John Squire: The Unknown Author of The Tryumphs of Peace, the London Lord Mayor’s Show for 1620

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Abstract The Lord Mayor’s Shows for the inauguration of London’s mayor offered the street audience a mix of dramatic speeches, elaborate pageant devices, and a sumptuous procession, all financed and produced under the auspices of the city’s livery companies and written by some of the most successful playwrights of the seventeenth century: John Webster, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Dekker, Anthony Munday and Thomas Heywood. However, one show, John Squire’s The Tryumphs of Peace (London: Nicholas Okes, 1620), is written by a figure unknown to literary history. Since the typical writer of Lord Mayor’s Show in the early Stuart period was an established dramatist, who produced multiple shows, this paper considers why the Haberdashers’ Company would select a writer with no dramatic reputation to compose their mayoral show in 1620. This paper aims to establish the likely identity of the author and to discuss the connection to the guilds of this unknown literary quantity.

Keywords Jacobean period · John Squire · Identity · London · Lord Mayor’s shows · Civic pageantry

Civic pageantry, as Richard Dutton remarks, is “the one form of drama which we know must have been familiar to all the citizens of London, and thus an important key to our understanding of those times and of the place of dramatic spectacle in the early modern negotiations of national, civic and personal identity.”


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public celebrations, the Lord Mayor’s Shows for the inauguration of London’s mayor offered the audience a mix of dramatic speeches and limited action, elaborate pageant devices, music, visual spectacle, and a sumptuous procession, all financed and produced under the auspices of the city’s mercantile and trade guilds.\(^2\) Held on the 29th of October, the day’s ceremonies began with the Lord Mayor elect traveling by barge up the Thames to Westminster to be confirmed by the monarch (or his representative) and then returning by barge to the city, that is, to the mercantile, commercial, and financial centre of London. Upon his return, the Lord Mayor, accompanied by members of the various guilds, the sheriffs, city officials and other dignitaries, would process through the streets of London along a traditional route (in part also employed by the royal entry, Midsummer Watch, etc.).

Along this well established ceremonial route emblematic tableaus comprising a physical device, such as a chariot of Truth or a fountain of Virtue, would be stationed for the audience’s enjoyment, the city’s self-promotion and mayor’s edification. These pageant devices were generally accompanied by speeches by mythological figures or allegorical personifications. All this was framed within a variety of street entertainments (sword play, music, whifflers, dancing, etc.) in addition to the formal procession. In the seventeenth century, it was customary to complete the day’s journey by processing to the new Lord Mayor’s house. This final step had the effect of both exalting the office (or institution) and of embodying the position in a specific person. The stage for these shows was the London streets and the civic, occasional nature of this form of drama, which, like stage plays, partook in the burgeoning of English theatre in the early modern period, makes the mayoral shows a significant expression of London’s civic identity and its socio-political and cultural milieu.

In the seventeenth century, it was a standard part of the livery company’s contract for the mayoral show to require the pageant author to produce a book commemorating the event in 300–500 copies\(^3\) for private distribution, not for public commercial consumption.\(^4\) The expense of printing the pageant books, approximately £2–4, was


\(^3\) Williams cites the records for the 1602, 1604, 1605, 1612, 1616, 1622 and 1629 mayoral shows, which stipulate that the pageant author was responsible for arranging the printing of the pageant book; and she cites the 1613 and 1617 shows as exceptions to this pattern. (Williams 1958–1959, p. 509). In 1613 Nicholas Okes was paid £4 for printing an unspecified number of copies of the pageant book, and in 1617 £4 for printing 500 copies of the pageant book (Robertson and Gordon 1954, pp. 87, 92).

\(^4\) In 1611 Munday was charged with the printing of 500 books to be delivered to the Master and Wardens and “by them to be disposed.” In 1629, the contract in the Ironmongers’ records stipulates that Dekker and Christmas will “give the company 500 bookes of the declaracon of the said Shewe” and in 1638 Heywood is awarded additional moneys for “furnishing the Company with 500 bookes” and “the Companies well liking it.” (Robertson and Gordon 1954, pp. 82, 115, 127). These entries, among others, indicate that the books were printed for the company and not for public sale. The concluding passages in John Tatham’s *Londons Triumphs* (1663) indicate that the books were distributed to members of the sponsoring guild, in this case, before the performance (Morrissey 1976, p. 354 n7). There is only one record of a pre-Civil War pageant book being available for public purchase, that is, the title-page of Dekker’s *Troia-Nova Triumphans* (1612) which states: “Printed by Nicholas Okes, and are to be sold by Iohn Wright dwelling at Christ Church-gate.” (Dekker 1953–1961, p. 229). See also Robertson and Gordon (1954, p. xxxii). The lack of imprints giving the name and location of the bookseller on all but