Dekker on "Steering the Passage of Scaenes"

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there exist no reliable reproductions of all the originals. The Griggs-Pretorius facsimiles of the quartos were a considerable feat for the age in which they appeared, but they are sometimes bad and often indistinct, which is a serious defect when one is dealing with matters of punctuation. The First Folio has fared better, but a Folio facsimile is unwieldy to handle, while in view of the unequal character of that famous text it would be a very great advantage to have the plays reproduced separately each with its own bibliographical introduction. Moreover, where two or more texts are extant for the same play, parallel-text editions are absolutely essential. Shakespearian study loiters in its task for sheer lack of tools. Can Dr Greg or any other reader of this *Review* suggest some way of rectifying this sorry state of affairs, which is greatly to the discredit of English scholarship?

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LONDON.

DEKKER ON 'STEERING THE PASSAGE OF SCAENES.'

In the well-known chapter in *The Guls Horn-booke*, on 'How a Gallant should behave himself in a Playhouse,' there is a passage which has proved a frequent stumbling-block:

By sitting on the stage, you have a signed patent to engrosse the whole commodity of Censure; may lawfully presume to be a Girder; and stand at the helme to steere the passage of *scaenes*; yet no man shall once offer to hinder you from obtaining the title of an insolent, overweening Coxcombe.

It is extraordinary that the absurd interpretation of Dekker's third clause given by Drake a century ago in his *Shakespeare and his Times* should still have its ardent supporters. Drake not only saw in it proof that the Elizabethan stage was furnished with movable scenery but maintained on the strength of it 'that those who obtained seats on the private stage, occasionally amused themselves by assisting the regular mechanists in the adjustments of the scenery.' It is not, of course, amazing to find random shots of this kind in the old commentators: they had no scientific methods of attack and their knowledge of the physical conditions of the early stage was elementary. What is amazing is to find the well-equipped scholar of to-day endorsing such theories (e.g. F. E. Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama*, I, p. 173).

As it happens, what Dekker meant to convey in his third clause, and probably did convey to contemporary readers, is revealed in the prologue to Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust*. From this I quote all that is

relevant, merely adding that the last five lines read almost like a direct gloss on the clause :

Thus from the Poet am I bid to say,
He knowes what Judges sit to deeme each Play,
(The over-curious Criticke, or the wise)
The one with squint, t'other with sunne-like eyes,
Shoots through each Scaene : the one cryes all things downe,
T'other hides strangers faults close as his owne.

.....
Tis not a gay sute, or distorted face,
Can beate his merit off, which has wonne grace
In the full Theater, nor can now feare
The teeth of any snakie whisperer :
But to the white, and sweet unclouded brow,
(The heaven where true worth moves) our Poet does bow ;
Patrons of Arts, and Pilots to the Stage,
Who guide it (through all tempests) from the rage
Of envious whirle-windes. O doe you but steere
His Muse this day, and bring her to th' wish'd shore,
You are those Delphicke powers, whom shee'le adore.

[Chance has shown me since the above was written that what I have really been doing is to quote Dekker in elucidation of himself. The prologue to Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust* (1633) is identical with the prologue to Dekker's *A Wonder of a Kingdome* (1636). Whichever play came first, there is no reason to doubt that the lines were Dekker's, and the probabilities are that they were originally written for his own play. I take them to be his, not only because of the expansion of his own metaphor, but because of the writer's resort four times within so brief a space to brackets, a familiar note (especially in his pamphlets) of Dekker's style. Unfortunately, this curious but not unique transference yields no clue to the date of *A Wonder of a Kingdome*. At first one is disposed to say that, since *All's Lost by Lust* was first produced at the Cockpit by the Princess Elizabeth's players *ca.* 1622, Dekker's play must belong to a slightly earlier period. Prologues would not be re-used in this way without a decent interval, probably at least five years. But we know from the title-page of *All's Lost by Lust* that, just before its publication, the tragedy had been revived by the Queen's Men at the Cockpit, and the transference of the prologue may have been made at that time. With the existing uncertainty as to the facts, no deduction of any consequence can be made : still I take leave to draw attention to one point. It seems to me that transferences of prologues or intercalated songs were only made either by the players who had originally produced the plays for which they were written or by players who had acquired those plays either by succession or by purchase. The inference would be that *A Wonder of a Kingdome* was originally produced either

by the Princess Elizabeth's Men or the later Queen's Men. This surmise runs counter to Fleay's identification of the play with Day's *Come see a Wonder*, licensed by Herbert for performance at the Red Bull by 'a Company of Strangers,' in September, 1623. And of a surety the prologue does not read as if addressed to the rough-and-ready audience of the Red Bull. Neither 'the over-curious Criticke' nor the 'Patrons of Arts and Pilots to the Stage' were to be found there. The Cockpit, where plays were 'arraigned daily' seems a more likely milieu.]

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'PARADISE LOST,' IV, 977-1015.

Readers of *Paradise Lost* have long noted the Homeric or Virgilian origin¹ of that figure in which Milton represents 'Th' Eternal' as hanging 'forth in Heav'n his golden Scales' to decide the imminent conflict between Satan and the angelic squadron on the borders of Paradise. But, so far as I know, it has not been observed that this and indeed the whole group of figures at the end of Book IV are actually inspired by the last 300 lines of the *Aeneid*. Milton used material from the final conflict of Aeneas and Turnus to shadow forth in symbol combatants so sublime verging on a shock so vast that the 'sum of things' was endangered.

I shall take the passages in their order, which is the same in both poems.

1. soli pro portis Messapus et acer Atinas
sustenant aciem. circum hos utrimque phalanges
stant densae, strictisque seges mucronibus horret
ferrea. (xii, 661-4.)

While thus he spake, th' Angelic Squadron bright
Turn'd fierie red, sharpening in mooned hornes
Thir Phalanx, and began to hemm him round
With ported Spears, as thick as when a field 980
Of *Ceres* ripe for harvest waving bends
Her bearded Grove of ears, which way the wind
Swayes them; the careful Plowman doubting stands
Least on the threshing floore his hopeful sheaves
Prove chaff. (iv, 977-85.)

Here the mere suggestion of a metaphor grows into a simile, but the language of vv. 978-80 reveals the source. The lines about the 'careful Plowman' are not simply a Homeric expansion: they suggest an issue still in the balance, and prepare for the vaster figure which makes Satan, though solitary, seem a fit adversary for the angelic host.

¹ *Iliad*, viii, 69, xxii, 212; *Aeneid*, xii, 725.