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TRACEY HILL

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**‘The Grocers Honour’: or, Taking the City Seriously in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle***

The Knight of the Burning Pestle famously flopped when first performed c. 1607. Critical debate over its so-called ‘privy mark of irony’ has subsequently oscillated between those who argue that the play did not satirize the London citizenry trenchantly enough, and those who prefer the interpretation that the ‘irony’ was only too apparent, and that this alienated the audience. Few have fully interrogated the play’s complex engagement with the early Jacobean citizen class and the City of London’s livery companies. This paper argues that *The Knight’s* presentation of citizens takes place in the context both of a theatre much more involved in civic structures, and of a city more imbued with performance, than is usually presumed.

PRO[LOGUE]. But what will you haue it cal’d?

CIT[IZEN]. *The Grocers honour.*

(B2r)<sup>1</sup>

According to the publisher of Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, Walter Burre, the play flopped when it was first staged around 1607 due to the audience failing to appreciate its ‘priuy marke of Ironie’ (A2r). This phrase has dominated critical response to the play. Debate oscillates between those who argue that the play did not satirize London citizenry trenchantly enough, and those who prefer the interpretation that the play’s ‘irony’ was only too apparent, alienating its audience. As Jeremy Lopez has argued, ‘it is remarkable that Burre’s ... assessment of the play’s reception ... has been almost universally taken at face value.’<sup>2</sup> Taking my cue from Lopez, in this essay I revisit the paratextual elements of the play’s first two editions, trying to avoid this overly ubiquitous ‘either/or’ dispute and engaging in a critique of what Lopez calls the ‘exaggerated demographic distinctions’ created by most critics of the play.<sup>3</sup> Few, if any, have fully interrogated the play’s complex engagement with the early Jacobean citizen class. I intend to restore

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Tracey Hill (t.hill@bathspa.ac.uk) is professor of early modern literature and culture at Bath Spa University, UK.

the balance by exploring *The Knight's* wider social and topographical contexts and by discussing the interactions between the City and the stage that the play reveals. What does it mean to have representatives of the London citizenry in a play of this period? Whose interests do they stand for? What do they reveal about the relations between the City of London and the theatre in this period? My title, 'The Grocers honour', comes from the name of the play originally requested by George, the citizen. Unlike the agreed designation of the play within the play as 'the London Merchant', this title has attracted almost no comment.<sup>4</sup> 'Honour' is itself a capacious term that captures the two main concerns of this essay by combining both the theatrical and the civic. The title page of the anonymous 1590s play *A pleasant comedie, of faire Em* encapsulates such a juxtaposition when it states that it was printed 'as it was sundrietimes publicly acted in the honourable citie of London, by the right honourable the Lord Strange his seruaunts'.<sup>5</sup> My intention here is also to challenge some categories that we retrospectively bring to bear on this play, especially the kind of critical snobbery exemplified by John Doeblér, who berates George and Nell for their 'stupidity'.<sup>6</sup>

I begin, however, with a seventeenth-century artefact. The British Library holds a copy of the 1613 edition of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* that bears some intriguing manuscript annotations which bear witness to the play's contemporary reception but which have received little scholarly attention. I will discuss two of these annotations later on, but will commence with the book's title-page, which shows an owner's name inscribed, that of Humphrey Dyson, a pivotal figure for my purposes [Figure 1]. Dyson was a citizen of London, free of the Wax Chandlers' Company; he worked as a notary and had wide connections in London's theatre world. Amongst Dyson's acquaintances we find a number of figures from the professional stage such as actors, patentees, tradesmen who worked on the playhouses, and three particular names which will become significant to this essay: Anthony Munday (with whom Dyson collaborated on the 1633 edition of *The Survey of London*), John Heminges, and Henry Condell.<sup>7</sup> Dyson's well-known large personal library contained many other playbooks, pageant books, and the like.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Dyson, a citizen of London, owned a copy of the first edition of *The Knight* does not demonstrate, in itself, a widespread readership of play-texts amongst the London citizenry. It should, however, prompt one to consider so-called 'citizen taste' more widely, in relation both to the play's reception and to some of its characters' literary preferences.

'The privy mark of irony' debate tends to hinge on the play's parody of romance fiction and by extension, its apparent satire of the London citizenry who, allegedly, consumed such works voraciously. Editors of the play, in particular, have

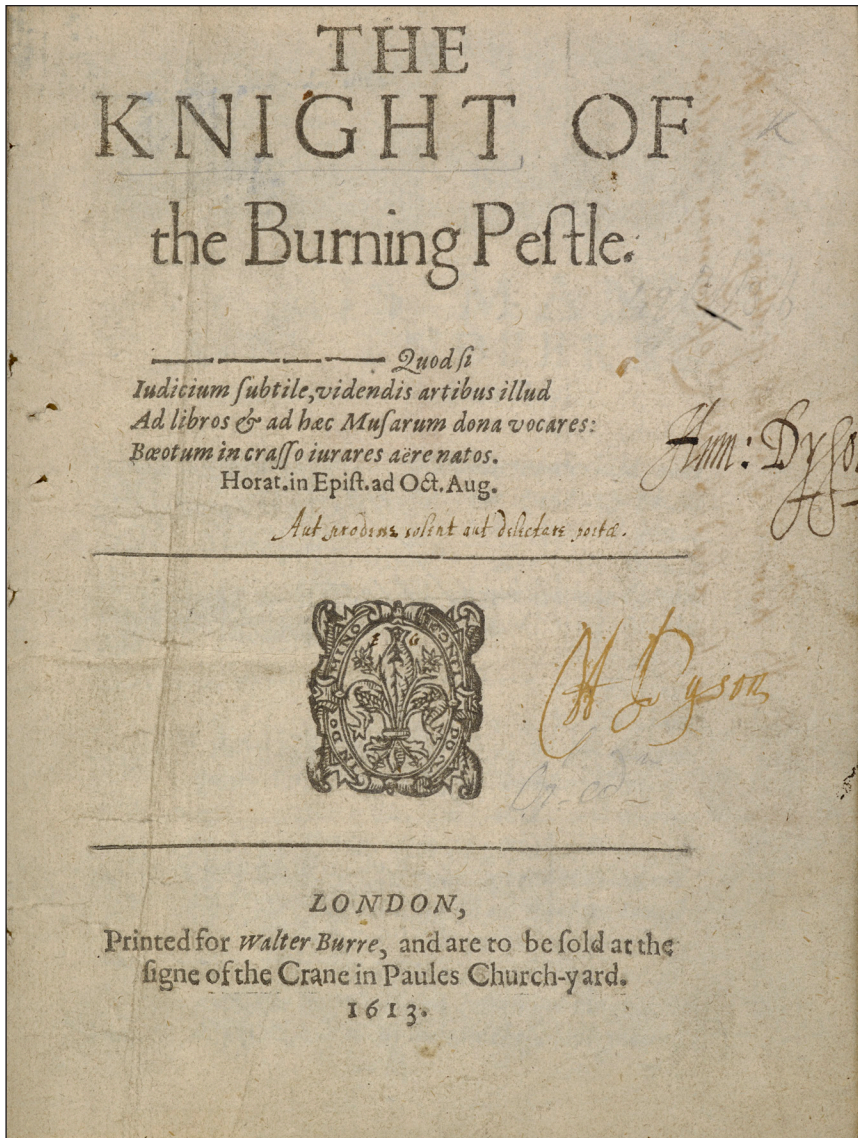


Figure 1. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613) (c) British Library Board. C.34 f.30, A1r.

done relatively little to challenge Louis B. Wright's position that prose romances appealed exclusively to a 'middle-class' readership.<sup>9</sup> The related assumption that all early modern citizens shared exactly the same attitudes or tastes is hardly credible; indeed, the undeniably elite third earl of Essex owned a copy of Munday's romance *Amadis of Gaul* and Sidney also praised the qualities of this text. Mapping social status onto literary taste is not therefore a straightforward matter. William Hunt has noted along the same lines that 'the chivalric mythos' exemplified in romance fiction is 'interestingly ambiguous ... [and its transmission was] complex and paradoxical'. He argues further that such a mythos 'fostered self-definition' in the City, and that 'chivalric romance helped to nourish the ideal of citizen honour'.<sup>10</sup> A central tenet of the City's self-presentation — the potential for a meritocratic rise through the civic ranks from apprenticeship to the ultimate 'honour' of the mayoralty — epitomized such an ideal. Prentices reading romances — let alone acting out fantastical adventures, as Rafe does in the play — were therefore not (necessarily) 'stupid', or ignorant, or lacking in aesthetic discrimination. As Hunt has argued, 'tales of knight errantry ... furnished the young with a narrative repertoire through which to articulate their own dreams and projects', and he describes such a practice as reflecting 'earnest social aspirations', a point to which I shall return.<sup>11</sup>

So, a copy of *The Knight* was owned by a citizen, Humphrey Dyson. Burre's preface to the 1613 edition of *The Knight* addresses itself to another citizen, Robert Keysar. A practicing goldsmith of 'somewhat dubious reputation', according to David Kathman, Keysar was also in charge of the Children of the Queen's Revels at the Blackfriars theatre at the point at which *The Knight* was probably first staged: hence the dedication to him by Burre.<sup>12</sup> William Ingram not only describes Keysar as a 'careless and at times troublesome' member of the Goldsmiths' Company who by 1605 had regularly been reprimanded for shoddy workmanship, but also stresses that Keysar's membership in the company was not a nominal but a fully functional one, at least until 1606 when his attention seems to have turned primarily towards his theatrical enterprise.<sup>13</sup> His involvement in the Blackfriars thus signals a reciprocal, rather than hostile, relationship between the City and theatre. Indeed, Ingram argues that after 1603 'policy about patronage, and the new restrictions on playing places, marked a change from the last days of Elizabeth. Children's companies, in particular, needed to find financial backers'.<sup>14</sup> Both adult and children's companies also needed civic structures like apprenticeship, as well as money, to function; Thomas Kendall, of whom more below, had young actors as apprentices at the Blackfriars. Some time ago Kathman noted that 'at least a dozen apprentices bound to professional players in livery



companies are known to have performed onstage — a remarkable number considering the fragmentary state of our knowledge of boy-players and the haphazard survival of apprenticeship records for these companies'.<sup>15</sup>

Players, therefore, may well have had personal experience of being apprentices. One must remember, furthermore, that apprentices were often the younger sons of gentry families — like the inns of court students who appear to have attended the Blackfriars playhouse regularly. To complicate the picture still more, these students might alternatively have come from 'middling' or citizen rather than gentry families.<sup>16</sup> As well as being part of the infrastructure of playing companies, apprentices are very evident in the play.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the majority of the named young male characters are prentices: Rafe, Tim, George, and, one should note, Jasper, the hero of the central quasi-romance plot, 'The London Merchant'. Early in the text Rafe is shown '*like a Grocer in's shop, with two Prentices Reading Palmerin of England*' (C1v). Inspired by the text, Rafe expresses his ambitions to leave shop work behind to 'pursue feats of Armes, & through his noble atchievements [*sic*] procure ... a famous history to be written of his heroicke prowess' (C2r). The boy actors performing these roles likely had been, or were even still, apprentices. Taking this into account confers a more inclusive, as opposed to purely satirical, resonance to this aspect of the play. The boy speaking Rafe's lines at the Blackfriars may even have identified personally with dreams of fantastical adventures and 'feats of Armes', which he himself was now embodying on stage.

Rafe's imagined 'feates of Armes' also manifests a key early modern phenomenon: civic chivalry. Hunt argues that civic chivalry 'was more than a comic plebeian affectation, and more than the stuff of adolescent daydreams'.<sup>18</sup> A real and serious trend of growing importance in the Jacobean and Caroline periods, it was one of the ways in which the City engaged with wider political concerns. We can see what Hunt calls 'urban/civic militarism' as including, for example, Lord Mayor William Cockayne's role as governor of the Artillery Garden and the celebration of such in Middleton's 1619 lord mayor's show and his 1621 work *Honorable Entertainments*. Beginning in 1618, the context of the Thirty Years' War further enhanced the significance of 'civic militarism', as did, more locally heightened tensions in London during the 1630s-40s. In addition, the company of armed men which Rafe leads on stage towards the end of *The Knight* not only refers to the regular military exercises at Mile End performed by the city militia — which in themselves form part of Hunt's 'civic militarism' — but also implies similar entertainments staged for Elizabeth I on progress (Elvetham and its artificial lake, for instance) as well as being a trope found in entertainments put

on by the City for the court, such as Prince Henry's installation in 1610, partly produced by Anthony Munday, which featured a sea battle on the Thames.

Civic chivalry is thus a significant factor in the play. One should recall that the presence of City organizations in the playhouse was not confined to apprentice actors. Livery company membership extended to dramatists and theatrical entrepreneurs too. A number of Beaumont's contemporaries were City freemen: Dekker was a Merchant Taylor, as was Webster, and Munday was a Draper with active links to the cloth trade; Lording Barry was free of the Fishmongers; Middleton may have been free of the Tylers and Bricklayers as Jonson was. George Peele's and Thomas Kyd's fathers were both free of the City (as Salters and Scriveners respectively) and the chances are that their sons would have claimed their freedom by patrimony; Thomas Lodge's father, a Grocer, had risen as far as lord mayor. John Heminges, who had a management-style role with the King's Men, was a Grocer and Henslowe called himself "cittizen and Dyer of London" in the deed of partnership for the Rose playhouse in 1587 and in various other legal documents.<sup>19</sup> These men's livery company memberships were current, not dormant — even Jonson paid his quarterage dues, albeit sporadically — and many pronounced their freedom publicly on their printed works as well as in the context of their business dealings. Freedom of the City carried with it many social and economic advantages which these men exploited. To demonstrate how these advantages could work in practice, one can consider the case of Thomas Kendall, another dual theatre/City practitioner closely related to *The Knight*. Kendall was a Haberdasher who with Francis Tipsley, his relation by marriage and erstwhile apprentice, was paid by his own company for providing the child actors' apparel and other things for the 1604 lord mayor's show.<sup>20</sup> This role suggests that he practiced his trade as well as being involved in theatre management, for simultaneously Kendall was a shareholder in the children's companies at the Blackfriars until his death in 1608. As with Keysar, Henslowe, and others, Kendall's membership in his company was very active: he rose to the highest level of the bachelors of the Haberdashers' Company, and is listed as processing 'in foins' for the 1604 lord mayor's show.<sup>21</sup>

A Great Twelve livery company is central to *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, of course. Beaumont may have chosen the Grocers because the incoming lord mayor for 1608, Humphrey Weld, was a Grocer (indeed, the name 'Humphrey' may have been transposed into the play as a figure of fun). Alternatively, Beaumont's choice may reflect the fact that a number of theatre men were free of the Grocers — notably Thomas Woodford, an associate of the shareholders in the Children of the Queen's Revels around 1606 — or simply because of the pestle's bathos and bawdiness.<sup>22</sup> Whatever the rationale, I want to emphasize that the

Grocers are presented in the play as theatrical patrons. A dramatic performance in their company hall is mentioned by the Citizen's Wife in the Induction when, in response to the Prologue's scepticism about Rafe's acting prowess, she retorts that their prentice 'hath playd before, my husband sayes, *Mucedorus* before the Wardens of our Company' (B2r). In the rush to patronize Nell's antique theatrical taste, or even, in the case of Finkelppearl, to see George and Nell as 'Puritan', anti-theatrical harbingers of the closure of the theatres in 1642, critical discussion has eclipsed the underlying point: that livery companies sponsored drama and employed actors, sometimes professionals.<sup>23</sup> *Mucedorus* itself certainly still had a lot of currency; like Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* with its eleven early modern editions, the former play went to multiple editions throughout the period after 1598 — possibly as many as seventeen in total, the largest number of playbook reprints in the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Once again we are forced to confront our assumptions about 'naïve' or 'citizen' taste. Just because a play was 'popular' did not mean it was bad, nor that it only appealed to a narrowly defined (and usually condescended to) non-elite audience. Michael Hattaway notes the tradition, going back to the 1570s, for 'chivalric' drama to be performed at court at Shrovetide, as *Mucedorus* was in 1610, resulting in its third edition. One can also mention in this regard the court performance of Dekker's citizen-oriented *Shoemaker's Holiday* in 1600. Indeed, *The History of the Knight in the Burning Rock* — one of the 'romance' plays parodied by Beaumont — was staged at court in the 1570s. Hattaway remarks that 'the history of [*Mucedorus*] ... neatly illustrates the difficulty of making a separation between popular and courtly drama'.<sup>25</sup> *The Knight* itself was presented at court in February 1636, shortly after the issue of its second edition and what must have been a more successful run at the Cockpit on Drury Lane.

Joshua Smith thus rightly observes that the play shows the Citizen and his wife to be quite familiar with theatre: the issue at stake is rather *what kind* of theatre. 'The Citizen and his spouse', he proposes, 'are actually exemplary representatives of an audience and are quite well-versed in the conventions of theatrical practice — not of the private theaters, but of the public. This knowledge is too often denigrated or simply passed over'.<sup>26</sup> The many scenes in which George and Nell try to insert elements of the kind of play they want to see acted demonstrate their awareness of theatre. In response to Nell's request for 'the Sophy of Persia', for instance, one of the boys retorts: "'Tis stale; it has been had before at the Red Bull' (H1r). Even Smith's revisionist reading, however, confines the citizens' experience of performance to a choice between the private and public playhouses. There were, however, modes of theatrical performance outside of the professional



stage, such as the annual lord mayor's show, in which context it is more than likely that a freeman of the Grocers' Company and his household would have heard the shawms and other musical instruments played by the City waits (specifically mentioned by George), as well as the trumpets and drums Nell calls for.<sup>27</sup> Such instruments certainly weren't exclusive to the open air theatres as Smith implies. The references to drums, trumpets, and processions therefore constitutes another link between the play and civic performance.

Indeed, such a link is overt, because civic theatricality features explicitly in the play. When Nell refers to Rafe's performance as Mucedorus 'before the Wardens of our Company' (B2r), this is not a fiction nor, as far as the citizens are concerned, a joke; as I have already indicated, there was a long tradition of plays, speeches and songs in company halls, sometimes put on by company members and sometimes by players employed specially for the occasion. Beaumont may even have had in mind a near-contemporary entertainment presented on 16 July 1607 by the Merchant Taylors at their hall to which, at the behest of John Swinnerton, Jonson contributed a speech and some songs as well as acting as a kind of impresario, in a very similar fashion to the work he and his peers undertook on the lord mayor's show (he got £20 for his pains). John Heminges was also involved in coaching the boy actor John Rice who delivered Jonson's speech.<sup>28</sup> The feast marked the end of John Swinnerton Senior's term as master of the company, and attendees included the king, Prince Henry, and a number of courtiers (James also made a visit to the Clothworkers only a few weeks beforehand, during which he was given the freedom of the company). From King James's perspective the visit was effectively a fundraiser and he was duly bestowed with purses of gold; Prince Henry received the freedom of the Merchant Taylors that day, a fact which was still being celebrated in pageantry for his company over a decade after his death.<sup>29</sup>

Like Humphrey Dyson, Swinnerton enjoyed strong associations with London's literary world. Closer scrutiny reveals a complex nexus of exchange and collaboration. In addition to Swinnerton's role in the 1607 feast as discussed above, when the latter was appointed sheriff of the City in 1602, Munday dedicated two works to him — one of which was *Palmerin of England*, the very book being read by Rafe and his fellow prentices in *The Knight*.<sup>30</sup> At his inaugural feast in 1612 at the Guildhall Swinnerton entertained Frederick of Palatine, and Beaumont in turn produced a masque to celebrate Frederick's marriage to Princess Elizabeth the following year; Middleton's *Masque of Cupids*, also part of the marriage celebrations, was paid for by the City. Swinnerton appears again as the patron of drama in the dedication to the play *The Hector of Germanie, or The Palsgraue Prime Elector* which, as its title indicates, also has a connection to the Palatine marriage. The

play was printed (twice) in 1615 but originally staged in 1613, the year of Swinnerton's mayoralty (and of the publication of *The Knight's* first edition). This dedication addresses Swinnerton in conventionally civic terms as 'right worshipful' but also describes him as 'the great Fauourer ... and a great Cherisher of the Muses'.<sup>31</sup> *The Hector of Germanie* itself refers to a lost play, 'the Freemans Honour', which appears to have been performed by 'the Now-seruants of the Kings Maiestie, to degnifie [sic] the worthy Companie of the Marchanttaylors'.<sup>32</sup> Based on this reference to the playing company that predated the King's Men, Martin Wiggins suggests that the latter play may have been staged at the time of the inauguration of the Merchant Taylor Robert Lee as lord mayor in 1602, the same year Swinnerton was appointed Sheriff.<sup>33</sup>

The City also put on regular ad hoc dramatic performances, such as those presented in Middleton's 1621 *Honorable Entertainments*, not to mention the close links between the boys' theatre companies and City schools such as the Merchant Taylors and St Paul's. Civic pageantry also employed child actors in large numbers. William Haynes, headmaster of the Merchant Taylors' school, wrote speeches for the 1602 lord mayor's show (in which ten of his 'scholars' acted) as well as for James I's royal entry in 1604, and *The Knight* refers to Richard Mulcaster from St Paul's School, of course, as 'M[aster] Monkester' (B4r). Swinnerton had been one of Mulcaster's scholars and the boy actor Nathan Field, who may have played Humphrey in *The Knight* when it was first staged, was too.<sup>34</sup> The Swinnerton/Heminges/Condell network offers a compelling example of how City and theatre could work in tandem. These men were close friends (Swinnerton and Heminges were quite possibly related by marriage) and all three lived in the small parish of St Mary Aldermanbury, behind the Guildhall.<sup>35</sup> Heminges collaborated with Dekker as a kind of impresario on the 1612 mayoral show for Swinnerton, an arrangement which was almost undoubtedly due to the former's intimate connection with the new lord mayor. We can therefore trace multiple lines of connection between the professional stage and the ceremonial associated with the governance of the City, as well as those involved in making performances of various kinds happen.

Thus far I have elaborated close links between the stage and some of the citizenry, which should force a rethink of the common presumption that *The Knight* has the latter in its sights in any unproblematic way. A consciousness of the embeddedness of the City in theatre makes the play's presentation of George, Nell, Rafe, and the other prentices more complex than many assume. There is also another way of seeing the famous preface to the 1613 edition. Zachary Lesser's bibliographical approach shows that one can bypass the audience question by bringing

in the argument that the publisher's marketing imperatives take priority: by his interpretation, the preface and the Latin verse on the title-page intend to appeal to a certain kind of reader, a self-defined 'witty' man of the gentry.<sup>36</sup> By this token, Burre's preface has less to do with the play's allegedly unsuccessful performance than it has to do with the publisher's positioning of a sophisticated *reader*. Indeed, Dyson's copy of the 1613 edition of the play suggests as much. It bears a motto inscribed in an unknown hand (probably not Dyson's) which can be regarded as a response to, or even a confirmation of, the Latin verse from Horace printed on the title-page invoking the reader's 'iudicium subtile' or 'discriminating judgement': it reads, 'Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae', which translates as 'Poets wish either to instruct or to delight' [Figure 1].

So, why did *The Knight* not 'delight' its audience? To reconsider this question I now turn to the physical space of *The Knight's* highly abbreviated initial run. The Blackfriars promised to be a good site for a playhouse in 1596 when James Burbage tried to redevelop it, not only because of its generally well-heeled population and proximity to the inns of court and, further down the road, to Whitehall, but also because playing in the four City inns may recently have been interrupted, and citizens with an appetite for theatre would have been used to venues on their doorstep. The Bel Savage, an inn venue that doubled up for stage plays and other forms of entertainment such as fencing, was on Ludgate Hill, just a couple of minutes' walk away from the Blackfriars precinct. Scholars can only regard the Blackfriars playhouse as being solely of appeal to a 'fashionable', elite audience if one assumes that citizens were indifferent to or even uniformly hostile to theatre. That at least four City inns were actively presenting plays until the mid-1590s, and indeed may have continued to do so, more surreptitiously, into the early seventeenth century, indicates that this cannot have been the case.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as we know, the noblemen and gentlemen inhabitants of the precinct, not the City, objected to Burbage's plans (much the same happened with the building of the Fortune in Cripplegate only a couple of years later). The City tended to try to intervene in the workings of the Blackfriars liberty mainly in relation to the control of trade and local taxation, not theatre-going. As A.P. House shows, the City's role in the Blackfriars precinct was less repressive than most assume: apart from 'complain[ing in 1599/1600] to the Privy Council about the continued recalcitrance of Blackfriars residents in contributing to military levies', he writes, 'the City left the liberty and its residents to their own devices'.<sup>38</sup> House concludes, furthermore, that 'the annexation of the liberty by the City in 1608 ... meant that genteel residents were supplanted by citizens of London'; this statement throws an interesting light on the theatre's most proximate audience once the King's Men had taken over the premises.<sup>39</sup>

The question of the composition of the Blackfriars audience takes me to the concluding section of this essay. Given how pored over *The Knight* has been in recent decades, some essential features of its paratexts have been remarkably overlooked. Where *are* the citizens, both inside and outside of this play? Are the citizen characters as separate from the others as many critics have assumed? On closer scrutiny it appears not, for at the very start of the play the Citizen comes onto the stage after the Prologue, it would seem also from the tiring house, since their entrances are not differentiated at all [Figure 2]. The 1635 edition of the play makes things clearer still. Characters are listed in order of appearance in ‘Speakers Names’, beginning with ‘The Prologue./ Then a Cittizen’, which confirms that George follows the Prologue onto the stage. It is *Nell and Rafe only* who are initially ‘sitting below amidst the Spectators’ [Figure 3].<sup>40</sup> The stage directions gloss their first two lines respectively as ‘Wife below’ and ‘Rafe below’; George is already onstage and Nell is calling up to him, a reading underscored by her subsequent question, ‘Husband, shall I come up husband?’ (B1v) [Figure 4]. Leslie Thomson, one of the few to note this aspect of the play’s staging, argues

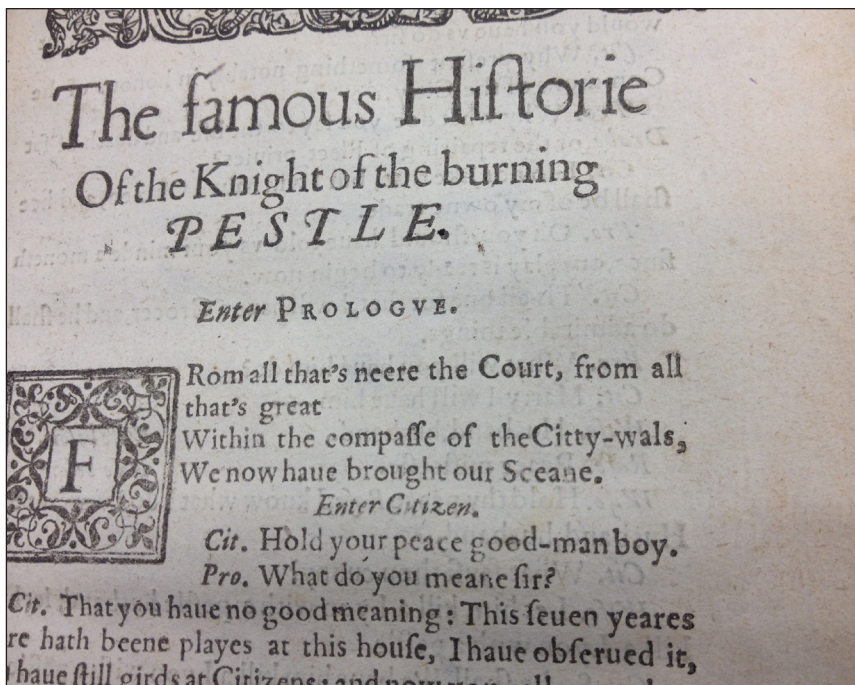


Figure 2. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613) (c) British Library Board. C.34 f.30, A1v.



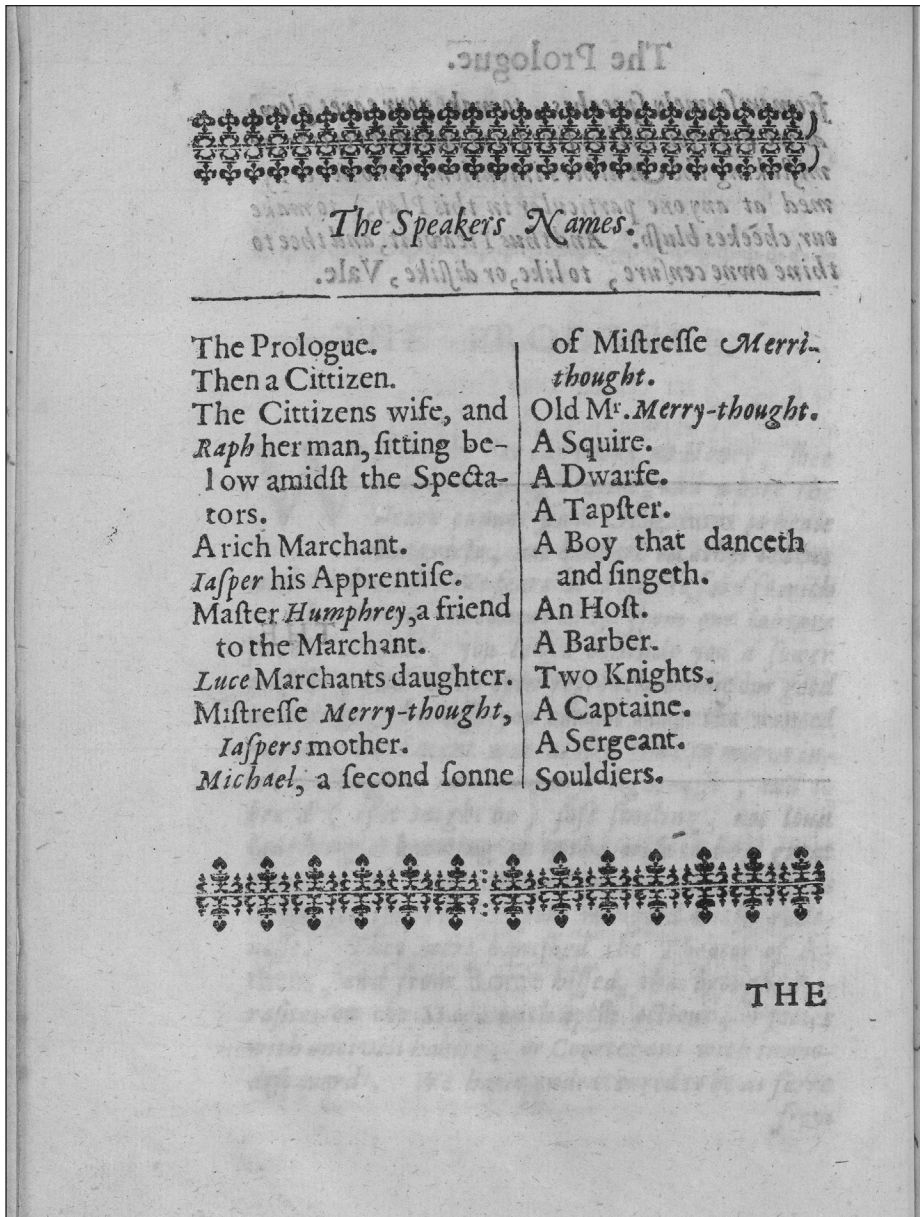


Figure 3. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613), B1r. Reproduced by kind permission of the Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.

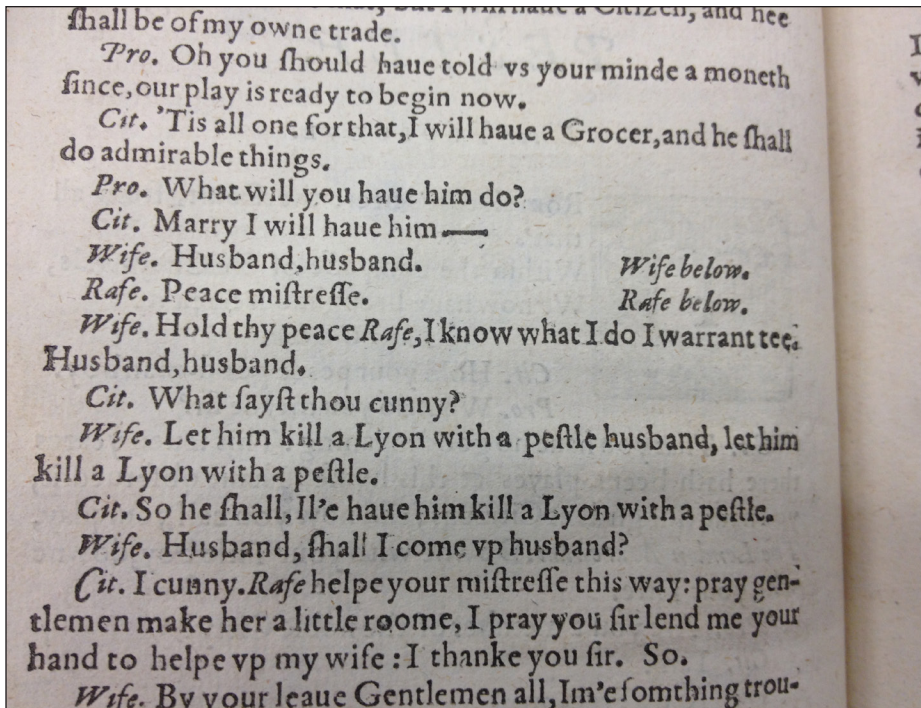


Figure 4. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613), B1v. Reproduced by kind permission of the Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.

that the arrangement establishes a disruptive link between the Citizen and gentlemen theatre-goers, one which 'would have been felt especially by the audience on stage'.<sup>41</sup> It certainly complicates matters compared to the prevalent assumption (which I confess to having once shared) that George is also 'below' the stage, along with his wife and Rafe. Glenn Steinberg argues, I think quite rightly, that 'the artistically uninspired plot of *The London Merchant* cannot compete with the vitality and spontaneity of the Citizens and Rafe'.<sup>42</sup> By this token, the 'citizen' characters are the most 'theatrical'. This recognition opens another way to think about the play's famed failure. Rather than positing a hostile polarity between the play's civic and theatrical dimensions, perhaps Beaumont's most radical experimentation was actually in the way he *conflated* these, especially in the context of the existing connections between these two domains which I have attempted to draw out in this essay.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, I will return to where I began, with that intriguing copy of the 1613 edition of *The Knight* in the British Library. As well as Dyson's signature and the



Latin tag discussed above, the book also contains an almost entirely overlooked annotation on the reverse of its title-page. This hand seems to be roughly contemporary with the play, but it is not Dyson's (indeed, it resembles the hand which has — oddly — inscribed Dyson's name on the title-page of the book alongside his autograph). The inscription reads: 'Oh how ye ofended Cittizens did nestle / to be abused with *knight* of burning pestle' [Figure 5]. 'Nestle' here means to squirm or fidget with unease.<sup>44</sup> As far as I can ascertain, Hunt is the only scholar to date to discuss this annotation, which represents what he calls 'a precious scrap of evidence on that elusive subject, reader-audience response'. He suggests that any 'offence' to citizens came about 'because they saw in this play an attack not only on the popular chivalric romances but on the whole notion of "civic honour" which these romances helped to sustain', a view which I think quite plausible.<sup>45</sup> Hunt does not, however, consider whether the annotation preserves the experience of a spectator or a reader of the play, nor when it might have been added to the book. A genuine seventeenth-century response to the vexed question of the target of the play's satire looks like scholarly gold dust, but in fact this annotation poses more questions than it can easily satisfy. On one hand, the reference to offended citizens might point to a theatrical audience composed more of citizenry than the modern reputation of the Blackfriars would suggest.<sup>46</sup> One must remember, as Lesser points out, that the audience invoked in Burre's famous dedicatory epistle to Keysar is an '*imagined* audience'.<sup>47</sup> Such a reading would require that the unknown commentator either witnessed the 'abuse' and consequent 'nestling', or heard about it from a reputable source. Alternatively — and given the likely seven year gap between performance and publication, perhaps more feasibly — the comment addresses the action of the play on the page, and thus implies George and Nell as the offended citizens, rather than some putative audience response. Perhaps we will never know.

What is certain is that *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* sits at the centre of a intricate series of mutually beneficial relationships. Taking a step back from tired critical assumptions and looking at the play afresh enables one to identify these connections, and to realize that its staging of citizens takes place in the context of a theatre much more involved in civic structures, and of a City more imbued with performance, than is usually presumed. 'The Grocers honour' is thus a window into a world of geographical and social proximity. Civic chivalry is not merely an elite jibe at the expense of clueless, theatrically naive citizens, but a politically and culturally meaningful way for the early modern citizenry to live their lives. As I hope to have shown, its representation in *The Knight*, rather than exposing mutual hostility, brings the twin spheres of City and theatre together.



Figure 5. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1635), A4v. src 1675 Copy 1. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## Notes

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- 1 Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (London, 1613; STC: 1674). Further references to the 1613 edition of the play are given in the text.
- 2 Jeremy Lopez, *Constructing the Canon of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge, 2014), 75.
- 3 Ibid, 77.
- 4 Scholars have also overlooked the fact that the 1613 edition of the play actually entitles itself 'The famous Historie of the Knight of the Burning Pestle' (B1r). Philip Finkelpearl discusses 'the Grocer's Honor', but only very briefly. See his *Court and Country Politics in the Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher* (Princeton, 1990), 93.
- 5 Anon., *A Pleasant Commedie, of Faire Em* (London [1591]; STC: 7675), A1r. William Hunt usefully defines 'honour' in this context as 'the fruit of virtuous action, not a mere accident of birth'; see his 'Civic Chivalry and the English Civil War', Anthony Grafton and Ann Blair (eds), *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 1990), 206, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812200492>. Civic pageantry echoes this sense of 'honour' repeatedly; it also occurs in Webster's dedication to Baron Barkeley in *The Duchess of Malfi*: 'the truest Honor indeede [is] for a man to conferre Honor on himselfe'. *The Tragedy of the Dutchesse of Malfy* (London, 1623; STC: 25176), *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*, A3r.
- 6 John Doeblér (ed.), *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (London, 1967), xviii. Michael Hattaway is a more judicious editor than Doeblér but even he uses the word 'naïve' three times in respect of the citizens. Michael Hattaway (ed.), *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (London, 1991), xiv–xv. Finkelpearl calls George and Nell 'witless', 'bullying, uncomprehending, vulgar ... impolite', and 'brutal', although he does concede that the play itself is not condescending to them (*Court and Country Politics*, 81–2, 93, 96).
- 7 Dyson drew up an indenture for Condell when he bought property in Gloucestershire in 1617. David Kathman, 'Henry Condell and his London Relatives', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63.1 (2012), 112 n.12, <https://doi.org/10.1353/shq.2012.0002>.
- 8 Dyson's distinctive signature appears on the title-page of a copy of the 1628 Lord Mayor's Show, Thomas Dekker's *Britannia's Honor*. For more on Dyson's book collection, see Alan H. Nelson's website: <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/PROVENANCE/select.html>. Zachary Lesser remarks that 'Burre's play quartos were within the price range of most of the middling sort', and Dyson fits exactly in

- that category. Lesser, 'Walter Burre's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*', *English Literary Renaissance* 29.1 (1999), 32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6757.1999.tb01135.x>.
- 9 Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, 1935); for a more nuanced view, see Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2006) and Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics*, 89–90.
  - 10 Hunt, 'Civic Chivalry and the English Civil War', 208–9. Finkelpearl discusses the persistence of chivalric cultural tropes in the early modern period but confines himself to how they were manifested in courtly and aristocratic, rather than civic, circles (*Court and Country Politics*, 90–2).
  - 11 Hunt, 'Civic Chivalry and the English Civil War', 209.
  - 12 David Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freemen and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55.1 (2004), 33, <https://doi.org/10.1353/shq.2004.0049>. After the collapse of the Blackfriars boys' company, Kathman writes, Keyzar 'entered into a short-lived venture with Philip Rosseter for a boy company at Whitefriars, after which he withdrew from theatrical activities for good' (ibid). Lucy Munro notes that the Whitefriars Queen's Revels company was in effect a continuation of the Blackfriars one, with many of the same actors and plays, and it continued until about 1613, the year in which *The Knight* was published. Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge, 2005), 23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486067>.
  - 13 William Ingram, 'Robert Keyzar, Playhouse Speculator', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37.4 (1986), 481–2, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2870678>.
  - 14 Ibid, 482.
  - 15 Kathman, 'Grocers', 6.
  - 16 Lesser remarks, by way of further context, that 'apprentices and servants are somewhat surprisingly well-treated' in plays published by Burre ('Walter Burre's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*', 34).
  - 17 In his faux dying speech Rafe implies that he himself has participated in Shrove-tide unrest similar to the infamous attack on the Cockpit in 1617 by mourning that he and his fellow prentices can no longer 'plucke downe houses of iniquitie' (K3v).
  - 18 Hunt, 'Civic Chivalry', 213.
  - 19 Kathman, 'Grocers', 15; see also Kathman, 'Citizens, Innholders, and Playhouse Builders 1543–1622', *Research Opportunities in Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 44 (2005), for a fuller account of theatrical entrepreneurs with livery company membership.
  - 20 For more on Kendall's theatrical investments, see Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels*: she comments that 'as a haberdasher, Kendall was particularly useful to a theatre company, as costumes were a major expense' (27).

- 21 Processing 'in foins' meant that his livery gown was trimmed with beech-marten fur; those further down the companies' hierarchy wore sheep's wool, known as 'budge'. Kendall appears to have been excused his assessed contribution of £3 towards the cost of the 1604 show, doubtless because of his organizational role behind the scenes (Guildhall Library MS 15,869).
- 22 For more on Woodford, see Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels*, and Kathman, 'Grocers'. Lawrence Manley notes that as well as Heminges, John Brayne, builder of the Red Lion in Stepney, and Richard Hickes, builder of the Newington Butts playhouse, were free of the Grocers' Company ('Why did London Inns Function as Theaters?', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71.1 [2008], 194.
- 23 Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics*, 99. For more on civic performance traditions, see Anne Lancashire, *English Civic Theatre* (Cambridge, 2002).
- 24 If *Mucedorus* was first produced as early as 1588, it is likely to have been performed at one or more of the City inns, possibly the Bel Savage just across the way from Blackfriars off Ludgate Hill. The title page of its earliest edition suggests as much, stating that the play was newly printed 'as it hath bin sundrie times plaide in the honorable Cittie of London'. Anon., *A Most Pleasant Comedie of Mucedorus* (London, 1598; STC: 18230), EEBO, A1r; emphasis mine. For more on references to playing at the City inns on early playbooks, see Joshua S. Smith, 'Reading Between the Acts: Satire and the Interludes in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*', *Studies in Philology* 109.4 (2012), 474–95.
- 25 Michael Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre: Plays in Performance* (London, 1982), 130.
- 26 Smith, 'Reading Between the Acts', 476.
- 27 Ibid, 483–4.
- 28 See Gabriel Heaton, *Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments* (Oxford, 2010), chapter 4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199213115.001.0001>. Jonson's employment by City bodies was infrequent compared to, say, Middleton and Munday, but it punctuated his career all the same. Only three years prior to the Merchant Taylors' feast he had presented 'a device, and speech for the children' for the 1604 Lord Mayor's Show for the Haberdashers (for which he received £12), and in 1628, after Middleton's death, he was appointed City chronologer, a role he does not seem to have performed with great distinction.
- 29 The Merchant Taylors' Company note that they 'saved' a considerable sum by Queen Anna's non-appearance (GH MS 34,048/9). Webster foregrounds the figure of the dead prince in his 1624 mayoral show for the Merchant Taylors, printed as *Monuments of Honor*.



- 30 The other was a religious text in translation, which survives with a holograph authorial preface in the British Library. Swinnerton was the dedicatee of some twenty literary works: see Ian W. Archer, 'Swinnerton, Sir John (*bap.* 1564, *d.* 1616)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), <http://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/105466>.
- 31 W. Smith, *The Hector of Germanie, or The Palsgraue Prime Elector* (London, 1615; STC: 22871a), *EEBO*, A2r.
- 32 A satirical 'prentice play', *The Hogge Hath Lost his Pearl*, was produced in 1614 and is widely regarded as being targeted at Swinnerton. This is another example of 'cross-over' theatre and the prologue references the amateur status of its actors, stating 'We are not halfe so skild as strowling players'. Robert Tailor, *The Hogge Hath Lost his Pearl* (London, 1614; STC: 23658), *EEBO*, A3v.
- 33 Martin Wiggins in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1553–1642: A Catalogue*, 10 vols (Oxford, 2012–), 4.425.
- 34 Scholars usually interpret Humphrey being described as one of Mulcaster's boys as a theatrical in-joke about Paul's Boys, but it could equally refer to the actor playing the part — if this was Field — having literally been one of his scholars. Janette Dillon considers it most likely that Rafe was performed by Field; see "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), 143 n.14.
- 35 'One of Heminges's children was baptized Swinnerton; and in his will Swinnerton left £20 to Heminges's wife, Rebecca, whom he describes as 'my cousin': see Mary Edmond, 'Heminges, John (*bap.* 1566, *d.* 1630)', *DNB*, <http://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12890>.
- 36 Lesser, 'Walter Burre's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*', 24–5. For more on Burre's marketing practices see Eoin Price, *'Public' and 'Private' Playhouses* (London, 2015), chapter 2, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137494924>.
- 37 For further discussion of the probability of City inn play-going continuing post 1594/5, see Herbert Berry, 'The Bell Savage Inn and Playhouse', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 19 (2006), 121–42, Manley, 'Why did London Inns Function as Theaters?', and Paul Menzer, 'The Tragedians of the City? Q1 *Hamlet* and the Settlements of the 1590s', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.2 (2006), 162–82, <https://doi.org/10.1353/shq.2006.0064>.
- 38 A.P. House, 'The City of London and the Problem of the Liberties, c. 1540–c.1640', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2006 (available at <http://www.ptomng.com/thesis/>), 140. House goes on to argue that 'this period of relative independence coincided with the advent of playing at Blackfriars. While the residents themselves worked at limiting the expansion of the theatre in the neighbourhood, by the time the City's 1608 charter extended its authority over the former liberty, there



was a long history of dramatic enterprise' (ibid). In contrast, within the parish of St Anne Blackfriars 'Puritan' religious sentiment became more prevalent after 1607, so much so that Jonson was to satirize it in *The Alchemist*.

39 Ibid, 152.

40 Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (London, 1635; STC: 1675), EEBO, A4v; emphasis mine.

41 Leslie Thomson, 'Who's in, who's out? *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* on the Blackfriars Stage', Paul Menzer (ed.), *Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage* (Selinsgrove, 2006), 62.

42 Glenn A. Steinberg, "You know the plot/ We both agreed on?": Plot, Self-Consciousness, and The London Merchant in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 5 (1991), 211.

43 Lopez argues in a similar vein that 'no one argues that *Knight* might have failed because citizens and [the] coterie [audience] alike were bored, or confused, or irritated by the play's chaotic exposition' (*Constructing the Canon*, 76).

44 *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*: "'nestle" (v.) Now rare ... To be uneasy or restless; to fidget; to move or bustle about'. The *OED* dates 'nestle' in this sense only back as far as the 1690s but I have found a couple of early seventeenth-century uses of the word.

45 Hunt, 'Civic Chivalry', 213–14.

46 The Blackfriars liberty was incorporated into the City by James I's new charter in 1608, only weeks after playing by the boys' company ceased there, so when it was inhabited by the King's Men post-1608 it was under the control of the City corporation.

47 Lesser, 'Walter Burre's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*', 24; emphasis mine.