

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10296-4 - The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, Volume III

Edited by Fredson Bowers

Excerpt

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The Roaring Girl.

OR
Moll Cut-Purse.

As it hath lately bene Acted on the Fortune-stage by
the Prince his Players.

Written by *T. Middleton* and *T. Dekker.*



Printed at London for *Thomas Archer*, and are to be sold at his
shop in Popes head-pallace, neere the Royall
Exchange. 1611.

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TEXTUAL INTRODUCTION

The Roaring Girl (Greg, *Bibliography*, no. 298), a collaboration by Dekker and Thomas Middleton, was not entered in the Stationers' Register by its publisher Thomas Archer; nevertheless, the transfer of the copy to Hugh Perrey in February of 1631 indicates that he held a good copyright.

The ornaments show that Nicholas Okes was the printer. Since a single skeleton-forme was used throughout to impose the type-pages of the inner and outer formes of every sheet, it is clear that printing was done on a single press. Evidence that is not wholly clear cut suggests the presence of more than one compositor, perhaps as many as three workmen who, in general, set the start, the middle, and the latter part of the quarto.¹

The limited number of copies preserved does not encourage very far-reaching speculation about the extent of the proof-reading. None of the known variant formes offers evidence to suggest that any other but the printing-house proof-reader was concerned with correcting the text, and none of the various alterations suggests reference to the manuscript for authority. On the evidence available, we find moderately extensive correction in the inner forme of sheet B, followed by somewhat similar alteration in only one page of inner C. Thereafter, until sheet H no further press-correction has been preserved. However, the rise in the number of literals in these non-variant sheets suggests a possibility that at least the later ones in the sequence were not formally proof-read in the same manner as sheets B and C. Beginning with sheet D (II.i.129) we find three and perhaps four literals that ought to have been caught by a proof-

¹ The evidence is surveyed in a recent study by G. R. Price, 'The Manuscript and the Quarto of *The Roaring Girl*', *The Library*, 5th ser., XI (1956), 182-183. Dr Price finds signs of five different compositors, a quite impossible number for a one-press shop. (Price states that Okes had other presses, but all external and internal evidence indicates the contrary.) The evidence for his Compositor C as distinguished from B is very thin, and I rather think that his D and E (like B and C) are only one compositor. A close study of Okes's work of this period would be necessary for certainty in the compositorial division.

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reader (II.i.177, 289, 369, 374), two in sheet E (II.ii.92; III.i.108), three in sheet F (III.i.139, 146; III.ii.17), a rise to ten in sheet G (III.ii.207, 209, 223, 232; III.iii.3, 54, 117, 150, 164, 168), and four in the inner forme of sheet H (IV.i.1, 34, 35, 168). Sheet G, incidentally, marks the major start of the third compositor.

The variation in the inner forme of sheet I, with some resetting of the type, is—except accidentally—confined to the half of the forme containing sigs. I 1^v and I 4. Obviously, the type loosened and pied; and it is perhaps a trifle easier to suppose that this accident happened somewhere during the process of proof-correction than in the machining of the sheets. If so, the forme had been unlocked, perhaps to correct such readings as *duckmee* (IV.ii.69), *Sommer* (IV.ii.219 S.D.), *headsir* (IV.ii.225), and *Crastina* (IV.ii.230).

Two pages, sigs. I 1^v and I 4, irregularly pied and had to be reset in part. The resetting seems to have been done in haste and without subsequent proof-reading, on the evidence of the number of literals that were produced. At least one positive substantive error was made in the resetting, the omission of *the* at IV.ii.49; and there is no reason to suppose that the transposition of *deale they* at IV.ii.53 is anything but a mistake. The variants in sigs. I 2 and I 3^v seem to have resulted exclusively from displaced or dropped-out loose type. Hence no alteration in the second state of inner forme I can be considered to be authoritative; and the text in this edition (save for the few necessary corrections) follows that of the earlier state as being closer to the manuscript.

If one were to depend upon the evidence of the readings alone, the question of which was the earlier and which the later state of the type in inner I might well seem to be a stand-off. Fortunately, a neat example of pure bibliography settles the case (see J. G. McManaway in *The Library*, 4th ser., XIX [1938], 176–179). The typesetting of the variant running-title on sig. I 1^v (and also the typesetting of the running-title on sig. I 4) is found as part of the originally constructed skeleton-forme that imposed the type-pages for sheet B and also sheets C–H and this state of inner I. The typesetting for the two running-titles in the other state of inner I is not found earlier, but subsequently replaces the typesetting found in sheets B–H. Therefore, the reset running-titles must enclose the pages of

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the later state of the text. Since these reset running-titles, first appearing in the later state of inner forme I, are also found in the outer forme, we know that the inner forme of this sheet was first through the press. This information has no textual significance, however, since with one-skeleton printing the order of the formes through the press does not bear on the method of proof-reading.

That the manuscript given to the printer was a good one is attested to not only by the fact of Middleton's preface but also by the comparatively correct substantive reproduction of the print, in so far as this can be estimated.¹ The nature of the manuscript is difficult to conjecture. If the preface to *The Family of Love* is Middleton's, and if it is candid, its statement shows that a dramatist could still write an introduction even though he had not provided the manuscript: 'Too soone and too late, this work is published: Too soone, in that it was in the Presse, before I had notice of it, by which meanes some faults may escape in the Printing. Too late, for that it was not published when the general voice of the people had seald it for good, and the newnesse of it made it much more to be desired.' On the other hand, the tone of the preface to *The Roaring Girl* appears to be that of an author introducing an approved publication to the public. But even if one of the authors thus approves publication, no guarantee is thereby made that he furnished the manuscript or that the manuscript was necessarily autograph.

When one examines the accidentals of this play with some care, one finds by and large a general consistency in forms between scenes that may reasonably be attributed to Middleton and scenes that are unquestionably by Dekker. In such cases one might argue that the compositors have so overlaid the originals with their own characteristics as to obscure what would be variable accidentals in autograph copy by the two dramatists. This condition might obtain in fact; nevertheless, common experience indicates that compositors

¹ Dr Price believes that on sig. K1^v two different lines are omitted (following IV.ii.303 and 310), but the breaking of the rhyme is insufficient evidence when unaccompanied by any break in the sense. The three literals on the same page that he cites as evidence of the compositor's carelessness have no relation to substantive omission. The case is better for his assumption that a short speech has been omitted at the foot of sig. I1 (following IV.ii.48), but the compositor may not be to blame here.

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are frequently influenced by the accidentals of their copy and that scenes in different autograph might be expected to reveal themselves by detectable differences in the form of the accidentals. In this particular case positive statements cannot be made in the absence of the identification and rigorous study against controls of the compositors in Okes's shop who typeset this quarto. However, a few considerations may be mentioned.

(1) If a transcript intervenes between autograph and printer's copy, the smoothing-out result of this transcript added to the tendency of a compositor to impose certain of his own characteristics would normally result in an approximately uniform texture in the accidentals despite the collaborated nature of the original. Distinctive characteristics do not appear to be present in the accidentals of scenes of different authorship in *The Roaring Girl*, and this fact is the more noteworthy if, as seems possible, three different compositors set the play.

(2) Experience shows that as a general rule a compositor may often impose a roughly similar form on the abbreviation of speech-prefixes, but he is less likely to interfere with variant prefixes for the same character. Also, when two dramatists collaborate, the odds are (as seen in *Westward Ho*, cf. II, 314–315) that variant speech-prefixes will appear in autograph. In *The Roaring Girl*, except for minor compositorial variants, the speech-prefixes are remarkably uniform save for one exception: In I.i Sir Davy Dapper's prefix takes forms like *S. Dap.*, *Sir Dap.*, and *Dap*; but in III.iii, the only other scene in which he appears, his prefixes are *Sir Da.* or *S. Dauy*. However, since each scene is almost certainly Dekker's, nothing is proved by this divergence, and we may return to the otherwise rather remarkable uniformity as some indication that a fair-copy transcript may have smoothed out possible variance.

If the printer's copy be provisionally accepted as a transcript, the inevitable query follows whether the manuscript was a prompt copy or a transcript of a prompt copy. To estimate the nature of a manuscript from the form and position of stage-directions is an art subject to varying interpretations and, except in the most obvious cases of stage origin, to considerable uncertainty. In this matter I can only express my own conviction that whereas the directions are not in-

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consistent with those an author would write, I see no clear indication that any direction necessarily originated in the theatre. My opinion is that if the printer's copy was a transcript, as I believe, it had no connexion with the prompt-book.¹

A non-theatrical transcript might be made by a professional scribe, or as a fair copy by either author. Although a scribal transcript made for the theatre from the authors' foul papers is not an impossibility—a working transcript from which in turn the prompt-book would be made up—in this case simplicity of argument suggests that either Middleton or Dekker wrote out a fair copy of his own and of the other dramatist's papers for the formal sale of the play to the actors.² What evidence there is points away from Middleton as the transcriber of the fair copy.

Since Middleton's signed preface was manifestly written for publication, we may conjecture that it was set directly from autograph copy. The text is too brief to offer much opportunity for analysis. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the digraph *æ* found in *obscene* (line 20) is very likely an authorial characteristic and is present nowhere else in the text in similar words. Less certain is the double appearance of *scene* in the prologue (lines 2, 7) since this spelling is more conventional, and it may be that the prologue is Dekker's. The two appearances of the short suffix form *-nes* in the preface (line 6) may be authorial, though matched by two in *-nesse* (lines 27, 28); but the full form is that found throughout the text.³

If Middleton provided the printer with the preface, perhaps the list of persons would be his also. Certainly, the list and its particular

¹ In this I find myself in disagreement with Dr Price, who feels that the inconsistencies between the imperative and indicative in the stage-directions are more probably due to the transcriber's incomplete adaptation of the stage-manager's directions in a prompt-book used as the source than to the dramatists' having partially adopted a book-holder's idiom. I do not myself attach any significance to this normal authorial inconsistency, nor do I think it ascertained that a transcriber would alter imperative to indicative directions.

² For such authorial fair copies, see Bowers, *On Editing Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Dramatists* (1955), pp. 13–22.

³ Dr Price finds the preface short form *sprucenes* and *nicenes* a Middleton spelling, but I do not understand his assignment of the commonplace spelling *onely* as Middletonian. I am happy to find him in agreement that the text itself is printed from a transcript by Dekker, even though we may differ about the circumstances and the source of the transcription.

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form does not seem to be one that would come from the printer, although here one may only speculate. In this connexion the curious error by which Sir Alexander's name is spelled *Wentgrave* (for *Wengrave*) and Neat-foot is *Neats-foot* does not indicate such familiarity with the characters as would come from a transcriber of the whole; and the casual identification of Sir Alexander's son as *Yong Wentgrave* (thus confirming the spelling) instead of *Sebastian* is odd.

To sum up, what evidence there is suggests a non-theatrical manuscript that was a fair copy, not foul papers. Under the circumstances it is reasonable to expect that one or other of the authors made the fair copy from his own and his fellow's foul papers. Evidence of some weight suggests that the transcriber was not Middleton, even though Middleton was concerned in the publication. The conclusion is that Dekker made the fair copy. If so, as I believe, he wrote out the copy not for printing but, instead, for the actors, and from this manuscript they transcribed their prompt book. The printer's copy, by this hypothesis, would have come from the manuscript preserved by the company and would represent Dekker's fair copy made for the original sale of the play. Although every link in this chain of reasoning is not of equal strength, the hypothesis is consistent with the available evidence and our present ability to interpret it, and I know of no evidence against it. Although this is not the place for an analysis of the authorship, I may say that I lean more to Fleay's views which assign a very considerable portion of the play to Dekker than to Bullen's which allow him only a few scenes. Moreover, this hypothesis helps to explain a scene or two in which the authorship seems somewhat mixed. In transcribing Middleton's papers it would be quite possible for Dekker to make minor alterations for dramatic interest and to tidy up any loose ends.

The Roaring Girl was edited first in Dodsley's *A Select Collection of Old Plays* (1780), vol. 6; and subsequently by Sir Walter Scott in vol. 2 of *The Ancient British Drama* (1810); by J. P. Collier in vol. 6 of Dodsley (1825); then by the Rev. Alexander Dyce, *The Works of Thomas Middleton* (1840), vol. 2; the Pearson reprint of 1873; and A. H. Bullen, *The Works of Thomas Middleton* (1885), vol. 4. A photographic facsimile of the British Museum copy

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(162.d.35) was issued in 1914 by J. S. Farmer for Tudor Facsimile Texts.

The present text is based on a collation of the ten copies that are known to be preserved: British Museum copy 1 (162.d.35), copy 2 (Ashley 1159); Bodleian (Mal. 246[1]); Dyce Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum; Bute Collection in the National Library of Scotland; Henry E. Huntington Library; Folger Shakespeare Library; Boston Public Library; Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection; and a copy privately owned by Robert H. Taylor of Yonkers, New York, this last purchased in 1956 at the Harlech sale by the Seven Gables Bookshop and not previously recorded.

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*To the Comicke Play-readers,
Venery, and Laughter.*

The fashion of play-making, I can properly compare to nothing, so naturally, as the alteration in apparell: For in the time of the Great-crop-doublet, your huge bombasted plaies, quilted with mighty words to leane purpose was onely then in fashion. And as the doublet fell, neater inuentions beganne to set vp. Now in the time of sprucenes, our plaies followe the nicenes of our Garments, single plots, quaint conceits, letcherous iests, drest vp in hanging sleeues, and those are fit for the Times, and the Tearmers: Such a kind of light-colour Summer stuffe, mingled with diuerse colours, you shall finde this published Comedy, good to keepe you in an afternoone from dice, at home in your chambers; and for venery you shall finde enough, for sixepence, but well coucht and you marke it. For *Venus* being a woman passes through the play in doublet and breeches, a braue disguise and a safe one, if the Statute vnty not her cod-peice point. The booke I make no question, but is fit for many of your companies, as well as the person it selfe, and may bee allowed both Gallery roome at the play-house, and chamber-roome at your lodging: worse things I must needs confesse the world ha's taxt her for, then has beene written of her; but 'tis the excellency of a Writer, to leaue things better then he finds 'em; though some obscœne fellow (that cares not what he writes against others, yet keeps a mysticall bawdy-house himselfe, and entertaines drunkards, to make vse of their pockets, and vent his priuate bottle-ale at mid-night) though such a one would haue ript vp the most nasty vice, that euer hell belcht forth, and presented it to a modest Assembly; yet we rather wish in such discoueries, where reputation lies bleeding, a slackenesse of truth, then fulnesse of slander.

THOMAS MIDDLETON

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Prologus.

*A Play (expected long) makes the Audience looke
 For wonders: — that each Scene should be a booke,
 Compos'd to all perfection; each one comes
 And brings a play in's head with him: vp he summes,
 What he would of a Roaring Girle haue writ;
 If that he findes not here, he mewes at it.
 Onely we intreate you thinke our Scene,
 Cannot speake high (the subiect being but meane)
 A Roaring Girle (whose notes till now neuer were)
 Shall fill with laughter our vast Theater, 10
 That's all which I dare promise: Tragick passion,
 And such graue stuffe, is this day out of fashion.
 I see attention sets wide ope her gates
 Of hearing, and with couetous listning waites,
 To know what Girle, this Roaring Girle should be.
 (For of that Tribe are many.) One is shee
 That roares at midnight in deepe Tauerne bowles,
 That beates the watch, and Constables controuls;
 Another roares i'th day time, swears, stabbes, giues braues,
 Yet sells her soule to the lust of fooles and slaues. 20
 Both these are Suburbe-roarers. Then there's (besides)
 A ciuill City-Roaring Girle, whose pride,
 Feasting, and riding, shakes her husbands state,
 And leaues him Roaring through an yron grate.
 None of these Roaring Girles is ours: shee flies
 With wings more lofty. Thus her character lyes,
 Yet what neede characters? when to giue a gesse,
 Is better then the person to expresse;
 But would you know who 'tis? would you heare her name?
 Shee is cal'd madde Moll; her life, our acts proclaime. 30*