Holding 242-3).

The program itself supported muddled and perhaps divergent attitudes towards the female characters. Page’s program gave equal billing to both men and women, listing characters in order of appearance, in contrast to the Richardson *Changeling* program that listed male characters first. As Gary Taylor has argued, while printed editions of the play differ in the way they list *dramatis personae*, either decision reflects an attitude about the relative importance of the characters in the play¹⁷. However, the program notes said that both *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women* show Middleton’s interest in “female psychology.” Given that Page’s script and direction established the Cardinal as the moral voice of the play, the production leaves the issue of Middleton’s ultimate attitude towards his female characters ambiguous. Was Page espousing the Cardinal’s attitude towards women and female sexuality as the correct one? Was the production’s message supposed to be strictly Jacobean or also relevant to contemporary sexual politics? The production raised these questions but left them unanswered.

¹⁷ See Gary Taylor, “Order of Persons,” *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*. Eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, OUP, 2007.

Two years later, in 1964, *The Changeling* was staged for the first time on the professional American stage, with the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center. It was not a marked success; in fact, it closed early¹⁸. The director, Elia Kazan, made efforts to modernize his production. He called the play a “black comedy,” and “an ironic, realistic, hard-headed view of the way humans behave” (*Elia Kazan* 69). According to Kazan, *The Changeling* represents people who show one face, or mask, to the world “in order to get along” but that this goes against their true feelings and impulses, which are the kinds of things that “erupt every day on page four of the Daily News in violent and desperate actions. I think there’s a terrific schism in our society between the way we pretend to live and the way we really live” (69). For Kazan, the play’s portrayal of this schism made it modern in spirit.

One departure Kazan made from his predecessors was to showcase the sex in the play more. He seemed to have taken a lesson from the critical panning of Ure’s sexless performance as Beatrice-Joanna and compensated by trying to sex up his own production. Henry Hewes described the set as “a miniature golf course,” complete with an “omnipresent Pullman berth . . . used as if the play were a bedroom farce.” Howard Taubman called *The Changeling* “a play that deserves to be done,” but deplored the way Kazan’s directing emphasized every “scatological point” to the point of literality. One example he gives was the dressing and undressing of Beatrice-Joanna on stage, which Taubman compared to “countless film sequences designed for no purpose except to please gapers.” Hewes also disliked the production, while appreciating its “emphasis on the absurdity of equating virginity with honor.”

¹⁸ Kazan anticipated this attitude in his *New York Times* article “On Process: The Development of a Repertory, or a Team, Needs Patience and Years,” which strikes a pose of accepting failure, and success, as part of the process of artistic growth. He approaches his own work in *The Changeling* from the viewpoint, not of an English company, but of an American company, “from our own viewpoint, as if it had never been produced before.”

In 1965, *The Revenger's Tragedy's* first professional revival occurred in Scotland, at the Pitlochry Festival. Directed by Brian Shelton, the production was a whirlwind of moods and atmospheres. Michael Scott says that Shelton envisioned the production as stylized rather than naturalistic, blending the influence of medieval morality drama and renaissance manneristic acting (40). The play was presented without cuts or additions, working from facsimiles of an early quarto of the play. According to Scott, Vindice and Hippolito stepped down toward audience several times to clarify the meaning of the action, acting as narrators coming off the stage and into the audience (41). The set itself looked like the site of some massive destruction; it was comprised of a partial thrust stage of charred timbers and bare boards with an arched tunnel at back flanked by two staircases. The octagonal acting area was slightly elevated and at the edges of the action, rows of poles stood with twisted metal spikes attached to them.

Shelton's production was the first Middleton revival to show a sexual act on stage. While the illicit affair between the Duchess and Spurio is made clear in the dialogue, there are no stage directions indicating that the audience sees them in congress. However, in a move that anticipated many later revivals of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Shelton brought their sexual relationship on stage. During the "bony lady" scene, while Duke was murdered on raised center stage, Duchess and Spurio were above, clearly conducting their affair. At the same time, Shelton's direction humanized Gratiana and Castiza. The actress playing Gratiana was directed to emphasize her destitution and shame about her poverty (Holding 31). Middleton's text portrays these three women—the Duchess, Gratiana, and Castiza—on a spectrum of Jacobean virtue; Shelton's production was as frank about and tolerant of the Duchess's sexual desire as he was about Gratiana's pitiful powerlessness. In contrast to these characters, the actor playing Vindice performed his role full of arrogance and hauteur—a move which, perhaps, drew sharp

contrast between his character's moral absolutism and the relativism which motivates Gratiana and the Duchess (Holding 32).

Two years later, the Trevor Nunn-directed RSC production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* took a similar approach to the female characters, humanizing Gratiana and Castiza while emphasizing the sexuality of the court society. According to Samantha Ellis, this production was the work that cemented Nunn's position as heir to Peter Hall. Many reviewers praised the play itself, calling it a "marvelous text," and the verse both "haunted" and "darkly magnificent" (D.A.N. Jones; J.C. Trewin; S.B.). However, Peter Roberts called it "a minefield of a text that constantly threatened to explode in [Nunn's] face," while noting that it never actually did. Perhaps one reason for the success with a tricky text was that the production included about 150 lines inserted by John Barton, whose editing of the text is praised by *Stage and TV Today* reviewer S.B. as eliciting "the trenchant quality of the verse."¹⁹

The production, played on the same set as the previous year's *Hamlet* (not a thematic, but an economic, choice) looked to reviewer Robert Bryden as though it were put together from "oilskins and aluminium paint." However, it was a startling success and, after only eight performances, reviewers were calling for a revival; it ultimately went on to London three years later, to be performed at the Aldwych Theatre in 1969. For the production, designer Christopher Morley created a palette of black, white, and silver. The set was furnished in heavy black wood, lit by shafts of white light. Skulls and skeletons formed a large part of the décor in this production; a skull doubled as an inkpot, and the masque, "a macabre dance of death" according

¹⁹ See also Stanley Wells' article "The Revenger's Tragedy Revisited," which analyzes Barton's contributions at length.

to Roberts, was performed by men in skull masks²⁰. The first skull in the play, the one meditated upon by Vindice in his first speech, is not bleached bone; encrusted with mortality, it still had some skin stretched across it. The Jacobean-style costumes and cloaks sparkled with silver glitter in Jackson Pollack-like swirls and streaks. The costume design for the Duchess had her wear a bald cap under her wig, perhaps aligning her with “that bald madam, Opportunity.” Steel wool created halos of hair around blank-eyed masks worn by several characters during the production. Peter Lewis said that the characters “float through the darkness like evil moths” (qtd. in Ellis). The stark, stylized design was in sharp contrast to the RSC’s then-dominant style, what Ellis calls “Brechtian neo-realism, all muddy boots and broken-down costumes” like itinerant players.

Castiza and Gratiana’s poverty and humanity were again emphasized. Castiza in particular was portrayed as the breadwinner for the family; she had five dressmakers’ dummies, showing that she worked as a seamstress to support herself and her mother. In 1966, Castiza was played by Lynn Farleigh, who portrayed the character as tender-hearted and distraught by Gratiana’s suggestions. In the Aldwych production, Helen Mirren was cast, in her first role after graduating from the National Youth Theatre, to play the character with a potential for sensuality (Holding 48). The production also showed the court characters in several sexual situations. It began by staging the offstage rape of the wife of Antonio. Lady Antonio was pushed down in the center of the silver circle which dominated the stage. Junior jumped on top of her while men surrounded them, hiding them with cloaks. Lady Antonio screamed and the men exited. In other scenes, both Lussurioso and the Duchess showcased the sensual atmosphere of the court.

Lussurioso was shown, nearly naked, wearing a thong and being oiled up by a male servant. The

²⁰ In addition, the program contained two illustrations of skulls. One, within a frame of torches and ribbons, was a dark man with a hooked nose about to kiss a skull wearing a woman’s headpiece. The other was a skeleton dressed as a woman, in a wide skirt, a feathered cap, and long flowing wig.

Duchess danced to bed with Spurio, and later in bed, her wig was snatched off and her diseased scalp exposed, suggesting syphilis.

Surprisingly, although the program for *The Revenger's Tragedy* attempts to historicize the play, its author, and its cultural context, it gives no information about the Jacobean sexual politics which permeate the play. Instead, the program quotes critics who compare the revenge genre to the modern “thriller,” compares illustrated moral broadsheets to “strip cartoons” and compares the vengeful protagonist to James Bond: “lonely, melancholy, of fine natural physique which has become in some way ravaged . . . dark and brooding in expression, of a cold or cynical veneer, above all enigmatic, in possession of a sinister secret.”

In 1969, the RSC produced Middleton again, this time working with *Women Beware Women* under the direction of Terry Hands. This production was ostensibly a development of the 1962 Anthony Page production which had been staged at the New Arts Theatre Club. However, in look and feel, the two productions were very different, as the second one benefitted from a much larger budget. Again, Middleton garnered praise from reviewers for the modern feel of the play; Philip Hope-Wallace compared it to work by Jean Anouilh and Iris Murdoch (Connolly 61). Some of the reviewers' responses might have been guided by the program which provided the audience with an interpretive lens, focusing on the wealth of the court and the subject of “woman”.

The court's wealth was evident from the lavish costumes, the crystal on the banqueting table, and the golden candelabras. Every element of the set design mirrored a chess set, perhaps signifying the stultifying, claustrophobic atmosphere of the court, or, as Connolly notes, as an indication of “the ways in which Florentine society is engaged in game playing” (61). Even characters stood in as chess pieces; the footmen—one for each person at the dining table—were

called “pawns” in the prompt script (Holding 252). The lavish costumes, donated by Harrod’s, served to indicate the very sharp class divide between Leantio and his mother, and the Duke and his family. Images held in the RSC archives show the court characters were dressed in velvets and satins, with slashed sleeves, sideswept capes, ostentatious lace cuffs and collars, and pearl jewelry. Leantio, The Widow, and Bianca, however, began the play by wearing plain woolen clothing, the only accessory being the Widow’s oversized rosaries hanging from her belt to accentuate her piety. As the action progressed, Bianca donned fabulous outfits, eventually wearing something almost identical to the costume of Livia and Isabella. Leantio’s change after his contact with the court was so pronounced as to be ridiculous; his fancy costume was excessively beribboned and even his boots were heavily decorated.

The production’s focus on women as property was just as pronounced as its emphasis on wealth. It was this production which made use of the giant Venus statue mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. This statue captured the imagination of reviewers; Connolly describes the nude covering her breasts and genitalia “as though she was the only model of female modesty left in Florence” (61). Given the production’s chess-themed design, the giant statue also suggested an oversized game piece. Although this interpretation may seem far-fetched, the men in the play treat women as pieces in a game to be traded and won. This idea is underscored by Act 2, Scene 2, when Livia defeats the widow at chess. During this scene, a parallel seduction occurs overhead. In this production, the duke, played by Brewster Mason, towered over Bianca, played by Judi Dench. The difference in their sizes made his next gesture even more oppressive, as he clasped her across the chest, his black gloves in sharp contrast to her white dress (Holding 251-2). Men literally “manhandling” women took place again in the Ward’s interactions with Isabella. In this production, the Ward was portrayed as mentally

disabled. He constantly grabbed at his genitals, slackjawed, and several times reached inside his shirt to pull out his pet, a live baby rabbit²¹. This did not stop him from grabbing his future bride, Isabella, and groping her beneath her skirt (Holding 259).

The final masque was performed as a darkly comic dance of death. Continuing the chess motif, it occurred on a checkered square which was raised ten feet above rest of stage using the theater's newly-installed hydraulic lifts. The characters were aligned in two rows, facing each other on the checkered floor. They began dancing, each movement meticulously choreographed. Instead of being positioned above, the Duke and Bianca danced among the masquers, a decision which added humor to his line "I have lost myself in this quite." The director added melodramatic drumrolls at each death, or in Isabella's case, applause and laughter. As characters died, they were thrown aside onto the stage below, like discarded chess pieces. The Ward, whom Nunn's production left alive, watched it all seated at center, crosslegged, clapping hands "with inane delight and incomprehension" (Holding 269).

The next major production of a Middleton play was Peter Gill's 1978 production of *The Changeling* at London's Riverside Studios²². As I will argue, in the nine years since Nunn's *Women Beware Women*, directors began to be more overt in emphasizing the sexual subtext of the plays on stage while also suggesting a strong link between the madness of the castle and the madness of the asylum. These productions seem to suggest that the nobility, built as it was on the buying and selling of virginity, bordered on legitimately insane.

²¹ This was indicated in the prompt book by a small hand-drawn cartoon of a rabbit in the margins each time he fondled it.

²² In the period between 1969 and 1978, these three plays received several stagings both in the US and in Britain. A few of these—for example, Richard Eyre's 1970 *Changeling* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and Philip Prowse's 1976 *Changeling* at Glasgow Citizen's Company—I find noteworthy. Eyre's *Changeling* strongly foreshadowed his later production in the 1980s. I have included a short description of the Prowse production in Appendix B.

Gill's staging was universally acclaimed for its clarity and faithfulness to the text; the play was, again, praised for its modernity. Martin Esslin was repeatedly "astonish[ed]" by the modernity and insight in the play, which he terms "one of the minor masterpieces of Jacobean drama." The set was sparse; the only decoration was a Picasso-like backdrop of human suffering and the few props and set pieces brought in and out by the madmen of the subplot. The two plots were brought into contact a few times, subtly underscoring the similarity between Beatrice-Joanna and Isabella in a brief moment onstage when they mirrored each other's movements. The dumbshow was staged as a series of frozen tableaux, foreshadowing later events, which occur under rapidly flashing lights (Holding; Morley).

In the first scene, sex was turned into a symbol; De Flores, standing at center stage, was "flanked by two loving couples alternately bursting into animated talk and freezing into erotic emblems" (Wardle). Emma Piper, who played Beatrice-Joanna, was, like Mary Ure, critically panned for a lack of sexiness which did not match up to reviewers' expectations of the character. She seemed to lack "fire," "thrust," and "blood" in the words of reviewers (Barker and Nicol par. 7). However, in Holding's understanding of the character, Piper did not play on prettiness or innocence but on a subtle immediate fascination with De Flores. She used repeated touches to indicate an unconscious attraction to De Flores, even while expressing her disgust for him. Michael Billington recorded that Piper's Beatrice-Joanna touched his hair, his scarred face, "and offers him her lips as if to suggest extreme sexual arousal" ("*The Changeling*"). Another reviewer described Beatrice-Joanna's climactic passion: she "lets her hair go loose, tears off her jewels and clings passionately to her 'wondrous necessary man' De Flores" (qtd. in Barker and Nicol, par 9). In Act 3, scene 4, she clung to his leg, screaming while he dragged her around the floor. "The wealth of all Valencia shall not buy my pleasure from me," the character insisted

(3.4.162-3). The production's final image, a golden shower of three thousand coins raining down on the stage, seemed to hint otherwise; perhaps, in Gill's vision of Valencia, there is no aspect of sexuality that defies commodification. This image also suggests the rape of Danae by Jupiter in a shower of gold, further strengthening the play's connection between sex and violence.

Another production of *The Changeling*, the same year as Gill's, was Terry Hands' RSC production, which emphasized the menacing passions of the play. Rosemary Say reported that it focused on "emergence of horrific sexual forces within the shallowness of the society" (qtd. in Scott 87). The set, a "world of blood-colored bronze," was darker and smaller than the large Riverside Studio stage (Martin White). Hands' production also did more to link the main plot and the subplot thematically; White describes Lollo, the madhouse keeper, as having a facial disfigurement similar to the one De Flores bore. White also complained about the heavy-handed miming of the play's sexual entendres. Scott reports that "no pun was allowed to escape. The verbal wit was stressed to its very limit" (87).

Diana Quick, who played Beatrice-Joanna, finally expressed the barely-suppressed sexuality that reviewers and audience members sought. She was dressed salaciously; when she asked De Flores to kill Alonso for her, at one moment she threw back her shawl and thrust her considerable cleavage at him, as if she was offering him her breasts. Later, when she begged for mercy, she thrust her face in his crotch. The dumbshow included a graphic rape scene; Alsemero married a shell, a doll-like effigy of Beatrice-Joanna, while the audience saw a campy De Flores, played by Emrys James, ravish the living Beatrice-Joanna, spread-eagled on a chest, from behind in another part of the stage. However, her next line, "This fellow has undone me endlessly" was delivered with such resignation and humor that it almost re-wrote the rape scene as a jolly tumble in the bed. According to Holding, the final murder scene in which De Flores killed Beatrice-

Joanna, occurred during intercourse (198). When they exited the closet, Beatrice-Joanna's wound was nearer her crotch than her bosom, suggesting a violent sexual act.

Conclusion

Interpolated scenes answer the texts' unanswered questions about what happens when the characters are offstage. They also, however, resolve ambiguities of characterization. When we see the Duke taking an unwilling Bianca from behind as we do in the 1969 RSC *Women Beware Women*, our understanding of her is literally "directed" by the director of the play. Bianca's subsequent character shift—a seemingly unmotivated and unanticipated lust for status and luxury—takes on a different meaning than it might if her complicity in the act is assumed.

Barker and Nicol discuss this problem of directed interpretation at length in their article "Does Beatrice-Joanna Have a Subtext?: *The Changeling* on the London Stage." Over the last several decades, the academic consensus on Beatrice-Joanna's motivation has shifted from a belief that she genuinely detests De Flores and is coerced into sex with him to a belief that she has an unconscious sexual fascination with De Flores and actually takes pleasure in their illicit relationship²³. This re-examination of Beatrice-Joanna's motivations calls into question the nature of the relationship between her and De Flores. Is it blackmail or an affair of the heart? And are their sexual acts rape, or consensual sex?

Barker and Nicol posit that this change of opinion is due to several London stage productions, some of which I have covered above. Over the decades, they show, Beatrice-Joanna has portrayed increasing agency onstage in her relationship with De Flores. Directors have

²³ Barker and Nicol cite as examples Christopher Ricks, "The Moral and Poetic Structure of *The Changeling*"; Peter Morrison, "A Canguin in Zombieland: Middleton's Teratological *Changeling*" (1983); and Joost Daalder's intro to his New Mermaids edition of the play. See also Joost Daalder, "'There's Scarce a Thing But Is Both Loved and Loathed': *The Changeling* I.i." (1999) and "The Closet Drama in *The Changeling*" (1991).

begun to include extratextual scenes of the sexual encounter(s) between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores in which Beatrice-Joanna appears to be enjoying herself, as in Quick's delivery of her line "This fellow has undone me endlessly" discussed above. White mentioned this moment in his review, calling it a "genuinely acceptable imposition on the text by the director" which "crystallize[d]" the themes of the play in one moment. Barker and Nicol comment:

Once again, we can see a reviewer reacting to *The Changeling* – and encouraging audiences to react to it – in a manner that maximizes our sense of Beatrice's final relationship with De Flores as an expression of her true self, and minimizes any tendency to see her as a rape victim (par 20).

In somewhat of a vicious cycle, the more audience members and critics become accustomed to seeing this relationship as an unconscious love-hate relationship, the more they demand it from subsequent actors and actresses (cf. the critical panning of Ure and Piper). At this point in *The Changeling's* modern stage history, critics have a very difficult time finding a Beatrice-Joanna who meets their expectations for portraying "a sexually and morally transgressive heroine who drives her own fate" (par 6). In other words, for *The Changeling* to work for modern audiences, Beatrice-Joanna's sexual desires which, in the text, are acted out offstage, have to take center stage²⁴.

Barker and Nicol's point is well-taken; my agenda here, however, is not to prove specifically whether or not Beatrice-Joanna was raped in that moment, as much as it is to emphasize the repeated "sexing-up" of each of these plays on stage. As they discuss in their article, *The Changeling* can be, and has been, interpreted in several ways: as a morality play

²⁴ Barker and Nicol's observation dovetails nicely with Daileader's discussion of the voyeuristic potential of the offstage/onstage sex dilemma; namely, when the sex occurs offstage, audience members are even more titillated than when viewing onstage sex, precisely because they don't know exactly what's going on (*Eroticism* 28-32).

about a woman destroyed by her own sin, as a criticism of a society that prizes surface and appearance, as a denouncement of the marriage trade. The same could be said of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Women Beware Women*. However, in their first two decades on the modern stage, these plays were produced as sexual morality tales—frightening visions of what might happen in a society in which women have sexual agency.

Why do these productions matter to our collective understanding of Middleton? First, since the productions covered in this chapter were the first major Middleton revivals, it does not require a large logical leap to assume that they were, for many people during the period, their first experience of Middleton, perhaps inspiring them to experience these, and other, plays on paper. Once revived on stage, Middleton receives a boost in readership as well—and from there, a boost in scholarship, in attention in university classrooms, and thus attention, again on stage. He becomes a more prominent literary and theatrical force. Second, as Barker and Nicol establish, widely-accepted stage interpretations of plays can, over time, affect the critical consensus of the meaning of a play. These interpretations get passed down to professors, students, and interested readers, and from there to Wikipedia, SparkNotes, film versions, and other popular cultural representations of and engagement with literature. Finally, once again, they underscore Middleton's—and other Jacobean authors'—continued relevance to modern society by emphasizing issues and perspectives that Shakespeare himself all but ignores. In this way, they widen our culture's understanding of and appreciation for a variety of authors and literary works of the Jacobean period.

I would like to return to the statue with which I began this chapter because it is she who is the final viewer and, I would argue, the audience's mirror in the bloody proceedings at the end of *Women Beware Women*. In the words of a reviewer, she stands frozen, smiling in irony “as

she watches the proceedings in which women betray each other and their men to the point when the stage is thickly piled with corpses” (qtd. in Holding 250). For unlike Hermione, this statue, with lights flickering on it, begins the play with the suggestion of life and ends it with death. Unlike *A Winter’s Tale*, this tale of the destructive, court-corrupting power of sex-fueled jealousy and revenge does not end in a successful romance, a celebration of new and restored life and love. In *Women Beware Women*, all of the nightmarish fantasy of *A Winter’s Tale* are shown to be real: the incest, the obsessive jealousy, the death.

This chapter has as its epigraph T.S. Eliot’s famous quote about Middleton’s uncanny observation and understanding of women—the best of the Elizabethans he says, “save Shakespeare alone.” This quote exposes a mindset that is taken for granted in literary criticism: it is important, always and of course, to keep Shakespeare and every other author firmly in distinct categories. Middleton’s entire critical history in the 20th century has been one of increasing adulation and praise, increasing recognition, with the persistent caveat “save Shakespeare alone.”

But let’s stop saving Shakespeare—he doesn’t need our saving—and look at Middleton on his own merits. There is no Shakespearean equivalent of the transgressive, transformative power of sex in *Women Beware Women*, *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and *The Changeling*, no equivalent Shakespearean attempt to portray female desire and female terror from within. Perhaps instead of Eliot’s half-hearted praise, we should remember a quote from Kenneth Tynan reviewing the 1962 production of *Women Beware Women*: “Where sexual vagaries are concerned there is more authentic reportage in *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women* than in the whole of the First Folio.”

CHAPTER THREE

‘QUESTION AUTHORITY’: MIDDLETON IN THE ‘80S AND EARLY ‘90S

List of Productions

1980 *The Roaring Girl*, dir. Brigid Larmour, Royal Court Theatre, London

1962 *The Roaring Girl*, dir. Barry Kyle, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon

1986, *Women Beware Women* (Barker adaptation), dir. William Gaskill, Royal Court Theatre,
London

1987, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, dir. Di Trevis, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-
Avon

1988, *The Changeling*, dir. Richard Eyre, National Theatre, London

1991, *The Changeling*, dir. Mark Rylance, British Chinese Theatre Company, London

1994, *Women Beware Women*, dir. Christopher Geelan, Buttonhole Theatre Company, London

In 1982, Allan Bloom wrote a little-known essay, “Our Listless Universities,” which led to his 1987 book *The Closing of the American Mind*. In this essay, Bloom takes academia to task for teaching cultural revisionism and relativism, claiming that “students in our best universities do not believe in anything” (230). Bloom goes on to complain that young people don’t read books anymore, that rock music is the “junk food” of music, and that our new culture is too permissive about sex (238). And all of these problems he lays at the feet of postmodern thinking, which has taught us that “there are no absolutes and that one cannot say that one culture is superior to another,” that there is no *truth* (233). The attitude that so upsets Bloom can be

summed up in that bumper sticker which became popular in the late '70s and early '80s:

“Question Authority.”

In the 1980s and early 1990s, directors and producers began to emphasize instances of characters questioning authority in productions of plays by Thomas Middleton. These productions overtly criticized abuses and misuses of power, focusing on the abusive fathers, neglectful rulers, hypocritical clergy, and greedy rich people in the plays, while generating sympathy for the oppressed. Near the beginning of the period, productions by Barry Kyle, Howard Barker, and Di Trevis focused on Middleton's many middle- and lower-class characters in rebellion against wealthy or titled characters. In the late '80s and early '90s, directors such as Richard Eyre, Mark Rylance, and Christopher Geelan used the stage to call attention to racial issues still dividing much of the US and UK. These productions not only question who gets to hold power, but also prompt us to ask what kind of social and cultural systems make these hierarchies possible.

This attitude towards authority wasn't new in this period, nor was it confined to productions of plays by Middleton. In the US and UK, public performance of all kinds in the '80s showcased the struggle between the haves and the have-nots. In the political arena, conservative leaders such as Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK merged political and religious authority when they championed a message of “tough love” which stressed a Puritan ethic of hard work, not class entitlements, as the key to wealth. Their policies privileged big business and discouraged labor unions, exacerbated existing economic disparity, and made “class warfare” a topic of discussion on both sides of the aisle. While both Reagan and Thatcher are credited for reversing the tide of recession and contributing to great prosperity in both nations, this devotion to a fierce economic individualism sometimes overlooked those who

could not succeed without governmental help, and contributed to a widening social stratification. As this disparity was perceived, a culture of anti-Thatcherism and anti-Reaganism sprang up, in response to their policies which made business, not the consumer, the focus of a thriving economy.

In both countries, there were other concerns that spread beyond the perceived welfare culture. In the US, the fights were over abortion, teen pregnancy, and a rapidly-expanding drug culture, each of which was seen by the religious right as an affront to traditional Christian values and American decency. In the UK, people expressed concerns about immigration and a growing multicultural population. Both countries experienced their first reported cases of the AIDS virus²⁵. In addition, both countries were engaged in the Cold War, fighting a faceless communist threat.

Great disparities in wealth and income brought money and class into sharp focus in pop culture as well. The greater visibility of wealth was evident in American and British consumption of costly goods like designer labels, luxury cars, and the newly invented personal computer. Expensive recreational drugs like cocaine were on the rise among celebrities and “yuppies,” a new class of stylish young professionals. Rich was cool, and, as Gordon Gekko reminded us, greed was good²⁶.

However, even fabulously wealthy pop icons like Madonna and David Bowie, who represented flashiness, fashion, and a glamorous lifestyle, subverted power and authority in their performances. Madonna’s songs, music videos, and even her name called to mind religious

²⁵ Coincidentally, a 1986 article by Joanna Coles in *The Guardian* about the AIDS virus makes reference to one of Middleton’s plays. It is titled “First Person: Revenger’s Tragedy: The deliberate spread of sexually transmitted diseases.”

²⁶ Gordon Gekko is the iconic 1980’s stockbroker character, played by Michael Douglas in Oliver Stone’s 1987 film *Wall Street*, whose often (mis)quoted line—“Greed is good”—is associated not only with the film but with the unrestrained materiality of the ‘80s.

authority in the form of Catholic iconography; however, her image as a sexy, empowered rock star inverted the typical association of holiness, purity, and obedience with the Virgin Mary. David Bowie was similarly identity-bending in his performance of gender. While both Madonna and Bowie were wealthy, white, and privileged, they often used their status as popular performers to buck against mainstream culture in various ways.

People spanning all social strata, however, used art to subvert religious, political, and cultural authority. Some of the most outspoken resisters arose within the emerging hip-hop and punk music communities whose images were more closely aligned with a lower-class lifestyle. Hip-hop and punk communities both embraced and railed against the idea of living a life of hard knocks without the help of “the man” or “the establishment.” In *The Message*, a pioneering rap record released in 1982, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five describe life in the ghetto in dismal detail. “Broken glass everywhere / people pissing on the stairs . . . / Rats in the front room, roaches in the back / Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat,” the verse says, before coming to the song’s iconic rhyme which distills its message into two lines: “It’s all about money, ain’t a damn thing funny / You got to have a con in this land of milk and honey.” The Clash’s hit “Clampdown” paints a picture of young factory workers whose lives are stolen by long years working for “the clampdown.” “We will train our blue-eyed men to be young believers,” the song says, warning that a life spent working in the service of capitalism will be one of self-delusion. Punk bands such as the Clash, the Ramones, and the Damned represented a do-it-yourself attitude modeled in their ripped clothing, self-conscious poverty, and a chosen anti-fashion ethos which became fashionable in itself. Other subversive art forms emerged as well. Graffiti artists such as Lee Quinones turned vandalism of public buildings and utilities such as the subway into political expression. In 1979, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a troupe of

campy street performers, began performing in San Francisco, dressing as nuns in drag to draw attention to issues of gender and sexual inequality.

1980 and 1983: Larmour's and Kyle's *The Roaring Girl*

No early modern play better exemplifies the “Question Authority” attitude of the ‘80s than *The Roaring Girl*. This city comedy, written by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, dramatizes the fictional exploits of a real-life subverter of authority, Mary Frith. Frith was a female pickpocket and pimp in Jacobean London who flouted societal gender norms by wearing breeches, smoking a pipe, and cursing, all behaviors associated typically with men. In Middleton and Dekker’s play, she is known by her alias, Moll Cutpurse and is portrayed as a spirited and strong—but ultimately moral—street woman who dons breeches and a sword instead of a skirt and apron. Despite fictionalizing events in her life, Middleton and Dekker do not alter the aspect of her character as a woman who crosses class and gender lines, defying the patriarchy in her determination to remain independent.

Michael Coveney compares the character of Moll to a more “fully fledged version” of *West Side Story*’s Anybodys, the fierce young tomboy who just wants to be one of the Jets. And like *West Side Story* (and its source, *Romeo and Juliet*), this play’s central plot revolves around two young lovers whose parents stand in the way of their union. Unlike these plays, however, *The Roaring Girl* is a comedy. In it, Moll agrees to help a young nobleman, Sebastian Wengrave, marry his love, Mary Fitzallard, in direct defiance of the money-grubbing objections of Sir Alexander Wengrave, his father. She pretends to be engaged to Sebastian so that his father, shocked and disapproving of his son’s relationship with a cross-dressing “roaring girl,” will agree to the marriage to Mary. Sir Alexander sends a spy, Trapdoor, to ingratiate himself to Moll and implicate her in crimes; however, Moll is too noble to steal or prostitute herself, and

Trapdoor cannot catch her at any wrongdoing. Several interwoven subplots show Moll as she outwits Laxton, a devious lothario who takes her for a whore; protects Jack Dapper, another rebellious gallant, from the strictures of *his* disapproving father; and revels in her street associations without allowing herself to be tarnished with the labels of thief or prostitute. The play concludes with both the successful marriage of Sebastian and Mary, and Moll's triumphant insistence on remaining single while society's values continue to disappoint her.

In 1980, Brigid Larmour directed a Cambridge Mummings revival of *The Roaring Girl* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The playbill described the play as not having been performed "since the Restoration" (Larmour, "Hi").²⁷ It played for two weeks at Riddle's Court Theatre and included Stephen Fry, Annabelle Arden, and Tony Slattery²⁸. Arden played Moll to great applause; John Barber said that she did not "rave or shout or swagger . . . she [brought] with her a chortling enjoyment of life, the kind roly-poly happiness that instantly fills a hall with sympathetic laughter" (qtd. in Mulholland 65). Larmour relayed, in a personal interview, that she was struck by the proto-feminist attitude of the character of Moll and that her production focused on the play's treatment of the male/female relationships. In this spirit, she reduced the citizen's plot drastically and focused most of the attention on Moll's triumph over characters like Laxton, Trapdoor, and Alexander Wengrave. This production launched Larmour's career in the theater; she is now the artistic director of the Watford Palace Theatre. According to Larmour, the production garnered positive media coverage at the festival and she herself invited the Royal

²⁷ Both Marilyn Roberts and Paul Mulholland note three other twentieth-century staged productions of the play before this one; however, two of these occurred in the US; the third was staged in Dundee, Scotland.

²⁸ Fry references the production and briefly describes a funny moment regarding Tony Slattery's performance in his autobiography, *The Fry Chronicles: An Autobiography*.

Shakespeare Company to the show. Because her production was such a hit, it inspired the RSC to revive it three years later.

Barry Kyle's 1983 RSC production of *The Roaring Girl* reclaimed the play for the decade by tying the cultural concerns of the time to the themes of resistance to power and authority found within the play²⁹. It played in repertory with *The Taming of the Shrew*, also directed by Kyle, a pairing that might have framed the story as the other half of a narrative about marriage and gender roles. Indeed, Alun Armstrong, who played a completely unsympathetic, brutish Petruchio in *Taming*, played Trapdoor in *The Roaring Girl*, the spy who is sent to betray Moll and who ultimately begs Moll's forgiveness and offers her his service. This abrupt role reversal could have potentially provided some interesting material for an explicitly feminist take on *The Roaring Girl*. However, Kyle's production departed from Larmour's feminist treatment, instead emphasizing the play's interest in capitalism and the middle class, while also showcasing Moll, its central figure, as a harbinger of cultural change³⁰.

The set for Kyle's production hinted at the cultural change that characterized the play's historical context. It was, in the words of Paul Mulholland, "a massive collection of edifices" (51). All angles, the set included a partially deconstructed Tudor-style brick building with windows and doors to nowhere. A decaying bust of Queen Elizabeth I sat in one corner; up on a rooftop, a new bust of James I rested under some scaffolding. These details set the production in the period after the death of Elizabeth I and the coronation of James I, when the country was still transitioning from one ruler to the next. For audiences, they might have also recalled the governmental and economic shifts occurring in the '80s, which were a time of boom and bust,

²⁹ Larmour stage-managed for Kyle during this season; however, she did not work on *The Roaring Girl*, but instead on *The Taming of the Shrew*.

³⁰ Kyle's interest in class issues may have been inspired by his working class background; his father was an East London dockworker and his mother worked in a factory (Hicks).

when one could see crumbling buildings standing next to brand-new construction. The production's set was dominated by a looming clock with exposed gears, behind which characters could hide and eavesdrop. Sir Alexander Wengrave, played by David Waller, did this twice, watching his son's interactions with Moll from behind the hands of the clock. This set piece foreshadowed the coming industrial revolution, in which every worker, like gears in a clock, has his place and must do his part or the whole will not function.

The set was later dressed with several wooden barrels, bales, and crates, and a large table covered with cones, cups, scales, and other mercantile implements. After the play's initial scenes in the Wengrave household, the backdrop of a bustling London street complete with storefronts was forever in sight. This stood as a reminder of the rising centrality of buying and selling in the early modern period, and the rise of the middle-class. For example, the play's citizen subplots focus on several shopkeepers and their wives. The production did not depict these characters as poor; the wives wore gaudily feathered hats and carried frilled handbags. However, they were not upper class either. They generally spoke among themselves with Cockney London accents, but each time they interacted with young gallants, they attempted to mimic their Received Pronunciation. Mistress Gallipot, the wife of the tobacconist (played by Stephanie Fayerman), tried to impress a customer with the following mincing response, lengthening the vowels and the whispery "h" sounds: "The syame as what you had at fahst, sah" (3.112).

One of these subplots also emphasized the importance of various forms of currency in the play itself. Scene 3 opens with the wives hawking tobacco, feathers, and garments: "Gentlemen, what is't you lack? What is't you buy?" (3.1). While they conduct business, the wives carry on flirtations with their customers. However, these are complicated when Laxton tries to blackmail Mistress Gallipot. She is interested in him and tries to schedule romantic assignations. Laxton

maintains an appearance of reciprocated desire; however, he is only interested in the money he can bilk from her to “spend upon other wenches” (3.95). This arrangement presents both love and money as sorts of currency. Mistress Gallipot uses cash as currency to get affection, while Laxton uses affection as currency to get more cash—which he intends to spend on other kinds of love.

Ultimately, Laxton threatens to tell Gallipot about his incipient affair with his wife if she does meet his demands. She tells her husband that she was precontracted to Laxton, a binding legal status that her marriage to Gallipot would have breached. Laxton uses this pretense to extort larger and larger sums of money from the Gallipots until, finally, Mistress Gallipot confesses that it was all a lie. Laxton takes the blame, exonerates Mistress Gallipot completely, and goes home to dinner with the couple. This plotline, in counterpoint to the main plot, reminds the audience that love and/or marriage are economic arrangements for both the middle-class and the nobles. In short, everyone in the play has—or is—something to sell.

Except, perhaps, for Moll. As the locus of rebellion in the play, she challenges not only the patriarchy but also the buying and selling of women for the pleasure and profit of men. She refuses Laxton’s money to sleep with him, saying “I scorn to prostitute myself to a man, I that can prostitute a man to me” (5.111). She knows that some women do this out of necessity and does not judge them; however, for herself, she rejects the institution of marriage as but “a chopping and changing” of heads, preferring her own head and her own bed (4.45).

In the RSC production, Helen Mirren played Moll as the celebrated champion of the people. Her wide stance emphasized her fearless androgyny and her Cockney accent underscored her connection to the lower classes and to city life. The play opened with the cast walking down the thrust stage, singing the traditional English round “Hey Ho Nobody Home”: “Meat nor drink

nor money have I none . . . yet will I be merry.” The cast members took turns delivering lines from the Prologue, lifting Moll together into a tight spotlight. She wore a tight black doublet and a tall black hat over frizzy hair; her arms were bare and her outfit was embellished with leather straps and metal clasps, looking like a punk-meets-Jacobean mashup³¹. The cast finished the Prologue as one, saying in unison “Her life, our acts proclaim” (line 30).

The full-cast scenes helped to create the atmosphere of bustling Jacobean London that dominated this production; reviewers compared it to the depiction of Dickensian London in the recent RSC production of *Nicholas Nickleby* (Mulholland 53). As I watched the recorded version, I also heard echoes of *Les Miserables*, an RSC production already in planning for its 1985 opening. At the beginning of Scene 3, the cast appeared *en masse* onstage again, moving forward into the light singing “London Poor,” preceded by a crouching beggar who dragged himself along with his arms. The stage was transformed into the marketplace during the song; barrels, stools, and bags of grain were brought on while the beggar set himself up in the corner, leering out at the audience. Later in the play, in Scene 10, Moll led the underlings of London—the thieves, the dock people, and the other roarers—in a “canting” song and dance, running and leaping about the stage while everyone sang. In each of these scenes, the city was depicted as a host of people from various backgrounds, and Moll was positioned as the one character whose presence transcended class. Her entrances in these scenes were hailed enthusiastically by gallants and beggars alike. Her last speech, claiming that she’d wait to get married until “gallants void from sergeants’ fear . . . women manned but never pandered, cheaters booted but not coached, vessels older ere they’re broached,” proved her to be the champion of all the powerless (11.218-22).

³¹ In some scenes, the punk aesthetic was pushed even farther by having Moll wear fingerless gloves and a leather armband.

Kyle's production of *The Roaring Girl* was hailed by Coveney as "the most persuasive piece of full-scale RSC reclamation" since another RSC Middleton revival, Trevor Nunn's acclaimed *The Revenger's Tragedy*. By producing it, the RSC established it as a play worthy of the attention of the most important—and authoritative—theater in Britain. Thus *The Roaring Girl*, a play about defying social and cultural authority, was also used in the service of artistic and academic authority, just as Moll's subversive behavior in the play ultimately functions as a prop for the patriarchal institution of marriage.

1986: Barker's *Women Beware Women*

Howard Barker's 1986 collaboration with Middleton on *Women Beware Women* shocked, confused, and titillated audiences in William Gaskill's production of the play for the Royal Court Theatre. This theatre, known as a venue for new and sometimes "politically oppositional" writing, drew audiences expecting to see serious work from young writers; Barker had been a regular writer for the Royal Court since 1970 (Milling 49; 95). Barker's adaptation used the framework of Middleton's play to address issues of class and control.

In a review of the play, Tony Howard called Barker the most "Jacobean" of modern British playwrights for his ornate language and "love of grotesque and violent situations." Barker had established a reputation for himself of writing about working-class characters whose struggles demonstrate "the futility of revolt" (Milling 96). He adapted Middleton's play by distilling the first four acts of the play into one, and replacing the fifth act with a second act of his own writing. He excised the complicated masque and wrote a new ending in which Sordido, in an outburst of class antagonism, rapes Bianca before her wedding. She then refuses to marry the Duke, citing her newly-awakened desire for "truth." The Duke stabs Sordido, acting as the authoritarian state putting down a rebellion, but then leaves Florence to avoid a mob. His sister

Livia and her lover Leantio, to whom he has given over control of the state, stand silent, ambiguously neither refusing nor denying power. In direct contradiction to the plot of Middleton's play, almost all of the principals live. In the program for the Royal Court production, Barker provided a series of aphorisms to explain his changes to the Middleton text: "Middleton says the wise woman marries a fool and fucks her favourite. I saw no one is as stupid as they appear. Middleton says a woman buys her sex. I say even bought sex carries hope. Middleton says lust leads to the grave. I say desire alters perception."

Gaskill's production was set, in Michael Billington's phrase, among "rust-pocked black columns," amid lighting that, according to Michael Coveney, "[made] no bones about abrupt changes of colour and tone." The few production photos housed at the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance Archives make evident the difference in age between the actors playing the Duke and Bianca. The Duke, played by Nigel Davenport, had white hair and a white beard, but Bianca, played by Joanne Whalley, wore her hair in braids. With wide dark eyes in a pale face, she looked fragile next to the large Duke. The costuming, according to Holding, was standard black Jacobean, but (as with other Middleton productions in this decade) they could also be read as "macabre punk outfits" (272). After the interval, Howard described each scene as "bordered by an ominous blackout and physically focused on a striking prop."³² The production's staging emphasized sexuality and voyeurism to a shocking extent. Billington noted the Duke luxuriously "picking a grape to indicate moral depravity," and an online commenter recalled him thrusting his face between Bianca's breasts. The Duke and the Cardinal, using a telescope, also observed Livia and Leantio in a private moment (Holding 271). Francis King recalled one particular audience reaction to the play's depiction of sex: "The funniest moment of

³² Other than mentions of the chess table usually associated with this play, I could find no description of the prop Howard mentions.

the evening came as Livia submitted to some frank sexual treatment from Hippolito. ‘Oh my goodness!’ a woman in the audience shriled out in horror. People inclined to shrill out ‘Oh my goodness!’ in horror should steer clear of the Royal Court.”

In Barker’s version, the Ward is no longer an idiot but uses the appearance of stupidity to more closely observe those around him. Played at the Royal Court by Simon Russell Beale, the Ward was “sweatily manic,” and “erupt[ing] like a firecracker . . . to be the glintingly determined avenger” (Coveney). He was keenly aware that his bride, Isabella, was having an affair with her uncle; the playscript indicates that, at one point, he made a lewd motion while asking sarcastically, “oh why oh why?” Barker also has him contemplate killing Isabella before he decides that he doesn’t care what happens to her.

However, the play’s most surprising outburst of vengeance was on the part of Sordido, the Ward’s lackey, played by Gary Oldman; Billington called him a “rapacious punk.” It is he who, in Barker’s second act, turns the wedding into a nexus of violent class revolution. In Gaskill’s production, the wedding’s pageantry and spectacle was meant to evoke the royal wedding of Prince Charles to Princess Diana. Sordido’s life, however, lacked the splendor and the freedom of wealth. He prefaced his rape of Bianca by a speech in which he recounts his life of servitude “in odd attics scratching with the dead men,” a life of “poverty and weird alcohols.” He envisioned forcing himself on Bianca “in her washed matrimonial skin . . . on some polished marbles in foams of lace and splitting fabrics” (Part Two Scene Five, qtd in Holding 272). When he did rape her, it was, as he imagined, in her wedding dress. After he finished, he said to her, “The people marry you.”

Barker’s skill at adapting and adding to the play was a subject for hot debate. Lyn Gardner saw Barker’s “liberating and redemptive” plot as a criticism of “the current Left’s

inability to deal with desire,” while Holding argued that “in Barker’s hands, Middleton’s vaunted modernity and realism are validated and extended” and credits his work with refocusing the play on its pre-existing themes of sex and class (269). However, Coveney said that Barker's Middleton-edits represent “a piece of clumsy hacking unmindful of versification, metre and the switches between prose and poetry,” and that the new scenes “incorporate impetuous attacks on old age, capitalism, lack of all passion and enthusiasm and general jumping up and down.” The most heated criticism was leveled at Barker’s rape plot. Charles Spencer was offended that “[r]ape is violently depicted as a way of mending a girl’s morals *and* purifying the body politic.” The *Today* reviewer sarcastically summarized: “According to Barker, this is just what she needed; she’s jolly grateful. In Barker’s view all sex—including rape—is revolutionary and therefore good. Pshaw!”

Barker’s depiction of a transformative rape is certainly off-putting to a modern viewer. It provides a very interesting, albeit extreme, example of the modern stage’s questionable treatment of Middleton’s women (see Chapter Two). However, I include it in this chapter not to discuss whether or not Barker’s treatment of Bianca can be read as misogynistic (it can), but to draw attention to his use of Middleton’s play to make a statement about class politics. After all, Sordido is, as Milton Shulman noted, the play’s only working class character, and it is he who speaks for “the people” when he rapes the privileged, sheltered Bianca. Barker’s re-write of *Women Beware Women* does not locate authority in wealth, power, or the Church. Instead, he locates authority—and agency—in the working class and in the audience. In *Arguments for a Theatre*, he writes that the play is not meant to provide “a restatement of public morality,” but instead “the audience . . . is freed into authority” (qtd. in Milling 36). Barker claims for himself and for us the ultimate freedom—the freedom to make our own meanings out of the text.

1987: Trevis's *The Revenger's Tragedy*

Like Kyle's production of *The Roaring Girl* and Gaskill's production of *Women Beware Women*, Di Trevis's 1987 production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* used a punk aesthetic to hint at connections between the Jacobean period and the 1980s. However, this connection was pushed farther in the character (and costume) of Vindice, the play's authority-busting protagonist, than it had been in either of the characters of Moll or Sordido. The visual metaphor worked especially well in this production, which set decaying materialism against the thwarted rage of the malcontent. Trevis's production challenged authority in the play when it pushed Vindice's project past the limits of personal revenge and into the territory of a rebellion against a ruling class.

Archival photos show the set as spare and dark, featuring a huge slanted platform which doubled as bed, scaffold, and inner stage. Behind the platform was hung a large "moth-eaten arras" whose tattered strips of fabric framed a candle-lit area like the mossy entrance to a cave (Billington). In the first scene, the Duke's family performed a stately pavane onstage. The former wealth and luxury of the court was made obvious in their costumes. They were tattered but gaudy, in costumes of glittery brocade and tufted velvet which sometimes read as "broken-down Renaissance extravaganzas" and other times "contemporary high sloppy fashion" (Coveney). Their sparkling clothing caused Irving Wardle to call them "so many glistening spiders." Their large, poofy wigs looked like auburn cotton candy, and their makeup was heavily drawn on. Lussurioso, the favored son of the court, snorted poppers, a popular drug in the club scene of the '80s. All of the court members seemed unhealthy with heavy red-rimmed eyes and unnaturally blooming cheeks. Like the 1969 Nunn production, the Duchess was portrayed as bald underneath her wig, perhaps signifying venereal disease.

When Vindice, played by Anthony Sher, first appeared, at the end of the court's dance, he was dressed in rags with stringy hair and beard, cradling the skull of his beloved Gloriana; Michael Billington compared him to Ben Gunn, the marooned pirate in *Treasure Island*. However, as the play went on, Vindice transformed into Piato, a Cockney-accented punk sporting a gelled Mohawk, an earring, and a spangled doublet. Billington described this iteration as having a "red cockatoo hairdo and an unhygienic habit of licking people's arms," while Coveney likened him to a "pomaded bike boy." The transformation of costume suggested a shift in Vindice's motives for revenge, from the personal to the political. Costuming Vindice/Piato as a punk suggested that class-based oppression could have spurred on his rebellion.

The play makes it clear, early on, that Gloriana's death is not the only reason for Vindice's depression. Vindice makes reference to his "worthy father's funeral," to which his mother responds that his father would indeed have been "worthy" (i.e. worth money) if "his estate had been fellow to his mind" (1.1.119, 123). The full impact of the Duke's crimes comes to light here; not only had he murdered Gloriana but he also "deject[ed]" Vindice's father, causing him to die, as Gratiana suggests, "of discontent, the nobleman's consumption" (1.1.124, 127). Compare this story to that of Bosola, the "court-gall" in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, who rails at the corruption of the court but would be, according to Antonio, "as lecherous, covetous, or proud, bloody, or envious, as any man, if he had means to be so" (1.1.24-9). Or we might compare Vindice to Iago, Shakespeare's bitter soldier, who was passed over in favor of Michael Cassio for promotion by the general Othello. It is clear that Vindice's father was, like Iago and Bosola, a malcontent: a man of intelligence and ability whose fortunes have fallen, whose energies are frustrated, and whose talents find no scope for use or reward.

Vindice is certainly a malcontent; he seems, at the beginning of the play, to be without court employment (perhaps retribution for his connection to Gloriana?) and is as bitter as either Bosola or Iago. Middleton suggests that Hippolito, whose courtier's income helps to support the family, is near to becoming a malcontent himself; when Vindice asks him how he has not been "turned out yet," Hippolito agrees, saying that he has been "shoved at" but that he maintains his position through the patronage of the Duchess (1.1.61-2). Both Hippolito and Vindice criticize and punish the court for its corruption; but the glee with which they plot the murders of the Duke and his family taints them with a lust for violence that eclipses the court's lust for wealth and pleasure.

Trevis's punkification of Vindice's character makes sense when one compares the punks of the '80s to the Jacobean figure of the malcontent. The punk is an emblem of rebellion, of counterculture, and of consciously chosen poverty and individualism. The main difference between these two figures is that one has claimed his social and economic status, while the other has often had bad fortune forced upon him. But in their opposition to the dominant order, they are similar. By costuming Vindice as a punk, Trevis reminded her audience that punks were contemporary rebels and sharpened the production's focus on the class issues inherent in the play. Vindice's rebellion, while it eventually led to his destruction, also contributed to the destruction of the court's empire, which was literally built on death. The slanted platform which made up most of the set was shaped like a headstone and rested on a mound of skulls and bones. Whether or not these were meant to be the bones of past courtiers who, like Vindice's father, died dejected, the production left ambiguous; but the first scene makes it clear that the court is to blame for two very different kinds of death.

The most significant change Trevis made, particularly insofar as the play comments on countercultural rebellion, was her addition of an entirely new character whose existence is not suggested by the text. In the show's London run, Trevis added an unspeaking "Scavenger" who snapped up scraps of food and helped to move corpses between scenes³³. This character represented the survival of the poor in the face of oppression by the wealthy. The most important action this character takes occurred at the very end of the play, after the action in the text had been completed. Once Vindice was taken offstage, the Scavenger acted as an assassin and killed Antonio, the only remaining figure of nobility. According to Billington, revenge in this production had its "own unstoppable momentum here symbolized by the Scavenger who finally crawl[ed] out of the woodwork to continue where Vindice left off." Because the Scavenger did not speak, his vengeance was necessarily impersonal. The audience could only assume that he killed to gain some control in a society where he and others like him were invisible. Thus, the invisibility of the malcontent in Jacobean society was metaphorically expanded to include the invisibility of the poor and downtrodden in every society.

1988: Eyre's *The Changeling*

In his 1988 National Theatre production of *The Changeling*, Richard Eyre emphasized the play's concerns of "sex, madness, and social order" (Program). In this production, based on ideas he developed for his 1970 Royal Lyceum production in Edinburgh, he updated the setting of the play from a Valencian fortress in the seventeenth century to a tropical Spanish slave colony in the nineteenth century. Eyre cast several black actors to play servant characters, notably those in roles in which they lust after white characters, such as De Flores, Lolloio, and

³³ Trevis may have been influenced in this choice by Philip Prowse, whose productions of other Jacobean tragedies such as *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The White Devil*, and *The Changeling* included an extratextual silent character called Death (Holding 70).

Diaphanta. Their racial difference was strongly marked. Beyond skin color, other signifiers set these characters out as culturally distinct. For example, costume designs show Diaphanta, Beatrice-Joanna's handmaid, wearing copious necklaces and bangles that read as tribal accoutrement layered over her nineteenth-century gown. Diaphanta's backstory is not discussed in the play, but an audience member could imagine a young slave taking on the clothing of her masters yet still holding onto some cultural markers.

Cultural difference was inscribed even more deeply in the case of De Flores, Alicante's steward. Instead of the "dog-faced" deformity that the text calls for, the actor playing De Flores, George Harris, bore facial marks that resembled ritual scarification. Three parallel slashes on his cheeks and other marks around his eyes, when read in context of his servant status in the Alicante household, suggested an enslaved African lord. Harris, a tall, imposing actor, played De Flores with a sycophantic stoop, sometimes almost bending in half to bow to his Spanish masters (Holding 220). His costume, too, denoted his status. As one of the head servants, he wore keys around his neck, a mark of his privilege and power in the household, but also a reminder of his invisible shackles. His stockings were beribboned, perhaps reminiscent of Malvolio, the cross-gartered steward in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Like Malvolio, De Flores harbors a futile longing for his mistress; however, in Eyre's production, both class *and* race combine to make him an entirely unsuitable mate for Beatrice-Joanna, the young noblewoman after whom he lusts.

Perhaps Eyre's casting of a black man and a white woman (Beatrice-Joanna was played by Miranda Richardson) in the two principal roles was meant to evoke memories of *Othello*. Eyre certainly wanted to suggest a link between obsessive love, madness, and tragic consequences. His director's note for his earlier production of *The Changeling* makes the connection clear:

In *The changeling* (sic), as in Goya's etchings, love is seen at best as a kind of 'tame madness'—to be in love is to become a changeling; at its worst, it becomes an uncontrollable force which gives birth to insane demons who mercilessly manipulate their progenitors and whose purification lies only in death" (qtd in Holding 192).

However, read alongside Eyre's casting choices, other aspects of the design and staging could be interpreted as an equally strong criticism of a power structure based on strict social control, where no one is allowed to deviate from their place defined by either class, gender, or race. The set, for instance, underscored the connection that Middleton and Rowley's text makes between the literal constraints of the madhouse and the social constraints of the castle. Production photos held at the National Theatre's archives show the set, dominated by a large tunnel upstage, leading to a huge arched doorway. The carved cornices, golden walls, and a fading fresco painted on either side of the door evoked a Spanish hall in decline. However, other set elements called to mind the bars of a prison. The hall was bracketed by cast iron stairwells that looked like zig-zagging fire escapes, connected at the top by a catwalk. Two iron gates were also closed across the tunnel structure at this point, forcing the action down-stage. The stage itself was steeply angled, which restricted many of the actors' mobility. Downstage center was a huge iron grate set into the floor like a covered entrance to a dungeon. Holding describes sound effects which underscored these set elements; every time a major plot development occurred, the audience heard the sound of iron doors slamming shut (202). All of these elements—the cavernous tunnel upstage, the sight and sound of iron bars, the actors treading carefully to avoid falling on the angled stage or tripping over the iron grate—worked together to create a sense of

claustrophobia. The beautiful set became a trap into which the principal characters, with every choice they made, fell deeper and deeper.

During the scenes set in the madhouse, the metal stairwells were populated by the characters of the madmen, who sat on the stairs whooping, stomping, or banging the metal. The madhouse characters themselves were animalized in masks that suggested the bestial demons from Goya's *Caprichos*, their posture and gestures animalistic³⁴. Lollo, the madhouse keeper, observed them from above on the walkway, carrying a whip which he cracked often at his half-human charges. They moved forward, flapping, pecking, and strutting as Isabella described them: "Sometimes they imitate the beasts and birds, singing, or howling, braying, barking; all as their wild fancies prompt 'em" (3.3.213-5). They surrounded her and pulled her to the ground, suggesting imminent rape, when Lollo came in to restore order (Holding 223).

Three mimed additions to the play suggesting the helplessness of the main characters. At the beginning of the play, most of the principals sat or sprawled out around the iron grate set into the floor. Two actors wearing bird masks entered the stage and lifted up Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero, setting them and the rest of the cast in motion. A note from the prompt book describes Beatrice-Joanna as "placid, puppet-like" as she moves upstage, where she and Alsemero touch hands as the rest of the cast "melt" offstage³⁵. This action was repeated after the act break. Finally, at the end of the play, the corpses of Beatrice-Joanna and her illicit lover, De Flores, were surrounded by the masked madmen. These creatures dragged the still-living Alsemero to the pile of bodies and then slumped down where they stood, as still as marionettes with no one manipulating their strings.

³⁴ Eyre is not the first director of *The Changeling* to associate the play with Goya; see Chapter Two's description of Tony Richardson's 1961 production.

³⁵ Cf. Peter Lichtenfels 1980 production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* at the Liverpool Playhouse, which used giant puppets in the masque. See Holding for a description of this production.

The characters' lack of control over their own bodies in these scenes mirrored their lack of control over their lives writ large. The finely-tuned morality which makes Beatrice-Joanna's love for Alsemero an act of adultery also makes her relationship with De Flores an act of miscegenation. She has little more choice or freedom in her life than De Flores; the similarity between the two is underscored by the image on the cover of Eyre's program. It is a close-up of Miranda Richardson's face, bearing marks like those De Flores had. On one cheek, the three parallel slashes bleed; on the other, the marks have already healed into scars.

Many critics panned Eyre's choice to emphasize race, concerned that it made the tragedy about miscegenation instead of the original social taboos that Beatrice-Joanna breaks. Holding saw the casting as a commentary on the blood lust of the primitive man which "skews the play in a quite mistaken direction" (221). Michael Coveney compared Harris's De Flores to "a routinely articulated Caliban with the hots for the boss's daughter." Others saw a white woman drawn in by the fascination of the exoticized other. John Peter noted that, "in a slave colony, a white woman's passion for such a man has very different connotations" than the original Beatrice-De Flores relationship might support.

At heart, these critics seemed to desire Eyre to represent the text's original motivations and conflicts. According to the text, Beatrice-Joanna's sin was not miscegenation but lust, murder, and adultery. Given the growing expectations of racial tolerance in the '80s, modern audiences may be uncomfortable with the suggestion that miscegenation is a tragic sin. However, instead of seeing Eyre's choices as mistaken, I read them in the light of Jonathan Dollimore's concept of "creative vandalism." In an essay discussing Barker's rewrite of *Women Beware Women*, Dollimore says, "But maybe we only ever learn from the past by radically reworking it." Eyre took *The Changeling* and, by setting it in a slave colony, allowed audiences to see the

play's conflict and tragedy through the lens of a more relevant social conflict/taboo. After all, making audiences confront things they are uncomfortable with is useful and a long-held purpose of the theater. In this case, the madness of racial prejudice is lumped in with the madness of class-based prejudice, and both are to blame for the tragic action of the play. In essence, the characters are slaves of a system that does not care about them and that ultimately kills them.

1991: Rylance's *The Changeling*

In 1991, Mark Rylance directed a production of *The Changeling* for British Chinese Theater with an all-Asian cast. The company was the brainchild of Susan Leong and was created to give Asian actors an outlet for performance that she felt wasn't being provided in the major national companies. In an interview with Jane Edwards, Leong says, "I think theatre should reflect the society that it caters for, and the great thing about Britain is that it is multicultural." Rylance was chosen to direct to attract additional publicity; his father was born in Peking (Edwards). However, Leong had trouble getting someone to write for the company, so she decided to do a classic. The program for *The Changeling* included the company's mission: "to fuse the British and Chinese cultures in innovative productions of the classics."

This production provided an inside look at British Chinese life, where, according to Leong, "even very modern men who have been to university still want a virgin" (Edwards). The madhouse subplot was cut, and the main plot was set in The Golden Castle, a modern Chinese restaurant in London, where Beatrice-Joanna, played by Leong, is the "spoilt, Vogue-reading daughter" of the proprietor (Billington). In this updated setting, De Flores, played by Julian Lyan, became the chef while Diaphanta, played by Toshie Ogura, was, according to James Christopher, a "beautifully expressionless waitress." Rylance used the setting inventively to accommodate action; Jeremy Kingston described De Flores as "braining Alonso with a pestle

and hacking the finger off the corpse with the cleaver he has just used for slicing lychees.” The dumbshow signifying Beatrice-Joanna’s marriage to Alsemero was replaced by a scene of De Flores watching the wedding on a small TV in the kitchen while he “jeeringly [shot] firecrackers” at the video (Billington). During the last act, Diaphanta appeared on stage as a ghost, a choice perhaps borrowed, Maureen Paton Maguire suggests, from the “Japanese/Chinese spirit tradition.”

Maguire’s easy equivocation of two distinctive Asian cultures provides a nice example of why a company like British Chinese Theatre is necessary. The reviewers’ seeming inability to discuss the production without resorting to bad puns and racist stereotypes provides another. Earlier in her review, Maguire described De Flores killing Alonso “as if he were a poor little Peking duck.” Christopher compared the play to the “unleavened melodrama of a Fu Manchu movie.” Malcolm Rutherford’s description of the play called it “slinky Asian and with a Chinese sense of hierarchy to go with it.” And Kingston’s review is titled “Spicy Meat Too Lightly Treated.” Despite the lazily offensive reviews, the production was a success and set a precedent for Asian actors. With it, Leong and Rylance challenged the *de facto* racial authority of white British actors performing classic English plays. As Billington put it, “an important principle has been established: that Chinese actors born or based in Britain have a legitimate claim on the classics.”

1994: Geelan’s *Women Beware Women*

I want to conclude by discussing Christopher Geelan’s 1994 Buttonhole Theatre Company production of *Women Beware Women*. This small modern-dress production ran for a month at the Duke of Cambridge in Kentish Town. The action was staged against a confusing background of tessellated lizards, and the production never quite settled into comedy or tragedy

(Robert Hanks). The moment when Isabella, played by Adrienne O'Sullivan, was examined by the Ward, played by Guy Burgess, was meant to be funny, but ended up forcing the audience to watch her painful humiliation. Another scene showcased a comic sword duel between Hippolito and Leantio that turned unexpectedly violent when Hippolito took out a gun and shot his opponent (Elizabeth Schafer; Hanks).

Likewise, Geelan's decision to cast Swaziland native Noma Dumezweni as Bianca crystallized the uneasiness of the production's atmosphere. Geelan was not engaging in so-called color-blind casting; on the contrary, he, like Eyre, certainly meant to emphasize Dumezweni's race as a mark of difference. Heightened by a central African costume, it entrenched Bianca's position as an outsider among a cast of otherwise white actors. But her race did not equate her with the play's lower class characters. She seemed out of place with Leantio (played with an East End accent and described by Hanks as a "wideboy") as much because she didn't share his low class background as because of her racial difference. Elizabeth Schafer described a moment of stage business in which Bianca refuses to help with the washing up, commenting that when Dumezweni's Bianca was seduced by the Duke, "there was a strong sense of Bianca's return home in terms of class."

It was not the first time this scene had been blocked as a seduction instead of a rape; the dialogue in this scene nowhere states or implies Bianca's consent, but it does leave much open to directorial interpretation through blocking, body-language, etc. However, as I discussed in Chapter Two, when a director decides to cast Bianca as receptive to the Duke's advances, this drastically changes the audience's understanding of her. When performed by a black actress, this moment becomes highly fraught, suggesting what Celia Daileader terms "Othellophilia," the eroticization of black actors and especially "black on white' sex" ("Casting" 178). The character

of Bianca as she is written already displays “violence, physicality, sexuality”—tropes of blackness that Daileader outlines as part of the phenomenon of Othellophilia (179; 185). When she is cast and performed as an exoticized, and even Africanized, black woman, the production perpetuates the stereotype of black hypersexuality.

Geelan’s choices, however, still provide an example of questioning authority—but not the same kind as the other productions discussed in this chapter. Where the productions use Middleton to challenge prevailing attitudes about race and class, Geelan’s (perhaps unconscious) antiauthoritarianism was leveled at Middleton himself. By changing the implied rape into a seduction and by casting a black actor as a character whose name means “white,” Geelan displayed a playfulness and lack of reverence towards Middleton’s text—an attitude that, we can see, increases over time. Beginning with the productions described in Chapter Two and continuing through to the present, directors have questioned the authority *of* the plays themselves by incorporating more and more directorial interpolation, even to the point of, as in Howard Barker’s case, re-writing the ending of a play. Interpretations which foreground modern approaches to class or racial issues epitomize the slogan “question authority” because they change the original version of an *author’s* work. Whether the text’s claim to authority lies in its age, the author’s name, or the words on the page, productions like these prove that the text is no longer the final authority on its own meaning. Instead, the director changes it, updates it, and purportedly improves it. Funnily enough, this cavalier treatment of texts is just what we suspect actors and theatre owners did themselves in the early modern period. In this light, original authority is no authority at all.

In other cases, producing a Middleton play grants him (and other early modern authors) authority while challenging the ultimate cultural heavyweight, Shakespeare. Barry Kyle’s

production of *The Roaring Girl* was a play by non-Shakespearean playwrights being produced by a company whose name includes “Shakespeare.” In one way, Middleton and Dekker benefited by riding on Shakespeare’s coattails, soaking up some of the authority that automatically attaches to his more-famous name. In another light, though, *The Roaring Girl*, as a text, gained authority by challenging the authority of Shakespeare. It was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company alongside *The Taming of the Shrew* and ended up showcasing Middleton and Dekker’s more modern, egalitarian attitude towards women in respect to Shakespeare himself.

What the productions from both Chapter Two and Three prove is that a creative, irreverent attitude toward Middleton pays off. At times they come under criticism as trivializing the works by making them address the issues of contemporary culture instead of inviting reflection on universal truth. However, I believe that is a positive, not a negative, effect. These directors, by focusing their attention on Middleton’s works, help to brush the dust off of this long-neglected author and bring his works into the light. These plays can meet the needs of directors, actors, and audiences today in very real, direct ways: they can be used to demonstrate urgent, compelling modern issues *and*—as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four—to create good, profitable art that benefits a theater and its surrounding community.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘TASTE THE WELCOME OF THE CITY’:

MIDDLETON’S COMEDIES AND ORIGINAL PRACTICES

List of Productions

1997, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, dir. Malcolm McKay, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, London

1998, *A Mad World, My Masters*, dir. Sue Lefton, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, London

1998, *The Honest Whore*, dir. Jack Shepherd, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, London

2011, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, Blackfriars Playhouse, Staunton, VA

2012, *A Mad World, My Masters*, Blackfriars Playhouse, Staunton, VA

In the late ‘90s, Mark Rylance, the Artistic Director of the newly opened Shakespeare’s Globe, coined the term “original practices” to describe an approach to early modern drama which was gaining popularity among both theatrical practitioners and academics (Tiramini). This approach, which I will describe in more detail below, has gained a strong following in its century of existence, reaching its apex in the late ‘90s and early twenty-first century. It has its roots in rigorous historical and theatrical research and proponents often claim that it produces a more engaging final product. Basically, the theater company attempts to reproduce some or all of the original staging conditions of early modern plays, ranging from the architecture of the theater itself to the ways in which the actors interact with the audience.

Two of the world’s most important theatrical centers to employ these practices are Shakespeare’s Globe in London, UK, and the American Shakespeare Center’s Blackfriars

Playhouse, in Staunton, Virginia. These theaters were built, in part, to house research institutions which would continue exploring early modern drama in its original and modern context. However, they are not only for academics interested in esoteric productions of old plays; each has found success functioning both as academic mecca and tourist hotspot. In 2012, approximately 1 million people visited Shakespeare's Globe ("Annual Review 2012"). The Blackfriars Playhouse, with a 300-seat auditorium, is open year round and produces 15 or 16 different plays each year. According to the ASC's website, since opening in 2001, it has delighted "tens of thousands" of people from across the world ("Blackfriars Playhouse"). One of the sources of appeal of this approach is that visitors get to feel as if they are traveling back in time. The theater professionals there model early modern theatrical practices for their audiences and the physical structures of these theaters also mimic the look and feel of early modern theaters.

As part of their early modern repertoire, both theaters have produced several plays by Thomas Middleton and his collaborators. What is unique to the Middleton productions at these theaters is that they have focused their attention much more on Middleton's comedies than on his tragedies. These plays—*A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*; *A Mad World, My Masters*; *A Trick to Catch the Old One*; and *The Honest Whore*—are not produced as often as his famous tragedies. More importantly, perhaps, they each incorporate elements of the city comedy, a genre that focuses on the city (often London) as a locale and as a thriving marketplace for all manner of goods. These plays, like many city comedies, showcase human relationships as being

fundamentally commercial while including a wide range of character types associated with urban environments³⁶.

That these two theaters have included Middleton's city comedies in their repertoire is important not only because these plays are produced more rarely by other theaters, but also because these two theaters are valuable cultural and economic institutions in their own cities of origin. In London, Shakespeare's Globe has attracted millions of tourists over its lifetime and has altered the look and feel of the Bankside area. The American Shakespeare Center has, of course, drawn fewer patrons to the smaller city of Staunton, Virginia, but its impact on that city has been many times more dramatic. The city of Staunton, whose major tourist attraction before the ASC was the birthplace of US President Woodrow Wilson, now centers its economy largely around theatre-goers. By producing the city comedies, these theatres each provoke questions about what a city is and does, while at the same time helping to shape the look, the atmosphere, and the economy of their own cities. These productions of Middleton's city comedies, which are about a fictional community of people, also change the actual community within which they exist. As I will argue later, the on-stage depictions of a city economy and the interactions between the actors and the audience members function as a microcosm of the actual city within which these theaters reside and their relationships to those cities.

Original Practices: A New Way to Produce Old Works

The Original Practices movement has its origin over a hundred years before Rylance coined the term³⁷. The actor-manager William Poel was one of its first practitioners, then termed

³⁶ Middleton's career was closely aligned with the city of London; not only was he, along with Jonson and Marston, one of the forerunners of the city comedy genre, but he also wrote civic entertainments and was engaged as the City Chronologer from 1620 until his death in 1627. Heather Easterling comments that Middleton was "most famous in his own day as the frequent author of the annual civic pageantry surrounding the Lord Mayor's installation" (82).

the “Elizabethan revival.” Similar to many of today’s OP productions, Poel’s productions used a stage bereft of realistic scenery, reintroduced period music, incorporated a faster pace of line delivery, and focused on restoring elements of Shakespeare’s text that had been traditionally edited out or altered entirely by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors and theater managers. While his productions were not very successful at the time, Poel’s theories influenced other notable Shakespearean practitioners and critics such as Harley Granville-Barker (Townsend 8-12)³⁸.

Today, theatrical institutions in places across the English-speaking world, from Portland, Oregon to Tallahassee, Florida in the US; Wellington, New Zealand; and Worcester, UK style themselves as abiding by OP standards³⁹. However, these standards themselves are not codified; they exist on a spectrum⁴⁰. The basics involve using a thrust stage, universal lighting, live music and sound effects, spare sets, and audience interaction (“What We Do”). The term also suggests that the actors are trained in rhetoric and verse-speaking. Other original practices adopted by many companies include doubling and cross-gender casting. Companies employ strategic doubling where a cast of 12 or 13 may put on a play with as many as 40 characters. Since women did not appear on the early modern stage, many companies employ cross-gender casting to

³⁷ Defining and labeling these practices has proved to be fraught with complexity. Some companies prefer the term “Shakespeare’s staging conditions.” Some prefer “Elizabethan theatrical practices.” For ease of use, I will call them “original practices.”

³⁸ For more on the early history of the original practices movement, Townsend’s dissertation makes use of Robert Speaight’s book *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival*, Claris Glick’s article “William Poel: His Theories and Influence,” found in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.1 (1964), and J.L. Styan’s book *The Shakespeare Revolution*.

³⁹ Respectively, the Original Practice Shakespeare Festival; Resurgens Theatre Company; Lord Lackbeards; and Propellor Theatre Company.

⁴⁰ For more information on the modern-day history and practice of OP, see Jeremy Lopez’s article “A Partial Theory of Original Practice,” in *Shakespeare Survey* 61; also see Brent Griffin’s 2011 dissertation *‘My Charms Crack Not, My Spirits Obey’: The Promise of Original Practices at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, 2003-2005*.

achieve the gender-bending dynamic of Shakespeare's original productions. However, several companies have made a name for themselves by including other OP elements that represent an even larger challenge. The Propellor Theater Company, founded in 1997, utilizes an all-male cast for all of its productions, citing the early modern stage's refusal to allow female actors as precedent ("About Propellor"). Another company, Patrick Tucker's Original Shakespeare Company, produced plays by Shakespeare using strictly Folio spelling and punctuation; Tucker argued that the Folio was more "fundamentally theatrical" than modern editions, which often modernized or deleted textual elements which were cues as to how the text was meant to be acted ("All About Shakespeare's First Folio"). Later, Tucker spearheaded the scholarly exploration into original rehearsal practices. His actors learned their lines from cue-scripts, documents that only contained their lines and cues and never had a full rehearsal of the play before the performance⁴¹.

All of the Globe's productions utilize the basic staging conditions mentioned above. However, in some productions, to which the Globe specifically applies the designator "Original Practices," the exercise is taken to a whole new level. These productions attempt to replicate "as far as possible the material practices of early modern theatre" which means that every aspect of the show is crafted and performed using methods and materials available during the first known staging of that particular play ("Original Practices at the Globe"). Costumes, props, and set pieces are made by hand using 16th-century materials and methods. The productions incorporate early-modern music and dance. However, as these productions are enormously expensive to produce (one "authentic" early modern-costume, complete with hand-made underwear, can cost

⁴¹ Tucker is the uncle of Tiffany Stern, the eminent early modern drama scholar. His company's questions about the early modern rehearsal process prompted her research which was later published as *Shakespeare in Parts* (co-authored with Simon Palfrey), *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, and *Documents of Performance in Shakespearean England*.

upwards of a thousand pounds), the works chosen for these productions are usually famous works by Shakespeare, as these can guarantee consistent audience revenue. To date, the Globe has staged no Middleton plays using these very specific and costly methods; instead, their Middleton productions have used the baseline OP standards to which most Globe productions adhere.

Like the Globe, all of the ASC's productions utilize the basic original practices outlined above. The pre-show announcement, a short explanation of the company's practices, introduces the audience to the concepts of pacing ("two hours traffic"), audience interaction, and universal lighting; the company's motto is "We do it with the lights on." Then begins the pre-show entertainment, live music performed (and in some cases, written) by the actors themselves, which usually transitions without pause to the show itself. The live music, while not specifically introduced to the audience as a tenet of original practices, is crucial to the look, feel, and sound of an ASC production.

In addition to these practices, which are employed for all shows, during the Actor's Renaissance Season the plays are produced using original rehearsal strategies. In these rehearsals, no director is involved and the actors put up the play by themselves, using the time and resources that early modern actors would have had. This often means that actors do not have the entire script available to them, but only a document with their lines and cues, called a "cue script" or simply a "part." They may rehearse as little as two days before putting a production on stage. Staging fights and blocking crowd scenes take up most of the time and practically no time is given to modern-day rehearsal strategies of understanding a character's "motivation" or interior life. The actors also design the show and choose their own costumes from the existing costume stock, often making these productions visually eclectic. A note in the ASC program for

A Trick to Catch the Old One says, “By daring to throw away more of our twenty-first century theatrical norms, we hope to create an even stronger bond between performer and audience, and an even greater level of fun and excitement by experiencing the raw energy of the Renaissance theatre” (13).

Because the Actor’s Renaissance Season is relatively cheap to produce (no new costumes, no directors to pay), it is often seen as the ASC’s experimental season. This is the season in which lesser-known playwrights often have their works staged; all of the Middleton plays I discuss below occurred during the Actor’s Renaissance Season and therefore utilized the aforementioned special rehearsal strategies.

Shakespeare’s Globe in London, UK

In June 1997, Shakespeare’s Globe was opened by Her Majesty the Queen on the south bank of the River Thames in London, UK. This reconstruction of the 1599 Globe theatre, just a few hundred yards from its original site, was a project decades in the making, spearheaded by the American actor and director Sam Wanamaker. Archaeological and historical research, combined with clues in early modern plays themselves, gave the architects an idea of what the original structure might have looked like. Using 16th-century techniques in construction, the building as it stands today took years to complete and is, as the Shakespeare’s Globe website attests, “neither more nor less than the ‘best guess’ at Shakespeare’s theatre” (“Shakespeare’s Globe: About Us”). It provides a space for theatrical research, education, and experimentation into the methods of performance in Shakespeare’s day, while at the same time performing as a functioning theater and a home base for numerous national and international touring troupes. Each summer several early modern plays, usually by Shakespeare, are produced in the Globe; the theater also hosts a few new plays each year, ranging from historical dramas dealing with Shakespeare and his

contemporaries to raunchy comedies set in modern-day London. The Globe provides weekly educational events such as public lectures, demonstrations, and rehearsed readings of early modern plays.

Most notably in this context, the Globe is a thriving tourist center that offers not only entertainment but also retail and hospitality service to its guests. According to the Globe's Annual Review, in 2012 the mainstage Shakespeare productions "achieved 97% capacity, with 316,522 tickets sold" (4). They hosted 301,000 tour members during the year, a number which, as the review notes, represents only a 3% drop from 2011, and compared well with visitor numbers at other London attractions which were highly impacted by the 2012 London Olympics (7). In addition to performances and theater tours, the Globe complex offers two catering kiosks as well The Swan Bar and Restaurant, all of which created £778,000 in revenue in 2012. These figures represent the success of the ongoing Globe activities. However, even more significant is the new growth of the Globe complex represented by the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, an indoor Jacobean theater which just opened in January 2014⁴². This structure, which cost £7.5 million to build, will allow for more theatrical productions and create more Bankside tourism.

The Globe's influence extends beyond its impact on tourism, however. It is not only economically important to London—it is also symbolically important. Its presence in Bankside is a visible reminder both of the city's history and of the centrality of the theater in general and Shakespeare specifically to the culture of Great Britain and, indeed, the English-speaking world. While the building does not dominate the skyline of Bankside, its whitewashed walls punctuated by wooden beams and its iconic thatched roof are instantly recognizable from across the river. Its

⁴² None of the first three early modern productions staged in the Sam Wanamaker were by Shakespeare, suggesting that this theater will be a hospitable space for authors like Middleton in the future.

significance to London and Londoners is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, on July 26, 2012, the Olympic torch passed through the Globe on its way to Olympic Stadium.

Middleton at the Globe

All of Shakespeare's Globe's productions of Middleton comedies—*A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, *A Mad World*, *My Masters*, and *The Honest Whore*—adhered to OP standards by employing cross-gender casting, doubling, direct audience address, and live music. However, according to Chantal Miller-Schütz, both productions made conscious use of anachronism and pastiche in staging, costume, and sound design. While not erasing the plays' Jacobean inheritance, the actors played in a variety of comic modes, using exaggerated gestures and facial expressions, sight gags, and even 20th century pop-culture references. To add to the sense of festivity, the productions incorporated quite a bit of music and dance. However, as most of the characters in these plays are not particularly sympathetic, the humor in the productions was not uniformly optimistic and upbeat. In both plays, violence, greed, and carnality were important forces driving the action forward. The various styles of clothing, music, and acting heightened the sense of wildness inherent in the plays.

The polyphonic sound design of each production was perhaps where the sense of self-conscious anachronism was the strongest. Musical influences in each production ranged from the American hymnbook to barbershop quartet and from Greensleeves to Wagner. Globe music director Clare van Kampen designed music for *Chaste Maid* to evoke “a London street band with a Jacobean flavour” (program note). In *Mad World*, the music was largely reminiscent of a New Orleans jazz band, incorporating brass instruments and a snare drum; a harmonium also featured on stage and played manic fairground music, as if a carousel were spinning wildly out of control. The music for *Honest Whore* utilized French jazz, Spanish salsa, and instrumentation and

vocalization that evoked the Middle East. Apart from the music, the voices of this production also worked to evoke the heteroglossia of both modern and early-modern London teeming with people from different areas and walks of life. Actors in all three productions utilized accents as various as French, African, American, Italian, Scottish, and Welsh, along with London accents, giving a strong sense of a city, a place where people gather together from many different places. At times actors deliberately switched into a new accent to disguise their character or to fit in with a different social stratum. For instance, in *Chaste Maid*, when Maudlin Yellowhammer, played by Amelda Brown, addressed Sir Walter Whorehound directly, she adopted an exaggerated Received Pronunciation accent and referred to her daughter as “ay byashful gel, sah.”

In addition, each of these productions tied the experience of watching the play to the geography and physicality of the city of London, inviting the audience into a London both modern and early modern. Not only were local landmarks referenced in the plays themselves, but the staging, from moment to moment, used the Globe stage, yard, balconies, and even its thatched roof to recreate London’s markets, crowded streets, and the river Thames itself. Finally, the atmosphere of pastiche generated by these productions both heightened the humor and consistently reminded the audience members that they were watching a new production of an old play in a new reproduction of an old theatre. The productions were celebrations, not just because they are comedies and end in marriages; and not just because they were Middleton’s expression of human weakness, fallacy, and ridiculousness; but also because they celebrated London itself and the Globe’s unique position in the city’s past and present.

The first, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, was directed at the Globe in 1997 by Malcolm McKay. It is a bawdy comedy that takes place during Lenten season in Cheapside, a well-known London commercial street and the residence of many of London’s goldsmiths. It is essentially

about two young people, Moll Yellowhammer and Touchwood Junior, who want to marry but are prevented by Moll's social-climbing parents. However, the play spends much more time dealing with other characters than focusing on two rather boring romantic leads. Sir Walter Whorehound has several children with his married lover, Mistress Allwit, whose husband aids their affair so that he can live a life of unencumbered leisure. However, Whorehound must marry so that he can have legitimate children. He lights on Moll as his future spouse because she is the daughter of a wealthy goldsmith. At the same time, Whorehound tries to get rid of his Welsh mistress. By claiming that she is his niece with lots of land in Wales, he presents her as a good match for Tim, the Yellowhammers' scholarly son home from Cambridge. Yellowhammer and his wife Maudlin are pleased to have made two good matches for their children to increase the family's wealth and social status.

At the same time, Whorehound's relative, Oliver Kix, is trying to conceive a child with his wife so that their family will inherit Whorehound's fortune. Luckily for them, they encounter Touchwood Senior, the elder brother of Moll's beloved. Touchwood Senior's fault is that he is too virile. After taking leave of his wife to avoid making her pregnant again, he hatches a plan to sell the Kixes some of his magic "water," a fertility potion. His plan actually involves him impregnating Lady Kix himself.

For the Globe's production of *Chaste Maid*, Malcolm McKay envisioned a "punk-Elizabethan" aesthetic (Miller-Schütz 19). The costumes, designed by Jenny Tiramini, gestured towards authentic Jacobean dress, with men in hose, doublets, and cloaks, and women in tight, low-bodiced dresses with large farthingaled skirts. Certain costumes were taken directly from images of the time, such as the Welsh gentlewoman's dress which was copied from a Venetian woodblock. However, Tiramini utilized some aspects of Jacobean style and, particularly,

hairstyles for comic effect. As “the head is essential for caricature,” the wigs in this production were based on styles that, while authentic, also worked to heighten the sense of ridiculousness inherent in the play (24). For instance, Maudlin Yellowhammer wore a curled red wig that came to points on her head; her soon-to-be daughter-in-law, the Welsh gentlewoman, wore an even more exaggerated hairstyle with her hair twirled up into little horns. Sir Walter Whorehound, played by Rory Edwards, had the most extreme look of all. In addition to his slashed yellow leather doublet and his ribbon-trimmed cloak lined in ikat print, Whorehound’s hair was styled in a tall mohawk and dyed red, while his facial hair was dyed green. While, as Tiramini pointed out in the programme, this hairstyle is based on an actual portrait of a young Jacobean dandy, it also contributed to the sense of anachronism that McKay had visualized.

The stage was unornamented except for the aforementioned Lenten proclamations and two grisaille hangings of Adam and Eve. A large bed was rolled off and on through the center doors for the christening scene. Other than that, a swing and a net made of heavy fishing rope were the only set pieces used in this production.

The prompt script of *A Chaste Maid at Cheapside* was gently modernized by McKay to make it clearer for modern audiences. In Maudlin’s first speech, the line was changed from “methinks you had need have somewhat to quicken your green sickness,” to “You need something to quicken yourself.” Maudlin’s archaic reference, two lines later, to the salad plant “samphire,” was deleted. At times McKay added a line to clarify a character’s motivation. In his text, Davy Dahumma says “I’ll plot and scheme like others in this city / which is bereft of all honesty and pity,” a couplet not found in the Middleton text. In other moments, McKay’s text substitutes a modern reference for an early modern one. For instance, “The George Inn in Southwark” was mentioned instead of the Exchequer, and “Lord Beggarland” became “Peter

Mandelson” in the recorded production I watched⁴³. But on the whole, McKay stayed true to the language and the intention of Middleton’s text.

The play’s central theme is excess; Lent is supposed to be a time when devout Christians practice abstinence and self-denial. The play, however, is full of characters who are excessive in their appetites and desires, such as the lusty characters Sir Walter Whorehound and Touchwood Senior; the greedy Allwits; and the wealthy but childless Kixes, who would trade any amount of money for a child. To highlight this clash between abstinence and excess, Middleton included marginal characters such as the hard-drinking Puritan women and the easily-bribed Lenten promoters. These characters mock the wide gulf between religious attitudes of self-denial and city realities of indulgence. To tie in with these themes, the Globe theater was hung about with proclamations that set the action both in the city of London and in the season of Lent: “Be it known that all persons in this city of LONDON are hereby forbidden any or all traffic in ANIMAL FLESH, until this solemn season of LENT shall be at an end, on pain of certain confinement to NEWGATE PRISON.” At the start of the show, an actor playing a Lenten promoter proclaimed this to theatergoers, effectively casting the audience in the role of the early modern London dwellers that the play dramatizes. Two men came out on stage to practice a dance, accompanied by musicians on the flute and the lute, while the rest of the stage filled up with other characters, creating the feel of an active city square. A girl dressed in white and pale pink, later identified as the play’s female protagonist, Moll, joined the dance. She was watched surreptitiously by her young lover, Touchstone Junior. Everyone on stage began dancing, only to

⁴³ The “Lord Beggarland” substitution alternated between “Peter Mandelson” and “Lord Aitken,” both modern-day British politicians whose careers have been under financial scrutiny and, in Lord Aitken’s case, scandal.

scatter when a red-haired harridan, Maudlin Yellowhammer, came on stage in search of her wayward daughter. Having established the bustle and energy of the city, the play began.

For the first entrance of the two noble characters, Sir Walter Whorehound and Sir Oliver Kix, retainers pushed their way through the groundlings, yelling “Make way for the knight” etc., as if they were clearing a path on a busy city street. When these retainers met, they began to try to out-announce each other in speed and volume.

The first half of the production ended after the christening of Mistress Allwit’s new baby, who Whorehound assumes to be his own. A huge procession of the drunk Puritan women and other characters exited the stage, carrying flags and singing the American hymn “Shall We Gather at the River,” while the central set piece, a large bed, was rolled off stage. After they leave, it is implied that one of them has urinated on a stool. In McKay’s production, one woman was left singing and dancing drunkenly, until she realized she was alone, curtsied briefly to the audience, and ran off stage. After the interval, the second half began with the stage musicians playing the same song intentionally badly, and actors filtering on stage.

The production created a strong sense of fun and celebration. Despite coming directly after the Lenten pronouncement, the musical prologue set the play squarely in celebratory mode. From the first dance to the final Morris dance to Greensleeves—and the dances in-between, including Mark Rylance’s frenetic dance in the character of Allwit, and the seductive swing-dance performed by the Welsh whore—every character was there to party. The actors employed a bit of crotch grabbing and hip-thrusting to make sexual innuendoes perfectly clear.

The staging, while noted in the research bulletin as being anachronistic, used the stage and auditorium areas to give the audience the sense of different London locales. At one point, the Kixes entered on the balcony, squabbling, before exiting above and then entering the stage

below, continuing their conversation. Later on, in Moll's river escape from her parents, a giant rope net, borrowed from the nearby Golden Hind replica, was raised up reaching from the stage to the roof of the theatre. Moll eluded her pursuers by climbing up one of the pillars into upper gallery, then running down the net from the heavens trap to the stage trap. This action transformed a non-stage area into a playing area—and, in the audience's imagination, the river Thames—for a few moments⁴⁴. However, one of the best reminders to the audience of their physical presence in London, old and new, was entirely accidental. In the recorded performance I saw, when Maudlin greeted Sir Walter, saying, "Please you draw near and taste the welcome of the city, sir," a plane flew overhead very loudly (1.1.161-2).

As such, there were very few moments meant to be taken seriously. The sobriety of the Lenten season was undermined even in the scene which is meant to affirm it. In this scene, the Lenten promoters stalked the stage, searching for people breaking the law and purchasing or consuming meat. However, as Miller-Schütz points out, the actors did not use the Globe's pillars or hangings to hide. Instead, McKay had his actors "exploit the sheer size of the stage and tricks such as turning their backs on other characters so as not to see them," a staging technique which added to the Three Stooges-type humor of the scene (22).

Two moments, however, were played straight. The first was Whorehound's monologue, delivered after the Allwits have cast him, wounded, out of their home. He laid back on the rope net, suspended in the air, with his arms stretched out in the posture of crucifixion. His delivery of this speech was deliberate and passionate; he was heartbroken and disgusted with the Allwits. "I bequeath to yonder wittol three times his weight in curses . . . Next I bequeath to that foul whore

⁴⁴ This net was used later in fight between Whorehound and Touchwood. They exited from the fight through the audience, engaged in fisticuffs, and ran back on stage with swords. A menacing martial dirge played while they climbed the net and fought.

his wife all barrenness of joy, a drought of virtue, and dearth of all repentance . . . If ever eyes were open, these are they. Gamesters, farewell, I have nothing left to play” (5.2.97-8; 104-5; 150-1). The second moment was when the lovers were raised from the dead. A somber procession with pipes and drum accompanied the two open coffins, born out by pall bearers. The couple was swathed in white like mummies. When they were revealed to be alive, they rose from coffins to ringing of bells and to Touchwood Senior’s command: “Up, then, apace, and take your fortunes, make these joyful hearts; here’s none but friends” (5.4.28-9). This moment had great potential to be played comically, but instead was played as a magical transformation, with Touchwood Senior as the author of all.

Another of Middleton’s popular comedies, *A Mad World, My Masters* has a similarly complicated plot as *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. This play follows two different trickster characters who, in parallel plotlines, each try to improve their positions in the world by deceiving people around them. One of them, Richard Follywit, fools his grandfather, Sir Bounteous Progress, into giving him money by disguising himself as various people to gain both Bounteous’s trust and access to his household. The play’s other trickster is Bounteous’s courtesan, Frank Gullman, who keeps selling her “virginity” to new customers while maintaining a public persona of a pure young woman. Gullman also uses this pious persona to gain the trust of her friend’s jealous husband, Shortrod Harebrain. In fact, behind his back, she is helping Mistress Harebrain cuckold her husband by consummating her secret affair with Penitent Brothel. In the end, both tricksters reap the reward of their deceptive lifestyles when they end up married to each other. Follywit and Gullman meet on the street and, thinking her a shy, modest girl, Follywit falls in love with her immediately. Seeing the chance to give her daughter a title and security, Gullman’s mother, who doubles as her bawd, agrees to the union at once. Upon

learning of the marriage of his nephew and his courtesan, Sir Bounteous laughs and forgives them both for tricking him, saying that “who lives by cunning . . . when he has gulled all, then is himself the last” (5.2.315-6).

Like the 1997 production of *A Chaste Maid at Cheapside*, the 1998 production of *A Mad World, My Masters*, directed by Sue Lefton, began with characters hurrying around the stage, while jazzy brass music played. However, this production was even more self-consciously anachronistic than *Chaste Maid* in the ways it blended costumes, music, and acting styles from various decades.

The shapes of the clothing were generally Jacobean, but the materials used were modern, inspired by the patterns and colors of the ‘60s and ‘70s. Mike Parker describes the actors as “kitted out in what appears to be a collection of cast-offs from productions of varying historical periods, though mostly, it seems, from the recent movie *Austin Powers*” (8). The odd mixture of costumes, time periods, and materials prepared the audience for a play full of hodge-podge, both in musical and acting styles. Dick Follywit wore tight snakeskin patterned pants, black platform shoes, and a bright pink ruffly shirt. When in disguise as Lord Owemuch, he wore a limp white ruff, pink mustache and beard, and topped it off with a tiger-print hat. Sir Bounteous Progress’s costumes were similarly outrageous. He wore large jewelry, a white curled pageboy wig, and obvious blusher, with a beauty mark like a teardrop on his cheek. At various points in the production, he donned a gold turban, a velvet jacket, a green patterned dressing gown, and, in the scene in which he prepares himself for his assignation with Gullman, a pair of red long-johns with suspenders.

The women were less fabulously arrayed. Gullman, called “the Courtezan” in this program, wore a long knit dress in the bedroom and a wine-colored dress in public, accompanied

by a large lace shawl that she draped over her head like a mantilla from time to time. Her hair was done in two braided arrangements on either side of her head, and she carried a little rod. Mistress Harebrain wore a black and white corseted gown. Her husband, Shortrod Harebrain, looked more modern, wearing a paisley sateen shirt with a gold necklace under a black suit and bowler hat. He had a pencil mustache and carried a briefcase on a chain. Finally, Penitent Brothel looked the part of the austere Puritan in a wide-brimmed black hat and a large black cloak. The musicians were perhaps the most oddly dressed of all the characters. Visible at various points on stage and in the balcony, they wore round reflective sunglasses, short Day-glo wigs, and brightly colored lederhosen and dirndl dresses.

The accompanying music was similarly patched together from various time periods and moods. For instance, Mistress Harebrain entered to a trumpet fanfare and a jazzy snare drum, while Gullman's entrance was accompanied by the sound of church bells. In the scene where Follywit, disguised as Lord Owemuch, gets ready for bed, Sir Bounteous's servants sang "a four-part pseudo-Hollywoodian romance" (Miller-Schütz 18). When the Succubus enters to tempt Penitent Brothel, tritones, commonly known as "the interval from Hell" or "the Devil in music," played (18). The play ended with a gospel motif. And, like *Chaste Maid*, this production played with sound in the form of the actor's voices by utilizing a variety of accents. For instance, Follywit used an exaggerated Caribbean accent when he masqueraded as the courtesan. "Tis an Amazonian time—you shall have women shortly tread their husbands," he said, sashaying around his cohorts in his disguise (3.3.118-20). In the recorded performance I witnessed, during the scene in which Penitent Brothel is visited by a succubus in the shape of Mistress Harebrain, the actress, Tonia Chauvet, used her native French to cajole, scold, and serenade him.

The physical acting also referenced various pop culture touchstones, highlighting the production's gleeful embrace of anachronism and pastiche. When Follywit and his cohorts steal from Sir Bounteous, they kicked and punched in the air performing exaggerated ninja flourishes to intimidate the old man. In the fifth act, after Gullman and her mother trick Follywit into marriage, the pair performed a celebratory can-can. At one point, actors playing the constables chased characters around the stage in a Keystone Cops-style chase.

The four-poster bed was the only set piece, and it was wheeled on and off depending on what the scene called for. For the scene in which Brothel and Mistress Harebrain consummate their relationship, the bed stayed on stage, but a large silk cloth dropped from the heavens and the courtesan pulled it over the bed, hiding them under a parachute-like expanse. Gullman stayed at the end of the bed, delivering her lines as responses to noises and phrases like Mistress Harebrain's unscripted "I love it!" (Maguire and Smith 185). Through the sheer white cloth outlines and motions were visible, but no details. Harebrain entered and listened to Gullman's one-sided dialogue from behind one of the Globe's pillars. "Still, still weeping? Huff, huff, huff, why now now, woman? Hey hy, hy, for shame, leave! Suh, suh, she cannot answer me for sobbing" (3.2.216-8). In one performance, upon Harebrain's entrance, a spectator called out the old pantomime standard "Look behind you!" (Maguire and Smith 185). Once the assignation was finished, the horns played a rising scale as the parachute lifted. After the lovers exited, Gullman mounted the bed. Musicians came on stage in a New Orleans style jazz procession and wheeled the bed out while she stood, waving as if on a parade float, and kicking her legs out in a triumphant can-can.

The Honest Whore, also produced at the Globe in 1998, is a two-part collaborative play; Part I is by Middleton and Thomas Dekker, while Part II is by Dekker alone. However, for this

production, Mark Rylance and director Jack Shepherd adapted and conflated the two plays, creating a three-hour performance with the interval at the juncture between the two. I will focus on the first half, of which Middleton was co-author. The tragi-comic plot follows three couples: Hippolito and Infelice, Mateo and Bellafront, and Candido and his wife. The young Hippolito blames the Duke for killing his daughter, Infelice, to keep the couple from marrying. Hippolito's friend, Mateo, has taken Bellafront's virginity and she has become a rich prostitute; her complacency about her profession changes, though, when she falls in love with and is chastised by Hippolito. She repents and seems to go insane as a result of guilt, anger, and unrequited love. Candido is a linen-drafter whose renowned patience irritates his wife, who vows to make him mad. He tolerates injury, insult, and assault until his wife, certain that he is mad, sends him to Bethlem Royal Hospital, where the plots converge. Infelice, who was only drugged into a death-like stupor, is restored alive to Hippolito, whom she marries at Bethlem. Bellafront is there, too, as a result of her feigned insanity. The Duke arrives at the hospital, is reunited with his daughter, frees Candido, and forces the unwilling Mateo to marry Bellafront.

As with the other Middleton productions at the Globe, this one used a variety of music, accents, and costumes to create an urban texture of variety and action. It also began with a street scene as an extra-textual prologue. A sign reading "Casa di Candido" hung above the Globe's discovery space next to a café, and the wide stage was meant to signify a public square, with lots of activity, noise, and a wide variety of people, before quieting down for Infelice's funeral procession and the play's first lines of dialogue. However, unlike the productions discussed above, this production was set in the twentieth-century: in 1950's London. It revolved around three separate but important city locations.

The first was Candido's shop, emphasizing the bustling and competitive commercial aspect of London. While the prologue indicated that this shop was located in the discovery space, the shop was brought onto the stage for the majority of the scenes that occurred inside it. For example, the second scene of Rylance and Shepherd's adaptation (a conflation of Scenes 2 and 5 from the text) used the entire stage to signify Candido's shop. Candido's staff entered to upbeat music, yelling over each other as they set the stage with rolls of fabric and a large table for measuring cloth; the staff were "ready with paper and pencils" to take orders (Kiernan 4). Marcello Magni, who played Candido, kept his native Italian accent for the character; his wife, Viola, played by Kathryn Pogson, had a Northern English accent. When Candido agreed to a customer's ridiculous demands for a "pennyworth" of fabric, Viola rolled the cloth out across the stage and angrily cut the piece from the middle of the roll. After Candido left, Viola stayed on stage, rolling up the fabric, before greeting her brother, Fustigo, dressed in a blue suit and orange socks and sporting a Teddy Boy quiff.

The second city setting was the Bellafront's boudoir, a symbol of the London underworld and an attempt to create "the demi-monde [sic] world of Bellafront and her Boys" (Kiernan 5). A couch and a little table set the scene, while a female singer above belted out some French jazz. Bellafront, played by Lilo Baur, sat at her dressing table in her slip and stockings, embodying sexy nonchalance. Her servant, Roger, however, symbolized the more flamboyant aspects of this community. In their first scene, he entered wearing a patterned shirt, bright lowslung pants with a gold chain hung around his exposed midriff. Later in the play, he dressed like a drag queen in patterned tights, a red miniskirt, a spangled black top, and a boa-trimmed sweaterlet, all the while wearing a leopard-print headpiece. While these scenes were relatively sparse, the props

and costumes created the sense of hedonistic luxury suggested by Bellafront's later lines: "Silks and velvets, pearls and amber shall not draw me to thy flattering chamber" (5.7-8).

The final city setting was Bethlem Royal Hospital, otherwise known as Bedlam, a place whose name immediately conjures up associations of historical London. The final scene of the first half was set here on a wide open stage, marked only by a lone Indian man sweeping the stage. In this scene, the duke and the audience "are given a conducted tour of the asylum" (Kiernan 5). They encounter a variety of inmates, played by actors given the freedom to improvise lines; however, the main refrain in this scene is one madman's repeated phrase "All these are whoremongers and lay with my wife: whore, whore, whore, whore . . ." (15.271-2). Kiernan reports that Shepherd had originally wanted to cut this scene from the production, but the actors convinced him not to, arguing that it was important because it took the play "off the boil" and allowed the audience to digest the plot (13). I argue that it is not only important to the themes and structure of the play, but also for the play's atmosphere. Without it, the audience would miss out on seeing one of the play's quintessentially London locations.

The Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, VA

The American Shakespeare Center, formerly Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, is the brainchild of Ralph Alan Cohen, a Shakespeare professor at James Madison University, and Jim Warren, Cohen's former student. The two co-founders began their lifelong mission by forming a professional traveling theater troupe that toured the eastern seaboard of the US for its first few years before gaining international theatrical and academic acclaim. In 1998, the SSE received an offer from Staunton, VA, a city with a population of around 25,000, to become host city to a resident company and a new theater building. This building, the Blackfriars Playhouse, opened in September 2001, just a few weeks after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The national mood

was dark and non-necessary travel was at a dramatic low. People in Staunton worried that the theater would never get off the ground (Knupp, “Changed”).

However, the theater lasted and remains a huge success. Today the ASC is a research, educational, and performance institution which hosts both a resident troupe and a touring troupe. These troupes perform sixteen shows a year, 52 weeks a year. During both the fall season and the springtime Actor’s Renaissance Season, the resident troupe performs five different plays a week using the same 12 actors. Like the Globe, the Blackfriars Playhouse itself was constructed based on rigorous historical research, mixed with a healthy dose of contemporary guesswork. Outside, it is a brick building with a steeply angled roof. Inside the theater, the dominant impression is of gleaming wood and candlelight. Handmade candelabras (with dimmable electric lightbulbs) hang from an oak-beam ceiling. Two levels of seating surround a thrust stage on three sides; audience members can also sit on the stage, on “gallant’s stools.”

The theater’s impact on the city of Staunton cannot be overstated. According to the city’s Department of Economic Development, the theater brings, on average, \$14.75 million per year to the city’s tourist economy, a figure which amounts to \$177 million over the theater’s twelve years in Staunton (Knupp, “Changed”). When visitors come into town to see a performance at the internationally acclaimed theater, they shop at local antique stores and boutiques and eat at local restaurants. The owner of Emilio’s Italian Restaurant on Beverley Street, Staunton’s main street, estimates that “around 35 percent of the restaurant’s clientele are catching a meal before or after a program [at the theater]” (Knupp, “The Bard”). The ASC partners with several local attractions, such as the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and the Frontier Culture Museum, to create ticket packages; they also send business to Staunton’s hotels and bed-and-breakfasts, such as the neighboring Stonewall Jackson Hotel, which was close to going under before the

Blackfriars opened next door. In 2012, Staunton was named one of the 20 Best Small Towns in America by Smithsonian Magazine; the article names the theater as one of the town's most important attractions (Spano and Shen).

Middleton at the Blackfriars

Like the Globe productions, all of the productions at the American Shakespeare Center incorporate doubling, cross-gender casting, direct audience address, and live music. And, like the Globe, their Middleton productions make heavy use of anachronism and pastiche. However, the ASC has not limited its productions of Middleton plays to comedies; they have put on two tragedies, *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Changeling*, and one of the only modern-day productions of Middleton's odd tragicomedy, *The Witch*⁴⁵. Also, since the ASC has only produced Middleton plays during their Renaissance season, the shows are imagined and executed by the actors, not by a director. The costuming, music, and acting choices on stage do not represent the artistic vision of one person but instead the collaborative vision of a group of people. As such, these productions have an even more pronounced feeling of being cobbled together from spare parts.

The two Middleton comedies put on at the Blackfriars Playhouse both featured the eclectic mash-up of aesthetic eras and acting styles that made the Globe comedies so successful. The 2011 production of *A Trick to Catch the Old One* was a fantastic example of both early modern effectiveness and postmodern playfulness. Everything about this production, from the casting (and use of doubling) to the costumes to the use of audience interaction, was exceptionally tongue-in-cheek.

⁴⁵ Details about the two tragedies can be found in the Appendix. *The Witch*, while it incorporates some of the comic aspects shared by the other plays in this chapter, will not be included as the DVD record of this show has been corrupted and I was not able to watch it. What details I could ascertain about the production can also be found in the Appendix.

In this play, the protagonist, Theodorus Witgood, is deeply in debt. He has mortgaged his inheritance to his greedy uncle, Pecunius Lucre. Because of his financial position, Witgood cannot afford to marry the girl he loves, Joyce Hoard, the daughter of his uncle's bitter rival. Witgood convinces his mistress, a girl whose virginity he took, to masquerade as a rich widow from the country. In her company, he travels to London and tells Lucre that they are engaged to be married if he can prove to the widow that he has money and an inheritance. Lucre gives him money and promises to reinstate his inheritance. Hearing the rumor of Witgood's rich fiancée, his creditors stop hounding him and begin lending money to him again.

Witgood's mistress, however, in the guise of the widow, has decided to take care of herself. She is being courted by Lucre's rival and Joyce's father, Walkadine Hoard, and secretly agrees to marry him. By playing all of the suitors, relatives, and creditors off of each other, Witgood and the courtesan both end up with the money and the spouses they desire. Lucre is infuriated when he finds out that he has been duped, but his fury abates when he sees Hoard's humiliation. Instead of marrying a rich widow, Hoard has married Witgood's poor ex-mistress. Everyone is appeased at the end when the courtesan promises to be a good wife to Hoard, and Witgood promises to reject his partying lifestyle and turn over a new leaf. Hoard ends the play with a statement much like Sir Bounteous's at the end of *Mad World*: "Who seem most crafty prove oftentimes most fools" (5.2.204).

The costuming for the show was vaguely turn-of-the-century, with younger characters adopting newer twentieth-century styles and the older characters wearing more typically Victorian clothing. The primary antagonists, Hoard and Lucre, were dressed in tailed coats, top hats and ascots. John Harrell, the actor who played Pecunius Lucre, wore slim-fitting kneepants and leggings that accentuated his height, making him look comically tall and slender.

However, the costuming diverged from the Victorian aesthetic whenever it suited a character to be dressed otherwise. Often these particular costumes were meant to function as visual jokes. For instance, in 4.3, when the sergeants enter with Witgood, they were dressed as modern-day London bobbies. In the next scene, Hoard begins to anticipate his new wife's wealth. "Not only a wife large in possessions, but spacious in content. She's rich, she's young, she's fair, she's wise. When I wake, I think of her lands—that revives me" (4.4.5-8). He calls in a tailor, a perfumer, a barber, a falconer, and a hunter to discuss setting up his new household. In this production, each of these characters was sharply characterized by voice and clothing. The perfumer wore period garments and spoke with a stuffed-up voice ("A perfuber," and "under your doze, zir") as though she had a cold, and thus could not smell. The falconer carried a stuffed parrot on his arm, and the huntsman was a parody of "Crocodile" Dundee with a large knife and a pronounced Australian accent. In a reference to barbershop, the barber sang all of his lines; the tailor, dressed very nattily, spoke in a falsetto with a lisp.

On the whole, the production was played mostly for laughs. As the program describes, *Trick* is "Thomas Middleton's deliciously wicked comedy of grifting, gulling, gallanting, and growing-up." The self-conscious use of doubling added to the humor, both with Glenzer who ended up playing four different characters and with Sarah Fallon, who played her own suitor, Moneylove. The actors also engaged the audience to humorous effect. In one scene, two businessmen handed out business cards to audience members as they made a circuit of the stage. In another scene, the Courtesan, played by Miriam Donald, disposed of a letter she wanted to hide by chewing it up and then spitting it into the audience. In the recorded version I saw, the audience member stood up and handed the letter back to her, leading her to throw it again in his

face. This unexpected bit of stage business had the audience howling; even the actors were visibly laughing.

One of the comic highlights of the production was the relationship between the two adversaries, Hoard and Lucre. At their first meeting, they circled each other on the stage as if preparing for a wrestling match, delivering invective with precise British accents:

“HOARD: I will so cross thee—

LUCRE: And I thee.

HOARD: So without mercy fret thee—

LUCRE: So monstrously oppose thee. . . .

HOARD: Toad!

LUCRE: Aspic!

HOARD: Serpent!

LUCRE: Viper!” (1.3.47-59)

Each time Harrell, as Lucre, said the name “Hoard,” he drew the vowel sound out as though he was roaring (1.3.8). In the final scene, when he revealed to Hoard that his new bride was a “dutch widow,” Curns did a dismayed double-take to the audience (5.2.107).

There were, however, two moments that were played for sincere emotion. The play includes a secondary set of characters who are thematically related but only tangentially involved in the plot of the play. This subplot follows the two associates Gulf and Dampit. Dampit is a rich, drunken usurer whose rapid decline and death is made a mockery of by almost everyone who knows him, except for his servant Audrey who remains loyal to him despite his verbal abuse. The unexpected addition of these three characters in the play was underscored by their strange appearance in this production. Dampit, a usurer and a cheat, was dressed like a down-on-his-luck

pimp, with a patched, baggy suit, and an open shirt with a huge gold medallion. His accomplice, Gulf, spoke with a low, affected voice like a villain in a melodrama. He was dressed in black and moved himself around the stage by scooting along on an ottoman, hunched over. Perhaps the oddest yet the most charming of the three was Dampit's servant, Audrey, played by Allison Glenzer. She wore red pajamas and big black-rimmed glasses and spoke in a nasal voice and giggled often at Dampit's verbal abuse of her.

While the scenes involving these characters bore little significance to the main storyline, they were both funny and sad. At his second appearance, Dampit, played by Tyler Moss, staggered onto the stage singing "I like beer, it helps me be a jolly good fellow . . . makes me feel mellow." Audrey entered, laughing at her drunken master, and helped him prepare for bed. While Dampit constantly curses Audrey in the text, this scene softened his treatment of her, portraying it as teasing instead of abuse. Their true intimacy was only revealed once Dampit finally died. In this scene, bells rang solemnly and Audrey cradled Dampit's head, gently covering his face with a cloth and saying "Sleep in my bosom, sleep," before taking his body offstage (5.2.195). According to Glenzer, whom I interviewed, she based her interpretation of Audrey on the Peanuts characters of Charles Shultz, saying that Audrey "knew the answers but had no power." She made Audrey cartoonish, but when Dampit finally died, Audrey's grief was subdued but real.

The other scene that portrayed real emotion was between Witgood and the Courtesan. In Act 3, scene 1, the Courtesan confers with Witgood about her chance of marriage to Hoard. In the performance of this scene, Witgood, played by Greg Phelps, danced with the Courtesan, swaying with her while she told him of her suitors. He told to her to marry Hoard and to take care of herself, saying "Wench, make up thy own fortunes now, do thyself a good turn once in

thy days . . . marry him, 'twould be a great comfort to me to see thee do well, i'faith, . . . I have a care of thee, i'faith" (3.1.98-104). After this tender moment, Witgood put his arm around her shoulder and they shook hands. Later on in the scene, once she secured Hoard's proposal, the Courtesan and Witgood exchanged a friendly high-five.

This production placed the emphasis on the benefits of friendship more than romance. Instead of being a traditional comedy where the male protagonist and the female protagonist end up married, in *Trick*, Witgood and the courtesan move past their initial sexual relationship into a platonic partnership where each helps the other achieve a goal. In both cases, the goal is to marry a third party; Witgood wants to marry Hoard's niece, Joyce, a virginal young woman, and the courtesan wants to marry Hoard, a rich man who can provide for her. Ultimately, this partnership pays off and each is able to marry their chosen mate. However, the chemistry between the two in this production far overshadowed any affection they may display towards their future spouses. In the text, their relationship is a remarkable Jacobean example of something approaching equal friendship between the sexes; in this production, it was the highlight of the show.

The 2012 production of *A Mad World, My Masters* utilized the typical Blackfriars aesthetic that Terry Teachout once described as a "cheerfully eclectic mish-mash" of early modern and later eras. Each of the actors played their character as an exaggerated caricature of a recognizable type, but the types displayed ranged widely in historical context. The production featured two bow-tied brothers, Inesse and Possibility, who laughed uproariously at their own jokes; a demurely dressed courtesan character, Frank Gullman, played by Miriam Donald, whose pregnancy was evident (and oft-referenced) under her modest empire-waist gown; and her bawd (and bawdy) mother, played by Alison Glenzer in a coral velour tracksuit, huge gold hoop earrings, press-on nails, and a black wig with an enormous bump.

The mother's Jersey-Shore-esque look was not the only specific visual reference to modern popular culture phenomena. For instance, John Harrel as Penitent Brothel, the religious hypocrite who cuckolds Shortrod Harbrain, channeled Rick Santorum—complete with sweater vest and Bible. Penitent's slight lisp read as either slightly gay or effeminate, but his rabid sexual drive was apparent when Harrel over-enunciated some of his words suggestively, such as “adulterous motions” and “forked head” (1.1.104; 119). During his illicit assignation with Mistress Harebrain, though, Brothel disguised himself as a doctor on a medical check-up. This production's shorthand for doctor in disguise was, hilariously, Groucho Marx glasses worn in conjunction with a CD attached to a headband, to mimic the physician's head-mirror.

In a similar campy move, the two characters Watch and Ward, whom Shortrod Harebrain asks to watch his wife, dressed and acted like stereotypical television FBI agents, wearing dark glasses, holding fake guns, and taking wide defensive stances. At one point they performed their duty like a raid, squaring up around the door, and then kicking it in, shouting “Go! Go! Go!” as they exited the stage.

The early modern touches were equally funny. When the protagonist Dick Follywit (played by Gregory Jon Phelps) dressed as a player to con his uncle out of some money, he and his friends overdid it in velvet breeches, long curly wigs, and Cavalier-style feathered hats in what might be a comment on the aesthetic of today's typical early modern productions. Even when playing at playing, as when these characters were in disguise, they exaggerated every detail of performance, from over-enunciating their lines to their flamboyant bows and flourishes.

All of the over-the-top characters were made as ridiculous and farcical as possible. Probably the most exaggerated character was that of Sir Bounteous, played by Daniel. The actor changed his interpretation of this character several times during the run, even changing the entire

costume (Glenzer). At one point he wore a velvet smoking jacket and a mustache. During the recorded performance that I saw, he wore bushy eyebrows and a bright blue lounge suit with an oversized chain. When standing, he thrust his hips forward; to get around the stage, he used a heavy walker which jingled with keys at his every step, moving at a snail's pace to great comic effect. After the first curtain call, Daniel left his walker at center stage as if it, too, was a character who deserved applause.

The production's funky blend of modern and early modern aesthetics underscored the audience's sense of this as an ASC Renaissance Season production; it came off as effortlessly thrown together rather than painstakingly obsessed over. The play itself has a modern feel, at times seeming like it was written by "a frat boy," in the words of Cass Morris, the ASC's Academic Resources Manager. The production capitalized on the playful, youthful spirit suggested by this comment, working in contemporary puns and jokes where an original meaning might not have supplied one. For instance, when Follywit asked "What will I do for a pimp?," his companions whipped out giant gold chains and strike gangsta poses as if they were rappers from the '90s. The actors' delivery also added to the sense of effortlessness. While the ASC actors are coached in verse-speaking, most of the lines were delivered as naturalistically as possible, sometimes with bits of improvisation to assist the conversational feel. In the first scene, a drunken Follywit described his uncle, saying "he keeps a house like his name," before halting, seeming to have forgotten his point. One of his companions suggested, "Bounteous?" and Follywit responded, yelling triumphantly, "Bounteous!"

For each of these productions, these seemingly unconnected bits often end up coming together in a strange theatrical alchemy with music as its catalyst. Every show at the Blackfriars Playhouse begins with live contemporary music, chosen and performed by the actors themselves.

Familiar hit songs by the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and Neil Diamond are mixed in with indie gems by Ray LaMontagne, the Pietasters, and Of Montreal. These musical preludes provide energy to the audience and to the rest of the production. There is no silent, awkward waiting for the show to begin; all is chaos and noise. Actors strum guitars, mandolins, and banjos, play drums, and toot on various horns from the balcony, switching instruments with abandon between songs, making it seem as though each of them can play a dozen instruments or more. In various degrees of costume, they dance, bob their heads, and belt out tunes full-throatedly, leaning out over the balcony as if they wish to get closer to the audience. Not only does the ritual of live music set the stage for the production, but the song choices themselves also set up expectations for the show that is about to commence. While many of the actors will downplay any direct links between the songs they choose and the themes of the play, in almost every case the music seems to explicate ideas found in the text and performance.

For instance, the two comedies utilized happy songs with themes of carefree living, love, and partying. *A Trick to Catch the Old One* used the jazz standard “On the Sunny Side of the Street,” the Beatles’ “I Want Money,” and the Pietasters’ “Girl Take It Easy,” a song about drinking and having fun. The highlight of the pre-show for *A Mad World, My Masters* was a funky performance of Ray LaMontagne’s “Repo Man,” with Greg Phelps playing a smarmy saxophone. During the interval, the cast played Neil Diamond’s crowd-pleaser “Sweet Caroline” and Aretha Franklin’s “Natural Woman.” For the latter, Greg Phelps performed in a long curly wig, with all the women in the cast backing him up on the choral ah-ooo’s; Allison Glenzer still wore her bald cap and powdered grey wig.

Furthermore, many of the songs are sung by the actors in costume as their characters in the play. These moments are ambiguous; it is possible for an audience member to read them as

unconnected performances by the actors of the Blackfriars Playhouse. However, the audience member might also read them as part of the production, like songs in a musical. These musical performances do not dictate how they are to be understood but they allow the audience an extra-textual opportunity to hear from the play's characters. For instance, John Harrell sang and played Frank Zappa's "Cosmic Debris" in costume as *Mad World's* Penitent Brothel. The song is about a man being tempted by a scam artist in the guise of a religious guru; the song's narrator ends up turning the tables and robbing the man blind, telling him "don't waste your time on me." Sung by the character of Penitent Brothel, this song might represent his rejection of the Succubus' attempt to "con" him back into sin. Miriam Donald's performance, in costume as the Courtesan, of "To Sir, With Love" during the production of *Trick* was a powerful instance of a character singing a song. In the lyrics, the singer is a girl graduating from school, thanking her teacher for his years of education as she grew up "from crayons to perfume." Like the Courtesan's relationship with Witgood, the singer understands that "the time has come . . . and long last looks must end." When the Courtesan performed this song, the meaning of her tutelage was certainly different from the original context; given the nature of their relationship, it would be difficult to argue that Witgood taught her "right from wrong." However, as the staging suggested, the affection between the two characters was sincere and the performance of this song only underscored the Courtesan's conflicted sense of loss and gain as the relationship ended.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's Globe and the American Shakespeare Center embody one of the major forces in Middleton's 20th century return to the stage—the desire to understand the theatrical context of early modern plays. As a result of this desire, we have learned more about the theatrical practices of the period, the other playwrights writing during the time period and

Shakespeare's collaboration with them, and the print culture that supported the theater and these plays.

However, when done well, original practices productions are not just an academic exercise; they work theatrically. These productions made great use of the best tool in the original practices toolbox: audience interaction. Universal lighting and direct address create an entirely different atmosphere in the theater, which makes for an immersive and interactive audience experience. Moments like the one in the ASC's *Trick*, when the Courtesan couldn't dispose of her letter because the helpful audience member gave it back to her, create a sense of community and even collaboration within the theater. All plays are embodied but original practices extends the body outward, beyond the bodies of the actors to include the audience member and even the building itself. The open roof of the Globe invites rain and airplane flyovers. Before each performance at the Blackfriars Playhouse, the actors remind the audience that the lights will remain on, and what that means for the production ("you can see us, and *we* can see *you!*"). They invite audience members to sit on stage. Each of these elements changes the performance. They gesture back towards a time when theater was a street performance full of hecklers and improvisation, rather than a group of silent people in a dark room. At the same time, these moments (and the practices that make them possible) work to remind us that these plays were modern, fresh pieces of art written in the parlance of the day, rather than creating temporal distance, making us feel as though we are visitors at a Renaissance Faire.

The sense of community nurtured in these productions extends outside the theater. As I have already demonstrated, these theaters are an active economic part of their local communities. However, their function in the city goes further than just generating revenue. The relationship between the actor and the audience is a bit like the relationship between the theater and its host

city. As Hamlet reminds us, an actor holds “the mirror up to nature,” and to the audience member herself; there is an exchange of energy between the actor and the audience member. These theaters perform this same task for the larger city, mirroring it back to itself.

Shakespeare’s Globe reminds one that London itself is a bricolage. It is a city where, walking down the street, one can encounter many cultures and many time periods. For instance, the reconstructed Globe sits next to such famous modern structures as the Tate Modern art museum and the undulating Millenium Bridge; the medieval ruins of Winchester Palace are a five-minute walk away. Even from within the theater, audience members are not allowed to forget the presence of the modern city just outside. The interior of the Globe, with its three-tiered wooden construction, thatch-roofed thrust stage, and intricately painted *frons scenae*, evokes an earlier time. Standing in the yard, amidst the crush and noise of a crowd anticipating their afternoon entertainment, an audience member might imagine leaving the theater and being transported back to early modern London. However, the presence of such modern devices as cell phones and cameras, the printed receipts, glossy programs, and other modern ephemera littering the yard, and even the sounds of the city outside—boats on the Thames, aircraft overhead—reach in to remind a theatergoer that, just like the Globe’s productions and the building itself, their experience is neither wholly early modern nor modern.

The Middleton productions at the Blackfriars Playhouse, however, evoke Staunton’s provincial charm. The shows’ sense of being assembled out of mismatched bits to create a funky whole is a result of the way the Actors Renaissance Season works; however, the beautiful end result also mirrors the new boutiques, locavore restaurants, and art galleries that have sprung up in the city’s recent revitalization. The small-town feeling is amplified for return audience members who get the pleasure of seeing most of the same actors perform year after year,

something which doesn't often happen at the Globe. The familiar faces of the actors at the Blackfriars represents the close-knit community that towns like Staunton develop.

These OP productions perform three acts of reclamation. First, they reclaim Middleton in a specific way for specific audiences. Their playfulness proves to naysayers that Middleton's comedies don't have to be left on dry and dusty pages. They do not attempt to create an early-modern performance; rather they use the principles of original practices as guidelines. By mixing in modern-day elements such as music, costuming, and staging practices to create a mash-up of modern and early-modern, these productions created theatrical experiences that were fun and relevant, not stuffily academic. Second, they reclaim the idea of the Jacobean city for modern audiences. They re-cast it as something familiar. In these productions, we see and hear modern (and even American) analogues of early modern London life; its locations, sounds, activities, and even character types become something that audiences can understand experientially. Third and finally, the productions at both theaters redefine the city in which they are based. The Sunday Telegraph proclaims that the Globe is "not just theatre, but *the capital* at its very best" (italics mine). But while Bankside has been changed and revitalized by the Globe, London never needed a reclamation. Staunton, however, was part of a dying breed, the American small town, until the ASC became its partner. Regarding the national attention given both to Staunton's downtown revitalization and the Blackfriars' enormous theatrical success, Cohen says, "We couldn't have done it without the city, and I like to think the city could not have done it quite as easily without us" (Knupp, "Changed"). Early modern drama—and by association Middleton—played a very tangible part in Staunton's rebirth. As a city boy himself, Middleton would be proud.

CHAPTER FIVE

MIDDLETON! THE MUSICAL: POSTMODERN ADAPTATIONS

List of Productions

- 1997, *The Changeling*, dir. Robert Woodruff, Theatre for a New Audience, New York
- 2006, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, dir. Jesse Berger, Red Bull Theater, New York
- 2008, *Women Beware Women*, dir. Jesse Berger, Red Bull Theater, New York
- 2008, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, dir. Melly Still, National Theatre, London
- 2010, *Women Beware Women*, dir. Marianne Elliot, National Theatre, London
- 2010, *Vice* (jazz opera by Jools Scott and Sue Curtis), industry showcase at Arcola Theatre and
Soho Theatre, London
- 2011, *The Changeling*, dir. Michael Oakley, Southwark Playhouse, London
- 2012, *The Changeling*, dir. Joe Hill-Gibbons, Young Vic Theatre, London
- 2013, *The Roaring Girl* (musical by Dan Bray and Jenny Trites), dir. Dan Bray, Vile Passeist
Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 2013, *A Mad World, My Masters*, dir. Sean Foley, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-
upon-Avon

At what point does a production of a play become an adaptation of the play? Does a savage cut, perhaps excising an entire plotline, count? How about rearranging scenes so that significant actions take place in a different order? Maybe ignoring crucial stage directions (or inventing new plot-altering stage business) makes something an adaptation? Or perhaps entirely

re-writing bits of the text? These questions take on a peculiar resonance when applied to the plays of Middleton and his cohort of non-Shakespearean early modern playwrights⁴⁶.

If any one of the above strategies were applied to a more modern play, say by Beckett (who, by the way, would never allow it), the resulting production would probably be called an adaptation. However, when early modern plays are produced, such tinkering with the text is expected, even encouraged as being consistent with early modern theatrical practices. Except when it comes to Shakespeare, whose texts (or the most widely-recognized versions of them, anyways) are sacrosanct. In her book *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, Margaret Jane Kidnie describes the anxiety of reviewers—and even a school headmaster—responding to Matthew Warchus’ 1997 production of *Hamlet* for the RSC, which significantly cut and intercut the text. Her bemused interest in this phenomenon led her to ask, if adaptation is “a matter of degree, at what point does theatrical production become adaptive?” (3). She summarizes Ruby Cohn’s categories of “reduction/emendation,” “adaptation,” and “transformation,” before quoting Linda Hutcheon’s conclusion that an adaptation is an “acknowledged transposition of a recognizable work or works” (3). However, as Williams points out in her post, the work of Middleton and his cohort is not as “recognizable” to the mainstream public as Shakespeare’s, which in turn “materially affects an audience’s ability to read [or, to use Hutcheon’s word, ‘acknowledge’] any production . . . as an adaptation.” This, in turn, effectively punts the duty of “acknowledg[ing]” a production as an adaptation back to academics.

⁴⁶ This line of inquiry was suggested to me by Nora Williams, a theatre Ph.D. candidate at the University of Exeter who is writing her thesis on adaptations of *The Changeling*, in a post titled “Adaptation?” on her blog, notinourstars.wordpress.com, and in a later discussion on Facebook, on which several academics and theater professionals commented. I am indebted to the initial post and ensuing conversation for suggesting this approach.

The job of acknowledging productions as adaptations becomes more meaningful when applied to the last twenty years of Middleton on stage. Starting in the mid-nineties, the productions became more self-consciously theatrical. Directors played with different modes of expression, using music, dance, and modern technology freely in the productions. The attitude towards these classical plays became less reverential and more experimental. The productions became less about putting on a faithful rendition of a Jacobean play, and more about pushing the text to the limits of what the theatrical experience would allow. Many of the Middleton productions of the last twenty years employ the adaptive strategies mentioned above. Each performs what Hutcheon calls “a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging” an early modern text for a modern audience (qtd. in Kidnie, 3). The appropriative act may include emending or adding to the spoken text in some way, as Jesse Berger does with his productions for Red Bull Theatre. It may include the use of theatrical hardware that affects the way the narrative unfolds, such as the revolving stage in the two recent productions at the National Theatre. And finally, it may mean a complete overhaul of the text to create an entirely new work, as in the final three productions—all Middleton musicals of one kind or another—that I discuss.

However, the adaptive acts may not always represent tampering with the spoken text. Some appropriative or salvaging work is involved each time the setting is updated or the performance style is radically modernized. Take, for instance, the 2011 production of *The Changeling* at the Southwark Playhouse, performed under what Paul Taylor describes as “rumbling railway arches.” Michael Oakley, the director, heightened the play’s sense of paranoia by setting it in the modern age, not in a gothic castle’s gloomy halls complete with dark corners and barely heard whispers as the play might seem to call for. In Oakley’s 90-minute version, the action took place in a modern castle’s security center, with De Flores as the security guard.

Cameras hung from the rigging, and the back wall of the stage was lined with flickering CCTV screens, reminding the audience that each character was constantly being watched. The biggest change Oakley made, however, was to film the asides rather than have them delivered live. As Henry Hitchings describes for the London *Evening Standard*, each aside was not directed toward the audience but instead projected over a sound system in an eerie voice-over effect, making every secret thought louder than intended. This choice was not well-reviewed; as Maddy Costa, writing for *The Guardian*, puts it, “the tactic distances the characters from the audience, halts the action, diverts our focus, and requires the actors to do a lot of face acting.”

In 2012, Joe Hill-Gibbons directed a production of *The Changeling* at the Young Vic which *Time Out* called “the most compelling eruption of sex, death and pudding in town.” Hill-Gibbons implicated everyone, even the audience members, in the madness of the asylum. He placed the audience members in tiered seating on all four sides of the stage, with the top tiers of seats separated from the space by what Peter Kirwan, in his blog *Bardathon*, described as “a net barrier.” Some audience members were seated on wheelchairs on the stage, according to Paul Taylor writing for *The Independent*. In the first asylum scene, boxes, chests, and cabinets rattled, “crammed with desperate, protesting inmates,” who emerged for the next scene, revealing themselves to be the noble castle characters (Taylor).

The aforementioned pudding appeared later in the play, first when De Flores tried to drown Alonzo in a punch bowl, and then at Beatrice-Joanna’s wedding feast. Both she and De Flores ended up smeared with meringue as he raped her across the table laid with goodies. Peter Brown, writing for *London Theatre Guide Online*, especially appreciated the moment when “a door is opened onto the room where the wedding dancing is taking place, and we hear snatches of songs which (humorously) match the action in the banquet room.” Michael Billington

described more dessert as Alsemero unwittingly deflowered Diaphanta, the couple “smearing each other with jelly and chocolate.” In the final scene, Tomazo started a food fight as he “pelt[ed] the remaining food at the bodies of De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna” (Kirwan). And as if that wasn’t chaotic enough, Alsemero ratcheted up the atmosphere of insanity by shouting his final monologue at the audience through a microphone.

These are just two examples of unique approaches to Middleton plays in the past three years. But the urge to use a Middleton as the springboard for an experimental production finds its strongest voice in the 1997 Theatre for a New Audience production of *The Changeling*, directed by Robert Woodruff.

Middleton goes Avant-Garde

Critical opinion of Woodruff’s modern dress production varied wildly from “unforgivable” by the *Daily News*’s Howard Kissell to “powerful, moving” by Joan Eshkanazi for *Curtain Up*. However, there is no doubt that the images Woodruff created for the audience were memorable, even scarring. His vision for the play both sexualized (and de-sexualized) the characters, while updating the atrocities of an early modern insane asylum for the modern age.

The production was drawn from his earlier production at Beer Sheva theatre in Israel, in which his design collaborator Miriam Gouretzky had a strong voice. In an e-mail, Woodruff explained that his vision for *The Changeling*, as well as his vision for a production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, was influenced by Jonathan Dollimore’s book *Radical Tragedy*. He was struck by the misogyny in both plays; in *The Changeling*, he wanted to “capture imprisoned female sexuality. and [sic] men’s domination/ownership over the female functions.” He said that the set design was meant to evoke both asylum cells (because “insanity/imprisonment has long been

used as controlling [sic] idea for female libido”) and spaces for exhibition, such as “Amsterdam whorehouse windows.”

The performance style drew from Artaud’s theory of Theatre of Cruelty. It relied on dance and movement to convey both the passion and the claustrophobic restraint of the characters and used jarring sound effects to surprise and discomfit audience members. However, the play was not only acted out *by* the actor’s bodies, but also enacted *on* their bodies. Extra-textual stage business was added that brutally physicalized the emotional repression and violence of the society. Finally, the aforementioned set design, while affording wonderfully versatile playing spaces, also created a nightmarishly impersonal, industrialized world. The set, composed of large open spaces and tight enclosed spaces, was vaguely Escher-esque; here a four-poster bed could spin and catch on fire, firehoses could become ropes to restrain characters, and bland glass boxes could morph from bedrooms to padded cells to coffins.

Spotlights rose on a woman and a man seated in café chairs facing the audience. Farther upstage, waist-high ropes stretched along the stage like lanes in a public swimming pool. At the back of the stage, ten glass-fronted boxes formed the back wall of the Neil Patel-designed set, looking like a row of industrial refrigerators or phone booths. After the seated couple exchanged a few heated glances, castanets rattled and the cast entered, stylishly dressed according to Peter Marks “as if it had emerged from a Versace fashion layout.” Among the café chairs, they performed a frenetic flamenco which turned into a mad romp. The dancers stripped down to white costumes, some wearing straitjackets; then, one by one, they each entered one of the boxes in the back, climbing the walls and banging on the glass door of their cell. Thus, even before the first line of dialogue, Woodruff, with the help of his choreographer Sa’ar Magal, established a tension between movement and restriction.

The glass boxes were used throughout the performance as entrances and exits but also as spaces for action. They became hallways, hidden corners for acts of violence or sex (or both), and literal phone booths. The first conversation between the de Piracquo brothers, when Tomazo warns Alonzo that Beatrice-Joanna loves someone else, occurred on a telephone line between two of these booths. Later in the play, De Flores murdered Alonzo in one of the boxes; Alonzo trailed handprints of blood down the door, his face pressed comically up against the glass.

In the asylum scenes, they became visible “padded cells” holding inmates. Several of the inmates wore straitjackets and twitched or laughed; others mimed yelling and clawing at the glass doors. However, the most intense imagery came in Act 1, scene 2, in which Lollo and Alibius, the asylum keeper, discuss Alibius’s wife. During their discussion, Lollo wheeled in several gurneys strapped with female patients. As he talked to Alibius, he went down the row of gurneys performing some kind of horrific surgery with large metal tools between each of the patients’ legs. The women silently screamed, writhed, and then went limp as Lollo moved onto the next. Reviewers interpreted this sequence variously as clitorectomies or abortions (Sommer; Kissel). Later on, in the same scene, when the new inmate Tony was introduced, he also bore the marks of genital mutilation; he had a white bandage wrapped, diaper like, around his waist, with a large red stain blooming over his crotch. This imagery was repeated during the dumb show, when Beatrice-Joanna wore a wedding dress with a vivid red stain on the front.

The audience members found the aforementioned asylum scene graphic and disturbing; one reviewer reports of the woman sitting next to him keeping her head down during it. In his e-mail, Woodruff said that, during an aftershow talkback, a famous feminist critic was moved to tears when discussing this scene⁴⁷. But the other images presented in the production were also

⁴⁷ Celia Daileader, who attended the performance, identified the critic as Andrea Dworkin.

shocking. Even aside from the straitjackets of the asylum inmates, there were repeated references to restraint. In the first scene, the ropes that stretched along the stage separated Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero, who kissed across the ropes. Later in the play, this imagery was repeated. Long firehoses were brought on to douse the flaming four-poster bed in which Diaphanta died; these hoses stretched along the stage to create lanes across which Beatrice-Joanna kissed De Flores.

In Act 3, scene 3, Isabella and Tony flirted with each other while restrained. Both were bound at wrist and ankle and shackled to their cell walls, but they hung out the door of their cells, suspended on long cords like puppets. When Lollo found them, he tried to rape Isabella, only to be interrupted by Alibius. Her greeting to her surprised husband, “your bounden servant, sir,” was made all the more mocking by the fact that she was half-naked and tied up on the floor.

The production also utilized the sound design of Darron L. West and lighting design of Donald Holder to create a startling theatrical experience⁴⁸. Two sound effects, one of a loud rattle and the other of glass breaking, were used repeatedly to punctuate significant moments in dialogue, such as Act 2, scene 2, during Beatrice-Joanna’s initial deal with De Flores. While these effects were perhaps overused, each was a very loud, sharp sound, often delivered in a quiet moment as if to wake audience members up and alert them to important plot points. The lighting effects were less intrusive but just as effective. In Act 3, scene 4, blackouts interrupted the dialogue between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores. Each time the lights came up again, the two were in different locations and postures as if the conversation had continued during the blackout. The effect was of a filmed version out of which several minutes of dialogue had been edited, leaving only the dramatic moments witnessed on stage.

⁴⁸ The sound, lighting, and set designers worked off of original designs for the Israeli production by Eldad Linder, Felice Ross, and Miriam Gouretsky, respectively.

The final scene of the play was saturated with color. Diaphanta and Alonzo de Piracquo reappeared as ghosts performing a Charleston together to Irving Berlin's "Let Yourself Go." Their otherworldliness was suggested by the fact that both actors were entirely blue—costumes, face, hair, everything, as if they'd been dipped in paint. Once finished with their dance, the couple sat at a table together to watch the last moments play out. Beatrice-Joanna danced seductively for Alsemero, even attempting to perform fellatio on him, before he locked her in one of the nearby cells. After a cheerily false discussion with De Flores, Alsemero shut him in the same closet. Lights in the cell showed the silhouette of Beatrice-Joanna receiving cunnilingus while Alsemero sat outside, rubbing himself through his pants. At the climax, Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, both covered in gore, stood in the doorway holding each other before collapsing together, sprawled in a pool of blood. Lights flashed with the sound of a camera taking a photograph and Alsemero trying ineffectively to scrub blood from his hands. Isabella entered in a bright yellow gown with a twenty-foot train to denounce Alibius while the blue ghosts exited the stage. Finally, eerie tinkling music played as red figures carrying briefcases entered, presumably to document the tragedy.

Middleton at Red Bull

In 2006 and 2008, Jesse Berger produced *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Women Beware Women*, respectively, for Red Bull Theater in New York City. Red Bull is a fairly young theater company that, according to their website, specializes "in plays of heightened language" ("About"). Their repertoire is built around "the Jacobean plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries," but they have also performed Jean Genet's *The Maids* and produced a reading series showcasing works by Howard Barker, Elizabeth Egloff, Jean-Paul Sartre and Aphra Behn, among others ("About"). The company has produced the two aforementioned full-length

Middleton plays as well as including seven Middleton plays in their ongoing reading series. Adam Feldman from *Time Out New York* called them “the most exciting classical theater company in New York,” leading Steve Mentz, in his review of *Women Beware Women*, to characterize them as “the city’s darlings” (671).

Berger is, as Wendy Weisman says in her feature article about him in *American Theatre*, “no purist” (62). He cuts plays ruthlessly and feels no compunction about swapping in dialogue from other Jacobean playwrights “if he feels the substitution better conveys the action” (62). Indeed, Berger’s published version of *Revenger’s Tragedy* includes a note about the authors, in which Berger cites Francis Bacon, John Donne, Thomas Kyd, John Marston, William Shakespeare, Cyril Tourneur, and John Webster as collaborators (7). This kind of directorial editing represents a classic case of Cohn’s definition of adaptation, which is adding new material to an emended or rearranged text (qtd in Kidnie 3). Both of his full-length Middleton productions pared down the Middleton text and incorporated bits of text from other playwrights. His production of *Revenger’s Tragedy* reframed the narrative around the story of Lord Antonio and his wife, while changing Castiza’s character substantially. Two years later, the Red Bull *Women Beware Women* cut much of the darker, more tragic material and was performed almost entirely comically.

While a video recording of *Women Beware Women* was not available to me, I was able to see a video of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* at the New York Library of Performing Arts. It was performed in the intimate space of the Culture Project’s 45 Below theater. The production, called “purposefully decadent” by Weisman, was costumed in contemporary clothing that used details to gesture back towards an earlier era (“Jesse Berger”). For instance, the men’s suit jackets had wide embellished satin cuffs; Lussurioso paired his with a bare chest and a mohawk. Disguised

as Piato, Vindice coupled a ruffled red shirt and a richly patterned velvet jacket with short bleached blonde hair and tinted glasses that made him look like a mix of Lord Byron and Bono. The Duchess wore a sleeveless silver dress with a wide skirt with a central panel of leather. In her *Brooklyn Rail* review, Weisman called the look “costume ball-meets-Eurotrash.” Adam Klasfeld, writing for *Theater Mania*, also picked up on the trashy part, pointing out that one of the court members sported cornrows and the Duchess herself “chew[ed] gum like a cow to emphasize her vulgarity.” The stage, painted like weathered stone, was lit dramatically by Peter West. George Hunka, writing for NYtheatre.com, likened the lighting to Renaissance painters, specifically Vermeer. The music was, with one exception, contemporary house music with a strong beat.

While the production featured a charismatic Vindice and a slinkily sexual Lussurioso, Berger bookended the play with story of the Lord and Lady Antonio. The first dramatic action was the rape of Lady Antonio. Wearing a white dress, she was surrounded and raped by masked figures while loud club music played. Finally, Vindice, wearing a suit and tie, delivered his monologue as the masquers unveiled their faces to reveal the court characters. A large gilt mirror in the back reflected the stage and the audience, much like the mirror used in the original staging of the musical *Cabaret*. Later in the play, Berger added a bit of stage business that does not appear in the text. In this scene, a soaring operatic chorus accompanied Lady Antonio as she stabbed herself in the vagina. Antonio rushed in to find her dead, stage blood covering her gown in the starkly lit chamber, draped in white.

At the end of the play Antonio was given his own bit of unscripted stage business. In the final scene, Antonio, addressing Vindice and Hippolito as murderers, gave a speech that is not found in the original script. In Middleton’s version, he merely ends the play with a couplet,

praying that the blood of the revengers “may wash away all treason.” In Berger’s text, Antonio ended the play by declaiming about the importance of implementing justice and the law through purity and rigidity. “If in the past you felt the law too strict, tomorrow shalt thou feel a sharper whip; the reign of restless lust is at its fall” (112). While Antonio spoke, Vindice and Hippolito were taken backstage and shot, execution style, an action only visible to the audience in the mirror.

Berger commented on the change in Antonio’s character in an e-mail to Steve Mentz, who reviewed the production for *Shakespeare Bulletin*. He said that Antonio was “vaguely modeled on Angelo from *Measure for Measure*,” and that the change was meant to indicate that Antonio’s rule would be “harsher by far than the previous Duke’s, perhaps more hypocritical, and decidedly less fun” (103). The final image of the production certainly called to mind Shakespeare’s hypocritical Angelo. As the curtain closed, Castiza, wearing a red and black corset, received a gold coin from Angelo before kneeling to perform fellatio on him. Berger commented on this change in his author’s note, saying that, in Middleton’s text, Castiza’s choice to remain chaste and not join her brothers at court “rang false” (19). What Middleton would have thought of such a change, we’ll never know; it is somewhat inconsistent, however, that a company devoted to reviving non-Shakespearean works would retroactively Shakespeare-ize a play.

After winning a \$100,000 grant from the Tony Randall Theatrical Fund, Berger produced *Women Beware Women* at the Theater at St. Clements in December 2008. The stage was set where the altar used to be at St. Clements Church and was split into three different playing spaces. According to Terri Bourus, Liv Rooth, who played Isabella, described the set as utilizing every possible playing space, creating “balconies and airy levels” and even using a swing in the

masque (qtd in Bourus 554). The costumes, designed by Clint Ramos, utilized a Jacobean silhouette but with modern fabrics in outrageous colors and patterns. Karl Levett called them “witty,” while Sam Theilman, writing for *Variety*, said they were “horribly wonderful.” Theilman described the Duke as looking like “Liberace’s older brother in an unearthly pink ensemble” (29). Bianca, played by Jennifer Ikeda, wore a chartreuse and lime-green dress, and Livia, played by Kathryn Miesle, was costumed in a black and poppy floral print. Rooth described her costume for Isabella as “young, frilly, almost little-girl pinafore . . . but with a hint of sexiness” (qtd. in Bourus 567). In the final scene, the masquers wore bright blonde wigs and white clothing, which, combined with the bright lights and the audience’s close proximity to the playing space, gave the masque what Rooth called a “circuslike . . . puppet-show quality” (554). In a personal message, Bourus described it as a display of the women as being “Geisha-like,” with bright lipstick, black-rimmed eyes, and everything else washed out in pale white, which “contrasted beautifully with the reds and grays and blues of the play.”

Berger’s production resulted in a more comic performance than the play had ever seen. Every reviewer mentioned how funny the play was. Levett, writing for *Critic’s Pick*, said that until the intermission, he thought he was watching “a raunchy romantic comedy of manners,” while both Thielman and the *New York Times*’ Charles Isherwood debated, in their reviews, about the genre of the play. Is it, as Isherwood suggests, “a tragedy spiced with comedy, or a comedy with a hyperactively tragic conclusion”? In Bourus’ essay, Rooth discussed her view of Isabella, saying that she consciously tried to get at the comedic aspects of the character. According to Rooth, Isabella is “young and “young and bright and perceptive . . . what else do you need for comedy?” (561). Accordingly, she played her “as a teenager. Light and giddy and not too bright” (562).

Middleton at the National Theatre

While Middleton's run in New York City was coming to a close, his plays were getting more attention on the London stage. In 2008 and 2010, the National Theatre staged two Middleton plays in London: *The Revenger's Tragedy*, directed by Melly Still, and *Women Beware Women*, directed by Marianne Elliot. Both productions occurred at the Olivier, the National Theatre's largest venue, and were characterized by their use of modern dress, contemporary music, and theatrical technology to create lavish spectacle. As such, each was very different from what playgoers might have come to expect from a Middleton production. Still's production in particular incorporated extra-textual prologue and epilogue sequences. Both productions made use of the Olivier's drum revolve to spin the stage around, at times using this effect to direct the flow of the narrative and create an almost filmic montage of images and actions. Finally, while they could not be categorized with the final three productions in this chapter as "musicals," both productions relied heavily on original music written for the show.

Still's 2008 production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* drew comparisons to the films of Tarantino by bringing the Jacobean tale of corruption and violence into the present day, setting it in a modernized Italian royal court with a club atmosphere (Zinman). In a platform talk, Still said that she consciously cultivated "a collision of periods visually and aurally," by blending the Renaissance and the modern, putting swords, masks, and early modern instrumentation alongside laminated ID cards, zippered jumpers, and projected videos (Still). However, it was her background as a choreographer that set this production apart. She was drawn to the play because she saw Middleton as "someone who loved music and dance and a theatrical experience," and she incorporated these aspects into almost every scene of the play (Still).

The set itself reflected the labyrinthine nature of the plot. The round stage of the Olivier was split into thirds, each of which represented a different playing space: a dark and imposing court, the throne framed by columns; Lussurioso's nattily furnished apartment; and Vindice's shabby room. Regina Buccola described the huge Renaissance-style paintings which defined each of these spaces. The Court was ornamented with two paintings of Lady Justice with a sword and scales. Lussurioso's apartment was hung with "a Renaissance image of orgiastic sex," while Vindice's dark room had one bright spot, a print of Caravaggio's portrait of St. Jerome, hung and lit from above (505). Corridors divided these spaces from each other, creating secret alleyways for clandestine behavior. The scrims separating the rooms and the corridors appeared opaque when lit from the front but transparent when backlit, allowing the audience to spy into other spaces. Since the stage was on the Olivier's drum revolve, the stage rotated during the show to face the audience with the appropriate room. The use of the revolve allowed the production to move very quickly, with continuous action between scenes. Actors began the lines of the next scene, walking in time with the revolve as it turned. However, its use was crucial during the prologue, the murder of the Duke, and the final masque and epilogue.

The music for the show, composed by Adrian Sutton, was performed and mixed live. It was comprised of a string trio, counter-tenor Jake Arditti, and the DJ duo DifferentGear, who mixed house and techno beats in with the Renaissance instrumentation and voice. Arditti's lyrics were romantic poetry set to operatic melodies. According to Buccola, the musicians were visible on balconies throughout the production; audience members could see Arditti, in his butterfly mask, and the DJs "bobbing along to their beats" (505).

The show began with a wordless prologue, an extra-textual addition by Still. This sequence of music and dance set the eerie, uncontrolled party mood. The revolve spun

seamlessly from set to set, creating a dizzying effect. Characters walked around the edge of the stage, exchanging flowers and watching as actors costumed as swans, deer, and lions performed dances simultaneously graceful, sexual, and violent under dappled blue lights. The Duke and Duchess donned elegant painted masks. In a short film on the National Theatre's website, Sutton described the music for the prologue. It was composed of three bits—"Swans," "Deer," and "Lions"—which were meant to convey the "elegance," "amorous nature", and "sexual prowess" of the host, the Duke (Raitt).

As the stage continued revolving, the audience saw a shocking montage of violence and sex. The Duke's youngest son raped Lady Antonio, whose screams mingled with the singer's voice. Vindice saw a vision of Gloriana's face rotting into a skull with a wagging maggoty tongue. The Duke received a blow-job in one of the corridors. As the set made a full turn, it revealed Lady Antonio, alone and gathering her torn skirts around her in Lussurioso's apartment. The music became more insistent and lights flashed on the floor. The revolve stopped on Vindice's room, who began his opening monologue standing on top of the chair. He described the Duke and his family who passed by in the foreground. Each court character stopped and looked out into the audience as Vindice swore his revenge, seeming to register some ominous presence.

Act three, scene five, which portrays the murder of the Duke via the puppeted skeleton of Gloriana, used the revolve in a similar way, allowing the audience to see simultaneous action across the three sets. Buccola describes the way this scene was managed; Vindice, in white pumps, stood in for the skeleton of Gloriana, who was just a head and torso in a dress and wig (511). After the Duke kissed the poisoned lips of the "bony lady," Hippolito and Vindice tortured him, nailing his tongue down so that he could not cry out. Then, to the heavy beat of

DifferentGear's music, the revolve began to turn "as the Duke reeled away from his killers who stalked him with grim determination from room to room on the revolve" (511). As the stage turned, the Duke saw the Duchess in sexual congress with Spurio, her step-son. When Lussurioso's apartment came back into view, Hippolito stabbed the Duke while the video from the prologue, of Gloriana's head rotting, played above Vindice's head. Suddenly, the abandoned skeleton on the floor (who had been replaced, mid-revolve, by a live actor) stood up. The ghost of Gloriana locked eyes with Vindice, and backed away, exiting through what seemed like a solid wall. The lights went out; when they came up again, the Duke lay alone in a puddle of blood.

The final scene of the play incorporated Still's talents as choreographer again. Lussurioso strode out, ready for his coronation, and a dancer in red swirled about him. The operatic voice sang again as he was crowned: "Kiss our souls that today were damned." Warriors walked out to house music and another dance party began; Lussurioso gyrated to the beat, unbuttoning his shirt. Suddenly, he was stabbed and the remaining brothers sliced at each other. The lights dimmed, with spots on Vindice and Hippolito. Their throats were slit and they fell to the floor, adding to the pile of bodies. The revolve began to spin yet again as the audience watched Still's epilogue. This wordless scene showed Antonio clearing the stage and breaking the news of Vindice's death to Castiza and Gratiana⁴⁹. As the two women fell to the floor weeping, Arditti sang "an original piece based on Castiza's speech celebrating 'a virgin honour' as 'a crystal tower'" (Buccola 515). The revolve finally stopped on the court, a spotlight on the empty throne with the crown still lying on the floor.

⁴⁹ According to Buccola, in rehearsals Antonio kissed Castiza's forehead during this scene, suggesting, as Berger did in his production, that the trend of lecherous rulers may not be over. However, this was dropped in production (515).

In 2010, the National Theatre hired Marianne Elliott to direct *Women Beware Women* at the Olivier. Elliott's vision for the production was slick and cool, set in a Fellini-esque Italy replete with New Look couture and glossy tiled floors. The set, as it did for Still's *Revenger's Tragedy*, was split into two halves and revolved. One side, the duke's lodgings, was all silver candelabras, antique mirrors, and black velvet furnishings. The other side, Leantio's home, was characterized by shabby wood and peeling paint. A marble archway dominated the stage, bearing the eroded words "Cosmus Medici." And, as in Still's production, *Women Beware Women* included over a hundred pages of jazz music composed for the show by Olly Fox.

Harriet Walters shone as the orchestrator of all the plots, the Duke's coldly amoral sister Livia. With hair coiffed like Wallis Simpson's and stiff dresses in vivid tones, she was as glittering as a knife-edge. Her halting, almost offhand delivery of the revelation that Isabella was not a blood relation belied the calculating intellect behind the scheme:

"That which you call your father's command's nothing;

then your obedience must needs be as little.

If you can make shift here to taste your happiness,

or pick out aught that likes you, much good do you.

You see your cheer; I'll make you no set dinner." (2.1.119-23)

Later, Walters drew chuckles as she chastised the widow for not visiting her more often. "You make yourself so strange, never come at us; and yet so near a neighbor, and so unkind. Troth, you're to blame" (2.2.139-41).

Harry Melling, playing the Ward, drew the most laughs. During the banquet scene, he attempted to outdo the sexy ballroom moves of Isabella and Hippolito, but could not find the rhythm, resorting to loud counting during his dance. At one point, he tried to force Isabella's face

down toward his crotch, but ended up on the floor in a breakdance pose. In the next scene, he kissed Isabella grotesquely, moving his face all over hers. “O, most delicious scent! Methinks it tasted as if a man had stepped into a comfit-maker’s shop to let a cart go by all the while I kissed her” (3.3.61-3). Later, he concocted a plan with Sordido to get glimpses up her skirt. “Dab down as you see me, and peep of one side when her back’s toward you” (3.3.116-18). In this production, Isabella caught them at it, but gamely stood still, legs spread wide and a longsuffering look on her face, while they peeped their heads beneath.

The production’s strength, however, was its beautifully staged spectacle. In the third scene, the Duke and his entourage entered in procession while a choir of male voices and one high female descant sang in Latin. Just as the Duke, played by Richard Lintern, looked up at Bianca on her balcony, gold confetti showered down on him. Later, during the chess game, a sheer voile curtain, lit with blue, was unfurled beneath the arch. Bianca entered above behind the curtain, wearing white. The Duke, also costumed in white, entered on the other side, forcing Bianca against the banister and pinioning her arms together above her head. She escaped and ran down a curving set of stairs on one side of the set, but he mirrored her movement on the other side, trapping her. As the Widow and Livia continued their chess game below, the set slowly revolved and the Duke dragged Bianca upstairs. Their white costumes and the curtain all strongly reflected the blue light in this nightmarishly graceful scene.

The masque which ends the play was stripped of most of its dialogue and played instead as a sexy dance of death. When the masque began, Guardiano offered the cigarettes to the servants, costumed like winged devils; they began dancing around sinuously, before surrounding one of their number who looked strangely like Livia, inspecting her costume. The Duke and Bianca entered, wearing gold crowns, and couples began dancing around the stage, snapping and

stomping to the jazz music. At the second verse of the song, the set began to rotate. People were on the staircases, and Leantio's ghost appeared, bloody and white in the face. In quick succession, Guardiano, the Ward, and the servant dressed as Livia were dispatched, their bodies danced offstage by Sordido. Suddenly, however, Isabella was attacked by a servant, who was revealed to be the real Livia. Hippolito stabbed Livia as Isabella died, surrounded by the horned (and horny) servants. Livia's dying screams finally halted both the dance and the rotating set. The last deaths occur when Bianca realized that the Duke had drunk from the poisoned cup she prepared. She screeched, "Twas meant for thee, thee, Cardinal," before kissing the Duke and drinking the rest of the cup (5.2.230). The Cardinal delivered the last speech and turned to face a masked devil who had risen up behind him, suggesting a dark fate awaiting him as well.

Middleton as Musical

The final three productions I discuss not only incorporated music and dance heavily into the show, but also used song and dance sequences to assist the play's written narrative. Two of these productions were marketed as adaptations. Both *Vice* and the *Roaring Girl* musical replace sections of spoken verse with songs either inspired by the text or using the text verbatim. However, the RSC production of *A Mad World, My Masters* was not acknowledged to be an adaptation, even though it utilized many of the adaptive strategies already discussed. Furthermore, it interlaced the text of the play with song and dance sequences that, while they did not replace any of Middleton's scenes, contributed to the characterization and story-telling.

In 2010, the jazz opera *Vice*, written by Jools Scott and Sue Curtis and based on *The Revenger's Tragedy*, premiered in London in two industry showcase productions⁵⁰. In his article

⁵⁰ In an e-mail, Sue Curtis told me that *Vice* is again being workshopped and showcased this February; she and Scott hope that it will be picked up by a passionate director and receive funding so that it can be produced in full.

about the opera, Doug Lanier notes that this piece was originally conceived of as a jazz musical, but ended up blending jazz and opera in the style of *The Threepenny Opera* by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht . Lanier also hears strains of Verdi, Schubert, and Gershwin (229-30).

In the two productions (at London's Arcola and Soho theatres), the staging was relatively stripped down. Lanier describes the actors seated in a semicircle and standing to deliver their parts before sitting again. The division between the court and Vindice's family was illustrated with clothing and makeup; the court characters wore black clothing and white makeup, with smeared red lipstick, while Vindice's family wore contemporary street clothes in lighter colors and no makeup (230). The opera's chorus were costumed as court members and listed in the script as "pandars." One of the choristers, "seated with an accordion he never played, wore a sardonic grin the entire evening," similar to the silent presence Prowse uses in many of his productions (230). There were few props other than Gloriana's skull resting on the piano. It appeared "almost jewel-like" with a "silvery-black patina" (234). The only attempt at stage-dressing was a "ring of broken mirror glass between performers and spectators," which Lanier reads as potentially implicating the audience in the violence and hypocrisy of the court society, similar to the original staging of the musical *Cabaret* (to which Lanier draws several connections in his essay) (234-5).

While Lanier acknowledges that the simple staging made some of the plot unclear, he also includes in a footnote Sue Curtis's vision for a full stage production complete with choreography. Hippolito's character is intended to be a "court entertainer" who expresses himself through tap dance instead of through song. His involvement with the Duke's murder would include stamping on the Duke's head "using the same rhythm of his tap dancing at the beginning and finally betraying his part in the court rhythm" (230). The final masque and death

scene would be staged as a dance in which Lussurioso attempts to publicly rape Castiza, only to be attacked by the entire court and dealt a final death blow by Vindice (231).

While it is based on *The Revenger's Tragedy* and takes many lines directly from Middleton, *Vice* also includes some significant departures from the play. For instance, Hippolito's relationship to the court in *Vice* is much more fraught than in the Middleton play. Lanier notes a tension between the brothers over Vindice's plan for revenge, with Vindice accusing Hippolito of being too eager to accept Lussurioso's money and Hippolito urging Vindice to stop his revenge with the Duke's death (233). *Vice* also humanizes its central female characters more than Middleton's play. Castiza's vulnerability is more sharply illustrated with an aria in which she describes the sensation of being watched by "eyes behind masks, eyes behind fans / eyes on my face, on my mouth, on my breast;" Lanier interprets these lines as Castiza struggling with "a generalized male gaze, an oppressive gender system that treats her like prey" (236-7). He also recognizes the leniency with which the script treats both Gratiana and the Duchess by calling direct attention to their dependence on money, and therefore on men, to live. Gratiana is persuaded to relent by her own poverty and the knowledge that "you need a man . . . to see you through" (238). Similarly, the Duchess recognizes that she "grow[s] old" and that even when love fades, "money stays." Scott and Curtis increase her pathos further by having her sing a duet with Gratiana, a move that, in musicals, typically suggests an affinity between characters (239).

Another change that Lanier notices is that the script of *Vice* introduces the audience to the court through the trial of Junior for his rape of Lady Antonio, rather than through Vindice's monologue describing the Duke's sexual harassment and murder of Gloriana. Lanier argues that, in the view of the audience, this change makes the court's depravity more objective and less a

potential figment of Vindice's diseased imagination. This change crops up often in modern stagings of *The Revenger's Tragedy*; in this chapter alone, two other productions of the play (the Red Bull's and the National Theatre's) begin with a silent scene depicting the rape of Lady Antonio before Vindice's opening monologue.

In February 2013, Vile Passeist Theatre, a Halifax-based company, produced an original musical based on Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*. In an article about the company, Vile Passeist's Artistic Director Dan Bray wrote that their mission is to produce "early modern, non-Shakespearean drama of exceptional quality" ("Just Another Renaissance"). In keeping with this goal, the company has staged works by Marlowe, Ford, Jonson, Webster, and, of course, Middleton; in addition to the aforementioned musical, they produced full-length versions of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, as well as a shortened commedia dell'arte version of *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

In 2013, after four years in the Halifax theater scene, Bray wanted to give their seasoned actors and audience members a taste of something different while attracting new actors ("HamHands"). He had been introduced to *The Roaring Girl* in his undergraduate studies and was astounded "that a play with a swash-buckling heroine existed at the same time as characters like Juliet and Ophelia" (personal message). He approached Jenny Trites, a Nova Scotia native and a composer, to adapt the play into a musical. In a personal interview, Trites described the process of working with Middleton and Dekker's script. From the beginning of her engagement with the play, she felt that the characters could "burst into song" at any moment. However, as Trites familiarized herself with the play, she was overwhelmed by its length and knew that it needed to be cut significantly. After a company read-through of the play, she and Bray, who was directing, decided to keep the musical's story focused around Moll and the other women. Bray

cut a total of 12 characters, doing away with the Dapper's feud and much of the city merchant material (Bray, message). At the same time, they focused on Moll's involvement in the romance between Sebastian and Mary and the subplot involving Laxton and the Gallipots. Because Vile Passeist attempts to be conscious of how many male vs. female roles early modern plays offer, they also changed the gender of Sir Guy Fitzallard. According to Trites, making Mary's father a mother, and a widow, emphasized the heartlessness of Sir Alexander's decision to renege on the agreed-upon marriage between their children.

All of the songs Trites composed rely almost exclusively on the Middleton/Dekker text for their lyrics. Her songs often occurred in moments when characters were lying, because "lying already involves an element of performance." However, she said that because Moll's character is very "genuine," she chose the most beautiful or most passionate lines to put to music. For instance, Moll's lecture to Laxton became the song "What Durst Move You, Sir" in which the chorus is Moll's repeated question, "What durst move you, sir, to think me whoreish?" (5.88-9).

The musical was performed in early modern costumes designed by Jordyn Bochon, and accompanied almost exclusively by Trites on a keyboard. It began with a large choral prologue, "A Play Long Expected." Moll opened this number from above, while the cast entered in small character groups, singing Middleton's lines from the play's prologue about what expectations audience members had for an unknown play. In the middle of the song, Moll began to sing a countermelody in which she described herself as the titular character whose "life our acts proclaim" (Prologue, Line 30). The round ended with Moll singing the final, plaintive phrase, "A roaring girl."

Trites attempted to differentiate characters and class by musical style. She said that the higher-class characters were written to evoke a more classic musical feel. For instance, Trites

viewed Sir Alex as “larger than life, a sort of protective father like Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof*.” As such, his opening number, “Sir Alexander’s Tale,” was a call-and-response song characterized by a minor melody with a driving, syncopated accompaniment. The two romantic duets between Sebastian and Mary, “Must I Shun” and “Every Kiss,” certainly evoked the Rogers and Hammerstein duets between characters like *Sound of Music*’s Captain VonTrapp and Maria, and *Oklahoma!*’s Curley and Laurey. During a musical interlude in “Must I Shun,” the two characters performed an early modern dance together. In “Every Kiss,” the romantic highlight of the second act, Sebastian and Mary begin singing a sort of round, each character’s phrase leading the next to echo, before their lyrics slowly overlapped and they began singing together in harmony. Near the end of the song, they performed a symbolic marriage as Mary sang “in one knot have our hands,” and Sebastian joined her to complete the phrase “by heaven have our hands been tied” (Scene 1, 76-7).

For Moll, however, Trites largely wrote in a blues and jazz style to accommodate the actress, who frequently performs in this style. In the song “Marriage Is But a Chopping and a Changing,” Sebastian wooed Moll with a sentimental, schmaltzy waltz. Moll responded to his insincere courtship with a jazzy melody, during which the two characters performed a swing dance led, of course, by Moll. Other musical styles Trites incorporated include a Joplin-esque rag for Trapdoor’s song, “I Have Gone Up Into the Steeple,” and an Andrews Sister-style merchant’s wives song, “Gentlemen, What Is’t You Lack.” And for two songs, Trites attempted to mimic the sound of music from the English Renaissance. For the songs that appear in Middleton and Dekker’s play, she “pulled out [her] counterpoint textbook and tried to follow the rules,” ending up with something that sounded like “a catch written by Purcell or Morley.” During these songs, the characters pulled out instruments and accompanied themselves. Trapdoor played the tin

whistle for “A Gage of Ben Rom Booze,” while Moll and Sebastian played the cello and the lute respectively for “A Pox On All False Tails.”

The musical ended with a full cast finale, “When Wilt Thou Marry.” This song opened with Mistresses Openwork, Gallipot, and Tiltyard asking Moll, in dulcet three-part harmony, when she will marry. Then Moll responded with a power ballad describing the unlikely day on which she’ll marry. The cast listened and laughed appropriately as she moved around the semi-circle of actors, addressing specific lines to specific characters. The cast joined in on a repeat of Moll’s melody, singing “When you shall hear gallants void from sergeants fear / when you shall hear honesty and truth unslan’d red . . .” while Moll scat sang (11.217-9). The entire cast completed her triumphant phrase “the next day following” with the final word, held back until the end of the song, “doomsday” (11.224-5).

Sean Foley’s 2013 production of *A Mad World, My Masters* at the RSC was performed as a raucous and raunchy musical set in 1950s Soho. As Foley explains in his program note, this world is, in many ways, analogous to the world Middleton was writing for: “a post-war world where everyone is worried about sliding morals, the position of women, a changing class system, immigrants, and where on earth to get the next drink.” The production was punctuated with renditions of American blues and soul songs performed by a live jazz band. It opened in a stage version of the infamous Flamingo Club, washed in a palette of neon blue, purple, and pink. As fashionably dressed club-goers filter onto the stage, a woman, dressed as a Playboy bunny sans tail, handed out martinis and cocktails; another woman flirted with audience members on the front row. The jazz singer, played by Deborah Tracey, entered and took her place on a glittery silver podium. She began belting out the Dinah Washington hit, “Big Long Slidin’ Thing,” only to be interrupted mid-song by the flamboyant entrance of Dick Follywit, played by Richard

Goulding, and his drunken crew. “Hello, I’m Dick, and I want a kiss,” he yelled, spilling a drink on a female patron. A fight ensued, a knife was brandished, and the club emptied. Suddenly street lights rose up out of the floor and half of the Flamingo Club set rolled aside to reveal a city street scene at “Hamyard,” where one of Follywit’s comrades sat in a trashcan with a lid on his head. Thus, in the first scene of the Foley production, the audience was introduced to both the stylish and the seamy side of London’s Soho district in the 50’s.

The production did not stop at highlighting London’s trendy spots like the Flamingo Club, the Moka Bar, and Soho’s streets. Audience members also witnessed Penitent Brothel’s bachelor pad (complete with hot plate), Sir Bounteous’s mansion, and the charming domestic palace of the Littledicks, the characters known in the Middleton play as Master Shortrod Hairbrain and his wife. Shortrod Hairbrain was not the only character whose name was changed, either. Sir Bounteous Progress became Sir Bounteous Peersucker. The brothers Inesse and Possibility became Muchly Minted and Whopping Prospect, respectively. And the courtesan Frank Gullman’s name was updated to Truly Kidman. (Thankfully, Penitent Brothel got to keep his name; even Foley realized that you can’t improve upon perfection.)

Foley not only updated the setting; he also updated the script, with the help of Phil Porter. The first evidence of this was Follywit’s first line, “Hello, I’m Dick, etc.,” which was obviously not Middletonian. The script cut the play by a fifth, updating Middleton’s most obscure jokes and including more modernized turns-of-phrase and anachronistic interjections. For instance, in Act 1, Scene 2, Mr. Littledick tells Kidman that he has taken all of Mrs. Littledick’s “wanton pamphlets, ‘Venus and Adonis’, her *Health and Efficiency* magazine . . .” substituting the title of the nudist magazine in place of the other “wanton pamphlet” Middleton mentions: *Hero and Leander*. Another hilarious change occurred during the sickbed scene, in which Penitent Brothel

pretends to be Kidman's doctor. He asks Sir Bounteous for money so that he can make a "precious cordial" to restore Kidman's health. In place of Middleton's string of intimidating Latin ingredients, Foley's text has Brothel list off several Italian dishes: "Osso bucco, tortellini, mellenzane parmigiane . . ." (3.2). Foley also borrowed from Middleton himself for some of the changes. For instance, when Sir Bounteous's friends begin to leave him in Act 2, scene 1, they entreat him to join them at Pimlico where they "are making a boon voyage to that nappy land of spice cakes," a line lifted directly from Middleton's play *The Roaring Girl* (10.57-8).

The costumes also helped to illustrate the characters in the updated setting. Dick wore khaki pants and a blue blazer with his tie loosened and collar unbuttoned, while Mr. Littledick wore a grey three-piece suit. Penitent Brothel looked like a noir detective in a black suit and fedora, while Sir Bounteous made his first appearance (spanking a scantily-clad blonde escort) in a tuxedo. The female characters, however, were usually costumed in ways that furthered their deception of the male characters in the play. Truly Kidman's New Look dresses were chic but understated in tones of gold and white, advertising her feigned moral purity for all her deluded suitors. This façade of piety was taken even further when she appeared at the Littledick's house in full nun's habit. Her mother's costumes, however, presented Mrs. Kidman as an older woman of independent wealth and taste. She resembled a gorgeous tropical bird in bright greens, magentas, and wild patterns, always accessorized with something either feathered or furred. The costumes of Mrs. Littledick highlighted that character's appearance of meek domesticity. She looked like Betty Draper with her blonde bob, pearl necklace, twinsets, and full-skirted day dresses in floral patterns. Her modest look could not have created a greater contrast with the actress's later entrance as the Succubus in a black corseted negligee and garters with a sheer red peignoir.

In addition to their costuming, each of the principal characters was typified by one song, usually performed in tandem with the jazz singer who presided over the production. For instance, Sir Bounteous, played by Ian Redford, performed “Let the Good Times Roll” in his living room while his servants changed him from his tuxedo into pajamas and a dressing gown. Truly Kidman, played by Sarah Ridgeway, sang “Ain’t Nobody’s Business” as her two suitors, Muchly-Minted and Whopping Prospect, observed from above. In the second half, after Mrs. Littledick (Ellie Beaven) was rejected and chastised by Penitent Brothel, she performed a heart-rending version of “Cry Me a River.”

Aside from the musical interludes, the overwhelming feel of this production was of a classic British farce such as the *Carry On* franchise. Take, for instance, the first scene at the Littledick’s house, which involved the couple taking turns eavesdropping on each other by miming the existence of a wall. The star of the scene was Truly Kidman, masquerading as an Irish nun, instructing Mrs. Littledick in the art of seduction via a loud conversation full of religious double entendres. Once the women’s tete-a-tete was over, Mr. Littledick gave Kidman some money, telling her to “slip this quietly into [her] offering box,” to which Kidman responded by purring, “You do so ravish me with kindness sir. You virtually make me moist— (*aside*) What a Berk” (1.2).

The double entendres continued apace at Sir Bounteous’s house which was served, in this production, by an ancient butler named Spunky, whose huge eyebrows, stooped frame, and squealing hearing aid provided a running gag⁵¹. Dick and his friends arrived for a visit disguised as Lord Owemuch and his entourage. In the text, Bounteous is eager to discuss his wealth with

⁵¹ As I discovered in the course of my time in the United Kingdom, the word 'spunk' and its derivatives refer only to male semen in British English, and not to 'pluck' or 'liveliness' as it is commonly used in the United States.

Lord Owemuch, which leads him to rhapsodize at length about the size of his “organs.” In this stage production, this verbal joke became visual as Bounteous revealed the switch to his library safe—the penis of a marble statue. When Dick’s gang robbed the safe later, they initially could not open it, despite repeated tweaking of the stone member. Once opened, the safe recalled Mary Poppins’ handbag as the thieves unloaded it of improbably large items, such as a set of golf clubs and a full-length ladder.

The play’s most memorable scene, the sick bed scene in which the courtesan Frank Gullman orchestrates the tryst between Mistress Hairbrain and Penitent Brothel, provided this production with a crowd-pleasing end to the first half. John Hopkins as Penitent Brothel delivered several original Foley-Porter lines while pretending to be Truly Kidman’s doctor, such as “I am a physician. Cigarette?” and claiming that Truly’s costly medicine included “the spirit of a wasp fart” (3.2). Once Mrs. Littledick arrived, he greeted her with a huge erection visible in his pants. Their lovemaking occurred behind the curtains of the canopy bed, with Truly Kidman delivering her monologue both narrating (for the audience) and disguising (for the eavesdropping Mr. Littledick) the lover’s enthusiastic assignation. As with Brothel’s earlier jokes, the funniest lines here were usually written by Foley, as Truly recounted a raunchy list of fake Irish relatives, including “my uncle Titsfatprick, my cousins Willy and Lickit, my Great Aunty Rugmunch . . .”⁵² The scene ended with Penitent Brothel’s last couplet: “Art of Ladies! When plots are e’en past hope, and hang their head, set with a woman’s hand, they thrive and spread” (3.2). At this, the characters on stage froze into a tableau and the jazz singer crooned, “Oh yeah . . .,” leading into the interval.

⁵² “Lickit” is Middleton’s joke; the rest are Foley’s.

Hopkins had another opportunity for broad physical comedy in the second half during the Succubus scene. In a moment of self-recrimination, Brothel whipped himself with a tea towel while preparing dinner and performing the song “Yield Not.” Suddenly the flames of his stovetop spiked up, the lights flickered, and the succubus—identical to Mrs. Littledick except for her suggestive costume—appeared. While Brothel scrambled to put the fire out, the tempting spirit toyed with him sexually, performing a song and dance for him to a rhythmic bass and drum line. As she left, she called back “cunny tease” over her shoulder, and the fire hydrant Brothel held at crotch level sprayed involuntarily. More sexual misadventures ensued between Dick in drag and Sir Bounteous, dressed in a mesh onesie and wearing a leash and collar. These ended just as poorly as the Littledick/Brothel coupling, with Sir Bounteous, robbed anew, crying on the couch in the fetal position.

The entire production culminated in a send-up of English drama as Sir Bounteous hosted a “Jacobean fancy-dress” party at his mansion, inviting all of the play’s characters. Each of them arrived in an era-appropriate costume, with Mr. Littledick sporting a giant beribboned codpiece and Penitent Brothel dressed like a Puritan in white and black with buckled shoes. Dick and his friends, in their final disguise as the troupe of actors, wore white shirts, black tights, and black Zorro-stye masks. Their play, “The Slip,” was punctuated by yells of, “Boom, huzzah!” and hat-flourishing at every line; they overdid their early modern accents by fastidiously rhyming “yours” with “flowers.” At one point, the audience groaned when Sir Bounteous quipped that the main actor was “an angry young man; I have seen such a man at the Royal Court!” At the very end, once all of Dick’s (and Truly’s) disguises and deceptions were laid bare, the party continued with a dance. A disco ball lowered and the jazz singer stood on a stool in the center, singing “Who Will the Next Fool Be?” Everyone around her slow danced, or lay on the ground snapping

their fingers, until finally, joining arms, they surrounded her. On the last chorus, they all fell to the ground around her, singing, “Who will the next fools . . . ,” stopping the phrase to wink in unison, and then belting out the final word, “Be!”

The Last Word

Despite the reverence with which we treat the Bard, the plays of Shakespeare have a long history of being adapted, starting less than a century after his own death⁵³. Today, his plays still receive alternative interpretations and adaptations into opera, musicals, films, *YouTube* videos, Twitter feeds, and more. His works remain alive not just because they are produced on stage, but because they act as fodder for other authors to create new works of art.

As evidenced by the productions discussed above, Middleton is also alive and kicking. No longer an author “lost in the mists of time and obscurity,” Middleton has established his relevance to the modern mind (Sam Marlowe). However, not only are his plays thematically resonant with our fabulously filthy age, but they are also theatrically exciting. His work is being produced in innovative, adaptive ways by directors like Robert Woodruff and Jesse Berger. His plays are so alive that they get up and dance, as evidenced by the reams of music and choreography composed just for the National Theatre productions discussed in this chapter. Finally, they inspire collaboration from artists like Jools Scott, Sue Curtis, and Jenny Trites. It’s proof that Middleton has come into his own.

It was about time.

⁵³ See Jean I. Marsden’s *The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory*.

CHAPTER SIX

‘TIL MY NEXT RETURN’: SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT MIDDLETON

So after fifty years of steady production history, where is Middleton’s reputation now? Where does he stand as a literary and cultural figure? What are the conversations surrounding his name and his legacy?

A few themes crop up time and time again in reviews and marketing materials for Middleton productions. As I discuss in the Introduction, reviewers from every decade continue to be surprised and delighted by Middleton’s relevance to whatever particular cultural moment they are writing from. Nevertheless, this is, by and large, the most unambiguously positive response to stagings of his work. Other responses, though they might seem positive, tend to rhetorically diminish Middleton in one way or another.

For example, one response to his comedies that occurs in review after review is a comparison to panto (short for “pantomime”), the English Christmas tradition of over-the-top, bawdy plays usually involving lots of audience interaction. Many reviewers of the Middleton productions at the Globe made this connection (Shaw; Gardner; Spence). Lyn Gardner, writing about the 1997 *Chaste Maid*, likened McKay’s choice to cast male actors as the Puritan women to the old panto standby, the “dame,” a male actor in drag playing a campy, melodramatic woman. In 1998, Robert Tanitch compared the Globe’s *Mad World* to the *Carry On* series and, while admitting that he enjoyed it, called it “a crude and smutty farce.” Ben Brantley described it as “a gawdy [sic], nonstop roundelay of earthy erotic entanglements, full of actorly adrenaline that fed off the rowdy audience.”

On first glance, this might seem like a stronger criticism of the Globe house-style under Rylance than it is of Middleton himself. After all, in a review (aptly titled “Send out the clowns

at the Globe”), Benedict Nightingale took Rylance to task for an aesthetic that privileged audience interaction, saying that a panto-like approach to *Othello* would be “unlikely to end up with a very searching, subtle *Othello*.” However, Nightingale’s article introduced a contrast between subtlety and crudeness that gets to the heart of how reviewers, whether they are praising or criticizing, judge Middleton. The program for the ASC’s 2011 production of *Trick* summarized the play thusly:

Times are hard in London town . . . What’s a boy to do? Simple. Lie, cheat, scam your rich, nasty uncle, and pimp your mistress out to your uncle’s bitter rival. . . . Thomas Middleton’s delicious wicked comedy of grifting, gulling, gallanting, and growing-up.

In 2012, Charles Culbertson praised *Mad World* for its “lusty bathroom humor,” with characters who are “caricature[d]” and “burlesqued.” Sean Foley, the recent director of the 2013 *Mad World* at the RSC, characterized the play as “broad,” “rude,” and “outrageous” in contrast to the “wit” that characterizes Shakespeare’s comedies (program).

Not everyone finds Middleton’s comedies crude. Peter Saccio, the editor of *Mad World* in the Oxford Complete Works, disagreed with reviewers who found the Globe’s production of the play lacking in moral seriousness. In her director’s note, Sue Lefton echoed Saccio’s opinion that *Mad World* is a “deeply moral play,” portraying a society “where the status quo has been shaken.” In a similar fashion, Michael Coveney called *The Roaring Girl* “complex, beguiling, ambiguous” in its portrayal of Moll, and praised the play’s verse, prose, and the “rich density of the [its] social subtext.”

Still, the popular consensus about Middleton’s comedies is that they are “gaudy,” “lusty,” “earthy,” “rowdy,” etc.—basically anything but subtle. And the idea that subtlety trumps

crudeness seems implicit in many, if not most, reviews of Middleton's comedies. They suggest that crudeness is well and good in its place, but just as a bit of fun—i.e., not worth much beyond short-term entertainment value. For instance, David Benedict summed up the Globe's *Chaste Maid* by saying that "McKay takes a crude play in what seems like a crude theatre and translates it into a treasurable event." The subtext here is that "crude" does not *usually* "translate" into "treasurable." It is, at best, fleeting fun. In a similar vein, Amanda Hodges characterized *Mad World* as "comic mirth at the expense of delicious barbs that make Middleton an accomplished playwright," suggesting that subtle wit, but not broad comedy, qualifies as an accomplishment.

When responding to Middleton's tragedies, reviewers consistently remark on their violence and gore, labeling them in the tradition of splashy horror entertainment. When reviewing Di Trevis's *Revenger's Tragedy*, Irving Wardle called Swan's 1987 season, which included *Titus Andronicus* and *The Jew of Malta*, "the Jacobean Charnel House." Stephen Godfrey commented that *The Changeling's* "atmosphere of suspense and slaughter" didn't "seem far removed from a pulp novel such as *The Postman Always Rings Twice*." Peter Marks, writing in 1997 about Woodruff's *Changeling*, said that the play revolved around "twin houses of horror." In 2005, Jasper Rees referred to the RSC's *Women Beware Women* as "a Grand Guignol," a phrase that also occurred in all the reviews mentioned above (and many others). Lately this trend has taken shape in reviewers comparing Middleton's plays to films that utilize an aesthetic of blood. For instance, Georgina Brown called *The Revenger's Tragedy* "the precursor of Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* or Coppola's *The Godfather*." The Tarantino comparison especially gets a lot of press; a Google search for the terms "Thomas Middleton" and "Quentin Tarantino" together gets over 22,000 hits. Alexis Soloski called the ending of *Women Beware Women* "so excessive it might give even Quentin Tarantino pause." Toby Zinman, reviewing

Melanie Lynskey's *Revenger's Tragedy* said that it was "so blood-soaked and sex-drenched, so Tarantino, so over-the-top, it's hard to know whether to gasp or laugh." The program for that production even included an image of The Bride, Uma Thurman's character from Tarantino's revenge film, *Kill Bill*.

Garnering comparisons to Tarantino makes Middleton seem hipper; it raises his street cred, so to speak. I tell my students that Middleton was "the Jacobean Tarantino," and enjoy the resultant "oohs" and "aahs" as I describe the plot of *The Bloody Banquet*. However, I wonder if reviewers who harp on these aspects of Middleton are taking him very seriously. Zinman's review continues, "The multiple plots - most too preposterous and complicated to summarize, with lots of rape, stabbing, poisoning, infidelity, incest and lurid sex - reveal the vileness of the world," and calls Lussurioso "a sensational creep." The common descriptors here and in other reviews of his tragedies ("pulp," "over-the-top," "excessive" "preposterous," "lurid," and "sensational") are not particularly laudatory. They point again to a perceived lack of subtlety and depth, both in style and content.

Both of these trends—focusing on the broad comedy or the splashy violence—are ways of controlling and diminishing Middleton's impact. By implying that this is *all* he does, this rhetoric makes Middleton smaller than he really is. We begin to understand Middleton as writing for a niche market instead of for a universal market. Part of this, perhaps, is that we must not allow him to encroach on Shakespeare's territory.

Shakespeare, of course, is the elephant in the room, the implied "other" against which Middleton is judged, even when that judgment is praise. This third response is the most significant theme running through reviews of Middleton's work. For instance, the program for Tony Richardson's 1961 production of *The Changeling* included quotes from T.S. Eliot, Lord

David Cecil, and Algernon Charles Swinburne, each praising the play as second only to Shakespeare. Fifty years later, the Young Vic *Changeling* marketed Middleton as the “greatest Elizabethan playwright after Shakespeare,” ignoring the fact that Middleton was not really an Elizabethan playwright.

Is Shakespeare the yardstick for style and content against which Middleton comes up short? Probably. Consider this response, a personal fax from Graham Pownes, the editor of *Theatre World*, to the Globe after their production of *Mad World*: “The Jacobean doesn’t seem to inspire as the Shakespeare does.” One might ask, is inspiration all we are looking for in drama? Another response to the same production, from Charles Spencer, gets at the heart of the matter. He argues that Jacobean comedies might work better at the Globe than Shakespeare because of their “simpler language, strong plots, unashamed populism” as opposed to Shakespearean richness which “often struggles to communicate itself to those thronging the yard.” In other words, Shakespeare is praised for his depth of characterization, his thrilling and uplifting verse, his insight into the human condition. Middleton, on the other hand, is reduced to a popular entertainer—a song-and-dance (-and-murder) man⁵⁴.

Middleton is populist, and this works against his favor in the canon wars. Canon, of course, has much to do with class. The works of the canon are those that have been deemed morally or philosophically uplifting and universally appealing by the arbiters of taste, who are by and large part of the ruling class. An appreciation for canonical literature is a mark of good taste, a class marker. Enjoying “fluff,” “pulp,” or “bubblegum” art is a mark of bad taste, an indication of a low education and a low income, the taste of the proletariat. Academics acknowledge this

⁵⁴ Considering responses to Middleton’s tragedies, Paul Budra asks, “Why is it ‘better’ to feel wonder or awe than it is to feel horror, dread, revulsion, or even bloody-minded glee when watching a form of popular entertainment?” (489).

when we share, in whispers, our love of *Toddlers and Tiaras* or Ke\$ha music videos—always quick to explain that it’s a “guilty pleasure.” Today, Shakespeare is high canon *and* high class. Middleton, like Ke\$ha, does not always make it past the gatekeepers and enforcers of taste. Ultimately, it makes a sort of ironic sense that Middleton criticism would be connected to issues of class, since Middleton himself was interested in exploring these issues on stage; today’s Middleton proponents esteem his works for this impulse.

Despite the limiting discourse about Middleton in popular media, the conversations among theater professionals display a deep understanding of and appreciation for Middleton’s plays. Ralph Alan Cohen, co-founder of the American Shakespeare Center, praises his work because “something is always happening.” Cohen labels it the “multiplicity of the moment,” and describes it this way: “If you’ve got five characters on stage, you’ve got five vectors moving in different ways. In this way, Middleton exceeds Shakespeare” (interview). When I interviewed several of the ASC actors about their experiences playing Middleton characters, they said that they revel in his characterization. Even the small characters are “drawn very vividly,” and they find it “gleeful” to play them, where there is “meat on every bone.” They also mentioned that Middleton was easy to memorize because “it’s the closest thing to our language that [they] have encountered” from the early modern period.

Dan Bray, co-founder of Vile Passeist Theatre, specifically turns to Middleton and other non-Shakespearean early modern playwrights because he wants to “question why so many of the period’s plays remain unproduced and ignored outside of academia” (“Just Another Renaissance”). He appreciates Middleton not only for what his works can tell us about Shakespeare and his cultural milieu, but also for his own “radical” voice. Brent Griffin, co-founder of Resurgens Theatre in Atlanta, GA, appreciates the “minimalism” of Middleton’s

plays, which he sees as responding to a our modern desire to “move away from overly scenographic theater toward a stage that is bare” (Interview). Like the ASC actors, he appreciates the “conversational, colloquial quality” of Middleton’s writing which, he adds, “still celebrates its artistry and artificiality.” Kevin Carr, founder of Southern Shakespeare Company in Tallahassee, FL, says that Middleton’s strong female characters fill a gap that Shakespeare leaves open. He also argues that, while we cannot discuss Middleton apart from Shakespeare, “we need to acknowledge the multiplicity of authors in the Renaissance and that their success had nothing to do with Shakespeare” (interview). These theater professionals, and others like Jesse Berger at Red Bull, Mark Rylance at the Globe, and Gregory Doran at the RSC, have indicated a greater interest in reviving the lost “Jacobethan” plays of Shakespeare’s contemporaries.

The disconnect between the evaluation of Middleton in the popular media and the worlds of academia and theater might be due to some anxiety about the threat he poses to Shakespeare’s dominance. In “Afterword: The Incredible Shrinking Bard,” Gary Taylor writes that Shakespeare was “shrinking,” predicting that “the number of people attending to Shakespeare, the intensity of their attention, the frequency and complexity of their appropriations, will inevitably diminish” (205). Aebischer and Prince suggest that other early modern dramatists provide an alternative point of view than the “mainstream, implicitly conservative, institutionalised Shakespearean canon” (2). They “[call] into question the ‘universal’ and ‘humanist’ Shakespeare” and “illuminate Shakespeare’s shortcomings or insufficiencies” (7). There might be a deep-seated fear that, if we replace Shakespeare, Western civilization as we know it will slowly erode.

On either side of this debate, the trend for strong disapprobation and equally strong adoration indicates that Middleton’s work is hitting a nerve—that it matters. In American and

British society at large, the growing numbers of his plays produced as films, as operas, and on the modern stage show us that Middleton appears sufficiently powerful to resist not only three centuries of theatrical neglect but also the criticisms leveled at him over those centuries. Perhaps the next step in advancing Middleton's reputation, and combating our culture's dismissive attitude toward any non-Shakespearean early modern dramatist, is to produce *more* of the plays, more often. If we are going to get beyond the idea that Middleton is good at belly laughs and bloody gasps, we need to stage Middleton's weirder plays, the ones that rarely see the light of day, the ones that don't fit easily into any Shakespearean genre. Anyone interested in putting on *The Witch?*

APPENDIX A
LISTS

Middleton Productions from 1985-present (by play):

A Chaste Maid in Cheapside:

- 1997, Shakespeare's Globe, dir. Malcolm McKay
2002, Almeida Theatre, dir. Ben Harrison (toured)
2010, Edward's Boys, London, Oxford, and Stratford-upon-Avon (all boy cast)
2011, Vile Passeur Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, dir. Dorian Lang (in rep. with *Revenger's Tragedy*)
2014, Classical Actors Ensemble, Minneapolis, MN (in rep. with *Romeo and Juliet*)

A Trick to Catch the Old One:

- 1994, White Bear Pub, Instant Classics
1997, National Theatre Studio, dir. Jenny Eastop (one night)
2011, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC
2008, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series, dir. James Wallace
2014, Rose Theatre, dir. Jenny Eastop

A Yorkshire Tragedy:

- 1987, National Theatre Studio, dir. Stephen Unwin (one night)
1997, Richmond Shakespeare Society, dir. Gerald Baker (called *All's One*)
2006, Friargate Theatre, York, dir. Mark France
2010, White Bear Pub, Tough Theatre Company
2012, Vile Passeur Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, dir. Dorian Lang

No Wit/Help Like a Woman's:

- 2013, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series

A Mad World, My Masters:

1998, Shakespeare's Globe
2012, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC
2013, Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Sean Foley

Michaelmas Term:

2007 Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series

The Changeling:

1986, Buxton Festival, Edinburgh, Yorick Theatre Company, dir. Michael Batz
1986, Arts Centre, Cambridge, dir. Bill Pryde
1988, National Theatre (Lyttelton), dir. Richard Eyre
1989, Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Stratford, Ontario
1990, Newcastle Playhouse, RSC, part of Fringe events
1990, Finborough Theater Club, British Chinese Theater, dir. Mark Rylance
1992, Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Michael Attenborough
1992, Tower Theatre Company, London
1993, London Pit, revival of 1992 RSC production
1997, Theatre for a New Audience, dir. Robert Woodruff.
1998, Battersea Art Centre, dir. Tassos Stevens
1999, The Kneehigh Theatre Company, dir. Emma Rice (Called "The Itch"; toured)
1999, Salsberg Studio, Salisbury, dir. Guy Retallack
2001, BAC, London, Third Party Productions, dir. John Wright
2001, Phoenix Theater, Exeter, Graeae Theatre Company, dir. Jenny Sealey
2002, Southwark Playhouse, Mamamissi Theatre Company, dir. Dawn Walton
2004, Tobacco Factory/The Pit, Bristol/London, dir. Andrew Hilton
2005, Courtyard Theatre, London, KDC Theatre, dir. Sarah Drinkwater
2006, Barbican, London, Cheek By Jowl, dir. Declan Donnellan
2007, Nottingham Playhouse, English Touring Theater, dir. Stephen Unwin
2008, Tower Theatre Company, dir. Brian Adambrooke (made Tomazo a female, Tomazia)
2009, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC
2011, Southwark Playhouse, dir. Michael Oakley

2012, Resurgens Theatre Company, dir. Brent Griffin

2012, The Young Vic, dir. Joe Hill-Gibbons

The Ghost of Lucrece (staged reading):

1997, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series, dir. Claire van Kampen/Jenny Tiramini

The Honest Whore:

1998, Shakespeare's Globe, dir. Jack Shepherd

2012, The Flea, NYC (part of a series in which five different teams of actors helmed by five different directors each perform an act of “a classic forgotten drama.”)

The Lady's Tragedy:

1994, Show of Strength, Bristol, dir. Alan Coveney

1995, Upstart Crow Theatre, Boulder, CO,

1995, Unseam'd Shakespeare, Pittsburgh PA (called *Cardenio*)

1995, Palm Beach Shax Fest, pro. Kevin Crawford (called *Cardenio*)

1998, Next Theatre, Evanston, IL, dir. Kate Buckley (called *Cardenio*)

2002, Lone Star Ensemble, Los Angeles, CA (called *Cardenio*)

2004, White Bear Theatre, London, Blue Eyes (called *Cardenio*)

The Old Law:

1990, The Lyric Studio, Commonweal Theatre Company, dir. Tony Hegarty

2005, The Swan, RSC, dir. Sean Holmes (called *A New Way to Please You*; part of “The Gunpowder Season” about revolution)

The Phoenix:

2007 Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series, dir. James Wallace

The Puritan:

1986, Shakespeare Globe Museum, dir. Patrick Spottiswoode

The Revenger's Tragedy:

- 1987, The Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Di Trevis
1988, London Pit, revival of 1987 RSC production
1988, The People's Theatre
1996, Protean Theatre, NYC, dir. Anthony Sher
1997, The Studio, Stratford College
2000, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC
2005, Red Bull Theatre, dir. Jesse Berger
2006, Southwark Playhouse, Doublethink Theatre and Halflight, dir. Gavin McAlinden (adapt. Meredith Oakes)
2008, National Theatre, dir. Melly Still
2008, Royal Exchange, Manchester, dir. Jonathan Moore
2009, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC
2010, Vile Passeist Theatre, Halifax, dir. Dan Bray and Colleen MacIsaac (abridged, *commedia dell'arte* version)
2011, Vile Passeist Theatre, Halifax, dir. Dorian Lang
2012, Old Red Lion, dir. Nicholas Thompson (in rep. with *Henry V*; cross-gender casting)
2012, Hoxton Hall, dir. Suba Das
2012, Hen and Chickens Theatre, Immersion Theatre, Dir. James Tobias

The Roaring Girl:

- 1999, Shakespeare's Motley Crew, Chicago (adapt. Penny Penniston and Jeremy Wechsler)
2000, Shenandoah Shakespeare, touring
2000, The Steam Industry, Finborough Arms, dir. Abigail Anderson
2013, Vile Passeist Theatre, Halifax, dir. Dan Bray (musical version)
2014, Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Jo Davies (upcoming)

The Witch:

- 2008, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC
2013, The Lord Stanley, Little Goblin Productions, dir. Chris Diacopoulos

Women Beware Women:

- 1986, Royal Court Theatre, dir. William Gaskill, adapt. Howard Barker
1989, Birmingham Repertory Theatre
1994, Duke of Cambridge, London, Buttonhole Theatre, dir. Christopher Geelan
1994, Lilian Baylis Theatre, London, GBH Theatre Company (Barker adaptation)
1995, Glasgow Citizen's Theatre, dir. Philip Prowse
2006, Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Laurence Boswell
2008, Red Bull Theater, New York, dir. Jesse Berger
2010, Constellation Theatre Company, Allison Arkell Stockman (Berger adaptation)
2010, National Theatre (Olivier), dir. Marianne Elliot

Your Five Gallants:

- 1991, Shenandoah Shakespeare, dir. Ralph Alan Cohen
2008, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series, dir. James Wallace

Middleton Productions from 1985-present (by year):

- 1986, *The Changeling*, Buxton Festival, Edinburgh, Yorick Theatre Company, dir. Michael Batz
- 1986, *The Changeling*, Arts Centre, Cambridge, dir. Bill Pryde
- 1986, *The Puritan*, Shakespeare Globe Museum, dir. Patrick Spottiswoode
- 1986, *Women Beware Women*, Royal Court Theatre, dir. William Gaskill, adapt. Howard Barker
- 1987, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, National Theatre Studio, dir. Stephen Unwin (one night)
- 1987, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, The Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Di Trevis
- 1988, *The Changeling*, National Theatre (Lyttelton), dir. Richard Eyre
- 1988, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, London Pit, revival of 1987 RSC production
- 1988, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, The People's Theatre
- 1989, *The Changeling*, Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Stratford, Ontario
- 1989, *Women Beware Women*, Birmingham Repertory Theatre
- 1990, *The Changeling*, Newcastle Playhouse, RSC, part of Fringe events
- 1990, *The Changeling*, Finborough Theater Club, British Chinese Theater, dir. Mark Rylance
- 1990, *The Old Law*, The Lyric Studio, Commonweal Theatre Company, dir. Tony Hegarty
- 1991, *Your Five Gallants*, Shenandoah Shakespeare, dir. Ralph Alan Cohen
- 1992, *The Changeling*, Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Michael Attenborough
- 1992, *The Changeling*, Tower Theatre Company, London
- 1993, *The Changeling*, London Pit, revival of 1992 RSC production
- 1994, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, White Bear Pub, Instant Classics
- 1994, *The Lady's Tragedy*, Show of Strength, Bristol, dir. Alan Coveney
- 1994, *Women Beware Women*, Duke of Cambridge, London, Buttonhole Theatre, dir. Christopher Geelan
- 1994, *Women Beware Women*, Lilian Baylis Theatre, London, GBH Theatre Company (Barker adaptation)
- 1995, *The Lady's Tragedy*, Upstart Crow Theatre, Boulder, CO,
- 1995, *The Lady's Tragedy*, Unseam'd Shakespeare, Pittsburgh PA (called *Cardenio*)
- 1995, *The Lady's Tragedy*, Palm Beach Shax Fest, pro. Kevin Crawford (called *Cardenio*)
- 1995, *Women Beware Women*, Glasgow Citizen's Theatre, dir. Philip Prowse
- 1996, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Protean Theatre, NYC, dir. Anthony Sher

1997, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Shakespeare's Globe, dir. Malcolm McKay

1997, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, National Theatre Studio, dir. Jenny Eastop (one night)

1997, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, Richmond Shakespeare Society, dir. Gerald Baker (called *All's One*)

1997, *The Changeling*, Theatre for a New Audience, dir. Robert Woodruff.

1997, *The Ghost of Lucrece* (staged reading), Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series, dir. Claire van Kampen/Jenny Tiramini

1997, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, The Studio, Stratford College

1998, *A Mad World, My Masters*, Shakespeare's Globe

1998, *The Changeling*, Battersea Art Centre, dir. Tassos Stevens

1998, *The Honest Whore*, Shakespeare's Globe, dir. Jack Shepherd

1998, *The Lady's Tragedy*, Next Theatre, Evanston, IL, dir. Kate Buckley (called *Cardenio*)

1999, *The Changeling*, The Kneehigh Theatre Company, dir. Emma Rice (Called "The Itch"; toured)

1999, *The Changeling*, Salsberg Studio, Salisbury, dir. Guy Retallack

1999, *The Roaring Girl*, Shakespeare's Motley Crew, Chicago (adapt. Penny Penniston and Jeremy Wechsler)

2000, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

2000, *The Roaring Girl*, Shenandoah Shakespeare, touring

2000, *The Roaring Girl*, The Steam Industry, Finborough Arms, dir. Abigail Anderson

2001, *The Changeling*, BAC, London, Third Party Productions, dir. John Wright

2001, *The Changeling*, Phoenix Theater, Exeter, Graeae Theatre Company, dir. Jenny Sealey

2002, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Almeida Theatre, dir. Ben Harrison (toured)

2002, *The Changeling*, Southwark Playhouse, Mamamissi Theatre Company, dir. Dawn Walton

2002, *The Lady's Tragedy*, Lone Star Ensemble, Los Angeles, CA (called *Cardenio*)

2004, *The Changeling*, Tobacco Factory/The Pit, Bristol/London, dir. Andrew Hilton

2004, *The Lady's Tragedy*, White Bear Theatre, London, Blue Eyes (called *Cardenio*)

2005, *The Changeling*, Courtyard Theatre, London, KDC Theatre, dir. Sarah Drinkwater

2005, *The Old Law*, The Swan, RSC, dir. Sean Holmes (called *A New Way to Please You*; part of "The Gunpowder Season" about revolution)

2005, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Red Bull Theatre, dir. Jesse Berger

2006, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, Friargate Theatre, York, dir. Mark France

2006, *The Changeling*, Barbican, London, Cheek By Jowl, dir. Declan Donnellan

2006, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Southwark Playhouse, Doublethink Theatre and Halfflight, dir. Gavin McAlinden (adapt. Meredith Oakes)

2006, *Women Beware Women*, Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Laurence Boswell

2007, *Michaelmas Term*, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series

2007, *The Changeling*, Nottingham Playhouse, English Touring Theater, dir. Stephen Unwin

2007, *The Phoenix*, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series, dir. James Wallace

2008, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series, dir. James Wallace

2008, *The Changeling*, Tower Theatre Company, dir. Brian Adambrooke (made Tomazo a female, Tomazia)

2008, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, National Theatre, dir. Melly Still

2008, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Royal Exchange, Manchester, dir. Jonathan Moore

2008, *The Witch*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

2008, *Women Beware Women*, Red Bull Theater, New York, dir. Jesse Berger

2008, *Your Five Gallants*, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series, dir. James Wallace

2009, *The Changeling*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

2009, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

2010, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Edward's Boys, London, Oxford, and Stratford-upon-Avon (all boy cast)

2010, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, White Bear Pub, Tough Theatre Company

2010, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vile Passeist Theatre, Halifax, dir. Dan Bray and Colleen MacIsaac (abridged, *commedia dell'arte* version)

2010, *Women Beware Women*, Constellation Theatre Company, Allison Arkell Stockman (Berger adaptation)

2010, *Women Beware Women*, National Theatre (Olivier), dir. Marianne Elliot

2011, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Vile Passeist Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, dir. Dorian Lang (in rep. with *Revenger's Tragedy*)

2011, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

2011, *The Changeling*, Southwark Playhouse, dir. Michael Oakley

2011, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vile Passeist Theatre, Halifax, dir. Dorian Lang

2012, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, Vile Passeist Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, dir. Dorian Lang

2012, *A Mad World, My Masters*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

2012, *The Changeling*, Resurgens Theatre Company, dir. Brent Griffin

2012, *The Changeling*, The Young Vic, dir. Joe Hill-Gibbons

2012, *The Honest Whore*, The Flea, NYC (part of a series in which five different teams of actors helmed by five different directors each perform an act of “a classic forgotten drama.”)

2012, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Old Red Lion, dir. Nicholas Thompson (in rep. with *Henry V*; cross-gender casting)

2012, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Hoxton Hall, dir. Suba Das

2012, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Hen and Chickens Theatre, Immersion Theatre, Dir. James Tobias

2013, *A Mad World, My Masters*, Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Sean Foley

2013, *No Wit/Help Like A Woman's*, Shakespeare's Globe, Read Not Dead series

2013, *The Roaring Girl*, Vile Passeist Theatre, Halifax, dir. Dan Bray (musical version)

2013, *The Witch*, The Lord Stanley, Little Goblin Productions, dir. Chris Diacopoulos

2014, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Classical Actors Ensemble, Minneapolis, MN (in rep. with *Romeo and Juliet*)

2014, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, Rose Theatre, dir. Jenny Eastop

2014, *The Roaring Girl*, Swan Theatre, RSC, dir. Jo Davies (upcoming)

APPENDIX B

SELECTED PRODUCTIONS

1966, *The Changeling*, Oxford Stage Company, dir. Frank Evans

The 1966 Oxford Stage Company production of *The Changeling*, directed by Frank Evans, emphasized the madhouse subplot. According to Peter Ansorge, who reviewed it for *Plays and Players*, the lunatics, locked in cages created by scaffolding, provided a “permanent background” to the dramatic action of the play, which occurred in a “carcass-filled, faded sand pit.” The main plot of the nobles in Alicante was performed as though it was entertainment for the inmates of the asylum, who watched voyeuristically, cheering it on. Ansorge compared this interpretation to *Marat/Sade*, but says it lacks in Jacobean psychology. This anticipates Barker and Nicol’s criticism of the modern Beatrice-Joannas whose Freudian fascination with the disgusting De Flores is anachronistic to Jacobean understanding of the self and desire.

1976, *The Changeling*, Glasgow Citz, Philip Prowse

Holding notes that, for this production, Prowse cut the subplot and reduced the remaining play to just over 1200 lines. Using only 9 actors, the play was performed with eight principal characters plus an extratextual mute character called “The Beggar,” which seemed to function as a silent figure of Death. Prowse had used this technique before in his productions of *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*. Prowse’s goal seemed to be to create an “atmosphere of claustrophobic terror” (Holding 190). The flagstone set was bordered on one side by immense Venetian blind which let in bright white light through its half-closed slats. Upstage was dominated by several tables which were covered in dust-cloths with enormous stains, seemingly blood, spreading across them. The costumes were modern combining Spanish dress with Mafioso suits. De Flores wore a cream suit with black tie. Holding says, “with his oiled hair and

pencil-thin mustache, he was a reasonable cross between a Godfather-figure and a major domo” (191). Almost every scene started with the loud sound of a clock ticking away, which stopped as action commenced. Some scenes began with a sound labeled “death rattle” in the promptbook. Prowse also added bits of lines delivered from offstage that worked as echo and distraction. Alonso was garroted and bit out his own tongue. Then he became a ghost who was onstage for much of the rest of the play, circling the live actors as they continued their parts heedless of his haunting.

1985, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, Bear Gardens Museum, Wayward Players, dir. Diane West

Bear Gardens was a small reproduction of an early modern theater in London, run by Patrick Spottiswoode and associated with the Shakespeare’s Globe museum. Diane West, who had worked as a stage manager at the RSC for 2 years, put together a small company, the Wayward Players in the 1980’s. With this company, she mounted three Middleton plays at Bear Gardens, in what was intended to be the first of many more Jacobean productions. The first of the three was *Trick*. She appreciated its soap-operatic qualities and made much of the histrionic fights between the characters Hoard and Lucre. Gerald Baker, who saw the production, remembered being impressed by the Dampit scenes especially, saying that the actor was very moving and added a dimension not often found in comedies.

Since Wayward Players was a newly-founded company, it was funded almost entirely by West herself. The costumes were hand-made in the Jacobean style; Baker, remembers them as being the “right shape, but the wrong material—too shiny,” which detracted from his experience of the show. However, a reviewer from *The Stage* (15 Aug 1985) praised the costumes.

1985, *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*, Bear Gardens, Wayward Players, dir. Diane West

West's run at the Bear Gardens Theatre continued with *No Wit* and *Women Beware Women* in repertory in November of the same year. West chose these plays because she appreciated their complexity and the strong female characters. Her challenge with *No Wit* were the play's repeated astronomical observations and references to the almanac, both incomprehensible to a modern audience. To help clarify some of these, she dressed the characters in conceptual costumes in accordance with their astronomical sign. However, she admits, this was a bad idea and did not work.

J. Plummer, reviewing the play for *The Student Magazine of University College, London*, praised the play for its "deadly real" fight sequences and the hilarious Steve Rubie, playing Pickadille, stealing drink and food during the banquet. Magda Lane, as Widow Goldenfleece, was praised by Paul Chand, reviewer for *The Stage*.

This production of *No Wit* is the only modern revival I have any record of, other than the staged reading at the Globe in summer 2013.

1985, *Women Beware Women*, Bear Gardens, Wayward Players, dir. Diane West

West intended this production, played in rep with *No Wit*, to emphasize Bianca's journey from young wife to corrupted court member. The Duke's seduction of Bianca was definitely intended to be a rape; West mentioned having to stop rehearsals to calm down the actress who became emotional during this scene. In her vision, Bianca was attracted to the wealth and status of the Duke, not the Duke himself. West met the challenge of the final masque by doing it straight, saying that the comedy in the scene undermined the moment; she also kept the actors' delivery at a quick pace. However, Plummer appreciated the final act's balance between stark tragedy and farcicle humor.

I include these productions because, while they were not widely attended (West mentions the audience being primarily composed of academics) and the Wayward Players company was soon disbanded, they represent an aborted attempt to revive some of Middleton's less-known plays and, if the company had been successful, could have brought his comedies more attention in the 1980's.

1995, *Women Beware Women*, Glasgow Citizen's, dir. Philip Prowse

In 1995, Philip Prowse directed a production of *Women Beware Women* for the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre which Sara Villiers described as "camp splendour." Prowse's production was punctuated by bursts of "inappropriate music" and an aesthetic that relished clashing styles and eras. For instance, while the set design utilized typical Jacobean tragic motifs such as crosses and skulls, other design aspects such as modern costuming and the sounds of helicopters also provided a sense of location and time period (McMillan). The court characters were costumed in cocktail wear; Livia, decked out in gold, garnered comparisons from reviewers to Gypsy Rose Lee and Melina Mercouri (Villiers; Richard Loup-Nolan). The wealth of the court, contrasted with the "clatter of the slums," highlighted the disparity in income and class that is one of the sources of the play's tragic outcome. The rise of the lower class characters was so visually striking as to be laughable. After the cuckolded Leantio became Livia's lover, he changed from his business-black suit and attaché case to wearing "a red lame jacket and gold striped trousers." The campiness of this production was amplified in the last scene. Prowse replaced the final masque with a cartoonish descent to hell. In the final scene, the principals were lowered through trapdoors. However, even this was performed tongue-in-cheek. As she descended, Livia languidly smoked a cigarette, her constant prop.

Prowse played with the inherent ridiculousness of certain plot points, pushing them to the point of silliness. He directed his actors toward an acidly funny, and at times, hammed-up delivery style, undercutting the tragedy of the play. Some of the funniest characters, though, were utterly changed. The Ward, who speaks some of the most egregious double entendres in the play, was almost cut entirely. He became a mute disabled character, who was wheeled about, howling and drooling, by Guardiano, dressed as a priest and suggested to be the Ward's father (McMillan). Prowse often inserts a silent, highly symbolic character into his tragedies, portraying Death, Revenge, or Poverty. Perhaps his transformation of the Ward was supposed to function as such a symbol.

1997, *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, Merry Wells Theatre, Richmond Shakespeare Society, dir.

Gerald Baker (called *All's One*)

In 1997, Gerald Baker directed a production of *The Yorkshire Tragedy* for the Richmond Shakespeare Society on the outskirts of London. It ran for 2 nights and went under the name *All's One*, the play's alternate title, because Baker did not want to create an expectation for genuine Yorkshire actors or accents.

The Richmond Shakespeare Society has active for 80 years; however, this is the first time it produced a play under the name of Middleton (at, as Baker notes, a time when Middleton's standing in popular consciousness was very low). Baker was directing this for the RSS as a "new director's piece," a project given to untested directors. The requirements for this project is that it be from 30-60 minutes long, with at least three actors. They had limited rehearsal and set-building time.

He chose this play because he liked Middleton. However, he noted, it presented some challenges for such a limited rehearsal schedule: sword-fighting, hand-to-hand combat, and child characters. He ended up cutting the first scene of the play, but keeping the rest almost unedited, in an effort to “be responsible to the text.” His design approach was influenced by Terry Hands’ RSC production of *Arden of Faversham*, which he described as “expressionistic, staged like a dream or a nightmare.” For *All’s One*, he draped the set in black and painted the stage black, with two flats on either side of the stage angled out towards the audience. On one was painted an ace of diamonds, on the other was an ace of hearts, and in the center of the stage an ace of spades was painted.

Baker cast all female actors for all the characters except for the husband; he did not regender the characters, however. The production began with closed curtains, and the children and the nurse entered through the audience. The children began peeking under the curtains, causing havoc, while the mother came in and remonstrated with them. A bouncy melody from Vaughan Williams folk song played while the wife shooed the nurse and children away. The curtains opened to reveal a table with the husband and four gentlemen playing cards. After the husband throws his cards down on the table, the gentlemen cleared the stage and the second scene dialogue began.

Baker directed his actors to deliver many of their lines semi-chorically, as gentlemen stood in the corners of the stage chanting their lines with the husband in the center. In a later scene, the husband was upstage while the master and servant were downstage right and left, with the stage dark and each actor delivering their lines from a spotlight.

The formalism of the action and staging highlighted the realism of the violence. When the husband stabbed his wife, it was staged so that he appeared to lift her body up on the point of

his knife. The actress reacted with shock when he stabbed her. The nurse was killed on stage, with a sound effect of a body being thrown down stairs after her body was removed. The last few moments of the wife's speech were overlapped with the prelude of Wagner's *Parsifal*, the Faith motif.

2005, *The Old Law*, *The Swan*, RSC, dir. Sean Holmes (called *A New Way to Please You*)

This production, the largest modern revival of *The Old Law*, utilized a very spare set and a modern costuming aesthetic. It began suddenly, with a large number of books dropping onto the stage from the ceiling and a bright bluish-white light illuminating the center of the thrust stage. Characters rushed out on stage, fighting each other to grab the books, while heavy throbbing jungle music played. As the characters left the stage, spotlights illuminated a judge in the downstage right corner and a young man, Simonides, speaking the play's first line: "Is the law firm, sir?"

While the set was very spare, with few (if any props), the production used many sound effects. With every scene change, strange whistling music and a loud rushing sound played while extraneous characters hustled by in the background, emphasizing the speed and chaotic nature of the law. In Act 3, scene 2, during the dancing and fencing sequence, electronic music played while the stage was lit like a *Dance Dance Revolution* pad, on which Lysander performed a virtuoso modern hip-hop dance. Then a game show theme played to introduce the fencing match. During the match, the "boing" sound from the *Mario* games played periodically and all the characters on stage jumped up and down.

The great cultural divide between the characters who favor the "old law" and those who are fighting it was emphasized by the costuming. Elderly characters and their younger champions wore relatively conservative, dignified clothing. The men wore slacks, button-up shirts, and

suspenders, while the women wore modest dresses. The more selfish characters like Simonides, who favored killing the elderly, wore flashy, trendy clothing like embellished jeans, sequined shirts, and fake fur coats. Courtiers wore jeans and trainers, while wearing short curled judge wigs. Cross iconography was prominent everywhere; protagonists like Hippolyta carried rosaries, while antagonists like Simonides wore crosses picked out in sequins and glitter on their clothing. In some scenes, elderly characters tried to “pass” as young by changing their costuming; for instance, Lysander showed up with dyed black hair and wearing a glittery leisure suit under a heavy fake fur robe.

The program’s cover was visually arresting; it featured a photo of a young, sexy blonde woman on the second page, whose image peeked through the cut-out of a silhouetted old woman, with a bun, hunched back, and a crooked nose. It advertised the production as part of the “Gunpowder season,” which celebrated “the 400th anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, with four little known Jacobean and Elizabethan political plays and a specially commissioned play by Frank McGuiness—*Speaking like Magpies*. The season also celebrates the Swan Theatre’s 20th year and ends on Bonfire Night, the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot.”

2008, *The Witch*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

The *Witch* was actually the first Middleton play to be produced at the Blackfriars playhouse, during the 2008 Actors Renaissance Season. Unfortunately, the DVD record of the production was corrupted and the actors I interviewed did not have a strong memory of the show. Since it was during an Actors Renaissance Season, there was no director. However, a few things came out in my interview with the actors. Allison Glenzer, the actress who played Hecate, remembered that her power to change the environment was signified by turning things (chairs,

props) upside down on stage, shuttering the light, etc. The trap door signified her cauldron and she lived in it. Everything she used to create magic was carried on her person; she wore a jumpsuit and a coat, and had lots of objects in her pockets. Rick Blunt, the actor who played Almachildes, simulated urinating on stage by using a water bottle, which some audience members took offense to. During the interval, the cast played an Alice in Chains song in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. The production made good use of doubling, with Glenzer playing both Hecate and Francisca, and James Keegan playing both the Duke and Abberzanes.

2009, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

In the 2009 Actors Renaissance Season, the Blackfriars actors put on *The Revenger's Tragedy*. It put into practice much of the theatrical shorthand that had built up around *The Revenger's Tragedy* in its years of staging in the twentieth century. The costuming followed certain norms. The court wore gaudy, shimmery clothing and the typical vampiric makeup of the corrupt courts in revenge tragedy, with pale faces and exaggerated dark eyes⁵⁵. The plain, dark-colored clothing of Vindice's family marked them as both less affluent and less decadent than the court. The acting also conformed, in many respects, to previous productions. Lussurioso was played as flamboyant and mercurial, swaggering and posing his way across the stage, delivering lines dripping with irony. The sexual undertones of the relationship between Piato and Lussurioso were highlighted by the actors' aggressively seductive behavior on stage. As in many

⁵⁵ According to Benjamin Curns, who played Vindice, this costuming was implemented to differentiate the court from the rest of the characters, and to mark them as "vapid, dead, something less than human." A comparison the actors brought up in my interview was to the replicants, bioengineered androids from the science fiction world of *Blade Runner*. In addition, the court characters wore glittery stickers in the shapes of penises next to their eyes, as if they were beauty marks. The only court character without this heavy makeup was the Bastard, played by Gregory Phelps, who had a large B tattooed on his neck.

productions, the duke was made to look ridiculous when Hippolito and Vindice killed him; in this performance, he wore boxers and socks pulled up with sock garters.

However, while staging, costuming, and characterization choices did not differ widely from what has become expected of a modern-day production of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the production incorporated music and the masque very effectively. The program compared it to “a vaudeville show from hell,” and it certainly partook of some of the joie de vivre of musicals. In particular, the musical accompaniment brought the passions of the play into the twenty-first century.

The play began in earnest with the court entering the stage, holding candles in front of them, and singing the Alice in Chains song “Them Bones” in $\frac{3}{4}$ time: “I believe that bones are me, some say we’re born into the grave, gonna end up a big ol pile of them bones.” This song led directly to Vindice’s first speech in which he vilifies the court for its “hollow bones” and “damn’d desires.” Vindice, played by Benjamin Curns, walked between them, addressed the Duke—“a parch’d and juiceless lecher”—to his unseeing face, and blew out his candle. Once the court processed offstage, Vindice addressed Gloriana’s skull which he held in his hand, stroking the few strands of hair still attached to it. His passionate delivery coupled with this grotesque object made for one of the most memorable images in the production, but it also presaged a detail from later scenes. In this production, Vindice kept Gloriana’s skull with him and delivered various lines to it as though they were in conversation.

The light-hearted treatment of Gloriana’s skull set the production’s somewhat campy tone. The scenes between Vindice (in disguise as Piato) and Lussurioso capitalized on this sense of fun-in-darkness. In their first scene together, Vindice toys with Lussurioso, whom he hates and intends to murder. In the recorded production I saw, when Vindice came out on stage in his

disguise, a white suit and a long curly white wig drawn back into a ponytail, the audience broke out in laughter. Curns broke character and said, “What?” before moving on with the scene. He walked over to Lussurioso, played by John Harrell wearing a silver suit, a V-neck tee, gold chains, and silver bands of makeup around his eyes, and leaned up against him, asking “When shall we lie together?” They shared a charged moment until Lussurioso, too excited by Vindice, became flustered and blushed. Turning on a dime, Lussurioso strode across the stage, throwing back the tails of his coat like a cloak, gesturing to the sky and ducking his head in a parody of an actor declaiming.

The final masque, choreographed by Alyssa Wilmoth, who also played Hippolito, took a similar tone, self-consciously theatrical to the point of silliness. The dancers—Vindice, Hippolito, and two other masquers—wore long gaudy robes, masks, and held bunches of fake flowers. They bowed, twirled, and gestured with the flowers, distracting the characters on stage before they held out their knives balletically and proceeded to prance toward the table, each masquer stabbing downward simultaneously and yelling out. The audience heard a roll of thunder (perhaps a reference to Vindice’s original call for thunder in Act 4) and upbeat, happy guitar music sounded. The first group of masquers exited and a second group, dressed identically, entered the stage. Once they saw that their intended victims were already dead, they revealed themselves to be Ambitioso, Spurio, Supervacuo, and (in contrast to the text, which specifies “a fourth man”) the Duchess. The brothers argued about who will be the next Duke, stabbing each other. All three brothers coughed at the same time, let a red scarf fall from hand at throat, and twirled to the floor, dead.

The pre-show and interval music used songs whose lyrics covered violence, loss, and anger. For instance, *The Revenger’s Tragedy* musical prelude began with Bob Dylan’s “I Shall

Be Released,” Sublime’s “Saw Red,” and Wilco’s “Hate it Here.” Each of these songs, while recognizable for many modern audience members, also forecasted the themes of the early modern play they were watching; in addition, each of them could be understood to speak from the perspective of Vindice. The Dylan song, from the viewpoint of a man in prison who “remember[s] every face of every man who put [him] here,” sounds like the voice of Vindice who requires revenge on the corrupt court who killed his love. “Saw Red” is a sung dialogue between two lovers whose relationship, at the beginning of the song, seems blissful and uncomplicated; however, the song quickly turns dark when it describes “one more secret lover that I shot dead.” It paints the picture of a world where men are animals (“feeling like a dog without a yard”) and “lack control.” In the end, the male singer admonishes girls not to “go crazy when the men use you.” This song encapsulates Vindice’s conflicting attitudes towards women, both his misogyny and his brotherly concern. The final introductory song, by Wilco, is from the point of view of someone whose love has left for good, and who is trying to keep themselves occupied by “do[ing] the dishes” and “mow[ing] the lawn.”

During one of the two intervals of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Curns finally took the balcony in costume as Vindice to sing the song “Skulls” by the horror-punk band Misfits⁵⁶. “Skulls” is a song whose lyrics are about blood, murder, and specifically decapitation. During the bridge, the singer says, “Hack off the heads of little girls and put ‘em on my wall.” In the context of the production, however, the lyrics take on new meaning. When Curns sang the chorus, “I want your skull / I need your skull,” he portrayed Vindice not only as a man possessed by vengeance, but also as a grieving lover obsessed with the only physical relic left of his dead beloved.

⁵⁶ There were two intervals. During the second one, Curns, while wearing a black doo-rag, performed an original rap about revenge. However, I could not get the text of this rap.

2009, *The Changeling*, Blackfriars Playhouse, ASC

In the 2009 Blackfriars production of *The Changeling*, sexual content was toned down in favor of deep characterization. The acting was muted, precise, and effective. Benjamin Curns' De Flores was quiet, tender, and pleading in some moments, but could turn quickly to acting with a cold, calculating intensity. Beatrice-Joanna, played by Sarah Fallon, was not sexually enthralled by De Flores but acting out of shame and fear of blackmail. Neither killing nor sex were made trivial, ridiculous, nor bawdy; even the scene of De Flores murdering Alonzo, often played for laughs, received gasps and groans from the audience. There was an urgency to this production that made it seem as though all actions had serious consequences.

There were, however, a few production choices that stood out. First, the costuming seemed very disjointed in a way that distracted from the understated tone of the actors' performances. While the Alicante characters wore a mixture of Jacobean clothing and modern business casual, most of the madhouse characters were costumed in brightly colored, patched clothing as if they were cartoon hobos, an aesthetic which stood out sharply. In the Actors Renaissance Season, the actors clothe themselves from the costume wardrobe and these two aesthetics may have been chosen to illuminate the seriousness of one locale and the silliness of the other. But Isabella's costume was strange even in the context of her madhouse locale. She wore clunky red Mary Jane's with a short dress of pink, orange, and red with a blue petticoat, and her hair was in two long braids. The whole effect was of a parti-colored Dorothy Gale. In addition to the costume, the actress, Alyssa Wilmoth, crossed her arms and walked like a child, speaking in a high nasal voice. According to the actors I interviewed, the rationale for this choice was that the madhouse doctor would want his wife to be as childlike and innocent as possible, so

he forced her to dress that way. That subtext, however, did not come across in performance, which made the humanizing character of Isabella inexplicable and off-putting.

However, another innovative choice was extremely effective. When Alsemero brought Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores out of the closet where they have been confined, Beatrice-Joanna still wore a robe and a nightgown. She seemed unharmed during the talk that followed, until De Flores said, "I have drunk up all and left none for them to come after me." At this point, he removed her robe to reveal bloody stains on her nightdress over her crotch, as if she had just been deflowered. Then he reached up into her nightgown and she gasped. Instead of the suggested sexual act, however, he revealed a knife, pulled out of her vagina where he had stabbed her. This dark and destructive act was a satisfyingly shocking end to a relatively understated version of this play.

Juxtaposed with this moment were two moments of hope during Alsemero's final speech. When he said "revive the dead again," Jasperino and Diaphanta came out on stage; when he said the line "regain a child," Beatrice-Joanna stood up from her prostrate position on the floor. This moment not only allowed all the actors to take their marks for a final bow, but also suggested the transformative power of grief, of forgetting, and of words to revive the dead.

The 2009 production of *The Changeling* also used the pre-show musical performances effectively to comment on the play. The actors chose "Finding Out True Love is Blind," by Louis XIV and "Fatso" by Story; both songs comment on the relationship between appearance and love. The third song was "O Valencia" by the Decembrists, a surprisingly upbeat-sounding song about two ill-fated lovers whose families oppose their union. In the song, one of the lovers

is shot, and the other “[swears] to the stars [to] burn this whole city down.” Finally, the musical pre-show ended with an original song performed by John Harrell and Miriam Donald⁵⁷.

2013, *The Changeling*, Resurgens Theatre Company, Tallahassee/Atlanta, dir. Brent Griffin

Resurgens Theatre Company started in 2012 in Tallahassee, Florida, as a collaboration between Brent Griffin and Kevin Carr, two scholars of early-modern drama. The company is now under the sole artistic direction of Brent Griffin and has moved to Atlanta, GA, where they put on approximately one show a year at the Atlanta Shakespeare Tavern. Before their production of *The Changeling*, Resurgens produced a version of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*; this spring, they hope to produce Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*. According to the website, the company focuses on “seventeenth-century non-Shakespearean plays” and takes an “enhanced prosodic approach to verse-speaking.” While they frequently use original practices methods such as universal lighting, audience interaction, thematic doubling, and live music, Griffin characterizes their engagement in original practices as filtering the present moment “through the production modes of the past,” acknowledging that giving an audience an authentic early-modern theatrical experience is “neither possible nor . . . desirable” (www.resurgentheatre.org/About_Resurgens.html).

While the cast had a month or two to memorize their lines, *The Changeling* utilized a weeklong rehearsal schedule, a practice that approximates some early modern rehearsal strategies. In rehearsals, which I was fortunate to observe, Griffin directed his actors with specific line readings that utilized the vigorous verse of *The Changeling*. He spoke of the music

⁵⁷ This song was the emotional high-point of the pre-show, but I was not able to attain a recording or lyrics.

of the words, asking his actors to make the language “reverberate” and not “dissonant.”⁵⁸ He reminded his actors that theatergoers are called the “audience,” not “spectators,” emphasizing the importance of sound in early-modern plays. In production, this attention to the sound of the play paid off. The verse speaking kept the pace urgent and there was a sense of musicality to the actors’ delivery; they had spent most of their time in rehearsal thinking about how the lines sounded, not how they themselves appeared on stage. As a result, they used their voices to convey a sense of historical difference or embodiment. Adam Braun, the actor playing Alsemero, was precise and antiquated in his speech, pronouncing the “-ion” ending of words like “perfection” and “confirmation” with two syllables instead of one. However, Alsemero’s good friend Jasperino, played by Art Wallace, used a slightly Caribbean accent, calling to mind both his class distinction from Alsemero and the early modern transatlantic trade, part of the historical context of the play.

One of the most organic aspects of the show was the venue, the Warehouse, a Tallahassee bar and pool hall with a large multi-purpose room in back. This room, which hosts the FSU English Department’s weekly poetry series, is easily transformed into a dance floor, a concert hall, or, as for this evening, a theater. The dusty wooden beams, dim lighting, and clinking of beer glasses provided an especially apt atmosphere for a production that attempted to reproduce, in part, the experience of a Jacobean play. A thrust stage of black flats was added to the existing stage, only 10 feet deep; a black cloth backdrop created a crossover and screened the off-stage areas. The only set piece on stage was a large box with a door—something like a plain black wardrobe.

⁵⁸ In rehearsals, Griffin often compared the play to a musical score, a comparison repeated on the website which quotes Gary Taylor, saying that “revitalizing ‘scores for lost voices’” is the goal of the company.

Griffin's emphasis on sound extended to music. A cellist, Deanna Remus, sat on one corner of the stage, underscoring specific moments of speech and action with music that switched abruptly from lyrical and romantic to dark and menacing with all the intensity of a silent film score. At its most subtle, this music helped set the mood; however, at times it became intrusive and almost humorous, turning De Flores' entrances into those of a villain from a melodrama.

When the actors took the stage, only three or four light cans illuminated them beyond the ambient light in the room, creating a chiaroscuro effect. Beatrice-Joanna, played by Laura Johnson, was a dark-haired beauty in a crimson gown, full of vim and verve. Her first meeting with Alsemero was all suggestive flirtation and lip-biting hesitation. De Flores, played by Lanny Thomas, was lusty, funny, and forceful, with a head of greasy gray hair and artfully applied pimples and moles to give him the requisite skin condition.

The actors made good use of the space, often descending from stage to audience area to deliver lines or even entire scenes. At one point, De Flores leered over a table of young women to provide a description of the ways in which Beatrice-Joanna spurned him, causing a ripple of giggles through the room. During the scene in which De Flores gives Alonzo a tour of the castle, the two actors moved between the tables of theatergoers. De Flores stabbed Alonzo in the back of the room, behind most of the audience members, a choice that occluded some of the sightlines. However, this enhanced the tension and shock of the act as he quickly dragged Alonzo, screaming, through the audience to the front to finish the job.

The greatest weakness of the production was that it cut the madhouse subplot, reducing the play to ninety minutes. While this length made for a very palatable evening for people who want to experience an unfamiliar play without the risk of falling asleep, cutting the subplot

disposed of a female protagonist who displays both strong character and agency. Isabella, who is not immoral or fickle, provides a good foil for Beatrice-Joanna; she does not succumb to sexual temptation or blackmail, remaining faithful to a husband who is much more inappropriate for her than Alonso would have been for Beatrice-Joanna. Isabella's counterpoint to Beatrice's character would have been especially welcome in this production, which staged Beatrice's downfall as a seduction, not a rape. Like many directors before him (see Chapter Two), Griffin's staging made Beatrice-Joanna lustier than the text actually presents her as. The first kiss between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores was forced, awkward, and terrifying to watch, but their sexual relationship quickly warmed after that. Instead of a wedding masque, Griffin staged a short symbolic dance "to convey the dual nature of her sexuality." Beatrice-Joanna, dressed as a bride, swayed with Alsemero romantically. After he left, De Flores entered, to ominous cello music. Beatrice-Joanna leapt on him, straddling him, he violently thrust her legs apart, and they mimed sex, which she seemed to enjoy. He grabbed her veil, laughed, and exited the stage. Beatrice-Joanna continued to lie in the same spot, groaning and touching herself in a masturbatory act, before weeping. Her connection to De Flores was emphasized at the end of the production, when they clasped each other while dying and then, during Alsemero's final speech, exited the stage separately, waving mournfully at each other.

When I spoke to Griffin about why he chose *The Changeling* for the company's second production, he said it spoke to a "notion of lust leading to lecherous demise," and compared the story to the recent coverage of the sex scandal surrounding General Petraeus. Unfortunately, the staging of the relationship between Beatrice and De Flores made Beatrice's lust universal, not specific to Alsemero. Her sexual desire was a Pandora's box that, once opened, could not be closed. Combined with a very randy Diaphanta, played by Zakiya Jas, this production makes

women out to be the locus of destructive and uncontrolled desire with no reprieve for the sex in the form of Isabella.⁵⁹

Griffin's program note justified the deletion of the subplot, saying that "the lusty antics of Alibius' asylum seem particularly incongruous with the play's starkly tragic themes."⁶⁰ In our interview, he further explained his motivations for the cut. He said that he believes comedy in early-modern plays is often "topical," while tragedy is "universal"; "what was funny in the past is not always funny today." Griffin is not the first to cut the subplot in order to focus on the main plot. However, in performance, this cut got rid of almost all of the play's comic relief, making the pace of Beatrice-Joanna's downfall seem even more frenetic and giving the audience almost no breathing room from the dark, claustrophobic atmosphere of the Alicante plot. This choice made the production's few humorous moments feel strained and out-of-place. Without the subplot, the only comical character in this production was Alonso, played by Kevin Carr. Carr wore a long curly wig, big pantaloons, and carried a single long-stemmed flower with which he gestured, twirling it about in the air. Even the death scene was darkly funny. When De Flores murders him, Alonso's wig falls off; De Flores picked up and stuffed it in his mouth, suffocating his cries for help. Alonso's return as a ghost was cut from the production, preserving the character's comic impact. While Carr's choices as a hilariously inept Alonso were brilliant, taken

⁵⁹ The tragic potential of lust and female sexuality is a familiar theme for Griffin's audiences. Resurgens Theatre Company's first production, *Doctor Faustus*, staged the relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles as intensely sexual. In this production, Griffin himself played Faustus, while all other characters were played by (mostly scantily-clad) women; Laura Johnson was a "fiendishly-hot Mephistopheles" in red lipstick and tight leather pants (Hand 132). For more on this production, see Molly Hand's review in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 31.1 (March 2013), 132-136).

⁶⁰ The program note also questioned whether modern-day audiences would find the madhouse scenes too disturbing, given "our present sensibilities regarding the mentally disabled."

in context of this production, they only served to illuminate Griffin's excision of almost all of the light material, preserving only the tragic emotional thrust of the play.

Ultimately, the production seemed to straddle the line between the "lively artistic engagement" that Resurgens wished to create and the "museum piece constructed solely to satisfy academic curiosity" that they wished to avoid. The audience for *The Changeling* was largely comprised of university professors, community theater enthusiasts, and FSU undergraduates who were there to fulfill a course requirement. And perhaps this is to be expected in a small city like Tallahassee where the early-modern theatrical offering is limited to five or six Shakespearean productions a year by various theater groups. With a new home city of Atlanta and a new home venue of the Atlanta Shakespeare Company, Resurgens may thrive in its goal of providing an early-modern alternative to a steady Shakespearean fare.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kate Lechler holds a BA in English from Union College in Lincoln, NE, and an MA in English Literature from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI. She previously served as the managing editor for the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*. She currently resides in Oxford, MS.