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<ct>Middletonian Stylistics</ct>

<ca>Jonathan R. Hope</ca>

<h1>1 Books</h1>

<p>‘A hand gets me my living,’ says the scrivener Martino in *The Widow* (5.1.190), and Middleton too lived by what his hand could produce—a true freelance, rather than a contracted author or, even more protected, a sharer in a theatre company like Shakespeare. When plague closed the theatres in 1603–4, Middleton’s response was a series of pamphlets presumably sold to their publishers for a set fee: *News from Gravesend*, written with Dekker and published in late 1603; *Father Hubburd’s Tales*, entered in the Stationer’s Register on 3 January 1604, and reissued in a second, expanded edition, possibly as soon as February; *The Meeting of Gallants*—probably also January–February 1604; *Plato’s Cap*—entered in March; and *The Black Book*—licensed in late March. No doubt the £5 Middleton shared with Dekker in early 1604 from Henslowe, ‘in earnest of their play called The Patient Man and The Honest Whore’, was a welcome sign that the theatres would soon be open again.<sup>1</sup>

<pi>Though we know him primarily as a playwright, this other side to Middleton is important if we want to understand his use of language. More than Shakespeare or Jonson, he was required at times to find audiences and markets beyond the theatre-yard. More than them, he was a writer of works *for* the printing press—works

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<sup>1</sup> The likely dates for these pamphlets are discussed in their *Textual Companion* entries: *Gravesend* 346–8; *Hubburd* 348–9; *Meeting* 349; *Plato* 349–50; *Black Book* 350–1. The unmodernized entry in *Henslowe’s Diary* for his payment to Middleton and Dekker reads: ‘in erneste of ther playe Called the paysent man & the onest hore’ (Foakes 2002: 209).

commissioned by publishers rather than theatres, whose initial reception would be in the visual form of the printed page. While Jonson certainly prepared his plays for the press, and Shakespeare may have thought about publication,<sup>2</sup> this was not the primary mode of disseminating their work, and print as a culture and a technology does not occupy either's mental landscape to the extent it does Middleton's.

Even in the plays, Middleton's characters display, and Middleton assumes in his audience, an easy familiarity with the language of printing and book-making. In *Your Five Gallants*, Primero the bawd approaches the pawnbroker Fripp for a dress to clothe a novice courtesan, and the two slip casually into the technical jargon of book-sizing as they discuss her measurements:

Fripp                    Of what volume is this book, that I may fit a cover to't?  
 Primero                Faith, neither in folio nor in decimo sexto, but in octavo  
                               between them both, a pretty middle-sized trug. (1.1.172–

5)

In *The Nice Valour*, would-be author Lepet appears onstage correcting the proofs of his catalogue of strikes and blows, *The Uprising of the Kick and the Downfall of the Duello*. He sends his servant back to the printer with the instruction

Bid him put all the thumps in pica roman—

And with great T's (4.1.237–8)

and also specifies that the 'kicks' should be 'in *italica*' (240), while complaining about the size of paper the printer is using ('He prints my blows upon pot-paper too, the rogue' 245). When the final sheet of proofs arrives later in the same scene, it is subject to an even more detailed and technical critique:

Clown                                  Here's your last proof, sir.

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<sup>2</sup> See Erne (2003).

You shall have perfect books now in a twinkling.

Lepet            These marks are ugly.

Clown                            He says, sir, they're proper . . .

Lepet            But why a pilcrow here? . . .

Did not I say, this wherret and this bob

Should both be pica roman?

. . . A souse, *italica*?

. . . why stands bastinado so far off here? . . .

Why lies this spurn lower than that spurn? (4.1.307–21)</dia>

<p>Lepet's complaint includes the technical terms 'pilcrow' (a paragraph mark: ¶) and 'spurn' (which also means the part of a letter which descends below the line); repeats his call for 'pica roman' (a specific size of roman font) and '*italica*' (right sloping letters); and voices concerns about the placing and spacing of terms on the printed page. When Lepet's book later turns out to be a best-seller, it is made clear that the only people making money from the text are the booksellers: a blunt acknowledgement of the economics of publication at a time when no royalties were paid to authors.

<pi>In the non-dramatic writing too, the book trade is a constant theme. The spoof pamphlet, *The Owl's Almanac*, speculates on the history of printing as part of a surprisingly **good joke**:

<py>Some almanacs talk that printing hath been in England            [4  
not above 156 years, but I find in an old worm-eaten            [*Printing*  
cabalistical author that sheets have been printed in this            [*of*

kingdom above a 1000 years before that time.

[*sheets*<sup>3</sup>

(312–17)]

(‘sheets’, of course, in the double sense of sheets of paper in a printing press, and fabric sheets on beds—alluding to the marks left by sex). But concern for and familiarity with the material context of printed language is brought out most forcefully in *Father Hubbard’s Tales*, where Middleton wishes for the book a ‘true-spelling’—that is accurate—printer (58). Thomas Creed, the man who printed both 1604 versions of the pamphlet, produced a visually complex text: roman type for poetry and introductory material; black letter for prose narrative. Beyond that, the narrative of the work, with its satirical treatment of writers, and their doomed attempts to win patronage, focuses explicitly on the materiality of the dedicated text:

Middleton writes (we suspect from painful experience) of the author having a special presentation copy of his book expensively bound, with gilt inlay, and numerous place-marking ribbons. The recipient of the book does not come up with the expected gift, and instead uses the ribbons as laces in his shoes (1241–55). A similarly cynical view of the material progress of the printed book comes in *The Owl’s Almanac*, when Middleton imagines the book’s likely end as baking paper in pie-making (1170). Middleton can therefore conjure meanings from the materials that make up books: leather, gilt, ribbons, paper. Their intrinsic value is compared to the low cultural value patrons, and society in general, place on the texts they embody.

Similarly, the visual materiality of typeface and spacing on the open page offer possibilities of meaning. The shifts from roman to black letter in the 1604 pamphlets may be largely printers’ conventions, but Middleton’s stylistic range shifts with

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<sup>3</sup> The text in *Collected Works* is at fault here, printing ‘*presses*’ for ‘*sheets*’ (see 1277).

them—and in other texts he demonstrates very deliberate use of the space of the printed page. *The Owl's Almanac* uses marginal notes which set up an often humorous counterpoint to the already satirical main text ('Women more lunatic than men', 'I believe it', 'I believe you', 'Tobacco keeps boots clean'), and more seriously and systematically, Middleton's biblical exegesis, *The Two Gates of Salvation* (1609), is entirely structured by use of the physical properties of the printed book. Old Testament prophecies are laid out on the left hand page, with their New Testament fulfilments placed opposite on the right. Middleton also specified printer's marks to underline the spatial linkage of the passages:

<dis>Upon every first page or leaf stand the prophets, and on the other page, right against it, are the evangelists: the one foretells the coming, the birth, the passion, etc., of Christ; the other shows wherein all the prophecies of him are fulfilled.

<pi>So that after you have read the words of the prophets at the upper end of the first leaf, marked thus ⊕ [character 197 Unicode character FOC5], with a circled cross, you are, if you would truly follow the method of this book, next to read the words of the evangelists on the other side, marked likewise as the former ⊕ [character 197 Unicode character FOC5], with a circled cross.

<pi>And so still if you read any verse quoted with any other marks, as + [character 43 Unicode character FO2B] ‡ [character 244 Unicode character 2021] ¶ [character 166 Unicode character OOB6], etc., behold the like mark on the other side just opposite to it; for the matter of the one is answerable to, and makes plain, the other. (*Two Gates* 167–83)<sup>4</sup></dis>

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<sup>4</sup> See *Collected Works* (2007: 682) for an illustration of an opening from the book showing these features. The extended title of *The Owl's Almanac*, if it is Middleton's, also displays an awareness of visible language, this time handwriting, when it claims

<p>If Middleton is conscious of print as a technology, and of books as ‘things’, he is also highly aware of the materiality of manuscript culture, and the handwritten word: *The Widow* features a legal clerk, Martino, as a major character, and the opening stage direction specifies that his ‘standish’—writing desk—should command the stage. The play is full of actual documents—often prepared, and sometimes destroyed, on stage. Martino is the servant of a justice, and it is worth remembering that to be a scrivener was to have a manual occupation. The positive social values we would associate with literacy, and especially the negative ones we would apply to illiteracy, do not hold for Middleton’s world. At one point in *The Widow*, Martino supplies a gentleman with a warrant:

<dis>Everyone cannot get that kind of warrant from me, signor. Do you see this prick i’th’ bottom? It betokens power and speed. It is the privy mark, that runs betwixt the constables and my master. Those that cannot read, when they see this, know ’tis for lechery or murder; and this being away, the warrant comes gelded and insufficient. (*The Widow* 1.1.111–17)</dis>

<p>The ‘prick i’th’ bottom’ is a secret mark to tell the illiterate constables that the warrant is a serious one and should be executed quickly (as well, of course, as a reference to buggery)—if the mark is not there, the warrant is not worth the paper it is written on, despite the apparent authority of the written words.

<pi>Middleton has numerous characters make disparaging remarks about the ability to read and write, no doubt with a glance at the hand to mouth existence his own

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that the text of the almanac was ‘Found in an ivy-bush written in old characters’ (lines 5–6)—though the text also imagines, as reason for celebration, ‘The scrivener i’th’ pillory’ (line 2508)—scriveners were often accused of preparing false documents.

literacy earned him. In *Michaelmas Term*, Mother Gruel says of her son, ‘he can scarce write and read’, to which her son (unrecognized by her) replies,

<dis>He’s the better regarded for that amongst courtiers, for that’s but a needy quality. (1.3.299–302)</dis>

<pi>where ‘needy quality’ implies that literacy is a competence developed by someone forced to earn a living—Mother Gruel’s son is living the high life of an idle courtier about town. And suspicion of literacy could go up, as well as down the social scale—in *Hengist*, once Simon the Tanner has been elevated to mayoral status, he proudly states

<py>. . . I found it i’th’ town book,  
And yet not myself, I scorn to read,

I keep a clerk to do these jobs for need. (4.1.6–8)</py>

<p>and later in the play he chides his clerk:

<dis>thou malapert clerk, that’s good for nothing but to write and read?  
(5.1.5–6)</dis>

<p>As he does with technical printing terms, Middleton is prepared to use the language of handwriting for comic effect. In *Michaelmas Term*, Easy asks another Middletonian scrivener, Dustbox, to give his professional judgement on the fashionable roman style of writing he has cultivated:

<dia>Easy                   How like you my Roman hand, i’ faith?  
Dustbox               Exceeding well, sir, but that you rest too much upon your R’s  
                                  and make your E’s too little. (2.3.383–5)</dia>

<p>The joke is scatological: ‘R’s’ = arse and ‘E’s’ = ease, to defecate (and Dustbox himself is an example of Middleton’s fascination with the technology of textuality: his name refers to the box of sand used for blotting the ink on legal documents). In *More*



*Dissemblers Besides Women*, Lactantio boasts to the Duchess, not just about his handwriting, but about his punctuation:

<py>I can write fast and fair

Most true orthography, and observe my stops. (3.2.76–7)</py>

<p>Much ‘prick’-related hilarity ensues.

<pi>If Middleton displays a particular consciousness of the processes of printing and writing in his culture, he is also alert to the particularities of reading—which emerges from his texts as something different from the silent, private activity we assume today. One common meaning of ‘read’ in the early modern period is ‘to perform a play’—audiences went to the theatre to hear a play ‘read’. And there is an economic point to be made here: even the most generous estimates for adult male literacy in London at the time barely reach 50 per cent, so a play ‘read’ in the theatre had a much greater potential audience than one printed in a quarto. In his pamphlets, Middleton’s comments make it clear that he understood that the market for such material depended on ‘readers’ who could read the pamphlet aloud to the majority who could not read. Middleton is also explicitly aware of the differences between written and spoken texts: he knows his texts will be read out loud—and he knows that the transition from speech to print, and back again, is a shift in medium that may not go smoothly:

<dis>For there is a great difference between reading and reading well, for those that read well have a good tongue of their own, and spoil nothing in the spelling </dis>

<p>he says, introducing *Plato’s Cap* (29–31), showing clearly that he regards ‘reading’ as an audible occupation—and using ‘spelling’, again implying audible voice, in a blend of two related early senses, the first simply ‘speaking’ (see *OED*

‘spell’ v.<sup>1</sup>), and the second spelling out loud, letter by letter (*OED* ‘spell’ v.<sup>2</sup>). His mind running on similar themes, Middleton subscribes *Father Hubbard’s Tales*

<py>Yours, if you read without spelling or hacking,

TM (81–2)</py>

<p>where ‘hacking’ carries a very specific early modern aural sense—to break the note, mangle the sound (see *OED* ‘hacking’ *vbl. n.*<sup>1</sup> 2; and ‘hack’ v.<sup>1</sup> 6 and 7).

<pi>Middleton’s responsiveness to the various media through which language can be recorded and transmitted, and particularly the shift from oral to literate forms, is also shown by a minor, but particular, feature of his dramatic writing: onomatopoeic words representing sounds. His plays are full of them,<sup>5</sup> and he has the distinction of being the first person (as far as the *OED* knows) to represent the interjection ‘huh’ in writing:

<dia>There’s gold for thee. [*Giving money*] Huh, let her want for nothing, Master Doctor. (*Mad World* 3.2.81–3)</dia>

<p>Though the same letter-group is used earlier (and later) in the same scene to represent feigned coughing:

<dia>Sir Bounteous How now, my wench, how dost?

Courtesan [*coughing*] Huh, weak, knight, huh. (3.2.36–7)</dia>

<p>It would, of course, be foolish to suggest that Middleton was the first *user* of these sounds—but he is the first, or one of the first, to attempt to represent them in print:

<dis>O fie, fie, wife! Pea, pea, pea, pea, how have you lost your time? (*Mad World* 1.2.130–1)</dis>

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<sup>5</sup> Middleton’s highly characteristic use of interjections is employed by M. P. Jackson as evidence for attribution (1979).

<dis>Still, still weeping? Huff, huff, huff, why how now, woman? Hey, hy, hy, for shame, leave! Suh, suh, she cannot answer me for snobbing. (*Mad World* 3.2.216–8)</dis>

<dia>Hoard            Hist!

Drawer            Up those stairs, gentlemen.

Hoard            Pist, drawer!

Drawer            Anon, sir. (*Trick to Catch The Old-One* 3.3.3–6) </dia>

<dis>Pup, pup, pup, pup! I like not this wine. (*Trick to Catch The Old-One* 5.2.1)

</dis>

<py>A base-born issue of a baser sire . . .

With nailed shoes and whipstaff in his hand,

Who with a ‘hey and ree’ the beasts command. (*Micro-cynicon* 2.33–6) (‘hey and ree’ are sounds used in controlling horses or oxen pulling a cart) </py>

<dis>the wind is always at that door; hark how it blows, pooff, pooff, pooff.

(*Honest Whore* 15.205–6) </dis>

<p>This close attention to quasi-linguistic noise is a marker of Middleton’s realist concerns, and his skill as an observer. The representation of these sounds also attests to the importance Middleton placed on the oral. For all his consciousness of the materiality of textual culture, language was for him primarily speech: an event occurring in one space, and at a particular time, between people. Writing might offer an escape from the temporal and spatial limitations of speech, but, as we will see in the next section, Middleton looks to the forms and attributes of spoken language, even in his most ‘written’ modes.

<h1>2 Sentences</h1>

<p>Addressing the reader in his ‘own’ voice (at least it is under his own initials) in the prefatory material to *Father Hubbard’s Tales*, Middleton adopts a strikingly direct and conversational tone, which follows the conventions of spoken, rather than written, syntax to a degree that can cause problems for readers (and editors):

<dis>Shall I tell you what Reader (but first I should call you gentle, courteous, and wise, but t’is no matter, they’re but foolish words of course, and better left out than Printed; for if you be so, you need not be called so; and if you be not so, there were Law against me for calling you out of your names) by John of Paul’s Churchyard I swear, and that oath will be taken at any Haberdashers; I never wished this Book better fortune, than to fall into the hands of a true spelling Printer, and an honest-minded Book-seller; and if honesty could be sold by the Bushel like Oysters; I had rather have one *Bushel* of honesty, than three of money. (*Father Hubbard* 50–61)<sup>6</sup></dis>

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<sup>6</sup> I have given the passage in its original punctuation here, rather than follow the modernized punctuation of the *Collected Works*, because I believe that the original punctuation better indicates the spoken structures of this text. The fully modernized text is as follows: ‘Shall I tell you what, reader?—But first I should call you gentle, courteous, and wise. But ’tis no matter, they’re but foolish words, of course, and better left out than printed. For if you be so, you need not be called so; and if you be not so, there were law against me for calling you out of your names. By John of Paul’s Churchyard I swear (and that oath will be taken at any haberdasher’s), I never wished this Book better fortune, than to fall into the hands of a true-spelling printer and an honest-minded book-seller; and if honesty could be sold by the bushel like oysters; I had rather have one bushel of honesty than three of money.’

<p>We are not used to encountering such constructions in writing, though we hear and speak them ourselves almost every day without noticing any difficulty. The text begins with Middleton’s direct address (‘Shall I tell you what Reader . . .’), which is straightforward enough, but immediately shifts into a long parenthetic construction in which Middleton employs the common rhetorical trope of appearing to deny something (flattery) while he actually does it (‘but first . . . out of your names’). In actual speech, intonation would clearly mark off this long interruption, and the resumption of the opening structure which comes with ‘by John of Paul’s Churchyard’. As the passage continues, Middleton immediately goes into a second parenthetic clause (‘and that oath . . . Haberdashers’), though this time much shorter than the first, and then continues straight to the end. If we removed the parenthetic material, the text would read:

<dis>Shall I tell you what Reader—by John of Paul’s Churchyard I swear I neverwished this Book better fortune, than to fall into the hands of a true spelling Printer, and an honest-minded Book-seller; and if honesty could be sold by the Bushel like Oysters; I had rather have one *Bushel* of honesty, than three of money.</dis>

<p>This passage takes speech as its model for both form and content. At a formal level there is a tendency for conjunction rather than subordination to join clauses: ‘but . . . but . . . and . . . and . . . and’; and striking use of antithesis, and parenthesis. There is a high frequency of pronouns (‘I . . . you . . . I . . . you . . . it . . . they . . . you . . . you . . . you . . . me . . . you . . . your . . . I . . . I . . . I . . .’), and a great deal of assumed knowledge (John of St Paul’s, haberdasher’s, bushels of oysters). Of course

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Note how the modern editor feels the need to break up the long structures of speech into more manageable, clearly delineated main clauses.

this is artistic, written prose rather than actual speech—as Middleton’s use of rhetoric shows—but it mimics the patterns of speech impressively closely.<sup>7</sup>

<pi>This address to the reader, signed, as I have said, with Middleton’s initials, comes after a fictionalized ‘Epistle Dedicatory’ to the supposed patron of the work, ‘Sir Christopher Clutch-Fist’, signed by ‘Oliver Hubburd’. The stylistic shift between the two short pieces of prose is an excellent example of the range of non-dramatic, but speech-based, prose styles Middleton could command. The ‘Epistle Dedicatory’, as its high-register title suggests, draws on a very different model: the elaborate satiric prose tradition of Nashe and the Elizabethan pamphleteers, all nonce epithets and alliterative insults, apposition, and archaisms:

<dis>Most guerdonless sir, pinching patron, and the muses’ bad paymaster,  
thou that owest for all the pamphlets, histories, and translations that ever have  
been dedicated to thee since thou wert one-and-twenty and couldst make water  
upon thine own lands . . . (*Hubburd* 10–4)</dis>

<p>In the tradition of prose pamphleteering, there is a delight in creating nonce epithets using word-derivation rather than high-register borrowing from Latin: poets are ‘line-sharkers’ (17) and then ‘muse-suckers’ (42); a playwright is called ‘the best common play-plotter in England’ (22). Although speech is the model here too, it is a rhetorically heightened speech—one that can extend an apostrophe with apposition so that there are four separate noun phrases referring to Sir Christopher (‘guerdonless

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<sup>7</sup> Linguistic articles on speech patterns at the time are Vivian Salmon 1987 [1967], ‘Elizabethan Colloquial English in the Falstaff Plays’, and 1987 [1965] ‘Sentence Structures in Colloquial Shakespearean English’, in Salmon and Burness (1987: 37–70, 265–300); and Wright (1995: 96, 93–105).

sir': 'pinching patron': 'the muses' bad paymaster': 'thou that . . .'). The style is also characterized by a high frequency of attributive modification:

<ul>**guerdonless** sir

**pinching** patron

the **muses' bad** paymaster</ul>

<p>This form of modification, where the adjective is placed immediately before the noun it modifies, is associated with writing. Spoken English tends to prefer either predicative modification, where the adjective is taken out of the noun phrase and placed after the verb 'to be':

<dis>my patron is **pinching**</dis>

<p>or post-head modification, where the modification is done by prepositional phrases and relative clauses—as we see here in the final apostrophe to Sir Christopher:

<dis>thou [that owest . . .]</dis>

<p>Attributive modification is something Middleton uses sparingly in his plays, but with relish in his prose pamphlets, and in this he differs from Shakespeare, who does not avoid it in drama. There are two things to explain here: the differences within Middleton's work, and the differences between Middleton and Shakespeare. To some extent, we can account for the difference between Middleton and Shakespeare in drama by reference to Middleton's generally more oral style: it is no surprise to find him avoiding a feature associated with writing. But why then does he employ this feature so much in the pamphlets—which are, after all, closely modelled on speech in many ways? We can begin to address this by considering the implicational effects of the different types of modification.

<pi>One feature of attributive modification is that it tends to present the quality assigned to the noun as essential, or objectively present—effectively reducing the overt textual markers of subjective consciousness. For example, the attributive form ‘my pinching patron’ implies strongly that there is no room for debate about the patron: the patron just is pinching, and everyone knows it—in the same way as ‘the red door’ appears to communicate an essential fact about the door’s colour, not the speculative opinion of the speaker. To say, alternatively, ‘My patron is pinching’, shifts the focus onto the evaluative term, and onto the source of the evaluation: the subjective opinion of the speaker—just as the form ‘the door was red’ tends to assign the identification of the colour to the consciousness of the speaker. So in his dramatic language, Middleton tends to represent evaluation as explicitly subjective by using predicative and post-head modification. In the pamphlets, however, subjective evaluation is presented in a form normally associated with objectivity—and much of the satiric force of the pamphleteering comes from this ironic presentation of opinion as if it were fact.

<pi>Middleton’s dramatic prose style is characterized by snappy, symmetrical prose, with effects coming at the phrasal and clausal, rather than lexical levels. Middleton’s effects come from structural manipulation: balance, juxtaposition, parallelism, and a cool, almost detached handling of ideas. In the following extract from *Michaelmas Term*, as Thomasine is advising her daughter on the best (that is, richest) husband, note how the vocabulary is almost entirely predictable (I do not mean this disparagingly)—it does not call attention to itself.<sup>8</sup> The force comes from the holding

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<sup>8</sup> This plain style has attracted favourable critical attention, as Gary Taylor charts in his ‘Lives and Afterlives’ (*Collected Works* 2007: 33, 40–1).



back of the most striking phrase to the end of the sentence, and also from complex patterns of parallelism:

<dis>Master Reareage has land and living, t'other but his walk i'th' street, and his snatching diet.</dis>

<dis>He's able to entertain you in a fair house of his own, t'other in some nook or corner, or place behind the cloth like a company of puppets. (2.3.64–8) </dis>

<p>Each sentence is structured by antithesis ('Master Reareage' : 't'other'; 'He' : 't'other'), and each one consists of two main clauses, with the grammatical structure of the first main clause reproduced by the second:

<dis><sup>Subject</sup>(Master Reareage) <sup>Verb</sup>(has) <sup>Object</sup><(land) and (living)></dis>

<dis><sup>Subject</sup>(t'other) <sup>Verb</sup>( ) but <sup>Object</sup><(his walk i'th' street), and (his snatching diet)></dis>

<p>So each main clause here has a subject-verb-object structure (SVO), with the object in each case consisting of two coordinated noun phrases ('land and living' and 'his walk i'th' street and his snatching diet')—a very precise case of grammatical parallelism. Middleton avoids too close a surface structural repetition however by ellipsis of the verb 'has', so that it is understood in the second clause ('t'other (has) but his '), and by having larger, expanded noun phrases in the second clause. The second sentence works in exactly the same way. It is structured by an antithesis between its two main clauses ('He' : 't'other'), and again, the grammatical structure of the first clause is paralleled by that of the second:

<dis><sup>Subject</sup>(He) <sup>Verb</sup>('s able to entertain) <sup>Object</sup>(you) <sup>Adverbial</sup>(in a fair house of his own)</dis>

<dis>*Subject*(t'other) *Verb*( ) *Object*( ) *Adverbial*(in some nook or corner, or place  
behind the cloth like a company of puppets)</dis>

<p>Ellipsis is used once more in the second clause to give variation to the surface features while preserving grammatical parallelism ('t'other (is able to entertain) (you) . . .'), and the final element, in this case a prepositional phrase functioning as an adverbial, is again expanded. Placing these larger phrases in the second clause rather than the first conforms to the principle of 'end-weight' in English, which naturally places large items towards the end of clauses—and this produces an effect of inevitability and naturalness which is strengthened by the grammatical parallelism.

<pi>The majority of Middleton's formal resources here—antithesis, coordination, ellipsis, SVO order, and end-weight—are associated particularly with speech. When, as here, they cluster in writing, it is reasonable to conclude that the writing is taking spoken forms as its model. These features, along with parallelism, all function at the level of the phrase and clause, rather than the individual word—and this is why I want to claim that Middleton concentrates on structural manipulation, rather than lexical innovation or play, to achieve his effects. A contrast with Shakespeare may make this clear. In *Hengist*, a group of dishonest players are asked what type of actors they are:

<dis>We are anything, sir: comedians, tragedians, tragicomedians, comi-  
tragedians, pastoralists, humorists, clownists and satirists. (5.1.71–3)</dis>

<p>This is a clear allusion to *Hamlet*, and matches Shakespeare's list of genres for lexical ingenuity.<sup>9</sup> But the real force of Middletonian phrase-mongering comes in the next sentence, with its pared-down metonymy:

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<sup>9</sup> *Hamlet* 2.2.333–6, 'The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, scene individable or poem unlimited.'

*OED* evidence suggests strongly that Middleton coined 'comi-tragedians' and

<dis>We have 'em, sir, from the smile to the laugh, from the laugh to the handkerchief. (5.1.73–5)</dis>

<p>Perhaps it is significant that Middleton, who normally prefers simile and explicit comparison to metaphor, here makes use of one metaphoric trope that depends on a direct link between the elements of the metaphor ('smile' and 'laugh' have a direct link to comedy, as does 'handkerchief' to tragedy).

<pi>Middleton, and his characters, know what high literary prose is, but they find it hard to use unselfconsciously: Quomodo the haberdasher fantasizes about the land he intends to cheat out of Easy:

<dis>O, that sweet, neat, comely, proper, delicate parcel of land, like a fine gentlewoman i'th' waist, not so great as pretty, pretty; the trees in summer whistling, the silver waters by the banks harmoniously gliding. I should have been a scholar . . . (*Michaelmas Term* 2.3.91–5)</dis>

<p>Although this has features that might make us think of unplanned speech (the lack of main verbs, the repetition of 'pretty', the paratactic syntax), this is, in fact, a careful piece of rhetoric, constructed in the Senecan mode to mimic speech or thought.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the features would be highly unlikely to appear in actual speech: the build-up of attributional adjectives in the first noun phrase ('sweet, neat, comely, proper, delicate . . .'); the juxtaposition of non-finite clauses ('the trees . . . whistling', 'the . . .

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'clownists' for this list, and it is worth noting that he matches Shakespeare's list of generic categories with one of people and agents. (I am grateful to Gary Taylor for these two observations.)

<sup>10</sup> For a brief introduction to Senecan and Ciceronian prose styles, see my entry for 'prose' in Dobson and Wells (2001).

waters . . . gliding’). The Arcadian tone and changed style prompts Quomodo’s self-analysis ‘I should have been a scholar’ (to write in such poetic terms).

<pi>Middleton’s dramatic verse, too, tends to employ formal features most closely associated with speech. This is perhaps most noticeable in his tendency to stick to subject-verb-object order, and the way ideas are amplified from clause to clause and phrase to phrase. At its best, this produces a measured clarity and directness:

<py>I pity all the fortunes of poor gentlewomen  
Now in mine own unhappiness; when we have given  
All that we have to men, what’s their requital?  
An ill-faced jealousy, which resembles much  
The mistrustfulness of an insatiate thief  
That scarce believes he has all though he has stripped  
The true man naked, and left nothing on him  
But the hard cord that binds him: so are we  
First robbed and then left bound with jealousy. (*Hengist* 3.1.44–52)</py>

<p>This speech opens with a straightforward SVO clause in the first line (‘S(I) V(pity) O(all the fortunes of poor gentlewomen)’)—made even closer to speech by the pronoun in subject position, and full noun phrase in object slot (this is highly characteristic of speech, and once again conforms to the principle of end-weight). Also formally characteristic of speech is the answer given to the question ‘what’s their requital?’—which is a sentence fragment consisting of a very large noun phrase with very heavy post-head modification (‘An ill-faced jealousy . . . binds him’):

<py>NP(An ill-faced jealousy, [which resembles much  
(The mistrustfulness (of (an insatiate thief  
[That scarce believes [he has all] [though (he) (has stripped

(The true man) naked), and (left) (nothing) (on him)

But (the hard cord [that binds him])))))]</py>

<p>Although the internal grammatical structure of this noun phrase looks highly complex when analysed like this, such heavy post-head modification is common in informal speech. Syntax aside, the ideas are developed in a logical, linear form: from jealousy, to mistrust, to thief. The complexity comes after the third idea has been established, and involves an extension of it. Middleton's language generally knows where it is going from the start of a phrase or sentence—and his sentences are not suddenly diverted by unexpected metaphors, or linguistic relations, to a conclusion that was not suspected.

<pi>Also characteristic of Middleton's use of language here is the preference for simile ('resembles much') and explicit comparison ('so are we') over metaphor and implication. It is tempting to link this preference for literalness and explicitness to the sense that Middleton conceives of the world as independent from language: where Shakespeare allows metaphor (and therefore language) the potential to be constitutive of reality, Middleton's city comedies posit a pre-existing, often amoral society which can be described, and explained, but not altered by language. The predominance of simple declarative clauses, with subject-verb-object order, and unspectacular vocabulary, implies that language can, ideally, function to describe the world directly and plainly (though this apparently direct relationship between language and truth can be undercut by dramatic action). When it works, the directness of this style is quietly impressive. It does run the risk, however, of flat repetition:

<py>Why, therefore take heart, faint not at all,

Women ne'er rise, but when they fall;

Let a man break, he's gone, blown up,

A woman's breaking sets her up;  
Virginitie is no city trade,  
You're out o'th' freedom, when you're a maid;  
Down with the lattice, 'tis but thin;  
Let coarser beauties work within,  
Whom the light mocks; thou art fair and fresh,

The gilded flies will light upon thy flesh. (*Michaelmas Term* 1.3.43–52)

This passage is constructed from a series of main declarative clauses (there are eleven main verbs in ten lines): we are presented with a series of assertions about the world, not argued for, simply stated. The verse structure adds to the effect, since very often a line will contain one main and one subordinate verb, with endstopping—all three opening lines follow this pattern—giving a proverb-like feel to the language (reinforced by the rhyme). In fact, only one line in the passage is not endstopped (and the editor has been—I think wrongly—enticed into stopping it): ‘Let coarser beauties work within, | Whom the light mocks.’ The passage uses recapitulation: we have, ‘take heart’, and then also, ‘faint not at all’; then three lines spell out the need for women to fall or break if they wish to get on twice; then two lines explain twice more that virginitie is worthless. As often with Middleton, the sting comes with the final line, which breaks through the slightly formulaic quality of what has gone before to demonstrate that simple subject-verb-order, coupled with striking imagery, can have a powerful effect: ‘The gilded flies will light upon thy flesh.’

Middleton's speeches are powered by their relation to the external world, rather than internal linguistic logic (as Shakespeare's are). They are also fuelled by a tension between the violence (actual or emotional) they often describe, and the coldly objective tone which arises from the straightforward syntax, and the predominant

endstopping. Terrible things happen in Middleton's world, not because it is anarchic, but because immoral social structures allow and encourage them. Those social structures have their mimesis in Middleton's linguistic forms. The following speech is the plan for a rape. The frenzy of lust is there in the relentless advance of the imagined narrative, but the language is held back from loss of control by a measured, linear development from idea to idea—and, aside from lines 173 and 174—strong endstopping:

<py>The honest gentlewoman, where e'er she be,  
When nothing will prevail, I pity her now,  
Poor soul, she's enticed forth by her own sex  
To be betrayed to man, who in some garden house,  
Or remote walk, taking his lustful time,  
Binds darkness on her eyes, surprises her  
And having a coach ready, turns her in,  
Hurrying her where he list for the sin's safety,  
Making a rape of honour without words;  
And at the low ebb of his lust, perhaps  
Some three days after, sends her coached again  
To the same place, and, which would make most mad,  
She's spoiled of all, yet knows not where she was robbed.  
Wise, dear, precious mischief! (*Hengist* 3.1.164–77)</py>

<p>The immediacy of this owes much to the influence of speech: the interjections of personal subjective sympathy ('I pity her now, | Poor soul'), the use of the present tense, the simple juxtaposition of temporally ordered clauses. But the most powerful effect is produced by the sense of control over the language: like the rapist, the

speaker takes his lustful time. The cool mind that can construct this coherent verse narrative of abduction and multiple rape seems more than capable of fulfilling the fantasy.

### 3 Words

The early modern period was characterized by a huge expansion in the vocabulary of English, as writers borrowed words from foreign languages, and, even more frequently, used native word-derivation processes to produce new words from English resources.<sup>11</sup> Foreign borrowings, especially those from Latin, flowed into written English, at first in technical, scholarly texts, but increasingly across all types of writing. To anyone ‘educated’ in the early modern sense of the term, these borrowings would have posed little problem, since a knowledge of Latin was the basis for formal education. The vast majority of people, however, had no Latin: the Latinate ‘inkhorn’ terms were opaque to them. This situation brought about the first dictionaries in English—‘hard word’ lists of borrowings. It also brought into relief a fault-line in British culture and society between the ‘educated’ and the ‘illiterate’ (i.e. those with no classical training).

The tracing of this fault-line in drama is not straightforward. In Shakespeare, for every Dogberry, misunderstanding and misusing Latinate words, and satirized for it, there is an Osric, ridiculously over-using pompous vocabulary, and equally (if not more soundly) pilloried. Studies show that Shakespeare avoids Latin-derived words when compared to other playwrights—and it is noticeable that Shakespeare has a self-

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<sup>11</sup> For accounts of this process with statistical analysis of the different sources of new words, see Barber (1997: 219–41), and Nevalainen (2006: 37–72).



glossing style, pairing Latinate words with native synonyms.<sup>12</sup> Given his plain syntactic style, we might expect Middleton to reproduce Shakespeare's cautious approach to vocabulary, but in fact his relation to Latin and inkhorn terms seems to be different. For one thing, Middleton does not very often resort to the lower-class malaprop-producing character as a source of comedy: Simon, the tanner elevated to mayor in *Hengist* has been called 'malapropic'<sup>13</sup> but there is no very clear evidence for this—he does not misuse Latinate vocabulary, and his most foolish speech is limping doggerel (4.1.1–10) specially written as a set-piece welcome. There are no malapropisms in Simon's burlesque rhetorical set piece on the seven deadly sins after his election, and nor is Simon (in the play) a 'simpleton' as has been claimed—though his title—Mayor of Queenborough—later became a jest-book term for foolish politicians.<sup>14</sup> Rather Simon emerges in the play's original context as symbolic of the rise of mercantile London: uneducated in a classical sense, but wielding economic and political power. Simon thus represents the Latinless, but hardly senseless, and perhaps most important, playgoing, majority.

If Middleton avoids satirizing those without Latin, he is not above flattering those with it. His plays are studded with Latin phrases—usually legal, frequently unglossed—no doubt as a hat-tip to that part of his audience which derived from the Inns of Court. The legal comedy *Michaelmas Term* ends its first scene with a

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<sup>12</sup> Figures reported by Spevack suggest that Shakespeare uses slightly more Germanic words than the norm (4.5%) and significantly fewer Latinate ones (50% less). See, Spevack (1985: ii. 343–61). For Shakespeare's self-glossing style, see Hope (2010: 77–90).

<sup>13</sup> Ioppolo (1996: 88).

<sup>14</sup> Munro (2004: 307–10).

character quoting the abbreviated Latin proverb ‘*Sat sapienti*’ (‘dictum sapienti sat est’—‘a word to the wise is sufficient’), and, presumably after a knowing look round the audience to check comprehension, ‘I hope there’s no fools i’t’h’house’ (1.1.74–5).

Elsewhere, it is notable that Middleton is happy to use Latin and Latinate vocabulary where it has a technical legal function, especially in plays written for the more elite ‘private’ theatres. Tangle, in *The Phoenix*, indulges in a virtuoso display of legalese over a series of speeches: ‘*veniam . . . Non declaravit adversarius . . . Si delarasset . . . Non ad iudicium . . . supersedeas non molestandum . . . testificandum . . . Nonmetuis testes . . . presenter . . . habeus corpus . . . procedendo . . . audita querela . . . supplicavit . . . procendendo . . . nunc pro tunc . . . venire facies . . . decem tales . . . capias ut legatum . . .*’ (Scene 4, lines 47–102). Even though Tangle readily admits that he uses these terms to dazzle foolish plaintiffs, he uses them correctly, and is proud of his long experience as a ‘term-trotter’ (126). In plays for the more populist, ‘public’ theatres, Latin is handled warily—for example the foolish speech of Tim and his tutor in *Chaste Maid*.

In terms of borrowing and word derivation, however, Middleton is cautious in his use of inkhorn terms. His characters, even lower-class ones, are certainly capable of savouring the unfamiliar weight of a newly derived Latinate word, but Middleton is more comfortable with words which mix Latinate roots with native affixes. In terms of affixation, we find Middleton as an early user of a range of derived words across all the main word classes (*OED* first citations are not evidence that the writer involved invented the word). Nouns formed by affixation include ‘punctuality’ (punctiliousness), ‘concupiscency’, ‘ingentility’, ‘hagship’.<sup>15</sup> Verbs formed the same

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<sup>15</sup> The contexts and references for these words are as follows: ‘This **punctuality** of reputation, is no better then a bewitching sorcery’ *The Peacemaker* 504–5; ‘the

way include ‘redescend’, ‘Gipsify’, ‘outfrown’, ‘out-tongue’.<sup>16</sup> Adverbs include ‘litigiously’, ‘decheerful’, ‘robustiously’, and ‘unjovially’.<sup>17</sup> Adjectives are ‘dispatchful’, ‘gigantical’, ‘nominating’, ‘unlawyered’.<sup>18</sup>

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spinner of **concupiscency**’ *A Trick to Catch the Old One* 4.5.29; ‘Gold . . . that throwest the earthen bowl of the world, with the bias the wrong way, to peasantry, baseness, **ingentility**’ *Father Hubbard’s Tale* 1230; ‘’tis the charm her **hagship** gave me | For my duchess’ obstinate woman’ *The Witch* 2.2.9–10.

<sup>16</sup> The contexts and references for these words are as follows: ‘Forthwith the voice of God did **redescend**’ *The Wisdom of Solomon* 6.1.5; ‘Which hoping you’ll observe, to try thee, | With rusty bacon thus I **Gipsify** thee’ *More Dissemblers Besides Women* 4.2.182–3; ‘This, why it **outfrowns** ink’ *The Phoenix* Scene 15, line 315; ‘What, shall we suffer a changeable fore-part to **out-tongue** us?’ *Your Five Gallants* 5.1.30–1.

<sup>17</sup> The contexts and references for these words are as follows: ‘Some foolish words . . . did pass | Which now, **litigiously**, he fastens on me’ *A Trick to Catch the Old One* 4.4.123–4; ‘O, **decheerful** prentice, uncomfortable servant’ *Your Five Gallants* 4.5.11–12; ‘There’s a kind of captain very **robustiously** inquires for you’ *The Phoenix* Scene 4, lines 192–3; ‘Lady—what so **unjovially** departed?’ *The Phoenix* Scene 8, line 37.

<sup>18</sup> The contexts and references for these words are as follows: ‘I’ll . . . | Fall like a secret and **dispatchful** plague | On your secured comforts’ *A Trick to Catch the Old One* 2.2.49–52; ‘she saw a pair of corpulent **gigantical** andirons’ *The Black Book* 255–6; ‘shall we call her wisdom by her name? | Or new invent a **nominating** style’ *The Wisdom of Solomon* 10.15.133–4; ‘One quiet, suffering, and **unlawyered** man’ *The Phoenix* Scene 12, line 146.

<pi>It is clear from this that Middleton is happy to use words newly derived by affixation—as indeed almost all early modern writers were. A related means of deriving new words is ‘zero-morpheme derivation’, or conversion—where a word is simply used, without the addition of a derivational affix, in a new grammatical role. Shakespeare makes particularly striking use of this throughout his plays: ‘He childed as I fathered’ (*Lear* 3.6.107), for instance. Interestingly, Middleton seems to avoid such spectacular conversions, perhaps as too metaphorical. Some instances of conversion are found in Middleton, though they tend to be less spectacular: he uses the noun ‘pimple’ as a verb in *The Black Book* (sig. F), ‘You will **pimple** your souls with oathes, till you make them as well faouored as your faces.’ In *Michaelmas Term*, ‘inn’ is used as a verb:

<dis>I have but **inn’d** my horse since (1.2.45)</dis>

<p>and in *Hengist*, ‘fox’ becomes a verb:

<dis>As blind as one that had been **foxed** a se’night (5.2.374)</dis>

<p>pace Ioppolo’s note (*Collected Works* 2007: 1483), this is *OED* ‘foxed’, ppl. a. 1. ‘Intoxicated, drunk, stupefied’—not ‘deluded’ as she claims. Middleton did not invent this usage, but *OED* entries show that his use of it is very early. Presumably ‘foxed’ in the sense ‘to be drunk’ was a very informal, oral idiom which Middleton is one of the first to record in print.

<pi>Middleton’s openness to the spoken word, and the tradition of the prose pamphleteers, means that his works record numerous nonce words, or words which perhaps thrived in speech, but were not otherwise recorded, for example: ‘smockster’, ‘snarer’, ‘callymoother’, ‘chitty-faced’, ‘nittical’, ‘smazkie’.<sup>19</sup> My final example is

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<sup>19</sup> The contexts and references for these words are as follows: ‘you’re a hired **smockster**. Here’s her letter | In which we are certified that you are a bawd’ *Your*

perhaps actors' slang for casually improvised dialogue, and returns us to the Middletonian themes of the interplay, and gaps, between printed page and spoken text:

<dis>You're sure cozened, sir, they are all cheaters professed . . . They only take the name of country comedians to abuse simple people, with a printed play or two they bought at Canterbury last week for sixpence, and which is the worst, they speak but what they list on't and fribble out the rest. (*Hengist* 5.1.357–63)</dis>

<p>Middleton fribbled out an improvisatory living amongst the text types and genres of Early Modern London, alive to the reality of the fleeting sounds of language, as well as the visual manifestations of writing and print. Our profit on it is a body of work with a unique stylistic and generic range which has barely been touched in terms of linguistic and stylistic study. This chapter is a very tentative beginning to that work.

## <h1>Suggested Further Reading</h1>

<bib>Barber, Charles (1997), *Early Modern English*, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

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*Five Gallants* 5.2.46–7; 'Snare without **snarer**, net without a bait' *The Wisdom of Solomon* 17.14.147; 'He's broke through | The net . . . | And left the **snarer** here herself entangled' *More Dissemblers Besides Women* 2.1.135–7; 'Thou upstart **callymoother**' *Hengist* 3.3.159; 'A tender, puling, nice, **chitty faced** squall 'tis' *More Dissemblers Besides Women* 3.1.98; 'a filthy-slimey-lousy-**nittical** broker' *Your Five Gallants* 4.7.142–3; 'Avaunt I say! I'll anger thee enough, | And fold thy fiery eyes in thy **smazky** snuff' *Microcynicon*, 'His Defiance to Envy' lines 5–6.

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