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Łódź

FRANCIS BEAUMONT'S WONDER OF THE STAGE - *THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE*

W. Burre, the first printer or publisher of the text of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* has called it an "unfortunate child" who was "utterly rejected" by the world "for want of judgement" (Baker, 1953:3).

Francis Beaumont's name is inseparably mentioned with that of John Fletcher. The gossipy Aubrey wrote about them that they "lived together on the Bank Side, not far from the Playhouse, both batchelors; they lay together; had one wench in the house between them, which they did so admire; the same cloathes and cloake etc. between them" (Halliday, 1964:57). Most of their plays they wrote together, but three stage productions are generally ascribed to Beaumont alone - the mock-heroic *Woman Hater* (1607), *The Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn* which celebrated Lady Elizabeth Stuart's marriage to Frederick V, Elector Palatine in 1612, and *The Knight* mentioned above. Ben Jonson, who in his known eulogy has called Shakespeare "the wonder of our stage", mentions Chaucer, Spenser, and Beaumont as likely famous companions of the poet's rest (First Folio).

The Knight of the Burning Pestle, staged about 1608 or 1609, probably by the Children at Blackfriars, was a complete flop. Its existence was saved by its being printed in 1613 with W. Burre's dedication to a friend, Master Robert Keysar, a London goldsmith and theatre fan who had bought from Marston a share in Queen's Revels Children about 1606. The revival of the play in 1635 and the publication of the *Beaumont and Fletcher Folio* in 1647 and 1679 ensured the further existence of its text and allowed for the growing appreciation and influence of the work.

In the late half of the twentieth century a short and well-balanced description of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* was made by D. Dai-

ches who wrote that it "must be exempted from all generalizations. It is a brilliant satirical comedy, mocking the popularity of Spanish romances and similar chivalric works among London prentices and their masters as well as burlesquing such urban heroics as are found in Thomas Heywood's *The Four Apprentices of London*" (Daiches, 1960, 338).

In Poland its literary debut came in 1989 when *Dramat elżbietański*, a two-volumed collection of Elizabethan drama in Polish translations was published. It includes *The Knight* in Krystyna Berwińska's translation.

I see three reasons for continued interest in the play:

1. The "play-within-a-play" form of dramatic construction has been used in it for the criticism of the theatre, opening the way for modern followers. It also suggested later enterprises in "building bridges" between the theatrical audience and the stage, which we frequently witness today. Thus it was a step forward beyond the older contacts of the public with the Prologus and the Epilogus.

2. The play is an almost inexhaustible well of intertextual allusions and references, comparable to T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland*.

3. It is a rare, exciting and amusing nonsense play.

THE STRUCTURE AND THE MESSAGE

The key to the structure and, partly, to the message of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is found in its *Induction* which begins like this: "Several Gentlemen sitting on stools upon the Stage. The Citizen, his Wife, and Ralph sitting below among the Audience" (Wheeler, 1958:201). When the Speaker of the Prologue begins to announce a play entitled *The London Merchant*, the situation suddenly changes. The Citizen, George the Grocer, leaps on the stage, followed by his Wife Nan and their apprentice Ralph, and takes place among the gentry as their equal. He protests against staging *The London Merchant* as a play which - he fears - will abuse the City. Then, together with his Wife, he imposes upon the management of the theatre changes which develop into a competitive play with its own hero - Ralph, the Knight of the Burning Pestle - so-called after the Elizabethan grocery - spice and sweets.

Consequently, we may distinguish three intermingled plots in the play: that of the couple of citizens interfering with the conduct of *The London Merchant* according to their fancy and taste; the resulting romantic adventures of their domestic idol Ralph, a ranting amateur actor, who once in his life can give public outlet to his aspirations; and the

originally planned play reduced to one of the subplots by the representatives of a new taste of a wider, democratic, though unlettered, audience. The result is a pleasant chaos and confusion.

The message of this "revolution" in the theatre coincides with Thomas Dekker's complaint about it in *The Gulls Horne-booke* published about the same time Beaumont's play was acted:

"The place is so free in entertainment, allowing a stool (on the stage) as well to farmer's son as to your Templar; that your stinkard has the selfsame liberty to be there in his tabacco-fumes, which your sweet courtier hath: that your carman and tinker claim as strong a voice in their suffrage, and sit to give judgement on the plays life and death, as well as the prudest Momus (carping critic) among the tribe of critic" (Dover Wilson, 1951:216).

The *Induction* with the couple of the grocers on the stage suggests the same idea: the theatre has become too popular to remain safe from contamination of low public tastes. One of the dangers of those tastes favouring loose romantic chains of adventures instead of strictly dramatic plots has been Beaumont's concern.

It has been said that his play "gives a cavalier aristocrat's view of the London middle class". But it does not express the upper class arrogance, for his couple of Londoners are presented "without rancour" and his Mr Merrythought, a cavalier type, has been created as a transcendent though engaging idiot (Baugh, 1967:572).

If Beaumont and Dekker agreed, it was because they cared for theatre as art.

So much may be said for the moment about the general message of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Let us examine its two other subplots.

The London Merchant of the play is Venturewell who has discovered that his daughter Luce is in love with his penniless apprentice Jasper Merrythought. Venturewell fires Jasper and arranges Luce's marriage to a genteel but infantile Mr Humphrey. Luce, however, does not mind. She plays with the boy and uses him to arrange an elopement to Waltham Forest north of London (where she is going to join Jasper). She says:

I swore, and will perform it,
No man shall ever joy me as his wife
But that he stole me hence.

(Act I, sc. II).

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This is a romantic fad, later borrowed by Sheridan in *The Rivals* for Miss Lydia Languish who will not marry except as a consequence of elopement.

At the same time the Merrythought family passes through a crisis. Mrs Merrythought, desperate about her irresponsible husband, a merry old man who cannot and will not work and has not forty shillings left and yet eats, drinks, and sings all the time in a company of wastrels, resolves to leave her house with her younger son Michael and a casket of jewellery and go through Waltham Forest to seek new life.

Waltham Forest, like the wood near Athens in Shakespeare's *Dream*, becomes the crossroads where all the parties, including Ralph in his role of knight errant, meet.

As a result Mrs Merrythought loses her casket, but is accompanied by Ralph to the Bell Inn. Jasper finds the casket, gets rid of Humphrey and spends a romantic night with Luce. Tempted, however, by silly romances which he had read, he tries to put Luce's love to test, frightens her and is beaten by her father's men while the girl is abducted and locked up at home.

Mrs Merrythought returns to her husband, but he does not admit her to their house, singing all the time allusive snatches from ballads. The desperate woman goes to Venturewell to ask him to accept Michael as an apprentice, but he coldly rejects her, because of his grudge about Jasper.

Meanwhile Jasper has designed a neat intrigue. He pretends to be dead, a coffin with his body is brought to Venturewell's house with a letter asking the merchant to allow Luce to see the body for the last time. Jasper hides in the girl's room and she is smuggled out in the coffin to Merrythought's house. Then Jasper with his face whitened with flour pretends to be his own ghost. He half frightens, half persuades Venturewell into forgiveness. They go to Jasper's family house to see Luce who is found alive. General forgiveness and reconciliation end the play.

Some of the characters in it are unforgettable. The ninny Humphrey; the wily but constant Luce; the ingenious and yet honest wag Jasper and his wonderful fool of a father Mr Charles Merrythought who embodies careless joy of life coloured with almost Christian philosophy expressed in the words:

Why, sir, I do forgive you; and be merry;
And if the wag in's lifetime played the knave,
Can you forgive him too?

(Act V, sc. III)

The subplot of Ralph the Knight of the Burning Pestle is a mere chain of episodes improvised on the stage by the couple of his patrons. It begins in the grocer's shop in Act I, scene III.

Ralph, having inspired himself with the reading of the romance *Palmerin D'Olive, the Mirrour of Nobilitie* (1588), takes two boys - Tim as his squire and the little George as his dwarf - and under the name chosen from, and appropriate to, his trade, sets out as a knight errant.

His destination is Waltham Forest. There he frightens Mrs Merrythought into losing her casket and attacks Jasper who beats him. Then he finds shelter at the Bell Inn where he takes the lady with her son. He treats the inn as a hospitable castle, behaving like Don Quixote, and the host accepts his delusion like Sancho Pansa until the moment of payment comes.

The adventure that follows takes place in the neighbouring shop of Nick Barbarossa, a barber who is taken for a cruel giant torturing his prisoners i.e. customers. Ralph delivers the victims after having knocked down the barber by the accompaniment of his excited mistress's shouts:

There, boy: kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, Ralph!

(Act III, sc. IV)

This significant slogan will recur in Ralph's later adventures, expressing, as it were, the latent aggressiveness of London citizens (cf. Act V, sc. I).

The couple of grocers try to invent more and more extraordinary feats for their Ralph to perform. The Citizen cannot pass beyond wishing that "the Sophy of Persia come and christen him a child" (Act. IV, sc. I), which is a mere repetition of an incident in the play *The Travaillies of the Three English Brothers* in (1607). The absurdity of this wish becomes manifest when we learn that the Sophy was the title of the Moslem Shah of Iran!

But the Citizen's wife's imagination soars higher. She says:

"George, let Ralph travel over great hills, and let him be very weary, and come to the King of Cracovia's house, covered with [black] velvet; and there let the king's daughter stand in her locks with a comb of ivory; and let her spy Ralph, and fall in love with him, and come down to him, and carry him into her father's house; and then let Ralph talk with her" (Act IV, sc. I).

The idea is accepted by the management of the theatre with the exception of covering the house with black velvet and the lady with beaten gold. So in the following scene Pompiona, the daughter of the King of Moldavia, converses with Ralph in blank verse.

She has heard of his brave countrymen, of their strong beer nipitato and great wars between England and her country (whatever it is). She wants Ralph wear her favour in his shield, but he refuses, because he is "a knight of a religious order" and "will not wear a favour of a lady that trusts in Antichrist and false traditions" (this, by the way, may be a reference to Catholicism as seen by a Protestant of that period). Besides, Ralph is true to Susan, a cobbler's maid in Milk Street.

So they part and Ralph, not to be beholden to the King of Cracovia or Moldavia, pays for his hospitality: twelvepence for the royal chamberlain, a shilling for his cook, twelvepence for the royal horse-keeper, a groat for the maid for washing, twopence for the boy who wiped his boots and threepence for the princess herself to buy her pins at Bumbo Fair.

Subsequent great exploits in which Ralph takes active share are: his election as May-lord and a spectacular march and skirmish of the London Militia at Mile Stone with funny little incidents. The presentation of the muster somehow reminds one of Falstaff's recruiting campaign, but the excitement is real enough to evoke the outcry "kill! kill! kill!"

Ralph's patrons' actions and his adventures give an impression that the prosperity and self-assurance inflate London people with energy. It is as if the national and Protestant feelings, accumulated about the time of the attack of the Spanish Armada, were still alive.

After all those exploits there is nothing more to be done except to die. So Ralph, the Knight of the Burning Pestle, appears as a ghost with a forked arrow through his head and delivers a parody of the speech of Andrea's ghost in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, summing up his gallant life. Thus the play comes to its end.

The interplay of the three subplots has been arranged by the playwright neatly enough. The characters of the *Induction* usually act first, then the *London Merchant* subplot follows and the Ralph subplot interferes with it or succeeds it. The whole, however, is so unusual and so unexpected that the audience must have been bewildered and lost in the confusing jungle of stage events. The mild spirit of burlesque must have been lost on the cruder public.

In an apostrophe to the readers of his play Beaumont complains that in his time no play is acceptable "but that which now *runneth an invec-*

tive, touching some particular persons, or else it is contemned before it is thoroughly understood" (my emphasis). He has added that "the author had no intent to wrong any one in this comedy; but, as a merry passage, here and there interlaced it with delight, which he hopes will please all, and be hurtful to none" (Baker, 1953:4).

Similarly he states in the *Prologue*: "Our interest was at this time to move inward delight, not outward lightness; and to breed (if it might be) soft smiling, not loud laughing" (my emphasis), (Baker, 1953:5).

The editor of the play hoped that the text would speak for itself.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle fascinated later playwrights and men of the theatre by its bold breaking down the barrier between the play and its audience. The English theatre had known this device, but merely as the use of personified Prologues and Epilogues who either came from outside of the play (like Gower in *Pericles*) or were acted by one of the characters (like Puck or Prospero).

Also the device of a play within a play had been known. It is enough to mention *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*. But Beaumont used the device to criticise the theatre. This explains why he became a model for those who were dissatisfied with the theatre of their time.

The Rehearsal (pr. 1672), a farcical comedy ascribed to George Villiers, the duke of Buckingham, and directed against the heroic tragedy of D'Avenant and Dryden is one example. *The Critic, or a Tragedy Rehearsed* (1770) by R. B. Sheridan, a satire on sentimental drama and malignat critics, is another.

In more recent times the "breaking of the barriers" was frequently used in Christmas pantomimes and may be found in the dramatic scene of the appeal to children to save the poisoned Tinker Bell by an act of belief in fairies in *Peter Pan*.

THE INTERTEXTUALITY: DRAMA

The second point of interest in the play is its intertextuality. The Elizabethan and the Jacobean periods of the English theatre were rich in genre interchange and interaction. Histories, chronicles, romances and ballads were adapted for the stage. Authorship of a play was neither legally protected nor limited to one playwright. The public appreciated topical references and allusions. When we add that Beaumont's purpose to write a burlesque naturally necessitated references to a text or texts,

all these things form the background of the unusually rich intertextuality and topicality of his work.

Without thorough understanding of the function of various titles, quotations, and parodies of other texts the burlesque does not yield its complete meaning. And the study of its infratexts reveals a wide literary and cultural background of the play.

From its very beginning the present-day reader is puzzled by the Citizen's energetic protest against acting *The London Merchant* which the man suspected of being a jibe at London townspeople. One begins to understand his objection only when some facts are recollected. In 1585 (the year of Beaumont's birth) John Ford had produced a play of the same title, based on an old ballad about George Barnwell, an apprentice who fell under the baneful influence of Millwood, a courtesan, robbed his employer and even murdered his own uncle. For those crimes he was executed.

That play was never printed, but after a time it was revived; first by George Lillo as *The History of George Barnwell, or The London Merchant* (1731). Then, quite unexpectedly, it was translated into French, German and Dutch and highly recommended by Diderot and Lessing who used it as a model for his *Miss Sara Sampson* (1775), the first German bourgeois tragedy. But in England George Barnwell was to begin his off-stage life as a parody. When in 1812 The Drury Lane Theatre was restored after one of its fires, the management wished to open it with an address to the audience. But none of the prepared addresses was accepted and Byron was asked to make an opening speech.

Then two brothers James and Horace Smith wrote a collection of parodies of outstanding poets under the title *Rejected Addresses*. Among them *George Barnwell Travestie* appeared. The *Rejected Addresses*, which became extremely popular, inspired - in turn - W. M. Thackeray to write another parody of the play - *George de Barnwell*.

Banning George Barnwell story, Beaumont's Citizen enumerates some plays popular with Londoners and approved of by himself which - when analyzed - reduce themselves either to a story of personal success or one which contributed to the dignity of the town and its people.

In most cases it is enough to look up *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* or similar reference book to discover the sense of the play mentioned by the Citizen. So we have *The Legend of Whittington* (1605), a story of a poor boy's elevation to the office of Lord Mayor. Then *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas Gresham with the building of*

the *Royal Exchange* follows. Sir Thomas was falsely reported to be a founding and was knighted.

The Story of Queen Eleanor with the rearing of London Bridge upon Woolsacks is associated with Charing Cross and London Bridge which was built from the funds accrued from wool trade.

The Life and Death of Fat Drake, or the repairs of Fleet Street privies did not appeal to the Citizen, but the unknown corpulent fellow of its title obviously deserved gratitude for his interest in London sanitation.

Jane Shore suggests a far-going fraternization of the Royalty with London merchants, for she was Edward IV's mistress. Her popularity made her the heroine of a tragedy by N. Rowe as late as 1714.

The Bold Beauchamps is connected with contemporaneous Londoners' interest in romantic chivalry. The Beauchamps belonged to the Warwick "king maker" family. There was Guy de B. earl of Warwick, d. 1315; Thomas de B. who went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, d. 1401; and Richard de B., d. 1439. Over all the Beauchamps the mighty and glorious spirit of Guy of Warwick hovered in the social consciousness.

L. Cazamian has written about the Londoners of the period in question that "their reading of degenerate chivalrous romances so easily went to their heads, that there was hardly an apprentice among them who did not conceal a Quixote" (Legouis, 1957:470).

The Knight of the Burning Pestle confirms this observation. Ralph, the domestic hero of the couple of the grocers - to quote the Wife - has played "Mucedorus before the wardens of our company" (*Ind.* line 107).

The Comedie of Mucedorus, printed in 1598, belongs to those dramatic renderings of pastoral romances of which *As You Like It* is a famous example. Mucedorus, in order to discover the character of Amadine, the king of Arragon's daughter, disguised himself as a shepherd, saved the infanta from an assault by bears and fell in love with her. Banished by her father, he saved her again in the habit of a hermit from a wild man, discovered his own identity and won her hand.

As one of the notorious examples of Londoners' absurd aspirations to high ranks of society Cazamian mentions the play *The Four Apprentices of London with the Conquest of Jerusalem*, known to our Citizen Grocer (Act IV, sc. I). Written by Thomas Heywood, the author of about two hundred plays which strongly influenced popular taste, it was staged in 1600, the same year in which Francis Beaumont won fame with his masque of the Inner Temple. The play presents pseudo-historical adventures of four sons of the Earl of Buloigne, who had to take refuge in London. The young men became apprentices - one to a mercer, the

second to a haberdasher, the third to a goldsmith, and the fourth to a grocer. They all enrolled as soldiers when an appeal was made to join the first crusade. Their war adventures surpassed those of Amadis and in the end they met in Jerusalem. Each of them won a crown, but Godfrey humbly asked that his might be the crown of thorns. The play built a bridge between London crafts and the founder of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Noblemen turned into apprentices, apprentices turned into princes with the emblems of their trades on their shields.

It is said that Heywood, who dedicated the play (printed in 1615) "to the Honest and High-Spirited Prentices", ascribed its success with the City to the fact that it coincided with the rising of the trained bands - the London militia, originally instituted by Elizabeth I's order in 1573. Act V of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* pokes fun at the military spirit of the crafts.

A play of structure similar to that of *The Four Apprentices* is to be found in the Citizen's reference to the Sophy of Persia. It was *The Trauailes of the Three English Brothers* written by John Day, Samuel Rowley and George Wilkins, printed in 1607 (Act IV, sc. I).

Other references - to a wrestling match between a Dutchman and a Scotchman; to a show in which "the little child" appeared "that was so fair grown about the members"; to another show in which a hermaphrodite attracted attention, and to a puppet show of Niniveh (Act III, sc. II) - present the Citizen couple as indiscriminate addicts to all kinds of performances, parallel to the twentieth century film fans.

But - most probably - they only heard of *The Rape of Lucrece* by T. Heywood acted in 1608 and they associated it with their Ralph (or Rafe) as follows from this their exchange:

Wife: ...what story is painted upon the cloth? The Confutation (!) of St Paul?

Citizen: No, lamb; that's Ralph and Lucrece.

Wife: Ralph and Lucrece! which Ralph? our Ralph?

Citizen: No, mouse; that was a Tartarian.

(Act II, sc. VIII)

Ralph himself had not only been an amateur actor, but also was saturated with dramatic texts imperfectly remembered. In the *Induction* when encouraged to show the gentlemen what he can do, he produced a parody of Hotspur's speech from *I Henry IV* (Act I, sc. III):

By Heavens, methinks, it were an easy leap
 To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon;
 Or dive into the bottom of the sea,
 Where never fathom-line touched any ground
 And pluck up drowned honour from the lake of hell.

Also his "post-mortem" speech (Act V, sc. III) parodies the speech of Andrea's ghost in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. No wonder then that "he should have played Jeronimo with a shoemaker for a wager" (*Ind.* 1.109). The reference is to *I Part of Jeronimo* (not Kyd's tragedy) acted in 1605. Thus Ralph is presented as able to act in pastoral, heroic and tragic drama.

An echo of Shakespeare's early plays (*I Henry IV*, *A Midsummer Night's Dreame*, *Romeo and Juliet*) written in the late 1590's may be heard in Beaumont's play, delicately parodied. Ralph is another Hotspur; Waltham Forest with its crazy encounters reminds the reader of the Athenian Wood and the lovers who fled to it like Luce and Jasper. Luce's lament over Jasper's coffin brings to memory Juliet over Romeo's dead body. And even Jasper as his own ghost with a face whitened with flour seems to make fun of the ghost in Hamlet. Yet Beaumont's fun is never coarse, but - like Shakespeare's - touched with poetry. And Shakespeare is not far when Luce and Jasper sing a love song borrowed from a Beaumont and Fletcher's play (*The Captain*, Act II, sc. II):

Tell me, dearest, what is love?
 'Tis a lightning from above;
 'Tis an arrow, 'tis a fire,
 'Tis a boy they call Desire.

(Act III, sc. I)

THE INTERTEXTUALITY: ROMANCE

So much may be said about the theatrical background of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. But just as behind the play glorifying London apprentices there loomed popular romances from which those plays derived their loose composition built on the principle of adding one episode to another, behind the text of Beaumont's burlesque there looms an array of romances which were read in his times.

There are some incidental allusions to them. Sir Dagonet, who appears in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, is made an apprentice to a grocer by

the Citizen (Act IV, sc. I); Sir Bevis (of Hamptoun) is mentioned by Humphrey as an example of courage which he himself lacks (Act III, sc. I). Ralph speaks about Rosicleer a giant-killer and about Palmerin who overthrew Franmarco in a fight (Act III, sc. II). In those times these references were familiar to all.

Palmerin was Ralph's immediate inspiration when he decided to become a knight errant. In Act III, sc. III he reads several lines from *Palmerin D'Oliua, the Mirrour of Nobilitie* (1588) in Antony Munday's English translation and then sets out to show his prowess.

The same Munday was responsible for making English readers addict to reading Spanish romances which had no real reference to history or geography and which fascinated readers mainly by an exciting action. He published the first part of *Amadis of Gaul* (1590), *Palmerin of England* (1596) and the second part of *Amadis* (1597) which was to be continued in parts three and four in 1617.

Meanwhile, Robert Tofte rendered into English verse books I-III of *Orlando Inammorato*. The publication of *The Historie of Orlando Furioso* (who went mad out of love) coincided with the stacrossed lovers Romeo and Juliet (1594).

The era of the seventeenth century romances began. Socially they functioned in a similar way as American westerns and never-ending TV serials in the twentieth century. But almost at once a reaction began against them under the cover of their own genre. The first part of *Don Quixote* was published by Cervantes in 1605 and its English translation by Thomas Shelton appeared in 1612. The second part of the original was to follow in 1615.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle, which was written between the publication of the original *Don Quixote* and its English translation, was a similar spontaneous reaction against the popular romances. But its main concern seems to be the condition of the English stage. Beaumont protested against the low standards of the romantic plays, especially their loose composition.

Like the Boy-actor in the play, he seems to defend the cohesion of the planned spectacle, saying:

"Sir [...] the plot of our play lies contrary; and 'twill hazard the spoiling of our play".

But then he meets with the Citizen's almost savage answer:

"Plot me no plots! I'll ha' Ralph come out; I'll make your house too hot for you else" (Act II, sc. IV).

The resemblance between Ralph and the Spanish hidalgo was obvious and was recognized very early. The publisher of Beaumont's play tried to obviate an accusation of imitation or plagiarism by saying: "Perhaps it will be thought of the race of Don Quixote; we both may confidently swear it his elder above a year" (Baker, 1953:3).

Ralph's and Don Quixote's points in common are: both of them play knights errant under the influence of degenerate romances of chivalry. Both by the force of their imagination transform the world round them into wild fiction. This may be observed in Ralph's behaviour at the Bell Inn and in his fight with the Barber to deliver his "victims"-customers (Act III, sc. II and IV). But the knight of La Mancha is mad and pays dearly for his attempts to put his noble ideas into practice, while Ralph acts in the imaginary world of the theatre in which innkeepers and barbers enter into the spirit of the game - analogously to Sancho Pansa - and if it comes to paying, Ralph's master is ready with his pence and even shillings. And Ralph's main idea is rather to show his own prowess and not to improve the condition of the world.

But he is not devoid of some esthetic and moral sensibility. Though unaware of the value and nature of real wit, he is sensitive to old-fashioned refinement of feelings and language. He says:

"There are no such courteous and fair well-spoken knights in this age: they will call one 'the son of a whore', that Palmerin of England would have called 'fair sir'; and one that Rosicleer would have called 'right beaوتous damsel', they will call 'damned bitch'" (Act I, sc. III).

Similar complaint against the reality of his times is expressed by Jasper:

"O, age
Where only wealthy men are counted happy!"
(Act II, sc. II)

One can guess that the maker of *The Knight* shared those feelings. George P. Baker, the author of *Introduction* to a selection of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays in Everyman's Library series has interesting remarks on the attitude of the two playwrights towards romance. Fol-

lowing A. H. Thorndike, R. M. Alden and O. L. Hatcher, he states that "Beaumont developed with Fletcher a new form of romantic drama" (Baker, 1953:XI). In their times the influence of the romance was getting stronger and stronger and it affected even greatest dramatists. Both Shakespeare and Beaumont yielded to the popular demand for romance in king James's times, but in a way high artists do. Beaumont "by proving that he could win the suffrages of a public whose taste he despised, and at the same time lift it to appreciation of better art that they usually acclaimed". Thus he had done the chief part in re-establishing romance in the drama, but "a romance different in kind from that of 1580 to 1600", (Baker, 1953:XII).

According to Baker "Beaumont's position, then, in our drama is unique. Richly poetic, thoughtful, genuinely humorous, a belated Elizabethan working in the early years of James I, he is the chief creator of a new dramatic romance which leads in unbroken sequence to the heroic drama fifty years later" (Baker, 1953:XIII).

Baker also says that it is more and more recognized "that it is Beaumont rather than Fletcher who is the real creator of this new romance and is consequently the real forerunner than Fletcher, of the heroic drama of the Restoration period" (Baker, 1953:XII).

THE INTERTEXTUALITY: SONGS AND BALLADS

The third field of intertextuality in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* has been formed by songs and ballads. There are about forty of them intertwined with the text not only as incidental outbursts of singing in the spoken or recited text as happens in musicals, but also and mostly as parts of the dialogue.

The character who talks or rather sings using snatches of songs and ballads chosen appropriately to the situation is the irresponsible merry-making Mr Merrythought. He even forces other characters to sing though they are unwilling or unable to do it.

In Act I, sc. IV we find the inserted texts beginning with lines 47, 54, 126, 141, 150; in Act II, sc. VIII they appear in lines 3, 11, 14, 29, 51, 58, 62, 73, 81, 88, 94; in Act III, sc. V in lines 16, 32, 53, 88, 108; in Act IV, sc. V in lines 3, 14, 31, 46, and in Act V, sc. III in lines 6, 13, 17, 24, 39, 50, 72, 75, 89, 112, 196. Thus the play acquires an evenly vocal and musical character.

In this way, besides the references to the theatrical and fictional context, the text of the play has become a memorial to the existence of rich medieval and renaissance body of songs. Otis and Needleman say: "Original music of thirteen among forty songs is extant: most of them, sung by Merrythought, help directly in characterization or creating--intensifying the atmosphere" (Otis and Needleman, 1962:241).

A NONSENSE PLAY

The third point of special interest in *The Knight* is that it is a specimen of the rich body of English literature of nonsense in which plays are not strong in number, with the exception of Christmas pantomimes and some eighteenth and nineteenth century burlettas and extravaganzas.

To avoid misunderstanding it is good to make the distinction between the theatre of absurd and the theatre of nonsense. The theatre of absurd is a new invention, historically and philosophically connected with the twentieth century's desperate collapse of unity of rational and moral outlook. It is pessimistic, full of anxiety and despair. It began with Alfred Jarry's *Roi Ubu* and has been practised by Witkacy and Mrozek in Poland, E. Ionesco in France, N. F. Simpson and (perhaps) H. Pinter in England, and by S. Beckett in Europe.

The theatre of nonsense is much older. It may be traced back to Aristophanes, medieval celebrations of Misrule and to *soties*. Its aim has been to enjoy oneself and to make the audience enjoy a performance full of fun, exuberance, nonsense and optimism. The theatre of nonsense accepts a rational and morally ordered universe, but wants to see it upside down by taking a holiday leave from it by the act of standing on one's head. To cut doubts short, I refer the reader to J. A. Cuddon, 1976.

Nonsense literature usually functions on the level of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax and on the level of the presented world. On the level of the message it - paradoxically - promotes usually a wider and multiple awareness of reality which is associated with the sense of humour.

The *Knight of the Burning Pestle* is unique among Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas in being a nonsense play on all levels. But it represents a trend especially strong in Shakespeare. His *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, both parts of *Henry IV* and *Twelfth Night* precede Beau-

mont's burlesque and can serve examples of every kind of nonsense in the theatre.

It is enough to make a study of the story of artizans' preparation and performance of the play to discover verbal nonsense in the theatrical genre terminology, in the mis-reading of the prologue and in the style of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Nonsense is manifest in the presentation of the play in which Moonshine and Wall *are acted* and in the style of acting which transforms a tragedy into a glorious farce.

Henry IV is still an unexplored mine of all kinds of nonsense radiating from Falstaff's presence in the drama.

As regards Beaumont's play, I shall limit myself to the presentation of nonsense in it on few examples. On the verbal (but also situational) level one may return to Act I, sc. VIII) where the Wife sees a painting which represents the rape of Lucrece. She takes it for the conversion of St Paul which she calls Confutation. She is corrected by the Citizen who calls it "Ralph and Lucrece". The depth of the absurdity of this conversation becomes still deeper if we know what a decent boy Ralph is.

Crazy nonsense fills Merrythought's answer to Venturewell upset about his daughter's elopement:

"Your daughter! what a stir's here wi'your daughter? Let her go, think no more on her, but sing loud. If both my sons were on the gallows I would sing" (Act II, sc. VIII).

In another scene he sings:

"Who can sing a merrier note
Than he that cannot change a groat?"

(Act IV, sc. V)

On the level of the presented world the characters are full of nonsense. The Citizen and his Wife in their role of playwrights from the very beginning of the play promise a crazy action. "Let him kill a lion with a pestle, husband! let him kill a lion with a pestle!" And her husband answers: "So he shall!" (Ind. lines 53-55). In the mad world of the play it is they who transform the theatre - a cultural and artistic institution - into a slave of the populace.

Ralph, who misquotes Hotspur's speech and resembles Don Quixote in his aspiration to honour and who takes a barber for a cruel giant is another embodiment of nonsense. For Merrythought's mentality see above.

The action and the ensuing situations also belong to nonsense literature. The intention to present Ralph killing a lion with a pestle, to which I referred, starts a chain of events which turn crazy. Mrs Merrythought, who leaves her husband's house with her younger son Michael and with a casket of jewels to make secure her own and her child's future, loses all in Waltham Forest. The cause of her plight is the presence in the wood of Ralph and his squires on his mission of righting distress. Indeed, the world of *The London Merchant* is as affected by the world created by the couple of London grocers as the Athenian wood by the host of fairies. And if both the worlds regain some stability and satisfaction, it is through nonsensical acts.

Venturewell loses his daughter because he wants her to marry a gentleman while Jasper, his dismissed apprentice, gains her by feigning his death and morally blackmailing her father into forgiveness and consent by means of pretending to be a ghost with a befloured face. And his coffin does not only help him to be smuggled into Luce's chamber, but also helps her to be smuggled out of her father's custody. The crazy neatness of the trick is perfect nonsense comparable to Marx Brothers.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle as a whole is also based on the nonsense of running two rival plays at the same time, on using two romantic subplots to confute popular romance and - as a burlesque - it starts from the idea of making fun of what is accepted as serious. And it is as delicate and sweet as Shakespeare's comic plays.

This is in accord with Francis Beaumont's intentions expressed in his address *To the Readers of this Comedy* in the printed version: "The author had no intent to wrong any in this comedy; as a merry passage, here and there interlaced it with delight, which he hopes will please all, and be hurtful to none" (Baker, 1953:4).

His wonder of the stage was misunderstood. Let us render it justice in our times.

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RYCERZ PŁONĄCEGO TŁUCZKA
- DZIWIW SCENICZNY FRANCISA BEAUMONTA

Streszczenie

Robiąc w tytule aluzję do określenia przez Ben Jonsona Szekspira jako „dziwów sceny” (*the wonder of the stage*) i umieszczenia obok niego Francisa Beaumonta (1584-1616), autor uzasadnia rangę komedii tego dramaturga jej historią i charakterem.

Mimo kompletnego niepowodzenia jej na scenie w 1608 lub 1609 r., przetrwała ona w druku (1613) i stała się natchnieniem dla pisarzy takich jak R. B. Sheridan i inni dzięki swej niezwyklej strukturze.

Istnieją trzy powody do zainteresowania się *Rycerzem płonącego tłuczka*:

1. Jest to sztuka skomponowana na zasadzie „budowania pomostu” między widownią i sceną, i na zasadzie „teatru w teatrze”. Wychodzi daleko poza renesansowe i późniejsze kontakty z publicznością uosobionych Prologów i Epilogów, wyzyskując inowacje Szekspira w *Śnie nocy letniej*, w *Hamlecie* i *Henryku IV* i wprowadza na scenę jednocześnie dwie rywalizujące ze sobą sztuki.

2. Jest ona prawie niewyczerpalnym źródłem aluzji i odsyłaczy do „romansu” teatralnego i do nigdy nie kończących się romansów rycerskich typu *Amadisa*, których głównym odbiorcą w czasach Beaumonta stawało się pospólstwo londyńskie, dyktujące dramaturgom tematy i formy. *Rycerz* jest burleską protestującą przeciw rezygnacji z rozsądku, poezji i dramatyczności dobrego romansu scenicznego.

Autor rozprawy omawia aluzje w tekście komedii do co najmniej 15 współczesnych sztuk, do 9 romansów powieściowych i wskazuje około 40 piosenek i ballad śpiewanych w burlesce, które nadają jej rysy musicalu.

3. Trzecim powodem, dla którego *Rycerz płonącego tłuczka* zasługuje na uwagę, jest fakt, że jest to rzadka nawet w bogatej angielskiej literaturze nonsensu sztuka, w której dramaturg wypowiada swoje idee za pomocą nonsensu na poziomie nie tylko nonsensu werbalnego, lecz także na poziomie świata przedstawionego – sytuacji, charakterów i akcji. Kontynuuje tradycję Szekspirowską łączenia nonsensu, humoru i poezji. W Polsce tekst sztuki jest dostępny w przekładzie Krystyny Berwińskiej.