

Thomas Middleton's satires before and after the Bishops' Ban

Among the books burned by order of the Bishops' Ban on June 4, 1599, was nineteen-year-old Thomas Middleton's *Micro-Cynicon: Sixe Snarling Satyres*, a collection of verse satires. T.M. the young satirist would of course soon become Thomas Middleton the seasoned dramatist, and criticism of Middleton's work has not surprisingly focused primarily on his more mature work for the theater. Nevertheless, early satires such as *Micro-Cynicon* and *Father Hubburds Tales; or, The Ant and the Nightingale* (1604) repay scrutiny, not only for what they can tell us about Middleton's youthful political views but also for what we can learn about the understanding of Spenser's importance as a satirist during this time period. In these two works, we see a young writer trying to demonstrate his political and religious allegiance to the ideas and positions associated with Spenser without getting into trouble.¹ This goal—to be critical but not too critical, to be understood by some while not incurring censorship from others—says much about the connections between politics, religion, and satire in the 1590s.

Examining Thomas Middleton's indebtedness to Spenser in 1599 and 1604 can deepen our understanding of Spenser's role in the literary system of satire in the 1590s and the first decade of the seventeenth century. Most critics who have discussed Middleton as a satirist have discussed his work in drama, especially *A Game at Chess*, paying scant attention to the satires

1 Middleton's other important early satire, *The Blacke Booke*, clearly imitates the satires of Thomas Nashe and thus is tangential to the focus of this study. Margot Heinemann has ably demonstrated *The Blacke Booke's* stylistic debts to Nashe (*Puritanism and Theatre*, 52–57), and Neil Rhodes discusses both *The Blacke Booke* and *Father Hubburds Tales* with reference to Nashe (*Elizabethan Grotesque*, 60–61). Heinemann notes that, whereas Middleton follows Nashe stylistically, the ideas he expresses both in *The Blacke Booke* and in *Father Hubburds Tales* align him politically with the Spenserian “tradition of Elizabethan Puritan satire ... against the court and Church establishment—and thus on the opposite side from Nashe” (57).

in prose and poetry that he wrote as a young man, in part because artificial period and genre divisions create a tendency for scholars of early modern English literature to study works of the sixteenth century *or* the seventeenth century, to study drama *or* poetry. Obviously, this sometimes makes it harder to perceive connections and continuities in authors who straddle the turn of the century or write in multiple genres, such as Thomas Middleton. We can find in Middleton's early poetry cautious efforts to express the kinds of political and religious perspectives that he would more boldly and clearly express in later dramas.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the ways that Spenser's meaning to other satirists changed after his own death, after the Bishops' Ban, and after the change of monarchs in 1603. Although I focus on changing literary uses of Spenserian indirect satire—for example, the inflection of nostalgia that attaches to Spenserianism in the early seventeenth century—I begin the chapter with an overview of Middleton's religious and political sympathies over the course of his life. I argue that, despite the variety of his literary output and the multiplicity of sources and influences to which he was indebted, Middleton uses these varied means to express what is a remarkably stable set of religious and political orientations.

Middleton's early political and religious sympathies

In examining Middleton's political and religious ideas, we see consistency over his lifetime in his commitment to reformist Protestantism; what changes is the way he expresses this mindset. Middleton enters the print scene in the 1590s, and his praise of aristocrats such as the Earl of Essex and Lord Compton—as well as his blame of the Cecils—aligns him with writers like Spenser. The connections between Middleton's politico-religious orientations and those of Spenser appear clear in the 1590s, but the accession of James I in 1603 changed the terms by which writers expressed these same ideas. Spenser posthumously would play a role in offering opposition writers ways of signaling their dissatisfaction with the current regime, and the “Spenserian” rhetorical strategy for expressing discontent develops in parallel with the choice of some writers to align themselves with the City instead of the court. I argue that Middleton avails himself of both rhetorical strategies in defining himself as an oppositional writer.²

2 O'Callaghan discusses the ways that the Spenserian poets positioned themselves as oppositional poets; Margot Heinemann argues in *Puritanism and Theatre* for Middleton as an opposition writer.

Middleton's most notorious expression of political and religious attitudes appears in *A Game at Chess* (1624).³ The anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic satirical play was licensed by the Master of the Revels on June 12, 1624 and enjoyed a wildly popular run of nine consecutive days in August 1624 before being shut down in response to complaints to the government from the Spanish ambassador Don Carlos de Coloma. Manuscripts of the play proliferated in the following months, and the play was eventually printed, without being licensed by the Stationers' Company, after James I's death in 1625. In this play, as Andrew McRae observes, Middleton employs a strongly Protestant worldview to explore the moral questions raised within the play; further, as Paul Yachnin argues, although the offensive portrayals of Spaniards, especially the ambassador Count Gondomar, were what led to the closing of the play, Middleton's satire also takes aim at James I for his gullible susceptibility to the plots of Catholic foreigners (McRae, *Literature, Satire*, 148–49; Yachnin, "Game," 117–18).

In *A Game at Chess*, we see the mature version of Middleton's nationalist and Protestant sympathies; from his early works and alliances, however, we learn that Middleton had a lifelong sympathy for this reform-minded Protestantism. In the 1590s, this Protestant orientation appears through Middleton's use of objects of praise (Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex) and blame (William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and his son Robert Cecil) similar to those emphasized in the poetry of Edmund Spenser. By 1604, following the execution of Essex, the death of Queen Elizabeth, and the accession of King James I, the cultural expression of this religious and political alignment appears instead through connections to the City of London, as opposed to court connections, as evidenced by Middleton's literary collaborators, patronage relationships, and pageants.

Middleton's first publication, *The Wisdom of Solomon, Paraphrased* (1597), seems an appropriate choice for a Puritan-leaning young man (Middleton was seventeen) to present his intellectual gifts to the world. His dedication of such a strongly Protestant work to Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, suggests that Middleton may have been one of the many who saw Essex as the successor to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, as the great hope for the international triumph of English Protestantism. Spenser himself provides an illustration of this shift in the 1590s, when

3 Numerous critics have discussed the political and personal allusions in the play and have connected it to the situation between England and Spain in 1624. For helpful overviews of the play and the circumstances of its performances and printing, see Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 17; Yachnin, "Game"; Prescott, "Housing chessmen," 222–29; Clegg, *Press Censorship Jacobean*, 187–89; and McRae, *Literature, Satire*, 145–52.

the bids for recognition as a member of the Leicester faction of his early career give way in 1596 to the fulsome praise of Essex in *Prothalamion* (see Prescott, "Laurel and myrtle," 70, for a discussion of this as a careerist move). Although we do not know the extent of the patronage relationship between Spenser and Essex during the lifetime of the former, Essex paid the funeral expenses of Spenser, indicating some patronage connection. We see in Middleton's dedicatory epistle to Essex a youthful optimism regarding the poet-patron relationship that turns to cynicism or outright hostility for the next decade and a half, until it returns, matured, in his dedication of the pageant *The Triumphs of Truth* to the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Middleton, in 1613. The extended metaphor of sowing and harvesting and the humility with which Middleton addresses Essex suggest an unironic endorsement of the idealized relationship between poet and patron that Spenser had imagined in such works as *The Teares of the Muses* and *The Ruines of Time* (see Martines [*Society*, 59] for an analysis of this idealized view of patronage). Middleton writes:

The summer's harvest, right honourable, is long since reaped, and now it is sowing time again. Behold, I have scattered a few seeds upon the young ground of unskilfulness. If it bear fruit, my labour is well bestowed, but if it be barren, I shall have less joy to set more. The husbandman observes the courses of the moon, I the forces of your favour; he desireth sunshine, I cheerful countenance, which once obtained, my harvest of joy will soon be ripened. My seeds as yet lodge in the bosom of the earth like infants upon the lap of a favourite, wanting the budding springtime of their growth, not knowing the east of their glory, the west of their quietness, the south of their summer, the north of their winter. But if the beams of your aspects lighten the small moiety of a smaller implanting, I shall have an everyday harvest, a fruition of content, a branch of felicity.

Your Honour's, addicted in all observance, Thomas Middleton

(Middleton, *Wisdom*, 1919)

The image of poet as husbandman will appear again later in his career, when the ant-ploughman of *Father Hubbard's Tales* will turn out to be Oliver Hubbard and therefore the putative "author" of the piece. But there, the satirical epistle dedicatory to the fictional "Sir Christopher Clutch-Fist," a "pinching patron, and the muses' bad paymaster," stands in stark contrast to Essex as dedicatee here (Middleton, *Father Hubbard's*, 164). The distance, both literal and metaphorical, between a husbandman and the sun and moon emphasizes the studied abjection of the young poet seeking patronage. Additionally, however, the image of Essex as the sun who nourishes the Protestant seeds sown here by

Middleton—given that Biblical translation is by definition at this time a Protestant act—recalls the religious significance attributed to Essex's military successes against Catholic foes. Another sincere dedication further connects Middleton with the patronage relationships established by Spenser. In 1600, Middleton dedicates *The Ghost of Lucrece* to William, Second Baron Compton, the stepson of Lady Compton and Mounteagle, to whom Spenser had dedicated *Mother Hubberds Tale* in 1591 (Lady Compton, born Anne Spencer, was one of the Spencers of Althorp with whom Spenser claimed kin several times in his work).⁴

Following these two sincere dedications to Essex and Compton, Middleton appears to enter a period of disillusionment with patronage, judging from his subsequent publications—*News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody* (1604; cowritten with Thomas Dekker) begins with an epistle dedicatory to “Sir Nicholas Nemo, alias Nobody,” which, in its length and Nashean rhetorical excesses, seems determined to break the rules of decorum governing the complaints of poets—what Anne Lake Prescott calls the “poetics of artistic dejection”—thus crossing into the territory of satire. Additionally, he opens the second edition of *Father Hubburds Tales* with the aforementioned address to Sir Christopher Clutch-Fist, who Adrian Weiss hypothesizes in the notes to *Father Hubburds Tales* may satirize Lord Compton (164). Thus, we can learn little about Middleton's alliances in this period from dedications, but his partners in literary collaboration evidence an alignment with the City of London and its merchants—generally seen as Puritan-leaning—more so than with the court of James I and James's favored writer, Ben Jonson. Middleton's playwriting connections with the Thomas Dekker syndicate starting in 1602 suggest sympathy for the religious and political outlooks that were beginning to coalesce into an oppositional poetic practice, imaginatively centered, for the Spenserian poets at least, on the memory and values of Spenser.⁵ One of the Spenserian poets, Michael Drayton, collaborated with Middleton and others on Middleton's first play, the now-lost *Caesar's Fall; or, Two Shapes* (Ornstein, “Dates,” 63). Neil Carson identifies and analyzes some of the groups that wrote plays collaboratively during this period, including evidence of Middleton's work with Dekker's group (Carson, “Collaborative Playwriting”). Gary Taylor notes that “by

4 For more on the development of the patronage relationships among Spenser and members of the Spencer family, see Hile, “Auto/biographical fantasies.”

5 See Grundy, *Spenserian Poets*; O'Callaghan, *Shepherds Nation*. Whereas Grundy focuses on the poetic connections that tied this group to one another and to the memory of Spenser, O'Callaghan interests herself in the political implications of these poetic alliances.

collaborating with Dekker, he aligned himself against Jonson, and that alignment soured relations between Jonson and Middleton for the next quarter-century” (“Thomas Middleton,” 38). Drayton also was publicly at odds with Jonson (Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*, 174–75); indeed, Jonson may be the best route to connect the religious and political sympathies of Middleton, studied primarily by specialists in Renaissance drama, with those of Spenser and the Spenserian poets, whom scholars seldom analyze with reference to contemporary drama. David Norbrook summarizes the political and religious significance of the opposition between Jonson and other poets and dramatists: “the reason Jonson enjoyed such high favour, especially in the earlier parts of James’s reign, was at least partly ideological: as a Catholic, and then a high-church Anglican, he had no sympathy with the tradition of low-church Protestantism with which Spenser was associated” (Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*, 176).

Jonson’s preeminence in court masques during the Jacobean period serves as a further example of this ideological and religious divide, as dramatists with allegiance to Puritan-leaning Protestantism tended to contribute to civic pageantry instead of to court-centered theatricals. Middleton firmly allied himself with this group through his seven mayoral pageants and his work, beginning in 1620, as official Chronologer of the City of London (Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry*, 179). Margot Heinemann adduces Middleton’s 1620 dedication of *The Marriage of the Old and New Testament, or God’s Parliament House* to Richard Fishbourne and John Browne, two Puritan-leaning London merchants, as evidence of his connections with “Parliamentarian and Puritan patrons, as well as Puritan and Calvinist views” (Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, 126). Norbrook connects Middleton to the Spenserian poet William Browne through their shared friendship with Fishbourne (Norbrook, “The Masque of Truth,” 109n68); and Heinemann, in a lengthy appendix on “Middleton’s Parliamentary Puritan Patrons,” argues that “Middleton is unusual in the closeness of his links with the City and with circles which must be considered as definitely Puritan” (Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, 258).

Given that the City paid for Middleton’s civic pageants, it comes as no surprise that Middleton devotes much praise to the City itself in his first Lord Mayor’s Show, *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613), and he frequently uses Spenserian ideas and imagery to convey this praise. David Bergeron notes Middleton’s debts to Spenser’s allegorical logic in his own depiction of Error in the pageant and concludes that “No other pageant-dramatist, nor Ben Jonson in the masque for that matter, gives greater evidence of

understanding the traditional iconographical presentation of allegorical figures" (Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry*, 181, 182). Middleton's use of the iconography of the mother goddess Cybele creates a complex web of meaning that connects the pageant to Spenser's earlier use of the goddess to glorify London. Middleton builds his description of the personification of London—"attired like a reverend mother, a long white hair naturally flowing on either side of her; on her head a model of steeples and turrets" (Middleton, *Triumphs of Truth*, 969)—upon the attributes of the mother goddess Cybele, best known iconographically by her crown of turrets and other city buildings.⁶

In doing so, Middleton reifies the allegorical connection between Cybele and London that Spenser had asserted in the Thames–Medway marriage canto of *The Faerie Queene*, in which the Thames wears "a Coronet / . . . / In which were many towres and castels set" (4.11.27, 8). Spenser then compares Thames's crown explicitly to that of Cybele:

Like as the mother of the Gods, they say,
 In her great iron charet wonts to ride,
 When to *Ioues* pallace she doth take her way;
 Old *Cybele*, arayd with pompous pride,
 Wearing a Diademe embattild wide
 With hundred turrets, like a Turribant.
 With such an one was *Thamis* beautifide;
 That was to weet the famous Troynouant,
 In which her kingdomes throne is chiefly resiant.

(4.11.28)

Through his own use of Cybele, Spenser connects London to the idealized cities of Troy and Rome: "Riding on the crest of the famous rivers and gods of the pagan East, Cybele brings to Albion the riches of other times and cities, uniting within herself both the fecundity of nature and the dynamic of historical succession" (Hawkins, "From mythography," 58). The westward movement of Cybele, who resides in the city most favored by Fortune at any given moment, appears, as Lawrence Manley argues, "in epic movement toward Troynovant. As the major focus of this

6 In her earlier form in Anatolia, Phrygia, and early Greece, she wore a *polos*, a high cylindrical hat, but, by the time of the Romans, the *polos* became conflated with the mural crown of Tyche, the deity who governed the fortunes of a city (perhaps through a misreading of *polos* as *polis*, city). This conflation of iconography of Cybele and Tyche presumably played a role in the conflation of the goddesses themselves, such that Cybele, formerly a goddess of fertility akin to Ceres, became associated with power, city-building, and the fortunes that cause cities to rise and fall (Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*).

epic movement, the city symbolically embodies historic destiny” (Manley, “Spenser and the city,” 218). The London/Troynovant connection was of course a commonplace (see, e.g., Federico, *New Troy*; Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser*), but, by following Spenser’s use of Cybele to make the connection, Middleton both connects himself ideologically with Spenser and compliments the patrons of his pageant by deploying this myth of the magnificence of London.

My goal in thinking about Middleton’s politics and religion over the course of decades, and across the division from sixteenth to seventeenth century, is to think about the ways that a fairly stable political orientation can manifest differently in different circumstances. A poet who introduces himself to the world with a version of the Book of Proverbs dedicated to the Earl of Essex is the same poet who, two years later, uses subtle allusions to Spenser to sharpen the force of his satire of Lord Burghley and his son. Five years later, he uses more overt Spenserianism, in the form of an insect and bird satire whose title alludes directly to Spenser, and the rhetoric of nostalgia to criticize the direction Jacobean England is beginning to take. In his youth, Middleton uses Spenserianism to clarify and communicate his values; as a mature artist, he forges his own path, but in order to express the same basic political and religious values.

The politics of satire and the burning of Middleton’s *Micro-Cynicon* (1599)

Cyndia Clegg has documented the unsystematic, arbitrary way that the Elizabethan authorities undertook censorship, and Annabel Patterson explores the psychological impact of such unpredictability on writers, the psychic effects of “subtle intersections of state censorship with self-censorship, as fear shades into caution, caution into prudence, and prudence into more self-serving emotions and motives” (Clegg, *Press Censorship Elizabethan*; Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 17). In Chapter 4, I discussed the congeniality of Spenserian indirect satire to Thomas Nashe and Tailboys Dymoke, who used similar strategies to create satirical meanings and subtly imitated two poems of Spenser: “March” and *Muio-potmos*, respectively. I want to emphasize, though, that just as Spenser developed his style of indirect satire in response to concerns about censorship—fears raised most directly, one presumes, by the temporal proximity of John Stubbs’s censorship experience to the publication of Spenser’s first major work, *The Shepheardes Calender*—other writers’ own fears of censorship affected the extent to which they could directly model

their satirical works on those of Spenser during the 1590s. A censorship system that depends on absolute power exercised arbitrarily creates fear and uncertainty in writers and publishers, and they respond with careful attention to moment-by-moment shifts in the censorship environment, with incremental assays at daring becoming more or less bold depending on the reception of previous efforts.

When looking at how other authors responded to Spenser's satirical works in the 1590s and the early 1600s, a storyline emerges: Whereas *The Shepherdes Calender* includes a number of satirical moments, as noted in Chapter 2, Spenser's satirical credibility was enhanced by the government response to *Complaints*, and Spenser's references to foxes and his antagonism to Lord Burghley became the simplified version of "Spenserian satire." But no writer was foolish enough to directly imitate Spenser's most inflammatory satirical work, *Mother Hubberds Tale*, in the period after *Complaints* was called in. Instead, some writers imitated his indirect satirical methods and alluded to his other works in creating their own satirical poetry. The calling-in of *Mother Hubberds Tale* definitely had a chilling effect on beast fables: although a few beast fables appeared in print in the 1590s, satirical writers mostly channeled their energies into formal verse satires. After the Bishops' Ban, and after the death of Queen Elizabeth, poets reversed this strategy, so that cautiously Spenserian animal fables featuring insects and birds begin to appear in the early seventeenth century. We cannot determine how much the increase in animal fables owes to the Bishops' Ban's explicit references to specific instances of formal verse satire and how much to the deaths of two people who had been part of the censorship of *Complaints*: Lord Burghley's death in 1598 and Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603. All we know is that the dearth of published animal fables in the 1590s corresponds neatly to the scarcity of formal verse satires in the first years of the seventeenth century, suggesting that Spenser's censorship episode, by virtue of having occurred eight years farther in the past than the Bishops' Ban, was less of a deterrent after 1599 to writers considering satirical meaning-making.

As I argued in Chapter 3, Spenser's prominence and meaning in the literary system of the 1590s gave him disproportionate influence over other writers during the period. What "Spenser" stood for was characterized by a certain doubleness, in Michelle O'Callaghan's words: "he was simultaneously the laureate poet gloriously serving his monarch and the oppositional poet, the persecuted critic of the corrupted times" (*Shepherds Nation*, 1). O'Callaghan argues that this double view of Spenser emerged after his death, but I believe that this view of him developed

in the literary imaginary in the early 1590s: the first installment of *The Faerie Queene* in 1590 celebrated his queen, while the 1591 *Complaints* criticized that queen's chief advisor; Faeryland allegorically complimented England, but works such as *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, and even *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*, emphasized Spenser's place at the periphery, politically and in terms of courtiership. I argued in Chapter 3 that the young Joseph Hall in his satires seems to be reacting against the towering figure of the "decorous" Spenser, that side of Spenser's public persona that led to Marx calling him, centuries later, "Elizabeth's arse-kissing poet" (qtd. in Riley, "Marx & Spenser," 457). But other young satirists, including Thomas Middleton, responded to and were inspired by the figure of the "opposition" Spenser.

The limited critical attention to *Micro-Cynicon* has tended to assess it as a mostly unremarkable iteration of Juvenalian verse satire, notable for the ways in which the future dramatist sometimes shifts from the discursive satirical approach characteristic of the genre to semi-dramatic character sketches that aim for more realism than one generally finds in formal verse satires (see, e.g., McCaw, *Middleton's Protest*, 10–12; Barker, *Thomas Middleton*, 30; Holmes, *Art*, 7). As discussed in Chapter 1, numerous critics have offered hypotheses for what led to the Bishops' Ban, with some asserting that the bishops were motivated by moral concerns, others arguing that politics drove the decision to ban these books, and still others seeking ways around the erotica/politics dichotomy created by earlier scholars. I believe that *Micro-Cynicon* was singled out to be among the satires specifically named in the Bishops' Ban and burned because the offense it gave was clearer and more specific than has been recognized. In the literary-political climate of 1599, because the genre of formal verse satire cued readers to look for topical, political allusions, the apparently general nature of Middleton's satire in *Micro-Cynicon* was not enough to spare it from scrutiny. The first two satires in the collection, focusing on "Insatiate Cron" and his son, "Prodigal Zodon," were likely read as referring to William and Robert Cecil. Middleton's use of imagery and ideas associated with Lord Burghley, most notably by Spenser in *Mother Hubberds Tale*, increases the likelihood that contemporary readers would read Cron as a satire on the Lord Treasurer. Given this association, the repeated references to Cron's death (and the unflattering observation that Cron has "fled to hell") would presumably be particularly offensive, given that Lord Burghley had died less than a year earlier.

The general obscurity in which *Micro-Cynicon* languishes means that few critics who have considered the Bishops' Ban have paid specific atten-

tion to what Middleton's work might have done to merit being recalled and burned, but the two hypotheses that have been put forth address both sides of the erotica/politics split in critical opinion regarding the motivations of the ban. John Peter, arguing that *Micro-Cynicon* offended the morals of the censors, calls the author "deliberately offensive" and notes that "in the fifth satire, 'Ingling Pyander,' besides what appear to be dark references to pederasty, there are several touches of unpleasantness where Marston's influence may be suspected" (Peter, *Complaint and Satire*, 147). Peter's allusions to "dark references to pederasty" are of a piece with his own moral repugnance at the style and method of the satirists who followed Marston's lead, but he is certainly correct that Middleton's fifth satire contains a titillating situation that leads to moral corruption of the satiric speaker—and thus perhaps of the reader as well. The speaker "loved Pyander well" before he realized that Pyander, "Whose rolling eye sets gazers' hearts on fire, / Whose cherry lip, black brow and smiles procure / Lust-burning buzzards to the tempting lure," was in fact "a pale chequered black hermaphrodite" (Middleton, *Microcynicon*, 5.42, 5.36–38, 5.24). Proving the relevance of Bruce Smith's assertion that, with late Elizabethan verse satire, "scourgers could be seduced by their sexual subjects and ... the seducers could turn into scourgers of moral authority" (Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, 164), part of the speaker's desire to expose Pyander stems from his own shame at being deceived ("shall I then procure eternal blame / By secret cloaking of Pyander's shame, / And he not blush?" [5.53–55]), and the rest from his vexation that he spent his money in vain ("Fair words I had, for store of coin I gave, / But not enjoyed the fruit I thought to have" [5.82–83]).

Cyndia Clegg, on the other hand, explains *Micro-Cynicon*'s inclusion in the named works of the Bishops' Ban as stemming from political, not moral, offensiveness in its second satire, which mocks "Prodigal Zodon." According to Clegg, because of the heightened political tensions in England at the time of publication surrounding the Earl of Essex's Irish expedition and concerns regarding his loyalty to the Queen, instead of appearing to be "a general satire of pretension and vanity," "Zodon looks like Essex, a man who indulged in luxuries though beset by debts" (Clegg, *Press Censorship Elizabethan*, 213). She comments that phrases such as "glorious on his progress day" and "Two days engaged at least in strongest hold" (Middleton, *Microcynicon*, 2.26, 2.29) might have seemed extremely topical if the book had been published after Essex's departure for Ireland. Clegg does not argue strenuously for Middleton's authorial intention to criticize Essex (Middleton's dedication of *The Wisdom of*

Solomon, Paraphrased [1597] to Essex only two years earlier would make this a problematic assertion). Instead, she believes that Whitgift, because of his warm friendship with Essex, responded to Essex's concerns about John Hayward's *The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie the IIII* (1599) with such zeal that he also identified and banned several other books that he saw as giving bad press to Essex, including *Micro-Cynicon*.

The bishops' silence regarding their motivations, coupled with the varied and complex cultural and political meanings of the genre of verse satire in the late 1590s, mean that we cannot definitively identify a single unifying offense committed by all of the named works, or even by Middleton's *Micro-Cynicon* alone. Instead, we can look at the ways that a single work may have given offense for multiple reasons, which, taken together, constituted grounds for censorship. As religious leaders, the bishops may have been shocked not only by Pyander's cross-dressing but also by the speaker's frank desire for Pyander. As a friend of Essex, Whitgift may have zealously attempted to protect his friend's political interests. Likewise, however, Whitgift and Bancroft, as part of what was after all a *state church*, may have taken action on behalf of both Robert Cecil and the memory of his recently deceased father, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, both extremely high-ranking advisors to Queen Elizabeth. Richard McCabe notes that both Whitgift and Bancroft "were in constant correspondence with Robert Cecil on the issue of the press" and that their letters indicate a commitment to politically motivated censorship (McCabe, "Elizabethan satire," 189).

In *Micro-Cynicon*, Middleton uses facts and images strongly associated with the Cecils and with Spenser's satire on them: calling Cron a fox; emphasizing the father-son relationship between these two satirical characters (and emphasizing their power by making this dyad's initials correspond to that other rapacious and power-hungry father and son, Chronos and Zeus);⁷ referring to a "fardel at his [Cron's] back" in the satire on Zodon; and creating the name Zodon itself, which derives from the Greek *zodion* for "little animal." With these clues or "entry codes"—the allegorization of the father-son dyad and the allusions to animals and hunchbacks—a searching reader, such as Whitgift or Bancroft, could perceive the indirect satire on the Cecil father and son.

Middleton refers to a fox only once, in a dense passage (editor Wendy Wall calls it "obscure") that seems allusive in part because the nature and animal images seem incongruous with the rest of the poem. The overall

7 I am indebted to Anne Lake Prescott for this observation.

message of the passage seems to be that desire (presumably lascivious) would be preferable to the “gain insatiate” that “this hoar-agèd peasant deems his bliss”:

O that desire might hunt amongst that fur!
 It should go hard but he would loose a cur
 To rouse the fox hid in a bramble bush,
 Who frighteth conscience with a wry-mouthed “Push!”

(Middleton, *Microcynicon*, 1.17–22)

The image of desire using a dog to hunt for a fox hidden, confusingly, in both fur and in a bramble bush—shifting the poem temporarily to allegory and beast fable—surely would remind a sixteenth-century reader of Spenser’s known satirical methods. Additionally, though, this difficult passage becomes much more comprehensible if we read it with the popular image of the aged, censorious Burghley in mind. Though none of the words in this passage describes an old man, the fur suggests someone wealthy, especially in proximity to the word “fox,” as fox fur served symbolically to identify usurers.⁸ Further, the descriptor “wry-mouthed” calls to mind an old man expressing his disdain with the interjection “push” (obsolete, now “pish”); ingenious readers might find support for importing the idea of Burghley through the similarity of a “bramble” to a “burr.” This passage, which differs in tone from the rest of the satire, calls attention to the possibility of a reading influenced by the concerns of *Mother Hubberds Tale*, as does Middleton’s emphasis on the father–son relationship between Cron and Zodon.

One way that Spenser had identified Lord Burghley as a target of the satire in *Mother Hubberds Tale* was by criticizing the Fox’s preferential treatment of his cubs:

He fed his cubs with fat of all the soyle,

 And loded them with lordships and with might,
 So much as they were able well to beare,
 That with the weight their backs nigh broken were.

(lines 1151, 1156–58)

8 See, for example, discussion of examples from Shakespeare, Thomas Nashe, Robert Greene, and Thomas Dekker associating usurers with fox-fur garments in H.C. Hart’s edition of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* (Hart, “Commentary,” 77n7). An anti-Cecilian libel written after the fall of Essex refers to either Robert Cecil or his brother Thomas (Lord Burghley after the death of William Cecil) as wearing a fox-furred cloak: “Little Cecil trips up and down / He rules both court and crown / With his brother Burghley clown / In his great fox furred gown” (qtd. in Croft, “Reputation,” 47).

Significantly, Catholic apologist Richard Verstegan, in an unlicensed tract against Lord Burghley smuggled into England, describes *Mother Hubberds Tale* using only the detail that it concerns “the false fox and his crooked cubbes,” indicating that contemporary readers saw the father–son(s) relationship as crucial in identifying the real-world targets of Spenser’s satire (Verstegan, *A Declaration*, 68; see Chapter 1 for fuller discussion).

Clegg’s argument identifying Zodon with Essex fails to convince not only because of Middleton’s public warmth for Essex in his dedication of *The Wisdom of Solomon, Paraphrased*, but also because it doesn’t take account of the significance of the father–son dyad in Middleton’s creation of these characters. Numerous details of Cron and Zodon line up neatly with the biographical details of Cecil *père et fils*, who were without a doubt the most hated and powerful father–son pair of late Elizabethan England. Like Lord Burghley, Cron has recently died, bequeathing his fabulous wealth to his corrupt son: “And scraping Cron hath got a world of wealth. / Now what of that? Cron’s dead. Where’s all his pelf? / Bequeathèd to young Prodigal. That’s well: / His god hath left him, and he’s fled to hell” (Middleton, *Microcynicon*, 2.49–52). Lord Burghley had died August 4, 1598, ten months before the burning of *Micro-Cynicon*.⁹ Additionally, the satire’s references to Cron’s base birth and facetious references to London as “Troynovant” call to mind Lord Burghley’s pretensions in claiming ancient genealogical connections (see, e.g., Alford, *Burghley*, 6, 349n8). Mockery of these pretensions appears most freely in unlicensed pro-Catholic propaganda tracts; for example, Catholic apologist Robert Parsons in 1592 states that Burghley first claimed descent from the Caecilius Claudius described by Pliny, before later connecting himself with the ancient Welsh Sitsilt family. Parsons asks, if this were true, if it were likely that Burghley’s grandfather

would keepe an Inne in Sta[m]ford as diuers vvorshipfull yet aliuie or lately dead haue affirmed to haue layen in the same; also how it is possible that his sonne the Treasures father, named also Dauid Cecil (if I forget not) should be onely groom of the vwardrobe, & so plaine, and meane a man, as thousandes yet can testifie that he was? & how finally VVilliam Cecil their child now Treasurer could be so poore, and meanely brought vp, as to get parte of his mayntenance by ringing the morning bel at his beginning in S. Ihons colledge in Cambridge as commonly yet in that vniuersitie is reported. (Parsons, *An Aduertisement*, 39–40)

9 *Micro-Cynicon* was not entered into the Stationers’ Register (see Clegg, *Press Censorship Elizabethan*, 286n52), so the *terminus a quo* for the book’s publication is January 1, 1599.

Parsons closes his withering analysis of Burghley's pretensions to status by noting that, instead of lions for his coat of arms, "a good fatt capon, or a roasted pigg seemeth a fitter cognisaunce for an Inneholders grandchild as this man affirmeth, seing that those things are more commonly to be founde in Innes, and Osteries then are Lyons" (Parsons, *An Aduertisement*, 40). Verstegan also makes reference to Burghley's father's relatively low-ranking post of groom of the wardrobe, noting that to Burghley's "wylinesse was joined a wonderfull ambition," even though he was "by birth but of meane degree," and warning of the possibility "whereby England may happen to haue a King *Cecill* the first, that is suddainly metamorphosed from a grome of the wardrobe, to the wearing of the best robe within the wardrobe" (Verstegan, *A Declaration*, 9, 55–56).

Middleton of course is more circumspect than these illicit publications, but Cron's exaggeratedly abject poverty in his youth, coupled with the reference to Troynovant, which facetiously implies how very, very far back Cron's pedigree extends, echo the criticisms made of Burghley in unlicensed works and in works such as Spenser's that were censored. Cron's son Zodon is a "mounted beggar" (Middleton, *Microcynicon*, 2.31),

A base-born issue of a baser sire,
 Bred in a cottage, wand'ring in the mire
 With nailèd shoes and whipstaff in his hand,
 Who with a "hey and ree" the beasts command,
 And being seven years practised in that trade,
 At seven years' end by Tom a journey's made
 Unto the city of fair Troynovant,
 Where through extremity of need and want
 He's forced to trot with fardel at his back
 From house to house, demanding if they lack
 A poor young man that's willing to take pain
 And mickle labour, though for little gain.

(2.33–44)

The narrative of these two satires together—the story of a poor young man who becomes wealthy and powerful, hoards his wealth, and then bequeaths it at his death to his undeserving and corrupt son—allegorizes (in exaggerated form, of course) the actual biographies of the two most powerful men in England in the 1590s. Middleton emphasizes the connection with the reference to the "fardel at his back" (2.41); the syntax is cloudy, and the fardel could be on the back of either father or son, but anything reminiscent of a hunchback at this time served to point the allusion to Robert Cecil, whose back was crooked (see Croft, "Reputation").

The “fardel” calls to mind Spenser’s fox cubs with backs “nigh broken” (Spenser, *Mother Hubberds*, line 1158), and both are part of the mean-spirited shorthand from the 1590s up to Robert Cecil’s death in 1612 and beyond that used language of deformity and subhumanness to refer to Cecil because of his crooked back and short stature. Pauline Croft has analyzed Cecil’s reputation by studying the libels written against him both after the fall of the Earl of Essex and following Cecil’s death, finding that “The themes which emerged most insistently and savagely were those of [Robert Cecil, Earl of] Salisbury’s crooked back and his sexual appetites” (Croft, “Reputation,” 54). Animal imagery abounds to highlight these themes, with fox, ape, dolphin, and spider imagery used to refer to him (Bellany and McRae, “Early Stuart libels”). Middleton’s sly use of a fardel on a back to allude to Cecil’s crooked back is echoed by other anti-Cecil writers. Writing in 1592, Verstegan jests that Robert Cecil’s father should have helped him to a job as “writer vnder some clerck or officier of the courte,” because “he was fittest for such purpose, for that he caried his deske on his back” (Verstegan, *A Declaration*, 71). Twenty years later, following the Earl of Salisbury’s death in 1612, a libelist describes him as “a Ciciliane monster beegott of a fox / some caulde him crookebacke & some litle Robbin / hee bore on his backe a packe like ower Dobbinn” (Anonymous libel, 1612).

Another way that Middleton subtly connects this satire to Spenser’s work is through the unusual name of Zodon. A search of Early English Books Online for the word “Zodon” yields only Middleton’s *Micro-Cynicon*, but a search for the Greek word *zodion* indicates that the etymological connection between this word and the English “zodiac” (which tangentially connects Zodon’s name to Zeus through the mythological reference) was well known. All occurrences of the word *zodion* appear in the context of providing an etymology for “zodiac.” In three instances (Richard Eden’s translation of Martín Cortés, 1589; Thomas Blundeville, 1594; and Thomas Hill, 1599), the author translates *zodion* simply as “beast,” but Philemon Holland’s 1609 translation of Ammianus Marcellinus retains the sense of the word as a diminutive (especially fitting for the short and hunchbacked Robert Cecil): “*Zodiak*, of *Zodion* in Greeke, a little living creature” (Marcellinus, *Annotations*, C4v). As I have argued, the beast fable was in the 1590s the satire that dared not speak its name, but Middleton finds ingenious ways of referring to animal satire in general and to Spenser’s infamous *Mother Hubberds Tale* in particular.

These allusions to Spenser’s methods of satirizing William and Robert Cecil—reference to a fox, emphasis on a corrupt father–son dynasty,

subtle allusions to physical deformity, and an animal reference in Zodon's name—served to teach contemporary readers how to understand the satire by suggesting the likelihood that Middleton shared the political and religious ideas associated in the public mind with Spenser. Identifying the nature of Middleton's offense in this work is important for what it tells us about Middleton—about his politics in the late 1590s, for example, and also his ideological alignment with Edmund Spenser and others whose satirical toolboxes the young poet raided to create this early work. Identifying the possible source of the decision to censor Middleton's work is also important for what it tells us about the political significance of the genre of formal verse satire in the 1590s. To a present-day reader, the references to the Cecils in the first two satires of *Micro-Cynicon* may appear tenuous and circuitous. And yet the reader of a formal verse satire in the 1590s came to the text not only with a wealth of contextual information about animal nicknames, popular criticisms of leading political figures, and the like, but also with a desire, inspired by the social meaning of the genre itself, to find secrets hidden within the text. In this rhetorical situation, readerly ingenuity met authorial intention to create topical interpretations.

Spenser's satiric influence on Middleton's *Father Hubburds Tales*

Being an oppositional writer in a time of repressive censorship is a dangerous business; having learned his lesson in 1599, Middleton in *Father Hubburds Tales* (1604) aimed to convey a satirical message, but more safely. He blunts the force of the satire by making *Father Hubburds Tales* quite different in form from the verse satires of the 1590s and by creating extremely general satiric targets. At the same time, he calls attention to the fact that there is indeed a satirical message by making insistent reference to Spenser. Andrew McRae argues that, rather than forcing satire “underground,” the Bishops’ Ban instead “contributed to a dispersal or diffusion of the mode, which subsequently informed a wide range of texts” (McRae, *Literature, Satire*, 90). Middleton, because of the 1599 burning of *Micro-Cynicon*, was presumably highly motivated in 1604 to vent his satirical ire in non-incendiary ways. In *Father Hubburds Tales*; or, *The Ant and the Nightingale*, Middleton responds to the danger of censorship and/or punishment by hiding his meanings in typically Spenserian fashion.¹⁰ As Spenser did in his *Complaints* volume, Middleton creates

10 The first edition of the work was titled *The Ant, and the Nightingale, or Father Hubburds Tales*; the second edition, which like the first appeared in 1604, was titled *Father*

formal and stylistic parallels with the medieval complaints tradition, thus distancing himself from the problematic, classically inspired formal verse satire even as he deploys nostalgia as a tool for political critique of Jacobean England. Second, in creating an “insect fable” akin to Spenser’s *Virgils Gnat* and *Muiopotmos*, Middleton invites readers to use the same interpretive strategies they had applied to Spenser’s *Prosopopoia*; or, *Mother Hubberds Tale* and to the fox imagery in *Micro-Cynicon* to understand the satirical message. By adapting these strategies from Spenser, and by insistently reminding readers of Spenser’s infamous satire, Middleton places himself both politically and artistically within the camp of the Spenserian poets of the early seventeenth century.

Father Hubburds Tales, differentiated in multiple ways from *Micro-Cynicon*, appears innocuous. Ovid’s Philomel, in her nightingale form, catches an ant, but he persuades her not to eat him. Instead, he tells of his past—like her, he used to be a human, and he reports his experiences as a ploughman, as a soldier, and as a scholar. Middleton distinguishes this satire formally from the clearly Juvenalian mode of *Micro-Cynicon* by using the mixed verse and prose associated with Menippean satire (the ant’s stories are in prose, whereas the conversations between the ant and Philomel are in verse) and thematically by means of the fable-like use of animals as characters. To complicate these classical satiric models with reference to the native English tradition, we might also say that the plot and concerns of *Father Hubburds Tales*—the unfair treatment of ploughmen by rack-renting aristocrats, the lack of public care for a soldier wounded in battle, and the declining appreciation of poets and scholars—seem more akin to the medieval complaint than to early modern satire *per se*. Additionally, the work engages with the estates satire tradition, but Middleton modifies the typically inclusive estates satire model by focusing *only* on poor characters. George Gascoigne had connected Philomel with satire in *The Steele Glas* (1576), a work that also includes passages of estates satire, and so we can see Middleton’s work referencing an entirely different literary genealogy than *Micro-Cynicon* and the other verse satires of the 1590s, with debts to Ovid, Menippus, Gascoigne, and English complaint in sharp contrast to the 1590s poems’ allegiance to Juvenal. Yet whereas Middleton in *Micro-Cynicon* makes no overt reference to Spenser and does not model the form on Spenser but uses Spenser’s indirect satirical strategies to criticize the Cecils, in

Hubburds Tales, or the Ant, and the Nightingale. See Shaaber, “The ant,” and Kaplan, “Printer’s copy,” for a more detailed explication of bibliographic issues related to the two editions of the work.

Father Hubburds Tales he references Spenser insistently, both explicitly and through formal and stylistic parallels.

Presumably these references to Spenser serve to counteract the danger that, because of the vagueness regarding specific targets in *Father Hubburds Tales*, Middleton risks blunting entirely the satiric force of his work. Calling attention repeatedly to Spenser's *Mother Hubberds Tale* reminds Middleton's audience to read carefully to interpret his meaning. Whereas the first edition uses "Father Hubburds Tales" as the subtitle, the second edition foregrounds the allusion by making that the main title of the work. Middleton alludes to Spenser's work again in the address to the reader: "Why I call these *Father Hubburd's Tales* is not to have them called in again, as the *Tale of Mother Hubburd*: the world would show little judgment in that, i'faith, and I should say then *plena stultorum omnia*, for I entreat here neither of ragged bears or apes, no, nor the lamentable downfall of the old wife's platters" (Middleton, *Father Hubburd's*, lines 62–67). Of course *Mother Hubberds Tale* does not include an old wife's platters; perhaps Middleton had not read Spenser's controversial satire, or perhaps he purposefully introduced an erroneous plot point in order to imply his own lack of familiarity with Spenser's work, given that it was a banned book. Despite this effort at deniability, Middleton's reference to the title reminds his audience of it, and the reference to animals would call to many readers' minds the fact that topical interpretations of the animal characters in that work were what led to its censoring.

This reminder to read attentively, and especially to think about the cultural meanings of the animal characters, would prime Middleton's audience to read this work with the same searching ingenuity that they brought to Spenser's *Mother Hubberds Tale* and to the formal verse satires of the 1590s. The work repays such a reading. Plot parallels with Spenser's translation of the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex*, titled *Virgils Gnat*, remind readers of Spenser's ideal of poetry as a guide and teacher for those in political power. References to monkey and marmoset characters and the frequent description of the ant-ploughman's young lord as an ape or baboon echo the fox and ape villains in the beast fable of *Mother Hubberds Tale*, as does the use of estates satire. Additionally, the use of a passage from Proverbs and a tale from Ovid as intertexts for the work suggests Middleton's reasons for using an ant as the protagonist and leads to a potentially antiroyalist interpretation of the satire.

The use of an insect protagonist would surely call to readers' minds Spenser's use of a gnat character in *Virgils Gnat* and a butterfly in *Muiopotmos; or, The Fate of the Butterflie* (both published in 1591 in

Complaints) or the bumblebee protagonist of Dymoke's very Spenserian *Caltha Poetarum*, one of the poems named in the 1599 Bishops' Ban, as discussed in Chapter 4. Confirmation of contemporary understanding that *Virgils Gnat* refers to poets' attempts to reform their social superiors appears in Thomas Scot's 1616 comment that "If *Spencer* now were liuing," "The Ghost of *Virgils Gnat* would now sting so, / That great Men durst not in the Citie goe" (Scot, *Philomythie*, B1r–B1v). As Spenser does in *Virgils Gnat*, Middleton plays up the contrast between his insect protagonist and the more powerful figure he seeks to influence. The ant tells Philomel, "I am a little emmet [ant] born to work" and "Why seeks your gentleness a poor worm's end? / ... / I come to wonder, not to work offence: / There is no glory to spoil innocence" (Middleton, *Father Hubburd's*, lines 174, 164, 166–67). The subtly anti-Jacobean didactic focus of *Father Hubburd's Tales* appears in Philomel's merciful response to the ant. Philomel, presumably a type of Queen Elizabeth, models the kindness to inferiors presented as proper to royalty; she releases the ant from her hold, saying, "I give thee life and way. / The worthy will not prey on yielding things. / Pity's enfeoffed to the blood of kings!" (lines 183–85). The use of "enfeoff," a feudal term, further emphasizes the sense of nostalgia, as Elizabeth through Philomel becomes associated with an idealized view of the feudal ties that connected people in earlier days.

As a satirist, Spenser was best known for his *Mother Hubberds Tale*, and Middleton, as he had done in *Micro-Cynicon*, uses beast fable imagery in "The Ant's Tale when he was a Ploughman" to connect this work to Spenser's famous satire. Each of the ant's tales focuses on the unfair treatment that a poor man endures at the hands of the wealthy and powerful, but the first tale, that of the ant-ploughman, is by far the longest and most thoroughly developed. The ant tells what happened to him and his fellow ploughmen when his wise, prudent, and hospitable landlord died, leaving the estate to his son, who was "accustomed to wild and unfruitful company about the court and London" (Middleton, *Father Hubburd's*, lines 320–21). After his father's death, the son engages a monkey and a marmoset as servants, further identified as a "French page and Itali-anate servingman," respectively, and then himself becomes "so metamorphosed into the shape of a French puppet that, at the first, we [i.e., the ploughmen] started and thought one of the baboons had marched in in man's apparel" (lines 330, 374–76). References to these animals abound in the rest of the tale. The son quickly signs away his patrimony to a merchant and a mercer in order to have ready cash. The ant-ploughman describes the son's profligacy in detail, but he also pays brief attention

to how life changed for the ploughmen: “what a sad Christmas we all kept in the country without either carols, wassail-bowls, dancing of Sellinger’s Round in moonshine nights about maypoles, shoeing the mare, hoodman-blind, hot-cockles, or any of our old Christmas gambols; no, not so much as choosing king and queen on Twelfth Night” (lines 638–42). Again, we here see nostalgia for an earlier era, when landlords understood that their social position conferred upon them the obligation of hospitality, especially at Christmas-time, toward social inferiors (Heal, *Hospitality*; Palmer, *Hospitable Performances*, 27–31).

The wide variety of animal characters hearkens to *Virgils Gnat*, *Muio-potmos*, and *Mother Hubberds Tale*; in addition, Middleton’s unusual use of the ant alludes both to Proverbs and to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 7, creating an intertextual web of ideas about ants that coalesces into a message against the oppression of the poor. Ants’ industriousness is, quite literally, proverbial, appearing notably in Proverbs, 6:6–9, which Middleton paraphrases in *Father Hubburds Tales* just before Philomel catches the ant:

There was a bed of busy, toiling ants,
That in their summer, winter’s comfort got,
Teaching poor men how to shun after-wants;
Whose rules if sluggards could be learned to keep,
They should not starve awake, lie cold asleep.

(Middleton, *Father Hubburd’s*, lines 121–25)

Using an ant to represent the lives of a ploughman, a soldier, and a scholar reminds the reader of the laboriousness of all of these endeavors, and lends them as well the aura of virtue that attaches to the ant’s work in cultural references to the ant’s industry. Dignifying the work of these unglamorous characters certainly serves a polemical purpose, but I believe the work supports an even more radical interpretation.

Let us compare Middleton’s paraphrase of the passage from Proverbs with the Geneva Bible version:

6 Go to the pismire [ant], O sluggard: behold her ways, and be wise.
7 For she having no guide, governor, nor ruler,
8 Prepareth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in harvest.
9 How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? (*Proverbs of Solomon*, 6:6–9)

We see that in *Father Hubburds Tales*, Middleton left out one verse – Proverbs, 6:7 – about how the ant has “no guide, governor, nor ruler.” One can certainly read the Proverbs passage as favoring political hierarchy, as William Burton does in a 1595 sermon:

And what a shame is this to the slouthful person (if he be not past shame) that hath both guides, and gouernours, and rulers, both to teach him, and keep him in order, besides the benefite of reason and vnderstanding: and yet for all these meanes and helpes, which the Pismire wanteth, is carelesse of his owne good? (Burton, *Rowsing*, 10–11)

In Burton's reading, guides, governors, and rulers are unambiguously good. Yet, Middleton's ant-ploughman, ant-soldier, and ant-scholar are human laborers who would be better off *without* the oppression and corruption of their "natural betters." In this regard, both the missing Proverbs, 6:7 and the plot points—such as, for example, the unfair treatment of the ploughmen through the legal machinations of the young heir to the estate and the disregard of needs of the disabled soldier, whose captain and commanders cheat him of his pay, granting him only "a passport to beg in all countries" (Middleton, *Father Hubburd's*, lines 951–52)—will remind the audience that, to the extent they buy the connection between English laborers and the virtuous, foresightful, and industrious ant, perhaps those ant-people would also be better off without the guides, governors, and rulers who oppress them.

The industrious ants of Proverbs, of course, remain ants, but Middleton surely had in mind as well a tale in which ants crawling up and down the length of a tree *do* become human. In Book 7 of *Metamorphoses*, King Aeacus, heartbroken over the death of his subjects from a plague, prays to Jupiter to have his city filled with people again. Aeacus relates, "And Jupiter sent omens—lightning followed by confirming thunder.... I happened to be standing beside an oak.... On this tree we saw a long line of ants carrying bits of grain, huge burdens for their tiny mouths.... Marveling at how many there were, I said, 'Father, highest of the gods, grant to me the same number of citizens to fill my empty city!'" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 122). He sleeps and dreams of the ants, who "appeared to grow and to become larger and to raise themselves from the ground, stand upright, shed their thin bodies, their many legs, and their black color, and take on human form" (122–23). He wakes and goes outside to find the ant-men of his dream, whom he names the Myrmidons, hailing him as king. He notes to his companion that "they still have the character they had before: a frugal, hardworking race, holding on to what they've acquired and storing it up for the future. All the same age and equal in courage, they will go off to war with you as soon as the wind blowing from the east ... changes around to the south" (123).

Middleton's Philomel sings not in an oak tree, but "On a green hawthorn, from the thunder blest" (line 109); the thunder blessing may

connect this tree to Jupiter's blessing in *Metamorphoses*. Although an oak tree would connect these images more firmly to the Ovidian text, the hawthorn in the early seventeenth century was seen as the usual perch for the nightingale.¹¹ Additionally, the use of the hawthorn tree, traditionally associated with fairies, serves to connect Philomel to Queen Elizabeth, the "Faery Queen" of early modern English literature (Spence, *Fairy Tradition*, 321–22; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*). Of the "bed of busy, toiling ants" in *Father Hubbards Tales*, only one actually transforms to a human, but the allusions to the tale of King Aeacus serve to remind the reader that those who look like ants—ploughmen, poor soldiers, and scholars—might rise up and become, like the Myrmidons, a warlike people.

Nostalgia for the past permeates this satire, from the black-letter type used for the ant's tales, to the use of the medieval forms of beast fable and estates satire, to the references to Edmund Spenser's satirical work.¹² Middleton uses this nostalgia to imply—circuitously, of course—that England under James was in decline from an idealized time represented by Elizabeth. Some references to James seem laudatory, such as "there's a manly lion now can roar, / Thunder more dreaded than the lioness; / Of him let simple beasts his aid implore, / For he conceives more than they can express" (lines 222–25). In the same section, however, he implies that the English have already forgotten Elizabeth ("They that forget a queen, soothe with a king" [line 200]) and that even more "curs ... fawn" over Robert Cecil under James's rule than flattered his father in Elizabeth's time ("Else would not soothing glossers oil the son, / Who, while his father lived, his acts did hate" [lines 214, 216–17]).¹³ In this way, Middleton seems strongly to suggest that James—and his luxury-seeking, spendthrift ways—bears some responsibility for the decline in care for the poor evidenced in the ant's tales.

11 For example, "the Nightingale vpon the hawthorene singeth" (Carlton, *Madrigals*, B2v) and "The Nitingale vpon the hawthorne brire / And all the wingd Musitions in a Quire, / Do with their notes rebuke dull lazie men" (Chettle, *Englands Mourning*, F3r).

12 According to Zachary Lesser, "one of the dominant meanings of black letter in this period ... was the powerful combination of Englishness (the 'English letter') and pastness (the 'antiquated' appearance of black letter by the seventeenth century) that I call typographic nostalgia. It is this combination that allows black letter to evoke the traditional English community" ("Typographic nostalgia," 107). Note that Spenser himself had used black-letter type to activate both nostalgic and nationalistic feelings in his *Shepherd's Calendar* (see Galbraith, "English").

13 Although Curtis Perry argues ("Citizen politics") that Elizabethanism was not a fully developed rhetorical strategy of protest during the first decade of James's reign, his discussion of Dekker's use in *The Whore of Babylon* (1607) of explicit praise of James coupled with implicit critique seems germane to the similar strategy discussed here.

Conclusion; or, “So what?”

Under conditions of censorship both violent and capricious, authors had to consider the possibility of offending not only with *what* they said but also with *how they said it*. I believe that writers in the 1590s saw Spenser’s *Mother Hubberds Tale* as an unsafe stylistic model for satire, but that the Bishops’ Ban—by censoring primarily works modeled on either Juvenal or the railing satirical style exemplified by Thomas Nashe’s contributions to his book war with Gabriel Harvey—made Spenser’s indirect satires seem a more acceptable model for satires written after the ban. These stylistic tendencies were strong enough to become a trend or fad, as we can see from comparing Middleton’s work in satire during this time period with that of John Donne, that is, his *Satires* of the 1590s and his *Metempsychosis; Poëma Satyricon* (1601; published 1633).

These two writers came to satire after 1599 from very different positions, in terms of both censorship risk and ideology. Middleton, who printed his works and whose *Micro-Cynicon* was named and burned, had much more to fear from government oversight after 1599 than did Donne, whose poetry circulated only in manuscript. Thus, in Middleton we must read the poetry as the author’s negotiation between what he wants to say and what he can safely say; for this reason, the Spenserianism of his satires, whether he writes in the Juvenalian vein before the ban, as in *Micro-Cynicon*, or the Menippean after the ban, as in *Father Hubburds Tales*, suggests an ideological commitment to the religious and political ideas associated by him and his contemporaries with Spenser, and this fits with what we know of Middleton’s lifelong sympathy for the reform-minded Protestantism associated with the Leicester faction and celebrated by Spenser, as discussed in the first section of this chapter.

On the other hand, we would not expect the sometimes Catholic, sometimes Anglican Donne to use Spenserianism as a covert means of signaling Puritan dissent—he sympathized with neither the ideas nor the forms favored by Spenser and the Spenserian poets (Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*, 177). However, unconcerned with outright censorship, the manuscript poet Donne has the freedom simply to explore contemporary trends in satirical writing; the Spenserianism of *Metempsychosis*, coupled with the absence of same from his *Satires* of the 1590s, suggests that he may simply be following a fad.¹⁴ In the supposedly unfinished *Metempsychosis*, Donne narrates the transmigration of a single soul from the apple

14 For critical comments noting Spenserian elements in Donne’s *Metempsychosis*, see Smith, “John Donne’s”; Corthell, “Donne’s,” 98–99.

that Adam and Eve ate to a mandrake, a sparrow, two fishes, a whale, a mouse, a wolf, the wolf's half-wolf/half-dog offspring, an ape, and finally, at the point where the poem ends, a human: Themech, the wife of Cain. Donne never arrives at the revelation he promises in the "Epistle," that he will "deliver you by her relation all her passages from her first making when she was that apple which Eve eat, to this time when she is he, whose life you shall find in the end of this book" (Donne, *Progress of the Soul*, 177). Probably intentionally, however, the apparently unfinished state of the poem has not prevented efforts to identify the target of the satire, with, for example, M. van Wyk Smith arguing that the poem satirizes Robert Cecil ("John Donne's," 142–43).

Donne's subtitle, *Poëma Satyricon*, tells us how to approach reading, but the poem clearly differs importantly from his satires of the 1590s. Janel Mueller, arguing against reading *Metempsychosis* as a satire, succeeds in describing, though not explaining, the important shift that took place in satirical writing in England after the Bishops' Ban. She writes:

[T]he prosodic, thematic, and tonal differences between the *Metempsychosis* and Donne's undoubted five satires have been almost entirely lost to view. The *Metempsychosis* confronts the scholar and critic with a number of distinctive characteristics—a rapid and continuous narrative sequence, a commitment to myth, the dominant themes of change and gradation into evil rather than achieved and assailable vice, a strong narrative presence which is subject to wide variations of tone and mood, and a full-blown epic framework. None of these can be matched, except intermittently, by Donne's satires. (Mueller, "Donne's," 113)

Despite the stylistic and generic differences, the *Satires* and *Metempsychosis* are certainly both satires, and I believe that closer attention to the government's interventions into the literary field in both 1591 and 1599 can help to explain the differences in works of satire by Middleton, Donne, and others before and after the Bishops' Ban.

Writers in the first decade of the seventeenth century wrote under demonstrably different conditions than those writing in the 1590s: whereas censorship of a beast fable in 1591 had led to the near-absence of this form in printed works of the 1590s, censorship of formal verse satires led to their decline, and a concomitant increase in pastorals and animal satires in the next decade. Additionally, the change of monarch in 1603 meant not only the need to determine, very carefully, the attitudes of a different person toward public criticism and censorship of same, but it also meant the development of new complaints, new things that annoyed English subjects about court and Crown. Spenserianism became

a safer and also inherently nostalgic way of expressing some of these new complaints. The freer imitations of Spenser, rather than the allusions to Spenser that had predominated in the 1590s, will be the subject of the next chapter.