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Prologue to the Comedy of Errors

Craig Kurtz

ANTIPHOLUS:

Who wants a lackey that is smart,
he'll short-change you right from the start;
you send him erranding, and he'd
steal all the best scenes, guaranteed;
what if he was crafty Jodlet
who got to woo Don John's coquette?¹
consider Warner, the servant,
who got rich, as well Millisent;²
with such a rogue as Jeremy,
Truewit was a non-entity;³
this will not do; a lackey must
be dull enough to merit trust;
if he's too clever, faith, he will
command the top place on the bill.

DROMIO:

Who wants a master that is smart,
you'll off to Tyburn in a cart;
the Pit may like someone noble,
but they're too brisk with the cudgel;
ye gallants prefer heroes deft
as they prevent their servants' theft;
ye swells may chouse dames to make nice,
but view askance my *galliardise*;⁴
a master who possesses brains
outwits his Bubble, just like Staines;⁵
forsooth, there's knav'ry in all trades,
but gents pluck the best escapades;⁶
it's beggarly, a lackey's lot,
a smart master cannot be taught.

1. William Davenant, *The Man's The Master*.

2. John Dryden, *Sir Martin Mar-All*.

3. Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*.

4. Peter Bellon, *The Mock Duellist*, in which the valet Champagne explains his thievery of his masters' wares as an expression of French servants' punctilio.

5. John Cooke, *Greene's Tu Quoque*.

6. John Tatham (attributed), *Knavery In All Trades*, in which the defalcations of merchants' apprentices are outrivalled by those of gentlemen seducing merchants' wives.