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Of Thomas Dekker**

By George E. Thornton

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## The Social and Moral Philosophy Of Thomas Dekker

by George E. Thornton\*

[*Editor' Note:* Mr. Thornton was not available for consultation during the preparation of this study for publication. Any alterations from the original manuscript to the present form have been undertaken by the editor with the advice and assistance of the Graduate Publications Committee. C.E.W.]

### I

God helpe the Poore,  
The riche can shifte . . .

*Work for Armourous* (1609)

It is impossible to divorce an author from his milieu and arrive at any complete portrait of the man. Indeed, when dealing with an Elizabethan, it is impossible for one to understand the man without first seeing him against that vast backdrop which constitutes the period—a kaleidoscopic backdrop, constantly shifting in things philosophical, spiritual, and economical. Thomas Dekker is no exception. Born in 1572,<sup>1</sup> he spent his life in London and its environs and was a clear-headed but not unemotional observer of the activities of this great city and its inhabitants. As a typical Englishman of the period, he was fiercely loyal to his Queen and proud of the considerable accomplishments of his country under her tutelage, for she had wrested the sovereignty of the seas from Spain and was extending her influence into the New World from whence precious metals were pouring into England. And no less significant to Britain's future under Elizabeth were scientific and technological advancements.<sup>2</sup> It was an age of invention which revolutionized English industry and made English fortunes, and the country was claiming the world market from Continental powers that had hitherto monopolized the colonies of the New World. Men were realizing huge profits from investments and were, in turn, indifferent to the effects of their actions upon a large segment of the population. The landed gentry continued to enclose large sections of farming land, with the result that houses, towns, and even churches disappeared. It is true that the consummate selfishness of these landowners often blinded them to the evils of enclosure to the country

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1. Sir E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, III, p. 289.  
2. A. L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth*, p. 112.

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as a whole, for men who had once earned a living tilling the soil were now unemployed, forced to steal, and frequently imprisoned.<sup>3</sup>

It was, therefore, an England of violent contrasts: great wealth and extravagance on the one hand; poverty and penury on the other. As a direct result of the first, prices rose steadily. But labor was expendable. Former workers swelled the army of the unemployed, and these frantic, homeless men with families were begging or stealing in defiance of the heavy penalties imposed for such crimes.<sup>4</sup> The ranks of the unemployed were filled with demobilized soldiers, once taken from their work and pressed into the campaigns in Ireland, Spain, and the Low Countries. Men, injured or maimed in service, joined this army of vagabonds and swarmed throughout England. One vividly remembers Falstaff's army of aristocrats, "toasts-and-butter," who immediately bought themselves out of service, a practice common to the times, until Falstaff was eventually left with a charge of

. . . such as indeed were never soldiers, but discarded unjust serving-men, younger sons to younger brothers, revolted tapsters and ostlers trade-fallen, the cankers of a calm world and a long peace . . . .<sup>5</sup>

These angry men—the maimed ones begging, the sturdier joining the criminal ranks—swelled the lists of the unemployed in the cities, especially in London, and increased the number of vagabonds who choked the highroads and haunted the city. The honest "employed" citizen was terrified by these hungry and disillusioned groups who were indulging in violence of all kinds and who, because of their war experiences, were somewhat callous to life. The potential danger to life and property inherent in such vile conditions was an ever-present problem to Elizabeth, an ugly and terrifying prospect demanding immediate attention. But Elizabeth was not able to act at once. An increasingly influential group composed of successful business men, wary of any encroachment upon their newly-acquired prosperity and fearing the violence latent in such a hungry mob, appealed to the Queen. Stringent laws were consequently enacted, but in spite of harsh penalties meted out to wrong-doers, every fair and market swarmed with thieves, prostitutes, and tricksters. In an effort to curtail these bands of wanderers, the government passed additional laws designed to return these people to home parishes which would, thereafter, assume responsibility either for their useful employment or for their maintenance. Furthermore, in the event that a local parish might receive more than its share of paupers, local justices were authorized to issue begging licenses for a limited territory to such persons, carrying stern penalties should the boundaries of these specified territories be

3. Kate Gregg, "Thomas Dekker: A Study in Economics and Social Background," *University of Washington Publications*, II (February, 1924), p. 75

4. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

5. *I Henry IV*, IV, ii.

exceeded. Provisions were additionally made for the erection of work-houses and hospitals and houses of correction, while wealthy parishes were enabled to contribute to others not so fortunate.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the government in 1572 reversed its decision upon licensed begging, fixing penalties again both upon beggars and upon those who fostered them,<sup>7</sup> making it now imperative for an accused beggar to reside in prison throughout two sessions, at the end of which time, if convicted, he was burned in the ear with a hot iron or, if for a second offense, was executed and his family deprived of any inheritance.<sup>8</sup> Dekker spoke openly about this condition:

What though there be Statutes to *Burne* us i'th eares for *Rogues*? to syndge us i'th hand for pilferers? to whippe us at posts for being *Beggars*; and to shackle our heeles i'th stockes for being idle vagabondes? what of this? Are there not other Statutes more sharpe then these to punish the rest of the Subjects, that scorne to be our companions?<sup>9</sup>

The severity of these statutes suggests that the problem of beggary in Dekker's time was immediate.

This age was a transition period during which many features of the Middle Ages persisted into an age that did not need them. There were many stabilizing influences peculiar to the Middle Ages that had disappeared before any satisfactory substitute could be found to take their place. The medieval scheme was founded upon tradition in which law and contract were not always necessary.<sup>10</sup> The nobleman who ruled the community was entirely responsible for the people and traditions in the community. Consequently, in contrast to this system, the economic principles of the Elizabethan-Jacobean period tended to conflict with and to destroy the old traditional order of things. This change was well under way by the time of the civil wars, so that there was in Dekker's age a recognizable attempt to synthesize the economic order of the Middle Ages and the new, divergent aspects of the nascent capitalistic system.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the growth of the mercantile, industrial, and agrarian fortunes based upon this prosperity was followed by a weakening of the nobility. The Elizabethan world was fast becoming ambitious and middle class.<sup>12</sup>

Catholic abhorrence to usury had been a temporary stumbling block to the new economy, but with the Protestant Reformation and Henry VIII, the problem had been solved, for the new order supported the

6. Later, when an investigation was made to determine the effectiveness of the work-houses and hospitals, it was discovered that many parishes had neglected to build them; cf. Gregg, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

8. *Loc. cit.*

9. Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Hornbook and The Belman of London*, p. 88.

10. L. C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, p. 19.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

12. Esther C. Dunn, *The Literature of Shakespeare's England*, p. 19.

profession of lending and borrowing. The resultant religious controversies and persecutions probably destroyed much of the true religious feelings, or at least caused doubts. "The world, not the Church, called the tune to which the Age of Elizabeth danced and sang."<sup>13</sup> It is necessary to realize, therefore, that while the economic philosophy of the Middle Ages, based upon the theory of the parts being subservient to the whole, survived somewhat into the sixteenth century, it was to be modified considerably with the rise of the middle class in the seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup> The emergence of this capitalist middle class affected the whole pattern of English life.<sup>15</sup> The social and economic tensions lurking beneath the surface did not erupt during Elizabeth's lifetime while England was still threatened by war or by possible invasion from Spain. With peace and with the death of Elizabeth, however, the potential violence was to gather force and lead eventually to civil disorder.<sup>16</sup>

As far as class structure in the Elizabethan period was concerned, it also had its roots in the period which preceded it; but, again, it, too, was in conflict with contemporary trends which tended to destroy it. The rigid class system of the earlier period had been modified somewhat, but the ideal still persisted which asserted that one's status was preordained by God and was permanent. Thus, medieval man was more conscious of status than of class. The ambition of a well-adjusted man of that era may not have been to rise out of his grade but *to stand well in it!*<sup>17</sup> Industrial and commercial enterprize was not ready, as yet, to challenge this concept.<sup>18</sup> Violation of one's status, to the medieval mind, was an indication of *unnaturalness* and could be expected to lead to catastrophe for the individual and for the state.<sup>19</sup> The maintenance of the status quo, therefore, constituted the greatest good; and the greatest evil was *change*. That this idealized philosophy was ever followed to the letter is debatable, but it was the basis for social thought in medieval life, in theory at least. Although it had been modified by Elizabeth's time, it was still the moral and social code of the conservative.

The purpose of much Elizabethan social and industrial legislation was to insure the continuation of this class system which moralists and statesmen both agreed to be essential to the stability of the commonwealth. This theory, it will eventually be seen, is Thomas Dekker's, as

13. Rowse, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

14. Knights, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

15. *Loc. cit.*

16. Rowse, *op. cit.*, p. 223; it is interesting to recall that Sir Thomas More had earlier commented upon this same situation in *Utopia*: ". . . Here nowe woulde I see, yf anye man dare bee so bolde as to compare with this equytie, the justice of other nations; among whom, I forsake God, if I can fynde any signe or token of equitie and justice. . . . Therefore when I consider and way in my mind all these common wealthes, which now a dayes any where do flourish, so God helpe me, I can perceave nothing but a certain conspiracy of riche men procuringe their owne commodities under the name and title of the common wealth. . . ." Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, pp. 160-62.

17. Knights, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

19. Gregg, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

well. Ulysses' speech in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* provides one a succinct statement of the creed:

O, when degree is shaken,  
Which is the ladder to all high designs,  
The enterprise is sick! How could commodities,  
Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,  
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,  
The primogenitive and due of birth,  
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptors, laurels,  
But by degree, stand in authentic place?  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark, what discord follows.<sup>20</sup>

In actual practice, the vagabond seemed to be the only Elizabethan expected to stay in his place. But, the theory of degree, which taught that one's position in the class structure was fixed by Divinity, was disregarded, obviously, by those who were climbing the social ladder. The poor were at the very bottom of the structure with all of the intellectually superior and socially secure classes rising above them in successive tiers. The poor were advised that their faculties could not enable them to appreciate the Divine Wisdom that so ordered this social pattern: their duty, hence, was to submit patiently. Defenseless as they were, they had no alternative.<sup>21</sup> Thus, while the classes in Elizabethan England seemed to be quite fluid, at least from the middle upwards, the force of the law was directed to this "patient submission" of the poor. However, one can believe that some within this inferior group were ambitious, for, as Hamlet said to Horatio, this was an age that had grown ". . . so pick'd that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe."<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, with the new economic order, the wealthy merchant class began to supercede the nobility as first in importance to the future of the realm. This trend was strengthened considerably when James I, in order to defray the costs of his extravagant court, sold titles with indiscretion, thereby increasing the nobility.<sup>23</sup> In order to be classed as landed gentry, some merchants as well as other wealthy members of the middle class bought country estates and *became* gentlemen. Some even had lineages counterfeited to enable themselves to hold positions of equality with the older, established families.<sup>24</sup> In general, however, the mercantile families of the towns ruled their provinces and were satisfied with their lot. But many in the yeoman class were moving upwards, becoming gentry. As a result, class structure was not only fluctuating but relations between classes were also changing. Originally, the Platonic-Aristotelian definition of a gentleman, with English modifications, was

20. *Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, ll. 101-10.

21. Gregg, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

22. *Hamlet*, V, i, l. 132.

23. Gregg, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

24. Knights, *op. cit.*, p. 249.



that which men of refinement endeavored to emulate. Temperance and moderation, a regard for reputation and carriage, and the conviction that a gentleman must never be a professional man comprised the code which one must follow.<sup>25</sup> With the appearance, however, of men who had made fortunes in trade, this definition could no longer hold meaning.<sup>26</sup> The new "aristocracy" was proving to be the *nouveau riche* of trade and commerce. Sons of these merchant princes, some of them younger sons, came to London to live. Their swaggering extravagances and superficial imitations of gentlemen provided many an observant author with rich material for satire, Dekker among them. The irresponsible actions of these young men were dominated by a normal desire to assert personality, but their efforts were rendered odious by their very lack of breeding.<sup>27</sup> They had little knowledge of gentlemanly behavior other than that of resenting insult and of holding their own with their equals.<sup>28</sup> In *The Guls Horn-Booke*, Dekker satirizes the typical behavior of a group of these dandies gathered in an ordinary in London:

Being arrived in the roome, salute not any but those of your acquaintance: walke up and downe by the rest as scornfully and as carelessly as a Gentleman-Usher: Select some friend (having first throwne off your cloake) to walke up and downe the room with you, let him be suited if you can, worse by farre then your selfe, he will be a foyle to you: and this will be a meanes to publish your clothes better than Powles, a Tennis-court, or a Playhouse: discourse as lowd as you can, no matter to what purpose if you but make a noise, and laugh in fashion, and have a good sower face to promise quarrelling, you shall bee much observed.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, apprentices were a superior class of young men. Indeed, some guilds required that the parents of the apprentice own property, often imposing strict educational requirements upon the child. The sons of unskilled laborers and husbandmen were not always eligible for apprenticeship by these tokens; consequently, it was not unusual for an apprentice to be the son of a gentleman. It was not unknown, for that matter, for an apprentice to become Lord Mayor.<sup>30</sup> Simon Eyre, the protagonist in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, rose to such heights by the end of the play.

Dekker himself enters the picture against this background of social unrest. Although he readily established himself both as a pamphleteer and a dramatist, he chose at the onset of his career to express his philosophy more stringently in his pamphlets than in his plays. There may indeed be valid reason for his choice of this medium. The reluctance (or seeming reluctance) of many Elizabethan dramatists to deal frankly and realis-

25. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

26. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

27. *Cambridge History of English Literature*, IV, p. 355.

28. *Loc. cit.*

29. Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Hornbook and The Belman of London*, pp. 39-40.

30. Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare's Audience*, p. 82.

tically with contemporary social and economic problems may rest in the fact that the stage and press had long been viewed with suspicion by the government. Alarmists looked upon large groups or assemblages of people as gatherings of seditious; and the press itself was often believed to be the very instrument through which seditious ideas were disseminated. Steps to control both the theatre and the press had been instituted during the reign of Henry VIII and maintained during the reigns of Elizabeth and James.<sup>31</sup> However, there was still another force or influence to be found in what may best be termed audience taste, for it is feasible to think that an Elizabethan audience did not always care to think deeply upon potentially unpleasant matters and that this audience, therefore, placed certain indirect restrictions upon a sensitive playwright. For example, it may be that Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* reflects an attempt by playwrights to satisfy audience taste while dealing with a current situation. One remembers that in this drama a grocer and his wife, accompanied by an apprentice, Rafe, force their ways upon the stage and insist that their profession be made the subject of a play. The situation which follows satirizes the aristocratic pretensions of the humble, especially when Rafe is made a protagonist, a kind of Quixotic grocery-boy knight bearing the grocer's insignia upon his shield. Or Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for that matter, shows one the rude mechanicals as they inherit the stage and inject their rusticity into the love story of Pyramus and Thisbe. But these two illustrations, at best, are examples of a mild, gentle satire of an easily recognizable contemporary situation. In both instances the dramatists are able to strike out against a social idea in comparative safety, simply because the situation chosen is not a particularly troublesome one. However pleasantly satirical these two episodes may be, one must conclude that from the standpoint of a realistically presented picture of society, the end results are *distortion*. Dekker, on the other hand, felt profoundly the conflicts with which the typical Elizabethan had to contend. A frequent association with the unstable elements of his society developed within him a stern moral code which a man of his integrity and experience could not contain. This code manifests itself in his pamphlets at the beginning of his career and is crystallized in his two important dramas, *The Honest Whore I & II*.<sup>32</sup>

31. Gregg, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65; 102; *cf.*, also, *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 165-68.

32. Hereafter in this study, for the sake of expediency since these two dramas will be referred to with much frequency, they shall be designated by the abbreviation *HW, I & II*.

## II

The Marriner then called mee his Sea-marke,  
for to him I stood as a Watch-tower to guide  
him Safely to our English shore . . . .

—*The Deade Tearme* (1608)

Much of the information on the life of Thomas Dekker is questionable, but it has been reliably ascertained that he was born in 1572,<sup>33</sup> and that he was last heard of in 1632.<sup>34</sup> What little has been written about Dekker has been gleaned from a study of internal evidence in his prose and dramatic works and from the few extant letters that he wrote. His parentage and birthplace are unknown, although there is some evidence to support a theory that he was London born and bred.<sup>35</sup> It appears that he was a member of the middle class,<sup>36</sup> some authorities maintaining that he was of Dutch extraction,<sup>37</sup> possibly the descendant of a family of weavers who came to England to escape persecution in the Low Countries when it was dangerous to be a Protestant there.<sup>38</sup> It is further suggested that he may once have been an apprentice and, later, a merchant tailor, which specific source also claims that the character of Orlando Friscobaldo in *HW, II* may be autobiographical, for Orlando was a merchant, and his daughter, Bellafront, a prostitute. Since it is thought that Dekker married early and had a daughter who was baptized in 1594,<sup>39</sup> this information may be given autobiographical interpretation; but Sir E. K. Chambers finds no evidence to show that Dekker was ever married, and the case rests there.<sup>40</sup>

When one first learns of Dekker in 1598, the playwright has already had a part in the composition of some fifteen or sixteen plays,<sup>41</sup> for in this year, his name appears on Meres' list of the best writers of tragedies.<sup>42</sup> To have earned such a reputation, it is obvious that he must have been actively writing for at least a few years prior to Meres. His name is recorded, also, in Henslowe's *Diary* for the year 1598.<sup>43</sup> Previously, Henslowe had made entries of the names of dramas but not of playwrights; consequently, it is very possible that Dekker's career may have begun as early as 1594.<sup>44</sup> From 1598 until 1602, he wrote constantly for the Admiral's Men at the Rose and Fortune, and later for Worcester's Men at the Rose.<sup>45</sup> Most of his dramatic work during this time was in collabora-

33. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

34. *Loc. cit.*

35. Thomas Dekker, *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, "The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London," II, p. 13: "O thou beawtifellest daughter of two vnited Monarchies! from thy womb receaued I my being. . . ."

36. Gregg, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

37. *Thomas Dekker*, edited by Ernest Rhys, p. xi.

38. Mary Leland Hunt, *Thomas Dekker*, p. 21.

39. *Thomas Dekker*, edited by Ernest Rhys, p. xxix.

40. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

41. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

42. *Loc. cit.*

43. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

44. *Loc. cit.*

45. *Loc. cit.*

tion with such men as Chettle and Haughton, Marston, Webster, Middleton, and others.<sup>46</sup>

As early as 1598, however, he was destitute. In this year Henslowe lent him money to pay for his release from the Counter, a debtors' prison.<sup>47</sup> His poverty presents a paradox if Meres' account for this year be accurate, suggesting that he was a successful playwright by this date. Furthermore, Hunt contends that Dekker was among the best paid of Henslowe's writers.<sup>48</sup> Although some playwrights learned to supplement their earnings with grants from titled personages or patrons to whom plays were dedicated out of gratitude,<sup>49</sup> Dekker did not seem to seek out such patronage—royal patronage at least—and his attitude may account for his poverty and imprisonment. It is certainly indicative of an independent spirit. Nevertheless, he was seriously in debt again in 1613, for which "crime" he was imprisoned until 1616.<sup>50</sup> This slight information constitutes the bulk of knowledge of Dekker's life. It is sketchy at best. However, one can piece out a somewhat more satisfactory account from a study of the man's pamphlets, which contain his opinions upon important events of the time and which help, in part, to trace the development of his philosophy.

Dekker first began to write pamphlets in 1603, when he published *The Wonderful Year*,<sup>51</sup> an occasion piece upon the death of Queen Elizabeth including an account of the London plague. This treatise begins with Elizabeth's death, describing vividly her lying in state and her funeral, progresses to the ascendancy of James I, and concludes with a grim account of the plague in the city. This material permits Dekker to express his views about *change* and, at the same time, to anticipate a theory which he strengthens in *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London*, the essence of which is that "immoderate rejoicing," which complimented the coronation of James I, was entirely responsible for the advent of London's ghastly plague. He shows what the death of Queen Elizabeth *should mean* to England, clearly recording his own political views. He claims, first, that Elizabeth was never once apprised of ". . . what that out-landish word *Change* signified . . ."<sup>52</sup> *Change* was the by-word of the new order that was making itself prominent toward the end of Elizabeth's reign, and Dekker was on the side of the conservatives of his age. That he was certainly not censuring his departed Queen, however, he makes clear later in the pamphlet:

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 292-96: *Patient Grissell* (1602); *Satiromastix* (1601); *Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1602); *The Honest Whore* (c. 1604-05); *Westward Ho!* (1604); *Northward Ho!* (1605); *The Roaring Girl* (1610).

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 290 ff.

48. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

49. *Loc. cit.*

50. *Thomas Dekker*, edited by Ernest Rhys, p. xxxvi.

51. Thomas Dekker, *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, "The Wonderful Year," I, pp. 71-148.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

. . . O what an Earth-quake is the alteration of a State! Look from the Chamber of Preference, to the Farmers cottage, and you shall finde nothing but distractions: the whole Kingdom seemes a wilderness, and the people in it are transformed to wild men . . . .<sup>53</sup>

These are strong words. Dekker has allied himself irrevocably in this passage with the political and social conservatives of his time. He is saying that "change," which brings "the alteration of a State," also introduces "distraction" and culminates in a "wildness" among the people. He is definitely antagonistic to the incoming political class changes.

After discussing the death and obsequies of Elizabeth, he shifts abruptly from the solemn, funereal quality of the introduction to the gaiety and commotion attendant to James' coronation. He admits that from Elizabeth's death, which he terms an "Ague," the country suddenly recovered to indicate its healthy state in a ". . . wholesome receipt of the proclaymed King."<sup>54</sup> But it seems to have puzzled him, at the same time, that such an abrupt change could so quickly permeate the temperament of the nation. He notes conclusively that "Vpon Thursday it was treason to cry God saue King Iames king of *England*, and vppon Friday hye treason not to cry so."<sup>55</sup> One may assume, therefore, that Dekker was loathe to discard his mourning. That he felt this state of national affairs strongly is evinced in his remark, "Oh it were able to fill a hundred paire of writing tables with notes, but to see the parts *plaid* in the compasse of one houre on the *stage* of this new-found world!"<sup>56</sup> Dekker's use of the phrase, "in the parts *plaid*," suggests a duplicity demanded of the commonality by such a rapid metamorphosis of things. He was perturbed that "In the morning no voice [was] hearde but murmures and lamentation, [while] at noone nothing but shoutes of gladnes and triumpe . . . ."<sup>57</sup> It was true that the celebration in honor of James did affect the entire kingdom, and spirits ran high that were at low ebb only a matter of hours before. The high and low celebrated, but Dekker attempts to justify their action without approving their taste: ". . . good reason had these time-catchers to be led into this fooles paradise, for they saw mirth in euery man's face, the streetes were plumed with gallants, Tabacconists fild vp the whole Tauernes . . . ."<sup>58</sup> However, he observes that the holiday spirit for these "time-catchers" did not last long:

. . . Night walks at the heeles of the day, and sorrore enters (like a tauerne-bill) at the taille of our pleasures: for on the Appenine heighth of this immoderate ioy and securitie (that like Powles Steeple ouerlookt the whole Cities) Behold, that miracle-worker, who in one

53. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

56. *Loc. cit.*

57. *Loc. cit.*

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

minute turnd our generall mourning to a general mirth, does now againe in a moment alter that gladnes to shrikes & lamentation.<sup>59</sup>

The moralizer is at work.

These initial passages from *The Wonderful Year* are indicative of Dekker's social thinking. There is a grim Puritan strain to be detected in his philosophy at this stage which bears close investigation since it is destined to comprise a large portion of his thought.

With respect to the plague section of *The Wonderful Year*, Dekker is clear from the start. He explains that he will describe a variety of plague incidents, ". . . some of them yeelding Commicall and ridiculous stufte, others lamentable: a third kind, vpholding rather admiration then laughter or pittis."<sup>60</sup> He proceeds, then, to relate these incidents. In the early portions of this section his stories are divided between those which express sincere compassion for certain sufferers and those which reveal a complete contempt for others. Although his attitude, here, may seem to be paradoxical, in reality it is not. He simply held contempt for those who, by fleeing the city, endeavored to escape the plague. In one instance, he tells of a Dutchman who planned to avoid the epidemic by returning to Holland. Dekker loathes this man: ". . . how pitifully lookt my Burko-maister, when he vnderstood that the sicknes could swim . . ."<sup>61</sup> This man desrved the plague for trying to ". . . cozen our English wormes of his Dutch carkas (which had been fatted heere) . . ."<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, he held an equally contemptuous opinion for his fellow countrymen who tried to escape. He graphically depicts one wealthy Londoner who attempted to protect his worldly property as well as his life:

. . . now is thy soule iocund and thy senses merry. But open thine eyes, thou Foole and behold that darling of thine eye (thy sonne) turnd suddeinly into a lump of clay: the hand of pestilence hath smote him euen vnder thy wing . . .<sup>63</sup>

But at other times, within this pamphlet Dekker seems to be amused by the plague. He appears pleased to discover that the plague, like death itself, is an indifferent leveler that takes both great and small. And his descriptions often assume a strange, macabre quality, as in the specific case of a gallant who dies of the disease:

. . . what shall become of such a coward, being told that the self-same bodie of his, which is now so pampered with superfluous fare, so perfumed and bathed in odoriferous waters, and so daily apparelled in varietie of fashions, must one day be throwne (like stinking carion) into a rank & rotten graue . . .<sup>64</sup>

Thus, although one may consider him a royalist by his attitude toward change, Dekker was pleased by the republicanism of a common burial.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

62. *Loc. cit.*

63. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

*The Wonderful Year* concludes with a brief episode, probably the most macabre in the pamphlet, which leaves the reader with a sense of charnel-house horror that neutralizes the moral effects of the foregoing plague sections and abates the pathos of the incident which immediately precedes it. Specifically, it is the tale of a man stricken with plague, thought to be dead, and thrown into an open grave half-filled with corpses. Later, he was discovered “. . . in the afternoone, gasping and gaping for life . . . .”<sup>65</sup> It is extremely difficult at this point to determine Dekker’s purpose in ending his pamphlet on this gruesome note, for it alters the tone of the work and modifies his apparent overall purpose—that of teaching a sound, moral lesson. In spite of this element, however, his first plague pamphlet maintains a fairly consistent philosophy. Of course, there is a remote possibility that Dekker meant to encompass King James as one of these resultant calamities, in an ironical and politically dangerous sense; and there is a further probability that he considered James’ “new-found world” a hoped-for continuation of Elizabeth’s world—an effort to return to the old and golden days that were undoubtedly dear to the hearts of the conservative. And unmistakably there is the final terror of the plague itself, involving an examination of the individual virtues and vices of the London populace. Beyond these concepts, also, there is a strong opinion in favor of the poor, Dekker’s implication that there is a virtue in submission and a sympathy for those who are submissive. Clearly, he has nothing but contempt for the wealthy, however, since he ascribed many vices to the new wealthy classes. His rich are everywhere depicted as socially foolish, extravagant, vain, egotistical, and lethargic. Little, if any, sympathy is wasted here. Rather, he exults in their predicament so that he appears like a self-appointed Messiah in *The Wonderful Year*, advocating hell-fire and damnation and deriving much pleasure from his work—an inspired individual with a touch of old-fashioned Puritanism in his attitudes. On the whole, in this pamphlet Dekker is a political conservative who believed that *change* led to self-indulgence, immoderation, and degeneration, and whose religion, as it may be indirectly discerned, would seem to be exceedingly as conservative as his politics.

In *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606)<sup>66</sup> Dekker is still searching for an explanation of the London plague. His seven sins comprise the allegorical grouping of Politic Bankruptism, Lying, Candle-light, Sloth, Apishness, Shaving, and Cruelty, all of whom entered London when the plague first attacked the metropolis.<sup>67</sup> Politic Bankruptism appeared first when he was met by prisoners from Ludgate who were on holiday. They addressed him in a speech in praise of prison life

65. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

66. *Thomas Dekker*, edited by Ernest Rhys, p. xxx.

67. *Thomas Dekker, The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, II, see frontispiece.

(" . . . prouing that captivity was ye only blessing that could happen to man . . . .").<sup>68</sup> In appearance, he was deceiving, for his manner, dress, and general deportment were outwardly pleasant, yet he could quickly affect many disguises.<sup>69</sup> Dekker explains that

Sometimes hee's a Puritane, he sweares by nothing but Indeede, or rather does not swear at all, and wrapping his crafty Serpeants body in the cloake of Religion, he does those acts that would become none but a Diuell. Sometimes hee's a Protestant, and deales justly with all men till he sees his time, but in the end he turnes Turke.<sup>70</sup>

Dekker also represents him as a tradesman or merchant who, by exemplary behavior,

. . . winds himselfe vp into the height of rich mens fauors, till he grow rich himselfe, and when he sees that they dare build vpon his credit, knowing the ground to be so good, he takes vpon him the credit of an Asse, to any man that will loade him with gold . . . . After he hath gotten into his hands so much . . . as will fill him to the vpper deck, away he sayles with it . . . .<sup>71</sup>

He introduces, next, a crowd of tradesmen and merchants with wives, children, and servants who follow the chariot of Politic Bankruptism. It is worth noting that these servants strew the way with curses which Politic Bankruptism overrides.<sup>72</sup> It is apparent that Dekker believes that almost everyone in his society is in debt and that people are living beyond their means; indeed, that it is fashionable to be in debt. The Ludgate prisoners on holiday symbolize inmates of the debtors' prison; while Politic Bankruptism becomes a symbol for the usurer who has no humane regard for his victim. The first sin is, in actuality, Dekker's warning to his high-living compatriots of the potential consequences to themselves and to their state.

The second sin is Lying. When he first enters London, the people are immediately suspicious; but after remaining in his presence for a time,

What a number of Men, Women, and Children fell presently in love with him! There was of euery Trade in the City, and of euery profession some, that instantly were dealers with him: For you must note, that in a State so multitudinous, where so many flocks of people must be fed, it is impossible to haue some Trades to stand, if they should not Lye.<sup>73</sup>

Lying is also frequently accompanied by Usury who has, in turn, ". . . begotten Extortion . . . Hardness of heart . . . and Bad Conscient . . ." <sup>74</sup> It is Dekker's contention that Lying, as well as Politic Bankruptism, is

68. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

71. *Loc. cit.*

72. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.



fashionable in London society and that Lying, furthermore, leads to many additional sins and abuses.

The third sin is Candle-light whose especial province is night—that time in which all kinds of iniquities are practiced, enabling one to sin in secret. Candle-light is described as a “. . . Bawd to diuerse loose Sinnes, . . . partly a Coozener.”<sup>75</sup>

The fourth sin is Sloth, who leads a “Gentlemens life and dooth nothing,”<sup>76</sup> followed by a great train of Malt-men. At once, upon entering the city, Sloth and his forces are met by an energetic army of householders who attempt to thwart them. Sloth, however, rises to the occasion and addresses his attackers, making “. . . such a strong Oration in praise of Ease, that they all stricke vp their Drums . . . and came marching in with him and lodged him in the quietest streets in the Cittie, for so his *Lazinesse* requested.”<sup>77</sup> After this act, Sloth opened the taverns of London to all and ordered the erection of dicing houses and bowling alleys:

. . . wherevpon a number of poore handy-crafts men, that before wrought night and day, made sticks to themselues of ten groates, & crowns a peece, and what by Betting, Lurches, Rubbers and such tricks, they neuer care for a good daies works afterwards.<sup>78</sup>

Dekker simply defines the Slothful man as he who “. . . does no good,”<sup>79</sup> and with this thought is led to recall those who fled London in time of plague, so frequently alluded to in *The Wonderful Year*; he subsequently scorns magistrates, physicians, and others who prospered in their offices but who cowardly stole away when most needed.<sup>80</sup>

There is the slothful man in the Church, as well. Here Dekker speaks strongly, and his thought warrants close observation in this study of the development of his philosophy:

. . . you that are the Stewarts ouer the Kings house of heauen, . . . what a dishonour to your places, if you should bee knowne that you are Sloathfull? you are sworne labourers, to worke in a Vineyard, which if you vnderprop it not wisely when you see it laden, if you father not the fruites in it, when they are ripe, but suffer them to drop downe, and bee eaten vp by Swine, O what a deere account are you to make him that must give you your hire?<sup>81</sup>

It is clear that he believes that the Church supports the framework of the State; therefore, he knows the responsibility of the Church to be as great as its sin, should it disregard its duty. He appeals to the Church, as a result; but he is not attacking it, for it is his Church of which he is speaking.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

78. *Loc. cit.*

79. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

The fifth sin is that of Apishness, reminiscent of the foppish plague victim whom Dekker described so graphically in *The Wonderful Year*. He is a

. . . dapper fellow, more light-headed then a Musitian: as phantastically attyred as a Court Iester: wanton in discourse: lasciuious in behaiour: iocund in good companie: nice in his trencher.<sup>82</sup>

At length, he ridicules the attire of Apishness, proving each article of clothing as foreign made. Such vanity in dress makes Englishmen appear ridiculous;<sup>83</sup> consequently, such artificiality needs be condemned. The attendants of Apishness are “. . . *Folly*, laughter, Inconstancie, Riot, Niceness, and Vain glorie.” He is followed by “*Tabacconists, Shuttlecock-makers, Cobweb-lawne-weauers, Perfumers, young Coun / trie Gentlemen, and Fooles.*”<sup>84</sup> He was ushered into London by

. . . none but richmens sonnes that were left well, and had more money giuen by will, then they had wit how to bestow it: none but Prentises almost out of their yeers, and all the Tailors, Haberdashers, and Embroiderers that could be got for loue or money, for these were prest secretly to the seruice, by the yong and wanton dames of the Cities, because they would not be seene to shew their loue to him themselues.<sup>85</sup>

It becomes obvious that frivolity is one of Dekker's strong dislikes; he lauds the simple ways, but departure from them brings his disapprobation.

The sixth sin is Shaving, a term synonymous to cheating. Shaving's company is landlords who cheat their tenants and who rent a house to a drunken Flemming before letting it to a fellow countryman, should more money be involved in the transaction.<sup>86</sup> Usurers follow Shavers: they lend money to young, prospective heirs, later to cheat them of their inheritance.<sup>87</sup> Market-folk who use false scales, attorneys' clerks, and prisoners' keepers all are included in this category, as well.<sup>88</sup>

The last sin is Cruelty. Ironically, Dekker claims that one would hardly expect to find Cruelty in England, but he admits that there are, in London, “. . . *Thirteene strong houses of sorrow*, where the prisoner hath his heart wasting away sometimes a whole prenticeship of yeres in cares.”<sup>89</sup> He condemns the cold, unwholesome nature of these places and describes their miserable inhabitants. He implies that Cruelty is common to everyone: in the man who forces his daughter to marry an old man, there is Cruelty; in the creditor who keeps men in prison for debts, there is Cruelty:

82. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

87. *Loc. cit.*

88. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

89. *Loc. cit.*

. . . They are most of them built of Freestone, but none are free within them: cold are their imbracements: vnwholesom is their cheare: dispaireful their lodgings: vncomfortable the societies, miserable their inhabitants: O what a deale of wretchednes can shift to lye in a little roome: if those 13. houses were built al together, how rich would Griefe be, hauing such large inclosures? Doth Cruelty challenge a freemans roome in the City because of these places? no, the politicke body of the Republicke wold be infected, if such houses as these were not maintanted, to keep vp those that are vnsound.<sup>90</sup>

He catalogues, next, all of the cruelties practiced in the name of justice. His cynicism is especially evident in a passage in which he pleads the case for all rejected members of society:

. . . Claimes he [justice] then an inheritance here, because you haue whipping posts in your streets for the Vagabond? the stocks and the cage for the vnruely beggar? or because you haue Carts for the Bawde and the Harlot, and Beadles for the Lecher? neither. Or is it because so many monthly sessions are held? so many men, women and Children cald to a reconing at the Bar of death for their liues? and so many lamentable hempen Tragedies acted at Tiburne? nor for this to have it so reted. No (you inhabitants of this little world of people) Crueltie is a large Tree & you all stand vnder it: you are cruel in compelling your children (for wealth) to goe into loathed beds, for thereby you make them bond-slaues . . . .<sup>91</sup>

Obviously, Dekker is championing the poor and the lowly. His own periods in debtors' prison are undoubtedly responsible for his casting his lot with theirs. He does not sentimentalize sin and its effects, but he cannot, on the other hand, excuse that justice which is harsh and unforgiving of the innocent. His pronouncement, "You inhabitants of this little world of people," suggests, at the same time, that he looked upon the world as being nothing more than a preparation for the next. There is a great deal of humanity in lines like these taken from his appeal to the heartless creditor: "Wee are most like to god that made vs, when we shew loue to another, and doe most looke like the Diuell that would destroy vs, when wee are one anothers tormentors . . . ." Fittingly, he concludes this section of *The Seuē Deadly Sinnes of London* with a warning to the rich:

. . . But remember (O you *Rich* men) that your Seruants are your adopted Children, they are naturalized into your blood, and if you hurt theirs, you are guilty of letting out your owne, than which, what *Cruelty* could be greater?<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, there is cruelty, too, in London ("faire *Troynouant*"), a place which Dekker considers ". . . worse and more barbarous than all the rest . . . ."<sup>93</sup> London did not bury 30,000 of her plague victims with ceremonies befitting Christians and Englishmen! Instead, she treated her dead like executed felons and soldiers slain and forgotten in battle.<sup>94</sup>

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

91. *Loc. cit.*

92. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

In conclusion to the entire pamphlet, then, Dekker takes up the plight of the humble left to die in the plague,<sup>95</sup> and speaks, at last, to his birthplace:

Thou setest vp posts to whip them when they are aliue; Set vp an Hospitall to comfort them being sick, or purchase ground for them to dwell in when they be well, and that is, when they are dead.<sup>96</sup>

Why does London quail before "these Seven?" Is it because they are so powerful? So frightful? This pamphlet strengthens the conclusions drawn from *The Wonderful Year*, for while the latter was primarily concerned with the horrors of the plague, *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* shows Dekker trying to discover a *reason* for the plague. Whether or not he has succeeded, he has found London badly in need of a return to the old concepts of Christian virtue, and his appeal is directed toward the people of the city to urge them to do something about their wretched lives before it is too late.

In *The Gols Horn-Booke* (1609) he returns again to the subject of the fop, showing that the gallant's innocuous behavior in the theatre, in St. Paul's, at the ordinary, and in public places in general was always motivated by his desire to be noticed, envied, and admired. With much irony, therefore, Dekker advises the young gallant on the proper conduct in St. Paul's, which advice, if taken, will quickly succeed in making the young chap a fool in the House of God. However, since the gallant wants to be seen, even in St. Paul's, Dekker tells him how to walk down the middle aisle:

The first time that you venture into Powles, passe through the body of the Church like a Porter, yet presume not to fetch so much as one whole turne in the middle Ile, no nor to cast an eye to *Si quis* doore, (pasted and plaistered vp with Seruing-mens supplications) before you haue paid tribute to the top of Powles *steeple* with a single penny: And when you are mounted there, take heede how you looke downe into the yard: for the railes are as rotten as your great-Grand-father . . . .<sup>97</sup>

Dekker knew that if admiration were not forthcoming, the gallant would be quick to feel insult and to take what he deemed a "gentlemanly action." The typical speciman, then, is an over-dressed fool whose passion is controlled by sloth. It is his greatest shortcoming—his cardinal sin, so to speak. In addition, he is guilty of lechery, a sin that is companion to sloth. Over and against this freakish character Dekker places the simple, hard-working, God-fearing man, rich in Calvinist doctrine and middle class virtue, a man like Simon Eyre, perhaps, or Candido, the linen-draper, or Orlando Friscobaldo, a merchant, all of whom embody the simple, intimate virtues that Dekker prized so highly. His thesis maintains,

95. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

therefore, that a disregard of the good life brings about social chaos, manifest in class struggle and in an over-evaluation of the ephemeral and transitory in this world. Eventually, a God who has endowed a nation with His blessings will lose patience and release, perhaps, a *pestilence* that will annihilate all mankind!

Social and moral chaos is broadly illustrated in *Worke for Armorours* (1609), a treatise upon the struggle that arises between Money and Poverty when both factions ignore the needs and sufferings of the other. Herein, Dekker expresses the misery of contemporary England, for example, in a sustained image of a bear-baiting in which he symbolizes the whole contest of the classes in the Bear and the Dog:

. . . for the *Beares* and the *Buls* fighting with the dogs was a lively representation (me thought) of poore men going to lawe with the riche and mightie. The dogs (in whom I figured the poor creatures; and fitly may I doe so, because when they stand at the Dore of Diues, they haue nothing, if they haue then but bare bones throwne vnto them,) might now & then pinch the great ones, & perhaps vex them a little by drawing a few drops of blood from them: but in the end, they commonly were crushed, & either were carried away with ribs broken, or their skins torne & hanging about their eares, or else (how great soeuer their hearts were at the first encounter) they stood at the last, whining and barking at their strong Aduersaries, when they durst not, or could not bite them.<sup>98</sup>

Such events so aroused the wrath of God, according to Dekker, that He visited the plague upon England. The author seems to have written this particular treatise primarily to awaken his country to the further suffering in store should its people not mend their ways. At the same time, to those who fled London to avoid the horror of the plague years, he wished to bring about the realization of the fruits of their desertions.

In *The Belman of London* (1608) he shows sympathy for the man of the country. He himself once sought escape from the wickedness of the city into country life only to discover that the countryside was equally as evil as the city, for he saw there the ". . . poor husbandman made slaue to the rich farmour; the farmour racked by his landlord." Indeed, every vice which he found in the city he uncovered, also, in the country. England, to Dekker, was undeniably the battleground upon which Vice was defeating Virtue.

These works, although by no means representative of all of Dekker's pamphleteering, constitute the most important philosophical treatises. The remaining ones are merely repetitious and often lacking in clarity. His social and moral philosophy as evinced in these selections indicates a fear and a suspicion of the changes already in operation in his country. He shows that class change was everywhere evident. While the merchant class was attempting to imitate the behavior of the gentry, the humble

98. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 98.

tradesmen, servants, and apprentices were imitating the new and idle rich; but the poor and rejected members of Elizabethan society were the forgotten souls for whom he would act as an apostle. Feeling the urgency of the situation, he issued his warnings, reminding England that she was sitting upon a social powder keg. Of all Dekker's dramas, it is *HW, I & II* which best embody this philosophy set forth in these pamphlets, since in these two plays one discovers the three classes of Elizabethan society each working in foolish and tragic imitation of the other.

## III

But gentlemen, I must disarm you then,  
 There are of mad-men, as there are of tame,  
 All humourd not alike: we have here some,  
 So apish and phantasticke, play with a feather,  
 And tho twould grieve a soule to see Gods image  
 So blemisht and defac'd, yet doe they act  
 Such anticke and such pretty lunacies,  
 That spite of Sorrow they will make you smile:  
 Others agen we have like hungry Lions,  
 Fierce as the wilde Bulls, untameable as flies,  
 And these have oftentimes from strangers sides  
 Snatched rapiers suddenly, and done much harme,  
 Whom if you'l see, you must be weaponlesse.  
 —*HW, I* (1604)

In discussing the plots of *HW, I & II*,<sup>99</sup> it is expedient to combine the two as one drama, since one is, actually, the sequel to the other. The plots are succinctly put forth in the original titles accorded the two plays. The 1604 edition of *HW, I* is described as "A Booke called The humours of the patient man, The longinge wyfe and the honest whore."<sup>100</sup> The 1630 edition of *HW, II* is entitled: "The Second Part of the Honest Whore, with the Humours of the Patient Man, the Impatient Wife: the Honest Whore perswaded by strong Arguments to turne Curtizan againe: her braue refuting those Arguments. And, lastly, the Comicall Passages of an Italian Bridewell, where the Scaene ends."<sup>101</sup>

The first plot of importance to *HW, I & II* concerns the efforts to marry of the royal lovers, Infelice and Count Hippolito, in spite of the

99. There is a textual problem of dates, here. Dekker's *HW, I* was published in 1604; his *HW, II*, in 1630. It has long been assumed that the first play was also written around 1604; however, there is still speculation concerning the date of composition for the sequel. Although a quarter of a century had lapsed between publications of these two plays, Hunt contends that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the second play was written shortly after the first (*op. cit.*, p. 94). On the other hand, there is the theory that the second play shows a greater maturity than the first, a theory which immediately suggests that *HW, II* may have been written on or about the date of its accepted publication date (*Thomas Dekker*, edited by Ernest Rhys, p. xxix). Henslowe mentions having made payment for *HW, I* to Dekker and Middleton between 1 January 1604 and 14 March 1604 (Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 295), and he records its acting by the Prince's Men soon afterwards. Middleton's share in the composition of *HW, I* is also a matter for disagreement. There is no doubt, however, that Middleton collaborated with Dekker, but it is difficult to single out those portions of the drama which belong to Middleton and those which belong to Dekker. Some critics contend that Middleton's contribution was negligible, consigning the major portions of the drama to Dekker (*Thomas Dekker*, edited by Ernest Rhys, p. xxx). However, Hunt finds evidence of Middleton's hand in *HW, II* (*op. cit.*, p. 94).

100. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

101. *Loc. cit.*

objections of the girl's father, Duke Gasparo Trebazzi, ruler of Milan. In a scene at once reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the Duke drugs his daughter and convinces Hippolito that she is dead; however, with the assistance of the court physician and a priest from Bedlam, the two lovers successfully thwart the Duke.

The second major plot concerns Candido, a patient linen draper, whose wife, Viola, spends most of her time attempting to provoke him to impatience. In her efforts she receives assistance from her brother, Fustigo, and from the gallants, Castruchio, Sinezi, Pioratto, and Fluello. Candido, however, survives the many trials put upon him and is patiently triumphant at the conclusions to both plays.

The third plot is the main one. It is the story of Bellafront, the titular character herself, who is reviled by Count Hippolito for her immorality. Realizing her depravity, she tries to return to respectable womanhood and is successful. However, on all sides, her moral redemption is combated by her former associates. She achieves her triumph single-handedly through much suffering, so that she is recognized as a truly moral person at the conclusion of *HW, II*.

The lowest social level in both dramas is represented by the prostitute, the pander, and the bawd. These people are Bellafront, the prostitute; Roger, her servant and pander; and Mistress Fingerlock, a bawd. At the conclusion to *HW, II*, Dekker takes them to Bridewell and tries them for social indiscretion. In addition, the Bridewell scene introduces a collection of prostitutes with whom Dekker has not been concerned in either drama prior to this time—Mistress Horseleech, Dorothea Target, Penelope Whorehound, and Catherine Bountinall. Although he certainly considered these individuals to be beyond the conventional code of social morality, he does represent them as highly respected members of their own chosen profession; *i.e.*, he permits them loyally to support professional standards of their own. For example, one may observe Roger, Bellafront's servant, pursuing his work as pander in much the same way as an honest merchant might display his merchandise. Roger is proud, indeed, to be a member of Bellafront's establishment, for he respects her as the most successful woman of her station in all Milan. When she chides him for his monetary interests, naming him a ". . . slaue to sixpence, base metalled villain . . .," he is very indignant, for he considers himself a pander only to quality: "Sixpence? nay, that's not so: I never tooke under two shillings four-pence: I hope I know my fee." Dekker shows that Roger is proud of his position, that he is a man who takes pride in conducting his affairs with a respect for the ethics of his profession. At the same time, it is made clear that Roger, like any "honest" merchant, feels free to cheat if it be to his advantage. Here, one is reminded of Dekker's criticism of business standards in *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London*: while tradesmen were

seen to use false weights and measures, Roger is now seen to water down the ale for Bellafront's customers and to forget, frequently, to return their change. Bellafront knows him and accuses him of lying to gentlemen customers, but he has a ready reply to her accusations:

If it be my vocation to swear, every man in vocation: I hope my  
 betters swear and dam themselves, and why should not I?<sup>102</sup>

Dekker was intrigued by the theory that, on society's lowest level, there is an open imitation of the sins of those who reside on society's higher levels. It is clear that the prostitutes imitate their betters in dress. In the Bridewell scene, again, a jailer explains that the prostitute's custom of dressing elaborately rests in her attempt to pass herself off as one of her more respectable sisters. She may dress lavishly, in one instance, like the ladies of gallants, since extravagance in clothing is fashionable. Later, she may affect the dress of the more humble, respectable woman of the merchant class. It is obvious that the philosophical jailer understands this vanity:

No, my good Lord, that's onely but the vaile  
 To her loose body, I haue seene her here  
 In gayer Masking Suits, as seuerall Sawces  
 Giue one Dish seuerall Tastes, so change of Habits  
 In Whores is a bewitching Art: to day  
 She's all in colours to besot Gallants,  
 Then in modest blacke, to catch the Cittizen,  
 And this from their Examinations drawne,  
 Now shall you see a Monster both in shape  
 And nature quite from these, that sheds no teare,  
 Nor yet is nice, 'tis a plaine ramping Beare,  
 Many such Whales are cast vpon this Shore.<sup>103</sup>

Both the jailer and Dekker admit that the citizenry of Milan (London) is easily duped into believing that outward appearance suggests a genuine quality to things. On the other hand, if Penelope Whorehound can be believed, she does not have the vice of debts:

*Lodovico*: . . . art in for debt?

*Penelope*: No—is my Iudge, sir, I am in for no debts, I payd my  
 Taylor for this Gowne, the last fiae shillings a weeke that  
 was behind, yesterday.<sup>104</sup>

Dekker, one remembers, had previously chastised London citizens in *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* for purchasing frivolous things and thereby running into debt for vanity's sake; so that, actually, in the light of this knowledge, Mistress Whorehound shows a moral superiority to the gallants, for she believes in paying her way. She is an ethical member of an illicit profession! Dekker seems reluctant to suggest that this kind of a woman is ashamed of her profession; rather, he would permit her to

102. Thomas Dekker, *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, II, p. 49.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 177.



think of herself as a member of a very essential institution. She seems instinctively to recognize that there is a double standard to her society, and she cannot be surprised, therefore, to learn that gallants who engage her services privately will castigate her publicly or even take pleasure in witnessing the cruel punishments which society metes out to those of her profession. Indeed, the gallants who had been engaging in friendly, if bawdy, conversation in Bellafront's establishment flock to Bridewell to watch the wretched prostitutes as they are humiliated and punished. Although Dekker strengthens this theory as he works his way through all three levels of his society, it is strongest in his treatment of the gallant. He extends his sympathy, however, to the prostitutes when they are caught up by justice. Catherine Bountinall, for example, chides a fellow sister who wishes to deny her trade to escape punishment:

Mary foh, honest? burnt at fourteene, seuen times whipt, sixe times carted, nine times duck'd, search'd by some hundred and fifty Constables, and yet you are honest? Honest Mistris Horsleach, is this World, a World to keep Bawds and Whores honest? How many times hast thou giuen Gentlemen a quart of wine in a gallon pot? how many twelue-penny Fees, nay two shillings Fees, nay, when any Embassadours ha beene heere, how many halfe crowne Fees hast thou taken? how many Carriers hast thou bribed for Country Wenches? how often haue I rinst your lungs in *Aqua vitae*, and yet you are honest?<sup>105</sup>

Catherine's contempt for the society which punishes her is scathing, and Dekker admires the woman for her courage and honesty, even if her morals, from society's viewpoint, leave much to be desired. She respects no one, it is true; when she is told that the Duke is present and that she should modify her language, she is even contemptuous of him and faces her punishment with strong heart:

If the Deuill were here, I care not: set forward, yee Rogues, and giue attendance to your places, let Bawds and Whore be sad, for Ile sing and the Deuill were a dying.<sup>106</sup>

At the conclusion to *HW, II*, these women are convicted and sent off to beat hemp, the Duke himself directing the force of the law against the profession, obviously hoping thereby to purge Milan of its ills:

Panders and Whores  
Are City-plagues, which being kept aliue,  
Nothing that lookes like goodnes ere can thriue.<sup>107</sup>

To Dekker, the prostitute is a product of the social contradictions of her society. Her establishment is a haven wherein gallants repair to drink, smoke, and swagger to their heart's content. It is an establishment with an atmosphere which the gallant's more conventional realm does not

105. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

107. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-82.

provide, in return for which, however, the woman is rewarded with the contempt of her society and with a gallant's renunciation when brought to justice. Ironically, this justice, while openly punishing her, secretly encourages her practice. Catherine Bountinall and Dekker are aware of the hypocrisy inherent in this social attitude, and neither is reticent to exclaim against it. The prostitute exists for man's candlelight hours (*The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London*); she cannot be acknowledged by the light of day.

Dekker is next concerned with the servant-apprentice class. His major contention is that most of the servants and all of the apprentices are eager to improve themselves socially, yet are rarely interested in working diligently to achieve their ambitions. They, too, imitate the superficial qualities which they discern in their betters. Candido's apprentices, for example, appreciate him more for his material success than for his goodly patience. Indeed, they assist his wife and the fun-loving gallants to deprive their master of that one virtue which makes him distinctive and valuable to society. George, for instance, seems to exemplify the worst qualities of the entire apprentice class. He is lazy, rude, and familiar with his customers. Candido unmasks him in *HW, I* when he sees him serving three gallant customers:

I pray come neare, y'are very welcome gallants,  
Pray pardon my mans rudeness, for I feare me  
He's talkt above a Prentise with you . . . .<sup>108</sup>

Hippolito's servant betrays a similar kind of rudeness to his superiors. Ushering Bellafront into Hippolito's study, he annoys the Count, who becomes remonstrative:

*Hippolito:* Thou slave, thou hast let in the devil.  
*Servant:* Lord blesse us, where? hee's not cloven my Lord that I can see: besides the divell goes more like a Gentleman than a Page, good my Lord *Boon couragio*.  
*Hippolito:* Thou hast let in a woman, in mans shape. And thou art damn't for't.  
*Servant:* Not damn'd I hope for putting in a woman to a Lord.<sup>109</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the servant's rudeness to the master, these lines serve further to illustrate his contempt for the whole nobility. Servants were frequently made to act the pander to their masters; this servant, therefore, can not understand his being berated for performing an act that ordinarily falls to the lot of a member of his station. Thus, he is similar to Candido's George in his ability to exchange repartee with his master. One recalls that, when George was demonstrating his master's fabrics to three gallants, the ensuing conversation concerning the quality of the material in question was laced with *double entendre* of obscene

108. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

overtones. Dekker makes it clear, however, that the gallants provoked this verbal duel, so that it becomes their example which George is following. Although the gallants are fingering a bolt of cloth (appropriately called *she*) which George has shown them, they are in reality looking upon Candido's wife during the entire conversation:

*Castruchio:* What, and is this she saist thou?  
*George:* I, and the purest she that ever you fingered since you were a gentleman: looke how even she is, looke how cleane she is, ha, as even as the brow of *Cinthia*, and as cleane as your sonnes and heires when they ha spent all.<sup>110</sup>

At the same time, George has a contempt for the gallants similar to that of Hippolito's servant for the nobility.

A different breed of servant, however, is introduced in *HW, II*, offering an interesting contrast to George and Hippolito's man. Bryan, Hippolito's groom and the character in question, is devoted to his master. Unfortunately, his lack of knowledge of the English language (he is Irish) is forever plunging him into serious trouble. Although he worships his master, his actions always end unhappily. For example, Infelice falsely "confesses" to Hippolito an affair with the unfortunate Bryan, when she learns that Hippolito himself has made advances to Bellafront. The Count believes her and, in a rage, beats the hapless man, who, throughout the struggle, does not know what he has done:

*Hippolito:* Prate not, but get thee gone, I shall send else.  
*Bryan:* I, doe predy, I had rather haue thee make a scabbard of my guts, and let out all de Irish puddings in my poore belly, den to be a false knaue to de I faat, I will neuer see dyne own sweet face more. *A mawhid deer a gra, fare de well, fare de well, I wil goe steale Cowes agen in Ireland.*<sup>111</sup>

Bryan is the only member of the serving-class to retain an old-fashioned virtue of duty and loyalty to master. It is curious that Dekker should have made this loyal servant an Irishman, for it was customary in this time to express a contempt for the Irish. Undoubtedly, there is some ridicule intended. Perhaps, he was suggesting that the less sophisticated country of Ireland still held reverence for humble virtue. If so, Ireland can produce loyal but incompetent servants, if nothing else. Bryan, too, is further annoyed by gallants who make him the butt of their nefarious jokes. They are a strange breed to him, for he does not understand them at all. Perhaps, it is for this reason that he does not attempt to imitate them. Consequently, he has a degree of virility that is lacking in Dekker's other servant-apprentice characterizations.

Dekker has so far concluded that the serving-class in his England possesses little humility. Like their superiors, they are arrogant, crude,

110. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

and irresponsible. They have little respect for their masters, and all show a tendency to imitate the superficial qualities of the gallant. The one exception is Bryan, who is actually abused when he tries to perform his duties. Though he is stupid and has none of George's wit, he does have a few virtues of the true servant. He is one of the ironies of the author's social world.

Dekker next investigates the merchant group. Candido, the patient linen draper, is a personification of the author's "virtuous people," and will be observed in greater detail later. He should be dealt with at this time only as he affects others within his own class. Viola, Candido's wife, however, represents Dekker's pattern for this class. As the wife of the great patient man, she has reason to appreciate him the most; yet she tries constantly to undermine that virtue which makes him outstanding. She lays elaborate plans to provoke his temper. She would have him to be like other women's husbands, and she is frustrated when his patience cannot be shaken:

. . . he loues no frets, and is so free from anger that many times I am ready to bite off my tongue, because it wants that vertue which all womens tongues have (to anger their husbands) Brother mine can by no thunder, turne him into a sharpnesse.<sup>112</sup>

Viola's "brother mine" is very much like her with respect to his superficial qualities. Fustigo is without ambition to achieve success through hard work, yet he wants success. He is arrogant, vain, extravagant, and lethargic. His personality is made up of the worst features of the gallants whom he imitates. He has had, at one time in his life, a slight education. He mentions Albertus Magnus and Aristotle upon occasion, but his basic stupidity is revealed at every turn. Viola, of course, has no difficulty in enlisting his aid. In return, she agrees to give him ". . . a great horseman's French feather." He *knows* what is fashionable! Viola, actually, affords one the most lucid description of her brother when she offers him the feather:

O, by any means, to shew your light head, else your hat will sit like a coxcombe: to be briefe, you must be in all points a most terrible wide-mouth'd swaggerer.<sup>113</sup>

Obviously, the role she desires him to play demands that he be *himself*.

Fustigo's pretentious behavior is patterned after that of the gallants in whom he envies luxurious living and ease. In all respects, Fustigo is the gull, or his prototype, the kind of person whom Dekker feigns to advise in *The Gols Horn-Booke*. He is without virtue. He is superficially personified. He wants to be a gentleman, but he is convinced, at the same time, that to be a gentleman he must have sufficient money to afford the best tailor. In his simple thought, the proof of a gentleman lies in

112. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

the cut of a coat and the whiteness of linen. It is clear to him that the gentleman's delicate comportment, his fastidious toilet, and his clever repartee make him successful with the ladies and the envy of all. Moreover, his gentleman does not toil, yet he reaps abundantly. One can imagine his horror when Viola once told him that he was brother-in-law to a linen draper! Dekker makes a neat contrast of Fustigo and Candido. The latter is the epitome of that success which may be attained to by a man of perseverance and industry. The former represents the degree to which the virtues of the middle class man can be perverted when he disregards place and imitates the most foolish of his superiors.

In Matheo, Dekker proposes an intermediary between the merchant and the gallant. Matheo, Bellafront's original seducer, was a member of the merchant class; however, when he first appears early in *HW, I*, Dekker would seem to place him next to Hippolito in social importance. Nevertheless, one suspects that Matheo has not long been a member of this class, for the Duke tells him that he *plays* the gentleman well and engages him in the plot to subdue the distracted Hippolito. Matheo, as well, fears that his new, exalted position in society may be endangered if Hippolito persists in antagonizing the Duke. He agrees, therefore, to assist the Duke, and in the lines which follow his decision, Dekker clearly shows Matheo's social position as he expresses deep fear for his "new Blacke cloakes." Eventually, Dekker will reveal Matheo as the most depraved character in the drama, for he is one individual who is thoroughly without scruple. He will do anything to further his ambitions, —to live in ease and to bask in luxury. Nor can he understand Hippolito's grief for Infelice, thought dead, for it is his contention that one woman will serve as well as another. When Hippolito, overcome with tragedy speaks of sorrow, Matheo unburdens himself of a contempt for all womankind:

. . . sfoote women when they are alive are but dead commodities, for you shall have one woman lie upon many mens hands.<sup>114</sup>

When Hippolito insists that he shall never again look upon another woman, Matheo, in turn, vows that he will take his friend to a brothel within the next few days:

If you have this strange monster, Honestie, in your belly, why so Jig-makers and Chroniclers shall picke something out of you: but and I smell not you and a bawdy house out within these ten daies, let my nose be as big as an English bag-pudding: Ile follow your Lordship though it be to the place aforementioned.<sup>115</sup>

Consequently, when next seen, Matheo has been successful in bringing Hippolito to the house of Bellafront. Matheo is very much at home in this environment, and, true to his own pattern, he expresses friendly

114. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

contempt for Bellafront, a contempt which he displays for all women. It must flatter his ego to think that he originally had discovered the most attractive courtesan in all Milan! Furthermore, he appears to have a sinister power which he exercises over people. He was successful, at first, in seducing Bellafront, taking her from a good home and a kind and loving father. And he was successful, secondly, in bringing Hippolito, against the latter's wishes, to Bellafront's establishment. Hippolito, however, is most uncomfortable in the company of Bellafront, and the riotous behavior of Matheo and his friends only intensifies his grief. But Matheo pays him no heed, for he is not one to waste sympathy on his fellow man.

Later, when Bellafront decides to abandon prostitution and announces her intentions to Matheo in the presence of the gallants, he believes that she is amusing herself at the expense of all present; he feels that she has invented the story for the purpose of being alone with him. That a person might wish self-redemption is a thought which never occurs to him! When the gallants subsequently leave, he congratulates her for what he calls her "gulling" of them:

Ha, ha, thou dost gull em so rarely, so naturally: if I did not thinke thou hadst beene in earnest: thou art a sweete Rogue for't yfaith.<sup>116</sup>

This deep, sadistic pleasure which Matheo derives from a manipulation of people causes him to appreciate what he believes to be a similar trait in Bellafront. He shows more appreciation, indeed, for her in this one scene than he has before or ever will, but his amusement is shortlived. When she tells him that she hates him worst of all—"you were the first to give me money for my soul"—, his rage is uncontrollable, and he releases his venom: "Is't possible to be impossible! . . . for a harlot to turn honest is one of Hercules labours . . ." When she demands that he marry her, he replies that he will be "burnt first!" Dekker says that Matheo depends upon the naivete and honesty of other men whose traits enable him to victimize them; however, in the Bedlam scene of *HW, I*, he completes this characterization in the episode in which the Duke orders Matheo to marry Bellafront, an action for which he had previously said he would rather be "burnt." Matheo, back against the wall, complains:

Cony-catcht, guld . . .  
Plague found you for't, tis well.  
The Cockolds stampe goes currant in all nations.<sup>117</sup>

At last, the past master of the art of gulling falls victim to his own devices. He is now the gull gulled, as it were, another of Dekker's ironies.

Dekker's gallants in *HW, I & II* are superficialities. They possess the immorality of which he spoke so vehemently in *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London*. They are rich, idle, frivolous, lecherous, dissembling, and

116. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

cruel. They have provided the pattern which directly influences every class beneath them, and they are one of the forces contributing to the innocuous behavior of most of the *dramatis personae*. The apprentices imitate their clever but immodest conceits. Almost all of the characters imitate their idle qualities, apprentices and serving-men even neglecting their work because they think the gallants' easy lives to be fashionable. They are cruel to the prostitute, as are all other "respectable" classes in the dramas. Their consummate selfishness is the pattern for Fustigo and Matheo. Fustigo, in fact, is made thoroughly useless to his society because of his aping of gallant mannerisms, and Matheo represents the values of the gallant when carried to a natural and pernicious conclusion. Although these gallants possess few individual qualities of distinction, they are people who are admired by the majority of the characters in Dekker's works. The gentle class, which has been the core of medieval society, is shown through the gallant to be on the threshold of a complete degeneration. In short, the gallant and his standards are society as Dekker conceives of it in these two plays.

The loftiest social class in *HW, I & II* is represented by Count Hipolito, Infelice, his wife, and her father, Gasparo Trebazzi, ruler of Milan. The whole of society in these two plays rises or falls with the royal class. Hence, this class and Dekker's understanding of it are most essential to the development of his social and moral philosophy. Infelice, daughter to the Duke and member of the royal family of Milan, is an egotistical, strong-minded young woman who will not permit her desires to be frustrated. To the modern reader, the fact that she disobeyed her father and married the man of her choice does not seem amiss. However, to the Elizabethan and to the conservative Elizabethan like Dekker, Infelice's action would seem to be that of a willful and spoiled child of an ever-indulgent father. Dekker is calling attention, undoubtedly, to the fact that one whose duty it was to rule Milan and to disseminate justice and equity to all could not control his own daughter. Indeed, Infelice was very much the daughter of Trebazzi. He, too, was self-willed, self-indulgent. He was a man enraged when his will was defied, and he could commit a murder with no moral compunction. But it was only natural, therefore, during this episode that the Duke put the affairs of state from his mind and concentrate wholly upon his pressing family problems. However, as head of state, he was supposed to be an example to all. Dekker calls specific attention to this neglect of duty, yet the Duke was no more neglectful of his duties than were the lowliest citizens of Milan. Certainly, his own gallants at court were the products of his inability to teach by precept and example. The Duke was not playing the part to which God elected him; Dekker was a staunch believer in the divine rights of kingship which emphasized the importance of good example

to one's subjects. Consequently, when Infelice pleads with the Duke to save her marriage from the threat of Bellafront, he decides to purge Milan of prostitution. He was not actually concerned with the act of stamping out an evil; such an idea was entirely contrary to his pronouncements. He was, first and last, interested in resolving his daughter's marital problem. One need only observe his subsequent proclamation to discern a lack of sincerity. The core of the man's whole social and moral philosophy is contained in the expression, "Nothing that lookes like goodnes ere can thriue."<sup>118</sup> How it probably concerned him greatly that his son-in-law's interest in Bellafront's charms could not "look like goodnes" to the state! However, that Bellafront was a good and moral woman was proved to the satisfaction of Orlando Friscibaldo, a man whom the Duke admired and respected. It is pertinent to realize that the Duke eventually explains his son-in-law's aberration in this way:

. . . for to turne a Harlot  
 Honest, it must be by strong Antidots,  
 'Tis rare, as to see Panthers change their spots.  
 And when she's once a Starre (fixed) and shines bright,  
 Tho 'twere impiety then to dim her light,  
 Because we see such Tapers seldome burne.  
 Yet 'tis the pride and glory of some men,  
 To change her to a blazing Starre agen,  
 And it may be, *Hippolito* does no more.  
 It cannot be, but y'are acquainted all  
 With that same madnesse of our Sonne-in-law,  
 That dotes so on a Curtizan.<sup>119</sup>

To Dekker, the Duke's statement must have smacked of sacrilege.

The madman who speaks in the Bedlam scene of *HW, I* analyzes the social conditions of Milan and seems to be Dekker's mouthpiece for warning to all England. The scene is the one in which the madman has confused the Duke with his own son. He holds the Duke's hand and notices that the fingernails are long:

Such nailes had my second boy: kneele downe thou varlet, and aske thy father blessing: Such nailes had my middelmost son, and I made him a Promoter: and he scrypt, and scrypt, til he got the divel and all: but he scrypt thus and thus and thus and it went under his legs, till at length a companie of kites, taking him for carrion, swept up all, all, all, all, all, all. If you love your lives, looke to your selves: see, see, see, see, the Turkes Gallies are fighting with my ships, Bownce goes the guns: ooh! cry the men: romble, romble goe the waters: Alas, there; tis sunke, tis sunke: I am undone, I am undone, you are the damn'd Pirates have undone me: you are by the Lord, you are, you are, stop'em, you are.<sup>120</sup>

Dekker's meaning is unmistakable. The state is ruled by a fool who keeps company with "kites," and, as a result, the ship of state is unmanned

118. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

119. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-57.

120. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.



when the enemy attacks. The Duke, upon deciding to rid the city of prostitutes, continues the image:

He try all Phisicke, and this Med'cine first:  
I haue directed Warrants strong and peremptory  
(To purge our Citty *Millan*, and to cure  
The outward Parts, the Suburbes) for the attaching  
Of all those women, who (like gold) want waight,  
Citties (like Ships) should haue no idle fraight.<sup>121</sup>

Earlier in *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* Dekker had expressed his opinion that the plague was a visitation from God—it was a divine warning. Here, again, he seems to be saying, through his ship image, that the state is in danger of a new divine intervention, since London is so wasted.

The lasting impression of *HW, I & II* is that of Dekker's concern for individual and social morality. He believes that state inferior whose inhabitants are not virtuous; therefore, a state which is not good must be made good, else a vengeful God will destroy it. He believes further that this God, because He knows that man is weak, has given man examples of strongly moral people to emulate and from whom to learn virtue for himself. The whole class structure of these plays shows an interdependency of one class upon another, a kind of social chain of being, crowned by the ruling classes with the ruler himself ordained by God. Dekker concludes that it is God's wish that this ruler be a good and virtuous man. If he be not so by nature, says Dekker, he can learn to be so through study of a virtuous man. Now, Dekker's philosophy permits of two kinds of virtue. One man is virtuous by nature. He has a natural affinity for goodness. It does not require much struggle for him to remain good. He merely has to defend his virtue from attacks of the stupid, who cannot recognize virtue when they see it and consequently try to destroy it. There is a second kind of virtue, however, which is probably the greater of the two in Dekker's thinking, since it is achieved only through great moral struggle. It achieves strength through sin; it suffers the agony of the tormented but receives a final purity only after moving dangerously near to eternal damnation. Candido possesses Dekker's first kind of virtue—a virtue which Milton would call *blank*. Bellafront possesses the second kind, a tested virtue. And there is a third person, Orlando Friscobaldo, who typifies that which can be learned from observation of the virtuous man. He is capable of learning, and, what is more, capable of accepting the truth, even when it contradicts the fashions of the times. True, he is motivated by love for his daughter, but when she tells him she is no longer a prostitute, he pretends not to believe her. He even denies her. Later, he resolves to test her, and when he muses aloud, one is permitted to understand his true character:

121. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

Las my Girle! art thou poore? pouerty dwells next doore to despaire, there's but a wall betweene them; despaire is one of hells Catch-powles; and lest that Deuill arrest her, Ile to her . . . . Yes, I will victuall the Campe for her . . . .<sup>122</sup>

With Bellafront's moral redemption, Orlando Friscobaldo's life is complete.

Dekker's *HW, I & II* are experiments in the negative presentation of moral virtue, in which are depicted various levels of morality, or the lack of it, which exist in mankind from the lowest state of society to the highest. At the very bottom of the scale of being there is a complete amorality, a total lack of understanding for much which is moral. At the top of the scale, there exist three characters who typify moral qualities. Although these three possess virtue, they differ in their kinds of morality and in the ways they have succeeded in achieving it. It would seem, therefore, to be Dekker's theory that few people have a knowledge or appreciation of virtue, insofar as most of the action in these two dramas is concerned with the attempts of those who represent the ungainly majority to deprive those who represent the virtuous minority of their virtue. That many of the scenes dealing with attempted seduction are laden with crude humor does not lessen the very serious intent of Dekker, but only veils it. Dekker would seem to have one think that virtue is rare, that the vulgar, the stupid, and the shallow are either oblivious to it or work consciously against it. The clever character becomes vain and frivolous in close analysis; the dull one becomes ambitious, yet lethargic, highly desirous of that which is sham and ephemeral. Dekker's evaluation of mankind is not pleasant, necessitating that he conceal such human spiritual weakness in clever comic exterior; the arrangement of his acts, by which two seemingly dissimilar plots dovetail and compliment each other, prevents Dekker's message from having a very direct contact with the audience. Indeed, upon cursory reading, the continuity of these acts seems haphazard, even to the point of being unplanned. It is only later that one realizes that Dekker has, perhaps, *gulled* his reader. The true message of *HW, I & II* is a hidden one, although there are visible signposts everywhere along the way. Out of these dramas has come Dekker's picture of social degradation. Always the moralist, he is understandably shocked by conditions as he finds them. At the same time, fortunately, he is also enough of a realist, a trait possibly derived from his pamphleteering days, to face up strongly to the situation in the interests of faithful reproduction. Although *HW, I & II* do not sustain his annoyance with the new order as he has shown it in his pamphlets, the dramas do reveal, often with a surprising subtlety, the whole complex social order of the London which Dekker knew.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

## IV

Would you know how many Nations (for sinne) haue been rooted vp,  
and swept from the face of the earth, that no memory of them is left  
but their name, no glories of the Kings or great Cities remaining but  
onely this, Here they liued, Here they stood?

—*A Rod for Run-Awayes* (1625)

In Thomas Dekker one finds many of the conflicts which beset Elizabethan man. Dekker was a social and moral conservative who looked backwards longingly to the medieval period and ahead with fear to the modern era. Within its limitations, the old era promised security, while the new stretched forth into a misty future. As earlier man feared dragons, Thomas Dekker feared the chimeras that lay waiting to pounce. If what he observed was any indication of the direction in which the world was moving, he believed he had reason enough to be uneasy. The old virtues seemed to have vanished. The English nobleman and his feudal estate were being quickly replaced by the *nouveau riche* of the city who were moving to the country. He saw the old ideals—belief in hard work and frugality, a fear of God, a reverence for one's sovereign, a concern for one's duty toward class and country—and realized that they were passing. A nation which had revered tradition and moderation and Godliness was relaxing its standards. Dekker wanted to know where the fault lay, and, believing in the ability and God-given power of the nobility to guide the people, he looked to them for answer. What he learned merely angered him. His nobility was interested only in amassing fortunes. He saw decay of old estates; he found sheep grazing where churches once stood; and he was troubled.

He was convinced that England was God's favorite child, for He had blessed England with an abundance throughout the years. Now, however, the abundance was proving a curse instead of a blessing. In London, Dekker saw the rich man's son preening himself, a gallant dressed lavishly in foreign drapery, powdered, perfumed. In Dekker's thinking, the nation was weakening itself internally. Its effeminacy would eventually be its undoing. The apprentice and the servant, once the backbone of the country, were apish of the manners and dress of the fop.

Dekker's philosophy crystallized with the death of Queen Elizabeth. For him, England's prosperity was synonymous with Elizabeth; hence, her death seemed to presage dark days. When the plague descended upon London and her streets were filled with the dead and dying, he was convinced that it was punishment sent from God. His London was a collection of outrages. He feared that England was destined to be the site for a new Armageddon. He took it upon himself, then, to warn England of his worst fears, hoping to stave off catastrophe. Nowhere is his concern more evident than in his trembling pronouncement, "O what an Earth-quake is the alteration of a State!"

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