Window Scenes in Renaissance Plays: A Survey and Some Conclusions

LESLIE THOMSON

Today, few if any theatre historians would argue that there were real windows on the upper level of the Renaissance stage; but such was not always the case, and the issue has never been, probably can never be, resolved with certainty. The accepted opinion, however, is not based on specific research but is part of the general and prevailing concept of an “open,” unlocalised Elizabethan and Jacobean stage developed through research into other aspects such as the inner stage. In fact, the only broad and detailed study of the window question is that by W J. Lawrence published in 1912, “Windows on the Pre-Restoration Stage.”1 The difference between the concept of the Renaissance stage then and now is conveyed in this characteristic assertion:

I take it that certain features were fundamental and ineradicable, that they were common alike to all the theatres of the platform-stage order; and paramount among these I rank the tiring-house balcony and its accompanying window or windows.

(p. 26)

And Lawrence leaves no room for doubt about what he means by “windows”: “what I hope to prove,” he says, “is that the windows used for the most part in all the theatres of the platform-stage era were real windows, and not conventional make-believes” (p. 26). These assertions and Lawrence’s “proof” are consistent with a literal interpretation of dialogue and stage directions that also leads him to argue for the existence of upper and lower “inner stages.” In the years since Lawrence wrote, his concept of the Renaissance stage has, with a few exceptions,2 been generally refuted as the pendulum has swung towards the view that dialogue and stage directions were more fictional than literal, and that visual realism was not expected, possible—or wanted.

This concept has been especially well argued and carefully documented by Richard Hosley. Since time has not yet provided the distance from Hosley’s interpretations of the evidence as it has from those of Lawrence, it is perhaps unfair to reject completely the latter and accept without qualification the former; nevertheless, given the evidence available today suggesting that on the Renaissance stage less was more, it is difficult not to do so. Thus it is unfortunate that while Hosley and others have presented convincing arguments against the likelihood of an “inner stage,” either upper or lower, no modern study has tackled the problem of
windows as thoroughly as Lawrence’s. Indeed, Hosley expresses his opinions on the matter in a rather general footnote that I shall quote almost in full since it sets out many of the key issues."

Whether any of the public theatres of Shakespeare’s time were permanently equipped with windows over the stage may be regarded as a moot question. The pictorial evidence for the Elizabethan stage is unanimous in failing to record such windows. Evidence drawn from dialogue and from most stage-directions is inconclusive since the “windows” in question are almost invariably appropriate to the fiction. (On the basis of such evidence one might argue equally effectively that the theatres were equipped with “walls”.) The tiring-house windows called for in the Fortune contract (Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, II, 437) must have had the function of admitting light to the tiring-house and may, accordingly, be postulated as set at the back or in the sides of that structure, which at the Fortune possibly projected from the playhouse “frame” (as is suggested by the additional requirement that the stage and tiring-house be set up within the frame); and which clearly (on the evidence of the van Buchell drawing) seems to have done so at the Swan. Since only seven of Shakespeare’s thirty-eight plays (18%) require action “at a window”, and that in only nine instances it may be supposed that permanent windows over the public-theatre stage would not have been sufficiently useful to justify their expense. For this reason, and also because any one of the rectangular openings of the galleries in the Swan drawing and the Roxana vignette sufficiently resembles the frame of a window as readily to have represented one when occasionally required, I incline to the opinion that the public theatres of Shakespeare’s time were not permanently equipped with windows over the stage. However, I would not deny the possibility that windows may occasionally have been provided in a specially-built structure, especially in private-theatre or court productions.

Studies of specific theatres, such as Reynolds’ of the Red Bull, King’s of the Phoenix, Beckerman’s of the Globe, and Stevens’ of Salisbury Court support Hosley’s general conclusion; but since no one since Lawrence has examined a wide range of plays, it seemed to me useful to do so, if only to provide detailed evidence for what is generally believed. In the event, however, some additional observations and hypotheses also have been prompted.

What follows are the results of a study of sixty plays that either in stage directions or dialogue, or both, make specific mention of upper level windows—that is, exterior windows in the context of the action, not an interior gallery. For those of us who incline to the minimalist view of the Renaissance stage, public or private, the evidence seems to confirm Hosley’s opinion that “real” gallery windows were unnecessary and, therefore, probably fictional. That is, they were no more real than the walls, turrets, or chambers the gallery often represented. Significantly, this is true regardless of when the play was written, the venue where it was performed, who wrote it, or who performed it. There is certainly a wide variation in the complexity of window scenes, at least on the page, but there is no discernable pattern of external, physical circumstances that might explain it. This is not to suggest that the stages
were identical, only that these window scenes do not provide evidence indicating otherwise.5

If the premise underlying Lawrence’s study is that all references to stage windows in Renaissance plays should be taken literally, the premise at the heart of Hosley’s, and this, study is that if an actual window was not necessary, it probably did not exist anywhere but in the fiction and thus in the imagination of the audience. There is, however, considerable support for fictional window(s) both in the dialogue and action and in the phrasing of stage directions. In other words, if there were real windows there are numerous references to them; conversely, if there were no windows, playwrights went to a considerable effort to create them in the mind’s eye. This textual support ranges from the very detailed and persuasive to the incidental and can be broken down as follows: a) a stage direction for “above, at a window,” and supporting action as well as dialogue referring to the “window”; b) either a stage direction referring to a window, or specific dialogue and action; c) a stage direction for “above” or “aloft” and some supporting dialogue and/or action implying a window setting; d) dialogue referring to windows but no indication of action above. Fifty of the sixty plays have window scenes that fall into one of the first two classifications; when there is such a scene the indicators are usually explicit. Not considered here are those scenes that probably used the gallery to imply a window situation but do not refer to “above” or a window in the stage directions or dialogue of the scene, or elsewhere in the play in reference to it.

Of the scenes examined, there are a relatively small but significant number which seem to require some representation of a window as a prop, or which raise the question of whether, even for a Renaissance audience, there was a point where the imagination would not accept a purely fictional setting—when merely saying there was a window was not enough to make it so because of what the action required. Thus it becomes a challenging exercise to imagine how these scenes might have been staged based on the premise that there was no window on the upper level, that it existed only in the mind of the playwright as he wrote the scene, envisioning a real house in front of which the action was taking place and anticipating that his audience would do the same. Such scenes will be given particular attention here. Other issues to be considered are whether “casement” was merely synonymous with “window” or had the specific meaning of a window that opened, and whether there were “bay” windows.

The advantage of looking at a large group of plays is that not only do anomalies stand out but repetitions become apparent as well. Indeed, the repeated scene is probably more significant than the unusual one, since the occurrence in many plays of the same kinds of window scenes seems to suggest theatrical conventions that functioned as shorthand between actors and audience, probably further eliminating the need for literalness.6 The two most frequent uses of a window are: observation scenes, when the tiring house façade functions as a house-front from which a character in an upper-level “window” observes action in the “street” below; and, wooing scenes, with a character below serenading one above and pleading for entry.
This second type, to be discussed later, occurs so often that if there were actual chamber windows for such scenes it is surprising that there are no references to them in records such of those of Henslowe or the Office of the Revels.

While it is necessary to acknowledge the possibility of a difference between how windows were represented on the public, private, and court stages, none is apparent—and it is often impossible to be certain where a play was performed, let alone if the text we have reflects any particular performance. Indeed, since often it is not known if the play ever was performed, we cannot be certain if the staging described in the extant text reflects a playwright’s ideal, a scribe’s addition, or theatrical experience. Furthermore, it is very possible that the extant texts reflect not the actual staging but the work of either an inexperienced playwright or one astute enough to provide descriptions enabling a reader to visualize a scene. This can be the case even if the text is a prompt copy since bookkeepers seem simply to have ignored material having no relevance to a play’s production. Thus most conclusions must be tentative in varying degrees, but the general method here has been to use what little we know—or think we know—about a play unless it has been seriously questioned. When it is available the earliest edition of a play has been used, both to keep as close to the original as possible and to avoid the persuasive influence of later editors.

A good example of the most basic window scene occurs in The Merchant of Venice (Q1600). In II.v, Launcelot prepares the illusion when he says to Jessica:

Mistres, looke out at window for all this,  
there will come a Christian by,  
VVill be worth a Iewes eye.

Shylock tells her to “goe in” and “shut dores after you,” and the next scene begins with Gratiano saying, “This is the penthouse vnder which Lorenzo / desired vs to make stand.” When Lorenzo enters he says, “here dwels my father Iew. Howe whose within?” and the stage direction reads, “Jessica above.” Jessica throws down the casket to Lorenzo, then exits from above to descend and join him below. Nothing more is necessary here than the basic gallery openings such as those depicted in the Swan drawing. Notice that while in the fiction—the dialogue—the upper area is designated as a “window,” in the stage directions the all-purpose “above” is used, suggesting that nothing more than the basic façade was required. In The Poetaster (Q1602), a stage direction not in the Quarto but added to the 1616 Folio, probably by the ever-precise Jonson reads, “Shee appeareth above, as at her chamber windows,” indicating the fictional nature of the setting. Perhaps even more telling in this regard is the use of “above” and “window” interchangeably in stage directions. In Othello, I.i, for example, the more theatrical Quarto (1622) reads, “Brabantio at a window,” and the Folio (1623), “Bra. Above,” implying that they mean the same thing. No real window is required as a prop; rather, the reference seems a shorthand way of indicating that Brabantio is in his chamber, having just arisen from bed. Similarly, for the second balcony scene of Romeo and Juliet, Q1
(1597) has the stage direction, “Enter Romeo and Juliet at the window,” and later, “She goeth downe from the window,” while Q2 (1597) has only “Enter Romeo and Iuliet aloft” at the beginning of the scene.\textsuperscript{13}

By far the majority of the “window scenes” listed in the Appendix are of this general type. Even those scenes which seem to refer to a physical property of the gallery usually require only the basic opening. In Greene’s Quoque (Q1614) a lover comes to his beloved’s house and asks the sun to, “poyn’t thy beames through yonder flaring glasse, / And raise a beauty brighter then thy selfe.”\textsuperscript{14} If we accept that the spectator’s imagination provided the sun and sunbeams, there is no reason to suppose it was necessary to have real glass for them to shine through. In An Englishman for My Money (Q1616) Pisaro, who has previously been “above” at his “window,” is “below” with Frisco, who has threatened to throw a stone. Pisaro exclaims, “What wouldst thou breake my VWindowes with a Stone?”\textsuperscript{15} No stone is thrown so no window is broken, and the situation and dialogue are probably more than enough to create and maintain an imaginary window—and stone for that matter.

Rather more problematic is the use of the word “casement” in both dialogue and stage directions. Lawrence believed that “the casement was in all probability the normal type of early stage window” (p. 27). And by “casement” he meant “a light iron or wooden sash for small panes of glass, as constituting a window or part of a window, and made to open outwards by swinging on hinges attached to a vertical side of the aperture into which it is fitted” (p. 33). The difference between his point of view and that common today is made apparent in his quaintly phrased and rather circular conclusion.

The supreme gratefulness of the casement as a permanent stage adjunct lay in the degree of illusion its employment lent to scenes of gallantry and intrigue. This is evidenced by the remarkable number of upper-window scenes in the Elizabethan drama.

Since it is unlikely that the playwrights, even Shakespeare, stood on the stage as they wrote, recording what they saw there, it is worth considering whether what they (and thus Lawrence) had in mind were the real windows on the actual houses in Elizabethan cities and towns—casement windows that an audience of the time also would have “seen.”

If we approach the matter assuming that no special window fixture was used, “casement,” “window,” and “above” or “aloft” can usually be considered synonymous references to the all-purpose gallery openings. The evidence suggests that in all probability dialogue and action were used to create the casement window of a house, and the house itself, in the minds of the audience. For example, in The Distresses (F1673), there are several preparatory references to a “window,” at which a serenade-wooing scene will occur, before the lover Leonte and musicians enter. Leonte sets the scene: “Just here, her Window doth / O’er-look our Garden Wall,”
and one of the musicians warns his fellows: "Stand all close beneath / The Penthouse; there's a certain Chamber-maid, / From yond' Casement, will dash us else. She was / Ever very free of her Urine." Later in the scene the character being wooed enters "above, with a light," helping to confirm the window setting. In *The Wonder of a Kingdom* (Q1636), IV.iv, a suitor says, "In this chamber she lies, and that's her window;" whereupon the woman enters "above." In the ensuing dialogue the woman asks, "To an unworthy window, who is thus kind?" and the man responds, "Look out of it, and 'tis the richest casement / That ever let in Ayre," again indicating no difference between the two terms and what they represented.

But sometimes a differentiation, or specificity, seems intended, especially when "casement" is used in reference to a window being opened or closed. In *The Devil's Law Case* (Q1623), V.iv, Capuchin and Leonora are "lockt up" in the "Turret" of a "Castle." Their imprisoner says they "may open a Casement, and whistle out to' th Sea" but no one will hear them. Soon Capuchin and Leonora enter "above at a window" and the scene ends with Leonora asking Capuchin to, "ope the other casement / That looks into the citie." Presumably this other casement is a fictional one to be imagined in the backstage wall of the "turret," so there is no need for an actual window that can be opened. In other plays, however, the problems of opening or closing windows, or "casements" raised by the text are not so easily resolved. In *Fidele and Fortuno* (Q1585), a stage direction reads, "Victoria setteth open the Casement of her windowe and with her Lute in her hand playeth and singeth this dittie." When Richard Hosley edited this play for his doctoral thesis he concluded that, "an upper station, apparently equipped with a practicable casement window is required (1.2) to serve four times as the upper-storey window of a house overlooking the street." Although he let this stand when the edition was published much later, his conclusions quoted earlier suggest that such staging would have been unlikely. The contradiction illustrates how easy it is to be beguiled into taking specific stage directions literally and then expanding upon them. Hosley's interpretation of this stage direction should perhaps have considered that, despite the detail, the word "above" never appears in any stage direction, and only the quoted direction refers to a casement or to opening it. For the other three window scenes a Swan-type gallery opening would suffice. *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (Q1601), contains a wooing song that refers to the casement opening, followed by the stage direction, "The Casement opens, and Katherine appeares." As in *Fidele and Fortuno* there is no stage direction for "above" here. But later in the same act of *Jack Drum's Entertainment* the use of the upper level is clear when the suitor of Camelia comes on asking if she is still in bed and Camelia's maid Winnifred "lookes from above." Shortly after, we read, "Camelia from her window," then she speaks to the suitor, offering him a "favour" (sig. D3). *The Woman's Prize*, another play that makes extensive use of the window, has two characters enter "above," and one below specifically say, "the window opens." There are equally specific references to windows being closed. In *Greene's tu Quoque* the stage direction "Enter Gartred aloft" is supported by her dialogue: "heere
you besiege my window.” Gartred exists above and one below says, “The windowe is clasped” (sig. F). Similarly, *The Maid in the Mill* (F1679), I.iii—a wooing scene with distinct echoes of *Romeo and Juliet*—ends with one of the characters “above,” at a “window,” saying to the other, “pluck to the window.”23 In *Blurt, Master Constable* (Q1602), which uses the upper level as a window several times, a character above tells one below to “begone” and a stage direction reads, “clap.”24 Bullen interprets this to mean that she claps the window closed.25

Most of these specific references to opening and closing windows do not easily invite alternate interpretations and are unlikely to have been satisfied merely by miming the action; an actual prop seems to be required. A possible solution is that curtains represented windows in some cases, since it is fairly certain that they were used on the main stage to represent doors, and the *Messallina* drawing shows curtains above.26 More significantly, in several window scenes dialogue and stage directions seem to confirm their presence. In *Henry VIII* (F1623), the King and Butts “Enter . . . at a Windowe above,” and shortly thereafter Henry says, “draw the Curtaine close.”27 A wooer in *Monsieur D’Olive* (Q1606) comes to his beloved’s house to find “the gates shut and cleere / Of all attendants.” He is surprised to see, “through the encourtained windowes / (In this high time of day) light Tapers.” Later he alters the description, perhaps indicating that curtains and windows were one and the same: “See all her windowes, and her doores made fast / And in her Chamber lights for night enflam’d.”28 In *Love and Honour* (F1673), yet another wooing scene contains a song beginning, “O, draw your curtains and appear,” and the two imprisoned women appear “above.”29 In *The Jewes Tragedy* (Q1662), the direction, “She draws her Window Curten,” twice describes the action of the character “in her chamber” who is asked to “come down.”30 Even more suggestive that curtains sometimes represented windows is IV.ii of *The Picture* (Q1630), where one character says to two others “above,” “You may shut vp your shoppe windowes,” and the scene ends with the direction, “They draw the curtaines.”91

There are a number of window scenes and references that presumably the playwright could envisage but which leave the reader formulating solutions even more hypothetical than those already attempted. In *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington* (Q1601), V.ii, Bruce appears “vpon the walles” of a castle. When those below ask him to open the gates, he says, “I will not ope the gates, the gate I will,” and the dialogue indicates that he has revealed several dead bodies imprisoned within the turret of the castle. But are they on the upper level with him? Later the opening is referred to as “this wide gappe” and Bruce asks, “Had I not reason, think you, to make wide / The windowe that should let so much woe forth.”32 While it is possible that the bodies are above, perhaps here “window” is a general term indicating an opening through which the bodies can be seen, and it is the discovery space curtain that is opened to reveal them.33

In *The Widow* (Q1652) Philippa says to Violeth, both “at a Window”: “Open not the window and you love me,” and Violeth replies, “No, I’ve the view of the whole body here, Mistress / At this pore little slit.” While there is no stage direction that
they are above here, a later scene has them, “above at the Window,” and the dialogue suggests this is also the case here. As the action continues Phillipa says “He cannot see me now; ile mark him better.”34 Then Phillipa asks Violetta to give her a letter, which she throws to the main stage. It seems unlikely that there would have been curtains obscuring much of the upper level action, but one wants to find some explanation for the “pore little slit” through which Violetta looks. Possibly it is a purely fictional window and slit in the front of the gallery, but it is more likely that she seems to look out through a slit on the side of the upper level—as long as it is believable that she can see the man she describes, who is on the main stage. A similar solution is probably applicable to IV.ii of The Picture where a character imprisoned “above” exclaims, “Slight tis a prison, or a pigstie, hal! / The windows grated with iron I cannot force ’em / And if I leape downe heere I breake my necke” (sig. K4). Real barred windows are unlikely since the ensuing long and rather complex gallery scene would have suffered by being staged behind bars, but perhaps the “heere” indicates alternative locations: the barred windows, probably fictitious, there, on a back or side wall, and “heere” the gallery where he is standing.35

Support for such staging is suggested by business in The Great Duke of Florence (Q1636). A character imprisoned “above” wants to send a message. He says: “This supplies / The want of penne and ink, and this of paper.” A stage direction in the Quarto reads, “Takes off the ring, & a pane of glasse.” Several lines later he throws down the pane of glass to the main stage and those who enter there and find it comment, “A pane throwne from the window no winde stirring?”36 While a real window is not necessary, the actor must take the glass from somewhere when he says “and this of paper.” Just before this he “Lookes backwards” out of the “back-part” of his prison (sig. I2) making it probable that he seems to take the pane from that fictional window.37

Another reference to bars occurs in The Family of Love (Q1608) when Maria, who has been locked into her “chamber”—“debaud of liberty”—says,

O, that this flesh
Could like swift moving thoughts transfer it selfe,
From place to place, unseen and undissolved:
Then should no yron ribbes or Churlish flinte diuide my loue and mee.38

Later in the scene Maria says to her lover below: “I prethee love attempt not to ascend / my Chamber window by a lathered [ladder] rope? / th’ entrance is to narrow: except this post / VVhich may with ease, yet that is dangerous” (sig. A4). Probably this again refers to two locations: a fictitious barred window on a back or side wall; this “post,” or location, the usual Swan-type opening.39

In A New Wonder (Q1632), IV.ii, the scene is Ludgate where the imprisoned Old Foster is told that he “must beg at the iron grate above” for food. Although there is no stage direction indicating that he goes to the upper level, he later begs and the one who hears and gives him money says he cannot see Old Foster or be seen by him.40 It
is worth noting that there are several scene-painting references to the grate, making it possible to argue that it was being created in the mind’s eye of the spectator in lieu of the real thing.\textsuperscript{41} Alternatively, since there is no stage direction for action above, perhaps at first the spectator is to imagine that Old Foster is imprisoned in a dungeon when he is told he must beg at the grate above, and later when he does so he is in the discovery space on the main stage, where a barred door or window would be more likely.

Some of the significant differences in the two texts of \textit{Doctor Faustus} have to do with a window scene that exists in the B-text (Q1616) but not in the A-text (Q1604). In it several characters want to get Benvolio’s attention. One says, “See, see his window’s ope, we’ll call to him.” Benvolio enters “above at a window, in his nightcap: buttoning.” When asked if he will “stand in [his] Window and see” Faustus’ “conjurin,” he says, “I am content for once to thrust my head out at a window.” After Benvolio mocks Faustus’ tricks he finds he has horns on his head. Faustus says he is “hang’d by the horns” and the dialogue suggests that he cannot free himself until the horns are removed.\textsuperscript{42} Benvolio later vows revenge on Faustus:

First, on his head, in quittance of my wrongs, Ile nail huge forked hornes, and let them hang Within the window where he yoak’d me first.

(sig. Fl)

The Revels editor notes that “whereas a performance of the B-text would call for the full resources of a normally-equipped Elizabethan theatre, the A-text is quite suitable for acting on a bare stage.”\textsuperscript{43} If the scene was removed so the play could be performed on a “bare stage,” was it specifically because there was no “window” to accommodate it, or merely because there was no gallery level at all? The confusion of texts invites the inference that the scene was never staged as written, but one wonders how Marlowe envisaged it being done.

Less problematic than such scenes are those referring to “bay” windows. In even the two most specific instances the dialogue seems to be sufficient, as it is when we are told that a character is on the “walls.” \textit{The Miseries of Enforced Marriage} (Q1607) has one character tell the other, “I’r]om a bay window which is opposite, I will make you knowne to your desired beauties.” Soon they appear “above,” “in this upper chamber.” Later two others enter “beneath,” one saying, “Here about is the house sure,” and the other responding, “We cannot mistake it, for heres the signe of the Wolfe and the Bay-window.”\textsuperscript{44} A rejected wooer in \textit{The Antiquary} (Q1641) says, “You are a nest of savages, the house / Is more inhospitable than the quick sands: / Your daughter sits on that enchanted bay / Like a Siren.”\textsuperscript{45} The directions do not indicate that she is even above although this is clearly the case. In \textit{Women Beware Women} (Q1657) Bianca and the Mother are “above” in the “Window” when the Duke’s procession passes below.\textsuperscript{46} Later there are several verbal reminders of this scene and the “window” in which the Duke sees Bianca, but the only specific description—“Tis a sweet recreation for a Gentlewoman, / To stand in a Bay-
window, and see gallants" (p. 139)—does not occur in the window scene and does
not necessarily describe it. Furthermore, since in this play the upper level also serves
as a chamber in Livia’s house and a gallery in the Duke’s palace, it is unlikely to have
been literally a window of any sort, let alone a bay window. 47

Possibly “bay window” is used metaphorically to imply a wide opening, one good
for seeing and, more especially, being seen. In The Captives a character uses a bay
window analogy to describe the consequences of a storm: 48

all our howses are nothinge nye but windowes: broad bay windowes so spacious that
carts Laden may drive’ throughge and neather brush ‘oth’ topp or eathers syde.

When hypotheses removing the need for real windows—whether casement,
barred, or bay—present themselves so readily, it seems reasonable to conclude that
such windows were not a usual feature of the Renaissance playhouse. Window scenes
are, however, a recurring element in the plays of the period and, as many of the above
examples indicate, these are very often love scenes of some type. Indeed, of the sixty
plays listed in the Appendix, half contain some sort of wooing scene, usually with the
woman above at her chamber window and the man below in the street—as in Romeo
and Juliet, an early example of the type. This plot situation and its attendant stage
business—which probably have their most immediate origin in the commedia dell’
arte, 49—are remarkably similar from play to play regardless of date, suggesting a
convention which, by its very nature, would have alleviated the necessity for realistic
staging. That is, once the setting—street, house, chamber, window—was under-
stood, because implicit in the situation, its degree of authenticity would not have been
questioned. As well, these wooing scenes are characterized by the use of portable
props and specific pieces of business that do the job of giving concreteness to the
setting. On the upper level there is usually a candle burning in the woman’s chamber
window, which is often curtained. Both devices are examples of “theatrical
synecdoche,” 50 shorthand ways of setting the scene. As well, they create a literal
context for conventional metaphoric dialogue associating the appearance of the
woman above with light and heaven—staging which, it should be noted, capitalizes
on the “heaven” symbolism of the upper level generally:

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun.
(Romeo and Juliet, 1597, sig. D)

What more than earthly light breaks through
that window?
(The Antiquary, sigs. c7Y)

Claramante! Break forth
Thou living Light!
(The Distresses, Folio p. 39)
This is her window! But the infant morne,
From night's black wombe, appeare but now.
Selina!
I feare to wake thee, thou more-glorious light;
Vp from that sphere thy bed, and make the day
The brighter by thyne eyes.

(The Swisser, III.i.1–5)\textsuperscript{51}

These conventional associations were likely well established when Jonson parodied them in *Every Man Out of His Humor* (Q1600):

What more than heavenly pulchritude is this?
What Magazine, or treasurie of blisse?
Dazle, you organs to my optique sence,
To view a creature of such eminence:
O, I am planet-stroke, and in yond Sphere,
A brighter starre then Venus doth appeare.\textsuperscript{52}

As has been mentioned, the wooing scene often includes a song to the woman by either the man himself or musicians accompanying him. Since the song is usually sung before the woman appears and to induce her to do so, suspense builds and the fictional context is further established. Also, the plot situation is frequently one that denies the man access to the woman either because she refuses to come down or let him in, or because she is imprisoned in her chamber. This is the situation discussed by the Duke and Valentine in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (F1623).\textsuperscript{53} When the Duke asks Valentine what he would do if he could not reach a woman because the "doores be lockt, and keys kept safe," Valentine suggests entering "at her window." They continue:

*Duk.* Her chamber is aloft, far from the ground,
And built so sheluing, that one cannot clime it
Without apparant hazard of his life.
*Val.* Why then a Ladder quaintly made of Cords
To cast vp, with a paire of anchoring hookes,
Would serue to scale another Heros towre,
So bold *Leander* would adventure it.

The Hero and Leander allusion also occurs in *The Family of Love* (sig. D3), where it is part of a joke that suggests its popularity and thus that the physical situation—the window—could easily have been taken for granted by playwright and spectator alike.

Besides creating a specific setting, such variations of the basic wooing scene permit the introduction of one or more props and related pieces of business; in particular, climbing a rope-ladder to the window and dropping a letter or a love-token from it. In *The Insatiate Countess* (Q1613)—which includes the neo-platonic language, music, and an imprisoned woman—the man, "throws up a ladder of cords, which she makes fast to some part of the window, he ascends, and at top falls"—stage
business that surely should foster a spectator’s willingness to accept any opening as a window.\textsuperscript{54}

Given the popularity of scenes where a woman at a “window” above refuses admission to a suitor below, it is not surprising to find the situation reversed in one of the many parodies of contemporary theatrical conventions that constitute \textit{The Knight of the Burning Pestle} (Q1613).\textsuperscript{55} As part of the inversion of the prodigal son situation Old Merrythought gains possession of the house after his wife and son leave to seek their fortunes elsewhere. When they return, repentant, Merrythought refuses them admission unless they sing a song. Earlier in the play Merrythought sings a popular song that capitalizes on the wooing convention.\textsuperscript{56} And although there is no stage direction that Merrythought is on the gallery, his song, in the context of the convention outlined above, suggests that, as modern editors indicate, this is almost certainly the case. When this wife asks him to “open the doore” he sings:

\begin{quote}
Go from my window, loue, goe;  
Go from my window my deere,  
The winde and the raine will drive you backe againe,  
You cannot be lodged heere.
\end{quote}

The reverse of this situation and song is found in in \textit{Monsieur Thomas} (Q1639), where the Maid being wooed sings from above:\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{quote}
Come up to my window love, come, come, come,  
Come to my window my deere,  
The winde, nor the raine, shall trouble thee again,  
But thou shalt be lodged here.
\end{quote}

Elsewhere in \textit{The Knight of the Burning Pestle} the mockery of the naive citizens provides evidence that realistic window scenes were neither possible to stage nor required by an indoctrinated audience. The Wife describes what she wants to see:

\begin{quote}
let \textit{Rafe} trauell ouer great hills, & let him be very weary, and come to the  
King of \textit{Cracouia}'s house, couered with velvet, and there let the Kings daughter stand in her window, all in beaten gold \textemdash{} and let her spy \textit{Rafe}, and fall in loue with him, and come downe to him, and carry him into her fathers house, and then let \textit{Rafe} talke with her.
\end{quote}

But the Boy who is in charge of presenting the action says, “if you will imagine all this to be done already, you shall heare them talke together: but wee cannot present a house couered with blacke velvet, and a Lady in beaten gold” (sigs. H–H').

In \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}—a study and demonstration of theatre’s dependence on imagination and illusion—Shakespeare has Bottom solve a problem of staging by depending on a real moon and window when it is obvious to the audience that neither is necessary: “Why then, may you leaue a casement of the great chamber window (where we play) open; and the Moone may shine in at the casement.”\textsuperscript{58} Like
the moon and wall in the Pyramus and Thisbe play, real windows in the plays surveyed here would surely have caused more problems than they solved. If Shakespeare and his contemporaries worked with a "bare" stage, and we work on the premise that this was the case, we discover that, as they must have done, we too can imagine how to convey the required illusion. Thus we end virtually where we began, in agreement with Hosley and contradicting Lawrence. In his note Hosley mentions the possibility that a window fixture might sometimes have been specially constructed. With a few questionable exceptions, however, these plays do not indicate that it was necessary. Rather, the accumulated evidence from the sixty plays suggests that probably we are correct to work on the premise that the more description—verbal window dressing—we are given the less there was to see.

NOTES

5. Readers who study the Appendix will note that almost half the plays were certainly or probably performed at the second Blackfriars playhouse. It would be most satisfying to be able to infer from this that the second Blackfriars stage had an upper level equipped with permanent or temporary windows. On the one hand, however, there is no hard evidence to support such a conclusion, and on the other, Blackfriars plays generally contained increasingly elaborate plots and business not restricted to window scenes. The prevalence and complexity of upper level window scenes in Blackfriars plays is likely a reflection of the demand for entertainment that was amusing and titillating, but which nevertheless depended on plot and dialogue to create its illusions and effects.
8. The date in brackets after the first reference to a play is that of the source used—almost always the earliest available quarto or folio. Quotations are reproduced as they appear in the edition used, with the exception of the long "s" which has been modernized. The Appendix lists all the plays included in the survey.


12. See Dessen on the use of the nightgown as a conventional signal in this scene, pp. 47–48.


17. Thomas Dekker, _The Wonder of a Kingdom_, 1636 (microprint), sig. F4

18. John Webster, _The Devil’s Law Case_, 1623 (microprint), sigs. L2–L2.


23. _The Maid in the Mill_, in _Fifty Comedies and Tragedies_, written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, 1679 (microprint), Folio p. 122.

24. _Blurt, Master Constable_, 1602 (microprint), sig. F2.

25. _The Works of Thomas Middleton_, vol. 1, (London: Bullen, 1885–86), pp. 215–219. It is at least possible that she merely claps her hands to speed his departure; although it should be noted that the phrase “clap it too,” in reference to a window, occurs in Middleton’s _The Widow_, 1652 (microprint), sig. G.

26. However, recent discoveries by John Astington suggest that we should be wary of using the _Messallina or Roxana_ drawings as evidence. He shows that the _Roxana_ engraver’s source was almost certainly not an actual Renaissance theatre but other title page engravings classical in nature, and that the _Messallina_ engraving is based on it. (“The Origins of the _Roxana_ and _Messallina_ Illustrations,” _Shakespeare Survey_, 43 (1991), 149–169.)


31. Philip Massinger, The Picture, 1630 (microprint), sigs. L–L'.
33. Cf. The Devil's Law Case, for a similar turret imprisonment scene, where the direction reads ‘Lockes him into a Closet’ (sig. L2). It seems that this closet is on the main stage (although afterwards imprisoned characters appear above in the scene previously discussed).
34. Sigs. B2–B2', E3'.
35. My thanks to Professor David Carnegie of the University of Victoria, Wellington, N.Z. for this imaginative solution. Real windows on the back wall of the tiring house have been postulated by Lawrence (pp. 45–60) and Albright (p. 66), but there is no proof they existed; certainly these scenes do not require them.
37. And see the scene in The Devil's Law Case, discussed earlier in connection with the opening of windows.
39. David Carnegie also deserves the credit for this suggestion.
41. Dessen, referring to this play and The Picture among others, reaches a similar conclusion (p. 98).
47. It is perhaps worth noting that large windows of any kind, particularly bay windows, were a relatively new addition to English houses. According to Shakespeare's England (eds. Sidney Lee and C. T. Onions, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916]), II.65: “bay windows, in particular, were employed to give dignity and rhythm to a façade, while at the same time adding greatly to the charm of the room’s inside.” Thus references to bay windows are likely intended as an indication of wealth and social status, making their actual presence even less necessary.
48. Thomas Heywood, The Captives, prepared by Arthur Brown, Malone Society Reprints (Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 19, ll. 472–475 (Fol. sig. 55r). This is one of the sixteen surviving manuscript playbooks. Although some of these plays have scenes aloft, they are not particularly complex, and unfortunately none is a window scene.
49. K. M. Lea, Italian Popular Comedy, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), gives examples of such commedia conventions and also relates them to English comedy. Significantly, she refers to several of the plays discussed here, making particular mention of the window-scene device. Of The Merchant of Venice she says, “the means of Jessica's
elopement is a commonplace on the Italian stage’ (p. 431); and the ladder scene in The Hog hath Lost his Pearl is ‘the stock-in-trade of the tragi-comedies of the Commedia dell’arte’ (p. 428–429). She also discusses An Englishman for My Money (p. 418), Jack Drum’s Entertainment (p. 421), and Greene’s tu Quoque (p. 428). See also Winifred Smith, The Commedia Dell’Arte (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), for a description of common commedia scenes (pp. 194–195), and for a discussion of The Widow: ‘The disguises in this play, together with the window flirtations and the charlatanlike performances of Latrocinio are commedia dell’arte features’ (p. 251). Supporting illustrations can be found in Cesare Molinari, La Commedia Dell’Arte (Milan: Arnaldo Mondadori, 1985), pp. 51, 157, 216.

50. Dessen’s very apt term, p. 13.
54. [John Marston], The Insatiate Countess, 1613 (microprint). It should be noted that this scene is clearly described in the source, Painter’s Palace of Pleasure. See The Insatiate Countess, ed. Giorgio Melchiori The Revels Plays, Manchester: (Manchester University Press, 1984), IIIi.42, note.
56. See The Broadside Ballad and Its Music, Claude M. Simpson (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1966), pp. 257–258: ‘A ballad called ‘Goe from the window goe’ was licensed March 4, 1588, but it is lost unless parts of it are echoed in Merrythought’s song. That the original ballad was considerably older than 1588 is suggested by a religious parody’ published in 1567.
57. John Fletcher, Monsieur Thomas, 1639, sig. Hr.
58. A Midsommer nights dreame, 1600: sig. D2

Appendix

Sources for the information on this list are The Annals of English Drama, 975–1700 (Alfred B. Harbage, rev. by S. Schoenbaum [London: Methuen; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964]), and modern editors’ research. The information given is the play title, author’s last name, date of first performance if known, theatre if known, the date of the first edition, and the locations of window scenes or specific references to windows. Act and scene numbers, where available, and/or the Quarto or Folio pages or signatures are given. For those plays discussed in the body of the article, the notes give full bibliographical information.

The Antipodes, Brome, 1638, Salisbury Court, 1640:
   III, IV; H, 13
The Antiquary, Marmion, 1634–36, Phoenix, 1641:
   II:i; C3v, D2, H
Blurt, Master Constable, Middleton/?, 1601–02, ?Blackfriars, 1602:
   III, IV; E–E, F2–F2
The Captain, Fletcher, 1609–12, ?Globe, ?Blackfriars, 1647:
   II:ii, V:i
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The Chances, Fletcher, 1613–25, Blackfriars, 1647:  
IV.iii; 1679 Folio pp. 422–424  
The City Witt, Brome, 1629–37, Salisbury Court, 1653:  
V; F5–F5  
The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, Chettle/Munday, 1600,  
Rose, 1601:  
xviii; L2, L3  
The Devil is an As, Jonson, 1616, Blackfriars, 1631:  
II.vi; vii; Folio pp. 122–125  
The Devil’s Charter, Barnes, 1607, Globe, 1607:  
III.ii; E2–E2  
The Devil’s Law Case, Webster, 1610–19, Red Bull, 1623:  
V.iv; L2–L2  
The Distresses, Davenant, 1639, ?Blackfriars, 1673:  
I, II.i; Eee2, Eee4–Eee4  
Doctor Faustus, Marlowe, 1588–92, Rose, 1616:  
xi, xii; C2–G3, E4, F  
An Englishman for My Money, Haughton, 1598, Rose, 1616:  
x; G3, G4–G4, H2, H4–H4  
Every Man Out of His Humour, Jonson, 1599, Globe, 1600:  
II, iii  
The Family of Love, Middleton, 1602–07, ?Blackfriars, 1608:  
I, II.i; III.i; A3–A3, D3  
Fidele and Fortuno, ?Munday, 1597–1584, ?Theatre, ?Blackfriars, Court, 1585:  
II, I.i; IV.vi, V.i  
The Great Duke of Florence, Massinger, 1627, Phoenix, 1636:  
V.i; I2–I3  
Greene’s tu Quoque, Cooke, 1611, Court, 1614:  
vi, x; F–F  
The Heir, May, 1620, Red Bull, 1622:  
II, C2  
Henry VIII, Shakespeare, 1613–14, Globe, 1623:  
V,ii; Folio pp. 228–229, ll. 3014–15, 3033  
The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl, Tailor, 1613, Whitefriars, 1614  
I, ii; B4  
The Incontinent Countess, Marston, ca. 1610–1613, Whitefriars, 1613:  
III; D4–D4, H4  
Jack Drum’s Entertainment, Marston, 1600, ?Blackfriars, 1601:  
II; C2, D3  
The Jewes Tragedy, Heminges, ca. 1622–42, 1662:  
IV, V, II. 2213–14, 2225, 2939–41  
The Just Italian, Davenant, 1629, Blackfriars, 1630:  
IV, G3, G4  
The Knight of the Burning Pestle, Beaumont, 1607, ?Blackfriars, 1613:  
III, V; G3–G3, H–H, K–K2  
The Lost Lady, Berkeley, 1637–38, ?Globe, Blackfriars/Court, 1638:  
III.i; I2  
Love and Honour, Davenant, 1634, Blackfriars, 1649:  
IV.i, V.i; 1673 Folio pp. Kk, L12–L12
The Maid in the Mill, Fletcher/Rowley, 1623, Blackfriars, 1647:
I.iii; IV.iii; Q, R3
The Maid's Revenge, Shirley, 1626, Phoenix, 1639:
III.i; E, E2–E3
May Day, Chapman, 1601–02, Blackfriars, 1611:
III.i, iii; IV.ii; E4, F3–F4 H, H2
The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare, 1594–97, ?Theatre, 1600:
II.v, vi; D–D
The Misericord of Enforced Marriage, Wilkins, 1605–06, Globe, 1607:
G2, G4
Monseur D'Olive, Chapman, 1604, Blackfriars, 1606:
I, V.i; A2, A4, G3–G3
Monseur Thomas, Fletcher, 1610–ca. 1616, ?Blackfriars, Phoenix, 1639:
III.i; H–H2
A New Wonder, Rowley, 1624–26, 1632:
IV, V, H2, H3, I3
The Noble Stranger, Sharp, 1638–40, Salisbury Court, 1640:
C4–C4
The Novella, Brome, 1632–33, Blackfriars, 1653:
II.i, IV.i; L4
The Ordinary, Cartwright, 1634–35, ?Oxford, 1651:
IV.v; p. 72
Othello, Shakespeare, ?1603, Globe, 1622:
I.i; B2; 1623 Folio p. 310, l. 89
The Picture, Massinger, 1624–25, Globe, Blackfriars, 1630:
IV.ii; K4, L–L
The Poetaster, Jonson, 1601, Blackfriars, 1602:
IV.ix; sdd. in 1616 Folio sig. Ee2
Promos and Cassandra II, Whetstone, ca. 1578, (unknown), 1578:
II.i; Hiii
Ram Alley, Barry, ca. 1611, Whitefriars, 1611:
B, B2, H
Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare, 1591–97, ?Theatre, 1597:
II.i; III.v; D, G3–G3
The Spanish Tragedy, Kyd, ca. 1587, Rose, Fortune, 1592:
III.ix; G
The Swisser, Wilson, 1631, Blackfriars, (undated MS):
III.i
The Tale of a Tub, Jonson, 1596–1633, Cockpit, Court, 1640:
I.i; 1640 Folio p. 69
The Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare, ?1593, ?Theatre, 1623:
V.i; Folio, Comedies p. 225, l. 2397
The Traitor, Shirley, 1631, Phoenix, 1633:
IV.ii; H3–H3
Two Angry Women of Abington I, Porter, ca. 1585–98, Rose, 1599:
viii; G
Two Gentlemen of Verona, Shakespeare, ca. 1590–98, ?Theatre, 1623:
III.i, IV.ii, iii; Folio, Comedies pp. 29, 33
Two Lamentable Tragedies, Yarington, 1594–ca. 1598, ?Rose, 1601:
C4
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Two Noble Kinsmen, Shakespeare/Fletcher, 1613–1616, Blackfriars, 1634:
   II.i–ii; D–D2, E
Volpone, Jonson, 1605–06, Globe, 1607:
   II.ii–iii; E2*add. in 1616 Folio, sig. Rr2
The Widow, Middleton, ca. 1615–17, Blackfriars, 1652:
   I.i, III.i, IV.i; B2–B2*, E3
Wit at Several Weapons, Middleton/Rowley, ca. 1609–20, 1647:
   III.i; 1647 Folio pp. 78–79
The Woman’s Prize, Fletcher, 1604–ca. 1617, ?Globe, ?Blackfriars, 1647:
   I.iii, II.ii, vi
   I.iii; Octavo pp. 102, 105, 115, 141
The Wonder of a Kingdom, Dekker, 1623–31, ?Phoenix, 1636:
   IV.iv, V.ii; F4*, G, G3