

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

**The Old Law by Thomas
Middleton and William
Rowley**

Edited by
Catherine M. Shaw



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Routledge
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First published in 1982 by Garland Publishing, Inc.

This edition first published in 2018 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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A Library of Congress record exists under ISBN:

ISBN 13: 978-0-367-14916-1 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-429-05391-7 (ebk)

Garland English Texts

Stephen Orgel
Editor

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Taylor & Francis

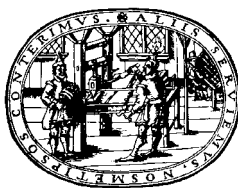
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Number 4



GARLAND PUBLISHING, INC.
NEW YORK & LONDON

1982

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Middleton, Thomas, d. 1627.

The old law.

(Garland English texts ; no. 4)

Bibliography: p.

I. Rowley, William, 1585?-1642? II. Shaw,
Catherine M. III. Title. IV. Series.

PR2714.042 1982 822'.3 82-880

ISBN 0-8240-9404-2 AACR2

Printed on acid-free, 250-year-life paper
Manufactured in the United States of America

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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the directors and staffs of the British Library, the Folger, Huntington, and Newberry Libraries for their unfailing help and cooperation and to Professor Virginia Carr for her assistance in reading proof and for making helpful textual comments. In particular, I would like to thank the British Library for permission to print the title page of the 1656 Quarto of *The Old Law* held in the Ashley Library.

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Abbreviations

Bentley	G.E. Bentley, <i>The Jacobean and Caroline Stage</i> , 7 vols. (Oxford, 1941–68)
Chambers	E.K. Chambers, <i>The Elizabethan Stage</i> , 4 vols. (Oxford, 1923)
CHEL	<i>Cambridge History of English Literature</i> , 15 vols. (Cambridge, 1919–1930)
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> , (London, 1885–99)
Greg	W.W. Greg, <i>A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration</i> (Oxford, 1939–59)
HLQ	<i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i>
MLN	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
MLR	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
MP	<i>Modern Philology</i>
OCD	<i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> (Oxford, 1970)
ODEP	<i>Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs</i> (Oxford, 1970)
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 13 vols. (Oxford, 1933)
Partridge	Eric Partridge, <i>A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English</i> (London, 1937)
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
RES	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
SP	<i>Studies in Philology</i>

- SR *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London*, Edward Arber 1554–1640, 5 vols. (London, 1875–77; Birmingham, 1894); G.E.B. Eyre and C.R. Rivington, 1640–1708, 3 vols. (London, 1915)
- STC *A Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad*, A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave 1475–1640, 2 vols. (London, 1926); Donald Wing 1641–1700, 6 vols. (New York, 1945)
- Tilley M.P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950)

INTRODUCTION

The Authors

Thomas Middleton, the older of the two dramatists who collaborated in the writing of *The Old Law*, was born in London in 1580 to Anne and William Middleton, a bricklayer of no small affluence. Although his father's death in 1586 and the subsequent legal disputes between his mother and new step-father, Thomas Harvey, caused some diminishing of the family assets, Middleton did attend Queen's College, Oxford, from 1598 until 1600. There is, however, no evidence he was ever granted a degree. In fact, a legal deposition dated February 8, 1601, which P. G. Phialas cites, states that "Thomas Middleton was forced by reason of some controversies betweene his mother and Allen Waterer [Middleton's brother-in-law] to come from Oxenforde to helpe his mother Anne Harvie when her husbonde was at Sea whereby he thinkethe he loste his Fellowship at Oxenforde." Another deponent, though disclaiming any actual knowledge of the loss of the fellowship, adds that he thinks it to be true for "nowe he [Middleton] remaynethe heare in London daylie accompaninge the players."¹ Thus, although Middleton had published some non-dramatic pieces before this date, *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased* (1597), *Micro-Cynicon, Six Snarling Satires* (1599), and *The Ghost of Lucrece* (1600), by early 1601 he had chosen association with the theatrical set and in 1602 his name starts to appear in Henslowe's *Diary* linked with those of Munday, Drayton, Webster, and Dekker, other dramatists producing plays for the Admiral's company at the new Fortune theatre. It was also during this early apprenticeship period that the playwright met and married Maria, the sister of Thomas Marbeck, an actor with the Fortune company. It was not, however, Middleton's association with the Admiral's or his early hack work for Henslowe that gained him his first reputation as a writer of comedy. Rather, it was a group of independent, somewhat satiric plays, a number of them London comedies, which he wrote for Paul's Boys. Of these, *The Phoenix* (1603-4), *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1604-7), *A Mad World, My Masters* (1604-7), and *Michaelmas Term* (1604-6) are extant. A fifth, *Your Five Gallants* (1604-7), may also belong to this group.

¹ "Middleton's Early Contact with the Law," *SP*, LII (1955), 191-2.

The years between 1606-7 and 1611 appear to be strangely unproductive ones for Middleton as an independent dramatist. The collapse of Paul's Boys, who disappear from theatrical records after June, 1606, may have contributed to this. However, Harold N. Hildebrand's proof that Middleton wrote the non-extant *The Viper and Her Brood* in late 1605 and perhaps *Your Five Gallants* (1604-7)² for the Children of the Queen's Revels indicates that the playwright had already transferred his allegiance to the rival company at Blackfriars before this. Yet the move was not immediately fortunate for the years following thrust one disaster after another upon the Queen's Revels. The scandal aroused by the Chapman, Jonson, Marston *Eastward Ho!* (1605) which cost the company its royal patronage was followed, as a result of further offence given by Day's *Isle of Gulls* (1606), by their temporary excommunication from the Blackfriars theatre. In 1608, the company, now called the Children of the Chapel or of the Revels, was again in trouble. Chambers cites one of the parts of Chapman's *Conspiracy and Tragedy of Byron* and another unnamed play as being the offenders (II, 53-4). Although the company did manage to rally from these setbacks and find new quarters at Whitefriars when the King's Men moved into Blackfriars, the whole unsettled atmosphere was hardly conducive to creativity.

It might also be noted that changes were occurring in the Admiral's company as well. The adult company had been, after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, taken into the service of Prince Henry and came to be known by his name. Shortly after this, certainly by 1606, the name of Edward Alleyn, son-in-law of Henslowe and a king-pin in the company, had disappeared from its rolls (Chambers, II, 186-8). Apparently, though maintaining certain financial interests, he became inactive and actually removed himself from London. It may well be that the "new blood" which Chambers records as being introduced into the company between 1606 and 1610 was antipathetic to a dramatist whose work for them had been little more than piecemeal.

One way or another, Middleton's next plays were written for the Lady Elizabeth's Men, a company which in March, 1613, amalgamated with the new Children of the Queen's Revels, by now restored to royal favour. These were A

² "Thomas Middleton's *The Viper's Brood*," *MLN*, XLII (1927), 25-8.

Chaste Maid in Cheapside (1611-13) and *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman* (1613?). It was probably during his association with Lady Elizabeth's that Middleton came into contact with William Rowley with whom he later collaborated so successfully. In fact, the latter of these two plays, according to C. W. Stork, show comic touches which he assigns to Rowley's hand.³ Indeed, although after 1615 Middleton wrote his independent plays for the King's Men, all five of the known collaborations between Middleton and Rowley were produced by Lady Elizabeth's or by Prince Charles' (I) which had, in turn, absorbed the principal members of Lady Elizabeth's by March, 1616 (Bentley I, 198-9). Among these was William Rowley who had been a principal member of Prince Charles' (I) company at least from 1609 when it carried the name of the Duke of York's Men.

Information about the life of William Rowley must be gleaned from theatrical or legal records associated with his stage career. Anything else is conjectural. Even his birth year, which Stork guesses to be 1585, is arrived at by working backwards from the first time Rowley's name is found in print.⁴ Together with those of John Day and George Wilkins, his name appears on a dedicatory leaf inserted after the title-page late in the print-off of *The Travels of Three Brothers* (1607). Considering that this play, his collaboration with Heywood, *Fortune by Land and Sea* (1607-9), and, apparently, Rowley's own *A Shoemaker, a Gentleman* (1608) were presented by Queen Anne's Men, the assumption may be made that he started his theatrical career with the Curtain-Red Bull company.

Most of Rowley's career, however, 1609-1623, both writing and acting, was with the Duke of York's Men which became Prince Charles' (I) after the death of Prince Henry in 1612 and ultimately part of the Lady Elizabeth's-Prince's-Queen's Revels complex referred to above. Yet, perhaps somewhat ironically after such long loyalty, for the last two years of his life Rowley was attached to the King's Men for whom, among other things, he acted the part of the fat bishop in Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1624). Bentley gives a listing of all the documented information on Rowley's life with both Prince's (I) and King's (II, 555-558; V, 1014-1018). Of particular importance in terms of

³ *William Rowley: His "All's Lost by Lust" and "A Shoemaker, A Gentleman,"* (Philadelphia, 1910), pp. 47-8.

⁴ *ibid.* pp. 7-8.

his collaborations is the number of times his name appears as actor. It would appear that his experience in this capacity, as a practical man of the theatre, was a most valued contribution to the Middleton-Rowley plays.

Comic characterization and incident were Rowley's dramatic forte and in this capacity critics have detected his hand in no less than fifty plays.⁵ Although Rowley did write one independent tragedy, *All's Lost by Lust* (1619), and his best-known collaboration with Middleton, *The Changeling* (1622), was also a tragedy, nearly all other extant plays in which he had a hand are comedies and the distinctive quality of his comic style is farce; sometimes outrageously overdone but rarely other than genuinely funny and well integrated into the themes and morality of the central dramatic movement. The broadness of Rowley's humour, particularly when juxtaposed with Middleton's incisive and cultured wit suggests the lusty roughness of the London streets. Indeed, the comic style of which he was so obviously a master may be a clue indicating a birth and rearing in the city and an earlier and closer association with the work-a-day life of the London theatre than documentary evidence has been able to support.

The third name which appears on the title-page of the 1656 edition of *The Old Law* is that of Philip Massinger. Just how much Massinger had to do with the play when it was originally conceived or to what extent he may have revised certain passages will be discussed under Collaboration. Here, it is merely interesting to note that particularly close association between the three playwrights is unlikely to have been before 1621-1625, those years in which Massinger wrote *The Maid of Honour*, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, *The Bondman*, *The Renegado*, and *The Parliament of Love*, plays certainly written for Lady Elizabeth's and presented at the Phoenix. Apart from his beginnings with Henslowe (1613-15), Massinger's writing career was, like Middleton's, primarily associated with the King's Men. All three, however, were only together with this company between 1623 and 1625, five years after the date now accepted for *The Old Law*. It is true that Middleton and Massinger both wrote for King's from as early as 1615-16 but *The Old Law* was most likely produced by Prince's-Lady Elizabeth's as were the other collaborations.

⁵ See D. M. Robb, "The Canon of William Rowley's Plays," *MLR*, XLV (1950), 129-41.

Unlike Middleton and perhaps even Rowley, Philip Massinger was not a Londoner but was born in Salisbury. His baptismal date is November 24, 1583. Like Middleton, however, he did attend Oxford although again there is no record of a degree being granted. A distinction which sets Massinger quite apart from either of the other two is his association, through his father, with the politically and socially prominent Herbert family. Arthur Massinger, the father, served both the second and the third Earls of Pembroke. He was also a fellow of Merton College and a member of Parliament; distinctions which would appear to indicate a more sophisticated upbringing for the son than either of the other two dramatists with whom his name is associated. Indeed, the closeness in age of Philip Massinger and William, the third earl, may suggest that the dramatist came under the influence of Samuel Daniel, tutor in the Herbert household family, clearly acknowledged in the dedication of *The Bondman* (1624), is the most likely link between Massinger and the London theatrical world. The third earl, after succeeding to the title in 1601, showed himself kindly disposed toward a number of dramatists, not the least of whom was William Shakespeare and, indeed, it was William Herbert's appeal which stood the King's Men in such good stead at the time of the *Game at Chess* scandal (1624).

Massinger's name first appears in theatrical documents around 1613 when, apparently for no more than two years, he was a writer for Henslowe. After that, except for the few plays mentioned above as being written for Lady Elizabeth's, his playwriting was connected with the King's Men; first primarily as a collaborator with John Fletcher and later, after Fletcher's death in 1625, as the regular dramatist with this company.

Of the three, Massinger lived the longest. Rowley and Middleton died within a year of each other in 1626 and 1627; Massinger in March, 1640. Although Rowley was active to the end of his life as both dramatist and actor, Middleton's contributions appear to have been abruptly curtailed after the suppression of *A Game at Chess*. Apparently, once Massinger took over Fletcher's place with the King's Men he did no more collaborating. He did some revising of earlier King's plays but mainly he produced an incredible number of independent plays with such regularity that one might suspect him to be under some form of contract. His last play, *The Fair Anchoress of Fausilippo* was licenced just a few