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Criticism of Thomas Middleton's earliest known tragedy, Hengist, King of Kent; or The Mayor of Queenborough, has been largely either negative or negligible. Hengist is available in a well edited text prepared by R. C. Bald in 1938 from a seventeenth-century manuscript, and study of the play, in the light of present knowledge, indicates that it deserves more serious critical attention than it has received. Such a reassessment is the purpose of this study.

When placed in its historical perspective, through an examination of the questions of authorship, dating, stage history, sources, and its relationship to the history play, Hengist is seen to be the product of Middleton's mature genius. Comparison of the finished play with its known sources provides an interesting look at the author's creative process. Where the play deviates from the sources, it reveals Middleton's use of history as a springboard for his own tragic vision.

Much of the negative criticism of Hengist hinges on its apparent lack of unity, reflected in the double title (which refers to the main and subplots). It can be demonstrated, however, that the play's theme (ambition) is amplified in the imagery and characterization, and that all of these elements contribute to its cohesiveness. Middleton implements this theme largely through a technique of balance and contrast.

Finally, Hengist is an effective vehicle for Middleton's

tragic vision. It reflects a pessimistic view of man which, nevertheless, has at its heart a Christian understanding. Middleton's tragic figures are sinners who willfully disregard the moral order which exists beyond them and who eventually suffer retribution. This orientation is presented through the play's emphasis on the Christian concepts of sin, judgment, and will; on fate and fortune; and on religion itself.

Hengist, King of Kent, then, is important for several reasons. It reveals Middleton the artist at work, transforming his sources to his own peculiarly ironic tragedy; its themes and method point toward the more successful later tragedies; and its strong scenes and characters are memorable in their own right. The play is, in the final analysis, clouded by Middleton's failure to divorce himself sufficiently from his sources and make his purpose clear. Yet Hengist is interesting and deserves greater attention than it has received.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THOMAS MIDDLETON'S

HENGIST, KING OF KENT

by

Nancy C. Simmons

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Approved by

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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[illegible]

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) was a playwright of great range and diversity. His prolific output includes approximately twenty-three plays, ranging from comedy and tragicomedy to tragedy and the unique political satire, A Game At Chess.[1] Among his collaborators were Thomas Dekker and William Rowley; he wrote for a number of different companies; and his London-based career included also the writing of city entertainments and the position of City Chronologer.[2] From this versatility there emerges a shadowy portrait of a playwright whose dominant characteristic is his realism. Throughout his plays, which include both the mediocre and the brilliant, certain Middletonian traits stand out. Middleton is always concerned with man in society, in his relationships with other men; his characters are ordinary men and women who are realistically and convincingly drawn; he is detached and ironic in his outlook;

1 R. C. Bald, "The Chronology of Middleton's Plays," MLR, 33 (1937), 43. Bald postulates a chronological order for the Middleton canon in which the comedies fall largely in the early period (1602-15), followed by the tragicomedies (c. 1616), tragedies (1615-22) and A Game At Chess (1624). The order is admittedly speculative.

2 Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1943), pp. 158-60.

his language manages to retain the effect of speech while incorporating powerful and poetic passages.

Because of his versatility, because he attempted so much, and because when he succeeded his achievement is great, Middleton is an extremely interesting subject for study. Critical response to the playwright has been consistently ambivalent; yet critics are again and again forced to place him high on their scales of values. T. S. Eliot's judgment of The Changeling is representative: Middleton, he says, is inferior to many in poetry and dramatic technique; but, he continues,

> . . . in the moral essence of tragedy it is safe to say that in this play Middleton is surpassed by one Elizabethan alone, and that is Shakespeare.[3]

It is in his tragedies that Middleton's realistic genius becomes fully developed. The playwright is generally acknowledged as the author of three tragedies, Hengist, King of Kent; or The Mayor of Queenborough (c. 1619-20); The Changeling (1622); and Women Beware Women (c. 1621?).[4]

3 T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, 1917-1932 (New York, 1932), p. 144.

4 See the discussion of the problem of dating Hengist in Chapter II, pages 9-11. The Changeling was licensed in 1622, and Women Beware Women is usually dated c. 1621 (see Bald, "The Chronology of Middleton's Plays," p. 43), although later critics (Irving Ribner and Richard Barker, for example) postulate a date close to Middleton's death in 1627. The problem of the Middleton canon is a thorny one, and whether or not the playwright wrote The Second Maiden's Tragedy and The Revenger's Tragedy (as Samuel Schoenbaum, Barker and Peter B. Murray believe) seems to me an insoluble question.

The earliest of the three, however, has not received the attention which it seems to deserve. Hengist, King of Kent, is interesting for two reasons: it provides insight into Middleton's artistic genius, through its close relationship to and simultaneous freedom from its sources; and it served as a testing ground for themes and techniques used more successfully by Middleton in the later tragedies. It will be the purpose of this study to examine Hengist, King of Kent in the first respect: to see what the playwright was attempting to do, through comparison of the historical sources with the finished drama; to examine how the play's several elements are shaped into a unified whole; and to attempt to see the play as a vehicle for Middleton's moral vision, his view of the reality of man and his world. This is not to say that Hengist is totally successful. However, it does seem that the play exhibits a unity which has been overlooked by most critics whose discussions have emphasized, instead, its weaknesses: its uneven texture, mingling of exceptional passages with the mediocre, and failure to coalesce into a meaningful whole. Theatrically the play may well be a failure; as an artistic creation, however, it is not, as this study will attempt to demonstrate.

A number of questions surround Hengist, King of Kent, and may have contributed to its neglect. The play combines historical events and persons in a tragic mold incongruously

suffused with a boisterously comic subplot, an anomaly suggested by the double title. Long known by the second title, whose reference is to the underplot, the play was called a comedy by Henry Herringman in his Stationer's Register entry and on the title page of the 1661 quarto.[5] A. H. Bullen, in his edition of Middleton's Works (1885) called the play a tragi-comedy;[6] C. H. Herford referred to it as "romantic drama";[7] and F. S. Boas labeled it "historic tragedy."[8] The confusion has continued: Richard Hindry Barker includes Hengist in his discussion of Middleton's tragedies, but calls the play a chronicle;[9] and Samuel Schoenbaum feels it is ". . . just as much a tragedy as a history play. . . ."[10]

A new edition of Hengist, King of Kent was prepared in 1938 by R. C. Bald.[11] Using as his basic text the Lambarde

5 Gerald E. Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, IV (Oxford, 1956), 884.

6 "Introduction," The Works of Thomas Middleton, I (Boston, 1885), xviii.

7 Charles Harold Herford, "Thomas Middleton," DNB (1920-21), XIII, 360.

8 Frederick S. Boas, An Introduction to Stuart Drama (Oxford, 1946), p. 233.

9 Thomas Middleton (New York, 1958), p. 116.

10 Middleton's Tragedies: A Critical Study (New York, 1955), p. 70.

11 Thomas Middleton, Hengist, King of Kent; or The Mayor of Queenborough, ed. R. C. Bald (New York, 1938). It is from this edition of the play that all citations in this study will be made.

manuscript (in the Folger Shakespeare Library), Bald incorporated corrections from a second manuscript and the quarto version of the play.[12] The volume represents the first modern edition of Hengist, and Bald's thoughtful Introduction reassesses the play and its background, emphasizing its strengths and placing it in proper perspective. It seems surprising, then, that little new interest has been stimulated in Hengist, King of Kent. Critics instead have confined themselves to the recognized masterpieces, suggesting, as do G. R. Hibbard and Parrott and Ball, that Middleton was the author of two tragedies, The Changeling and Women Beware Women;[13] or relegating Hengist to a footnote, as does Irving Ribner in Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order.[14] Hengist, in fact, occupies the position of a difficult stepchild whom it is easier to ignore than to deal with. Even Schoenbaum, one of Middleton's most dedicated critics, feels obliged to apologize for discussing the play at length in his discussion of Middleton's tragedies.[15]

In an attempt to rescue Hengist, King of Kent from such neglect, this study will focus on three aspects of

12 See the Appendix for a discussion of the text.

13 G. R. Hibbard, "The Tragedies of Thomas Middleton and the Decadence of the Drama," Renaissance and Modern Studies (University of Nottingham), I (1957), 42; Parrott and Ball, p. 236.

14 New York, 1962, p. 125.

15 Middleton's Tragedies, p. 70.

Middleton's play: Chapter II will provide historical background, in order to place the play in perspective, and will emphasize Middleton's sources and use of them. Chapter III is an examination of the unifying elements which shape the play; and in Chapter IV the play is examined in terms of its tragic vision. It is to be hoped that a deeper appreciation of Middleton as playwright and of Hengist, King of Kent as an artistic creation will emerge from this close reexamination of a play which has been unduly ignored.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The findings of twentieth-century scholarship would seem to force a reappraisal of Hengist, King of Kent. Previous neglect of the play was partially caused by a nineteenth-century assumption that Hengist represented merely Middleton's revision of an older play or that it was an early, immature work. Since these assumptions are contradicted today, further study of Hengist seems justified. The play's importance is also illuminated through an awareness of its popularity, with both contemporary and subsequent audiences, and an understanding of Middleton's transformation of his sources. Therefore, this chapter will summarize current thinking on these four areas of concern: the play's authorship, its date of composition, its stage history, and Middleton's use of sources.

Authorship

Despite the questions which surround Hengist, there are few who share Havelock Ellis' serious doubts as to its authorship. Ellis felt that the play was ". . . by no means characteristic of Middleton . . ."; in fact, that it was more representative of Rowley.[1] Dispute exists, however,

1 Havelock Ellis, "Preface," Thomas Middleton, The Mermaid Series, II (New York, 1890), x.

as to how much of the play is Middleton's unaided work. F. G. Fleay in 1891 identified Hengist with an earlier work (now lost), mentioned in Henslowe's Diary. Fleay states,

> It seems to be an alteration of Hengist, an Admiral's play of 1597, June 22, which not being marked as a new play, I take to be the same as the Vortiger of 1596, Dec. 4. Query, was this old play by Middleton?[2]

The suggestion was adopted by subsequent critics,[3] but Mark Eccles' discovery that Middleton was born in 1580, not around 1570 as had been earlier assumed, makes such a supposition highly unlikely.[4] That Middleton may have based his play on this older work would explain its uneven surface and incorporation of archaic elements, but the fact of such a rewriting must be based purely on speculation. The consensus of recent scholarship is that although Middleton may have been influenced by the earlier play, the extent of that influence can only be surmised.[5] A critical appraisal of Hengist, therefore, must assume that the play represents Middleton's own rendering of known historical sources.[6]

2 Frederick Gard Fleay, A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559-1642 (New York, 1891), II, 104.

3 See, for example, E.H.C. Oliphant, The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher (New Haven, Conn., 1927), p. 119.

4 "Middleton's Birth and Education," RES, 7 (1931), 431.

5 See Bald, "Introduction," Hengist, King of Kent; or The Mayor of Queenborough, pp. xv, xviii-xix; Eccles, p. 433.

6 See the discussion of sources and Middleton's use of them on pages 12-26.

Dating

The uneven quality of the play which led Ellis to doubt its authorship has caused many critics to regard Hengist as an early work. Bullen felt it was an early play which ". . . underwent considerable revision . . ."[7] since it mixed fine elements with ". . . the appearance of being an immature production."[8] Arthur Symons speculated that the play was Middleton's earliest, that it ". . . seems to be the premature attempt of a man, not naturally equipped for tragic or romantic writing, to do the tragic comedy then in fashion."[9] And E.H.C. Oliphant interpreted the publisher's statement which precedes the 1661 quarto, "Gentlemen,/ You have the first flight of him I assure you . . ."[10] to mean the play was Middleton's first. Oliphant further concludes that Hengist dates from before 1597.[11] Eccles, however, argues for a later date, probably not earlier than 1606-07 and definitely not later than 1621.[12] His conclusion is based on internal evidence provided by the play's verse (as compared to Middleton's other plays whose dates are certain),

7 Bullen, p. xviii.

8 Ibid., p. xix.

9 "Middleton and Rowley," Cambridge History of English Literature, VI (New York, 1939), 69.

10 Quoted by Bald, "Introduction," p. xxvi.

11 Oliphant, p. 119.

12 Eccles, p. 433.

the parallel between Middleton's chronicler-chorus and that of Shakespeare's Pericles (1608), and the references to several new plays in the Cheaters' repertoire, mentioned in Act V, scene i.[13] The span is narrowed considerably by Bald, who concludes that Hengist was written between 1616 and 1620, probably in 1619-20.[14] Bald's evidence includes the earliest reference to the play, a Revels Office slip used by Sir George Buc, James I's Master of the Revels, for making insertions in the manuscript of his History of the Life and Reigne of Richard III.[15] Other evidence presented by Bald is internal, found in the play's reference to ". . . a greate enormitie in woole . . .".[16] Citing facts about

13 Ibid., p. 433. Among the plays referred to are The Whirligig, Gull upon Gull, and The Wildgoose Chase. The first two, Eccles says, suggest Cupid's Whirligig (Edward Sharpham, 1607) and The Isle of Gulls (John Day, 1606). However, his argument seems to be negated by his conclusion that the allusion to The Wild Goose Chase (John Fletcher, 1621) was added later. Other critics feel the play titles are probably fictitious (see, for example, Bentley, p. 885) and should not be used to date Hengist.

14 Bald, "Introduction," pp. xiii-xvii.

15 Bald ("Introduction," p. xiv) notes that Buc held the position from 1608 to 1620; however, the list includes "The Cambridge Playe of Albumazar and Trinculo," written for James' visit to the university in 1615. Sir E. K. Chambers, in his review of Frank Marcham's The King's Office of the Revels, 1610-1622 [RES, 1 (1925), 479-84] suggests that Buc's insertions date from close to the dedication of his work (1619), since other evidence on the scraps has reference to a period ". . . not earlier than 1617. . . ." (p. 479) He states also that the lists, which he believes represent plays considered for performance at court, are concerned chiefly with plays produced or revived about 1619 or 1620 (p. 484).

16 Middleton, Hengist, I.ii.101.

the woollen industry during James' reign, Bald concludes this would be a live issue in 1616-17 and again from 1619 on.[17] The late date, Bald asserts, is significant, since many critics had dismissed the play as immature, disregarding the obviously mature and powerful poetry which characterizes its major scenes.[18]

Middleton's use of apparently archaic devices, such as the appearance of Raynulph as chorus and the dumb shows, does not necessarily support either an earlier date or the assumption that Middleton borrowed an earlier play. Middleton himself used the dumb show device to open Act IV of The Changeling (1622); Bald cites similar relics in Pericles and Fletcher and Massinger's Prophetess (1622).[19]

Stage History and Popularity

Although little is known about the play's stage history, Hengist appears to have enjoyed a long popularity, particularly for the comic subplot. Its widespread reputation is attested to by several seventeenth-century references to the Mayor of Quinborough, as well as by quotations from the play itself.[20] The publisher's Epistle to the quarto,

17 Bald, "Introduction," pp. xiii-xiv.

18 Ibid., p. xvii.

19 Ibid., p. xv.

20 Bentley, p. 886, notes that John Cotgrave in 1655 published twelve quotations from the play in his English Treasury of Wit and Language (which agree with the quarto, published six years later, but which differ somewhat from

printed in 1661, refers to the play's reputation:

> . . . this Mayor of Quinborough whom you have all heard of, and some of you beheld upon the Stage, now begins to walk abroad in Print; he has been known sufficiently by the reputation of his Wit . . .[21]

And the title page of the same edition notes that the play ". . . hath been often Acted with much/ Applause at Black-Fryars. . . ."[22] The references continue into the eighteenth century: John Genest notes that the comic underplot involving Symon and the Cheaters was ". . . turned into a Farce for Bullock's benefit at Hay, April 29, 1710."[23]

Sources

Hengist, King of Kent is based on events in British history from 433 to 487. Although largely legendary, this material was generally accepted as factual in Middleton's day.[24] It was included in most of the major chronicles, several of which could have provided Middleton with the

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both manuscripts). Bald ("Introduction," p. xv) notes also a reference to the play in Edmund Gayton's Pleasant Notes upon Don Quixote (1654); and the reprinting of a scene (IV,i) in the 1658 Wit Restored. Bentley (p. 887) further notes a reference to the play in the commonplace book of Henry Newcome (1650-1713), now in the Folger Shakespeare Library.

21 Quoted by Bald, "Introduction," p. xxvi.

22 Ibid., p. xxvi.

23 Some Account of the English Stage (Bath, 1832), IV, 114.

24 Bald, "Appendix: The Early Development of the Hengist Legend," Hengist, King of Kent; or The Mayor of Queenborough, p. 127.

Vortiger-Hengist story. The question of the sources used is complicated by the existence of the older play from which Middleton may have borrowed when writing Hengist.[25] However, since the fact of Middleton's rewriting an earlier play must be based purely on speculation, for this study it will be assumed that Hengist represents Middleton's combination of certain historical events (whose outline he may have taken from the older play) with his own interpolations. It seems that Middleton's Hengist represents something new, the playwright's transformation of his materials; and that transformation -- the creative result -- is illumined by comparison with the history as received.

Study of Middleton's sources must begin with an attempt to unravel the tangle of chronicles which may have provided the historical facts. It was long thought that the primary source for the play was the Polychronicon of Ranulph Higden, a Benedictine monk who died in 1363.[26] The work, a universal history from the creation to the author's own time,[27] was written in Latin but was translated into

[25] See pages 8-11, above.

[26] Churchill Babington, "Introduction," Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis, Together with the English Translation of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century, I (London, 1865), xi.

Note: The historical events around which the play revolves had also been included in the early histories of Britain and were fully elaborated in Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae (1137).

[27] Ibid., p. xiii.

English by John Trevisa in 1387.[28] The assumption that Higden was the source was based primarily on Middleton's use of Raynulph as presenter (or chorus) in the play and his mention of the Polychronicon in the prologue. The ascription to Higden was apparently advanced first by Gerard Langbaine in An Account of the English Dramatick Poets (1691),[29] and the suggestion was followed in succeeding discussions of the play, including Schelling's The English Chronicle Play.[30]

However, in his discussion of the sources of Middleton's plays, Quellenstudien zu den Dramen Thomas Middletons, Karl Christ presents evidence, which has not been disputed, that Holinshed, not Higden, was the major source for Hengist.[31] Christ's argument is based on the fact that other chronicles than Higden's could have provided Middleton with the same facts and on the assumption that Middleton would have been more likely to use a contemporary chronicle than one written in the fourteenth century whose

28 A.W. Pollard, G.R. Redgrave et al., A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475-1640 (London, 1926), p. 299. The work was printed in 1482 by Caxton, 1495 (Wynkyn de Worde) and 1527 (P. Treveris).

29 New York, 1969 (Originally published Oxford, 1691), pp. 371-73. Langbaine's reliability is questionable; he also labels The Mayor of Queenborough a comedy.

30 Felix E. Schelling, The English Chronicle Play (New York, 1902), p. 187.

31 Leipzig, 1905, p. 6.

manuscripts and printed copies were probably inaccessible. Since succeeding chroniclers, particularly Fabyan, refer to Higden's work, Middleton's use of the names does not necessarily indicate first-hand knowledge. Christ rules out as also inaccessible the medieval chronicles and Geoffrey of Monmouth.[32] Moreover, he asserts, the contemporary chronicles agree even more closely with Middleton's play in the spelling of names and in specific events.[33]

A brief summary of Christ's results follows. It seems important to emphasize that no source study can determine which of the overlapping histories the playwright actually used. It can, however, pinpoint the minimum materials necessary for him to have written Hengist. Comparison of the source material, so isolated, with the play can then lead to a deeper critical understanding, to an interpretation of the meaning of Middleton's final product as seen against its background.

Comparison of names, specific events and other parallels between the possible sources and the play leads Christ to conclude that Middleton probably borrowed the account of the reign of Vortiger and arrival of Hengist and the Saxons from both Holinshed accounts (in the Historie

[32] However, see Bald, "Appendix" p. 135, who feels it is possible Middleton did refer to Geoffrey (translated from the original Latin only in 1718) since, as official Chronologer to the City of London, the playwright would have been interested in the older chronicles.

[33] Christ, p. 7.

of England and the Historie of Scotland) with the addition of a number of details from Fabyan. The comparison of names leads to one important conclusion: only from Holinshed's Historie of Scotland could Middleton have gotten the name Roxena; the other sources list her variously as Rowen (Polychronicon, Historie of England), Ronix (Historie of England), or Ronowen (Fabyan and Grafton).[34] The other names (Constantius, Vortiger, Hengist, Horsus, Aurelius, Uther, Vortiner, Lupus and Germanus) each appear in several of the possible sources. However, since the Historie of Scotland lacks many other details present in the play, a fusion of sources is indicated.[35] The comparison of specific parallels reveals a number of incidents, not included in the Polychronicon, which could have come from a combination of Holinshed's Historie of England and either Fabyan or Grafton (who agree almost word for word).[36] Christ concludes that Fabyan was the auxiliary source since only he mentions Queenborough: in a marginal note he places "Thonge Castell . . . within 4 Miles of Feuersham by Thamys syde, nat ferre from Quynburghe . . .",[37] contradicting his own text, where the castle is located in Lyndesey.[38] In

34 Ibid., p. 8.

35 Ibid., p. 14.

36 Ibid., pp. 7, 14.

37 Quoted by Christ, p. 12. The note appears only in the 1516 edition, indicating Middleton used that edition.

38 Bald, "Introduction," p. xxxviii.

addition, Fabyan offers the suggestion that Fortune is the goddess of the Saxons, an idea which Middleton incorporates into the play.[39]

A look at the sources themselves seems to support Christ's conclusions. The older Higden lacks several details included in the later chronicles and in Middleton's play: Higden states that the treasonous peace meeting was near a monastery of Ambre,[40] whereas Holinshed (Historie of England) and Middleton locate it on the plain of Salisbury;[41] the command given at the meeting is "Nymeth ȝoure sexes" in Higden[42] compared with Holinshed's "Nempt your sexes"[43] and Middleton's "Nemp yor sexes" (IV.iii.35). Vortiger's son is called Vortumerus by Higden,[44] as opposed to the Vortimer of Holinshed, Fabyan and Grafton or Middleton's Vortiner; and Higden speaks at length of Saint German but does not mention Lupus.[45] Finally, Higden alone omits the list of cities

39 Christ, p. 11.

40 Ranulph Higden, Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis, Together with the English Translation of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century, V, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby (London, 1874), 273.

41 Raphaell Holinshed, The First and second volumes of Chronicles (London, 1587), p. 81; Thomas Middleton, Hengist, King of Kent, IV.iii.10. All subsequent quotations from the play will be by act, scene and line number within the text.

42 Higden, V, 273.

43 Holinshed (1587), p. 81.

44 Higden, V, 273.

45 Ibid., pp. 277-79.

adopted by Middleton: "I could haue liud like hengist King of Kent,/ & London yorke Lincoln & winchester" (V.ii.31-32). Grafton states ". . . the Saxons had the rule of London, Yorke, Lincolne, and Winchester . . ."[46] and Holinshed lists "London, Yorke, Lincolne, & Winchester."[47]

The probability of Middleton's use of Fabyan is also supported by Fabyan's emphasis on the Saxon's paganism: Vortiger, he says, calls the Saxons "miscreantes";[48] and he attributes Vortiger's subsequent troubles with his subjects to his giving Kent to Hengist and his marrying a ". . . woman of uncought beleefe . . . ."[49] The religious difference becomes equally important in Middleton's play. Fabyan leaves indefinite the relationship between Hengist and Horsus: Horsus is ". . . Brother to Hengist, or Cosyn."[50] Likewise, Middleton's Horsus and Roxena plot precludes their being related as uncle and niece. From Fabyan Middleton could have taken the legend of the ox hide as the original basis for the land-grant in Kent; the story (which has no antecedent in the Historie of England) could also have

[46] Richard Grafton, A chronicle at large and meere history of the affayres of England . . ., ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1809), p. 80.

[47] Holinshed (1587), p. 83.

[48] Robert Fabyan, The chronicle of Fabian, whiche he nameth The concordaunce of histories, newly perused . . . (London, 1559), p. 70.

[49] Ibid., p. 72.

[50] Ibid., p. 75.

come from the Historie of Scotland.[51] Finally, where the other chroniclers state that Constantius was made a monk because he was ". . . soft and childish in wit . . .",[52] Fabyan makes an alternate suggestion, which was developed by Middleton. Constentius became a monk, he says, because of the ". . . pure devocio that he had to God & saynt Amphiabyl . . .".[53] Despite these obvious echoes of Fabyan, however, Middleton apparently relied most heavily on Holinshed.

The principal source for Hengist, King of Kent, as established by Christ, is that found in the fifth book of Holinshed's Historie of England, chapters 1 through 8. The account begins with the reign of Constantine in 422 following the Britons' ousting of the Romans from England. After the murder of Constantine, Vortigerus (or Vortigernus) used his influence to have Constantius crowned king.[54] Vortigerne (as he is also called) subsequently had the king murdered by some of the Picts and Scots who made up the king's body guard; he then had the assassins killed to disguise his

[51] Raphael Holinshed, Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland, V, ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1808), p. 142; Fabyan, p. 71.

[52] Holinshed (1587), p. 77.

[53] Fabyan, p. 68.

[54] Note: For consistency, spellings of names will be as they appear in the work referred to; i.e., the source spellings will be retained when reference is to the source and Middleton's spellings will be used when referring to his characters.

involvement and, in addition, apprehended many more Picts and Scots, a show of zeal which endeared him to the British people. Constantius' younger brothers fled and Vortigerne, having convinced the nobles of his worth, was chosen king.

Following his assumption of the throne, Vortigerne attempted to suppress the followers of Constantine, many of whom fled the country and joined Constantius' brothers. A period of unrest caused Vortiger to send to Germany for aid from the Saxons. Being a war-loving people, the Saxons were happy to comply, and they chose two brothers, Hengist and Horsus, to lead the forces. Holinshed also offers an alternate explanation for the Saxons' arrival: it was a Saxon custom, he says, in times of overpopulation, to choose men by lots who would go out, do battle, and seek a new place to live.[55] The Saxons were assigned land in Kent, after their arrival in England, and they began a successful campaign against the Scots and Picts.

Hengist now began his plot to establish a kingdom in Britain by obtaining permission to bring over more Saxons. Vortigerne, Holinshed says, did not perceive the outcome of this action, and sixteen shiploads of Saxons arrived, bringing with them Hengist's daughter Rowen.[56]

[55] Holinshed (1587), p. 78.

[56] Ibid., p. 78.

Hengist then contrived to advance himself by uniting his daughter with the king. A banquet was prepared to effect a meeting between Rowen and Vortigerne, and the king fell in love with the maiden. Soon thereafter ". . . he forsooke his owne wife . . ."[57] and married Rowen. Hengist's reward was the gift of all Kent. Holinshed is quick to state the moral:

> This marriage and liberalitie of the king towards the strangers much offended the minds of his subiects, and hastened the finall destruction of the land.[58]

Ignoring the warnings of his countrymen, who feared the increasing number of Saxons, Vortigerne was finally deposed and his son, Vortimer, crowned king. The new king led the Britons in a series of four important battles against the Saxons (in the second of which Horsus was killed), but his career came to an abrupt end when Ronowen, fearing the destruction of the Saxons, had the new king poisoned and Vortigerne, who had been living in Wales, was restored to the throne. The Saxons, many of whom had fled from England during Vortimer's reign, returned, and Vortigerne planned to counter Hengist's arrival by meeting him with a large British force. Hengist, however, forestalled him by arranging a meeting on the plain of Salisbury. Hengist's goal was treason, his men were armed contrary to the agree-

[57] Ibid., p. 79.

[58] Ibid., p. 79.

ment, and on the prearranged signal, "Nempt your sexes,"[59] they drew their concealed weapons and slaughtered the unsuspecting Britons. Vortigerne was captured and held prisoner until yielding to Hengist three provinces, Kent, Sussex, and Norfolk and Suffolk.[60]

Following a digression on the struggles of Christianity in England before and during the Saxon occupation (from which Middleton drew the names of two bishops, Germane and Lupus,[61] who in the play become Constantius' fellow monks), the history returns to Vortigerne. Fearing both the Saxons and the return of Constantius' brothers, the king withdrew to his Welsh castle, where he was attacked by Aurelius and Uter:

> . . . they found meanes with wild fire to burne it down to the earth, and so consumed it by fire together with the king, and all other that were within it.[62]

Aurelius succeeded Vortigerne in 481, and in 487 captured Hengist and had him beheaded. With the defeat of the invaders, Holinshed's account of this early period in British history comes to a close.

The above account, Christ concluded, formed the basis for Middleton's play; however, Middleton borrowed more than

59 Ibid., p. 81.

60 Ibid., p. 82.

61 Ibid., p. 83.

62 Ibid., p. 84.

facts from the Chronicles. Except for Fabyan's emphasis on the Saxons' paganism, only Holinshed goes beyond the historical events to discuss character, motivation and the cause-and-effect relationship between actions and events.[63]

Study of Middleton's sources thus reveals both his fidelity to the history and his deviation from it. For the outline of Hengist, King of Kent, Middleton remained faithful to tradition while selecting only those details which would serve his dramatic purpose. Thus he ignores the reign of Vortimer with its series of battles and death of Horsus, choosing to focus on Vortiger as the man of ambition who is finally defeated by his blindness to the consequences of his acts. He selects details from various sources to fit the pattern, choosing the suggestion that Fortune directed the Saxons' arrival instead of the version in which Vortigerne called upon the Saxons for aid; leaving deliberately vague the relationship between Hengist and Horsus in order to allow himself freedom to develop the Horsus-Roxena intrigue; using the Thongcastle legend as the unifying element between his main and subplots; elaborating on the scanty reference to Vortigerne's lawful wife to create the role of Castiza (through which he illuminates the characters of Constantius, Vortiger and Horsus); and developing a memorable character from the brief references to Constantius.

63 This influence is discussed more fully on pages 28-29 and 56-58.

Middleton's technique in using the sources seems to be one of assimilation; as Bald notes, only one line (V.ii.32, the list of cities) seems to have come verbatim from the histories.[64] Instead, the playwright seems to have mastered his sources to the extent that they become the given for his play; and those incidents which appear to have little bearing on the development of the theme -- the brief reign of Vortimer or the meeting on Salisbury Plain -- are there precisely because it was the history which shaped Middleton's creation. Of this process Bald says,

> Middleton seems rather to have thoroughly absorbed his facts and formed his conception of character before putting pen to paper. Indeed, when the full significance of an incident is understood only by reference to the sources, . . . one feels that he assimilated his materials almost to the extent of taking for granted knowledge that his audiences could not possess.[65]

Although there is much that is merely adoption of historical elements (particularly in the dumb shows) in the play, there is even more which reflects Middleton's own interests, and the final product must be said to be more than a chronicle, more than the molding of secondhand facts into a dramatic unity. Through emphasis, compression, selection and expansion, Middleton has made his play one about ambitious man in his relationships with other men and

64 Bald, "Introduction," pp.xxxix, xl.

65 Ibid., p. xl.

his world, not about fifth-century England. His lack of concern for temporal consistency may be seen in the Act V comedy involving Oliver the Puritan, an anachronism which seems not to have bothered Middleton.

Possible sources for the comic underplot are discussed briefly by Bald in his Introduction to the play. Bald labels the first scenes ". . . conventional . . . comic relief . . .",[66] while he feels that the long comic scene in Act V (the Cheaters and the play-within-a-play) is indebted to Nashe's Pierce Penniles and has an analogue in a later play, The Knave in Graine, New Vampt by J.D. (1640).[67] Bald does not discuss C. R. Baskerville's suggestion of a parallel between the Cheater and the Clown scene in Hengist and the puppet show in Jonson's Bartholomew Fair.[68]

The correspondences between Middleton's sources and his play have been noted in passing, above, and will be more fully discussed in reference to characterization in Chapter III. In summary, it appears that Holinshed and Fabyan have provided the playwright with the framework for Hengist, King of Kent, its linear movement from the assump-

66 Ibid., p. xli.

67 Ibid., pp. xli, xlii.

68 C. R. Baskerville, "Some Parallels to Bartholomew Fair," MP, 6 (1908), 124-26. Baskerville suggests (p. 126) that Jonson might have borrowed from Middleton's play, but does not rule out the reverse. Like other early critics, he assumes an early date for Hengist. (BF was written in 1614.)

tion of the throne by Constantius to the ousting of the usurper Vortiger by the rightful heirs, Aurelius and Uther. Providing the thematic link between the diverse events which the time span includes is the career of Vortiger, his ambitious climb to power and inevitable destruction by the forces which he himself sets in motion. Specific events in Vortiger's career are dramatically employed by Middleton: his murder of Constantius and subsequent murder of the hired assassins, his increasing dependence on the pagan Saxons, the granting of land to Hengist, his infatuation for Roxena and disposal of his wife, the popular rebellion through which he is replaced temporarily by Vortimer, the poisoning of Vortimer and restoration of Vortiger, the meeting with Hengist on Salisbury Plain, and the final destruction of the king in his Welsh castle. In addition, Middleton has adopted much of Holinshed's moralizing tone and cause-and-effect attitude toward the historical events. Yet, superimposed on this outline are several non-historical additions, the product of Middleton's own genius, before which the history somehow recedes. Such are the creation of Constantius as a living human being, the entire character and plight of Castiza, and the Horsus and Roxena affair. It is to these elements that Middleton directs our attention, and they in turn shape our response to the drama.

<u>Hengist, King of Kent and the History Play</u>

Discussion of Middleton's sources leads inevitably to

the question of whether his use of history makes Hengist a history play. A number of twentieth-century critics have attempted to arrive at a definition of the genre. Felix Schelling, in The English Chronicle Play (1902), says merely that the form is one which aims at " . . . the scenic representation of history . . ."[69] and usually results in a loose episodic structure which is slavishly faithful to chronology. E.M.W. Tillyard emphasizes the relationship between history and theology, stating that the Renaissance moralized history through its tracing of cause-and-effect relationships in events, which revealed the providential nature of God.[70] Lily B. Campbell discusses the political aim of history which provided lessons from which present rulers might learn and be guided.[71] Irving Ribner provides something of a synthesis of the earlier views (each of which he feels is too narrow) in his study, The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare. The problem of definition is not a simple one, and each critic's conclusions seem to lead to contradictions between the genre as defined and the plays which they attempt to measure by the definition.

The history play, Ribner concludes, is one " . . .

69 p. 49.

70 Shakespeare's History Plays (New York, 1947), pp. 80, 89.

71 "English History in the Sixteenth Century," Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (San Marino, Calif., 1947), pp. 55-84.

which fulfilled what the Elizabethans considered the purposes of history . . . ".[72] Thus, one must first understand the Elizabethan concept of historiography which, Ribner says, resulted from the fusion of Italian humanist principles with the Christian tradition. Humanism produced a didactic intent (". . . man had some measure of control over his own destiny . . . and by his reason and strength he might determine political success or failure . . ."[73]); whereas Christianity saw history as the working out of God's judgment in human affairs, as the revelation of the providence of God.[74] According to Ribner's analysis, then, the history play is any which uses, for any of seven listed purposes, ". . . material drawn from national chronicles and assumed by the dramatist to be true . . .".[75] At the same time, Ribner asserts, source is secondary to purpose;[76] if such historical material is used without didactic intent, the product is not a history play.

The problem then becomes one of emphasis: in the case of Middleton's use of admittedly historical material, in which he even incorporated much of Holinshed's didacticism -- his emphasis on the inevitable fall of the usurper

72 Princeton, N.J., 1962, p. 14.

73 Ibid., p. 18.

74 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

75 Ibid., p. 26.

76 Ibid., p. 26.

and the sin involved in the Saxons' paganism -- it is difficult to rule out his own didactic intent. Lily B. Campbell has said of Holinshed:

> . . . he made clear his understanding of cause and effect in human actions and of the vengeance exacted by God for sin, working out with arithmetical accuracy the relation of each sin to the divine vengeance.[77]

Such, one might say, is Middleton's purpose; yet his focus is different from that of Holinshed. For Middleton is interested in the individual man, the sinner, who the playwright knows will suffer God's vengeance, but who continues to act as if such vengeance did not exist. Sin in _Hengist, King of Kent_ involves retribution, but our interest is diverted from God's action and is centered instead on man's failure to acknowledge the possibility of this action. Thus, Middleton has removed the play from the political arena to the private and, in so doing, has created something quite different from those plays which critics confidently label history. In Middleton's hands the Hengist and Vortiger story becomes tragedy, the tragedy of individuals who assert their own wills in the face of inevitable destruction. His play is not devoid of didactic intent; yet its emphasis is not on the historical, but on several specific incidents which are the product of Middleton's imagination.

It seems then that the didactically based definition

77 Campbell, p. 74.

of each of the critics cited creates a contradiction which is implicit in any attempt to define the history play. On the subject of Hengist, Ribner concludes that the play invites comparison with Macbeth as " . . . a tragedy of vaulting ambition, with a demonic hero who sins against the moral order and is finally destroyed . . .",[78] a statement which implies historical purpose. However, he continues by saying that Middleton neglected the most important feature of the history, its political, didactic purpose.[79] It seems more reasonable merely to accept the play's historical basis, to view the history as a source for plot and character, and then to attempt an interpretation of Middleton's use of that source. Eugene Waith has summed up this approach:

> . . . if the background is made to determine the entire meaning, we are in danger of losing the very thing that distinguishes one author from another -- his treatment of the traditional theme.[80]

Middleton's intent seems to have been to write a tragedy, and his concern is partially revealed through examination of the sources for Hengist and comparison of them with the finished play. The play's outline is provided by Holinshed and Fabyan, but the emphasis is on the personal, the ethics of man's relationships with other men and his

[78] Ribner, The English History Play, p. 259.

[79] Ibid., p. 260.

[80] Eugene M. Waith, "Introduction," Shakespeare, The Histories: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), p. 9.

responsibility for his own moral choices. Middleton compresses the historical events, largely into the three dumb shows, to allow himself greater freedom to develop the characters of Horsus, Roxena and Castiza. Also, although there is the suggestion that Vortiger's personal crimes have infected the body politic (as the Saxons steadily increase their foothold and the people rebel against the pagan influence), the king's awareness is of the retribution that will fall on his own head, not on the state.

Thus, Hengist illustrates, to some extent even better than the other two tragedies, Middleton's unique contribution to the drama of his day. The playwright has begun with the stuff of which historical tragedy is made and imposed upon it his own levelling influence. Unlike the common people who play the central roles in The Changeling and Women Beware Women, Vortiger and Hengist possess great tragic potential by virtue of their birth and position. Yet Middleton manages to reduce Vortiger to a man obsessed by ordinary sexual desire and to reveal Hengist as a devoted father and amiable politician, who is nevertheless driven to acquire land and power.

In conclusion, it seems that in the case of Hengist, King of Kent, Middleton's intent was to create a tragedy, using from the history what suited his artistic purpose, rejecting what did not, and creating what was needed to

make the play a unified whole. The remainder of this study will be devoted to an examination of that created product.

CHAPTER III

THE UNITY OF HENGIST, KING OF KENT

Examination of Middleton's use of his sources has revealed that the playwright's intent in Hengist, King of Kent seems to have been to create a tragedy using as the nucleus the chronicles he borrowed; examination of the play itself can show how Middleton shaped these materials into a unified whole. Such a reading of Hengist makes apparent its artistic and thematic unity, a unity which is achieved largely through a technique of balance and contrast. Throughout the play, the characters, images and actions point to the two sides of the theme -- which can be briefly stated as ambition -- around which Middleton has constructed Hengist, illuminating and commenting upon each other. This chapter will examine those elements which contribute to the play's unity: the theme and structure, the paralleling and contrasting of characters and Middleton's use of his sources for characterization, and the imagery.

Discussion of Hengist generally takes one of two forms: if not totally ignored, it is attacked as an immature work, characterized by a "repulsive" plot (Bullen and Swinburne),[1] as a ". . . confused and rather hideous

[1] Bullen, p. xx; Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Thomas Middleton," Thomas Middleton, The Mermaid Series, I (London and New York, 1887), xxii.

mingling of tragic bombast and strained farce . . ." (Symons),[2] or simply as uninteresting, leaving no final impression on the reader's mind (Ellis and Bullen).[3] Furthermore, critics assert, the play lacks focus as the ostensibly historical plot disintegrates into a drama of sexual intrigue, further confused by the comic underplot whose connection with the main action is tenuous at best. Confusion results further from the lack of a single character; the spotlight shifts from Vortiger to Constantius to Hengist to Horsus and Roxena, so that the reader has difficulty concentrating on the play as a whole. Instead, it seems to break down into a series of separate chronicles highlighted by powerful scenes, and the reader's final impression is one of uncertainty as to exactly what Middleton has said. The overwhelming impression created by Hengist, then, has been one of confusion as to its intent, its focus, theme and vision. Schoenbaum has summed up this feeling by calling the play

> . . . a diffuse blending of tragedy and history, melodrama and farce, in which the individual parts are for the most part very fine, but the finished product is lacking in purpose.[4]

On the other hand, there are those whose goal is to defend the play, to establish it as the product of

2 Symons, p. 69. See also Swinburne, pp. xxii-xxiii.

3 Ellis, p. xi; Bullen, p. xx.

4 Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, p. 86.

Middleton's mature genius (Bald and Bentley);[5] to overlook its obvious flaws in the effort to appreciate the play's "dark grandeur" (Barker);[6] and to rescue it from the oblivion to which it has been consigned. A close reading of Hengist reveals that it does possess thematic and artistic unity, and this chapter will seek to isolate several of the elements which contribute to that unity.

Twentieth-century assessment of Middleton as tragedian has resulted in the awareness that he was a man who attempted to break away from established dramatic forms, but who was never quite strong enough to do so completely. Middleton's tragic vision is seen to be somehow different from that of his contemporaries: his outlook is called psychological, realistic, ironic, detached; his emphasis is on the mind of the sinner, of fallen man, as he stumbles through life making the wrong choices and eventually paying for them. G. R. Hibbard views the playwright as inhibited by the great period of tragedy from which he drew his inheritance, as

> . . . a man with fresh intuitions about the nature of tragic experience, seeking to embody those intuitions in dramatic form, trying hard to escape from the shackles of the past and never quite managing to do so.[7]

5 Bald, "Introduction," p. xvii; Bentley, p. 885.

6 Barker, p. 121.

7 Hibbard, p. 35.

It was Middleton's concession to the past and public taste, Hibbard concludes, that flawed his tragedies, resulting in the melodrama which characterizes the plays' endings, intrusion of farcical subplots and the explicitly moral outcomes.[8] Schoenbaum would add that Middleton's preoccupation with lust or the sexual theme is the product of his desire to satisfy the coterie-type audiences he was writing for.[9] However, it does not appear that Hengist disintegrates to the extent that Schoenbaum suggests in his discussion. Rather, it seems that Middleton uses the sexual motif, seen in the Horsus-Roxena-Vortiger triangle, as a metaphor for all of man's lustful drives, and as such it expresses his view of reality, not of sex. Moreover, the seeds for the sexual theme were present in the chroniclers' descriptions of Vortiger, which formed the nucleus for Middleton's characterization of the king.

Despite the apparent flaws, however, a unity can be perceived in Hengist. The unity begins with the play's theme, ambition, and it is developed in the working out of this theme through the interaction of plot, characters and imagery. Throughout the play Middleton carefully combines the several elements into a dramatic whole whose purpose is to explore this central theme: to see ambitious man as he oversteps his bounds and brings on the destruction which the

[8] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[9] Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, p. 86.

playwright sees as his inevitable reward.

The potential of ambition as a theme for historical tragedy had already been demonstrated by Shakespeare in Macbeth. In its depiction of the fall of the great man, and with him the state, through the disruption of the established order, this motif was particularly suited to tragic interpretation. Middleton, however, is interested in exploring the ramifications of ambition on several different levels at the same time: in Vortiger, the usurper who fails to foresee the consequences of his own actions; Hengist, the outsider, whose ambition is to have land and be king; Horsus, the manipulator, who delights in his power over other men; Roxena, the whore, whose ambition is to have her own way while retaining her reputation. Each principal, in fact, represents the moral blindness which characterizes Middleton's sinners -- for his tragic figures are sinners, men and women who act as though their deeds had no consequences, who do evil without acknowledging the existence of a moral order beyond them, and who finally suffer retribution, destroyed by that order over which they have no control. Symon the tanner, central figure in the comic underplot, is likewise ambitious, and his presence extends the theme to all levels of society. The "good" characters, Constantius and Castiza, also emphasize the ambition theme. In their rejection of the world they provide foils to the ambitious characters, who are driven by dreams of earthly power.

Viewed as a composite, then, the central characters in Hengist, King of Kent represent several different degrees of ambition, of the sinner's desire to step beyond his rightful place, all of which eventually result in destruction. However, by dividing his emphasis among a group of major characters rather than concentrating on a single individual, Middleton has subjected himself to the criticism cited above.

Middleton's method of establishing thematic unity in Hengist can be seen through a close examination of the play's opening scene. The scene is important as an introduction to the remainder of the play, and it reveals the care with which Middleton constructed the opening of Hengist. Here he achieves a dramatic intensity which is one of the play's triumphs. With great economy, dramatic skill and vividly rich poetic language, Middleton manages to introduce the play's theme, its central character, its dominant images and tone, and to knit all of these elements into a unified whole which points to the rest of the play. Had he sustained the power of this opening scene, Middleton would not have become a target for critics confused as to his intent and accomplishment in Hengist. Unlike those passages which appear clouded by a seeming failure to strip off the more historical paraphernalia, the opening scene is sharply focused, each element playing an important role in shaping the reader's response to the play.

Act I, scene i, vividly illustrates Middleton's organizing principle of balance and contrast. The scene opens with Vortiger's soliloquy on ambition; the speech is balanced by the second soliloquy on the same subject, revealing the intensity of Vortiger's desires (I.i.176-96). The scene has come full circle at its close: in his first line Vortiger castigates the crowd, calling it ". . . that wide throated Beast the Multitude . . ." (I.i.1); in the final line of the scene members of that multitude, now to be used by Vortiger to further his ambition, echo his statement: "We haue throates wide enough . . ." (I.i.210). The symmetry achieved seems to frame the action of the scene, one which is constructed on contrasts.

The opening speech directs our attention to Vortiger who, despite the play's titles, is the central character in Hengist; and the contrast of Vortiger with Constantius, which provides the nucleus for the scene, only serves to sharpen this focus. Vortiger's speech (I.i.1-21) reveals him to be a man obsessed with the desire for power; yet one whose naiveté and insensitivity make him ill suited for the game of power politics. Simultaneously he reveals his thirst for glory, symbolized by ". . . a Scepter and a Crowne . . ." (I.i.5), his naive belief that such power will bring happiness, and his incapacity for relating to other men, particularly the multitude, whom he calls ". . . those Truncks that haue no other soules/ But noyse and Ignorance . . ." (I.i.20-21).

Vortiger's worldly desires are immediately placed in perspective through juxtaposition with Constantius, whose arrival is heralded by the monks' song rejecting earthly desires in favor of holiness:

> It is not state, it is not Birth;
> The way to heauen is grace on earth.
> [I.i.37-38]

The portrait of Constantius has been called "a study in sainthood";[10] Middleton presents a man who has totally rejected the world, who paradoxically views earthly involvement as death; who represents the soul disassociated from temporal cares. Vortiger points up the contrast between his own goals and Constantius' when he says,

> . . . giue attention to ye publique peace
> Wherein heauen is serud too; though not soe purely;
> . . .
> [I.i.42-43]

To Constantius, heaven can be served only through complete purity. Germanus, Constantius' fellow monk, voices the historically correct notion of the divine responsibility of kings, one which is abrogated both by Constantius in his rejection of the role and by Vortiger in his usurpation:

> Who's borne a Prince is borne for generall peace
> Not his owne onely, heauen will looke for him
> In others busines, and require him their;
> What is in you religious must be showne
> In saueing many more soules than yor owne
> . . .
> [I.i.101-05]

The contrast is deepened as the scene progresses:

10 Barker, p. 117.

kingship is several times referred to by Constantius as a weight or burden and as an affliction; this burden Vortiger naively feels he desires to bear, while Constantius foresees that it will kill him. Vortiger has already introduced the image of sickness or affliction when, in his opening speech, he refers to the crowd as infectious, the instrument which has poisoned his fortunes (I.i.8-9); Constantius sees not the crowd but kingship itself as an affliction. The image thus represents throughout those forces which destroy both the "good" and "bad" characters. Vortiger's speech at I.i.136-52 again juxtaposes the toils, troubles and burdens, which symbolize kinship to Constantius, with the glory Vortiger anticipates. The usurper's speeches are filled with images of rising, symbolic of his aspirations (I.i.9, etc.); Constantius begs not to be forced to ". . . [grow] downwards into earthe againe . . ." (I.i.50). Middleton also provides ironic contrast between the two characters through the scene's play on the word <u>necessity</u>. Vortiger associates the word with fate in I.i.25; like his poisoned fortune (I.i.9), necessity has provided a stumbling block to his ambition. Later, in an exchange with Constantius, Vortiger insists that the holy man accept the crown due to "The vrgd necessity of ye times." (I.i.58) To which Constantius replies,

> What necessity
> Can be i'th world, but praier and repentance,
> And that Busines I am about.
> [I.i.59-61]

The passage establishes a parallel between necessity, prayer and "Busines." The distinct Biblical echo in Constantius' use of "business" intensifies the religious nature of his orientation, and the necessity-business complex becomes for him the will of God to which he submits himself. Realizing he cannot avoid its demands, he refers to "Cruell necessitye" (I.i.170) which has separated him from his chosen life. Likewise he views the crown as the "mark of fortune" (I.i.66). The gap between the two characters is revealed in the ironic juxtaposition created through their use of the words: Constantius bows himself to necessity and fortune, which have forced him into a role he does not wish to play, into the world he has rejected; simultaneously, Vortiger blames the same necessity and fortune for withholding from him the power he desires.

In his final soliloquy Vortiger makes explicit the contrast which has been implied throughout the scene: "What seurall inclinations are in nature . . ." (I.i.184), he muses, naively comparing his own lust for the crown with Constantius' disdain for it. This final speech sums up the drama to this point: here are made explicit Vortiger's wish to assume the crown which Constantius views as a burden and his plan to disguise his ambition in order to gain authority. Vortiger's wish to ". . . sing vnder that Burthen . . ." (I.i.188) ironically foreshadows the disillusionment and anguish that kingship will bring. The Dumb Show which

follows introduces Hengist, Horsus and Roxena, who Fortune determines must leave Germany.

This detailed analysis of a single scene is testimony to Middleton's skill as a playwright. From the unadorned historical facts borrowed from Holinshed and Fabyan, Middleton has created dramatic tension in the contrast of Vortiger and Constantius; irony in Vortiger's dreams and desire for earthly power; poetry in Vortiger's two soliloquies which establish thematically important images; and a beginning in which are sown already the seeds which, at the end, will destroy Vortiger and all who surround him, their ambitions and dreams.

The remainder of the play proceeds naturally from the opening scene. In Act I, scene ii, the contrast between Vortiger's worldly ambition and Constantius' lack of it is continued as the would-be king arranges a series of vexations whose object is to force Constantius to relinquish the throne. The scene's primary effect is to reveal the ruthlessness of Vortiger in his quest for power.

Act II completes the introduction of the play's major elements: Vortiger decides the time has come to act and has Constantius killed, but his dream is only briefly realized before his subjects rise against him, forcing him to accept the aid of Hengist and the Saxons, who have recently arrived in England. Two prominent images occur in the second scene where Vortiger characterizes the populace as ulcers (II.ii.12)

destroying his dream of glory, and he notes that the voice of ruin is like thunder (II.ii.20-21). Sickness[11] and storms are used throughout the play to indicate the forces within and without that destroy the ambitions of each of the characters. The final scene of Act II establishes Hengist's character as an admirable man and devoted parent, sets in motion the action involving Horsus and Roxena (which will finally destroy Vortiger), and introduces Symon the tanner. It is Symon's rise to the position of mayor of Queenborough which provides the comic underplot and second title of the play, and it is he who fortuitously supplies the hide that is the basis for Hengist's foothold in Britain. By the end of Act II, all of the principal characters and images have been introduced, and it remains for the play's several actions to get underway (Act III), to gather speed (Act IV), and to rush pell mell toward the climax in Act V. The dreams of power and earthly glory, established in the opening scene as the central focus of the drama, are finally crushed as reality imposes itself on the dreamers' world. Vortiger's dreams do not differ radically from those of Hengist or Roxena; each character provides one facet of the composite, and so the initial scene has served to delineate the ambition of all.

The play's main plot, it appears, is well organized. Through the use of the three dumb shows and the chorus,

11 See page 41, above.

Middleton manages to retain the historical outline of the plot while developing fully his own additions as the focus of the action. However, the question of the relationship of the underplot to the main action is also central to a consideration of structure, and it is not so easily answered. Four scenes involve Symon the tanner and the townspeople of Queenborough; these occur at II,iii (the incident with the ox hide), III,iii (Hengist's choosing of the mayor), IV,i (Vortiger's rebuff of Symon and the people), and V,i (the cheating players). The first three scenes are all closely tied to the main plot: II,iii provides the basis for the Saxon threat and the next two reveal the wide difference between Hengist and Vortiger and their methods of gaining power.[12] Although the over-long comic scene with which the final act opens is integrated into the main action, its relationship is qualitatively different. The scene begins with the announcement that Hengist will visit Symon that evening and ends precipitously with the news that Constantius' brothers have arrived -- news that spells imminent destruction for the major characters. Aside from these links, however, the subplot seems to proceed on a separate level, and few critics have actually considered the underplot as anything but comic relief (comedy which they feel is inharmonious with the remainder of the play). However, Eva E. S. Fulcher discusses the subplot at length, arguing that it is

12 See my discussion of these two scenes, p. 50.

the critic's task to see how the comic elements function, not merely to excuse them.[13] Mrs. Fulcher makes a case for the comic subplot as mirror for parts of the tragic action, and she states that the parallel lessens the heroic potential of the major figures.[14] She is particularly concerned with the long scene at V,i, and her intriguing analysis is welcome, although not wholly convincing.

The scene, Mrs. Fulcher says, gives ". . . the central metaphor for Hengist . . ."[15] in its use of sight and blindness images, a metaphor which is focused in the garment Symon is described as wearing in the stage direction at V.i.285. In the middle of the cheaters' performance, Symon, disgusted by the Clown's duping, is said to "[throw] off his gown, discovering his doublet with a satten forepart and a Canvas back." He then begins to play the Clown's part himself. The importance of his costume is emphasized by the unusually precise stage direction, and Mrs. Fulcher sees it as an element in the deception theme, present throughout the play in the clothing imagery. The doublet she construes as ". . . a symbol for the four major characters . . ."[16] as the wearer attempts to deceive his audience by exposing his

[13] Eva E. Slater Fulcher, "The Seamy Side of the Tragic Vision: An Analysis of Thomas Middleton's Tragedies." Diss. University of Oklahoma 1966, p. 51.

[14] Ibid., p. 48.

[15] Ibid., p. 50.

[16] Ibid., p. 49.

elegant front, his facade. Since he cannot see his own back, she says, the doublet also symbolizes his self-deception. The scene also makes use of sight and blindness imagery in Oliver's covering his eyes so as not to see the play (V.i.181), and Symon's blinding with the meal (V.i.319), and of rationalization in Symon's attempts to blame others for his duping (V.i.340-45). The major characters are all guilty of similar self-deception, rationalization and blindness to the consequences of their actions, and Mrs. Fulcher concludes:

> Symon the tanner, who would be Symonides, still remains Simple Simon. Vortiger and Hengist, who like Symon want to be King of the Mountain must remain a cuckold and a deceived father.[17]

Parallels between the characters from the two actions are also discussed. The complimentary roles of Vortiger, Hengist and Symon as ambitious men have been noted and seem valid. However, several of her parallels seem contrived, including that of Horsus and Oliver as detached spokesmen or Castiza and Oliver as unwilling blinded victims.[18] Also less convincing is her emphasis on the religious and intellectual satire in the scene as ". . . literalizations of the absurdities practiced by Vortiger . . . ."[19]

It seems that the comic underplot of Hengist, King

[17] Ibid., p. 50.

[18] Ibid., p. 53.

[19] Ibid., p. 51.

of Kent has been too severely criticized. It is structurally and thematically tied to the main plot. However, any attempt to discover a point-by-point parallel between the two actions is unrealistic. In view of Middleton's successful paralleling of main and subplot actions in The Changeling, Hengist is interesting as an earlier attempt to make a comic action provide commentary on the tragic. However, since Symon is punished for his overweening vanity -- represented by his assertion that he can outwit the cheaters -- it seems that Middleton is not using the subplot to show the acceptable course of action that is rejected by his sinners. (This is the role most critics would assign to the Isabella-Antonio plot in The Changeling.[20]) Instead, the action seems to parody the main plot (Mrs. Fulcher's contention), and Symon's punishment -- the blow dealt to his pride through the cheaters' duplicity -- foreshadows the toppling of the central characters' more serious ambitions. The analogy, however, is only suggested. Moreover, the delay caused by the length of the scene with the cheaters must be regarded as a flaw, although the comedy does provide a

[20] The case for the relationship of the subplot to the main action in The Changeling is advanced by William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (London, 1935), pp. 48-52; Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison, Wisc., 1960), p. 180; Karl J. Holzknecht, "The Dramatic Structure of The Changeling," Shakespeare's Contemporaries, ed. Max Bluestone and Norman Rabkin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961), pp. 263-72; and Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy, pp. 134-35. Other critics (including Barker and Schoenbaum) persist in dismissing the subplot as Rowley's addition and an artistic failure.

welcome respite following the series of foreboding actions in Act IV, each of which adds to the sense of impending doom. That doom breaks in as reality at the end of the comic scene when the characters' deceptive facades are destroyed and their evil exposed.

A second device used to create structural unity in Hengist is Middleton's repeated paralleling and contrasting of characters who represent the poles which define the play's action, ambition and its opposite. Just as Vortiger's character was illuminated through its juxtaposition with Constantius in Act I,[21] the playwright similarly contrasts Hengist with Vortiger, beginning with the Saxon's arrival in Act II, where Hengist manages subtly to ingratiate himself with the king and to obtain land through his clever use of the ox hide.

The two characters are also contrasted in their methods of obtaining the power which is their goal. Following the murder of Constantius at the beginning of the second act, Vortiger's insensitivity to human needs leads to a popular uprising against him. His failure to cultivate those who count forces Vortiger to accept the aid of Hengist and the Saxons, setting in motion the forces which are finally to defeat him. A second uprising follows Vortiger's ill-considered marriage to the pagan Roxena and results in

21 See pages 39-42, above.

the brief restoration of the throne to his son, Vortiner (Act IV, Dumb Show iii). The polarity between Vortiger and Hengist and their drives for power is revealed in two scenes involving the comic characters. In Act IV, scene i, Symon, exercising his duty as mayor of Queenborough, ceremoniously presents gifts to the visiting king, Vortiger, and his queen. Vortiger's ill-tempered reply reveals his lack of sensitivity:

> Forbeare yor tedious and rediculous duties
> I hate em as I doe ye rotten rootes of you
> You inconstant rabble, I haue felt yor fits,
> Sheath up yor Bountie wth yor Iron wits
> And get yo^{u} gon -------- . . .
> [IV.i.15-19]

In contrast to Vortiger, Hengist rises with the blessing of the people whose support he cultivates. The scene discussed above may be compared with Act III, scene iii, where the townspeople prevail on Hengist, as Earl of Kent, to settle a dispute about the mayorship. Hengist accepts the responsibility saying,

> Twere noe safe wisdome in a riseing Man
> To slight of such as these, nay rather these
> Are ye foundation of a Lofty worke;
> We Cannot build without them and stand sure;
> He that ascends vp to a Mountaines topp
> Must first begin at foote, . . .
> [III.iii.26-31]

The lust for earthly power which dominates Vortiger and Hengist receives further definition through its juxtaposition with Constantius' total rejection of the world. A pious man who is wholly devoted to God, otherworldly to the point of appearing ridiculous when he assumes his petitioners are

kneeling in prayer, Constantius is everything that Vortiger is not. The dialogue between the two in Act I, scene i, reveals the distance between them. Through the ironic plays on words such as <u>necessity</u>, <u>fortune</u>, <u>burden</u>, <u>affliction</u> and <u>glory</u>, Middleton reveals the gap which makes each man unable to comprehend the basic points of reference of the other.

When the petitioners arrive to pester him in Act I, scene ii, Constantius turns them away in a scene which parallels Vortiger's later refusal to listen to the townspeople. However, Constantius' action is governed by his inability to understand the worldly concerns -- represented by buttons, wool and pastures -- which occupy the petitioners. The answer lies in heaven, not on earth. Constantius sums up his opposition to Vortiger's world when left alone:

> Heeres a wish'd howre for Contemplation now;
> All still and silent, this is a true Kingdome,
> . . .
> [I.ii.124-25]

Castiza, in her pious renunciation of the world, likewise represents a contrast to Vortiger, although her later marriage to him blurs her character. More importantly, her devotion and purity contrast with the bold amorality of Roxena. Where Castiza strives to remain unstained and is trapped by her devotion to truth, Roxena flagrantly violates the sanctity of marriage bonds but apparently goes unpunished; her lack of faith allows her to sin, she believes, without fear of heavenly retribution.

Middleton's characterization also serves to reveal his

transformation of his sources. All of the play's central figures have their origins in the histories, and all but Castiza are named in the sources. However, the degree to which Middleton depended on the sources for his conception of character varies according to the role the playwright has assigned to each. At one pole is Hengist, whose ill-defined nature reflects Holinshed's description of the Saxon as ". . . a man of great wit, rare policie and high wisedome . . ."[22] who also acts by ". . . wiles and craft . . . ."[23] He is a man capable of enormous treachery and of using his daughter as a pawn. Middleton's portrayal of Hengist is sympathetic: from the time of his arrival in Act II, scene ii, through his outwitting of Vortiger at his own game (of power politics) and his just rule of Kent, there seems to be little preparation for Hengist's destruction. His sins are ambition and his paganism, but the reader does not expect his defeat as he does Vortiger's. In addition, the spotlight shifts increasingly from the career of Hengist to the intrigue of Roxena and Horsus, so that Hengist gradually recedes into the background, to emerge only briefly at the end of the play. We are given only a glimpse of Hengist, and the conflicting views which result from seeing the Saxon in several different situations -- tricking Vortiger, fraternizing with Symon and his friends, admitting his thirst for glory -- lead to an

22 Holinshed (1587), p. 78.

23 Ibid., p. 78.

ambivalent response. Hengist's nature is adequately summed up by Horsus, who says,

> . . . the Earle of Kent
> Is Calme & smooth, like a deepe dangerous water,
> . . . I know his Blood
> The graues not greedier, nor hells Lord more proud
> . . .
> [IV.ii.283-86]

By simply adopting Holinshed's ambivalent attitude toward the Saxon, whose depth has great dramatic potential, Middleton has failed to create a living character.

At the other pole is Horsus who, except for his name, is totally Middleton's own creation. The most interesting of the play's characters, Horsus is a cynically detached observer who nevertheless is also important as a manipulator; he makes things happen (and thus serves as a catalyst for the action) while simultaneously commenting on them (and filtering the reader's response to the action). Horsus views his role objectively:

> . . . euery one has his toye
> While he liues here: some men delight in Building,
> . . .
> Some in Consuming what was raysd wth toyleing
> Hengist in getting hono^r^, I in spoyling --------
> . . .
> [IV.iii.160-61, 163-64]

Horsus is introduced with Hengist and Roxena in the Dumb Show following Act I, scene i, but he does not become prominent until the arrival of Roxena (Act II, scene iii) when, through a series of ironic asides, he reveals his passion for Hengist's daughter. The sight of his mistress arm-in-arm with Vortiger brings on an epileptic fit which thrusts

Horsus into the spotlight, and his character is first defined in the exchange with the equally cynical Roxena in Act III, scene 1. Roxena regards a liaison with the king purely as a matter of expediency, and Horsus, who is revealed as totally committed to Roxena, understands the arrangement and is willing to assist his mistress in her drive for position. It is Horsus the lover and realist who emerges from these passages. The scene is followed by one devoted to Horsus and Vortiger, in which the pair coldly plots the rape of Castiza's honor, with the manipulating Horsus skillfully playing the king into his hands. The ironies increase as Horsus continues to play his game, following Vortiger's marriage to Roxena, and Vortiger naively continues to regard the Saxon as a true friend. Horsus' confession to Vortiger in the final act juxtaposes his own calm, realistic acceptance of the situation with Vortiger's uncomprehending fury as reality begins to shatter his illusory world. Horsus fully acknowledges his own crimes and awaits their reward; Vortiger attempts to pin the blame for his actions on Horsus, to continue to deny his sin. The nature of Horsus is thus vividly illustrated through comparison with Vortiger. In addition to emerging as a very vivid character, Horsus serves as a link between the historical elements and Middleton's additions to the story.

Like Horsus, Roxena is largely Middleton's creation. Holinshed describes her as ". . . a maid of excellent beautie

and comelinesse . . .",[24] and in his account she seems to be merely an innocent tool in her father's quest for power. Although Middleton retains this suggestion in Act II, scene iii, (where Hengist is made Earl of Kent in an apparent bribe for his daughter's hand), subsequent emphasis is on Roxena's own motives. She seeks to preserve her reputation simultaneously with achieving a place of honor; and, like Horsus, she is a realist, playing the expediency game, brazenly using a convenient marriage with Vortiger to disguise her sin. Roxena appears prominently in four scenes: II,iii, the fainting scene; the first half of III,i, the exchange and bargain with Horsus; IV,ii, the banquet; and V,ii, where she acknowledges her guilt. Her first three appearances successively reveal the mixture of self-deception and cynicism which she represents. Like Horsus, Roxena acts expediently, motivated largely by self-preservation; yet, like Vortiger, she seems to foresee no consequences to her actions.

The third of Middleton's creations in the play is Castiza, whose origin lies in the chronicles' references to Vortiger's lawful wife: shortly after falling in love with Rowen, Holinshed says, Vortiger ". . . forsooke his owne wife . . ."[25] and married the Saxon maid. From this suggestion Middleton has developed an ambiguous figure, one who is originally betrothed to Vortiger; who is then used by

[24] Ibid., p. 79.

[25] Ibid., p. 78.

Vortiger in his attempt to plague Constantius; who, influenced by Constantius, renounces the world, only to accept it later when forced to marry the king. Her oscillations between these two poles are unconvincing, and she disappears from the play following her "rape" in Act III, scene ii, and confession (IV,ii), only to reemerge at the play's conclusion, hailed as the future bride of Aurelius. Somehow, Castiza impresses the reader as being more functional than human. Her role is to reflect upon Vortiger, Constantius and Roxena, and to illuminate each of their characters, while never becoming a living figure in her own right. She is too pure, too devout, to be convincing; yet she serves an important function in the play.

Standing somewhere between the two extremes is the play's central character, Vortiger. The king's nature is explored in depth by Holinshed. The chronicler notes first Vortigerne's motives in having Constantius crowned king:

> . . . but for that cause speciallie did Vortigerne seeke t'advance him, to the end that the king being not able to governe of himselfe, he might have the chiefest swaie, and to rule all things as it were under him, preparing thereby a way for himselfe to atteine at length to the kingdome . . . .[26]

Following the murder of Constantius, Vortigerne was chosen king, an accomplishment which, Holinshed notes, he worked by

> . . . indirect meanes and sinister proceedings . . . having no title thereunto, otherwise than as blind fortune vouchsafed to him the preferment: so . . .

26 Ibid., p. 77.

> he uncased the crooked conditions which he had covertlie concealed, and in the end (as by the sequele you shall see) did pull shame and infamie upon himselfe.[27]

In Holinshed's portrayal may be seen the seeds both for Middleton's conception of Vortiger's character and the moral judgment implied in the final retribution which he is seen to have brought on himself through his crimes. Moreover, Vortigerne grants Hengist's request to bring over more Saxons, failing to see the outcome of the action: ". . . not foreseeing the hap that was to come, did not despise this counsell tending to the destruction of his kingdome . . . ."[28] This is the conception of Vortiger's character adopted by Middleton: he is a man who is unable to perceive the results of his own actions.

Middleton also adopts Holinshed's emphasis on Vortigerne's sensual nature. Holinshed says that Rowen was able

> . . . speciallie to win the heart of Vortigerne with the dart of concupiscence, whereunto he was of nature much inclined, and that did Hengist well perceive.[29]

Continuing in the same vein, Holinshed says,

> . . . [Vortigerne] was much given to sensuall lust, which is the thing that often blindeth wise mens understanding, and maketh them to dote, and to lose their perfect wits: yea, and oftentimes bringeth them to destruction, though by such pleasant poison they feel no bitter taste, till they be brought to the extreame point of confusion in deed.[30]

27 Ibid., p. 77.

28 Ibid., p. 78.

29 Ibid., p. 78.

30 Ibid., p. 79.

In the historian's emphasis on the cause-effect relationship of Vortigerne's crimes to his end, one sees the nucleus for Middleton's dramatic conception of the king. In addition, the emphasis on Vortigerne's lust provides a clue to Middleton's emphasis in the play and seems to obviate much of Schoenbaum's discussion of Hengist as a play marred by its author's own sexual preoccupations.[31] Finally, the relationship between Vortigerne's acts and his end is explored by Holinshed:

> This marriage and liberalitie of the king towards the strangers much offended the minds of his subiects, and hastened the finall destruction of the land.[32]

Middleton thus retains the historian's emphasis on Vortiger's deceit and treachery, as well as his insensitivity to his subjects and his lust for Roxena. However, above all, it is Vortiger's naiveté which Middleton emphasizes in Hengist. His opening speeches reveal his thirst for glory and belief that kingship will bring happiness; when succeeding events begin to impinge on his hopes, Vortiger is surprised, unprepared for reality, constantly ready to try once more to attain his illusory dream. Thinking himself his own master, he is constantly manipulated by Horsus and Roxena, who use him to achieve their own goals, and by Hengist, who

31 Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, pp. 82-88; see also "Hengist, King of Kent and Sexual Preoccupation in Jacobean Drama," PQ, 29 (April, 1950), 182-98.

32 Holinshed (1587), p. 79.

tricks him into granting him Kent and later slaughters his men on Salisbury Plain. He is a man who believes in appearances and cannot conceive of the danger which lies beneath the surface. Yet, he is also ruthless in his methods of obtaining what he wants, whether it be a wife or a throne. In Vortiger Middleton has created what Schoenbaum labels a ". . . primitive and passionate man . . . ."[33]

The only other major figure is Constantius, whose role as a foil to Vortiger has been discussed above.[34] In his creation of Constantius, Middleton partially adopted the chronicles' description of a man unfit for kingship and devoted to God,[35] but he expanded the portrait to create a living person. Each of the characters is derived from the historical sources, but it is when the playwright chose to impose his own stamp on the historical figure that the character comes alive. Each character, moreover, is representative of one facet of the play's theme, and through the device of parallelism and contrast, is used by Middleton to explore the nature of ambition and thus provide unity to Hengist.

The imagery of Hengist acts as a third unifying device. Again Middleton explores ambition on several levels and illuminates this theme through its juxtaposition with

33 Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, p. 92.

34 See pages 39-42.

35 Holinshed (1587), pp. 76-77; Fabyan, p. 68.

humility, the lack of ambition. The conflict seems to be not only between the desire for power and the lack of such desire, but also between the world and the rejection of it and, finally, between appearance and reality -- for it is the sinners' substitution of illusory goals for lasting values which results in their destruction. These are the poles which become increasingly emphasized in the play's imagery. In their antithetical aspects, the images are applicable to both sides of the duality and, in this respect, reinforce the irony which defines the peculiar tone of the tragedy.

The desire for power is expressed in images of food: eating is associated with the flesh, with worldly cares, and the image is introduced by Constantius in Act I:

> Eight houres a day in serious Contemplation
> Is But a bare alowance, no higher food
> Toth soule, then Bread and water to the Bodye,
> And thats but needefull then; . . .
> [I.ii.76-79]

The speech sharply contrasts the earth-bound body, which requires ordinary food, and the heavenly -- the soul -- which feeds on prayer. Constantius is associated with the latter; earthly food becomes increasingly associated with Vortiger, and its connotation is that it is somehow evil, representative of the desires of the flesh. The opposition becomes more apparent at the end of Act I where Constantius, as the last of his vexations, is forced to eat because, as Vortiger says, "Tis for ye generall good." (I.ii.233) The "generall good" is the good of the earthly kingdom which Vortiger seeks to

rule; and Constantius is now a public figure, no longer to be permitted to fast and follow the dictates of his conscience, to seek heavenly food. Constantius associates eating with sin:

> Meate, away, gett from me, . . .
> [I.ii.213]

And again,

> Sure tis forgetfulness and not mans will,
> That leades him forth into Licentious wayes
> He Cannot Certainly Coñitt such errors,
> And think vppon 'em truely, as they are acting:
> Why's abstinence ordeynd but for such seasons
> . . .
> [I.ii.222-26]

The images continue throughout the play: in the speeches of Vortiger and Roxena, food is increasingly related to the ephemeral goal of power as well as to sexual lust, and the associations with Roxena further define her earthbound nature (III.i.10-11, 59-60, 110-13, for example). Vortiger's desire for glory is expressed in terms of appetite:

> Sweete power before I Can haue power to tast thee
> Must I foreuer Loose thee: . . .
> [II.ii.8-9]

And in the speech in which his desires move from the lust for power to that for Roxena, Vortiger again employs food imagery, this time in reference to his sexual appetite:

> . . . why shold not y[e] mind
> The nobler part that's of vs, be allowed
> Change of affections, as our bodyes are
> Still Change of foode and rayment; Ile haue't soe;
> . . .
> [III.i.110-13]

Horsus, too, describes his obvious pleasure at the "rape" of Castiza, saying,

> I Could haue fasted out an ember weeke
> And never thought of hunger to haue heard her:
> . . .
> [III.iii.275-76]

Ironically, he employs the image of fasting which Castiza, fearing the loss of her honor, has already introduced:

> . . . But take not from me
> That wch must guide me to another world
> And leaue me dark for ever, fast w^thout
> That Cursed pleasure wch would make two soules
> Endure a famine everlastingly:
> . . .
> [III.ii.102-06]

Hengist's ambition is likewise emphasized through Vortiger's description of it as a thirst in IV.iii.115 and 119; and in Act V Symon associates food with Hengist's paganism as he directs the preparations for the anticipated feast (V.i.51-69).

A second major image group is composed of storms, symbolic of the outside forces which threaten the characters. Constantius introduces the image in the first act by twice referring to himself as buffeted by a storm:

> No violent storme lasts euer,
> Thats all ye Comforth ont
> . . .
> [I.ii.111-12]

These lines are spoken in the presence of the petitioners; after they leave he says;

> Thankes heauen tis ouer, wee shold neuer know rightly
> The sweeteness of a Calme but for a tempest;
> . . .
> [I.ii.122-23]

Just as Constantius' doom is symbolized by the petitioners -- the representatives of the temporal world -- who create a storm around him, Vortiger is similarly plagued by the people

whose loyalty he is unable to ensure, and who pose a constant threat to his monarchy. To describe the multitude, he uses two prominent images: sickness and storms. "Vlcers of realmes . . ." (II.ii.12) he calls them, and hearing the mob, goes on to say,

> Hark I heare ruin threaten me, wth a voice
> That imitates thunder.
> [II.ii.20-21]

Vortiger's inability to control his subjects results in his dependence on Hengist who, appropriately enough, arrives because of a storm (II.ii.42-44). The king feels that he has been aided by fate in Hengist's arrival; his inability to see the threat this second storm will present to his reign is part of the play's irony.

It is a storm too that wrecks the calm of Castiza's life. When Horsus and Vortiger discuss the upcoming exposure of her supposed infidelity, it is suggested that the wrath of her father and uncle will serve as insurance for her punishment, just as one seeks insurance against theft or storm. Horsus continues,

> . . . in marriage tis no wonder
> Knotts knitt wth kisses are oft broke with thunder
> . . .
> [IV.ii.39-40]

Finally, Castiza's revelation that she cannot swear to her fidelity brings on just such a storm, as her father exclaims:

> Heers a storme
> Able to wake all of o^{r} name inhumed
> . . .
> . . . we that remaine my Lord
> Her vncle and my selfe, in this wild tempest,

As euer robd mans peace, will vndertake
Vppon liues deprivation, landes & hono[r],
She shall accept this oath.
[IV.ii.160-61, 167-71]

Hengist, plotting against Vortiger, foresees that he must act while Vortiger is in trouble or ". . . y[e] least storme may rend vs from y[e] bosome/ Of this Landes hopes for ever . . ." (IV.iii.4-5). And Vortiger, taken by surprise, recognizes in Hengist the storm that dashes his hopes:

Who Could exspect such treason from yo[r] brest
Such Thunder from yo[r] voice: or take you pride
To imitate the faire vncertaintye,
Of a Bright day that Teemes the sodainst storme,
When y[e] world least expects one: but of all
Ile neuer trust faire skye in man againe
Theirs y[e] deceit full weather: . . .
[IV.iii.70-76]

The storm around all of the characters becomes more violent in Act V when the arrival of Constantius' brothers threatens to destroy Vortiger, Hengist, Roxena and their dreams of glory. The catastrophe is variously symbolized by lightning (V.ii.10), thunder (V.ii.76) and whirlwinds (V.ii.125). The death of the four principal figures, Vortiger, Horsus, Hengist and Roxena, brings a calm to the close of the play with the suggestion of hope in Aurelius' peaceful reign, the destruction of the pagans and restitution of Castiza's honor.

Images of health and sickness are also opposed in the play: Constantius' physical health becomes Vortiger's concern as he says, "Your health and life is dearer to vs now . . ." (I.ii.234); and Castiza turns Vortiger's inquiry about her physical health into a comment on her spiritual

well-being:

> Vort: Are you well
>
> Cast: Neuer soe perfect in ye truth of health
> As at this Instant
> . . .
> [II.i.3-5]

The two "good" characters stand against the images of poison, infection and disease which reflect the forces that destroy the sinners from within. Middleton's sinners are characteristically unwilling to recognize their roles in their undoing; they prefer to blame fate, outside forces and other people for what they actually bring on themselves through their crimes. Thus Vortiger sums up his impending death:

> Ambition, hell, mine own vndooing Lust,
> And all ye broode of plauges Conspire against mee
> . . .
> [IV.iii.141-42]

The plagues have appeared throughout the play. In his important opening speech, Vortiger referred to the crowd as poison to his dreams of glory; yet, as the play progresses, it becomes increasingly evident that it is not the people so much as Vortiger's failure to reach them which is the infection. This is the same crowd referred to as a storm; the images work together to suggest the inner and outer forces of destruction. Again, referring to the mob, now in arms against him, Vortiger uses the words "impostume" (II.ii.9), "Vlcers" (II.ii.12) and "poysoned" (II.ii.14). Whenever health is used in reference to Vortiger, it is in an ironic

context: Hengist, on his arrival in Britain, wishes Vortiger "Health powre and victorye . . ." (II.ii.29), all goals which are finally destroyed; and Vortiger and Horsus discuss the former's health in relation to the fever that Roxena has inspired in him (III.i.95-140), a scene loaded with sexual innuendo. Likewise, Vortiger's use of images of infection with reference to Castiza is ironic since he himself, through his plot against her honor, is the source of the disease:

> Away with that infection of greate Hono^r
> And those her leprous pledges, By her poyson
> Blemisd and spotted in their fames for ever;
> . . .
> [IV.ii.265-67]

Poison enters the play physically in the third Dumb Show (Act IV) when Roxena disposes of Vortiner, who was placed on the throne following Vortiger's marriage to a pagan. "But she soone poysoned that sweete spring . . ." (Chor. IV.4), says Raynulph; and Roxena herself somehow becomes the poison in the realm.

Another image group is that of theft. Each of the varieties of ambition, whether for power, land or sexual gratification, is seen as a robbery, the sinner's willful usurpation of what is not rightfully his. Again it is Constantius who, in Act I, introduces the image. Seeing that no good can result from his kingship, which he views as the destruction of his soul, he refers to his peace as "filcht" (I.i.126) and continues with the theft metaphor:

> To robb a Temple, tis no lesse offence
> To rauish meditations from a soule
> The Consecrated alter in a Man,
> . . .
> [I.i.128-30]

Raynulph says Roxena is ". . . like a theife . . ." (Chor. II.10), and refers to stolen kisses (Chor. II.13); she herself calls a woman's loss of virginity a robbery by an "insatiate theife" (III.i.51), while Horsus places the blame on the woman who, he says, tempts the man:

> A treasure tis, able to make more theeues
> Then Cabinetts set open to entice,
> W^ch^ learnes one theft, y^t^ neuer knew ye vice
> . . .
> [II.iii.163-65]

The motif reappears in the plot against Castiza who, Horsus says, will "[know] not where she was robd . . ." (III.i.191), and is echoed by Castiza in III.ii.99. Finally, Horsus refers to Hengist as ". . . that theife King/ That has soe boldly stolne his honno^rs^ from yo^u^ . . ." (IV.iii.145-46).

An important group of images consists of those relating to sight and blindness, which, with the related themes of darkness and light, occur sporadically in <u>Hengist</u>.[36] Light is associated with those in whom right reason prevails: Lupus and Germanus, who are called ". . . lights/ Of holyness and religion, . . ." (I.i.95-96) and Castiza, referred to as "You Chaste Lampe of eternitye . . ." (I.ii.180) and as a star (IV.ii.129). The image, however, is never used

[36] It does not seem that they dominate the play as Mrs. Fulcher asserts; see my discussion on pages 46-47, above.

with reference to Constantius. Middleton also employs the light motif ironically to indicate the blinded characters' failure to perceive the reality of their situation. Hengist views Symon's success as a good omen:

> . . . tis a presage methinkes
> Off bright succeeding happines To myne
> When my fates glow-worme Casts forth such a shine:
> . . .
> [III.iii.113-15]

A particularly ironic use of the motif occurs (in the quarto version) in the banquet scene. Vortiger refers first to Roxena's "white soule" (IV.ii.252), and then to Castiza's "black honour" (IV.ii.256Q), a reversal of reality that reflects his moral blindness.

Constantius, to whom sin is incomprehensible, uses the image when speaking to Vortiger:

> Dare yo^u receiue heauens light in at yor eye Lidds
> And ofer violence to religion; take heede,
> The very Beame lett in to Comforth yo^u
> May be the fire to burne yo^u . . .
> [I.i.69-72]

The speech ironically foreshadows Vortiger's destruction in the fire, his punishment for denial of heaven's light. Vortiger's eyes see only what they wish to see (III.iii.3) and accept appearance as reality, as when he falls for the "sight" of Roxena (II.iii.206). To Castiza, true sight will be provided by her soul, her guide in the next world (III.ii.103) and guardian against spiritual darkness; she is physically blinded by her captors rather than through her own sin. The blindness image reappears in Act V, where it is associated

with Symon and Oliver.[37]

Although Middleton employs a number of images related to the theme of moral blindness, it does not seem that they dominate the play's vision. Some of the major characters (such as Hengist and Horsus) are never associated with the light and darkness motif. These images belong, rather, to a group of interrelated images dealing with the general themes of appearance and reality, deception and knowledge, which underscore the action. Perhaps the most impressive of these images is spoken by Hengist:

> Lurke like ye snake vnder ye innocent shade
> Of a spread sommers leafe; . . .
> [IV.iii.24-25]

The treachery underlying the surface calm is related through the snake image to the poison imagery discussed above.

Other major images are those concerned with weights or burdens and the frequent use of the words <u>rise</u>, <u>ascend</u> and variations of them.[38] All of these images are used by Middleton to emphasize and extend his theme through their application to both sides of the duality which defines <u>Hengist, King of Kent</u>.

In summary, a close reading of <u>Hengist, King of Kent</u> reveals the play's thematic and structural unity, achieved through the repeated paralleling and contrasting of char-

[37] See page 47, above.

[38] See page 41, above.

acters, images and situations, all of which ironically reflect the two sides of the theme, ambition. The play does have a central character, Vortiger, whose career provides the linear framework; the other characters are used as foils to Vortiger and to provide additional dimensions to the theme. The resulting tragedy is, on the whole, Middleton's own creation, and it is when he fails to strip off the more cumbersome historical elements that his own vision becomes clouded. It is on this vision -- on what Middleton attempts to say about reality in Hengist, King of Kent -- that the final portion of this study will concentrate.

CHAPTER IV

MIDDLETON'S TRAGIC VISION IN HENGIST, KING OF KENT

> See sin needes
> Noe more distruction then it breedes
> In it owne Bosome
> . . .
> [V.ii.107-09]

These lines, spoken by the gentleman in the final scene of Hengist, King of Kent, might well serve as the key-note for the entire play. Middleton's emphasis on sin and retribution comes to a dramatic climax as Horsus and Vortiger verbally and physically attack each other, the realist forcing the dreamer to acknowledge the reality of his sin; the dreamer still rationalizing that sin. Both finally perish in the hell-like flames that engulf Vortiger's castle, while the comments of the on-lookers -- Aurelius, Uther and the lords -- provide a barrier between the scene and the audience. The effect is to force the audience to judge the sinners, as do the on-lookers, rather than to pity them. The final scene indulges in melodrama as Vortiger and Horsus kill each other while Roxena, haunted by the ghost of Vortiner, dies in the flames. However, in view of Middleton's tragic vision, this is a necessary conclusion to Hengist.

Consideration of Hengist, King of Kent as tragedy must finally focus upon this vision, upon what Middleton was attempting to say about reality in the play. Characterized by a bleakly realistic view of human life, one which ex-

presses no sense of heroism or optimism about mankind, Middleton's tragedies are ironic in tone, largely eradicating the profound feelings one expects from tragedy. Instead of a vision of the nobility of the human spirit affirming itself in the face of an inexplicable order beyond it, Middleton gives us a picture of the morally blind man who, aware of his place within the order, nevertheless chooses to ignore it, and in so doing brings on his own defeat. The framework is essentially Christian, and this orientation finds expression in the plays' language and imagery, in specific references to sin and hell, to reason, judgment and will. God is creator and man is creature, and it is in willfully denying their relationship to this order that Middleton's characters first step into sin. Thus Middleton does make a positive statement in his tragedies, for he posits a moral order beyond man which man can choose to ignore -- or with which he can align himself. The knowledge of what is right, juxtaposed with his sinners' choice to do wrong, gives the plays their peculiarly ironic tone.

The special nature of such Christian-oriented tragedy is pointed out by W. H. Auden, who emphasizes that its authors do not necessarily believe Christian dogma but do derive ". . . their conception of man's nature . . ."[1] from

[1] W. H. Auden, "The Christian Tragic Hero: Contrasting Captain Ahab's Doom and its Classic Greek Prototype," <u>Tragedy: Modern Essays In Criticism</u>, ed. Laurence Michel and Richard B. Sewell (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), p. 234.

such an orientation. Greek tragedy, he asserts, is the tragedy of necessity, whereas Christian is one of possibility; and the Greek tragic hero is flawed by hubris (". . . the illusion of a man who knows himself strong and believes that nothing can shake that strength . . .")[2] whereas the Christian hero suffers the sin of pride (". . . the illusion of a man who knows himself weak but believes he can by his own efforts transcend that weakness and become strong.").[3] The distinction seems to underline Middleton's tragic view. It finds expression in his predominant themes, listed by Ribner as the confusion of appearance with reality and moral blindness which makes man unable to distinguish good from evil. Ribner adds as a third theme man's ". . . total degeneration as his own damnation is gradually revealed to him . . .".[4] Corollaries to these themes are the characters' self-deception, their attempts to blame fate for their own sins, and their desire to disguise acts of will as the product of reason. The themes are those of Christianity, a revealed religion through which man is made aware of the moral order; and in their refusal to acknowledge their sin and their attempts to disguise their evil as good, Middleton's

[2] Ibid., p. 234.

[3] Ibid., p. 234.

[4] Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order (New York, 1962), p. 125.
Note: This understanding, which Ribner attributes to Middleton's "Calvinistic bias" (p. 125), does not seem justifiable; see my discussion on pages 82-84.

sinners are eventually destroyed. The playwright's picture of the world reveals, through its horror and the inevitable retribution, that sin is real; that hell is what man, through sin, makes of his life; that the moral order which exists will operate. The moral statement implicit in the plays demands the sordid realism which gives them their chilling horror.

Middleton was working within a theological framework which the Renaissance partly inherited from the Middle Ages: it was, according to Tillyard, based on ". . . an ordered universe arranged in a fixed system of hierarchies but modified by man's sin and the hope of his redemption."[5] In this system sin, originally the result of the fall, is the disruption of the hierarchy established by God, and its product is disorder and chaos.[6] Fused with this medieval legacy was the more recent Reformation thinking, perhaps best expressed in the writings of Richard Hooker. Man, Hooker said, is endowed with reason, which enables him to attain knowledge of things both sensible and insensible; this, his highest faculty, also guides man in making the proper choice between good and evil.[7] Reason also directs man's will, whose first desire is to do good; and man's "inferior, natural desire" -- also called

5 The Elizabethan World Picture (New York, n.d.), pp. 5-6.

6 Ibid., p. 20.

7 Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, ed. Ernest Rhys, Everyman's Library (London and New York, 1907), I, 169.

appetite -- is directed by his senses: "Appetite solicits the will but will controls the appetite."[8] If the will is swayed by the senses to choose a less good, sin results.[9] Thus sin is seen to be the disruption of the reason-will-appetite hierarchy.

It is interesting to note that Hooker uses the images of sight which are frequently associated with Middleton's moral outlook. Edward Engelberg calls "tragic blindness" the dominant metaphor in The Changeling and Women Beware Women;[10] and its ironic use by Middleton recalls the sight theme seen in Hooker: "Goodness is seen with the eye of the understanding. And the light of that eye is reason."[11] It is the inability of Middleton's blinded characters -- blinded by their own substitution of appetite for reason and subsequent rationalization of their actions -- to see the consequences of their acts which constitutes the basis of the Middleton tragedy. The sight and blindness images, which Mrs. Fulcher calls the "metaphoric equivalents" of the judgment and will themes,[12] are only tentatively explored in Hengist.[13]

8 Ibid., I, 170.

9 Ibid., I, 173.

10 Edward Engelberg, "Tragic Blindness in The Changeling and Women Beware Women," MLQ, 23 (1962), 20.

11 Hooker, I, 170.

12 Fulcher, p. 19.

13 See my discussion of this imagery, pp. 67-69, above.

The theological framework enters the play on several different levels. The ambition which drives each of the central characters is a manifestation of their substitution of will or appetite for reason, and the play contains a number of specific references to reason, knowledge and will. Middleton's characters sin when their reason becomes subject to the will or appetite (a theme which is emphasized largely through the food imagery). The subsequent self-deception, rationalization, masking of evil as good, and refusal of the sinner to acknowledge his sin are emphasized through the prominent role played by fate and fortune in the play. The "good" characters' acceptance of fortune as an expression of the will of God, contrasted with the sinners' denial of responsibility for their misdeeds (by blaming fate), dominates the play's moral structure, providing ironic contrast and unity. Another major element is the emphasis on religion itself through the juxtaposition of the holy Constantius, supposedly Christian Vortiger, and pagan Saxons. It will be on these elements and their contribution to the tragic vision in <u>Hengist, King of Kent</u>, that this discussion will focus.

Constantius introduces the theme of reason, knowledge and will in the opening scene:

> Theirs nothing makes man ffeele his miseries,
> But knowledge only, reason that is placd
> For mans directo[r], is his Cheife aflicter,
> . . .
> [I.i.157-59]

It is man's reason, his ability to know (the result of the

fall) that enables him to assess his situation and be aware of his state. This same reason, rightly used, should make him aware of the good as well as the evil. In contrast to Constantius' acceptance of knowledge with all of its concomitant pain stands Vortiger's desire for ignorance, his rejection of the rational faculty:

> . . . Ignorance is safe,
> I slept happilye, if knowledge mend me not
> Thou has Comitted a most Cruell sinne
> To wake me into Iudgment, and then leaue mee:
> . . .
> [III.i.122-25]

Vortiger seeks only the "knowledge" that will satisfy his appetite, not that which comes from reason, and his rationalization contrasts with Constantius' naive assumption that man, using his reason as a guide, would not choose to sin:

> Sure tis forgetfulness and not mans will,
> That leades him forth into Licentious wayes,
> He Cannot Certainly Comitt such errors,
> And think vppon 'em truely, as they are acting:
> . . .
> [I.ii.222-25]

In this speech, the holy man seeks to excuse the gentlemen who do not observe fasts -- who instead indulge their appetites. However, it is not that the men have forgotten the fast days; rather, knowing what has been ordained by the church, they choose to disregard the order, to allow their wills and appetites to usurp the role of reason. Vortiger, too, reveals that his will has overruled his reason when he questions the paradox of the pagan Saxons representing good fortune. Willing to accept their help, he disregards his

reason, which indicates that "misbeleeuers" (II.iii.9) are dangerous. He ironically reveals his self-deception by referring to Hengist as "reasonable" (II.iii.43) when the latter asks for a piece of land. Roxena, too, makes ironic use of the word reason: she advises Horsus to take ". . . th'opinion/ Of Common reason . . ." (III.i.63-64) and aid her in her quest for position. Although motivated by appetite, she rationalizes her action as dictated by reason.

Middleton's method of interlocking images is illustrated in Vortiger's speech which moves from his thoughts on kingship to his lust for Roxena:

> . . . why shold not ye mind
> The nobler part that's of vs, be allowed
> Change of affections, as our bodyes are
> Still Change of foode and rayment; Ile haue't soe;
> . . .
> [III.i.110-13]

Vortiger reveals that he is aware of the supreme role of reason; yet he confuses his objectives (power and lust) with the right objects for the reason and equates reason with appetite. The change of clothes is significant also, since the image appears occasionally as a part of the play's deception theme. This motif is given ironic definition in Act IV when Vortiger, accusing Castiza of hiding her sin, says,

> Mark but what suttle vaile her sinn puts on;
> Religion brings her to Confession first,
> Then steps in Art, to sanctifie that Lust,
> . . .
> [IV.ii.196-98]

It is Vortiger, not Castiza, however, who is at this moment employing deception to hide his lust.

Finally, Hengist too subjects his reason to his will: when asked by Vortiger what it is he wants, he replies,

> Faith things of reason,
> I demand Kent
>
> [IV.iii.98-99]

The ambition theme which defines the play's action is thus seen to be an appropriate vehicle for Middleton's tragic vision. Ambitious man, guilty of sin in the perversion of the hierarchy which reason should dominate, masks his appetite as reason and chooses ignorance over true knowledge, thus disrupting the divinely established order. The inevitable conclusion is punishment for the sinner, the man whose ambition has led him to substitute will and appetite for reason.

An explicit Christian versus pagan frame of reference exists in Hengist, where Middleton's examination of religion is on three levels, those represented by the purely spiritual Christian (Constantius and Castiza); the Saxons, whose goddess is Fortune; and Vortiger, a professed Christian who in reality worships at the same altar as the Saxon leaders. Likewise, religion is emphasized in the underplot where Oliver uses his Puritanism as an excuse not to view the play (V.i.181), but later resolves to lose his sight through ". . . a deadly sinn or two . . ." (V. i.404). Symon also rationalizes about religion when he makes Hengist's paganism, a potential barrier to their friendship, an excuse for a lavish feast:

> Giue Charge ye mutton Come in all blood raw;
> Thats Infidell meate? the King of Kents a Pagan
> & must be serud soe; . . .
> [V.i.56-58]

The religious orientation reveals an important distinction between Hengist and Middleton's later tragedies. Unlike the later plays, in Hengist each of the central characters is static: Constantius is firmly committed to his life of devotion and never wavers; Vortiger has decided on his course for power before the play begins, and it drives him to the end; and Roxena acts as she does in an attempt to cover her past sins. Likewise, Hengist's desire for power is constant and can only be ended by death:

> . . . the whole Kingdome had bene mine
> That was my hopes greate aime, I haue a thirst
> Cold never haue bene full quenchd, vnder all;
> The whole land must, or nothing
> . . .
> [V.ii.248-51]

The contrast of good with evil breaks down into separate characters, just as the levels of the ambition theme were seen to do. In the later tragedies Middleton instead fuses these elements in a single character whose progress -- or fall -- is the source of the drama. Thus, both Beatrice-Joanna and Bianca (of The Changeling and Women Beware Women respectively) begin as young, beautiful, seemingly innocent girls who are transformed by their sin. Beatrice is described as ". . . beauty chang'd/ To ugly whoredom . . .",[14] and

[14] Thomas Middleton, The Changeling, ed. N. B. Bawcutt, The Revels Plays (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), V.iii.197-98.

Bianca speaks of her ". . . deformity in [spirit] . . .".[15] Sin brings isolation; the heroines' willful acts transform them into base creatures, alienated both from God and from their fellow man.

The moral order in Hengist thus is partially represented by religion itself. Vortiger defines this religious orientation: he sees himself as different from Constantius in the initial scene where it is Constantius' faith that places the power just beyond Vortiger's grasp:

> The death of all my hopes I see allreadye,
> Their was noe other likelyhood: for religion
> Was neuer friend of mine yett,
> . . .
> [I.i.165-67]

However, Vortiger reverses himself in Act II where he refuses Hengist's request for land on the grounds that their separate religions create an unbridgeable gulf between them:

> But for y'are strangers in religion Cheifly,
> W^ch^ is ye greatest alienation Can bee,
> And breeds most factions in ye bloods of men
> I must not grant yo^u^ that.
> [II.iii.34-37]

He then disregards this order when lust drives him to marriage with Roxena; and his former followers acknowledge that it was this act, not his killing of the king, which led them to oppose him (V.ii.70-72). Although Vortiger intellectually realizes the dangers inherent in his act, he is motivated by lust, not reason. The moral order of which he is aware and

15 Thomas Middleton, Women Beware Women, ed. Charles Barber (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 1969), V.i.223.

which he nevertheless chooses to disregard is here represented by religion itself, and a comparison may be drawn with Oliver's similar rationalizations in Act V. Moreover, to the end Vortiger refuses to acknowledge his wrong and attempts to make Horsus the scapegoat for his sin.

Horsus and Roxena do not deceive themselves; yet Middleton shows that their paths also lead to destruction. Although pagans, they are aware of the moral and social order which they have trespassed and which finally must prevail.

Vortiger's blindness to the reality of his sin results in moral equivocation. Yet it does not seem correct to assume, as does Ribner in his discussion of the other two tragedies, that Middleton's sinners actually have no choice. Ribner's thesis is that the plays represent a Calvinistic understanding in which man slowly reaches an ". . . awareness of his own damnation, . . ."[16] and that their dominant motif is ". . . the working out of a kind of inexorable fate which makes impossible any real change."[17] The possibility of good does exist in Constantius and Castiza and, it is suggested, in Aurelius and Uther, characters who choose the way authority has sanctioned. Repeated references to sin in the play make it apparent that the sinners know they are violating some order: Vortiger says that Constantius' delay in

[16] Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy, p. 10.

[17] Ibid., p. 130.

accepting the crown is a sin (I.i.86) and tells Horsus he will have committed a sin if he cannot secure Roxena for him (III.i.124). Castiza, when abducted, asks what her sin is (III.ii.39); and, when forced to confess her supposed infidelity, she distinguishes between "a voluntary syn" (IV.ii. 187) and "a Constraind one" (IV.ii.188). Vortiger, however, is quick to label her action as sin (IV.ii.196). Roxena, too, uses the word when she finally realizes she cannot avoid the consequences of her action (V.ii.189). The references appear also in the comic underplot: Oliver threatens to raise the seven deadly sins against Symon and his followers (III.iii. 190), prompting a lengthy speech by Symon, the heart of which is that the sins are not really worth punishment (III.iii. 191 ff.) -- the attitude of all of the characters.

The important question seems to be that of the role of fate in Hengist. Does the man who sins actually have a choice, or is he already damned, as Ribner suggests, and forced to an awareness of this fact? The role of fate and fortune in Hengist is complicated through Middleton's introduction of Fortune as the goddess of the Saxons (Dumb Show I) who is responsible for Hengist and Horsus' presence in England. The agency of fate in the characters' lives thus takes on an ironic dimension: in their moral equivocation, they view their apparent successes as the gifts of fortune while simultaneously making fate the scapegoat for their sin. The Saxons are referred to as "the sons of fortune" (II.ii.40),

and England as "the faire predistind soyle" (II.iii.27); the play's conclusion reverses these expectations. A gentleman announces the Saxons' arrival saying, "My Lord these saxons bring a fortune wth em/ Staines any Romaine success . . ." (II.iii.1-2), referring ostensibly to their wealth; ironically the statement foreshadows their disastrous effect on Vortiger's rule. Fortune is generally regarded as a boon by Hengist, although it in fact bodes ill; Vortiger sees fate as the agent which separates him from his desires (I.i.1-21 and II.iii.301), but he uses the word "fortunate" to refer to the plot against Castiza (III.i.199 and III.iii.297-98), where the agent is not fortune, but Horsus. The king finally seems to recognize Hengist as an agent of fate when he is surprised by the Saxon on Salisbury Plain. He grants Hengist's request for kingship saying,

> You haue ye advantage,
> He whom ffate Captiuates must yeilde to all
> . . .
> [IV.iii.126-27]

Yet he is still blind to his position and, when Horsus volunteers to follow him (and Roxena), he says, "Is my ruind fate blest with soe deere a friend . . ." (IV.iii.154). Throughout the play the words "fate" and "fortune" are used to emphasize the appearance-reality theme through the characters' rationalizing of their deeds. What is actually sin, in their assertion of their wills against the established moral order, is called "fortune" or "fate" by those who refuse to acknowledge their guilt.

The play's conclusion brings with it a resolution through which the sinners accept their responsibility for the actions which they have attributed to fate. Vortiger momentarily acknowledges his sins while simultaneously blaming outside forces for his ills:

> Ambition, hell, mine owne vndooing Lust,
> And all ye broode of plauges Conspire against mee
> I have not a friend left me.
> [IV.iii.141-43]

Roxena arrives at a true vision of her sin:

> No way to scape; is this ye end of glory
> Doubly besett wth enemyes wrath and fire;
> See, for an arme of Lust, Ime now embracde
> W^th one that will destroy me, wheir I read
> The horror of dishonest actions, guile
> & dissemblance: . . .
> [V.ii.181-86]

Hengist seems most aware of the devil -- his unquenchable ambition -- which drives him; yet he can only blame fate for not enabling him to succeed:

> Had but my fate directed this bold arme
> To thy Life, the whole Kingdome had bene mine
> . . .
> [V.ii.247-48]

All of the characters, to some extent, acknowledge their guilt, but they are not ennobled by it. It is too late in Middleton's view. There is no redemption, only the final working out of justice. The moral order posited by Middleton is thus seen to make evil self-destructive,[18] and man's hell is seen not in terms of an afterlife but on earth,

[18] Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, p. 147.

symbolically expressed through the conflagration in which the sinners are consumed. Defeated by the forces of the moral order which does exist beyond them, Middleton's sinners die without nobility, repentance or expectation of an afterlife. The comments of the on-lookers, as well as Hengist's delayed death off-stage, create a distance between the action and the audience which makes it impossible to feel sympathy or pity. Their deaths only seem inevitable. Aurelius, Uther and Castiza are left at the end as representatives of the moral order which does exist and, it is hoped, will prevail.

Middleton's concept of judgment in the universe is uncompromising. The play depicts literally the inexorable force of justice as well as the tragic gap between the sinful characters' expectations and their rewards. As such, _Hengist, King of Kent_ is intensely moral in its assertion that sin does have consequences. It is simultaneously profoundly pessimistic about the nature of mankind which, knowing what is right, chooses nevertheless to do evil, and Christian in its analysis of sin as the inversion of the reason-will-appetite hierarchy and its depiction of the retribution which comes as a consequence of sin. It is also tragic in its affirmation that man has a choice, but willfully elects to do wrong and thus bring on himself the forces of destruction.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE HENGIST PROBLEM

The aim of this study, as stated at the outset, was to reassess Hengist, King of Kent. The method was to place the play in a historical perspective from which it might be viewed as the product of a mature playwright and then to examine that product with emphasis on its unity, an element which reveals Middleton's artistic genius at work, and its success as a vehicle for the playwright's moral or tragic vision. The result of each of these investigations seems to justify defense of the play. Middleton was a playwright of remarkably varied talents, and his single attempt at historical tragedy should not be disregarded.

Finally, however, one must grapple with the problem presented by Hengist. The play has failed to impress its readers as being successful; it has instead overwhelmingly created a feeling of confusion. Although this study has demonstrated that the elements for unity are present in Hengist, they are not voiced clearly enough. Middleton, in the final analysis, has failed to create a dramatically cohesive play. He has spread his theme among too many characters and incorporated too many diverse elements for the play to create a forceful impact. Examination of his use of his sources reveals how Middleton transformed them from bare history to

human tragedy; yet, at the same time, the transformation is incomplete. Such a potentially dramatic figure as Hengist never really steps beyond Holinshed, and the reader is uncertain why it is the minor figure of Horsus, not Hengist, that dominates the action. It is this failure either merely to adapt his sources (and thus create historical tragedy) or totally to disregard them (and thereby create his own play) which results in the anomaly that is _Hengist_. When he moves beyond source, Middleton is highly successful; his artistic genius dominates in his creation of Constantius and Horsus and Roxena. When he remains enslaved to the history, he fails, and the result is the muddle that is Hengist or Vortiner.

The study of necessity has reflected the negative criticism which surrounds the play, for few positive assessments exist. Its aim, however, was not to refute these judgments but to attempt to look beyond them, to see what Middleton was trying to do in _Hengist_, and then to interpret his success or failure in light of that attempt. Thus, although _Hengist_ is flawed, it seems that the majority of the critics have been too harsh in their judgment of the play. _Hengist_ is unique in its treatment of the source material, and it represents Middleton's only experiment in historically oriented tragedy. In addition, as the earliest of Middleton's three tragedies and as a play which contains many highly successful devices, _Hengist_ should be considered an important

element in the Middleton canon. It is a play which deserves attention and which rewards the student with a deeper appreciation of Middleton's peculiarly ironic method and vision.

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APPENDIX: THE HENGIST TEXT

Hengist, King of Kent survives in three texts whose similarities and differences are discussed by R. C. Bald in the Introduction to his edition of the play.[1] Two manuscripts exist, one (on which the Bald edition is based) in the Folger Shakespeare Library's Lambarde volume of seventeenth century plays, the other in the library of his Grace the Duke of Portland at Welbeck Abbey, England. This latter manuscript contains the only use of Hengist, King of Kent as title (aside from the Revels Office playlist), The Maior of Quinborough being more common.[2] Bald concludes that the two manuscripts, which are essentially the same, are most likely private copies made from an annotated prompt book, and he feels they are in the same seventeenth-century handwriting. However, C. J. Sisson has taken issue with this conclusion, and he argues also that the hand or hands are of the third quarter of the seventeenth century rather than the second, as Bald asserts.[3] The quarto was printed in 1661 by Henry Herringman who, on the title page, labeled the play a comedy,

[1] Bald, "Introduction," Hengist, King of Kent; or The Mayor of Queenborough, pp. xxiv-xxxvi.

[2] Bentley, p. 884.

[3] C. J. Sisson, (Review of Thomas Middleton, Hengist King of Kent; or The Mayor of Queenborough, ed. R. C. Bald), MLR, 24 (1939), 261-62.

correcting the mistake in a later issue.[4] The play was entered in the Stationers' Register on Sept. 4, 1646, and again on Feb. 13, 1660/61.[5]

The manuscripts contain many stage directions which were omitted from the quarto; however, the most important difference between the manuscript and printed copies lies in the quarto's omission of many lines found in the manuscripts. Bald states that,

> In all, the manuscripts contain 175 lines not in Q, although Q has about 25 lines not in the manuscripts.[6]

Some of the variations represent ordinary theatrical cuts, but Bald notes also three omissions from Q which might be construed as ". . . criticism of the throne . . ."[7] and therefore may have fallen subject to censorship. Two songs are also omitted from Q.[8] Most important, the endings of the quarto and manuscript versions differ. The quarto ending, Bald asserts, was ". . . probably not written by Middleton."[9] Q substitutes eleven lines for the final 43 in the manuscripts, cutting out completely the final scene, Castiza's

4 Bentley, p. 884.

5 Bald, "Introduction," pp. xiv-xv.

6 Ibid., p. xxxi.

7 Ibid., p. xxxii. These occur at II.ii.14-15, II.iii.143-45 and III.i.105-09.

8 Ibid., p. xxxiii. These occur at I.i.29-40 and IV.ii.51-57.

9 Ibid., p. xxxiv.

return to the stage and the promise of a new posterity to issue from the marriage of Castiza and Aurelius.[10] Also omitted from Q is Raynulph's final speech.[11]

The importance of the 1938 edition of Hengist is apparent: all earlier printings, including that in Bullen's standard edition of Middleton, relied solely on the less complete quarto version. Bald's edition, however, is based on the fuller Lambarde manuscript with corrections incorporated from the Portland manuscript and the quartos, with textual notes indicating variant readings. Criticism of the Bald edition has come from Sisson, who objects to Bald's editing the manuscript to the point of incorporating Q readings into the text and changing spellings.[12]

10 Ibid., p. xxxv.

11 Bald, "Introduction," p. xxxv, suggests that the change may have been made to make the play compatible with Rowley's Birth of Merlin, a play based on the events following those in Hengist, in which Aurelius weds the Saxon maid Artesia. The relationship of the two plays has never been satisfactorily explained. F. A. Howe ["The Authorship of 'The Birth of Merlin'," MP, 4 (July, 1906), 1-13] proposes that, because of the success of Hengist, Middleton had drawn up a sketch for a future play using the same basic formula, and that this play was later fleshed out by Rowley.

12 Sisson, p. 261.