

history of the reception of the *Rose*” in his speculations about the gaps in the Middle English *Romaunt of the Rose* shows the value of such cross-cultural histories in exploring evidence that might otherwise be ignored due to the fragmentary status of the English text (194). The chapter culminates with a return to Dante to explore how Chaucer responds to both the *Commedia* and the *Rose* in his *House of Fame*, again showing that an English reception history is also necessarily one that spans languages and geographies.

Paradoxically, one of the book’s greatest strengths is also one of its greatest challenges. Knox explicitly refrains from organizing chapters around a single author. The *Pearl*-poet, for instance, emerges as both a courtly and a clerical reader with discussions of this poet’s works found in two separate chapters. I agree with Knox that any study of a poem with such a complex, reception history— a poem that is itself multi-authored and intertextual— ought to defy traditional classificatory schemes. But I also found myself occasionally unmoored in chapters that so quickly move from one text and author to the next. For instance, a tantalizing taste of what the manuscript copies of the *Rose* might mean for our understanding of Chaucer’s Retractions jumps quickly into a study of the centrality of the *Rose* in Gower’s self-presentation as a satirist in his *Vox Clamantis*.

However, to say that I wanted to know more about each of these threads (and others) in the book is a testament to Knox’s ability to advance such intriguing arguments and to ask such provocative questions about how we write about literary history and reception in the later Middle Ages.

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Thomas Middleton and the Plural Politics of Jacobean Drama. Mark Kaethler. Late Tudor and Stuart Drama. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2021. xiv + 224 pp. \$102.99.

Mark Kaethler’s first book, *Thomas Middleton and the Plural Politics of Jacobean Drama*, is part of De Gruyter’s list for a Late Tudor and Early Stuart Drama series focused on gender, performance, and material culture. If the work contains some flaws often attending an adaptation from a dissertation, it sustains a solid through line that synthesizes several kinds of criticism while making its own significant interventions in Middleton studies.

In four chapters focused on *The Phoenix*, *The Witch*, *The World Tossed at Tennis*, and *A Game at Chess*, this book traces turns in Middleton’s political drama within the contexts of James’s political theories and obsession with witchcraft, the sensational Overbury Trials, the Spanish Match, and the Thirty Years’ War. In one keynote,

Kaethler points to Middleton's Latin punning on his name via *Medius* and *Tonus* to avow a "middle tone" (21), reflecting a *via media* in Middleton's political drama. In the same way, this work treats Middleton's definition of *ironia* in *World Tossed at Tennis*—that is, looking "two ways at once"—as indicative of the playwright's approach. Kaethler likewise sees *parhësia*—that is, a rhetorical device in which criticism of a ruler is coupled with politic praise—as characteristic of Middleton's topical political drama. Kaethler thus interprets Middleton's drama written ostensibly for the monarch as inviting audiences (and readers) to join him in looking another way.

This approach enabled a plurality of interpretations among various audiences. Kaethler argues that Middleton's consequent "plural politics" aimed, first, to temper James's sense of himself as infallible rather than as a fallible human being subject to divine will and tethered by contractual relations to Parliament and the governed, and, second, to foster political awareness and responsible engagement among publics, thereby appealing to a burgeoning market for topicality in news, libels, and ballads disseminated alike in London bookshops and theaters.

The book is alternately commendable and (occasionally) lacking in seeking to build on recent critical developments. Notably, it recognizes the need to attend to the religious turn in early modern studies, including understandings of political theology, something Kaethler observes at the outset that "Middleton criticism . . . rarely broaches" (2). But if so, political theology should engage less cursorily with Middleton's Calvinism. Treated somewhat superficially, Calvinism is reductively interpreted as simply leading Middleton to see all human beings (including the monarch) as fallible, and positive outcomes as providential rather than results of monarchic agency. Yet attending to his political theology would seem to have warranted more consideration of Middleton's scathing satire of radical Puritan sects, especially given James's antipathy toward Puritans.

Elsewhere, in another welcome critical turn, by taking up early important work by Kim Hall on English constructions of Blackness and fairness in postcolonial terms of race, religion, and nationalism so operative in the period, Kaethler points to Middleton's dogged association of Spaniards with evil and lust via Blackness versus English "white supremacy" and "white nationalism" (Kaethler's words) associated with virtue, chastity, and fair complexion throughout *A Game at Chess* and, significantly, with the very word *whiteness* in the *Masque of Heroes*, with its opposing depictions of "Indifferent Days" as "parti-coloured varlets" and "Bad Days" as black and "noted . . . for badness." Even so, such significant readings would have benefited from awareness of pervasive protoracist English portrayals of Spain as characterized by moral deficiency and dark complexions due to miscegenation with Moors and/or Jews, as well as familiarity with more recent work on race, religion, and white nationalism.

This book's biggest flaw is excessive uses of arcane classical terms such as *opera basilica* and *parhësia*. One recognizes that *opera* means "works" but primary connotations and

etymology of *basilica* cause confusion. One ultimately deciphers that this idiosyncratic phrase, derived from Francis Bacon, means “works for the monarch,” but readers would have benefited from appositive phrases intermixed with synonyms. That goes doubly for dozens of uses of the less familiar term *parrhēsia* over about fifty pages.

Above all, Kaethler’s work is generative, as it successfully synthesizes contexts and criticism into new understandings of Middleton’s political theology, pervasive irony, and appeals to audiences and publics craving topicality. The book is also refreshing in recognizing both the virtues of Middleton’s challenges to a fallible monarch asserting his own infallible authority and his troubling resort to misogyny and an early strain of white nationalism/supremacy. Finally, those steeped in Middleton criticism will delight in nuanced interpretations of Middletonian irony, allegory, and satire, while readers not so imbued will learn much from the exploration of the intricacies of Middleton’s political drama.

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