This interdisciplinary series will include books that examine a wide range of aesthetic works and moments in their original cultural milieu. This would include, for example, the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as the products of the burgeoning theatrical industry, designed for the entertainment of heterogeneous audiences who lived in a rapidly changing world where politics, religion, national identity, and gender roles were all subjects of contestation and redefinition. We solicit manuscripts from fields including, but not limited to, literature, history, philosophy, religion, and political science, in order to enable a truly multifaceted understanding of the early modern period.

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Introduction: Shakespeare Inside and Out
Paul Menzer and Ralph Alan Cohen

John Madden’s delightful SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE (1998) SPINS FABLES transparent to any student of early modern drama: the appearance of a woman on stage, the composition of Twelfth Night hard upon Romeo and Juliet, Elizabeth I’s visit to the Rose Playhouse, and so on. Less transparent but equally fabulous, Shakespeare in Love sketches a narrative that moves Shakespeare from inside out, from the shadows of coterie drama to the sunlight of popular fame. The film opens with a performance of Two Gentlemen of Verona, presented at court for an impassive Queen, and climaxes with Romeo and Juliet, played at the Rose to a roaring throng. The “character arc” of young Will Shakespeare is evident: from courtly maker of conceited verse drama to the full-throated Bard of the popular boards, unleashed by the passion of forbidden love. When, in the film’s climactic moments, Elizabeth I slips her mask and reveals her presence in the Rose galleries, the upshot is unmistakable: even the Queen prefers her Shakespeare alfresco.

Facts don’t always do what we want them to. The current of Shakespeare’s career ran in the other direction, outside in, from suburbs whose names inscribed their marginality—Shoreditch, Southwark—to the center of the city proper. For in 1608, after years of legal wrangling, the King’s Men finally gained access to the playhouse James Burbage bought and fitted out in 1596. While William Shakespeare had but scant years to enjoy the luxury of indoor playing, the centripetal move to the middle reflected his cultural evolution from an upstart crow to a full-fledged swan.

As Andrew Gurr argues in his contribution to this collection, the Blackfriars was clearly the playhouse in which the Chamberlain’s Men wanted to play. The Globe was a desperate stopgap, though a wildly successful one. Nevertheless, the Globe—and the Elizabethan amphitheater in general—looms as Shakespeare’s home in the popular imagination. “Shakespeare’s Globe,” after all, is the name of

Who’s In, Who’s Out?: *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* on the Blackfriars Stage

Leslie Thomson

**Discussions of the Knight of the Burning Pestle** typically focus on its parody of the fare popular with citizen audiences at outdoor theaters, but the play as a whole targets virtually every aspect of a playgoer’s theatrical experience in early modern London, especially at the indoor theaters. A fundamental element of a performance at any venue was the fluid use of space made possible by the “unlocalized stage,” on which the fictional location of the action was determined by the dialogue. In the Blackfriars theater, however, some of the stage was appropriated by members of the audience, whose presence would have made it also partly their real-world space. By taking a new look at original staging evidence, this paper focuses on how Francis Beaumont seems to have capitalized on these two practices in order to blur the lines among players, characters, and playgoers—between the art of comedy and the reality of everyday life. The most literal of these traditional boundaries is the divide between stage and auditorium, player and spectator, so that when it is repeatedly crossed, the effects and the ironies related to them would have been impossible to ignore for those who experienced the play in its original context. In addition, Beaumont uses another related division—between stage and tiring house—in ways that are both unique to this comedy and directly relevant to its particular manipulation of audience response.

Among the many dramatic conventions Beaumont parodies in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is that of the neoclassical three unities, which are very literally adhered to: the action is what happens in his play, the time is how long that play takes to perform, and the place is where it is performed. When Nell, the Citizen’s wife, says of Jasper “his master did turn him away; even in this place ’twas, I’faith, within this half hour,”22 she is referring to events in the fictional “London Merchant,” occurring in the real “here and now” of the Blackfriars
audience. And because one or both of the citizens, George and Nell, are on stage until the end of Beaumont’s play, the action is continuous: there are no scene divisions and the acts are connected by interludes during which the Citizens discuss the play and speak to the spectators on stage with them. Furthermore, because these two figures are ostensibly members of the Blackfriars audience, the location of the action of Beaumont’s play is always the Blackfriars theater. But not only did gentlemen playgoers sit on the stage, in the Blackfriars theater they would have entered from the tiring house as described in The Gull’s Hornbook, where “our gallant” is advised: “Present not yourself on the stage (especially at a new play) until the quaking prologue hath (by rubbing) got colour into his cheeks, and is ready to give the trumpets their cue that he’s upon point to enter: for then it is time, as though you were one of the properties, or that you dropped out of ye hangings, to creep from behind the arras with your tripods or three-footed stool in one hand and a teston mounted between a forefinger and a thumb in the other.” These are the “gentlemen” with whom the citizen and his wife watch the play; moreover, the first quarto offers evidence that Beaumont wanted to capitalize on this behavior by a privileged few. Although the quarto’s second stage direction is simply “Enter Citizen,” modern editors commonly add some version of “[climbing to the stage],” presumably because it is clear from later dialogue that this is what first his Wife, then Rafe, do (45–48, 61). But the use of “enter” for the Citizen actually implies that he enters conventionally from the tiring house, a staging for which the list of “Speakers’ Names” in the second quarto gives support. Unusually, it lists the characters in order of appearance, and it separates the Citizen from his Wife and Rafe:

The Prologue.
Then a Citizen.
The Cittizens wife, and Raph her man, sitting below amidst the Spectators.

If the Citizen did enter from the tiring house as the gentlemen playgoers had just done, the implied links between him and them would have been felt especially by the audience on stage, and this connection would have been broadened when the Wife and Rafe began the play among the audience in the auditorium. Once Nell and George get settled on stage and involved in directing the performance, the effect is to make them seem more “real” than those who behave as characters should by returning periodically to the tiring house.

By convention, the area behind the stage was a place to which the audience did not go after the action had begun. Typically it represents a fictional location different from where the onstage action occurs, but in The Knight of the Burning Pestle the tiring house represents a dizzying number of different places, creating an element of parody that calls attention to itself. In “The London Merchant” it is Venturewell’s house and shop, the Merrynthought house, and the Bell Inn; in Rafe’s additions, it is Barbaroso’s “mansion,” “cell,” or “cave” (depending on who is talking). For the Citizen and his Wife, besides representing these fictional locations the tiring house is also a tiring house, whence the boy players of “The London Merchant” enter and into which they repeatedly exit. And for Beaumont’s Blackfriars audience, it was the unseen tiring house of the real-world theater in which they were sitting. Significantly, all but one of these are places of business where money is necessary, whether the shop of a merchant who has found “a wealthy husband” for his daughter, or the Bell Inn where the Host insists on payment, or a tiring house filled with expensive costumes, properties, and playbooks.

These aspects of this play’s preoccupation with the world of commerce and the tiring-house representations of it are not as apparent on the page as they would have been on the stage, where there were evidently signs to mark locations, like shop signs on the streets outside the theater. In act 2, Tim (as Rafe’s squire) announces, “we are at Waltham town’s end, and that’s the Bell Inn”; but George (as Rafe’s knight) immediately transmutes it into “an ancient castle, held by the old knight / Of the most holy order of the Bell” (361–66). Then in act 3 when the Tapster reminds Rafe that “the reckoning is not paid,” Rafe responds, “Right courteous knight, who, for the order’s sake / Which thou hast ta’en, hangst out the holy bell, / As I this flaming pestle bear about, / We render thanks to your puissant self” (141–45). Signs, both literal and figurative, designate places and roles, but they can be variously interpreted, as the play repeatedly emphasizes. Later in act 3, for example, there is a nice moment when the Host initiates a new function for the tiring house as Barbaroso’s house and “cave.” First he tells Rafe: “Without his door doth hang / A copper basin on a prickant spear” (240–41); then, after their journey has been signaled by an exuri and reentrance, the Host points to what was just his place but is now the barber’s: “yonder his mansion is; / Lo, where the spear and copper
The elements I have been describing—the locations represented by the tiring house, the focus on money and merchants, the onstage intermingling of players and audience—all come together in the person and house of Merrythought, the play's presiding genius. Earlier, I noted that the tiring house represents various places of commercial enterprise, with one exception. This is the Merrythought house, which is explicitly the antithesis of everything mercantile—a place free of the commercial world and ethos that are repeatedly rejected by him. A playgoer's (or reader's) awareness of Merrythought's resistance to reality and change is heightened by the structural device of having him end every act with a song, and by his expressing a "merry" point of view that effectively and ironically counters the worldly values of work and responsibility apparent everywhere else in the play. Furthermore, while around him the action and its location change repeatedly, Merrythought remains always in one place—his house—and always what he is—a carefree, prodigal husband and father.

An audience hears Merrythought "within" before it sees him. His exasperated wife says, "Hark, my husband; he's singing and hoisting, and I'm fain to cark and care" (1.348.1, 351–52). When she asks how he can hope to survive with no money, he replies: "How? Why how have I done hitherto this forty years? I never came into my dining room but at eleven and six o'clock I found excellent meat and drink a' the table; my clothes were never worn out but next morning a tailor brought me a new suit; and without question it will be so ever" (366–71). The Citizen's Wife comments disapprovingly: "It's a foolish old man this; is not he, George?" and "Give me a penny i' th' purse while I live, George" (374, 376). But as the act ends and the interlude begins, Merrythought insists, "All I have to do in this world is to be merry" and the Wife says, "I'll be sworn he's a merry old gentleman for all that" (5.431–31, int.1). Nell's use of "merry" might not be wholly positive here, but it marks a change of attitude that will develop. Near the end of act 2, she signals Merrythought's entrance: "here comes the merry old gentleman again" (436–37), and soon he is singing "Tis mirth that fills the veins with blood / More than wine, or sleep, or food" (460–61). Now Nell says to her husband: "Look, George, how sayst thou by this, George? Is't not a fine old man? ... When wilt thou be so merry, George?" (474–76). It is noteworthy, therefore, that when the Host of the Bell Inn insists on payment from Rafe and the Wife asks her husband if he must pay, George reassures her, "No, Nell, no; nothing but the old knight
is merry with Rafe.” She says “Rafe will be as merry as he,” which seems to cue his next words to the Host: “Sir knight, this mirth of yours becomes you well” (3.164–67). When the Host still insists on payment, however, she realizes he is “in earnest” (176).

The play's contrast between “merry” and “earnest” (or the mirthful and mercantile) is exemplified in Merrythought and Venturewell. Their place in the structure, along with the responses of the Citizen and his Wife to them, is part of what might be called the “enchantment” the play works on the audience. Whereas all five acts begin either with Venturewell or with Jasper (the apprentice Venturewell has dismissed because he is not the “wealthy husband” [1.12] he has arranged for his daughter Luce), each act ends with the singing Merrythought. Significantly, Beaumont brings the two characters together only twice: first in act 2, when Venturewell comes to Merrythought for help getting his daughter back, then again in act 5, when Venturewell comes to Merrythought to ask forgiveness. When on the first occasion Merrythought responds with snatches of song, Venturewell tells him, “This mirth becomes you not.” Venturewell’s angry insistence on the return of his “stolen” child is set against Merrythought’s claim that “If both my sons were on the gallows, I would sing” and his dismissal of the merchant: “I'll hear no more o' your daughter; it spoils my mirth” (486, 489, 501, 519–20). This exchange prepares for their second—which is important not only as a contrast with the first but also as one of two similar returns to the Merrythought house in act 5.

When Merrythought first appears in act 3, he is again located “within”—that is, inside his house and inside the tiring house of the stage on which the two Citizens and gentlemen playgoers sit together. Mistress Merrythought and Michael, who are clearly representatives of a world where money is necessary to survive and prudence a moral good, are also onstage, outside the house, asking to enter. To this point in the play, George and especially Nell have sided with Mistress Merrythought and against her husband; in addition, the two Citizens have had several exchanges with the gentlemen-audience on the stage with them. The connections between the real audience, the actors-as-audience, and the “London Merchant” characters with them onstage are therefore particularly close, so that when Merrythought refuses to admit his wife and son, all those on stage with them—characters and audience—might be said to be excluded too, a commonality I believe Beaumont created then exploited for a purpose.

The original stage directions indicate an extended period during which Merrythought speaks or sings either from within his “house” or at his “window” (3.485–564).19 Worth noting first is that the business of Merrythought at his window above and his wife calling to him from below constitutes yet another parody of dramatic convention. When Merrythought sings “Go from my window, love, go / . . . / You cannot be lodged here” (503, 507), the audience would almost certainly have been amused by the inversion of numerous wooing scenes that have the man below seeking admission and the woman above refusing it.14 Here, Merrythought insists, “Faith, no, I’ll be merry. You come not here” (511). Furthermore, when Nell asks her husband, “He's not in earnest, I hope, George, is he?” (528) and George seems to side with Merrythought, she reacts by calling out angrily to Merrythought who is again “within” (541). Here, for the only time in the play, he seems to acknowledge her existence, singing “I come not hither for thee to teach” (550), thereby linking the two judgmental wives, Nell and Mistress Merrythought, both outside the Merrythought house.

As a result of this exchange, an overheated Nell commands her husband, “Get me some drink, George” (3.559). The quarto has no stage direction for his exit, but most editors assume he departs into the tiring house and insert “[Exit Citizen].”15 Maybe so, but, especially given the overtly and deliberately metadramatic nature of this play, it is also possible that this Citizen went down into the auditorium to buy beer from the same vendor as did the playgoers.16 This would have been an opportunity to enhance the relationship between these characters and the real audience that, I suggest, Beaumont not only wouldn’t have missed but that he engineered, just at the point when he was emphasizing the division and difference between Merrythought in the tiring house and everyone else outside it. Certainly the physical relationship of the Citizen, Wife, and gallants onstage is further enhanced when George returns with the beer (there is no stage direction for his reentrance in the early editions) and Nell says, “Gentlemen, I’ll begin to you all, and I desire more of your acquaintance, with all my heart. —Fill the gentlemen some beer, George” (ll.3.4–6).

Beaumont’s repeated incorporation of tiring-house locations into the action of his play culminates in act 5 with the return to the Merrythought house of first Mistress Merrythought then Venturewell. After losing her jewels and money, Mistress Merrythought and Michael again ask to be admitted. This second time, however, wife and
son are not on the stage but in the tiring house, which has therefore become outside the house, while Merrythought is on the stage, which has become inside the house. What this means, of course, is that now George, Nell, and the gentlemen audience are “inside” Merrythought’s house with him. To my knowledge, this reversal is unique; that is, although there are other plays in which the tiring house represents inside in one scene and outside in another, this is the only instance where a scene explicitly replays the events of a previous one but with the locations reversed. And certainly this is the only play in which this inversion occurs when the onstage audience includes players-as-audience. Furthermore, the reason why Mistress Merrythought and Michael are admitted this second time is that whereas before they refused his demand that they sing, now they agree to do so. This repetition with variation emphasizes that Merrythought has won the battle between prodigality and prudence, a conflict that runs through the play. And this triumph of “mirth” over money is immediately repeated when Venturewell, the mercenary merchant, also returns to the Merrycuseth house asking to be admitted. He too calls from the tiring house: “Are you within, sir?” and Merrythought answers: “Are you merry? You must be very merry if you enter.” As with his wife, he insists that Venturewell must sing “or by the merry heart, you come not in” (5.234, 238–39, 243-44). The Merchant complies and is given permission to enter and join all the others already onstage. Significantly, Venturewell has come to ask Merrythought’s “forgiveness” (250), which, when granted, initiates the “rebirth” of Jasper and Luce, the play’s young lovers.

This play’s awareness of the dramatic conventions it employs and mocks is apparent throughout, but nowhere more than in its concluding events and language. The “London Merchant” plot ends with the comic clichés of reunion, forgiveness, and betrothal, which seem to parody the forced conclusions in the comedies it parodies. But The Knight of the Burning Pistle is not over. The Citizen immediately protests that “Everybody’s part is come to an end but Rafe’s, and he’s left out” (5.277–78), thus demanding, in effect, a finish that has no “outsider figures” to spoil the comic inclusiveness. When Nell and George decide that Rafe should “come out and die,” the Boy is dismayed: “’Twill be very unfit he should die, sir, upon no occasion, and in a comedy too”; but the Citizen replies: “Is not his part at an end, think you, when he’s dead?” (283, 286–89). The audience’s consciousness of dramatic genres and the conventions associated with them is thereby heightened just at the moment when they really matter. What follows indicates further that Beaumont knew what he was doing and why. When Rafe enters “with a forked arrow through his head” (289.1) and speaks a fifty-line “omnibus parody” of ghost scenes in earlier plays, the comic inversion of tragic conventions is hilariously apparent. After Rafe is done and the citizens happy, Merrythought again signals a comic conclusion, but now it has broadened to include the three citizens: “Methinks all we, thus kindly and unexpectedly reconciled, should not depart without a song” (344–45).

The “Merrythought ethic” dominates the play: his world, where dinner is on the table every night and money unnecessary, is at one level a play-world in which each time the play is performed, the necessary properties are there. This, of course, is the world of art, not of reality. But because of Beaumont’s artistic sleight-of-hand with staging, for the audience watching the play at the Blackfriars theater in 1607 there would have been a few moments when they were physically included in that comic world, a world where one can sing with Merrythought: “Hey, ho, ’tis nought but mirth / That keeps the body from the earth” (5.356–57). When this song is over, there is a direction in the quarto—“Exeunt omnes”—signaling the departure from the stage of all but the Citizen, his Wife, and the gallants, whom she thanks and invites home for a “pottle of wine and a pipe of tobacco” (5–7). Then Beaumont’s Knight of the Burning Pistle finally ends with Nell’s last words to those gentlemen who have shared the stage with her—“God give you good night”—and to her husband: “Come George.” Here the quarto again provides no stage direction for their exit, an omission which, though not uncommon, prompts a final question in the context of the play’s other instances of playfulness with staging conventions: where did the Citizen and his Wife then go—into the tiring house with their fellow players, or down into the audience? Might George have started to go toward the tiring-house door, only to be called back by Nell, who then led him through the auditorium and out into the real world? Such an inventive piece of business would certainly have been in keeping with the other mind-bending uses of place in the play as well as briefly extending the mode of comic possibility out into the reality of everyday life.

Notes

1. This paper expands the much shorter version of the argument I presented at the second Blackfriars Conference. It assumes a knowledge of the play, particularly its metadramatic nature.

3. There are no scene divisions in the quarto, but modern editors often add them, thereby masking the reasons for their absence. See Zitner’s discussion (Introduction to *Knight*, 6).


5. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, 1618 (STC 1674). (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969). B1v. Not only this quarto, but also the second quarto (STC 1675, 1635), B1r, and the second folio (Wing B1582, 1679), 2nd F3v, have only “Enter Citizen.” Herbert S. Murch’s doctoral edition of the play indicates that the first edition to emend this is Weber’s of 1778, with a note that the Citizen is with his Wife and Rafe below the stage” followed by “Citizen leaps upon the stage”; Murch’s collation indicates that in 1908 all subsequent editions had repeated this direction, with which he agrees (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1908), 110. Versions of it are almost universal since: John Doebler’s Regents edition has “Enter Citizen [climbing onto the stage]” (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1967); Fredson Bowers’s collected works has “Enter Citizen [from audience below]” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), vol. 1, as does Michael Hattaway’s Mermaids edition (London: Benn, 1969); Sheldon Zitner’s Revels edition has “Enter Citizen, [climbing to the stage],” with a note of explanation: “[Enter] in the sense that he enters on to the stage platform” (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). Andrew Gurr’s Fountainwell edition does not emend the stage direction, and his commentary note says: “Presumably he enters from the yard, or pit of the indoor theatre, where his wife and apprentice are amongst the audience, and not from the tiring house behind the stage” (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 101. Only A. R. Waller’s edition of the works reproduces the direction without emendation or comment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), vol. 6. My point is not that the additional information is necessarily incorrect but that by adding it editors have effectively closed off consideration of other staging possibilities.

6. A.dw.

7. For a different approach to the play’s use of space, including stage space, see Janette Dillon, “‘Is Not All the World Mile End, Mother?’: The Blackfriars Theatre, the City of London, and The Knight of the Burning Pestle,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 9 (1997), 127–48.

8. This is emphasized, for example, when Rafe goes “in” for his costume (induction, 87–88). For a discussion of paying to sit on the stage see William A. Armstrong, “The Audience of the Elizabethan Private Theatres,” *Seventeenth-Century Stage*, 223–25.


11. Even Rafe’s aim, however fantastical his methods, is to be a heroic success.

12. The quarto has no direction for Merrythought to appear at his “window” in this scene, although it has “within” at lines 487.1 and 521.1. See Zitner’s note to 487.1 for a discussion of when and whether Merrythought does appear. If, however, the quarto accurately represents the original staging here (there are omissions and problems that call it into doubt elsewhere), then Merrythought is only heard from within the tiring house—his house, where he lives his carefree life and into which he refuses to admit his wife and son.


14. This direction is added in the editions by Bowers, Hattaway, Doebler, and Zitner.

15. Contemporary evidence that beer was sold in theaters is provided by Thomas Platter: “During the performance food and drink are carried around the audience, so that for what one cares to pay one may also have refreshment” (*Thomas Platter’s Travels in England* 1559, trans. and intro. Clare Williams [London: Jonathan Cape, 1937], 166–67). Without realizing the metadramatic implications, Murch comments, “Weber and the editors following him have the Citizen go out and get the beer” but that this “hardly seem[s] necessary, since the liquor might easily have been obtained from the venders of refreshments who went about among the audience” (*Knight of the Burning Pestle*, 218).

16. In his introduction Zitner observes that “the prodigal play is turned upside down and inside out,” the latter involving “a transformation of values, with prudence becoming meanness and prodigality something like Christian cheerfulness” (20); Lee Bliss comments, “it is appropriate that at the end Merrythought should dominate the stage. He has forgiven his wife and Venturewell and, more important, converted them from false values that destroy the heart’s ease” (“Plot mee no plots’: The Life of Drama and the Drama of Life in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 45 [1984]: 17).

17. Zitner, note to 5.290 ff.