Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi
Cilt 5 / Sayı 2 / Aralık 1988 / ss. 67 - 78

THE LIFE OF A CITY GALLANT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

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During the reign of Elizabeth I certain social and economic changes started to occur, as a result of which the aristocracy and landed gentry began to move to London with the hope of finding better living conditions and "the younger sort (went to London) to see and show vanity."[1] Thus London became the centre of national life and the much-desired background for plays, since the audience wished to see familiar surroundings and familiar people on the stage. The playwrights, being aware of this interest came to populate their plays with gallants who thought of nothing but rich and fashionable clothes and who spent their time gambling, drinking and swearing, taking walks at St. Paul's or Westminster or visiting the Royal Exchange, going to the theatre to see plays or bull or bearbaiting, taking instructions in fencing and having affairs with richly apparelled and painted ladies.

The most important place in a gentleman's life was St. Paul's. People went there to walk about, meet people, greet each other, mix with each other, exchange jests and anecdotes, and to discuss one another's affairs. Meetings, accidental or arranged, took place in the "powiles walk." Thomas Dekker in his **Dead Term** gives an account of St. Paul's:

> What swearing is there, what facing, and out-facing
> What shuffling, what shouldering, what jostling,
> What jeering, what biting of drums to beget quarrels...
> What casting open of cloaks to publish new clothes,
> What muffling in cloaks to hide brokenn elbows...
> foot by foot, elbow by elbow shall you see walking,
> the knight, the gull, the gallant, the upstart, the gentleman...[2]

As we learn it from Ben Jonson's **The Magnetic Lady,** followed by his servant who wore a blue livery and had his "master's arm in Silver

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1. L.G. Salinger, "The Social Setting" **The Age of Shakespeare,** ed. Boris Ford, (Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd. 1966), Vol. 2, p. 31.
2. Thomas Dekker, **The Dead Term** (London 1608), p. 62.

fastened to (his) left arm"[3] and carried his master's purse, the typical London gallant would arrive at St. Paul's Cathedral to start his day, in

> a new, brave, four-pound beaver hat,
> Set with enamell'd studs...
> and right pair of crystal spectacles...
> Hung in an ivory case, at a gold belt;
> And silver bells to gingle, as he pace
> Before his fifty daughters in procession
> To church, or from the church.[4]

If somebody wished to have an interview or a favour from the master, he had to bribe the servant first. Masters were aware of this and as Sir Bounteous did in Middleton's **A Mad World, My Masters,** they took their precautions:

> Sir Bounteous: How should it come to his ear?
> If you be my lord's chief man about him, I hope
> you do not use to speak, unless you be paid for't,
> And I had rather give you a councillor's double
> fee to hold your peace.[5]

Even if it were not to the same extent, another fashionable resort to spend a gentleman's morning or part of it was the Exchange, which opened for business, according to some authorities at ten and according to others at eleven. Gallants made their way to the Exchange around that time and as we see in **Every Man In His Humour** it had almost become a time-marker. As a proof of this to indicate the hour Cash says "Exchange time, Sir,"[6] Like St. Paul's, The Exchange was a fruitful place for news-mongers and we learn this from Barnabe Rich who writes that "The News-monger... from aleaven to twelve, ... will not miss the Exchange.[7]

As it is revealed in a conversation between Thomas Barber and a Dutchman in **The Staple of News** some made it their business to frequent St. Paul's and the Exchange and to run the oral gossip columns of the time.

> Thomas Barber: Then Master Ambler, emissary Pauls,
> A fine-pac'd gentleman as you shall see walk
> The middle aisle. And then my fray Hans Buz,
> A Dutchman: He's emissary Exchange.[8]

3. Paul Hentzner, "Travels in England", **Life In Shakespeare's England,** ed. J.D. Wilson, (Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd. 1964), p. 20.
4. Ben Jonson, "The Magnetic Lady", **Complete Plays,** ed. F.F. Schelling, (London, Everyman Library), p. 599.
5. Thomas Middleton, **A Mad World My Masters,** II, vi.
6. Ben Jonson, **Everyman In His Humour,** III, ii.
7. Barnabe Rich, **My Ladies Looking Glass,** 1606, p. 52.
8. Ben Jonson, **The Staple of News,** I, ii.

Westminster Hall, where the law courts were held until 1882 was also a place to visit in the morning. Dampit alludes to this in **A Trick to Catch the Old One** when he says:

> he would be up in a morning. ... have his feet stink about Westminster Hall, and come home again.[9]

After spending the morning at St. Paul's or at the Exchange a London gentleman either retired home or went to one of many ordinaries in London to take his dinner. It is apparent in the literature of the period that a gallant had to see to it that he did not remain at St. Paul's during dinner time. According to Dekker's **Paules Steeples Complaint,** and according to John Earle's **Microcosmographie** some people went to the Cathedral to seek dinner or somebody to pay for it and finding this was not uncommon because, again according to Dekker's advice, a gallant had to do all in his power to start rumours about himself that he was a spendthrift and that he kept company to knights, lords and ladies.[10] Those who failed to get an invitation to dinner walked up and down Duke Humphrey's Walk and hence, according to Stow "To dine with Duke Humphrey's" came to mean to go hungry and to go dinnerless.[11] This is referred to by Thomas Barber in **The Staple of News.**

> Thomas Barber: Much like Duke Humphrey's
> But now and then, as th'wholesome proverb says,
> Twill obsonave famen ambulando.[12]

At the time, there were both inexpensive and expensive ordinaries[13] in London. The least expensive one, we learn from Jack Dapper in the **Roaring Girl** cost half penny. He tells his servant to "meet (him) an hour hence in Paul's.", saying, "Here's halfpence for your ordinary."[14] In the more expensive ordinaries, as Morose in **Epicoene** calls them "the twelve-penny" ordinaries,[15] there was music, provided by a travelling orchestra, called "noises."

Ordinaries were terrible places for news and scandal, excellent places to frequent, to be seen in and to acquire the necessary impu-

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9. Thomas Middleton, **A Trick To Catch The Old One,** I, iv.
10. Thomas Dekker, **The Guls Horn-Booke,** (London, 1609), p. 62.
11. Stow, **Survey,** I. 355.
12. To provide an appetite by walking Jonson, **The Staple of News,** III, iii.
13. Restaurants.
14. Thomas Middleton, **The Roaring Girl,** II, i.
15. Ben Jonson, **Epicoene,** II, v.

dence.[16] A gallant's life was almost centered around an ordinary and Luke in the **City Madam** tells what part an ordinary plays in a gallant's life:

> What ravishing lechery it is to enter
> An Ordinarie, ca pa pe, trim'd like a Gallant, ...
> The reverence, respect, the crouches, cringes,
> The musical chime of Gold in your cram'd pockets,
> Commands from the attendants, and poor Porters?
> Then sitting at the Table with
> The Braveries of the kingdom, you shall hear
> Occurents from all corners of the world,
> The plots, the Counsels, the designs of Princes,
> And freely censure'em: the City wits
> Cri'd up, or decri'd, as their passions lead'em;
> Judgement having nought to do there.
> My Lord no sooner shall rise out of his chair,
> The gameing Lord I mean, but you may boldly
> By the privilege of a gamester fill his room.
> For in play you are all fellows; have your knife
> As soon in the pheasant; drink your healths
> And striking in a luckie hand or two freely;[17]

Gambling was a natural pastime for a gentleman and not gambling or stopping to play after losing the game was something to be ashemed of:

> Shortyard: What? ... Will you cease in the first loss?
> Show me one gentleman that e'er did it ...
> forswear dice? ... What would gentlemen say of you?[18]

The successful gambler was the hero of the ordinary and Face in **The Alchemint** gives the picture of a successful gambler:

> He will winne you
> By unressistable lucke, within this fortinight
> Inough to buy a baronie
> And, for the hole yeere through, at everis place,
> Where there is play, present him with the chaire,
> The best attendance, the best drinke, ... and pay nothing,
> The purest linnen, and the sharpest knife, ...
> The dainty bed, in private, with the daintie.[19]

16. Zwager, **Glimpses of Ben Jonson's London,** (Amsterdam, Swets and Zeitlinger, 1926), p. 66-69.
17. Philip Massinger, **The City Madam,** II, i.
18. John Middleton, **Michaelmes Term,** I, iv.
19. Ben Jonson, **The Alchemist,** III, iv.

But the gallant's luck remained with him as long as he could avoid another place of temptation and this seems to have been Chartley's problem in Thomas Heywood's **The Wise-woman of Hogsten**

> Chartley: I am glad I have wonne my Money againe
> ... And if I meete not with a Dyce House, or an
> Ordinary by the way, no question but I may increase
> it to a summe.[20]

But one did not always have the luck in gambling. As Walker says,

> Marry the dice-players stuck well by it and made
> very fresh play, saving one or two, that were clean
> shriven, and had no more money to lose.[21]

His words recall to mind Sam's words in Middleton's **A Trick to Catch The Old One:**

> He thumps his breast like a gallant dicer that
> has lost his doublet, and stands in's shirt to
> do penance.[22]

It was not only the clothes the unlucky gamblers lost at gambling tables but all their possessions. Haringfield in the **Wise-woman of Hogsden** refers to an incident at which the players lost everything:

> Haringfield: Let's not like debosht fellowes, play our Clothes,
> Belts, Rapiers, nor our needfull ornaments:
> Tis Childish, not becomming Gentlemen
> Play was at first ordayn'd to passe the Time;[23]

When there was nothing more to lose, then the gallant started borrowing from those who made a profession of lending money to the gambling gallants.

> Quicksilver: I am going to an ordinary now: the gallants
> fall to play: I carry light gold with me; the gallants
> call, 'Cousin Frank, some gold for silver;
> I change, gain by it; the gallants lose the gold and
> then call 'Cousin Frank, lend me some silver[24]

Obviously lending money to a gallant meant more gains for the lender. Either the money lent was counterfeit and thus the gallant was cheated or else he was cozened and as a result lost all his property. Quicksilver tells us how it works:

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20. Thomas Heywood, **The Wise-woman of Hogsden,** I, i.
21. Gilbert Walker, "A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play", **Life in Shakespeare's England,** p. 154.
22. Middleton, **A Trick to Catch The Old One,** IV, ii.
23. Thomas Heywood, **The Wise-woman of Hogsden,** I, i,
24. Ben Jonson, **Eastward Ho!,** I, i.

Quicksilver: I am entertained among gallants, true!
... I lend them moneys, good! They spent it, well!
But when they are spent, must not they strive to get
more? Must not their land fly? ... How would merchants
thrive, if gentlemen would not be unthrifts?
How could gentlemen be unthrifts, if their humours
were not fed? How should their humours be fed but
by white-meat and cunning secondings?[25]

Gallants required money not only because they lost at gambling tables but also because they lived in such fashionable ways and spent so lavishly that it was very difficult, if not impossible, to find enough ready money to keep up the standard . They were in perpetual need for money and one way to satify this need was to pawn their valuables. Frip in **Your Five Gallants** writes down:

Lent to Iustice Crupskin upon both his Velvet
Iackets, five pound ten shillings...
Lent to Sir Oliver Needy upon his Taffatie cloake,
Bever hat, and perfum'd lether Ierkin, six pound five
shillings. Lent to Maister Andrew Lucifer, upon his
flame-colourd doublet, blew Taffity hose.[26]

Eating and dicing were not the only pastimes of a gentleman. Play-going was also a popular form of entertainment for the English public. Especially it was customary for a gallant to entertain himself after dinner either at a playhouse or at one of the many available places of amusement in London. Some of the play-goers went to the theatre to have fun, some, as Ben Jonson said, "only for sight."[27] Some others frequented the theatre with only one interest, that is, to see what others wore and to see what the actors did on the stage.

Prologue: Oh, Curiosity! You come to see who wears
the new suit today, whose clothes are best penn'd
Whatever the part be, which feathered actor has the
best leg and foot, what king plays without cuffs,
and his queen without gloves, who rides past in
stockings and dances in boots?
Censure: Yes, and which amorous prince makes love in
drink or does overact prodigiously in beaten satin
and, having got the trick on't, will be monstrous
still, in despite of counsel, embroidered.[28]

25. **Eastward Ho!,** I, i.
26. Thomas Middleton, **Your Five Gallants,** I, i.
27. Jonson, **The Staple of News,** Prologue.
28. **The Staple of News,** induction.

The next place "filled, after the play-houses be emptied"[29] says Dekker, were taverns. Just as ordinaries occupied a central part in a gallant's life, so did taverns and ale-houses. The proof of this fact may be found in that in Dekker's **Guls Horn-Booke** an entire chapter is devoted to the advising of a gallant on how to behave in a tavern.[30] For example, Dekker recommends that while paying a tavern reckoning the gallant should cast his "eie onely upon the Totalis and no further",[31] because this would prevent him from being taken as someone who knew the current prices of everything or, worse still, from being thought "pater-familias". That is why Ben Jonson's Pennyboy Junior says, " I look on nothing but totalis."[32]

It was also a common practice to find a dupe and make him pay the bill for the whole company at the tavern and this dupe was called the 'shotclog'. Golding in **Eastward Ho!** reprimands Quicksilver for being one:

> Golding: Alas, I behold thee with pity, not with
> anger, thou common shot-clog, gull of all companies.[33]

Kitely in **Every Man In His Humour** explains what people did in a tavern:

> He, and his wild associates, spend their hours,
> In repetition of lascivious jests,
> Swear, leap, drink, dance, and revel night by night,[34]

Since going to a tavern was an essential part of a gallant's social life, drinking to healths was very important to the Elizabethans. "I pledge you, Signor Candida"[35] was an examplary toast and was accompanied by various rites. Healths were drunk bare-headed, falling on knees and in very enthusiastic moments stabbing arms and mixing the blood with wine and drinking to the health of a mistress was a common thing to do and was thought an act of gallantry. Bellafront in **the Honest Whore** is referring to this custom when she is boasting:

> How many gallants have drunk healths to me,
> Out of their dagger'd arms, and thought them blest,[36]

29. Dekker, **Guls Horn-Booke,** p. 54.
30. **Guls Horn-Booke,** Chapter VII.
31. **Guls Horn-Booke,** p. 56.
32. Jonson, **The Staple of News,** I. iii.
33. Jonson, **Eastward Ho!,** I, i.
34. Jonson, **Every Man In His Homour,** II, i.
35. Thomas Dekker, "The Honest Whore", **A Select Collection of Old Plays,** (London, 1. Nichols, 1708), Part I, p. 266.
36. Dekker, **The Honest Whore,** Part I, p. 295.

Taking tobacco was also a sign of gallantry. A box and a pipe were among a gallant's equipment. They took great delight in taking tobacco "in the lord's room over the stage" and then go and spit privately in Paul's.[37]

A gentleman without a mistress was unheard of. When a gallant wished to find himself a mistress he had to frequent certain places. As Truewit points out, staying in one's chamber was no way to get a mistress. His advice to a young gentleman is to

> leave to live i'your chamber,
> ... and come abroad ... to court,
> to tillings, public shows and
> feasts, to plays and church sometimes:
> thither they come to show their new
> tries too, to see and to be seen. In
> these places a man shall find whom to
> love, whom to play with, whom to touch
> once, whom to hold ever. The variety
> arrests his judgement. A wench to please
> a man comes not down dropping from the
> ceiling, as he lies on his back droning
> a tobacco-pipe. He must go where she is.[38]

Once the meeting was arranged then the gallant had to please the young woman to keep up her interest and her love. He had to take great pains to satisfy his mistress' whimsies and if necessary appear quite a different person than he really was. Truewit shows the way in **Epicoene:**

> If she love wit, give verses, though you
> borrow 'em of a friend, or buy "em, to have good.
> If valour, talk of your sword, and be frequent in
> the mention of quarrels, though you be staunch in
> fighting. If activity, be seen o'your barbary
> often, or leaping over stools, for the credit of
> your back. If she love good clothes or dressing,
> have your learned council about you every morning,
> your French taillor, barber, linener, et cetera.
> Let your powder, your glass, and your comb be your
> dearest acquaintance... Let your gifts be slight
> and dainty, rather than precious. Let cunning be
> above cost. Give cherries at a time of year, or
> appricots; and say they were sent to you out o'
> the country, though you bought 'em in Cheapside.[39]

37. G.W. Thornbury, **Shakespears's England or Sketches of our Social History in the Reign of Elizabeth** (London, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1856), p. 171.
38. Johnson, **Epicoene,** IV, i.
39. **Epicoene,** IV, i.

In cases of desperation the gallant would even change his appearence and what he was capable of doing in this connection is related in **The Alchemist.**

> Love-wit: you had tane the paines,
> To dye your beard, and umbre o're your face,
> Borrowed a sute, and ruffe, all for her love;[40]

Yet the whole idea of going through all this trouble was not marriage but was to have fun and to be fashionable. To have a mistress was a distinctive colouring of a gallant and meant nothing else. Chartley in the **Wise-woman of Hogsden** speaks of his mind very sincerely.

> Chartely: As I live, I love her extremely, and to
> enjoy her would give anything: But the foole
> stands in her owne light't will doe nothing
> without Marriage: but what should I doe marrying?[41]

Like the medieval knight, the Elizabethan gallant had to conform to certain codes of behaviour in his relations with a woman. We learn from Centaur in **Epicoene** what the women of the period expected of a gentleman when she asks,

> ... and who will wait on us to coach then?
> or write, or tell us the news then? make anagrams
> of our names? an invite us to the cockpit,
> and kiss our hands all the play-time , and draw
> their weapons for our honours?[42]

A gallant's day, however, was never complete if he did not visit a brothel which was a trap both for him and for his purse. That is why Witgood in **A Trick to Catch the Old One** complains and asks:

> Why should a gallant pay but two shillings for
> his ordinary that nourishes him, and twenty times
> two for his brothel that consumes him?[43]

It was in the bawdy houses of the time that the foolish heirs to rich lands would be lured into signing away their land and money by giving them access to a prostitute at any hour of the day or night. Surly in **The Alchemist** is referring to an heir's being cheated at a brothel, when he swears that he would.

40. Johnson, **The Alchemist,** V, v.
41. Heywood, **The Wise-woman of Hogsden,** I, i.
42. Jonson, **Epicoene,** IV, iv.
43. Middleton, **A Trick to Catch the Old One,** I, i.

No more be at charge of keeping
The livery-punke, for the yong heire, that must
Seale, at all houres in his shirt. No more
If he denis, ha'him beaten to't as he
That brings him the commoditie.[44]

An almost complete picture of a gallant can be found in the dramatic literature of the times. For example, Clerimont in **Epicoene** says that a gallant

is one of the Braveries, ...
He will salute a judge upon the bench, a bishop
in the pulpit, a lawyer when he is pleading at
the bar, and a lady when she is dancing in a
masque and put her out. He does give plays and
suppers, and invites his guests to 'em aloud out
of his window as they ride by in coaches. He has
a lodging in the Strand for the purpose, or to
watch when ladies are gone to the china-houses[45]
or the Exchange, that he may meet 'em by chance and
give 'em presents, some two or three hundred pounds
worth of toys, to be laughed at. He is never without
a spare banquet or sweetmeats in his chamber, for
their women to delight at, and come up to, for a bait.[46]

Truewit in the same play gives another perspective to a gallant:

Hearken after the next horse-race or hunting-match;
lay wagers, praise Puppy, or Peppercorn,
Whitefoot, Franklin[47] swear upon Whitemare's
party; spend aloud that my lads may hear you,[48]
visit my ladies at night and be able to give 'em
the character of every bowler or bettor o' the green.
These be the things wherein your fashionable men
exercise themselves.

Follywit, on the other hand, talks about how a gentleman of fashion passes his time:

I ... sit up late till it be early, drink
drunk till I am sober, sink down dead in
a tavern, and rise in a tobacco shop, ...
I go without order, swear without number, gull.
without mercy, and drink without measure[49]

44. Jonson, **The Alchemist,** II, ii.
45. Shops where oriental goods were sold and which were fashionable meeting places.
46. Jonson, **Epicoene,** I, iii.
47. Horses of the time.
48. Jonson, **Epicoene,** I, i.
49. Middleton, **A Mad World, My Masters,** I, i.

and as Bobadill adds he

> will have a bunch of radish, and salt,
> to taste (his) wine; a pipe of tobacco,
> to close the orifice of the stomach: and
> then call upon young Wellbred.[50]

If the gallant loves

> a Madam-punk, and your wide nostrill
> Be taken with a sent of cambrick smocks
> Wrought and perfum'd ... apprehend
> The raptures of being hurried in a coach
> To Brainford, Stanes or Barnet[51]

Meercraft in **the Devil Is An Ass** tries to complete the picture by telling what contributes to the ruining of a gallant:

> This comes of wearing
> Scarlet, gold lace, and cut-works, your fine gart'ring
> With your blown roses ... and your eating
> Pheasant and gotwit, here in London, haunting
> The Globes and Mermaids, Wedging in with lords,
> Still at the table, and affecting lechery,
> In velvet,[52]

And finally, Witgood's confession in **A Trick to Catch the Old One** helps to round up the portrait:

> And here forever I disclaim
> The cause of you h's undoing, game,
> Chiefly dice, those true outlanders,
> That shake out beggars, thieves, and panders,
> Soul-wasting surfeits, sinful rich,
> Queans' evils, doctors' diets,
> 'Pothecaries' drugs, surgeons' glisters,
> Stabbing of arms for a common mistress,
> Riband favours, ribald speeches,
> Dear perfumed jackets, penniless breeches,
> Dutch Flapdragons, healths in urine.[53]

However, the life a gallant led was a cause for a father's complaint. Sir Davy tells in great misery:

50. Jonson, **Every Man In His Humour,** I, iv.
51. Massinger, **The City Madam,** II, i.
52. Ben Jonson, **The Devil Is An Ass,** III, i.
53. Middleton, **A Trick to Catch the Old One,** V, ii.

your Sebastian
Doats but on one drab, mine on a thousand,
A band noise of fiddlers, tobacco, wine and a whore,
A mercer that will let him take up more,
Dice, and a water-spaniel with a duck; oh
Bring him abed with these, when his purse jingles
Roaring boys follow at's tail, fencers, and ningles.[54]

and the father was always sure where to find his son, the gallant:

Dispense yourselves, inquire about the Townes,
Ordinaryes, Bowile-allyes, Tenis-Courts,
Gaming-houses. For thers (I feare) he will be found.[55]

With its fun and games, with its fashions and customs, such was the life of a London gentleman as we learn it from Elizabethan comedies

54. Middleton, **The Roaring Girl,** III, iii. Ningles were boy favourites.
55. Heywood, **The Wise-woman of Hogsden,** V, i.