THOMAS DEKKER'S PAMPHLETS

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A.B. Baker University, June 1925

Submitted to the Department of English and the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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June 1932
PREFACE

For this study the edition of Thomas Dekker's works edited by A.B. Grosart has been used, and all of those pamphlets in this edition, even the Canaan's Calamity and The Bachelor's Banquet, considered by some authorities to be of doubtful authorship, were drawn upon.

Four additional pamphlets considered by Mr. E. P. Wilson to be Dekker's were not taken into account. Not being prepared to weigh the facts as to the authenticity of these, I felt it better policy to confine my attention to the material in the Grosart edition. These four pamphlets discussed in Mr. Wilson's book, Dekker's Plague Pamphlets, are: News from Graves-end, The Meeting of Gallants, London Looke Back, and The Black Rod.

I want to express my sincere thanks to Dr. W. S. Johnson, Miss Lulu Gardner, and Dr. J. H. Nelson for the advice, help, criticism, and time which they have so graciously given me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I  
Characteristics of Pamphleteering in London during Thomas Dekker's Time ............... 1

Chapter II  
Thomas Dekker as a Pamphleteer ............... 7

Chapter III  
The Pamphlets—Form and Content ............... 12

Chapter IV  
The Style of Dekker's Pamphlets ............... 42

Appendix: List of Dekker's Pamphlets ......... 53

Bibliography ............................................. 54
Chapter I

CHARACTERISTICS OF PAMPHLETERING IN LONDON DURING DEKKER'S TIME

Thomas Dekker lived in the Elizabethan age—
that interesting time when tradesmen called, "What do you lack?", when rogues roamed the city streets, and when the dread plague visited many homes. It was an age when the public literary taste was rapidly changing, developing and becoming more catholic. There were many experiments in writing, and a great variety of writing was being published.

Practically almost every class of book that is produced now from year to year began to be produced when Elizabeth was queen. There were novelists, headed by Lyly and Sidney, Lodge and Nash, whose works were eagerly bought up by country podlers. There were character-writers, such as Hall and Overbury, Breton and Earle. The essayists could claim Bacon and Folliham; the critics, Sidney and Johnson; and one of those names at least has dominated his department from that day to this.

Not only in literature was expansion and progress shown. It was during the reign of Elizabeth that England developed and established the greatest maritime power in the world. The church and state question was settled. England was at peace and was rapidly growing in wealth;

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manufactures were multiplied, and commerce was increasing. Private prosperity and public confidence were being restored.2

The Elizabethans were apt to startle us by a display of apparently callous cruelty at one moment and an almost reckless generosity at the next....Broadly, they were governed by instincts and impulses rather than by reasoned ethical theory, instincts occasionally barbaric but for the most part frank and generous; and they were sturdily loyal to the somewhat primitive code of right and wrong which was the outcome.3

While poetry first claimed the attention of the educated, there was a large audience clamoring for literature of any kind provided only that it should be sufficiently amusing. Eager publishers were not slow in sensing this clamor. Many writers who depended on popular approval for a livelihood wrote of anything and everything that might satisfy the thirst for novelty and amusement.

The writers of Dekker's age may be divided into three classes. Besides the aristocratic writers who had other means of livelihood and who wrote only because every well-bred man did so, there were men who wrote as hack writers, and who depended on obtaining a living from their works. These constituted the second group. The third class had very little ability, and catered to the coarse and the commonplace. The pamphleteers, Dekker,

3 Idem., p. 426.
Greene, and Nashe, belonged to the second class. Though these men had little genius, they were comparatively able, and commanded a reputation among the higher class of readers. This group had to educate the public to distinguish between literature and the printed trash which the third class of writers put upon the market. Thomas Nashe warned his readers that there was a difference between the ballad-monger and the true poet which they must learn to recognize.  

It must be remembered that the Elizabethan pamphlets were as likely to be written in verse as in prose. Even those in prose were often interspersed with verse. Greene inserted many poems in his prose. The pamphlets of that day corresponded more nearly to the modern magazines than to anything else unless it is the modern newspaper. Jests, London rogueries, and satirical ridicule of fashions were the most popular subjects. When once read, pamphlets were no longer interesting, and they were published as cheaply as possible. No one cared to keep them; therefore, not many are extant today.

The pamphleteer sold his work to stationers who were primarily booksellers, though they might be printers, publishers, and scriveners. They had a trade organization incorporated in 1557 and confirmed in 1559, and they had power to regulate

4 Thomas Nashe, Pierce Penniless, (McKerrow edition), vol. 1, p. 159.
5 George Saintsbury, Elizabethan and Jacobean Pamphlets, p. 9.
in detail the printing and selling of books, to decide questions as to ownership and in general to make any regulations considered advisable so long as they were not contrary to the law of the land.\(^6\)

One can readily see that an author was in a stationer's power. Dekker, even when he was fairly popular, complains of the difficulty of suiting the stationer's taste. "Go to one and offer a copy; if it be merry, the man likes no light stuff; if sad, it will not sell. Another meddles with nothing but what fits the time."\(^7\)

The writer's reward ended when he sold the manuscript. There was no system of royalties. If a manuscript proved popular and went into many editions, the author's added reward was only fame. For the catch-penny pamphlet, the regular payment was forty shillings, with, perhaps, a bottle of wine. Writers of popular reputation could, no doubt, count upon a good deal more—perhaps double the sum. For mere hackwork, such as translations, the author sometimes had no money payment at all, receiving only a certain number of copies to dispose of at as good a price as he could get. Popular pamphlets sold at two pence, three pence, and four pence. The tracts were advertised by nailing or posting the front page, with an attractive catch-title, on the whipping posts.

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\(^7\) Thomas Dekker, *Jests to Make you Merry* (Grosart edition), vol. 2, p. 271.
in the streets, on the pillars of St. Paul's, and on the walls of the Inns of Court, to attract lawyers and their country clients. The facsimiles of Dekker's Bellman of London and Greene's cony-catching pamphlets—"cony" meaning a rabbit—can be seen in the Grosart editions. Greene's title-pages are more clever. They depict hares in various poses; for example, a hare sitting at a table holding a glass in one hand and playing cards in the other.

Authors had to bid high for favor; hence, the dedications of books and pamphlets laud the charity of a patron more than his good taste and judgment. Phrases similar to the following are often seen: "But such is our weak ability that we cannot requite the least point of that life prolonging kindness, which the riches of your country did yield." A good example of the manner in which a patron is solicited is found in Dekker's Lantern and Candlelight, in the chapter on "hawking". It shows also that plagiarism was very common.

The pamphleteers, who were essentially journalists, took a mercenary attitude towards their writing. They chose their material and subjects for their promise of popularity and their sensationalism. The writers also tried to propitiate opinion in any way they could, especially by announcing the purpose of the particular pamphlet on the

8 Phoebe Sheavyn, The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age, p. 73.
9 Thomas Dekker, Canaan's Calamity, (Grosart edition), vol. 1 p. 5.
Dekker includes nearly everyone in his list of people who would profit by reading one of his pamphlets. "Profitable for gentlemen, lawyers, merchants, citizens, farmers, masters of households, and all sorts of servants to mark, and delightful for all men to read." He also announces that he describes roguery only to have others shun it. Greene made the most wholesale attempts to conciliate public opinion. He pretends to be more moralistic than either Dekker or Nashe does.

Today, Greene's and Nashe's pamphlets are not as interesting reading as Dekker's. It is to him that one turns for the most entertaining and amusing accounts of London life. Neither of the other authors gives such a graphic picture of that city. Dekker's pamphlets are so accurate that social histories are able to use them for sources concerning customs and manners of Elizabethan and Jacobean London.

Few of the prose tracts published during the reigns of Elizabeth and James are great literature. Some of the best, such as The Gull's Horn Book, Bellman of London, Seven Deadly Sins, News from Hell, Lenten Stuff, Pierce Penniless, have an artistic form. Many of Dekker's passages show a grace and a poetic ability that is the mark of true literature. Other pamphlets of his live because of the contribution they make to social history.

DEKKER AS A PAMPHLETEER

To most students of English Literature, Thomas Dekker is known as a dramatist, and his fame rests largely on his play, The Shoemaker’s Holiday. As a poet and a prose writer, especially a pamphleteer, he has attracted considerably less attention than he deserves. Some critics feel, in fact, that his work as a whole has so far been too little appreciated; and certain it is that he is an obscure figure in the age of Elizabeth. Not much is known about his life nor about the authenticity of his supposed writings. Scholars could have written more authoritatively concerning Dekker’s works if they had known more about the man himself.

We do not know the year during which Dekker was born, nor do we know for certain the year of his death. We do not know how well he was educated or if he was ever married; but we do know several interesting facts concerning him. For instance, he was able to accomplish that remarkable feat which was somewhat rare among the Elizabethans— that of making a living by his pen.

As early as 1604 he spoke of himself as one ‘whose crest is a pen and ink horn’...... We know, also, certain definite facts about the inner life of the man; what he liked and disliked, what he loved and hated...... Some of them [his ideas] are well known; his pity for maimed
soldiers, for poor scholars, for the victims of usurers; his horror of cruelty; the democracy of his outlook that at times included even women in its scope. We likewise know his love of books and music, his liking for law, and his passion for love and religion. ¹

Mr. Rhys says of him:

Indeed, after the endless shortcomings and disappointments of his verse and prose have been estimated and written against him, he remains the same lovable, elusive being, a man of genius, a child of nature. For this reason, it is disappointing that so little is to be actually known of his life.²

One never finds, in Dekker's prose, such facts relating to his private life as one finds in Greene's works. His pamphlets are, nevertheless, filled with the man's personality. For instance, to him books must have been a source of great pleasure. He says, "Art thou poor? Open those closets, and invaluable treasures are poured into thy hands."³ But his writings never tell us where he obtained these books. Miss Hunt suggests three ways in which he acquired his reading:

He may have had access to private libraries; such 'a companion to scholars' as Nashe may have helped him out; he probably had the book stall habit; it may be that he showed what has been called his "hopeless improvidence" by buying some of his books.⁴

¹ Mary Leland Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 1-2.
² Ernest Rhys, Best Plays by Old Dramatists, Intro. p. 9.
³ Thomas Dekker, Work for Armourers, (Grosart edition), vol. 4, p. 102.
⁴ Mary Leland Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 18
His epistles-dedicatory show that he was unwilling to seek patronage, and that when compelled to do so, he did not obsequiously attach himself to the houses of nobles. The patriotic love which the queen demanded of all her subjects and which Dekker so often and ardently expressed was never soured by disappointed hopes or failure to obtain a preferment.

Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe were Dekker's predecessors in pamphlet writing, but "more vividly even than Nashe and Greene he takes us back to the crooked lanes, the gabled houses and creaking signs of old London." Like most writers of his age, Dekker plagiarized a great deal. The successful pamphleteers showed rare skill in seizing upon topics likely to attract the attention of a large number of readers. They gave the public what it wanted. Dekker, knowing what was popular of Greene's and Nashe's writings, and admiring them, felt no misgivings in using the same kind of material that they did. The Bellman of London and Lantern and Candlelight found their source in Greene's cony-catching pamphlets; but, to quote Miss Hunt:

.... whether the prose of Greene or Nashe more strongly influenced Dekker's pamphlets, it

would be hard to say. News from Hell was written in imitation of Nashe, and it was from Nashe that he derived the fantastic style in which too many of the prefaces and dedications were composed, although no man then living could at will put his ideas into clearer, more direct, and more idiomatic prose;... But Dekker had a special admiration for Nashe both as a man and writer. In A Knight's Conjuring he describes him as "a mad Greek that had drunk of the holy water and was full of the divine fury." In News from Hell, he affirms that the book was written "even out of my love to Pierce Penniless because he hath been always a companion to scholars."... Dekker further showed his interest in Thomas Nashe by continuing in The Gull's Horn Book and in Satiromastix the controversy as to the relative merits of long and short hair waged between Nashe and Richard Harvey, and by versifying in his Canaan's Calamity a subject that Nashe had written upon.

Dekker is distinguished from the other pamphleteers by certain qualities of style. These qualities will be discussed more fully in another chapter. There is a grace, a wholesomeness, and a buoyancy of spirit that sets Dekker apart from his contemporaries in prose. Still, one must admit that these three writers, Dekker, Greene, and Nashe, from necessity, wrote hurriedly and for the moment. One must take this into consideration when judging the productions of any of these authors. Dekker's prose, however, is more individualistic than that of the other two. Thomas Dekker unconsciously leaves the impression that he is an

6 Mary Leland Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 8.
honest, genial citizen of London writing his ideas about the city for the entertainment of the world in general. He does not select his readers, but wishes to include the unlearned as well as the sophisticated, the servant as well as the lord. His prose is never tedious, because the personality of the author is so vividly traced in the pages.

As previously stated, it is difficult to be dogmatic about Dekker as a pamphleteer because of the obscurity of his life and the doubt concerning the authenticity of his writings. That he compared favorably with Greene and Nash, however, is certain, and the chances are that interest in him will tend to increase rather than diminish. The opinion of Miss Mary Leland Hunt, expressed in her book of 1911, Thomas Dekker, appears at the present time to be to the point. She says:

Dekker's prose is once more coming into its own. Although the books most popular during his lifetime have the least enduring value, yet all possess interest, for they afford us luminous glimpses into the past, and they reflect the personality of the author, upon whom city scenes exercised so potent a fascination, and who loved, pitied, and laughed with and at the people who thronged them. Always clear and idiomatic, he commanded a variety of styles, often swift, gay, exuberant, nearly always picturesque, but at will whimsical, dramatic, ironical, or epigrammatic, and rising at his very best to a noble simplicity that may have had its origin in his susceptibility, moral and aesthetic, to the rhythm of the English Bible.7

7 Mary Leland Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 200.
Dekker's primary aim in writing his pamphlets was that of entertaining his readers. He had, to use a journalistic term, a "nose for news", or an unusual sense of what would be interesting and popular. He felt no compunction about plagiarizing. If any writing had been successful, Dekker was likely to borrow the material and redressed it. Practically every pamphlet of his has some borrowed material in it, but the author added much on the subject which not only changed it, but often improved the presentation. Dekker fashioned his Bellman of London and Lantern and Candlelight on the model of Greene's cony-catch ing pamphlets. He drew attention to his News from Hell by stating that it was an answer to the already popular pamphlet, Pierce Penniless by Nashe. There is a close resemblance between Canaan's Calamity and Nashe's Christ's Tears over Jerusalem. Satire and ridicule were, in Dekker's day, especially popular. The Gull's Horn Book and The Bachelor's Banquet are of this type.

The commendable qualities found in Dekker's pamphlets resulted, as previously stated, from the author's own personality. Like Goldsmith, he was genial, amiable,
and kind-hearted. It has been said of Dekker that "to the mental energy and facility of a Defoe, he added the impractical temperament, the genial kindliness, and happy heart of a Goldsmith."¹ It is these Goldsmithian qualities that make him particularly suited to write the tracts on the plague, the rogues, and the gulls of his own period. A subject such as the plague could have been so handled that it would have been horrible reading. Dekker, however, although he shows the reader the seriousness of such a mysterious and fatal disease, avoids the disagreeable as much as possible. Neither does he, in handling the subject, fill his tract with dreary statistics. He chooses interesting facts and human traits to portray. There is a homiletic trend to his writing, even though he did write for the entertainment of his readers. This tendency is a characteristic of all of Dekker's writings. The Elizabethan reader cared more for moralistic writing than do present day readers. This fact should be remembered when considering the author's subject matter. Never is the homiletic strain so pronounced that it becomes wearisome, and rarely is it as noticeable as in Greene's pamphlets.

The _Encyclopaedia Britannica_ says that Dekker is

¹ _Cambridge History of English Literature_, vol. 6, p. 58.
comparable with Dickens in the bent of his genius toward the presentation of life about him as well as in the humorous kindliness of his way of looking at life. Even while exhibiting vice, he casts his eye about for the discovery of the good. His rogue pamphlets are an example of this. One feels that Dekker only mildly censures the rogues for their thieving. The upright man, whom all rogues fear, has the good will of the reader. Gull-groping seems only to be a joke played upon unthinking people to teach them to be more alert in the future. His characters, whether good or bad, all have the reader's sympathy because the author has portrayed them so humanly and sympathizes with them himself. Both good and evil are so mixed in them that condemnation is denied the reader. All this is to say that Dekker is tolerant. The author ridicules the gull, but there is no ill-natured censure in his writings. His satires lack the bitterness and maliciousness of those of Swift. Throughout one of Dekker's pamphlets one can see a tolerance for mankind. This tolerance, however, is not due to indifference. Dekker was disgusted with the Elizabethan fop, but he never became so disgusted that he could not laugh at the ridiculousness of the gull's poses. The Bachelor's Banquet never dissuaded any man from marriage, nor was it ever intended
to do so.

Another outstanding quality of Dekker is his sympathy for dumb animals as well as for human beings. His remark about the blind bear shows his attitude best. "Yet methought this whipping of the blind bear moved as much pity in my breast towards him as the leading of poor starved wretches to the whipping posts of London." ²

Dekker's pamphlets are, on the whole, much shorter than either Greene's or Nashe's tracts. Yet Dekker does not confine himself to one topic in a pamphlet. The Wonderful Year tells of Queen Elizabeth's death as well as of the plague, and The Dead Term, besides containing a debate between Westminster and London, ends with a story which has no connection with the rest of the pamphlet. He interspersed many of his pamphlets with little stories and amusing incidents in much the same way that Greene inserts verses in his prose tracts. These insertions caught and held the reader's attention, as Dekker well knew that they would. Generally, these stories have a bearing on the main theme, but that is not always true.

There is little logical arrangement or uniformity in the structure of Dekker's pamphlets. In some, the elaborateness of detail is very noticeable. There are many allegorical bits which show the author's interest in that

field. One of the best examples of the use of allegorical material is found in The Seven Deadly Sins. Each sin is described vividly. Here is an example:

He [the politic bankrupt] rides in a chariot drawn upon three wheels, that run fastest away when they bear the greatest loads. The beauty of the chariot is all inlaid work, cunningly and artificially wrought, but yet so strangely and of so many several-fashioned pieces that a sound wit would mistrust they had been stolen from sundry workmen. By this proud Counterfeit run two pages. On the left side Conscience, raggedly attired, ill faced, ill colored, and misshapen in body. On the right side runs Beggary, who if he outlive him, goes to serve his children. Hypocrisy drives the chariot, having a couple of fat, well-colored and lusty coach-horses to the eye, called Covetousness and Cosenage, but full of diseases and rotten about the heart. 3

Dekker's real contribution to social history comes from the fact that his graphic pictures have intimate touches showing the age in which he lived. His power of imparting suggestions is very noticeable. One feels that although the author does not give many facts about London, yet all that he tells us is true. For instance, nowhere in his pamphlets does Dekker say that the streets of London were lighted by lanterns hung at the doorways of houses, but in one of his jests he tells the story of a group of gallants who went down the street stealing lighted lanterns from doorways until a servant interrupted them. Since he was writing for

a public that knew the custom of lighting streets, he assumes the readers' knowledge of the fact.

It is believed that many of Dekker's pamphlets were popular. The most successful tract by him of which one knows today is The Bellman of London. It was printed twice in 1609, the year it was published, and was followed the next year by a sequel called Lantern and Candlelight. The Bellman of London begins with a delightful description of the country. Birds sing; yellow field flowers besides red and white daisies bloom along the roadside. The author goes to a large hall where a feast for the rogues is being prepared. As the hostess proves loquacious, Dekker learns of the different varieties of villainy in England. The enumeration that follows is a brief characterization of the kinds of rogues as the hostess explains them. At the head of the list is the upright man, whom all rogues fear, because, as he is superior, he may demand a share of profits from others. He asks money from farmers, and if refused will steal the farmer's poultry. A ruffler is, generally, a man who has deserted the army or a serving man whom no one will trust with his livery. He

4 Mary Leland Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 135.
robs country people coming home from market. An angler begs in the daytime and "angles" with a long pole at windows during the night. His booty consists of sheets, wearing apparel, or whatever remains on his hook. A rogue is a dirty beggar who pretends to be ill. A sturdy rogue pretends to travel from place to place in search of friends or on a commission for a gentleman. A wild rogue has known no other life. His parents were rogues before him, and his only home has been barns and brick yards. A prigger of prancers is a horse stealer. A polliard begs alms from door to door. Many Irish and some Welsh are of this "lowsie regiment." A frater begs for a false philanthropic enterprise. A quire bird is an ex-convict who accepts hospitality, then robs his host. The most historically interesting rogue is the Abraham man, who swears he has been in Bedlam. He calls himself "Poor Tom", and sticks pins in his flesh to incite pity. A whipjacke pretends to be a shipwrecked sailor, and robs booths at fairs. A counterfeit crank says he is troubled with the falling sickness, and falls in the street in much the same way as the man in O. Henry's story, The Cop and the Anthem. A jackman writes counterfeit licences and acts as priest to the rogues. An Irish toyle and swigman peddles laces
and pins while doing petty thieving. A *kinchyn company* consists of little boys who have run away from their masters and live by ganging together to do petty thieving. Besides these there are classes of women rogues who correspond approximately to the men.

After learning about the rogues from the hostess, the author decides there is too much vice in the country; therefore, he will go to the city. Here he meets the bellman of London, who explains the city’s vices, the greatest of which is cheating at dice. There is a regular system of cheating by which the *cosen* (sometimes called cony), the man who is to be cheated, is caught. The *taker* is the man who brings the cosen to the tavern. The *verser* gives the cony confidence. The *bernard* is the cheater, and the *rutter* deals with the cony after the others have deceived and left him.

Each manner of cheating is called a "law". The use of *vincent law* is made in a bowling alley. A group of men, among whom there is a *gull*, begins to bet on a game. Needless to say, the gull is the loser. The *black art* deals with "hooking" goods out of windows, and the *lifting law* with shoplifting. The *prigging law* means horse stealing. The *high law* and *figging law* are concerned with purse taking. The *sacking law* needs
a longer explanation. A woman of the streets entices a man into a tavern. When he is under the influence of liquor, a pretended husband appears with a drawn rapier. To save his reputation and avoid a quarrel, the man pays the supposed husband the money which he demands. Another vice which Dekker calls five jumps of the leap frog deals with men who steal horses and obtain free meals at taverns.

In Lantern and Candlelight many of the same laws are discussed. The title of this pamphlet is clever, for it is during the hours of candle and lantern light that much vice is committed. There is in this pamphlet, in addition to the description of various vices, an interesting account of the thieves' dialect. The vice called hawking is also discussed, a discussion which makes the tract particularly interesting to the student of literature. Hawking is a vice by which patrons of letters are cheated by pseudo-pamphleteers. As already stated, patronage was beginning to decline, and writers feared the consequences if wealthy men refused to aid them. These pseudo-pamphleteers would devise a false pamphlet, go to the patron and show him the flattering dedication and the plan, at the same time asking for a sum of money. The pamphlet never would be forthcoming. Against this vice, Dekker protests in the
following terms:

"0 sacred learning! Why doth thou suffer thy seven-leaved tree to be plucked by barbarous and most unhallowed hands? Why is thy beautiful maiden-body polluted like a strumpets, and prostituted to beastly and slavish ignorance? 0 thou base-brood, that make the Muses harlots, yet say they are not your mothers! You thieves of wit, cheaters of art, traitors of schools of learning, murderers of scholars. More worthy you are to undergo the Roman "furca" like slaves, and to be branded in the forehead deeper than they that forge testaments to undo orphans. Such do but rob children of goods that may be lost. But you rob scholars of their fame, which is dearer than life. You are not worth an invective, not worthy to have your names drop out of a deserving pen. You shall only be executed in picture." 5

Undoubtedly, in these pamphlets, Dekker has been greatly influenced by Greene. But, as has been said before, Dekker puts so much of his own personality into his writing that even when the subject matter is about the same, in the work of the two men, Dekker's treatment and style add new interest to the material.

Of the two plague pamphlets, The Wonderful Year is considered the better. In this pamphlet, and in A Rod for Runaways, there is a vivid picture of London lying sick with the plague. Although the author avoids the disgusting, yet he gives such graphic detail that he

5 Thomas Dekker, Lantern and Candlelight, (Grosart edition), vol. 3, p. 246.
impresses the reader with the horror of the disease. Dekker implies that he knows many stories which he does not tell—possibly because they are so familiar at the time or because they show people to be too unkind. There are many little sketches showing how miserable folks, marked by "God's tokens", gave up and died, how wealthy Londoners stood in fear of the plague, and how outlying districts and suburbs feared to open the inn doors to a Londoner. "A crow that had been seen in a sunshiny day, standing on top of Powles, would have been better than a beacon on fire, to have raised all the towns within ten miles of London for keeping her out." 6 "How many at sight of only a letter from London have started back and dared have laid their salvation upon it, that the plague might be folded in the empty paper." 7

No one knew of any prevention for the plague. Some people stuffed rue and wormwood in their ears and nostrils. 8 As a warning, red crosses were placed upon the doors of infected dwellings. 9 All who could do so left the city, but many died along the highways, in

7 Ibid., p. 145.
8 Ibid., p. 113.
9 Thomas Dekker, A Rod for Runaways, (Grosart edition), vol. 4, p. 286.
the fields, or at the neighboring inns. Dekker sympathizes with his sickening neighbors who knock desperately at silent alehouses, only to drag themselves to the hayfields to await death. Yet, since Dekker cannot long dwell upon the depressing, comedy follows tragedy in these tracts. A well known story is the one about the first plague victim who died in a tavern of a suburban town. The little village held a council and offered forty shillings to anyone who would bury the corpse, but no one volunteered even for that amount of money. At last a devout tinker, who honored the god, Pan, and who could play so sweetly on his kettledrum that bees swarmed about him, came to the inn and was told about the situation. He, being a merry and lighthearted tinker, agreed to take the Londoner away for ten shillings. As he came back to town, the villagers were surprised as they heard him cry out lustily, "Have ye any more Londoners to bury, hey down a down derry, have he any more Londoners to bury." 10

There is also the story of the justice who was called upon to decide a case between a farmer and two men who were stealing in his orchard. The justice opened the case, but upon hearing that the thieves were from London, immediately held his nose, wished them both in

"Limbo", and dismissed the case until later. II

Dekker's characters appear so human that it is a delight to read his little sketches, with their mixture of pathos and humor. If these stories were not so individualistic, they might be considered examples of "the character". They have, however, more of the story interest in them than interest in the traits of the individual. The Bachelor's Banquet, which is a series of sketches showing the little deceits and inconsistencies of women, comes nearer the character of Overbury and Hall than any other of Dekker's tracts. The chief interest of the pamphlet to the reader today is that it shows many customs of the times, such as those connected with child-bearing—the gossip's supper, the churching, and the christening. It also gives the present-day reader an idea of the manifold duties of a sixteenth century housewife. According to this pamphlet, a husband spends most of his life trying to please his temperamentlal wife.

The Gull's Horn Book, another of the author's satirical works, is perhaps the best known of the pamphlets. The whole is a book of etiquette for the gallant of the Elizabethan day. There are many delightful passages, by the quotation of which the flavor of the

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book may be suggested. The following passages are two of the best known:

"Being arrived in the room [of an ordinary] salute not any but those of your acquaintance. Walk up and down by the rest scornfully and as carelessly as a gentleman usher. Select some friend (having first thrown off your cloak) to walk up and down the room with you. Let him be suited if you can, worse by far than yourself. He will be a foil to you. And this will be a means to publish your clothes better than Powles, a tennis court, or a playhouse. Discourse as loud as you can, no matter to what purpose if you but make a noise, and laugh in fashion, and have a good sour face to promise quarreling. You shall be much observed." 12

"Present not yourself on the stage (especially at a new play) until the quaking prologue hath (by rubbing) got color into his cheeks, and is ready to give the trumpets their cue, that he is upon point to enter, for then it is time, as though you were one of the properties, or that you dropped out of the hangings, to creep from behind the Arras, with your "tripos" or three-footed stool in one hand, and a teston mounted between a forefinger and a thumb in the other.... It shall crown you with rich commendation, to laugh aloud in the midstest of the most serious and saddest scene of the terriblest tragedy; and to let that clapper (your tongue) be tossed so high, that all the house may ring with it." 13

The chapters, as one sees, deal with a gallant as he whiles away his day. Other amusing sections tell how a gallant should dress, how warm himself by the fire, how stroll along "Powles Walk", and how he should con-

13 Ibid., p. 250-251.
duct himself along the street while returning home.

News from Hell, Dekker's last genial satirical tract, is a story of a knight who first goes adventuring upon the earth to see the fashions, then to Hell where Conscience "poor in attire, diseased in his flesh, wretched in his face, heavy in his gait, and hoarse in his voice" 14 accuses the condemned. The last incident in the pamphlet tells of a group of English spirits getting into Charon's boat. "On the other side of the river stood a company crying out lustily, 'A boat, hoy a boat, hoy!'. And who should they be but a gallant troop of English spirits, all mangled, looking like so many old Romans, that for overcoming Death in their manly resolutions were sent away out of the field, crowned with the military honor of arms." 15

There are many other contemporary pictures, such as that of the surly key-turner, who like those "big fellows that stand like giants at lord's gates with cheeks strutting out like two footballs, being blown


15 Ibid., p. 148.
up with powder, beef, and brows." 16 This pamphlet was so immediately popular that the following year, 1607, another edition, renamed A Knight's Conjuring, was issued.

Dekker's love for London is made very evident in The Seven Deadly Sins of London, The Dead Term, Dekker: His Dream, and Canaan's Calamity, all exposing London's sins in order that she might see her faults and improve them. The Dead Term contains a long history of London which might interest the student of history. In the Seven Deadly Sins of London, Dekker lists what he thinks are the outstanding sins of London. The pamphlet is rich in allegory and personifications. The first sin is that of the politic bankrupt, by which term the author means a man who designedly evaded the payment of his debts by serving a prison sentence. Every prison welcomes such men because they always tip the wardens plentifully. The second sin, that of lying, is described as "a lusty reveler" with his troop of followers. He has a difficult time getting through the gates of London until he places his troops among the tradesmen going to market. When he comes into the city, many people fall.

in love with him because of his charm.

In calling the third sin "candlelight", Dekker shows originality in using a journalistic "tag" to arouse the reader's curiosity. It is by candlelight that many evils are committed. Cheating in taverns, gullgroping, and robberies are done while candlelight flicks her one fiery red eye. The fourth, fifth, and sixth sins are respectively, sloth, apishness, and shaving. Sloth, with ten drowsy malt men, slips into the city. The householders object, but he argues so enticingly that he is welcomed by them. Apishness is brought to the city by rich men's sons. Shaving is a term the author applies to anything that is "lawfully" dishonest. Tradesmen who cheat their customers, brokers who charge excessive interest, and landlords who are unfair to their tenants are the "barbers". The seventh and last sin, cruelty, has the writer's sincere interest. Dekker is such a kindly tolerant person that he hates cruelty in any form. He describes the sin as a "hag, horrid in form, terrible in voice, formidable in threats, a tyrant in his very looks, and a murderer in all his actions." 17

The prisons of London are "thirteen strong houses of

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sorrow, where the prisoner hath his heart wasting away sometimes a whole apprenticeship of years in cares."\(^{18}\) This tract shows his sympathy for the apprentices and servants of inconsiderate masters.

Another pamphlet which shows Dekker's regard for the oppressed is his *Four Birds of Noah's Ark*. In this, there is a prayer that God may take all thoughts of cruelty from the apprentice master's heart and that the master may not assign tasks that are too heavy for the boy's strength.\(^{19}\) In fact, the tract is constituted entirely of a series of prayers, many of which are exceptionally fine for their tone of humility and earnestness. Dekker divides the prayers into four groups, and calls the divisions by the names of birds, each bird having a symbolical significance in medieval literature. The dove symbolized peace, the eagle sovereignty, the pelican charity, and the phoenix immortality. The following note to the reader gives a summary of the pamphlet:

I have for thy comfort sent unto thee four birds of Noah's Ark, upon four several messages; and have changed the notes of those birds' voices into prayers of different music, but all full of sweetness. Under the wings of the dove, have I put prayers fitting the nature of the dove, that is to say, simple prayers, or such as are


\(^{19}\) Thomas Dekker, *Four Birds of Noah's Ark*, (Grosart edition), vol. 5, p. 19.
fitting the mouths of young and the meanest people; and for such blessings as they have most need of. The eagle soars more high, and in his beak beareth up to heaven supplications in behalf of kings and rulers. The pelican carrieth the figure of our Redeemer on the cross, who shed his blood to nourish us (he being the right pelican) with the drops of which blood, have I writ prayers against all those deadly and capital sins, to wash out whose foulness our Savior suffered that ignominious death. And, lastly, in the spiced nest of the phoenix (in which bird likewise is figured Christ risen again) shalt thou find a book written full of thanks and wishes. 20

Four Birds of Noah's Ark shows, among other things, Dekker's attitude toward religion. He is against the Papists, but one doubts whether he hated them as much as he pretends to do in The Double PP. Work for Armourers represents a kind of prose morality in which there is a contest between money and poverty. It concludes with a compromise, both money and poverty being glad to give up the struggle. The Strange Horse Race recounts another contest in which virtues and vices are personified. The pamphlet really deals with a medley of subjects, and ends with two moralistic yet dramatically and amusingly written sketches called the Devil's Last Will and The Bankrupt's Banquet. The Raven's Almanac also is marked by a variety of subject matter. The pamphlet begins by ridiculing astronomers, but ends

with a series of short, coarse stories of various natures. Jests to Make you Merry is not an outstanding tract in any way. Most of the jokes, as in all jest books of the sixteenth century, do not seem subtle or humorous to us today.

One interest of Dekker’s for which the pamphlets will continue to be valued is, as has already been made clear, the author’s evident love for his city. Dekker was born and reared in London, and seems never to have lost an enthusiastic relish for the sights, sounds, and beauties which he had known from childhood. "O, thou beautifullest daughter of two united monarchies", he cried in 1606, "from thy womb received I my being, from thy breasts my nourishment." 21 Six of his prose works are directly concerned with London 22—its manners, its vices, its glories, and its sufferings. In one of his pamphlets, Dekker apostrophizes London, using many endearing terms. A few are as follows:

"O, thou darling of Great Britain, thy princes call theeo their treasurer, and thou art so"; 23

"O thou the best and only huswife of this island"; 24

"O thou charitable reliever and receiver of distressed strangers." 25 Even though he praises London highly, he

22 Wonderful Year, Seven Deadly Sins of London, Jests to Make you Merry, Dead Term, Gull's Horn Book, A Rod for Runaways.
23 Thomas Dekker, Dead Term, (Grosart edition), vol. 4, p. 14.
24 Ibid., p. 32.
25 Ibid., p. 36.
sees her faults as well as her virtues, as has earlier been shown. In the following passage, Dekker says:

0, London, thou art great in glory, and envied for thy greatness. Thy towers, thy temples, and thy pinnacles stand upon thy head like borders of fine gold, thy waters like fringes of silver hang at the home of thy garments; Thou art the goodliest of thy neighbors, but the proudest; the wealthiest but the most wanton. Thou hast all things in thee to make thee fairest, and all things in thee to make thee foulest..... What miseries have of late overtaken thee, yet (like a fool that laughs when he is putting on fetters) thou hast been merry in the height of thy misfortunes. 26

Yet Dekker's picture of his beloved city is in no way complete. He sketches here and there little incidents from the lives of Londoners, scenes and glimpses of playhouses, prisons, and taverns. But sometimes, also, he does more, and gives information of universal interest. For instance, his news of the Queen's death was of interest everywhere.

The report of her death (like a thunder clap) was able to kill thousands. It took away hearts from millions. For having brought up (even under her wing) a nation that was almost begotten and born under her; that never saw the face of any prince but herself, never understood, what that strange outlandish word "change" signified. How was it possible, but that her sickness should throw abroad an universal fear, and her death an astonishment. 27

27 Thomas Dekker, The Wonderful Year, (Grosart edition), vol. 1, p. 87.
Dekker also sets forth vividly how the people proclaimed King James.

Upon Thursday it was treason to cry, "God save King James, King of England", and upon Friday, high treason not to cry so. In the morning, no voice was heard but murmurs and lamentations, at noon nothing but shouts of gladness and triumph.28

One does not obtain as clear a notion of the classes of people and their occupations in Dekker's pamphlets as one does in his drama; nevertheless, the author deals quite thoroughly with a few topics. In the sixteenth century, the law could be irritating at times. The Dead Term says that in "the hands of bad and 'unconscienceable' lawyers, pens are forks of iron upon which poor clients are tossed from one to another till they bleed to death. Yea, the nebs of them are like the beaks of vultures, who (so they may glut their appetites with flesh) care not from whose backs they tear it."29 The author also speaks of the slowness with which justice comes and the costs of lawsuits. A man who tried to recover a tenement which was a part of his wife's dowry had to go to law. This cost him as much as the property was worth.30 Another man had to journey

29 Thomas Dekker, The Dead Term, (Grosart edition), vol. 4, p. 35.
30 Thomas Dekker, Bachelor's Banquet, (Grosart edition), vol. 1, p. 158.
thirty or forty miles to court to attend some matter which began to occupy the attention of the courts in his grandfather's day. 31 There were, apparently, no laws governing the amount of interest usurers and brokers could charge, or any law to prevent the deceiving of people. "Usurers", says Doldor, "for a little money and a great deal of trash (as fire shovels, brown paper, motley cloak bags, etc.) bring young novices into a fool's paradise till they have sealed the mortgage of their lands and then like peddlers, go they... up and down to cry commodities, which scarce yield the third part of the sum for which they take them up." 32 People were imprisoned for debt; and to obtain good treatment prisoners had to tip their keepers.

Doldor mentions nearly all the trades known in the Elizabethan period. A shoemaker sings at his work in spite of a scolding wife; tinkers roam through the village streets and play for dancos. In his pamphlets, one sees peddlers with packs on their backs, waterman sitting in their boats, mercers and drapers plying their trades, hosts sitting at tavern tables drinking with their

31 Thomas Dekker, Bachelor's Banquet, (Crosart edition), vol. 1, p. 192.

patrons, and merchants calling, "What do you lack?"

Dekker tells an amusing story of a tailor who entices a man into his shop and insists on his buying a suit. After the man leaves, the tailor learns that he is the devil disguised. The tailor searches the shop to see if anything has been taken. Everything is there but the tailor's conscience. 33

In view of Dekker's interest in the London of his own time, it is somewhat surprising to find him neglecting contemporary politics, literary disputes, and the pettier topics of the day. Such thought provoking subjects as hold his interest were ordinarily of a broad and general kind. The Elizabethan period was a time when religion was a decidedly controversial matter. Dekker was vitally interested in it. He makes such remarks as the following: "Thou playest the Puritan so naturally that thou couldst never play the honest man afterward." 34 His picture of the Jesuit is not flattering to that order, and one of his coarsest stories concerns a priest who confesses a nun. Later she bears him a child, and soon the whole nunnery is corrupted. But Dekker's aim in telling the story is to show the adroitness

34 Thomas Dekker,  Jests to Make you Merry, (Grosart edition), vol. 2, p. 282.
with which the mother abbess handles the situation and punishes the guilty priests. 35

But in spite of all the controversy with the Puritans, the plagues, and the death of the Queen, London is a happy city, as prosperous and as flourishing as any metropolis today. People, as we might perhaps expect, are interested in about the same topics then as now. Food, for instance, is a topic referred to quite frequently in Dekker's pamphlets. Capons are spoken of often. Other fowls mentioned are partridge, plover, woodcocks, quails, and goose. Dekker advises the gallant to vary his fare "as a capon is a stirring meat, sometimes, oysters are a swelling meat sometimes, trout a tickling meat sometimes, green goose and wood-cock a delicate meat, especially in a tavern." 36 Sack was a common drink, muscadine the favorite one. 37 A few spices are mentioned, such as nutmeg and ginger. 38 Herbs must have been used a great deal because there were women who made their living by selling them. During the plague herb women became quite wealthy because rue and worm-

wood were used as preventives, and it was the custom to use rosemary at both funerals and weddings. Farm produce was brought into markets. Vegetables and live stock were also sold at fairs besides merchandise such as rings, hats, and girdles. The author speaks of Sturbridge fair as "a city built up in a few days, and quickly raised as if it had been done by enchantment." 39

Except for the rogues, the people described by Dekker are rarely of the lowest class, nor are they often of the highest class, but are tradesmen, country gentry, and lords of moderate means. Only one type of the richer class, the London gallant, takes a prominent place, the Gull's Horn Book being his special primer. In it, one can see not only the gallant as he spends his day, but also all the places a gallant would frequent—the streets, ordinaries, theaters, and taverns. After reading the Gull's Horn Book, and the chapter in The Seven Deadly Sins of London on "apishness" the reader has a fairly good picture of the details of a fashionable man's apparel. Although Dekker never actually pictures the dress of a person, he makes such statements to the gallant

39 Thomas Dekker, The Dead Term, (Grosart Edition), vol. 4, p. 79.
as the following:

Be sure your silver spurs dog your heels and then the boys will swarm about you like so many white butterflies, when you in the open quire shall draw forth a perfumed embroidered purse... and quoit silver into the boy's hands. 40

One infers from references that tradesmen wore damask cloaks, while gallants wore taffeta-lined, fur-trimmed ones of velvet. We get a vivid account of a gallant's dress in the following example:

There was neither the Spanish sloop, nor the Skipper's galligaskin, the Switzer's blistred codpiece, nor the Danish sleeve sagging down like a Welsh vallet, the Italian close stroller, nor the French standing collar; Your treble-quadruple Daedalian ruffes, nor your stiffnecked rebozoes, (that have more arches for pride to row under, than can stand under five London bridges) durst not then set themselves out in print, for the patent for starch could by no means be signed. 41

Dekker gives much less attention to women's costumes. He makes a reference to a woman wanting a dress which has "trunk sleeves, a fardingale, a turkey grosgrain kirtle, and a taffeta hat with a gold band." 42

As one follows the gallant through the day, one first sees the ordinary, of which there are two classes.

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41 Ibid., p. 210-211.

of these, the gallants frequent the higher priced type. The usurer, the stale bachelor, and the thrifty attorney go to the other. Since it is fashionable to smoke in the ordinary, Dekker gives advice about tobacco which is interesting to quote here:

Before the meat comes smoking to the board, our gallant must draw out his tobacco box, the ladle for the cold snuff into the nostril, the tongs and priming iron. All of which artillery may be gold or silver (if he can reach the price of it), it will be a reasonable useful pawn at all times, when the current of his money falls out to run low ....... Then let him show his several tricks in taking it, as the whiff, the ring, etc. For these are compliments that gain gentlemen no mean respect and for which indeed they are more worthily noted, I assure you, than for any skill that they have in learning. 43

From the ordinary the gallant goes to the theater.

The theater seems to afford the chief amusement of the gallant, although he is fond of sports such as various card games, bowling, tennis, shooting, and fencing. The type of theater he frequents is familiar to all students who know something of the Elizabethan drama and its staging. Dekker writes of the flags being taken down and the playhouses being shut up because of the plague. 44 He also speaks of the mountebanks posting


44 Thomas Dekker, Work for Armourers, (Crosart edition), vol. 4, p. 96.
their bills around London, and refers to the then popular child actors.

After the theater, the gull goes to the tavern, of which the author says:

Your discourse at the table must be such as that which you utter at the ordinary. Your behavior the same, but somewhat more careless, for where your expense is greater, let your modesty be less.... If you desire not to be haunted with fiddlers, bring no women along with you.

When it is time to leave the tavern, the gallant goes through the streets lighted by a hired candle bearer. London streets have constables and bellmen whose duty it is to inquire the business of late travellers. The gallant is warned about such meetings in this fashion:

If you smell a watch (and that you may easily do for commonly they eat onions to keep them in sleeping, which they account a medicine against colds) or, if you come within danger of their brown bills, let him that is your candle stick and holds up your torch from dropping, let "Ignis Fatuus" I say, being within the reach of the constable's staff, ask aloud, "Sir Giles, or Sir Abram, will you turn this way, or down the street?".... The watch will wink at you, only for the love they bear to arms and knighthood.

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that

45 Thomas Dekker, The Wonderful Year, (Crosart edition), vol. 1, p. 117.
46 Ibid., p. 100.
48 Ibid., p. 262.
in form Dekker's pamphlets are loose, episodic series of discussions of many subjects. One gains the impression that when he sat down to write a pamphlet, he had no definite plan. One knows he wrote some pamphlets in the debtors' prison. Pamphlets were then, in fact, a new type of writing. They were written hurriedly, and were for the most part of ephemeral quality. As before stated, the tracts were like newspapers of today in that they were timely and discussed many subjects.

To summarize: the pamphlets are varied although most of them concern London and London life. Those that are extant today, offer us a convincing and sprightly record of the life of the work-a-day London, and are of as much interest to the historian as to a student of literature.
Chapter 4

THE STYLE OF DEKKER'S PAMPHLETS

When one compares Thomas Dekker with Ben Jonson, Richard Hooker, and Francis Bacon, one can only say that he did not write prose equal in merit to theirs. He was a mere hack and wrote hurriedly. He did not take time to choose and weigh his words as Jonson did; therefore, there are no dignified formal bits such as "Words borrowed of antiquity do lend a kind of majesty to style, and are not without their delight sometimes. For they have the authority of years, and out of their intermission do win themselves a kind of gracelike newness. But the eldest of the present, and newness of the past language, is the best." Dekker was no conscious stylist. He was a struggling journalist, always writing with the shadows of a debtor's prison looming not far from him. It is with the attitude of trying to please a rather exacting audience, and as one who feels that he has won the approval of a temperamental group of people, that Dekker writes in one of his pamphlets: "Nothing that is set down is tedious because I had a care for thy memory. Nothing is done twice because thou mayst take delight in them."  

1 Ben Jonson, Timber, vol. 9, p. 198-199.
Although Dekker's prose ranks below that of a number of Elizabethans, he shows, nevertheless, a natural charm and a grace in his writing that makes his prose far from being dull reading. He has a freshness and spontaneity, and a casual indifference that seem to belie the fact that he wrote under pressure. His subject matter is of such wide interest, also, that one is not conscious that he chose this material with a view merely to immediate salability. Swinburne says of Dekker that "there are times when we are tempted to denounce the muse of Dekker as the most shiftless and shameless of slovenes or of sluts; but when we consider the quantity of work which she managed to struggle or shuffle through with such occasionally admirable and memorable results, we are once more inclined to reclaim for her a place of honor among her more respectable and reputable sisters."

Dekker is careless about the structure of his sentences. Sometimes they are complete, sometimes not. His rhetorical faults are many, but his geniality and good nature speak so loudly that often the reader forgets the structure of the sentence in the charm and grace of the passage. At times this imperfect sentence structure

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5 Algernon Swinburne, Age of Shakespeare, p. 90.
is due to the author's attempts to produce a desired effect, as the dramatic, in the following passage:

"Surely the loud groans of raving sick men, the struggling pangs of souls departing. In every house grief striking up an alarm. Servants crying out for masters, wives for husbands, parents for children, children for their mothers." This passage also shows Dekker's ability to create effective pictures through a series of quickly wrought images.

Not a little of the author's charm results from his unpretentious and simple diction. His writings are practically free from the euphuistic ornateness of his near contemporaries. Nevertheless, he uses a few ornate phrases, the most common being, "lying in his last inn", meaning lying in his grave, and speaking of the plague sores as "God's tokens". As a whole, Dekker writes in a simple, direct, vivid fashion. Nothing could be more unassuming or straight forward than these passages.

Being arrived at the gate where the gentleman or farmer dwellcloth, he boldly knocks, inquiring for him by name, and steps in to speak with him. The servant seeing a fashionable person tells his master there is a gentleman desires to speak with him. The master comes and salutes him, but after a few words, says he does not know him. "No sir", replies the other (with a face bold enough), "It may be so, but I pray you, Sir, will you walk a turn or two in your orchard or garden,

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I would there confer."  

In the county of Devonshire, not far from Exeter, there dwelled a rope maker, whose name I conceal. This rope maker (whom I will call Richard) was about the age of some forty years, and he was a perilous sour fellow, ill loved of his neighbors, because he so unkindly liked of his wives. For this jolly companion had been married to three wives in ten years and had used them all so hardly that he killed them all with kindness.  

There are many rhythmical phrases and sentences which add grace to his diction. For example, note the following:

Spring, the bride of the sun, the nosegay giver to weddings, the only and richest herb-wife in the world.  

A merry cobbler there was who for joy that he mended broken and corrupted soles, did continually sing, so that his shop seemed a very bird-cage, and he sitting in his foul linen and greasy apron, showed like a blackbird.  

When you see a poor wretch, that to keep life in a loathed body hath not a house left to cover his head from the tempests, nor a bed (but the common bed which our mother the earth allows him) for his cares to sleep upon, when you have (by keeping or locking him up) robbed him of all means to bat, what seek you to have him loose but his life?

5 Thomas Dekker, Lantern and Candlelight, (Grosart edition), vol. 3, p. 255.  
7 Thomas Dekker, The Raven's Almanac, (Grosart edition), vol. 4, p. 194.  
8 Ibid., p. 197.  
Possibly, because Dekker was writing for a popular audience, he used a simpler diction than he ordinarily would have done. Little is known of the author's education, yet his writings suggest that he had a fairly good training. He was acquainted with the classics, although he does not use many literary allusions. This, also, might be due to his judgment of his reading public. Nevertheless, the allusions he does employ are so poetically employed that the reader is charmed with the beauty of them. He draws upon Ovid's *Metamorphoses* more than upon any other classic. The following, based upon the story of Tereus, Progne, and Philomela, is one of his most beautiful passages:

> When the nightingale sits singing with a brier at her breast, and the adulterer (that ravished Philomel) sits singing at the thorns that prick her conscience. ⑩

Dekker's vivid description of Cerberus is an interesting passage. The visitor throws him a sop, as Psyche did when she had to pass through the gates:

> He has three heads, but no hair upon them, (the place is too hot to keep hair on) for instead of hair they are all curled over with snakes, which reach from the crowns of his three heads along the ridge of his back to his very tail, and that is wreathed like a dragon's. Twenty couple of hounds make not such a damnable noise,

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when they howl, as he does when he barks. His property is to wag his tail, when any comes for entrance to the gate, and to lick their hands, but upon the least offer to escape out, he leaps at their throats. Sure he is a mad dog, for wheresoever he bites, it rankles to the death. His eyes are ever watching, his ears ever listening, his paws ever catching, his mouths are gaping. In so much that day and night he lies howling to be sent to Paris Garden, rather than to be used so like a cur as he is. 11

In addition to his references to the classics, Dekker makes allusions to the plays which were popular at that time, such as Tamburlaine and Jeronimo.

Dekker also has his audience in mind when he picks out familiar little details of nature with which to entertain his readers, such as the following:

The floor of this summer house was paved all over with yellow field-flowers, and with white and red daisies upon which the sun casting but a wanton eye, you would have sworn the one had been nails of gold, and the other studes of enamelled silver.... The melody which the birds made, and the variety of all sorts of fruits which the tree promised, with the pretty and harmless murmurings of a shallow stream running in windings through the middest of it (whose noise went like a chime of bells, charming the eyes to sleep) put me in mind of that garden whereof our great grandfather was the keeper. 12

There are many passages that exhibit Dekker's "common touch" with all classes of readers. Note, for example,


the following:

Streets were full of people, people full of joy. Every house seemed to have a lord of misrule in it, in every house there was so much jollity. No screech owl frightened the silly countryman at midnight, nor any drum the citizen at noonday, but all was more calm than still water. All hushed as if the spheres had been playing in consort. In conclusion, heaven looked like a palace, and the great hall of the earth, like a paradise. 13

Some sat turning of spits, and the place being all smoky, made me think on hell, for the joints of meat lay as if they had been browning in the infernal fire. The turn spits (who were poor tattered greasy fellows) looking like so many devils. Some were basting and seemed like fiends pouring scalding oil upon the damned. Others were mincing of pig meat, and showed like hangmen cutting up of quarters, whilst another whose eyes glowed with the heat of the fire, stood poking in at the mouth of an oven, torturing souls as it were in the furnace of Lucifer. There was such chopping of herbs, such tossing of ladles, such plucking of geese, such scalding of pigs, such singing, such scolding, such laughing, such swearing, such running to and fro, as if Pluto had that day bidden all his friends to a feast, and that these had been the cooks that dressed the dinner. 14

This last example, also, is one of the best illustrations of realism in the author’s prose. In the early seventeenth century, attention was being drawn more and more to the commonplace side of human nature. The moods

and idiosyncracies of people were becoming the commonest themes of creative literature.15 Ben Jonson's comedies of humors were popular. The prominence of the character was beginning to make Overbury and Hall famous. People were interested in the individual as a type more than ever before. Individuals were becoming more interested in themselves, in their lives, and in the progress of their nation and city. Now, in all these ways, Dekker shows the spirit of the times in his writings.

Not only are his characters clearly drawn, but his scenes are vividly pictured. The author's graphic views of the city, both in the rush and hurry of midday traffic, and in the lighted taverns at night, place him among the foremost realists of his day. Miss Hunt says in writing of the characters of his plays that Dekker's realism "is the sort of realism that selects the normal and the human, not the degraded and the beastly. He had the rare artistic ability to make the normal and the human as lovable in a play as in real life."16 What can be said of the realism of his plays can also be said of the realism of his pamphlets. There is nothing unwholesome and obnoxious about the material in Dekker's

16 Mary Leland Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 58.
pamphlets, although he does not avoid the unpleasant or vary from the truth. He could have given many a gruesome picture of the plague, but the description of the charnel house is the only one in all his pamphlets that is even mildly revolting.17 Other examples of his realism are found in such passages as these:

Ride thither upon your galloway-nag, or your Spanish jenmet a swift ambling pace, in your hose, and doublet (gilt rapier and poniard bestowed in their places) and your French lackey carrying your cloak, and running before you, or rather in a coach, for that will both hide you from the basilisk eyes of your creditors and outrun a whole kennel of bitter-mouthed sergeants.18

One fellow, more daring than the rest of the chickenly brood, went and fetched the sick man (no good drink) but fair water in his bottle, which he delivered fearfully to him. He greedily (to cool his deadly and fatal thirst) drank it, and thanked him.... He died, the fellow (after the country way) buried him in his clothes, but diving into his pockets, took out thirty pieces, and store of white money.19

To one so highly imaginative as Dekker, personification and allegorical interpretation are so natural that he uses them with great success and at times quite unconsciously. Virtues, vices, cities, and sins talk,

think, mourn, and walk about in his pages as naturally as if they were human beings. "Hasty and loathsome" sloth ventures into the city, wondering who will give him lodging. Self-will is a coachman, and Ignorance holds the reins of Cruelty's chariot. Lame Repentance is the only attendant who ever follows Cruelty, and as Self-will drives the chariot so fast, Repentance very seldom overtakes his master. Westminster says, "Other sins lie gnawing (like diseases) at my heart, for Pride sits at the doors of the rich. Envy goes up and down with the beggar, feeding upon snakes. Rents are laid upon the rack." London, in much distress, tells of the plague: "But woe to me, unfortunate city! Woe unto us both (O my distressed neighbor,) shall we never shake hands with her and part? Shall our bodies never recover of this disease, which so often and often hath run all over them, and doth now again begin to be a plague unto us?" In this fashion, Dekker adds much human interest to his pamphlets and takes the reader away from the prosaic facts into the realms of fanciful imagination and allegorical interpretation. It is easy

21 Thomas Dekker, The Dead Tern, (Grosart edition), vol. 4, p. 15.
22 Ibid., p. 77.
for the reader to follow Dokker's flights of fancy, for his symbols are not obscure. The reader never becomes lost in a half allegorical, half factual allusion.

Dokker avoids multiplicity of detail, and creates his impression through suggestion. This ability is probably due to his dramatic sense. In his descriptions, he does not weary or confuse the reader by employing useless words. He has the gift of portraying scenes with a few significant words which makes the impression clear and lasting.
APPENDIX: LIST OF DEKKER'S PAMPHLETS

2603 The Wonderful Year
2603 Bachelor's Banquet
2606 Seven Deadly Sins of London
2606 News from Hell
2606 The Double PP
2607 Jests to Make you Merry
2608 The Dead Term
2608 The Bellman of London
2609 The Gull's Horn Book
2609 The Raven's Almanac
2609 Work for Armourers
2609 Lantern and Candlelight
2613 Strange Horse Race
2609 - 12 (?) Four Birds of Noah's Ark
2618 Canaan's Calamity
2620 Dekker his Dream
2625 A Rod for Runaways
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