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Author(s): Caroline Bicks

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Staging the Jesuitess in *A Game at Chess*

CAROLINE BICKS

I

In 1622, a petition penned by the late William Harrison, Archpriest of the English Catholic mission, was presented to the Holy See. The document, "Information concerning the Jesuitresses," complained that "lately there has sprung forth out of our nation a certain society of women, by religious institution (as it pretends), which professes to be devoted to the conversion of England, no otherwise than as priests themselves."¹ Harrison's Jesuitess pretenders were the followers of Mary Ward, a Catholic Englishwoman who had founded a religious institute modeled on the Society of Jesus. In 1606, Ward, like many other daughters of England's recusant gentry, had left her parents in Yorkshire to join a convent of Saint Clares overseas in Saint-Omer. Five years later, claiming to have received a divine revelation, she left the order to found the first of over a dozen houses on the Continent devoted to teaching Catholic English girls abroad and pursuing missionary work for the troubled Catholic cause back home. Ward's followers took vows, but, in direct violation of Tridentine decree, they were not enclosed. In this way, they were better able to carry out the apostolic and educational work that was at the heart of Ward's vision: "to devote ourselves with all diligence and prudent zeal to promote or procure the salvation of our neighbor,

Caroline Bicks is an associate professor of English at Boston College. She is the author of *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare's England* (2003) and coeditor of "The History of British Women's Writing, 1500–1610" (forthcoming from Palgrave). This essay is part of a larger project entitled "Stages of Girlhood in Early Modern England."

by means of the education of girls, or by any other means that are congruous to the times.”²

What Ward saw as “congruous,” however, her many detractors viewed as heretical. Ward’s insistence on nonenclosure inspired the most common negative representations of her and her “galloping nuns,” and it was this breach of papal law that eventually led to the institute’s suppression in 1631.³ Scholars of early modern women and Catholicism have traced this aspect of Ward’s history in great depth, noting that Catholic men themselves were among her greatest opponents: Jesuits (wary of Ignatius’s prohibition of a female branch) disavowed any connection to the institute, and the secular clergy were rankled by Ward’s refusal to be governed by local Church authorities.⁴

But there was another much-less-studied piece to Ward’s enterprise that captured the imagination of her opponents—one that became a persistent target of their hostility and that is the focus of this essay: her training of English girls in theatrical performance and public speaking, both of which were central to the Jesuit curriculum for boys. The goal of this training, from Ward’s perspective, was to turn girls into eloquent and pious Christian women who then could go back to England to save Catholicism one household at a time—or, in the words of two of her followers, “to do God service in whatsoever state, religious or secular” they chose to return.⁵ To her critics, however, such public performances trained girls in the art of heretical deception and daring apostolic activity. Such was the fear expressed by Thomas Rant, agent of the English secular clergy in Rome, when he complained to the pope in 1624 that Ward and her followers “run about all over England and associate with men. They refuse to pray in choir or to follow conventual practices and, on the Continent, *they train their pupils for just such a daring way of life by the production of plays*. In doing so, they are a threat to the women of England and a scandal to catholics.”⁶ The charges concerning the preparation of these plays were serious enough to be recorded as one of the four major complaints against the institute that were brought before the newly formed *Congregatio pro Propaganda Fide* in Rome in June of that year.

Ward’s theater was meant to strengthen the flagging Christian world beyond her institute’s walls: in this sense, the actress and the apostle were one.⁷ To her English critics especially, however, this fact connected Ward to her Jesuit brethren who were notorious for their theatrical deceptions. Anti-Catholic treatises regularly attacked the “Theatre of their *Exorcising* plots” and blasted the

plays that Jesuits put on to incite audiences to conversion.⁸ The *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Jesu* itself outlines the pedagogical significance of theater within the Jesuit curriculum and readily acknowledges the connection between performance and religious zeal: “Young boys . . . and their parents become marvelously excited and inflamed, and also very much attached to our Society, when the boys are able to display on stage our labours, some results of their study, their acting ability, and a sample of their powers of memory.”⁹

This conjunction of religious conversion and theater becomes fraught especially when one replaces these young Jesuit boys with Ward’s English schoolgirls. How do the stakes change when virgins become the theatrical agents of these fiery conversions? The early modern female body, as Peter Stallybrass notably has argued, stood for the integrity of the patriarchal household and the state. Men anxiously guarded their daughters’ mouths and virginity and, by extension, their domestic and national thresholds.¹⁰ Through Ward’s dramatic productions, however, these portals, like her nonenclosed institute itself, became dangerously open: contained daughters transformed into daring actresses who not only ran around England associating with men but also participated in the seduction and corruption of English souls. Ward’s critics feared that when English girls learned how to perform incendiary theatricals, they threatened to bring home and homeland down with them in a popish ball of flames.

At the same time, these virgin bodies were imagined to become illegible through their stage training, able to move between the public and private spheres and to take on any number of roles in pursuit of Ward’s apostolic ends. Englishmen of all denominations feared that Ward’s members would make their way into their homes and lure their daughters away to join her mission. After “gathering to herself many young women,” Harrison writes, Ward takes them from their native English soil to her college overseas where she instructs each “in the Latin language, training them to hold exhortation publicly,” finally “preparing and fitting the more approved for the English Mission, which is especially the end of their Institute.”¹¹ Once back home, this group, much like a traveling theater troupe, “travels freely hither and thither, changes its ground and habit at will, accommodates itself to the manners and condition of seculars, [and] discharges the administration of others’ families.” In this sense, Ward’s Jesuitesses resembled their male counterparts who (it was feared) could transfer their deceptive theatrical skills easily to the domestic sphere and se-

duce young women away from their families. As Arthur F. Marotti notes, anti-Jesuitical writings emphasized the Jesuits' "skilled deceiving of the wider public through staged 'exorcisms'" as well as "their adoption of disguises" that could lure "poor women into debauchery."¹²

In short, when Ward lured England's virgin daughters overseas and educated them in public exhortation and performance, it was feared that she was training them in a particularly Jesuit kind of theatrical expertise—one that ultimately allowed them to insinuate themselves back into English households in the guise of God-fearing women. Once there, they could enflame a new group of girls, thus ensuring that the cycle of insinuation, seduction, and conversion would be carried on. In the eyes of her critics, Ward was not just teaching girls how to act like men (an aberration in its own right); she was teaching future Jesuitess apostles how to play innumerable roles in the larger incendiary theater of religious conversion back home.

Given Ward's notoriety in 1624 England, it is surprising that critics of Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess* have paid such scant attention to the character of Ignatius Loyola's "secular daughter / That plays the Black Queen's Pawn," the "Jesuitess" he crafted that same year.¹³ Although some scholars point to Ward as the probable historical woman behind the Black Queen's Pawn, they generally go no further in their exploration of this character than to equate her with the many other recusant women who appear in anti-Catholic texts as seduced pawns working for the Jesuit men who corrupted them.¹⁴ Some have argued that the Black Queen's Pawn is an amalgam of more than one woman, but Ward and her followers were the most notorious Jesuitesses living and working in London when he wrote the play.¹⁵ Furthermore, the three years leading up to 1624 were ones of tremendous growth for Ward's institute; rumors that it was on the verge of papal approval were circulating much to the dismay of English Jesuits and Protestants alike.¹⁶

When critics do attend to the Black Queen's Pawn's larger political significance, they often allegorize her as Spain.¹⁷ Of course, the play is full of anti-Spanish allegory (the Black Knight is the notorious Spanish ambassador Gondomar, and the play as a whole is a critique of the recently attempted match of Prince Charles and the Spanish infanta). However, it is curious that critics compare the Black Queen's Pawn to a foreign country—essentially detaching the Jesuitess from the controversial Englishwoman she seems to have been impersonating—when their talk turns to the

contemporary political events that the play stages. This critical trend is especially odd given that the Jesuitess evokes a historical woman who posed unique threats *as an Englishwoman training English girls* to the future of the Anglican Church in 1624.¹⁸

At the same time Rant was blasting Ward and her followers for teaching girls the daring ways of theater and conversion, Middleton was staging his Jesuitess as a woman who can “act treachery with an angel’s tongue” (III.i.206). She emerges as the play’s most unpredictable and effective stage director, as well as its most accomplished performer. Most important for my argument here, the Black Queen’s Pawn’s influence over the White Queen’s Pawn (a figure who allegorizes Devotion to the Anglican Church) is wielded consistently in the context of theatrical production; in provocative ways, the Jesuitess and her relationship to the virgin Pawn play out her Protestant detractors’ fears about Ward’s corruption, through the theatrical training of her young pupils, of Englishwomen, English homes, and ultimately the English Church. At the same time, the play stages the fears of Ward’s Catholic and especially Jesuit critics, who blasted Ward for corrupting and scandalizing the English Catholic mission. Although the Jesuitess appears to assist the Jesuit Black House in their plots to seduce the White Queen’s Pawn and to rape Devotion more broadly, she ultimately uses her in her own production, one that brings down her fellow Jesuit. The real danger she poses to the White Queen’s Pawn, then, is not that of sexual corruption but rather of instruction in the ways of the stage—an act that eventually conflates the virgin and the Jesuitess and threatens to turn this representative of the true Church into one of Ward’s own insinuating and independent performers.

In what follows, I arrive at a reading of Middleton’s Jesuitess by laying out the two ways in which Ward’s theatrical work was imagined to threaten the English nation and church: first, through the training of girls in the incendiary art of stagecraft; and second, through the deceptive theatrics that this training and the apostolic life more broadly instilled in England’s daughters—skills that showed them how to insinuate themselves back into English homes and corrupt them from within.

II

In one of many direct appeals she made to the pope for approval of her institute, Ward argued that in order to help “the sadly afflicted state of England,” she and her companions needed to

embrace a “mixed kind of life.”¹⁹ According to Ward, the mixed life would allow her and her followers “to embrace the religious state and at the same time to devote ourselves . . . to the performance of those works of Christian charity towards our neighbor, that cannot be undertaken in convents.” She proposed this lifestyle so that “by this means we may more easily instruct virgins and young girls from their earliest years in piety, Christian morals and the liberal arts, that they may afterwards . . . profitably embrace either the secular or the religious state.”²⁰ Ward conceived of her educational enterprise, one based in “the liberal arts,” as instrumental to the promotion of the institute’s “mixed life.” But, as A. C. F. Beales notes, those outside Ward’s community sensed a darker purpose: “For nuns living in community to be non-enclosed was a breach of the Tridentine decrees. For them to teach girls along the lines the Jesuits used for boys was also a breach of Trent . . . For them to encourage dramatic productions in their school was horrifying.”²¹

We have scant evidence about the nature of these allegedly horrifying performances put on at Ward’s schools, but critical consensus and contemporary reports suggest that they did happen.²² Mary Oliver argues that “[t]he acting of plays [in Ward’s schools], dramatized from scriptural or secular reading, was considered as important in the training of character as in cultural development.”²³ But to Ward’s detractors, the kind of character training going on via these school theatricals was entirely corrosive. Sometime between 24 December 1621 and the end of May 1622, a Benedictine priest, Robert Sherwood, presented a petition to the pope in which he complained that “[t]heir pupils, sent to them to be educated, publicly produce immoral plays (*publice et non satis verecunde*), so that later they may consort with seculars or preach in churches in this bold manner (*hoc modo audacius*).”²⁴ Here the stage is figured as a training ground for future private acts of seduction and public acts of conversion.

It was one thing for girls to perform for each other within the confines of convent walls and another thing entirely for them to perform for a wider audience. Elissa Weaver has uncovered a lively tradition of convent theater dating back to the fifteenth century in Italy, Spain, “and probably in all of Catholic Europe and its colonies.”²⁵ She suggests that the Jesuits in fact may have taken their idea for including theater in their curriculum from this rich female tradition. Although laymen may have attended these performances, Church authorities repeatedly stipulated that the plays only be staged for the women in the convent.²⁶

In England, there is evidence that nuns wrote and acted in liturgical dramas as early as the fourteenth century.²⁷ But the pressure to keep female performances out of the public eye dates back to at least the thirteenth. Eileen Power notes that there are “scattered references” in English records to a custom during Childermas festivities in which a “Girl Abbess or Abbess of Fools was elected from among the novices, and at the *Deposuit* she and her fellow novices, or the little schoolgirls, took the place of the Abbess and nuns.” She cites Archbishop John Peckham’s injunction in 1279 that this disguising of the girls be held in private: “The celebration of the Feast of the Innocents by children, which we do not approve, but rather suffer with disapproval, is on no account to be undertaken by those children . . . until after the end of the vespers of St. John the Evangelist’s Day; and the nuns are not to retire from the office, but having excluded from the choir all men and women.”²⁸

In post-Reformation England, of course, these religious female performances, like the nunneries that hosted them, had disappeared. When they emerge in literary texts, they appear as private diversions for the convent’s young inhabitants: Aphra Behn, for instance, describes a lovelorn novitiate Isabella who could neither sleep, eat, “nor exercise in those little Plays they made, and diverted themselves with, now and then”; and the virgins who live in Margaret Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure* put on their plays to please only each other.²⁹

But Ward meant for her pupils to take their theatrical training beyond convent walls. She made no secret of the fact that she was following consciously the curriculum that the Jesuits had put forward in their *Ratio Studiorum*—a document that emphasized the importance of teaching students the art of dramatic production and acting. Robert Miola has argued that “the purpose of playing in Jesuit schools” was to “inflame their students with zeal for virtue, a hatred of sin and a love of God” and so affect “conversion and transformation.”³⁰ Henry Schnitzler argues that these dramatic productions further proselytized by virtue of their resemblance to the Catholic Mass. By performing plays in Latin before a public audience, the Jesuits hoped to “create[] in their minds associations with that other institution where they listened to the same language, the Church.”³¹ The ultimate goal of these performances was “to propagate the faith, to deter the audience from sin, to fire them to conversion, atonement and ultimate recognition of the Catholic dogma.”³²

This incendiary theater of conversion was infamous in the eyes of England’s anti-Catholic, anti-Jesuit population: the Jesuits,

according to one 1607 English account of a performance in Lyons, make “a mockerie of God . . . holding his sacred truth in derision, suffering prophane wretches and Atheists, audaciouslie to make a May-game of that wherein eternal life and death consisteth, referring all to the Theaters of Jesuites.”³³ How much more disturbing was it for English Christians to imagine English virgins as the main players on these heretical and fiery stages?

III

Although Ward’s work with girls was based on the Jesuit educational model, it paradoxically defined her enterprise as lying outside the parameters of Ignatian rule. Ward had some supporters from within the Society of Jesus, but Jesuits officially were barred by Ignatius’s prohibition from supporting a female branch; most distanced themselves from her accordingly or actively sought to suppress her institute. Ward herself did not want to be taken under the wing of any established orders but rather imagined that her institute would answer directly to the pope.

By the time Harrison was appealing to the pope to stop Ward’s detrimental interference in the Catholic mission, Ward already had made numerous trips back home to oversee the thirty known Jesuitesses of her institute who were at work in London.³⁴ The women helped Catholic priests in their underground operations, prepared the poor to receive sacraments, assisted with conversions, and accepted would-be students and members before sending them overseas to join one of Ward’s houses. Ward makes reference to Spitalfields as being “our neighborhood” in 1611, which suggests that the women had established a house in London as early as this year.³⁵ Although they could not open a school in England for obvious reasons, they were able to go into private homes to instruct children. Like their Jesuit brothers, they had to go about their missionary activities disguised as everyday citizens, wearing none of the conventual clothing that might have given them away as members of a religious foundation.³⁶

Members of the institute themselves described their mission of conversion as a theatrical enterprise mandated as such by the underground nature of their work.³⁷ In a biography written by Ward’s followers soon after her death in 1645, we learn that “In England she went cloathed as became her birth for matter and manner . . . When it best suited with present occasions, she put on servants and meane womens cloathes; noe prison did she dreade to visit, or daunger to passé . . . Our dearest mother employed

herself & hers, sometimes disguised, sometimes in her owne Cloathes, using sometimes familiar conversation, other times authority amongst the common people & poore sort.”³⁸ These quick changes in habit and speech translated easily into accusations of elusive and heretical activities. In his petition, Harrison writes that “[t]hese Jesuitresses have a habit of frequently going about cities and provinces of the kingdom, insinuating themselves into houses of noble Catholics, changing their habit often . . . But anyone will easily see how dangerous it is, and occasionary of many scandals, that women should go about houses in this fashion, wander hither and thither at will, and according to the various fancies whereby they are led . . . now publicly, now privately, now in noble dress, now in poor, now in cities, now in provinces, now many together, now alone, among men, seculars, and not seldom of bad morals.”³⁹

In Harrison’s increasingly anxious description, Ward and her followers consciously decide what role to play, what costume to wear, when, for whom, and where: they are active and unpredictable agents fully in control of their “insinuating” performances. The response across the religious aisle to Ward’s wanderings was essentially the same. James Wadsworth, an anti-Catholic spy, reported of “the Jesuitrices, or wandring nuns” the following: “They walke abroad in the world, and preach the Gospell to their sex in *England* and elsewhere . . . Mistresse Ward is become mother Generall of no lesse than 200 *English* damsels, being most of them Ladies and Knights daughters, who live in their colledges at *St. Omers, Leige and Colen*, and from thence are for *England* to convert their Country.”⁴⁰ In both cases, Ward’s traveling antics and preaching performers do not save English souls but rather corrupt them—starting with the most precious and susceptible.

Within this larger set of concerns about England’s spiritual salvation, England’s chaste and noble damsels (the daughters of “Ladies and Knights”) represented what was at stake in allowing Ward to continue her deceptive work. As John Bennett, agent of the English clergy in Rome, wrote of the Jesuitesses in 1622, they have “impeached the opinion which was held of the modesty and shamefacedness of our Country-women. Finally, without clausure they must dissolve . . . that they delude no more young women, to the hazard of their ruin.”⁴¹

Ward’s opponents consistently connected her associations with English daughters to the Jesuits’ notorious abductions of young women and disruptions of faithful English households. In his *Workes of Darkenes Brought to Publike Light* (1645), for

instance, William Prynne describes how the Jesuits “seduced” more than two hundred English Gentlewomen “and got from them their portions, the least having a thousand pounds (for lesse they would not take) and when they came to *Flanders*, they were committed to the charge of Mistresse *Mary Ward*, who forced them to labour with their hands, and live in great misery with bread and water: And at last (like galloping nuns) made thirty of them to take their journey to *Rome* and *Naples*, and there to teach young children.”⁴² In this anti-Catholic polemic, Ward works with the seductive Jesuits to enslave and corrupt English gentlewomen and, eventually, the young English children whom they are forced to teach overseas.

The secular clergy also cast Ward as a dangerously independent operator.⁴³ Like the anti-Catholic detractors we have seen, even Jesuit sympathizers feared that she would come into their homes to lure their daughters away in order to serve her missionary designs. One aggrieved English parent complained in 1619 to a Jesuit Father that he was under great pressure to let his remaining daughter join Ward. He refused, however, because “these Virgins detained amongst them another female relation of mine, almost by force, and by urgent persuasions, so that I was obliged to use several artifices in order to get her back.”⁴⁴ The Englishman here must stoop to using the same deceptive “artifices” Ward’s followers employed in order to save his female relation from their alluring persuasions. More important for my argument here, he imagines that Ward’s deceptive “Virgins” are dangerously close to crossing his home’s threshold and seducing the symbol of its security: his own virgin daughter.

IV

Ward’s theatrical work with English virgins posed a dual threat to the English nation: it not only put precious virgin bodies on public display, opening them up to sexual and spiritual corruption, but also it taught English girls how to insinuate themselves into private homes, corrupting from within the sanctity of the Christian English household. This rubric opens up new possibilities for reading what consistently has been misread in Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*: the role of the “Jesuitess” Black Queen’s Pawn in the plot to rape the White Queen’s Pawn, the symbol of devotion to the English Church.

This plot commonly is read as an allegory for the attempted corruptions of the Anglican Church and of England’s future

monarch at the hands of the Spanish papists. Critics also have suggested that the Black Bishop's Pawn's attempts to violate the White Queen's Pawn are a direct reference to stories like those we have seen of Jesuit priests corrupting innocent Englishwomen living abroad.⁴⁵ These are entirely reasonable readings of the Black Bishop's Pawn's role in this play, a piece that reports directly to the Father General of the Jesuits himself; they fail, however, to explain the Jesuitess, who has an independent and opposing part to play in this central storyline about England's spiritual fate. She is not actually working for the Jesuits (a fact that she manages to hide through her various performances from all the characters in the play and—until she decides to reveal herself to them—from the play's audience members as well); the sexual corruption of the White Queen's Pawn is never her goal. From the start of the play, the taking of the White Queen's Pawn is stated as a top priority for the Black House, yet given the chance to do so, the Jesuitess foils it time and again. At the same time, the play makes it clear that she could succeed where her Jesuit brothers failed. Although the White Queen's Pawn's virginity ultimately is spared, the play presents the Jesuitess as the one piece who could have breached "her safe innocence" had she chosen to do so (II.i.41).

Yet when critics consider the Black Queen's Pawn, they tend to focus on her alliance with the Jesuits. T. H. Howard-Hill calls her a "quick-witted accomplice" to the Black Bishop's Pawn—even though the majority of her time on stage is spent duping and ruining him.⁴⁶ In this sense she is markedly distinct from earlier English depictions of Jesuitesses as unquestioning supporters of the Jesuit men they serve. In 1602, for instance, William Watson wrote that "whosoever should say . . . that a Jesuit could fal or erre, or misgovern himself or others, or do any thing amisse, you shall have a yong Jesuitesse ready to flie in his face, to cast the house out at the window where she stands."⁴⁷ Unlike this young Jesuit defender, Middleton's Jesuitess casts her own house out; like the visions of Ward that danced in her Catholic detractors' heads, the Black Queen's Pawn turns out to be a deceptive outlier corrupting the English Catholic mission she allegedly supports.

Clearly Middleton imagined the Jesuitess as a central player in his political drama: he places her on stage in the first scene following the induction and gives her the first word. This opening speech is unquestionably a performance of just the type that Ward's opponents most feared. She lures the innocent White Queen's Pawn into her snare, inflaming her with a mournful speech and crocodile tears shed for the latter's lost soul:

I ne'er see that face but my pity rises;
 When I behold so clear a masterpiece
 Of heaven's art, wrought out of dust and ashes,
 And at next thought to give her lost eternally,
 In being not ours but the daughter of heresy,
 My soul bleeds at mine eyes.

(I.i.1–6)

The performance, put on for this English “daughter,” succeeds with its audience: the White Queen’s Pawn is convinced that “truth speak[s]” through the Jesuitess’s put-on sorrow and, moved by the Black Queen’s Pawn’s apparent “charity,” she claims that “no virtue / Could win me sooner” (I.i.7, 15–6). This initial performance by the Jesuitess is central to sparking what will become the “flame” of conversion under the Black Bishop’s Pawn’s “sanctimonious breath” and “comely presentation” (I.i.31–2, 35): as the “virgin” English daughter is taken in by the Jesuitess, the latter observes how

A zealous primitive sparkle but now flew
 From your devoted eye,
 Able to blow up all the heresies
 That ever sat in council with your spirit.

(I.i.27–30)

It soon becomes clear, however, that the Jesuitess is not working in concert with the Jesuit. She has her own reasons for luring the virgin. In this sense, her performance is not an opening act for the Jesuits’ main show; rather, it serves the Jesuitess’s independent aim of using the White Queen’s Pawn to further her own vengeful plot. This fact is key to distinguishing Middleton’s Jesuitess from the recusant women who appear in many anti-Catholic texts from the period as malleable Jesuit recruits enlisted as passive props in their corrupt theatricals. John Gee, for example, whose *The Foot Out of the Snare* was one of Middleton’s sources, gives many examples of Englishwomen induced to perform in the “Theatre of their *Exorcising* plots.”⁴⁸ We hear how the Jesuits “caused” Grace Sawiebutts of Lancaster to accuse her own grandmother of witchcraft and how they used the unfortunate pregnancy of “a certaine *Catholick collapsed Lady*” to their advantage by having one of them put on her clothing and then claim that “shee was possessed of an evill spirit, which did make her body swell like a

woman with child” before staging an elaborate exorcism of this “*Shee knave Jesuite, or Hee-lubberly-Lady*.”⁴⁹

Middleton’s Jesuits, however, have no such control over their female pawns. As the seduction plot unfolds, in fact, it is the Jesuitess who consistently controls the actions and position of the Pawn whom she allegedly is assisting. When the Black Bishop’s Pawn attempts to rape the White Queen’s Pawn, she interrupts the action by providing offstage sound effects—“a noise within” (II.i.140). Once again, Middleton stages the Jesuitess’s power in terms of her superior theatrical skill and timing. So far she entirely controls the plot and pacing of the White Pawn’s seduction, a goal that is considered central to the Black House’s larger “rape of devotion” and world domination (II.i.21). Fearful that the escaped White Queen’s Pawn will reveal the Black House’s plot, the Black Bishop (head of the Jesuits) arranges a false alibi for his Pawn placing him thirty leagues outside London. It is the Jesuitess, however, who actually controls where he will go, directing his body into “a secret vault” to prevent his discovery (II.i.188).

When the White Queen’s Pawn brings her complaints to the attention of the White King, she is initially condemned by this alibi but is later vindicated when the Jesuitess comes forward to testify on her behalf. Her performance is so convincing that the Black Duke calls her a “Traitorous pawn,” but she quickly reverses their opinion when she claims she has saved the White Queen’s Pawn only to bring “a new trap / For her sure confusion” (III.i.235, 239–40). She deceives both the Black and White sides in this scene, acting the parts of angel and deceptive apostle with equal success. As she boasts in an aside, her plan is “to act treachery with an angel’s tongue,” a phrase that recalls Ward’s English virgins whose stage training prepared them to act in the larger inflaming theater of conversion (III.i.206).

As part of her performance, the Jesuitess claims that she will bring the Black Bishop’s Pawn—whom she has directed into hiding—“strangely in again” (III.i.207). Using the illusionary trappings of the theater, she shows the White Queen’s Pawn a magical glass and tells her that it reflects the future. The production is complete with music, props, and a costumed Black Bishop’s Pawn in rich attire who appears in the mirror as the virgin Pawn’s future husband (III.iii.51). As the Jesuitess “conjure[s]” and “invoke[s]” the “apparition,” she resembles Gee’s Jesuits who use the “Theatre of their *Exorcising* plots” to win over their converts (III.iii.28, 33, 11). She is in no way a pawn, a passive prop in this production; rather she directs the players and the action. The show is

so convincing that the White Queen's Pawn gives in to her desire and decides to marry the mysterious man.

Up until this point, the Black Bishop's Pawn does not suspect that he is merely a player in the Jesuitess's independent plotline. He follows the Jesuitess's advice and makes a verbal contract promising marriage since he cannot actually wed; in this way, he can bed his original prey. Instead, the Jesuitess orchestrates a dumb show in which she directs them into separate rooms and takes the White Queen's Pawn's place in the Jesuit's bed (IV.iii). Her deceptive theatrics here mimic the inflammatory theater of the Jesuits—only in this case it is the Jesuit himself who becomes its enflamed victim. Meanwhile, the White Queen's Pawn remains notably unenflamed, wondering only why her alleged groom never showed up.

The dumb show marks a critical change in the relationship between the White Queen's Pawn and the Jesuitess, one similar to the shift that Ward's enemies imagined occurred when she taught English girls how to lead daring lives by first producing and acting in plays; for by appearing together in the bed-trick dumb show, the two become interchangeable bedfellows. This explicitly theatrical exchange of the women's bodies—one angelic and the other treacherous—goes to the heart of Middleton's decision to give the Jesuitess such a key part in his most political drama. She is not interested in violating the White Queen's Pawn; for the Jesuitess, it is more productive to turn her into one of her own.⁵⁰

Like Ward's pupils, who eventually became actors in the theater of conversion, the White Queen's Pawn emerges from the Jesuitess's dumb show as much more than an exploited player. When she next encounters the Black Bishop's Pawn (dressed in his original garments), she rails against him for speaking "the language of unchasteness" in a religious habit (V.ii.17). As she continues in her attack, she begins to sound like a seasoned critic of the theater: "The world's a stage on which all parts are played," she tells him.

You'd count it strange to have a devil
Presented there not in a devil's shape
.....
You'd rail at that for an absurdity
No college e'er committed.

(V.ii.19–24)

This direct reference to Jesuit school theatricals suggests that she now knows something about these performances and how they work. More provocative still, as she continues her speech, she uses theatrical terms that underscore her position as an actor performing on stage with the Jesuit:

If you'll persist still in your devil's part,
 Present him as you should do, and let one
 That carries up the goodness of the play
 Come in that habit, and I'll speak with him;
 Then will the parts be fitted and the spectators
 Know which is which.

(V.ii.26–31)

She continues to foreground the stage on which she and the Jesuit are standing as she describes the Black Bishop's Pawn's plots against her:

Nay, those that you have seduced, if there be any
 In the assembly, when they see what manner
 You play your game with me, they cannot love you.

(V.ii.34–7)

The White Queen's Pawn is the first character (outside the induction) to draw attention to the play as a performance with audience members who are watching their every move. When they view him on stage with her, she asserts, the "assembly," some of whom may have been "seduced" previously by the Black Pawn's alluring games, will no longer be drawn in to any Jesuit deceptions. She has disarmed the power of his Jesuit theatricals and turned the stage into her own righteous platform.

At the same time, the line that originally divided the guileless White Queen's Pawn from the performing Jesuitess becomes virtually invisible in this scene. We are about to learn that the women have played the same role opposite the Jesuit—that the Jesuitess herself was seduced by the Black Bishop's Pawn "when I was a probationer at Brussels" (V.ii.91). As with the dumb show, this conflation of the women literally is staged—in this case, when they begin to speak for one another. Together, the women beat the Jesuit at his own devilish theatricals as he becomes increasingly confused about whom he has bedded and with whom he is performing:

BLACK BISHOP'S PAWN. Here's a strange game! Did not I lie
with you?

BLACK QUEEN'S PAWN. [Within] No!

BLACK BISHOP'S PAWN. What o'devil art thou?

WHITE QUEEN'S PAWN. I will not answer you, sir,
After thanksgiving.

BLACK BISHOP'S PAWN. Why, you made a promise to me
After the contract.

BLACK QUEEN'S PAWN. [Within] Yes.

BLACK BISHOP'S PAWN. A pox confound thee!
I speak not to thee.

(V.ii.80–5)

When the Jesuitess enters she finally tells the tale of her seduction at the Black Bishop's Pawn's hands. As she lists his wrongdoings, including the "transportation / Of ladies' daughters" (V.ii.97–8) and the stealing of their portions, she sounds like a typical mouthpiece of anti-Catholic propaganda. Her final accusation, though, identifies her more specifically as a woman with a history and makes her revenge through theatrical deception most fitting: she asks, "Whose niece was she you poisoned with child, twice, / Then gave her out possessed with a foul spirit / When 'twas indeed your bastard?" (V.ii.104–6). The story recalls the many tales of young seduced girls turned passive pawn to the Jesuits' theatrical deceptions. This Jesuitess, however, is no longer a prop; she has learned how to perform and direct, catching the Jesuits in their own snares. And she has no intention of removing herself from the stage. Her final words to the Black Bishop's Pawn, spoken from the bag into which the Black House has been thrown, are a defiant insistence on showing herself: "Down, viper of our order!" he commands. "Art thou showing / Thy impudent whorish front?" Her response is unequivocal: "Yes, monster-holiness" (V.iii.195–7).

Having duped the Black Bishop's Pawn and facilitated his capture, she and England's virgin daughter have arrived at identical ends: they have exposed the Jesuit's seductive games. Thanks to the part the White Queen's Pawn has played, audience members who may have been seduced by the Black Bishop's Pawn will not love him; similarly, thanks to the Jesuitess's deceptive theatricals, his attempted corruption of the White Queen's Pawn is aborted, and he is "taken in mine own toils" by the White House (V.ii.107). In allegorical terms, both acts translate into the defeat of Spanish popery in England.

This unraveling of the Black House's plot could be read as an anti-Jesuit fantasy: the Jesuitess really is working for the Protestant White House. But how safe, in the end, is the English Church? The White Queen's Pawn continues to call attention to herself as a woman on stage once the others have exited: she is the one to step forward and deliver the epilogue, a moment rarely assigned to female characters and one that always draws attention to the fact that this is a play. Audience members at the time would have witnessed this symbol of devotion to the Anglican Church herself stepping forward to "bow" to "this assembly" and address them at the end, like any common actor (Epi. 2, 4). As Swapan Chakravorty observes, "In the end, virtue gains her promised victory . . . but the dizzying shifts of black and white, play and earnest, cheat us of its moral comfort."⁵¹

Although the men of the Black House put on much more elaborate shows in Middleton's play, theirs are never as alluring or effective as the Jesuitess's. The extensive production put on for the impersonators of Charles and Buckingham, the White Knight and Duke, does not seduce its intended audience, despite its moving statues, Latin orations, singing, and music: "There's a taste / Of the old vessel still, the erroneous relish," notes the White Knight (V.i.34–5). Where the Jesuits fail, however, the Jesuitess threatens to succeed. The play suggests that, like the Church of England (or its future monarch Prince Charles), English virgins can fall prey to Jesuit seductions, but the greater threat lies in what happens once they have been delivered into a woman's hands: they, like Ward's pupils, can be schooled in the art of acting like angels while corrupting England's sacred institutions from within. The White Queen may have sent her Pawn out to perform the epilogue, but it was the Jesuitess who first taught her how to take the stage.

NOTES

¹ William Harrison, "A Copy of the Information concerning the Jesuitesses, made by the Very Rev. William Harrison, Archpriest of England, Lately Deceased, and Subscribed by His Assistants after His Death," in Mary Catherine Elizabeth Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward*, 2 vols. (London: Burns and Oates, 1882–85), 2:183–7n1, 183.

² Mary Ward, "Memorial of Mary Ward and the English Virgins to Paul V, 1616," in Chambers, 1:375–85n3, 377.

³ The derogatory name "galloping nun" appears in a number of sources. See, for instance, Sister Dorothea, "Sister Dorothea's Narrative," in *Mary Ward: Pilgrim and Mystic, 1585–1643*, by Margaret Mary Littlehales (London:

Burns and Oates, 1998), appendix 3, pp. 248–51, 251; and William Prynne, *Hidden Workes of Darkenes Brought to Publike Light* (London, 1645), p. 203; EEBO Wing P3973.

⁴ For an overview of the different religious factions working against Ward, see Laurence Lux-Sterritt, “An Analysis of the Controversy Caused by Mary Ward’s Institute in the 1620s,” *Recusant History* 25, 4 (October 2001): 636–47.

⁵ Mary Poyntz and Winifred Wigmore, *A Briefe Relation of the Holy Life and Happy Death of our Dearest Mother* (ca. 1650; 1726 copy in Bar Convent Archives), p. 9. I am grateful to Sister M. Gregory Kirkus, librarian at the Bar Convent in York, for sharing this and other materials in the Convent archives with me.

⁶ Henriette Peters, *Mary Ward: A World in Contemplation*, trans. Helen Butterworth (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1994), p. 389, emphasis mine.

⁷ As Michael Zampelli argues, “The *animus* of religious men toward the actress must be considered within a wider social context that also included a growing uneasiness with and hostility toward the more public activity of religious women intent on claiming their place in the apostolic mission of Roman Catholicism” (“The ‘Most Honest and Most Devoted of Women’: An Early Modern Defense of the Professional Actress,” *ThS* 42, 1 [May 2001]: 8–23, 9).

⁸ John Gee, *The Foot Out of the Snare with a Detection of Sundry Late Practices and Impostures of the Priests and Iesuites in England* (London, 1624), p. 57; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 11704. As Swapan Chakravorty argues, “The stigma of the theatre attached itself especially to the Jesuit, who in Jacobean England had eclipsed the Machiavellian as the archetype of the evil thespian” (*Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996], p. 170). This perception of Jesuit performances as heretical was further strengthened by the infamous equivocations of Henry Garnet, the Jesuit priest who was executed for his alleged involvement in the Gunpowder Plot against James I in 1605.

⁹ *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Jesu*, qtd. in Robert S. Miola, “Jesuit Drama in Early Modern England,” in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 71–86, p. 72.

¹⁰ Peter Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed,” in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 123–42.

¹¹ Harrison, p. 184.

¹² Arthur F. Marotti, “Alienating Catholics in Early Modern England: Recusant Women, Jesuits, and Ideological Fantasies,” in *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. Marotti (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 1–34, 18–9.

¹³ Middleton, *A Game at Chess* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1993), ed. T. H. Howard-Hill, induction, lines 46–7, l.i.41. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

¹⁴ See, for instance, F. G. Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, vol. 2 (London: Reeves and Turner, 1891), pp. 105–6; Marotti, p. 21;

and Gary Taylor, *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 25. Hill identifies the secular Jesuitess as a follower of Ward but not necessarily Ward herself in his edition of *A Game at Chess* (p. 75). Edgar C. Morris identifies her as the Archduchess Isabella in his "The Allegory in Middleton's *A Game at Chess*," *Englische Studien* 38 (1907): 39–52, 45.

¹⁵ Luisa da Carvajal, a Spanish noblewoman who came to England to do apostolic work from 1605 to 1614, was also well known in London, and some critics have suggested that she is the woman behind Middleton's Jesuitess. Ward, however, appears to have been the more well-known Jesuitess, based on evidence that da Carvajal was mistaken by London authorities and everyday citizens for Ward. In a letter describing da Carvajal's arrest with a companion in 1613, Ward writes, "thus they were conducted a long distance through the public streets, the people thronging round calling out, 'English nuns, English nuns!'" (Chambers, 1:330). Ward goes on to describe how the accusations against the women described activities in which Ward and her followers—and not da Carvajal—were involved: they claimed that "she sought out young girls in England, and sent them over to the nuns at St. Omer, from whence they came back afterwards and carried on their nuns' work in England" (1:331). Chambers asserts that the Protestant archbishop indeed had confused da Carvajal with Ward. She adds that "the account tallies with that given in Dona Luisa's *Life* by her Spanish biographer Luis Munoz" (1:331). Marotti specifies other recusant women who were well known for harboring Jesuits in London between 1601 and 1608, but Ward and da Carvajal would have eclipsed them by 1624 (p. 9). Middleton's *Black Knight* describes where some of the Englishwomen working for the Jesuit cause live: Whitefriars, Bloomsbury, and "the nunnery in Drury Lane" (II.i.201–4). This last reference may be to Ward's English house: the women lived in Hungerford House in the Strand in 1619. After this, they moved to Knightsbridge (Littlehales, pp. 84–5).

¹⁶ Peters, pp. 353–4.

¹⁷ Jane Sherman, for instance, reads her as representing the "two equally firm, but quite self-contradictory opinions in England about the Spanish attitude to the match" between Prince Charles and the Spanish infanta—that she was stringing England along and that they were plotting it "for seven years as the main means of achieving her nefarious political designs" ("The Pawns' Allegory in Middleton's *A Game at Chess*," *RES* 29, 2 [May 1978]: 147–59, 158). Marotti provides the most extended reading of the Jesuitess, noting that the play "exploits the popular beliefs about the relationship of Jesuits and women," but he does not discuss the ways in which the Black Queen's Pawn performs politically subversive acts independent of the Black House; Marotti focuses instead on how the Jesuitess "assists in the evil business" of the Black Bishop's Pawn (p. 21). Other critics depoliticize the Jesuitess by reading her as an emotional, self-destructive heroine akin to Beatrice-Joanna from *The Changeling* or Livia from *Women Beware Women*—"a scheming peon who dreams of exerting power" but only in the personal realm, or a reflection of Middleton's fascination with "scenes of manipulative female-female eroticism" (Miroslawa Ziaja-Buchholtz, "A Female Peon and the State of War in Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess*," *SAP* 34 [1999]: 369–79, 376; Douglas Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Question of Culture* [New

York: Macmillan, 2003], p. 139). Although Ziaja-Buchholtz argues that the White Queen's Pawn represents the "possibility of female lower-class discontent with male-dominated politics and religion," she gives no such political weight to the Black Queen's Pawn (p. 379).

¹⁸ Alison Findlay reads *Measure for Measure*'s Isabella alongside Ward and so connects the play to a wider, sociopolitically engaged movement of women in the Counter-Reformation. She argues that both women's "refusal to be positioned easily by men . . . makes them attractive to feminists" (*A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* [Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999], p. 34). Richard Wilson similarly uses Ward in his analysis of *Measure for Measure* when he argues that "the play seems to authorise the 'mixed kind of life' and social activism espoused by Ward in the lay Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary she later founded" (*Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion, and Resistance* [Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004], p. 250). The play predates Ward's work, of course.

¹⁹ Ward, 1:375, 376. Lowell Gallagher aptly describes this mixed life as "quasi-theatrical" ("Mary Ward's 'Jesuitresses' and the Construction of a Typological Community," in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999], pp. 199–217, 204).

²⁰ Ward, 1:376.

²¹ A. C. F. Beales, *Education Under Penalty: English Catholic Education from the Reformation to the Fall of James II, 1547–1689* (London: Athlone Press, 1963), p. 203.

²² See, for example, Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *Redefining Female Religious Life: French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-Century Catholicism* (Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2005), p. 92; Marie B. Rowlands, "Recusant Women, 1560–1640," in *Women in English Society, 1500–1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 149–80, 170; Sister Marion Norman, "A Woman for All Seasons: Mary Ward (1585–1645), Renaissance Pioneer of Women's Education," *Paedagogica Historica* 23 (1983): 125–43, 135; and Rosemary A. DeJulio, "Women's Ways of Knowing and Learning: The Response of Mary Ward and Madeleine Sophie Barat to the *Ratio Studiorum*," in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 107–26, esp. 117.

²³ Mary Oliver, "Education in Mary Ward's Schools," in *Mary Ward, 1585–1645*, Appendix 2 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959), p. 227.

²⁴ Qtd. in Peters, p. 342. In 1628, the Archbishop of Vienna complained to Rome that the institute had opened a school there without his knowledge. A month later he further complained that they had acted a comedy in the school. See Peter Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees on the Continent, 1558–1795* (London: Longmans, Green, 1914), p. 192; and Leo Hicks, "Mary Ward's Great Enterprise" (Part 4), *The Month* 2 (September 1928): 231–8, 232.

²⁵ Elissa Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 2–4, 2.

²⁶ Weaver, p. 52.

²⁷ Nancy Cotton notes, "The first recorded woman playwright in England was Katherine of Sutton, abbess of Barking nunnery in the fourteenth century," who wrote liturgical dramas for her religious community (*Women*

Playwrights in England, c. 1363–1750 [Lewisburg PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1980], p. 27).

²⁸ Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1922), p. 312.

²⁹ Aphra Behn, *The History of the Nun: Or, the Fair Vow-Breaker* (London, 1689), p. 33; EEBO Wing B1737. In Margaret Cavendish's play, Lady Happy retreats to a convent of pleasure with twenty of her single lady friends. They perform a number of plays to please each other, "and will admit none of the Masculine Sex, not so much as to a Grate" (*The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*, ed. Anne Shaver [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999], p. 223).

³⁰ Miola, p. 72.

³¹ Henry Schnitzler, "The School Theatre of the Jesuits," *TA* (1943): 46–58, 49.

³² Schnitzler, p. 51.

³³ *The Jesuites Comedie Acted at Lyons in France* (London, 1607), [A4r]; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 14531.

³⁴ Littlehales, p. 129.

³⁵ See Peters, p. 159.

³⁶ For an overview of this early history of the institute, see Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 28–34.

³⁷ Miola argues that the Jesuits' theatrical training was in fact part of this larger survival tactic: "working in dangerous places such as England, Jesuit missionaries practiced impersonation to survive . . . the Jesuit way of proceeding necessarily required exercise of the theatrical imagination" (p. 73).

³⁸ Poyntz and Wigmore, 14r–15v, 19v–20r.

³⁹ Harrison, p. 185. David Wallace reads Ward as an actor in her own life as it was portrayed in her writings, those of her followers, and in the *Painted Life*, a seventeenth-century series of fifty paintings dramatizing Ward's history. Wallace argues that these portrayals intersect with the genres of country house drama, Elizabethan comedy, and hagiographic narrative ("Periodizing Women: Mary Ward [1585–1645] and the Premodern Canon," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36, 2 [Spring 2006]: 397–453, esp. pp. 414–24).

⁴⁰ James Wadsworth, *The English Spanish Pilgrime. Or, a New Discoverie of Spanish Popery, and Jesuiticall Stratagems* (London, 1629), pp. 30–1. Folger copy HH212/9.

⁴¹ Letter of John Bennett, 23 May 1622, Bar Convent Archives, 1/1 30–1.

⁴² Prynne, *Workes of Darkenes*, p. 203. Arthur Wilson later corroborated Prynne's story in his *History of Great Britain Being the Life and Reign of King James the First, Relating to What Passed from His First Access to the Crown, till His Death* (London, 1653), p. 152; EEBO Wing W2888.

⁴³ Guilday notes that the secular clergy resented the influence of Jesuits over the education of boys and saw "Mary Ward's attempts to duplicate this educational system for girls . . . [as] the secret work of the Fathers, and from the beginning the epithet 'Jesuitesses' was flung at her nuns as a reproach" (p. 176).

⁴⁴ Chambers, 1:445.

⁴⁵ Critics commonly cite a passage from *The Anatomy of the English Nunnery at Lisbon in Portugall* that describes “Henry Flood, a Jesuit, who is the chiefe agent for the transporting of Nunnes, both to Bruxels, Grueling, Lisbon, or any other place” ([Henry Robinson], [London: 1622], p. 8; EEBO STC [2d edn.]).

⁴⁶ Howard-Hill, introduction to *A Game at Chess*, by Middleton, pp. 1–59, 45.

⁴⁷ William Watson, *A Decacordon of Ten Quodlibeticall Questions concerning Religion and State* (London, 1602), p. 44; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 25123.

⁴⁸ Gee, pp. 57–8, 57.

⁴⁹ Gee, pp. 67, 69.

⁵⁰ Gary Taylor is one of the few critics to pay attention to this relationship between the queens’ pawns, which he defines as one of “imitation and rivalry,” a dynamic that “sustains the entire pawn plot” (p. 239). While imitation is clearly at work in this scene, rivalry most certainly is not. At no point does the White Queen’s Pawn wish to have something that the Jesuitess possesses. Taylor’s reading may be part of a larger critical tendency to read women’s relationships as apolitical and narcissistic.

⁵¹ Chakravorty, p. 173.