Shakespeare's co-author revealed
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New research suggests Shakespeare collaborated with Thomas Middleton on 'All's Well that Ends Well'.

(Phys.org) -- *All's Well that Ends Well* may be a collaboration between William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, Oxford University academics have found.

It has long been thought the comedy in the *First Folio* of 1623 is textually problematic: it has a low incidence of Shakespeare’s spelling, inconsistent speech prefixes and unusually narrative phrasing in its stage directions.

Professor Laurie Maguire and Dr Emma Smith, both of Oxford University’s English Faculty, have found these anomalies can be explained by Shakespeare collaborating with his contemporary Thomas Middleton, with whom he also collaborated on *Timon of Athens* at the same time (1606-07).

Dr Emma Smith said: 'We are not saying that Middleton and Shakespeare definitely worked together on *All's Well*, but Middleton’s involvement would certainly explain many of the comedy’s stylistic, textual and narrative quirks.

'The narrative stage directions - especially "Parolles and Lafew stay behind, commenting on this wedding" - look as though it is the point at which one author handed over to another.'

An analysis of the textual composition of *All's Well* provides more support for Middleton’s involvement. Professor Maguire said: 'The proportion of the play written in rhyme is much higher than usual for Jacobean Shakespeare - 19% of the lines are in rhyme, which fits Middleton’s norm of 20%.

'There are more feminine endings and tri- and tetra-syllabic endings than usual - again hallmarks of Middleton. Shakespeare tends to use "Omnes" as a speech prefix and "All" (preferred by Middleton) only occurs twice in the Folio - both times in All’s Well.'

Professor Maguire and Dr Smith suggest that Act 4, scene 3 was written by Middleton. Professor Maguire said: 'This scene sees Parolles describing Bertram as "ruttish" - a word whose only other occurrence as an adjective is in Middleton’s *The Phoenix*. It also sees an unusual number of Middleton’s known spelling preferences.'

If Middleton and Shakespeare did collaborate on *All’s Well*, it provides an interesting insight into the way Shakespeare worked. Dr Smith explained: 'Where we know Shakespeare worked with other playwrights, it tended to be in a master-apprentice relationship - with Shakespeare as the apprentice in the early years and as the senior writer in his later years.

'But if, as we suspect, *All’s Well* and *Timon of Athens* were written in 1606-7 while Shakespeare was in the middle of his career and working with a dynamic, up-and-coming playwright like Middleton, the relationship seems not unlike an established musician working with the current "big thing" and is
about more than just professional training.'

The article first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* on Friday April 20 2012.

Provided by Oxford University


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