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Erotics of Textuality

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Erotics of Textuality

In understanding the complex nature of textual studies, an important aspect, but often overlooked as just a part of the publishing process, is the different set of biases that each editor imposes on the text. What is often studied is the relationship of the author to the text and developing the enjoyment that one can experience in the exploration of what is referred to as authorial intent. This concept of authorship, however, is one that is distinct to the modern audience. When one considers a text in a modern literacy the single person responsible for what is thought of as the authorship of the work is the focal point. Seldom fully explored, however, are the different preferences that each editor imposes on a text. Readers may unknowingly be more attracted to one editor's stylistic preferences than to that of another's. The editing process, especially in adapting works from the early modern era, is one that is not met without subjectivity. Editors often go unnoticed when studying texts from the early modern period such as that of the works of Thomas Middleton. The work of Thomas Middleton, a well-known playwright who collaborated with such dramatists as William Shakespeare and Thomas Dekker during the 1600s, is the primary focus of this research. Through the critical examination of contributions made by each editor and the general editors, especially Gary Taylor, I work with *An/The Old Law: Or, A New Way to Please You, A Mad World My Masters, How To Use This Book* (there are two copies of this, similar in nature and both by Taylor but found in the

Collected Works and *The Companion*), the forwards for both plays by Saccio and Masten, and Gary Taylor's *Preface: Textual Proximities*. From my reading and own interpretation of the editing based on my own biased desires in textual experience, I have concluded that the contributions made by each editor to a work is more than just a part of the publishing process, but, rather, it is part of the creation of the text in a new way. In an effort to explore how different editors find different titillations and interpretations of textuality the *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* and *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to The Collected Works* are studied with a focus on the editing choices of Jeffrey Masten and Peter Saccio in two plays by Middleton and how their two very different styles of editing are able exist and enhance the works of Middleton under the general editors Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino.

The process of forming a collection of works, especially with the numerous titles accredited to Thomas Middleton, is not one that could be accomplished by one person. Thomas Middleton did not work independently on his plays; it was through collaboration, altering, printing, and the desire to draw an audience that the works of Middleton have been brought forth for one to participate in and study. Multiple printers were given foul papers to work from with different markings from different playhouses. Some copies of Middleton's works, such as *Old Law,* had different sections of the play printed from two or more different printers at the same time. This multiplicity lends itself to speculation on the process of creating the text as a valid, and integral, component of the textual experience. For Taylor and Lavagnino's *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works,* it took no less than the collaborative efforts of the two general, four associate general, and the contribution of 56 additional editors to create this volume. When one stops to consider the enormity of the task for this text to come together one can think about

how such efforts were similarly undergone in the 17th century for each of Middleton's plays. Printing may have been delayed, someone's piece may have been missing or irksome to that of a different writer, two very different personas may contradict one another in just a few pages, and other obstacles that would have been challenging for Middleton in the 1600's would still be problematic for Taylor and Lavagnino in composing this volume.

The lack of a modernization in spelling would have left some words open to interpretation whilst being printed. For example, the word "whining" in Masten's edition of *Old Law* was interpreted in four different spellings while undergoing the transition from oral to written text during a time without a standard spelling. Masten states, "whining this edition; wheening Bell; whening Coxeter; wheezing Mason+. Since none of the other proposed emendations seems especially persuasive, this edition adopts *whining* as a near-spelling of Bell's *wheening*" (Middleton, *Old Law* 1355). Here one can see how one word can take so many different meanings. When one imagines the action of the drama, an actor that is whining sounds and acts a lot different than an actor who is wheezing. In considering the mise en scene of each of these different interpretations one will imagine many different possibilities. One would have to know why the actor was wheezing—is the audience acknowledging the artificiality of drama by seeing an unfit actor struggle through lines, is the character supposed to have a breathing disruption during this scene, or is this a non-modernized spelling of a whining which would change the image of the character and the action the reader imagines to be taking place on stage? What Masten has done here is exercise an element of alteration which he finds excitement in. Masten envisioned the actions taking place on stage while reading the multiple copies of *Old Law* and for Masten the most pleasing representation was that of the whining character. Masten, however, does not limit the reader's experience of the text by neglecting the duplicity of previous

printings. For Masten, the act of imagining the multiple possibilities is a pleasurable experience within itself, and the selection of just one form of the word would deny the reader of the enjoyment of experiencing the text in that way. Masten aids the reader in interpreting and envisioning the actions of the play in multiple ways through the incorporation of the multiple spellings. Reimagining the scene with different elements and different actors is an exercise in which one is able to further explore the humane nature of drama. By allowing oneself to experience the text and then experience the text in a new way there can be a great deal of amusement for those that read in a manner similar to that of Masten's own.

For some readers, however, this ambiguity of text is alarming. Not knowing the "correct way" or the "true way" to read the text and imagine the play can be bothersome to readers who demand a more definitive answer. For these readers the erotic elements found in Peter Saccio's works may be better suited to their sense of satisfaction. Saccio describes the actions of the play with words such as "obscenity," "fake," and that readers are, "urged to applaud the action and to disregard as relics of old-fashioned convention…" (Middleton, *Mad World* 416). For Saccio, the artificiality of drama is disturbing and there is contentment in distancing oneself from that disconcertion. In reading Saccio's edition, one will note the modernization of spelling. Saccio has even modernized the Title to *A Mad World, My Masters* by following conventional rules in capitalization in titles and because the □ found in an earlier printing titled "*A mad World, my Ma□ters*" is no longer used in the modernized spelling. In compiling the volume the general editors chose to print the title in the early form of *A mad World, my Ma□ters* for the headers in the volume—a choice that would not have been made had this edition of the text been included in a volume comprised in a similar style to Saccio's own.

The title of Middleton's *An/The Old Law* is an example of the style of modification that Masten engages in when reviewing a piece. This suggests that the play may have been titled two different ways (or perhaps in this dual way) during the time it was performed. Had the title simply read either *An Old Law* or *The Old Law* the reader would have two distinctly different interpretations of the title of the play. As it reads in Masten's transcription the duality allows for the reader to explore the implications made in the title about the law. When read as *An Old Law* the law, in question, could be referring to any commandment given by a modern authority that had been given. *The Old Law* conjures the image of a specific law, and for Middleton's audience the significance of the law being written on a stone tablet would not have been lost. *The Old Law* would also be a play on words that the audience of the early modern period would recognize as relating to "The Poor Laws" which were laws specifically designed for those of lower socioeconomic status in society. With this awareness the audience may surmise that *The Old Law* is a set of laws designed for those more geriatric members of the society. *The Old Law* would also be used in reference to the laws given to Moses in the Old Testament. These laws are at the controversy of the town's decision to end the life of the elderly. Not only does this go against the fifth commandment forbidding murder, but it also goes against the fourth commandment of honoring one's father and mother. The commandments were not given to Moses in esoteric order, and the breaking of the fourth commandment is one that is not often punishable in a court of law as is the fifth commandment, which is the only commandment still truly valued in modernity, but to the early modern audience the wrath of God was still a very real consequence.

An/The Old Law Or, A New Way to Please You, as titled by Masten, incorporates all of the varying possibilities of titles used in the production of this drama. Sometimes referred to as

An Old Law, other times *The Old Law*, and may have also been known as *A New Way to Please You*. The latter of the three may or may not have served as a subtitle or an alternative title. In this way there are over six possible titles for the same text. How can one text have six different titles and still be appreciated as a valid text? It is because the multiple possibilities in the title reflects the nature of the drama to appeal to the audience. By changing the titles and making different modifications the crowds may also fluctuate and bring in more revenue. *A New Way to Please You* has a hint of salacious indulgence that might bring in an audience that would not go to a play titled *The Old Law*, which sounds religious in nature.

These two very different approaches are both found in the same volume of works under the general editors Taylor and Lavagnino. So in contemplating the decisions made by these two editors the text becomes a further complexity. Taylor and Lavagnino read and accepted both Saccio and Masten's copies of Middleton's works into the same volume. Did Saccio and Masten volunteer for a specific play or did Taylor and Lavagnino decide who would work with which drama? If one was to assume that Taylor and Lavagnino selected the plays that Saccio and Masten would work with then one would need to consider the nature of the texts themselves. One of *Old Law*'s original printers, Bell, has undergone a great deal of scrutiny from modern editors, "Bell's most recent editor, it is a 'deplorably bad quarto', a 'hodge-podge bad quarto', with 'numerous textual absurdities resulting from misreadings'"(Middleton, *Old Law* 1123). The text was not pleasurable to the previous editor because of the uncertainties that had risen while reading it. Instead of participating in the processes that the text had undergone and enjoying the multiple scenarios the editor wanted to form it into a singular perspective. Masten comments on this method of altering Bell's work:

> Though it seems to me more productive to interpret the text than to arraign it, I think it may be said that Bell is 'bad' in one very limited sense: as a material artifact, it has been poorly manufactured in the most literal way. That is, the letters of the type have been inadequately (or sometimes *excessively*) inked, and the result is a text in which some letters (or, more accurately: ostensible letters) do not register on the page. (Middleton, *Old Law* 1123)

The term "bad" is used by both editors, but the meaning to each is quite different. The previous editor, resonating of Saccio, discredits the quarto because of its difficulty to read, multiple notes, and "absurdities" from other readers. Masten, however, uses the term "bad" to describe the transcription of the text rather than the text itself. The difference is similar to the discrediting of a text because of the poor penmanship rather than reading the work itself. The humane aspect of the work has been removed for the sake of the modern audience. It is to assume that if it is human it must contain errors, but if it is technology that produces the text it has become infallible. When approaching the text in this manner there is more enjoyment in the modification of the text into the uniformed modernity rather than in participating in the text in a way that would be appreciated by audience members. What is so disturbing to the person previously working with Bell's print is the same aspect of the copy that Masten found enjoyment analyzing. After becoming familiar with the editing styles of Masten and Saccio one can understand why such a text would have been assigned to Masten over Saccio. Saccio would derive some enjoyment from "fixing" this bastardized text and bringing it into the modern, but in doing so the experience of the text as Masten would prefer escapes the reader.

A Mad World, My Masters, edited by Saccio, reads in a manner that allows one to remove the human element from the drama. Saccio briefly mentions that, "With its intrigues for money

and sex, the play strongly resembles the other London comedies Middleton wrote for performance by the Children of Paul's" (Middleton, *Mad World* 414). Saccio then moves on to comment on the settings of the scenes throughout the play. What is interesting in analyzing this section of Saccio's commentary is that Saccio chooses to emphasize the setting of the plays over the performers. What a reader may miss is the pleasure found in pederasty during seventeenth century England. In considering the following dialogue and action taking place between Penitent and Wife in Act three Scene two:

> COURTESAN: Pish, you're a faint liver. Trust yourself with your pleasure and me with your security. Go.
>
> PENITENT: The fullness of my wish!
>
> WIFE: Of my desire!
>
> PENITENT: Beyond this sphere I never will aspire! (*Mad World* 3.2.188-191).

The reader may not understand the affect that this scene would have on the audience watching this performance by the Children of Paul's entirely young boy cast. For the modern audience this perversion cannot be continued, indeed one would have a difficult time recreating a historically accurate portrayal of this text using children to play such salacious roles on stage. When one imagines this scene as it would have been experienced by Middleton's audience one will see three boys on stage. The youngest two playing the role of the Courtesan and Wife because of the pitch of their voice and the older one playing the role of the Penitent; or, perhaps for added comedic enjoyment the two female roles would be played by older boys, thus poking fun at the role of the Wife and the Courtesan in society. There are many ways in which to imagine this scene being acted by the Children of Paul's but in all of them the relationship

between the Penitent and the Wife would have an added element of humor when male child actors are in both roles than if the roles were to be assigned to adults and to obey the gender roles of modernity. Saccio does not address the question about who would write a play about "money and sex" to be performed by children. When considering why one might leave out the pederast element of the drama, and indeed the culture of the audience, one may come to the conclusion that it is because imagining such a culture is not as amusing to the editor as imagining it did not exist. There is a form of excitement to be had in both the confirmation and the denial of any element of text. For Saccio, to not focus on the sexual pleasure of young males portraying characters that have both explicit and implied sexual relations is a form of indulgence within itself. Saccio is able to remove this element from the drama and focus on a more sterile, and comfortable element, of the mise en scene.

In an effort to further institutionalize the environment required of the modern the traditions and structures of the early modern era began to change. Once such change is the way in which the maternal is conceptualized by the society. The role of the mother in seventeenth century England is being criticized by Middleton. The early modern era was beginning to experience the death of maternity as a central value. This is critiqued in both *Mad World* and *Old Law*. *Mad World* is one of the only plays during this era to feature a pregnant character. This too is glossed over by Saccio through his brief summary of the play. If one were to imagine what this action would mean on stage, one would picture a young boy playing the part of a pregnant character. In thinking about how this would look and what this would suggest to the culture of the Middleton's era, what is the social criticism that the pregnancy portrays on stage? The Courtesan is seen as both chaste and immoral in his role on stage. The role of the mother is traditionally associated with the Church's depiction of Mary the virgin mother of Jesus. As

society begins to shift away from the traditions found in the Church it also begins to move away from the maternal. Middleton's *Old Law* questions the honoring of one's mother and father. For the mother to be killed twenty years before the father suggests the devaluing of the feminine and the raising of the patriarchic hierarchy. Middleton has gone so far as to portray a young boy as being pregnant on stage in an effort to draw attention to the loss of maternity. It is a key satirical moment of the drama in reflection of the society that the modern reader does not understand because it appreciates the end of the maternal. For the modern reader, like Saccio, the comedic element is missed because it has already been accepted as reality. For the audience at the time of Middleton, this scene would have been riotous. It is both offensive and absurdly funny. To mock motherhood in such an openly burlesque manner is uncomfortably funny to Middleton's audiences in a way that, when not participating in an imaginative reading of the performance, would be missed by the reader.

Saccio does remark on the tantalizing element of experiencing the bodies on stage. "The play suggests that we enjoy not only witty contrivance by minds but also resourceful activity of bodies" (Middleton, *Mad World* 416). Saccio has not participated in the drama as an active textual experience. A play would suggest that the audience enjoy the resourceful activity of bodies because what is central to the play is not the dialogue, but rather the action that is happening on stage by actors for an audience that realizes the artificiality of the events before them. The exaggerated motions of the actors, the louder sounds of the bodies functions, and the loud, and often phallic, costumes of the performance are meant to be a spectacle for the audience. If one removes the actors from the drama, what is left is a text that resembles that of the novel. The ribaldry humor found throughout the play has gone unappreciated by Saccio, and the previous editor, whom Saccio says:

> In the best recent edition of *Mad World*, Standish Henning rightly declares that 'the play revels in obscenity', body jokes that he finds too obvious to explicate. In the present edition Celia R. Daileader does annotate them (and continues discussion of the sexual issues in her recent book *Eroticism on the Renasissance Stage*). (Middleton, *Mad World* 416)

Not only has Saccio taken the opportunity to criticize previous editions of the text, but he also imposes his own idea of eroticism upon the reader. Saccio has not been comfortable with aspects of the body or the actors who would have been portraying the characters. Further consideration of the actors as young children make the modernly perverse humor all the more hilarious for Middleton's audience. Rather than invite the reader to participate in the culture that would enjoy these elements and see the social criticism, Saccio commends those who have been able to see past them in order to appreciate what is "correct" about the text.

What Saccio fails to appreciate is the role of the audience as a crucial element of the textual experience that cannot be removed from the drama. Drama is a text that lends itself to the gratification of the audience. If the audience enjoyed a particular action in the play the audience might demand it to be performed again. An entire afternoon at the playhouse could end with the audience only seeing the first half of the play before demanding a favorite climactic moment from another play or the repetition of a scene that was a former favorite. The audience may hate one of the actors on stage and may demand that the character be killed or beaten in a spectacular way, changing the entire plot of the written text. In the same manner, the audience may love a character or particular actor and may demand that the character be brought back to life (and then die again) for their enjoyment. Whatever the audience desired at that performance was what the text strove to show them. The flexibility and multiple changes that can happen to

the text during a performance was the design of the text itself. This was a text performed to an audience that would have left if their entertainment ideals had not been satisfied. The audience wanted to see the grotesque, the odd, and the salacious on stage. Had they not, they would have merely left the theatre to enjoy the bear baiting down the road or fraternized with a local courtesan. In Act three, Scene two the actions happening on stage in an exaggerated manner so that it could be appreciated by the audience member farthest away from the stage would have been a truly sensational experience for Middleton's crowd. The Penitent and Wife have just exited the stage together and the Courtesan is to distract the husband. It is during the dialogue between Harebrain and Courtesan that the audience begins to hear the coitus taking place off stage between the two actors. The, presumably, increasing resonance of what the audience is careening to try and catch a glimpse of off stage shows the foolishness of Harebrain, thus allowing him to do credit to his name. It is in Act three, Scene two that the audience is able to experience these actions on stage:

> HAREBRAIN: She's weeping, 't'as made her weep. My wife shows her good nature already.
>
> COURTESAN: Still weeping? Huff, huff, huff, why how now, woman? Hey, hy, hy, for shame, leave! Suh, suh, she cannot answer me for the snobbing.
>
> HAREBRAIN: All this does her good, beshrew my heart, and I pity her. Let her shed tears till morning, I'll stay for her. She shall have enough on't by my good will, I'll not be her hindrance. (*Mad World* 3.2.214-222)

Harebrain believes that the "weeping" his wife is doing off stage with the doctor is what will heal her ailment. Courtesan tries to mask the sounds coming off stage with fake coughing

sounds and comments on how remarkable it is that the wife is "Still weeping?" The level and the duration of delectation that the wife is experiencing off stage are shocking to a courtesan—which is an indication of how spectacular the sound and performance would have been for the audience. When considering this the reader can find the satirical criticism happening between the wife and the courtesan through their role switching of coital gratification. Instead of looking beyond the humor associated with the body, one can attempt to decode the purpose this served the text. Saccio's attempt to remove the human element in order for the text to better serve the modern literacy changes the very nature of the text as human performance to be viewed by other humans. For Middleton's audience, the exaggerated bodily humors and coital pleasures on stage might have been enough to convince them to stay at the theatre instead of passing the time with a local punk.

One must ask what the nature of each of the editors is in order to appreciate their modification decisions. From reading Masten and Saccio's works one can surmise that these two editors would have very different interpretations on what exactly that may be. Where Masten adds multiple pages of notes and additional comments to guide the reader through the possibilities of the text, Saccio attempts to validate the work to the modern reader by providing the readers with his interpretation of the "answers" sought in modern reading. The reader wants to know more about what the author's intent was and less about what was the reaction of the people at the time. For this reader finding how this play can fit into modern society would make the text more enjoyable. For those that prefer Masten's approach all these questions still exist, but there is no definitive answer—but the sheer act of contemplating the questions is gratifying within itself.

Masten draws the reader's attention to several different forms of plurality found within *Old Law*. Masten refers to several of these forms as linguistic, intentional, collaborative, and aural pluralities (Middleton, *Old Law* 1335). It is through exploring what Masten means by each form of these pluralities that one is able to understand how Masten has edited *Old Law*. The linguistic plurality can be attributed to the lack of standard, modernized, spelling of English during the period. An example of this is highlighted in Masten's notes found in the I.I.74 of *Old Law* "Whither, sir, I pray?" As Masten notes "whither" after the modernization of spelling, would read as "whether." What is interesting about the editing that Masten engages in is that Masten often chooses to keep the early modern whither instead of modifying the text to fit a modern spelling, whereas Saccio commends the improved modernized spelling that replaces the early modern chaos. Intentional plurality is, as implied by the name, plurality that the writer and audience would be aware of. Playing on words and social context through the use of puns and other linguistic nuances is what made Middleton's plays so entertaining to the audience. Modern audiences may imagine a plurality that did not exist in the historical rendition of the performance but would exist in the modern period, or they may miss a witty pun that would have had seventeenth century audiences roaring. Middleton uses such a pun within his speech by the first lawyer, "...and are like to grow old before their inheritance (born to them) come to their necessary use; for the which are the women, for that they never were defence to their country...to be put to death as is before recited" (Middleton, *Old Law* 1340). The pun is found in the delivery of the word "born" in reference to women. Collaborative plurality is quite common for early modern drama but is a difficult concept for modern audiences to understand and causes them to question the validity of a work. The collaborative processes involved in producing a text and the continual modification of that text is one that lends itself to multiple

modes of experience by audiences. Titles and venue changes may be necessary to draw in new crowds. Some words may be added or omitted from varying printers. Manuscripts may have been written in and stage directions added or changed by players and prompters alike. The notion of "authorship" did not exist as it does in the modern literacy. One does not own a work fully, but rather a work is continuously created with each new "author" it interacts with.

Finally, Masten refers to the aural plurality. What is written and what is performed are not always the same. An action may take place on stage that requires an impromptu response from a performer, a heckler may draw the attention away from the performance and may be incorporated in an improvisational manner to regain the attention of the audience, or an audience may miss part of a speech and have to assume the dialogue from the context of the action on the stage. What members of the audience hear during the performance may change their perception of the play. The difference between the reader and the audience at a performance is the importance of the words in the text. The reader requires the text to imagine the performance taking place on the stage. The audience at the performance is there for the spectacle taking place on stage, they may or may not hear every word of a speech but they do not need it to appreciate the action taking place before them.

Masten invites the reader to participate in the plural nature of the text whilst reading the text *Old Law*. He does this through his exploration of the plural found in the text and the performance of the text. Masten aids the reader in appreciating what the text has to offer as both written document and a theatrical performance. Masten notes that his edition of *Old Law* and the commentary provided throughout the piece is intended to, "This commentary in particular attempts to activate some of the 'plural' meanings of *Old Law* available to audiences and readers in the seventeenth century" (Middleton, *Old Law* 1335). The abundance of marginal notes and

footnotes becomes apparent the moment one begins reading the text. Masten first provides readers with an introduction and explanation of the vastness of notes provided about the drama. He begins with a quote,

> To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it....this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.... (Middleton, *Old Law* 1335)

When thinking of the text in this "galaxy" metaphor, with multiple points of entry, the amount of notations provided by Masten becomes less overwhelming, and the efficacy of these notes becomes perceptible to the reader. One may argue that Masten would not want the reader to read all of his notes and commentary in one sitting while reading the play, but would rather the reader read the play multiple times and read different notes and commentary each time. To one who prefers a more linear presentation the notation is more of a distraction than an aid because it disrupts the linearity that is familiar and comfortable to this reader. In Masten's editing method the reader is able to appreciate the text in a new way each time she or he reads it. To try and comprehend all of the many ways to imagine the actions in one sitting is unfathomable to those who appreciate Masten's approach. A reader may read *Old Law* first without considering Masten's notations and may then read again and reconsider assumptions made during the previous readings. Each new reading is to experience a new performance just as each audience would have experienced a new performance at the theatre.

While reading Masten's *Old Law* one feels as though one is engaging Masten in a textual discourse. Masten addresses the reader directly and helps guide the audience with possible

explanations for variations in the text, and anticipates questions one will have whilst participating in the drama. For example, in discussing the ending of the play Masten explores the culture or the seventeenth-century's value of family and the role of the king as the father of the country. In this way *Old Law* is seen as a political satire as well as a tragicomedy about family. This notion of what family means to the audience of Jacobean England compared with the modern audience beliefs about family is one that should be explored by the reader to appreciate the cultural significance of the text in Middleton's England. Masten makes note of this in the forward before his edition of *Old Law* so that the reader has this double meaning in mind whilst exploring the text.

After considering the work done by Saccio and Masten in interpreting Middleton's work, one begins to consider the editorial practices of Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino and how these two editors were able to have a style of modification that allowed for the numerous additional editors to create a collaboration of Middleton's works. One should consult both *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to The Collected Works* and *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* when contemplating the choices made by Taylor. In both of these texts Taylor includes a section, near their beginnings, entitled "How to Use This Book." The placement, as well as the title, is a way of appeasing the modern reader by providing the context in a method that is pleasing to this style of reading. For the modern mind, one should follow the directions before delving into the text, and the directions, logically being read before the rest of the text, should appear at the beginning of the works. In this way, Taylor approaches the text in a similar way as Saccio. However, it is in the context of these sections that Taylor begins to participate in an editing style that those that enjoy Masten's approach would appreciate. "Rather than simply applying to Middleton modes of editorial practice and critical

theory developed to represent another author, we have sought to present Middleton's works in the manner most appropriate to their production and (re)production in early modern culture" (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 19). Taylor explores the many textual conventions of the early modern time period that the reader should be familiar with in order to read the dramas within the cultural context of which they were formed in an effort to allow the reader to experience the text in a culture that is different than the one that she or he currently participates.

In order to appreciate the textual nuances that make Middleton's work witty social satire and brilliant dramatic spectacle, Taylor provides the novice reader with brief introductions into areas such as: the concept of authorship, character names, chronology of the pieces, compositors, consistency in editing (or more accurately—lack thereof), basic editorial practices and principles, and other important elements in reading drama. In both *Collected Works* and *The Companion* the "How to Use This Book" chapter read almost verbatim to one another. *The Companion*'s directions includes both how to use *Collected Works* as well as *The Companion.* In contemplating the rational for having the same information in both texts one should consider the selected audience for each as different readers or the same reader interpreting the text in a new way. A novice reader may not be willing or able to obtain *The Companion* and must hope to find the necessary scaffolding within the *Collected Works.* Or, a reader may be intrigued and wish to seek out additional information on the textual editing and Middleton's works that were not included in the original volume and would appreciate seeing the connections being made from the previously constructed schema regarding the reading of Middleton. Either way, Taylor provides both texts with a basic introduction to reading Middleton's drama in a way that would have been similar to that of the early modern audience.

One of the first concepts that Taylor addresses with the reader is the idea of authorship. As discussed earlier, this is a relatively new phenomenon in the modern literacy that seeks to ascribe ownership of a written text to one, occasionally multiple, writer of the work. The familiar, yet tiring, argument of "Did William Shakespeare really write all of those plays himself?" is a question that has also been applied to Middleton, and other play wrights during the early modern period by readers that are unfamiliar with how the concept of authorship has developed with the advancement of modernity. Taylor clarifies for the reader that this volume, "...includes works written by Middleton alone, works written by Middleton in collaboration with other writers, and works by other writers which Middleton later adapted" (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 19). Taylor's introduction is meant to provide the reader with a brief overview, and as such, Taylor notes that it would not be possible to completely discuss the concept of authorship but invites the reader to investigate this notion further. In *The Companion* Taylor includes, "An overview of the history and the issues surrounding definition of the authorial canon is provided by MacDonald P. Jackson's essay (p. 80). But since such issues have been so central to the history of Middleton's reputation and of Middleton scholarship, Part II of this *Companion* is entire devoted to determining the canon" (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 19). In order to appease those who appreciate more concrete evidence and validity of the text Taylor must first demonstrate the artifice of determining the legitimacy of text according to modern standards.

To impose the current modern definitions of authorship and validity to a text is to discredit the culture in which it was conceived. Definitions as Saccio would ascribe to different components of the work would not have existed in the early modern era. What Saccio refers to as "offstage sex" (Middleton, *Mad World* 416) would not have made sense to seventeenth

century audience members. To the modern, a stage is a set place in which the actors go to perform. To the early modern the stage was the place where the actors performed and the audience recognized them as doing so. The stage was where ever their attention was drawn at the time, so Courtesan and Harebrain, though physically in front of the audience and clearly visible, would have been competing with the sounds coming from a hidden location in the theatre for the stage. Audience members would be looking in both the direction of the hidden sounds—trying to catch a glimpse of what the actors were doing—and in the direction of Harebrain and Courtesan; their attention divided between the two venues. The other component that the audience would not understand is Saccio's notion of "sex." Indeed, Saccio would have a just as difficult of a time explaining this to a modern audience as he would to the audience of seventeenth century England. How would this "offstage sex" be happening between two young boys portraying the characters? The audience of Middleton's era would not have suspended the reality of the actor's physical bodies and would be very much aware that both of these actors have matching genitalia. It is this attention that celebrates the artificiality of drama for an audience. One then has to consider the different categories that modernity tries to impose upon coitus in order to classify these acts as a form of what it would consider to be "sex." There is no category that is able to completely sterilize the pederast pleasure one experiences in two male child actors creating the illusion of an unfaithful Wife participating in coitus with an impenitent Penitent.

Taylor notes that characters in the plays were often not seen as individuals unique to that drama, but rather archetypal cultural representations that those in Middleton's audiences would have been familiar with while those currently reading the drama may lack that cultural understanding. "In the original texts many characters are not given personal names, but

identified by generic social labels (Tyrant, Queen, Lady, Clown, White Queen's Pawn)" (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 19). Wife and Courtesan are two archetypal characters that one can see in *Mad World* and it is in considering them as the representation for those roles in society that makes their actions humorous to the audience. One has to imagine what these characters would look like on stage and how the audience would recognize them in each performance. What actions would the Tyrant play compared to that of the Clown or a Lady? All of the performers would have been male during the period, so the modern identification of people based on their genitalia would have been of little use to those in Middleton's audiences. The slapstick actions of the clown and the exaggerated interpretation the class distinction of a "lady" would have cued the audience into the nature of the character on stage. Taylor states "We have retained the original generic labels in the STAGE DIRECTIONS and SPEECH PREFIXES, believing they reflect an emphasis upon social and theatrical roles rather than unique individuals" (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 19). The audience would then have developed (consciously or not) a set of norms that they would anticipate that character to act within. The satirical delight is in the portrayal of the extreme opposites of the characters the actors represent. Often times, the Clown is the most insightful character in the drama, the religious are the most prone to heresy, and the lady is the most salacious. It is in playing with these roles that Middleton is able to critique the society in which the dramas take place in. In order to read drama effectively one must be able to imagine the actors, their bodies, their actions, and their attire and then imagine the physical relationships that they share with one another on stage.

In exploring the texts, Taylor also notes for the reader to contemplate the multiplicity of textual interpretation that Masten acknowledges in his edition of *Old Law*. Taylor, as the general editor working with such a large number of literary scholars, would need to find the collaborative

process intellectually stimulating in order to create a successful collection of Middleton's works. It is in Taylor's address of the consistency of the volume that Taylor expresses the pleasure of the multiple interpretations of Middleton's works:

> This edition does not attempt to provide or impose a unified view of Middleton or his works. Different EDITORIAL PRACTICES are adopted for different works, and the introductory essays adopt different critical and theoretical perspectives. This diversity is deliberate. It derives from a belief that authors and their readers are better served by 'federal' than 'unified' edition. (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 19-20)

As one will note from Taylor's excerpt that what was textually pleasing for Taylor in this process was that within the editions of these works different editors interpreted and transcribed in different manners according to what they found appealing. It is in this way that the editors can be seen as a representation of the early modern audience. The audience members all participated in the drama because they enjoyed the action on stage but for varying reasons. As discussed earlier, Saccio enjoys the distancing of the actors, and their physical bodies, and the elimination of the audience when reading *Mad World.* Masten takes an approach that is similar to Taylor's own in his need to alert the reader to the diverse interpretations of the text. Taylor addresses the different interpretations, and reminds the reader that each rendering is just one of the many interpretations of the performance. "For such single-text works, the editor's primary task is to reproduce, accurately, the substance of that earliest document, and at the same time make it accessible to modern readers" (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 20). For one to consider the enormity of writing all the possible interpretations, what Masten thought of as a "galaxy", is a task that one cannot fully comprehend.

"Editorial practices and principles" (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 20) further aids the reader in finding the enjoyment of participating in (or choosing to participate in a different manner) the interpretations of each play. Each edition of a text does not, as modern audiences would prefer, fully guarantee the integrity of the text as an original. "However, all forms of early modern textual transmission introduced errors; accordingly, texts have been emended where the editors believe that such an error has occurred" (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 20). Ink markings, poor printing technology, and multiple printers without a standard spelling have opened all the texts from the early modern era to interpretation of editors. What each editor chooses to address and "correct" for the benefit of the modern reader varies significantly from person to person. One editor may be very vigilant about modernizing the spelling, such as that of Saccio's work in *Mad World*; whereas, another editor may revel in the ambiguity presented in the multiple interpretations of what the spelling may imply:

> ...some editors are more interested in detecting error, and more adventurous in correcting it than others. All such emendations, and all variants in authoritative early texts, are recorded in the TEXTUAL NOTES; emendations and variants are not marked in the text of *The Collected Works* (except in the commentary to *Old Law*). (Taylor, *How to Use...Companion* 20)

What is so interesting in this passage is that Taylor notes the different editing style of Masten in comparison to the other literary scholars working to compile this collection. Of all these scholars Masten is the only one who wanted, and chose, to include all of the emendations and variants he made within the text. This practice differs from that of all the other editors' works in that it is recognized by Taylor as the exception to the norm for the volume. Indeed, Masten's copy of *Old Law*, includes more footnotes and additional markings from Masten than there appears to be

dramatic text from Middleton. It is because of this that the reader is invited to explore the diverse aspects of the texts. Masten wants the reader to become aware of the impact of the editor on the text. Saccio, it could be argued, wants the reader to focus on the text itself and not the process it underwent to be conveyed to the modern audience. However, participating in this manner is to neglect to see the impositions that each editor makes upon the work he or she is reviewing. Both Saccio and Masten would argue that his editorial practice was in the best nature of preserving the integrity of the text and each would choose different interpreting techniques than the other. The way in which the audience considers the plays themselves would vary drastically if the two scholars had worked on different plays.

When considering all the potential changes that an editor can make—textual modifications that are believed to add clarity for the modern reader—one realizes that knowing the mindset of the editor, discovering what that person finds titillating in textual contemplation, and in comprehending how a work may be skewed through the interpretations of that editor, one enhances the understanding of the work. In reading and examining *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* and *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to The Collected Works,* one can see how the altering decisions made by Jeffrey Masten in *An/The Old Law: Or, A New Way to Please You* and Peter Saccio in *A Mad World, My Masters* differed drastically from one another. However, both of these works were able to be appreciated by the editing style of the general editors Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino. Each interpretation of the dramas is a reflection of the textual appeal of that editor while reviewing that play. Some of the enjoyment comes from the feeling that one has when experiencing dislike or suppressing an element that is unpleasant for that person to comprehend or imagine. Other aspects come from the enjoyment one has in the exploration of a topic that is familiar to that person's own literacy.

Through the research of textual erotics found in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* and *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to The Collected Works,* one can conclude that the dramatic genre is one that allows for the imagination of the reader to both reflect and reject that of the editor.

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