

A Critical View of *The Telltale*, an Anonymous Play

by

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An anonymous manuscript play, *The Telltale*, recently issued in type-script by the Malone Society, is surrounded by obscurity.¹ Scholars have done little more than allude to its anonymity or, in some cases, assign it conjectural dates. Greg, in his edition of the Henslowe papers, describes the document as follows: "MS. XX. The *Tell-Tale*, a comedy in five acts; unfinished. Early seventeenth century."² In his list of anonymous seventeenth-century dramatic manuscripts, Harbage refers to it merely as "*The Tell Tale*. Dulwich College, MS. XX."³ Schelling, who had probably not read the play, offers a somewhat fuller description:

Tell Tale, the scene of which is laid in Florence, still remains in manuscript in an imperfect copy in Dulwich College. From Warner and Bullen's description of it, it evidently belongs to the tragic-comic type. Its comic scenes are reported by Bullen to suggest William Rowley at his worst.⁴

The Bullen commentary to which Schelling alludes is the following:

Through the courtesy of the Master, Dr. Carver, I have had the opportunity of examining this play. It is of no particular interest. The comic part is very poor, suggesting William Rowley at his worst.⁵

It is also apparent that Bullen was responsible for Harbage's suggestion of Rowley as the author, admitting, at the same time, that this identification has little acceptance.⁶ R. A. Foakes and J. C. Gibson, the Malone editors, suggest multiple authorship, noting the variant spellings of the names of two characters (*Hortensio* becomes *Hortenza* or *Hortensa* between ll. 804-1718, and thereafter *Hortenzo*; and *Garullo* becomes *Garretto* or *Garettzi* between ll. 81-2151).⁷ This theory is strengthened, to some extent, by abrupt changes in style in certain speeches. For example, in the following speech by the Duke of Florence, after the first six lines, obviously prose, the next eight lines are rhymed couplets, roughly hewn:

Dead[,] Fidelio[,] Things of their nature[,] like vipers brood[,]
kill their owne parents: but hauing sett the Court

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¹R. A. Foakes and J. C. Gibson (eds.), *The Telltale, The Malone Society Reprints*, 1959 (1960). In this study, all quotations from the play are from this edition. The lineation followed in quoting is that of the Malone editors. Capitals in italics and all bracketed punctuation are the work of the present author.

²W. W. Greg (ed.), *Henslowe Papers, Being Documents Supplementary to Henslowe's Diary*, p. 111.

³Alfred B. Harbage, "Elizabethan and Seventeenth-Century Play Manuscripts," *PMLA*, L (September, 1935), 698.

⁴Felix E. Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama, 1558-1642*, II, 239.

⁵A. H. Bullen (ed.), *Old English Plays*, II, 417.

⁶Alfred B. Harbage (ed.), *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*, p. 88.

⁷*The Telltale*, p. viii.

in some good order[,] my next busines
ys[,] thus disguised, to ouerlooke the Camp[,]
for a rude army[,] like a plott of grownd[,]
left to yt selfe[,] grows to a wildernes[,]
Peeped wth wolues & tigers[,] Should not the prince[,]
Like to a Carefull gardner[,] see yt fenct[,]
Waterd & weeded[,] wth Iuditious Care[,]
That hee[,] i[']the time of pruning[,] nether spare
Weeds for faire looks, and painted brauery, nor
Cut downe good hearbs and seruicable [f] for
Theire humble growth[,] the violet that ys borne
Vnder a hedg outsmells the blossomd thorne
That dwells fare higher.

(1002-1016)

It is possible, of course, that such evidence indicates multiple authorship, but it may also be the sign of textual revision.

Recent attempts at dating this play have not been successful. Harbage has arbitrarily established the limits as 1616-1635,⁸ relying possibly upon Chambers for the earlier date,⁹ although his method used in arriving at the later date is not at all clear. The Malone editors suggest a date “. . . well after 1605,” because of similarities in the play to *Law Tricks*, *The Phoenix*, *The Malcontent*, and *Measure for Measure*, all of which have been dated as 1604.¹⁰ They call attention, also, to the purge in Jonson's *Poetaster* (1601) for its similarities to Garullo's purge in *The Telltale*. Greg thinks that the manuscript belongs to the period “1630-40?,” but does not venture a date for the composition of the play.¹¹

As noted earlier, the MS. is in the possession of Dulwich College, although little is known about its previous history. Bullen thinks it the only remaining item from a MS. collection which an actor named Cartwright gave to the College in the late seventeenth century. Furthermore, he believes that the Dulwich authorities exchanged this collection for “. . . tomes of controversial divinity,” sometime in the eighteenth century.¹² He implies that Malone was responsible for the exchange.¹³ However, Greg was unable to find proof that the MS. of *The Telltale* had ever belonged to Dulwich College.¹⁴ It was George Steevens who first observed that the “Platt” of 2 *Seven Deadly Sins* had, at one time, “. . . been converted into a cover for an anonymous manuscript play entitled *The Tell-Tale*.”¹⁵ Greg believes, therefore, that it was Malone who may have obtained the MS. from Dulwich in exchange for the earlier mentioned books of divinity, or that he may have obtained the play from Steevens at a time prior to the latter's sale of books and papers on May 13, 1800, since the records for this sale show that the play was not listed among the items offered for purchase.¹⁶ All that is certain, therefore, is

⁸Harbage, *Annals of English Drama*, p. 88.

⁹Harbage, “Elizabethan and Seventeenth-Century Play Manuscripts,” 687. *Tooth-Drawer; Honour in the End; Don Quixote; and The Fair Spanish Captive*. Greg, A

¹⁰*The Telltale*, p. viii.

¹¹W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 339.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 418.

¹³Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, p. 128.

¹⁴James Boswell (ed.), *Malone's The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators*, III, 350.

¹⁵Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 9.

that Malone possessed the MS. for a time, and that Boswell, his executor, described it in his catalogue for the Malone sale (June 2, 1825), as follows:

3140 The Tell Tale, a Comedy, MS. The curious Plotte of the Seven Deadly Sinnes formed the cover of this comedy when it was discovered at Dulwich.¹⁷

Boswell, however, included the "Plotte of the Seven Deadly Sinnes" as a separate item, number 3136, in the catalogue.¹⁸ A note (now bound with the MS.), written by one Thomas Jenys Smith, verifying that Dulwich authorities had claimed and received the MS. of *The Telltale* before the time of the Boswell sale in 1825,¹⁹ must not have been examined by Greg who, one recalls, found no proof of Dulwich ownership at the time of his inspection of the MS.²⁰ There is an interesting problem, here. According to Boswell, the "Plotte of the Seven Deadly Sinnes" was no longer attached to the MS. of *The Telltale* at the time of the Malone sale in 1825.²¹ Nevertheless, after Dulwich College had obtained the play in 1825, this half leaf "Plotte" was discovered to be bound as folio I of the MS.²² Scholars have noted, also, that the paper of folio I is not the same as that in the MS., and the only foliation appearing in the MS. itself has been added in pencil, presumably later than the time of its possession by Dulwich authorities in 1825.²³ Foakes and Gibson dismiss folio I as a ". . . leaf which clearly has nothing to do with the play."²⁴

In his will, Edward Alleyn, Henslowe's son-in-law and the founder of God's Gift College at Dulwich, specified that many of his possessions be left to the college at his death, an event which took place on November 25, 1626. A portion of the will contains the following information:

Also all the wainscots, hangings, pictures, carpets, presses, tables, chairs, fforms, and stools, in the said College, with all shelves, desks, and seats, also my books and instruments, and likewise all the furniture in the twelve poor schollars chamber²⁵

It is conceivable that Alleyn's reference to "books" implied MSS., and that among them was the MS. of *The Telltale*. Although Alleyn further requested in the will that an inventory be made of the articles bequeathed to Dulwich, the list has never come to light.²⁶

Henslowe's *Diary* shows entries for two plays bearing titles that may represent Henslowe's curious manner of referring to *The Telltale*. There are two entries for "the comedy of cosmo" (January 12 and 23, 1593).²⁷ However, since Cosmo is a minor character in *The Telltale*, it is not likely

¹⁷Quoted in *loc. cit.*

¹⁸Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, p. 128.

¹⁹*The Telltale*, p. v.

²⁰Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, p. 128.

²¹Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 9 .

²²*The Telltale*, p. v.

²³*Loc. cit.*

²⁴*Loc. cit.*

²⁵Quoted in J. Payne Collier (ed.), *The Alleyn Papers, A Collection of Original Documents Illustrative of the Life and Times of Edward Alleyn and of the Early English Stage and Drama*, p. xxiv.

²⁶*Loc. cit.*

²⁷R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert (eds.), *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 19-20.

that Henslowe would have referred to the play in this name. There are fourteen other entries in the *Diary* (ranging from January 3, 1594, to January 18, 1601) to a play entitled (by Henslowe?) "the fren[she] docter,"²⁸ which may infer *The Telltale*, since Picentio is a character in the play disguised as a French doctor and much more prominent than Cosmo.²⁹ Such an early date, however, is opposed to the date of 1605 arrived at by the Malone editors.³⁰

Although the MS. is formally divided into acts, it has no scene divisions. There are Latinate headings for II (496), III (1066), IV (1590), and V (1916), but none for Act I. The editors have seen fit to divide the MS. into scenes, marked (though not formally so) by the presence of a rhymed couplet of iambic pentameter: I.ii (343-44); I.iii, end of act, (493-94); II.iii (997-99); II.iv (1027-29); III.i (1207-8); III.iii (1588-89); V.i (2013-14); and V.ii, end of play, (2300-1). The third and fourth lines from the end of I.i (275-76) form a couplet of iambic pentameter; the two closing lines of the scene are an aside. Another scene, IV.ii, end of act, (1914-15) closes with a rhymed couplet, the first line of which is iambic pentameter; however, the last line has four feet: the first two, anapestic; the last two, iambic. Five scenes are closed without a couplet: II.i (679); II.ii (718); II.v, end of act, (1065); III.ii (1380); and IV.i (1771).

The Malone editors describe the punctuation used in the MS. as "light and erratic."³¹ Most of the minor stage directions are located in the right margin of the MS., but six appear in the left margin (*ll.* 1-4, 36, 578-579, 738, 2015, and 2302), four of which refer to a flourish or "sennett," the remaining two being placed there as the result of a narrow right margin that may have restricted the scribe.³² The scribe used English and Italian script, reserving the latter hand for what appear to be important stage directions.³³ Occasionally, as the Malone editors point out, the scribe began a stage direction in Italic hand, only to change to the English hand, except in the cases of *exit* and *exeunt*.³⁴ The only "unusual" stage directions in the MS. are *Solus* (4), *manet* (1768) and *Exiturus* (567).³⁵ The Malone editors think that the directions, *wine* (1971) and *A Cry wthin* (738), are evidence of a prompter's hand,³⁶ although Greg finds no traces of censorship or prompt notes in the document.³⁷ Furthermore, he classifies the hand as a "literary type."³⁸ There is a distinguishing feature of the manuscript, however, which may lead to a future identification of scribe or author; *i.e.*, almost every *c* occurring as an initial letter

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 25 (three entries); 26; 27 (three entries); 28 (two entries); 31; 48; 54 (two entries); 187.

²⁹French doctors, however, appear in other plays in the period; *i.e.*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Case Is Altered*.

³⁰*The Telltale*, p. viii.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

³²Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 340.

³³*The Telltale*, p. xi.

³⁴*Loc. cit.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. vii.

³⁶*Loc. cit.*

³⁷Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 340.

³⁸*Loc. cit.*, also *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, II, 1001.

in a word is a majuscule.³⁹ In addition, there are three examples of the use of an internal majuscule *c*: “beCause” (765); “bridChamber” (1119); and “aCuse” (2165).⁴⁰

A lacuna occurs in IV (1818) where two and one-half pages of the MS. are left blank so that the text of the play begins in the middle of a new sequence at the top of a new page, with no apparent concern for the omitted action.⁴¹ Greg thinks it is evidence that a scribe, and not the author, was the party responsible for the MS.⁴² Bentley, however, holds the opposite view:

The Dulwich College MS. is written in a literary hand which Dr. Greg seems to think is that of a scribe of about 1630-40 rather than that of the author, in spite of the corrections.⁴³

Bentley's reference to “corrections” is puzzling, since the only “corrections” noted by the Malone editors are those of a scribal nature, evidence which strengthens Greg's theory. For example, Foakes and Gibson cite the following incorrect anticipations in the MS.: ll. 356, 401, 618, 697, 893, 906, 1070, 1258, 1404, 1892, and 2231; a line is anticipated at 821, and several lines at 1258.⁴⁴ It is obvious that someone had difficulty in reading Picentio's “Frenchified” English,⁴⁵ and at 513 in the MS. there may have been trouble with one of the difficult words so frequently used in Garullo's speeches.⁴⁶ This is scribal evidence. Furthermore, Greg doubts that the play was ever performed, especially because of its fragmentary nature.⁴⁷ Harbage, however, thinks that it was acted under the auspices of Elizabeth, although he gives no evidence for his belief.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, there is an interesting use of the word, *mine*, in the left margin of the MS. between ll. 8-9, alongside the opening speech of the Duke of Florence. The word is enclosed within ruled lines and written in a bold hand.⁴⁹ Warner first suggested that *mine* was evidence that the MS. had belonged to an actor who had acted the rôle of the Duke, a theory which Foakes and Gibson do not endorse,⁵⁰ nor does Greg.⁵¹

A final characteristic of the MS. is a monogram occurring at the end of the play, leading Bentley to contend that the MS. “. . . might repay analysis to see if it could be the lost unnamed comedy of John Nichols or Nicholas that was performed at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1639 or 1640.”⁵² Greg suggests that the letters form *Nicholas*,⁵³ although other names may be made from the device. The Malone editors, however, think

³⁹Foakes and Gibson retained the original punctuation and capitalization of the MS. in their edition of the play. *The Telltale*, p. ix.

⁴⁰*Loc. cit.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁴²Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 340.

⁴³Gerald E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, V, 1418.

⁴⁴*The Telltale*, pp. vii-viii.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴⁶*Loc. cit.*

⁴⁷Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 340.

⁴⁸Harbage, *Annals of English Drama*, p. 89.

⁴⁹*The Telltale*, p. vii; see p. xii for a facsimile of the first page of the MS.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁵¹Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 340.

⁵²Bentley, *op. cit.*, V, 1419.

⁵³Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, I, 340; he also describes the appearance of the monogram in *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama*, II, 1001.

the monogram belongs to the scribe, not the author.⁵⁴ While *The Telltale* seems to have been a MS. play until the appearance of the Malone Society text, there is evidence, nevertheless, that Nathaniel Brook had advertised that the play was in the press between 1658 and 1662.⁵⁵ However, there is no indication that it was ever printed.⁵⁶ Greg points out that *The Telltale* with seven other plays⁵⁷ was

. . . advertised by Nathaniel Brooke among "Books in the Presse, and ready for Printing" in E. Phillips, *The New World of English Words*; next among "Books very lately Printed, and in the Press now printing" in K. Q. *Naps upon Parnassus*, also in 1658; the same in R. Loveday, *Letters Domestic and Foreign*, 1659; among "Books in the Press and now printing" in E. M., *Wit and Drollery*, 1661; and the same in R. Loveday, *Letters Domestic and Foreign*, 1662.⁵⁸

Of the seven plays mentioned by Brook in connection with *The Telltale*, none is extant.⁵⁹ Greg concedes the possible loss of one printed play, but does not think that an entire series of eight plays could have met with such a fate, and concludes that ". . . there is indeed no reason to suppose that any of these pieces, if they ever did get into the press, actually got out again."⁶⁰ There is not much on record about Nathaniel Brook, although his name appears in approximately sixty entries in the Stationers' Register from August, 1655, to November, 1674.⁶¹ However, there is no entry in his name for *The Telltale*, the only related evidence being the entry for *Loveday's Letters, Domestick and forreign*, in which Brook advertised the printing of *The Telltale* for June 5, 1662.⁶² At the same time, there is an account of the trial and sentencing of a Nathan Brooks, bookbinder, for his share in the printing and publishing of a "seditious, poisonous, and scandalous book," entitled *A Treatise of the Execution of Justice Is as Well the People's as the Magistrate's Duty; and if the Magistrates Prevent Judgment, then the People Are Bound by the Law of God to Execute Judgement without Them, and Upon Them*, dated February 20, 1663.⁶³ It may be that this unfortunate Nathan Brooks is the Nathaniel Brook, who advertised *The Telltale* in 1662.

The Telltale, a comedy of intrigue, takes place in the court of the Duke of Florence. The main details of the plot are the following:

Act I. The Duke of Florence believes that his Duchess, Victoria, is in love with Picentio, a man to whom she has spoken frequently on behalf of Isabella, her niece. Aspero, the Duke's general, captures

⁵⁴*The Telltale*, p. viii.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. v; also, Bentley, *op. cit.*, V, 1419.

⁵⁶*The Telltale*, p. viii.

⁵⁷*The Fool Transformed; Louis the Eleventh; The Chaste Woman against Her Will; The Tooth-Drawer; Honour in the End; Don Quixote; and The Fair Spanish Captive*. Greg, *A Bibliography of English Printed Drama*, II, 1000-1001.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 1000.

⁵⁹*The Telltale*, p. v.

⁶⁰Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama*, II, 1000.

⁶¹*A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, 1640-1708 A. D.*, II, 6; 13; 14; 27; 38; 48; 59; 74; 83; 114; 116; 126; 129; 130; 131; 157; 186; 199; 201; 205; 215; 225; 253; 256; 257; 292; 310; 324; 334; 341; 342; 358; 375; 388; 412; 413; 426; 427; 446; 447; 453; 461; 465; 592.

⁶²*Ibid.*, II, 310.

⁶³Charles H. Timperley, *A Dictionary of Printers and Printing with the Progress of Literature*, pp. 540-541.

Hortensio and Borgias, two princes of Venice, whom he has brought to court as his prisoners. Here, in an evening's festivities, the group exchange Valentines on which are depicted emblems in the forms of animals. These emblems are, then, explicated. Attached to each emblem is the name of a woman who will be a companion for the evening. Hortensio is fortunate enough to draw the name of Princess Elinor, a young lady with whom he is to fall in love. At the same time, Count Garullo also draws Elinor's name. Picentio's emblem is that of a wounded hart bearing Victoria's name, a turn in the festivities which angers her husband, the Duke, who puts an end to the game. He explains, then, that he must leave the court for a time, designating Picentio to be his lieutenant during his absence. Next, he engages Aspero to spy upon Picentio and Victoria, so that eventually he may have them tried and executed. He departs, then, going to Castle Angelo. In a soliloquy, Aspero explains that, while he will carry out the Duke's orders, he plans, at the same time, to dispose of the Duke. Victoria and Picentio, discussing the reasons for the Duke's anger during the Valentine exchange, are surprised by Aspero, whose men place them under arrest. Aspero, wishing to be thought noble, offers the two prisoners the chance of a public trial, suggesting that it will clear their names. He summons Corbino (Julio in disguise and also Victoria's brother and former general of the army), ordering him to guard the prisoners. Confident that he is in control of the situation, Aspero thinks that he has found a means of eliminating Picentio, along with the Duke and Duchess. Once again, he summons his slave, Corbino (Julio), and offers him freedom if he will agree to kill Victoria and Picentio. Corbino vows that he will act accordingly, although he has no intention of doing so.

Act II. Elinor invites Garullo's attentions, hoping to make Hortensio jealous. Since Garullo is a coward, he disguises himself as a clown in order to be in Elinor's presence without Hortensio's knowledge. Venetian ambassadors arrive to ransom Borgias and Hortensio, and are informed that Hortensio is insane, because Elinor has not requited him. Aspero sends for a doctor to treat Hortensio. At this point, the Duke re-appears, disguised as a hermit, bringing news that the "Duke" has been killed by Picentio and the Duchess. Immediately, Aspero orders Julio to prepare Victoria and Picentio for execution, but Julio falsely reports that they are already dead. The hermit (Duke) informs the court that the Duke of Florence, now thought to be dead, had requested that Aspero be his replacement, and, furthermore, that Aspero and Isabella should marry.

Act III. Believing that he has put his court in order, the disguised Duke next inspects his army. The soldiers inform him that Victoria and Picentio have been murdered by Aspero, whom they also suspect of murdering the Duke. Furthermore, they inform him that Julio (Corbino) was unjustly removed from his position as a general and compelled to serve Aspero as a slave because of Aspero's conspiracy. When the physician arrives, he is Picentio disguised as a French doctor. He is accompanied by a young boy, disguised as Elinor, who tells Hortensio that Elinor loves him. Immediately, Hortensio returns to normal, explaining to his ambassadors that he was only pretending insanity to make Elinor return his love. When the real Elinor enters and the ambassadors take it upon themselves to thank her for requiting Hortensio, she laughs at Hortensio. However, the clever French doctor (Picentio) interprets this action, saying that she did not want her love to become common knowledge. He, then, instructs Hortensio to be as indifferent toward Elinor as she has been toward him, until the time of their marriage, assuring Hortensio that the day will soon arrive. Isabella, who has merely pretended to return

Aspero's affections, now feigns illness to delay the day of her marriage to him. Consequently, the French doctor is summoned to her. He announces that her illness is the result of her love for the "dead" Picentio.

Act IV. Elinor, who cannot understand Hortensio's lack of attentions, announces at court that Garullo, before she could make him a complete fool, has married Lesbia, her chambermaid. Hortensio enters and, following the French doctor's orders and believing Elinor to be testing him, ignores the woman completely when she begs for his love. Eventually, however, they are united. In the meantime, the army officers decide that they must curb Aspero's power before he becomes a tyrant. To do so, they disguise the hermit (the Duke of Florence) who they do not realize is the real Duke, as *the Duke of Florence*. Frightened by her brother's (Julio's) concern for her welfare, Victoria (the Duchess) is living in the protection of the army where she has disguised herself as a cook. Recognizing her husband, she tells him he has wronged her.

[The action presumably omitted in the lacuna concerns the officers' being informed that the man whom they have just disguised as the Duke is actually the Duke and that their cook is Victoria, the Duchess. The officers in turn convey this information to Gismond, Cosmo, and Fernese, who, thereafter inform Isabella and Picentio that the Duke and Duchess are alive. The next scene has probably just begun when the text of the play resumes.]

Aspero claims that he has seen the ghost of Picentio. Upon his departure, Isabella learns that the Duke and Duchess are alive. When she expresses the wish that Picentio, her own true love, were also alive, the French doctor (Picentio) suddenly discloses his identity. Then, the two plot to remove Aspero from power.

Act V. Elinor has caused Garullo and his bride, Lesbia, to be taken prisoner. Realizing that Elinor was paying attention to him because she wanted to make Hortensio jealous, Garullo attempts to poison himself to avoid being disgraced by Elinor's partial success in having made a fool of him. Although Cancko, the clown, has substituted sugar for poison, Garullo thinks himself dying. They permit him to continue in this belief, hoping to cure him of his pomposity by having him believe that he is to die. The plot against Aspero called for officers to force him to prove his innocence by hiring the French doctor to recall the "spirits" of the Duke, the Duchess, Picentio, Julio, and the Captain, Lieutenant, and Antient of the army (all of whom Aspero believes he was responsible for killing) to state that Aspero was not responsible for their deaths. They appear like ghosts and pair off for a dance. When Aspero finally discovers that they are living, the Duke of Florence restores everyone to his rightful position and offers to make Aspero Julio's slave. When Julio refuses, Aspero is given his freedom. Garullo is then brought in ". . . a new man . . ." (2268). A purge has been administered, and the results are read by the Lords of Florence. The Duke, then, points out that the entire court has been purged of jealousy. The Duke and Duchess, Hortensio and Elinor, Picentio and Isabella, and Garullo and Lesbia are reunited.

The author of *The Telltale* was well acquainted with beast fables and proverb lore. The fable, of course, is not alien to medieval or Renaissance literature, but its frequent use in *The Telltale* is a valuable index to the character of the author. The title of the play suggests the telling of tales,

and Bentivoli, the telltale, is characterized by the types of stories which he relates, most of which are derived from animal lore. The first use of this material in the play occurs in the Valentine sequence involving the explication of emblems:

- Duke[.] Let mee see; a pellican feeding his yong wth his bloud:
the morall[?] Comel[,] emblazon[,] oracle[.]
- Gent[.] By the pellican ys vnderstood a prince[,]
by his yong[,] the Comon wealth, by his bloud they are
fed wth[,] his proudient Care ouer their safty[.]
(63-67)

Littledale identifies this fable as an Oriental one and points out that it was often used by medieval preachers to represent a “. . . type of Christ, shedding its blood to feed its young”⁶⁴ In *The Telltale*, the Duke of Florence interprets the allusion to mean that his wife wishes to murder him; *i.e.*, her lust feeds upon his blood. (68-69) Lear refers to this same fable in speaking of his “pelican daughters,” in III.iv.77.

When Bentivoli announces that he will tell a second tale, the Duke of Florence speculates that the author may be AEsop, and Bentivoli assures him that he knows who the author is: “A tale[,] my lord[,] the meere literall sence of a tale[,] I can produce mine author[.]” (134-135) However, it is clear that the author of Bentivoli’s tale is not AEsop; in fact, the telltale claims that “. . . the prince will find this a true tale” (137) The story (118-131) is that of a young lion taken prisoner in a war with a neighbor. Although the victor treats his captive nobly, the other animals show him cruelty. Bentivoli wishes to point out that the lion learned nothing from this experience, intending the tale as an insult to Hortensio, who is also a prisoner and whose fate it was during the Valentine exchange to have picked the emblem of which this tale is the explication. In AEsop, the only tale comparable to the one which occurs in *The Telltale* is “The Lion and the Mouse Who Returned a Favor;”⁶⁵ however, the resemblance is faint.

The source of the next tale is AEsop. It is a fable concerned with a hungry bear and two friends, known as “The Wayfarers and the Bear.” In AEsop, the story is told in the following manner:

Two friends were travelling along the same road. When a bear suddenly appeared, one of them quickly climbed a tree and hid. The other, on the verge of being caught, fell down on the ground and played dead. When the bear nuzzled him, the man held his breath, remembering that it is said that an animal will not touch a dead body. When the bear departed, the man in the tree asked the friend what it was the bear had said to him, he replied, “Not to travel in the future with friends who won’t stand by you in danger.”⁶⁶

Bentivoli’s version of this story shows his reliance upon AEsop:

. . . vpon a time[,] a couple of ffreinds / & nere kinsmen[,] sworne

⁶⁴H. Littledale, “Folklore and Superstitions: Ghosts and Fairies: Witchcraft and Devils,” in *Shakespeare’s England*, I, 521.

⁶⁵Lloyd W. Daly (tr.), *AEsop without Morals*, p. 156.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 120.

to second each other in all dangers[,] / Chanct to trauaille through
 a wildernes, where sudainly a / hungry beare rusht out vpon
 ['] um[.] The one of them like a / white liuerd Coward tooke himselfe
 to his heeles, Climb / vp a tree & left his friends in y^e danger, who
 being vnarmd & / to[o] weake for his enemy[,] fell mee flatt to the
 grownd and / Counterfeits him selfe dead[.] The beare[,] smelling
 him and / taking him[,] by the holding of his breath[,] to bee dead,
 scorning / to pray vpon a lieweles Carcasse[,] mussled about his face
 and / necke a while and then left him[.] Being out of sight[,] [at]
 once / his fellow Came Creeping out of the tree; and askt him / what
 the beare whispered him so long in the eare for[.] [“]Marry[,]” /
 quoth hee[;] “]amongst many other good & holsome instruction[.] / he
 wisht mee neuer to entertaîne freindship wth a foole / nor hold
 society wth a Coward” (572-587)

Although much longer than AEsop's story, Bentivoli's version parallels the fable in every respect.

Furthermore, Bentivoli tells a story (1603 ff.) that recalls AEsop's "The Mouse Belling the Cat," in which mice decide to tie a bell about a cat's neck to warn them of his approach.⁶⁷ Since no mouse really wants to undertake this dangerous assignment, it is not surprising that the one who volunteers is immediately deserted by his cowardly companions. Bentivoli uses the fable to warn the army officers who seek to depose Aspero. Finally, he tells the tale of a fox threatened with eviction (1855 ff.). The animal, at first, makes certain that the landlord cannot depend upon the help of friends in carrying out the threat. However, upon learning that his landlord has not been discouraged, the fox thinks it is time to move.

That the author was also well acquainted with proverb lore is evident in his frequent use of such sayings in the play, apparently, however, for no deliberate effect (except in the case of Bentivoli, for whom they are appropriate), inasmuch as proverbs occur throughout the speeches of most of the other characters, as well. Although a catalogue of these items would be of little value to this present study, a selection of the proverbs in the play, on the other hand, may suggest the general characteristics of this lore:

. . . true Crocadile whine when shee meanes to murder[.] (227)⁶⁸
 . . . wee are a kinn to March[.] / Wee Come in blustering like a
 lion when wee are angry[,] / Wee go[w] out mild as a lamb when
 wee are pleasd (336-339)⁶⁹
 . . . that[']s flat[.] (342)⁷⁰
 . . . & [nere] no man say blacks his eye. (634)⁷¹
 . . . teach mee to gett my sword againe by schoole triks / or winn
 my mth loue by sillogismes (819-820)⁷²

⁶⁷William M. Carroll, *Animal Conventions in English Renaissance Non-Religious Prose 1550-1600*, p. 66. Also, Morris P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 45, indicates that the fable is the basis for the saying, "Who shall tie the bell about the cat's neck?"

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 443.

⁷⁰Archer Taylor, "Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases in the Plays of Thomas Middleton," *SFQ*, XXIII (June, 1959), 82; the proverb occurs in Middleton's *Family of Love*, I.ii; IV.iii.

⁷¹See Middleton's *Blurt, Master Constable*.

⁷²Tilley, *op. cit.*, p. 397, refers to this proverb as "love makes men orators." Hortensio wishes he could win Elinor by means of his logic.

. . . when a great man falls[,] he breaks his neck & ten to one
 neuer / recouers his feet more (886-887)⁷³
 . . . pick that bone / Cleane & Ile send thee another to gnaw[.]
 (888)⁷⁴
 . . . but traitors / how ere they liue would seeme to dye like
 swanns / wth passionate dittyes in their mouths to winn / loue of
 the world[,] when in their harts they carry Curses and execrations[.]
 (939-943)⁷⁵
 . . . hee buy damnation deare that sells a praire (970)⁷⁶
 . . . things of their nature, like viper[']s brood[,] / kill their owne
 parents (1002-1003)⁷⁷
 . . . to seeke a needle in a bottle of hey. . . . (1151)⁷⁸
 . . . lupus in / fabula (1650-1651)⁷⁹
 . . . I herd a bird sing so (1965)⁸⁰
 . . . though kings[,] like elephants[,] haue no bending kneel[,] /
 Thus low we Can discend. (2099-2100)⁸¹

Therefore, it is clear that any attempt at solving the problem of authorship presented by this play must include a search for a dramatist whose work exhibits a similar use of proverb lore.

A consideration of the five plays cited by the Malone editors for themes which are "imitated" in *The Telltale* may be of further interest to scholars in determining the authorship of this play. Essentially, there are three themes: the disguised duke, the usurper, and the "purge." The theme concerned with the duke who forsakes his court and returns in disguise to study the behavior of his former associates is, in part, manifest in Day's *Law Tricks* (1604), Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604), Middleton's *The Phoenix* (1603/4), and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1604).⁸²

In *Law Tricks*, a duke, wishing his son to think him dead, leaves his court and returns, disguised as a messenger, to spread the false information, thereby hoping to test the younger man's capacity for leadership. Similarly, in *The Telltale*, a test underlies the actions of the Duke of Florence, an overly suspicious man plagued by the thought of the possibility of his wife's infidelity. That his disguise also enables him to pry into the secrets at court is a matter of secondary importance to him is made clear when he registers surprise upon discovering its advantages: ". . . this Camp[']s a glass w^{ch} some riotous Court/May see their errors, yt hath shewd mee some / I neuer saw before" (1203-1206)

⁷³*Ibid.*, 103. Also, Charles G. Smith, *Shakespeare's Proverb Lore*, p. 71, notes an allusion to the proverb in *Richard III*, I.iii. 259-260.

⁷⁴Tilley, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁷⁵H. Littledale, "Folklore and Superstition: Ghosts and Fairies: Witchcraft and Devils," *Shakespeare's England*, I, 521, points out that the proverb occurs also in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

⁷⁶Tilley, *op. cit.*, p. 13, "he preaches that gives alms."

⁷⁷William M. Carroll, *Animal Conventions in English Renaissance Non-Religious Prose 1550-1600*, p. 47. Also, T. H. White (tr.), *The Book of the Beasts Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*, p. 170.

⁷⁸F. W. Fairholt (ed.), *The Dramatic Works of John Lilly, the Euphuist, with Notes and Some Accounts of His Life and Writings*, II, 276, fn. 17; 127. Cf. Tilley, *op. cit.*, p. 494.

⁷⁹Morris P. Tilley, *Elizabethan Proverb Lore in Lyly's "Euphues" and in Pettie's "Pettie Pallace" with Parallels from Shakespeare*, p. 138.

⁸⁰Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 130.

⁸¹White, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁸²*The Telltale*, p. viii.

Although the dukes in *Law Tricks* and *The Telltale* leave their courts for different reasons, they react similarly when they discover that a presumably responsible individual has, during their absences, violated their trust. Furthermore, each ruler returns in time to ward off serious difficulties.

In Marston's *The Malcontent*, the reasons for the leave-taking and disguise are different from those seen in *The Telltale*. Marston's duke has been usurped, and he is banished; hence, he returns as a malcontent. The analogous character in *The Telltale*, as noted previously, is concerned only with testing his wife's fidelity and does not learn, until late in the play, that he is in danger of losing his position to an aspiring individual. Marston's plot is quickly complicated by Malevole's decision to remove his unworthy successor from office. As a friend, he unwittingly reveals this plan to the usurper who thinks it meet to put on hermit's weeds to avoid detection, a disguise, one recalls, used in *The Telltale*. In both plays, the rightful duke is restored to power, and all problems eventually are solved. A love intrigue forms a part of the themes in both works, although it is differently presented in each case. Marston's duke, Mendoza, vainly attempts to force into marriage Maria, the wife of his successor. In *The Telltale*, the hypersensitive Duke of Florence suspects Picentio of having designs upon Victoria, his duchess, even though it is clear that there is no basis for these thoughts. At the same time, Aspero, the usurper, wishes to marry Isabella, the niece of the disguised ruler.

The disguise theme in Middleton's *The Phoenix* concerns a duke's son who leaves court, hoping by travel to equip himself to assume the responsibilities of office when his father dies. During his travels, he joins a group plotting against his father, and the disguise theme is used once more for the purpose of spying upon court activities. When the older man recognizes his son's fitness to rule, he resigns in favor of the young man, announcing plans to devote himself to a life of religious meditation, perhaps as a hermit, a disguise found in *The Telltale*.⁶³

Themes of a disguised duke and a pretender occur in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. In this play, the Duke of Vienna leaves his court, not wishing to enforce the strict laws pertaining to sexual vice, naming Angelo as Lord Deputy in his absence. He returns, however, disguised as Friar Lodowick, to keep an eye on the events at court. Whereas the Duke of Florence in *The Telltale* was able to set things right with little effort, Shakespeare's duke achieves success by means of curiously complex plots, eventually freeing Claudio, preserving Isabella's innocence, and uniting in marriage Angelo and Mariana. *The Telltale* resembles Shakespeare's play, more than it does the previously mentioned works, for the following reasons: (1) both dukes choose similar disguises—that of a friar in *Measure for Measure*; a hermit in *The Telltale*; (2) both men have con-

⁶³Samuel Schoenbaum, *Middleton's Tragedies: A Critical Study*, p. 209, discusses the Tony Clown of *The Changeling* (1622-24). Tony is the name which Count Garullo in *The Telltale* assumes when he disguises himself as Elinor's clown: ". . . I am Tony[,] Dame Nells foole[.]" (838) Eustace Conway, *Anthony Munday and Other Essays*, pp. 20-21, notes that Anthony Munday signed a collection of poems (1600) as "Shepherd Tonie."

cern for the moral codes in their respective courts—in *Measure for Measure*, for the laws relating to fornication; in *The Telltale*, for a wife's suspected infidelity; (3) in the absence of the dukes, the men charged with the welfare of the courts turn out to be untrustworthy—in *Measure for Measure*, Angelo; in *The Telltale*, Aspero (their names, in each case, also suggesting a dominant character trait); (4) both substitute rulers have designs upon an innocent woman; and (5) both dukes must put their respective courts in order. Furthermore, the Duke of Florence in *The Telltale*, when he retires from court, takes up his residence in *Castle Angelo*, a fact that may be significant.

Characters of similar names also appear in these plays. For example, Julio appears in *Law Tricks*; Fidelio in *The Phoenix*; Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, and Ferneze (Fernese in *The Telltale*) in *The Malcontent* and *Law Tricks*. Angelo is a character in *Law Tricks* and *Measure for Measure* but a place name in *The Telltale*, as noted earlier, occurring six times in the text (30, 274, 914, 1036, 1064, and 1858). It should be explained, however, that these names are assigned to characters of dissimilar traits in the plays concerned.

The "purge" scene in *The Telltale* appears to have been written in imitation of Jonson's famous "purge" of Horace in *Poetaster* (1601). In Jonson's play, the administering of the "purge" takes place on stage in view of the audience; in *The Telltale*, it is administered to Count Garullo off stage, so that the audience witnesses only the results of the treatment. As a consequence, both Horace and Garullo are "purged" of rhetorical afflictions in the two plays, although the words which flow from their mouths are not parallel. For example, in *The Telltale*, Garullo regurgitates terms like *sinderisis*, *hiperbole*, *cacumenos*, *metaphisticall*, and *hieroglyphicall* (2260-2264). In *Poetaster*, Horace is relieved of such words as *retrograde*, *reciprocal*, *incubus*, *glibbery*, *lubrical*, and *defunct* (V.i.). Furthermore, the "purge" occurs in the fifth act of each play.

Finally, the phrasing in certain passages in *The Telltale* recalls similar lines from other works of the period. In the following cases, the similarities are those which occur in passages of parallel plot development, and are offered as further evidence of the nature of this anonymous play. For example, in *The Telltale* the Duke of Florence, suspicious of his Duchess, refers to her "seeming virtues" (10-12), a phrase which recalls the parallel situation in *Hamlet* (I.v.41-45) wherein the Ghost describes Gertrude as his "seeming-virtuous" queen.⁸⁴ A further example of similar phrasing in these two plays occurs in episodes concerned with the theme of pretended insanity, a disguise adopted for similar reasons in each play. One recalls that Hamlet warns Horatio and his companions not to show concern if, in the future, he should ". . . think meet / To put an antic disposition on . . ." (I.v.169-172) In *The Telltale*, Hortensio, who has also pretended to be insane, explains his odd behavior to his ambassadors as follows: "I did but faigne / the humor only to sound the princes

⁸⁴Quotations from Shakespeare's plays used in this study are from Hardin Craig (ed.), *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*.

bosome." (1291-1292) A third example of parallel phrasing between the two works occurs in scenes which involve the presence of a ghost, or what is thought to be a ghost. It is Hamlet alone, one remembers, who sees his father's ghost when it appears in Gertrude's chamber, prompting Hamlet to exclaim to his mother, "Why, look you there! look, how it steals away! / My father, in his habit as he lived . . ." (III.iv.136-137) In *The Telltale*, Aspero has a similar experience when he sees the Duke of Florence. Since he alone has reason to think that the Duke is dead, he cries out to Isabella, "Th—there: see where hee stalks & stares vpon mee . . ." (1823) Because the women to whom these remarks are addressed do not see the ghost, they reply in similar ways to the frightened men. *Gertrude to Hamlet*: "This is the very coinage of your brain: / This bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning in." (III.iv.139-141) When Hamlet also asks her if she sees anything, she replies, "Nothing at all; yet all that is I see." (133) *Isabella to Aspero*: "Tis nothing but Concept / and strange imagination[:] yf hee were here / sure I should see or heare or feele or some thing . . ." (1826-1828) There are further instances of similar phrasing between these two plays, of less significance, however, than those just cited. For example, in *The Telltale*, there is an allusion to an earthquake that would ". . . shake Pelion downe in the lap / of Ossa," (536-537) which recalls Hamlet's remark, ". . . to o'ertop old Pelion." (V.i.276, followed later by his reference, "Make Ossa like a wart." (305) Secondly, a character (Ferneze) in *The Telltale* (2007) remarks: "I hope the foole has not poysned him selfe in earnest," the reverse of Hamlet's comment, "No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest . . ." (III.ii.244-245) Elsewhere in *The Telltale*, the Duke of Florence states, ". . . & yet to[o] I would haue thee / doo'te but as actors play such parts in ieast." (261-262) Finally, *The Telltale* employs the expression, *drink deep*, on two occasions (343-344; 1980-1982), which is similar to the thought in Hamlet's greeting of Horatio, "We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart." (I.ii.175)

The play echoes lines from Shakespeare's *Richard III*. For example, an Ancient speaks the following sentiments in *The Telltale* (1120-1122):

& wouldst haue vs robb our owne tresury[,] pilladge our owne / war-
houses, deflowre our wiues[,] murther our sonnes[,] and rauish / our
owne daughters?

These words are comparable to those spoken by Richard in his oration to the army (V.iii.320-322; 336-337):

You sleeping safe, they bring you to unrest;
You hauing lands, and blest with beauteous wives,
They would restrain the one, distain the other . . .
Shall these enjoy our lands? lie with our wives?
Ravish our daughters?

It is possible, also, that *The Telltale* echoes lines from Marston's *The Malcontent*, with reference to the terms, *egress* and *regress*, words that occur in similar situations in both works. In *The Malcontent*, the words appear in the following passage:

Thou, closely yielding egress and regress to her,
 Madest him heir; whose hot and unquiet lust
 Straight tous'd thy sheets, and now would seize
 Thy state. (III.ii.63-65)

In *The Telltale*, a Clown says,

. . . haue egress & regress into yo' ladyes Chamber at midnight[,]
 / nay[,] kisse her hand & tumble in her lap a fore yo' riuals face.
 (630-631)

When Aspero in *The Telltale* refers to an “. . . A per se A. of Courtship & merchant royall / of language . . .,” (151-152), he strangely suggests Nashe's scathing indictment of Gabriel Harvey in “Four Letters Confuted,” wherein Harvey is similarly described in the following statement: “A *per se* A can doe it: tempt not his clemencie too much. A *per se* A^p . . . Everie inch A per se A *his termes and braueries in print*.”⁸⁵ It is difficult, however, to understand how *The Telltale* might have become involved in the Harvey-Nashe quarrel, as such evidence might infer, unless there is a hidden reference to Harvey as Count Garullo in the “purge” at the close of the play.

A final observation on the phrasing in *The Telltale* is concerned with the speech habits of the French doctor (Picentio in disguise) whose garbled French-English resembles that which is spoken by two other French doctors of the time—Caius in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1599-1600?) and Pacue in Jonson's *The Case Is Altered* (1597?). The speech habits of these three stage doctors are too similar to be dismissed as coincidence.

This study brings to light some valuable clues which, if carefully pursued, may resolve the puzzling questions of authorship and date of composition presented by *The Telltale*. Clearly, internal evidence points to an author familiar with London theatrical activities for the years, 1597-1604. Furthermore, it reveals that he was an author well informed about animal and proverb lore. To some extent, it may suggest, also, that he was a member of one of the acting companies engaged in the famous stage quarrel that occupied the London theatres at the turn of the century. It emphasizes his acquaintance with the works of men like Shakespeare, Jonson, Marston, Middleton, and Day, and indicates that he was working in the traditions established (or, at least, recognized) by these dramatists during the period of time involved. There is yet much to be done in piecing together the fragments of evidence related to *The Telltale*. Perhaps, this present study will suggest some of the ways in which scholars may eventually achieve a more comprehensive view of the stage history of this anonymous play.

⁸⁵Alexander Grossart (ed.), *The Complete Works of Thomas Nashe*, II, 261. See also Eugene J. Kettner, “*Love's Labour's Lost* and the Harvey-Nashe-Greene Quarrel,” *Emporia State Research Studies*, X (June, 1962), 29-39.

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