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978-0-521-10299-5 - Cyrus Hoy: Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to texts in 'The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker', Volume II

Edited by Fredson Bowers

Excerpt

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THE HONEST WHORE, PART I

INTRODUCTION

SOMETIME between 1 January and 14 March 1604, Henslowe – acting in behalf of Prince Henry's (formerly the Admiral's) Company – paid £5 to 'Thomas deckers & Midelton in earneste of ther play Called the pasyent man & the onest hore'.¹ The London theatres had been closed for the past year, since 19 March 1603, first in connection with the illness and death of Queen Elizabeth I, and then in consequence of the plague which had raged from April 1603 through the first weeks of 1604. It is not clear just when acting was resumed: perhaps before Lent, which began on 22 February, in any case by 9 April when, with the expiration of Lent, a play restraint was removed.² Henslowe's records for the Prince's Men end with his entry for 14 March 1604, so that his diary contains no further account of progress on the play for which earnest had been paid. It was in existence by 9 November 1604, when it was entered in the Stationers' Register. The end of the siege of Ostend, which occurred on 11 September 1604, is referred to at IV.i.29, but this topical allusion may have been inserted when the play was revived in the fall after an initial production in the previous spring.

By the spring of 1604, Middleton had been plying the trade of dramatist for at least two years. In May 1602 he is found, according to Henslowe's records, working with Munday, Drayton and Webster on a play which on 22 May was titled *Caesar's Fall*, and which presumably is the same as the play titled *Two Shapes* for which Henslowe records full payment on 29 May to Dekker, Drayton, Middleton, Webster and Munday.³ Nothing further is known of either title. Middleton's *Randall, Earl of Chester* (payments from Henslowe on 21 October and 9 November 1602) is

¹ *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 209. Following the accession of King James I, the Admiral's Company was taken under the patronage of Prince Henry 'about Christmas 1603' (Chambers, II, 186).

² *Ibid.*, IV, 350.

³ *Diary*, pp. 201, 202.

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also lost.¹ In its original form, Middleton's *The Family of Love* may date from 1602.²

The relation of Middleton and Dekker in the years from 1601 or 1602 through 1604 is one of the mysteries of Elizabethan literature. All that can be said with certainty about it is that it was close, so close as virtually to defy any precise definition of their respective shares in works on which they are presumed to have collaborated, and to clothe with high uncertainty the attribution of anonymous works to either the one or the other. Of premier importance to the question of their literary relationship is the comedy titled *Blurt, Master-Constable, or The Spaniard's Night-Walk*, published anonymously in 1602, and the uncertainty that has surrounded the attribution of this play fairly typifies the problem of differentiating the work of the two authors. *Blurt, Master-Constable* was long regarded as the earliest of Middleton's extant plays, but Dekker's share in it is now recognized, and he may indeed be the sole author of it.³

During the latter months of 1603, while the theatres were closed, both dramatists took to the writing of non-dramatic pamphlets. Dekker's *The Wonderfull yeare* was in existence by 5 December 1603,⁴ and his *Newes from Graves-end* was written in the autumn of that year (the dedicatory epistle alludes to the Christmas season of 1603–1604).⁵ Both these pamphlets were published anonymously, but Dekker's authorship of them is certain. He claimed *The Wonderfull yeare* as his own in one of his later pamphlets, *The Seven deadly Sinnes* (1606), and the attribution to him of *Newes from Graves-end* has been demonstrated by F. P. Wilson.⁶ But a third

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 206. Henslowe, acting in behalf of Worcester's Men, records a payment of £1 to Middleton on 3 October 1602 in earnest of an unnamed play (*Diary*, p. 217). All the other *Diary* entries concerning Middleton (including the record of payment to him on 14 December 1602 for a prologue and epilogue for a court performance of Greene's *Friar Bacon* (*Diary*, p. 207) connect him with the Admiral's Company.

² See Richard Hindry Barker, *Thomas Middleton* (New York, 1958), pp. 159–161.

³ For evidence for Dekker's authorship of *Blurt, Master-Constable*, see Barker, *ibid.*, pp. 197–200, and the impressive statistical analysis of the play's vocabulary in David J. Lake's *The Canon of Thomas Middleton's Plays* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 66–90.

⁴ F. P. Wilson (ed.), *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker* (Oxford, 1925), introduction, p. xxix.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. xi–xvi.

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anonymous pamphlet, *The Meeting of Gallants*, dealing as the two previous ones had done with the recent plague and written, according to Wilson, in late January or early February 1604,¹ bears some striking resemblances to two contemporary pamphlets by T.M., initials which are generally acknowledged to be those of Thomas Middleton: *Father Hubbard's Tales* (entered in the Stationers' Register on 3 January 1604), and *The Black Book* (entered on 22 March 1604). Wilson, recognizing the parallels between these two pamphlets and *The Meeting of Gallants*, accounts for them by noting the association of Dekker and Middleton at just this time in writing *1 Honest Whore*. 'What is more likely', he asks, 'than that they should talk over and show to each other those pamphlets by the writing of which they were earning some sort of livelihood while the theatres were closed?'² In the end, Wilson opts for Dekker as the author of the pamphlet, but in guarded terms: 'it is perhaps unsafe to go beyond this conclusion: that if *The Meeting of Gallants* is not Dekker's, it is T.M.'s, if indeed it is not, like *The Honest Whore*, a work of collaboration'.³

Wilson's caution concerning the authorship of *The Meeting of Gallants* reflects what anyone seeking to investigate the collaboration of Middleton and Dekker in *1 Honest Whore* must sooner or later recognize: that the styles of these two dramatists, distinctive

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.² *Ibid.*, p. xx.

³ *Ibid.*, p. xx. Other Middleton–Dekker collaborations have been proposed: that Dekker contributed the concluding 'Last Will and Testament of Lawrence Lucifer' to Middleton's *Black Book* (P. Shaw, 'The Position of Thomas Dekker in Jacobean Prison Literature', *PMLA*, 62 (1947), 366–367); that Dekker has a share in Middleton's *Family of Love* (G. J. Eberle, 'Dekker's Part in The Familie of Love', *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, The Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington, 1948), 723–738; a view developed by Lake, *Canon of Middleton's Plays*, pp. 91–107). L. J. Teagarden, 'The Dekker–Middleton Problem in *Michaelmas Term*', *Texas Studies in English*, 26 (1947), 49–58, notes parallels between the cony-catching schemes by which Easy is cheated of his lands in *Michaelmas Term* and the description of a similar cheat in Dekker's *Lantern and Candlelight*. Noting that 'the styles of both writers are at times so much alike that they cannot be distinguished' (p. 57), she is at a loss to know how to account for the parallels, since *Michaelmas Term* predates *Lantern and Candlelight*, and suggests, alternatively, that either 'Dekker, using materials he later published in pamphlet form, could have written the cheating scenes without the interpolation having been detected' (p. 57), or that 'Middleton may have seen an early draft of Dekker's manuscript' of *Lantern and Candlelight* (p. 58).

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enough at times, have a way of assuming the characteristics, each of the other, until they are virtually indistinguishable.¹ Middleton's share in the play has always been controversial. Bullen agreed with Dyce in finding it 'inconsiderable',² and such a recent scholar as S. Schoenbaum has pronounced Middleton's role in the play to be 'negligible'.³ Schoenbaum, making a point that had been previously stated by R. H. Shepherd,⁴ argued that Middleton's share must have been minimal or else Dekker, who at just this time (spring 1604) had been so scrupulous about acknowledging the single speech Middleton had contributed to the *Magnificent Entertainment*, would have named him as a collaborator. This is to confuse matters that were obviously of unequal importance to writers of the period. It was one thing for a poet to have public recognition of his contribution to the coronation pageant for the new king; it was another and a lesser thing for him to have his name on the titlepage of a play written for the public theatre. If that had been deemed more important, then we can be sure that dramatists would have seen to it that their names were regularly displayed there and their work properly acknowledged, and there would be fewer anonymous titlepages of play quartos of the period. The omission of Middleton's name from the titlepage of *1 Honest Whore* can mean either that the fact of a collaboration was not duly noted by the printer (as printers of the plays of the Beaumont and Fletcher canon regularly failed to note details of collaborations, with the result that Massinger, for example, is seldom named on titlepages of plays on which he worked); or, what is probably more likely, Middleton's name was omitted because his share in the play is not as great as Dekker's, and the advantages that would accrue to the younger dramatist from having it displayed were not important enough to make a point of including it. In acknowledging

¹ The point with reference to Middleton has often been made. See, e.g. M. C. Bradbrook, *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy* (London, 1955), p. 164: 'Middleton's power to work with other men and produce a play of apparently seamless unity is one of the most astonishing features of the Jacobean drama.'

² Bullen (ed.), *Works of Middleton*, I, xxv.

³ 'Middleton's Share in "The Honest Whore", Parts I & II', *Notes and Queries*, 197 (1952), 3.

⁴ R. H. Shepherd (ed.), *Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker* (London, 1873), I, xxiii. The point is also made by Bullen, *Works of Middleton*, I, xxvii.

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Middleton's contribution of a sixty-line speech to the *Magnificent Entertainment*, Dekker is quite obviously going out of his way to give a generous boost to the fortunes of a younger colleague who has shared in a work that just might conceivably come to the attention of the King. But this provides no necessary precedent for the public acknowledgment of his share in a play written for the common stage. As sources of evidence where questions of attribution are concerned, titlepages are notoriously unreliable, and the omission of Middleton's name from the titlepage of *1 Honest Whore* signifies nothing.

Though it might be tempting to dismiss the problem of Middleton's share in *1 Honest Whore* by supposing with Schoenbaum that he withdrew from the collaboration with Dekker, the external evidence from Henslowe that associates him with the play, taken together with the internal evidence of the parallels which the play exhibits with Middleton's acknowledged work, makes it impossible to deny his presence. There is no doubt at all that *1 Honest Whore* is the joint work of Dekker and Middleton. The collaboration was obviously very close, though one suspects that it took various forms: some scenes seem to have been written largely by one or the other dramatist, with occasional hints from his fellow; others seem to contain a good deal of joint writing; and it is possible that some of Middleton's work was revised by Dekker, the senior partner in the collaboration. Middleton's presence is most apparent in I.v; III.i; and III.iii. The play is largely Dekker's, but often scenes that are clearly signed with his style will contain one or more single passages that seem just as clearly to be signed with Middleton's. If, for example, the emendation at II.i.355 ('Back-door'd' for Qq 'Blacke-door'd', as originally proposed by Dyce, and not 'Blacke-beard' as emended by Professor Bowers; see the Commentary) should be permitted, then Middleton may be found contributing a highly characteristic stroke to Dekker's famous scene of Bellafront's conversion.¹ Apart from his prominence in

¹ Middleton may have helped to shape the opening scene, where the interrupted funeral procession for one who is not in fact dead parallels an episode that some two years later he would recast in a farcical key in *The Puritan*. Bogus funeral processions would become, indeed, something of a Middleton stock in trade; there are others in *Michaelmas Term* (IV.iv) and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (V.iv). Though Barker

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the three scenes just designated, Middleton's contribution may have consisted principally in touches given to individual passages throughout the play as a whole. This would account for the fact (made evident in the Commentary) that while there are signs of his presence in many scenes, they are often isolated signs, limited to but one or two passages in a given scene. Since the styles of the two dramatists are virtually identical, at least at this stage of their careers, it would be a rash scholar who would attempt to set precise limits on where the work of the one ends and the other begins. The most sophisticated study of the play's authorship that has yet been undertaken – D. J. Lake's statistical analysis of its colloquial and contracted forms – can do no more concerning the authorial division than to designate certain scenes as the work of 'Middleton and Dekker', certain others as the work of 'Dekker with minor assistance from Middleton', and a third group of scenes as the work of 'Dekker alone'.¹

For the student of Middleton, *1 Honest Whore*, coming as it does

(Middleton, pp. 201–204) is doubtful concerning Middleton's authorship of *The Puritan*, Lake's more recent and authoritative study demonstrates quite clearly that the play is his (*Canon of Middleton's Plays*, pp. 109–135). Though not all of the scholarly world is prepared to acknowledge Middleton as the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, a number of parallels exist between that play and *1 Honest Whore*; what is perhaps the most striking occurs at III.iii.95–96, in a scene in which Middleton's work is particularly evident (see Commentary). The parallels between *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *1 Honest Whore*, IV.i (Hippolito meditating on the skull) were noted by Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama*, 3rd ed. (London, 1953), p. 120, n. 1. However, since *The Revenger's Tragedy* is generally regarded as of later date, and since Ellis-Fermor was committed to the view that the play was the work of Tourneur, she was unable to account for them. In discussing *1 Honest Whore*, she noted the possibility that the opening scene might belong to Middleton (*ibid.*, p. 120). For arguments favoring Middleton's authorship of *Revenger's Tragedy*, see Barker, *Middleton*, pp. 165–169, and Lake, *Canon of Middleton's Plays*, pp. 136–162.

¹ Lake's attribution (*ibid.*, p. 58) is as follows:

Middleton and Dekker: I.i, iii-v.a (to George's first exit, line 132); III.i.a (to line 50).

Dekker with minor assistance from Middleton: II.i; III.i.b, iii; IV.iii.

Dekker alone: I.ii, v.b.; III.ii; IV.i-ii, iv; V.

On the whole, this seems acceptable, though I do not find the distinction between 'Middleton and Dekker' and 'Dekker with minor assistance from Middleton' very useful. For the attributions of earlier scholars, see Barker, *Middleton*, pp. 162–164, and Jones-Davies, II, 370–371. Price, p. 164, n. 19, considers Middleton's 'undoubted scenes' to be I.v; III.i; and III.iii.

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near the beginning of his career as a dramatist, is full of interesting connectives with the plays he was writing at the time and anticipations of those he would be writing in the years ahead. His most notable contribution to the play seems to have been the character of Candido, the patient man; some critics have suggested this figure to be a development of the character of Quieto in Middleton's *The Phoenix*, the play which it is likely he had just completed before collaborating with Dekker on *1 Honest Whore*.¹ The suggestion seems entirely plausible. Quieto's equanimity of temper is worthy of Candido. During his first appearance in the play, his Boy enters to announce that his neighbor has come into his house drunk and taken away the best table-cover:

Qui. Has he it?

Boy. Alas, sir!

Qui. Let him go; trouble him not: lock the door quietly after him, and have a safer care who comes in next.

(*The Phoenix*, IV.i.186–190)²

Phoenix, who has overheard the exchange, suggests that 'in such a cause as this a man might boldly, nay, with conscience, go to law'. To which Quieto replies: 'O, I'll give him the table too first! Better endure a fist than a sharp sword.' At the end of the play he reappears to administer a purge to Tangle, who has gone mad in consequence of his obsession with legal matters. Quieto binds him 'with silken patience' (V.i.299), and when the purge has done its work, restores him with 'the balsam of a temperate brain'. The play ends with Tangle, now cured, hailing 'sacred patience' (V.i.339). Peter Ure has noted the resemblance of this to the end of *1 Honest Whore*, where Candido the patient man also has a patient, his shrewish wife, whose condition he has cured.³

¹ For evidence that the play 'was composed between June and December 1603', see Baldwin Maxwell, 'Middleton's *The Phoenix*', *Adams Memorial Studies*, p. 750. Two of the scenes in *1 Honest Whore* in which Middleton's work is most evident (I.v and III.i) feature Candido. For the relation of Candido to Quieto in *The Phoenix*, see Hunt, p. 100, and Peter Ure, 'Patient Madman and Honest Whore: The Middleton–Dekker Oxymoron', *Essays and Studies*, new series, 19 (1966), 21–22.

² Quotations from *The Phoenix* are based on the text in vol. I of Bullen's edition of Middleton's *Works*.

³ 'Patient Madman and Honest Whore,' pp. 21–22. Both Ure and Hunt (p. 100) note the resemblance of Candido to Chamlet in *Anything for a Quiet Life*.

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Years later (in 1621), Middleton provided what Ure has termed the most complete analogue to *Candido* in the character of Mr Water Chamlet, the linen-draper in *Anything for a Quiet Life*. Like *Candido*, Chamlet has a discontented and intemperate wife, and an honest apprentice named George. In one scene (II.ii) he is victimized by gallants, who visit his shop and cheat him. In the course of the play, Mistress Chamlet accuses her gentle husband of fathering bastards, and threatens to sue for divorce; but when he announces his intention to go to the Bermudas in search of a quiet life, and she is threatened with his loss, she makes her peace.

It is unlikely that Middleton's share in the play was limited to the *Candido* subplot and sundry verbal and poetic strokes elsewhere. With the knowledge of hindsight, it is hard not to see his hand in the structural design of *1 Honest Whore*. Or if he did not help to design it, he must have learned from it. Ure noted that 'Any argument about the thematic unity of *1 Honest Whore* would need to take account of the way in which the converted shrew of the *Candido* scenes matches the converted courtesan of the *Bellafront* scenes.'¹ Near the end of his career, and working again with a collaborator (this time William Rowley), Middleton would design his masterpiece along the lines of the double plot adumbrated in *1 Honest Whore*. Writing of *The Changeling*, M. C. Bradbrook says that 'The subplot is connected with the main plot chiefly by implication. It acts as a kind of parallel or reflection in a different mode';² and the same can be said of the relation of subplot to main plot in *1 Honest Whore*. 'In all its stories', says Ure, 'indeed, not least in the Hippolito/Infelice one, the play echoes and re-echoes to the theme of transformation, or rebirth, of starting to live again'.³ Miss Bradbrook, writing of the thematic construction of *The Changeling*, says: 'it may be described as a study in the conflict of passion and judgment, and of the transforming power of love'.⁴ *1 Honest Whore*, a comedy of transformation, stands at the beginning of Middleton's career in the most striking juxtaposition with

¹ 'Patient Madman and Honest Whore', p. 27.

² *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 221.

³ 'Patient Madman and Honest Whore', p. 27.

⁴ *Themes and Conventions*, p. 214.

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The Changeling, the tragedy of transformation which comes at the end of his work for the stage. The plays have in common their division into main plot acted to the accompaniment of parodic subplot, each centering on a transformed woman: the transformed courtesan and the transformed shrew in *1 Honest Whore*; the fatally transformed Beatrice and the 'temporarily transformed'¹ Isabella in *The Changeling*.

The finale of *1 Honest Whore* takes place in a madhouse where the exigencies of both plots have caused all the principals to be assembled and where, while sorting out their own tangled affairs, they are diverted by the antics of the inmates. 'Can none but madmen serue / To dresse their wedding dinner?' asks the Duke (V.i.102–103) concerning the marriage of his daughter Infelice and Hippolito, scheduled to take place in Bethlem Monastery; and the words anticipate the grotesque pageant of fools and madmen which is intended to give 'a frightful pleasure' to the revels celebrating the wedding of Beatrice and Alsemero in *The Changeling* (cf. III.iv.247–256 of that play). In naming Lollo, the crafty assistant to the madhouse keeper in his and Rowley's play, did Middleton remember that the name had been used years before in his early collaboration with Dekker (*1 Honest Whore*, II.i.94 and 98–99: 'Well, many tooke that *Lollo* for a foole, but he's a subtile foole', a view that might well be applied to his namesake in *The Changeling*). Love for Hippolito prompts Bellafront to put on the disguise of madness (see *1 Honest Whore*, V.ii.436–437), even as love for Isabella causes Antonio and Franciscus to take on respectively the guises of fool and madman in *The Changeling*. *1 Honest Whore* is full of dramatic hints, the full theatrical potential of which Middleton would explore years later. Which of these were his own, yet undeveloped, and which were Dekker's, every reader must decide for himself. The relation of sanity to madness in *The Changeling* – where a madhouse has become the locus of the whole subplot, thereby enforcing its status as parodic image of what passes for the world's sanity – is far more equivocal than anything that is suggested in *1 Honest Whore*, and this may afford the measure of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

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how profoundly Middleton's tragic and ironic perspectives had developed in the course of two decades.¹

The well-established place which courtesans have always had among the *dramatis personae* of comedy goes back at least to Plautus and Terence and the Greek new comedy on which so much of Roman comedy is based, but scenes featuring them with their panders and bawds and their clientele have a particular vogue in early seventeenth-century Jacobean city comedy. Recent scholars have remarked on the possibility of Dekker's role in introducing to the stage what an older generation of scholars termed 'questionable scenes'. As has often been noted, the opening of II.i of *1 Honest Whore*, where Bellafront prepares to receive her Milanese gentlemen friends, seems to derive from II.ii of *Blurt, Master-Constable*, where the courtesan Imperia makes ready to receive the Venetian gallants.² *Blurt, Master-Constable* is almost certainly the work of

¹ But the seeds of these perceptions were there from the beginning, if one may be permitted to draw on the evidence of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. 'Surely we're all mad people', says Vindice, contemplating his *memento mori* (*Revenger's Tragedy*, III.v.79), and Hippolito, contemplating his in *1 Honest Whore* (IV.i.64), echoes the phrase: 'How mad are mortals'.

² Among those who have noted the connection between *Blurt* and *1 Honest Whore* are Hunt (p. 96), Schoenbaum, 'Middleton's Share', p. 3, Barker, *Middleton*, pp. 163–164, and Ure, 'Patient Madman and Honest Whore', pp. 19–20. Earlier critics regularly compare the first Bellafront scene with Middleton's *Michaelmas Term*, III.i, where the Country Wench dresses to receive company (see, e.g., Bullen, *Works of Middleton*, I, xxvi; Hunt, p. 96, n. 20; Parrott, *Comedies of Chapman*, p. 840, n. 1). The phrase 'questionable scenes' is Parrott's (*ibid.*, p. 839). He thought it 'probable that the first deviser of this fashion was Thomas Middleton', whose influence over Dekker, Parrott considered to be 'particularly strong'. He found Middleton's influence on Dekker to be 'plainly visible' in *1 Honest Whore*, 'and in *Westward Ho*, where he collaborated with Webster, Dekker swung over as far as his talent and temperament permitted to the manner of his former partner' (p. 840). The older critics regularly view Middleton as a corrupting influence on the drama of the time in general and on Dekker in particular. Hunt is especially virulent: 'It was Middleton. . . who carried the comedy of mud to the greatest length' (p. 92). Since she considers *Blurt* to be his, it is clear to her that Middleton must be responsible for the dubious elements in *1 Honest Whore*:

'he preceded Dekker in bringing such situations into a play. In *Blurt, Master-Constable*, . . . the scene in which Imperia talks with her attendants and afterwards admits her would-be suitors is pretty closely imitated by Dekker, though with less coarseness, in the scene in which Bellafront is waited on by her servant Roger and receives Matheo and the other gallants. The scenes are similar and the general tone is similar' (p. 96).