

0608196

EN301 Shakespeare and Selected Dramatists of His Time

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‘So to glister and shine before their people’ (*Basilicon Doron*, 1603 text).

Discuss the theatricality of power on the Jacobean stage.

The medieval structures of class and graded hierarchy, a legacy of the former feudal state, remain ingrained in the institutions and populace of the Early Modern period. As well as established chains of command in the Church, state and military, this also includes the core division of masters and their apprentices, who will eventually qualify as masters themselves (Thomas Whitfield Baldwin 2-3). A master can be defined as one who has authority, direction or control over the action of others; the playwrights, kings and fictional rulers discussed in this essay are all ‘masters’ in this sense. However, on the Jacobean stage this fixed classification often comes into conflict with an alternative description: ‘A person who is stronger than or who overcomes another’ (‘Master’, n¹.I.4 *OED*). This meaning, which can be traced back to the Thirteenth Century, introduces activity, competition and indeterminacy into the concept of mastery. Similarly, the act of service is concerned with activity, not merely a fixed position or title, which allows for dynamic characterisation. This essay will consider presentations, corruptions and inversions of mastery on the Jacobean stage, as well as how this relates to elements of performance in James I’s own attempts to rule his subjects.

The first work considered is William Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-07), in order to establish the Egyptian Queen as a model of staged power. The main body of the essay then looks at two duke-in-disguise plays, Thomas Middleton’s *The Phoenix* (c.1603) and Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* (1604), both of which were likely performed at Court in 1604. They engage in a

discourse of kingship and its theatricality, echoing James' own maxims of good rule as laid out in *Basilicon Doron* (1599). Finally, some time is spent on Middleton's *The Changeling*, composed in the early 1620s, which presents another subversion of hierarchy through performance. The essay's central narrative is the common concern of all these works with the theatricality of mastery, as well as the vulnerability of hierarchical systems to 'shows of service'¹.

According to Louis Montrose, there was a clear relationship between spectacle and power in the Elizabethan context (60), one example being the role of performance in Essex's notorious rebellion of 1601 (66-67)². This demonstrates the power of theatrical performance to challenge mastery in certain contextual situations. It is also crucial, says Gerald Eades Bentley, to remember Shakespeare's lack of interest in readers (23-24)³. Because of this, the spectacle on the stage is often the most important manifestation of power. It is through visual emblems and stage language that a play communicates relationships of command to its spectators. In Shakespeare's oeuvre, Cleopatra is one of the clearest examples of a character performing mastery as a spectacle of power.

This culminates in Cleopatra's suicide, which can be seen as a carefully staged performance. The Egyptian Queen bids her attendant Iras to 'Give me my robe, put on my crown' in preparation for her 'noble act' (5.2.316-321). She then arranges her women around the monument (which will also become *her* memorial) to complete the masterful stage spectacle. Margaret Lamb judges this costume and positioning as 'richly emblematic, evincing a hierarchical significance in her death' (31); a very Elizabethan understanding of 'the

¹ This phrase is taken from Shakespeare's *Othello*, 1.1.53. In this speech, Iago, a model of insubordination and puppetry, describes his theatrical rather than dutiful performance of service.

² In 1601 Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, attempted to seize control of the throne from Elizabeth I. A performance of a play at the Globe Theatre, commonly assumed to be *Richard II*, was commissioned by his fellow conspirators in preparation for the rebellion. For further discussion, see Montrose p.66-67.

³ Bentley, p.23-24, describes Shakespeare as 'essentially a man of the theatre, not a man of the study', an 'actor-dramatist' who was occupied with the stage rather than with his readers.

theatricality of power'⁴. Furthermore, it forcibly casts Octavius Caesar in the role of spectator, arriving, as Dolabella puts it, 'To see performed the dreaded act' (5.2.375). The double significance of 'act' in both of these extracts is crucial, emphasising the fictional Cleopatra's role as an actress within her own history. In Mark Rose's terms, this is the 'theatrical choice' of her final scene (11). It is clear that she fails to reduce Octavius to Antony's level of dotage; he meets her 'My master, and my lord!' with the steely response 'Not so. Adieu' (5.2.222-23). With this, he refuses to be mastered by Cleopatra's deceptive 'shows of service', for her lord is in fact her dotard. Nevertheless, the final performance of the play is unquestionably her scene. It is also one of great dramatic transparency, which reveals the disparity between her public image and its private construction⁵.

Shakespeare extends this metatheatricality to comment on the literal stage spectacle created through her performance. Just as Cleopatra refuses to become an 'Egyptian puppet' (5.2.247) in Octavius's performance of his own Roman mastery, so she disdains having 'Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I'th' posture of a whore' (5.2.260-61). This latter quotation ironically refers to the very boy actor performing these lines, exposing the shortcomings of theatrical reproduction. However, in the masterful image that she presents before Octavius she emblematically unites her roles as mother, wife and queen⁶. She becomes an immortal female heroine who, through staging her own death, avoids debasement and service in 'th'imperious show' (4.15.27) of Caesar's tawdry parade.

Despite the emblematic power on the Jacobean stage, the importance of being an *audience* should not be forgotten. It is often through words that the full power of the imaginative spectacle is created. For instance, Cleopatra's mastery relies

⁴ Lamb, p.34, goes on to propose that some may have found Cleopatra's final exit reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth's funeral procession through London in 1603. However, this would have arguably been controversial, given that the new king saw himself as an Augustan figure.

⁵ Shakespeare explores this further in his other Roman plays. For example, in *Coriolanus* (1608) the great soldier is shamefully reluctant to engage in public performance and spectacle: 'It is a part that I shall blush in acting' (2.3.140).

⁶ These three roles are signified by her suckling of the asps (5.2.340), her joint ceremony of death with Antony and her regal attire respectively.

heavily upon an account by Enobarbus (2.2.222-76)⁷. Poetically adapted from Thomas North's 1597 translation of Plutarch's *Lives*⁸, this creation of her character becomes more interesting through Enobarbus' frequent association with Shakespeare. As Jonathan Bate proposes in his introduction to the play, Enobarbus, greatly enlarged from the source text, could be seen as Shakespeare's most 'considered self-portrait' (2160). In his plot function, he legitimises Shakespeare's lengthy poetic descriptions, as well as mediating the perceptions of the audience. Thus, in another metatheatrical element, both the playwright and the character simultaneously construct the image that she must master. Cleopatra must serve both her historical reputation and the theatrical function assigned to her by Shakespeare. The genius resides in the self-consciousness and seeming autonomy with which this is achieved.

The final scene is the culmination of Cleopatra 'becoming herself' throughout the play, of mastering her own historical name and reputation. (This is something that Antony arguably fails to do with his own bungled death: 'I have done my work ill, friends: O, make an end / Of what I have begun' (4.14.123-24)). Through her autonomous death, she fulfills Enobarbus' early claim that 'Age cannot wither her' (2.3.271) by mastering her immortal self. In this way, says Rose, the audience are the witnesses of life becoming history (13). They are, like Octavius, spectators of the spectacle that she produces, a powerful *gestus* that illuminates her own status rather than making Caesar's crown shine more brightly.

Cleopatra's performance supports Stephen Greenblatt's claim that 'kingship always involves fictions, theatricalism, and the mystification of power' (167). Comparable ideas were engaged with around James' 1603 coronation, as can be

⁷ It was not until Victorian productions that directors sought to astonish the public and accurately present the historical scene through spectacular effects. During this period, elaborate stage-spectacle was crucial for commercial success. This is discussed by Lamb, p.73-77, who labels Isabella Glyn's 1867 revival of *Cleopatra*, which reused expensive 'armor and regalia' from Paris, as 'unabashedly spectacular'.

⁸ Plutarch's work, *Lives of the Most Noble Grecians and Romanes*, was composed in Greece during the first century AD.

seen in the sudden fashion for duke-in-disguise plays⁹. Shakespeare had already offered models of inadequate kingship, such as King John and King Henry VI, in his earlier history plays, but these had always upheld the monarchy as inherited by Elizabeth (Arthur F Kinney 138-39). Some flattery is unavoidable in Jacobean plays such as *The Phoenix* and *Measure for Measure*, due to the reliance of performing companies upon the King's goodwill¹⁰. Yet it is also relevant that James' political treatise, *Basilicon Doron*, was the most discussed book of 1603 (J W Lever 22). Roslyn Lander Knutson contends that Shakespeare was consistent in his choice of crowd-pleasing subjects and dramatic formulas (48). Thus, to some extent, such plays can be seen as attempts to appeal to the companies' dual interests of Court patronage and public appeal. However, they are also comments on the principles of kingship, as well as how this ultimate mastery can be achieved through theatricality, disguise and performance¹¹.

Shakespeare's sensitivity to such matters emerges in *I Henry IV* (1596-97), where Hal's father reproaches him for being 'So common-hackney'd in the eyes of men' (3.2.40). This links to the dangers of demystifying kingship, a peril appreciated by Sir Henry Wotton¹² (Montrose 84). Essentially, Hal has allowed himself to become too mortal in the eyes of the common people, embodied by Falstaff, and must regain the allure of obscurity before becoming the monarch-god. Similarly, the rulers in both of these plays must disguise themselves, allowing them to reassert their authority over the realm when they return from obscurity. As Shakespeare's Duke puts it: 'I'll privily away. I love the people, / But do not like to stage me to their eyes' (1.1.72-73). This statement can be understood ironically, as his temporary withdrawal is in preparation for the greater staging of his authority in Act Five. It all forms part of 'the whole

⁹ John Bradbury Brooks lists other Jacobean examples of the form as Marston's *The Malcontent* (c.1603) and *The Fawn* (1604), Sharpham's *The Fleire* (1606), and Day's *Law Tricks* (1604) and *Humour Out of Breath* (1607-8).

¹⁰ It is worth considering the literal service that actors owed to their patrons. According to Baldwin, they became royal servants, 'ranking as grooms of their chamber' (6). Thus, the King's Men who performed this play at Court were technically servants of James, introducing another interesting frame of mastery into the production.

¹¹ Though both plays are displaced onto a foreign Italian environment, they clearly engage with the political climate of early Jacobean London. They are probably located in this way because the new fashionable genre of the tragicomedy was an Italian import.

¹² Sir Henry Wotton was James I's ambassador to Venice.

theatrical apparatus of royal power' identified by Greenblatt (167). Within this structure, Angelo serves as a foil for the deferred unmasking of true authority: '[we have] Lent him our terror, dressed him with our love' (1.1.19). He *acts* authority, just as the Duke performs divine rule, whilst offsetting the Duke's own theatrical return to power.

Amidst the constant attempts to curry favour with the future heir, examined by Nicholas Tyacke (22), it would have become necessary for James to learn how to dissemble. Tyacke also discusses James' reformist credentials (40-43)¹³, which match the sense of 'clearing house' throughout the duke-in-disguise plays. Indeed, James concedes that his earlier rule was too lenient in *Basilicon Doron*, and there is no precedent in Shakespeare's sources to account for the Duke's similar statement (Lever 23): 'We have strict statutes and most biting laws, / . . . / Which for this fourteen years we have let slip' (1.4.20-22). In this situation, where the rod of authority 'becomes more mocked than feared' (1.4.28), the Duke delegates the reinforcement of justice to Angelo, whilst setting the stage for the benevolent ruler's return.

The structure of *The Phoenix* is, ostensibly, less complex. Lever associates it with a Jacobean theatre more sophisticated and satirical than its Elizabethan precursor, in which the trope of the disguised ruler becomes 'a flexible literary device' (21). Nevertheless, Middleton's ruler is sparsely characterised¹⁴, and is more clearly didactic than its Shakespearean counterpart. Dorothy M Farr commends Middleton's outstanding ability to effectually conceal the dramatist behind his work (6). However, David M Holmes reads Prince Phoenix as an uncharacteristic indulgence in judgement, in effect functioning as Middleton's personal spokesperson (24). In March 1604, after the February performance of *The Phoenix* at Court, Middleton was named as the part-author of *The*

¹³ According to Tyacke's essay, James was courted by Puritans with appeals to clear up the corruption of Church and State. This culminated in the production of the *1603 memorial*, which probably emanated from the Puritan remnants of Essex's faction. However, his reformist credentials were wearing thin by the first meeting of parliament in March 1604.

¹⁴ Brooks, p. 104, notes the Prince's weakness in being outwitted by a mere groom (1.4.15) and duped by Falso's mock-trial (3.1.228). However, these can be dismissed along with the naivety that he must overcome in order to fill the role of the monarch-god.

Magnificent Entertainment, a pamphlet celebrating the new king (Gary Taylor, 'Thomas Middleton: Lives and Afterlives' 41). As such, Lawrence Dawson and Ivo Kamps believe, his play is bound up with the optimism of this transition (91). The Prince's didactic judgement is often reminiscent of *Basilicon Doron* and the 'new phoenix' James I¹⁵, becoming essentially an abstraction of Jacobean Good Rule¹⁶.

Both playwright and protagonist become omniscient observers in an effort to gain 'a kingdom's better sight' (1.1.54). Their exploration of the Dukedom sheds light upon vice and corruption beneath the ordered surface. This is one aspect in which it differs from *Measure for Measure*. Shakespeare's Duke seeks to quell the emerging disorder of his own state, repairing his imperfect rule. In contrast, Prince Phoenix exposes underlying revolt before succeeding his ailing father, thus achieving godlike authority. On his 'travels' the Prince is accompanied by Fidelio, described by Brooks as Middleton's 'commentator on his commentator' (99). Yet, whilst he allows the concealed Duke's action to be 'witnessed', he also embodies an allegorical Faith¹⁷. Fidelio is Good Service, just as Prince Phoenix is Good Mastery.

In keeping with this allegory, Holmes identifies a 'reverence for an ideal law' in *The Phoenix* (128), creating a conflict between the moral justice of the author-god and the verbose, corrupt legal justice evinced by Tangle and Falso¹⁸. The Prince laments the debasement of law among men at length: 'How has abuse deform'd thee to all eyes' (1.4.198). In contrast, Tangle is a 'villainous law-

¹⁵ As Brooks points out, p.19-20, James I was often referred to as the 'new phoenix', who rose from the ashes of Elizabeth's forty-five year reign. This is an identical situation to that of Prince Phoenix, whose father's reign has been of equal length (see 1.1.6). It can also be linked to the idea of Christ as the resurrected servant, an idea that Brooks expands upon on p.91.

¹⁶ This can be related back to Elizabethan variations of the morality play, one of which, George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), is a direct source of *Measure for Measure*.

¹⁷ This allegorical characterisation is typical of Elizabethan literature, stemming from morality plays and didactic works like Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590). It is just this relationship of loyal service that Shakespeare is soon to abuse in the character of Iago.

¹⁸ Part of Middleton's satirical treatment of the law can be attributed to events from his own youth. As Taylor discusses on p.30-31 of his article, 'Lives and Afterlives', his mother's remarriage in 1586 led to a lengthy legal battle. Anne Middleton sought to protect her children's inheritance from the playwright's stepfather, Thomas Harvey, and though she outwitted her new husband this led to a dysfunctional marriage.

worm' (1.4.43), and Falso a crooked Justice of the Peace who seeks to seduce his recently orphaned niece. As their names suggest, they represent a corrupt, false and fallen law. Falso's preparation for the mock-trial, in which he bids his men to 'bring hither a great chair and a little table' (3.1.41-42), is comparable to Cleopatra's preparation for her death scene. Both are concerned with presenting a spectacle of authority in order to master a spectator, in this case Prince Phoenix. The Prince also contractually 'witnesses' The Captain's attempt to sell his wife, Fidelio's mother, playing upon the term in both its moral and legal sense¹⁹. Falso, like Shakespeare's deputised ruler Angelo, can be seen as an example of the Corrupt Magistrate, a structural foil of bad justice which is later corrected. The problem is, with no *hamartia*, it is difficult to see beyond the Prince's sententious plot function. Nevertheless, Middleton skilfully portrays the Duke's manipulation of performance, a 'piercing art' (5.1.180)²⁰ through which he masters his subjects.

Like Prince Phoenix, there is a critically established resemblance between Shakespeare's Duke and King James²¹. Unlike his pageant-loving predecessor Elizabeth, James was not fond of public appearances. Nor did he habitually disguise himself in order to wander freely amongst his people, which may stem from his grandfather James V of Scotland (Alexander Leggatt 358). Rather, he provided a literary picture of himself in *Basilicon Doron* (Bennett 80-82), which became a partial model for Shakespeare's Duke²². First published in Edinburgh in 1599, this treatise was widely in London circulation after its re-issue. Bennett draws attention to James's public address, added to the 1603 edition of this 'highly idealised, official portrait'. This stated that it 'must be taken of all men, for the true image of my very mind, and forme of the rule, which I have

¹⁹ Dawson and Kamps, p.92, invoke the established notion that The Captain may be based upon Middleton's stepfather, Thomas Harvery, another seafaring man who sought financial gain through marriage.

²⁰ This prefigures by a number of years the comparable 'art' of Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611).

²¹ According to Lever, p.22, the modelling of the Duke upon James was first suggested by Alexander Chalmers. Josephine Waters Bennett, p.79, cites a number of specific idiosyncrasies.

²² Some critics treat *Basilicon Doron* as a direct source of *Measure for Measure*. This view is championed by the German scholar Louis Albrecht, who in 1914 identified the Duke as an idealised homage to the King. Ernest Schanzer, p. 121, analyses this debate at greater length.

prescribed to my selfe and mine' (qtd. Bennett 85). James carefully managed his public reputation in an effort to appear as 'a philosopher-king' (Lever 22), a model of Christian Humanism much like the rulers in these two plays. His publication can be seen as his own brand of performance, presenting an imaginative spectacle through which to prepare England for his impending rule. This suggests that, despite his dislike of public pageantry, he was highly aware of the need to 'perform' his authority in order to master the nation. However, despite this influence, it would be ungenerous to reduce *Measure for Measure* to mere sycophancy²³. Rather than being another flattering abstraction of Good Rule, echoing the 'Christ-like' James, Shakespeare's Duke can be seen as a comment upon this literary, or theatrical, aspect of mastery.

Lever gives a number of other examples of *coup de theatre* utilised by James in his attempt to demonstrate exemplary justice (23-24). One he does not mention, however, is the Court Masque. This evolved later on in James' reign, stemming from the tradition of Elizabethan pageantry. Nevertheless, it shares some common concerns with the duke-in-disguise plays, not least the theatricality of kingship²⁴. Though James never participated in the masques, in his role as privileged spectator he was arguably the centrepiece of the occasions. As Martin Butler observes, 'he alone can see the action as it is meant to be seen, and it is always implicitly if not overtly centred upon him' (22). In this way, James featured not only as the key spectator, but also as a spectacle for the other courtiers. Accordingly, David Lindley notes that it was the King's arrival, rather than the appearance of the actors on the stage, that marked the start of the masque (136). Though lacking the level of fluidity between actors and courtiers, the same is presumably true of much Court theatre. Thus, at the first performance of the duke-in-disguise plays, James may have been both spectator and spectacle;

²³ Commendatory verses on poetry dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton and an early patron of Shakespeare's, suggest that he would not be above such conventional appeal to patronage, especially where the monarch and company's master is concerned.

²⁴ The influence of Masque culture appears more explicitly in *The Tempest*, which is similarly concerned with systems and processes of mastery. Here, the conspiratorial sub-plot of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo to overthrow the Duke can be seen as another use of the anti-masque structure. Prospero also presents the newly betrothed Ferdinand and Miranda with a wedding-masque (4.1).

whilst viewing the theatricality of mastery on the stage, he performed the 'true' spectacle of kingship.

This notion of monarch as spectacle becomes more relevant with the introduction of the anti-masque, first deployed by Ben Jonson in *The Masque of Queens* (1609). Created at Queen Anna's request to act as 'a foil or false masque' (12) for her own performance, Hugh Craig claims the anti-masque as 'a dark ground to make the glitter of the masque jewel all the brighter'. Similarly, Stephen Orgel infers that its sudden dispersal implies the imaginary nature of its evil (Craig 182). Here a comparison can be made with *Measure for Measure*, in which the imaginary power of Angelo acts as a foil for the 'real' authority of the Duke. As Portia tells Nerissa in *3 Henry VI*, 'A substitute shines brightly as a king / Until a king be by' (5.1.93-94). Similarly, though Claudio initially sees Angelo as the embodiment of 'the demigod Authority' (1.3.5), his tawdriness is exposed when his master returns. Thus, the Duke uses Angelo to intensify the brilliance of his own 'divine' kingship, and dispels the evil of his tragic plot by imposing a comic resolution. By extension, James may also have enhanced his 'real' authority by negotiating with the performed power on the stage.

The problem with this structure of deputising (then deposing) authority is that it implies a greater power beyond the Duke. With this comes the potential subversion of mastery in the play. On one level, as Bennett suggests, Angelo and Isabella represent a potentially fallen mankind, rectified by the godlike Duke (126). However, argue Dawson and Kamps, this necessary authority in *The Phoenix* becomes fearful in *Measure for Measure* (92). Shakespeare's focus shifts to the *theatrical* performance of this authority, in accordance with the divinely-ordained kingship evinced in *Basilicon Doron*. This *re*-presentation is not one of original power. Rather, Shakespeare's Duke seeks to perform the structure of rectification deployed by Middleton in the *Good Justice of Prince Phoenix*. In doing so, he arguably comes into conflict with the very authority that he 'embodies'.

Like Cleopatra's self-staging of her suicide, Bennett identifies Act Five as 'the Duke's play' (127)²⁵; he becomes the actor-playwright of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The Duke 'prepares the stage' for this performance throughout the second half of the play, rehearsing those characters, such as Friar Peter and the Provost, who know 'our purpose and our plot' (4.5.1-10). Angelo is not blind to the artificiality of these proceedings, sensing that the women are 'But instruments of some more mightier member' (5.1.258), but is caught in a theatrical snare. The Duke and Friar Peter identify the Friar, the Duke's other 'character', as the one who has 'set them on' (5.1.270-73), allowing them to engineer the eventual unmasking. It is vital that in authoring this act, the Duke is not merely exercising his power; it is also the means through which he regains it. Thus, Lucio's removal of his Friar's outfit is not just an unmasking, but also a *re*-masking of 'the Duke', through which he once more dons the robes of authority. As 'the Friar', the Duke declares his role as 'a looker-on here in Vienna' (5.1.333). In being revealed as 'the Duke', he makes a theatrical move from spectator to spectacle. However, the actual transition occurs much earlier in the play, when he becomes a producer of his own comedy rather than a spectator of Angelo's tragedy²⁶. Through such manipulation and performance, Shakespeare seems to be satirising the comic restoration of order through which the Duke masters his subjects.

Despite Richard Helgerson's claim that Shakespeare often avoids the problematic of subjecthood (239), its ambiguous treatment in *Measure for Measure* allows for another subversion of mastery. Although Lucio performs the unmasking of the Duke in Act Five, he is an uncooperative subject throughout the play. Through skilful puppetry, the Duke steers his refusal to be mastered towards the revelation. However, a sense of natural revolt remains. Pompey illustrates this by suggesting to Escalus that he must 'geld and splay all the youth

²⁵ Bennett, p. 131-32, summarises the elements of 'the regular, five-act structure of the play-within-a-play'. This provides a useful illustration of how the Duke orders the action of the other characters.

²⁶ This shift can be located at the beginning of Act Three, when he begins to engineer the resolution of Isabella's plot. This follows his adoption of the robes of divine authority to hear Claudio's confession, where his egoism is evident from his didactic and subordinating judgements: 'Thou art' (3.1.5-41).

of the city' (2.1.183) to restore order and cleanse it of debauchery. This is reminiscent of The Captain's insincere remorse in *The Phoenix* (2.2.310), which seems to suggest inevitable disobedience. Lever identifies Lucio as another foil for the Duke (25), a figure of disorder amidst his attempts to order the realm. In mastering this masterless underworld, the success of Shakespeare's Duke seems limited. It could be argued that he occupies the judicial middle-ground, a Christian humanism between Angelo's hypocritical strict justice and the nihilistic Lucio²⁷. However, their disobedience is more interesting from a theatrical perspective. In the theatre of the Renaissance, the clown part was often not written into the play (Baldwin 177), giving the individual actor the freedom to manipulate the words and selves of the other characters. As such, these subversive fools are unscripted in the 'playtext' of the Duke, only realising their parts through performance.

Subjecthood is also addressed through the Duke's mastering of Isabella. Although his theatrical innovations, like casting Mariana in the bedroom scene, enable her to escape the tragic plot of Angelo, she is no less constricted by the comic plot of the Duke. Caught between competing authorities, she is compelled to submit her chastity to male power. In re-assuming the office of mastery he had deputised to Angelo, the Duke also assumes the sexual right to master Isabella. This culminates in his unanswered proposal of marriage (5.1.517), potentially indicating either a silent submission to his will or speechless indignation. This ambiguous reaction can only be manifested in the performance text. In order to make such a proposal, the Duke assumes pretence in Isabella's chastity akin to Angelo's superficial Puritanism. In casting her as his wife in the final act, he either suggests her hypocrisy or exposes his own. Perhaps, as Pompey has indicated, neither Angelo nor the Duke can suppress their physical longings.

If Shakespeare does intend to stress the Duke's mortality, his embodiment of heavenly rule is further eroded. Schanzer identifies that Isabella adheres to 'a legalistic conception of divine justice' (105), as can be seen in her merciful

²⁷ Schanzer, p.114, connects the Duke's failure to fully enforce the law to the Aristotelian principle of the golden mean, a common attribute of the good ruler in Renaissance literature.

defence of Angelo against the Duke's civil judgement. This suggests another level of authority superior to the Duke's. Thus, rather than manifesting divinity in his role as author-god, he is in direct conflict with scripture, the 'script' by which Isabella regulates her 'action'. Isabella's status as a novice was another of Shakespeare's additions to his source material, and it serves to emphasise the Duke's competition *against* God for the mastery of Isabella. As a future nun, she will be figuratively 'married to God'. Thus, the Duke's mastery forces her into a double engagement, inciting the comic trope of a nunnery as a whorehouse. Shakespeare surrounds the final revelation of authority with an ambiguous silence, which invites the audience to speculate upon the true power behind the Duke's performance. This is a play that makes notions of exemplary justice problematic. After multiple levels of disguise, manipulation and subversion, it is difficult for the audience to accept the Duke as a simple abstraction of Good Rule.

The ambiguity of *Measure for Measure* may indicate a dual appeal to two competing modes of theatrical production, what Montrose calls 'patron-based' and 'market-based' considerations (75). Montrose identifies the theatre as the locus where royal and civic interests intersect (56), and the performance of this play both in Court and on the public stage makes it a prime example of such duality. Thus, Shakespeare must dwell upon questions of kingship that will appeal to King James, whilst also allowing the potential for subversion and fallibility. The duke-in-disguise plays explore the need for rulers to be 'hypocrites'²⁸ in order to master the dissemblers of their kingdom. W. W. Lawrence regards Shakespeare's Duke as a minor and artificial figure, whose chief importance is a plot device (Bennett 79). However, when one considers the potential criticism of mastery, the Duke is revealed as the embodiment of hypocrisy. He is both the biggest performer and the only character that is not 'measured'²⁹, merely projecting his judgement onto others. His only *anagnorisis*

²⁸ Etymologically, the term hypocrite originally meant 'an actor on the stage', a pretender or dissembler. Further specifics are available in the *OED* entry for 'hypocrite'.

²⁹ As Bate discusses in his introduction to the play, p.155, this title comes from the opening chapters of Saint Matthew's gospel, chapter seven. This would have been readily recognised by Shakespeare's audience:

involves the exchange of one character for another. This arguably makes the Duke the focal point in the core discourse of self-judgement.

The internal discursive frames that separate the Duke from both the author and his other characters demonstrate not only that Shakespeare's ruler is the better, or at least more committed, actor, but also re-emphasises his mastery *through* performance, not merely in exposing the performances of others. Holmes contrasts Shakespeare's enigmatic characterisation with the 'puppet-like quality' of Prince Phoenix (27); this didactic proximity robs Middleton's play of any intrigue³⁰. Bennett also raises the possibility that Shakespeare himself may have played the part of the Duke, discussing the highly comic implications (135-37). This irony, when compared with *The Phoenix*, once more highlights the greater sophistication of *Measure for Measure*. Both feature an author-god character that can be strongly aligned with the playwrights themselves. Yet whereas Middleton's is an uncomfortably didactic mouthpiece, Shakespeare's is metatheatrically involved in the struggle to orient his own characters, or subjects, away from Angelo's tragedy and towards a comic resolution. The potential subversions of this artificial conclusion add a further level of self-consciousness to its mastery.

Yet it does not follow from this that Shakespeare is the more sophisticated of the two playwrights. As Taylor notes in 'Lives and Afterlives', *The Phoenix* is Middleton's first surviving play and one of the earliest English tragicomedies (55). Though the theatre industry had no royal charter or official structure, Taylor claims that Middleton was initiated into the 'fraternity of wit' in 1602 (37). He also discusses, in his *ODNB* article, that although Middleton was writing for Shakespeare's chief rivals, the Admiral's Men, when the duke-in-disguise plays were composed, by the middle of the decade he was employed by the King's Men. Furthermore, after Shakespeare's death in 1616, Middleton was trusted

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

³⁰ Though the dramatic irony of Proditor prepping 'Phoenix' the assassin to kill his own father is successful (4.1.1-27), the Prince evinces a knowing quality throughout his masked role in Act 5.

with the adaptation of his work, including alterations to the playtext of *Measure for Measure* in 1621³¹. Amongst other things, he enlarged the subversive role of Lucio, thus bringing his own mature skill to bear upon its first publication in the 1623 Folio.

Not only is one of the play's clearest subversions of mastery due to Middleton's revisions, he also expands these ideas in his own work, *The Changeling*. This was composed shortly after his engagement with *Measure for Measure*, and both involve the substituted woman device, the terrible-choice plot structure, and the threat of sexual mastery through blackmail. Middleton's play presents a theatre of collaboration both through William Rowley's co-authorship³² and the conduct of its characters. Farr stresses the basic motifs of reversal and change (66). In addition to the final revelation of 'changes' (5.3.196-214), this is clearly manifested in the inversion and dissolution of social mastery, which moves from hierarchy towards chaotic flux. The discussion above reveals the instability of the early modern text, as well as how the playtext seeks to produce both a performance and the audience's attitude towards it (Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis 6). This becomes interesting in *The Changeling* due to the gaps between plotting and performance.

Middleton either seeks to subvert Shakespeare's plot, or suggests the essential similarity of Angelo and Isabella. *The Changeling* can be seen as a more gritty and realistic portrayal of how such a situation would resolve itself, given the likely absence of a disguised author-god; a corrupt underworld without the intervention of a benevolent ruler. Without this additional level of moral conscience, the action becomes subject to the malevolent direction of Deflores, a

³¹ Ironically, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's famous painting, 'Mariana', is based upon a Middleton passage from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. See Taylor, p.52, in 'Lives and Afterlives'.

³² Rowley was largely responsible for the madhouse sub-plot, which will not be the focus of this short discussion. For ease of reference, Middleton will be used as the named author.

domestic servant and hopeless lover of Beatrice-Joanna. Through his Iago-esque corruptions of service, he entangles and distorts both power relations and genre³³.

Beatrice-Joanna and Deflores have competing 'scripts', playtexts which they struggle to realise through performance. These alternative designs are indicated by double asides that run throughout their early dialogue. It is crucial that, despite his 'hard fate' of servitude, Deflores 'tumbled into th'world a gentleman' (2.1.48-49). In hiring him to kill her unwanted fiancée, Beatrice-Joanna mis-casts him as a 'journeyman', who, says Baldwin, can be hired for their skills but never become a 'master' in any true sense (3). She naively believes that she can be rid 'Of two inveterate loathings at one time' (2.2.145). In the central scene, where their expectations collide, he clearly rebuts this assumption: 'Do you place me in the rank of verminous fellows, / To destroy things for wages' (3.4.63-64). He then asserts that he 'could ha' hired / A journeyman in murder at this rate' (3.4.67-68). Subsequently, terms like 'service', 'salary', 'fee' and 'payment' teeter between their economic and sexual significations until, through blackmail, Deflores claims Beatrice-Joanna's honour as his price. It is interesting that Taylor, in 'Lives and Afterlives', describes playwrights and freelance actors as 'journeymen', whose services were hired by the companies of actor-shareholders (37)³⁴. This reinforces the sense of competing 'scripts' in *The Changeling*. Though Beatrice-Joanna believes herself in control of her journeyman-actor, Deflores' performance subverts her expectations. Thus, he becomes the author and proprietor of her sexuality (Peter F Morrison 229), and the master of the stage.

This overpowering moves the play towards a destabilisation of fixed hierarchical systems. Middleton continues the problematic notions of nobility from his city comedies³⁵ and, like Iago, Deflores seems 'not what he is'; he is the Venetian's

³³ According to Morrison, p.223, it was first entered into the *Stationer's Register* as a comedy. However, *The Changeling* is not just dubious but *indeterminate* in its genre, not least because of its dual authorship.

³⁴ Shakespeare, as effectively an in-house dramatist for the King's Men, was an exception to the general structure of a playwright's career.

³⁵ This can also be traced back to *The Phoenix*, where the Knight is 'one of King James's knights by purchase'. According to Holmes, p.26, this is a type frequently attacked by Middleton.

counterpart, ‘honest Deflores’ (4.2.37)³⁶. This destroys the notions of honest service, embodied by Fidelio in *The Phoenix*, upon which systems of mastery rely. Beatrice-Joanna’s failure may identify mastery as a specifically male position, as its counterpart ‘mistress’ would suggest. Indeed, Morrison describes her as the ‘sad inheritress’ of a smug, masculine social structure (227). This is reinforced both by Alsemero’s chastity kit, and the male economy of exchange that runs throughout Middleton’s work. However, Shakespeare’s Cleopatra has previously conflated this dichotomy, becoming both Antony’s master and mistress. The distinction is perhaps the need for performance, a wit for dissemblance in which Beatrice-Joanna is fatally lacking. Thus, Deflores is able to master her because he *performs* the part of the journeyman, before revealing his true motives of mastery.

Through the murder of Alonzo, Beatrice-Joanna unwittingly binds herself to both the deed and her plotting partner. Deflores, on the other hand, is wise to this consequence, recognising that she is as ‘guilty’ and in as ‘deep’ as he (3.4.82-83). He shows this by producing Alonzo’s ringed and severed finger (3.4.28), which signifies their inextricable union, as well as her sexual penetration. She is ‘undone’ by her act, as by losing her honour she transgresses the stipulated female roles of maid, wife or widow. Only in collaboration with Deflores does Beatrice-Joanna understand the theatricality of mastery, and comes to love him for this ‘service’ (5.1.72). Most notable is the casting of Diaphanta on her wedding night, in which she is once more undone by the betrayal of her ‘actress’. Like Othello with Iago, and then Iago with Emilia, the master is undone by bad service and the corruption of a hierarchy upon which they rely. Beatrice-Joanna repeatedly falls through the gaps between plotting and performance, leading to her inglorious end. In the closet with Deflores (5.3.139-143), her penetration by both phallus and dagger reasserts his mastery of her person, whilst playing upon the dual sense of the female ‘wound’. This contrasts markedly with Cleopatra’s enduring spectacle of power, emphasising the banality of her failed performance.

³⁶ See *Othello* 1.1.67, ‘I am not what I am’, and the frequent references to ‘honest Iago’ throughout the play.

The play then closes with an ironic ‘unmasking’ scene, which echoes *Measure for Measure* in its satirical treatment of this comic structure.

Through the indeterminacy of its genre, *The Changeling* exhibits a theatre of instability, rather than the hierarchical order required for either tragic or comic productions. As Samuel Johnson declares in his *Preface* of 1765, it is in this interplay of dramatic moods that Shakespeare’s genius also resides. But, as Bate discerns in *The Genius of Shakespeare*, it is one of community (185). It is for this reason that Middleton’s re-engagement with and re-creation of his ideas is of such interest. The characters of *The Changeling* move towards a theatre of collaboration, rather than the author-god function evinced by the duke-in-disguise plays. This embodies the active definition of mastery offered in the introduction, and complicates the meaning of service. Thus, the ambiguities of mastery, which Shakespeare achieves through the ironic treatment of his characters, are proliferated.

On a basic level, the duke-in-disguise plays dramatise James’ own staging of himself in *Basilicon Doron*. Yet they also explore theatricality as a mechanism of power. This rekindles the spirit of Elizabethan pageantry and prefigures the more explicit performance of kingship in the Court masques. *Antony and Cleopatra* provides a clear spectacle of mastery, a tragic heroine attempting to stage her own immortality. *Measure for Measure*, *The Changeling* and, to a lesser extent, *The Phoenix*, can be seen as a dissection of such performance, a look ‘behind the scenes’ at the theatricality of mastery. In this way, it also embodies a wider Jacobean exploration of Elizabethan pageantry. Amidst the individualistic chaos of tragicomedy, both mastery and service become concerned with activity rather than hierarchy. Through ambiguities and ironically comic resolutions, Shakespeare and Middleton suggest an essential instability. Simultaneously, they extend metatheatricality beyond the boundaries of the theatre, to explore the wider staging of power in society.

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