

CHAPTER 7

MIDDLETON'S
HISTORICAL
IMAGINATION

THOMAS ROEBUCK

MIDDLETON wrote two extant history plays. One was his unprecedented runaway success, a play on recent history (in the manner of Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*), *A Game at Chess* (1624). The other, *Hengist, King of Kent* (late 1620),¹ resembles other Jacobean plays in deriving its subject from ancient British history. This chapter will not only try to demonstrate some of the historiographical, religious, and political issues at stake in *Hengist*, but also to argue that this play is part of a particular moment in Middleton's career, running roughly from the late 1610s to the early 1620s, when historical writing was much on his mind. History writing could take multiple forms in the early modern period: chronicle, antiquarian, chorographic, civic, and so on.² These genres fluidly interpenetrated one another in Middleton's historical writing for the public stage and for the civic entertainments he wrote for his London patrons.

HENGIST, KING OF KENT

Middleton's *Hengist* is narrated by Raynolph Higdon, the fourteenth-century Benedictine monk and chronicler. Higdon would have seemed an anachronism by 1620, both as a medieval chronicler who had been superseded by new Renaissance

¹ A recent survey of Jacobean stagings of ancient Britain, which discusses *Hengist*, is McMullan (2007): 119–42. On *A Game at Chess* as a history play see Gary Taylor's introduction to the play (*Works* 2007: 1773–9). On the dating of *Hengist*, see *Companion* 2007: 410–14.

² A good introduction to the scholarship on history writing in the English Renaissance remains Woolf (1990). A bibliography of more recent work can be found in Womersley (2010). This subject is vast and no one guide is sufficient, even to the English material.

historiography and because he is speaking as a chorus (and master of the play's many dumb shows), genres which were more associated with the plays of the 1590s than the late 1610s.³ One of the effects of this is to historicize the process of historical transmission itself: by creating an anachronistic narrator who seems himself to be the product of several different pasts (cultural, historiographical, theatrical) the viewer or reader of the play is invited to reflect on the historical specificity of the account of the past the narrator is offering.

The story of Vortiger's reign and the arrival of Hengist in Britain is a crucial moment of transition in the history of Britain. The Romans have departed from Britain for the last time, and the country is beset with ethnic conflict: the Picts and Scots are invading from the north, while the ancient British inhabitants attempt to defend their hegemony in the south of the island. At this point, Vortiger decides there is no option but to summon the Saxons from Germany to help to wage war against their northern enemies. And this is the moment that allows the Saxons to begin to extirpate the ancient British inhabitants from England, and drive them into the far western parts of the island: into Wales and Cornwall. So this is a key moment of violent rupture in which the control of Britain begins to pass from the British (i.e. the Welsh, Cornish, and Breton inhabitants) towards the Saxons.⁴ In the Medieval and Renaissance British historiographical tradition, this story is frequently placed at the start of new books of English history. William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum* begins with the story of Hengist and the Saxons' arrival in Britain: it is his moment of the national origins of the 'English' people.⁵ In Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, Book 4 ends with the Romans' departure from Britain, and Book 5 introduces the story of Vortiger and the arrival of the Saxons.⁶ But this is by no means a nostalgic story about the search for unified, ethnically, religiously, or politically pure national origins.⁷ It is an origin myth which depicts an ethnically and politically divided ancient Britain: all the British territories are being fought over by Picts, Scots, Britons, Jutes, Angles, and Saxons. The story also questions the extent to which ancient Britain was ever an ideally organized religious society, which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reformers often presented it as.⁸ That the story offers a historical account of national origins which emphasizes crisis, rupture, violence, and betrayal may have been one of the reasons Middleton was attracted to presenting this period on stage.

In the sixteenth century, it might be useful to distinguish here between broadly two different kinds of treatment of the Hengist and Horsa story: one could be called the 'chronicle' tradition, the other the 'antiquarian' tradition.⁹ The chronicle tradition

³ See Pearn (1935: 385–405); Bruster and Weimann (2004).

⁴ For the significance of this story in the eighteenth century see Feibel (2001: 1–21).

⁵ See Savile (1596: Aiiij). The story of Vortiger begins on Aiiij.

⁶ See Wynkyn de Worde's second edition of this text, Higden (1495: 'Book Quintus') (new page signatures for each book).

⁷ For the association of national history and nostalgia, an association about which I remain sceptical, see Schwyzer (2004).

⁸ For a brilliant survey of these arguments see Milton (1995: ch. 6). For an example of them in practice in the Renaissance see Abbot (1624).

⁹ Momigliano (1950: 285–315).

broadly reproduces most of the accumulated features of the story from the oral traditions of Nennius and the historical romance of Geoffrey of Monmouth, minus some of the more egregious elements such as the prophecies delivered to Vortiger by Merlin.¹⁰ However, the antiquarian tradition introduces a newly synthetic and analytical approach to the source material. It is never critical of the historical veracity of the Hengist and Horsa story itself, although some of the extraneous accretions from the ninth-century Nennian compilations are removed.¹¹ William Camden (1551–1623) and John Speed (1551–1629), in particular, place the story of the Saxons' arrival in a far broader intellectual context, drawing especially on European scholarship to investigate the origins of the Saxons. They use etymological commentaries on the origin of the word 'Saxon' to develop different theories about the origin of the people themselves. Speed's round-up of European scholarship is largely derived from Camden, and so includes figures such as Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609) and Goropius Becanus (1519–1572), but he also adds a number of more recent commentators, including Richard Verstegan (1548–1640). For these antiquarian writers, the language is itself historically sedimented, and distinguishing between these levels of sediment allows the historian to derive historical data.¹² William Lambarde (1536–1601) treats the story in the context of a chorographic history of Kent, so he is keen to locate key places in the story, such as Thong Castle. This has an influence on John Stow (1524/5–1605) too. Stow participates in the antiquarian tradition, organizing his *Survey* of London chorographically, as a journey around all the wards of the city. But he also contributes to the chronicle tradition: his manuscript notebook for his chronicle history survives in the Bodleian, and shows him excerpting and comparing the many different chronicles of England's past (Bodleian MS Douce 225).

In some respects, Middleton's treatment has far greater affinity with the chronicle tradition. He synthesizes elements of the English and Scottish sections of Holinshed.¹³ This is partly why I am unpersuaded by Grace Ioppolo's suggestion (*Works* 2007: 1449) that Middleton drew the spelling of Hengist's daughter's name 'Roxena' from Lambarde's *Perambulation of Kent*: it seems more likely that he drew this spelling from the Scottish sections of the 1577 Holinshed. But central to the English antiquarian tradition is a new analysis and perception of local history. The chorographic histories draw on local records to present the history of individual communities and associations—the county, town, city, guild, family, and so on. Middleton is steeped in this tradition by 1620. He is familiar with Stow and the history of London and many of his plays respond indirectly to new perceptions of local identity and affiliation in the early seventeenth century, particularly

¹⁰ See e.g. Fabyan (1559: ch. lxxx).

¹¹ Camden (1609: 127–39) does not mention Hengist's daughter, a feature added in the Nennian compilations and developed by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

¹² For a recent account of the overlap between literature and etymology in the Renaissance see Vine (2006: 1–21).

¹³ Bald points out, interestingly, that Middleton may have drawn some details (e.g. Constantius' great religiosity) from Robert Fabyan's *Chronicle* (1938: xxxviii). He also points out that this chronicle contains a side-note: 'Thonge Castell standyth within 4 Miles of Feuersham by Thamys syde, nat ferre from Quynburghē, a note which is found only in the 1516 edition of Fabyan.'

his city comedies. Even the titles (*The Widow of Watling Street*, or *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*) situate the plays in local London contexts familiar to their original audiences. After considering Middleton's civic entertainments I wish to suggest that local and national histories and modes of historical writing overlap in *Hengist* in the conjunction of national chronicle history with the comic 'Mayor of Queenborough' scenes.

The story of Hengist and Vortiger will have raised certain issues for Middleton and seventeenth-century readers of history. One is religious. The reformed Church in Britain had argued that the ancient British Church, before the introduction of Roman Christianity via Augustine in the sixth century, had been closely related in terms of doctrine and hierarchical governance to the contemporary reformed Church in England. The reformed Church in England was not a novelty, but a deliberate return to a church of originary apostolic purity.¹⁴ So any play which stages early British society needs to think carefully about its depiction of that ancient Church. The second issue the material raises is one of ethnicity. How far have the ancient tensions in the British Isles been resolved in the Jacobean present? How far are the contemporary British peoples descended from one particular grouping (Saxon, British, Scot, etc.) and how far have they become amalgamated and indistinguishable over the centuries in between?¹⁵ Thirdly, there is an issue of governance and political authority. How far was ancient Britain a monarchical state? How far was it governed from the centre, or how devolved were structures of power? These religious, ethnic, and political questions are at the heart of understanding Middleton's treatment of the story of Hengist, King of Kent.

Religion, first of all. Middleton's *Hengist* depicts an ancient Britain in which religion is traduced in every aspect. This can be seen most clearly in his adaptation of Germanus and Lupus from the chronicle sources. Rather than Bede's saintly Germanus, a miracle-worker and apostolic converter of the ancient Britons to true Christianity, or the Nennian Germanus who is willing to speak truth to power, Middleton's Germanus, along with his colleague Lupus, is a tool of Vortiger's tyranny. Vortiger exploits Germanus and Lupus to force Constantius into the role of the puppet king at the outset of the play: 'Holy Germanus | And reverend Lupus, with all expedition | Set the crown on him' (1.1.56–8). Whereas Bede's Germanus and Lupus respond to the threat of the Saxon war with prayers and cries of 'Alleluia', Middleton's Germanus is an advocate of naked power politics: religious retirement is useless 'when a time so violent calls upon you' (90); Germanus ignores Constantius' plea that he might 'Stand... Clear from all temporal charge by my profession' (88–9). This depiction of the ancient British Church seeps out into other aspects of the play. In the manner of a sixteenth-century reformer, Hengist notes that national spending has been eaten up by the opulence of the Church:

There's the fruits
Of their religious shows too, to lie rotting
Under a million spent in gold and marble

¹⁴ On this issue see e.g. Booty (1963: 126–49); Quantin (2009).

¹⁵ A good starting point for the scholarship in this area is Baker and Maley (2002).

When thousands left behind dies without shelter,
Having nor house nor food. (2.4.134–8)

This is also to jumble the chronology of British history: the chronicles usually depict the Saxons as the great beautifiers and builders of churches after their conversion by St Augustine, whereas the ancient British places of worship were simple and unadorned. Sir Henry Spelman would include an illustration of such an ancient church in his 1639 edition of the councils of the British Church, which was little more than a simple thatched hut.¹⁶ And this depiction in *Hengist* of a factionalized, religiously atrophying state seeps out from the historical characters in the play to the non-historical plot: the comedy of Oliver the Puritan, and his conflict with Simon the Mayor of Queenborough. When the text was printed in 1661, the publisher's preface drew attention to parallels between Oliver in the play and 'the Rebel Oliver' Cromwell (Middleton 1661: A2'). In other words, this plot underlines parallels between the division of the ancient British Church, the contemporary Jacobean Church, and even the Church forty years after the play was first written. The historical and non-historical aspects of this play are not mutually antipathetical but comment on and reinforce one another. So when looking back into the past to ancient British Christianity, Middleton does not depict an ideal Church to which contemporary Britain might return. Rather this Church is degraded and factionalized in ways comparable to the contemporary Jacobean Church. Looking into the past in this play is far from a cause for religious nostalgia.¹⁷

This point becomes clearer if we compare *Hengist* briefly to other plays on ancient British stories from the period. There had been a rash of plays on Jacobean stages which depicted an idealized ancient British Church. Such stories tended to be set in Wales. This was because Wales was believed to be the repository of ancient British Christianity, after the Saxons arrived in Britain and drove the ancient Christians into the far west of the country. We can see this idealization of Wales as a resting place for apostolic Christianity in the preface to the sixteenth-century Welsh translation of the New Testament, for instance.¹⁸ One of the Jacobean stage plays on a Welsh theme makes a particularly instructive comparison with Middleton: a play by Middleton's frequent collaborator, William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, a Gentleman*. Although this play was printed in 1638, it was probably written and performed around 1608, at a similar time to other plays set in Wales such as Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1609? 1610?) and the anonymous *Valiant Welshman* (1615). Diocletian is making war against the ancient British Christians. In the opening scene, one of the princes of Wales plans to take the British queen to refuge 'safe into North Wales', but finds that already even there 'the Barbarous Romans have supplanted peace' (Rowley 1638: B2'). The Welsh sequences of the play concentrate on the martyrdom of St Albon and the attempts of

¹⁶ Spelman (1639: 11): 'Formam primae istius Ecclesiae totius orbis vetustissimae... hic intueret'.

¹⁷ On such nostalgia for the primitive Church see Neveu, 'L'Érudition ecclésiastique du XVIIe siècle et la nostalgie de l'antiquité chrétienne', in Robbins (1981: 195–223).

¹⁸ See Thomas (1976).

the virgin saint Winifred to resist rape by the Romans.¹⁹ The play ends with the prince Offa (in a radical telescoping of historical time) building a 'beauteous Monastery... In honour of our first English martyrs fame' (L1^v–L2^r). So the play centres on the attempt to protect the purity of primitive Welsh Christianity from the encroaching Roman invasion.

Middleton's treatment of ancient Britain and Wales is quite different. The final scene of *Hengist* takes place in Wales.²⁰ Vortiger planned at the end of 4.4 to go to take shelter from the Saxon warriors in his Welsh castle: 'But we must part, | My queen and I, to Cambria' (in *Collected Works* 2007: 128–9). All the historical, chronicle sources, from the Nennian compilations onwards, show that Vortiger's castle was built in Wales. Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon return from their exile (in that other repository of Celtic Christianity, Armorica or Brittany) to burn down Vortiger's castle. The lascivious Vortiger is himself hardly an ideal representative of ancient British Christianity. He hides in Wales purely for reasons of realpolitik rather than to preserve apostolic religious purity. But Ambrosius and Uther don't fare much better either. Brutal violence against Vortiger is tricked out by Aurelius with the workings of divine justice: 'Let wildfire ruin' the castle, Aurelius orders, 'That his destruction may appear to him | I'th figure of heaven's wrath at the last day' (5.2.2–4). The kind of apocalyptic visions of religious history which we find, for instance, in John Foxe's division of Christian history into five periods is dependent on a historical periodization which privileges the primitive purity of Christianity.²¹ Since *Hengist* deconstructs that very originary purity, the appeal to Christian apocalypticism is here rendered hollow as a consequence. It is another piece of power politics. There is no nostalgic repository of British Christianity in *Hengist*: simply pagan Saxons fighting against a corrupt British elite. This departure from earlier treatments of ancient Wales on the Jacobean stage gives the play a distinctively Middletonian satirical bite.

The second set of issues which Middleton's play raises I have called issues of 'ethnicity'. This is a useful catch-all word, but is also troublesomely anachronistic.²² In broader terms, it might be useful to think here of Middleton's play as a work concerned with national origins and nation formation. The first thing to note here is that Middleton has removed a dimension of the story of the Saxons' arrival in Britain which is present in all the chronicle accounts, from Gildas onwards. There is no mention of war being made on the British by the Scots and the Picts. Hengist arrives to crush a rebellion by the British, not to defeat warring northern neighbours. One reason for this might be that Middleton was afraid of creating controversy with a Scottish king on the throne. But Middleton was not afraid of controversy in other works of the 1620s, especially his other history play,

¹⁹ For a discussion of this play in its Welsh context see Kerrigan (2008: ch. 3).

²⁰ Simon threatens Hengist that he will 'follow you to Wales with a dog and a bell' (5.1.393).

²¹ On Foxe's division of history see Martin (2002: 37–53).

²² Again, the literature on this topic is vast. Some useful primary sources are gathered in Loomba and Burton (2007).

A Game at Chess. And there were other plays which depicted wars with the Scots and Picts, such as Lodowick Carlell's two-part play *Arviragus and Philicia* (1639).²³

Perhaps another way of thinking about this problem is in terms of John Kerrigan's notion of 'Archipelagic' writing; that seventeenth-century writing is symptomatic of the interactivity between multiple monarchies which make up Britain. Although this is a seminal thesis, it is not one which applies universally to all writers. Middleton is an exception. He eschews an opportunity to think about the multiple monarchy of Britain in archipelagic terms—an opportunity which would be afforded by the treatment of this period in chronicle history.²⁴ Indeed, Middleton probably used Holinshed's *History of Scotland* to elaborate details of his plot. But instead of depicting interactions between the three kingdoms, or many nations, of Britain, Middleton's plays seem preoccupied with the conflict between Saxon (English) and British (Welsh) identities and histories. The particular inflection which Middleton gives to these issues perhaps helps us to distinguish Middleton's position in relation to other dramatists and theatrical history in the period. John Kerrigan has pointed to the engagement of plays written around 1610 with the Four Shires controversy, in which leading gentry in the four shires which border Wales contested their legal and bureaucratic administration by the Council of Wales.²⁵ A particularly clear example of a play which engages with this dispute is R.A.'s *The Valiant Welshman* (published 1615). But this play was written for Prince Henry's Men; Henry was himself of course the Prince of Wales, preoccupied with issues of Welsh history and administration, and his theatre company toured in the Welsh border regions.²⁶ Middleton, on the other hand, is writing for a very different theatrical climate. The King's Men—who performed *Hengist*, and seem to have kept it prominently in their repertoire until the closure of the theatres—were a far more London-based company by 1620 than the theatre companies had been even ten years before.²⁷ And Middleton is a writer whose historical concerns are closely centred on London and the south-east of England, as we will see in more detail below. In *Hengist*, these contextual pressures seem to have shaped a play which is particularly concerned with questions of national origin in England, and indeed with locating the origins in the south-east specifically, rather than with broader Britain-wide concerns.

Middleton's scrutiny of the origins of the Saxons and the English is clear in Hengist's paeon to the land which the Saxons claim in England: the area encircled by strips of leather, on which Thong castle is built. Hengist says:

²³ Although the controversy over the *Isle of Dogs* set a precedent for dramatists getting in trouble over Scottish satire.

²⁴ For the term 'archipelagic' and its context see Kerrigan (2008).

²⁵ On the Four Shires controversy see, for instance, Roberts (1996: 118–47).

²⁶ John Doddridge, *The History of the Antient and Moderne Estate of the Principality of Wales* (1630) was probably first written for Prince Henry. On the touring patterns of Prince Henry's Men see Murray (1910: i. 206–9).

²⁷ For a good, accessible introduction to the nature of touring theatre in the early modern period see Keenan (2002).

It is the first foundations of our fortunes
On Britain's earth and ought to be embraced
With a respect near linked to adoration (2.4.126–8)²⁸

This notion of a religious bond with the English earth ('adoration' comes from 'adorare', 'to pray towards') is crucial to understanding the kind of moment of historical transition we witness in the play. The Saxons are always presented in chronicle accounts as wanderers who love the coastal regions: Camden, for instance, sees the Saxons as pirates who pillage and invade one coast after another.²⁹ Middleton acknowledges their status as wanderers in Raynolph's speech in act 1: 'When Germany was overgrown | With sons of peace too thickly sown, | Several guides were chosen then | By destined lots to lead out men' (1.2.1–4). The Saxons have departed from Germany, not on a piratical mission to pillage different lands, but instead to settle in one excellent land in particular. In Middleton's play, the Saxons are undergoing a transition from nomadic sailing life to settled habitation of a particular venerated landscape.³⁰ Hengist goes on to say that 'About the fruitful banks of uberous Kent, | A fat and olive soil, there we came in' (2.4.140–1). So Hengist's purchase on the land gradually moves outwards from the immediate area of Thong Castle to the broader landscape of Kent itself.

It is not just land in which the Saxons are investing themselves, but also language. It is significant that *Hengist* is the only play on the remarkably polyglot Renaissance stage to feature the Anglo-Saxon language. It comes at a key moment of ethnic violence and betrayal. Hengist has summoned Vortiger and his British nobles to a seemingly friendly parley on Salisbury Plain. But he orders his men to keep their knives concealed and wait his word: '*Nemp your sexes*' (4.2.35), meaning 'seize your knives'. The Saxons slaughter the unarmed British nobles. This is a moment of historical betrayal which is repeated many times in the chronicles, a crucial moment of rupture and violence in the origins of the modern English people. The narrator of the play, Raynolph Higden, makes it clear the meeting takes place 'Upon the plain near Salisbury' (4.3.10). This would have cast the historically alert viewer or reader's mind forward to the building of Stonehenge on this site to commemorate the Saxon betrayal and murder: one of the commonest aetiological explanations surrounding Stonehenge in the early modern period.³¹ Stonehenge is a site which resonates not only with betrayal, but with the extirpation of history and historical memory itself. This is evident in the little-known manuscript play written by the historian John Speed's son, also called John Speed, a physician at St John's College, Oxford.³² This academic play, performed at St John's in the 1630s, takes place on Salisbury plain amidst the

²⁸ I prefer 'near' as a modernization of 'neer' to Ioppolo's 'neër' (*Works* 2007: 1461).

²⁹ Camden (1609: 127–8).

³⁰ This process is also described by Camden (1609: 128).

³¹ For an early modern overview of theories about the origin of Stonehenge, see Jones and Webb (1655).

³² There is a brief account of this John Speed (1628–1711) embedded in the account of his father's life (1595–1640) in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. It does not mention his surviving academic play.

monoliths of Stonehenge, the meaning of which stones mystify and fascinate the play's characters.³³ So this scene in Middleton takes place at a location which is resonant not only with memories of historical betrayal, but also with forgetting and the extirpation of such memories.

But perhaps particularly important in the context of Middleton's play is the use of the word 'sexes' for 'knives'. The antiquarian tradition of history, as mentioned above, searches for historical origins through etymology. One of the chief etymological theories for the origin of the word 'Saxon' was that it derived from 'seaxes', the knives that were treasured by the warlike Saxon people. John Speed gives the clearest expression of this theory in the period:

the name *Saxon* tooke the appellation from the *Fashion* of the *Weapon* that vsuallie they wore; which was a *Crooked Bowing Sword* ... such as were those that were hid vnder their Garments in the *Massacre* of the *British Nobilitie* vpon *Salisbury Plaine*, when *Hengist* gaue the watch-word, *Nem eour Seaxes*, that is, *Take your Swords*³⁴

So the call of 'Nemp your sexes' in Middleton's play announces not only a crucial moment of betrayal. It is a moment of betrayal which is woven etymologically into the history of the name of the Saxons themselves. The Saxon language is instinct with this moment of violent historical rupture. What is at stake in Middleton's play, therefore, is not only hegemony over the British landscape, but the possibility that the supplanting of the British language itself might be a means towards that domination. Middleton stages a look back into the shivered national origins of the English domination of land and language.

What evidence is there for the ways Middleton's contemporaries (either on the stage or page) read his play? There is some evidence that they might have been alive to the play's oscillations between comic and tragic affect.³⁵ But was anyone aware of the historical content and sources? At least one reader was, and that was Gerard Langbaine in his *An Account of the English Dramatic Poets* (1691: 372–3). He calls the play, 'Mayor of Quinborough' (after the published play title), and outlines the play's historical sources: 'In this Play are several Dumb Shews, explained by Rainulph monk of Chester, and the Author has chiefly followed his *Polychronicon*: See besides Stow, Speed, Du Chesne, &c. in the Reign of Vortiger' (372–3). *Polychronicon*, Stow, and Speed are self-explanatory as choices of sources. It is interesting, however, that he mentions André Duchesne, whose *Histoire d'Angleterre, d'Ecosse, et d'Irlande* (1614) was one of the most popular continental European works on British history.³⁶ So although we know little about how Langbaine

³³ See BL Add. MS 14047, fos. 44^v–59^v. The play was called *The Converted Robber*. See the discussion of authorship in Bentley (1941–68: v. 1181–4).

³⁴ Speed (1611: 285). He is citing Richard Verstegan's *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities* (1605).

³⁵ Munro (2004: 307–10).

³⁶ Duchesne was also something of an Anglophile, corresponding via Peiresc with William Camden in order to obtain manuscripts for his forthcoming edition of Norman historical texts, *Historiae Normannorum scriptores antiqui* (1619). He thanks Cotton and Camden effusively in the preface to his edition (aiij^v) for providing manuscripts for *Emmae Anglorum reginae* ... *Encomium* and *Gesta Guillelmi II. Ducis Normannorum*.

read *Hengist*, we can be sure that he was alive to the kind of multiplicity of historical sources available to Middleton, ranging from the chronicle tradition (*Polychronicon*) to scholarly antiquarian texts (Speed) and European scholarly works (Duchesne). The range of historiographical contexts in which this chapter has situated *Hengist* were available to early readers of the play. It is also worth tentatively noting that for Langbaine, calling the play the 'Mayor of Quinborough', i.e. drawing attention to the comedy of Kentish civic life, did not render the historical sources of the play irrelevant. Appreciation of the dynamic interaction between the civic comedy and the historical scenes of the play are important to a full appreciation of Middleton's historical imagination—but this will become clearer after an analysis of Middleton's work as a civic historian.

MIDDLETON'S CAREER AS A CIVIC HISTORIAN

At the time Middleton was writing *Hengist* he was also at the apex of his career as a writer of civic histories and entertainments. Local London history-writing, most obviously John Stow's *Survey of London*, was popular in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.³⁷ This kind of writing traced in detail the history of individual city guilds and corporations, the names and histories of individual mayors of London, and the structures and individuals who governed the City of London. In a developing metropolis, historians such as Ian Archer have suggested the value of historical writing to defining an emerging sense of civic identity and the cohesive values of local guilds and institutions.³⁸ Such histories were by no means restricted to London: we can see similar undertakings in other big towns in England.³⁹ But focus on institutions of civic governance does distinguish histories such as Stow's from both the narrative chronicle tradition of historiography, and from the local county chorographies, which were primarily genealogical in their focus.⁴⁰ Unlike Camden's *Britannia*, aimed at a transnational audience for works of Latin scholarship, Stow's work is aimed at a local, London audience. It is this historiographical environment in which we need to situate Middleton's work for the City of London.

On 6 September 1620, Middleton was appointed as the city chronologer of London. What was the nature of this office? This question has proved notoriously difficult to answer. The names of most of the city chronologists appointed in the seventeenth century survive in the *Repertories* of the City of London, which were edited in the nineteenth century.⁴¹ One thing that stands out immediately is that many of these 'chronologists' were

³⁷ There is now a huge bibliography on Stow, especially on his *Survey*. The best starting point is the volume of essays dedicated to the range of his works: Gadd and Gillespie (2004).

³⁸ See Archer's chapter in the volume cited above as well as (2005: 205–26).

³⁹ e.g. William Gray, *Chorographia, or, A Survey of Newcastle* (1649).

⁴⁰ On the county histories see Broadway (2006).

⁴¹ *Analytical Index to the Series of Records Known as the Remembrancia. Preserved among the Archives of the City of London. Ad.1579–1664* (1878: 305–6).

also major poets or dramatists in the period: Middleton, Jonson, and Francis Quarles were all appointed. When Jonson died, the King, the Earl of Pembroke, and the Earl of Dorset all wrote in support of Thomas May to become the next city chronologer.⁴² He was not selected for the post, and one Edward Hewes succeeded Jonson. But even so, the fact that he was nominated by such distinguished figures suggests that he would have been a suitable candidate for the post. So the post in the 1620s and 1630s seems to have been primarily designed to reward a poet-dramatist and historian, which both Middleton and Jonson were well suited to. Middleton of course was a frequent writer of civic entertainments, but Jonson too had his moments in that genre: as Gabriel Heaton and James Knowles have shown, the lord mayor's inauguration records show that £12 was paid to Jonson for 'his device and speech for the children' and he wrote an entertainment for the Merchant Taylors' Company in July 1607.⁴³ The city fathers' threat to withdraw Jonson's stipend if he did not produce any historical chronicles soon, however, may show that in some respects he was the wrong appointment: his literary and patronage circles were not primarily, or even largely, civic.⁴⁴ Two of the manuscripts Middleton produced in this role survived into the eighteenth century (*Works* 2007: 1907–11; *Companion* 2007: 438–9, 443, 1166); this suggests he might have been a better fit for a role aimed at a poet-historian with commitments to London and its civic institutions.

In Middleton's case specifically, there is strong evidence for the involvement of a specific figure in his appointment: Sir William Cokayne, who was mayor of London when Middleton was invested as chronologer.⁴⁵ Middleton wrote the entertainment for the day of the 'extirpation of his praetorship', his last day in mayoral office, on 28 October 1620 (*Works* 2007: 1438). This entertainment was written only shortly after Middleton's investiture. Middleton wrote several pageants and entertainments for Sir William Cokayne: *The Triumphs of Love and Antiquity*, commissioned by the Company of the Skinners, celebrated Cokayne's investment as mayor; and the *Honourable Entertainments* for various occasions, such as the marriage of Cokayne's daughter. So a close association between Middleton and Cokayne is authoritatively documented. It is also significant that Middleton's pageants for Cokayne include large amounts of historical material. Before turning to those pageants themselves, it is worth pointing out that within the *Honourable Entertainments*, the transition between Cokayne's mayoralty and that of his successor, Sir Francis Jones, is striking. The pageants for Sir Francis are largely on pastoral themes: the seventh entertainment, for instance, features long speeches by 'Severity', 'Levity', 'Flora', and 'Hyacinth'. They are quite different in theme and subject matter from those for Cokayne.

The comic scenes in *Hengist* help us to understand more deeply Middleton's patronage relationships. R. C. Bald suggested in 1938, and all subsequent scholars have agreed,

⁴² See David Norbrook in 'Thomas May', *ODNB* (2004).

⁴³ Heaton and Knowles (2003: 587–600).

⁴⁴ For records of Jonson's role as city chronologer see Jonson (1925–52a: i. 240–1). A good overview of Jonson's circles in the Caroline period is Sanders (2006: 279–94).

⁴⁵ For a modern account of William Cokayne's life see his entry in *ODNB*. For an account of William Cokayne and his family, see Cokayne (1897: 83–90). For his funeral sermon, preached by John Donne: Simpson and Potter (1954: vii. 257–78). For his funeral monument and inscription see Dugdale (1658: 68–9).

that the poor petitioners' references to 'a great enormity [i.e. crisis] in wool' (1.3.98) might be a reference to the failure of the 'Cokayne Project' (xiv). This was Cokayne's attempt to ensure that all wool was dyed and processed domestically before being exported, through the establishment of The New Company of Merchant Adventurers (1615), who owned exclusive rights to export dyed wool and cloths. It was a complete disaster as the Dutch, in particular, refused to pay for the processed materials.⁴⁶ Middleton's relationship with Cokayne is therefore significantly complicated by these scenes. They strengthen the case that the play was written after October 1620 (i.e. after the end of Cokayne's mayoralty). Civic patrons were probably fluid: once Cokayne had retired as mayor Middleton moved on to cultivating the next holder of the office. Indeed, because Cokayne was such a deeply unpopular figure he was willing to turn upon him in the presence of that other great patron of the London stage: the amassed audiences at the public theatres. Middleton was willing, in the context of a public stage play, to satirize the very patron he had eulogized in the more intimate civic setting.

What is the relationship between the historiography of *Hengist* and that of Middleton's civic pageants and entertainments? First of all, Middleton's pageant history offers different formal options from the chronicle history play. In the *Honourable Entertainments* in particular, Middleton draws on the chorographic tradition of land-writing, particularly in *The Third Entertainment*. Here, a 'water-nymph' rises out of the water conduit to greet the magistrates upon their arrival at the water conduits by the Banqueting House. She then offers an account of the 'renewing' of this 'ancient custom' and laments that she has for a long time been 'so forgot' (3.1, 3.8, 3.42). Such rhetorical prosopopoeia through a water-nymph associated with a particular place and its history is characteristic of chorographic poetry of the English Renaissance: Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612) is a clear example, as is Spenser's *The Ruines of Time* (1591). But politically this is an understandably quiescent genre. Hence there is no room for the vision of rupture and discontinuity presented in *Hengist*. The *Honourable Entertainments* are preoccupied with the renewing of ancient customs: *The Second Entertainment*, for instance, describes the re-establishment of archery festivals by Henry VIII and Edward VI. In older times, such festivals had been considered worthy of protection by the monarch:

Old time made much on't, and it thought no praise
Too dear for't, nor no honour in those days.
Not only kings ordained laws to defend it
But shined the first examples to commend it. (2.3–6)

So when old customs had been abandoned—such as archery festivals or the visit to the water conduits by the city fathers—then Middleton celebrates the reconnection of ancient custom and present practice.

Such continuities are strongly locally inflected, especially in *The Triumphs of Love and Antiquity*. The figure of 'Antiquity' appears and announces that 'I record, that after-times may see | What former were, and how they ought to be' (in *Collected Works* 2007: 254–5).

⁴⁶ See Friis (1927).

'Antiquity' seems specifically to be a historian of the Skinners' Company and their relationship with nobility and royalty since their establishment: he lists the kings, queens, prince, dukes, and earls who were 'of this fraternity made free' (*Collected Works* 2007: 263).⁴⁷ He is keen in particular to establish the symbiotic relationship between local civic guild and national polity. The Fates, according to Antiquity, 'Have to this noble brotherhood knit such states' (266).⁴⁸ After this speech, the printed pageant offers a long account of the interactions between monarchs and the Skinners' Company, since the foundation of the latter in the reign of Edward III.⁴⁹ Such local inflection of national politics is comparable to the relationship between the two plots of *Hengist, King of Kent*. It should be no surprise to a reader of Middleton's civic pageants to see a plot about disputes in corporate town administration and an account of national history being grafted together. *Hengist* presents an analysis of conflicts between different levels of government in Britain. When Hengist demands more than the earldom of Kent, but instead the 'kingdom on't... without control, | The full possession' (4.4.91-2), Vortiger is reluctant because 'Never was King of Kent yet | But who was general King' (4.4.94-5).⁵⁰ This points to both the devolved nature of kingship in the early British kingdoms (that more than one king would be imaginable) and also the tense hierarchies between those kings (because the King of Kent is traditionally the King of the whole of Britain). And it is in this context that we should read the civic disputes within the town of Queenborough: local political squabbles mirror, and are interrelated with, violence and betrayal in national history.

In the town of Queenborough, Simon the Tanner is in conflict with the Puritan Oliver, a 'fustian-weaver'. The conflict is presented to Hengist by the other townspeople as a rupture within the 'corporation' (3.55, 70), alluding to the early modern incorporated civic structures of governance. In such incorporated towns and boroughs guild members could vote to elect aldermen and the mayoralty.⁵¹ Each of the guild members' anxieties about corporate institutions are expressed in metaphors associated with their trade. The Barber is a 'corrector of enormities in hair' (3.3.46), the tailor intends to 'rip the linings' (68) of the town quarrel to show them to Hengist, the glover is anxious that 'our town wants a hand' (88), and so forth. Hengist is asked to solve this dispute, but he feels the nobility should remain outside civic disputes, which ideally could be resolved internally. He asks, 'But why to me is this election offered? | The choosing of a mayor goes by most voices' (3.143-4). Hengist actually abandons the people to their disputes. When Simon

⁴⁷ For more on the history of the Skinners' Company see Wadmore (1876-80: 92-182).

⁴⁸ Contrast this with Vortiger's attack on the 'rank brotherhood' of civic tradesmen (*Hengist* 1.3.18).

⁴⁹ For more on the London guilds see Rappaport (1989).

⁵⁰ Grace Ioppolo wants to place this kind of conflict in levels of governance within the context specifically of problems in the island of Jersey (*Works* 2007: 1449). I am not convinced, both because there is no evidence Middleton knew or cared about Jersey, and because this sort of conflict between governmental hierarchies was a far more widespread problem in governing an early modern state without any developed bureaucratic administration. On the latter issue see Braddick (2000). For Ioppolo's argument see Ioppolo (1996: 87-107).

⁵¹ See Withington (2005).

later offers a 'gilded scabbard' to the royal party (4.1.14), Vortiger rejects his offer with contempt for all the ordinary citizens of Kent ('I hate 'em as I do the rotten roots of you' (16)). This drives the townspeople into the arms of Hengist: "Then bless the good Earl of Kent' (21), Simon concludes. We are in recognizably the same world here as the one described by Middleton's historical pageants, a world in which guilds are designed to maintain political order both horizontally in relation to one another, and vertically by their relationship to the king and local nobility. But whereas the pageants represent these relations in idealized terms, the play teases out conflict. Guilds are set against one another here, particularly on religious grounds: Oliver is a Puritan rebel. In that sense, the comic plot underlines the religious conflicts in the historical plot. But the comic characters are themselves caught up within the larger political divisions in the kingdom. They offer fealty to Vortiger and his family, but are forced instead to factionalize and to side with Hengist. Middleton's historical imagination in both *Hengist* and his pageants is deeply invested in the local: regional landscapes, politics, and civic contexts. Chronicle history is situated in specific local, chorographic, contexts. But whereas in the pageants, such historical modes and the political visions they imply are seamless with one another, in *Hengist* they are set into dynamic conflict.

CONCLUSION

What is clear from the above survey is that the multiple ways in which Middleton engaged with history were closely shaped by the context within which he was writing. The same historical forms do not obtain for a pageant as they do for a play. However, some things remain constant, and if they do not quite amount to a vision of history they are still worth enumerating individually. First, Middleton's historical vision is intensely locally inflected, particularly focusing on London and the south-east of England. It is no surprise he should have been attracted to writing a play about the ways strangers and alien settlers embed themselves in that landscape to become the modern English. Secondly, and allied to this first point, is the idea that national and local history are intertwined. Rather than seeing a tussle between comedy and tragedy, or the local and the national, in *Hengist*, I want to have pointed towards ways in which competing genres and institutions are mutually sustaining and interpenetrating. This is why it is necessary to see Middleton's historical vision developing within a particular civic context: his civic histories, as we have seen, are preoccupied with the sustaining relationship between local institutions and national sovereign government. Finally, it is worth pointing to what makes Middleton's use of history unique. We have already suggested earlier that rather than presenting an idealized ancient Britain, or at least some partially idealized figures within that Britain, Middleton finds the ancient British and the ancient Saxons tyrannous, idolatrous, and lascivious. There is no secure return to national origins. It is perhaps the fact that it has produced one of the most troubling visions of national history on the early modern stage that makes Middleton's historical imagination so worthy of study.