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'Participating Immortality': Memory and Performance in Middleton's Hengist, King of Kent

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Article abstract

Middleton's *Hengist, King of Kent* and its multifaceted textual afterlives dramatize memorial processes, greatly dependent on the participatory experience of the formed event. These processes highlight not only that theatrical production is a means for preserving cultural memories, but also that the preservation of the past is inseparable from, and conflated with, the production of new theatrical memories. Remembering the past in the theatre — in the fullest sense of 're-membering' as imaginatively putting dead bodies back together — goes hand in hand with the necessity of remembering the theatrical past, of recalling the play that vanished even as it came into being.

J. Gavin Paul

‘Participating Immortality’: Memory and Performance in Middleton’s *Hengist, King of Kent*

Middleton’s Hengist, King of Kent and its multifaceted textual afterlives dramatize memorial processes greatly dependent on the participatory experience of the performed event. These processes highlight not only that theatrical production is a means for preserving cultural memories, but also that the preservation of the past is inseparable from, and conflated with, the production of new theatrical memories. Remembering the past in the theatre — in the fullest sense of ‘re-membering’ as imaginatively putting dead bodies back together — goes hand in hand with the necessity of remembering the theatrical past, of recalling the play that vanished even as it came into being.

Thomas Nashe’s *Pierce Penniless* (1592) is perhaps best known for a kind of ghost story that it contains, its reference to the affective power of the English hero, Talbot, in *1 Henry VI*:

How would it have joyed brave Talbot, the terror of the French, to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.¹

While critics and editors regularly cite and anthologize this passage (largely because *1 Henry VI* is so integral to speculations on Shakespeare’s earliest forays into the theatre), they rarely contextualize it. The quotation is from the section on ‘The Defence of Plays’ in Nashe’s text, and what I am particularly interested in is the portion immediately preceding the famous remembering of Talbot:

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Nay, what if I prove plays to be ... but a rare exercise of virtue? First, for the subject of them: for the most part it is borrowed out of our English Chronicles, wherein our forefathers' valiant acts, that have lain long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books, are revived, and they themselves raised from the grave of oblivion, and brought to plead their aged honours in open presence: than which, what can be a sharper reproof to these degenerate days of ours?²

While Nashe's description of Talbot is noteworthy for its depiction of the transaction involving what Anthony Dawson describes as 'actorly passion and detachment, as well as ... audience participation and awareness of fiction',³ I wish to stress that Nashe's celebration of theatrical power involves a juxtaposition of performed memories against textual, recorded ones. As Thomas Rist has noted, Nashe's description 'makes the actor the commemorator of history, meaning both performer and narrative in the history play is commemorative'.⁴ The tears, triumphs, and blood of performance are made all the more striking when set against the 'worm-eaten books' in which Talbot's exploits would otherwise lay dormant. Indeed, Nashe implies that both the body of Talbot and the chronicles that champion his accomplishments face a similar, inevitable fate: burial, stagnation, rot. What 'revives' man and chronicle, what rescues body and text from oblivion, is the theatre.

Nashe's remarks on the physical decay of textual memories are not a rarity in the early modern period. In Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, for instance, Lucrece laments that 'Time's glory' is 'To fill with wormholes stately monuments, / To feed oblivion with decay of things, / To blot old books and alter their contents' (939, 946–8); this formulation is transformed slightly in *Henry V*, where Exeter, presenting the French king with some sort of documentation, insists that Henry's right to the French crown is 'no sinister nor no awkward claim, / Picked from the worm-holes of long-vanished days, / Nor from the dust of old oblivion raked' (2.4.85–7).⁵ The second book of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* offers an example more germane to my interests in the activation of old texts. Spenser's extensive allegorization of the Castle of Alma as the human body involves a lengthy description of the chamber of memory (located in the castle's highest tower). This space is figured as 'ruinous and old', inhabited by 'an old oldman, halfe blinde, / And all decrepit in his feeble course' (2.9.55.1, 5–6); the archives of memory are

hangd about with rolles,
And old records from auncient times deriu'd,

Some made in books, some in long parchment scrolles,
That were all worme-eaten, and full of canker holes. (2.9.57.6–9)⁶

While Spenser's architectonics of memory repeatedly emphasize stasis and fragility, it soon becomes clear that the old man 'of infinite remembrance' (2.9.56.1) is not alone:

A litle boy did on him still attend,
To reach, when euer he for ought did send;
And oft when things were lost, or laid amis,
That boy them sought, and vnto him did lend. (2.9.58.4–7)

Thus, as Bruce Smith observes, Spenser's chamber of memory is a mixture of 'vital activity' and 'unsettled and unsettling disorder'.⁷ Not unlike Nashe's formulation, the records of the past are largely inert until revived by an activating, human force — the boy seeking and finding the necessary texts; in William West's words, Spenser provides 'a hypostasized reminder that some barrier always stands in the way of bringing to consciousness all that the archive contains'.⁸ Most striking in the chamber of memory is the healthy measure of chaos and randomness that Spenser adds to his depiction of memory's operations: the 'liuely vigour' (9.55.7) of the old man's mind, along with his commitment to perpetual record-keeping, are not enough. A fully functional memory requires a repository for storage and an individual actively navigating the messily curated texts of the past.⁹ Notably, these memorial operations are haunted by the possibility of decay, vanishment, and forgetting, texts 'worme-eaten, and full of canker holes', texts 'lost, or laid amiss'.

Arthur and Guyon — the knights being shown the chamber of memory — proceed to read through the histories of British kings and Elven emperors, respectively; near the end of the British chronicles, Arthur encounters the story of Hengist, a Saxon leader 'well approu'd in warre', a man of 'renowmed might' (10.65.2, 3) invited to bring his forces across the water by Vortiger, who has 'Vsurpt the crowne' (10.64.3) from the sons of Constantine (Vortiger's brother). The points of emphasis in Spenser's account — Hengist's help in stabilizing Vortiger's rule, the burgeoning power of Hengist's Saxon forces within Britain, Hengist's treacherous slaughter of British lords at a meeting near Stonehenge, the violent ends of both Hengist and Vortiger — also form the building blocks of Thomas Middleton's play, *Hengist, King of Kent, or, The Mayor of Queenborough*, written in late 1620.¹⁰ In what follows, I would like to consider Middleton's treatment of the legend of Hengist in detail, focusing on the ways in which his play appears to

self-consciously position itself within the resonant space that I have been describing: the space, that is, between texts and bodies, reading and enactment. If the theatre itself can be seen as occupying 'an institutional position as a repository of memory, a kind of *midden* in which the rags and bones of culture can be taken up and examined',¹¹ then *Hengist*, with its eponymous character who, like Nashe's Talbot, is revived from the dusty pages of history books and represented on stage, becomes a theatrical artifact with intriguing affective characteristics. Complicating matters, the play survives in a range of textual forms, including manuscript, printed quarto, and anthologized excerpt, and these textual forms document their own sequence of rememberings and forgettings that extend and tangle the play's memorial roots.

How does a play seek to activate the memories of its audience, and how does the subsequent printing of that play both catalyze that activation and alter its terms? *Hengist* — a contact zone between theatre history and history-as-theatre — serves as a productive site for taking up these questions. In dramatizing memorial and imaginative processes greatly dependent on the participatory experience of the performed event, and in its multifaceted textual afterlife, *Hengist* exemplifies the notion that memory is one of the primary engines of early modern performance, that memory serves, as Robert Weimann suggests, as 'product and producer', 'an object of representation [and] an agency of both performances and their reception'.¹² *Hengist* brings into relief not just that theatrical production can be a means for preserving cultural memories, but that the preservation and transmission of the past are inseparable from, and deeply conflated with, the production of new memories of the theatrical event itself. Remembering the past in the theatre — in the fullest sense of 're-membering' as imaginatively putting dead bodies back together and reassembling historical events — goes hand in hand with the necessity of remembering the theatrical past, of being able to recall the play that vanished even as it came into being hours, days, or decades before. Middleton's history play serves as a reminder of the genre's representational challenges and opportunities, requiring as it does that the playwright 'establish a "we" that crosses the temporal boundary between past (on stage) and present (in the audience)'.¹³ *Hengist*, much like the metaphor of the young boy navigating Spenser's chamber of memory, activates history: engaging with the play, then and now, entails travelling amidst the scrolls, books, and records archived in the social imagination and brought to life through the pleasurable labours of the theatre.

As Spenser's rendering in *The Faerie Queene* suggests, Hengist was an important figure in the historical imagination.¹⁴ His arrival in Britain marked the point of origin for Saxons in England, and his mythical feats — including introducing

the practice of 'wassail' and having his murder of Vortiger's men memorialized by the structures at Stonehenge — had been legitimized by the likes of Bede (who identifies Hengist as a Jute rather than a Saxon) and Geoffrey of Monmouth. In R.C. Bald's words, by the Elizabethan period, the legend of Hengist 'had passed into the domain of authentic history'.¹⁵ Indeed, Grace Ioppolo notes that 'Holinshed's *Chronicles* ... prominently featured the story of Hengist's betrayal of Vortiger as the seminal event, both tragic and celebratory, in the establishment of Anglo-Saxon Britain', and further, 'Even in James's age, historians had to continue to insist that (contrary to popular belief) "England" was not a corruption of "Hengist's land", but a reference to the land of the Angles'.¹⁶

Middleton explicitly positions his work within a textual historiography by framing his play with a prologue and epilogue spoken by Raynulph Higden, a fourteenth-century Benedictine monk who had included Hengist's incursions into England (along with much else) in his history of the world, *Polychronicon*.¹⁷ Raynulph performs a number of interrelated roles within *Hengist*: he asserts the play's historicity; he functions as a chorus as well as a stand-in for Middleton as playwright; he is even a kind of performance critic, commenting throughout the play on a number of elaborate dumb shows that are central to the plot. Raynulph, identified as '*the presenter*' (1.0.0.2) in surviving manuscripts, introduces the play by way of reference to his own work, using language that both connects *Hengist*'s subject matter to recorded histories and distinguishes the performance to come as a unique means of engaging the past.¹⁸ Raynulph claims that the events of the play have been 'Raise[d] from his *Polychronicon*' (1.0.2), a move that recalls Nashe's memories of Talbot in figuring the theatre as a site where legendary acts and individuals are reincarnated. In linking the current performance to its historical subject matter, Raynulph proceeds to efface differences between 'then' and 'now', suggesting 'time is not linear, but strangely circular':¹⁹

Fashions that are now called new
 Have been worn by more than you,
 Elder times have used the same
 Though these new ones get the name,
 So in story what's now told
 That takes not part with days of old?
 Then to prove time's mutual glory
 Join new times' love to old times' story. (11–18)²⁰

Taken together, Raynulph's prologue and epilogue emphasize the presentness and immediacy of the theatrical event: appearing to acknowledge his presence in an

outdoor theatre, he refers to 'this round fair ring / With sparkling judgments circled in', and speaks of 'win[n]ing the grace of two poor hours' (5–6, 8).²¹ At the conclusion of the play, Raynulphe claims that the performance that has just finished was made up of basic elements — subject matter and actors — that he has purposefully selected:

For truth of story compact
I chose these times, these men to act,
As careful now to make you glad
As this were the first day they played. (Epilogue 1–4)

The 'truth' of the story, Raynulphe suggests, results from a deliberate process of selection and representation: raising Hengist and his feats from the documentary record is a transformative act of interpretation that sacrifices historical exactitude for the purposes of pleasure and entertainment ('to make you glad'). Raynulphe, that is, champions the story's continued actuation by the theatre above and beyond any claims to historical accuracy, explicitly positioning the performance 'now' within a lineage descending from 'the first day they played'.²²

Within Middleton's play, discussions involving Hengist often include a meta-theatrical glimpse at just how memorable his mythical achievements are destined to become. Early in the play Vortiger applauds Hengist's presence on the island, remarking,

You've given me such a first taste of your worth
'Twill never from my love. Sure when life's gone
The memory will follow my soul still,
Participating immortality with't. (2.4.10–13)

Memory 'participating immortality' is a wonderfully provocative construction, one that points toward the vitality that memorial processes can confer. In Vortiger's formulation, memory and its objects exist in a symbiotic afterlife with each sustaining the other: like his soul, Vortiger's memories of Hengist will live forever, and by extension, so too will the feats or 'worth' of Hengist himself. 'Participating' is the key component here: memories survive and persist because they are a reactive force, partaking in transmissions that are rooted in, yet also exceed, the body. Notably, this occurrence is Middleton's only use of the adjective 'participating'; there are five instances of 'participate' in his surviving drama, usually in the sense of 'partake'.²³ Ioppolo glosses Vortiger's use of 'participating' as 'partaking of', which nicely captures the reciprocal, experiential sense of Vortiger's point. Vortiger's metaphor, I suggest, is also applicable to the participatory pleasures

offered by the play, where memories of Hengist live in and give life to the work, consequently spurring the audience to a heightened awareness of what is happening before them: long since dead and vanished figures being impersonated by actors with a real, physical presence.

Introducing himself and his Saxon army to Vortiger as ‘The sons of Fortune’ (2.3.36), Hengist offers his armies and ‘red sweat’ (37) to the king of the Britons, who faces a popular uprising in response to his fratricidal ascent to the throne. Hengist quickly makes good on his promise to stamp out the rebellion, and the Saxon leader, commenting that ‘This land appears the fair predestined soil / Ordained for our good hap’ (2.4.26–7), soon seeks compensation for services rendered. On the grounds that Hengist and his company are ‘strangers in religion’ (32), Vortiger refuses to grant Hengist what he most desires: ‘A little earth to thrive on’ (28). Hengist, undeterred, offers an alternative plan: spotting a hide carried by Simon the tanner (and soon to be mayor of Queenborough), Hengist requests only so much land ‘As yon poor hide will compass’ (37). Vortiger agrees, and Hengist shrewdly employs Simon to ‘Take your hide and cut it all into the slenderest thongs that can bear strength to hold’ (80–3). In voicing his aspirations to his captain, Hersus, Hengist speaks in terms that intermix confidence and futurity:

It is the first foundations of our fortunes
On Britain's earth and ought to be embraced
With a respect ne'er linked to adoration.
Methinks it sounds to me a fair assurance
Of large honours and hopes, doesn't not, Captain? (126–30)

Hengist's boast shades into a kind of impossible, future memory; his order for Simon to see the hide-trick 'carefully performed' (125) gives rise to a formulation of the plan as already accomplished. The subsequent back and forth between Hengist and Hersus continues in this anticipatory vein, intensifying the attention paid to the lasting memorial resonance that can suffuse lives long gone:

HERSUS How many have begun with less at first
That have departed emperors from their bodies,
And left their carcasses as much in monument
As would erect a college.

HENGIST There's the fruits
Of their religious shows too, to lie rotting

Under a million spent in gold and marble
 When thousands left behind dies without shelter,
 Having nor house nor food. (131–8)

Carcasses and rotting bodies: these things inevitably decay and wither to dust, but what endure are the monuments and memories that facilitate the prospects of, borrowing Vortiger's terminology, 'participating immortality'.

Adding further nuance to the exchange is its metatheatrical touch: the frame of theatrical production underscores the Saxons' comments concerning memories that can and cannot be traced back to physical bodies (once vital 'emperors' reduced to mere 'carcasses'). As the dialogue twists through past, present, and future the audience encounters the real, physical presence of actors representing vanished historical characters whose bodies have, of course, rotted away. To put this in slightly different terms: what completes the circuit to give the scene its compelling charge is the audience's foreknowledge that Hengist's claim to 'the fruitful banks of uberous Kent' (2.4.140) will succeed: the future he anticipates is the past they are invited to help produce, and the mechanism for helping to bridging past and present, absent bodies and actual bodies, is participatory engagement that is sometimes imaginative, sometimes memorial, sometimes both. Dawson articulates the complex negotiation in pertinent terms: 'The actor, by participating his body, creates his part, constructs the person he represents; the audience participates the actor, exchanging its hold on ordinary reality for an embodied, but also of course impersonated, passion'.²⁴ Fittingly, Vortiger's acknowledgement of Hengist's 'strong and spacious castle' (3.3.5) gestures at this foreknowledge of the audience in terms suggestive of permanence and durability: 'And for your building's name shall to all ages / Carry the stamp and impress of your wit, / It shall be called Thong Castle' (313–15). Indeed, even in the world of the play the castle's name quickly becomes common currency, becomes *memorable*: in the very next scene, Simon, who is not on stage when his king bestows the name on Hengist's stronghold, nevertheless greets Vortiger, his wife Castiza, and others with 'And now expect a rare conceit before Thong Castle' (4.1.9).

A similar conflation of futurity and retrospection infuses Hengist's efforts to inspire his men to slaughter British lords during a 'peace-treaty ... Upon the plain near Salisbury' (4.3.8, 10); 'dear Saxons', says Hengist, 'Fasten we now, and our unshaken firmness / Will assure after-ages' (4.4.5–7). Hengist's forecast of their actions being assured 'after-ages' echoes another, better known scene of assassination which anticipates future re-enactments:

CASSIUS How many ages hence
 Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
 In states unborn and accents yet unknown?
 BRUTUS How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport,
 That now on Pompey's basis lies along,
 No worthier than the dust? (*Julius Caesar* 3.1.113–18)²⁵

Unforgettably, the assassination scene in *Julius Caesar* deliberately raises awareness of both the participatory pleasures and limitations of performed drama: the casting forward to 'ages hence', and 'states unborn and accents yet unknown' self-reflexively frames the performance in the present, the embodied realization of the past's potential for memorialization that the conspirators prophesize; and yet, even while the play invites an audience to reflect on their imaginative contributions to historical understanding, the projections of Cassius and Brutus remind them that they are engaging with a representation that is itself already fading into the past and subject to interpretation: Caesar is destined to bleed 'in sport ... No worthier than the dust'. Dawson's comments on the assassination scene in *Julius Caesar* are extremely helpful here: 'The past is being remembered — represented or re-enacted — but at the same time the very act of re-telling, of making history, is foregrounded by being made part of what purportedly happened ... Meta-theatrical awareness ... is a constituent of historical memory, even as it destabilizes the 'truth' of memory by underlining its constructedness'.²⁶ The moment in *Hengist* is not as explicitly metatheatrical as what is found in Shakespeare's play, but the two scenes are linked in the way in which they likely intensify an audience's awareness of the imaginative engagements necessary to represent history within the theatre. That is, in both instances (though more diffusely in *Hengist*), 'the arts of remembrance do not look inward to the mind, but outward to the culture',²⁷ as the casting forward to 'after-ages' or 'ages hence' weaves a complicated pattern to account for the participatory relationship that is shared by performers and their audience. The fictional future is also the historical past, which has in turn become the fiction brought to life on stage.

If the enduring resonance of the legends surrounding Hengist explains Middleton's attraction to the source material, by the middle of the seventeenth century, Middleton's play had become something of a cultural phenomenon in and of itself. Significantly, though, the play's memorableness and sustained popularity appear to be a product not of the tragic narrative arcs involving Hengist, Vortiger, Castiza, Roxena, or Hersus, but of the comic subplot involving the misadventures of Simon, the mayor of Queenborough. Indeed, the play seems to have

been commonly known as *The Mayor of Queenborough*: it first appears in the Stationers' Register in 1646 as the 'Maio[r] of Quinborough' (though the play is not printed at this time) and it is registered again in 1661 as 'A Comedie called the Maio[r] of Quinborough' along with an attribution to Middleton. References to the play throughout the century follow this pattern.²⁸ In a revealing phrase, Sara Jayne Steen, who describes *A Game at Chess* and *The Mayor of Queenborough* as Middleton's two most well-known works in the seventeenth century, writes that 'Simon so amused Londoners that he took on a life of his own ... [he] may have been Middleton's single most popular character'.²⁹ In Ioppolo's words, 'Simon the Mayor was so beloved a comic figure that the title "Mayor of Queenborough" became a cultural tag for a foolish politician on and off the stage'.³⁰

Simon was 'what people remembered',³¹ but the reputation of Simon's character appears to surpass even the play's expectations: the narrator figure Raynolph completely disregards Simon — his choric interjections focus exclusively on the main, tragic plot. Simon's prominence in the play's afterlife is thus all the more conspicuous because the play itself is determined to assert the primacy of Hengist's narrative arc. Nevertheless, Simon's appeal is undeniable, and his position in the play connects in revealing ways to representations of memory and participation in both textualized and performed modes of realization. Simon's rise to the mayoralty of Queenborough involves him beating out Oliver, a 'Puritan and fustian-weaver' (5.1.126), for the title; the subplot as a whole — with its squabbles, inflated rhetoric, and grandstanding — serves as a kind of comic microcosm of Hengist's rise to power in the main plot.³² This relationship between the high and low plots is reinforced in the play's imagined topography, with Middleton situating Queenborough in close proximity to Hengist's Thong Castle, a point that not all of his sources agreed upon.³³

Scholars have seized on the subplot's concern with contemporary politics and local industry, particularly its apparent references to the 'Cockayne Project' begun in 1614 that nearly destroyed England's cloth industry and sent the nation's economy into depression: petitioners in the first scene of the play, including a Grazier, Brazier, Fellmonger (sheepskin dealer), and Buttonmonger, complain to the king of 'a great enormity of wool' and the high price — 'twopence an acre' — of pastures (1.3.97, 100). Briggs, for instance, contends that 'Topical references in the sub-plot may have functioned to alert the audience to the way that national history influences present and future destinies, connecting itself to the present time either through analogy, or through ancient blood ties'.³⁴ I would like to adopt Briggs's claim that the subplot serves to centre an audience's engagement with the play in the 'present time', though I wish to shift the emphasis toward the

presentness of performance. In the beginning of act 5, Simon learns that Hengist (now king of Kent) intends to feast with the new mayor; thrilled, Simon addresses the audience, reminding them of Hengist's Saxon heritage and briefly inciting their historical imaginations: 'The King of Kent! The King of Christendom shall not be better welcome to me, for you must imagine now neighbours this is the time that Kent stands out of Christendom, for he that's King there now was never christened' (5.1.35–9).

The meta-theatrical reminder is striking, and it is followed by even more self-reflexive highlighting of performativity: news that 'a certain company of players' (61–2) have arrived, seeking Simon's favor 'to enact in the town hall' (65). Unbeknownst to poor Simon, the players are also thieving 'Cheaters' (they are identified as such in speech prefixes and stage directions) who eventually make off with his purse and 'three spoons too' (5.2.358); after some debate it is decided that the play they will perform is the ironically titled '*The Cheater and The Clown*' (5.1.114). Clearly Simon is a great admirer of plays, recalling fondly as he does,

O, the clowns I have seen in my time! The very peeping out of 'em would have made a young heir laugh if his father had laid a-dying. A man undone in law the day before, the saddest case that can be, might for his twopence have burst himself with laughing and ended all his miseries. Here was a merry world, my masters! Some talk of things of state, of puling stuff, there's nothing in a play to a clown's part, if he have the grace to hit on't, that's the thing indeed. The king shows well but he sets off the king. (124–34)

Simon's recollection here of the 'collective free laughter'³⁵ of performances past supports Lina Perkins Wilder's claim that 'By remembering what the audience does not, and doing so at length, in excess of the demands of the plot, on a subject that conflicts with the needs and imperatives of the present, and often to no particular direct purpose, [a] character [can create] the illusion of independence, of a personal history distinct from the action of the play'.³⁶

Simon demonstrates a humorous understanding of performance only magnified by his new posting as mayor and corresponding over-inflated sense of self-worth: 'What think you of me, my masters? Have you audacity enough to play before so high a person?' (5.1.81–2). Simon's running commentary on how plays work expresses a twisted logic that results in escalating zaniness when he assumes the role of the clown in the preview put on by the players/cheaters; as Simon puts it, 'Cannot a man of worship play the clown a little for his pleasure but he must be laughed at?' (296–8). A fellow artisan cautions Simon against debasing himself,

but Simon insists by way of a proverbial rebuttal: 'tis not good to scorn anything, a man does not know what he may come to. Everyone knows his ending but not his beginning' (288–90). These lines echo an earlier moment in the play, when Hengist puts forth a stark claim to be king of Kent: 'I'll be the first then, everything has beginning' (4.4.96). Simon gets the proverb exactly wrong, but his mistake nevertheless bespeaks a kind of theatrical truth. In an earlier exchange, Simon had explained his reasoning for wanting to view the play before showing it to Hengist:

'tis a point of justice, an't be well examined, not to offer the king
worse than I'll see myself, for a play may be dangerous, I have known
a great man poisoned in a play.

GLOVER What, have you, Master Mayor?

SIMON But to what purpose, many times I know not.

FELLMONGER Methinks they should destroy one another so.

SIMON No, no, he that's poisoned is always made privy to it; that's one good
order they have amongst 'em. (5.1.144–52)

Those playing kings know what is coming to them, so in the representational space of the theatre, Simon's corrupted belief that 'Everyone knows his ending but not his beginning' makes a strange sort of sense. Surely every actor knows the ending of his part if not his play, and yet the legendary subject matter of *Hengist* itself is a testament to both the allure and the elusiveness of the origins that shape and sustain memories of foundational events and individuals.

Simon's direct involvement in the play-within-the-play exemplifies the pleasurable, activating forms of participation the theatre makes possible: his ill-fated role as a clown who defies anyone to laugh at him provides *Hengist*'s funniest moments. For the most part, the chaos resulting from Simon's participation largely stems from his violations of the play-text; the players/cheaters are perplexed when Simon doesn't follow their script: 'He spoils all my part'; 'What's here to do?'; 'I know not how to go forward' (5.1.278–9, 285, 293). Simon forces himself into the world of the play-within-the-play, destroying the actors' familiar cues, and any internal logic linking endings and beginnings of discrete speeches within *The Cheater and The Clown* is blown apart. The Second Cheater responds by warning Simon that he has entered a play that is and is not the one he remembers: 'Therefore I beseech your worship pardon me, the [cheater's] part has more knavery than when your worship saw it at first, I assure you, you'll be deceived in't, sir, the new additions will take any man's purse in Kent or Christendom' (311–15). Dared by Simon to

'do thy worst, I charge you' (317), the Second Cheater improvises, throwing meal in the mayor's face before robbing him of his purse and escaping. In drawing attention to discrepancies between textualized and performed modes of realization, the subplot again parallels the main plot's subtle though persistent suggestions that personating and representing the texts of the past — encapsulated in Raynolph's admission that 'I chose these times, these men to act' — inevitably distorts the very memories that are retransmitted. Simon's disruptions to the play reveal the players'/cheaters' reliance on a stable script, even as their mercenary improvisation is a reminder of the adaptability of performers, the way in which, in Weimann's words, performance 'is something that is neither fully contained nor anticipated in the written representation itself'.³⁷

Simon's association with the memorable pleasures of performance run even deeper, and spill well beyond the boundaries of the world of the play. In the previous act, Simon, flush with his newfound civic authority, had attempted to impress Vortiger and Castiza with the promise of a lavish pageant or spectacle put on by the people of Queenborough. Soon enough, Simon's prelude would become a well-known passage from the play:

Lo, I the Mayor of Queenborough town by name,
 With all my brethren, saving one that's lame,
 Are come as fast as fiery mill-horse gallops
 To meet thy grace, thy queen and thy fair trollops.
 For reason of our coming do not look,
 It must be done, I found it i'th' town book,
 And yet not I myself, I scorn to read,
 I keep a clerk to do these jobs for need.
 And now expect a rare conceit before Thong Castle, so thee,
 Reach me the thing to give the king, the other too, I prithee;
[He takes the scabbard and dagger from the brethren]
 Now here they be for queen and thee, the gifts of all steel and leather,
 But the conceit of mickle weight, and here they're come together;
 To show two loves must join in one, our town presents to thee
 This gilded scabbard to the queen, this dagger unto thee. (4.1.1–14)

Vortiger is unimpressed: he denounces Simon's 'iron wits' (18), wanting nothing to do with the 'inconstant rabble' (17) accompanying him and almost certainly taking offense to some vulgar stage action related to the dagger and scabbard. The new mayor's reliance on his clerk offers a comic distortion of the 'old old-man' in Spenser's chamber of memory who relied on the young boy to navigate

memory's archives. Simon thus offers a speech that (humorously) gestures at the activation of archival sources to preserve and transmit cultural memory: 'th' town book', presumably the site of Queenborough's formal civic records, both initiates and authorizes the presentation to Vortiger and Castiza — 'It must be done'. The lengthy speech, marked with physical humour and conspicuously positioned at the beginning of a new scene in which the high and low plots converge, offers the actor playing Simon the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in both word and action and thus, as Evelyn Tribble suggests, become memorable: 'From the point of view of the actor learning his part, especially in a part-based system, playwrights who open the language up to the actor's expertise and training in action allow him to use, harness, and display the passions, to extend them through the body, to the properties, to other actors, and to the audience'.³⁸

This particular speech from Simon evidently *was* memorable, as it gained an afterlife related to, though nevertheless separate from, *Hengist, King of Kent* — the play that became, along with *A Game at Chess*, 'Middleton's most popular, most noted, most quoted'³⁹ work in the seventeenth century. In 1658, some three years before the first quarto publication of the play, Simon's speech is printed as a discrete poem entitled '*A Prologue to the Mayor of Quinborough*' in John Mennes's *Wit Restor'd in Several Select Poems not Formerly Publish't*.⁴⁰ The deep irony of this section of Simon's 'wit' is difficult to ignore: the quotation anticipates a performance that, of course, can never occur, since *Wit Restor'd* is interested only in Simon's decontextualized speech, and, moreover, the event promised by Simon never occurs in the play itself. The excerpt in *Wit Restor'd* is thus a striking example of the complex relationship between performance, text, and memory. On one hand, the excerpt testifies to Simon's immense popularity on stage: the speech is a vital clue in gaining a fuller understanding of what — and who — made the play memorable, since the memorableness of these particular lines surely rested on an ostentatious delivery from an actor (the foolish Simon believing he is fit to entertain kings), as well as bawdy humor — 'Reach me *the thing* to give the king' — and some physical ado with the presentation of the dagger and scabbard. Of Simon, Steen writes, 'As a role, he would be hard for an actor to overplay, and his part probably acquired increasing amounts of stage business over the years the play continued in repertory'.⁴¹ And yet, on the other hand, the excerpt signals the immense power of textualized memories to shape the perception of plays and performance histories: Simon is excised from the world of the play in which he exists and these fourteen lines are given a context and permanence that is incompatible with what could be produced by the play in the world. Just as the precise details of the 'rare conceit' that Simon promises in the speech ultimately are beside the

point, so too is *Hengist* shorn away to allow Simon's witty fragment to stand alone. The excerpt, then, is fundamentally linked to theatrical memory, but as the speech travels in orbits distinct from the playtext proper, it simultaneously and necessarily documents a kind of forgetting as well, a forgetting of *Hengist* — both the character and the play.

The earliest printed quartos of *Hengist* also record these inherent tangles of text and performance. Two different title pages for the 1661 quarto published by Henry Herringman register uncertainty as to which plot — *Hengist's* or Simon's — should be marketed to potential readers: the first run advertises the play as 'THE MAYOR OF Quinborough: A TRAGEDY', but the words are eventually changed to read 'THE MAYOR OF Quinborough: A COMEDY'.⁴² Herringman's preface to readers is nevertheless consistent in its attempts to kindle memories of Simon, and only Simon, on stage. Herringman begins with a sales pitch that conflates the play's staged and printed incarnations: '*Gentlemen, you have the first flight of him I assure you; 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*'.⁴³ What Herringman puts forth is an inversion of the memories of performance with which I began: Nashe's sense that Talbot is 'raised from the grave of oblivion' — a sentiment that lingers somewhere behind the inception of *Hengist*, with Raynolph 'Rais[ing]' figures and events from his *Polychronicon*. Where Nashe implies that Talbot's incarnation on stage is one 'revived' from lost, worm-eaten books, Herringman reverses the flow of recollection, appealing to memories of performance in order to lure prospective readers to newly printed material. The affective power that distinguished the personation of Talbot from his printed forms is here utilized by the publisher of *Hengist* to champion his play's transition *into* print. What Herringman distills in his preface is Wilder's 'illusion of independence' in textual form.

Of course, Herringman's preface also alludes to the fact that the public theatres have only recently reopened. The book of the play is the most readily accessible space for encountering Simon's character, since, as Herringman writes, 'wit, you know, has skulked in corners for many years past'. Herringman's quarto is thus representative of the ways in which Middleton's plays in the 1650s and 1660s are, as Maureen Bell observes, 'tricked out, designed to appeal both to a nostalgia for performance and to an interest in the plays as literary artefacts'.⁴⁴ References to the civil war continue: Herringman wonders if Simon has remained hidden for so long because he 'feared the decimating times', and the preface concludes by conjuring the spectre of Oliver Cromwell:

'tis enough for me to put him [Simon] into your hands, under the title of an honest man, which will appear plainly to you, because you shall find him all along to have a great picque to the rebel Oliver; I am told his drollery yields to none the English drama did ever produce; and though I would not put his modesty to the blush by speaking too much in his commendation, yet I know you will agree with me, upon your better acquaintance with him, that there is some difference in point of wit, betwixt the Mayor of Queenborough and the Mayor of Huntingdon.⁴⁵

The 'rebel Oliver', the name of the puritan who challenges Simon in the mayoral election, now resonates in ways that were impossible for Middleton to anticipate. Herringman collides the play's past with its present moment, and in so doing, the publisher (whose goal, no doubt, is to sell books) produces a paratextual record of the dynamism of theatrical memory. Marvin Carlson is helpful here, noting that theatre

is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection.⁴⁶

I began with a ghost story, and thus it seems fitting to end with one: as the ghosts accumulate in Herringman's preface — specific performances recalled by potential readers, Simon's prominence in popular culture, the shadow of Cromwell — so too do the interpretive layers that fasten themselves to the play. Herringman's sales pitch is a textualized fossil formed amidst the ongoing processes and pressures by which *Hengist* necessarily evolves (or as Carlson might put it, recycles itself) in order to survive, bringing into relief the memorial and participatory elements at the heart of theatrical production. Moreover, these elements of Herringman's preface are another reminder of how memories of performance facilitate — but also distort — the transmission of history: as is the case in the excerpt found in Mennes's *Wit Restor'd*, Hengist and his plot are nowhere to be found.

Simon's prominent afterlife is a kind of revenge for the character, since it is Simon who is not to be found as *Hengist* reaches its violent conclusion. Still functionally blind after his disastrous encounter with the players/cheaters, Simon remains intent on sharing 'the jest' (5.1.393) that he had promised Hengist — 'I'll follow you to Wales with a dog and a bell, but I'll tell't you' (395–6) — but this

is not to be. The end of the play has no need for him, and he does not appear in the final scene. As the body count rises — Hersus, Vortiger, and Roxena die on stage, while Hengist is led off to be executed — Simon vanishes down a narrative wormhole, disappearing without explanation.⁴⁷ And yet, as we have seen, Simon lives on, emerging outside the textual and temporal bounds of his play, powered by the imaginative energies that fuel both the memories of performance and textualized retrospectives. The major figures from both halves of the play connect by way of what can be thought of as symbiotic memory; despite tending toward mutual exclusion — Simon is ignored by the play's formal memorial markers, like its quarto title page and presenter, Raynulp, yet he eclipses Hengist in surviving recollections of the play — each cannot survive without the other. Middleton's representation of Hengist's story provides Simon with the world of a play in which he can thrive, and simultaneously, Simon's compelling stage presence infuses that play with an undeniable memorableness and vitality. What *Hengist* at some level dramatizes, and what its popularity — rooted in the figure of Simon — confirms, is that the theatre facilitates, and necessarily partakes in, unique reactions between memories old and new: 'Join new times' love to old times' story', as Raynulp put it. Books rot and fade away, and plays in performance vanish even as they come into existence, but the textual and memorial afterlives of *Hengist* suggest that the theatre offers a distinctive regenerative space where the inaccessible past reacts with the future foretold, and where the open-ended invitation to participate enlivens figures as disparate as the king of Kent and the mayor of Queenborough.

Notes

- 1 Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless his Supplication to the Devil*, in *The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. J.B. Steane (Harmondsworth, 1985), 113.
- 2 Ibid, 112–13.
- 3 Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate* (Cambridge, 2001), 19.
- 4 Thomas Rist, "'Those Organnons by which it Mooves': Shakespearian Theatre and the Romish Cult of the Dead', *Shakespeare Survey* 69 (2016), 228–42, 237, <https://doi.org/10.1017/SSO9781316670408.018>.
- 5 References to Shakespeare are from *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition*, gen. eds Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan (Oxford, 2016), <http://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199591152.book.1>.

- 6 References to Spenser are from *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche (London, 1978).
- 7 Bruce R. Smith, 'Speaking What We Feel About *King Lear*', in *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge, 2006), 23–42, 28.
- 8 William N. West, 'Figures and Other Fictions in the Archive', *English Language Notes* 45.1 (2007), 45–56, 47, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00138282-45.1.45>.
- 9 Garrett Sullivan, Jr's, tripartite definition of memory helps to map Spenser's chamber: Sullivan distinguishes between *memoria*, 'the faculty that stores images in the brain [and] the site of that storage', *recollection*, 'the process by which memory traces are retrieved and brought into consciousness', and *remembering*, which involves 'social performances', including 'the claim made on the subject that he or she remember [and] the act of remembering performed by subject'. See Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge, 2005), 7, 9, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511484032>.
- 10 For Gary Taylor's convincing account of the date of the play, see 'Works Included in this Edition: Canon and Chronology. *Hengist, King of Kent*', in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, gen. eds Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), 410–14, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198185703.book.1>. Middleton's main sources appear to consist of Holinshed's *Historie of England* and *Historie of Scotland*, along with Fabian's *Chronicles*. Grace Ioppolo believes Middleton might have read William Lambarde's *Perambulation of Kent* (published 1576, reissued in 1596). For more on the play's sources, see Ioppolo, 'Introduction' in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. eds Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), 1448–51, 1448–9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199580538.book.1>; Julia Briggs, 'New Times and Old Stories: Middleton's *Hengist*', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg (Cambridge, 2000), 107–121, 110, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511518775.007>; and R.C. Bald, *Hengist, King of Kent; or the Mayor of Queenborough* (New York and London, 1938), xxxvii–xlii.
- 11 Dawson, *Culture of Playgoing*, 63.
- 12 Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge, 2000), 240, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511484070>.
- 13 Gary Taylor, 'History · Plays · Genre · Games', in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford, 2012), 48–63, 55, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199559886.013.0004>.

- 14 He is included, for instance, in a quartet of legendary figures (the others are Caesar, Brutus, and William the Conqueror) on the frontispiece to Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (London, 1612; STC: 7226).
- 15 Bald, *Hengist*, 135.
- 16 Ioppolo, 'Introduction', *Hengist*, 1448. Thomas Heywood, for instance, writes, 'And of this *Hengist Brittan* chang'd the name, / Was cleaped-*Hengists* Land; since *England* cald', *Troia Britanica*, (London, 1609; STC: 13366), Early English Books Online (EEBO), Nn5r, 427.
- 17 The epilogue is found in the two scribal manuscript versions of the play but is not printed in the 1661 quarto. For a detailed account of the extant states of *Hengist*, see Ioppolo's *Hengist*, in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, gen. eds Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), 1029–33, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198185703.book.1>. Scholars generally think the manuscripts were copied from the same source document, believed by Ioppolo to be 'a playhouse manuscript descending from the author's foul papers' (*Hengist*, *Textual Companion*, 1029). Bald recognized the same hand in both manuscripts, while Ioppolo (following Peter Beal) argues that they are in separate hands.
- 18 All references to *Hengist* are from Ioppolo's edition in the *Oxford Middleton*.
- 19 Lucy Munro, "'Nemp your sexes!': Anachronistic Aesthetics in *Hengist*, *King of Kent* and the Jacobean "Anglo-Saxon" Play', *Modern Philology* 111.4 (2014), 734–61, 749, <https://doi.org/10.1086/675420>.
- 20 Raynulphe might be appealing for applause at the conclusion of the speech if the actor somehow signals 'new times' love' with one hand and 'old times' love' with the other before 'joining' them together. Thomas Roebuck argues that Higdon 'would have seemed an anachronism by 1620, both as a medieval chronicler who had been superseded by new Renaissance historiography and because he was speaking as a chorus (and master to the play's many dumb shows), genres which were more associated with the plays of the 1590s than the late 1610s'. See Thomas Roebuck, 'Middleton's Historical Imagination' in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford, 2012), 116–29, 116–17, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199559886.013.0008>. Roebuck also discusses connections between Raynulphe, Middleton's history plays, and Middleton's career as city chronologer of London.
- 21 The title page of the 1661 quarto refers to it having 'Been often Acted with much Applause at *Black-Fryars*'. Given that *Hengist* belonged to the King's Men, scholars assume that it was performed at both this indoor site and at the Globe.

- 22 Recalling Shakespeare's use of Gower in *Pericles*, Briggs argues that Middleton deployed Raynulp in the play 'to defuse criticism of its accuracy by deliberately emphasizing its legendary nature' (see 'New Times and Old Stories', 113). Roslyn Knutson puts forth that Raynulp is one of a number of features (including 'complex dumb-shows', a 'royal villainess', and 'a richly contrasting clown plot') that make *Hengist* something of 'a mix of retro and nouveau theatrical devices'. Such features, writes Knutson, make the play 'seem much more old-fashioned than its placement late in the chronology of Middleton's plays would suggest'. See Roslyn L. Knutson, 'The Adult Companies and the Dynamics of Commerce', in *Thomas Middleton in Context*, ed. Suzanne Gossett (Cambridge, 2011), 168–75, 173.
- 23 'Participate' is found twice in *An/The Old Law* (1618–19): 'and this no mortal ear / Shall participate the knowledge of' (1.1.473–4, glossed as 'partake, share'); 'One belike / That doth participate in this our present joy' (2.1.158–9). The word appears twice in the masque *The World Tossed at Tennis* (1620): 'I participate more of Heraclitus than Democritus' (36–7); 'And he alone participates with me' (166, glossed as 'has things in common with'). It appears once in *The Changeling* (1622): 'I would e'en participate of both' (3.3.20, glossed as 'partake (with sexual suggestion)').
- 24 Dawson, *Culture of Playgoing*, 27.
- 25 Taylor, et al., *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, 1607–75, <http://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199591152.book.1>.
- 26 Dawson, *Culture of Playgoing*, 163.
- 27 Andrew Gordon and Thomas Rist, 'Introduction: The Arts of Remembrance', in *The Arts of Remembrance in Early Modern England: Memorial Cultures of the Post Reformation*, ed. Andrew Gordon and Thomas Rist (Routledge, 2013), 1–15, 3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315612669>.
- 28 Sara Jayne Steen, *Ambrosia in an Earthen Vessel: Three Centuries of Audience and Reader Response to the Works of Thomas Middleton* (New York, 1993), 37, 58–9, 61, 64–6.
- 29 Ibid, 4, 6.
- 30 Ioppolo, 'Introduction', *Hengist*, 1448.
- 31 Steen, *Ambrosia*, 6.
- 32 Gary Taylor remarks of the play's tragic and comic strains that 'Neither genre is subordinated to the other; instead, the two are juxtaposed in a way that compels a composite emotional response to the whole' ('Canon and Chronology', 413). Suzanne Gossett observes that Middleton wrote a number of plays — *Hengist*, *The Witch*, *An/The Old Law*, and *A Game at Chess* — 'which only with difficulty can be forced into familiar categories'. See 'Middleton and Dramatic Genre,' in *Thomas Middleton in Context*, ed. Suzanne Gossett (Cambridge, 2011), 236.

- 33 See Bald, *Hengist*, xxxviii.
- 34 Briggs, 'New Times and Old Stories', 116.
- 35 Taylor, 'History · Plays · Genre · Games', 55.
- 36 Lina Perkins Wilder, *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character* (Cambridge, 2010), 12–13.
- 37 Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice*, 17.
- 38 Evelyn B. Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Theatre* (New York, 2011), 110, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230118515>.
- 39 Taylor, 'History · Plays · Genre · Games', 47.
- 40 *Wit Restor'd in severall select poems not formerly publish't* (London, 1658; Wing: M1719), EEBO, M3r–M4v.
- 41 Steen, *Ambrosia*, 6.
- 42 For Herringman's position as a leading publisher of plays during the Restoration, see Maureen Bell, 'Booksellers Without an Author, 1627–1685', in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, 260–285, especially 282–3.
- 43 *The Mayor of Quinborough: A Comedy* (London, 1661; Wing: M1984A), EEBO, A2.
- 44 Bell, 'Booksellers', 265.
- 45 Huntington was Cromwell's birthplace.
- 46 Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor, 2003), 2, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.17168>. Philip Schwyzer builds on Carlson's metaphorical 'ghosting' to consider 'the fantasies and longings that both actors and audiences can bring to the encounter' between the past and the present. See Philip Schwyzer, 'Shakespeare's Acts of Reenactment: Henry at Blackfriars, Richard at Rougemont', in *The Arts of Remembrance in Early Modern England: Memorial Cultures of the Post Reformation*, ed. Andrew Gordon and Thomas Rist (Routledge, 2013), 179–94, 181, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315612669>.
- 47 As mentioned in note 17 above, in addition to the 1661 quarto, the play survives in two scribal manuscript copies. Substantive differences exist between the endings of the manuscript and printed versions of the play. The quarto excludes Castiza (Vortiger's wife) from the final scene, meaning that she does not receive an offer of marriage from Aurelius (who becomes king of the Britons after Vortiger and Hersus have stabbed each other). Also significant is the quarto's heavy cutting of two lengthy speeches from Roxena, in which Hengist's daughter (and Hersus's lover) rails against the 'Guile and dissemblance' (5.2.143) she has experienced.