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THE DATE OF *THE ROARING GIRL*

By P. A. MULHOLLAND

THE dating of *The Roaring Girl* has attracted some interest but neither of the main arguments—which indicate either 1604–5 or 1607–8—is satisfactory. The proposal for the latter date was founded on tenuous evidence which, when examined closely even on its own terms, is inconclusive and fails to convince; but under the weight of evidence for a later date, the argument disintegrates completely. The suggestion of 1604–5 may now be entirely abandoned since it was based chiefly on the erroneous dating of a court record concerning the real-life Roaring Girl, Mary Frith. In the context of its correct date (January 1611/12), however, the implications of this record are manifold. The likely date of performance may now be fixed within fairly close limits in the year 1611.¹ Further, some details of the play's publication and its probable first entry in the Stationers' Register are clarified. Of perhaps broader significance for the history of English theatre, the particulars of Moll Cutpurse's appearance at the Fortune Theatre as set out in the court record document one of the earliest instances of a woman on the Elizabethan/Jacobean public stage in connection with a known play.

In addition to this new information, the identification of several topical allusions to 1611 which have escaped the attention of previous commentators not only sheds light on a number of unexplained passages in the text, but also provides fresh evidence bearing on the date of composition. The play's publication in 1611 supplies a useful *terminus ad quem* and the close convergence of internal and external references on this year points to the likelihood that the progress from composition to the stage and finally into print was a comparatively swift one. The legal proceedings involving Mary Frith which apparently resulted from the play's performance (to which Middleton very likely alludes) may help to account for at least the final stage of this hurried sequence.

The association of Middleton and Dekker with Henslowe's company provides no real clue to the date of *The Roaring Girl*. Both dramatists

¹ E. K. Chambers's original proposal of *c.* 1610 (*Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 1923), iii. 296)—following in A. H. Bullen's footsteps—was presumably based on the likelihood that the writing and performance preceded publication by the reasonable space of about a year since no substantial supporting evidence is given. This does not, I feel, present any serious threat to my argument. R. B. Parker's convincing redating of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, in his 'Revels' edition of 1969, from 1611 to 1613 indirectly helps the case for *The Roaring Girl*.

had been employed by this company early in their careers. They collaborated about 1604 on *I Honest Whore*, but after this early joint venture, apart from *The Roaring Girl*¹ and *II Honest Whore* (which is of uncertain date), the only play known to record either man's subsequent association with the company is Dekker's *Whore of Babylon* (c. 1606-7).² Between 1607 and 1611 Dekker concentrated on pamphleteering but Middleton's career is something of a blank. Recorded litigation concerning debts has revealed that both dramatists were experiencing financial difficulties about the years 1611-12,³ and it may follow that *The Roaring Girl* represents an attempt to alleviate their own troubles as well as those of Moll Cutpurse as described below.

Since it makes a contribution to the study of the play and raises several interesting points, R. C. Bald's argument deserves re-examination.⁴ In support of his proposal of 1607-8 as the date of composition, Bald cited the likeness between *The Belman of London* and the canting scene (v. i) of *The Roaring Girl*, and advanced the possibility that Dekker may have worked on both at the same time. He further noted the mention of a comet in Sir Alexander's lines (1. i. 254-5), seeing it as a possible reference to Halley's comet 'which reached its perihelion towards the end of November 1607':

Nay, more, let this strange thing walk, stand, or sit,
No blazing star draws more eyes after it.⁵

Finally, he convincingly identified the curious passage from the epilogue referring to a book of 'base tricks' as an attack against the author of the 'Martin Markall' pamphlets which constituted a scathing reply, first to *The Belman*, and later, to *Lanthorne and Candle-light*. This passage has traditionally been interpreted as a reference to *The Madde Francks of Mery Mall of the Bankside* by John Day (entered in the Stationers' Register on 7 August 1610), but no copy of this work is known and Bald's proposal provides what I believe in any case to be a more satisfactory and likely

¹ G. E. Bentley (*Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Oxford, 1941-68), iv. 857) mistakenly interprets 'The Prince his Players' on *The Roaring Girl*'s title-page as meaning Prince Charles's Men, but both the date of publication (Prince Charles's Company was not so named until 1612—i.e. after Prince Henry's death) and the mention of the Fortune Theatre make it clear that Prince Henry's Men are indicated. Bentley does not, however, repeat this error in Vol. vi in his discussion of the First Fortune.

² Unless otherwise indicated, information given about the dates and auspices of the plays is based on Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama 975-1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum (London, 1964).

³ See Mark Eccles, 'Thomas Middleton, A Poett', *S.P.* liv (1957), 516-36, and S. Schoenbaum, 'A New Middleton Record', *M.L.R.* lv (1960), 82-3; Thomas Dekker, *Selected Prose Writings*, ed. E. D. Pendry (London, 1967), p. 6.

⁴ 'The Chronology of Middleton's Plays', *M.L.R.* xxxii (1937), 37-9.

⁵ All quotations from Middleton, including *The Roaring Girl*, are from A. H. Bullen's edition of his *Works* (London, 1885).

explanation. No 'Martin Markall' pamphlet survives earlier than 1610, but Bald pointed out that 'Dekker's remarks in *Lanthorne and Candle-light* make it clear that one had appeared soon after *The Belman* was published'. He accordingly aligned the writing of *The Roaring Girl* with *The Belman* and postulated a performance long enough after to incorporate this riposte to 'Martin Markall'.

Bald's dating is inadequate, however, since it does not accommodate all of the evidence, and several amendments can be made to his argument. Although the correspondence between *The Belman* and the canting scene may be regarded as indisputable, this does not necessarily imply that both originated at the same time. Several minor resemblances to *Lanthorne and Candle-light* (1608), as well as other considerations examined below, argue in favour of a later date. References to blazing stars are frequent enough in the drama of this period, and particularly in Dekker's plays, for attempts to identify them as topical to be probably mistaken, and the apparent relationship seen by Bald is most likely coincidental.¹ Dekker's dispute with the 'Martin Markall' author seems to have been no flash in the pan, and apparently lasted until about 1612.² In this light, the epilogue's remark can as easily be construed as relating to the latter end of the conflict as to its beginning, and Bald's attempt to make a case for an early date here seems unnecessarily contrived. The battle probably achieved some measure of celebrity in the course of the series of attacks and counter-attacks, if the popularity of this underworld pamphlet literature is credited, and the epilogue's interpolated gibe may, indeed, mark an attempt by Dekker, in the aftermath of the pointed attacks on *The Belman* and *Lanthorne*, to have the last word in the exchange.

In 1921 F. W. X. Fincham drew attention to a remarkable record from the *Consistory of London Correction Book* concerning Mary Frith, alias Moll Cutpurse, the Roaring Girl.³ He noted that it appeared in the 1605-6 volume and was dated 1605. Soon afterward, E. K. Chambers compounded the error when he essentially reproduced Fincham's transcript and presented the material as evidence for a performance in 1604-5.⁴

¹ *Satiromastix* (1601), iv. iii. 37; *I Honest Whore* (1604), i. i. 1 ff.; *II Honest Whore* (1604- c. 1605), iv. ii. 52; and *The Whore of Babylon* (c. 1606-1607), iii. i. 14 all contain references to comets or blazing stars. All line references to Dekker's plays are from F. Bowers's edition of his *Dramatic Works* (Cambridge, 1953-61).

² F. W. Aydelotte in *Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds* (London, 1913, repr. 1967) identifies the 'Martin Markall' author as Samuel Rid. The latter's *Art of Jugling* appeared in 1612 and some residue of the quarrel with Dekker seems to be present in the pamphlet's preface and in its closing reference to the beadle. This may be a hint that the author is the Beadle of Bridewell lampooned by Dekker—i.e. Martin Markall.

³ 'Notes from the Ecclesiastical Court Records at Somerset House', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (iv), iv (1921), 111-13.

⁴ 'Elizabethan Stage Gleanings', *R.E.S.* i (1925), 77-8. An accurate transcript which corrects Fincham's errors and omissions is appended below.

However, the date of this record is not 1605, but 27 January 1611/12; and in this light the document demands especially close attention in relation to Middleton and Dekker's play.

The *Correction Book* entry is interesting in itself in that it provides an extraordinary glimpse of the real-life original of the play's heroine. More broadly, it may be seen as a document of control since it well illustrates contemporary opposition to women both appearing on the public stage and assuming a costume of male attire. But the record also has a specific value for the play, and important to recognize in this regard is that it details two distinct cases involving Mary Frith: the immediate instance in which she has been brought before the court on 27 January 1611/12 to answer for misdemeanours committed at St. Paul's on the recent Christmas Day 1611, and another concerning the particular occasion of her appearance at the Fortune Theatre about nine months earlier (together with more general charges of immodest behaviour), for which she was punished at Bridewell.¹ Both cases in different ways shed significant light on the play and may best be dealt with in turn.

As Chambers observed, both in his original remarks on the play and in relation to the misdated Consistory Court record,² the earlier of the two incidents accords closely with the forthcoming appearance of the real Moll promised in the epilogue:

The Roaring Girl herself, some few days hence,
Shall on this stage give larger recompence.

Our knowledge of the repertoire of Prince Henry's Men about the time that this company presented *The Roaring Girl* is slight; but this remarkable correspondence of internal and external evidence strongly urges acceptance of a direct connection between the performance of this play and Moll's recorded appearance at the Fortune. And, although we are told only that the incident occurred at 'a playe', so striking a combination of circumstances seems unlikely to be merely coincidental, particularly since *The Roaring Girl* provides a uniquely appropriate vehicle for the occasion pledged in the epilogue.

The confession preserved in the *Correction Book* unfortunately does not clarify the capacity in which Mary Frith appeared on the Fortune stage; but such details as are recorded do encourage speculation on this point. Whatever its nature, her mounting the stage would no doubt have been good box-office. R. C. Bald argued, although in an attempt to

¹ Unfortunately, I have been unable to discover an exactly contemporary official record of this earlier case. The volume from the *Consistory of London Correction Book* covering the earlier part of 1611 is missing, and no record of the case is preserved in either the Middlesex or the City Sessions of the Peace Registers.

² *Elizabethan Stage*, iii. 297 and 'Elizabethan Stage Gleanings', 78.

discount Chambers's mistaken 1604-5 proposal, that she may simply have frequented the playhouses, sitting on the stage in the manner of a gallant and treating the audience to an 'unscheduled turn'; but more attractive and, I feel, more probable explanations deserve serious consideration. The record reveals that Moll 'sat there vppon the stage in the publique viewe of all the people there p[rese]nte in mans apparrell & playd vppon her lute & sange a songe', and further, that she wore boots and had a sword by her side. The stage character is so dressed through most of the play; moreover, in Act iv, scene i, while singing a song, she accompanies herself on an instrument (a viol). Although the play's central figure confronts us with no challenge to return to her lodging to verify her sex as in the court record, she does engage in much bawdy by-play affording ample opportunity for impromptu asides of this kind. There is accordingly a reasonable chance that Mary Frith may have stood in for the actor impersonating her, if not for an entire performance, perhaps for Act iv, scene i alone or a part thereof, spicing the written dialogue with extempore jests. The delightful title-page woodcut of Moll—probably designed to promote sale of the text—agrees faithfully with the description given in Mary Frith's confession and may, indeed, accurately represent her as she appeared on the stage on the occasion recorded. But persuasive as an argument for her appearance in the play proper may seem, there is also an alternative possibility. As the October 1612 General Session of the Peace Order for Middlesex makes clear, the Fortune Theatre had a not entirely savoury reputation at this time for the presentation of jigs at the end of performances:

An Order for suppressing of Jigges att the ende of Playes.

Whereas Complaynte have [*sic*] beene made at this last Generall Sessions that by reason of certayne lewde Jigges songes and daunces vsed and accustomed at the play-house called the Fortune in Gouldinglane divers cutt-purses and other lewde and ill disposed persons in greate multitudes doe resort thither at th' end of euerye playe many tymes causinge tumultes and outrages wherebye His Majesties peace is often broke . . .¹

Clearly matters had got out of hand when occurrences such as that involving the butchers described below and another in which a man was stabbed outside the theatre took place, but less consequential post-performance entertainments were more probably the rule.² The epilogue's pledge of an occasion allowing the Roaring Girl to give 'larger recompence' may have been made with such a jig, song, or dance in mind. Moll may accordingly have taken part in a diversion of this nature, perhaps as an after-piece to a performance of *The Roaring Girl*.

¹ J. C. Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records* (London, 1886-92), ii. 83-4.

² See C. R. Baskerville, *The Elizabethan Jig* (1929, repr. New York, 1965), pp. 113-20.

Backdating about three-quarters of a year from 27 January 1611/12, the date of the *Correction Book* entry, places Moll's appearance at the Fortune, and hence the approximate date of performance, in late April or early May 1611. Internal evidence from the play concerning the date of composition discussed below converges closely on this date and so provides additional support both for the time of performance and, indirectly, for a link between the two events. But even if the stage appearance of the real Moll is interpreted as being independent of a performance of Middleton and Dekker's comedy—a remote possibility, in my view—the dating argument remains fundamentally sound by virtue of the epilogue's reference to the occasion 'a few days hence'.

The Consistory Court record reveals that Moll had already been punished for the misdemeanours at the Fortune Theatre by the time of her presentation before the Court to answer for the immediate charges in early 1611/12. This important information provides a possible clue to the circumstances of the play's publication, for Middleton probably refers to the earlier legal predicament in his Epistle to the reader prefixed to the play, where there is a suggestion that the outcome is as yet undecided:

. . . for Venus, being a woman, passes through the play in doublet and breeches; a brave disguise and a safe one, if the statute untie not her codpiece point.

The statute, in real life at any rate, appears to have penetrated Moll's disguise and forced her, albeit briefly, to assume clothing more appropriate to her sex. John Chamberlain interestingly mentions in connection with the later case considered below that she 'used to go in mans apparell', a remark whose past tense perhaps indicates that she had abandoned her accustomed mode of dress in the course of—possibly as a result of—the legal proceedings which followed from her appearance at the Fortune. If she did adopt female dress, as the 'peticoate' reference in the evidence bearing on her actions at St. Paul's further attests, it was very likely temporarily, since she is generally presented in other accounts in the more familiar male attire.¹

Although the duration of the legal process is difficult to determine in the absence of official records of the earlier trial, the surviving evidence suggests that the appearance of the play in printed form was designed to

¹ Dekker speaks of her wearing breeches in Act v, scene iv of *If This Be Not a Good Play* (1611–12) and Shacklesoule's statement there (l. 107), 'Shee has bin too late a sore-tormented soule', is surely a reference to her legal difficulties presently under discussion, and possibly a clue to dating that play. For other mentions of her male dress about this time, see Nathan Field's *Amends for Ladies*, Act II, scene i (published 1618 but probably acted about 1611 when it would be taking advantage of the popular interest in Moll); Epigram 90 of Thomas Freeman's *Rubbe and a great Cast* (1614); and John Taylor the water poet's *The Water Cormorant* ('A prodigall Country Gallant', 1622 and included in his *Workes*, 1630).

exploit Moll's celebrity—at a high point during the legal process—while at the same time, through the favourable dramatic representation of her, to help her damaged reputation. These circumstances, moreover, make sense of the title-page's claim, 'As it hath lately beene Acted'. Middleton may, indeed, be drawing attention to this aim in the latter part of his Epistle:

Worse things, I must needs confess, the world has taxed her for than has been written of her; but 'tis the excellency of a writer to leave things better than he finds 'em; though some obscene fellow, that cares not what he writes against others, yet keeps a mystical bawdyhouse himself, and entertains drunkards, to make use of their pockets and vent his private bottle-ale at midnight,—though such a one would have ript up the most nasty vice that ever hell belched forth, and presented it to a modest assembly, yet we rather wish in such discoveries, where reputation lies bleeding, a slackness of truth than fulness of slander.

The immediate indictment involving Moll's licentious behaviour in St. Paul's, although fairly certainly later than the play, also has important implications for *The Roaring Girl*. In this instance, the information set out in the court document is complemented by two independent accounts; both make reference to the subsequent penance at Paul's Cross which can reasonably be assumed to have comprised part of her sentence.

John Chamberlain in a letter to Dudley Carleton dated 12 February 1611/12 (a Wednesday) gives an eye-witness report of this remarkable spectacle:

. . . this last Sunday Mall Cut-purse a notorious bagage (that used to go in mans apparell and challenged the feild of divers gallants) was brought to the same place [i.e. Paul's Cross], where she wept bitterly and seemed very penitent, but yt is since doubted she was maudelin druncke, beeing discovered to have tipled of three quarts of sacke before she came to her penance: she had the daintiest preacher or ghostly father that ever I saw in pulpit, one Ratcliffe of Brazen Nose in Oxford, a likelier man to have led the revells in some ynne of court then to be where he was, but the best is he did extreem badly, and so wearied the audience that the best part went away, and the rest taried rather to heare Mall Cutpurse then him.¹

Although at times lacking in credibility and occasionally of dubious authority, *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith* (1662), containing what purports to be Moll's 'diary' in first-person narrative, in this instance supplements the account given by Chamberlain. The charge notably corresponds in the main with that recorded in the *Correction Book*, although the Consistory Court is confused with the Court of Arches:

¹ John Chamberlain, *Letters*, ed. N. E. McClure (Philadelphia, 1939), i. 334.

While thus I rained, free from the danger of the Common Law, some promoting Apparator set on by an adversary of mine, whom I could never punctually know, cited me to appear in the Court of the *Arches*, where was an Accusation exhibited against me for wearing undecent and manly apparel. I was advised by my Proctor to demur to the Jurisdiction of the Court, as for a Crime, if such, not cognizable there or elsewhere; but he did it to spin out my Cause, and get my Mony; for in the conclusion, I was sentenced there to stand and do Penance in a White Sheet at *Pauls Cross* during morning Sermon on a Sunday. (p. 69)

The direct connection between this evidence and the play is the entrance by Ambrose Garbrand in the Stationers' Register of 'a booke concerninge Mall Cutpurse' on 18 February 1611/12—a mere nine days after the penance;¹ 'Moll Cutpurse' is, of course, the play's sub-title. On the basis of the proximity of dates, the entry surely indicates that the book was an attempt to capitalize on the interest generated by Moll's predicament, and accepting it as the play is particularly tempting, especially as no stronger candidate survives. Evidence which has escaped attention but which importantly strengthens this case is an entry in *Records of the Court of the Stationers' Company 1602-1640*² also dated 18 February 1611/12:

Ambr: Garbrand rd of him for a fyne for printinge the booke of } vj^d
Moll Cutpurse wthout entring it }

This record significantly indicates that the book was already in print when entered and so removes one of the main obstacles preventing the acceptance of the 'booke concerninge Mall Cutpurse' as *The Roaring Girl*. For, in order for the circumstances to agree with Nicholas Okes's shop practices, not to mention the argument advanced above, the play almost certainly must have been printed before December 1611.³

¹ R. C. Bald (loc. cit., p. 37) noted that the S. R. entry possibly refers to *The Roaring Girl* but offered no support. The actual entry reads as follows:

Ambr: Garbrand Rd of him for thentrance of a booke } vj d.
convninge Mall Cutpurse. }

Bald gives 'Garland' for Garbrand and 'book' for booke, and Arber in his *Transcript of the Register of the Company of Stationers of London 1554-1640* (1875 ff., repr. New York, 1950, iii. 478) expands the abbreviations, italicizes 'Mall Cutpurse' and capitalizes 'Mall'. Garbrand was a bookseller and publisher (not a printer) and his connection with such a book is particularly suspicious since he was involved chiefly with ecclesiastical publications about this time.

² Ed. W. A. Jackson (London, 1957), p. 449.

³ G. R. Price identified Okes as the play's printer on the basis of type ornaments ('The Manuscript and the Quarto of *The Roaring Girl*', *The Library* (V), xi (1956), p. 180). Okes's name does not appear on the title-page and this may indicate, in view of the absence of an S.R. entry and several fines incurred by him (see *Records of the Court of the Stationers' Company*, pp. 171, 443, 444), a desire to lie low since his livelihood may have been in

The other obstacle is created by the later transference of copyright entered in the Stationers' Register February 1630/1 from Thomas Archer, its publisher, to Hugh Perrey. This difficulty may be explained, however, in the light of similar occurrences¹ and by a close look at the circumstances and the individuals concerned. An informal copyright transfer such as apparently took place in the instance of *The Ravens Almanacke* (where the same publisher was involved) could easily account for the discrepancy in the present case. Further, Archer and Garbrand probably knew each other since both had been bound to Cuthbert Burby, although their respective apprenticeships are separated by about two and a half weeks.² Garbrand's stall was conveniently situated near the scene of the penance in St. Paul's Churchyard, where opportunities for sale of the play would no doubt have been vastly superior to Archer's normal outlets. He was probably acting in his capacity as bookseller when caught and fined by the Stationers' Company Court, and it would appear from the 1630/1 entry that at some point in the intervening years he was successful in coming to a private arrangement with Archer over possession of copyright.

Corresponding intimately with the pattern established through arguments based on the court record and related material is evidence drawn from the play itself bearing on the date of composition. This is comprised chiefly of a number of topical allusions which centre on the year 1611, suggesting that the play was performed soon after it was written. The possibility that these were inserted by way of revision for publication must, of course, be considered; but if this were so, the apparent absence of a reference within the play text—beyond that in the Epistle—to the legal difficulties encountered by Mary Frith as a result of her stage appearance is striking and unaccountable. Further, timing in this matter is significant. If a late April/early May performance is accepted, such a proposal loses much of its force since none of the allusions makes reference to an event

jeopardy. In his study of Okes's shop practices in connection with Webster's *The White Devil* in his 'Revels' edition (1966), J. R. Brown concluded that 10 November was the final date for entry in S.R. before the appearance of a later date in a book printed by Okes (p. xxii, n. 1). The basis of his argument is apparently an isolated instance from 1609 without parallel between 1608 and 1613. But over this period, so far as we can tell, Okes averaged about a dozen books a year, suggesting a period of about a month more or less, allowing for size variation and other contingencies, for printing. 10 November is best regarded as a general guideline for books entered in the S.R., but further leeway is almost certainly due in the present case since, without entry before printing, we have no idea when Okes may have begun work. And so the end of November may, I feel, be accepted as a reasonable and safe limit for the commencement of printing, although, as I have argued above, the book was probably printed earlier in the year.

¹ See F. P. Wilson, *Shakespearean and Other Studies*, ed. H. Gardner (Oxford, 1969), p. 274; also W. W. Greg, '*The Honest Whore or The Converted Courtezan*', *The Library* (IV), xv (1934), 55-6.

² See R. B. McKerrow (ed.), *Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers . . . 1557-1640* (London, 1910), pp. 10 and 110.

later than April 1611. The topical passages are accordingly accounted for within the natural time scheme suggested by the known evidence, the most recent probably marking a late limit to the writing.

F. G. Fleay noted that in Act v, scene i the Swan Theatre is mentioned as open.¹ Theatrical activities at this playhouse in the early 1600s remain obscure, but the evidence that survives suggests that no plays were presented there from about 1599 to 1611. From about 1600, when a licence was granted for the use of the Swan for acrobatic performances, to 1604, when a man was killed in a contest for a prize, the theatre seems to have functioned primarily as a sporting arena, apart from Richard Vennar's *England's Joy* hoax² of November 1602. Nothing is known about the years 1604 to 1608, but it is not unlikely that similar exhibitions would have persisted, if the theatre was not closed altogether. C. W. Wallace's discovery of the *Account Book of the Overseers of the Poor of the Liberty of Paris Garden* helped to throw light on the use of the theatre from 1608 to 1671:

From these records . . . it is shown that the Swan was in use as a theatre from 1611 to 1615 inclusive, also in 1621, and paid a varying but heavy annual tax for the poor of the parish.³

The accounts are recorded in each year from 1608 to 1671, but records of receipts from the Swan begin only in 1611. In order to qualify for topicality, the allusion to a knight who 'lost his purse at the last new play i' the Swan' could not have been made before, and presumably not long after, the earliest receipt recording the resumption of play performances at the Swan in April 1611—especially since *The Roaring Girl's* is the earliest dramatic reference to its re-use as a playhouse after the turn of the century.

An otherwise puzzling remark made by Jack Dapper's page, Gull, immediately before the attempted arrest in Act III, scene iii, assumes particular significance when linked with a recorded court case involving the Fortune Theatre:

. . . why, 'tis as I saw a great fellow used t'other day; he had a fair sword and buckler, and yet a butcher dry beat him with a cudgel. (219-22)

Beyond its use as an illustration of Jack's ridiculous predicament, there is a strong possibility that this might refer to an incident noted in *Middlesex County Records* (ii. 71). On 26 February 1610/11⁴ two butchers, Ralph

¹ *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama* (London, 1891), i. 132.

² See E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, iii. 500-2.

³ C. W. Wallace, 'The Swan Theatre and the Earl of Pembroke's Servants', *Englische Studien*, xliii (1910-11), 390.

⁴ G. E. Bentley incorrectly gives the date as 28 February in *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vi. 146.

Brewin of St. Clement's Eastcheap and John Lynsey of St. Andrew's Undershafte, were released on a total of £160 bail for their appearance at the next Middlesex Session of the Peace to answer 'for abusing certain gentlemen at the Play House called The Fortune'. Gull's remark might easily have been prompted by this incident. Moreover, if, indeed, it occurred 't'other day', as Gull reports, we are faced, allowing for some temporal licence, with a date not too far from the incident itself or from the date of the trial in March 1611, although greater latitude is perhaps due since popular interest in this kind of outrage would probably have remained alive for some time.

Much of the stir created by Coryate's *Crudities* (1611) centred on his detailed description of the famous courtesans of Venice. Coryate himself showed an awareness of the controversial nature of his material by expressing caution at its inclusion and also by concluding the discussion with a defence. In a passage strongly reminiscent of this, Moll defends her reputation and knowledge of 'ill things' (v. i. 327 ff.) and it is probable that this correspondence is not accidental. She cites by analogy to her own knowledge of the underworld the case of a man come from Venice informing a friend about to travel there of the 'close tricks of courtesans' in order to save him from their danger. Just as Coryate claimed to have come away without contamination, so Moll declares her purity in spite of her contact with thieves and other criminals. The link of particular interest here, however, is Prince Henry, who was at once Coryate's benefactor, having financed the publication of the *Crudities*, and also the patron of the company at the Fortune Theatre.

The play's allusion to the work (which would no doubt have been obvious to a literate playgoer) is perhaps best explained as a token of support for the beleaguered Coryate, although it could also be in the nature of advertisement. In either case, Moll's reference to the most celebrated passage in the book may have been a gesture sponsored by the Prince himself or a favour by the company to Coryate, one of his familiars. The *Crudities* was entered in the Stationers' Register on 26 November 1610 and is dated 1611 on its title-page, but it is unlikely that an allusion would appear in another work before Coryate's travelogue had come to public attention.

Although assuming too close a correspondence between fiction and contemporary life and events can be dangerous, it is perhaps more defensible in this play where an actual person, alive and well known at the time of performance and publication, is represented. Moll was probably born in 1584 or 1585, which would make her twenty-six or so in 1611.¹ Provid-

¹ See Middleton, *Works*, iv. 3-4, for Bullen's argument for 1584-5 as the date of Moll's birth. Moll's biography, *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith* (1662), claims 1589 as her

ing a kind of negative evidence, the generally consistent maturity of the stage character gains proportionately in plausibility the older we allow the real Moll to have been at the time of the play's performance. While she may have been a person of note at an earlier date, many of her statements—especially in the above-mentioned defence—are incompatible with a younger person even if designed to exploit her precocity. The tone of the defence, moreover, is serious, and such facile humour as would result from this kind of exploitation is out of place here. One passage in particular recalls the Consistory Court record's mention that she had long frequented playhouses to see plays and prizes:

In younger days, when I was apt to stray,
I've sat amongst such adders; seen their stings,
As any here might, and in full playhouses
Watch'd their quick-diving hands, to bring to shame
Such rogues, and in that stream met an ill name. (v. i. 329-33)

The self-justification is more marked here than elsewhere and would probably have been more credible and acceptable from the vantage point of 1611 than at an earlier date.

A final, though slender, thread of support for a 1611 date is provided in Act IV, scene ii. Greenwit, disguised as a summoner, delivers a citation requesting Master Gallipot to appear in Bow Church 'upon *Crastino Sancti Dunstani*—this Easter term'; that is, the morrow after Saint Dunstan's Day (19 May), or 20 May. The law terms followed by Bow Church, the seat of the ecclesiastical Court of Arches, differed from those followed by Westminster Hall and other civil courts in several particulars. In William Harrison's *Description of England* we learn that in Easter Term, St. Dunstan's is a feast day on which no session is held, and further, that,

The rest of the law days are kept to the third of the Ascension, which is the last day of this term. And if it happen that the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord do come before any of the feasts aforesaid, then they are omitted for that year.¹

St. Dunstan's accordingly falls within Easter Term on only three occasions between 1603 and 1612; namely, 1606, 1609, and 1612. If the play was presented after the 1611 Easter Term, it is possible that 'this Easter term'

birth date and that she was in her threescore and fourteenth year when she died (p. 169), but the publication of this book in 1662 detracts from its credibility on this point. Difficult as it may be to credit the authority of a note signed 'N' in R. Dodsley's edition (*A Select Collection of Old Plays* (1780 ed.) xii. 398) citing 'a manuscript in the British Museum' as evidence that Moll died in her seventy-fifth year on 26 July 1659, it accords more closely with what we know of Moll than other dates.

¹ *Description of England*, ed. G. Edelen (Ithaca, 1968), p. 179.

would look forward to Easter 1612. But, equally, the dramatists may simply have been casual in their reckoning. In this case, the time of year indicated in the allusion exactly corresponds with that suggested by the other evidence bearing on the date of writing.

Although the links in the argument are not all of equal strength, the preponderance of evidence points to early 1611 as a date for writing and some time in late April or early May for performance, the latter probably followed closely by publication. In addition, the original Stationers' Register entry—almost certainly the result of an attempt to trade on public interest which partially backfired—is fairly reliably placed in early 1612. Signs of haste are evident in several parts of the text itself and may indirectly support the proposed publication date since speed would undoubtedly have been a factor if the intention was to exploit topical interest, as appears to have been the case. In balance, it might be argued that revision is responsible for the 1611 allusions or that the recorded appearance of Moll at the Fortune was in connection with another play. But apart from the fact that such arguments are sterile and unsatisfying, we may be reasonably sure that at least some of the writing was done in 1611; moreover, without contrivance, this date not only accommodates but also makes best sense of the known evidence bearing on the play's sequence from manuscript to the stage and, finally, into print.

OFFICIUM DOMINI CONTRA MARIAM FRITH

The following transcript is taken from the *Consistory of London Correction Book* covering the period November 1611 to October 1613 (ref. DL/C/310, folios 19–20). This volume, along with others in the same series formerly held at Somerset House, was transferred in 1957 to the Greater London Record Office, County Hall, London. The entry is uncrowded and is written in a clear hand. Some letters have been lost as a result of fraying of the outer edge of the leaves, but none of these losses is serious.¹

vicesimo septimo die mensis Januarij Anno D[omi]ni iuxta computac[i]o[n]em eccl[es]iæ Anglicane 1611 cora[m] R[everen]d[issim]o pre[sule] D[omi]no Joh[ann]e² London E[pi]sco[po] in palatio suo E[pi]sco[pa]li London Judicial[ite]r seden[s] vnacu[m] M[agist]ro Thoma Edwardę Legu[m] D[oc]tore vicario suo in sp[irit]ualibę gen[er]ali et Offi[ci]a^{1e} prin[cipa]l¹ⁱ &c in p[rese]ntia M[agist]ri Rob[er]ti Christian no[ta]ri^{ij} pub[li]ci.³

¹ I am grateful to the Greater London Record Office for permission to publish the following transcript, and also to the staff for friendly and valuable assistance.

² John King, S.T.P., Bishop of London from 7 September 1611 to 30 March 1621.

³ My thanks are due to Dr. J. Binns of the University of Birmingham for help in deciphering the Latin abbreviations. The following is a literal translation:

On the twenty-seventh day of the month of January in the year of our Lord, according to the reckoning of the English Church, 1611, before the most reverend bishop, John

Officiu[m] D[omi]ni contra / This day & place the sayd Mary
 Mariam ffrithe / appeared p[er]sonally & then & there

voluntarily confessed y^t she had long frequented all or most of the disorderly & licentious place in this Cittie as namely she hath vsually in the habite of a man resorted to alehouses Tavernes ^rTobacco shops¹ & also to play howses there to see plaies & pryses & namely being at a playe about 3 quarters of a yeare since at y^e fortune in mans apparell & in her bootꝛ & wth a sword by her syde, she told the company there p[re]sent y^t she thought many of them were of opinion y^t she was a man, but if any of them would come to her lodging they should finde that she is a woman & some other imodest & lascivious speaches she also vsed at y^t time And also sat there vppon the stage in the publike viewe of all the people there p[re]sente in mans apparrell & playd vppon her lute & sange a songe. And she further confessed y^t she hath for this longe time past vsually blasphemed & dishonored the name of God by swearing & cursing & by tearing God out of his kingdome yf it were possible, & hath also vsually associated her selfe wth Ruffinly swaggering & lewd company as namely wth cut purses blasphemous drunkardꝛ & others of bad note & of most dissolute behaviour wth whom she hath to the great shame of her sexe often tymes ^r(as she sayd) drunke hard & distempered her heade with drinke¹ fallen into the detestable & hatefull sinne of drunkennes And further confesseth y^t since she was punished for the misdemeanors afore mentioned in Bridewell she was since ^rvpon Christmas day at night¹ taken in Powles Church wth her peticoate tucked vp about her in the fashion of a man ^rwth a mans cloake on her¹ to the great scandall of diu[er]s p[er]sons who vnderstood the same & to the disgrace of all womanhood And she confesseth y^t she is comonly termed Ma<ll> cutpurse of her cutting of purses And she sayeth & p[ro]testeth y^t she is heartely sory for her foresayd licentious & dissolute lyfe & giveth her earnest p[ro]mise to carry & behave her selfe ever from hence forwarde honestly soberly & woma<n>ly & resteth ready to vndergo any censure or punishem^t for her misdemeanors afor<e> sayd in suche mann[er] & forme as shalbe assigned her by the Lo: B^p of London her Ordinary. And then ^rshe¹ being pressed to declare whether she had not byn dishonest of her body & hath not also drawne other women to lewdnes by her p[er]swasions & by carrying her selfe lyke a bawde, she absolutly denied y^t she was chargeable wth eyther of these imputac[i]ons And therevppon his Lo^p. thought fit to remand her to Bridewell from whence she ^rnowe¹ came vntill he might further examine the truth of the misdemeanors inforced against her wthout laying as yet any further censure vppon her.

Lord Bishop of London, in his episcopal London palace, sitting judicially together with Master Thomas Edwards, Doctor of Laws, his vicar general in spiritual matters and principal officer etc., in the presence of Master Robert Christian, notary public.