Call for Papers

The Theatrical Legacy of Thomas Middleton, 1624-2024

Edited by William David Green, Anna L. Hegland, and Sam Jermy

With an afterword by Professor Tracey Hill

We plan to publish a collection of essays celebrating 400 years of Thomas Middleton’s legacy as a dramatist, from his final work for the commercial stage up to the present day.

When does a dramatist’s theatrical legacy begin? The answer may vary depending on the occasion. In 2016, celebrations took place worldwide to mark 400 years since the death of William Shakespeare, but further commemorative material can be expected in 2023, the year in which the First Folio, the renowned volume in which so much of Shakespeare’s dramatic canon is preserved, will similarly turn 400 years old. For Shakespeare’s contemporary Thomas Middleton, however, no such early posthumous canonization exists. Middleton died in 1627, but it was not until 2007 that the Oxford Collected Works of Middleton, the self-proclaimed “Middleton First Folio”, 1 was published; and yet, celebration of Middleton’s drama can be seen to have begun as early as 1624, in the unprecedented popular response to what would prove to be his final work for the commercial theatres.

On 6 August 1624, A Game at Chess, Middleton’s scathing satire of Anglo-Spanish relations, received its first performance by the King’s Men at the Globe Theatre on London’s Bankside. Although presented as allegory, the play’s barely concealed representation of numerous real-life political figures as the various chess pieces that make up the play’s dramatis personae (including England’s King James himself) proved highly inflammatory. The play was stopped by official intervention on 16 August, and on 18 August the Privy Council opened a prosecution against the actors and the playwright. Middleton was acquitted, but never wrote another full play for the London playhouses. Yet despite bringing about a somewhat ignominious end to Middleton’s theatrical career, before being shut down the play had already become “the greatest commercial success of the early English theatre”, 2 having been staged for a record nine consecutive performances (excluding Sundays) and possibly having been seen by up to twenty-seven thousand theatregoers, in 1624 more than a tenth of London’s population. 3 The play also received a significant number of written responses by readers and spectators in the months and years following its initial performances. 4 Middleton’s full canon may not have come to be truly defined until the publication of the Oxford Collected Works in 2007, but 1624 did mark the beginning of four centuries of reader/audience response to, and celebration of, Middleton’s significance to the history of early modern drama.

With a 2024 publication date in mind, we intend to publish a collection commemorating four centuries of Middleton's theatrical legacy, taking the initial success of *A Game at Chess* in 1624 as our starting point. We therefore invite proposals for chapters to be included in this collected volume. Topics to consider might include, but are certainly not limited to:

- The legacy and impact of the 2007 Oxford *Collected Works*.
- The evolution and redefinition of Middleton's authorial canon.
- The importance placed upon such issues as anonymity, authorship, and collaboration in the present-day study and textual editing of Middleton.
- The textual transmission, readership, and shelf life of Middleton's works in print, taking into account both early and modern editions.
- Discussions of present-day performances of and practice-based engagements with Middleton's works, or interviews with practitioners involved in such work.
- Online performances and other engagements with Middleton's work from a digital humanities perspective.
- Middleton's work with boy players (i.e. the Children of Paul's; the Children of the Queen's Revels), as well as the reimagining of such work by modern troupes of boy players, e.g. Edward’s Boys (King Edward VI School, Stratford-upon-Avon).
- Middleton's relevance to present-day critical theories.
- Responses to major works of Middleton criticism.
- Middleton and the characterization of women on the stage.
- Examining Middleton's contemporary attitudes to race, gender, and religion, as considered from the perspective of the twenty-first century.
- The importance of *A Game at Chess* to the study of early modern commercial theatre.
- Middleton's importance to the history of London.
- Past efforts to celebrate Middleton (i.e. the 1972 Oxford/York revival of *A Game at Chess*; the Beyond Shakespeare Company’s *Triumph 2021* event).

Finished chapters should be 5000-6000 words in length (including endnotes). Please send abstracts of 250-300 words, along with a brief bio, to Thomas.Middleton2024@gmail.com by 23:59 GMT on **11 March 2022**. We anticipate that the deadline for the submission of completed chapters will be in September 2022. Any potential contributors wishing to discuss their chapter idea before preparing an abstract are welcome to do so (well in advance of the deadline) either by contacting us at the above email address or by contacting any of the co-editors individually. Scholars and theatre practitioners from all backgrounds and of all career levels are invited to submit abstracts, and we are also eager to receive proposals from PhD students and early career researchers.