

Reality and Appearance:
An Examination of Thomas Middleton's
A Chaste Maid in Cheapside

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In 1501, William Dunbar called the city of London the "sovereign of cities" and the "flower of cities all" (Smith 513). John Lyly was most emphatic in his description of the city as well. He said:

London, a place both for the beauty of building, infinite riches, variety of all things, that excelleth all the cities in the world; in so much that it may be called the store-house and Mart of all Europe. Close by this city runneth the famous river called the Thames . . . What can there be in any place under the heavens that is not in this noble city either to be bought or borrowed?

. . .

It hath divers hospitals for the relieving of the poor, six score fair churches for divine service, a glorious burse which they call the Royal Exchange for the meeting of merchants of all countries where any traffic is to be had. (Lyly 186)

London was a fast growing city in Thomas Middleton's time. Population in the city jumped from 120,000 in 1550 to 375,000 in 1650—an increase of over 200% in a span of a hundred years. By the close of the 16th century the city became a hub of industry and commerce, a thriving port, the home of the nation's major wholesale markets and the place from which professions, crafts and trades were regulated through the city. However, along with the economic prosperity came the parallel new world of "dicing, whoring, cheating