CHAPTER 11

English News Plays of the Early 1620s

Thomas Middleton's A Game at Chess *and Ben Jonson's* The Staple of News

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Theatre, Politics and the News Business in the Early 1620s

Hitting the stage of the Globe Theatre in August 1624, Middleton's *A Game at Chess* instantly became news. Its fervently anti-Spanish as well as anti-Catholic satire was, according to the letter-writer John Chamberlain, "followed with extraordinary concourse and frequented by all sorts of people."[1] Thousands flocked to the Globe where the King's Men played to a packed house for an unprecedented nine-day period, before the play was eventually banned from stage upon the indignant intervention of the Spanish Ambassador.[2] This "veritable nine days' wonder"[3] of early modern English theatre is a political play, not only because it caused diplomatic tensions between England and Spain,[4]

1 Quoted in Gary Taylor, "*A Game at Chesse*: An Early Form" in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1776.

2 Having witnessed a performance on 11 August, John Holles describes the Globe as having been "so thronged that by scores they came away for want of place," see "John Holles, Lord Haughton to the Earl of Somerset, Wednesday 11 August 1624" in Thomas Middleton, *A Game at Chess*, ed. by T.H. Howard-Hill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 198. The Spanish ambassador reports that "there were more than 3000 persons there [in the Globe] on the day that the audience was smallest," see "Don Carlos Coloma to the Conde-Duque Olivares, Tuesday [10] 20 August 1624" in Middleton, *A Game at Chess*, ed. Howard-Hill (1993), p. 194. Taylor assumes that, "[i]n nine days in August 1624, *A Game at Chess* was seen by perhaps one-seventh of the total population of London, and many more who did not see it heard about it, or heard the 'extraordinary applause' and 'extraordinary concourse' of its audiences" (Gary Taylor, "A Game at Chess: A Later Form" in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, p. 1825). For a detailed account of the reactions the play provoked see T.H. Howard-Hill, *Middleton's "Vulgar Pasquin"*: *Essays on "A Game at Chess"* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), pp. 99–104.

3 Middleton, *A Game at Chess*, ed. Howard-Hill (1993), introduction, p. 1.

4 For an outline of the diplomatic tensions surrounding *A Game at Chess* see Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England. Buggeswords* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 139–146.

but also because it originated in the context of the Anglo-Spanish conflicts at the onset of the Thirty Years' War, which focalized in the Spanish Match and the Bohemian crisis.[5] Its particular historical context also makes *A Game at Chess* a play that is linked to the burgeoning news industry of the 1620s and its conflicted relationship with the English Crown.

By the early 1620s, news publications had become increasingly popular with English readers.[6] As the country was more and more involved in the escalating conflicts on the European Continent, demand increased for foreign news, that is, news about events abroad as well as about the Crown's foreign policy.[7] Information of this kind became available, for example, in letters exchanged between politically informed correspondents as well as in subscribed newsletters written by professional letter-writers. Foreign news also circulated in print publications which widely extended the dissemination of news along both vertical and horizontal lines within English society. Information about English involvement in international affairs was thus no longer restricted to a small political elite, but became accessible to a growing number of readers across different social strata. News was reported in polemical pamphlets often published anonymously and, since 1620, in the news-sheets known as corantos,

5 See Taylor, "*A Game at Chesse*: An Early Form," p. 1773. For a more detailed contextualization of Middleton's play within the English-Spanish crises of the early 1620s see T.H. Howard-Hill, *Middleton's "Vulgar Pasquin,"* pp. 77–92.

6 The following necessarily brief overview of the forms and circulation of news in the early 1620s is based on Fritz Levy, "The Decorum of News" in Joad Raymond (ed.), *News, Newspapers, and Society in Early Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 12–38; Fritz Levy, "Staging the News" in Arthur F. Moretti and Michael D. Bristol (eds.), *Print, Manuscript, Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), pp. 252–278; Joad Raymond (ed.), *News Networks in Seventeenth-Century Britain and Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Michael F. Suarez and H.R. Woudhuysen (eds.), "Newsletters" in *The Oxford Companion to the Book*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), vol. 2, p. 965.

7 The onset of the Thirty Years' War was not the first time an English public took an interest in foreign news. For example, "there [was] suddenly a group of at least a dozen tracts [i.e. news pamphlets] published in 1562, when an English expeditionary force, intended to help the Huguenots, crossed the Channel" (Levy, "The Decorum of News," p. 18). The late Jacobean age, however, witnessed not only a quantitative increase in, but also qualitative changes to news publications. During this period, Susan Clegg argues, "English interest in a war that spread from Bohemia to the Palatinate and Hungary joined with nationalistic concerns about both Princess Elizabeth's safety and Prince Charles's marriage to a Catholic princess to create a market for news persistent enough to warrant reports that came first with intermittent regularity and then, later, on a weekly basis." *Press Censorship in Jacobean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 170.

the first issues of which were printed in Amsterdam and illegally imported to England. In short, "[n]ews had become, for the first time, a routine commodity,"[8] making political knowledge available to a wider reading public. This process of democratizing information about England's dealings in foreign affairs was strongly opposed by James I who regarded all questions of royal policy as belonging to the sphere of *arcana imperii*, his "prerogative or mystery of State."[9] In order to stop the proliferation and circulation of political news, James issued "A Proclamation against excesse of Lavish and Licentious Speech of matters of State" (24 December 1620), commanding his:

> loving Subjects [...] to take heede, how they intemeddle by Penne, or Speech, with causes of State, and secrets of Empire, either at home, or abroad, but containe themselves within that modest and reverent regard, of matters, above their reach and calling, that to good and dutifull Subjects appertaineth[.][10]

However, the proclamation failed to take effect, as did a second one issued six months later, and, by the end of 1621, the Crown had changed its tactics.[11] Instead of attempting to suppress political news, the king henceforth tried to control its dissemination by issuing royal patents for corantos to be printed and published in England.[12] "These, however, were," as Fritz Levy remarks:

> now registered by the Stationers' Company after passing the censor – that is they were subject to all the usual controls exercised by the Crown over material printed in England, and so were preferable to unconstrained imports.[13]

With these licensed corantos, the serial publication of printed news began, reflecting on the increasing availability of news and political opinion to the reading public.

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8 Taylor, "*A Game at Chesse*: An Early Form," p. 1776.

9 George McIlwain (ed.), *The Political Works of James I*. Reprinted from the edition of 1616 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 332.

10 James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes (eds.), *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), vol. 1, pp. 495–496.

11 See Levy, "Staging the News," p. 266.

12 See ibid., p. 266. For more detailed information on the history of the English coranto see Folke Dahl, *A Bibliography of English Corantos and Periodical Newsbooks 1620–1642* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1952).

13 Levy, "Staging the News," p. 266. For a close analysis of Jacobean censorship see Clegg, *Press Censorship in Jacobean England*.

It is the theatre's reaction to the burgeoning news business on which I will focus in the remainder of this chapter. English theatre had been involved in staging news long before the advent of printed, serialized news publications. However, "until the 1620s, stage plays customarily dealt with topical matters."[14] As Paul J. Voss argues, the parallels that, for example, can be found between Christopher Marlowe's play *The Massacre of Paris* (written *c*. 1590–93) and a news pamphlet of June 1590 (reporting a failed attempt to assassinate the French King Henry IV) illustrate "the ease with which events in France could move from page to stage – news from one day became the drama of the next."[15] Another example of how the stage made use of news prior to the 1620s is John Fletcher's and Philip Massinger's *The Tragedy of Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt* (1619), a dramatic rendering of the trial and execution of the Dutch politician Johan van Oldenbarnavelt. This play, which Fritz Levy calls a "staged newsbook,"[16] was first performed less than three months after the events had been reported in English news publications.[17] In contrast to these plays by Marlowe, Fletcher, and Massinger, news plays such as Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1624) and Ben Jonson's *The Staple of News* (1626) engage in more complex discussions of contemporary English news culture, as I will show in this chapter. Going beyond issues of topicality, both Middleton's and Jonson's plays are concerned, each following its own ideological agenda, with negotiating the intricate links between politics, news culture, and the theatre of the 1620s.[18]

Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess*

A Game at Chess takes the form of an allegorical chess game in which the White House, representing the English court, defeats the Black House, representing the Spanish court, by revealing the latter's moral conceit and corruption.

14 Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 139.

15 Paul J. Voss, *Elizabethan News Pamphlets: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe and the Birth of Journalism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 2001), p. 115.

16 See Levy, "The Staging of News," p. 259.

17 See ibid., pp. 257–259.

18 My discussion of Middleton's *A Game at Chess* and Jonson's *The Staple of News* as news plays forms part of a larger research project in which I focus more extensively on the relationship between theatre and news culture in early modern England between 1620 and 1660. I want to thank Joachim Frenk and the members of his research colloquium for the helpful and encouraging comments they made during a project presentation in the early summer 2010.

On the level of allegory, Middleton's play negotiates and contains the cultural anxieties of its time as it has English-Protestant virtuous integrity unveil Jesuit treacherous plotting and defeat Spanish-Catholic moral corruption. *A Game at Chess* is also a topical play which invited contemporary audiences to identify its characters as the leading members of both the English and the Spanish royal families and their respective courts.[19] It brings on stage a decidedly English reinterpretation of the Spanish Match in which the White Knight's revelatory visit to the Black House transforms Prince Charles's ill-advised trip to Madrid into a heroic act of rescuing Protestant England from Popish Spanish plots. *A Game at Chess* is indeed staunchly patriotic in its celebratory representation of the White House. But since it is not the White King (representing James I), but the White Knight (representing Prince Charles), who eventually saves his house, scholars have often read Middleton's play as voicing criticism of James I in particular, and of Stuart absolutist ideology in general. As Margaret Heinemann argues, *A Game at Chess* is an example of Jacobean "opposition drama"[20] which criticizes James's attempts to enter into a dynastic alliance with Spain by presenting him as an honourable, but nevertheless weak king who is lured in by the plots of his Spanish and Jesuit adversaries.[21] For Albert H. Tricomi, Middleton's play "dramatize[s] the views of vociferous critics of crown policy."[22] According to him:

> The White King's failure of leadership and his inability to recognize or cope with the threats to the commonweal are tantamount to an indictment of James.[23]

Gary Taylor sees Middleton's satire as relying on a strategy of "unravelling by repetition." In its allegorical chess game,

> kings, dukes, and bishops [are present] on both sides; one hierarchy mirrors the other. But one side represents an evil which the audience rejects.

19 See "John Holles" and "Don Carlos Coloma" in *A Game at Chess*, ed. Howard-Hill (1993), pp. 199, 193–194.

20 Margaret Heinemann, "Drama and Opinion in the 1620s: Middleton's and Massinger" in J.R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (eds.), *Theatre and Government Under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 238.

21 Ibid., p. 243.

22 Albert H. Tricomi, *Anticourt Drama in England 1603–1624* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. 140.

23 Tricomi, *Anticourt Drama*, p. 148.

> Thus, there can be no intrinsic dignity or authority in bishops or dukes or kings, who may, as individuals, be either good or bad, worthy of obedience or deserving of disrespect.[24]

According to Taylor, *A Game at Chess* attacks royal as well as episcopal authority and, consequently, "champion[s] an ideology of resistance" against Stuart absolutism.[25]

Compelling as these readings are, I would however argue that the play's critical negotiation of absolutist authority does not so much depend on its allegorical use of chess as on its complex engagement with the burgeoning news business of its time. *A Game at Chess* criticizes the dissemination of political information by vilifying the commodification and circulation of the written word in both manuscript and print. Both manuscript writing and print publications figure prominently in the plots the Black House sets up in order to corrupt and thus defeat the White House. For example, after the White Queen's Pawn has only narrowly escaped being raped by the Black Bishop's Pawn,[26] the Black Knight successfully convinces the White House that her justified accusations are after all false.[27] He does so with the help of forged letters which provide the perpetrator with a fake alibi for the time of the assault.[28] The Black Knight procures yet another fake letter to entice the (White) Fat Bishop to betray the White House by converting to Catholicism.[29] Letters also form a central part of the Black House conspiracy to establish a "universal monarchy,"[30] that is a global Catholic empire which, as commonplace prejudice had it, Spain sought to build with Jesuit support.[31] As the Black Queen's Pawn explains, spies have been placed at various European courts whose "important secrets | Of state" they reveal in "notes of intelligence" to the Jesuit "Father General."[32] While the Black Knight's forged letters serve to question the overall

24 Taylor, "*A Game at Chesse*: An Early Form," p. 1778.

25 Ibid., p. 1777.

26 Thomas Middleton, "*A Game at Chess*: A Later Form" in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (eds), *Thomas Middleton*: *The Collected Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1830–1885, ii.i.9–149. All references to *A Game at Chess* (henceforth *Game*) are to this edition.

27 *Game* ii.ii.94–224.

28 *Game* ii.i.182–85; ii.ii.197–204.

29 *Game* ii.ii.72–81; iii.i.24–58.

30 *Game* i.i.51, 244.

31 See *A Game at Chess*, ed. Howard-Hill (1993), introduction, p. 34. Also see *Game*, note to i.i.56.

32 *Game* i.i.57–61.

reliability of the written word, the dispatches sent by the Jesuit agents are a direct reference to Jacobean news culture. Similar to (either privately or professionally written) newsletters, the Black House "notes of intelligence" circulate information that is deemed secret. As it is with the help of their spies' correspondence that the Black House works towards its global empire (which would entail the destruction of the White House), *A Game at Chess* seems to suggest that the dissemination of political news violates the monarch's *arcana imperii* and, consequently, endangers the commonweal.

The criticism which Middleton's play inflicts upon print media is likewise severe. The White Queen's Pawn, who symbolizes virtue and innocence, equates the "hot-burning […] syllables" of the words the Black Bishop's Pawn speaks to her, with "letter[s] new cast from hell."[33] Since the term *letters* refers not only to the elements of the alphabet, but also to printing type, *A Game at Chess* represents print publications as Satanic devices signifying Popish attacks on Protestant truth and morality. The play underlines this negative association between print products and the Catholic Church as the White Queen's Pawn describes her adversary's letter as having been "cast from hell." Thus, the Black House missive appears to have been issued by the Devil and, at the same time, it is associated with the process of producing metal printing type by casting, which also shares in the White Queen's Pawn's hellish description.[34] What is more, the play taps into the repertoire of Protestant accusations directed at Rome. The Black Knight admits to the commodification of religion when he says to his pawn:

> For venting hallowed oil, beads, medals, pardons,
> Pictures, Veronica's heads in private presses,
> That's done by one I'th'habit of a pedlar,
> Letters conveyed in rolls, tobacco-balls.[35]

It is through lines such as these that *A Game at Chess* represents the Catholic Church as an itinerate trader, a petty dealer to whom religion is a mere commodity; its goods are available for the sums specified in the "Book of general pardons of all prices."[36] In Middleton's play, printed texts thus play a central role in the commercialized idolatry on which, according to Jacobean Protestant

33 *Game* v.ii.42–43; v.ii.44.

34 I am grateful to Puck Fletcher for alerting me to the ambiguous use of the verb *cast*.

35 *Game* iv.ii.48–51.

36 *Game* iv.ii.83.

stereotyping, the Catholic Church is grounded. The only print product that escapes this strategy of vilification is

> that white book of the defence of virgins
> Where the clear fames of all preserving knights
> Are to eternal memory consecrated [...].[37]

As these lines show, the use of print products is not restricted to the Black House alone. However, the printed word cherished by the White House differs significantly from the texts associated with the Black House. Representing the King James Bible, the "white book" is praised as a reliable source of truth, innocence, and virtue and, thus, stands in contrast to the texts used by members of the Black House in order to further their devious plans. What is more, the "white book" is the only book owned by the White House, whereas the Black House has numerous texts at its disposal. I would therefore argue that it is not print itself that comes under attack in *A Game at Chess*, but rather the printing press as a means of pluralizing opinions and making them available to the public.

However, the critical rendering of print media in *A Game at Chess* is ironically at odds with how the play profited from its own involvement in the marketplace of print and, in particular, in the marketplace of news. For its representation of deceit and corruption in the Black House, Middleton's satire is deeply indebted to printed pamphlets reporting foreign news. As Gary Taylor argues:

> Middleton's play was made *from* news. Formally, it drew upon a long tradition of anti-Catholic polemic, which ranged in substance from Donne's erudite *Ignatius his Conclave* to popular ballads and broadsides ridiculing the pope or celebrating the constancy of Protestant women [...]. Factually, though, the sources for the play's political details were not magnificent old folios of official history, but rough pamphlets about recent events.[38]

The most important pamphlets *A Game at Chess* draws on, and even quotes from, are Thomas Scott's anti-Spanish *Vox Populi, or News From Spain* (first published anonymously in 1620) and its sequel *The Second Part of Vox Populi* (1624); John Gee's anti-Jesuit *Foot out of the Snare* (1624); and John Reynold's

37 *Game* iii.i.164–166.

38 Taylor, "*A Game at Chesse*: An Early Form," p. 1776.

anti-Spanish *Vox Coeli* (1624).[39] However, Middleton's play not only made use of news; it, too, became a news item. The newsletter-writer John Wooley, for example, reported that *A Game at Chess* was "[a]ll the nues I haue hearde since my comming to toune."[40] Its status as a news item increased the profit made from the play, and the play's notoriety in turn furthered its commodification as news. With estimations varying between "£100 a day […] or £1500 all in all," *A Game at Chess* made the "King's Men an unparalleled, scandalous amount of money."[41] Being transformed from a commodity of the theatre into one of the news market, *A Game at Chess* was subjected to a process of pluralization in both manuscript and print forms. As a result, Middleton's play (Figures 11.1 and 11.2).

> survives in many more manuscripts than any other play of the period; it was published in more illicit editions than any other play; it was the first individual play published with an engraved title-page – and was then published again in another edition with yet another engraved title-page.[42]

The economic success that *A Game at Chess* met with, and the play's subsequent circulation in multiple textual forms, suggests that Middleton's satire re-enacts the media practices for which it criticizes the Black House. Its various manuscript copies and print editions undermine the very ideals of textual reliability and transcendent meaning the play privileges in the "white book." In short, *A Game at Chess* enters into a highly ambiguous relationship with the market forces of news and print: it attacks their strategies of pluralization and, at the same time, it becomes one their most successful products in the early 1620s.

Ben Jonson's *The Staple of News*

Its ambiguous engagement with the news business of its time places Middleton's *A Game at Chess* into close proximity to the second news play

39 See Howard-Hill, *Middleton's "Vulgar Pasquin,"* pp. 49–51. See also Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics in 1623/24* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

40 "John Woolley to William Trumbull, Friday 6 August 1624" in Thomas Middleton, *A Game at Chess*, ed. by T.H. Howard-Hill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 192.

41 Taylor, "*A Game at Chess*: A Later Form," p. 1825.

42 Ibid., p. 1773.

FIGURE 11.1 *Title page of* A Game at Chess *(1625; STC 17884; RB 28185).*
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FIGURE 11.2 *Title page of* A Game at Chess *(1625; STC 17882; RB 23674).*
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under scrutiny here, Ben Jonson's *Staple of News* (1626). Although Jonson's play was certainly less popular, it too vilifies the marketplace of news and print whilst also making use of it.[43] According to Mark Z. Muggli, "Jonson's long-standing interest in journalism," which has left its imprint on several of his poems, plays, and masques, eventually culminates in *The Staple of News*.[44] With its eponymous staple in which ludicrously fantastic stories are sold to gullible customers, and with its set of (mostly) ridiculous characters who are involved in either the production or the consumption of news, the play is a vehement invective against the news culture of the 1620s. Decrying the contemporary desire for news more fully and effectively than any other of Jonson's other texts,[45] the play's satire is directed at the commodification of news in different media.[46] The women who invade the stage at the beginning of the play serve as comical representations of gossip as an oral form of exchanging information which predates the market in manuscript and printed news.[47] Having Gossip Tattle claim that her personal network of gossipmongers provides her with better news than the products sold at the staple,[48] Jonson's play satirically implies that the news market does nothing but commercialize stale gossip. The newsvendor Cymbal represents manuscript news media. He:

> prides himself on the fact that he is a mart for handwritten news and explains to the young Pennyboy that "when news is printed, | It leaves, sir, to be news."[49]

Joseph Loewenstein observantly notes that:

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43 The play was performed only twice, once at Blackfriars and once at the court. See, *The Staple of News*, ed. by Anthony Parr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), introduction, p. 49.

44 Mark Z. Muggli, "Ben Jonson and the Business of News," *Studies in English Literature* 32 (1992), p. 323. See also Joseph Loewenstein, "*The Staple of News*: Introduction" in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. by David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 6, p. 3.

45 See Muggli, "Ben Jonson and the Business of News," p. 331; see *The Staple of News*, ed. Parr, introduction, pp. 23–49.

46 See Muggli, "Ben Jonson and the Business of News," p. 333; see *The Staple of News*, ed. Parr, introduction, p. 25; Loewenstein, "*The Staple of News*: Introduction," vol. 6, pp. 4–7.

47 See Loewenstein, "*The Staple of News*: Introduction," vol. 6, p. 7.

48 Ben Jonson, "*The Staple of News,*" ed. by Joseph Loewenstein in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, vol. 6, pp. 15–157, iii. Int. 15–18. All references to *The Staple of News* (henceforth *Staple*) are to this edition.

49 Loewenstein, "*The Staple of News*: Introduction," vol. 6, p. 4 (quoting *Staple* i.v. 50–51).

> the irony of the [newsvendor's] remark derives from the fact that while Cymbal here speaks for a culture of private information, it was a culture that the market in news was quite obviously destroying.[50]

It achieved this as it made news available beyond the limits of the private sphere. The play's most severe criticism, however, is directed against printed news publications. Critics have pointed out that *The Staple of News* relentlessly satirizes corantos as well as the "pioneers of periodical print journalism – [...] above all Nathaniel Butter whose name, endlessly metamorphosed, provides the play with its most recurrent running gag."[51]

This vilification of printed news stands in contrast to Jonson's own reliance on the medium of print in the note "To the Readers" which he first added to *The Staple of News* for the Folio edition of his works, published in 1616. In this note, Jonson tells his readers that his play "hath hitherto been wholly mistaken," and he attempts to rectify this by interpreting "the ridiculous office of the Staple" as a representation of the age's "own folly or hunger and thirst after published pamphlets of news."[52] The addition of this note, which Stuart Sherman calls a "pure print intervention in the midst of a theatrical script," sits uneasily on a play that criticizes the news business and, in particular, its commerce in printed news as debilitating cultural practices.[53]

Middleton and Jonson: Contrasting Ideologies of News

Similar to Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, Jonson's *Staple of News* thus displays a highly ambiguous relationship with the medium of print. In spite of this similarity, however, each play's critical discussion of news follows its own distinct ideological agenda. In the Prologue for the Court, Jonson's play characterizes news as "common follies" – that is follies of the "common" people – from which it seeks to distance itself: "Wherein, although our title, sir, be News, | We yet

50 Ibid., p. 6.

51 Stuart Sherman, "Eyes and Ears, News and Plays: The Argument of Ben Jonson's *Staple*" in Brendan Dooley and Sabrina Baron (eds.), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 30. For similar observations see Loewenstein, "*The Staple of News*: Introduction," vol. 6, p. 4; and *The Staple of News*, ed. Parr, introduction, p. 29.

52 *Staple*, Note to the Reader, vol. 6, p. 78, ll. 8–9.

53 Sherman, "Eyes and Ears," p. 35.

adventure here to tell you none[...]."[54] The Prologue identifies the court as its privileged audience because it addresses its members as:

> [...] scholars, that can judge and fair report
> The sense they hear above the vulgar sort
> Of nut-crackers that only come for sight.[55]

Favouring the ear above the eye, the play establishes a cultural hierarchy of the senses, which it imposes on the social hierarchy of class.[56] *The Staple of News* is thus an elitist news play whose rejection of the news business is reflected in its "peculiar embrace of aristocratic values."[57]

By contrast, the ideological agenda of Middleton's *A Game at Chess* has a more egalitarian thrust. As Ian Munro argues, the play is "obsess[ed] with discovery."[58] It climaxes in a scene in which the Black House is defeated by "checkmate by | Discovery."[59] Exposing the corrupted policies of the Black House to public scrutiny, the White House is able to win the day. The play's insistence on discovery is, however, at odds with the notion of *arcana imperii* which, as I have outlined above, was an integral part of Jacobean royal policy and which the Crown sought to enforce by censorship. The play's allegorical dramatization of Prince Charles's visit to Spain constitutes a violation of the royal prerogative, since it exposes aspects of the Crown's foreign policy to the scrutiny of theatre audiences.[60] Yet, *A Game at Chess* represents its strategy of exposing state secrets as a patriotic act serving to prevent the moral, religious, and political defeat of the White House and, by implication, England. Jacobean censorship in turn comes under attack when the Black Knight boasts that "our drifts

54 *Staple*, Prologue for the Court, vol. 6, p. 24, ll. 9–10.

55 Ibid., vol. 6, p. 24, ll. 6–8.

56 For a detailed discussion of this hierarchy see Sherman, "Eyes and Ears."

57 Loewenstein, "*The Staple of News*: Introduction," vol. 6, p. 3.

58 Ian Munro, "Making Publics: Secrecy and Publication in *A Game at Chess*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 14 (2001), pp. 221. See also Isabel Karremann "Medial Pluralization and Censorship in the Early Seventeenth Century: The Case of Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess*" in Joachim Frenk and Lena Steveker (eds.), *Proceedings: Anglistentag 2010 Saarbrücken* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010), pp. 237–245.

59 *Game* v.iii.161.

60 See also Munro who argues: "In the context of the historical event of the play [i.e. the recent failure of the Spanish Match], the enormous popularity and scandalousness of *A Game at Chess* was caused by its publication of the alleged secret machinations and private personal details of the Spanish in England." See, "Making Publics," p. 208.

walk uncensored but in thought," while the White House imposes a "silenced muzzle | On all the barking tongue-men of the time," thus enforcing "political restraint" on any kind of opposition.[61] Within the logic of the play, it is therefore censorship which endangers the state authority that imposes it in order to secure its own power. With its critical negotiation of censorship and its reliance on the notion of discovery, *A Game at Chess* suggests that it is indeed vital to make political news available beyond the limits of King and Court.

In the end, however, Middleton's play could not escape the censor. It was suspected that it would be banned from stage even before it was in fact suppressed.[62] Far from damaging the play's popularity, this led to an increased demand, first for performances and then for its circulation in manuscript and print. As Gary Taylor argues, "Middleton turned the censorship of news against itself, creating a text designed to make news of censorship."[63] To put it differently, *A Game at Chess* functions as a news play which stages the tensions between state authority and the news business of its time. While Jonson's play criticizes public theatre as a space where "common follies" such as fashion and news – which the play conceptualizes as just another form of fashion[64] – prevent audiences from benefiting from the educational potential of the stage, Middleton's play conceptualizes public theatre as an adequate and indeed necessary medium for disseminating political news.

61 *Game* iii.i.100–103.

62 See Howard-Hill, *Middleton's "Vulgar Pasquin,"* p. 99.

63 Taylor, "A Game at Chesse: An Early Form," p. 1776.

64 Loewenstein argues that in *The Staple of News*, Jonson "imagines the news as an heir to fashion, plotting an arc in the play's first scenes as the object of satire shifts from modishness of person to modishness of data," see Loewenstein, "*The Staple of News*: Introduction," vol. 6, p. 7.