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Politics in the theatre of Jacobean England 1618-1625:  
satire and commentary in a climate of censorship

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## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with political engagement on the late Jacobean stage. This topic is studied with particular reference to Thomas Middleton's *The Old Law* (c.1618), Philip Massinger's *The Bondman* (1623), and John Fletcher's *A Wife for a Month* (1624). Thomas Middleton's highly controversial work *A Game at Chess* (1624) will also be discussed.

I argue that despite the scrutiny placed on new plays by the Master of Revels, the censorship of the Jacobean stage did not seem to directly prohibit a great many subjects. The controversial topics of assassination, usurpation of power, treason, and rebellion are all explicitly dealt with and often soliloquised upon in a variety of plays. These topics were all permissible assuming the proper execution.

I will begin this thesis by discussing likely the most well-known victim of Jacobean censorship in *A Game at Chess*. I will discuss *A Game at Chess* in its wider political and theatrical context and explore why the censorship of this text is not representative of Jacobean censorship as a whole. Middleton and his contemporaries were in fact adept at including topical references and criticising what they saw as social ills without forcing the hand of the censor. Having discussed why *A Game at Chess* was censored, I will move on to discussing the methods Middleton and others used to write about politics without falling victim to censorship.

In Middleton's *The Old Law*, the virtuous and sympathetic protagonist directly defies the law and questions whether a citizen is obliged to obey an unjust law or a tyrannical prince. These controversial ideas are conveniently discarded when it is revealed that the Duke implemented the law in order to draw out corruption in his court. I will argue that in *The Old Law* Middleton directly engaged with changing ideals of masculinity in the period and that these changing ideals reflect an attempt by people like James and Middleton to bring masculinity more in line with James' politics regarding royal authority and international diplomacy. Matters of state were frequently allegorised through depictions of familial and domestic relationships and *The Old Law* utilised these metaphors to great effect.

Philip Massinger's *The Bondman* is a work that is much more forthright in its treatment of contemporary politics. *The Bondman*'s first act glorifies warfare and portrays a close connection between nobility and warfare. After the first act, however, I argue that Massinger was more concerned with the politics of class in England than war. The play depicts a slave revolt occurring as a result of poor governance by the nobility. I argue that Massinger's depiction of inverted social order conforms to Bakhtin's notions of the carnivalesque. In particular I will show how Massinger uses inversion of social order to both offer release from the prevailing social system whilst ultimately strengthening it.

In the chapter covering *A Wife for a Month* I will detail some of Fletcher's methods in avoiding suspicion when writing about tyrants and corruption. Fletcher's previous encounters

with censorship ensured that he was well aware of the need for subtlety in political writing. Fletcher, like his contemporaries, used personal relationships as a microcosm for the relationship between king and subject. Fletcher depicts Frederick as an absolute ruler who is encouraged by his advisor to forcefully exert his authority in order to impose his will. The other characters at court continually criticise this position and are seen to be keenly aware of the degraded state of their society. Characters such as the Queen and Evanthe (the target of Frederick's lust) often assert that the King does not have authority over the will of the subject and that his acts must be validated by the law and by parliament. Despite these assertions the play does not show any evidence of these other authorities; in *The Old Law* legal discourse and documents play a prominent role and *The Bondman* depicts a debate in the senate but *A Wife for A Month* depicts resistance to tyranny and corruption purely through the acts of individuals.

The texts already mentioned are not an exhaustive list of the important plays in the politics of late Jacobean drama but they do demonstrate some of the key players in the period and how they engage with contemporary events, even in plays that are not overtly political in nature like *A Game at Chess*. In the years just before and during the 1620s dramatists were active and engaged with issues concerning their society and this engagement could and did often lead to censorships and arrests. The King was often at odds with the ideals of his people and this came to a head in the 1620s when James' policies of peace-making on the continent came into opposition with the desire of many to wage war on Spain. James' belief in his absolute authority as monarch also caused friction between him and his English subjects, who valued parliamentary authority. The tensions of Jacobean society and the conflicting ideals of its people, its government and its king proved fertile ground for dramatists despite censorship of the theatre.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Political Climate of 1618-1625

The final years of James I's reign were plagued with political tension and criticism both from the public and from within the court. In 1618 James' son-in-law Frederick (Elector Palatine of the Rhine) accepted the crown of Bohemia, triggering war with the Holy Roman Empire.

Widespread anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish sentiment meant that many expected James to declare war both to defend Protestantism in Europe and to defend his daughter and grandchildren from Catholic oppression (Cogswell, 1989: 24-25). Following the failed marriage negotiations in Spain, James faced opposition even within his own family; having returned from Spain not only without securing a bride but without securing the reclamation of his sister's territories in the marriage negotiations, Charles was frustrated and eager to assert his own authority having 'gained self-confidence by being constantly at the centre of political affairs' (Kishlansky and Morrill 2004, 2008). James was acutely aware of the importance of controlling the narrative of his rule; especially since his subjects 'were increasingly knowledgeable about state business, and increasingly willing to discuss and criticise his policies' (Coast, 2014: 3).

### 1.2 Politics and the Stage

This thesis is concerned with the different ways that playwrights engaged with the politics of the time and how they did this in a climate of increasing censorship. Thomas Middleton's savagely anti-Spanish *A Game at Chess* (1624) has become the work that defines Jacobean censorship but it is something of an anomaly. With a little care playwrights could avoid censorship with relative ease. This thesis will focus primarily on political engagement in Middleton's *The Old Law* (c.1618), Philip Massinger's *The Bondman* (1623) and John Fletcher's *A Wife for a Month*

(1624). These works were not victims of censorship but they were certainly not apolitical. The role of the censor was not to impose an 'ideological hegemony' but rather to 'ensure that the fictional veiling was adequate, so that serious offence might not be offered to members of the court or friendly foreign dignitaries' (Bawcutt, 1996: 41), (Dutton, 2000: 7). It is unlikely that some pointed criticisms of frivolous courts and tyrannous kings went unnoticed but they often went uncensored since censoring any references to a king that was 'prodigal, indulgent towards favourites, pretentious and despotic on his vapourings on the prerogative[...] would have implied an awareness of the shortcomings of the King and of his social and courtly milieu' (Clare, 1999: 175). It has been stated that there 'were conventions that both sides accepted as to how far a writer could go [...], how he could encode his opinions so that nobody would be *required* to make an example of him.' (Patterson, 1984: 7). The word 'required' is key, as the suppression of a play was usually triggered by objections outside of the office of the Master of Revels. In the case of *Sir John van Olden Barnavelt* (1619) 'the Bishop of London had intervened to prevent its performance' despite 'Massinger and Fletcher only touch[ing] on the confrontation of religious leagues' in the Netherlands (Clare, 1999: 203-204). Similarly, it has also been pointed out that the censorship of *A Game at Chess* occurred primarily due to the outrage of the Spanish ambassador (Dutton, 2001: 55). This thesis will explore a few significant works during the final years of James' reign and seek to understand how authors engaged with contemporary politics, but more importantly how they engaged in political discourse with a level of plausible deniability. *A Game at Chess* is certainly a significant work, but because of its overt politics and well documented history it often overshadows the subtler criticism utilised by other authors and indeed by Middleton in his earlier career.

### 1.3 Thesis Outline

In this thesis I will begin with a brief chapter on *A Game at Chess* and its place in the wider context of political discourse on the Jacobean stage. There was a specific ban on representing a ‘ruling sovereign’ onstage (Heinemann, 1980: 39). The play was censored specifically for its impersonations of James, Philip IV of Spain, and Count Gondomar, the former Spanish ambassador in James’ court (Dutton, 2001: 62). Action had to be taken since relations with Spain at the time were ‘appalling, but not non-existent’ (ibid.) *A Game at Chess*’ example will inform our understanding of political engagement in other plays by Middleton and his contemporaries.

In contrast to *A Game at Chess* and *Barnavelte*, a satire and a tragedy, tragicomedies of the period appear to have been much less likely to suffer from post-performance censorship. The plot of *The Old Law* questions the validity of the authority of unjust rulers and distinctly aligns a failure to fulfil familial duties with the failures of leadership and governance. The play depicts subjects who disobey an unjust law but excuses this disobedience by revealing that the law was enacted as a moral test. The tragicomic structure of the play allowed Middleton to directly engage with themes of tyranny without having to engage with the question of how to get rid of a tyrant. Massinger’s *The Bondman* explores the master-servant dynamic and its place in broader early modern discourse regarding social order. The play’s first act strongly advocates for war with Spain by portraying nobles who redeem their honour through warfare. Massinger’s primary focus, however, was emphasising the importance of social hierarchy in the maintenance of a strong and stable state. I will then move on to a study of the Fletcherian tragicomedy *A Wife for a Month*. In this section I discuss Fletcher’s portrayal of tyranny and resistance to it; this play is a result of a careful cultivation of techniques designed to criticise political corruption and glorify

resistance to it without incurring the wrath of the censor. All three plays engage with controversial topics but ultimately support the status quo by ‘work[ing] themselves through to some kind of “happy ending”’ (Foster, 2004: 13).

All three of the playwrights discussed were men of strong opinion and all three men had their work censored at one or multiple points in their careers. In addition to *A Game at Chess* and Fletcher and Massinger’s *The Tragedy of Sir John van Olden Barnaveit*, Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy* was censored in 1610 for its depiction of regicide (Clare, 1999: 188), and in 1631 Massinger was required by Herbert to change the setting of *Believe as You List* to veil its topicality (Bawcutt, 1996: 171-172). As well as men of strong opinion they were also talented and creative playwrights that were able to navigate the stormy waters of late Jacobean political writing.

## 2. *A Game at Chess*

*A Game at Chess* is a fiercely anti-Spanish play that allegorises the Spanish Match as a chess match between the ‘White House’ (England) and the ‘Black House’ (Spain). James had the play suppressed for its impersonations of contemporary figures, specifically of James himself, the King of Spain, and the former Spanish ambassador, Count Gondomar. Before being brought to James’ attention by Coloma, the current Spanish ambassador, the play ran for an ‘unbeaten’ nine days (Stern, 2009: 36). The length of the run alone attests to the popularity of the play since ‘[t]iny London of the early modern period could not sustain a long run of the same play as it would be unable to produce the audience for it’ (Stern, 2009: 36). The scandal surrounding the play’s performance and suppression was also much remarked upon by contemporaries; there is so much known about the play that ‘we finally have nothing with which we can properly compare it to’ (Dutton, 2000: 132). The play’s well-documented scandal and suppression can therefore give a false impression of Jacobean censorship. This section will focus on the social and theatrical context of *A Game at Chess*. In particular, I will build on the work of critics like Richard Dutton and T.H. Howard-Hill who frame the play as an anomaly rather than a representative example of Jacobean censorship.

*A Game at Chess* is a prime example of the possibilities of stagecraft. It has been argued that the tools of performance played a larger role in clarifying the play’s motives than Middleton’s script. Costuming was a particularly useful tool to the early modern acting company and one that was often exploited:

What early modern audiences saw on stage was the clothing worn by themselves, their neighbours or their social “betters”[...] state kings, queens and dukes hold

positions of absolute power but are rendered fascinatingly vulnerable on stage, in the moment of putting on and taking off new identities with new sets of clothes. (Escolme, 2013: 120)

Middleton and the actors made almost no effort to conceal their targets, and in the case of their portrayal of Gondomar the audience could be left in no doubt as to the character's true identity:

John Chamberlain notes in his commentary on the play that the actors had gone so far as to purchase one of the ambassador's old suits, or clothing made to resemble it [...] Beyond observing that Gondomar was readily identifiable, however, several contemporaries note that he appeared on the stage with his well known litter and chair. The litter was one that he frequently used while in London, and the chair was specially designed with a hole in the bottom to accommodate his severe case of anal fistula. (Lublin, 2007: 240-41).

As well as imitating his dress, Middleton and the players explicitly mocked the Count for his physical infirmity. The presence of the litter, as well as the Fat Bishop calling the Black Knight 'the fistula of Europe' (2.2.46), could leave the audience in no doubt about whom the play was portraying. The recognisability of the Black Knight as Gondomar likely 'breached normal levels of fictional veiling and so fuelled a level of popular success Herbert did not anticipate.' (Dutton, 2001: 54-55). In contrast to other political commentaries at the time, there was no alternate reading available to the audience except to read the Black Knight as Gondomar:

Usually, however, any observations that might have been taken to have contemporary relevance were shrouded by being set in peculiar circumstances or

foreign settings, thus enabling all concerned to disavow their English application should the need arise. But Middleton's play [...] barely attempted to conceal that it was a commentary on the prevailing political situation. (Howard-Hill, 1991a: 277).

The lack of an alternate reading of the play likely contributed to the play's initial success but also condemned it.

Middleton's *Black Knight* is 'the mightiest Machiavel-politician/ That e'er the devil hatched of a nun's egg' (5.3.204-5), who seeks to advance '[t]he business of the universal monarchy' (1.1.243). The *Black Knight*, like Sorano in *A Wife for a Month*, advances his villainous cause by flattering and manipulating those in power:

And what I have done, I have done facetiously  
 With pleasant subtlety and bewitching courtship,  
 Abused all my believers with delight;  
 They took a comfort to be cozened by me.  
 To many a soul I have let in mortal poison  
 Whose cheeks have cracked with laughter to receive it;  
 I could so roll my pills in sugared syllables  
 And strew such kindly mirth o'er all my mischiefs,  
 They took their bane in way of recreation  
 As pleasure steals corruption into youth. (1.1. 257-266)

Explicitly insulting Gondomar's infirmity and morality would likely have been enough to delight audiences and outrage Coloma. However, by characterising the Black Knight as a flatterer who capitalises on the frivolity of the White House's court Middleton implicitly criticises the White King, i.e. James, for being duped by a Catholic spy. The Black Knight's speech is similar to other flatterers; the Black Knight delights the court with 'mirth' and 'sugared syllables'; similarly, Gaveston in Marlowe's *Edward II* uses courtly entertainments to 'draw the pliant king which way I please' (1.1.50-52). As the other texts in this thesis demonstrate, critiques of courtly corruption were not, by themselves, objectionable. In the case of *A Game at Chess*, however, Middleton does not condemn courtly corruption and frivolousness in general but specifically condemns corruption and frivolity in the court of James I; 'to portray Gondomar as the most evil and ruthless (and also successful) of plotters would necessarily cast some doubt on the King's judgement in befriending him' (Bawcutt, 1999: 936). Whether Middleton intended to criticise James' toleration of Gondomar as well as Gondomar himself is debatable, but impugning public figures close to the King was always dangerous since 'the mud could so easily stick to the King himself' (Lindley, 1996: 162). Direct allegory is rare on the Jacobean stage; in limiting the audience's options for interpreting the play the author would also limit their options for defending the play against accusations of 'dangerous matter'.

When understanding the controversy surrounding *A Game at Chess* it is important to consider why the play was objectionable, but also why it was not so objectionable as to be prevented from being performed in the first place. Furthermore, it must be noted that although the play contained material that had the potential to offend a great many influential people, Coloma appears to have been the only person of influence to actually 'take violent exception' to the play (Dutton, 2001: 55). In fact James seems to have been frustrated that the issue was

brought to him by a ‘forraine Ambassador’ when ‘so manie Ministers [...] are thereaboutes and cannot but have heard of it’ (cited in Howard-Hill, 1991a: 278). Moore went so far as to say that the ‘ministers were in a conspiracy of silence’ (Moore, 1935: 767). By understanding how *A Game at Chess* failed to avoid censorship it can be better understood how so many other plays with controversial content succeeded in avoiding it.

*The Bondman*, *A Game at Chess*, and *A Wife for a Month* were all licensed by the same Master of Revels; Henry Herbert. Herbert’s role as the censor was largely to ‘ensure that no offence was given in the public theatres to those- including friendly foreign ambassadors- with standing at court’ (Dutton, 2001: 62). Although Herbert ‘carried out his duties as vigorously as possible’ he did this ‘probably more from a wish to maximise his income than from a desire to assert an ideological hegemony over the drama.’ (Bawcutt, 1996: 41). Dutton has stated that rather than a play giving offense influential people at court, like Coloma, would have to ‘choose [...] to receive offense’ (2001: 69). An often cited example of Herbert’s pragmatism in regard to topicality in plays is that of Massinger’s *Believe as You List*. In 1631, Herbert initially refused to license Massinger’s *Believe as You List* because of ‘dangerous matter’ regarding the ‘deposing of Sebastian king of Portugal’, but licensed the play after Massinger relocated the play to Carthage (Herbert, 1996: 171-172). Notably, Carthage also served as Spain’s stand-in for *The Bondman*. Herbert, by this point in his career an experienced censor, would not be so naïve as to believe that a simple change in setting would erase Massinger’s intent and prevent audiences from interpreting Carthage as Spain.

There is something very patrician about Herbert, as representative of the privileged classes, not deigning to notice what did not strictly require to be noticed. [...] It was not for him to second guess either Massinger’s *intentions* or

what audiences might *infer* from material that was not openly provocative.

(Dutton, 2000: 7)

There is no evidence, however, that Herbert requested any amendments be made to *A Game at Chess* before granting it a license. The players used this in their defence by producing the manuscript, that had been signed and dated by Herbert, and claiming that they had not diverted from this script in their performances (Bawcutt, 1996: 40-41). Some critics have interpreted Herbert's failure to censor *A Game at Chess* as evidence of a conspiracy, and much scholarship has been devoted to attempting to explain Herbert's approval of the play by identifying a powerful patron. John Robert Moore followed previous critics in pointing to Buckingham as a likely candidate (Moore, 1935: 768). This has since been widely disputed given that the play criticises Buckingham's theatrical counterpart, the 'White Duke' (Heinemann, 1980: 165). Citing Pembroke's affiliation with the King's Men (the company that performed the play) and his kinship with Henry Herbert, Heinemann identified William Herbert, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Pembroke, the Lord Chamberlain, 'as an important figure behind the play', although she admits that such evidence is 'not conclusive' (Heinemann, 1980: 166-169). However, the combined factors of the failure of the Spanish Match, Charles and Buckingham's pro-war stance following their return from Spain, and the general antipathy towards Spain held by the public mean that powerful backer is not needed to explain the licensing of the play. Howard-Hill has stated that 'the mystery of Herbert's license is no mystery at all' (1995: 108). From the manuscript alone Herbert would have been able to identify anti-Spanish sentiment but he would not have been able to predict the lengths the actors would go to make their targets explicit. Dutton identifies 'the root issue' as 'the impersonation of royalty and its representatives, rather than the content of the play in general' (2001: 62). It is these impersonations that clearly signalled the play's targets to

the audience and provided Coloma justification for demanding that the author and the players be punished 'in a public and exemplary fashion' (Coloma, 1624 reprinted in Howard-Hill, 2009: 193).

Once offence had been taken, it was important that the perpetrators were seen to be punished. Yet despite the request that extreme action be taken to make an example of the perpetrators, those responsible for the staging of *A Game at Chess* appeared to have suffered no more than a slap on the wrists. The King's Men were initially forbidden from performing but 'before the end of August they were back in business. So little were they chastened by the experience that four months later they presumed to act a completely unlicensed play' (Bawcutt, 1996: 66). Herbert was called upon to explain his lapse in judgement, but no records exist of his being punished for licensing the play (Clare, 1999: 216). Middleton too, seems to have not been 'chastened' by the event given his apparently heavy involvement in the 'multiplication of texts of his play after performances were stopped'; unauthorised quartos were also printed in London and 'documentary evidence does not show that any effort was made to prevent the production and circulation of manuscripts' (Clegg, 2001: 188). It seems that *A Game at Chess* did cause genuine annoyance in the King, and the play was prevented from being performed in an attempt to avoid unduly insulting the Spanish ambassador any further. Despite this James was also aware of the danger in attempting to silence anti-Spanish opinions since they were so widely held. Dutton has stated that 'players and playwrights were too insignificant for those in power to take all that seriously, except when they were "too insolent" or contrived to offend someone with influence' (2000: 14). The example of *A Game at Chess* can be seen to agree with Dutton's assertion; the play was certainly offensive to 'someone with influence' but very little effort seems to have been

made to silence the insolent voices of Middleton and the King's Company and '[n]one of the English deigned to be offended on their own behalf' (Dutton, 2001: 69).

### 3. *The Old Law*

#### 3.0 Introduction

In *The Old Law* Thomas Middleton and his collaborators directly engaged with political debates surrounding the law, kingship, and masculine identity. Although the play was written as a collaboration ‘Middleton’s is without doubt the controlling imagination in *The Old Law*, whether or not Middleton himself wrote every scene’ (Rowe, 1979: 175). Dating for the play has been debated, but is generally thought to have been written in late ‘1618 or early 1619’ (Masten, 2010: 1333). The play’s many complexities and contradictions reflect the politically confused state of the country at the time; the beginning of the Thirty Years War would put James’ political ideologies to a practical test. Defining tyranny, corruption, and the duties of kings and their subjects was not merely a philosophical exercise but a question of national importance. I will explore Middleton’s engagement with the complex and often contradictory ideologies surrounding masculinity in the early modern period, and how these ideas relate to the late Jacobean political climate.

The play begins with the proclamation of a new law by Duke Evander stating that men and women should be executed when they reach old age; specifically, men will be executed at age eighty and women at age sixty. Interestingly Middleton has the Duke declare a rather generous definition of old age in relation to contemporary thoughts on the matter as ‘[t]he most pessimistic of medical tracts placed the beginning of old age at thirty-five, while the most optimistic delayed it until sixty’ (Shepard, 2006: 216). The plot centres around two courtiers; Simonides, who happily sends his father Creon to the gallows, and Cleanthes, who attempts to fake his father’s death. The comic subplots mostly centre around the law’s impact on marriages: Simonides and other corrupt courtiers attempt to woo Eugenia; the young wife of the aging

Lisander, Gnothoes attempts to accelerate his wife's execution so that he can remarry, and Creon's servants (having been dismissed by Simonides) seek to marry wealthy widows who are close to sixty. The various plots are resolved when the Duke reveals that the aged characters have not been executed, and the law was an attempt to weed out corruption at court. New laws are put in place that place power in the hands of the virtuous characters and restore order and justice to Epire.

Judy Park has stated that 'given the ideological links between the household, the state, and divine right, ambivalence about gender and sexuality in Jacobean society can therefore be understood as a proxy for political scepticism about sovereign power and its conceptual underpinnings' (Park, 2015: 38). This rhetoric also played a large role in James' *True Law* which defined the relationship between a monarch and a subject as similar to the relationship between a father and child. James defined his responsibilities to his subjects in very intimate terms, stating that a monarch's duty was to serve 'as a loving father and a careful watchman, caring for them more than for himself, knowing himself to be ordained for them' (James VI and I, 1996: 56). James used this metaphor to emphasise the importance of obedience to a monarch as well as the monarch's need to care for the wellbeing of his subjects. When discussing the overthrowing of kings, James asks his reader 'suppose the father were furiously following his sons with a drawn sword, is it lawful for them to turn and strike again or make any resistance but by flight?' (James VI and I, 1996: 74). Middleton balanced support of the ideals for kings and subjects that James set out in *The True Law* and satire of authoritarian rule and social corruption. This balance allowed Middleton to interrogate some of James' statements regarding a king's absolute authority without seeming to directly criticise the King or his agents. The use of 'extraordinary laws' to 'place the characters in an extreme situation that will produce an intense emotional



Cleanthes: Why sir, is there so main a difference?

First Lawyer: You'll never be a good lawyer, if you understand not that.

(1.1. 99-104)

The amorality of the lawyers creates a great deal of comedy in this scene but the clear message is that the law may be twisted by a good lawyer and a good lawyer is available to anyone with funds. After telling Cleanthes 'the very letter and the sense both/ Do both o'erthrow you in this statute' (1.1.106-7) the First Lawyer offers an argument that, since a man does not come of age until he is twenty-one, his life cannot be said to begin until that age. The Lawyer argues this point only after receiving a fee from Cleanthes, and only argues it for as long as he feels his fee lasts. The comedic elements in the scene are effective and introduce an important idea into the narrative; that the law is a tool that can easily be misused when the wrong people have power over it.

Creon rejects the validity of a law that targets the innocent rather than protecting them. He views the enforcement of such a law as an act of tyranny rather than a legal process:

Creon: [...] And so must I die by a tyrant's sword

First Lawyer: O say not so sir; it is by the law

Creon: And what's that, sir, but the sword of tyranny,

When it is brandished against innocent lives? (1.1.244-247)

The law of the land is established as a tool of authority rather than as an authority unto itself, unlike scriptural law, which Cleanthes invokes in the following exchange:

First lawyer: It is so plain it can have no demur

The church-book overthrows it.

Cleanthes:

And so it does;

The church-book overthrows it if you read it well. (1.1.113-115)

The term ‘church-book’ refers either as a book of service; a religious and moral text, or to the parish registry; an official record of christenings, marriages, and deaths (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2018). Cleanthes appears to be referring more broadly to the Bible, specifically the commandment to ‘honour thy father and thy mother’ (Exodus 21.12 King James Version). The lawyers use the parish registry as a legal document and as evidence of the characters’ ages. In this context, these two meanings demonstrate the central conflict of the play: the conflict between moral (i.e. religious) and legal authority and the increased likelihood of these two forces ‘fractur[ing] in an absolute monarchy’ (Mukherji, 2011: 111). The simple play on ‘church-book’ is an extremely effective one by Middleton. This exchange summarises the earthly vs heavenly law debate and seems to challenge James’ assertion in *True Law* that the King’s power ‘flows only from himself’ as ‘God’s lieutenant’ (James VI and I, 1996: 71, 66). The Duke’s moral test hinges on the belief that good men will disobey the law (and their Prince) when it contradicts their own conscience. This would seem to contradict James’ teachings, but by centring the disobedience of his characters around patricide Middleton avoids this since in James’ own words there was no ‘pretext whatsoever it will not be thought monstrous and unnatural’ that sons should rise up against fathers (James VI and I, 1996: 76). By James’ own rhetoric there is no moral justification for crimes done by a son to his father. This allows Cleanthes to be seen directly disobeying the Duke whilst still supporting James’ teachings.

This scene, however, reveals that creative interpretation of the law is unlikely to benefit the vulnerable. The second lawyer's interpretation is not accepted by those who enforce the law- not because it is an obvious attempt at finding a loophole to the law- but because those enforcing the law benefit more from the apparent intent of the proclamation. The contrast between heavenly morals and the earthly conduits through which they are communicated is portrayed in the exchange between the lawyers and Cleanthes and again in Act 3 Scene 1 in the exchange between the Clerk and Gnothoes. The lawyers use immoral but lawful justification for their deeds but in this scene we see immorality that is both self-serving and without attempts at moral justification. Access to knowledge is important to the Gnothoes subplot; upon being told that she has only a few weeks to live Agatha resolves to check the parish records herself, but she will find no justice or truth in the records because of the corruption of her husband and the clerk. The altering of the parish records is an episode in the play that relies heavily on wit and puns; the clerk and Gnothoes use literacy and numeracy in order to pervert justice rather than to uphold it. The clerk corrects Gnothoes on his mispronunciation of 'Pollux'- instead Gnothoes calls his father-in-law 'Bollux'- and states that 'the word is corrupted else' (3.1.28-31). The clerk goes on to call the church-book an 'infallible record' (3.1.34). In this exchange the clerk acts to preserve the integrity of the text but he quickly agrees to a much greater corruption than a simple mispronunciation. Gnothoes sets the clerk as the 'infallible record' rather than the book itself. He states that 'Clerks are the most indifferent honest men, for to the marriage of your enemy, or the burial of your friend, the curses or the blessings to you are all one' (3.1.51-54). To Gnothoes their position makes them impartial, and their impartiality means that their honesty cannot be questioned. Gnothoes knows this sentiment to be false and the clerk immediately agrees to 'say 'amen' to anything might do you a pleasure' (3.1.56). They then make a 'wager' over whether or

not the clerk can ‘cast a figure’ and alter Agatha’s birth records (3.1.84-108). The clerk does so, and therefore keeps Gnothoes’ ‘wager’. Despite this elaborate ceremony, the clerk admits that this is ‘flat corruption’ (3.1.98) and Gnothoes notes that ‘better men than you have been thrown over the bar for as little’ (3.1.106-108). The ‘church-book’ undergoes gratuitous abuse by Gnothoes and the clerk. Gnothoes is literate, occupies a reasonably high social standing and is presumably financially well-off considering his bribery of the clerk. The rise of print meant that there was greater accessibility to legal knowledge out with the legal profession, but the sheer volume of material and ‘the law being unavailable to all in a single authoritative book’ meant that for many the law simply became easier to manipulate (Mukherji, 2011: 109-110). As well as purging the court and society of unjust persons it is necessary to purge society of unjust practices. This purging is achieved by the paternalistic intervention of the Duke, who brings the law back into alignment with natural justice and acts to prevent corrupt individuals from having the opportunity to act on their corrupt impulses.

### 3.2 The Duke of Epire and Jacobean Kingship

Unlike the tragically weak kings that dominated the history play in the Elizabethan period, or the lustful and emotionally stunted Frederick in *A Wife for a Month*, *The Old Law*’s Duke manages to identify and manipulate the social climbers and sycophants of his court without succumbing to corruption himself and without any negative consequences to his subjects. His initial characterisation is similar to that of Marlowe’s Edward II or Shakespeare’s Richard II; a king whose primary concerns are hedonistic pleasure and rewarding frivolous courtiers. The Duke’s court seems to be built on the frivolous foundation of ‘gloss and good clothes’ (2.1.37) and Evander praises his new ‘sweet, fresh, and fashionable’ court (2.1.36). This is reminiscent of Marlowe’s Edward II whose ‘soldiers marched like players, With garish robes, not armour’

(2.2.181-183). Much like the perception of Edward II, James' preference for fashion and entertainments over warfare was often viewed as an effeminate trait, with 'one contemporary dubb[ing] him "Queen James"' (Cogswell, 1989. p72). The device of having the Duke's tyranny be a ruse is a necessary one as it allows for a happy ending that does not depict the deposing of a king and limits the possibility that the play will be interpreted as encouraging disobedience. The influence of *True Law* is clear; Middleton portrayed a ruler who exemplifies the proper way to govern as a father to one's subjects. The Duke intervenes directly in the lives of individual subjects as a father would settle disputes between unruly children in a way that closely conforms to the model of kingship in *True Law*:

As the father's wrath and correction upon any of his children that offendeth ought to be by a fatherly chastisement seasoned with pity as long as there is any hope of amendment in them, so ought the King towards any of his lieges that offend in that measure. (James VI and I, 1996: 57)

The Duke's new declarations are ones that seek to 'amend' and 'correct' the courtiers' and servants' behaviour as much as punish them, and it is legislative reform rather than executions that restore Epire to a just state:

Cleanthes: [reading the table] 'It is decreed by the grave and learned council of Epire that no son and heir shall be held capable of his inheritance at the age of one-and-twenty, unless he be at that time as mature in obedience, manners and goodness

[...]

‘Moreover is enacted, that all sons aforesaid, whom either this law or their own grace shall reduce into the true method of duty, virtue, and affection, relate their trial and approbation from Cleanthes, the son of Leonides’ (5.1.293-296, 301-305)

In this passage the Duke not only punishes the corruption in Epire but takes legal steps to prevent its continuation by declaring that a son’s inheritance will be bestowed on the event of his reaching moral maturity and not simply according to reaching the age of twenty-one. This conforms to contemporary belief that ‘[m]anhood was a maturity level’ that could be lost or gained throughout a man’s life (Shepard, 2006: 22). James’ paternal prince is ‘bound to care for all his subjects’ as a father is ‘bound to care for the nourishing, education, and virtuous government of his children’(James VI and I, 1996: 57). In the final act Evander both protects his aged subjects from exploitation and acts to rehabilitate the frivolous youths by withholding their inheritances. Evander is an active prince and orchestrates the reforms, but the specifics are decided by ‘the grave and learned council’. Proper order is restored with law and justice taken out of the hands of ‘boys and madmen’ (5.1.243). Conferring royal authority on another could be portrayed positively or negatively; for example, in *A Wife for a Month* Frederick confers his power to a minion but this is in service of Frederick’s tyrannous rule, and Marlowe’s Edward II undermines his own authority by attempting to ‘share the kingdom’ with his favourite (1.1.2). In the case of Evander, proper order is restored when he confers his authority on the correct people:

Duke:            You must change places, for ‘tis so decreed

                      Such just pre-eminence hath thy goodness gained

                      Thou art the judge now; they, the men arraigned. (5.1.262-4)

This decree is significant because it represents a compromise between the warring ideologies of James' absolutism and the English belief in parliamentary authority. Almost immediately upon inheriting the throne there was tension between James' 'priority, which was to get things done' and 'English insistence on getting them done in the right way' (Wormald, 2004, 2014). This conflict of ideas was not merely academic; one of James' first acts upon entering his new kingdom in 1603 was to '[hang] a thief without due process of law' (ibid.). Concerns about the King intervening in the course of justice would again be raised after his intervention in a divorce scandal involving Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset and one of James' favourites, and the later trial of the Earl and his wife, Frances Howard, for the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. The trial resulted in the execution of servant accomplices but the Earl and his wife were later pardoned. Heinemann has asserted that 'this must have confirmed a sense that there were indeed two laws, one for the great, and another for the commoner' (Heinemann, 1980: 109). James' earlier intervention in Frances Howard's divorce was also seen to undermine the belief that the connection between social inferiors and superiors was as close and unbreakable as familial bonds. The scandal raised the question of '[h]ow durable was the bond between king and subject if the King himself could insist upon the dissolution of the like bond between husband and wife?' (Clegg, 2001: 13). It is significant that in this scene Middleton portrays a prince who is seen to both get things done, and see justice done through proper channels by appointing judges and reforming legislation.

### 3.3. Individual Masculine Identity in the Patriarchal State

The Duke embodies two contrasting male archetypes in the weak, feminised tyrant and the just, paternal monarch. Throughout the play Middleton also explores a wide spectrum of masculine identity in his male characters and contrasts moral and immoral behaviour in men of diverse ages and social standing.

Simonides is a character who seeks the privileges of manhood whilst eschewing the responsibilities. Without the guiding presence of his father, Creon, Simonides is free to indulge in youthful, unmanly desires. Shepard notes that youth was considered separately from the ideal form of manhood, and that ‘freedom from the yoke of parental discipline was conditional upon learning self-mastery and upholding meanings of manhood in terms of rational discretion and self-government’ (2006: 37). Character flaws such as tendency towards ‘violent disruption, excessive drinking [and] illicit sex’ were generally recognised as youthful excesses that were ‘unmanly, effeminate, and beast-like’ (Shepard, 2006: 94). In *The Old Law* Middleton criticised these unmanly social evils by making them seem ridiculous. Classical ideas regarding humour as a tool for correcting socially unacceptable behaviour were highly influential in the period (Ghose, 2008: 56). In *The Old Law* it is characters who most egregiously violate common decency who are the most comical.

Vanity is an important source of laughter in the play and it is telling that Simonides first dismisses the tailor. He reasons that ‘what son and heir will have his father’s tailor/ Unless he have a mind to be laughed at?’ (2.1.226-7). Simonides assumes that being out of fashion will cause him to look foolish, but it is his vanity that makes him vulnerable to laughter from the audience and demonstrates some of the performative aspects of courtly life. Concern for one’s reputation is not in itself a character flaw in early modern society, and the loss of reputation

could have a real and lasting impact on a person's position. In *Othello*, Cassio laments that his drunken bout of violence has led to him losing 'the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial.' (2.3.248-9). Simonides recognises the importance of reputation for a man of his social standing but bases his reputation on being fashionable rather than being an effective head of the household or a fiscally responsible property owner. In cases of defamation 'men's reputations were most frequently attacked through questioning their economic integrity' (Shepard, 2006: 164). This lack of foresight and 'self-mastery' means that he destabilises his own position by fracturing the very systems that keep him wealthy. As well as the tailor, the butler, and the cook, Simonides also dismisses his bailiff. The bailiff agrees that the other servants are 'superfluous vanities indeed' but that he is necessary 'to receive your rents' (2.1.245-246). Simonides responds by stating that the bailiff is unnecessary because in regards to rents 'I shall take a course to spend 'em faster than thou canst reckon 'em' (2.1.248-249). Simonides' dismissal of his father's servants is a clear and effective demonstration of the disruptive influence of powerful fools and the importance of the household hierarchy. In dismissing his household, Simonides shows a lack of concern for his responsibilities and this neglect leads to real consequences for the servant characters. Having been dismissed, the servants decide to seek out wealthy wives of fifty-nine so that they may also benefit from the new law.

Butler:            Let's e'en therefore go seek out widows of nine-and-fifty an we  
                          can; that's within a year of their deaths, and so we shall be sure to  
                          be quickly rid of 'em, for a year's enough of conscience to be  
                          troubled with a wife for any man living.        (2.2.267-273)

The servants only turn fortune-hunters when they find themselves displaced from the social hierarchy. The servant 'who, after being maltreated or abandoned by his employer, is forced into

extreme measures in order to survive' was 'a common narrative' (Burnett, 1997: 89). There is no indication that the servants engaged in immoral behaviour prior to Creon's apparent execution, just as there is no indication that Simonides sought his father's demise before he had the opportunity to do so without consequences. However, once the commonwealth of the household is dismantled the servant class quickly take to idleness. In doing so they fail to fulfil their own masculine duties by making themselves reliant on the financial support of their new wives. Common men were expected to be obedient to their superiors but they were still expected to lead and guide their own families, both morally and financially, once they came into maturity. On the other hand 'a husband was warned against becoming dependent on his wife' since '[t]he thriftless husband persisted with the vices elsewhere associated with youth, and as a result was deemed to forfeit his manhood' (Shepard, 2006: 83-85). In *The Old Law*, villainy is opportunistic and often reactive. Apart from Gnothoes' attempts to falsify records to accelerate his wife's execution, immoral characters do not do a great deal of plotting. Rather than rampant ambition and Machiavellian scheming, Middleton presents the audience with characters who are dangerous because they lack proper guidance from male authority figures, and are therefore unable to break free of the immaturity of youthful desires and impulsiveness.

Middleton does not just lampoon the folly of youth; the elderly Lisander is also held to account for his failures in masculinity. He is a victim of frivolous courtiers, but he is open to ridicule when he debases himself. The link between laughter and social expectations is used highly effectively by Middleton in *The Old Law*. Cicero stated 'neither great vice[...] nor great misery is a subject for ridicule and laughter' (2014: 35532). This ideology would persist throughout the early modern period; Sir Philip Sidney would also note that laughter was often



manhood. The righteousness of Lisander's admonishment is perhaps lessened by the harsh curses that immediately follow. He wishes the same sinfulness and ingratitude of the courtiers on their own children and hopes 'your male seed be hasty spendthrifts too' and their 'daughters hasty sinners and diseased' (2.2.92-93). Lisander's curse is reminiscent of a sentiment expressed in *The Peacemaker*:

Our grandfathers, for the most part, were honest men than our fathers, our fathers better than we, and our children like enough to be worse than ourselves.

(lines 123-126)

Lisander's position is reversed again when he says that he must 'cleanse myself with prayers' after his 'uncharitable' outburst (2.2.100-101). Lisander attempts to live virtuously in old age, but lacks the same self-control that the courtiers do. Lisander's imperfect nature is signalled to the audience by both his lust for his young wife, and his inability to keep her from being tempted by the young courtiers:

Lisander:        Shall not a man for a little foolish age

Enjoy his young wife to himself? Must young court-tits

Play tomboys' tricks with her, and he live, ha? (3.2.63-65)

Lisander is shown to be pious in nature, but is also uninterested in guiding the younger generation until they threaten to steal his young wife away. Rather than competing with their younger counterparts it was generally accepted that older courtiers should act as mentors (Skenazi, 2003: 84). This ideal is realised at the end of the play when Evander names the elder characters as judges and forbids youths from inheriting until they have reached maturity of the mind as well as the body.

The pivotal scene of Lisander's competition with the courtiers opens by establishing Lisander's difficulty in carrying out physical tasks such as dancing and copulation with his wife:

Lisander: Marry, a trick- if thou couldst teach a man  
 To keep his wife to himself, I'd fain learn that.

Dancer: That's a hard trick for an old man specially.  
 The horse-trick comes the nearest.

Lisander: Thou sayst true, i' faith;  
 They must be horsed indeed, else there's no keeping on 'em  
 And horse-play at fourscore is not so ready. (3.2.83-88)

When Lisander attempts the dance he curses it and says that it has 'given me a wrench i'th'back.' (3.2.94-95). This interaction uses dancing and horsemanship imagery to suggest that Lisander lacks the virility to 'keep his wife to himself', since wives 'must be horsed'. This term refers to stallions mounting a mare (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2018). Sexual desire was generally seen as another folly of youth; referring to Castiglione's highly influential *Book of the Courtier* Skenazi notes that it was widely believed that '[s]exual desire may fool a young man, but not an old one who is no longer weighed down by his body and is guided by reason' (Skenazi, 2003: 86).

Middleton established the ridiculousness of Lisander's attempts to regain his youth but the scene soon gives way to using Lisander's insecurity to humiliate the courtiers and reveal their own impotence and hypocrisy. Eugenia and the courtiers enter the scene in a state of merriment, the first courtier stating he will 'kill himself with infinite laughter' (3.2.3). Eugenia's open

amusement is in itself a signal of her immorality to a Jacobean audience, as excessive laughter in women was seen as a sign of promiscuity (Ghose, 2008: 1). The group observes Lisander's dance lesson with amusement, with Simonides further demonstrating his lack of 'self-mastery' by being unable to contain his laughter, stating 'I shall burst; I can hold out no longer.' (3.2.104-5). Lisander's challenge marks a turning point in the scene, the humour is no longer derived from an old man attempting to act like a young man, but from the failure of the courtiers to live up to their own overconfidence. Lisander's speech in Act 2 is effective but his later comic scene is arguably more satisfying to the audience and a more effective admonishment of Simonides and the courtiers. By challenging them in a way that appeals to their vanity and sense of superiority, Lisander's rebukes are more keenly felt. Lisander's characterisation of himself as a 'poor old man' evokes pity in the audience but, as Quintilian noted, 'nothing dries so quickly as tears' (2015:6189). Simonides' confidence of the superiority of youth over age is shown to be hilariously misplaced as he and his companions are outmatched in youthful pursuits. Having been bested at dancing and beaten at fencing, Simonides is shown to be unable to hold his drink:

Lisander: I make you stink worse than your polecats do.

Here's long sword, your last weapon

*[He drinks the third glass]*

Simonides: No more weapons.

First Courtier: Why, how now, Sim? Bear up, thou sham'st us all else.

[...]

Simonides: No more venies goes down here, for these two

Are coming up again.

Second Courtier: Out! The disgrace of drinkers!

[...]

Lisander: What, shall we put down youth at her own virtues?

Beat folly in her own fround wondrous much?

(3.2.182-184, 189-190, 195-196)

Lisander's victory over the courtiers is certainly satisfying to the audience, but it cannot really be said to be a moral victory on his part. Two of Lisander's three challenges (drinking and duelling) are soundly condemned in *The Peacemaker*:

*Law* shall wrangle with her [Peace]; *Ebriety* and Drink shall strike her, *Pride* and *Ambition* shall seek to overthrow her; yea, even her oily and most dangerous enemy, *Hypocrisy*, shall get within to strangle her; yet still shall she stand, and reign, and conquer. (lines 197-201)

The vices listed in this passage are also a fairly comprehensive list of the concerns of *The Old Law* in general and the duelling scene specifically. In challenging the courtiers Lisander encourages them to indulge in unmanly behaviour. Amussen states that 'emphasis on restraint and self-control is the starting point of Middleton's development of an alternative model of manhood, particularly for prosperous young men' (2010: 1304).

Cleanthes is in many ways the realisation of this revised ideal Jacobean man, and arrives just in time to admonish Lisander for his moral regression:

Cleanthes: I had a father, had he lived his month out

But to ha' seen this most prodigious folly,  
 There needed not the law to have cut him off:  
 The sight of this had proved his executioner,  
 And broke his heart. He would have held it equal  
 Done to a sanctuary, for what is age  
 But the holy place of life, chapel of ease  
 For all men's wearied miseries? And to rob  
 That of her ornament, it is accursed,  
 As from a priest to steal a holy vestment  
 Ay, and convert it to a sinful covering. [Exit Lisander]  
 I see 't'as done him good; blessings go with it. (3.2.243-254)

This speech highlights that although the play condemns devaluing old people, it does not claim that their value is the same as in their prime. Here, old age is framed as a religious vocation. It is important that in the final scene Lisander appears in his 'holy vestment'; his beard is once again white and his legs 'gouty' and he submits to death with grace:

Lisander:	But never fit
	To die till now, my lord; my sins and I
	Have been but newly parted, much ado
	I had to get them leave me, or be taught

That difficult lesson how to learn to die  
 [...] I now can look upon thee, erring woman,  
 And not be vexed with jealousy; on young men,  
 And no way envy their delicious health,  
 Pleasure, and strength, all which once were mine own  
 And mine must be theirs one day. (5.1.112-115, 120-123)

Just as the young must learn to respect the wisdom of the old, so too must the old learn to accept age with grace. Despite Lisander's competence and display of control in dancing, duelling, and drinking, Cleanthes rebukes Lisander for desecrating his old age and compares aging to a vocation. The question of how aging patriarchs should conduct themselves was of particular importance in the final years of James' reign. James' masculinity had been questioned throughout his reign, and in 1618 James was in his fifties but his court was still facing criticism for being 'excessively young, fashionable, and effeminate' (Masten, 2010: 1334). The latter years of James' reign had an aging king still seen to be attempting to compete with his young courtiers and as Lisander demonstrates this is a course of action that is as likely to demean one's own dignity as to project virility.

### 2.3 Conclusion

The courtiers' fashionable dress, shallow and selfish world-view, and skewed priorities are humorous to the audience, but the image of innocents facing death and loyal subjects facing moral dilemmas is not. Middleton mocked the symptoms of social disorder whilst simultaneously earnestly condemning its causes. An effective way that Middleton did this was by

creating parallel characters who embody the comic and the solemn sides of the play's premise. These explorations of masculine virtue are effective not only because they display conflicts between youth and age but also between competing ideas of Jacobean masculinity and Jacobean politics. Superiority of natural law and justice over royal prerogative and complex legal rhetoric was also a charged topic for comedy. The virtues and vices of the characters in *The Old Law* exemplify a number of ideologies regarding the changing face of Jacobean masculinity and of class, and how criticism of changing class structures and definitions of masculinity impacted the wider political world of Jacobean England.

*The Old Law* was written in a time where political upheaval in Europe brought uncertainty, and that uncertainty was compounded by increasing lack of faith in James' leadership style. James' support of the scandalous marriage of Robert Carr and Frances Howard and his intervention in the Overbury trial led many of his subjects to view the court as corrupt and vice-ridden. Middleton engages with these concerns in his initial characterisation of the Duke and his courtiers but used a tragicomic structure to reassure his audience of the Duke's (and therefore James') virtue and competence. James was criticised for appearing to use his authority to interfere in the course of justice but the Duke reforms the justice system in Epire by appointing virtuous individuals to carry out justice in his name. *The Old Law* does not directly engage with contemporary events in the way that *The Bondman* does but engages with contemporary politics largely through the microcosm of the family and the household and aligns masculine virtues with social harmony. The play engages with a number of discussions surrounding James' court and reign whilst ultimately attempting to reassure the audience of the virtue and competence of the monarch and his agents.

#### 4. *The Bondman*

##### 4.0. Introduction

Philip Massinger's *The Bondman* has long been recognised as a political play. Gardiner referred to the play as 'a treatment of the politics of the day so plain and transparent' as to be obvious to anyone with a passing knowledge of the period (1876: 495). Even Allen Gross, who rejected the premise that 'satirical portraits of James, and Charles, and Buckingham' were being drawn acknowledges Massinger as 'a topical writer' (1966: 280-290). Although the play has clear topical allusions, the pro-war and anti-Spain commentary that features so heavily in the play's first act all but disappears afterward. The play was recorded by Henry Herbert as being first performed at Whitehall with 'the prince only being there', just two months after the Prince's return from Spain (Herbert, 1996: 147). Notably the play was acted by The Queen of Bohemia's Company; 'the new company must have been associated in the public mind with the fortunes or misfortunes of its absent patroness, and the plays would therefore have attracted an audience already sympathetic to her cause' (Patterson, 1984: 84). This connection would also not have been lost on Charles, who had a strong connection to his sister and initially agreed to the Spanish Match 'as a sacrifice for the benefit of his sister and brother-in-law' (Kishlansky and Morril, 2004, 2008). Act 1's topical allusions have tended to overshadow the political commentary in the rest of the play. Despite the intimate performance for the pro-war Charles, Massinger seems to have been more interested in exploring the destabilising effects of conflict between classes than writing pro-war propaganda.

*The Bondman* begins with the senate of Syracuse gathered in anticipation of the arrival of Timoleon; a military commander from Corinth. Syracuse is in disarray and their military is unfit to defend the city from the 'thundering threates of Carthage' (1.1.9). Timoleon and Cleora

(daughter of the Praetor, Archidamus) convince the citizens to give up their wealth and volunteer to go and fight their enemies in Carthage. Most of the men agree, but Cleon and his son Asotus refuse to fight. With the virtuous lords away from the city, a slave revolt is orchestrated by Pisander; an exiled gentleman from Thebes who returned to the city to revenge a wrong done to his sister. In the process he falls in love with Cleora. When Timoleon and the other lords return to find the city in the hands of slaves they retake the city by intimidating the slaves with the whips that were previously used against them.

*The Bondman's* first act unambiguously sides with Charles and Buckingham's preference for war. Yet despite the many stirring, patriotic monologues of the opening scenes the war is almost incidental to the plot and exists mostly as a way of getting the able bodied men out of the city to provide an opportunity for the slaves to take the city. *The Bondman* portrays warfare as a worthy and manly pursuit, but there is a persistent conflict between the pro-war stance and the implication that the more pressing danger is popular revolution. The proper treatment of servants is portrayed as a duty that if neglected can lead to complete social collapse. It is important not to understate the importance of service in early modern society; '29 per cent of households during the period' employed servants in some capacity (Burnett, 1997: 1). Massinger's own father had served the Herberts as a 'general agent' (Garrett, 2004, 2008). Massinger references this in his dedication in *The Bondman*, stating there was 'a desire borne with me, to make tender of all duties, and service, to the Noble family of the Herberts, descended to me as an inheritance from my dead father[...]' (Massinger, 1976: 313). In writing a play about Syracuse Massinger both reaffirms the superiority of England's might and suggests that the country's foundations need to be rebuilt to restore this superiority.

#### 4.1 True Nobility and Warfare

Act 1 is the most overtly political section of the play as it deals explicitly with the failures of Syracuse's government in regards to military success and the financing of war. Archidamus laments the country's ignorance 'in the Art of government' and is ashamed that they have had to recruit foreign assistance in Timoleon, worthy as he is (1.3 1-10). Limon suggests that possible rewrites in Act 1 reflect topical debates surrounding the arrival of 'a foreigner to take command of their army, and the necessary sacrifice of the rich to provide means for the maintenance of the troops' (Limon, 1986: 64). The foreign commander in question references the German Count Mansfeld who arrived in England in April 1624 (Limon, 1986: 67). Archidamus' lamentations specifically refer to a sense of loss and wasted potential. He expresses shame that although the city has 'all blessings An Iland can bring forth' and all 'the sinnewes of the Warre' they are unable to 'produce One fit to be our Generall' (1.3.12-18). Timoleon also specifically notes the improper running of the navy and scolds the lords for leaving their 'ships unrig'd' to 'rot in the harbour' (1.3.205-206). Neglect and corruption had been of particular interest since 1618 when Buckingham took over as the Lord High Admiral. Peck states that Buckingham oversaw 'reduced corruption' from 1618-1625 but Massinger's specific criticism of naval command suggests that this was not the prevailing opinion (Peck, 1990: 110). Critics including Gardiner and B.T. Spencer have read these lines as explicitly targeting Buckingham in his role as Lord High Admiral, and doing so in a way that a Jacobean audience would be attuned to (Gardiner, 1876: 497), (Spencer, 1932: 191). This example effectively demonstrates how a play may contain pointed references to influential individuals without being suppressed. Despite this insult, there is no evidence that Buckingham had any objections to the play. Indeed, '[i]n most circumstances aristocrats were secure enough in their status not to acknowledge veiled satire

against themselves; they would not dignify it with their notice' (Dutton, 2001: 69). Since the play supported Buckingham's desire for war, it did not benefit him to notice the insult. Public support for military action would continue to vex James despite his continued reluctance to involve England in a 'miserable' religious war because of his son-in-law's 'hastie and rashe' acceptance of the Bohemian crown (James VI and I, 1994: 257). Act 1 (and especially scene 3) of *The Bondman* has a strong relation to the political climate in which it was written but it is not a direct allegory. Rather than attempting to identify Massinger's targets, it is perhaps more fruitful to explore Massinger's broader commentary on the 'art of governance' and how failures of governance impact the state. Timoleon does not lay the blame on any one individual but rather laments that the leadership of Syracuse is now peopled with the young and frivolous:

Timoleon:     Your Senate house, which us'd not to admit  
                   A man (how ever popular) to stand  
                   At the Helme of government; whose youth was not made glorious  
                   by action; whose experience  
                   Crown'd with grey haire, gave warrant to her counsailes,  
                   Heard, and receiv'd with reverence, is now filld  
                   With greene heads that determine of the State  
                   Over their Cups, or when their sated lust  
                   Afford them leisure: or suppli'd by those  
                   Who rising from base arts, and sordid thrift  
                   Are eminent for their wealth, not for their wisdom. (1.2.178-188)

Much like Middleton's *Epire*, Massinger's *Syracuse* is in the hands of 'boys and madmen' who place personal indulgence and advancement over the proper running of the state. Also like *Epire*, the personal flaws of individuals at the top of society lead to corruption and instability throughout the country. Notably this passage also highlights that *Syracuse*, and therefore England, is a once-great state that has lost its way. Timoleon's continued admonishments make a direct link between the greed and frivolity of *Syracuse*'s leadership and their military failures. It has been noted that the securing of funds was as much of an obstacle to war as James' determination to resolve the situation diplomatically. Charles and Buckingham found that 'the Commons, with a few exceptions, were almost as reluctant as James to start a war' (Limon, 1986: 67). Parliament's reluctance to produce funds was not a fact that was unknown to the public; since James published his speeches 'Massinger and his audience could hardly be unaware of his difficulties' (Turner, 1995: 366). In Act 1 Scene 3 the financial and martial obligations of the ruling class and the glorification of warfare are explored at length. In *Syracuse* a lack of funds for the war is due entirely to the avarice and short sightedness of its rulers:

Timoleon:                   [... ] the treasure of the City is ingros'd  
   By a few private men: the publique Coffers  
   Hollow with want; and they that will not spare  
   One Talent for the common good, to feed  
   The pride and bravery of their Wives, consume  
   In Plate, in Iewels, and superfluous slaves,  
   What would maintain an Armie (1.3.195-201)

Frivolous spending is identified as the only impediment to filling ‘the publique coffers’. When Archidamus urges the court to welcome Timoleon, Cleon voices his intention to ‘garde my gold’ and says that he is more afraid of the allies with ‘nimble fingers’ who are ‘within out walls’ than the ‘farre off’ enemy of Carthage (1.3.39-43). When asked to give up his fortune Cleon asks ‘what could the enemy, though victorious, Inflict more on us?’ (1.3.223-4). He remains comically stubborn despite Timoleon’s warnings. Timoleon paints a vivid picture of riches seized, sons enslaved, wives and daughters ravished, and lords cast out into the desert (1.3.235-263). The lords appear disturbed at Timoleon’s speech, but they do not capitulate until they are shamed by Cleora. The lengthy discussions of the importance of sacrificing one’s own wealth for a noble cause hints at the deployment of volunteers and gathering of donations for the use in defence of the Palatinate in 1620. James granted the envoy from the Palatinate permission to gather funds and volunteers. Rather than, as much of the public hoped, leading to decisive and committed support of Frederick, James’ ‘sabre-rattling’ was likely conceived of as a way of putting pressure on Spain to ‘accelerate negotiations for a Spanish match’ (Coast, 2014: 65). Donations included £5000 each from Charles and Buckingham (Kishlansky and Morrill, 2004, 2008), (Lockyer, 2004, 2011). There was also a force of 2200 volunteers, ‘including many from distinguished families’, led by Sir Horace Vere (Trim, 2004, 2009). However, the same year contributions were taken to repair St. Paul’s Cathedral and it was ‘reported that far more had been raised in the city for the Cathedral than for Bohemia’ (Coast, 2014: 64). In Timoleon’s admonishments of Syracuse’s leadership Massinger voices criticism of English lords who enjoyed the benefits of power without being ‘Made glorious by action’. Act 1 highlights the importance of taking an active role in the protection of one’s country through warfare both as a soldier and as a financier. The particular emphasis put on the virtues of financial sacrifice would likely please Charles

given his and Buckingham's sizeable contributions to the Palatinate defence fund and their difficulty in securing financial backing from the Commons.

Like the recurring imagery of a plant that must be pruned in *The Old Law*, corruption and greed are continually defined as something that must be purged in order to restore the proper natural harmony of society. In this scene Massinger repeatedly mentions disease and medical treatment in relation to corruption and incompetence; Corisca's infidelity is hinted at through euphemisms involving a doctor and his potions (1.2.9-15), Archidamus thanks Timoleon for shaming 'the countries sickness' (1.3.214), and Timoleon frames his plan to improve the government in graphic medical imagery:

Timoleon:	Old festred sores
	Must be lanc'd to the quicke and cauteriz'd,
	Which borne with patience, after I'll apply
	Soft unguents (1.3.216-219)

Following this is Cleon's response that 'the cure is worse then the disease' (1.3.223), and Timoleon's warning that a resistance to 'the meanes that is offer'd to give you health' means that 'no hope's left to recover your desp'rate sicknesse' (1.3.229-231). The continued references to diseased bodies creates a link between physical health and a nation's health. This metaphor was also used by James; he noted that the King, as the head, must sometimes cleave diseased parts from the body for the good of the whole (James VI and I, 1996: 74). In *Richard II* Shakespeare would also portray England as a 'fortress built by nature for herself against infection and the hand of war' (2.1.43-44).

The ideal state and man is portrayed rather traditionally through depictions of physical strength and military achievement. Military service as a path to manhood is an idea that is explored in a number of works in the early modern period, and would be put to particular use throughout James' reign to criticise his political pacifism and perceived effeminacy. George Buchanan, a former tutor of James, said that it was 'no less unbecoming' for a woman to command an army than for a man 'to tease Wool [...] and to perform the Services of the Weaker Sex' (cited in Crawford, 1999: 364). Also, before his death Prince Henry was often contrasted with his father and 'often represented as a heroic soldier' by the 'old Elizabethan war party' (Crawford, 1999: 370). Shakespeare's Henry V, a formerly wild and drunken youth, is encouraged to 'invoke [the] warlike spirit' of his militaristic ancestors John of Gaunt and Edward the Black Prince (1.2.103-110). Manhood through military service was also not an uncommon motif in Massinger's work; the male leads in his plays frequently take the form of 'soldiers [and] ambitious men seeking worldly glory' (McDonald, 1985: 91). Even the aged men are defined by their usefulness as soldiers; in contrast to Cleon, and despite his own age, Archidamus agrees to fight because he is 'tough, steele to the back' and has 'not wasted My stocke of strength in feather-beds' (2.1.3-4). Archidamus is praised by Timagoras who compliments his ability to 'use a sword/ As well as any beardlesse Boy' (2.1.4-5). Disease is once again referenced in relation to corruption and cowardice when Timagoras wishes 'all diseases, sloath and lechery bring, fall upon him that stayer at home' (2.3.379-380). Despite the convincing rhetoric and public shaming, Cleon and Asotus continue to debase themselves by painting themselves as grotesques who cannot fight:

Cleon: I am still

Old Cleon, fat, and unwieldy, I shall never





I would not to my Brother, nay my Father,  
 Be brib'd to part with the least peece of honour  
 I should gaine in this action. (1.3. 348-362)

It is notable that Cleora's speech contains few references to the foreign enemy, but expresses a persistent anxiety regarding the destabilising effects of lords who allow their inferiors to carry out noble duties. Obviously wars were not only fought by the highest tier of society, but this speech makes clear the idea that it is dishonourable to allow others to fight wars on one's behalf when one makes claims of nobility. It is stated that earning 'honour, wonne in warre' would style the bondmen as 'preservers of their Countrey'. Delegating the actual fighting to bondmen is suggested to be an exchange of power. In doing so Cleon would save himself from physical danger but would forfeit his authority over matters of state for the simple reason that his servants will have usurped his authority. Cleora also undermines their masculinity by displaying her own 'masculine spirit'. Masculine women were seen as particularly threatening to the natural superiority of men (Breitenberg, 1996: 13). By defining herself as more manly than the cowardly courtiers, Cleora metaphorically castrates them in a way that Timoleon cannot. It is a considerable insult to have one's masculinity challenged by an equal but it is a far greater blow to a man's authority to have his masculinity challenged by an inferior. It is for this reason that 'rituals that were intended to ridicule dominated or cuckolded husbands and to punish their "unruly" wives' were widely practiced in the early modern period (Breitenberg, 1996: 20). The trappings of power are also skewered as frivolous in comparison to the true duties of rule; if a slave cannot have the same rich food and 'costly garments' as his lord, then he certainly has no right to 'touch what is Noble'. Whether or not Massinger had specific targets in mind there is an implicit criticism of those who opposed direct intervention and those who refused to finance a

war. Whereas Timoleon's criticism of the lords primarily focused on their poor governance and financial policy, Cleora's criticisms explore the concept that the refusal to go to war has a destabilising effect on society because it devalues the nobility. It is primarily her words rather than Timoleon's that persuade the nobles to finance and fight the war. Cleora's lengthy admonishment of the lords continually emphasise that warfare is part of the duties of their position and that they dishonour themselves by refusing to go to war.

#### 4.2 The Master-Servant Relationship and the Roots of Rebellion

The degradation of Asotus and Corisca is one of the most memorable scenes in the play and one that deserves close attention. Before this can be done, however, it is necessary to telegraph the flaws of the nobility outside their display of their cowardice and avarice in the senate and to show how their humiliation at the hands of their former slaves is explained, though not justified, by their behaviour in earlier scenes. Rather than foreign invasion it is the complacency of its own citizens that leads to violence and chaos in the city. In their first appearance, Creon, Corisca, and Asotus are seen to lack the respect of the slaves. Being in the service of fools and adulterers makes it all too easy for Pisander to convince the slaves that they are their masters' equals. Graculo mocks and contradicts his masters but he is not a revolutionary; his defiance comes in the form of sarcasm and annoyed mutterings rather than impassioned speeches on the nature of freedom. He does not contemplate open rebellion until he is prompted by Pisander. When attempting to convince Cleon of her fidelity, Corisca bids him to 'aske my Man else,' because 'You know he dares not tell a lie'. Rather than play the humble servant, Graculo jokes about Corisca's infidelity and the cuckolding of Cleon:

Graculo:

Indeed,

You are no sooner out of sight, but shee  
 Does feele strange qualms, then sends for the doctor,  
 Who ministers phisicke to her, on her back,  
 Her Ladyship lying as she were entranc'd.  
 (I have peeped in at the keyhole and observd them)  
 And sure his Potions never faile to worke,  
 For she is so pleasant, in the taking them,  
 She tickles again. (1.2.8-14)

Gracculo goes on to compare Corisca to Venus, and says that he 'is sure she *Vulcans* him' (1.2.18). Gracculo's tongue-in-cheek monologue suggesting Corisca's adultery is evidence of his lack of respect for both the promiscuous Corisca and the cuckolded Cleon. Corisca attempts to use Gracculo, but is apparently unaware of how little he respects her. Corisca gives Gracculo power by having him act as a witness for her character. Corisca's use of Gracculo as a character witness is a risky gambit unless she has trust in his loyalty, or at least confidence in his fear of punishment. A servant in a high position in a lord's household was 'encouraged to see himself as a guardian of the household's morality' (Burnett, 1997: 157). Much like how Gnothoes in *The Old Law* first invokes the image of the clerk as an unimpeachable public servant before bribing him to doctor parish records, Corisca invokes the image of the ideal servant who is loyal, honest, and moral, yet she is depending on him being the opposite. Gracculo confirms Corisca's claims but in does so in a speech with obvious clues to her infidelity. The pointed reference to Corisca being 'on her back' is suggestive in itself but Gracculo goes on to say that he spied this through a





for his own pleasure and he has little consideration for the social structures which have placed him in this privileged position. Graculo does not ask Asotus why he is beating him, but if Asotus knows why he is beating him, Graculo recognises the senselessness of the beating and recognises that Asotus acts impulsively and without purpose. As the scene goes on, Graculo continues to show Asotus disrespect; when Asotus says that he was thrown from his horse, Graculo thanks the horse (2.2.18). When Asotus asks ‘What’s that?’ in response Graculo attempts to bargain with his master, stating ‘I’le teach him to hold his heeles, If you will rule your fingers’ (2.2.19-20). By offering terms to Asotus, Graculo suggest that there is a possibility of disobedience and, moreover, that the beating is not only unjust but ineffectual in fostering obedience. Graculo does not physically rebel against Asotus but he is certainly not a humble and penitent servant. Asotus, in his role as a master, is expected to conform to the ideal of James’ ideal prince or father; his ‘wrath’ should be ‘a fatherly chastisement seasoned with pity’ (James VI and I, 1996: 57). Instead, his lack of confidence in his own masculinity leads him to bully and demean his inferiors instead of earnestly seeking to correct their behaviour. When Graculo voices dissent after a beating by Asotus he does not rail against slavery specifically, but says that it is better ‘to be a dogge,/ Then slave to a Foole or a Coward’ (2.2.21-2). This suggests that Graculo’s discontentment is not with the institution of slavery but with the individuals whom he serves. Massinger did not justify rebellion but the play goes to great lengths to show it as preventable if masters do not abuse their position. ‘Male domestic servants’ were generally presented as either ‘the victims of or the prime movers behind a perceived breakdown in the social order’ (Burnett, 1997: 88). In *The Bondman*, Massinger presents both sides of this character type in the slaves. Graculo and his companions are first the victims of an imbalanced society and, as a result of their victimhood, then become the orchestrators of complete societal

collapse. Foster has said of *The Bondman* that the comic nature of the slaves and their masters make it ‘difficult to take their suffering seriously’ (2004: 93-94). This is debateable, but even if the audience lacks empathy for the slaves this is not necessarily a failure on Massinger’s part. Massinger’s concern was not with the plight of the working class, but with the effective governance of the working class. The folly of the masters, rather than their cruelty, is the root cause of social disruption. Graculo’s level of education is not clear, but he is quick-witted with at least a passing knowledge of classical mythology. Pisander also states that he has ‘a fluencie of language’ and ‘quicke conceite’ (2.3.49). Graculo does not appear to fall comfortably under either the position of a ‘yeoman’ occupying a ‘lower position’ or a ‘gentleman’ servant responsible for household government’; he has direct and intimate contact with the family which he serves, but judging by his later interaction with Asotus he also has involvement in menial tasks related to keeping the horses (Burnett, 1997: 155). This perhaps reflects the changing nature of service in the seventeenth century, where ‘the elaborate rankings of chief officers had invariably been replaced by an urban skeleton staff’ whose ‘responsibilities are exercised not in the master’s chamber but in the mistress’s boudoir’ (Burnett, 1997: 178). Graculo’s indistinct role can be usefully contrasted with Simonides’ household, which contains a full complement of domestic servants ranging from Butler to Footman. These changing roles were perceived to lead to dissatisfaction and ambition, which would in turn destabilise the social order.

The slaves have valid grievances but it is usually Pisander who voices these grievances most eloquently. Pisander, like Timoleon, understands the slaves and this allows him to control them. When sowing the seeds of rebellion, Pisander’s first act is to encourage the slaves to drink wine. In this scene wine is presented almost as a magic potion; Pisander promises that the drink ‘will make us as free as our Lords’ (2.3.11) and the drink affects the slaves almost immediately:

Pisander: [...] How doe you feele your selves now?

Cimbrio: I begin

To have strange conundrums in my head.

Gracculo: And I,

To loath base water: I would be hang'd in peace now,

For one moneth of such Holy-dayes. (2.3.19-22)

It is important to note that although Pisander drinks in this scene he does not lose control of himself or the situation. Pisander voices valid criticisms of the slaves' treatment, but the bondmen are continually shown to need the influence of true nobility to temper their savage impulses during the revolt. The thought of the common man in complete control of the army would likely be a frightening one for many nobles at the time since 'the lurid picture of the common soldiers of the 1620s is of a lawless band of mutinous, murdering, thieving, drunken, riotous rapists, a violent and unreasonable horde sweeping up property and challenging all order' (Stearns, 2007: 109). It is this image that Massinger evokes in his descriptions of the slave revolt, as Poliphron relates to Pisander that there is 'leaping, shouting, drinking, dancing, whoring, Among the slaves; answer'd with crying, howling, By the Citizens and their wives' (3.1.41-43).

Pisander's speeches are often followed by incredibly violent sentiments by the slaves. After Pisander urges the slaves to consider what price they would pay to 'fill your famish'd mouthes, With the fat and plenty of the Land' and 'redeeme you from the dare vale of servitude' (2.3.84-86) Gracculo states that he would 'Doe any think, To burne a Church or two, and dance by the light on't Were but a May-game' and Cimbrio says that he would slit his own throat to

taste freedom (2.3.88-90, 92-94). Graculo's reference to a 'May-game' foreshadows the carnivalesque nature of the rebellion; it is a temporary release from the social order, but one that ultimately strengthens the power structures already in place (Bakhtin, 1965, 1968: 9). Pisander's speech about the nature of equality is a compelling one but the resulting revolt reveals that the social hierarchy is more than 'outward glosse' (2.3.41). Pisander's convincing rhetoric, when coupled with the slaves' descent into violence and vice, conforms to Turner's belief that Massinger sought to 'mitigate without erasing the insistent hierarchy in English life' (Turner, 1995: 375). Despite the apparently subversive nature of his words, Pisander's call to revolution serves to confirm the rightness of existing social hierarchies by displaying the power a gentleman can wield using only his eloquence and natural air of authority. The slaves believe Pisander to be their equal, yet he is able to command them almost as a personal army using only a little wine and a little flattery. When Pisander commands them to 'with one voice cry with me,/ Libertie, Libertie' they all immediately comply (2.3.113-114). It is important that the most convincing justifications for revolt come from Pisander, as it allows Massinger to keep true power in the hands of a gentleman. Pisander states that the slaves are the equal to their masters because 'the beare serves not the beare, Nor the wolfe, the wolfe' (2.3.32-35) and asks 'should the strong serve the weake, the faire deform'd ones?' (2.3.39-40). Despite its revolutionary appearance, Pisander's speech does not question that some men should have dominion over others, but asserts that the masters have forfeited their superiority.

After the revolt is underway the visual marks of nobility have been reversed; the slaves now wear their masters' clothes and the masters are stripped and leashed. This physical transformation, however, seems to have triggered the reaffirmation of the 'true natures' of the characters' class; the former slaves are now slaves to their base instincts, and the nobility have



not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one' (Bakhtin, 1965, 1968: 21). Corisca describes her situation as 'a punishment for my lust and pride, Justly return'd upon me' (3.3.16-17). The metaphorical significance of Asotus being equated with an animal is also stated explicitly by the character:

Asotus:	I am punish'd
	For seeking to cuckold mine owne natural Father.
	Had I been gelded then, or us'd my selfe
	Like a man: I had not beene transform'd, and forc'd
	To play an ore-grown Ape. (3.3.81-84)

Members of the lower classes viewing this play may take pleasure in seeing pomposity humbled, but some of this satisfaction is taken away by Corisca's quick learning of her lesson. The play remained in the company's repertory as late as 1639 which suggests that it had a broad appeal out with its topical allusions (Edwards, 1976: 307). Although the play may have had broad appeal, Massinger's body of work suggests that he believed that the 'aristocracy should remain national rulers' while 'upstarts, monopolists [and] favourites should be firmly put in their place' (Heinemann, 1980: 214). Throughout the play, whenever the rightness of prevailing social hierarchies is questioned it is quickly reasserted. The presence of the slave revolt is therefore more of a friendly warning to the nobility rather than a threat; Massinger reminds his middle and upper class audience and readers that they have a responsibility to earn their position as well as an entitlement to that position. The degradation of the nobility inverts the social hierarchy of wealth but reaffirms the social hierarchy of moral and intellectual superiority. Where the nobility has been degraded and begin to ascend to moral superiority as well as social superiority, the

slaves quickly make themselves ridiculous with their newly formed pride and vanity. The freedom and release that is offered by carnivalesque inversions are fleeting because they ultimately serve to reinforce the social hierarchy rather than undermine it.

#### 4.3. Restoration of Social Order

Pisander's speech to the returning warriors is a somewhat nostalgic appeal to the traditional structure of a noble household that was 'the perfect modell of a Common-wealth.'

Pisander:                    Since I must speake for all; your tyranny  
                                      Drew us from our obedience. Happy those times,  
                                      When Lords were styl'd fathers of Families,  
                                      And not imperious Masters; when they numbred  
                                      Their servants almost equall with their Sonnes,  
                                      Or one degree beneath them; when their labours  
                                      Were cherish'd, and rewarded, and a period  
                                      Set to their suffrings; when they did not presse  
                                      Their duties, or their wills beyond the power  
                                      And strength of their performance; all things order'd  
                                      With such decorum, as wise Law-makers,  
                                      From each well-govern'd private house deriv'd  
                                      The perfect modell of a Common-wealth; (4.2.52-64)

Pisander defends the revolt by claiming that the ‘tyranny’ of the nobility is to blame. He paints the ideal master as one who ‘cherishes’ the work of his servants and rewards them for it. Once again the link between fatherhood and leadership utilised by James is invoked. Pisander asserts the importance of treating servants as a member of one’s own family. Familiarity between those of different ranks was in fact encouraged; gestures of familiarity could offer a carnivalesque release in everyday interactions since ‘the social distance separating the gentry from their “inferiors” was so great that it was paradoxically reinforced by gestures that temporarily ignored its existence’ (Shepard, 2006: 35). Pisander knows that a contented servant is a loyal servant, whereas ill-treatment will draw a servant ‘from [their] obedience’. In Massinger’s work, social harmony exists in ‘a political circle of generosity and gratitude’ (Turner, 1995: 366). Social harmony is not achieved by replacing corrupt masters with corrupt servants, but rather by a return to an imagined past where the gentry knew their duties and the servants knew their place.

Before the idyll that Pisander describes can come about Timoleon must first restore everyone to their correct place in the hierarchy. Timoleon uses whips to regain power, but it is not simply the threat of physical violence that brings the slaves in line; Graculo had no qualms about rebelling against a master he knew to be violent. Timoleon wins back the city as much through confidence in his ideology as through military prowess. He refuses ‘to deale with Bondmen, as if we encountred An equall enemy’ (4.2.108).

Timoleon:	They are wilde beasts,  And to be tam’d by pollicie; each man take  A tough whippe in his hand: such as you us’d  To punish them with, as masters; in your looks
-----------	--

Carry severity, and awe, 'twill fright them

More than your weapons; [...]

'Twill force them to remember what they are,

And stoope to due obedience. (4.2.113-118,123-24)

Timoleon's speedy reclamation of the city shows that popular revolutions are doomed to fail because the natural authority of true nobility will always reassert itself. In contrast to Asotus' earlier beating of a slave, Timoleon inspires awe in his social inferiors rather than disdain. Timoleon does not engage with the bondmen as equals but rather uses a symbol of their oppression to remind them of their place. The whip is a symbol of the master's dominion over a slave, but also of man's dominion over beasts. Animal imagery is used throughout the play; Asotus calls Graculo a dog, and then Asotus is made into an ape. Timoleon uses extreme imagery to dehumanise the slaves, but this is necessary to undo Pisander's manipulations. Pisander convinced the slaves that the slaves were wolves serving wolves, and encourages them to 'defy the whip' to prove their manhood (2.3.24). Timoleon, however, reminds the slaves that the wolf is not serving the wolf, but beasts are serving men. The lack of self-control in the slaves prohibits them from achieving full manhood since 'deviations from [the] rational ideal were [...] stigmatized as bestial' (Shepard, 2006: 28). Once the city is reclaimed, Timoleon's discipline is 'seasoned with pity' (James VI and I, 1996: 57). Timoleon asks the Graculo if will be 'obedient and humble' to his master, to which Graculo replies 'As his Spaniell/ Though he kickt me for exercise [...]' (5.3.260-262). This leads to Timoleon pardoning the slaves. Timoleon is a talented military commander and statesman and he is able to discern between the different skills required for both. He knows that wars are fought with money and soldiers. He also knows that stern

punishment is the most effective response to an unruly mob, but paternal chastisement and mercy most effectively maintains social stability.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

The slave revolt depicted in the play is certainly not a glowing recommendation of revolution; the revolt quickly devolves into excuses for depravity and it is orchestrated not by the slaves themselves but by a ‘disguised gentleman manipulating the lower classes for his own, essentially non-political ends’ (Barton, 1977: 634). Despite this, the grievances of the slaves are treated as valid and the mistakes of the nobility are acknowledged and corrected. The audience of the early modern theatre was a diverse one; the playhouse (and the playbills that advertised them) were ‘available to all irrespective of class’ (Stern, 2009: 52). This diversity can often make it difficult to ascertain how a text was intended to be read, especially in the case of authors, such as Massinger, about whom little is known. In *The Bondman* a lord is depicted leashed by his former slave; this image can be read a number of ways; as a warning to the ruling class about the fragility of their power, as a humorous bit of schadenfreude where the pompous nobles are humbled, or as a confirmation of the moral inferiority of the lower classes. It is likely, then, that *The Bondman* is intended as a cautionary tale to both the serving class and to the ruling class. The play warns against disobedience and revolution, but also reminds the servant class that their masters have obligations towards them in return for loyalty and obedience. It also reaffirms the rights of the nobility to rule, but encourages the nobility to consider both the responsibilities and the fragility of their position.

## 5. *A Wife for a Month*

### 5.0. Introduction

Like *The Old Law* and *The Bondman*, Fletcher's *A Wife for a Month* heavily criticises corruption in the ruling class by displaying the negative consequences of leaders who are unable to control their vices. Unlike the earlier plays *A Wife for a Month* focusses on the ruler's treatment of the lords and ladies of his court with very little attention paid to interaction between the classes. It is also notable that unlike the earlier plays where the corruption of court is the collective responsibility of both corrupt individuals and the leaders who have failed to correct them, in *A Wife for a Month* the blame is laid almost entirely on the King and his minion. *A Wife for a Month* was licenced 'for the King's Company' by Henry Herbert on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1624 (Herbert, 1996: 152). It was written just a few months before *A Game at Chess*, and performed by the same company. It has been noted that *A Wife for a Month* contains a number of familiar plot points and character types found in the Fletcher canon; Fletcher seems to have been on 'such familiar ground that he needed to imagine little more than the general outline of the plot' (Turner, 1985: 359). This opinion is shared by Finkelpearl, who describes the play as having 'a curiously retrospective quality, as though Fletcher were recapitulating much of his life's work' (Finkelpearl, 1990: 231).

The court is headed by the vice-ridden absolutist King Frederick and the ambitious and immoral courtier Sorano, who encourages the King's worst impulses in order to advance his own power. Frederick's advances are rejected by Evanthe. After discovering a love poem by Evanthe's gentleman servant Valerio in her belongings, Frederick declares that Valerio and Evanthe will be married, but at the end of the month Valerio will be executed and any man whom Evanthe

marries will suffer the same terms. The cruelty of the situation is taken to a further extreme when Valerio is told that consummation of the marriage will lead to Evanthe's execution. The play's seemingly inevitable tragic conclusion is prevented with the return of Alphonso, the King's older brother. Alphonso returns having recovered both from the melancholy that prevented him from initially taking the throne, and from an attempted poisoning orchestrated by Sorano.

Fletcher's solo efforts in the final period of his career reveal an adeptness at avoiding censorship whilst writing about tyranny, especially when contrasted with earlier collaborations that faced controversy and censorship. *The Maid's Tragedy* (a collaboration with Beaumont) was censored for its depiction of regicide, a particular phobia of James (Clare, 1999: 187). Fletcher and Massinger's *Barnavelto* dramatized a popular piece of news regarding an attempted rebellion against the Prince of Orange. In the case of *Barnavelto*, the play was allowed to be performed after extensive edits from Sir George Buc (the Master of Revels at that time). Despite this already heavy censorship the play encountered 'further difficulties' involving the Church because the contemporary events that the play depicted were closely tied to conflicts between the Arminian sect and Calvinism (Clare, 1999: 195). Once again, tragicomedy proves to be the most effective genre for political commentary; Turner has stated that Fletcher (and Beaumont) 'avoided obvious topical allusions and hedged their criticism sufficiently to have it both ways' (1989: 134). Turner goes on to call this method 'pusillanimous, no doubt, but also delightfully ingenious' (ibid.). With this in mind, *A Wife for a Month* can be interpreted as the culmination of Fletcher's skills in the art of subtle commentary.

### 5.1 The Tyrant and the Flatterer

Thomas Aquinas defined the tyrant as one who 'does not intend the good of his subjects, but considers only his own profit' and this definition remained the standard (cited in Budziszewski,





of his subjects. In fact Evanthe even suggests to the Queen that ‘he may forget all’ (1.2.224). In light of Sorano’s repeated affirmations of a king’s right to indulge in any whim, it is an odd development that Frederick assents to a transfer of his power to Sorano. Sorano has a clear vision of the potential of Frederick’s power and intends to use the King’s weakness to seize it for himself:

Sorano:           You are too remisse and wanton in your angers,  
  
                          You mold things hansomly, and then neglect ‘em,  
  
                          A powerful Prince should be constant to his power,  
  
                          And hold up what he builds, then people feare him;  
  
                          When he lets loose his hand, it shews weaknesse  
  
                          And men examine or contemne his greatness;  
  
                          A scorne of this high kinde should have cal’d up  
  
                          A revenge equall, not pittie in you. (2.3.1-8)

This scene is the first time we see Frederick following his order of the month-long marriage. With a better advisor, Frederick may have been redeemed. Instead Sorano encourages Frederick to go further in his tyranny. Even Frederick seems taken aback with Sorano’s viciousness when he replies ‘She is thy sister’ (2.3.9). As in the opening scene, Frederick shows a knowledge of the correct conduct of a ruler but chooses to ignore it in favour of his own gratification. When Sorano replies that he betrays his kinswoman ‘To satisfie your angers that are just,’ Frederick seems to express regret about his conduct, stating that he fears his actions have ‘pull’d to many curses on me.’ (2.3.12-14). Sorano promises possession of Evanthe and revenge on Valerio if he

gives ‘your power unto me’ and Frederick takes the bargain. Despite his declarations and tantrums, he proves to be a somewhat impotent figure; he fails to impose his will on Evanthe through intimidation or deception. Frederick is ruled by his emotions and his pride; declarations are made out of spite and he is highly susceptible to Sorano’s flattery. Sorano manipulates Frederick but the burden of guilt is not entirely on Sorano’s shoulders; tyranny rules because Frederick is free to disregard the criticisms of virtuous subjects in favour of listening to subjects who tell him what he wants to hear.

Sorano recognises that the marriage has not aided the fulfilment of Frederick’s will; instead it has given Evanthe and Valerio a kind of power:

Sorano:           What satisfaction can their deaths bring you,

                          That prepar’d and proud to dye, and willingly,

                          And at their ends will thank you for that honour? (2.3.25-27)

Frederick arranges the month-long marriage, but it is the threat on Evanthe’s life if Valerio consummates the marriage that comes closest to driving a wedge between the virtuous couple, and this amendment to the conditions of the marriage is entirely a creation of Sorano. Frederick’s initial punishment of Valerio is essentially a month of marital bliss followed by honourable martyrdom. Strictly speaking Evanthe’s and Valerio’s deaths would have been executions rather than suicide but Fletcher’s characterisation of Evanthe ensures that it is clear that she never lets Frederick’s will overtake her own. By choosing death over dishonour Evanthe is portrayed as a martyr to tyranny. James asserted his ‘power over the life and death of every one of his subjects’ (James VI and I, 1996: 72) and legally suicide was seen as violating ‘the monarch’s right to execute or preserve his or her subjects’ (Neil, 2014: 89). Frederick orders the month-long

marriage in a jealous rage and it both marks him as a tyrant and fails to bring him closer to his goal of bedding Evanthe. His threats prove ineffective against virtuous and courageous subjects; Evanthe has already stated that she would rather sleep with a ‘gally slave’ or be a leper than ‘become your Queen’ (1.1.161-165).

According to Turner, ‘Fletcher’s tyrants express their disregard for restraints by invading the bedroom’ (Turner, 1989: 127). Sorano’s scheme, however, is a far more effective violation of the sanctity of marriage and a more intimate form of oppression. Like other Fletcherian tyrants, Frederick’s ‘invasion of the bedroom’ symbolises the tyrant’s sinful violation of his subjects’ person, but his obsession with the domestic sphere and neglect of the wider commonwealth also serves to ‘reduce something of his grandeur’ (Turner, 1989: 127-128). As mentioned previously, James’ own ‘invasion of the bedroom’ in the form of his involvement in the divorce proceedings of Frances Howard served to undermine his views on kingship and the family. Frederick’s rule is often treated as a joke by the courtiers and even his own queen seems to view him as an angry child in her early interactions with Evanthe. Even the King’s victims do not fear him; Valerio is perfectly content to die as Evanthe’s husband and Evanthe expresses fear of death but constantly and enthusiastically berates the King. Fletcher’s tyrant is one who is incapable of effective rule because he is incapable of seeing the bigger picture; he fails to see the wider implications of divorcing his wife or executing subjects over personal vendettas.

### 5.2 Questioning and Resisting Tyranny

In the play Frederick’s subjects do not oppose his orders, but their criticisms continually call into question the validity of absolute rule. Characters such as Evanthe and the Queen clearly regard law and the process of law as a higher authority than the King’s will. This is a direct contradiction of James’ assertion that power is derived directly from monarch (James VI and I,

1996: 72). Evanthe makes it clear that she values other powers more highly than the King's, and mocks his offers of advancement by asking if he has the 'magick' power to prevent the loss of her reputation:

Evanthe:       Can all the power you have or all the riches,  
                   But tye mens tongues up from discoursing of me,  
                   [...]  
                   Can you do this? have ye this magick in ye?  
                   This is not in your power, though you be a Prince Sir  
                   (No more then evill is in holy Angells)  
                   Nor I, I hope; get wantonnesse confirm'd  
                   By Act of Parliament an honesty,  
                   And so reciev'd by all, ile harken to ye. (1.1.112-113,117-122)

Evanthe's 'argument depends entirely upon a political situation in which the absolute tendencies of the monarch, expressed in sexual metaphor as is Fletcher's habit, are tempered by the reasonable response that a parliament might guarantee' (McMullan, 1994: 175). In an attempt to satisfy Evanthe's concern for her reputation, Frederick offers to divorce the Queen and marry Evanthe (1.1.124-125). When Evanthe asks why Frederick would divorce the Queen (citing treason, adultery, and disobedience as possibilities) he offers no reason other than 'tis my will' (1.1.126-129). Simply by asking the question Evanthe has challenged Frederick's absolute authority. In the case of divorce, questioning 'why?' is also a question of 'how?' or 'with what justification?'. Unhappy marriages were not uncommon in the period; 'something like one-third

of the older peers were estranged from or actually separated from their wives' between the years of 1595 and 1620' (Stone, 1965: 217). Divorce, however, was still a rare and often scandalous occurrence. Frances Howard's infamous reputation began not with an illicit affair but with the pursuit of a divorce (Lindley, 1996: 80). Frederick's lust for Evanthe establishes him as a flawed individual, but his offer to supplant his lawful wife with another connects personal vice to unlawful governance. By attempting to cast aside his lawful wife, Frederick attempts to dismantle his own household, and therefore casts doubt on his ability to rule a kingdom. Like the masters in *The Bondman*, Frederick forfeits his patriarchal authority by failing to fulfil masculine duties in the home. Like a servant, a wife's obedience was 'earned rather than expected' and '[g]reat emphasis was placed on a husband's responsibility to justify his position in the household, leading by example and thus vindicating the gender order[...] Conduct manuals warned husbands that the biggest threat to their authority was their own tyrannous delusions' (Shepard, 2006: 80-81). He fails to 'justify his position' and even makes himself irrelevant by conferring all of his authority on Sorano. Evanthe does not accept Frederick's will alone as an authority and replies that his will is not only 'wicked' but 'absurd' (1.1.129-130). The need for legal justification of a monarch's will is clearly stated in a later scene by the Queen:

Queen:                   Your feares are poore and foolish,  
                                   Though he be hasty, and his anger death,  
                                   His will like torrents, not to be resisted,  
                                   Yet Law and Justice go along to guide him;  
                                   And what Law or what Justice can he finde  
                                   To justifie his will? what Act or Statute,

By Humane or Divine establishment,

Left to direct us, that makes marriage death?

Honest faire wedlock? 'twas given for increase

For preservation of mankind I take it;

he must be more then man then, that dare break it; (2.2.4-11)

The Queen's speech notes that Frederick's declaration has no foundation in earthly or heavenly laws; she reassures Evanthe by pointing out that though Frederick's angry whims are 'torrents, not to be resisted', he still requires 'Law and Justice' to 'justifie his will'. The Queen acknowledges a need for checks and balances to a king's will, since a king may be as impulsive and flawed as any man. Despite this portrait of a balanced state and Evanthe's reference to the authority of parliament, the law is spoken about purely in the abstract. The other power structures are not shown; they are, at best, fleetingly mentioned. In earlier works by Fletcher tyranny is opposed through less subtle means; *The Maid's Tragedy* features regicide and *Philaster* is resolved through 'popular revolution rather than an intervention by the nobles' (Park, 2015: 35). Frederick's power is not opposed by a parliament or a popular revolution but rather by the constancy and moral fortitude of his subjects. Frederick's tyranny inspires neither fear nor loyalty in his subjects and his disregard for the laws of God and man mean that when a more desirable alternative is offered in Alphonso, Frederick's regime collapses.

Resistance to tyranny in *A Wife for a Month* is realised almost exclusively through a refusal by the subjects to be corrupted. The three honest courtiers, Camillo, Cleanthes, and Menallo, demonstrate this passive disapproval throughout the play and also mock the corruption that surrounds them. Fletcher's criticism of absolute monarchy takes two forms in *A Wife for a*

*Month* and other tragicomedies; the earnest admonishments of characters such as Evanthe, and the scenes with the courtiers and Tony that mock the corrupt society and the ridiculous proclamations of a tyrant. Similarly, in *The Bondman* Timoleon and Cleora earnestly chastise their peers for greed and cowardice, whilst the slaves mock and undermine their corrupt masters. Having been told to leave by Sorano, the courtiers wonder ‘What new design is hammering in his head now?’ (1.1.6-7). The exchange between the courtiers, and similar exchanges throughout the play, portray an aristocracy that is weary and disapproving of Frederick’s rule, but their disapproval primarily takes the form of withering comments out of earshot of their king. They continuously comment on the corruption of court but never act to prevent it. The nearest they come to offering a solution is when Camillo states that the rotten society will ‘burst’ revealing its corruption to the world:

Camillo:       What have we to do with the times? we cannot cure em;  
                           Let ‘em go on, when they are swolne with surfets  
                           They’le burst and stink, then all the world shall smell ‘em (1.2.1-3)

The lords go on to outline the various sins of their society and lament that Alphonso did not take the throne. The lords seem content to watch the society fester and discuss the moral bankruptcy of Naples with more amusement than despair. The three men outline specific corruptions through sarcastic, paradoxical statements about how men’s reputations are enhanced by sinful behaviour. Particular attention is drawn to men who advance through sexual exploitation of their relatives:

Cleanthes:     A man may live a bawd, and be an honest man.  
                           Menallo:       Yes, and a wise man too, ‘tis a vertuous calling.

Camillo: To his own wife especially, or to his sister,

The neerer his own bloode, still the honestest;

There want such honest men, would we had more of 'em (1.2.4-8)

Ghose's characterisation of the provoking of laughter in the early modern court as 'a contest of one-upmanship, where one sneering remark gives way to the next' seems particularly relevant to this exchange (Ghose, 2008: 1). Sorano encouraged the King's cruelty with the justification that it would make his subjects afraid and respectful of his power. The courtiers acknowledge the injustice of Frederick's proclamations, but rather than lamenting the state of the country they jest about it. They mock the bawdiness of their contemporaries and when discussing the cruel conditions of Valerio's marriage, they in turn discuss what month would be best to be married in (2.1.28-39). The courtiers possess an aloofness that shields them from despair or corruption and lessens Frederick's power over them. Like Simonides and Asotus, Frederick loses respect and authority by making himself appear ridiculous to others. Frederick's punishment of Evanthe and Valerio is cruel and unjust, but it is also ridiculous and its pettiness has made Frederick look ridiculous. Cicero argued that the worst crimes should not be joked about because great crime is attacked 'with more forcible weapons than ridicule' (Cicero, 2014: 35532). This may be true in a society with just laws and effective courts but in a tyrannical regime ridicule can be used to great effect in undermining the power of a tyrant. The three noble courtiers form a clear faction in the court of Naples; they are frequently praised as honest but they do not openly challenge the King's integrity in the way that Evanthe, or occasionally Tony do. Instead they use humour as a buffer between themselves and their surroundings. They do not seek the King's removal, but show an eagerness to take up arms when word of Alphonso's recovery reaches them (5.3.2).







Before we have strength enough to assure your life,

What will become of you? (5.1.48-51, 54-58)

Frederick's tyranny is not sufficient reason to overthrow him. Action against him is only taken when he can be replaced with a prince with a superior claim, a prince who not only has popular support but has seemingly recovered from an assassination attempt through a genuine miracle. Moreover, Alphonso displays a willingness to receive and listen to counsel rather than just seeking approval from a favourite like his brother. Alphonso does very little speaking in this scene, instead he listens and replies simply 'I am counsel'd; ye are faithful (5.1.68).

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Coleridge's portrait of Beaumont and Fletcher as 'servile royalists' has rightly been challenged by more recent scholarship (Finkelpearl, 1990: 5). Fletcher's persistent interest in tyranny and resistance to it certainly complicates the assertion that he was a mere propagandist. *A Wife for a Month* is the culmination of all of Fletcher's skills as a subtle political dramatist. The honest characters of *A Wife for a Month* far outnumber the corrupt ones; widespread corruption is often referred to by the courtiers but it is portrayed almost exclusively through a king and his favourite. *A Wife for a Month* is a subtle work, and this makes its chronological closeness to *Chess* all the more jarring.

## 6 Final Conclusions

In the early modern period personal relationships were highly politicised and the family was not a private sphere but rather ‘the individual derived a sense of self largely from external matrices, among which the family and its place in society was paramount. The family was understood as part of a larger world, the smallest social unit, the building block of society, not somehow antisocial or a retreat’ (Goldberg, 1983: 86). With the exception of *A Game at Chess*, all of the plays studied in this thesis revolve around the household and its relationships, both between relatives and employers and employees. These relationships are used to portray the complex power structures in Jacobean society and reflect a variety of attitudes towards these power structures. Exploring matters of state through domestic allegory did not, however, give playwrights carte blanche to contradict the King’s authority or directly insult living kings and their courtiers. The home as a microcosm for the state was a well-known device and would not have been lost on the audience or the censor. As long as order was seen to be restored playwrights did have breathing space to explore the complexities of Jacobean politics. The rise of the tragi-comedy also allowed playwrights to deal with controversial topics and moral complexities because the conventional happy ending could offer the play a veneer of frivolity. Courtiers can conspire to kill their fathers, slaves can revolt, and tyrants can rage with the understanding that order is always restored, and good always triumphs.

The three plays discussed at length all broadly focus on relationships between people of different status and explore how breakdowns in these relationships can impact society at large.. *The Old Law* specifically condemns ‘unmanly’ behaviour and encourages cooperation between different generations rather than competition. The concerns of the play reflect criticisms of James’ conduct and his court but Middleton avoided direct criticism by framing the Duke as an

ideal paternal Prince. *The Bondman* focuses on tensions between the classes, specifically in regards to the domestic sphere where the classes exist in close quarters. Despite briefly engaging with the politically charged topic of war with Spain, Massinger's focus is not on the international but the domestic. Finally, *A Wife for a Month* is perhaps the least overtly political play discussed in this thesis and this is a testament to Fletcher's subtle and nuanced depiction of relationships between a king and his subjects. The play is concerned with tyranny and peopled almost exclusively with courtiers but remains intimately focused on the effects of tyranny on individuals and their responses to that tyranny.

The plays studied in this thesis often rail against corrupt courtiers and indulgent kings with few or no repercussions. The mere presence of political commentary in a play was not enough to have it suppressed. However even an insult alone would not guarantee censorship since the target had to choose to recognise the insult. It was rare for a play to be censored simply because it could be interpreted as political in nature. Rather censorship was likely to occur only when no other interpretation was possible. Censoring any broad criticism of corrupt or frivolous Kings and courtiers could be seen to admit, however indirectly, 'an awareness of the shortcomings of the King and of his social and courtly milieu' (Clare, 1999: 175). In addition, playwrights such as Fletcher and Middleton made great use of comedy to lampoon social ills without seeming insolent. They also took advantage of the developing genre of tragicomedy to ask difficult questions in their works without having to provide difficult answers. The nuanced commentary in these plays support Patterson's conception of 'a highly sophisticated system of oblique communication, or unwritten rules whereby writers could communicate with readers or audiences [...] without producing a direct confrontation' (Patterson, 1984: 45). Rather than being erased, political criticism evolved and adapted to the changing political climate.

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