

**THE PROBLEM OF ATTRIBUTION IN MIDDLETON AND ROWLEY'S  
THE CHANGELING:  
a review of critical opinion.**

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE is to examine the critical arguments presented over the last century assigning authorial shares in *The Changeling*, and to assess the quality of the evidence cited. In the inevitably controversial field of authorship studies it is the quality of the evidence cited that frequently weakens an argument. This article will not attempt to consider afresh the division of scenes between Middleton and Rowley in *The Changeling* but will examine critical approaches to that subject over the past hundred years. I am thus not trying to break new ground but merely to clear away the old wood. Since many critics rely on the findings of their predecessors, the arguments will be examined in their chronological sequence.

During the nineteenth century three major editions of Middleton's work were published — by Alexander Dyce in 1840, by A.H. Bullen in 1885, and in the Mermaid Series in 1887. Bullen's edition is largely indebted to that of Dyce, as he states in his Preface. Dyce had not considered Rowley's contribution as being considerable and was content to speak in subjective terms of the "terribly impressive" passages of Middleton. Bullen gives the collaboration lengthier consideration but is only slightly kinder to Rowley:

Rowley was probably responsible for the conduct of the underplot. The wild extravagance of the madhouse scene is quite in his manner.<sup>1</sup>

This final phrase is typical of the impressionistic critic; we never learn much of Rowley's "manner", except that earlier in his Introduction, Bullen tells us that Rowley "roared like a bull of Basham when he ought to have been dignified".<sup>2</sup> Probably the nearest he comes to an objective critical comment is his judgement on Rowley's verse: it "hobbled badly when it came from his pen". In assigning the final scene to Rowley Bullen recognises his "metrical roughness", yet no examples are given. Bullen's impressionistic approach is shared by Swinburne, who wrote the Introduction to the 1887 Mermaid edition. His description of Rowley's having "a rough and crude genius" is reminiscent of Bullen's statement of his being "sadly wanting in artistic form and refinement". Such judgements are clearly in no way quantifiable, nor do they identify characteristics unique to Rowley. While Bullen saw only "occasional traces" of Rowley in the opening scene, Swinburne acknowledges that "the first and last scenes of the play bear the undisputable sign-manual of William Rowley", yet fails to account for the authorship of the subplot, presumably taking it to be Middleton's work.<sup>3</sup> The only other significant reference to the subject before 1897 comes from Frederick Fleay, in his *Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama* of 1891. There he states the division as it has now come to be accepted, but gives no indication of how he reached this conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

The gathering of the evidence and the first extended treatment of this subject were made by Pauline Wiggin in 1897. Her study, *An Inquiry into the Authorship of the Middleton-Rowley Plays*, remains to this day the most thorough investigation of the problem and her conclusions have earned wide acclaim. At the outset Wiggin dissociates herself from the impressionistic efforts of her peers:

These opinions are undoubtedly valuable on account of the ability and reputation of the critics; but they are simply opinions, and the student must feel that he should like to know something more of the grounds upon which they are based before he accepts them as his own.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike many of her successors, Wiggin does not begin with any preconceived notion of the division and try to prove it, but sets out impartially to discover what the division may be, according to the evidence. She identifies four specific "evidences of Rowley's hand" — masculine endings, run-on lines, frequent inversions of feet other than the first, and carelessness over the number of unaccented syllables per line — and shows, with many examples, that these clearly distinguish Rowley's verse from Middleton's. The second group of tests she applies use typical features of each author's dramatic style — including the type of comedy used by each, punning habits, and characterisation — as indications of his hand. All her criteria are thoroughly tested on known plays of each author before being applied to their collaborate works. On the basis of these tests Wiggin concludes that Rowley was responsible for the first and last scenes of the play and for the subplot, and that all the intermediate scenes of the main plot were Middleton's. She thus arrives at the same conclusion as Fleay but, as she emphasises, her conclusions are accompanied by supporting evidence. In her conclusion, Wiggin emphasises that Middleton's best work was achieved only in his collaborations with Rowley and suggests that it is "extremely probable" that the two collaborated closely on the whole play. Here, too, she includes evidence to support her claim. Wiggin makes no claims that are not supported by evidence from the play and at every point in her study she applies negative tests to show that alternative hypotheses are not supported by the evidence. It is the more surprising, then, that poorly-argued challenges to her conclusions were still being made in the 1970s.

The first treatment of this subject after 1900 begins by emphasising that the play is the result of close collaboration between two dramatists, the finest work of both of them, and a tribute to their worthwhile influence on each other. Arthur Symons, writing a chapter on Middleton and Rowley for the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, does attempt to isolate the qualities of each dramatist and consider how such qualities are expressed and transcended in *The Changeling*. The terms which he uses remain subjective, however, and do not define any tangible qualities in the work of either writer. Of Middleton's prose, Symons writes:

It has lightness and yet is not empty, is often witty without going unduly beyond the probabilities of talk . . . and it rarely loses a certain deftness even when it drops into coarseness.<sup>6</sup>

The plethora of epithets in this one sentence does not provide any coherent picture of Middleton's distinctive style, but only underlines the inadequacy of Symons's terms. He later isolates "culinary and haberdashery similes" as one developing feature of Middleton's imaginative fabric and does provide an example (without giving its source), but a cursory glance at *The Changeling*, with its persistent images of storms and torment, soon nullifies the effect of any "homely colloquial tendency" in his writing. Symons makes the mistake of contrasting Rowley's "crabbed and abstract" verse in another collaborate play, *The Maid in the Mill*, written with Fletcher, with the "winged verse" of Fletcher in the same play, failing to explain first how he determined the shares in that play! As Cyrus Hoy points out in his work on the Beaumont and Fletcher canon, in order to distinguish the share of any dramatist in a collaborate play "one must possess some body of criteria which . . . will serve to identify his work".<sup>7</sup> Yet Symons adduces no such criteria, turning instead to another collaborate play. He merely states bluntly that "it is easy, but not very profitable, to trace the share of Rowley" in this play. Symons compounds his error by building up from this and other examples a supposed picture of Rowley's style in order to reach conclusions about his influence on Middleton. His conclusions are thus based on inconclusive and inadequate evidence. When he turns to discussing *The Changeling* the weakness of his argument, unsubstantiated by tangible evidence, becomes clearer. As well as the subplot and opening scene, he assigns all of the last two acts to Rowley:

[Middleton] has both hands upon it in the third, though, at the end of the great scene, Rowley seems to snatch the whole web out of his hands and to twist it into an abrupt end.<sup>8</sup>

This is a new claim for Rowley, giving him three scenes hitherto assigned to Middleton. Since, however, Symons's argument is so broad at this point, there is no way of ascertaining his reasoning. C.W. Stork, in his *William Rowley, his All's Lost by Lust and A Shoemaker, a Gentleman*, commits the same error.<sup>9</sup> Having acknowledged Wiggin's conclusions he vaguely states that he considers the penultimate scene, hitherto assigned to Middleton, as "doubtful" but gives no reasons for his doubts and never returns to the point.

If Symons asserts that the achievement of *The Changeling* is a tribute to the collaborative partnership, the same cannot be said of E.H.C. Oliphant.<sup>10</sup> While acknowledging that Rowley "had the ability to draw out Middleton's best", he maintains that he is the least deserving of his reputation of all the Elizabethan playwrights.<sup>11</sup> In his text of the play, Oliphant follows Wiggin's division with two significant differences. In a footnote to the heading of the opening scene, he states: "with apparently some lines by Middleton". He does not specify which lines, nor does he give any indication of the method used to distinguish them from Rowley's work. Earlier, Oliphant claims that Middleton's verse is quite distinctive, through his use of "triple and quadruple endings" and end-stopped lines; indeed Oliphant considers him to be "one of the most original of all

versifiers of the period".<sup>12</sup> He gives only one example, of one of Middleton's "tricks of construction", and in discussing Middleton's distinctive verse, he fails to apply the essential negative test: he does not examine Rowley's verse to ensure that the same features do not appear there. His recognition of Middletonian lines in the opening scene may only reflect Rowley's absorption of his partner's technique, a likely result of close collaboration. Oliphant's other important departure from Wiggin is to assign the first fourteen lines of Act IV, Scene ii to Rowley, an attribution which becomes accepted in most subsequent works. Here, however, Oliphant imparts his theory of this division only in a perfunctory footnote; no reasons are given. At no point does he propose any distinctive style for Rowley's verse, and it is hard to understand what prompts him to recognise Rowley's hand in this scene. Like so many critics, Oliphant is content to dismiss Rowley as only the junior partner and to speak of his "complete lack of a verse gift", conveniently ignoring the fine speeches of the final scene which Wiggin's division, accepted by Oliphant, gives to Rowley.

One of the first, and most notable, articles to question Wiggin's conclusions appeared in 1933: W.D. Dunkel's article, "Did not Rowley merely revise Middleton?"<sup>13</sup> Dunkel's initial premise — that Middleton was capable of writing the subplot unaided — is reasonable since Middleton did write very successful city comedies before turning to tragedy, but beyond that his argument is unconvincing. His conclusions are based upon a series of parallel passage tests, a popular authorship test during the 1930s. The questionable character of this evidence may be seen in an example he takes from *A Fair Quarrel*, another Middleton-Rowley collaboration. Dunkel points out that in the subplot of this play, the character of a Dutch nurse is used for the comic value of her attempt to speak English. This was a common enough device of the time — Dekker uses a variation of it with the disguised Lacy in *The Shoemakers' Holiday* — but Dunkel restricts his comparison to a similar device in Middleton's earlier comedy, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. His conclusion speaks for itself:

Though the use of a foreign language for comic value is a dramatic device not peculiar to Middleton, its use in a play bearing his name on the title page, favours Middleton's authorship of the scenes in which the device is used.<sup>14</sup>

Dunkel does not prove that Rowley never uses the same device, nor does he consider the possibility that the latter deliberately imitated his collaborator in using the device, or that Middleton suggested the device to Rowley. Dunkel believes that Wiggin's verse tests merely indicate the work of a reviser. In speaking of the subplot, Dunkel notes that "the minor action is not developed into a plot but is effective rather as individual scenes", and considers this to be another point of resemblance with Middleton's work! What is even more disturbing about Dunkel's article is that he does not ensure that his essential facts are correct. This leads to the strange mistake of his considering that only two scenes in *The Changeling* present the comic action (I, ii and III, iii); he omits any mention of

Act IV, Scene iii, the important climax of the subplot. This inexplicable mistake might be excusable, were it not that Dunkel repeats the error as part of his conclusion:

It is not difficult to suppose that in a brief comic action of little more than two scenes, Middleton may again have used the old, tried, and true type character for a quick emotional response from the audience.<sup>15</sup>

By forgetting the 215-odd lines of the third madhouse scene, Dunkel destroys all the remaining credibility of his argument. Dunkel's original thesis — that Rowley merely revised the dialogue while Middleton was responsible for plot and characters — is never supported by the inconclusive, and incorrect, evidence he adduces to support his argument.

Dunkel's article was not the only work published in the 1930s to question Wiggin's conclusions and fail to produce evidence to support the challenge. Muriel Bradbrook, in her well-known study of Elizabethan tragedy, bluntly denies Rowley any part in the main plot, but gives no evidence beyond intangible impressions. Having made her position clear, Bradbrook proceeds to discuss the play with no further mention of William Rowley. She believes the unity of the main plot to be beyond "even the most sympathetic collaboration".<sup>16</sup> While such unsubstantiated opinions do not merit much discussion, it is important to realise that as late as 1935, forty years after Wiggin, acknowledged scholars are still prepared to advance subjective opinions in this way.

On the question of the relationship between the subplot and the main plot in *The Changeling*, the critics divide sharply. Those who are keen to exalt Middleton's genius dismiss the madhouse scenes as coarse and vulgar and frequently ignore Rowley's accepted contribution to the main plot. This is another kind of critical blindness which refuses to recognise that joint authorship may involve closer collaboration than two men writing in isolation from one another. F.S. Boas, in a brief treatment of the play, focuses on the central scenes and the "stupendous development" which he considers a sign of Middleton's "mastery".<sup>17</sup> He neither accepts the now traditional division of the play, nor provides any reason for questioning it. Having acknowledged that Rowley's hand has been "conjecturally found" in the opening and closing scenes, Boas continues his discussion of the play with no further reference to Rowley, and happily quotes from the final scene without any tribute to Rowley's part in its execution:

Middleton had a peculiar flair for handling sexual complications, and he achieves the paradoxical feat of leaving us with the sense that Beatrice, in spite of her sins, is at heart a chaste woman.<sup>18</sup>

While this is not specifically an unjustified attribution, it is a typical example of loose critical reasoning which results in misleading conclusions. It is refreshing to find G.E. Bentley, in an equally brief account of the play some years after Boas,

speaking of "Middleton and Rowley" as the authors and designers of its overall structure, thereby avoiding the common prejudice against Rowley.<sup>19</sup>

In the ten-year gap between Boas's work and that of Bentley, the only study of significance in this area is D.M. Robb's article on the Rowley canon.<sup>20</sup> This article begins promisingly, with the prospect of new evidence on the distinctive features of Rowley's style, but ends by tamely accepting Wiggin's division with no further comment. No doubt this is a tribute to Wiggin's thoroughness, yet Robb does not consider Oliphant's attribution of the opening of Act IV, Scene ii, nor the uncertainty felt by some critics over Act V, Scene ii. He begins by examining four main causes of error in the estimation of Rowley's canon. These include the misconception that he was an "habitual reviser" of old plays (another blow to Dunkel's theory), the failure of critics to realise the futility of metrical tests on his verse because of the corruption of the extant texts, and undervaluation of the variety he was capable of. Robb does isolate two features which provide a degree of distinction between Middleton and Rowley — Rowley's delight in punning, and his linking of one speech to the next by repeating one of the words — but does not apply them to *The Changeling* in order to confirm Rowley's share in the play. Having undermined Wiggin's conclusions by attacking the validity of metrical tests, Robb still does not use his tests to reaffirm her conclusions. This is disappointing since these features are both objective and quantifiable, and therefore quite valid. Robb even forgets his own earlier complaints when he states that Rowley has little feeling for verse!<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, his article is a positive, if unadventurous, step towards more objective treatment of the problem, and is quoted by later critics. A few examples would, however, have substantiated his claims more convincingly than his blunt enumeration of the features.

As the value of the old tests becomes exhausted, critics turn to new and more exclusive means of identifying the presence of any particular author. In the case of Middleton, Charles Barber produced an unusual test in 1957 for identifying Middleton's hand.<sup>22</sup> Barber's test is based on the occurrence of the word "honour" in certain plays, with the unusual meaning of a bow, curtsy, or obeisance of some kind.<sup>23</sup> The initial scope of the tests is reasonably broad; Barber tests 127 plays, written between 1591 and 1640, and finds only twelve examples of "honour" having this meaning — of these, eight were in plays of which Middleton had at least part-authorship. It is on this basis that Barber modestly claims it may be regarded as a "small criterion of authorship". Furthermore, since he did not begin by considering this as a possible indication of Middleton's hand — that only arises from his results — his conclusions may be considered to be unhampered by prejudice. In *The Changeling* Barber finds three occurrences of this meaning, all within ten lines of dialogue in the third of the madhouse scenes.<sup>24</sup> Having acknowledged the generally accepted view that Rowley wrote this scene, Barber argues that this points to Middleton's having a hand in the overall planning of the whole play and does not necessarily mean that he wrote

the whole scene:

The violent punning of the passage is highly characteristic of Rowley, and the clown (Lollo) is one of his favourite characters; but if the collaboration between him and Middleton really was intimate, Rowley may (for example) have picked up a speech written (or suggested) by Middleton, and elaborated it into a series of puns.<sup>25</sup>

I have quoted at length here to demonstrate Barber's careful reasoning. His evidence supports the theory — first proposed by Wiggin at the end of her monograph — that Middleton and Rowley collaborated closely in writing *The Changeling*. He does supply the results of negative tests and other supplementary tests, all of which confirm his findings. Like most pieces of internal evidence, this test on its own is insufficient evidence on which to attribute doubtful works but it does provide useful supporting evidence.

In a long and informative Introduction to his edition of the play for *The Revels Plays* N.W. Bawcutt gives some attention to the problem of the respective shares of the two dramatists, and briefly reviews critical attitudes to that problem. He asserts that the "remarkable consistency and continuity" of the play points to an "unusually close collaboration".<sup>26</sup> In his eagerness to emphasise the "complete absence of the discrepancies in detail", which often result from collaboration, Bawcutt ignores the loud voices of the many critics who have denounced the coarse irrelevance of the subplot, and confidently claims that "all the evidence" points to close collaboration. While his intentions are admirable, he does allow his emotional defence of the play's unity to obscure the facts of its critical heritage. Words like "all", "remarkable", and "complete" give a misleading impression of the unanimity of feeling about the play's overall coherence.

Bawcutt proceeds to outline a number of distinctive features of the two dramatists, in a commendably thorough and objective way. The features on which he concentrates are parallel passages in other plays of each author, individual stylistic habits, and versification. Throughout the commentary on the text he notes textual parallels as they occur. These vary considerably in both nature and worth as indications of authorship. For Middleton, he notes a number of metaphors repeated in *Women Beware Women*. Some of these are of little value:

Creation fram'd *for some use*, yet to see . . . [II,ii,44]

To these three italicised words he notes simply that they are repeated in the other play, yet they are hardly a distinctive mark of Middleton's hand! In his Introduction, Bawcutt remarks:

Such minor idiosyncracies may not amount to much when taken separately, but their cumulative effect is highly convincing.<sup>27</sup>

This is not a reasonable, critical proposition. One hundred examples like the one

quoted are no more significant than ten; they are simply not distinctive enough to be of value. Quantity is only meaningful when the original test has some significance on its own. Bawcutt also notes (at III, iv, 25–26) that “weeping for joy” is a frequent image in Middleton, but acknowledges that “other dramatists . . . use the same idea”. For Rowley, Bawcutt does note one parallel of a favourite metaphor of his which is distinctive enough to be of interest:

. . . Shall I alone

Walk through the orchard of the Hesperides,

And cowardly not dare to pull an apple? [III, iii, 173–175]

He cites two parallels from other Rowley plays where the image of picking an apple in an orchard is used in a similar context, one of which refers again to “Hesperides”. Here, while the parallel is not sufficient to identify an unknown author, it does form corroborative evidence to the attribution of a passage already assigned to Rowley on other grounds. Bawcutt is the first editor of this play to analyse its linguistic character so closely, and his results consolidate the accepted division of the scenes.

Overall, Bawcutt’s discussion of the distinctive styles of the two authors is a comprehensive one. He notes Middleton’s favourite use of “Push”, and properly points out that while it appears six times in the scenes assigned to him, it never appears in those given to Rowley. Having noted the latter’s “love of puns”, a point of only limited significance in itself, he then makes a useful distinction between Rowley’s puns and Middleton’s biting verbal irony, thereby increasing the significance of the test in showing that each dramatist makes a distinctive use of wordplay. On versification, Bawcutt is less convincing. Having acknowledged the lack of reliable evidence of the nature of Rowley’s versification, he still speaks of its “rigidity and stiffness of movement”, yet concludes with the admission that Rowley is responsible for Beatrice’s powerful dying speech. These contradictory impulses reflect the unreliability of tests based solely on versification. Finally, Bawcutt makes the interesting, though perhaps obvious, point that Middleton and Rowley recognised their own strengths, and divided the play accordingly. That they were able to do this so successfully is further proof, as Bawcutt shows, of their close collaboration.

It is hard to believe that in the same year that Bawcutt’s balanced critical edition first appeared R.H. Barker, in his book on Middleton, could take textual criticism back to the dark ages of nineteenth-century impressionism with his openly biased comments on the collaboration with Rowley.<sup>28</sup> Having accepted, in principle, Wiggin’s division, Barker outlines his views on the method to be used for detecting the hand of a particular author:

One reads and forms, or tries to form, impressions; finally a play or a scene or a passage gets to “sound like” Middleton or Dekker or Rowley . . .<sup>29</sup>

At no point does Barker explain how a scene does “get to ‘sound like’ ” a



particular writer. He does, however, refer to Rowley's opening of *The Changeling* as being "in the aimable, vulgar, and conventional way that is so very characteristic of him".<sup>30</sup> His prejudice against Rowley is evident throughout the discussion. In a highly subjective judgement, given without any supporting evidence, he speaks of Middleton rescuing his characters from Rowley, and giving the story "distinction", which apparently Rowley's part lacks.

To compound these critical solecisms, Barker makes comparisons between Middleton's part in *The Changeling* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, silently assuming it to be Middleton's. Even if the latter play is considered by some to be his, it remains a doubtful attribution and should never be used as a definitive example of his work. In the same year that Bawcutt praises the unity of the play Barker believes it would be convenient to forget the subplot altogether, yet he does not attempt to see its relation to the main plot. At no stage in his discussion does Barker seriously examine the collaborative shares of the two authors with any reason, and his work is a backward leap in the development of authorship studies.

Despite the knowledge that unresolved questions remain over the nature of the collaboration, editors during the 1960s generally avoid more than passing contact with the subject. Patricia Thomson, editor of the New Mermaids edition of 1964, considers that Rowley's most successful collaboration was with Middleton but her discussion of this subject occupies only one paragraph of the Introduction.<sup>31</sup> Having pronounced "almost unanimous" agreement among the critics over the allocation of the scenes, Thomson states vaguely that "verbal characteristics of V(ii) incline me to suspect that Rowley at least had a hand in that scene". Nothing further is said, and no evidence is given beyond a passing reference to Stork. The paragraph ends abruptly with another assertion that "on the whole, the division of the play is unquestioned".<sup>32</sup> In the critical notes at the end of the text, the place where Thomson could most conveniently have indicated the "verbal characteristics", there is no mention whatsoever of Act V, Scene ii. Thomson's editorial failure in producing a poor text of the play is compounded by her failure to justify her remarks concerning its authorship.

Matthew Black, in an edition for the Mathew Carey Library, also fails to give evidence, but fortunately refrains from making any wild, new suggestions.<sup>33</sup> He adopts the usual division, but insists that "traces of both authors are found in every scene".<sup>34</sup> The only distinctions he makes are in broad, descriptive terms: Middleton's "subtler psychology" contrasted with Rowley's "cruder, more virile genius". The other important edition of the 1960s is that of G.W. Williams, for the Regents Renaissance Drama Series. Williams reviews briefly the basis upon which scholars have assigned the scenes to the two authors, isolating three factors: textual parallels, versification, and character types.<sup>35</sup> He also states that "linguistic preferences" give the opening of Act IV, Scene ii to Rowley. Williams

is much clearer than Thomson in stating the division of scenes, and he does not speak vaguely about "verbal characteristics" that can only confuse the issue. Furthermore, he is not prejudiced against the subplot, as is evident in his open discussion of both plots. However, of all these recent editions, only Bawcutt's covers the subject with reasonable thoroughness.

Samuel Schoenbaum's study of Middleton's tragedies, published in 1955, includes an extended discussion of his collaboration with Rowley and of various doubtful attributions.<sup>36</sup> Schoenbaum reviews the previous critics on this matter, ending with Robb's article in 1950. He acknowledges his debt to the latter, and repeats many of his findings. Having emphasised that Wiggin's original findings have never been seriously questioned, Schoenbaum analyses Rowley's distinctive stylistic habits at some length. He includes a useful example from *All's Lost by Lust*, which exemplifies Rowley's tendency to use run-on lines, and his infrequent use of caesuras, in contrast to Middleton. This example, of eleven consecutive lines of verse, substantiates Schoenbaum's argument very well, something many of his predecessors failed to do.<sup>37</sup> Thus, his claim that "Rowley's style is individual enough to make possible a reasonably precise estimate of his share" is credible because he supports it with good evidence. His review of other critics is well-argued, and again he cites examples, where necessary, to support his criticism of their conclusions. Unfortunately, when he comes to express his own view on the shares of the two dramatists, he does not maintain his own standards or rules. In discussing the presence of typical Middletonian characters, and at the same time refuting the theory that Rowley had much influence in the main plot, he cites, albeit briefly, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* as an example of Middleton's other work. Yet this play remains a disputed attribution, and is therefore inadmissible as evidence in any discussion of this kind. Furthermore, Schoenbaum shows his low opinion of Rowley with a strong hint of subjective judgement:

It seems more just to attribute this pre-eminence to Middleton's attainment of maturity as an artist rather than to the influence of a third-rate dramatist . . .<sup>38</sup>

From this assumption he postulates the usual division, allowing Rowley no influence outside his scenes, and crediting Middleton with the "characterisation . . . and the general conduct of the main action". On the opening of Act IV, Scene ii, he refuses to decide, claiming, probably reasonably, that the passage is too brief to be tested. Thus, while his assessment of other critics is well-reasoned, his own argument is coloured by his prejudice for Middleton, which he is at little pains to conceal.

Moving into the 1970s, two important studies remain to be considered. The first, written at the beginning of the decade, is a study of Middleton by David Holmes. Like Barker, he devotes one appendix to the collaboration of Middleton and Rowley.<sup>39</sup> However, his attitude is most clearly displayed in the earlier

section devoted to *The Changeling*, where Rowley's name is not mentioned once, not even in connection with the subplot. His view of their respective shares is evident in the following extract:

Lollo's assumption that Isabella will agree to a liaison is the same assumption as Knaves-bee makes about his wife in *Anything for a Quiet Life*, and like Knaves-bee he is wrong. Middleton makes Isabella stand in relation to Beatrice as Mistress Knaves-bee does to Lady Cressingham.<sup>40</sup>

Apparently Holmes considers that this insubstantial parallel with another play by Middleton proves the latter's hand in the subplot of *The Changeling* since he goes on to speak of what Middleton "makes" happen in the comic scenes. He conveniently ignores the consensus of critics over the past eighty years, and does not even attempt to justify his position. He merely assumes the right to discuss the whole play as Middleton's creation, not even referring the reader to the appendix.

In the appendix, Holmes begins by reviewing the traditional views of the collaborative shares of the two authors. The doubtful nature of his reasoning is demonstrated by his defence of Dunkel's article:

It demonstrates that underplots and characterisations traditionally held to have been Rowley's are substantially the same as plots and characterisations that Middleton had produced years before.<sup>41</sup>

He further states that Dunkel "nowhere departs from readily demonstrable facts", ignoring the central point that it is the quality of those "facts" as evidence of authorship which is questioned by other critics. Holmes favours Barber's interpretation of Dunkel's findings, suggesting that Middleton designed the whole play, in preference to Dunkel's conclusions, which he does at least reject. His discussion relies heavily on other critics. The only fresh evidence he presents is a vague reference by Middleton, in 1613, to the "impudent common writer", speaking of Anthony Munday. From this flimsy evidence, Holmes concludes that "it hardly seems likely . . . [Middleton] would feel inclined to seek the assistance of a man of Rowley's patently modest gifts". Holmes also quotes the following lines from Rowley's Prologue to *All's Lost by Lust*:

Patrons of Arts, and Pilots of 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'unwish'd shore . . .<sup>42</sup>

To Holmes this is "a fairly clear indication" that Rowley aspired to the rank of an independent playwright. Unfortunately, this piece of evidence does not figure in Holmes's conclusions, but the implication is that he sought to work and learn from Middleton, denying any close collaboration. With no other evidence, Holmes concludes that Middleton's "characteristic dramatic method pervades *A Fair Quarrel* and *The Changeling*". He never exemplifies that method in the discussion of individual plays, except in broad and vague terms. His argument is

neither well-substantiated, nor very convincing.

The final work to be considered is a recent canonical study on Middleton by D.J. Lake, published in 1975.<sup>43</sup> Lake's investigation is basically statistical. He aims to identify, from authenticated works of Middleton and other authors, typical features of their style – such as the choice between "I have" and "I've" – and use those features to identify the authors of plays of unknown or doubtful authorship. Before embarking on these tests for *The Changeling*, Lake asserts that "there is no major authorship controversy involved" in this play.<sup>44</sup> His tests on this play are thus designed only to confirm the accepted division. This is important because the tests by themselves are by no means conclusive. His method involves the identifying of possible items to be used as "Middleton-Rowley discriminators", which he divides into two categories, oaths and contractions.<sup>45</sup> Having chosen the items to be tested, Lake presents his results in tabular form. In mathematical terms, his figures are too small to be truly significant. Furthermore, he does not supply the figures for negative tests performed on the same items. Lake's claim is that "I've" and "w'are" are distinctive features of Middleton's verse. I have examined only the two features which Lake uses as "discriminators" since they form the solid basis of his attribution.<sup>46</sup> In the table below, I have reproduced Lake's results on the left, and the results of my own tests on the right:<sup>47</sup>

			Lake <sup>48</sup>		"Negative tests"		
			"I've"	"w'are"	"I have"	"I ha' "	"we are"
I	i	(R)	—	—	3	—	1
	ii	(R)	—	—	2	—	—
II	i	(M)	—	2	1	1	—
	ii	(M)	—	1	4	2	—
III	i	(M)	2	—	—	—	—
	ii	(M)	—	—	1	1	—
	iii	(R)	—	—	—	—	—
	iv	(M)	1	—	4	—	—
IV	i	(M)	1	—	—	—	—
	ii (1-16)	(R)	—	—	—	—	—
	ii (17ff.)	(M)	1	—	3	1	—
	iii	(R)	—	—	8	—	1
V	i	(M)	1	—	1	3	—
	ii	(M)	1	—	3	—	—
	iii	(R)	—	—	7	—	2

Lake makes no mention of possible compositorial interference, nor does he consider that the use of "I've" by Middleton is more likely to be governed by the requirements of verse length than by personal preference. As the table shows, his use of "I've" is by no means consistent; both "I have" (16) and "I ha' " (8) occur more frequently than "I've" (7). Furthermore, as already pointed out, the figures for the occurrence of "I've" are too small to be truly significant. While

these results do provide some confirmation of the accepted divisions for *The Changeling*, they would not be very decisive in the case of a disputed play, and Lake does use these and similar tests to establish his theory that Middleton wrote *The Revenger's Tragedy*. I do not mean to discredit Lake's work. His approach is commendably objective, and his numerical results indisputable, but he credits them with greater weight as evidence than they merit. The critic must assess the ultimate value of his evidence as well as its objectivity.

The fault of many of the critics considered is their reliance on too narrow a basis of evidence in support of their arguments. What is lacking from many of the critical arguments is flexibility and open-mindedness. For most of the critics considered, notably specialists like Lake, it is not their findings that are in question, but the assurance of the critic in their conclusiveness. Of course, some critics, notably Barker and Holmes, are easily detected as inadequate judges through their dearth of conclusive evidence. There is no right way to conduct investigations in this field, but the essential rules are quite simple. To depend too closely on one kind of test, whatever it may be, is unlikely to yield conclusive results, and to adopt unwarranted assumptions before beginning will never produce fair results. As T.S. Eliot so neatly points out, "personal prejudices and cranks" should not be part of the critic's search for "true judgement".

Tim Scott,  
Monash University.

<sup>1</sup> A.H. Bullen (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Middleton* (1885 — rptd. New York, 1964) Vol. I, p. 1x.

<sup>2</sup> Bullen, I, p. xv.

<sup>3</sup> A.C. Swinburne, Introduction to *Thomas Middleton*, ed. H. Ellis (Mermaid, London, 1887) p. xxxv.

<sup>4</sup> F.G. Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama* (London, 1891) Vol. II, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Pauline G. Wiggin, *An Inquiry into the Authorship of the Middleton-Rowley Plays* (Boston, 1897) pp. 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Symons, "Middleton and Rowley", in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge, 1910) Vol. VI, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Cyrus Hoy, "The Shares of Fletcher and his Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon", in D.V. Erdman and E.G. Fogel (eds.), *Evidence for Authorship* (New York, 1966) p.187.

<sup>8</sup> Symons, p.76.

<sup>9</sup> C.W. Stork (ed.), *William Rowley, his All's Lost by Lust, and A Shoemaker, a Gentleman* (Philadelphia, 1910) p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> E.H.C. Oliphant (ed.), *Elizabethan Dramatists* (New York, 1931).

<sup>11</sup> Oliphant, p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> Oliphant, p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> W.D. Dunkel, "Did not Rowley merely revise Middleton?", *PMLA* XLVIII (1933).

- <sup>14</sup> Dunkel, p. 800. <sup>15</sup> Dunkel, p. 801.
- <sup>16</sup> Muriel C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1935) p. 213.
- <sup>17</sup> F.S. Boas, *An Introduction to Stuart Drama* (London, 1946) p. 242.
- <sup>18</sup> Boas, p. 245.
- <sup>19</sup> G.E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Oxford, 1956) p. 863.
- <sup>20</sup> D.M. Robb, "The Canon of William Rowley's Plays", *Modern Language Review* XLV (1950).
- <sup>21</sup> Robb, p. 134.
- <sup>22</sup> Charles L. Barber, "A Rare use of the word *Honour* as a criterion of Middleton's authorship", *English Studies* 38 (1957).
- <sup>23</sup> The *OED* gives this meaning as obsolete and ironically quotes as one example of its past use a line from Chapman's *All Fools!*
- <sup>24</sup> Barber, p. 163. The lines referred to are IV, iii, 90-100 (Revels ed.).
- <sup>25</sup> Barber, p. 164.
- <sup>26</sup> N.W. Bawcutt (ed.), *The Changeling* (The Revels Plays, London, 1958) p. xxxix.
- <sup>27</sup> Bawcutt, p. xli.
- <sup>28</sup> R.H. Barker, *Thomas Middleton* (New York, 1958); his comments are contained in the Appendix.
- <sup>29</sup> Barker, p. 155. <sup>30</sup> Barker, p. 121.
- <sup>31</sup> Patricia Thomson (ed.), *The Changeling* (London, 1964).
- <sup>32</sup> Thomson, p. ix.
- <sup>33</sup> Matthew Black (ed.), *The Changeling* (Philadelphia, 1966).
- <sup>34</sup> Black, p. 6.
- <sup>35</sup> G.W. Williams (ed.), *The Changeling* (Regents Renaissance Drama Series, London, 1966) p. xii.
- <sup>36</sup> Samuel Schoenbaum, *Middleton's Tragedies* (New York, 1970).
- <sup>37</sup> Schoenbaum, p. 207. <sup>38</sup> Schoenbaum, p. 216.
- <sup>39</sup> David M. Holmes, *The Art of Thomas Middleton* (Oxford, 1970), Appendix C, pp. 207-218.
- <sup>40</sup> Holmes, p. 181. <sup>41</sup> Holmes, p. 209.
- <sup>42</sup> Quoted by Holmes, p. 218.
- <sup>43</sup> D.J. Lake, *The Canon of Thomas Middleton's Plays* (London, 1975).
- <sup>44</sup> Lake, p. 37. <sup>45</sup> Lake, p. 199.
- <sup>46</sup> On page 199 Lake states "the features *I've* and *we're* + *w'are* ... will be used to prove authorship in the collaborations".
- <sup>47</sup> The figures for my tests are based on the University Microfilms reproduction of the 1653 Quarto — the text used by Lake.
- <sup>48</sup> Lake, p. 204, Table 4.4(3).

**Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a license from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)**