THOMAS MIDDLETON, UNCUt: CASTRATION, CENSORSHIP, AND THE REGULATION OF DRAMATIC DISCOURSE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Richard Burt

Thomas Middleton's canon and career present us with quantitatively significant and highly detailed evidence of censorship. Perhaps the best known case of censorship, A Game at Chess, continues to receive the most sustained attention of any play censored in the Renaissance. Middleton's Lady's Tragedy was also censored. And two other plays, Hengist, King of Kent and The Witch, may have been censored as well. More crucial than these instances is that the cases themselves are often extremely detailed. There are six manuscripts and three printed quartos of A Game at Chess, the total number of manuscripts being significantly larger than that of any other Renaissance play. And the single manuscript of The Lady's Tragedy contains evidence of censorship in the censor's own hand. Moreover, there is an unusually full record of contemporary responses to A Game at Chess, including a lengthy eyewitness account.

Through Middleton, I want to suggest, we may gain a fuller understanding of how censorship operated and thereby reshape the present debate about it: some critics have argued that censorship was a systematic and fully conscious contractual arrangement; others have argued that it was capricious and arbitrary. Similarly, some have a fuller understanding of how censorship operated and Renaissance theatre. And the single manuscript of The Lady's Tragedy contains evidence of censorship in the censor's own hand. Moreover, there is an unusually full record of contemporary responses to A Game at Chess, including a lengthy eyewitness account.

Through Middleton, I want to suggest, we may gain a fuller understanding of how censorship operated and thereby reshape the present debate about it: some critics have argued that censorship was a systematic and fully conscious contractual arrangement; others have argued that it was capricious and arbitrary. Similarly, some have seen the theatre as a prime site of censorship, while others have seen it as exceptional in relation to the censorship of other media. And some have concluded that theatre censorship was severely repressive, while others have argued that it was enlightened, tolerant, and virtually non-existent (Heinemann, 1980; Patterson, 1984; Finkelpearl, 1986; Sharpe, 1987; Worden, 1988; Clare, 1990; Dutton, 1991).

Middleton's contribution to the present debate over whether stage censorship was repressive or lenient lies in the way he forces us to pose a fundamental question that critics have not asked: namely, 'What is censorship?' When debating the relative repressiveness or leniency, efficiency or inefficiency of theatre censorship, critics have largely ignored the way that the similarity between censorship and noncensorship presents us with a more complex and nuanced model of censorship involving dispersal and replacement. In this model, the difference between censoring and uncensoring is never self-evident.

A quick review of the production and reception of A Game at Chess makes this paradox clear. The play was first licensed by the court censor (the Master of the Revels), ran nine days continuously, and was then shut down. Middleton was 'on the run' for some (unknown) time in a failed effort to escape the authorities and was imprisoned for some (unknown) time. The company that acted A Game at Chess was briefly prevented from performing. Middleton obtained his release from prison through a witty epigram to King James. He may or may not have been forbidden to write for the stage again. And, remarkably, the company went on to perform The Spanish Viceroy, a play on the same subject, without a licence the following year (for which they received no punishment at

1 On Hengist, see Bald (1958), and Grace Ioppolo's introduction elsewhere in this edition: Works, 000. On The Witch, see Anne Lancashire (1983).

2 For documentation of these cases, see Bentley, 1941 68, 4:870 7. Gary Taylor's edition of A Game at Chess (Works, 000), and Julia Briggs's edition of The Lady's Tragedy (Works, 000). For the audience response to A Game at Chess, see Appendix A of Howard-Hill (1993).

3 For the case that the play was censored, see Heinemann, 1980. For the opposite case, Patterson (1984, 17) and Howard-Hill (1993, 22). Patterson cites A Game at Chess as one of her examples of noncensorship cases. Janet Clare (1990, 198) and Richard Dutton (1991, 257) have confirmed her point. Even Heinemann wonders along similar lines: 'The question remains: given the censorship, how was it possible for the play to be put on at all?' (1980, 165). For further details, see Howard-Hill, who maintains that 'the official reaction to A Game at Chess was not harsh' (1993, 22). For an opposing account of the play and of Middleton's career, one that stresses Middleton's progressive politics, see Gary Taylor (1990).

4 Those who believe that theatre censorship was repressive might point out that Middleton did not write for the stage after A Game at Chess, that his entertainment for Charles I (paid for by the City of London) was cancelled might be taken as further proof of Middleton's lack of favour with the court. But Trevor Howard-Hill quotes (without endnote) the rumour that 'James, Charles and Buckingham were all loth to have it forbidden, and by report laught barely at it'... and [John Woolley] later passed on the rumour 'how true it is I know not' that the Players are gone to the Court to Act the game at Chesse before the Kinge, which doth much trouble the spanishe Ambassador'.”...” (122).
all. Middleton continued to receive patronage from the City of London. Moreover, A Game at Chess was printed (albeit illegally) in 1625, nine months after the banned performance. The asymmetry between the play’s major political transgression and the leniency, the near absence, of repressive consequences suffered by the written text and actors, and the uncertain extent of the penalties suffered by the author, makes the case one that can as easily be called censorship as it can noncensorship.¹

This ambiguity is a symptom, I believe, of the way early modern stage censorship was dispersed among a variety of regulatory agents and practices and of the fact that it was productive as well as prohibitive, involved cultural legitimation as well as delegitimation.² Censorship was more than one thing, occurred at more than one place, and at more than one time. Moreover, Middleton’s case allows us to see that texts were displaced from one channel or medium to another (say from print to manuscript or performance to print) not obliterated wholesale. Even an apparently destructive act like a book-burning could be understood as a symbolic rite of purification rather than an attempt to block access to forbidden books completely.³ Middleton offers, then, less a way of deciding whether particular cases can be classified as either censorship or noncensorship than a call for a more deconstructive definition of censorship, one in which the spatial and temporal location and limits of censorship come into question, in which censorship and editorial revision and literary criticism, censorship and noncensorship, cannot be rigorously distinguished.

Defining censorship in terms of displacement and dispersal displaces and absorbs, so to speak, a definition of censorship as removal and replacement. It is both an alternative categorization and a more inclusive one, both an opposition and an expansion. On the one hand, a dispersal and displacement model of censorship keeps in place a sense of the graduated differences between forms of punishment and repression (between having a hand removed and having a word removed), with ‘soft’ forms of censorship (like critical censure) at one end of a continuum and ‘hard’ forms of censorship (like imprisonment) at the other. Yet on the other hand, a dispersal and displacement model unsettles a traditional hierarchy of more or less repressive punishments in so far as it shows that no one form of legitimation or delegitimation necessarily has priority over others. Cultural capital may in some cases count more than economic capital; perhaps even more provocatively, one could say that ‘soft’ forms of censure may sometimes wound more deeply than ‘hard’ forms of censorship. More crucially, displacement yokes, often paradoxically, precisely those terms that the more traditional model wishes to oppose: repression and diversity; production and consumption; censoring and uncensoring; public and private, among others.

In discussing the details of Middleton’s cases of censorship, fetishism becomes a key term in my analysis of the way censorship permits or blocks entry and access to the literary field. I suggest that censorship is a version of the fetishizing critical practice Naomi Schor (1987) has termed ‘reading in detail.’ Censoring is a version of the fetishizing critical practice Naomi Schor (1987) has termed ‘reading in detail.’ I suggest that censorship is a version of the fetishizing critical practice Naomi Schor (1987) has termed ‘reading in detail.’ Censoring is a version of the fetishizing critical practice Naomi Schor (1987) has termed ‘reading in detail.’

Since it may seem counter-intuitive to think of censorship in terms of dispersal and displacement, let me begin by calling attention to the limitations of the removal and replacement model. This approach assumes a model of textual transmission in which censorship is clearly located in the court censor, or Master of the Revels, as he was known. In this model the process of submitting a theatre manuscript (playbook) to the court censor for licensing would be fairly straightforward. One could trace a line from the text’s beginnings to its endings, from plot to foul papers to authorial or scribal prompt-book to a licensed prompt-book (private transcripts may have been made from the foul papers or from prompt-books) to performance to acquisition by a publisher or printer, then to a compositor (who sets the type and makes corrections),

¹ For fuller accounts of this case, see Howard-Hill (1993), Clare (1990), and Dutton (1993).
² For a fuller account of this definition of censorship, see Burt (1993), ix-xv, 1-25, 50-68, Burt (1994b), and Bourdieu (1992). See also Francis Barker (1984) for a Foucauldian account of censorship, and see Patterson (1984, 1990) and Norbrook (1994) for an opposing humanist account.
³ See, for example, a print in John Foxe’s Actes and monuments... (1563) illustrating the burning of heretical books written by Martin Bucer. At the centre of the illustration is a pile of books being burned. In front of this pile is a procession of priests reading religious books accompanied by torch bearers. As in executions, the burning is a public performance: fire takes on metaphorical significance, not only as a purifying agent (destroying the corrupting influences of heretical books) but as a source of religious illumination—the tapers ‘light the way’, as it were, toward the true Church and its authorized books.
to the printing of the first edition and on possibly to later editions and/or to a theatrical revival and resubmission of the prompt-book for licensing. In this view, censorship is a specific form of intervention and interference in an otherwise clearly transmitted set of signals from the theatre company to the audience: the censor is granted a central kind of interference or imposition, significantly different from the kind of interference introduced, for example, by a printer, whose mistakes could be corrected at will. The underlying assumption here is that the court censor is at the apex and centre of transmission: he would read a manuscript and then assess it positively or negatively, either burning it or licensing it as submitted (or on condition that it be revised). Censorship is understood, then, as a clearly defined (in the sense of limited) activity, located in time and space.

This understanding of censorship is not entirely wrong, of course. The Master of the Revels licensed a text by signing his name and giving his authorization at the end of the text. He had punitive powers and exercised them. In at least one case, he burned a manuscript he was unwilling to license; he demanded that some texts be revised; and one Master, Sir Henry Herbert, threatened authors, theatre managers, and actors with "publique punishment" (Bawcutt, 1996, 52). The censor's powers were increasingly centralized after 1606. Whereas early in Middleton's career there were a number of censors, including the Bishops of London and dramatists like John Lyly, by the time of his last play, A Game at Chess, there was a single court official and his deputies. The (apparent) intervention of the Bishop of London in Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt in 1619 is the exception that proves the rule. The Master also put into practice the Acte to Restraine Abuses of Players, passed by Parliament in 1606, making it illegal "jestingly or prophanely [to] speak or use the Holy name of God or Jesus Christ, or of the Holy Ghoste or of the Trinity, which are not to be spoken but with fear and reverence" (Chambers, 1923, Vol. 4, 339).

A closer look at the evidence begins to complicate the assumption that censorship has a precisely defined location and definition. Consider the manuscript of The Lady's Tragedy. One sees a number of different markings and a number of different handwritings. Not all of the cuts are in the Master's hand. Some are by the bookkeeper, some by the scribe. Sir George Buc, the Master of the Revels, has, for example, "struck out a number of oaths in the manuscript, but the specifically Catholic oath 'By th' mass' (4.3.94) uttered by the Tyrant, has been deleted by a different hand" (Clare, 1990, 158). Similarly, a wavy line alongside the passage signifies its removal, although again the colour of the ink does not link the instruction directly with Buc. Janet Clare concludes that the cuts and marks imply "a degree of collaboration between the censor and the playhouse bookkeeper" (1991, 159). She maintains that the manuscript provides "clear evidence that plays were censored in the playhouse, either in anticipation of the [court] censor's objections or in response to his verbal instructions" (1996, 157). This play is not by any means an exceptional case. Hengist evinces a similar dispersal. As R. C. Bald comments, it is unclear whether the play has been censored at all: the cuts may have been made by the actors rather than by the censor (1938, xxx-xxxiii). More recently, Grace Ioppolo in the present edition doubts whether the cuts can be attributed to censorship.

To buttress Clare's point about collaboration, we could add that dramatists might function as censors in the repressive sense. In a discussion of the Acte to Restraine Abuses of Players, Gary Taylor (1993c, 51-106) points out that when a text has been expurgated, the source of that expurgation is almost always the theatre. One might infer from the low number of oaths in the Middleton canon, much lower than Shakespeare, that Middleton acted as a self-censor (Lake, 1975, 79). The existence of collaboration is further confirmed by the fact that the Master of the Revels did not double-check to make sure that the acting company had made the revisions he requested. He could rely on the company to obey him, and they generally did (Dutton, 1991, 203).

Thus, censorship was dispersed, not centred in the court, despite the increasing centralization of the Master of the Revels' powers. However much power the Master amassed, that power remained partly decentralised by its dispersal even at court and within the Office itself. There were always ecclesiastical censors, and the Revels office had deputies (Clare, 1990; Dutton, 1991; Martin Butler, 1992). In addition to the playhouse exchanges with the Master of the Revels, we could locate the Master himself in patronage faction struggles, as Richard Dutton has pointed out (1991, 247-8). Furthermore, the Acte to Restraine Abuses of Players dispersed censorship across all areas of theatrical production and reception in which actors as well as members of the audience could serve as spies and informers (anyone convicted would pay a fine of ten pounds). The use of spies and informers formed part of a larger pattern of administrative dispersal in early Stuart culture. And individuals sometimes successfully sued for libel, managing to shut down performances (Clare, 1990, 74; 92-3).

My point that censorship is dispersed confirms a current consensus among critics working on early modern theatre censorship that it operated in terms of complicity and collaboration between censors, authors, and critics rather than in terms of radical oppositions between dumb censors and intelligent literary writers. Richard Dutton has observed that court censorship of the theatre was neither authoritarian nor totalitarian (1991, 205; 217). If the dispersal of censorship meant collaboration and complicity, the question remains: does it alter our understanding of censorship?

---

9 A version of this model is described by Gary Taylor (1987).
10 On spying and the theatre, see Archer (1993).
11 On this pattern, see Linda Levy Peck (1982).
12 Patterson's (1984) contribution is perhaps strongest in this regard. She has been seconded directly by Richard Dutton (1991, 9) and indirectly by Natalie Zemon Davis (1990) and Robert Darnton (1991).
Castration, Censorship, and the Regulation of Dramatic Discourse

Censorship? The fact that censorship was dispersed, some might argue, does not (and should not) significantly alter our sense of it as a repressive practice. Instead, we have only a more rigorous, more nuanced conception of it: censorship remains externally imposed by the court censor and internally self-imposed (as self-censorship) when undertaken by anyone else. Furthermore, censorship would still be located temporarily, occurring either before or after performance or publication. That is to say, we would still have a stable model of censorship, one that places it on one side of an axis moving between the opposite poles of repression and freedom, one that opposes agencies and clearly demarcated discursive spaces, one that believes dramatists could choose to collaborate or to resist.

I want to suggest that Middleton presents us with a much deeper sense of collaboration and complicity, one that extends to all points of the agencies and practices of literary consumption and production and thereby calls into question a strict definition of censorship as repression, one that enables censorship to be clearly opposed to noncensorship. Censorship penetrates and is penetrated by literary consumption and production. In defining censorship to encompass state censorship, market censorship, and criticism, I mean that instances of obtrusive suppression belong to a continuum which also includes active support or patronage, as in the support Middleton received from the city for his civic entertainments, or his masques. Criticism, for example, may be regarded not as the antithesis of censorship but as an alternate form of censorship in a form of censorship in so far as it involves legitimating certain dramatic discourses and delegitimizing others. Criticism operates productively in terms of establishing exclusive hierarchies and repressively as censure (the aim being a kind of post-publication censorship) in order to secure these hierarchies. In the productive sense, criticism, as a form of patronage, establishes capital through elitist forms of censorship: the exclusiveness of a given performance is part of its appeal. The non-alienability of a court masque, say, helps create a sense of the court as the charismatic centre of power.

It might appear to provide incontrovertible evidence of censorship in the repressive sense of removal. Crosses and wavy lines, that is, mark passages that the court censor demands be deleted. But things are not all that simple. Take the much discussed change from 'most ladies' to 'many ladies' that is nearly synonymous. Similarly, the tyrant's line 'Your king's poisoned' is changed to the virtually synonymous 'I am poisoned' and how either of these examples of censorship differ from revision is hard to tell. The marking of a change in the last line of the play from 'Might all be borne so honest to their tombs' to 'Might all be borne so virtuous to their tombs' looks just like the marking used to change 'Your king's poisoned' to 'I am poisoned' (A.S. 2.1.3/B.S. 2.164).

These examples return us to the ambiguous way a case looks like censorship to some critics and like noncensorship to others. Critics have recently tried to explain the difference between 'most ladies' and 'many ladies' in terms of a specific topical allusion to the Jacobean court that focused on Lady Frances Howard, who divorced her first husband on grounds of non-consummation and who along with her second husband murdered Sir Thomas Overbury (Lancashire, 1978, 47, 276–7; Clare, 1991, 161; Dutton, 1991, 198).

While I would not want to rule out that possibility (though this particular topical allusion has been used to explain the censorship of a surprisingly large number of plays, including Middleton's Witch) I think the manuscript shows that the censor's revision cannot be decisively differentiated from theatrical revision in terms of its verbal outcomes. As one editor notes, not all of the marks necessarily suggest censorship, some marking theatrical revision (Lancashire, 1978, 280–1). My point is that this lack of difference suggests that the censor operated productively as a kind of editor. The change from 'most ladies' to the less pointed 'many' softens but, I would argue, hardly neutralizes the topical allusion since in both cases 'ladies' remains as a figure for court corruption. The censor has asked for an editorial revision that involves a fine degree of tact. Editing and censorship thus overlap. And from the fact that the same marks were used by the censor and by actors/authors/bookkeepers in the playhouse we may surmise that censorship and theatrical revision were

---

11 Middleton's court patronage can be reviewed in Kawachi (1986).
12 On the breakdown of a distinction between the masque as inalienable and public theatrical performances of dramatic texts as alienable under the early Stuarts, see Burt (1993, 115–49).
13 Gary Taylor (1993b) finds similar synonyms inexpurgated and non-expurgated oaths in Shakespeare editions.
14 One could contrast these example as soft and hard versions of censorship, the revision of 'Your king's poisoned' to 'I am poisoned' regarded as more serious than the revision of most to 'many' because it is more directly political. I would observe, however, that in both cases the displacement of one phrase by another complicates the degree to which soft and hard instances may function smoothly as acceptable replacements. Consider again the substitution of women for court politics. Anne Lancashire notes 'the odd substitution of "woman" for "courtier"' at A. 2.1.69/B. 2.1.75, which she points out 'removes one kind of criticism only to add the other' (1978, 277).
15 Lancashire (1978) uses it to explain censorship of The Lady's Tragedy and (1984) to explain censorship of The Witch. The same allusion has been used to interpret The Changeling as well. See Christina Malcolmson (1990, 333). As will become clear in the second section of this essay, I think the underlying premises of this kind of topical identification bear scrutiny.
16 ‘Woman’ also figures as an object of censorship in Hentry: the passage at 4.2.225–32 appears in the two manuscripts but was omitted from the printed edition. See Heinemann (1980, 144).
understood as parallel, complementary activities, not as opposed or different in kind.

Understanding that the censor functioned as an editor allows us, then, to begin to understand the ways in which censorship is structurally complicit with what is often taken to be its opposite, namely, criticism. The Master chose plays for performance, and was therefore an extraordinarily important critic as well as a censor: whether or not a play would get performed at court. As an editor, the censor reads critically in detail. We can adduce further evidence of the censor’s critical abilities and interests. It is worth pointing out that George Buc, himself an author and owner of an impressive library, gave The Lady’s Tragedy the title The Second Maiden’s Tragedy to differentiate it from Beaumont and Fletcher’s (also censored) The Maid’s Tragedy (Clare, 1990, 165). John Lyly and Ben Jonson both sought to become Master of the Revels (Jonson obtained a reversion to it in 1624). And Sir Henry Herbert (Master of the Revels after George Buc) wrote the following in 1624 in regard to a court performance of Middleton’s More Dissemblers Besides Women: ‘The worst play that ere I saw’ (Bawcutt, 1996, 148). Censorship and criticism are complicit, then, in the sense that they are overlapping activities.

Just as literary criticism turns out to be a form of censorship, so too does the market. It is often assumed that court censorship is radically different from market forces. The market is thought to allow into circulation that which censorship seeks to block. And if one allows for market censorship, it is often differentiated from state censorship on the grounds that the former blocks production while the other blocks consumption. In this view, market censorship is better than state censorship. But even this distinction breaks down because it is not always easy to tell the two kinds of censorship apart. Middleton’s tragicomedy The Witch illustrates the ambiguity by showing that it is difficult to differentiate a censurable reception on the stage from a censorship practiced by the court. The Witch exists only in a single manuscript and the evidence of its production on stage is a note by Middleton on it. Middleton explains to Thomas Holmes, the person for whom the manuscript was made, that he has ‘meerly upon a tast of yr. desire’ recovered into my hands (though not without much difficultie) This (ignorantly-ill-fated) Labour of mine. Witches are (ipsa facto) by ye Law condemned, & yt onely (I think) hath made her lie so long in an imprisoned obscuritie’ (Steen, 1993, 36). Anne Lanchashire has suggested that the phrase ‘ignorantly ill-fated’ refers not to the play’s failure on the stage, as is frequently assumed, but to its political censorship by the Master of the Revels (1983, 162–3). By contrast, I would argue that the phrase is ambiguous: it may be taken literally or metaphorically, the play’s lack of stage productions being due to censorship by the court or to what was termed ‘censureship’ on the public stage.

We can understand further the way that censorship extends to the regulation of consumption by looking at Middleton’s reception by competing dramatists. Criticism operated repressively as delegitimating censure. Ben Jonson and George Chapman, who sought to establish literary hierarchies as a way of reforming what they took to be the unacceptable diversity of the popular theatres, regarded Middleton negatively. In his epistle to his translation of Homer, Chapman used Middleton as an example of Londoners’ bad taste. They preferred Middleton’s Lord Mayor’s pageant, The Triumphs of Truth, to Homer: ‘why should a poor Chronicler of a Lord Maior’s naked Truth, (that peradventure will last his yeare) include more worth with our moderne wizards, then Homer for his naked Vlysses, clad in eternall Fiction?’ (Steen, 1993, 30–1). Ben Jonson was even more censorious. In Conversations with Drummond (1619), he remarks ‘that Marckham (who added his English Arcadia) was not of the number of the Faithful Poets and but a base fellow that such were Day and Middleton’ (cited by Steen, 1993, 35). And Jonson excorciated A Game at Chess in The Staple of News (1626):

Lic. What newes of Gundomar? Tho. A second Fistula, or an excorciation (at the least) For putting the poore English-play, was writ of him, To such a sordid vse, as (is said) he did, Of cleansing his posterior’s. Lic. Justice! Justice! Tho. Since when, he lies condemned’to his [chair], at Bruxels.

And there sits filing certaine politque hinges, To hang the States on, b’hav heau’d off the hookes.

(Howard-Hill, 1993, 212)

The use of a text for toilet paper is as effective a means of taking it out of circulation as burning it. It is worth noting that Middleton too engaged in critical practices. He wrote a commendatory poem to accompany the first publication of The Duchess of Malfi and an epitaph on the actor Richard Burbage. Furthermore, references to plays are scattered throughout his dramatic and non-dramatic works. He offered an appreciation of Joseph Hall in the prefatory matter to The Two Gates of Salvation (1609) and praised Utopia in The Owl’s Almanac (1618).

Just as the opposition between censoring and uncensoring is troubled by the dispersal of censorship across all aspects of literary consumption, so too it is troubled by its dispersal across all areas of literary production. A number of critics have recently called into question the notion of an original unrevised authentic draft. Texts are revised versions originating out of impure, heteroglossic conversations. Though some manuscripts may rightly be identified as ‘authorial’ for editorial purposes, there is no unrevised Utext originating out of a single author sitting in his private study.

20 For a fuller account of the relation between criticism and censorship, see Burt (1993), 27–77 and Burt (1994b).
21 For instances of censurship and for an account of the way its meaning overlapped with censorship and criticism, see Burt (1993), 30–1, 51, 65.
CASTRATION, CENSORSHIP, AND THE REGULATION OF DRAMATIC DISCOURSE

Middleton allows us to extend this insight into authorial revision to censorship: if texts cannot be unrevised, they cannot be uncensored either. The differences among some of the manuscripts of A Game at Chess make it clear that just as there is no point at which one can locate an unrevised text, so there is no point at which one can locate an uncensored text. In discussing the lengths of various manuscripts, critics have differentiated between more or less complete versions of the play in terms of whether passages in one version not in another were added after the play was licensed and, if so, whether the censor knew of them or not (Dutton, 1991; Clare, 1990, 193-4; Howard-Hill, 1993, 29-33). The censorship of the play, that is, only makes sense for these critics if at some point in the production of the play, the author/actors circumvented the censor’s wishes. They assume that authorial/theatrical revision can be separated from censorship, that Middleton, at the actor’s instigation, revised in order to add passages that he feared the censor might not approve (similarly, the actors might have made clear an equation between the hated Spanish Ambassador Gondomar and the Black Knight by using Gondomar’s actual litter—required to relieve discomfort from an anal fistula—and one of his actual suits, thereby changing the text’s meaning in a way that the court censor presumably could not have anticipated). One critic has used textual evidence to explain the censorship of the play in precisely these terms: ‘it is almost certain that the play book which Henry Herbert licensed was somewhat less provocative than the play seen on the stage of the Globe’ (Clare, 1990, 193).

But given the complicity between the playhouse and the Master of the Revels, there is no reason to assume that the additions amounted to an evasion of what are presumed to be the censor’s politically more conservative desires. As Trevor Howard-Hill points out, ‘It is unlikely that the actors would commission a substantial revision unless they were already convinced they could go ahead with performances’ (1993, 18). He maintains that the revisions make no serious difference: ‘That the Black Knight represents Gondomar is transparent in the early version; the additions make the satire no more offensive than the play seen on the stage of the Globe’ (Clare, 1990, 193).

Whereas critics have tended to assume that these manuscripts can be clearly positioned along a line beginning with an uncensored early draft and ending with a licensed final draft in the form of a prompt-book or a first edition, I would argue that the manuscripts suggest the reverse. Rather than moving toward a final full draft either in manuscript form or printed form, Middleton and the scribes he used put different versions into different kinds of circulation, some shorter and some longer. As Howard-Hill points out, ‘textual analysis reveals that Middleton had decided to make transcripts for sale even before the play had been revised for performance’ (1993, 4). This meant that, in one case, a presentation copy was shorter than the performance copy. Whether a particular manuscript is an incomplete transcript or an early draft, whether the additions or omissions were made by the author or by the scribe acting as an editor, whether the additions involve an evasion of the censor or were suggested by the censor, may sometimes all be, in my view, undecidable questions. If there is no moment at which we can definitively establish the author’s unrevised text, that is because there is no uncensored original any more than there is an unrevised original. Any search for the origin of censorship will be frustrated by an infinite regression: court censorship (defined in its repressive and productive senses) generates self-censorship in the actors and the author that may be regarded with equal validity as being either an anticipation of court censorship or as following after the suggestions/demands of the censor. The various versions of A Game at Chess suggest that censorship was a negotiation over what will or will not play in a number of different venues, not the establishment of a monumental, authorized, final version.

The details of Middleton’s censored plays alert us to a structural complicity much deeper than critics have thus far allowed, a complicity not between opposed agents and spaces but between regulatory agencies at all points of literary production and consumption. This structural complicity, I hope it is now clear, significantly changes our understanding of censorship from a practice that operates in terms of removal and replacement to one that operates in terms of dispersal and displacement. The dispersal of censorship decentres the court censor, who occupies one of many competing sites of authorization and licence that legitimate particular revisions. He is not at the apex of power but is caught up in a contestation of literary production and consumption. This structural complicity, I hope it is now clear, significantly changes our understanding of censorship from a practice that operates in terms of removal and replacement to one that operates in terms of dispersal and displacement. The dispersal of censorship decentres the court censor, who occupies one of many competing sites of authorization and licence that legitimate particular revisions. He is not at the apex of power but is caught up in a contestation of literary production, transmission, and consumption but because it is a fetishistic practice that involves, as Freud saw, displacement rather than outright removal. Censorship is as much about displacing one version with another, displacing texts from one channel to another, as it is about blocking access or destroying transgressive material. As Thomas Cogswell notes in a discussion of censorship in the 1620s:

...political tracts, sermons and verse, which had no hope of receiving a license, could find a wide cir-
CASTRATION, CENSORSHIP, AND THE REGULATION OF DRAMATIC DISCOURSE

culation in the unofficial market for news. Lack of access to a printing press was not a crippling blow. . . . Few authors slipped . . . direct criticism into print in 1623. Yet the government’s particularly tight control of the press in this period did not forestall similar efforts; it simply forced them into channels that newsletters-writers had developed for circulating their manuscripts. (1989, 21, 45)

Similarly, the Acte to Restraine Abuses of Players was directed only at profanity in performance, not in print. The crosses in the manuscript of The Lady’s Tragedy, for example, may mark passages for removal only during the text’s performance.

Displacement is not just about more or less narrow kinds of readership and access, but involves a differential system in which texts circulate and become exchangeable by becoming cultural and economic capital. It involves the commodification of small differences meant to increase the text’s value, either by limiting its circulation, say to manuscript (that is, the fact that it can not be shown elsewhere gives the manuscript reader an elevated status as critic, insider, and so on) or by exceeding the limits placed on a given text’s earlier circulation—the full uncensored text, as opposed to its performance. As Gary Taylor remarks in a discussion of expurgated texts, ‘Although profanities could not be played, they could be printed, or circulated in manuscript . . . . Once authors and publishers recognize a distinction between the play as performance and the play as literary commodity, the door is opened to various literary embodiments of the theatrical text, including particularly the restoration of material cut in performance’ (1993b, 147). Middleton’s plays were subject to a series of regulations over literary production and consumption.

I take these networks of regulation to be part of the formation of what Pierre Bourdieu (1993) terms the literary field. According to Bourdieu the literary field emerges as a form of cultural legitimation: texts circulate as negotiable currency, as both symbolic and economic capital, insofar as they are differentiated from other versions in the same or in different media: a text in manuscript form, for example, may be valued over printed versions because a select, élite readership alone has access to it, while a performance may be valued over a printed version because the former is thought to be fuller than the censored printed text; conversely, the printed text may be valued over a performance because the former is regarded as fuller than a censored performance.

Commodities are fetishized not, as Marxists have argued, because they are reified, alienable products of labour (Marx, 1867; Lukács, 1968) but because their value as economic and cultural capital is created within an intensely differentiated literary field. As I am defining it, however, commodity fetishism is not just economic or even primarily economic. Cultural critics (Marxists foremost among them) assume that the market precedes the literary, that fetishism depends on the market. A commodity aesthetic, so the argument goes, is an effect of capitalism (Haug, 1986). Marxists assume that a specifically literary market place follows upon the emergence of a broader market place. I am suggesting that the reverse is the case: the commodity is an after-effect of the literary, modelled upon the literary form: indeed, the market is made possible precisely though fetishism, not the reverse. The proliferation of manuscripts of A Game at Chess is due, as we have seen, to the perceived markets for them, some being sold and others presented as gifts, markets here understood to include economic and cultural capital (though patrons sometimes made cash payments, the cash could be less important than the prestige attached to their patronage). I am suggesting, moreover, that all number of texts, ranging from privately circulated manuscripts to publicly circulated printed texts and performances to court performances could be commodities only because they had already been fetishized. What looks like historical specificity from a Marxist perspective—the emergence of a market place in the sixteenth century—is rather a misrecognized instance of a critical fetishism: ‘History’ is fetishized as that which stands outside of fetishism.

Now some critics might want to object to my account of censorship as a fetishistic practice on several grounds. Even if texts are not wholly blocked but displaced from one medium or channel to another, they might argue, it would still be crucial to differentiate between more or less narrow channels, ‘softer’ or ‘harder’ forms of censorship, greater or lesser access and availability of a text to readers and/or performances to spectators. Indeed, some critics might want to argue, the most diverse range of texts, performances ought to be able to circulate as broadly and as freely in as big and heterogeneous a market as is possible. If discourses and their circulation were truly diverse, truly free of censorship (in its repressive sense) displacements from official to unofficial channels wouldn’t be necessary.

While I am sympathetic to what I would call the diversity position, I also think that many of its fundamental assumptions about censorship as a strictly repressive agency are untenable. To begin with, the circulation of discourses depends on their being commodities. This paradoxically both makes entry and access possible and limits what, where, and how texts can circulate; commodity fetishism is not an antidote to regulation but is itself another (paradoxical) form of regulation. A related problem with the diversity position is the correlative assumption that there is a strong opposition between direct and indirect criticism, between official and unofficial discourses; that is, an uncensored criticism would be direct, immediately readable, in short, non-literary (unambiguous, without irony or equivocation). Yet non-literary texts were prosecuted on the basis of their perceived literary strategies, not
because of their naked, unveiled attacks on the Crown. For example, William Prynne's index entry to Hisstrimastix, ‘women actors, notorious whores’ was taken (mistaken, Prynne maintained) as an attempt to parallel classical Roman and contemporary Caroline courts, to the massive discredit of both. Moreover, the diversity position assumes that there were uncensored versions of a text, however difficult they might be to read critically. The uncensored version might be an unperformed manuscript, a printed text containing material censored which had been for performance, or a performance of a text.

By contrast, I have been suggesting that if censoring is always a matter of censoring in detail, then two points follow: on the one hand, there is no whole uncensored original version but a proliferation of always already revised, always already partial, always already censored versions; on the other, censorship never occurs (one can always locate an 'uncensored' version). Fetishism allows us to see both that uncensoring is an impossibility and to see why the desire for an uncensored text persists, even in countries with no official state censorship apparatus. For if understanding censorship as fetishism shows it always already occurs, the same understanding also shows that the phantasm of an uncensored text appears everywhere. All media can potentially trump the others as the source of the uncensored version. Print can be regarded as fuller than manuscript because it allows for greater access; conversely, a manuscript can also be regarded as fuller precisely because it was not subject to state censorship (Henri, King of Kent, for example, exists in two manuscripts which are fuller than the 1661 printed version). Similarly, theatre may be regarded as harder to police than print because performance is more fluid, allowing the actors to inflect the text's meanings through gestures and props, while, conversely, print may be regarded as fuller than performance because it includes material censored on stage.

But in none of these cases, I would argue, is one getting a completely uncensored version. (In psychoanalytic terms, the fetish 'replaces' what was never there to be removed in the first place, the mother's phallus: the fetishist misreads sexual difference, substituting an originary fullness for an originary lack. In these terms, a censored text would be a castrated text.) To paraphrase Octave Mannoni’s (1968) account of the logic of fetishism as a knowledge and disavowal of sexual difference ('Je sais bien, mais quand même…'), we might say that the logic of censorship is as follows: ‘I know very well texts are always already censored, if it attempts to secure, that is, an censored, uncastrated phallic politics of textual potency and plenitude, some critics might wonder whether one might be able to construct a defetishized model of textual production, transmission and consumption. I want to turn now to A Game at Chess to show why this is

11 In addition to enabling us to see that specific cases not
cannot be definitively classified as instances of censorship or noncensorship, an understanding of censorship as fetishism throws into relief the way sexuality figures this paradox in early modern culture in general and in Middleton in particular. Middleton’s canon as those of other dramatists, a sexual metaphorics is the vehicle of a topical politics. For many modern critics, sexuality is a transparent figure for court politics. As we have seen, when discussing ‘ladies’ in modern accounts of The Lady’s Tragedy or women in The Witch, critics regard the court as the real object of criticism. Similarly, critics of A Game at Chess tend to read through or past the play’s sexualized figuration of court politics, reading images of gelding, rape, and prostitution as metaphors for religious, moral, or political conflicts (Lancashire, 1978, 234–7; Howard-Hill, 1993, 40–8). But it is precisely the details of this sexual figuration that complicate any easy assignment of a given politics to the play: rather than create stable equivalences that might reinforce a model of censorship as castration (in which castration is precisely a radical removal) the play’s sexual metaphors call into question the self-identity of censorship. Hence, they call into question the difference between censoring and uncensoring. Reading in detail means reading in parts, in terms of a deconstructive account of allegory, a part-to-part relation, rather than hermeneutics, a part-to-whole relation.

If the fetishistic status of censorship means that texts are always already censored, if it attempts to secure, that is, an censored, uncastrated phallic politics of textual potency and plenitude, some critics might wonder whether one might be able to construct a defetishized model of textual production, transmission and consumption. I want to turn now to A Game at Chess to show why this is

---

24 For an account of the connections between sexuality and political censorship, see Burt (1993, 132–43) and Boone (1994).
25 On allegory, see De Man (1979), 188–245. Political critics often assume a more coherent notion of allegory as a decoding of one-to-one correspondences between the text and history. Hence the notable tendency in many so-called New Historicist topical readings to reinscribe Old Historicist critical practices.
impossible. Modern critics have made the politics of *A Game at Chess* intelligible by moving away from the literal and the detail (which remain opaque) in the direction of the metaphorical and the abstract (which allows the play’s meaning to become clear). Richard Dutton phrases the usual move in a manner apt for our purposes:

> There is room for debate about the details of the allegory, but the broad outlines could hardly be clearer… De Domini and Gondomar are, Middleton implies, different faces of the same threat, a relatively sophisticated notion if anyone were looking for a literalistic ‘shadowing’ of persons and recent events. The audience was apparently expected to make sense of composite or multi-faceted allusions which may have no literal or one-to-one relation to persons or events. (Dutton, 1991, 239; 241; 241)

The move toward metaphor and a general sense of the play’s allegory apparently stems from a desire to save the play from a crude topicality, one that would make it only of antiquarian and non-literary interest. It also assumes a hermeneutic model of censorship—the whole play can be read even if some of the parts can not (they’re capable of being dismissed as incidentals that would not change the play’s meaning).

But the local allegories and details cannot be so easily dispensed with. For the details turn out not to be incidental but in fact call into question the possibility of allegorizing the whole play. Despite the clarity of particular parallels, the satirical force of *A Game at Chess* remains unclear in modern criticism. Indeed, discussions of this play enact a frequent impasse in censorship studies: the more detailed the case, the more impenetrable it becomes. In searching for an explanation for the censorship of *A Game at Chess*, critics ignore the fact that there is an inconsistency in contemporary accounts, that we get multiple reasons for its performance being shut down: initially the King being personated, and then the satire of Gondomar. Audience response to the play is similarly indefinite. Though we have an extremely full record of responses to this play it too clarifies only parts of the play. An eyewitness account by John Holles is telling in this regard. Calling Holles’s report ‘the most detailed, intelligent, and (in a reviewer’s sense) the most sympathetic of the known descriptions’ (1990, 356), A. R. Braunmuller notes that Holles misread the White Bishop’s Pawn as a ‘Spanish euneuch’ rather than English character and that he didn’t note parallels obvious to us (1990, 351; 349). Braunmuller concludes that the play leaves us with major questions unanswered (‘Was the play an attack on James? on Prince Charles? on the Duke of Buckingham?’ [1990, 355]) and with a sense of how undefined the play’s reception was: ‘Holles’ letter…urges us to interpret Middleton’s allegorical meanings cautiously, to respect the variety and the indefiniteness that performances and audiences’ responses necessarily (every day, every performance) lend to any dramatic “text”’ (1990, 356).

Rather than ride over the play’s details in order to abstract a general message, then, I want to examine a particular detail through which the play inscribes the overlooking of details as what I would call the impossibility of a definitively uncensored reading. Middleton figures this impossibility through a specific metaphor for censorship, namely, gelding.29 Gelding is figured in the White Bishop Pawn’s plot (the centrality of which has long been recognized by modern critics).30 It is generally read as a story of the harm done by the Jesuits to the Church of England. As Gary Taylor (1993a) has observed, Middleton specifically uses gelding as a metaphor for this harm. Given that castration and censorship became exchangeable terms (Ben Jonson referred to a Jesuit edition of Martial’s epigrams as ‘Jesuitaru castratus’) and given the censorship (in the repressive sense) of the anti-Jesuitical tracts by Thomas Scott and others whom Middleton used as sources, and given that tolerated Jesuitical texts play a central role in the White Queen’s Pawn’s seduction and prostitution, it is possible, as Taylor (1993a) maintains, to see gelding as a metaphor for censorship. While Middleton’s gelding metaphor obviously assumes that censorship is painfully repressive, the point of the metaphor, I want to argue, is not to criticize censorship in general but to criticize illegitimate forms of it. The play can be read as a critique of Jacobean censorship—not that it was repressive, but that it was repressive in the wrong way, censoring texts that have been tolerated and tolerating texts in that should have been censored. In the 1620s, an almost unlimited number of Jesuit texts were allowed to be circulated while Protestant ones were not (Cogswell, 1989, 20–35). Middleton moralizes censorship not in terms of its presence or absences (as we tend to do) but in terms of who uses it for what ends. The bad censor is a castrator. In a typically Middletonian moral economy, censorship in *A Game at Chess* leads to its own undoing. No forgiveness is available to the Black Bishop’s Pawn for having gelded the White Bishop’s Pawn. The castrator is castrated, the biter bit.

The play’s moral opposition between good and bad censorship self-deconstructs, however, because the figure of castration unsettles rather than underwrites an equation of censorship with repression. Critics have noted that the White Knight’s staged confession of his sins in an effort to entrap the Black Knight compromises the moral difference between them (Harper, 88; Braunmuller 1991, 348–9). The White Knight’s references to sodomy pertain not only...
to Olivares (the Black Knight), the favourite of Philip IV, but to Buckingham (the White Knight), the favourite of James I, as well. But, more crucially, the play’s moral distinctions self-deconstruct because, as I will make clear momentarily, castration is not self-identical. The sexual metaphorics of A Game at Chess do not form a chain of binary oppositions with equivalent terms on each side, each moralized, valued in terms of its place above or below another, as if one could say that uncensored is to censored as uncastrated is to castrated, as whole is to part, as plenitude is to lack, as good is to bad.

The coherence of Middleton’s moral economy depends on there being a clear difference between castration as a symbolic practice and castration as a literal practice. This distinction allows for a kind of poetic justice: the castrator is castrated in symbolic terms; that is, the Black Knight is not literally castrated as was the White Bishop’s Pawn. The Black Knight’s crime and his punishment are symmetrical but not identical. The two meanings of castration thus make it possible to differentiate the Black and White sides in moral terms (one side literally castrates, the other side only metaphorically castrates). This difference secures others. There is no good gelder as opposed to a bad gelder. (None of the admirable chess pieces were constructed not as abstract shapes but as images of persons. Yet precisely because the White Bishop’s Pawn, makes him lighter and hence faster; it does not make him ‘impotent’, but instead displaces and disperses his power. In making the Jesuits mocks Catholics who wish to become saints by asking angels to castrate them. Similarly, Barnabe Barnes in The Devil’s Charter denounces Pope Alexander VI as a sexually deviant monarch by staging a scene in which he castrates a young boy. The point of this tradition was to deprive (one is tempted to say ‘castrate’) Catholics from assigning castration a positive meaning (say, as celibacy). These symbolic meanings testify to the productivity of castration, a productivity that undermines its self-identity.

Understanding censorship through the metaphor of castration, then, alters our understanding of censorship by revealing its self-deconstructive non-identity. As a multiple and paradoxically repressive practice with positive effects and meanings, castration cannot be reduced to a unified, morally comprehensible practice. The metaphor of castration foregrounds not the literal status of censorship but its (dis)figurative status; that is, castration figures an originary (and paradoxically productive) lack rather than the loss of an originary plenitude; as such, castration is a figure for the way that texts have always already been censored (see Derrida, 1987, 439–42). Censorship is a metaphor for the endlessly displaced origin and end of censorship. If censorship has always already occurred, it follows that uncensoring is always reading in detail and hence will never deliver an uncensored ‘pay-off’, the equivalent of what in the porn industry is termed the ‘money shot’ (Williams, 1989, 8). Uncensoring is not the opposite of lack, that which replaces castration, the

---

11 I thank Gary Taylor for this point and for these references.
12 The problem the figuration of castration poses to those who want to decode an ‘uncensored’ politics in the play is crystallized in the questions of whether gelding was theatrically represented, and if so, how? If it was represented, by what details would the White Bishop’s Pawn’s lack have been signified? More to the point, could it have been represented given that what is being represented is a literal impossibility? In contemporary terms, one might ask ‘can a mannequin be castrated?’ Perhaps. The nearest analogue I know of is Cindy Sherman’s series of photographs of nude, fragmented female mannequins exhibited at Metro Pictures, New York, in 1992. Even here, however, female sexuality is clearly figured. It is not surprising, then, that two reviewers found the images difficult to read (see Hartney, 1992 and Weinstein, 1992), and one notes that ‘Sherman’s new work has already been enthusiastically misinterpreted as exclusively concerning the link between sex and violence. What has been ignored is that these are mannequins’ (Weinstein 1992, 97).
13 At stake in images of castration is not the difference between real and symbolic, but the economy of substitutions structuring male and female desire whereby something can or cannot be exchanged for something else. On the related problem of glossing and expurgating bawdy puns, see Hedrick (1994).
14 John Rogers has alerted me to a perhaps even more bizarre Protestant tradition involving foreskin mutilation which tied ‘improvement’ of the genitalia to the approach of the millennium.
15 Following Derrida’s account of castration as necessarily figured because necessarily misread (i.e. the female body has not been castrated), we could say that censorship too is always metaphorical, available only through a figure which supplements it. I argue (1994a) that censorship’s performative, productive status means that its identity is never given, available only through a metaphorical supplement, a supplement which critics often use in an effort to literalize censorship (as with various metaphors of the bodily mutilation, castration among them). For more on this point, see Hart (1993, 150–68) and Bourdieu (1993, 138).
achievement of phallic plenitude. Uncensoring does not lead to an orgasmic moment of pure presence since there is no uncensored text to recover.

If it is clear that censorship of *A Game at Chess* and Middleton’s other plays demands that we rethink censorship in terms of dispersal and displacement, we are now in a position to make clear that a desire for an uncensored radical politics will always be disappointed. The uncensored, whole, original text is precisely the phantasmatic promise that fetishism offers and always disappoints. A salient contribution of Middleton’s case is the way that it puts into question rather than embraces a desire for an original, uncensored, whole text. Uncensoring *A Game at Chess* produces not a single coherent allegory (political, religious, or moral) but dispersed, fragmented allegories which do not come together. Indeed, they do not ‘come’ at all. While they tellingly link dramatic characters and historical personages, they don’t tell the meaning of the parallel. Middleton’s play enacts a paradoxical economy of both putting topical parallels into circulation and withholding their whole meaning (both inviting uncensoring and making it impossible). Thus, one arrives at an uncensored general allegory only at the expense of reading in detail, only as it were by not reading. To put the point in its most paradoxical form, uncensoring the play as a whole entails censoring some of its parts.

On the basis of this account of censorship as fetishistic, we can begin to see why there can be no defetishized model of textual culture that might be harnessed to the politics of feminist criticism and/or queer theory. To imagine that uncensoring is an antidote to censoring in the repressive sense is to cling to a fetishistic narrative of textual transmission in which a complete integral text is more or less repressed as it is put into circulation. The uncensored text is implicitly regarded as masculine, an imaginary whole prior to its castration, while the censored text is constructed as feminine, as lacking integrity. This narrative is fetishistic, moreover, in that it constructs a model of textual production and consumption with clear beginnings and endings that either reasserts patriarchal authority over its meaning or reads its textual productivity in phallic terms (the text is productive precisely because it has not been censored/castrated). Critics often tell this story (and perhaps most intensely) in the name of an uncensored politics (either oppositional in the neo-Whig version or consensus in the revisionist version).

In so far as political critics (and here I include all political critics) have (often unconsciously) sought a defetishized, uncensored politics, a whole and original text, they have made a fetish out of oppositional, radical politics. Politics, that is, functions like a commodity rather than as the antidote to commodity fetishism. Just as the commodity constructs a desire which it never satisfies fully (impelling the consumer to purchase another commodity promising to do what the other did not), so each instance of an apparently uncensored radical politics disappoints. Cases of repressive censorship cannot always be decisively distinguished from cases of noncensorship. Local disappointments at not finding clear-cut cases of repressive theatre censorship do not necessarily effect the intensity of the desire for a non-commodified, defetishized, uncensored politics; indeed, one could argue that that desire is hysterialy intensified the more it is disappointed. To imagine that it could be satisfied would be to imagine (mistakenly) that castration ever secured binary oppositions between disavowal and avowal, between distortion and clarity, between visibility and invisibility, between censorship and uncensorship that some anti-fetishism feminist critics think it has (Silverman 1992; Penley 1993). What looks like defetishism (multiple, small differences constituting a clitoral criticism opposed to the single, big difference of a phallic criticism) from another perspective looks like fetishism masquerading as its opposite (small differences being that which enables the construction of a big difference between feminist and patriarchal criticism).

The details of Middleton’s cases of dramatic censorship paradoxically place him by showing how hard it is place him (or any other dramatist) politically. Middleton contributes to contemporary political criticism, indirectly to be sure, in helping to characterize the present in terms of a detumescence of the political, thereby opening up the possibility of an ambivalent, jangled up, ‘freaked out’ critical practice (iconoclastic, scandalous, tabloid), rather than in enabling a History of fetishism that would somehow counter the repressive effects of both commodity fetishism and psychoanalytic models of fetishism. Perhaps Middleton’s value lies in the way he might make us face our disappointment at not finding a well-heeded politics, or, to put it another way, at finding that politics are always

37 For an account of fetishism as securing a whole male body at the expense of the female body (which is regarded as lacking), see Silverman (1992).

38 For a similar formulation, see Haber (1993).

39 I develop this point more fully in Burt (1993).

40 It is perhaps already clear I would argue that any Lacanian informed account of a ‘lesbian phallus’, of ‘displaceability’ (see Judith Butler 1992) or of a more polemically, Deleuzian informed anti-psychoanalytic account of masochism (see Steven Shaviro 1993) would not serve as an antedote to Freud’s account of castration and fetishism but would instead recapitulate the problems with regard to censorship articulated here.

41 I say this notwithstanding the reasonably held view of Middleton as unequivocally anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic, and anti-Spanish match. Though there were two sides to the issues dramatized in a play like *A Game at Chess*, Middleton is less concerned with aligning himself on one side or the other than the way displacement breaks down oppositions. This interest may account for the sometimes surprising reception of Middleton’s works. Consider a concrete example: Middleton might be put at one end of an axis, Ben Jonson at the other, with Middleton representing a progressive anti-censorship politics and Ben Jonson representing a reactionary, censorious politics. Yet Jonson was mistaken for Middleton’s collaborator on *The Widow* (1615–16).

42 By ‘freak out’, I mean both the negative sense of ‘get hysterical’ and the positive 1960s sense of breaking with established (and often repressive) norms.

43 I say this partly to acknowledge that a detumescent or even fully ‘castrated’ politics can be an instance of phallic politics, as in the Hyena, where cutting of a head only leads to the growth of two more. Moreover, it would be a mistake to imagine that a ‘new’ historicizing practice could lead to a new way of valuing topicality over allegory, or a topicality of fragments over a topicality of the whole reading. These very oppositions would simply secure the same kind of fetishistic desire and disappointment. See Leah Marcus (1990; 1992); Alan Liu (1990); and Patricia Fumerton (1990) for accounts of the importance of topicality and...
CASTRATION, CENSORSHIP, AND THE REGULATION OF DRAMATIC DISCOURSE

high-heeled.\textsuperscript{44} If we have escaped ‘CENSORSHIP’ of the sort Middleton faced, we can never escape the fetishistic regulations of discourse that implicitly or explicitly construct a hierarchy of legitimations, enable and limit access to a given reading field.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{WORKS CITED}


Bald, R. C., ed. 1938. 


\textit{the detail in New Historicism. On the self-deconstruction of hermeneutics, see Joel Fineman (1991). For a different account of displacement, one that stresses the reinscription of a stable binary opposition rather than the breakdown of such oppositions, see Dollimore (1991).\textsuperscript{44}} I would like to thank Stuart Culver, Barbara Freedman, Judith Haber, Amy Kaplan, Mary Basso, Rebecca Schneider, and Gary Taylor for their conversations about this essay and for their comments on earlier drafts. I am grateful to Gary Taylor for letting me read a copy of his own (then unpublished) essay on castration and A Game at Chess, to Manfred Pfister for inviting me to present a version of this essay to the Department of English Philology at the Free University, Berlin, to Julie Sanders for inviting me to present a version of it at ‘Relaunching Ben Jonson’, a conference held at the University of Warwick, and to Cyndia Egle for inviting me to present a version of it as the keynote paper at ‘Liberty, License, and Authority’ at the Huntington Library, one of a series of eight conferences in a program entitled ‘Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation’, sponsored by the University of California Institute for Academic Research, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Getty Center for the Arts. I am also grateful to Julia Briggs for obtaining photographs of the manuscript of The Lady’s Tragedy from the British Library.\textsuperscript{45}
Castration, Censorship, and the Regulation of Dramatic Discourse

City: University of Iowa Press.
— 1990. ‘Censorship’. In Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism, ed. Martin Coyle et al. London: Routledge,
CASTRATION, CENSORSHIP, AND THE REGULATION OF DRAMATIC DISCOURSE

901–14.