

“Making Time their king”: The Christmas Culture and Politics of the Early Modern Inns of Court in Thomas Middleton’s *Masque of Heroes*

Bomin Kim

New York University

Probably no other demographic is more frequently mentioned in the history of early modern English drama, besides the monarch and the people who created and performed the dramatic works, than the Inns of Court men. They were creators and performers of plays; they frequented the theaters (especially the indoor playhouses within the liberties [Gurr 77]) as audience and routinely hired playing companies to perform in their main halls; singly and collectively they were often dedicatees of playwrights and poets; and, most relevant to my present topic, they were also creators, connoisseurs, sponsors and performers of masques. In the scholarship of early modern literature, however, the masques produced or performed by Inns of Court men are under-represented, most studies preoccupied with specimens of the genre produced in the context of the royal court with issues of high politics and religion as their subject matters.

In the spirit of what Patricia Fumerton has usefully, if schematically, called “a new new historicism” which is “not so much ‘political’ as ‘social’ historicism” (4), this article participates in the revisionary trend in scholarship to bring due attention to the “the complexity and multifariousness of masque” (Laskowski 12) with a case study on Thomas Middleton’s *Masque of Heroes*, performed at the Inner Temple during the 1618/9 Christmas season.¹

Masque of Heroes has been recipient of only a limited amount of critical attention from scholars, most of them stopping short at merely introducing the masque in a summary fashion. With varying degrees of historical contextualization and textual analysis, the masque has been represented as engaging in such thematic preoccupations as ideological mythologization of the legal profession, propagandizing for militant international Protestantism in anticipation of the Bohemian crisis, and entertaining but essentially “slight” showcasing of the author’s craft.² For my present purpose, which is to interpret the masque in terms of Christmas keeping at the Inns of Court illuminated in a sociological and anthropological light, the most relevant observation is A. Wigfall Green’s that the masque’s uniqueness lies in the fact that “it deals with the entertainments and studies of the gentlemen of the Inner Temple” (122). Green, however, does not set up or follow up on the insight with any historical contextualization or textual analysis. What were the “entertainments and studies” like at the Inner Temple that the playwright took them up as the subject matter of a Christmas masque? This article present a view of the culture and politics of the early modern Inns of Court, and the Inner Temple in particular, in which Christmas was a season for negotiations between work and play, old

¹ For instances of scholarly interest in “non-Jonsonian” masques and revisionary methodologies, see Wright; Levin; Laskowski; Ravelhofer; Shohet.

² Respectively, Raffield 372; Knowles’s Introduction to *Masque of Heroes* 1322-24; Bald 255.

and young, and base and gentle. The following discussion of *Masque of Heroes* then attempts to ground the "invention" of the masque, both the folkloric, earthbound and plebeian antimasque and the heroic, superlunary masque proper, in the specific time-space of the early modern Inns of Court in general and the Inner Temple in particular.³

* * *

Inns of Court were first and foremost places for the collegiate life of legal professionals at the upper echelons of the common law jurisdictions called "barristers."⁴ They also acquired the reputation of being, in George Buck's memorable phrase, "the third university of England" offering what would later be called "liberal education." If there seems to a tension between the two discrete, if not incompatible, functions, that was how things actually were. Indeed, the culture of the Inns of Court and culture at the Inns of Court revolved around a creative tension between those institutional identities and Christmas was the season when negotiation between the two came to prominence.

Each Inn of Court was governed through a hierarchy with three tiers. At the bottom were students, or "inner barristers" (so called either because their practice of the common law was limited to the premises of their respective houses or because they sat on the inner seats of the pew, or "the

³ I use "invention" in the sense defined by D. J. Gordon as "the most inclusive term" for the narrative and its theme (156). Gordon also offers convenient clarifications of related masque terms like "device" and "argument".

⁴ For contemporary accounts of Inns of Court, see Dudgale 144-321, and Edward Waterhous's commentaries on Fortescue which also include Henry VIII's commissioners' report on the Inns of Court (525-46). W. Green's work and the introductions to the published records of Inns of Court, although dated, are all useful sources of information. For more recent introductions, see Finkelppearl 3-80 and Prest's book-length study. The published records of Inns of Court used for the present article are: *A Calendar of the Inner Temple Records* (henceforth *IT*); *Minutes of Parliament of the Middle Temple* (*MT*); *The Pension Book of Gray's Inn* (*GI*); *The Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn: the Black Books* (*LI*).

bar,” as they took part in pedagogic exercises). After certain years of academic exercises and keeping commons—collective meals taken in the main hall where the members were seated at tables arranged according to the principle of rank and seniority—they were eligible for a “call” to the bar, which made them full-fledged barristers, or “utter” or “outer” barristers—more frequently, though, they were simply called “barristers.” After several years of academic duties and keeping commons, barristers were eligible to be called upon to deliver readings (i.e. lectures) during the “grand vacations” of Lent and August. The latest reader then joined the governing body of the Inn, the bench, as one of its junior, or *puisne*, members. It was from among these benchers (or readers) that the monarch elected serjeants as new additions to the highest tier of the common law jurisdiction (the “order of the coif”), who upon election left their respective Inns and joined their professional equals at the Serjeants’ Inns.

There was one important demographic that was practically outside the pedagogic structure of the Inns, for they were also host to a large number of the male offspring of gentry families who, as the Gray’s Inn bencher John Finch put it, had “com hither to honor (i.e. ‘confer honour or dignity upon’ [*OED* 3a]) it” (qtd. in Prest 40) rather than for a career prospect in law. It is quite likely that such students (if the word can be applicable to these members of the Inns at all) easily outnumbered their professionally committed counterparts in the junior constituency.⁵ Most of the documents introducing the Inns of Court, written invariably in eulogizing vein, were quite explicit about the fact, using it to propagate positive images of the Inns of Court, the common law and its practitioners they were advocating.⁶

⁵ An indirect way to approximate the proportion between amateur and professional students is to compare the records of admissions with those of calls. According to Prest’s calculations, the ratios of the entrants to the barristers called to the bar between 1590 and 1639 ranged from 3.7 to 1 at Lincoln’s Inn, 4.7 to 1 and 4.8 to 1 at the Inner and Middle Temples, to 10.9 to 1 at Gray’s Inn (52).

⁶ The earliest of such writings, Fortescue’s *De Laudibus* (c. 1468-1471), describes how

However, the houses of the law had hardly anything to offer to this amateur demographic in the way of formal education of the law. Among them, formation of social networks and acquisition of accomplishments befitting the social status seem to have been the primary concerns (Prest 141-3; Charlton 37). In this respect, the Inns were ideally suited to benefit from "the third universitie of England," by which George Buck actually meant the city of London itself with its various cultural and educational institutions (including the Inns of Court) where one could acquire "Arts and Sciences proper and fit for ingenuous and liberall persons" (964). Supported by family fortune, secure in life prospect, and free from academic obligations, amateur residents at the Inns were far better situated to exploit the educational offerings of "the third universitie" – and many other things the metropolis had to offer as well. It may well be that this group of young men were the implicit model of Buck's "ingenuous and liberall persons." It may be no coincidence that Master of the Revels of King James who forged the idea of "the third universitie" acknowledged himself to have been "a fellow, and Student (or to confesse a truth) a trewand" at the Middle Temple (973).

Whatever their position, seniority and life prospect, all Inns of Court men were expected to excel at "revel." While the word "revel" usually did and does denote festivals or festivities, Inns of Court men used the word with an idiosyncrasy and precision unique to themselves. At the core of the word's signification was collective dancing in the hall accompanied by

"knights, barons, and the greatest nobility of the kingdom, often place their children in those Inns of Court; not so much to make the laws their study, much less to live by the profession, having large patrimonies of their own, but to form their manners and to preserve them from the contagion of vice (Fortescue 434). A seventeenth century commentator on Fortescue thought education at the Inns offered a far superior and safer alternative to what by then had become the finishing touch to the education of the gentleman, the grand tour, making them "towardly to all purposes of warr and peace, counsel and conduct" (Waterhous 536-37).

instrumental music and singing.⁷ Relatedly, in the masque context, the “revel” meant opening up the hall floor to the general audience, when each masquer “took out” an audience member of the opposite sex for a series of dances “distinct from ‘set’ dances in which only the special performers took part and everyone else watched” (Cunningham 18). Inns of Court culture practiced two types of revels on a regular, institutional basis. A “solemn revel” was a round of old dance measures trodden on “grand days” (which always included Candlemas [February 2] and All Hallows [November 1]) led by the masters of the revels, selected from among more senior members, and performed by gentlemen at and under the bar to the accompaniment of songs by utter barristers. Performed mostly by junior members, the solemn revel was for the delectation of those higher up in social and pedagogic hierarchies such as judges, serjeants, benchers, and visiting courtiers. The floor was then taken over by “Post Revells performed by the better sorte of the younger gentlemen of the Society with galliards corantos and other dances,” dances that were of more modern origins (Cunningham 10). Use of “revels” in the general sense of festivities was not completely lacking in Inns of Court culture, but it was quite rare.⁸ In this regard, George Buck’s discussion of the “Art of Reuels” deserves mention. The art of revels, he claimed, “requireth knowledge in grammar, Rhetorike, Logicke, Philosophie, Historie, Musick, Mathematikes, & in other

⁷ By “revels,” or *jocos*, Fortescue meant “singing, and all kinds of music, dancing and such other accomplishments and diversions ... as are suitable to their quality, and such as are usually practised at court” (434). Dugdale mentions how the tedium of law study was alleviated by “Dancings for their recreation and delight, commonly called Revells” (245). In a celebrated Shakespearean example, such confusion erupted due to an eager crowd at Gray’s Inn on December 27, 1594, that those responsible for organizing Christmas entertainment thought it good “not to offer anything of account, saving dancing and revelling with gentlewomen; and after such sports a Comedy of Errors” (*Gesta grayorum* [henceforth *Gesta*], 22).

⁸ *Gesta* has only one instance of this usage and even here the connection with the genre of the masque is pretty clear. See *Gesta* 30.

Arts" (988). The catch is, he was discussing the art as "a Corollary" to his discourse on such topics as "Hippice, or the art of Horsemanship," "the Art gladiatorie, or Science of Defence," "Ars telorum, or Artellerie, and of Polemica or art Military, and of Pyrotechnie, and ... the art of Swimming," "Orchestice, or the Art of Dancing," "Graphice, or Art of Paynting, and of Pourtraiture, and of Stayning and Cosmetica" (984-86). In other words, "revels" in Buck's sense were recreations that required intellectual and technical mastery of arts, which gave their participants an opportunity to exercise and manifest what Bourdieu calls "cultural capital" that existed in "the embodied state" (48-50)—skills and aptitudes that the sons of the governing elites inherited and cultivated as markers of their status. The revel was an exercise in aristocratic *sprezzatura*.

Being a reveler was important to the Inns of Court man because it was a badge of his class identity and because gentility, in turn, was part of his professional ideology—that is, if he was seriously committed to the law. For those on the upper echelons of the legal profession as the barristers as a class were, professing gentility was not simply a matter of vanity but an essential component of their defense mechanism in an age notorious for litigiousness whose ills were often blamed on the lawyers' greed (Prest 22; Raffield 370). Gentility was a crucial differentia that set good lawyers from bad since "mean spirits doe embase the honour of the Lawes by serving the ignoble ends of those, who being great would be cruel and disorderly against the counsel and enaction of the Laws: which . . . men of good families may be presumed not to connive at or approve, but to oppose and reject" (Waterhous 529).⁹ As Prest reminds us, part of the motivation for Inns of Court men's celebrated pursuit and patronage of liberal arts, and

⁹ These sentiments were enshrined most clearly in the admissions policies of the Inns barring the entrance of "common" attorneys and solicitors. For example, see the Inner Temple policy statements (*IT I* 191) and the 1614 orders issued by the king's judges to the Inns of Court governors (*GI* 213).

even libertinism, was this urgent need for them to distinguish themselves from the stereotyped figure of the case-mongering, money-grabbing lawyer (41).

The cultural distinction between the good lawyer and the bad did not just work to tell the barrister class from the "common" attorneys and solicitors; rather, the opposition could be reproduced within Inns of Court junior constituencies. An informative example is Francis Beaumont's "The Grammer Lecture," the dramatist's contribution to Inner Temple Christmas festivities sometime between 1600 and 1605 (Eccles 403), which concentrates all the anti-lawyer topoi of contemporary culture within the figure of the "plodder," a professional student who single-mindedly pursues professional success by currying favor with the benchers and exploiting legal quarks to rip off his father's tenants and local tradespeople. On the opposite side stood the "reveler" whose only interest is in perfecting his dancing skills, getting fine clothes to shine in at revels and polishing his lines for his lady. "The Grammer Lecture" thus offers an imaginary view of junior culture at the Inns of Court that polarized into a thoughtless and reckless pursuit of libertinism channeled through the medium of "revels," and a calculated and calculating pursuit of career advancement of the professional student, with a clear preference of the former as the normative state of being for any self-respecting Inns of Court man to aspire to.

Crucial to Beaumont's libertine gentrification of the Inns of Court is the fact that the bifurcating line that "The Grammer Lecture" draws between plodding and reveling, while temptingly parallel to that between the non-professional sojourners and the professional students, does not quite align with it; Beaumont, son of a justice of the Common Pleas, was even ready to contemplate the possibility of the money-squandering, dance-loving, reveling philanderer gracefully aging into the master of the revels, an office almost invariably reserved for barristers of substantial standing if not outright benchers. The scapegoat that the official discourse

about the English justice system finds for the failure of the law in the menial, "base" servants of the law "The Grammer Lecture" locates in the plodder. Reveling is what separates a gentlemanly Inns of Court man, whether amateur or professional, as just dispenser of justice *in potentia* from the anti-lawyer stereotype embodied in an embryonic form in the plodder. By illuminating the cultural cachet of being reputed a reveler, Beaumont's mock lecture also paradoxically reveals how the real-life plodder must have been especially motivated to fashion himself into a reveler. And, for actual revelers and plodders alike, there was a season specifically reserved for the purpose: Christmastide.

Among the better-known of Christmas festivities at the Inns of Court (and at the universities as well) is the "Christmas Prince" game (or "sports" as *Gesta* calls it): an extended game of "the lord of misrule," which was played at royal and aristocratic households, universities, and some parishes in parody of governance as usual. (Hutton 107-109). Inns of Court Christmas sports differed from all others in that "the fiction lasted for so long and was agreed to by so many" (Finkelpearl 41) including the monarch, lord mayor of London, and courtiers placed in the highest echelons of power. These games have received increasing scholarly attention as an important creative matrix for early modern literature in general and drama in particular.¹⁰ These Inns of Court sports do merit an extended discussion for their aesthetic content and for the insights they can offer into the young Inns of Court men's frame of mind, which however I can ill afford in the present paper. There is another, more relevant reason why I pay only marginal attention to full-blown Christmas sports: as far as the Elizabethan and Stuart periods are concerned, Christmas prince games were unusual occurrences and the contemporary participants in the games were fully aware how far and few between the cultural events they were

¹⁰ For instance, see Finkelpearl 45-61; Roth; Arlidge.

taking part in came.¹¹ This fact no doubt made the Christmas prince games valued cultural treats at the time but reduces their value as specimens of *ordinary* celebration of Christmas at the Inns. It is this latter aspect of Christmas keeping at the Inns my paper primarily focuses on.

The material basis of Christmas keeping at the Inns of Court was Christmas commons. Ordinary commons was dissolved on “the Saturday after dinner preceding St. Thomas’ even [i.e. December 20] and resumed on “the Saturday next ensuing the feast of the Epiphany” (*IT* II 253). During the hiatus Christmas keepers elected Christmas officers from among their own ranks to administer commons and supervise other business. Ordinary in-house officers and servants would continue their service in the employ of the Christmas keepers, and those out of favor with the temporary masters were frequently banished from the company, and thus denied the right to keep “the box” at the gaming tables which accounted for an important portion of their income during the period. “The box” seems to have been originally intended as an instrument for financing other recreational activities but have increasingly become a chief Christmas pastime in and of itself. Beaumont’s Christmas lecturer observes that “musick, Revells, shewes...have hitherto declyned and exceeding base [whereas]...Box, dice, cards, and tower [i.e. stocks for punishment]...have bene vndeclyned and in exceeding practice” (*Eccles* 411). Judging from the expense entries on music in records of Inner Temple Christmas commons, however, musicians were a daily presence in the Inner Temple hall (and probably at other Inns as well) throughout the time available for commons.¹² Given the ubiquity of

¹¹ *Gesta* 1; *Le Prince d'Amour* 78.

¹² A quick example should suffice for demonstration. During the fiscal year of 1618/9, the Inner Temple bench hired musicians on three separate occasions (All Hallows, November 5, and Candlemas) and each time they were paid 13s 4d, the combined yearly expense amounting to two pounds. In contrast, Christmas commoners paid for music at a much more substantial sums at the rate of 9l 8s 8d a week (*Inns of Court* 203-204). This level of expenditure is completely typical of the years for which REED offers relevant entries.

music it is reasonable to assume that dancing was also a fairly common occurrence. Christmas masques like the two "Inner Temple masques" – William Browne's 1614/5 *Ulysses and Circe* and Middleton's 1618/9 *Masque of Heroes* – might well have been natural developments from this milieu; legitimate and honorable occasions for junior constituents to organize and enjoy "revels" after their hearts.

In the beginning, Christmas commons seems to have been an occasion all constituencies were obligated to participate in, but at some point the benchers seem to have gradually withdrawn their presence from it. So began the process of *de facto* privatization and de-officialization of Christmas commons which had become status quo by the Jacobean period. The seniors' withdrawal from Christmas, however, proceeded at uneven paces and in varying manners in each Inn reflecting each bench's received understanding of Christmas, and its and the "gentlemen's" rights and duties therein, and these would prove key stakes in Christmas politics of the Inns. With the gradual withdrawal of the bench, Christmas keeping increasingly became a young men's game and many in the junior constituencies of the Inns of Court came to regard it as part of their due predicated on "ancient custom, which we conceive to be a law," as a group of Inner Templars explained to Privy Council in 1638/9 (*IT II* 304). Issues such as who had the ultimate say in deciding whether to keep Christmas or not, for how long, or how, were left uncodified most of the time as they should be under a regime of custom of which Christmas keeping was a part. This state of affairs led to one of the most spectacular scenes of junior insurrection at the Inns at the Middle Temple in 1630/1.

On November 26, the bench decreed that "No commons shall be held in the House this Christmas, in consequence of the danger of infection from the resort of all sorts of people to the House, in respect of play [i.e. gambling] there, as lately it has been used, *contrary to the ancient course*" (*MT II* 770; italics added). The phrasing of the order suggested that it was

by no means a public health notice but a thinly-veiled condemnation of the Christmas culture of the young centered on “play”. The reaction of the young was little short of mutiny and they responded to the bench’s claim to be enforcing “the ancient course” by putting into practice their own conception of custom. On the day the commons was to break (December 11), “Divers young gentlemen of the House then in commons opposed the order for breaking up commons . . . on pretence of their *liberties* (as they termed it) being infringed” (MT II 771; italics added) and Christmas commons was kept from the day led by a group of senior non-professional students, who took their customary “liberties” by holding parliament sessions of their own, fining the in-house steward with 40 shillings for refusing to serve them, and imprisoning him at their “Tower.” With the return of the benchers, three ring leaders were fined with a further warning that failure to submit to the bench would result in their expulsion. At supper—the Middle Temple parliament records do not specify which day—“most of the young gentlemen then in commons came up together . . . to the Bencher’s table, and demanded a present repeal of the said order.” Having retreated to their own tables for the duration of supper, they again attempted to parley with the benchers, “telling the Bench they had given them time to consider, and with many insolent speeches peremptorily pressed to have the order repealed.” Failing to grant the demand, the benchers were showered in their retreat from the board by pots thrown at them by the students which scored several hits on random benchers (773-34). The bench did suppress the mutiny by enlisting the help of Lord Chief Justice and other justices; the elder two of the ring leaders were thrown in jail; major players were all fined with five pounds; and, in a ceremonial gesture of capitulation, the mutineers were forced to damn their own orders issued at Christmas and burn their parliament book.

What the physical acts of violence and the discursive exchange that accompanied them demonstrates is the extent Christmas keeping had

become a specifically junior culture, even to the extent of acquiring the force of custom. Interestingly, all of the three ring leaders were non-professional students and were also heirs apparent to their fathers (with the possible exception of one), who were all knights and all Middle Temple alumni to boot.¹³ These family backgrounds and their several years' standing at the Temple suggest the three young gentlemen were well aware of what kind of argument they were making when they based their rights to hold Christmas commons on "liberties" or, as *OED* defines it, "privilege[s], immunit[ies], or right[s] enjoyed by prescription or grant" (II.6.a). As the bench had condemned Christmas commons on grounds of custom, so was it answered by an argument from custom. And it seems clear from the Middle Temple bench's subsequent codification about Christmas that the students did win that particular polemic exchange although defeated on every other front; for the Middle Temple benchers subsequently had to clarify the grounds of their authority in the matter: "no liberty in the House," it was declared, "may exempt them at any time from being governed by the orders of the Bench" (771), and any attempt at self-governance "otherwise than as subordinate to the orders of the Masters of the Bench" was declared to constitute *ipso facto* expulsion from the house. Further clarifying the issue, it was also decreed that not the benchers as individuals but the benchers-in-parliament held the ultimate jurisdiction and benchers in individual capacities were forbidden "to treat or intermeddle concerning the rights, liberties, and privileges of the House in vacation time" without express orders from "the Masters of the Bench in Parliament" (774). Ironically, a premier institution specializing in the common law with its heavy reliance on precedents and customs was to be

¹³ The three ring leaders were Lewis or Richard Deyer of Staughton Magna, Huntingdon (respectively admitted April 17, 1624 and May 25, 1625 [*MT* II 690, 700]); George Oglander of Nunwell, the Isle of Wight (admitted February 6, 1626/7 [715]); and John Lister of Kingston on Hull (admitted June 3, 1628 [732]).

governed not by the principle of the common law but by its opposite, the executive authority of the governor, or *gubernaculum*.

The case of the Middle Temple in 1630/1 was surely an exceptional case of inter-generational, inter-constituency conflict over Christmas, symptomatic of the “special mark of . . . Middle Templars” who often “went too far, lost control, and ended with violence” in many other matters (Finkelppearl 55). Nevertheless, it is still an exception that illuminates the ordinary since the conflict was essentially about which constituency held jurisdiction over Christmas as part of “business as usual” at the Inns; a question the answer to which could either solidify or dent the control the Inns of Court ruling elites exercised over the operation of the houses of the law. Custom and the right to autonomy were the two operative concepts as the junior constituencies lived out and, when they were obliged to, discursively articulate their ideas of Christmas. They also constitute the core thematic of Middleton’s 1618/9 masque.

At the Inner Temple, the generational conflicts over Christmas featured a different configuration of custom and autonomy. The key issue was how long Christmas commons should be according to custom. An almost fetishistic insistence on limiting Christmas commons to within three weeks predominates the Inner Temple bench’s bench decrees and rulings about Christmas.¹⁴ The insistence probably originated from the formulation “Saturday before St. Thomas’s feast (December 21) and Saturday after Twelfth Day (January 6),” a period which could last for either three or four weeks depending on which day of the week St. Thomas’s fell. Records dating from the early fifteenth century mention the obligation for students to keep Christmas commons for a minimum of three weeks.¹⁵ A century

¹⁴ See *IT II* 130, 141 and 221 for amercement records. For Inner Temple bench’s attempted reform of Christmas commons in which the three week window features prominently, see *IT II* 170, 173.

¹⁵ In 1520, a Lathome petitioned the bench for exemption from amercements for failing to keep “mean” vacations and to serve as a master of the revels. He was,

later, in the eyes of the Inner Temple bench, that number had become, for all intents and purposes, a reference by which to judge whether a particular year's Christmas commons complied with "the ancient usage and custom of the House" (*IT* II 173). What the bench was unable or reluctant to factor in in its codification of custom was the long-term transformation of Christmas from an obligation to a liberty, and the attending difference between securing a minimum and limiting a maximum.

Problematic in genesis and not particularly conducive to educational and professional business at hand (a smooth transition to the Temple's ordinary law business kicking off with Hilary term would have depended more on fixing *terminus ad quem* of Christmas commons than on its duration), the fetish arguably did have a symbolic function to discharge which in the end was not without practical implications. For an Inns of Court bench reluctant to give up its involvement in the gentlemanly Christmas keeping and yet unwilling to represent itself in any more substantial strength than in the form of absentee Christmas officers, the fetishistic insistence on a three-week Christmas commons was a thinly veiled assertion of its authority to interpret custom; a monopoly which found a clearest expression in the Middle Temple bench's declaration in the wake of 1630/31 mutiny that "the sole power of ordering the time of Christmas has undoubtedly belonged to the Masters of the Bench" (*MT* II 787). How Christmastide should be defined, which constituency had the authority to define it and on what juridical grounds, these were some prominent issues that came to a head when inter-constituency relations at the Inner Temple were strained over Christmas. Middleton's 1618/9 Inner Temple masque was one way of symbolically negotiating the matter.

however, willing to keep Christmas. The bench compounded for a sum of 3s. 4d on condition that "he keep four weeks in the vacations of the scholarship . . . and three weeks of the Christmas vacation" (*IT* I 55).

To borrow from Tom Bishop's apt warning against the overuse of "a discursive model of masque politics that focuses on texts rather than action," the masque was "a formal and kinetic event" whose meanings were "not simply uttered, but enacted," and whose cultural content "exists not only in ways of writing or talking, but also in ways of moving, grouping and seeing" (88-9). The poet's job was to create a script for such a multi-media performance by means of an "invention" or "device," the theme and the narrative that fleshes it out, whereby the masque could be brought to a culmination in the dance measures trodden by costumed masquers, whose elevated social status allowed for the imaginary that the virtues being espoused by the masque had been achieved *in potentia* through the very performance. For such proleptic apotheosis, Middleton has nine young Inner Temple gentlemen put on appropriate costumes to re-present (rather than "represent") nine "heroes" of yore, a transparent reference to the nine "worthies" of the medieval chivalric lore. The nine heroes' apotheosis into timeless beings resulted from, so argues Harmony the presenter, their having been timely. Timelessness and timeliness prove inseparably bound up with each other in Middleton's Inner Temple masque.

The preoccupation of the "invention" of the masque with time combines several narrative motifs in setting up the masque proper danced by the nine gentlemen. Overarching the whole device is the Platonic conception that time is (mis-)taken for what it is measured by: the movement of the stars. The device then takes up the idea from medieval cosmology that the stars, or "spheres," are inhabited by spiritual beings, who in the masque are represented by nine apotheosized "heroes" from history and whose timeless exploits had been made possible on account of their having been timely:

Bright heroes in lasting honour sphered,

Virtue’s eternal spring,
 By making Time their king,
 See, they’re beyond Time reared. (297-300)

The implicit identification of the fictive nine “heroes” with apotheosized historical figures thus activates the central class-conditioned masque aesthetic whereby properly fictive roles are consigned to professional actors while the gentlemen-masquers act out, or dance, embodiments of abstract virtues, in the process turning disguising into not so much impersonation as proleptic incarnation of the virtues, who then return to the historical world of the Inner Temple main hall by means of the final “revel” with the ladies (Lindley 1).

Although the apotheosis and the subsequent descent of the nine heroes represent the formal culmination of the masque as a “kinetic event” to which all other elements are nominally subjected, the masque proper in itself is too rarefied to make a propaganda or polemic point. Of course, such factors as the calendar timing of the performance, the cast of the nine heroes, their costumes, dance measures being trodden, and who of the masquers danced with who of the audience in the “take out” part may all have had contemporary significance justifying Bishop’s characterization of the masque as a “kinetic,” as well as a “formal,” event. Unfortunately, these are the kind of information that is only partially available even for scholarly well-represented court masques. Consequently, on grounds of expediency as well as of formal, aesthetic logic, interpretation of *Masque of Heroes* can only rely on the antemasque as the main source for teasing meanings out of the heroes’ dances in so far as they were relevant to the institutional culture and politics of the Inner Temple. In other words, it is the antemasque with its properly dramatic substance that illuminates what “making Time their king” is supposed to mean in the context of the Inns of Court culture, which constitutes the “external requirements” which it

was the poet's job to transform into poetic texture (Orgel 62).

The "device" of the antemasque is in essence an allegorical etiology of calendar customs cast in the form of the inauguration of anthropomorphized New Year as new master of the household, whose exercise of domestic sovereignty on the first day include, besides attending his father Old Year's funeral, arbitrating on a dispute between Plumporridge and Fasting Day. It is a Middletonian rendition of the "Battle of the Seasons" of which Pieter Brueghel's visual representation of the fight between Carnival and Lent is probably the best known instance. (As a matter of fact, Brueghel's visual characterization of Carnival and Lent is probably as close as can be to how Middleton wanted Plumporridge and Fasting Day to be presented respectively by William Rowley and John Newton of the Prince Charles's Men).

Referred to by Fasting Day as "my big-swollen enemy" for his "plump and lusty" figure (67), Plumporridge is denounced by his emaciated enemy as being associated with every occasion and venue for eating: "whoreson breakfast, dinner, nuntions ("nuncheon" i.e. "a light refreshment between meals" [OED α]) , supper and bever (i.e. "A small repast between meals" [OED 3]), cellar, hall, kitchen, and wet-larder" (75-76). In the seasonal context of *Masque of Heroes*, however, all this attack only serves to endear the dietary incarnation of Christmas to the audience. Precursor to the national Christmas dish of Christmas pudding (or plum pudding), plum porridge's place as Christmas food *par excellence* was already secure by the early modern period alongside its oven-side cousin, the mince pie. Moreover, Christmas or not, it was the essential culinary and physiological Englishness that Plumporridge projects with its rotundity and floridness, and his love of "gross" meats in contempt of meatless diets and *ersatz* meats.¹⁶ It is in this vein that Plumporridge introduces himself:

¹⁶ There must have been considerable regional and household divergence in recipe but the essence of plum porridge was a meat-induced broth boiled with a wide

I was born an Anabaptist, a fell foe
 To fish and Fridays: pig's my absolute sweetheart.
 And shall I wrong my love, and cleave to saltfish?
 Commit adultery with an egg and butter? (84-87)

Rotund, ruddy and lusty, Plumporridge as a stage character embodies an ideal image of English physiology of which plum porridge was both cause and effect. Even the otherwise condemnatory epithet of anabaptistry, instead of implying religious hypocrisy as it does in so many contemporary dramatic works such as Jonson's *The Alchemists*, is used in such a disarmingly Falstaff-esque way that it is not so much a confessional statement as mock-heroic appropriation of denominational stereotypes justifying his inborn lifestyle: as an illocutionary speech act, "I was born an Anabaptist" is both a statement about his *Dasein* ("Seeing how I love pork, I must have been born an Anabaptist, as far removed from the fish-loving papist as can be") and a warrior's bravado ("There can be no peace with a dietary regime that is made so much of by the papist").

Both affectively and seasonally, Fasting Day is clearly out-weighted and out-welcomed. His "big-swollen enemy" has altogether more nasty and more viscerally damning language for him than he is able to muster, his gaunt appearance even acquiring an auditory and an olfactory dimension:

A lean spiny rascal with a dog in's belly; his very bowels bark with
 hunger. Avaunt, thy breath stinks; I do not love to meet thee fasting;

range of fruits and spices, thickened with bread, and further reinforced by addition of liquor. As a nineteenth century English newspaper article explained it, it was "made of a very strong broth of shin of beef, to which was added crumb of bread, cloves, nutmeg, cinamon, mace, currants, raisins, and dates. It was boiled gently, and then further strengthened with a quart of canary and one of red port: and when served up, a little grape verjuice or juice of orange was popped in as a zest" (Ashton 135).

thou art nothing but wind, thy stomach's full of farts, as if they had lost their way, and thou made with the wrong end upward, like a Dutch maw that discharges still into the mouth! (69-74)

As a result, the Christmas season, or "Kersmas," has been a spell of utter unemployment and disregard for the anthropomorphized fasting day who "ha[s] scarce been thought upon o'Friday nights." To add insult to injury, with Christmas falling on a Friday that year (1618), "The Fridays have been ever since so proud/ They scorn my company" (48-9). Having his head broken by a porter at the court who would "rather see the devil" than have any of him, "hunted up and down" the country, he plans to try his last luck in England with popishly inclined Lancashire before taking to "his last refuge" of Rome (155-65). The "plump and lusty" Plumporridge is "The only man in place" (57).

Plumporridge's dominance over his rival is a guaranteed one given the calendar arrangement for Christmastide then in force, but so is his enemy's eventual return. The interest is in how the masque will dramatically render the initiation of the fasting regime as dictated by custom and statutes, and how the transition will be made meaningful with regard to the institutional life at the Inn of Court. Pinning its hopes on the new master of the house, Fasting Day hopes to be employed from the eve of the first major holy day after Christmastide: Candlemas or the feast of the Purification of the Virgin on February 2. It is a wish, however, that the in-masque calendar expert Dr. Almanac thinks is "frampold" ("cross, disagreeable" [OED 1]). He is certain that "the Puritans will never yield to't" (64-65), obliquely alluding to the objections among radical Protestants to commanded fasting on the eves of holy days. Ultimately, arbitration is referred to New Year, now coming into inheritance of the household.

Curiously, despite the universal spurning of Fasting Day, there has existed, it turns out, an implicit affinity between the masters of the Year

household and Fasting Day. Besides New Year, it is only Fasting Day that grieves over the death of Old Year, his "dear old master" (43). At New Year's first stage appearance, Plumporridge excuses himself from the scene on the pretext that "I have ne'er a gift to give him" (142), whereas Fasting Day does get to "whine out" his case in the absence of his physically imposing enemy (179). Surprisingly the "unseasonable coxcomb" finds a sympathetic ear in the new master, whose filial piety for his deceased father readily extends to hearing out and granting the plea of the now jobless servant:

Thou shalt not all be lost, nor for vainglory
Greedily welcomed; we'll begin with virtue.
As we may hold with't, that does virtue right.
Set him down, sir, for Candlemas Eve at night. (180-83)

The new household sovereign lays down virtue as the general principle to be brought to bear upon decisions upon this particular case. Presumably the household may "hold with" fasting since it "does virtue right." However, the Aristotelian logic that dictates virtue as means between extremes ("not all be lost, nor for vainglory / Greedily welcomed") also makes virtue as such a procedural matter rather than an inherent quality of the practice. Timing here is the essential dimension: fasting is only virtuous when it begins on Candlemas Eve. What then is the virtue of Candlemas Eve relative to fasting? This is one question that the masque cannot answer, for the whole edifice of the etiological allegory is built on mystifying the answer to this question. It is also a question the audience only knows the answer to all too well: Candlemas Eve is a virtuous time to fast because custom and statutes dictate it. Middleton's trick lies in characterizing Fasting Day in clearly unsavory and unsympathetic terms—"an unseasonable coxcomb" as Dr. Almanac calls him—and presenting what is customarily and statutorily in force as something preposterous,

only to have the “frampold” wishes ratified by the new master of the house, all this without explicit recourse to either custom or law but in the name of virtue.

The particular form of allegorical etiology Middleton adopts entails a coincidence of custom with autonomy in the form of decision based on “virtue,” and it is not accidental. If there was one Inns of Court cultural formation that involved custom and autonomy, it was Christmas commons, whether the two concepts were seen as mutually reinforcing (e.g. the Middle Templars’ idea of “liberties”) or opposed (e.g. the Inner Temple bench’s insistence on “the ancient usage and custom of the House”). There is another allusion to the Christmas culture of the Inns in the reference to Candlemas. Candlemas and its autumnal counterpart All Hallows were “grand days,” when court luminaries and coiffed alumni were invited to the halls of the Inns for feasts for whom junior members performed solemn revels. As such, they were occasions for the reaffirmation and celebration of the Inns of Court’s status as nurseries of England’s political, social and juridical cadres. Both feasts also represented the calendar marks for Christmastide as most broadly conceived in Inns of Court culture. In particular, the idea of Candlemas as marking the end of Christmas was widely shared by Inns of Court men in a near matter-of-factly manner despite the facts that Christmas commons ceased at least two weeks earlier and that it was in the middle of Hilary term (January 23 through February 12).¹⁷ Candlemas was the unofficial calendar point where “the gentlemen”

¹⁷ For example, a Middle Temple manuscript dating between 1635-8 mentions how “The comendable (or rather heroical) sports and pastimes” were played “in the tyme of Christmas whiche by an ancient ordynance begynneth yerelie upon the Even of All Saints and thence continually untill the feast Daie at night of the Purification of the blessed Virgin Marie” (qtd. Cunningham 9). With a comparable matter-of-factly attitude, Dugdale introduces how *The Triumph of Peace*—the Inns of Court’s answer to Prynne’s anti-theatrical tract—was presented “at Christmas” to Charles without bothering to mention that it was performed on a day after Candlemas (246). Both of the extant Christmas Prince sports (Prince d’Amour of

were expected to have completed a transition from a life of “reveling” to one of “plodding.”

The antemasque of New Year, Plumporridge and Fasting Day is, then, an elaborate structure of concentric spheres of references all pointing to a certain anxiety about when Christmas ends, or should end, at the Inner Temple and about the grounds for making that determination. It is also about what practical form “making Time their King” should take. Given how the bench monopolized the rhetoric of custom at the Inner Temple, the practical question being asked is: should Christmas come to an end when the governors have said it should according to what they alleged was the custom of the Temple or when the Christmas keepers decide that it was the right, or “virtuous,” time for Christmas to come to an end, which may or may not coincide with the bench’s ruling? Interestingly, the script for the masque allows for both of the partisan readings. The question is which part of the allegorical narrative, and its topical application, to accentuate. A pro-bench reading would prefer to emphasize the fact that the result of New Year’s autonomous decision coincides with, and thus validates, what is already passing as custom in the official rulings of the Temple. The Christmas-keeping gentlemen could, however, note that a young man coming into his own gets to make an executive decision at all on how the

the Middle Temple in 1597/8 and Prince of Purpoole of Gray’s Inn in 1594/5) had Candlemas slated for the celebration of the closure of the Christmas games. Sometimes, even Shrovetide merged with Christmas festivities when the court was in need of entertainment. With their plans for a Candlemas finale dashed by the bench’s implicit sabotage, the Grayans of 1594/5 were able to bring the year’s Christmas to a closure at the queen’s court on Shrove Tuesday—on March 4. Just over two decades later, their descendants again took to the court with a revival of *The Antimaske of Mountebankes* (a masque originally performed for intra-mural consumption on Candlemas) on as late as February 19, a day past Ash Wednesday (Douthwaite 237). The levity of the subject matter and the untimeliness of the performance seemed to have raised a number of eyebrows since, as John Chamberlain reported, “it were thought to be somewhat out of season to revel in Lent” (qtd. in Green 118).

calendar affairs are to be ordered. If the gentlemen are flattered in the first reading with an aesthetically created illusion of autonomy as a precondition to their submission to custom, the benchers themselves are allayed in their fears about the consequences of the gentlemen's self-determination when the gentlemen's decision just happens to coincide with their idea of custom. As a propaganda device, Middleton's allegory in *Masque of Heroes* is a curious one whose defining characteristic is a *formal* indeterminacy. It is a proverbial blade that is not so much double-edged as is double-handed.

So how would an Inner Temple constituency have been able to use Middleton's masque to leverage its position in Christmas politics at the Temple? One could, not to put too fine a point on it, pay for the masque and, more importantly, have the fact publicized in time for its performance. It is, after all, a "standard operating procedure" in the scholarship of early modern masques to contextualize a masque in terms of its sponsor and his or her politico-religious agenda, and interpret the aesthetic content of the masque in this light. Knowledge of those "external requirements" and "the demands of the occasion," which it was the poet's task to transform into the texture of "a complex work of art" (Orgel 62), was precisely what would have enabled the contemporary audience to appreciate the performance as a "formal and kinetic event." For a modern student of the masque, it is a crucial interpretative key to understanding the audience's reception and its politico-cultural implications. Unfortunately this is also a key that is missing for the twenty-first century critic.

On the other hand, the "double-handedness" of *Maque of Heroes* as a *formal* structure can also help us further appreciate the degree masque participated in the Inner Temple culture and politics of Christmas. Assuming that there was a certain distinct mentality or habit of thought and feeling marking the institutional culture of each Inn of Court, it is a significant fact that the Inner Temple bench seems to have maintained its, if only nominal, presence in Christmas far longer than the other governing

bodies of the Inns of Court.¹⁸ Unlike their counterparts in other Inns, it kept up the appearance of its endorsement of Christmas commons by continuing to appoint its absentee representatives and by neglecting to abolish the nominal obligation to keep Christmas vacation without actually enforcing it. It also seems to have been much less eager than some other Inns to suppress Inns of Court men’s traditional foible of “play.” Christmas keepers, for their part, do not seem to have challenged the three-week limitation on Christmas commons on grounds of principle despite occasional violations thereof and they never elaborated such violations into a coherent discourse about the jurisdictional nature of Christmastide and their rights therein except during the 1639/40 Christmas. What they took for granted was their customary right to self-governance in the form of their own parliament was not questioned and disputed by the bench because it was not explicitly asserted as at the Middle Temple 1630/1 (again the year 1639/40 is an exception). The aggregate result of this long-term historical process was an institutional environment well suited to the survival of Christmas as a cultural formation but hardly conducive to

¹⁸ Extant records indicate that the benches of the traditional “allies” of Lincoln’s Inn and the Middle Temple were more eager than those of the other two Inns to reform the junior constituencies’ culture along puritan lines. Lincoln’s Inn prohibited gambling in the hall as early as 1556 “except in tyme of Christmas,” and the Christmas proviso is found crossed out indicating even more stringent suppression subsequently enforced (*LI I* 318). In dedicating his *Histrion-mastix* to the benchers of Lincoln’s Inn, Prynne was certain of their approval since “you have alwayes from my first admission into your Society, and long before, excluded all Common Players with their lewd ungodly Enterludes, from all your solemne Festivals; not suffering them so much as once to enter within your gates, for feare they should corrupt the mindes, the manners, the vertuous education of those young hopefull vertuous Gentlemen committed to your care” (★2r). The Middle Temple may have been more tolerant of stage plays—Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, for example, was performed at the house on Candlemas 1601/2 (Manningham 18)—but its governors were equally committed, at least on records, to extirpating Christmas gambling, prohibiting dice play at Christmastide as early as 1581/2 and confirming the same order in 1584, 1590/1, and 1609 (*MT I* 248; 272; 317; *II* 514).

institutional readjustments to gradual, not necessarily perceptible, changes in the way Christmas was kept.

The double gesture of Middleton's masque seemingly affirming both junior autonomy and the bench's insistence on custom may in fact have been a result of the strategy of negotiation conditioned by this institutional environment where, whether for good or ill, the appearance of Christmas as an inter-generational, inter-constituency undertaking had to be kept up even while partisan agendas were being projected. Whether as a proverbial sugar-coated pill for "the gentlemen" to swallow to see the wisdom incarnate in custom, or a procedural heresy of the young which however voluntarily minimize its practical ramifications, the masque does not forget to accommodate the claims of the party it was designed to contest. Whichever of the Inner Temple constituencies the masque was actually performed to advocate, its very "invention" was rooted in and ultimately contributed to the imaginary of Christmas as an Inner Temple undertaking in which each and every of the constituencies was entitled to its share of glory as well as responsibility; or, as Dugdale referred to it, a "time of solemnity, honour, and pleasure" (Dugdale 153).

Works Cited

- Arlidge, Anthony. *Shakespeare and the Prince of Love: The Feast of Misrule in the Middle Temple*. London: DLM, 2000.
- Ashton, John. *A righte merrie Christmase!!!: The Story of Christ-tide*. London: 1894.
- Bald, R. C. Introduction: *The Inner Temple Masque or Masque of Heroes. A Book of Masques*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967. 253-56.
- Bland D. S. ed. *Three Revels from the Inns of Court*. Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Avebury, 1984.

- Bishop, Tom. "The Gingerbread Host: Tradition and Novelty in the Jacobean Masque." *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*. Ed. David Bevington et al. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998. 88-120.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." *Education: Culture, Economy and Society*. Ed. A. H. Halsey et al. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997. 46-58.
- Buck, Sir George. *The Third Vniversitie of England*. London, 1615.
- A Calendar of the Inner Temple Records*. Ed. F. A. Inderwick. London, 1896.
- Charlton, Kenneth. "Liberal Education and the Inns of Court in the Sixteenth Century." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 9.1 (1960): 25-38.
- Cunningham, James P. *Dancing in the Inns of Court*. London: Jordan, 1965.
- Douthwaite, William Ralph. *Gray's Inn: Its History & Associations*. London, 1886.
- Dugdale, William, Esq. *Origines Iuridicales*. London, 1666.
- Eccles, Mark. "Francis Beaumont's Grammar Lecture." *Review of English Studies* 16.64 (1940): 402-14.
- Finkelpearl, Philip J. *John Marston of the Middle Temple: an Elizabethan Dramatist in His Social Setting*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1969.
- Fortescue, John, Sir. *The Works of Sir John Fortescue, Knight*. Ed. Thomas Fortescue Lord Clermont. Vol. 1. London, 1869.
- Fumerton, Patricia. "Introduction: A New New Historicism." *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*. Ed. Fumerton et al. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999. 1-17.
- Gesta grayorum*. Ed. W. W. Greg. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1914.
- Gordon, D. J. "Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949): 152-78.
- Green, A. Wigfall. *The Inns of Court and Early English Drama*. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965.
- Gurr, Andrew. *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.
- Hutton, Ronald. *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.
- The Inns of Court*. Ed. Alan H. Nelson et al. Vol. 1 of *Records of Early English Drama*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010.
- Laskowski, Eliza Fisher. *Performance, Politics, and Religion: Reconstructing Seventeenth-Century Masque*. Diss. U of North Carolina, 2006.

- Levin, Kate, "Coming of Age on Stage: The Pedagogical Masque in Seventeenth-Century England." *George Herbert Journal* 29 (2005-2006): 114-30.
- Lindley, David. *The Court Masque*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.
- Manningham, John. *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602-1603*. Ed. Robert Parker Sorlien. Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1976.
- Minutes of Parliament of the Middle Temple*. Trans. and ed. Charles Trice Martin. London: Butterworth. 1904-1905. 4 vols.
- Middleton, Thomas. *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*. Ed. Gary Taylor et al. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
- Orgel, Stephen. *The Jonsonian Masque*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1965.
- The Pension Book of Gray's Inn*. Ed. Reginald J. Fletcher. Vol. 1. London, 1901.
- Prest, Wilfrid R. *The Inns of Court under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts, 1590-1640*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman, 1972.
- Le Prince d'Amour, or the Prince of Love*. Ed. Rudyerd, Benjamin. London, 1660.
- Prynne, William. *Histrion-mastix. The Players Scourge, or, Actors Tragaedia*. London, 1633.
- Raffield, Paul. "A Discredited Priesthood: The Fallings of Common Lawyers and Their Representation in Seventeenth Century Satirical Drama." *Law and Literature* 17.3 (2005): 365-95.
- Ravelhofer, Barbara. "Bureaucrats and Courtly Cross-Dressers in the *Shrovetide Masque* and *The Shepherd's Paradise*." *English Literary Renaissance* 29.1 (1999): 75-96.
- The Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn: the Black Books*. 4 vols. London: 1897-1902.
- Roth, Steve. "Hamlet as The Christmas Prince: Certain Speculations on Hamlet, the Calendar, Revels, and Misrule." *EMLS* 7.3 (2002): 51-89.
- Shohet, Lauren. *Reading Masques: The English Masque and Public Culture in the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.
- Waterhous, Edward, Esq. *Fortescutus Illustratus, or a Commentary on that Nervous Treatise De Laudibus Legum Angliae*. London, 1663.
- Wright, Gillian. "Giving Them But Their Own: Circe, Ulysses, and William Browne of Tavistock." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 12 (1999): 190-217.

ABSTRACT

“Making Time their king”: The Christmas Culture and Politics of the Early Modern Inns of Court in Thomas Middleton’s *Masque of Heroes*

Bomin Kim

This article investigates the cultural work done by Thomas Middleton’s *Masque of Heroes* in the context of Christmas culture and politics at the early modern Inns of Court. Christmastide at the Inns of Court was a season reserved for the cultivation and exercise of the younger Inns of Court men’s aristocratic cultural capital by means of revels and Christmas commons. The custom of Christmas keeping by the junior constituencies came under increasing pressure of their governors to suppress or circumscribe the seasonal junior autonomy. By making the end of Christmastide the subject matter of his Christmas masque, Middleton aesthetically mythologizes this major source of intramural political tension at the Inner Temple whereby the ambiguity of his allegorical masque allows for an imaginative and imaginary room for contending parties to come to an agreement on Christmas in and through the masque itself.

Key Words | Thomas Middleton (1580-1627), *Masque of Heroes* (1619), non-courtly masque, Inns of Court, Inner Temple, Christmas commons, revels