

Performing Reform: Erasmus's Moriae Encomium and the Politics of Religion in Sixteenth-Century England and Europe

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“Folly and Politics” in sixteenth-century theatre is a wide and conceptually challenging theme. Folly itself has multiple meanings, ranging from a want of good sense to derangement of mind, from error to mischief, from lewdness to insanity. There are multiple theatrical examples of these differing kinds of folly throughout the Tudor period. The narratives within which they occur are equally varied. A popular version of political folly centres upon tyrannical behaviours in which a ruler foolishly abuses the power with which he or she is endowed. But the personal is also seen as political within the framework of the family, the community or the state. Nor can the role of an actual clownish person, identified by costume and disposition as a fool, and whether natural or artificial, be ignored. Tudor playwrights sought to tease out the implications of each and all of these personifications of folly in their own contexts and discover the effects of the foolish actions wrought upon the commonwealth of the people. It was a deep and continuing concern.

On this occasion, however, I have chosen, somewhat uncharacteristically, to shift attention from the theatre itself and matters of theatrical performance to embark on a more oblique approach to the theme of Folly and Politics. I wish to broaden the topic to

include the notion of the “performative” as applied to texts that operate within a culture and which produce sometimes incidental and sometimes intended effects. For this I will begin with an assertion regarding the novelty of print in the early sixteenth century. At the time it produced a kind of publishing fervour. It was suddenly possible to achieve a distribution of ideas to a wide range of people in a relatively short time. In a way rather similar to our own experience of the expansion of public exchange through the internet, the impact of printing on a manuscript world produced a flurry of monographs and pamphlets, as well as books, that flooded the market and were read widely and avidly. This was particularly the case in matters of reform and change in religion, subjects that often carried with them criticism of monarchy and the exercise of power.

One of the genres that was thought to be effective within this environment was that of the dialogue. While it is true that some plays of the period contained what was in effect a dialogue—notably, for instance, Henry Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucrez*, with its debate around the politically controversial issue of Gentleness and Nobility—nevertheless, the formal dialogue, rooted in a Socratic or, rather, a Platonic method, was recognised and practised and published in many cases with a direct political aim. Such dialogues were presented in quasi-dramatic form, of course, and often given a fictional location, as they took on the characteristics of a forensic exploration of contemporary issues. Sir Thomas Elyot’s *Of the Knowledge which Maketh a Wise Man* and Thomas Starkey’s *Dialogue Between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset* are two eminent examples. Elyot’s work is specifically aimed at the king and contains some outspoken advice on good monarchy, while Starkey’s is more generally directed at the correction of abuses in government and the development of good and just policy with regard to the commonwealth. While neither dialogue was intended for performance, they can, nevertheless, in two ways be described as performative. In the one sense, and straightforwardly, they may be said to mimic a dramatic action, with two, sometimes more, people talking to each other. But in another and more significant way, their function was to provoke a response in their target readership, either the king himself or his councillors. Although it may be difficult to measure any response at this distance from events, the dialogue can be seen, nevertheless, as both a public display and a provocation within the context of the contemporary culture. It may have had, or failed to have, an effect, much as one might expect a play or any other similar event—a sermon, for instance—to have had.

With these considerations in mind, I have chosen not a dialogue but a monologue as exemplar of the performative nature of texts other than plays. Erasmus's *Moriae Encomium*, written in the first instance as an entertainment for his friend Thomas More but later achieving a kind of cult status, is the subject of my discussion of Folly and Politics.¹ What I shall endeavour to demonstrate in this paper is how this text was in its own time and in every sense a performance that made as significant an impact on the culture of its day as any comparable theatrical event may have done.

Erasmus's pen was prolific and, as is well understood, his exploitation of the possibilities of publication through print was skilful, wide-ranging and thorough. He made translations from the Greek, especially Euripides and the satirical dialogues of Lucian. He published more than one edition of his *Copia*, a kind of handbook on style, and his *Adagia*, a series of *bons mots* from classical authors. Both of these derived from his early experience of teaching, as did his *Colloquia*, a series of dialogues prepared for student use to assist in the learning of Latin. Each of these volumes ran through several editions, and as the readership expanded, each subsequent edition was modified and developed to include more material. The *Colloquia* in particular offered an opportunity for Erasmus to create dialogues on the subject of religion and reform, dialogues that, as the more and later expanded editions came into circulation, began to cause concern and offence in high places in the Church. Their message was always the same. The present religious organisation and practice was a betrayal of the original simplicity and integrity of the early Christian church.

Erasmus was also responsible for a number of polemical books, beginning with the *Enchyridion Militis Christiani* (*The Handbook of a Christian Soldier*), a *miles christianus*, in Erasmus's terms, being a soldier for peace. He was himself a convinced pacifist. He also wrote the *Institutio Principis Christiani*, a guide for the Christian education of princes, following his own advice from an earlier adage entitled, *One Ought to Be Born a King or a Fool*. There he wrote: "if anyone is to be a coachman, he learns the art, spends care and practice; but for anyone to be a king we think it enough for him to be born" (trans. Margaret Mann Phillips, Rummel, ed., p. 339). It followed from this statement that "We are not free to choose our king—but we are free to educate him." He also wrote *Querela Pacis* (*A Complaint of Peace*), a

1 All references will be to the 1549 translation (as *The Praise of Folie*) by Sir Thomas Chaloner, ed. Miller.

declamation not dissimilar to *The Praise of Folie*, lamenting humankind's continuing capacity for ignoring the benefits of peace in contrast with the disruptions of war. The *Complaint* pilloried the folly of kings and their courtiers who caused the mayhem of war in pursuit of illusory honour, status and self-respect. War was above all a wholly unchristian activity. Erasmus is also alleged to have written the comically satirical piece *Iulius Exclusus e Coelis* (*Julius Excluded from Heaven*), which plays on the idea that Pope Julius II, because of his venality and warmongering disposition, cannot persuade Peter to let him into heaven. Enduringly inscribed in Erasmus's memory was the image he had of Pope Julius entering Bologna victoriously at the head of his army. He could hardly imagine a more unchristian performance, the epitome of folly in a religious leader, and he never forgave him for it. Although Erasmus never openly acknowledged the authorship of the *Julius Excluded*, it was from the beginning attributed to him.

But Erasmus was also recognised as a Christian humanist scholar, who, through new approaches to the study not only of classical Latin but also of Greek and Hebrew, initiated and enabled new translations of both the Old and New Testaments. As Reginald Bainton suggests:

The contribution of Erasmus to Biblical Studies lies even now in the questions which he raised, the controversies which he precipitated, and the awareness which he created as to the problems of text, translation and interpretation. (p. 166)

Erasmus's approach seriously challenged the authority of the medieval Schoolmen, especially those of the Sorbonne and of Louvain, who were locked into a tradition of interpretation of the Scriptures based upon St Jerome's Latin Bible, the Vulgate. Erasmus showed that the Vulgate was in part erroneous, especially in its representation of the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and, perhaps most importantly, St Paul's Epistles. He claimed that his own translations were more accurate, deriving from original documents in either Hebrew or Greek.

So one may perceive that Erasmus was an active campaigner in the process of the Reformation with a particular mission to deploy his writings to a wide reading public through the medium of print. Despite being accused on more than one occasion of intellectual arrogance, he claimed that he was not seeking conflict. He was seeking intellectual agreement with what seemed to him the self-evident truth that the Church had foolishly strayed from its ministry. Some confirmation of Erasmus's moderate position may be found in the fact that, despite being accused by Noel Beda of the Sorbonne of being a Lutheran, he

fell out with Luther. He could not agree to a root-and-branch rejection of the inherited organisation and practices of the Church. He accepted the sacraments, for instance, and especially the pastoral principle upon which Christianity was based. He felt strongly, however, that the Scriptures should be made accessible to the individual Christian even in the vernacular. That, therefore, meant re-translation of the Bible to represent the truths it contained more accurately than in the past. It was just that his challenge to the Catholic Church seemed to strike at its doctrinal orthodoxy and was felt to be as dangerous as that of Luther, even though he had no intention of establishing a new church, only of reforming the existing one.

My case for bringing Erasmus's *The Praise of Folie* into this discussion rests on three premises. The first is that it is undoubtedly performable. I believe I have demonstrated that fact sufficiently both at Tours in 2004 and earlier at Groningen in 2001.² Secondly, in the reading, it is a text that entertains in the manner of a performance. Indeed, Erasmus called it a Declamation, and its opening direction is simply "Folie speaketh". Thirdly, it was also, in its own time, performative in the sense that it was active within the public cultural process I have sketched above. It gives its readers even today an experience that is inescapably similar to that of an audience in a theatre. But more significantly, just like those sixteenth-century plays published on the back of a performance, it was intended through print to reach its influence out into a wider community. For Erasmus, it became an agent in conveying his message to like-minded reforming Christians across Europe.

It was Pirandello who said that for drama to work it is necessary to find a language that is in itself spoken action. *The Praise of Folie* is a supreme example of such *azione parlata*, for, as she enters, Dame Folly not only characterises herself as someone who has the capacity to cheer people up, but also greets and characterises her fictitious and supposedly present audience, an audience whose attitudes and responses she constructs:

as soone as I came forth to saie my mynd afore this your so notable assemblie, by and by all your lokes began to clere vp: vnbandyng the frounyng of your browes, and laughyng vpon me with so merie a countinaunce, as by my trouth me semeth euin, that all ye (whom I see

2 *An Interlude of Folly* was a solo performance derived substantially from Erasmus's monologue. Bob Godfrey performed it at a Festival of Medieval Drama at the University of Groningen in 2001 to accompany the Xth Colloquium of the SITM (Société Internationale pour l'Étude du Théâtre Médiéval). It was performed a second time in 2004 at the CESR, Tours, in association with the IXth Round Table on Tudor Drama.

here present) doe fare as if ye were well whited, and thoroughly moysted with the **Nectar** wine of the Homericall Goddes. (p. 7)³

It is worth noting that this trick of constructing the audience's situation is almost identical with the one played by Medwall in the opening gambit of player A on his entry into the fictional world of *Fulgens and Lucres*. Erasmus carries this further, as Folly proceeds with her self-fashioning, so that the marks that link her to the present occasion, the here and now-ness of her address, proliferate:

For I am here (as ye see) the distributrix and dealer of all felicitee, named Μωρία in Greeke, in Latin **Stultitia**, in Englishe Folie.

But aye, what neded me to vtter thus muche? as if I bare not signes enough in my face, and countenance, what maner person I am. (p. 10)

The whole of this induction is sprinkled with glancing rhetorical questions that give immediacy to her discourse. For instance: "And what (I praie you) maie be more apt or better sitting, than dame Foly to praise hir selfe, and be hir owne trumpet?" (p. 8); or perhaps: "Ye haue heard my name than (O my friendes) what addicion shall I geue you?" (p. 11). Through such questions, Folly suggests alternatives, keeps the readers—the fictional audience (and the actual audience)—engaged. Similarly, the frequent use that Folly makes of the personal pronouns "I" and "you" both brings her subjectivity into relationship with the consciousness of her audience and personalises the effectiveness of her arguments. Speaking of her lineage, she claims that her father was

Plutus the golden god of riches. . . . At whose arbitrement, warre, peace, kyngdomes, counsailes, judgements, assemblies, mariages, couenauntes, leagues, lawes, sciences, games, earnest mattiers (my breath faileth me) to be short, all publike, and priuate doynge of men are administred. . . . Further, to the ende that ye mistake no thyng, I dooe ye to wite that **Plutus** begatte me not in his olde daies, whan he was blynde, and skarce able to goe for age, and goutinesse, . . . but in his prime yeres, whan as yet he was sounde, and full of hote bloudde, but muche fuller of **Nectar** drinke, whiche . . . he had sipped than by chaunce somewhat more than enough. (pp. 11-12)

Thus Erasmus has succeeded in weaving together a network of affective meanings that give flesh and blood to his lady Folly and to the supposed occasion of

3 Citations follow the typographic conventions adopted by Miller for his edition (roman type for the original gothic, bold-face for original roman, italic as in the original).

the *Encomium*. Furthermore, this technique brings the supposed audience into the frame in such a way that the whole declamation has the characteristics of an extempore performance.

The style and manner is one thing, the theme and subject matter of *The Praise of Folie* another. How may it be seen as performative in the per-locutionary sense of having an effect beyond its author's first intentions? To what effect does this monologue play a role in the political arena of the sixteenth century? How might it earn a place as a text able to compete with the drama in that context? A brief reference to the *Narrenschiff* of Sebastian Brant will prove useful here. First published in 1494 and subsequently immensely popular throughout Europe, this extended satire on a wide selection of the failings of humankind gives us a picture of fallen man and woman whose follies are also sins. The poem treats of these failures moralistically in a quite traditional manner: the verses are set in the style of a preacher who exhorts his congregation to better behaviour. Brant deploys the preacher's technique of offering bad *exempla* to his audience in a comic way as a means of persuading them to behave better. The direct correlation between folly and sin is reinforced through the woodcut illustrations that accompany the text. No doubt the popularity of Brant's book rested as much on the numerous woodcuts as upon the entertainment from the *exempla*. The verse that introduces Dame Wisdom illustrates this point:

Wysdome with voyce replete with grauyte
Callyth to all people, and sayth o thou mankynde
Howe longe wylt thou lyue in this enormyte
Alas howe longe shalt thou thy wyt haue blynde.
Here my preceptis and rote them in thy mynde
Nowe is full tyme and season to clere thy syght:
Harkyn to my wordes, grounde of goodnes and ryght
Lerne mortall men, stodyenge day and nyght
To knowe me wysdome, chefe rote of chastyte
My holy doctryne thy herte shall clere and lyght
My tunge shall shewe the ryght and equyte
Chase out thy foly, cause of aduersyte.⁴

4 Identified in EBook No. 20179 under the title, "Of the sermon or erudicion of wysdome bothe to wyse men and folys".

In direct contrast, Erasmus's character subverts this traditional view of folly as sin. The figure of Folly could confront Wisdom with the cry, "Not so! I (Folly) am the most superior cause of happiness and contentment and the whole world is indebted to me for that very fact." For Erasmus's personification makes of Folly the most appealing and personable character. While using many of the tricks of practical preaching, he employs a far more subtle and ingenious approach. His character seems constantly to invite agreement, a kind of conspiracy and collaboration towards happiness, rather than belabouring her audience with injunctions to change their lives. Her talk is celebratory. She is content with a state of affairs in which everyone in the world is in one way or another complicit in folly. However, she identifies two kinds of folly akin to madness: the one deriving from a false understanding of self-importance and which results in misconduct, a fact that she is at pains to suggest is the responsibility of humankind itself; the other, that for which she is proud to be responsible, is an innocent kind of madness, in which the mind takes a holiday from everyday cares. Thus her satire upon human life and behaviour becomes an appeal to her audience to accept that there is a difference between innocent and reprehensible error. It also allows Folly to pillory any or all orders of society equally, despite their assumed or actual status. The fictional audience becomes complicit, therefore, in the satire on all aspects of human behaviour and in making judgements about what is represented.

It is remarkable that Sebastian Brant himself seems to have been one of the first to recognise a difference in objective and potential between his *Narenschiff* and the *Moriae Encomium*. Shortly after the publication of the first edition of the latter in 1511, he wrote:

Content to have carried vulgar fools in our *Narenschiff*, we allowed the *toga* to go untouched. *Moria* now comes forth, who, censuring the *bryyha*, the *symata* and the *fascas*, conveys as well philosophers and druids. (cited Screech, p. 186)

That is, in his view and plain for all to see, the *Moriae Encomium* ventures to censure cardinals, lawyers, the state itself, as well as theologians and the religious, targets that Brant himself largely avoided. Prophetically, Brant concludes, "Alas, what smears of blood she will call forth, arousing anger with wrath" (cited Screech, p. 186).

From this hint it would appear that the *Moriae Encomium* could from its inception be regarded as a dangerous, even a dissident, if not actually hereti-

cal work. Though it began life as an entertainment for Thomas More (the pun on his name in the title was deliberate), once it arrived in the public domain, it was destined to provoke antagonism amongst those churchmen of a more conservative frame of mind. Even Thomas More in his later years turned against it. In *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, More claimed that if it was translated into English he would burn it with his own hands (Greenblatt, p. 267, n. 83). And this apparent antagonism is one of the ways in which it is possible to perceive *The Praise of Folie* as a performative text in its own time. It established itself in the cultural consciousness in a way similar to that of polemical plays of the period and, as we shall see, possibly to greater effect.

But how was it that this personable and jokey goddess, accompanied as she was by an emblematic array of companions such as Selflove, Adulation, Belly-cheer, and Soundsleep, and who claimed to hold the secret of all human happiness and even to influence the behaviour of Jupiter and the immortal gods, could come to be such an enemy of the Church and its reactionary defenders? The effect is achieved by a subtle sleight of hand. “For *if wisdom . . . is naught els,*” she argues, “*than to be ruled by reason: and folie, to be ledde as affection will:* Consider now (I praie you) how much more **Affection**, than **Reason**, **Iupiter** hath put in men” (p. 23). She deals deftly with petty and entertaining foolishness—the childishness of old age, for instance: the foolishness of old men pursuing young girls or the image of old women pursuing young men. She insists that whatever pleasure such individuals derive from these behaviours, it is all to be put down to her. But through a trick of irony, Folly’s approval is subverted, and that is at the heart of the serious message of the work. While such follies are presented as a positive example of her powers over humankind, they are, at the same time, so displayed as to make the actors in their folly utterly discredited. For instance, Erasmus allows his female protagonist to give a searing account of these old women who are so carcase-like and yet play the wantons, still tuppung when they have the chance, daubing their cheeks, displaying their breasts—“theyr flaggie and pendant dugges” (p. 42)—writing love letters, dancing and so on. But, having set up a picture of utter ridicule, Folly concludes:

But yet dooe these my oldgurles not a little lyke them selues herein, takyng it for a singuler and onely delight, as if they swamme vp to the chinnes in a sea of hony, wherin who but I doeth vphold them? (p. 43)

This ambivalent ridiculing style, which focuses on the folly and blindness of self-love, is the true signature of *The Praise of Folie*. It serves Erasmus's purpose most eloquently as Folly draws attention to the failings of the Church. The middle section of her declamation dealing with the follies of religion begins with a brief satire on the gullible public who accept stupid superstitions that are fed and exploited for their own profit by priests, pardoners and friars. She ridicules those who worship the images of saints, for instance, but who fail in their lives to emulate their examples of good living. She remarks upon the stupidity of many superstitious practices, such as "set[ting] tapers afore the virgin mother of god: and that at noone daies whan lest nede is?" (p. 67).

Similarly, Folly shows little tolerance when describing one of the Church's most profitable sidelines, the selling of indulgences, by which a subscriber was enabled to redeem time to be spent in Purgatory. The attack here is sustained, and its terminology leaves little room for doubt that Folly is being used by Erasmus directly to pillory what he regards as an indefensible practice:

For what speake I of others, who with feigned **Perdones**, and remissions of sinnes dooe pleasantly flattre them selues, takyng vpon them to measure the space and continuance of soules abode in **Purgatorie**, as it were by **houreglasses**, setting out, bothe the yeres, the monthes, the daies, the houres, and the lest minutes, without missyng, as if they had cast it by **Algrysmes**? (p. 56)

And she persists with a diatribe against "some vsurer, or man of warre, or corrupte iudge" (p. 57), those in positions of trust and authority who seek to buy forgiveness for a life of sin, only to return to and continue in those sins, unrepentant. Folly concludes with a blanket accusation that in all such cases people are assisted by priests who seek to make money out of the business and who "know well enough on whiche side theyr breade is buttred" (p. 59). The attack on such corruption is made even more pointed when Folly introduces, with heavy irony, the instance "if some one of those cumbrous wyse-men shoulde ryse vp, and saie (and saie truely) *thou shalt neuer die ill, as longe as thou liuest well*" (p. 59), but goes on to point out how such an admirable moral idea and the man who offers it will be condemned by most people as exhibiting the height of folly. From the evidence of his other writings, it is clear that this whole section on religious follies and abuses occupies a central position in Erasmus's personal criticism of the established Church and its essential deception of its congregations. He believed that it was necessary to discard all the trappings of superstition and ceremony,

all the overweighted hierarchical machinery of church government, and return to a simpler “Imitation of Christ”. And it is clear also that he held priests and bishops and cardinals and popes as equally responsible for the fostering of these abuses. There is an extended and vituperative attack on the Religious too, belittling their observances in the monasteries as the chants of the ignorant and the illiterate; Folly likens the friars preaching to the acts of Italian Mountebanks and describes them all as “counterfeictours of holinesse” (p.92). Doctors of Divinity fare little better. Folly is equally unforgiving in her attack on the Princes of the Church for the manner in which they mimic the pride and magnificence of secular princes. But when she arrives at popes, her words appear as pure invective:

For as for Christ, he (thei thynke) maie easily enough be pleased, so long as thei shew them selues like popes in their **Misticall Pontificalibus**, bolstred vp with **ceremonies**, and titles of **blissednes**, **reuerendnes**, and **sanctitee**, to blisse and curse whom thei liste: what for the rest, it is stale with them, and out of vse at these daies to doe myracles: peynefull, to teache the people: scholerlyke, to expounde scripture: to ydle a thyng, to praie: farre more milkesoplyke and womannisshe, to cast fourth teares: vile, to be nedie: dishonourable, to be ouercome, and most vnsittynge for them who scantly will admitte kyniges and emperours to the kyssynge of theyr feete: Finally it is an vnsauoury thyng, to die: and as reprocheable, to be hanged on the crosse: So that refusynge to stande to any of these harde condicions, thei rest onely vpon feates of armes, with also those sugred and doulcet **benedictions** of theirs, ... with a thousande wherof I wene they woulde parte more liberally, than with one pennie. (p. 99)

It is possible to see from this that *The Praise of Folie*, as it develops, has turned into something else. It grows into a critique of the *status quo* in religion, as regards both its practice and its theology. Erasmus clearly speaks out against what he sees as behaviour contrary to the Christian belief to which he aspires and for which he pleads most earnestly. The mood of lightness and fun has changed radically to a mood of frustration, even anger, at what Erasmus sees as perversions of the Christian faith. *The Praise of Folie* has turned from being an entertainment for a friend into a direct attack on what the author regarded as the abuses of the Church.

It is this latter emphasis to which Martin Dorp referred especially in the letter he purportedly wrote to Erasmus following his reading of *The Praise of Folie* some time between 1512 and 1515. His letter began by congratulating Erasmus on his work on commentaries on the New Testament, though he warned that the corrections made to the standard text, the Vulgate, might be suspect theologically. He then went on to criticise *The Praise of Folie* on two major grounds.

One was that the subject matter and style of *The Praise of Folie* was trivial and that it reflected badly on Erasmus and his reputation. The second was that he had raised some sensitive issues relating to Church practice. Furthermore Dorp warned that certain figures in the Church regarded themselves as direct targets for Erasmus's satire and would be moved to take action against him.

In an extensive written reply to Martin Dorp, Erasmus sought to defend *The Praise of Folie*, beginning with the assertion that he himself regarded it as a slight piece hardly worthy of serious intention. He went further, invoking both Plato and Horace in defence of his method of using humour to tell the truth. He wrote, "the charge of having gone clumsily to work I won't dispute; that of excessive bitterness I certainly do. We all know how many things could be said about bad popes, scandalous bishops and priests, corrupt princes—if, like Juvenal, I had not been ashamed to write down what many are not ashamed to act out" (Letter, p. 233). If people wished to identify themselves by what he had said, then that was their business, not his. He went on to say that "I wanted to mock, not to attack; to benefit, not to wound; to comment on men's manners, not to denounce them" (p. 231)

He also insisted that although he had raised questions about the failings of churchmen, he had mentioned nobody by name. But in defending *The Praise of Folie*, Erasmus included a most stinging rebuke for certain Doctors of Divinity, a tactic through which he might appear to be aiming at a number of those within the Louvain faculty whom he believed were behind Dorp's criticism:

It's an admitted fact that among theologians there are some so deficient in wit and judgement that they're unfit for study of any sort, let alone theology. ... these are the ones who despise Greek, Hebrew and even Latin literature and who, though they are more stupid than swine and don't even have ordinary common sense, fancy themselves the defenders of the fortress of learning. ... these fellows are engaged in a great conspiracy against humane letters because they want to cut a figure in the assembly of theologians and they are afraid that if polite learning flourishes and the world gets a little wiser they will be recognised as ignoramuses, though before they wanted to appear before the world as know-it-alls. ... Folly displeases them because they don't understand her. (Letter, p. 236)

And much more of the same.

Interestingly, it has long been believed that the correspondence between Erasmus and Dorp was a genuine debate about the implications of the satirical content of *The Praise of Folie*, its validity and its power to offend. Lisa Jardine, how-

ever, amongst others, has argued strongly for the idea that Erasmus concocted the debate with Dorp's connivance.⁵ Erasmus's decision to publish his reply to Dorp's accusations in the second edition of *The Praise*, issued in 1515, now looks like a calculated piece of provocation. This is supported by the fact that he also wrote additional material as a conclusion to the second edition that outlined his own belief in the innocent pursuit of a simple Christianity. He identified the "fool Christian" as one who endeavours to live according to the model that Jesus has set. He also included in the volume a detailed commentary on *The Praise* in the manner of scholarly commentaries on classical texts. This was allegedly the work of Gerardus Listrius but is thought to be mainly if not wholly the work of Erasmus himself. This commentary offered a machinery for the interpretation of *The Praise*, seeking to place it within the context of other serious academic discourse. In Erasmus's eyes, the popularity and rising notoriety of this book had become an active agent in his larger objective to effect radical change within the Church. He even suggested to Dorp that *The Praise* was simply a humorous version of his earlier piece, *The Handbook for a Christian Soldier*. Evidence of its popularity is not far to seek. Before Erasmus died in 1536, a further thirty-six Latin editions of *The Praise* had been published with all these additional materials. Translations of these editions were made into French, German, Czech and Italian. Erasmus himself said of this phenomenal publishing success that "hardly anything of mine has had such an enthusiastic reception" ("Catalogue", ed. Rummel, p. 34).

In this context, it is perhaps surprising that, even apart from Thomas More's threatening remark, no English translation of the *Encomium* was made until 1549, nearly fifteen years after Erasmus died. On the one hand, of course, when one thinks of Erasmus's English associates and friends of the 1520s and 30s, almost all of those who might have chosen to read it would have been perfectly able to do so in Latin. Certain individuals like Thomas Cranmer, the author of the first Prayer Book in English, and later Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury and architect of the Elizabethan religious settlement, "the middle way", had extensive libraries of Erasmus's books which it must be assumed included *The Praise*. As has been suggested by A. G. Dickens and Whitney Jones, Erasmus's ideas and teaching may have had significant influence on the evolution of the theology and practices of the sixteenth-century English Church settlement (pp. 196-209 and 212-14). Whatever the case, it remains a fact that the English Reformation took a

5 See Jardine, pp. 111-22 and 180-87, for a detailed and persuasive argument in support of this case.

distinctly different trajectory from that on the Continent. Erasmus's idea of intellectual argument and reasonableness was in direct contrast to Luther's and Calvin's root-and-branch approach, which was only ever supported by a minority in England and hardly at all by the Establishment. The process of reform in England was further complicated by the shifts of allegiance necessitated by the differing preferences of Edward VI, Mary and then Elizabeth.

However, during the 1540s, Catherine Parr and her associates were bent upon a more radical approach to reform than had been the case for Henry VIII. Indeed, she had come close to arrest and death for her persistent attempts to bring Henry along with her. After Henry died in 1547, Queen Catherine initiated work on translations of Erasmus's *New Testament Paraphrases* into English. It was a major project involving a number of individuals, including, rather strangely, the Princess Mary. She was given the paraphrase on St John's Gospel to translate. When the first volume of the *Paraphrases* was published in 1548, Nicholas Udall, the editor, wrote in his preface how Erasmus had shown leadership in reform and, almost echoing the sentiments expressed in *The Praise*, makes clear what he regards as Erasmus's role "in detesting of imagery and corrupt honouring of saints, in opening and defacing the tyranny, the blasphemy, hypocrisy, the ambition, the usurpation of the See of Rome" (cited in Dickens and Jones, p. 205). The significance of this publication of the *Paraphrases* can hardly be exaggerated, since it followed on from a Royal Injunction of July 1547 stipulating that alongside a Bible in English, these translated *Paraphrases* of Erasmus should be in every church in the kingdom (Dickens and Jones, p. 206). Thus it may be inferred that, for the English Church at this moment, the *Paraphrases* of Erasmus were regarded as of the greatest importance to the process of reform. They were perceived as having a major performative role. From a similar point of view, I would argue that, in England, *The Praise of Folie* could have been translated in order to participate in this process.

Whether Thomas Chaloner was commissioned to make the translation or chose to do so himself is not on record. His pedigree for the job is interesting, however, since, after studies at Cambridge in 1538, he was recommended for service in the household of Thomas Cromwell, a posting that would have exposed him in some degree to the forces of reform. From there he seems to have progressed through the ranks of what might be termed the Civil Service, serving on a number of embassies, including one at the court of Charles V. He became a life-long friend of William Cecil. At a later date, he bore witness in the trials of both

Bishop Bonner in 1549 and Bishop Gardiner in 1550. Both of these bishops were reactionary conservatives opposed to reform, who fell foul of the Protestant authorities in the reign of Edward VI. So at one level Chaloner's Protestant credentials would have made him a good choice for the job. He also had developed a reputation as a writer and poet with a special interest in Latin lyric poetry and in translation. He is mentioned for his literary achievement in George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* and Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia*, as well as in Ben Jonson's *Timber, or Discoveries*.

Whatever the case regarding the origins of the move to translate it, not far behind the publication and distribution of the *Paraphrases*, Thomas Chaloner's version of *The Praise of Folie* was published in 1549. It certainly seems like a timely and deliberate addition to the campaign of reform. Erasmus's text was perhaps a salutary as well as an entertaining reminder of what had to be left behind in terms of the abuses and superstitions of Romish practices. The satire on the excesses of the popes was fuel for the reformers, creating a church now freed from that tyranny. In his preface to the reader, Chaloner confirms the view that this book has a force beyond its comic form, in that Erasmus

openeth all his bowget: So farfoorth as by the iudgement of many learned men, he neuer shewed more arte, nor witte, in any the grauest boke he wrote, than in this his praise of Folie. Whiche the reader hauyng any considerance, shall soone espie, how in euery mattier, yea almost euery clause, is hidden besides the myrth, some deaper sence and purpose. (p. 5)

As further evidence of this deeper sense and purpose, and therefore of the energy underlying its essential performativity, I think I need only make reference to the Council of Trent, where, in 1559, all of Erasmus's works, including *The Praise of Folie*, were placed on the Index of prohibited books. And although some five years later, Pope Pius IV relented and removed the scholarly religious works from the Index, nevertheless Erasmus's *Colloquies*, his *Adagia* and *The Praise of Folie* remained banned by the Church of Rome. Surely a book is not so utterly prohibited unless it is feared that it will have an influence beyond its binding. It must have been genuinely believed that the critique of the Princes of the Church and of superstitious practices would have the power to affect people's thinking and behaviour. Even as Erasmus's text was consigned to the Index, Thomas Chaloner's translation of *The Praise of Folie* was reprinted twice in 1560 and 1577—still performing in England, as it might be said, on behalf of the Elizabethan religious settlement.

And it is just possible that it is still in its own way performing today in the twenty-first century. In 2008, Nicholas Lezard wrote a review for *The Guardian* of a new edition and translation of the book. He admitted his enthusiastic championing of Erasmus's work and asserted that "The modern world begins in a sense with this book ... it should be on every civilised bookshelf. ... There was a time when it was: it was the must-read of its day, and reverberations from its impact are still being felt." Whether this assessment is true or not, *The Praise of Folly* remains a living testament to the intellect, imagination, sense of fun and powerful faith in an uncorrupted Christianity that are the impulses underpinning Erasmus's achievement. On behalf of Erasmus, then, his great creation, Folie, takes her leave and, as she departs, asks you, her audience, to "clappe your handes in token of gladnesse, liue carelesse, and drinke all out, ye the trustie seruauntes and solemne ministers of Folie" (p. 129).

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Olena LILOVA, « Tudor Domestic Theatre: In Search of Political Consent through Folly »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 23-34
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<https://sceneuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta10>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

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Date de création

Avril 2013

Tudor Domestic Theatre: In Search of Political Consent through Folly

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In late medieval and Renaissance England, indoor dramatic presentation in the banquet-halls or great chambers of the nobility was a very popular kind of festive pastime. This paper is devoted to one of the most notable of early Tudor dramatic practices, the interlude, intended especially for playing in the great hall of a royal palace or noble manor house. Tudor domestic theatre as a means of relieving social strain through performance will be my principal concern.

When elucidating such issues as the social and cultural milieu of dramatic practice in England in the years 1485-1603, researchers highlight the peculiar setting of the interlude, which distinguished it from the other types of theatrical presentations of the epoch. It was a form designed for performance in a banquet-hall or great chamber during various kinds of festivities. For this reason, the introductory part of this paper will deal with the main physical parameters of the Tudor hall.

The spatial organisation of the hall created particular conditions for acting interludes. Among the basic features of great halls in Renaissance England, the absence of any kind of physical division between players and audience should be mentioned. There was no stage in the Tudor nobility's great chambers, and the whole interior of the banquet hall served as the dynamic performing area, with no distinction between stage and auditorium

structures. According to the theatrical records of this period, indoor performances usually took place in the centre of the hall, with the spectators grouped around (standing or sitting on four sides of the playing space). Some great halls had a sort of raised area or dais at one end, upon which the king or the master of the house, together with his honoured company, dined. From this place they watched the performance. The sovereign's or the master's seat could sometimes serve as one of "the focal points for the staging".¹ Actors could even apply to the patron with a request to resolve the conflict of the play.

At the other end of the hall, there were entrances to the kitchen and other service or private rooms, which were separated from the hall itself by a special partition, usually referred to as the Screens.² It was around the entrances and exits that the lower-status household members crowded while watching the performance. Popular audience members could also be standing at the doors in the side aisles behind tables placed alongside the walls on both sides, extending forward from the head table. In such a way, the banquet hall space was divided into a number of auditorium segments meant for different strata of the community, a practice which reflected the hierarchy of Tudor society. With representatives of different social groups and layers as the viewers at the banquet hall, the indoor performance—though located in noble premises—was not a presentation of "a closed type" aimed at a selected audience. On the contrary, it was obviously addressed to the whole community.

Being associated with festive ceremony, "household drama" was usually played on occasions of seasonal revelry (Christmas, Shrovetide, etc.), visits by honourable guests, personal celebrations or other festivities. This explains the evident entertainment function of household performance. The earliest record of the attempt to unite English secular drama with the Roman tradition of banquet entertainments goes back to about 1300. The English play *Interludium de Clerico et Puella* is considered to have been created at this time.

Given the idea of the interlude as an important component part of banquets in Tudor England, some scholars relate the origin of this Latin term to "entertainment between courses".³ An illustration of this idea can be found in John Heywood's *Play of the Weather*. One of the interlude's characters—namely,

1 According to the analysis of Hattaway, p. 17.

2 See Walker, *Politics*, p. 301, and Bevington, p. 91.

3 See Westfall, p. 42.

the Boy—proclaims that his godfather, God Almighty, “was come from Heven . . . /This night to suppe here with my lord” (Heywood, ll. 1026-27). So, one can assume that the performance took place between the parts of the banquet party. This is not necessarily proof of the term’s origin. In many contemporary studies, “interlude” comes merely to be synonymous with “pastime” or “play”, and perhaps the safest definition is still that given by E. K. Chambers in his fundamental study, *The Medieval Stage* (1903). In his view, the term refers to “the play between two or more speakers” (cited in Axton, Introduction, p. 2).

Whatever the direct etymology of the term might be, in Tudor England interludes presented dramatic pieces, basically secular in nature, incorporated into the feast as a break between the courses. They were structurally similar to other entertainments (dancing, musical performance, circus acts, etc.). Many of them preserve a sense of the occasion and are distinguished by a convivial and relaxed mood. At a time when religious drama was skilfully used as “a means of promulgating moral or theological opinions” (Nicoll, p. 43), the interlude reflected on topical, mainly secular, problems of the day that concerned individuals as members of society. On the other hand, the interlude, because of its “unusual freedom in construction and theatrical illusion” (Craik, p. 45), can also be contrasted with the formal tradition of Roman comedy with its classic regularity and compositional decorum.

Having surveyed the conventions of the venue of Tudor household presentation (that is, the hall layout, the social composition of the audience, the general atmosphere of the play) in the first part of this paper, I will go on to consider the distinctive role the Tudor hall theatre played in the political discourse of the epoch. Early modern English indoor drama was characterised by some special playing strategies that proved essential for the moulding of the interlude genre. These strategies at the same time provided conditions for rewarding exchanges of opinion between different interest groups in the Tudor political arena.

Since there was no formal division between the space of the players and that of the audience (no specific stage or auditorium space, no tiring rooms for the troupe members, almost no scenery), all the hall was used as a playing area. Early Tudor playwrights soon learned to make use of these distinctive staging conditions, available in great halls, for achieving special dramatic effects in their plays, one of them being the intimate atmosphere within the playing space. This feeling of unifying complicity, typical of Tudor household plays, was obviously engendered by the playing venue itself. Jean-Paul Débax characterises the Tudor hall

playing space as “transformable, plastique, protéiforme, à l’intérieur de ce cadre familier” (“Deux fonctionnements”, p. 19) in a way that enabled constant play upon proximity and remoteness. Scenes of “serious content” were played out at the distant Screens, while broadly entertaining episodes were located closer to the hall centre. This technique of alternating distances helped greatly in establishing the intimate atmosphere in Tudor interludes, which Débax calls “un théâtre de l’intimité” (“Deux fonctionnements”, p. 19). The practice of interposing the Vice’s tricks into the main serious plot illustrates the “blithely undecorous mingling of hornpipes and funerals” (Russell, p. 110) in household theatre. This remained one of the principal devices of later Shakespearean drama.

The sense of complicity was only intensified when performers in hall presentations stepped out of the audience and began an action, “putting on” their roles in sight of the spectators.⁴ Their acting consisted mainly in gesturing to one another, or exchanging remarks as if at a casual encounter. As soon as they started the play, the interlude performers got on familiar terms with the viewers. For in Tudor interludes the playing potential was implemented, not only through the dramatic interaction between the characters, but also in the relations between performers and spectators. Characters would address spectators with their asides, exchanging quibbles with viewers in the course of performing, thus drawing them into the play-world. In the extant texts of Tudor interludes there can be found numerous appeals to spectators: “A, for Goddis will / What meane ye, syrs, to stond so still?” (Medwall, ll. 1-2); “How say ye, gode women? Is it your gyse / To chose all your husbandis that wyse?” (ll. 2278-79); “All men beware of suche folys!” (Skelton, l. 1264); “Now syrs, take hede, for here comth goddess servaunt” (Heywood, l. 186); “Stande ye mery, my frendes, everychone!” (l. 220); “All you bere recorde what favour I have” (l. 476). These examples give an impression of the devices used to involve the audience in close association with the actors. Tudor hall performers were the descendants of “those individual artists of the Middle Ages, strolling actors, musicians, fools, tumblers, and jugglers, who made a living moving from house to house, fair to fair” (Hattaway, p. 19). From their predecessors, early Tudor writers and performers inherited a taste for improvisation, and they used this device actively in the dynamic process of interacting with the audience.

Such close and dynamic interaction between the participants in the hall presentation created a basis for touching upon acutely topical issues of Tudor

4 See Hattaway, p. 21.

social and political life in domestic productions. The very chance in hall interludes to voice one's thoughts, to convey various (not infrequently contrasting) ideas, to play out opinions of different social or interest groups, to imagine possible consequences of actual or merely contrived events and the decisions of the authorities—this is in itself a very effective means of rendering less sensitive the problems under discussion. Domestic drama obviously could not have contributed to either the reconciliation of conflicting groups or the formulation of political decisions in the times of the Tudor monarchy if it had not been for the authorities' openness to dialogue.⁵

Active engagement with the audience was especially characteristic of what has been categorised as the “Vice function” or “Vice effect” (Débax, “Complicity”, p. 33). The Theatre of Vice can be considered as the main dramatic principle of many English fifteenth- and sixteenth-century interludes. Vice figures were endowed with different names because multiple flaws or negative features of human nature could be demonstrated through them. This character was capable of arousing the public's laughter by bringing into derision everything and everyone around him (Débax, “Deux fonctionnements”, p. 16). In Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece*, for instance, this role is attributed to the pair of servants named A and B. It is Jupiter's crier, Mery Report, that functions as the figure of misrule in Heywood's *The Play of the Weather*. He is, at the same time, the play's master of ceremonies, controlling the acting space as an intermediary not only between the characters but between the acting space and the audience as well. In such interludes as *Magnyfycence* (by John Skelton) or *Respublica* (attributed to Nicholas Udall), it is not single characters but whole bands of rogues who fulfil the Vice function. It is of interest that the tonality of the Vice's jokes depended upon their addressee: they could be decent or vulgar in their appeal. The playwrights who composed indoor presentations were clearly mindful of this differentiated audience in Tudor great chambers and banquet halls. The Vices used their undignified quips to seek comradeship with the low-status public, while the serious moral sentiments were addressed to the patrons and their guests (Walker, *Politics*, p. 301). Thus dramatists of the period were expected to take into account various tastes, intending the same piece for the instruction and delight of different social classes. It is noteworthy that the Vice character in Tudor interludes appears to be a recognisable representative of folk comic tradition, thus establishing a line of descent from English medieval popular theatre to early modern drama.

5 See Walker, *Early Tudor Drama*, *passim*.

The conciliatory nature of laughter, hence its role in upholding the social hierarchy, has often been considered in studies of medieval and early modern literature. I would like to stress the awareness of the uniting function of laughter that the authors of domestic drama manifested in their interludes. The subjects' laughing in their principal's presence, together with the principal himself laughing, could not but engender special "playful affinity" (Walker, *Early Tudor Drama*, p. 89) with the hall drama audience. The presence in interludes of a Vice function whose main responsibility was to provoke laughter clearly shows how much writers and performers of domestic theatre relied upon laughter's relaxing effect in their productions.

The interaction with spectators in Tudor interludes contributed to dissolving even further the vague boundaries between the dramatic fictive illusion and the real world. Since the performance space itself suggested no illusion of place, playwrights made no attempt to sustain the fictive bounds of the staging. As Michael Hattaway observes, "entertainments of this kind preclude any dramatic verisimilitude based on illusion" (p. 17). Thus, in Tudor interludes generally, the dramatic strategy is not aimed at constructing a play-world continuum, parallel to the real world. On the contrary, in many cases, indoor presentations give us a clear example of the original interpenetration of the two different worlds—that of the play and that of reality. Because of "the free-and-easy commerce between reality and make-believe" (Craik, p. 42), interludes proved ready to respond to current social problems, to reflect the concerns and preoccupations of the community that produced them.

For the Tudor audience, theatrical presentation was the most powerful means of mass communication available (probably comparable to today's Internet, though mainly located within the confines of one community). Every more or less significant event from the political, economical or cultural spheres of social life could become the focus of the playwrights' attention. The Tudor hall audience was a mirror image of the English community of that period, with the whole variety of interests and aspirations of the main social groups represented there. Theatrical ventures reflected widely on the political and ideological tendencies of the epoch, making topical use of current events and thus drawing connections between dramatic presentation and the everyday world.⁶ As Robert Godfrey shows in his article on "Nervous laughter in Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Luces*", the interlude by Cardinal Morton's chaplain contains a possible allusion

6 See Микеладзе.

to the marriage of the king's sister—Mary Tudor—to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. When choosing between two suitors, the Roman senator's daughter Lucre preferred the one who proved to be virtuous by his deeds, and not by his origin and titles. In such a way, the play was probably intended to reconcile the king to Princess Mary's choice, thus playing quite a risky role in court intrigue.

Another prominent representative of the early Tudor group of playwrights, John Heywood, who was the chief maker of interludes at Henry VIII's court, issued a caution against the possible political and religious consequences of the monarch's being granted the title of Supreme Head of the Church. There is a distinct call for tolerance in the face of social and religious divisions in Heywood's *The Play of the Weather* and *The Four PP*. Both interludes also contain some innuendos concerning the king's private life. When Prince Lucifer of *The Four PP* complained of two women giving him more trouble than all the souls in hell, the spectators could not but think of the two women closely connected with the king at that time—Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn.⁷ These are just a few illustrations of the strong political engagement of English household drama of the period. Tudor hall performance was an effective means of information exchange in both horizontal and vertical ways, with the highest as well as the lowest levels of the social hierarchy involved in the communication process. The acute topicality of household staging and its leading role in organising information exchange within the society would be inherited by the later Elizabethan drama.

As one of the vectors of the communication process in early Tudor society, domestic drama made its contribution to sustaining the balance within “the political ecosystem” (Walker, *Early Tudor Drama*, p. 88) that the Henrician court comprised. The involvement of the hall interludes' participants—both performers and audiences—in the communication process enhanced their civil consciousness and invited them to share the responsibility for their rulers crucial choices. Probably this feeling of responsibility, or of influence on the political events of the time, was often so tenuous that it was hardly sensed at all. Besides, representatives of different segments of this process at different levels would have felt involved in it to varying degrees. Still, the very participation of all parties in the topical information exchange provided by domestic theatre undoubtedly made them more concerned about the social and political situations of the day and more ready to assume various opinions and views.

7 See Axton, “Narrative”, p. 55.

Tudor household performance was a novel and distinctive type of theatrical experience that in many aspects anticipated Elizabethan theatre, comedy in particular. It was a phenomenon starkly contrasting with the “elaborate spectacle or exact illusion that modern expensive and technologically equipped theatres arouse” (Hattaway, p. 23). Yet it remains an elusive phenomenon. There is still a need to rediscover the particular aesthetics of early Tudor dramatic practices.

The role of domestic theatre in Tudor political discourse will certainly be the focus of further studies in early Tudor drama. Its function in the process of social communication was no less determinative for working out the principal artistic strategies of household drama than were the entertaining and didactic purposes of the genre.

As has been shown in this paper, the dramaturgy of Tudor hall presentation was influenced considerably by the conditions of staging. These include the non-discursive playing area, which united the performers with the stratified audience. Intimacy and spontaneity as the interlude’s basic playing strategies contributed greatly to establishing dialogue between the society and its ruling elite, to transmitting political ideas and to forming attitudes to them. The playful, festive atmosphere of household presentations, encouraged by the prominent role within them of laughter-provoking devices, contributed to turning Tudor domestic theatre into a kind of polyphonic performance area, where the positions of various interest groups could be voiced and heard. Directing and playing out different political ideas and views in interludes, as well as suggesting ways out of dangerous situations, helped to neutralise conflicts in the early Tudor community.

In the process of performing, the entire Tudor hall space was turned into the playing area. In this way, the idea of Tudor household drama transports us to a time when the entire world could really be considered a stage, without resorting to metaphor. Acting out one’s fate in real life or living out one’s role in a theatrical presentation (even if as a viewer) would have carried similar emotional and intellectual intensity for an early modern human being. Thus, seeing problems solved and decisions taken in household drama could serve, at least for a certain time, to reconcile him with the physical reality around him. Appealing to the tastes of a wide audience and representing the views of different interest groups of Tudor society in a fictional, fanciful way, the domestic theatre functioned as an effective instrument of conciliation.

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Sarah CARPENTER, « The Politics of Unreason:
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« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 35-52
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<https://sceneuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta10>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

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Date de création

Avril 2013

The Politics of Unreason: Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis and the Practices of Folly

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The interaction of folly with politics is a familiar and well-established theme in sixteenth-century literary discourse. It also has a vivid visual tradition. Pictures from at least the fourteenth to the late-sixteenth century show the persistence of images of direct confrontation between fools and secular authority. The principles that such images illustrate may be very different: the illumination from the fifteenth-century Ranworth Antiphoner which shows a motley-clad fool confronting a sceptred and throned King David depicts the opening words of Psalm 53: “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God”.¹ In a similar meeting in Raphael I. Sadeler’s 1588 engraving, *Le Bouffon et le Roi*, the court fool sets a jester’s cap on the king to mark the illusory quality of his authority.² Either king or fool may hold the moral authority, but they testify to a familiar visual encounter. For good or for bad, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Folly has something important to say to political power.

We may well assume this is now a dead tradition, fascinating but confined to its early modern period.

1 http://www.broadsideparishes.org.uk/bspicons/antiphoner/david_fool.htm (accessed 9 January 2012).

2 <http://www.artfinder.com/work/the-fool-and-the-king-raphael-i-sadeler/> (accessed 9 January 2012).

But although the visual codification of the encounter has faded, we can still recognise the demonstrative impulse to folly as an intervention in politics today. On 19 July 2011, the proceedings of the select committee of the Parliament of Westminster in London, investigating serious allegations against News Corporation, briefly dissolved into chaos as a custard pie was thrown into the face of Rupert Murdoch, chairman of the international organisation.³ Although its cultural formula is now less clearly articulated, its images less familiar, this event clearly resonated with Renaissance practices. The pie-thrower, later identified as a part-time stand-up comic Jonny Marbles (a semi-professional fool?), presented himself as a voice of common humanity, breaking into the dignity of official proceedings with a harmless but physically humiliating comic attack. The aim seemed to be to expose Murdoch, the figure of authority, as beneath the trappings himself a mere fool like his attacker, thus dissolving the frustrating distance between the powerful and the powerless. Immediate responses to the moment extended the parallels with sixteenth-century practice. To the delight of the media and public comment, Murdoch's wife leapt to his defence, inadvertently providing a striking enactment of a "world-upside-down" attack of woman on man, a young wife defending an elderly husband.⁴ Mixed public reactions at the time revealed disagreement as to where moral authority was understood to lie in this confrontation, whether with Murdoch and his wife, or with the figure of the fool. But it suggests that in the twenty-first century, folly's encounter with political power remains active and expressive, even if we have lost its formal traditions.



This is the context for this paper's exploration of David Lyndsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, a lively, large-scale allegorical drama performed in Scotland in 1552 and 1554.⁵ It is a play which draws vividly on familiar Fool traditions, to make its own forceful intervention in the politics of mid-sixteenth century Scotland. Most overtly, it closes with a classic *sermon joyeux* from the character of Foly himself, who "hing up his [fools] hattis on the pulpet" (l. 4489) and preaches on

3 <http://images.mirror.co.uk/upl/m4/jul2011/9/5/rupert-murdoch-pic-reuters-24991864.jpg> (accessed 9 January 2012).

4 http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/01950/wendi-deng_1950463i.jpg (accessed 9 January 2012).

5 Lyndsay, *Satyre*, ed. Lyall, pp. vii-xiv. All references are to this edition.

the text “Stultorum numerus infinitus [The number of fools is infinite]”.⁶ Foly addresses the broad vision of universal social foolishness by offering his fool’s caps to merchants, old men, clergy and kings. But he also applies the lessons of folly to the current political situation in Europe, mocking the aggression that was flaring between the Emperor, the French King and the Pope in 1552, the date of the first known production of the play (Lyndsay, *Satyre*, ed. Lyall, p. xiii). Lyndsay’s chief focus throughout the play is on immediate political issues for Scotland, addressing such problems as Church abuses and corruption, the oppression of the poor through unjust taxes, and the failure to educate and support the lay community. Through Foly’s sermon at the end, these contemporary local issues are set into a wider international and universal context of folly.

Foly’s sermon is a very explicit example of foolery which shows clear influence from established European traditions, such as Brant’s *Ship of Fools*. But all through the play, Lyndsay draws on a variety of traditions of folly to expose and challenge the political processes of his own time and country. He even includes an interruption of Parliament by a fool-figure, although unlike Jonny Marbles, the Westminster pie-thrower, Lyndsay’s fools are safely contained within a dramatic performance. That framework of performance allows the spectators to enjoy and at times support the antics of his disruptive fools; it encourages the audience to reflect on the resonances of their *lèse majesté*, rather than being caught up into the immediate social disruption. It is worth exploring these resonances, as well as the mechanics of Lyndsay’s fools’ political challenges, in relation to the literary and dramatic folly traditions of the time. The *Thrie Estaitis* is naturally and rightly thought of in comparison to Erasmus’s *In Praise of Folly*, Brant’s *Ship of Fools*, *sotties* and other kinds of European folly literature.⁷

In his sermon at the end of the *Thrie Estaitis*, Foly projects onto the audience the biblical text so often associated with foolery (“Stultorum numerus infinitus”), as he tries to sell his hats to them. But the text also reflects back over the

6 Vulgate, *Ecclesiastes* 1:15. Later translations rendered the Hebrew text differently. For a preaching fool from Durer’s woodcuts for Sebastian Brant’s *Ship of Fools* (1497), see http://www.spaightwood-galleries.com/Media/Old_Masters/Durer/Durer_Fools/Durer_Fools_Preaching_Fool_97.jpg (accessed 9 January 2012).

7 These key works were available in Scotland in the mid-sixteenth century. The 1523 edition of Erasmus’s *Stultitia Laus* was owned by a man who may well have been the schoolmaster of Cupar, Lyndsay’s home town, at the time of the production of the *Thrie Estaitis* there in 1552. Alexander Barclay’s English translation of Brant’s *Ship of Fools* was owned by one John Chepman early in the sixteenth century. See Durkan and Ross, pp. 98, 176.

play itself, which is thick with fools of different kinds. In this, the *Thrie Estaitis* is closely linked to and quite probably influenced by French *sotties*. Scholars have often pointed out the analogies of Lyndsay's play in plot and characters, as well as in topic, both with the genre of the *sottie* and even with specific examples.⁸ But more important than any particular parallel is the overall conception of folly itself and how that might be realised in dramatic mode. Heather Arden has a helpful analysis of the *sotties* with their focus on infinite folly; she points out that these dramas used fools to play a richly contradictory set of roles:

[the] complex nature of the fool enabled the authors of the *sotties* to develop the three roles of evildoer, accuser, and victim. . . . The fool had the remarkable ability to represent any and all of the roles. (Arden, p. 163)

Arden's evil-doer fool dramatises "all the misguided, wrong-headed, silly, self-destructive behavior that mankind could devise". As victim, the fool represents "the simple-minded . . . the meek of the earth, and for this reason he came to stand for the downtrodden—the victims—of society" (p. 164). Finally, as accuser, the fool acts as the truth-teller, the revealer of wrong, because "he alone was given the right to speak his mind openly" (p. 163).

These conflicting roles map persuasively onto the characters and action of the *Thrie Estaitis*. Lyndsay's play presents the audience with a fertile, if at times confusingly varied and even contradictory cast of different kinds of fool. Some are wrongdoers—either mischievous or vicious. So Flattery, one of the three Vices who abuse King Humanitie, is explicitly presented as a fool, introducing himself to the audience:

Se ye not Flatterie, your awin [own] fuill,
That yeid [went] to mak this new array?
Was I not heir with yow at Yuill? (ll. 629-31)

He is not only a classic fool, but speaks as a figure the audience might have expected to encounter during Christmas festivities. The chief villains of the play, the corrupt members of the Spirituality, are also, as in many *sotties*, eventually revealed as wearing fools' costumes underneath their clerical robes: as Henrie Charteris reported of the 1554 production, "thay denudit of thair upmaist garments, thay war fund bot verray fulis" (Preface to Lyndsay, *Warkis*, fol. +iii').

8 See Mill, "Continental Drama"; Graf; Lyndsay, *Satyre*, ed. Lyall, pp. xxiii-iv; and Happé, pp. 101-2.

So vice—and in this play that means largely political vice—is folly. But this is also a play where vice is exposed and truth revealed by fools: Foly himself in his final sermon challenges and uncovers the foolish vices of all classes. More significantly, within the body of the play the character of John the Common-weill acts as the righteous accuser of the Spirituality. John the Common-weill does not wear the distinctive costume of the professional fool, but he embodies much of the manner and behaviour of folly. He bursts into the ceremonial dignity of the Parliament of the Three Estates to present his complaint, with a comic slapstick somewhat reminiscent of Jonny Marbles’s pie-throwing. In rough, tattered clothes he emerges from the spectators, leaps over (or falls into) the stream, and greets the king with a cheerfully colloquial challenge to the formal etiquette of the assembly, and with a wise and fearless speaking of his mind against the powerful (ll. 2424–73). Theatrically, he carries some of the force of Marcolf, the comically wise and outspoken peasant-fool who challenges the intellectual wisdom of Solomon in the well-known medieval dialogue between Solomon and Marcolf.⁹ So in the *Thrie Estaitis* folly is not just the wrong-doer, but also the challenger of wrong, the political truth-teller.

Finally, the Poor Man of Lyndsay’s play, with his rags and comically forthright but helpless complaints against oppression, acts as the simple fool, the powerless victim of the Spirituality who is defended by John the Common-weill. There are even more types and examples of fools in the play, especially in the two farcical interludes in the Banns and in the interval. In the Banns, a sexually successful “Fuill” wins the young wife of a jealous old man from her many suitors, while in the interval a foolish Sowtar (shoemaker) and his wife are divorced by a fraudulent Pardoner in a farcical arse-kissing ceremony. Altogether this range of conflicting but interacting characters reinforce Foly’s claim in his concluding sermon about the inescapable universality of folly. More particularly, they cast the whole dynamic field of politics as an arena of folly. Wise fools challenge the self-satisfied and corrupt fools who are in authority, and expose them to the innocent fools who are ruled by them, both on-stage and in the audience.

This powerful image of multivalent and all-embracing folly clearly relates to the wittily ambivalent traditions of classic fool literature. But it is not a purely literary conceit: in mid-sixteenth century Scotland, folly traditions were not

9 [T]he *Dyalogus . . . Salomon and Marcolphus*. Some of the sense of John the Common-weill confronting King Humanitie is captured in the image at <http://marolf.org/photogallery/Fictional%20Characters/salomon%20with%20marcolfus%20and%20wife%20polycana.jpg> (accessed 9 January 2012).

confined to literary or dramatic representation. Lyndsay and his audience were familiar with a wide range of festive fool activity and behaviour that itself often carried a political dimension. Folly practices seem to have embodied a recognised visual and metaphorical language that had a place in the real world of politics. These local practices also feed into the play, inflecting not only the action of the *Thrie Estaitis*, but also the likely audience response. They create a semantic ambience by which folly's intervention in politics on-stage can be recognised and interpreted in relation to the audience's experience of such activity in their own social and political lives. To explore how Lyndsay tapped into these cultural practices, I will highlight three areas of fool activity in sixteenth-century Scotland: the keeping of fools at court and in noble households; the practices of outspoken comic truth-telling in flytings and advice literature; and the traditions of the "Abbot of Unreason", the temporary mock-rulers who organised and governed festive civic entertainment.

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The records of the Scottish royal court show how fools were maintained by the monarch right through the sixteenth century, as well as documenting the occasional patronage of fools belonging to other noble households.¹⁰ Unfortunately, little information is recorded about what these fools actually did at court, or how they were considered.¹¹ Some were clearly "natural fools"—those with intellectual handicaps tended by carers, like Curry, a fool of James IV.¹² We find regular payments to "the lad that kept Currye" (*Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*,¹³ I: 275), and to "Curryis modir" (II: 104), as well as for food, drink, clothing and accommodation. Curry was later married to another natural fool, "Daft Anne" (III: 369). Yet we know very little about what he did to entertain the court. There is a payment "to the lityll fithelar callit Curryis fithelar" (*LHTA*, II: 103) which suggests performance of some kind. But Curry is held up to laughter in a poem of Dunbar's for twice shitting in his saddle, which suggests

10 For a selection of these records, see Mill, *Mediaeval Plays*, pp. 313-33.

11 For the difficulty in discovering evidence of fools' activities, see Southworth.

12 For discussion of the blurred distinction between "natural" and "artificial" fools, see Welsford, p. 119, and Cockett. For Curry, see Bawcutt, p. 59.

13 Henceforth abbreviated *LHTA*.

rather the comedy of unintended and undignified physical mishaps.¹⁴ We are now, of course, uncomfortable with this kind of humour directed at this kind of person, which makes it difficult for us to assess its cultural function in its own time. Thomas More in *Utopia* articulates one contemporary attitude to such fools, which helps illuminate the issue:

They sette greate store by fooles. And as it is greate reproche to do to annye of them hurte or iniury, so they prohibite not to take pleasure of foolyshnes. For that they thynke doth muche good to the fooles. And if any man be so sadde and sterne, that he cannot laughe nother at their wordes nor at their dedes, none of them be commytted to his tuition: for feare lest he would not ordre them gentilly and fauorably enough. (More, sig. N8^{ra})

This Utopian view of mutual benefit suggests that such fools were probably regarded as innocents whose incomprehension was a legitimate source of laughter because it revealed the innate folly of all human beings.

Later, stories were recorded of a Scottish natural fool and dwarf who is said to have served the court in the reign of Mary Queen of Scots—Jemy Camber, who is described as a “fatt Foole naturall”.¹⁵ In his collection *Foole vpon foole*, Robert Armin, himself a professional actor-fool in Elizabethan London, recounts Camber’s story claiming that as a natural fool “his wit, indeed . . . is just none at all, but merry and pleasing” (sig. B4^r), and that with his fat belly and diminutive stature “his very presence made the king much sport” (sig. B3^v). Armin’s tales suggest that this sport again consisted largely of physical practical jokes played against the uncomprehending fool: “How *Jemy* this Fat foole swet almost to death, and never knew the reason” (sig. C1^r), or, more alarmingly, “How this Fat foole *jemy* was stung with nettles, and how after unknowen to himself, helped to make his owne grave” (sig. C3^r).

Fools like these are certainly, in Arden’s phrase, “innocent victims”; but the roughness of the jokes played on them suggests that they do not really function as individual objects of pity or sympathy, but rather as emblems of wider human uncomprehending foolishness. There is perhaps an interesting comparison to be made with, for example, Lyndsay’s character of Pauper, a ragged and simple poor man who angrily but helplessly seeks redress from the courts. In the interval of

14 Dunbar gives another court fool, Sir Thomas Norny, a backhanded compliment, explaining that “He fyld [fouled] neuer sadell in his dais, / And Curry befyld tua [two]” (Dunbar, “Of Sir Thomas Norny” [“Now lythis off ane gentill knycht”], ll. 47-48 [l: 143]).

15 Armin, sig. B3^v; see Billington, pp. 35-36.

the *Thrie Estaitis*, Pauper rudely climbs up into the King's empty throne, where he is trapped by the steward Diligence—who takes away his ladder, laughs at his unsophisticated lack of understanding, and castigates him as “the daftest fuill that ever I saw!” (l. 2015). The play clearly acknowledges Pauper as a victim who is both innocent and oppressed; yet this apparently does not demand reverential treatment either from the virtuous characters of the play or from the audience. Like Jemy Camber or Curry, the innocent fool may be acknowledged as blameless and even as oppressed, but is nonetheless a legitimate target of rough mockery and ridicule.

Not all court fools were “natural”, but we know even less about the activities of the so-called “artificial fools”. They are identified in the accounts largely in terms of their duties as messengers or other court workers, and it is often from other sources that we find they also functioned as fools.¹⁶ On occasion they are dressed in more elaborate and expensive clothing than the known natural fools, a fact possibly suggesting more deliberate performance roles. John Bute, for example, in 1511 was provided with relatively costly red and yellow cloth to make “ane Coit of ye fassoun of ye sey wawis [sea waves]”.¹⁷ Clothing of this kind seems to have become satirically associated with performances involving foolishly extravagant court employees. In a 1540 interlude, which is generally thought of as a precursor to the *Thrie Estaitis*, we find that the three foolish, boasting courtiers are also dressed in elaborate parti-coloured red and yellow, colours which had by then become a visual reference to the livery colours of the Scottish royal court.¹⁸ Such flamboyant clothing may also suggest the costume of Flattery in the *Thrie Estaitis*: he is a fool, dressed in “gay . . . new aray”, who is also one of a group of three corrupt courtiers.¹⁹ So it is possible that the court fools of this kind had already come to occupy a role of providing satiric commentary on the behaviour and excesses of the court, and that this is picked up in the two trios of courtly vices we find in the *Thrie Estaitis*. Both natural and artificial fools, then, appear to hold roles which in different ways expose the

16 John McCrery, for example, receives a number of payments for clothing, horses and unspecified duties in the Treasurer's Accounts 1525–32. He is identified as “fatuus” in the Household Books, and as a fool by Lyndsay in “The Complaint” (*Selected Poems*, p. 50, ll. 283–84).

17 *LHTA*, IV: 263. Sir Thomas Norny was given satin gowns in 1505 and 1506 (*LHTA*, II: 109, 307).

18 *LHTA*, VII: 276–77. For an account of the interlude, see Walker, pp. 125–38.

19 According to Arden, this “three-of-a-kind” trio is a motif commonly linked to the *sottie*: “Because of the prevalence of three-of-a-kind characters, I would argue that a short satiric play with a trio of similar characters is almost certainly a *sottie*” (p. 37).

failures of understanding and behaviour of the courtly household; both provide models which Lyndsay develops.

Apart from those designated and kept as fools, we find that other members of the Scottish court deliberately drew on traditions of folly, both in creating entertainment and for more serious purposes. There is a general sense that the sixteenth-century royal court of Scotland was less formal in manner, and more irreverently outspoken, than that of England. English commentators noted with surprise the freedom with which James VI was addressed by his subjects, and both James IV and James V were the subject of raucously outspoken poems about their sexual exploits.²⁰ The court apparently enjoyed flamboyantly farcical comedy, both physical and verbal, as we see in the virtuoso insults of the tradition of flyting, or the undignified slapstick of a poem like Dunbar's "Ane Dance in the Quenis Chalmer". Perhaps it is not surprising that in the enclosed world of the court this sort of disruptive foolery was sometimes used to proffer more serious political advice. Lyndsay himself gives us an excellent example of this. His "Answer to the Kingis Flyting" not only accuses the young James V of "fukkand lyke ane furious fornicatour" (l. 49), but offers a ludicrous picture of the king ruffling a kitchen maid, throwing her across a "stinking trough" and then weltering with her in the dregs of the overturned brewing vat. This sort of ridiculous sexual and (literally) filthy comedy is a characteristic of fool behaviour.²¹ It is echoed in a story Foly tells on his entrance in the *Thrie Estaitis* about his encounter with an angry sow in a midden (ll. 4315-41); and it is more explicitly enacted by the Fool in the Banns farce who steals the key to the young wife's chastity belt (ll. 170-75). But Lyndsay's outrageous attack on his monarch is not only a joke. The poem also carries a serious criticism of James's irresponsible behaviour, even though it is couched in words and images that invite rudely bantering laughter. As king, not yet married and without heirs, James V is not only losing respect but risking the future stability of his country by such behaviour, says Lyndsay:

Quharefor, tak tent, and your fyne powder spair,
And waist it nocht, bot gyf ye wit weill quhair.

...

20 See *Calendar of the State Papers*, IX: 707; Dunbar, "This hinder nycht", I: 245-47; and Lyndsay, "The Answer to the Kingis Flyting", *Selected Poems*, pp. 98-100.

21 http://www.britishmuseum.org/collectionimages/AN00062/AN00062616_001_1.jpg (accessed 9 January 2012).

And, speciallie, quhen that the well gois dry,
Syne can nocht get agane sic stufe to by. (“Answer to the Kingis Flyting”, ll. 34-42)

This disruptive, ridiculing folly is certainly primarily to be enjoyed; but its humour also becomes the vehicle for political criticism.

In the *Thrie Estaitis*, the truth-telling John the Common-weill shares in this tradition of provoking disrespectful, foolish but critical laughter. Like Lyndsay himself with the young James V, John uses the tools of comic sexual humiliation to undermine and expose the powerful. Challenged to confess his faith in Holy Church before the Spirituality, he responds:

I trow *Sanctam Ecclesiam*—
But nocht in thir bischops nor thir freirs,
Quhilk will for purging of thir neirs [kidneys]
Sard [fuck] up the ta raw [one row] and doun the uther.
The mekill Devill resave the fiddler [cartload]. (ll. 3037-41)

John’s tone is less bantering, more fiercely critical, than Lyndsay’s. But he uses the same mechanism of publicly inviting bawdy laughter against the politically irresponsible. The irreverent truth-teller foolishly and comically threatens the dignity of the powerful, exposing them as the real fools. John the Common-weill, in fact, uses the same techniques as had apparently been vividly demonstrated in real life in the late 1520s by one Alexander Furroure. Brought to examination for heresy, Furroure twisted his trial into a comical challenge to the adulterous cleric who had seduced his wife. His explicit sexual jokes not only exposed the corrupt hypocrisy of the clergy but re-defined his clerical judges as helplessly foolish butts of his performance.²² Lyndsay co-opts this mode of political-theatrical intervention in John’s attack on the Spirituality. As audience we are permitted to enjoy and participate in the bawdy language of folly, which is sanctioned by its use in exposing vice and challenging corruption.

Folly practices with a potentially political edge, therefore, seem to be familiar both in and beyond the royal court. But there is another more official institution established throughout Scotland at the time that demonstrates how widely embedded the language of folly also was in civic organisation. From well

22 See Knox, I: 18-19. For a penetrating and subtle exposition of the theatrical power of Furroure’s challenge, see McGavin, pp. 20-25.

before the sixteenth century, it was the practice of many burghs to elect seasonal kings, who oversaw festivity, entertainment and civic ceremony for the year. These kings had many different names, but the commonest are terms that link directly to the practices of misrule and folly: the “Lord of Inobedience”, the “Abbot of Na Rent”, the “Abbot of Unrest” and—most commonly of all—the “Abbot of Unreason”.²³ Abbots of Unreason were regularly chosen in burghs all across Scotland from at least the mid-fifteenth century: they are figures who sum up the rich tensions and ambivalence around the public practice of folly. They hold a significant municipal office, and were selected, paid and authorised by the burgh council; yet their titles openly associate them with foolery and a challenge to authority and reason. These mock rulers were put in charge of a kind of licensed folly: a 1553 statute in Aberdeen reminded its abbots that their role was “halding of the guid toun in glaidnes and blythnes wyth dansis, farsis, playis and gamis in tymes conveyent” (Mill, *Mediaeval Plays*, p. 150). In this role the Abbots of Unreason were, paradoxically, supported by a tight legal bureaucracy: they were formally appointed, rewarded from council revenues, and given authority to enforce appropriate participation from their fellow-citizens. Men could be fined for failing to ride out in procession with the Abbot of Unreason on feast days. The office was in fact not always welcomed, largely because the responsibility, time and expense weighed heavily; various records survive of citizens trying to escape their appointment as Abbot of Unreason, apparently because of its burdensome duties.²⁴ This does not sound as though unreason or folly was a dominant element of the role.

But the official sanction and authority of the Abbots of Unreason was at times in tension with the disruptive, festive foolery they were appointed to promote. Their foolish excess might get out of hand: in outlining the duties of the role, Aberdeen had actually been attempting to rein in its Abbots, who had been sponsoring “our mony [too many] grit ... ryetous [riotous] & sumptuous banketing ... nother profitabill nor godlie” (Mill, *Mediaeval Plays*, p. 150). Even in their official activities, there were regular payments to citizens whose property had been damaged during the Abbots’ events. Sir Walter Scott records a story from 1547 in which an official delivering letters of excommunication from St Andrews to Borthwick Castle was first ducked in the millpond by the Abbot

23 See Mill, *Mediaeval Plays*, pp. 21–33.

24 See Mill, *Mediaeval Plays*, pp. 220, 250–51.

of Unreason and then forced to eat the letters in a glass of wine.²⁵ The little we know of the official games the Abbots sponsored suggests that these too drew openly on folly traditions. One of their chief responsibilities was the May play or game, involving the participation of the citizens in celebrating the bringing home of summer. It is not clear how far these games involved scripted performance, but one speech survives from the presenter of such a May play—a dwarf called “Welth”.²⁶ His performance routines are very much like those of the comic Vices of the *Thrie Estaitis* or even of Foly himself: in his monologue he tells a story of the adventurous journey he has taken to Edinburgh, gives a playfully fantastic introduction of himself and his ancestors, and all through enters into direct and intimate teasing interaction with the spectators.

The Abbot of Unreason, then, is a figure poised between authority and folly, between political power and a challenge to that power. The putting on of plays was part of the duty of the Abbot of Unreason, and these plays were supported by the authorities—just as the 1554 Edinburgh production of the *Thrie Estaitis* was financed by the burgh and patronised by the Queen Regent. But it seems that, as often as not, these plays and games presented themselves as festive, foolish and disruptive of the very authority that licensed and supported them—just as the *Thrie Estaitis* publicly but comically challenged both political and ecclesiastical authorities. This potential for fertile ambivalence was recognised at the time. The title of the Abbot of Unreason entered into the political discourse of the day, with the image of the role available as a means of conceptualising political relationships. So John Knox records a resonant sermon directed against the church establishment in the 1530s: he reports on a Friar who delivered a “sermon of the Abbot [of] Unreason, unto whom and whose laws; he compared the prelates of that age; for they were subdued to no laws, no more than was the Abbot [of] Unreason” (Knox, I: 17). Unreason, or folly, is subject to no laws; as such, it can offer a powerful image of corrupt authority. Knox, like Lyndsay, caricatures the “Prelats of that age” as fools who deny both social and spiritual laws. But by virtue of standing outside the law, Unreason is also the very instrument by which such corruption is exposed. Corrupt clergy are not only themselves images of the Abbots of Unreason, but may be challenged and exposed by others adopting the same role, as was shown in Knox’s story of Alexander Furrour.

25 See Mill, *Mediaeval Plays*, pp. 28-29, n. 2.

26 “The Maner of the Crying of ane Playe”, *The Asloan Manuscript*, II: 149-54.

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This leads us yet again to the motif of universal folly: as Brueghel's image of the Feast of Fools proclaims, all are fools, so the best fools are those who accept their own folly.²⁷ Lyndsay exploits this image tellingly in the *Thrie Estaitis*: universal folly asserts the fundamental likeness between the ruler and the ruled, the corrupt and the innocent. All are fools, and "the number of fuillis ar infinite" (l. 4506). Lyndsay demonstrates how the use of this motif of universal folly is a means by which political antagonism can be played out, while still asserting the strength of the community as a whole. Kings and commoners, abusers and victims, the players and the audience, are all fools. In the final note of the play, Diligence leaves the audience with an invitation to share with him in folly behaviour:

Now let ilk man his way avance:
Let sum ga drink and sum ga dance.
Menstrell, blaw up ane brawl of France:
Let se quha hobbils best! (ll. 4663-71)

Laughter is not only a means to attack abuses but a unifying political force.

The *Thrie Estaitis* is an exceptionally powerful example of the uses of folly as a means of intervening in politics. Lyndsay clearly had an easy familiarity with the European literary and dramatic traditions of folly to which his own play contributes. Yet he is also working in a country in which folly practices were active in social and civic life. Both at court and in the burghs, these practices created a climate in which Folly might enter political discourse; these are deftly exploited both in the characters and situations of the *Thrie Estaitis* and in the relationship it establishes with its audience. Lyndsay thus draws on traditions which are European and local, humanist and popular, literary and social, creating a play whose sources and effects both vividly assert the universality of folly.

27 <http://www.art-wallpaper.com/2684/Bruegel+Pieter/The+Feast+of+Fools-1024x768-2684.jpg> (accessed 1 June 2012). The final verse of the picture's caption may be translated: "Yet there are numbskulls who behave themselves wisely / And grasp the true sense of numbskulling / Because they accept their own folly. / Their numbskulls will hit the pin best." See Moxey.

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Elisabeth DUTTON, « “Whan Foly cometh, all is past” : Revisiting the Drama of Fools in *Magnyfycence* »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 53-68
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/Theta10>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsables scientifiques

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Date de création

Avril 2013

“Whan Foly cometh, all is past”: Revisiting the Drama of Fools in *Magnyfycence*

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John Skelton's *Magnyfycence* was probably written 1519–20, and was published by William Rastell in 1530. The play dramatizes the fall and recovery of the allegorical prince Magnyfycence, who is persuaded by a string of disguised vices to abandon his advisor, Measure; loses Welthfull Felicite and Lyberte; is driven to the point of suicide by Dyspare; and is rescued by Good Hope and re-established in prosperity by Redresse, Sad Cyrcumspeccyon and Perseveraunce. The political satire of *Magnyfycence* has been extensively discussed: Wolsey appears to be the target of much veiled attack, and, as Greg Walker has demonstrated, there are numerous allusions to Henry's minions who were expelled from court for exerting corrupt influence over the king.¹ The play appears to offer advice to princes—it is perhaps a warning to the young King Henry VIII from the man, Skelton, who had been his tutor.² The play is also of considerable interest to any narrative of the development of English theatre: it combines the allegory and fall-and-rise

- 1 See Greg Walker, *Plays of Persuasion*, pp. 88–91; also Skelton, *Magnyfycence*, ed. Walker. Quotations from the play will be from this edition, by line number.
- 2 For discussion of different possible audiences and venues for performances of *Magnyfycence*, see Scattergood, “Skelton's *Magnyfycence*”, and Evershed.

plot of medieval morality drama with the political satire of Tudor interludes, and it hints, in its characterisation of the eponymous prince, at early modern tragedy. Furthermore, it provides intriguing examples of theatrical fools: Folly and Fanny at least, and possibly all the vice figures, may be represented as stage fools. But what does it mean to play the fool in *Magnyfycence*? How would we recognise the theatrical fool in an English play of *circa* 1520?

As Peter Happé has pointed out, few surviving theatrical fools pre-date *Magnyfycence* (p. 427). He considers as precursors to Skelton's play the English moralities *Wisdom*, *Mankind*, *Mundus et Infans*, and *The Castle of Perseverance*, in all of which folly is shown to be simply evil and destructive: however, only *Mundus et Infans* and *The Castle of Perseverance* feature Folly in their casts, as an allegorical figure, and it is by no means clear that an allegorised figure of Folly is the same thing as a fool. Happé suggests that the fools in *Magnyfycence* have more in common with those of the French *sotties*: they are characters acting foolishly rather than allegorical embodiments of folly.³ Action which is typical of the *sottie* includes fools' costumes worn under the characters' clothing, and gradually revealed; "double act" scenes, in which pairs of fools compete with each other; scenes in which false learning is parodied. The prominence of all of these actions in *Magnyfycence* provides compelling evidence for the influence of the *sottie* on Skelton's play, and, since all of the vices in *Magnyfycence* become involved in actions of this sort, all of the vices must be considered as potential *sottie*-style fools.

But Skelton has also included "Foly" as an allegorical embodiment, who might perhaps be expected to fit more into the English morality tradition. He appears to be creating generically different sorts of fool within the one play. Skelton's Foly does not simply act foolishly, as *sottie* fools do; nor does he show people to be fools, as later English fools will do;⁴ but rather, of course, he *makes* them fools, because he is not just a fool but is, in fact, Folly: he does not simply exhibit traits, he embodies the essence, and so his presence signals man's fall. Thus in *The Castle of Perseverance*, Folly (called Stulticia, though he identifies himself as Folly) needs only to appear, and lead Humanum Genus to the seat of Mundus, for his significance to be clear: "In worldys wyt / Pat in Foly syt / I þynke

3 Distinguishing *sotties* from *moralités* in the French tradition, Arden writes that the *sotties* are "less abstract, more humorous, more concerned with political satire" (p. 9).

4 For example, Feste: "Good Madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool" (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, I.v.57-58).

3yt / Hys sowle to sloo” (ll. 643-46); in *Mundus et Infans*, Folly quickly persuades Manhood to take him into his service, and immediately his fall is complete, as his name becomes Shame. When a protagonist theatrically accepts the company of a vice, allegorically that vice has become an attribute of the protagonist—as Stulticia declares: “3a, couetouse he muste be / And me, Foly, muste haue in mende” (ll. 504-5).

Certainly folly is no laughing matter. In *The Castle of Perseverance*, it is Folly who from the beginning plots to slay man’s soul; in *Mundus et Infans*, as in *Magnyfycence*, Folly is the last and deadliest vice to appear. When *Magnyfycence* has been redeemed from his fall into corruption, Sad Cyrcumspeccyon characterises this fall as “folly”: “ye repent you of your foly in tymes past”?, he asks. Foly himself notes that he can “use” those who “vertu refuse”, and attributes even the fall of Adam and Eve to folly (l. 1294). The question of how to identify folly is thus intimately connected to the question of how to identify a vice in Skelton’s play.

The identification of vice is not a simple matter at the court of *Magnyfycence*. Within the Vices-versus-Virtues scheme which we might expect from a morality play, Foly, Crafty Conveyaunce, Courtly Abusyon, Clokyd Colusyon and Counterfet Countenaunce are clearly vices, and Measure, Good Hope, Perseveraunce, Redresse clearly virtues. But the character of Lyberte complicates a simple moral scheme: “For I am a virtue yf I be well used / And I am a vyce where I am abused” (l. 2099-100).

For this personification, then, context—the action of the play—will dictate moral value: of course, this is, in fact, unsurprising, since liberty, like felicity, which is also personified in the play, is more a state of being than a vice or a virtue. Fancy also, as Jane Griffiths points out, is neither a vice nor a virtue according to any moral scheme, but rather is a faculty (pp. 66, 135-36). Fancy, who is perhaps dressed as a fool,⁵ and who has the most prolonged, *sottie*-like scene with Foly,⁶ is perhaps the most morally complicated of all. He, with his brother Foly, will be the focus of this paper. In focusing on Fancy and Foly, the paper follows Happé’s thorough and illuminating study: it seeks to add to Happé’s work through observations of the play’s effects in performance.⁷

5 See Walker, ed., p. 351, n. 3, and Foly at l. 1045: “What frantycke Fancy, in a foles case?”

6 The exchange (ll. 1042-156) between Fancy and Foly in which the two barter over a dog and an owl, and quote school Latin, shows much *sottie* influence, as Happé discusses (p. 432).

7 *Magnyfycence* was staged by a professional cast at Hampton Court Palace, May 2010, directed by Elisabeth Dutton. The production developed two earlier, amateur productions, by *Thynke Byggly*,

Fansy makes his first appearance as Magnyfycence stands chatting with Welthfull Felicite. Crucially, Measure has just left the scene, and Felicite comments that, if he were not ruled by Measure, Magnyfycence would not be able to retain him long (ll. 249–50). This piece of subjunctive history facilitates not a flight of fancy but a fantasy realised; Fansy appears, commenting that Felicity’s language is vain, and asserting that Magnyfycence should listen instead to “the trouthe as I thynke” (l. 253). Fansy introduces himself to Magnyfycence as Largesse, and presents a letter of introduction which he claims is from Sad Cyncumspeccyon—he points out that the letter is “closed under seal” (l. 312). To us, it continues to be “closed”: Magnyfycence sends everyone except “Largesse” away, and then:

Hic faciat tanquam legeret litteras tacite. Interim superveniat cantando Counterfet Countenaunce suspenso gradu qui viso Magnyfycence sensim retrocedat; ad tempus post pusillum rursus accedat Counterfet Countenaunce prospectando et vocitando a longe; et Fansy animat silentium cum manu.

[Here let him act as if he were reading the letter silently. Meanwhile, let Counterfet Countenaunce come in singing. On seeing Magnyfycence let him retreat on tiptoe, but after a while let Counterfet Countenaunce come again looking about and calling from a distance, and Fansy motions him to be silent with his hand.] (l. 324 SD; translation from Walker, ed.)

Magnyfycence hears Counterfet Countenaunce cry “Fansy”, but Fansy claims that it was “a Flemynge hyght Hansy”, and then that “it was nothyng but your mynde” (l. 330). We never know what the letter says; Magnyfycence declares, “I shall loke in it at leasure better” (l. 332), but accepts Sad Cyncumspeccyon’s authorship and, on the basis of this, accepts Fansy to his court.

In staging terms, this moment has huge comic potential, and the letter can appear almost as a device to distract Magnyfycence from the comic interplay between Fansy and Counterfet Countenaunce. But in fact this little dumb show is not a separate action, but an allegorical enactment of Magnyfycence’s mental processes as he reads: it represents the encroachment of Deceit (Counterfet Countenaunce), who has not yet gained a voice in Magnyfycence’s head and so can only call out to his “Fansy”.

staged at the Medieval English Theatre conference in Sheffield, March 2007, and Worcester College, Oxford, December 2008.

In thematic terms, John Scattergood (“Familiar and homely”) has suggested that this scene offers a caution against over-much faith in documents: early Tudor drama reflects a sense of unease at the excessive authority granted the written word in an increasingly bureaucratic Tudor court. This is true, but Skelton’s point is subtler. We do not need to know *what* Magnyfycence is reading, because what is important is that we see the error in his reading *process*—he does not read at sufficient “leisure” and so cannot see through the deceitful words. Indeed, only at the play’s resolution does Magnyfycence learn that the letter was not, in fact, written by Sad Cyrcumspeccyon, and Redresse then reprimands him for his “hasty credence”. Documents may or may not be trustworthy, but only the careful reader will know the difference. Skelton’s precise theatrical realization of allegory is here exemplified: the actions—indeed, here only the stage directions—carrying a weight greater than words. Magnyfycence’s careless reading of the written word occurs in the presence of Fansy, who attacks Felicity’s *language* and encourages Magnyfycence to receive “the trouth as I thynke”. Reading hastily, in the presence of the flighty Fansy, is dangerous.

As it is through Fansy that the vices gain access to the prince, this is a crucial moment in the action of the play. Fansy could be characterized as an “access vice”: his primary function, in terms of the play’s action, is to control the access of other characters in the play to the royal protagonist. In this he is like Merry Report in John Heywood’s *Play of the Weather*, who is the first character explicitly designated, in a cast list, as a “vice” figure.⁸ Although the vice figure in early theatre is generally understood in relation to medieval schema of “vices and virtues”, in Tudor interludes it becomes clear that a simple equation of vice figures with personifications of sin is inappropriate, and other connotations of the term “vice” are therefore at play. From the Latin “vitium” (“fault”), “vice” has a

8 My argument about Merry Report as a vice figure is presented more fully in “John Heywood, Henry, and Hampton Court Palace” (forthcoming). In Heywood’s play, representatives of various estates and professions petition the god Jupiter for the weather best suiting them: the topic of the weather, an apparently perennial English preoccupation, is used in the interests of political commentary. The play was written between 1529 and 1533, when the issues upon which it touches—the powers of the sovereign, the problems of a rancorous parliament, the conflicting claims of the people, the king’s marriage—were hot topics. See Walker, ed., *Medieval Drama*, p. 456. *The Play of the Weather* was published in 1533 by John Rastell, who was the playwright’s father-in-law. For a full discussion of John Heywood’s biography, particularly his family connections to the Rastells and the family of Thomas More, see Heywood, ed. Axton and Happé, pp. 1-10.

wide range of meanings, including, adverbially, “substitute” or “surrogate”:⁹ this sense is of course familiar in the modern English “vice President”, “vice captain”, and the word was in use in this way, as a prefix, by 1497.¹⁰ Is it possible that Latinate writers such as Heywood and Skelton, returning the “vice” to his etymological roots, create a figure who, in addition to controlling access to a protagonist, also takes his place?¹¹ Certainly, Merry Report not only controls access to Jupiter, but also represents and perhaps replaces him: his theatrical usurpation of Jupiter is sufficient to provoke the Boy’s question: “be not you master god?” (l. 1003). Merry Report, as the play progresses, becomes a vice-god: this sets him in a similar role to that of a king, if kings are divinely appointed representatives of God. He becomes a convenient device for circumspect criticism of the King.

Might Fanny, also, be a vice in the sense of a substitute for the prince Magnifyfence? Skelton gives us strong hints that the drama of *Magnifyfence* is to be read not just as a satire on external political events but also as an allegorical dramatisation of the inner state of the prince. “Thy wordes and my mynde odly well accorde” (l. 1603), Magnifyfence tells Courtly Abusyon, making us suspect that the vices not only speak *to* Magnifyfence but also speak *for* him. But Fanny’s relationship to the prince is particularly marked in this respect. When Magnifyfence, talking to “Largesse” (Fanny), tries to blame him for his fall—“Is this the largesse that I have usyd?” (l. 1863)—Fanny drops the disguise but also attributes responsibility back to the prince: “Nay, it was *your* fondnesse that ye have usyd . . . coulde not *your* wyt serve you no better . . . ? it was I all this whyle / That you trustyd, and Fanny is my name” (ll. 1864-69, emphasis mine).

Fanny seems here to be making interesting claims about his identity. He is not, then, Largesse, but “fondness” and “wit” might well be aspects of “Fanny”—indeed, punning definitions thereof: they are both “yours”—Magnifyfence’s. When Fanny tells Magnifyfence that the cry of “Fanny” which he hears is “nothing but your mind”, he is referring to something we, the audience, have also seen. The drama we are watching is “nothing but Magnifyfence’s mind”, indeed.

9 See the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

10 *OED* cites the following instance, from 1497: “It is thought expedient that the Popes Holynesse comaund the said aide to be published by his vicecollectour.”

11 Perhaps any actor can be understood as a vice figure in this sense—playing another’s part—and perhaps it is for this reason that the vice figure, reaching its apogee in *Iago*, is so consistently fascinating to students of theatre. *Iago*’s elusive assertion that “I am not what I am” (Shakespeare, *Othello*, I.i.65) can perhaps be understood in this light.

In indicating the corruption of a faculty, Fanny, Skelton is perhaps, like Heywood, creating a substitutionary, as opposed to moral, “vice” figure to take the sting out of the criticism of his prince, Magnyfycence, who is himself a figure for Henry VIII. That Fanny nonetheless insists on “your fondness”, “your wit”, ensures that the message comes across.



Foly is a very different sort of vice. Having directed three different actors in the role of Foly, I am struck by the fact that they have all instinctively made him sinister. Dominik Kracmar, who played Foly in the 2010 production at Hampton Court, drew on his LAMDA training in playing different types of bouffon, particularly the “child bouffon”, of whom he writes:

there was generally a knowing quality, sometimes a malicious quality—I played a boy in shorts, with a little toy gorilla, overseeing this unpleasant farm where the animals were tortured. So it was him that I used in Foly. I used a west country accent as it lends itself to the jester role: that west country accent really can have that friendly/malicious quality.¹²

Kracmar’s instinctual use of the bouffon type is perhaps unsurprising, given that the bouffon, though a modern creation of the Lecoq school, sought to develop themes and techniques of medieval performance as Lecoq and others understood them. Eric Davis, one of the most celebrated bouffon artists, writes that the Lecoq school wanted to find a character who could “mock anything”:

Initially, they were looking at the medieval age for models . . . people who were outcasts from the city and then would have the chance at the Feast of Fools carnival to turn that around and make a mockery of the audience. It’s someone who’s a bit of a demi-god, not even of this earth necessarily, a strange mysterious creature who is watching us. I think more of him as that sort of thing, a collective unconscious, kind of poking at their fears and dreams. (Davis, “Red Bastard” bouffon)

Of course, the anachronism involved in applying Lecoq to a discussion of Skelton makes this merely suggestive, but the modern projection of a medieval fool who perceives and who mocks his audience, as well as being a figure of fun, may not

12 Private correspondence. Kracmar draws comparison with Dominic West’s portrayal of murderer Fred West in the ITV miniseries, *Appropriate Adult*: the actor’s capturing of his subject’s West Country accent was praised for its accuracy and was exceptionally chilling.

be entirely inaccurate. The notion of a bouffon Foly who is an embodiment of the “collective unconscious” is particularly suggestive in relation to Foly’s puzzling way of speaking.

Firstly, Foly, strangely, never speaks to the audience. Indeed, part of the problem in interpreting Folly, and the source of some of his sinister quality, may be that he, alone of all the characters on-stage, shows no awareness of the audience’s presence. Other vices all introduce themselves when alone on-stage. They explain what they do: Counterfet Countenaunce tells us that he is part of the plot to trap Magnyfycence, that he enjoys writing fake letters and making false coins (ll. 401-93); Clokyd Colusyon tells us that he spies on people and flatters them into corruption (ll. 689-744); Courtly Abusyon explains his policy of encouraging others to spend money on French fashions rather than help their starving neighbours (ll. 827-909). The vices speak directly and openly to the audience, even as they trick and deceive Magnyfycence. Even Fandy introduces himself in erratic, disjointed Skeltonics:

Frantyecke Fandy Serveyce I hyght:
My wyttys be weke, my braynys are lyght,
For it is I that other wyle
Plucke down lede, and theke with tyle.
Nowe I wyll this, and nowe I wyll that,
Make a wyndmyll of a mat.
Nowe I wolde . . . and I wylt what . . .
Where is my cappe? (ll. 1022-29)

Foly is never alone on the stage. We learn about Foly’s actions when he explains to Crafty Conveyaunce and Fandy about his schools, where he makes fools: he finds work for idle hands; he encourages lechery; he teaches those in authority to be proud and vicious (ll. 1218-50). In this scene he sounds like the other vices, but the effect of his speeches is different because they are never addressed directly to the audience, who thus do not respond to him directly: rather, the audience’s experience of Foly must always be to some extent influenced by his interactions with the characters around him. Furthermore, when he appears with Magnyfycence, he does not seem to be doing any of the things he says he does to corrupt people; rather, he is just speaking nonsense, and sinister nonsense, in which nature is perverted:

And, sir, as I was coming to you hither
I saw a fox suck on a cow’s udder,

And with a lime rod I took them both together.
I trowe it be a frost, for the way is slidder.
See, for God avow, for cold as I chidder (ll. 1811-15)

The riddling and indirect nature of Foly's speeches could indeed resemble dream messages from the unconscious. The fool's language here anticipates that of poor Tom, or Lear's Fool. But Foly, unlike these riddling characters in *King Lear*, does not seem to reveal anything in his riddles: if these were to be considered messages from the unconscious, they would reveal nothing except a confused, perhaps corrupted mind. And when the action becomes serious, when Folsy appears crying, he runs away (l. 1849); he does not, as it were, stay with Lear on the heath.

This is not the first time that Foly has emptied language of meaning. At the centre of the play is a wonderful scene in which Folsy and Folly reminisce about the Latin declensions of their school days, and then turn the remnants of their schoolboy Latin to composing verses about the dog and the owl which they have bartered. Folsy's "declension", *Nil, nichelum, nihil* is, of course, not a grammatical declension at all, but simply a list of alternative forms of a Latin word which he then renders, accurately and decisively, as the English "nothing":

Folsy. Yes, yes, I am yet as full of game
As ever I was, and as full of tryfys
Nil, nichelum, nihil, anglice, nyfys.
Foly. What, canest thou all this Latin yet?
And hath so mased a wandrynge wyt?
Folsy. Tush, man, I keep some Latyn in store.
Foly. By Cockes harte, I wene thou hast no more!
Folsy. No? Yes in faythe; I can versyfy.
Foly. Then I pray thee hartely
Make a verse of my butterfly;
It forseth not of the reason, so it kepe ryme. (ll. 1139-49)

Magnyfycence seems in a small way to be doing for classical Latin what *Mankind* and the plays of Bale do for Church Latin: presenting it as suspect and open to abuse by those who borrow its appearance of authority, while mistranslating it or rendering it nonsensical. Latin grammar is here presented as a childhood game. But the scene, though funny, is not one of innocent fun, and while Folsy delights in playing with his declensions, Foly rather plays along with Folsy's belief that he is composing Latin while fully aware that the vacuous verse has rhyme but no reason.

Scattergood suggests that Foly is presented as an “allowed” fool, and Fandy as a “natural” fool (cited in Walker, ed., p. 351, n. 3). The distinction is rather more difficult to establish theatrically than might be expected: phenomenologically, the difference between the two must be one of knowingness and attention—the allowed fool is consciously fooling, whereas the natural fool is acting innocently—but the words and actions of theatre might not easily clarify inner difference, particularly without direct audience address. It is true that Foly is knowing: he talks about the educative methods in his school of folly, and he gets the better of Fandy, in the financial transactions over the swapping of a dog for an owl, and of Crafty Conveyaunce, on whom he plays a trick to make him remove his cloak.¹³ But again there is the problem of meaning: the allowed fool’s folly should have a message, but Foly’s has none: he is an allegory of folly who does not just expose folly, but actually makes men fools: there is no possibility of reading him as exposing truths through nonsensical words, but rather it is his theatrical presence which is meaningful. When he has appeared in the mind of the prince, with his talk of cold and disorder in nature, Magnyfycence tries to dismiss him—“Thy wordes hang togyder as fethers in the wynde” (l. 1816)—but Foly’s reply is chillingly definite: “I make God avowe ye will none other men have” (l. 1825). By this point, Magnyfycence is completely fallen, and that fall is Foly. And the audience, experiencing the play from inside Magnyfycence’s mind, are as chilled, lost and fooled as he is.

In comparing Fandy and Foly as fools, it is important to note that Fandy does come good in the end. It is Fandy who reveals the truth to Magnyfycence about the trap into which he has fallen. He does this, importantly, as he interrupts a scene between Magnyfycence and Foly, and his grief at the prince’s undoing (“Let be thy sobbynge”, says Magnyfycence [l. 1849]) is what drives Foly away: “is all your myrthe nowe tourned to sorowe? Fare well . . . ” (l. 1846-47). When Fandy, the faculty, operates to reveal sober truth, Foly is banished.

Magnyfycence’s generic mixing of morality play with satirical interlude may thus be particularly traced in its principal fools, Foly and Fandy, an English allegory and a French *sot*. But the play in performance may reveal slightly more subtlety in the portrayal of Foly, also in the light of the *sottie*. Heather Arden writes that there are three aspects of the fool in the *sottie*: the evil-doer, the accuser, and the victim (p. 53). It is clear, as we have seen, that Foly does evil:

13 These are *sottie*-related scenes, as Happé discusses.

we hear him describe his schools for corruption, and we learn that it is folly which Magnyfycence must repent. Though there may be elements of accusation in the words of Fany—“coude not your wyt serve you no better?”—Foly has no accusation to make, and the principal work of accusation is done instead by the figure of Poverty; “ye have deserved this punysshment” (l. 200r), he tells the fallen prince, bluntly, before pointing the contrast between what was and what is: “nowe must ye lerne to lye harde, / That was wonte to lye on fetherbeddes of downe” (ll. 2003-4). Poverty also, importantly, is the principal victim figure of *Magnyfycence*: he appears at the moment of Magnyfycence’s fall, and while the prince laments what he has lost, Poverty articulates what he must now embrace: “A, my bonys ake! My lymmys be sore. / Alasse, I have the cyatyca full evyll in my hyppe” (ll. 1953-54).

Is it significant, then, that the doubling scheme dictated by Skelton’s extensive cast of characters requires that the actor playing Foly also play Poverty? It is, of course, possible to over-read the significance of doubling, but Skelton seems to draw our attention to this theatrical practice, making it something more than pragmatic. He repeatedly writes scenes of explicit recognition of characters through costume, and of obscuring of identity through disguise and false names: for example, Clokyd Colusyon, when he first appears, is unrecognisable to Fany and Crafty Conveyaunce because he is disguised in a cardinal’s cope and biretta (ll. 574-601); Counterfet Countenaunce is concerned that Crafty Conveyaunce will be recognised if he does not change his name (l. 516). In the light of this, the audience cannot but ask themselves, when an actor appears in a new costume, whether he is “really” a new character with a new designation. Furthermore, Foly’s final speech about cold and frost, which, as has been noted, bears no logical relation to the action which has preceded it, might bear some sense as an anticipation of Poverty’s scene to come: “Nowe must ye suffer bothe hunger and cold”; “Nowe must ye be stormy beten with showres and raynes” (ll. 201r, 2015). Is “Foly” already starting to feel the cold which will afflict him when he appears as Poverty? The meanings of the victim and his accusations are not revealed, however, till Foly, or at least the Foly actor, is dressed, not as the fool, but as Poverty.

In the *sottie*, a character is revealed as a fool when his fool’s garments are gradually exposed; this is the process which Fany and possibly Crafty Conveyaunce

undergo.¹⁴ But Foly's fool's garments must instead be entirely changed—a theatrical act of re-dressing. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Foly-Poverty actor must also then present Redresse. The *sottie* tradition, in which Folsy participates, reveals folly, and satirises it; the *sot*, who may be evil-doer, accuser, or victim, may disguise his folly under layers of other costume, but these costumes are revealed as false disguise through the act of undressing. But in an allegorical tradition which represents not a fool, but folly undisguised, the figure of Foly can only be evil, and cannot be satirically revealed, undressed. Instead, Foly as evil-doer must be driven away, effaced, and the work of the accuser and the victim achieved through the re-dressing of the actor in different roles. An actor can play one character disguised as another, but he cannot represent two characters at once. An absolute morality is thus asserted. Poverty and Folly may look and sound like each other, but they are entirely separate and distinct, and the audience are enjoined to study the difference.

14 See ll. 1196-204 for the "louse trick" by which Foly persuades Crafty Conveyaunce to remove his cloak and reveal his fool's motley. The process by which Folsy's costume is revealed or concealed is unclear: Walker notes that "he wears a fool's costume only partially covered by a courtier's clothes" (Walker, ed., p. 357, n. 30), and certainly his fool's costume must be obscured to Magnyfy-cence, while Foly can nonetheless observe that he is "in a foles case" (l. 1045).

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Greg WALKER, « “To speak before the king, it is no child’s play”: *Godly Queen Hester* in 1529 »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 69-96
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/ThetaX>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

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Date de création

Avril 2013

“To speak before the king, it is no child’s play”: Godly Queen Hester in 1529

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The anonymous early Tudor *Interlude of Godly Queen Hester* dramatises the events narrated in the Old Testament Book of Esther, from King Ahasuerus’ decision to seek a wife and his choice of Hester (there is no reference here to his previous marriage to Queen Vashti), up to the execution of Haman (here named Aman) and the pardon and restoration of the fortunes of the Jews. (Again there is no mention of Jewish revenge upon their would-be persecutors.) But it retells the story in a distinctly English vein, taking in a short humanist debate on the nature of kingship and references to local concepts such as the statute of apparel (l. 378), the equity courts (l. 601) and the prospect of war with Scotland or France (l. 479), as well as the signal intervention of a trio of morality play vices, Pride, Adulation and Ambition, and a still more idiosyncratic court fool named Hardyardy.

As I argued in an earlier study, the play’s representation of the Vulgate narrative retells it as a reflection on contemporary events at the time of the calling of the Reformation parliament (Walker, *Plays*, pp. 103-32). In this reworking, the Jews in part function as allegorical representations of the English clergy, especially the regular religious—monks, nuns and friars—but also the bishops and the officers of the ecclesiastical courts. Aman

reflects aspects of the role of Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor and chief minister, Thomas, Cardinal Wolsey, while Hester herself in some ways echoes the case of Henry's first wife, Katherine of Aragon. This allegorical dimension unsurprisingly influences the terms in which each element of the story is represented. Most obviously, perhaps, Haman's biblical accusation that the Jews form an alien privileged community within the Persian Empire is given a particular inflection in a debate that revolves around their provision of charity and hospitality and religious services for the commonweal—issues that were central to the religious debates of late 1529. Similarly, Aman is criticised in the interlude, not only for his hostility to the Jewish “households”, but also for his domination of the law courts (specifically as “Chancellor”), his interference in appointments to ecclesiastical benefices through “bulls” and his capacity to benefit from the estates of those who die intestate—powers and prerogatives that closely resemble those obtained by Wolsey as papal legate, and which formed the substance of a number of the charges levelled against him at his fall (Walker, *Plays*, pp. 104-6). Finally, Hester is not the beautiful, young, sensual and partisan figure of the Book of Esther, but rather a more mature woman (if that is what the reference to her “ripe years” [l. 231] is taken to imply) who is the king's first wife, and chosen for her wisdom rather than for her beauty.¹

The last analogy is perhaps the most unexpected of the play's contemporary resonances, for it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the interlude uses the representation of Hester for some at-times-none-too-subtle advocacy on behalf of the embattled Katherine of Aragon, who was at this time resisting the king's attempt to annul their marriage. The playwright stresses that Hester comes to the king “a virgin pure, / A pearl undefiled, and of conscience clear” (ll. 255-56), an observation that, while it points to a commonplace of wifely virtue in the period, gains a sharper edge in the light of Henry's claim that Katherine did not come to him a virgin, having previously consummated a marriage to Henry's deceased older brother, prince Arthur (a claim that formed the basis of the king's objection to the match, and which Katherine in her turn strenuously denied). Moreover, the drama seems to allude favourably to a number of Katherine's more conspicuous triumphs during the years of their marriage. Prime among these was her period as regent of England during Henry's invasion of France in 1513, during which time she oversaw the successful defence of the realm against a Scot-

1 See Dillon, *passim*.

tish attack and the crushing defeat of the Scots at Flodden. In the light of these events, it is striking to note the terms of Hester's response when Assuerus asks her what virtues a queen should possess—an exchange that has no equivalent in the Vulgate text. Queens, she argues, should possess the self-same virtues as kings, as they are likely to meet many of the same challenges and responsibilities.

Eftsoons it may chance at sundry season,
The king with his council, most part of all,
From this realm to be absent when war doth call.
Then the queen's wisdom sadly must deal
By her great virtue to rule the common weal.

Wherefore as many virtues be there must
Even in the queen as the prince,
For fear lest in war some treason unjust
The realm should subdue and falsely convince [*conquer*],
And so the queen must safeguard the whole province. (ll. 282-91)

Similarly, Katherine drew praise from chroniclers and other observers by formally intervening on a number of ceremonial occasions to seek pardons from Henry for individuals and groups facing the death penalty for various crimes. Such events add contemporary resonance to Mordechai's instructions to Hester in the play that, if she is selected as the king's spouse, she should

Break not the course that queens have had
In this noble region most of all:
They have aye been good and none of them bad,
To their prince ever sure, just and substantial;
And good to the commons when they did call
By meekness for mercy to temper the fire
Of rigorous justice, in fume or in ire. (ll. 177-83)

Again, symbolic intercession with kings in pursuit of mercy was a common role for queens in this period, but once more the terms of the allusion seem marked. And even if spectators did not detect a precise contemporary *ad hominem* allusion here, the broad defence of queens of "this noble region" as good women, ever true to their princes, "and none of them bad", would surely have raised eyebrows in the light of the arguments surrounding the present royal marriage.

In such details the play reveals itself, as I have argued elsewhere (Walker, *Plays*, pp. 102-32), as the product of a particular moment in Henrician history, the period in late 1529, immediately following Wolsey's fall from power, during which

the Cardinal was still being pursued by his critics and rivals, and the issues of clerical privilege and power and the status of the religious houses were the subject of fevered debate. But in my earlier study, I did not see the full significance of its close dialogue with two other texts of that period, a dialogue that allows us both to date it with some confidence to the Christmas period of 1529-30 and to appreciate how quickly it must have been written (or, perhaps, as has recently been suggested by Janette Dillon [pp. 130-39], adapted), to respond to those texts and to the events that they provoked and reflected. Nor did I appreciate the degree of subtlety with which the interlude engaged with contemporary debates, forming part of what seems to have been a concerted strategy adopted by defenders of the institutional church to take advantage of the fall of Cardinal Wolsey and to head off the fierce assault on clerical liberties and prerogatives that had been launched in the first session of the Reformation parliament (which convened on Candlemas Day, 3 November 1529 and closed six weeks later on 17 December). If we read the interlude in the light of the events of this anxious, pivotal period in the early history of the English reformation, a new understanding of both its intense topicality and its bold and detailed intervention in contemporary debates can be teased out.

To gain a sense of the specificity of the play, and of the audacious opportunism of the playwright, we need briefly to remind ourselves of the principal events of the long fraught summer of 1529 and their place in the history of the reign. By May 1529, Henry and his agents had been striving for almost two years, at first confidently and covertly, and then with increasing publicity and desperation, to secure a diplomatic and legal resolution to the “Great Matter” which was exercising the royal conscience, the legality of his marriage to Queen Katherine. Finally, after much lobbying, Wolsey had obtained what he had assured the king was the solution to his difficulties, a papal warrant to try the matter in England, and in May 1529 a court met at Blackfriars in London, presided over by Wolsey himself and Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio, sent directly from Rome for the purpose. Things did not, of course, go to plan. Not only did Katherine appear personally at the trial to attest powerfully to the validity of her marriage and the invalidity of the court set up to try it, but Campeggio proved unwilling to follow Wolsey’s script, and, instead of finding in the king’s favour, prorogued the court on 23 July with the matter still undecided. The explosion of royal anger that this verdict prompted cost Wolsey his position, and ultimately his life. Its first manifestation was the intervention of Henry’s friend, Charles Brandon, Duke

of Suffolk, who, slamming his fist down on the judges' table with a mighty clap, declared to the assembly that the court had proved what everyone already knew, that no cardinal had ever done good in England (Hall, fol. clxxxiiir). The implications of that declaration were obvious. Wolsey spent the summer in a prolonged and largely fruitless attempt at damage limitation, but by October he had conceded defeat, resigned his secular offices and left London, never to return (Hall, fols. clxxxiii^{r-v}; Cavendish, p. 100).

On 3 November, a new parliament convened, and Wolsey's successor as Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, "standing on the right hand of the king, before the bar", opened the session with "an excellent oration" to both houses, the terms of which, although well known to historians, are extraordinary enough to warrant rehearsal here. Having begun by drawing the conventional comparison of the king to a shepherd, More put the analogy to a more specific and striking use. "As you see", he observed,

that amongst a great flock of sheep, some be rotten and faulty, which the good shepherd sendeth from the good sheep, so the great wether [*castrated ram*] which is of late fallen, as you all know, so craftily, so scabbedly, yea and so untruly juggled with the king that all men must needs guess and think that he thought in himself that the [king] had no wit to perceive his crafty doing, or else that he presumed that the king would not see nor know his fraudulent juggling and attempts. But he was deceived, for his grace's sight was so quick and penetrable that he saw him, yea and saw through him, both within and without, so that all thing to him was open, and according to his desert he hath had a gentle correction, which small punishment the king will not to be an example to other offenders, but clearly declareth that whosoever hereafter shall make like attempt or commit like offence shall not escape like punishment. (Hall, fol. clxxxvii^v)

This speech marks a signal moment in the reign. That the Lord Chancellor, flanked by the king himself and clearly speaking with his authority, should so publicly denounce the man who had held his own office only months earlier, and who had effectively dominated the administration of church and state for fifteen years (and was still, it must be remembered, both Archbishop of York and a cardinal of the church), and that he should do so in such a lurid vocabulary, more redolent of literary polemic than of sober political discourse, was itself astonishing. That he went on implicitly to present the king as the long-term dupe of this crafty and scabbed juggler (for, no matter how much he praised the king's acute insight, everyone knew that he had trusted Wolsey absolutely) must

have seemed extraordinary, both to those who witnessed it and to those who only read or heard about it later.

The unforgettable nature of the speech, and of the turbulent parliamentary session which followed, can be judged in part from the ways in which it reverberated in the literature, and especially the drama, of the following months and years. The fall of the “great wether”, and More’s declaration elsewhere in the same speech that the king had summoned the assembly to address “diverse great enormities” sprung up in the realm under his oversight for which as yet no legislative solution had been devised, resurface, for example, in the opening lines of John Heywood’s *Play of the Weather*, probably performed at court over Christmas 1532-33, in which the god-king Jupiter talks of replacing his old father Saturn and taking supreme power into his own hands, and of a fractious parliament of the gods called “for the redress of certain enormities / bred among them through extremities / Abused in each to other of them all” (ll. 25-27). (Indeed, did the title of that play itself, perhaps, also contain a punning echo, if perhaps only an unconscious one, of More’s depiction of Wolsey as a “great wether”?)

For our purposes here, the parliamentary session, with More’s speech depicting Henry as the newly-enlightened victim of Wolsey’s deception, resonates still more immediately and insistently in *Hester*. It underpins the final scene of the interlude, with its depiction of the sudden, calamitous fall of the Chancellor Aman, where another formal instrument of Henrician rule, a royal proclamation, stands in for the speech to parliament as the method by which the nation is informed of the king’s change of both heart and chief minister. In Assuerus’ proclamation, designed to be read to the people in every province, the king acknowledges that he, like Henry, has been deceived by the wiles of a cunning adviser, and has come close to countenancing a monstrous crime. It acknowledges the sudden reversal in the king’s attitude, so much so that the current proclamation is so opposed to his last message that it is “clean repugnant” to it (l. 1111). But it reassures his subjects:

When ye know our mind ye shall be content
To think it no lightness, nor wit inconsistent,
But the necessity of times variant,
And as cause requireth for the utility
Of our whole realm, heads and commonalty. (ll. 1112-16)

Hence, the text declares, Aman, who had so recently been the king's most trusted lieutenant, has been dismissed and despatched to sudden death:

The son of Amadathy, called Aman . . .
Which by his subtlety, both now and then,
Our gentleness so infecteth for certain
That near we were like all Jews to have slain.
We favoured him, that he was called
Our father, and all men did to him honour,
But his heart with pride so strongly was walled,
That by his sleight and crafty demeanour,
Had we not espied his subtle behaviour,
He would have destroyed Queen Hester our wife,
And from us at length have taken our life. (ll. 1118, 1121-34)

Twenty-five lines later, in concluding the play, the actor playing Assuerus, now no longer necessarily in character, turns to address directly both the on-stage court and the audience beyond, to point up the wider political moral of the interlude:

My lords, by this figure ye may well see
The multitude hurt by the head's negligence,
If to his pleasure so given is he
That he will no pain take nor diligence.
Who careth not for his cure oft loseth credence,
A proverb of old sometime in usage.
Few men that serve but for their own advantage. (ll. 1155-61)

The Hester actor then takes his turn in outlining and developing the theme, again addressing a "you" that takes in both his fellow actors and the gathered spectators:

And yet the servants that be untrue,
A while in the world their life may they lead,
Yes, their wealth and worship daily renew;
But at the length, I assure you indeed,
Their favel [*fraud*] and falsehood will come abroad,
Which shall be to them more bitter than gall.
The higher they climb, the deeper they fall. (ll. 1162-68)

Performed at court or anywhere in London or Westminster over the Christmas season of 1529-30, these speeches could not but have brought to mind More's words to parliament only weeks before, and Henry's dismissal of Wolsey that

prompted them. The description of a king “infected” by the subtlety, craft and sleights of a minister whose deceptions he has (finally) seen through seems clearly designed to echo More’s account of the crafty and scabbed Cardinal who had “so untruly juggled” with Henry VIII until his “quick and penetrable sight” saw through his tricks.

Hester is, then, an interlude that seems determined to press upon some very sensitive political nerves. But, while at first sight it might seem politically suicidal to have produced a play (whether at court or elsewhere) that implied that the reigning sovereign had been foolish enough to ignore conventional wisdom and become the dupe of a villainous minister, in the context of More’s speech to parliament, which had said the same thing in even more lurid language, the idea becomes readily explicable. Indeed, it is clear that there was at the time of Wolsey’s dismissal a concerted effort on the part of Henry and his ministers to tell the story of the king suddenly having come to his senses and deciding to rule in his own person rather than through a chief minister. The royal secretary, Sir Brian Tuke, told the Spanish Ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, that Henry had previously left matters of administration in Wolsey’s hands, but now intended to take control of them himself, and “manage his own affairs” (*Calendar of State Papers, Spanish* [hereafter *C.S.P., Sp.*], IV [i]: item 257). And in January 1530 the king himself repeated the same message, telling Chapuys that formerly “those who had the reins of government in their hands had deceived me [and] many things were done without my knowledge, but such proceedings will be stopped in future” (*C.S.P., Sp.*, V: item 250).²

For a ruler to pose as newly enlightened and resolved to dispense with evil counsellors and to govern virtuously himself was, of course, a useful, if rather melodramatic political strategy. It enabled a king to wipe the slate clean of former mistakes and unpopular policies and dismiss them as the deceitful schemes of the disgraced minister. So one can see the advantages of the pose for Henry. Indeed, he had used it before more than once to escape the consequences of difficult situations. When in 1519 a group of his senior advisors came to him with complaints about the unseemly behaviour of some of his young male companions, known informally as his “minions”, Henry claimed ignorance of their antics and told the advisors they had free licence to investigate the situation and inform him of the facts (Walker, *Persuasive Fictions*, pp. 35–53). Similarly, when

2 See Walker, *Plays*, p. 164.

in 1525 an ill-judged demand for a so-called Amicable Grant, deigned to raise money for an invasion of France, provoked widespread resistance and popular unrest, Henry again posed as the bemused innocent. The demand, he claimed, must have been devised by Wolsey without royal assent, and the Cardinal duly admitted as much at a public ceremony where he sought royal forgiveness for a demand that had in truth been Henry's own idea.³

Such a strategy was, however, double-edged. It allowed the king to discipline or dismiss no-longer useful ministers and walk away (almost) unscathed from unwanted policies, but it also allowed others within the circle of courtly politics to exploit the same agenda. They could appeal to the “newly enlightened” monarch to repeal or moderate other policies which he had previously promoted, but which, it might now be suggested, were also the product of the previous, discredited regime, the brainchildren of the fallen favourite. Thus a brief period of flux opened up in the turbulent days or weeks following such an event, before the precise terms of the new dispensation had been clarified, in which it was possible for various interested parties to suggest which other parts of the existing political agenda might be consigned to oblivion with the crafty deceiver who could be “discovered” to have devised them—and see whether the king might agree. The nature and direction of policy were suddenly up for renegotiation, and anyone with an interest in shifting the agenda was licensed to lobby for their own ends. It is just such a process of lobbying that, I will argue, we see happening in the winter of 1529, and to which the performance of *Godly Queen Hester* is a significant contribution.

But before we leave this subject it is worth noting what appears to be a sly satirical swipe at Henry's strategy in the interlude itself. Just as the king had brazenly denied all knowledge of Wolsey's sleights at the time of the Amicable Grant, and was doing so again in late 1529 in relation to the undefined “enormities” which parliament had been called to redress, so King Assuerus in the play seeks to dissociate himself from the suppression of the Jews when challenged by Hester. When she pleads with him to repeal the proclamation that condemned the Jews to death, he implies that he knows nothing about the proposed genocide, asking her, “What is he, or what is his authority / That is so bold this act to attempt?” (ll. 915-16). Hester takes the question at face value, or seems to, as she carefully explains Aman's role in the plot. But the audience would have been

3 See Bernard, *passim*.

under no illusions about the king's calculated hypocrisy here. For less than two hundred lines earlier it had watched Aman explicitly request royal approval for the slaughter, and receive it. The chancellor identified his intended victims from the outset as "A great number of Jews within this realm . . . / A people not good for your common weal" (ll. 726-27), and advised Assuerus to eliminate them:

Your Grace, by your power royal,
Shall give sentence and plainly decree
To slay these Jews in your realm over all,
None to escape (let your sentence be general),
Ye shall by that win, to say I dare be bold,
To your treasure ten thousand pound(s) of gold. (ll. 750-55)

And the king equally explicitly consented to the request. "As touching the Jews", he responds,

. . . which be so valiant,
Both of goods and great possession,
We do agree unto their suppression. (ll. 760-62)

And, just in case any doubt remains about the nature of the suppression he is agreeing to, he subsequently agrees that the Jews should be "quench[ed]" (i.e., extinguished) (l. 768).

Thus, while Assuerus' words to Hester in the play are a direct echo of his namesake's answer to Esther in Scripture, their implication is entirely different. For where the biblical king can honestly respond that Haman did not name the Jews as the people whom he wished to suppress, as he said only that there was a dangerous group in the realm living by separate laws, in the interlude both Aman and the king himself name the Jews specifically as the victims of the intended pogrom. Hence, when Assuerus responds to Hester's account of Aman's animus against her people, his admission only that the minister had mentioned a redistribution of Jewish wealth for the benefit of the people at large seems both economical with the truth and obviously self-serving:

He signified unto me that the Jews did
Not feed the poor by hospitality.
Their possessions, he said, were all but hid,
Among themselves living voluptuously;
Thinking the same might be, verily,
Much better employed for the commonweal
Where now it little profiteth, or never a deal [*not at all*]. (ll. 936-47)

The playwright seems to be using the licence of the festive occasion gently to mock the conceit that he was himself allegorizing, suggesting that, of course, everyone was aware of the disingenuous nature of Henry's claim to ignorance of Wolsey's schemes, but was happy to conform to Henry's script if there were benefits in it for them. But this barbed moment is only a sideshow to the writer's main campaign.

The Church Beleaguered

Thomas More's announcement to parliament that Wolsey had fallen and the king was ready to amend any enormities that had sprung up since its last meeting (in 1523) prompted an energetic discussion of allegations of clerical abuses and plans for closer regulation of the church in both houses. These ideas did not spring from nowhere. A number of members came to the session already prepared to try to force debate on clerical issues (Walker, *Plays*, pp. 158-60),⁴ while religious radicals in London chose the day of the opening of parliament for a public display of their strength and demands, scattering copies of Simon Fish's virulently anti-clerical tract, *A Supplication for the Beggars*, along the route of the procession to parliament and in the streets of the City. More formally, the London Mercers' Company had drawn up a list of articles that they hoped to have discussed in the Commons, one of which requested the King to compensate those Londoners who "have been polled [*close-shaven*] and robbed without reason or conscience by the ordinaries [*bishops*] in probating of testaments, taking of mortuaries [*death taxes*] and also vexed and troubled by citations, with cursing one day and absolving the next day, *et hec omnio po pecuniis* [*and all for money*]" (cited in Miller, p. 114). More's opening declaration gave all of them formal approval to speak out.

The debates began with discussion of probate fees, and critics of the church were further emboldened to contribute when Sir Henry Guildford, the controller of the royal household, intervened to criticise the allegedly excessive fees charged for the probate of the will of another senior courtier, Henry's groom of the stool, Sir William Compton, by Wolsey and Archbishop William Warham of Canterbury. For someone so close to the king to lead the criticism was a clear

4 As early as October the French Ambassador, Jean du Bellay, reported that Wolsey's aristocratic critics intended, after he was dead or ruined, to "impeach the state of the church, and take all their goods, which it is hardly needful for me to write, for they proclaim it openly" (*Letters and Papers*, IV [iii]; item 6011).

signal that Henry was willing to listen to suggestions for institutional reform of the church courts, and so others responded more confidently: “and after this declaration were showed so many extortions done by the ordinaries for probate of wills that it were too much to rehearse” (Hall, fol. clxxxviii^r). Debates about mortuary payments, clerical pluralism and non-residence followed (Lehmberg, p. 83), and the vociferousness of the criticisms of the clergy emerging from the Commons and the City prompted ambassador Chapuys to report on 13 December that “nearly all the people here hate the priests” (*C.S.P., Sp*, IV [i]: item 232).

Meanwhile a meeting of the king’s counsellors, both lay and clerical, drew up a set of charges against Wolsey that might be used in the courts or as the basis of a parliamentary bill of attainder. This document, known to historians as the Lords’ Articles, was a comprehensive list of indictments against the Cardinal’s character and his administration, ranging from serious criticisms of his handling of foreign policy to claims that he knowingly breathed on the king when he was infectious.⁵ Among these were a series of accusations concerning the exercise of Wolsey’s legatine regime, under which, as legate *a latere* (literally sent as if “from the side” of the Pope with delegated papal powers), he could override the jurisdictions of the bishops and religious orders to instigate reforms, claim first right to taxes and duties and impose his own candidates to vacancies in parishes and other positions. Such charges were clearly the work of the senior clergy on the king’s council, anxious to reclaim some of the prerogatives, jurisdictions and privileges that had been taken from them by Wolsey. But they were careful to present these claims in terms most likely to find favour with the king, as reassertions of the rights of the crown against foreign, Roman interference. Wolsey, the first article claimed,

hath not only hurt your said prescription, but also . . . hath spoiled and taken away from many houses of religion in this your realm much substance of their goods. And also hath usurped

5 For a full transcription of the Articles, see Herbert, pp. 266–71. Although the document bears the seals only of laymen, including Thomas More, prominent nobles, judges and officers of the court, it is evident that senior clergy were consulted during its compilation, both from the content of specific allegations about Wolsey’s handling of ecclesiastical issues, and from the claim of the chronicler Edward Hall, who was present in parliament as member for Wenlock in Shropshire, that “when the nobles *and prelates* perceived that the King’s favour was from the Cardinal sore minished, every man of the King’s Council began to lay to him such offences as they knew by him, and all their accusations were written in a book, and all their hands set to it” (Hall, fol. clxxxiii^r). For the suggestion that the king was considering acting against Wolsey through a bill of attainder, see Cavendish, pp. 112–13.

upon all your ordinaries within this your realm much part of their jurisdiction, in derogation of your prerogative and the great hurt of the said ordinaries, prelates and religious. (cited in Herbert, p. 266 [Article 1])

That Wolsey should be criticised for hostility to the regular religious houses is unsurprising. During the 1520s he had used his legatine powers to visit and reform a number of religious orders, including, controversially, those, such as the Observant Franciscans, exempt from episcopal scrutiny, and between 1524 and 1529 had suppressed twenty-nine small religious houses, diverting their revenues to Cardinal College, Oxford (re-founded after his death as the modern Christ Church). The Lords' Articles drew attention to these suppressions in Article XIX, which claimed that

the said Cardinal hath not only, by his untrue suggestion to the Pope, shamefully slandered many good religious houses, and good religious men dwelling in them, but also suppressed by reason therefore about thirty houses of religion. (cited in Herbert, p. 269)

These suppressions, being piecemeal, provoked limited resistance at the time.⁶ What made them suddenly contentious in 1529 was the prospect that Wolsey was intending a more radical dissolution at the time of his fall. In the five months to April 1529 he had obtained bulls from Rome investing him, either alone or in conjunction with Cardinal Campeggio, with the power to dissolve a number of abbeys, including some large ones, as part of a scheme to create new English bishoprics, and to dissolve outright any house with fewer than twelve inmates which he judged was no longer functional (*Letters and Papers*, IV [iii]: items 5667-68; Knowles, III: 160; Gwyn, pp. 466ff). With Wolsey's fall the process stalled, but the precedent set was a dangerous one, especially as the more radical evangelical reformers were arguing loudly at just this time for the wholesale abolition of monasticism on doctrinal grounds. Indeed, the case for abolition was a major theme of Fish's *A Supplication for the Beggars*, which had been so provocatively scattered in the streets on the day that parliament convened.

It is in the context of this debate that we need to read the discussion of the Jews in *Hester*. That their representation there is a defence of the regular religious and the clergy in general in the wake of these attacks in parliament and else-

6 The townsfolk of Tonbridge in Kent had unsuccessfully petitioned Archbishop Warham to intervene to save their local house (*Letters and Papers*, IV [i]: items 1470-71, 4920), and there had been a short-lived popular rising in Baynham in Sussex in 1525, during which the brothers were briefly restored to the local abbey (Goring, pp. 1-10), but the suppressions largely passed without difficulty.

where is made clear by the otherwise curious terms in which they are discussed throughout the play, which at times echo the text of the book of Esther, but for the most part focus on the seemingly idiosyncratic issue of charity. Aman launches his attack upon the Jews by accusing them of both separatism and licentiousness, telling King Assuerus,

The precepts of your law
They refuse and have in great contempt;
They will in no wise live under awe
Of any prince, but they will be exempt. (ll. 735-38)

And Aman himself is accused (in what sounds like a direct allusion to Wolsey's claim to the right to suppress religious houses, rescinding the terms of their foundations if he found them wanting) of setting his own judgement above those of the founders of Jewish houses and the authors of their rules:

For all rulers and laws were made by fools and daws [*jackdaws: idiots*],
He sayeth nearly.
Ordinances and foundations, without consultation,
He sayeth, were devised;
Therefore his imagination brings all out of fashion,
And so all is disguised [*disfigured*]. (ll. 459-64)

Elsewhere, as we have seen, Assuerus tells Hester that Aman had convinced him to punish the Jews because they “did / Not feed the poor by hospitality” (ll. 943-44), but rather hoarded their wealth for their own use: “Their possessions, he said, were all but hid / Among themselves living voluptuously” (ll. 945-46).

What the vices Pride, Adulation and Ambition reveal, however, is that it is Aman's rapacious *taxation* of the Jews that has reduced their capacity for alms-giving, not any lack of charity on their part (ll. 475-82). And, as Hester argues, well-established and regulated religious communities of the kind that the Jews provide are vital for the spiritual and the material well-being of the realm, as they offer not only prayers and services for the community but material sustenance to travellers and the poor, keeping them in good health should the king ever need to call on them for military service (ll. 311-16). Thus, she argues,

Let God always therefore have his part,
And the poor fed by hospitality,

Each man his measure, be it pint or quart,
And no man too much. (ll. 318-21)

And later she specifically warns against the “dissolution” of Jewish houses,

Since God therefore hath begun their household,
And aye hath preserved their hospitality,
I advise no man to be so bold
The same to dissolve, whoseever he be,
Let God alone, for he shall orderly
A fine ad finem, both here and there,
Omnia disponere suaviter.⁷ (ll. 964-70)

The Jews be the people of God elected,
And wear his badge of circumcision.
The daily prayer of the whole sect,
As the psalms of David by ghostly [*spiritual*] inspiration,
Eke [*also*] holy ceremonies of God’s provision,
To God is vaileable [*effectual*], that nothing greater,
And the whole realm for them fares the better. (ll. 1089-95)

Focusing in this way on the Jews’—and so the religious houses’—charitable functions and status as engines of prayer, played, as I have argued elsewhere (Walker, *Plays*, pp. 108-9), to the monasteries’ strengths, stressing their social utility in ways to which few could object, while avoiding the more contentious questions raised by Lutheran reformers about monastic morality or the doctrinal basis of their functions as providers of prayers and services for the dead. Precisely the same defence was mounted in the Lords’ Articles, which condemned Wolsey’s dissolutions in very similar terms:

Where good hospitality hath been used to be kept in houses and places of religion of this realm, and many poor people thereby relieved, the said hospitality and relief is now decayed and not used, and it is commonly reported that the occasion thereof is because the said Lord Cardinal hath taken such impositions of the rulers of the said houses . . . as they are not able to keep good hospitality as they were used to, which is a great cause that there is so many vagabonds, beggars and thieves. (cited Herbert, p. 268 [Article XIII])

7 “Reaching from one end to the other . . . ordering all things mightily and sweetly”, quoting Isaiah 11:2-3 and 28:29, the antiphon for 17 December: “O Wisdom, Who didst come out of the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end and ordering all things mightily and sweetly: come and teach us the way of prudence.”

So there was good strategic sense in defending the religious foundations in these terms. But there was also a more specific edge to the choice, as it was precisely in terms of the clergy's *lack* of charity and support for the poor that Simon Fish had chosen to couch his strident assault upon church wealth (and implicitly on the whole idea of purgatory) in *A Supplication for the Beggars*, a book that seemed so alarming to Sir Thomas More that he immediately wrote a strident (and far longer) response, *The Supplication of Souls*, to counter its claims.

Printed anonymously, Fish's short tract claimed to be a petition from the starving poor addressed "to the king, our sovereign lord". It asserted that deserving beggars were deprived of the alms that normally sustained them by the institutionalised begging and impositions of that mass of "strong, puissant and counterfeit holy and idle beggars and vagabonds", the clergy. The latter, it claimed, have increased in numbers to the point where they now constitute a separate "kingdom" within the realm. As a result "the goodliest lordships, manors, lands and territories are theirs", but they are still not satisfied, and so extract ever more wealth from the hard-pressed laity through "probate of testaments, privy tithes, and by men's offerings to their pilgrimages and at their first masses", as well as through mortuary payments, funeral fees, and "by cursing of men and absolving them again for money" (Fish, p. 2; my pagination). Working up to a rhetorical crescendo, Fish presented the wealth and privileges of the clergy as a direct challenge to the prerogatives of the crown and the military capability of the kingdom:

What tyrant ever oppressed the people like this cruel and vengeable generation? What subjects be able to help their prince that be after this fashion yearly polled? ... And what do all these greedy sort of sturdy, idle, holy thieves with these yearly exactions that they take of the people? Truly nothing, but exempt themselves from th'obedience of your grace. Nothing but translate the rule, power, lordship, authority, obedience and dignity from your grace unto them. Nothing but that all your subjects should fall into disobedience and rebellion against your grace and be under them. (Fish, pp. 3-4)

Therefore, Fish concludes, the king should rouse himself and punish the clergy by depriving them of their temporal wealth, property and privileges:

Where is your sword, power, crown and dignity become that should punish (by punishment of death, even as other men are punished) the felonies, rapes, murders and treasons committed by this sinful generation? Where is their obedience become that should be under your high power in this matter? (Fish, p. 7)

Set these sturdy lobbies [*idlers*] abroad in the world to get them wives of their own, to get their living with their labour in the sweat of their faces according to the commandment of God (Gen[esis] III) to give other idle people by their example to go to labour. Tie these holy, idle thieves to the carts to be whipped naked about every market town till they will fall to labour. (Fish, p. 14)

Much of the queen's defence of the Jews in *Hester* reads like a direct response to charges such as these levelled in Fish's *Supplication* and the debates in parliament, charges that themselves find direct expression in the interlude in Aman's malicious criticisms of Esther's people. The deceitful minister accuses the Jews of multiplying exponentially,⁸ living in separate communities ("dispersed over all your province, / Within themself [*sic*] dwelling de-severed from our nation" [ll. 728-29]), "exempt" (l. 738) from domestic laws, hiding their wealth and living "voluptuously", while, conversely, Hester defends them as socially beneficial communities that are integrated into—and indeed vital to—the kingdom at large, using their wealth to fund almsgiving and hospitality.

More subtly, a number of the other allegations that Fish and the reformers in the Commons levelled at the church resurface in the play, not as allegations levelled by Aman at the Jews, but as Aman's own crimes and vices, which are "revealed" by Pride, Adulation and Ambition. As Fish protests that "the best lordships, manors and territories are in church hands, and rails against the practices of the church courts, probate fees, mortuaries and funeral duties, and "cursing of men and absolving them again for money", so Adulation denounces Aman's dominance of the law courts (ll. 411-12), his grasping of the best positions ("For if it be a good fee, Aman sayeth 'That longeth [*belongs*] to me!' / Be it benefice or park" [ll. 439-41]), and profiting from the execution of wills and testaments (ll. 566-75). Indeed, the play may well acknowledge the link between its own allegations against Aman and the charges in *A Supplication for the Beggars*, in Ambition's somewhat arch comment that

8 There is perhaps an allusion to Fish's assertion that the clergy were swelling in numbers to the point where they constituted their own separate kingdom in Aman's claim that the Jews' "possessions be of substance / So great and so large that I fear at the length / They will attempt to subdue you by strength" (ll. 746-48). The equivalent claim in Fish's tract warns that the clergy "have ... gotten into their hands more lands ... than any duke in England ... yea, have they not ... translated into their hands from your grace half your kingdom ... and of one kingdom made twain ... ? And which of these two kingdoms suppose ye is like to overgrow the other, yea to put the other clear out of memory? Truly the kingdom of the blood-suckers, for to them is given daily out of your kingdom" (Fish, p. 9).

Beggars now do ban [*curse*], and cry out of Aman,
That ever he was born.
They swear by the Rood [*Holy Cross*] he eateth all their food,
So that they get no good, neither even or morn.

And many that be poor, though not from door to door
A-begging they did go;
Yet had they relief, both of bread and beef,
And drink also.

And now the door stands shut, and no man can we get
To work neither to fight. (ll. 469-78)

For it was precisely the conceit of Fish's tract that it was voicing the cries of the poor folk, who had once enjoyed alms and relief from their neighbours, but were now denied these because the clergy were sucking up all the available charity and keeping the proceeds for themselves.

As I have argued elsewhere (Walker, *Plays*, p. 123), *Hester*, like Fish's *Supplication*, seems carefully designed to encourage royal intervention, albeit to exactly the opposite effect. On one level, it represents an appeal to Henry VIII, figured in king Assuerus, to assert himself and take policy firmly into his own hands. By the time the play was performed, of course, this was an appeal that the playwright knew was likely to be favourably received, as Henry had declared publicly that he intended to do exactly that after Wolsey's fall. Thus the interlude was preaching to the converted in terms of its general thesis. But what the playwright also sought to do was to use that general plea to achieve something quite different to the ends pursued by Fish, at least where intervention in the governance of the church was concerned.

The interlude begins with a short debate between Assuerus and a group of courtiers over the best way for a king to govern. Of all the things a king must possess, from riches and noble blood to wisdom, the best, it emerges, is virtue, and of all the virtues a king might possess, the most necessary is a love of justice. But how should justice be exercised? After briefly considering the merits of ruling through favourites, the debate is resolved in favour of personal rule without intermediaries, as only monarchs themselves can be relied upon to govern impartially, free of greed or ambition. But, as soon as the discussion ends, Assuerus reveals he has misunderstood its terms. For he immediately decides to appoint a chancellor to administer the realm in his name. He chooses Aman on rather suspect grounds (ll. 106, 109-10), and through that choice invites the near

disaster that is forestalled only by his personal intervention at Hester's insistence at the end of the play.

In this way the play gives potent expression to the moral that kings need to avoid favourites. But beneath what presents itself as a parable of the virtues of personal rule, what the playwright actually offers is a plea for clerical self-regulation. Hence, in the final scene, Assuerus, having asserted himself and dismissed Aman, does not keep power in his own hands, but appoints Mordechai, Hester's uncle, as governor of the Jews in Aman's place. The new minister, we can assume, will be a strong champion of the rights and privileges of the Jews, just as his near namesake, lord chancellor More, would prove a champion of the church and clergy. Likewise, the proclamation prepared for the king by Hester, which pardons and sets out the future constitutional arrangements for the Jews, places their governance, not in royal hands, but with "them that can do best", the Jews themselves. The queen requests that Aman's cruel plan

Against me and all the Jewish nation
May be revoked, and upon convocation,
A new devised by them that can do best. (ll. 1078-80)

Here again the vocabulary seems rather pointed. "Convocation" might mean simply a gathering, as it does elsewhere in the play (for instance, in line 1169). But it was also the name of the governing body of the church, the clerical assembly that sat in Westminster and York alongside parliament. Thus the play tacitly suggests that clerical regulation and reform should be taken out of the hands of the laymen in parliament and returned instead to the clergy's own assemblies, a move that would effectively have secured the church from the assaults of its more radical critics.⁹

If my arguments are correct, *Hester* was thus playing politics in a very direct and immediate sense, in that it parodies and celebrates an analogue of the fall of Wolsey only weeks after his resignation of the Great Seal and the compilation and signature of the Lords' Articles against him in December 1529. This was not an unprecedented use of drama to reflect upon contemporary events. Wolsey was to be the posthumous victim of an even more direct and offensive dramatic representation of his fall a year later, in January 1531, when two of his

9 The proclamation enshrines the right of the Jews to live by their own laws and regulations: "The Jews to their laws themselves should prepare [*dedicate*] / Duly to keep them and not from them square [*deviate*]. / And no man to hurt them ..." (ll. 1141-43).

principal critics, Thomas Boleyn, earl of Wiltshire, and Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, entertained the French ambassador with a “farce” depicting Wolsey “going down into Hell” (*C.S.P., Sp.*, IV [ii]: item 615). But, while that play seems, on the limited evidence available, to have been motivated by little more than triumphalism, *Hester* seems designed, as we have seen, to play a rather more subtle political game.

As I have suggested, the “anti-clerical” furore of late 1529 actually contained two distinct and mutually hostile strands of public criticism of the church. On one side, evangelicals and common lawyers took the king’s signal that he would listen to the grievances of anyone damaged by Wolsey’s administration as a green light to criticise not only the Cardinal but other aspects of the church, including its privileges and even aspects of doctrine to which they were opposed. Hence, the commons introduced and debated a series of bills aimed at curtailing the interference of the clergy in lay affairs, especially the rota of levies and taxes imposed upon the laity and the church courts that enforced them, backed by the threat of excommunication or accusations of heresy. In addition, reformers like Simon Fish used criticism of church wealth as a means of implying more radical criticisms of the doctrine of purgatory and the entire intercessionary apparatus that the church had built upon it.

Distinct from this reformist strand of criticism (which it is legitimate to think of as “anti-clerical”), and fundamentally opposed to it, was a second critique coming largely from within the church hierarchy itself and its lay allies, which was aimed much more specifically at the novel, “foreign” jurisdiction imposed upon the church by Wolsey’s legatine authority. Advocates of this position were striving, not to abolish the legal and financial prerogatives of the bishops and the regular clergy, but to restore them, taking back those rights, exemptions and privileges that Wolsey had gathered into his own hands over the past fifteen years. Thus, while the two strands of thought were indeed united in criticising issues such as the handling of probate in the church courts, the potential for corruption in appointments to benefices and the decay of religious houses, and so seem at first glance to contribute to a single mass of anti-clerical agitation, they were in fact based upon quite contrary assumptions about the source of the problem and the means of its solution. The strategy shared by the *Hester* playwright and the authors of those Lords’ Articles proposed by the clergy was to seize the initiative from the reformers and lead the criticism of the church in an ultimately conservative direction, away from legal reform, dissolutions and

greater regulation of the church, and towards a much more limited and manageable dismantling of Wolsey's legatine prerogatives. From such a process, the bishops, the ecclesiastical courts and the religious houses would emerge stronger and more independent, rather than diminished.

Thus in *Hester*, the kind of spoliation of the church advocated by Fish and the more radical reformers is depicted, as it was in the Lords' Articles, as an affront to the royal prerogative, inspired by Aman/Wolsey's pride and acquisitiveness, rather than the patriotic reassertion of royal powers that Fish's tract claimed. By associating Aman/Wolsey with the closure of monasteries and assaults upon the wealth and prerogatives of the bishops, the regular clergy and the ecclesiastical courts, the *Hester* playwright sought to tar these reformist, proto-protestant positions with the unpopularity of the Cardinal's regime. The strategy was a bold and ingenious one. If there was one thing that the king had publicly declared his willingness to entertain, it was criticism of Wolsey's influence, so for the playwright to be able to consign the spectres of monastic dissolution and spoliation of the church to the wilderness with the Cardinal was a deft stroke. If successful, it would deprive the church's most radical critics of their strongest weapons and also, no doubt infuriatingly, associate them with the very man who was the epitome of everything they despised about the clergy.

Moreover, if, as some of Queen Katherine's closest allies seemed to believe, the driving force behind the king's Great Matter was Wolsey's diplomatic aspiration to remarry Henry to a French princess, then it might also have seemed plausible that the Cardinal's fall could lead to a restoration of the queen's fortunes, especially as she remained a part of the royal household which celebrated Christmas 1529 at Greenwich with the king, as Edward Hall tells us, "with great plenty of viands and diverse disguisings and interludes, to the great rejoicing of his people" (Hall, fol. clxxx^r). Indeed, Henry had very publicly praised Katherine in seemingly the most affectionate and respectful terms immediately after her appearance at the Blackfriars' court in the preceding June, describing her as

A woman of most gentleness, of most humility and buxomness, yea and of all good qualities appertaining to nobility, she is without comparison, as I this twenty years almost have had the true experiment; so that if I were to marry again if the marriage might be good, I would surely choose her above all other women. (Hall, fol. clxxx^v)

Given the fulsomeness of such a declaration, it might well have seemed to someone unaware of the king's determination to secure an annulment and to marry

Anne Boleyn that a reconciliation between Henry and Katherine was at least a possibility worth arguing for at this time. The idea of presenting a drama that would condemn the fallen Cardinal and his policies, outflank the church's most strident critics and at the same time urge the virtues of the queen as a champion of traditional religious values, wifely probity and political intelligence might have seemed too good an opportunity to miss for a conservative playwright anxious to defend the causes closest to his heart.

If this reasoning is correct, though, how might the interlude have worked in performance? In great part, of course, this would depend upon where it was performed, and before whom. The text itself provides some helpful evidence in the stage direction calling for "the chapel" to enter and sing a hymn after line 854. This suggests a production in a household large enough to support a chapel choir, whose resources the playwright knew; this would narrow the possibilities to a small number of royal, aristocratic or clerical houses. Additionally, the play's engagement with debates at court, in parliament and the city of London would imply both a playwright and an audience familiar with events and rumours in those places, and their significance. There is also evidence in the text of a concern for the practicalities and mechanics of government that might suggest it is the product of a circle familiar with the machinery of day-to-day politics and administration. When Aman issues the order for genocide, for example, the play specifies that it will be carried by pursuivants with clear instructions to deliver its contents "to the rulers of every town and city" (l. 777) and to ensure that the massacre occurs only on the specified day across the realm. And when Assuerus later agrees to pardon the Jews, the earlier order is rescinded via the same channels, with similarly careful and detailed instructions. Moreover, the playwright is not content simply to have the king issue his order to ensure that all will be well. As we have seen, he is mindful of the likely impact of two such contrary proclamations arriving in the provinces in quick succession, and so writes a preamble to the second edict which (entirely unnecessarily in plot terms) acknowledges the awkwardness of the clash of instructions and seeks to disarm it. This is surely something that would seem necessary only to a writer familiar with the practicalities of royal or episcopal administration, and with the difficulties of ensuring that instructions issued at the political centre were both received and complied with in other localities.

A performance within the royal court itself is thus a distinct possibility. Was *Hester* one of the "interludes" that Henry witnessed with Katherine at Greenwich

over Christmas 1529? The implicitly critical representation of Assuerus as somewhat hypocritical as well as a naive monarch might seem to argue against a royal production, but it need not. As I have argued elsewhere (Walker, *Plays*, pp. 6–36), it was quite possible for playwrights to present the king or his counsellors with quite sharp criticisms of their actions or policies, provided they were careful not to transgress the boundaries of acceptable courtly licence. But if a royal performance is discounted, then a production in a conservative nobleman's, bishop's or abbot's household in or around the capital would seem the most likely context for the play's debut production.

What the interlude's close engagement with the debates in parliament, the Lords' Articles and Fish's *Supplication* suggests more certainly, however, is the speed with which the interlude must have been written, reacting to events as they happened, and turning them into persuasive drama for performance only weeks later. The engagement with Fish's arguments might notionally have been scripted at any point in 1529, as his tract was printed early in that year, and its significance as a dangerous challenge to the prerogatives of the clergy had been signalled by More's decision to write his own *Supplication* against it, and publish it in the following September. The scattering of copies of Fish's book in the streets before the parliamentary procession on 3 November gave added urgency to the situation. *Hester's* reflection of the allegations, language and strategy of the Lords' Articles, however, suggests a later date, as the Articles were formerly drawn up and subscribed to only on 1 December, and even then would have been known only to an inner circle of signatories, courtiers and counsellors for some time after that. Even if the playwright had informants from within that inner circle, then, as seems likely, he would have had a matter of only a few weeks to turn the sensitive material of the articles into the stuff of drama.

In this context, the suggestion recently advanced by Janette Dillon that the scene between the three vices, Pride, Adulation and Ambition, could be a later interpolation into the text, is of considerable interest (Dillon, p. 118). For it is in this scene that the most detailed and sustained discussion of Aman's vices occurs, and there that the material reflects most closely the charges in the Articles and Fish's text. Could this section have been added later, most plausibly in December 1529, to "update" the play to reflect the latest news from parliament and the court, thereby both sharpening the contemporary edge of its satire and furthering the strategy to deflect Fish's and other reformers' attacks on the entire clergy toward the fallen Cardinal alone? Certainly the scene is a curious one in

dramatic terms, and sits awkwardly with the interlude that surrounds it. All of this adds weight to the suggestion that the other vices were indeed added later, along with Hardydardy's brief allusion to their testaments (ll. 800-6), for performance at Christmas 1529, in order to sharpen the play's deft simultaneous attack on both Wolsey's reputation and the polemics of Fish and the reformers.

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Andrew HISCOCK, « *Johan Johan (1533): The Politics of Marriage and Folly in Henrician England* »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 97-116
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/ThetaX>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

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Date de création

Avril 2013

Johan Johan (1533): *The Politics of Marriage and Folly in Henrician England*

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Howard B. Norland has celebrated the extravagant comic entertainment *Johan Johan* as “the first play printed in England to represent farce as a dramatic form” (p. 255). The composition of *Johan Johan* might well date from the 1520s, but it was published in 1533 by William Rastell, who also brought out John Heywood’s *The Pardoner and Frere* and *The Play of the Wether* in the same year. Nonetheless, it was not until the Restoration that *Johan Johan* would be attributed formally to Heywood in a bookseller’s listing attached to yet another early play whose origins have been the source of some scholarly contention: *Tom Tyler and his wife an excellent old play* (1661).¹

I See *Tom Tyler and his wife*, p. 12 (2nd pagination set). In the year of its publication, 1661, *Tom Tyler* was attributed to William Wager in Kirkman’s *A true, perfect and exact catalogue* (see p. 15). Milton’s nephew, Edward Phillips, followed this lead in his *Theatrum poetarum* (1675)—see p. 195. However, this attribution has not enjoyed sustained support in recent criticism. With respect to date, in 1900 Schelling identified *Tom Tyler* as “ca. 1578” for his edition of the text published in *PMLA*. Later in the century, Moore referred to “this anonymous farce ... dating from, vaguely, the middle of the sixteenth century” (p. 105); Bradbrook placed it “c. 1560” (p. 83); and Freeburg argued that the play “may date from about 1550” (p. 20). In more recent decades, Brown dates the play to “circa 1558” (p. 130), Lancashire to “ca. 1563” (p. 28), and Bevington to “1558-63” (p. 442). Most recently, *Tom Tyler* has been designated more cautiously as “a sixteenth-century farce” (Fletcher, *The Tamer Tamed*, ed. Munro, p. 77).

If the attribution of *Johan Johan* to Heywood has gained increasing critical consensus, the longevity of the debate surrounding the authorship of the farce constitutes not only a striking insight into the changeful critical politics of textual control across the last hundred years, but also an opportunity to consider further the transforming assessments of the status and function of performance and cultural intervention in the Henrician period. Indeed, in the early years of the twentieth century, Charles William Wallace wished to promote the cause of one William Cornish, Henry VIII's Master of the Boys of the Chapel Royal, and the influence of Sir Thomas More with regard to the composition of this drama: "*The Pardoner and the Frere* and *Johan Johan*, were probably written by Cornish . . . and certainly not by Heywood" (p. 80). In the years preceding the Second World War, R. de la Bère (Ronald B. Delabere Barker) countered such arguments with the submission that "the play must be attributed to Heywood, though I can only base my opinion on rather small evidences" (p. 87). Some thirty years later, Robert Carl Johnson was still proceeding with caution: "*Johan Johan* should perhaps be assigned to Heywood only tentatively. Externally, evidence is lacking; but internally, the style is familiar" (p. 102). However, in 1991, taking into account the critical history and textual transmission of the text, Richard Axton and Peter Happé included the farce in *The Plays of John Heywood*—and there has been little sign of a demur in the intervening period.

Johan Johan and the Early Tudor Government of Marriage

The turmoil-ridden later decades of Henry VIII's reign certainly yielded ample opportunity for his subjects to ponder the government of polity and parish, indeed the nature of all commitments to life in society. The celebrated humanist scholar Juan Luis Vives remained in no doubt of the political continuities which existed between the unity of marriage and the unity of the state, tellingly underlining in 1529 that God

would not, that man untemperately shoulde medle with manye women, nor that the woman shoulde submitte her selfe to many men. Therfore he bounde them together in lawfull marriage, and delivered her unto the man, not only for generations sake, but also for the societie and fellowshippe of life. . . . And what a commoditie is the wife vnto y^e husband, in ordering

of his house, & in governing of his familie & housholde? by this cities are edified & buylded.
(*The office and duetie of an husband*, sigs. A5^r, A7^v)²

In 1518, Erasmus had published his own *Encomium Matrimonii*, and an English version of it appeared in 1532, the year prior to the publication of *Johan Johan*. It was dedicated to Thomas Cromwell by the translator, Richard Tavernour, who advised readers that Erasmus had been prompted to write the tract because “he considered the blynd superstition of men and women which cease nat day by day to professe & vowe perpetuall chastyte before they suffyciently knowe themselves & thinfirmite of their nature.” Indeed, Tavernour proffered further strong food for thought for his readers of the 1530s that the frailty of such unions “(in my opinion) hathe bene and is yet unto this day the rote and very cause original of innumerable myscheves” (Erasmus, *A ryght frutefull epystle* [1536], sig. A2^r).

The Tudor literature of marital conduct and household discipline forms a rich and extensive corpus of diverse textual materials and continued to nourish the remorseless appetite for debate in the period regarding possible models of government to be implemented at all levels of society. Dedicated to Catherine of Aragon, Vives’ *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* (1524), for example, left its readers in no doubt that it did not “[become] a woman . . . to live amonge men or speke abrode. . . . it were better to be at home within and unknowen to other folks. . . . let few se her and none at all here her” (*A very frutefull and pleasant boke*, sig. E2^v). Conversely, in Heywood’s play, it is Tyb who is as ready to complain about her husband’s “bawlyng” (l. 117), as he is about her “catter wawlyng” (l. 110).³ As a consequence, the priest-lover is able to dupe Johan all too easily into thinking that he has censured this shrew’s loose tongue and received his reward: “And therefore I knowe she hatyth my presens” (l. 365).

Erasmus insisted that “No man (if ye give any credence to me) had ever a shrewe to his wyfe, but thrughe his owne defaute” (*A ryght frutefull epystle*, sig. D2^v), and the perils of relaxing the checks of domestic restraint appear all too evident at the opening of *Johan Johan*, where the shamed husband is driven

2 However, my discussion does not seek to extend these analogies to view *Johan Johan* as a *pièce à clé*, but as an engagement with cultural concerns which were widely shared in the Reformation society of Henry VIII’s England. For an example of a *pièce à clé* thesis that sees Johan as a representation of Catherine of Aragon, see Borowska-Szszun.

3 All line references from Heywood’s plays are taken from *The Plays of John Heywood*, ed. Axton and Happé.

to petition an audience of strangers: “God spede you, maysters, everychone! / Wote ye not whyther my wyfe is gone?” (ll. 1-2). Was it with such theatrical capers in mind that the Brigittine monk Richard Whitford submitted, in the very year preceding the publication of *Johan Johan*, that plays did “more harme than good . . . for without fayle they ben spectacles of mere vanites, whiche the worlde callethe pastymes, and I call them waste tymes” (Whitford, fol. 209^v)? Whether in the home or the larger world of the parish, with regard to mental or physical exertions, Johan remains a figure of failed authority. He may secure a position of sustained attention (if not intimacy) with the audience in his numerous asides as the dramatic narrative unfolds, but his collapsed cultural status is never in question, for he is continually defined by the roaming rebelliousness, the marked *unreformability*, of his wife—for Tyb “wyll go a gaddyng very myche / Lyke an Anthony pyg with an olde wyche / Whiche ledeth her about hyther and thyther” (ll. 5-7).

At such junctures we may be reminded that in Heywood’s *Play of the Wether* yet another woman is accused of leading an “ydyll lyfe”: the launder rails that the Gentywoman is devoted to “daunsynge and syngynge . . . eatynge and drynkynge and . . . apparellynge” (ll. 916-17). Nonetheless, if the emphases of the *Frauenfrage* (or *questione delle donne* or *querelle des femmes*) debate which exercised the authors of conduct literature throughout the early modern period must clearly shape critical responses to the unruly, yet resourceful Tyb, *Johan Johan* attends equally energetically to pressing aspects of the contemporaneous *Herrenfrage* debate, concerning the urgencies for masculine self-government and exemplary leadership. In *Johan Johan* we are never allowed to deflect our attention from the ritualistic humiliations of the cuckold, who may “eate nothyng, nother meate nor brede” (l. 612) in his own house, and is set to the hopeless task of “Mendynge the payle, whiche is so rotten and olde” (l. 639).

Syr Johan remains a key player in this vacated, and then violated, family home. If Johan himself acknowledges plaintively that Tyb “doth nothyng but go and come, / And I can not make her kepe her at home” (ll. 37-38), this husband struggles repeatedly and desperately to unsettle or mask the knowledge of his own sexual displacement by the priest by diverting his energies to the scrutiny and endless re-scrutiny of the evidence before him. Like so many cuckolds locked in domestic comedies, Johan ultimately fears conclusive proof and is riddled with anxieties concerning the public ridicule which will accompany his plight: “The folkes wyll mocke me” (l. 48). Equally significantly, the meagre resources

of his imaginative life are also deeply stimulated by the possible details of Tyb's adventuring—the idea that the priest enjoys the final favours of his wife all too easily and indeed, “gyve[s] her absolution upon a bed” (l. 141).

Syr Johan and the Rigours of Church Discipline

In his wide-ranging study, *Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, James A. Brundage has highlighted that “The attempt to deny legitimate sexual outlets of all kinds to the clergy had a long history going back to the fourth-century Council of Elivira” (p. 369). Indeed, in his highly influential twelfth-century treatise *De arte honeste amandi*, Andreas Capellanus had invested in a key concept in medieval social theory—that ecclesiastics were to be treated as an elite class apart on account of their vows of personal dedication and their spiritual vocation: “the clerk is considered to be of the most noble class by virtue of his sacred calling, a nobility which we agree comes from God's bosom and is granted to him by the Divine Will” (*The Art of Courtly Love*, p. 142 [Chapter VII: “Concerning the Love of the Clergy”]).

Moreover, as the studies of the historian Margaret Bowker make clear, the medieval clergy's public commitment to celibacy had rendered them over the centuries palpable privileges of social access and protection. Tellingly, Margaret Bowker recounts that in the early Tudor period, when one Robert Becket of the Diocese of Lincoln informed the wife of William Tailboys that “he must nedes have his pleasure of her” and attempted to sexually assault her, the husband bribed Becket to prevent having his wife's name cited in the subsequent ecclesiastical court hearing. Equally significantly, despite being insulted as “false perjured churles”, the churchwardens were chary of condemning this priest who otherwise “doth his dewty” in the parish.⁴ Yet if Becket himself had attempted to bribe Mistress Tailboys with the lure of a gold noble placed on the bed, in *Johan Johan* the cuckold makes a rather different wager with his conscience: “But where the dyvell, trowe ye, she is gon? / I holde a noble she is with Syr Johan” (ll. 85–86).

In 1518 John Colet, celebrated scholar and dean of St Paul's Cathedral, had recognized, with reference to his proposed reform of the Cathedral's statutes, that “convenit . . . ut qui tam proprie accedunt ad Altare Dei, tam magnisq[ue]

4 See Bowker, pp. 120–21. Bowker notes that “It was very rare for the bishop or his deputy to deprive a clerk for immorality”, but acknowledges that there were inevitable exceptions (p. 119).

ministeriis intersunt, omnino casti & intemerati sint [it is fitting that those who approach so near to the altar of God, and are present at such great mysteries, should be wholly chaste and undefiled]" (cited in Lupton, p. 135). And in the same year, Cardinal Wolsey's provincial constitutions re-affirmed earlier decrees that the concubines of priests risked excommunication and burial in non-sanctified ground.⁵ Nevertheless, under the influence of Lutheran teachings, priests began to be married in Wittenberg from 1521, and Luther himself married Katharina von Bora in 1525.⁶

If Capellanus had argued that the cleric "ought not devote himself to the works of love ... to keep himself free from all bodily filth", he also gave rein to a familiar theme of debate from the medieval centuries, the argument that *necessitas non habet legem*: "hardly anyone ever lives without carnal sin, and ... the life of the clergy is, because of the continual idleness and the great abundance of the food, naturally more liable to temptations of the body than that of any other men" (p. 142).⁷ The scrutiny of ecclesiastical privileges (privileges which might test the priest's sexual continence) certainly appears to have preoccupied the Church courts throughout the period, as in the case of the rector of Addington in Northamptonshire who was summoned before the bishop in 1526. It was reported that he had fathered two children by the wife of one Mr Bryde, who was herself no stranger to the forces of the law and in the past had found herself in the stocks. Furthermore, by way of forestalling any questioning of his authority, rather than attiring himself in the garb of a priest, the rector was given to visiting the parish wearing a suit of chainmail!⁸

Like the Church courts, early Tudor print culture also remained keenly sensitive to the continuing critique of sinning priests. Caxton's rendering of Gui de Roze's *The doctrinal of sapyence* (1489), for example, had poured scorn upon the "preste that lyueth in deadly synne, specialy in sinne of lecherie" (sig. H8^v). And the English translation of Dionysius the Carthusian's *The lyfe of prestes*, published in same year as *Johan Johan*, demanded that those who administer "the sacramentes of the churche be most clene and ghostly", for "it is most vicyous and inconuenient that the minysters of the church and altare shulde so precyous sacramentes defyle & corrupte with that moste fowle fylthye and abhominable synne of the flesh and

5 For further discussion here, see Heal, pp. 77ff., *passim*, and Parish, pp. 128ff., *passim*.

6 In this context, see the extensive discussion in Parish, esp. pp. 152ff.

7 For further discussion of the clergy's status apart in medieval society, see Jones, p. 149.

8 For further discussion here, see Bowker, p. 118.

bestly concupiscenceye and so presume to serue” (sig. C5^r). Greg Walker has justly argued that “The repackaging of . . . late-medieval texts for Tudor audiences was part of a wider strategic agenda on the part of the reformers” (*Writing under Tyranny*, p. 48); and we may be reminded that the cuckold himself in *Johan Johan* appears to be conversant with such well-established critique of the clergy (“The parysshe preest forgetteth that ever he ware clarke” [l. 595]), as he queries plaintively:

But Syr Johan, doth not remembre you
How I was your clerke, and holpe you masse to syng,
And hylde the basyn alway at the offryng? (ll. 596-98)

Orthodox doctrine of the Catholic church had insisted that the purity of the sacraments was in no manner marred (or improved) by the human agent who administered them. *The doctrinal of sapyence* stressed that “Saint Austyn saith that the synnes of an euyl prest empessheth not the sacrament. but he dampneth him right parfondly” (Caxton, sig. H8^v); and, striking a similar note, an anonymous text of 1493, *The compendious treetise dyalogue of Diues and Pauper*, affirmed that “the secrament is not the worsse for the malyce of the preeste” (sig. R8^v). If, in the event, scorn for the erring *clericus* increased both within and without the Church in the decades leading up to the Reformation, it is certainly evident that such criticism also varied in vigour according to regional and national politics operating across the British isles at this time. If the Henrician regime was engineering thoroughgoing reform of Church and State in the early 1530s, we should be mindful that its ecclesiastical authorities had always had to negotiate the diverse customs and practices of the British nations. Felicity Heal argues persuasively for a “difference of cultural assumption” operating across the isles, whereby clerical concubinage “remained a norm for the secular clergy” in much of Scotland, Gaelic Ireland and Celtic Wales, whatever powers the bishops might summon in the attempt to suppress it (p. 77ff.).

This conclusion is certainly supported by Henry A. Jefferies’ studies of pre-Reformation and Reformation Ireland. Jefferies underlines, for example, that if any cleric were accused of keeping a concubine and denied the charge, the court would order him “to purge himself in public by means of his own oath, and those of a number of compurgators who would swear on his behalf. . . . Dnus Cúconnacht O Higha, rector of Aghaloo, purged himself in 1455 of the charge of maintaining a concubine” (p. 108). Jefferies adds that priests might also institute their own court actions: “The rector of Rathdrumin sued his rela-

tive Thomas McLaughlin for alleging in public that the priest had intercourse with his wife” (p. 111). In his own account of Wales and the Welsh during this period, Glanmor Williams stresses that “In 1397 nearly all the many priests of Herefordshire diocese with Welsh names were accused in the course of the visitation of incontinence and maintaining women” (p. 340). Indeed, in 1536 the secular clergy of Bangor in North Wales petitioned Thomas Cromwell to allow them to retain their “hearth companions” (*focariae*), pleading, “No gentleman nor honest substantial man will lodge us in their houses, for fear of inconvenience and knowing our frailty” (Williams, pp. 342, 344). Nonetheless, the *inconvenience* of the lecherous priest is well attested in Church Court records from the opening decades of the sixteenth century. We learn, for example, that in 1503, one Margaret Scott, “beyng a mayde very seke like to dye”, sent for her local priest Sir Roger Johnson, vicar of Petham in Kent, to hear her confession. Once the assembled company had been ushered out, it was reported in later depositions that Sir Roger “offerd to the said Margaret his prevy members”, enquiring, “wull this do you any ease or pleasure?” In the later court proceedings, Scott refused to revise her testimony, and arrangements were put in place for another cleric to replace Johnson in the parish.⁹

Governing Hearth and Home

At the very beginning of *Johan Johan*, the audience is reminded in no uncertain terms that the vacated home is the most powerful indicator that the changeful female body “kepeth not her house, as her duetie is” (l. 28). As a consequence, the abandoned spouse resolves to tame the unruly dame with a passionately constructed fantasy of physical violence:

Bete her, quoth a? Yea, that she shall stynke,
 And at every stroke lay her on the grounde
 And trayne her by the here about the house rounde.

 I shall bete her and thwak her I trow,
 That she shall beshyte the house for very wo. (ll. 12-14, 31-32)

9 This episode is related in Jones, pp. 149-50.

Desiring to compensate for the frequency of Tyb's perambulations and the suspicion of the loss of his sexual privilege, the over-protesting Johan seeks to remedy the dereliction of the hearth with an extravagantly tyrannical regime of corporal punishment (articulated at length, in directly inverse proportions to that of his authority as a patriarch). Equally strikingly, he endeavours to reduce the errant and erring wife to the status of a wild creature: "I shall beate her by cokkes bones / That she shall stynke lyke a pole kat" (72-73). And if he had been afforded the unlikely gift of literacy, the cuckold would certainly have found ample encouragement to adopt this line of thinking. Vives himself insisted that it was in no way "expedient" that a wife "go forth alone, nor that she be accompanied with many. . . . For why? in the societie & company of men, one doth infecte the other, as in frute & beastes" (*The office and duetie of an husband*, sig. U5^{r-v}).

As we enter the disorienting scenes of frantic verbal and physical exchanges between the impoverished, the impotent, the oath-breakers and sexual sinners, Tyb expresses no inclination to defend anything more than her right to access the enticing world of adult experience beyond the marital home—and, as so often in jest narratives from the period, those who fail to participate in this world of merry jests are served up as suitable fodder for universal derision.¹⁰ The environment of the hearth, which Tyb regularly abandons for her "pylde preest" (l. 289), is afforded a palpable, if unappealing reality: indeed, Johan may not even place his coat on the ground ("by cokkes soule here hath a dogge pyst" [l. 247]), and so the audience is invited to take care of it "Whyle ye do nothyng", and to "skrape of the dyrt" (l. 257). In this way, at several reprises throughout the dramatic narrative we are urged to attend to the very specificity of the domestic scene: indeed, the wrathful Johan curses not only the antics of the erring lovers, but the very public correlative of his failed union, the untended home: "a vengauce . . . / On the pot, the ale, and on the table, / The candyll, the pye, and all the rable, / On the trystels and on the stole" (ll. 288-92).

In *De officio mariti* (1529), Vives argued forcefully that the wife should attend most particularly to "those thinges y^t belong vnto y^e kitchen, & to y^e most part of y^e houshold stufte" (*The office and duetie of an husband*, sig. Ur^r), and it becomes increasingly evident that Johan himself cannot be divorced from an *emasculinity* denoted by the neglected objects in his home environment.¹¹ Vives remained

10 For further discussion here, see Hiscock, "Hear my Tale, or Kiss my Tail".

11 For further discussion of "emasculinity" in the context of medieval society, see Swanson.

adamant in his *De officio mariti* (1529) that the husband must remain “maister ouer al the house” (sig. T8^v). However, in the comic inversions of Heywood’s dramatic world, Tyb assumes the authority to surpass Johan verbally and physically, promoting her very own ideals of service: “go to brynge the trestels hyther” (l. 241); “lay the table I say” (l. 265); “Gyve us water to wasshe nowe” (l. 442). In this context, Richard Axton and Peter Happé argue persuasively that “This comic inversion of ‘normal’ authority is very much funnier (and less offensive to modern audiences) if, as was probably the case historically, Tyb is played by a man” (Axton and Happé, eds, p. 15).

Nonetheless, the failure to enforce the doctrine of *coverture*, the social and legal subordination of the wife to the husband, failed to amuse cultural theorists of the period: it constituted nothing less than an assault upon the patriarch’s authority and a violation of his property rights. Indeed, in his earlier *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* (1524), Vives showed himself eager to envisage the disorders which might be stirred if the wife compelled her husband “to vse any fylthy occupation or drogery” for her own “welfare”:

for hit were better for y^e to eate browne bread & drynke claye & myry water than cause thy husbände to fall vnto any slobery worke or stynkyng occupation & excedyng labour for to escape thy scoldyng & chydyng at home. For y^e husbände is his owne ruler and his wyues lorde. (*A very frutefull and pleasant boke*, sig. A1^r [2nd pagination set])

Unsurprisingly, given the profoundly gender-marked expectations of labour circulating within early Tudor society, Johan is mocked remorselessly in his repeated performance of domestic chores, with the most stinging attack landing from his rival, the priest himself: “What, Johan Johan, canst thou make no shyfte? / Take this waxe and stop therwith the clyfte” (ll. 455–56).

More generally, as the audience quickly learns to appreciate, the slips between thought, word and deed remain the comic mainspring of the dramatic action in *Johan Johan*. Publicly denied the roles of provider and protector, Johan determines from the safety of his empty house that the “catter wawlyng” spouse must be schooled vigorously on her duties and prevented from entering the wider economy of the parish, where she is given to using her body as a token of exchange.

Hospitality and the Clergy

Despite the energetic cut-and thrust of accusations between husband and wife at the beginning of this intrigue of ruses and humiliations, it is in fact the ousted Johan who initially seeks out the hospitality of another: “How mayster curate, may I come in / At your chamber dore without any syn?” (ll. 314-15). In the event, there is little reason for him to feel disoriented: whether at home or abroad, Johan is harassed by individuals peddling lies of one kind or another. In Heywood’s *Pardoner and Frere*, the audience is cautioned not to “despyse the pore freres / . . . Leste they happen your houses for to leve—/ And than God wyll take vengauce in his yre” (ll. 55, 58-59). In the rather more domesticated dramatic world of *Johan Johan*, the cuckold is released from any such anxiety concerning the clergy, and within the confines of the priest’s house he succumbs once again to tales of communal *doings* in the kitchen (“I / Sayd that I wolde gyve them a pye” [ll. 388-89]) and some coy artifice on the part of Syr Johan, who demurs at first in accepting an offer of hospitality from his harried parishioner.

In *De officio mariti*, Vives had warned in a timely fashion that “The straungers and gestic, the which that thou doste receaue into thy house, do oftentimes become thy enemies, & throughe a certayne beneuolence do cause muche wick-ednes” (*The office and duetie of an husband*, sig. U6^{r-v}). However, in *Johan Johan*, upon entering the couple’s home, the “pylde preest” is able with little trouble to blur the distinctions between guest, predator and itinerant felon. Moreover, in this world of comic frenzy (where the exigencies of the labour economy appear permanently deferred), all the characters have an embarrassment of leisure in which to ponder the devices and desires of temptation:

But I shall tell the what I have done, Johan
For that matter: she and I be somtyme aloft,
And I do lye uppon her, many a tyme and oft
To prove her, yet could I never espy
That ever any dyd wors with her than I. (ll. 348-52)

In case there were any doubt, Vives had emphasised that “true matrimonie can not be betwene thre or foure, but betwene two onelye” (*The office and duetie of an husband*, sig. B7^r). However, rather than demonising Tyb as *luxuria* or unveiling the priest as a wanton reprobate, as might be anticipated from Johan’s many and various muttered asides (“In fayth, all the towne knoweth better that he / Is a

hore monger, a haunter of the stewes” [ll. 233-34]), the drive of this comic narrative is to later eyes distinctly more Molièresque in tenor: *Johan Johan* is remorselessly intent upon probing the farthest limits of the gull’s simplicity. Instead of exhibiting an anti-laical contempt such as John Van Engen has identified as a conventional response of the late-medieval clergy, the fleshly Syr Johan finds himself mostly among like-minded people and has no qualms in tapping the resources of his parish for his own needs.¹² Indeed, in the riotous company of Johan, Tyb and Syr Johan for the final scene, the audience is invited to savour the irony that whilst the priest and his mistress gorge themselves upon a baked offering, the humiliated cuckold repeatedly finds himself in “a very purgatory” where “the smoke puttyth out [his] eyes” as he “Must ... / ... stond here rostying by the fyre” (ll. 486, 509, 534-35).

Closing Thoughts: Johan Johan and Its Audiences

In Thomas More’s *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), amongst the spirited exchanges between the quick-witted “Master chauncelour” and the “specyall secrete frende” or messenger sent by one of his acquaintance, we are asked to partake of a “mery tale” of parish infidelities:

The pore man, quod he, had found the preste ouer famylyer wyth hys wyffe and because he spake hym abrode and coulde not proue it, the prest sued hym before the bysshoppys offycyall for dyfamacyon, where the pore man vppon payne of cursyng was commaunded that in hys paryshe chyrch he shuld vpon the sonday at hygh masse tyme stand vp and saye mouth thou lyst. (More, *A dyaloge*, fol. 13^v)

As might be expected, the “master chauncelour” is not content to let such accounts pass without further scrutiny and reminds the messenger later of the ease with which “a lewde preest” and his “lewde dede” are all too often used to indict the whole of the clergy: “then forgete we to loke what good men be therin and what good counsayle they gyue vs & what good example they shewe us” (fol. 83^r). Striking a similar note in reviewing records from the Ecclesiastical Court records from the period, the historian Helen Parish points out justly that “For every misdemeanour recorded by the courts, it is possible that there were either several others unreported, or as many clergy living a life grounded in

¹² See Van Engen, p. 19.

the celibate ideal” (p. 128).¹³ Nonetheless, as has become apparent in the course of this discussion, a couple of years after the appearance of More’s *Dialogue*, the publication of *A mery play betwene Iohan Iohan the husbände, Tyb his wyfe, and syr Iohan the preest* might enjoy a robust reception in a Reformation society of the 1530s which was wrestling strenuously with pressing questions of political government and spiritual discipline. Indeed, Greg Walker has argued persuasively that in overseeing this publication, William Rastell “may have thought of it as an animated dialogue, similar in nature to those which he was printing for Sir Thomas More at this time, rather than as a play with distinct conventions and desiderata of its own” (*The Politics of Performance*, p. 19).

Heywood’s play *The Pardoner and Frere*, also published in 1533, concludes with an energetic “fyght” (“Ye horeson, wylt thou scrat and byte?” [l. 543]) between the main protagonists, and the Curate and “Neybour Pratte” are finally called upon to separate the combatants of this “nyse fraye” (l. 578). In the final scene of *Johan Johan*, after the husband has been left for a sustained period to “chafe the wax / And . . . chafe it so hard that [his] fyngers krakkes” (ll. 507-8), it should come as no surprise that the dramatic business ends in a scrimmage between the “pyld preest”, his “drab” and the “horson kokold” (ll. 658, 651, 657). Johan’s revenge is spectacular, if brief and inconclusive: Syr Johan becomes the victim of his own jest (“take thou there thy payle now” [l. 645]), and Tyb is threatened with a “shovyll full of colys in thy face” (l. 654). Not to be bested by her spouse, Tyb proclaims, “I shall make the blood ronne about his erys” (l. 650), but is fended off with the retort: “Nay, get the out of my house, thou prestes hore!” (l. 656).

Johan is more than content to rail against his lecherous priest as “a hore monger, a haunter of the stewes” (l. 234), but, as the historian Karen Jones underlines, earlier in the century in 1515 a Kentishman, one William Baldok of Newington (named “a common defamer of the order of priests”), might easily have risked a heresy charge for calling priests “whoremongers and other words in public”.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the currency of such abuse in late medieval society is not in doubt from the court records of the period, in which the figure of the priest’s concubine recurs with some frequency. Indeed, Jones points out that “priest’s whore” was a common insult cited against female plaintiffs and draws attention to the 1467 case of one Katherine Cheyne of Romney, who was heard to

13 In this context, see also Bowker, p. 120.

14 For full discussion of this case, see Jones, p. 106.

claim that “the gay bedys and gyrdils that Johane Markby hath cam never of her husbondes geft but by the geft of prystes” (pp. 149, 106).

By way of conclusion, it should be added that ribald tales of parish antics may not have been so unfamiliar to the eyes that greeted the publication of *Johan Johan* in 1533. This last phase of my discussion began with Thomas More’s account of an anxious husband called upon to condemn himself before the assembled company at his own parish church, and it would seem fitting to conclude with a final historical example of how erotic and clerical authority in the early Tudor parish might be subject to more general scrutiny and popular judgement, even if ecclesiastical powers proved more reluctant to intervene. In 1531, two years prior to the publication of *Johan Johan*, one Joan Harrow of Hackington, Kent, was summoned before the authorities for accusing her vicar, John Harrison, of sexually importuning her. Unsurprisingly, Harrow was unable to supply the court with the requisite evidence and so was called upon to suffer the same punishment as the husband in More’s account. However, after performing her public act of penance, she immediately turned to her fellow parishioners, declaring:

Beere me recorde that I have doon my penance. Howebeit those wordes that I have said of hym be true or els I pray God and our Lady that this child I go withall and I never departe. (cited in Jones, p. 150)

After this unexpected performance, the courts were at a loss to know how to punish Harrow “for further reformation”, and Harrison himself remained in office until his death in 1545.¹⁵

15 For a full account of this case, see Jones, p. 150.

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Marie-Hélène BESNAULT, « The Political Folly of Malcontents in Early Jacobean Drama »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 117-138
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/Theta10>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

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Date de création

Avril 2013

The Political Folly of Malcontents in Early Jacobean Drama

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“Malcontent”: the connection of the noun, as opposed to the adjective, with political restlessness or rebellion was established in France in 1574, when, under the name of “Malcontents”, François, Duke of Alençon, the youngest son of Catherine of Medici, and other Catholic and Protestant noblemen, including Condé, Montmorency and Turenne, later joined by Henri of Navarre, entered into open rebellion against a tyrannical intolerant Roman Catholic policy inspired by the League, which had led to the Saint Bartholomew’s day massacre. The rebels also opposed the Medicis’ and the Guises’ supremacy at the court of France, which resulted in changes to the laws of the realm, as well as the barring of certain French noblemen from power.¹

Today’s “indignant” citizens in many parts of the world²—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, etc.—and the deflagrations caused by, on the one hand, the lack of opportunities for deserving young people and, on the other hand,

- 1 See Mironneau, pp. 29-30, and Jouanna for a more general context.
- 2 I refer to the movement inspired by Stephan Hessel’s little book *Indignez-vous!* (2010), which was immediately translated into more than ten languages. “La révolution du jasmin” started in Tunisia in early 2011, followed by Egypt and Libya.

the lavishing of offices and fortunes on the families and time-pleasing parasites of men in power, make the political malcontents of the late sixteenth century and the emergence of malcontent types in the English drama of the early seventeenth century topical to a certain extent.

Since Lawrence Babb's *The Elizabethan Malady*, it has been customary to link what he calls "malcontent types" to the vogue of melancholy under Elizabeth.³ Yet Babb makes no chronological distinction, although he covers more than six decades, and mixes malcontents with melancholy lovers, scholars, cynics and villains. In the late 1580s, Elizabethan fiction and prose satire offer some portraits of malcontent citizens which might have influenced the characterisation and appearance of later dramatic malcontents. Some of Shakespeare's characters, notably Hamlet, have been labelled "malcontents" by critics, though never by their author. Hamlet has far too complex a personality and is not sufficiently concerned with social and political problems to be reduced to one of the malcontent types which appeared on Stuart stages, and whose dissatisfaction is mainly political and social, unlike that of Jaques, Iago, Thersites and other cynics.

This study is concerned with two of these figures: the eponymous Malcontent of John Marston's tragicomedy, which presents malcontentedness in a light mode in 1604, and the much darker version of Middleton in 1607, the eponymous revenger of his *Revenger's Tragedy*.⁴ In both cases, the focus will be on the political folly or follies of the malcontent character. By political folly I mean a venturesome, ill-advised action, which aims at a political benefit but has, or might have, a destructive, self-defeating outcome.

Altofronto and Vindice, Marston's and Middleton's malcontent heroes, seem to me to reflect, not only the growing favour of tragicomedies, then of tragedies, but the contemporary increase in tensions among English "disaffected" or ill-affected young graduates and members of the gentry or aristocracy. As was the case of the French "Malcontents" thirty years or so before, many could find no position in Church or State. Many accused a Stuart power founded on favouritism and simony, and bluntly criticized the follies engineered by the sovereign's lustful, covetous, sycophantic courtiers.

3 Babb's Chapter 4, pp. 73-101, is headed "The Malcontent Types".

4 The author of the play was long thought to be Cyril Tourneur. Many critics now favour the authorship of Thomas Middleton. All quotations from the play are from the 1996 Revels Student edition, ed. Foakes, which gives Middleton and Tourneur as authors. All quotations from Marston's *The Malcontent* are from the 1998 New Mermaids edition, ed. Kay.

Both Altofronto and Vindice, having reasons to hide their true identities, put on a disguise to assume their malcontent role or roles. These disguises are not mere lunatic poses or “antic dispositions”. Do the actors who play these parts emulate Thomas Lodge’s character, called “Scandal and Detraction”, who is “a right malecontent Devill, who skulks in the back aisles of Paul’s”, “his looks suspicious and heavie”, a reader of Machiavelli “who delighteth in nought els but traiterous and devilish stratagems” (*Wits Miserie and the Worlds Madnesse*, cited in Kay, ed., Marston, *Malcontent*, p. xx)? Does the character they play appear, like Thomas Nashe’s “Counterfeit Politician” in *Pierce Penniless*, as a solitary fellow who “goes ungartered like a malcontent cut-purse, and wears his hat over his eyes”, as well as “a scornful melancholy in his gait and countenance, and talk[s] as though our commonwealth were but a mockery of government, and our magistrates fools, who wronged him in not looking into his deserts” (Nashe, pp. 65–66)? Apart from one allusion in Marston’s play to Malevole’s entering “in some frieze gown”, which we assume to be of coarse texture (III.ii SD), and Vindice’s reference in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* to a costume that will fit the part “quaintly” (I.i.102), the dramatic texts do not give us clues about these disguises. Was the short-cut hair which characterized the French “*coiffure à la malcontent*” in the 1570s part of them?⁵ We cannot say. Nor is Vindice’s “quaintly” a clear indication. Whatever their physical appearance, dramatic Malcontents share scornful dissatisfied countenances evincing intellectual and political superiority; they voice mocking and even pessimistic views of their society, if not of mankind, and affect a great tendency to seclusion. Indeed, they are not part of a collective entity, unlike the “Malcontents” in the fifth French civil war (1574–76). They rather appear as more-or-less crazed individuals whose political enterprise seems doomed from the start, hence foolish. They are shrewd and may be witty, but often lack diplomacy and even prudence.

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John Marston’s Giovanni Altofronto, the former Duke of Genoa, has been deposed by Pietro Jacomo. His disguise as Malevole, a malcontent, and his impeccable judgment save him from what might have proved mere political folly on his part, namely to return, alone, to the court of Genoa, from which he has

5 See the Littré dictionary under “malcontent”.

been “forever banished” (I.iv.7), while his enemies, and notably his usurper, whose wife, Aurelia, is related to the mighty Duke of Florence, are still in power, and his own wife, Maria, is imprisoned. Moreover, although he accuses himself of having, while in power, “slept in fearless virtue, / Suspectless, too suspectless” (I.iv.13-14), Altofronto reveals his true identity to Celso, trusting him to be a “constant lord” (2). This confidence might have proved politically foolish, too, had not his judgement been impeccable, since Count Celso now serves the new Duke. Malevole may feel too secure. Speaking of the chief villain of the play, Mendoza, he exclaims:

Oh, my disguise fools him most powerfully.
For that I seem a desperate malcontent,
He fain would clasp with me. (III.iii.33-35)

At the beginning of the play, he has gained a reputation as Malevole, a spitting critic, lavish dispenser of satirical, even insulting comments, railing openly against individual or general vices at the court. This solitary cynical misanthrope is modelled on Diogenes the Cynic and, among his other descendants, Shakespeare’s fools and professional railers like Jaques or Thersites. Altofronto boasts of “the fetterless tongue” (I.iii.162-63) he owes to his disguise. Indeed, Pietro himself, who is wary of flatterers, gives his “dogged sullenness free liberty” (I.ii.10) and appreciates his frankness. However, he says, “his speech is halter-worthy at all hours” (26), and “his highest delight is to procure others’ vexation” (20-21), as he soon experiences himself. Even the music that emanates from Malevole’s window above, at the very outset of the play, is “the vilest out-of-tune” (I.i SD) “discord” (I.ii.2) that can be heard.

The malevolence Altofronto’s assumed name advertises manifests itself brutally in the third scene of the play, when he informs his usurper that he is made “a becco, a cornuto” (I.iii.73), a “horned beast” (79), by Mendoza, a treacherous Machiavellian favourite aiming at seizing power by any means. The Malcontent takes the risk of deliberately torturing Pietro’s soul by conjuring the general infamy of cuckoldry, “every page sporting himself with delightful laughter, / Whilst he must be the last to know” (I.iii.98-99). Iago-like, he dwells on the “lewd heat of apprehension” (124) his adulterous wife forms in the presence of her lover, and other outrageous physical details, not to mention the possibility of having bastards and incestuous descendants born from them (130-36). Unlike Iago, Malevole does not lie. At the end of the scene, when he is alone, we discover

that it is his “just revenge” (168) that Altofronto is feeding with the “hideous imagination” (137) he fosters in Pietro’s mind by delivering unpalatable truths:

Lean thoughtfulness, a sallow meditation,
Suck thy veins dry, distemperance rob thy sleep!
The heart’s disquiet is revenge most deep. (154-56)

Altofronto’s method might well prove political folly, we feel, not only because it involves a slow process, but because Mendoza is prompt to turn Pietro’s jealous rage against another lover of Aurelia, the young Ferneze. This courtier’s being caught unbraced as he flies from the Duchess’ room almost proves fatal to him; it discredits Malevole’s testimony and deflects the Duke’s trust. The Malcontent is rejected, not only by Pietro (“Begone, I do not love thee; let me see thee no more; we are displeased” [II.iii.4-5]), but by Mendoza (“Out with him” [13]) and by time-pleasers like Bilioso: “Out, ye rogue! Begone, ye rascal” (23). Altofronto, however, relies on discord, which “to malcontents is very manna” (I. iv.38), and on his ability to turn his sarcastic malcontentedness to his advantage with the vain Mendoza.

Like Tudor dramatic figures modelled on Diogenes, like Kinsayder, the “barking Satyrst” of Marston’s own verse satires, and indeed, like Marston, the Scourger of “Villanie”, himself, under the guise of Malevole, this Malcontent makes scathing and scurrilous but witty attacks against ambition, lust, opportunism, flattery and other courtly vices. And he does so with great relish:

Well this disguise doth yet afford me that
Which kings do seldom hear or greatmen use
Free speech . . .
I may speak foolishly, ay, knavishly,
Always carelessly, yet no one thinks it fashion to poise my breath. (I.iii.159-61, 164-65)

Fools’ and buffoons’ jests were still considered a nobleman’s standard entertainment under the Stuarts and were allowed free play. James I had several fools at his court. In Marston’s play, it was as a free-speaking fool that Malevole had gained Pietro’s confidence. As he adapts his speech to his addressee, he manages, thanks to his gleeful “knavish strain”, to be hired as a villainous instrument by Mendoza. He professes to be a moneyless bastard, a malcontent willing to serve Mendoza’s aims by any means, to be his “slave, beyond death and hell” (III. iii.70). When asked how he feels about murdering the present Duke, he answers

enthusiastically: it is “My heart’s wish, my soul’s desire, my fantasy’s dream, / My blood’s longing, the only height of my hopes!” (III.iii.72-73). Richard Burbage, who played the part of Malevole at the Globe after having played Richard III and Hamlet,⁶ must have made the most of the diversity and gusto of this “mal-contentedness”, humorous, clever, high-flown, scatological, punning, sarcastic, learned, inspired, wise and mad in turn.

Faced with a Machiavel whose self-aggrandizing and oversexed dreams are almost comical (see notably I.v.20-50), Malevole’s crude banter, in which insulting comments are mixed with animal imagery and unrecognised mythological references (“Ah, You whoreson, hot-reined he-marmoset! Aegisthus” [I.v.7-8]), although not welcome at first, does not deter the man he calls “a treacherous villain” and likens to “a filthy incontinent fishmonger” (10) from hiring his services. Indeed, it triggers in him a new fantasy. Malvolio-like, Mendoza imagines himself as a favourite surrounded by courtly sycophants “licking the pavement with their slavishness” (28), or “odd palace lamprels that engender with snakes and are full of eyes on both sides, with a kind of insinuated humbleness” (29-30), the very butts of Malevole’s satire.

Unlike Middleton’s Vindice later, Altofronto does not feel bound by the promises he makes when disguised as a malcontent. He avails himself of the opportunities offered—first, money, then weapons: “Lend me rapier, pistol, cross-bow; so, so, I’ll do it” (III.iii.79). He collects first-hand information from the self-proclaimed “politic” (89) Mendoza:

My utmost project is to murder the Duke, that I might have his state, because he makes me his heir; to banish the Duchess, that I might be rid of a cunning Lacedaemonian, because I know Florence will forsake her; and then to marry Maria, the banished Duke Altofronto’s wife, that her friends might strengthen me and my faction. (91-96)

But this “crash course” in Machiavellian politics does not influence his mode of action. Although he sounds as overjoyed as Marlowe’s Barabas at the prospect of using diabolic ferocity, he is not intent on murdering anyone, an attitude which will become exceptional among tragic malcontents, especially those who are primarily revengers. In the case of Pietro, his usurper, he is satisfied with working

6 The play was first performed by the Children of the Chapel Royal/Queen’s Revels at the Blackfriars Theatre in 1604, but the King’s Men obtained a copy and played it at The Globe the same year. See Kay, ed., pp. xiv-xvi.

on his soul. He first inflicts on him the pangs of jealousy. He then opens his eyes to the treachery of Mendoza and other courtiers. Mendoza's successful counteraction and his immediate disgrace do not discourage him. Taking his time and, "with most servile patience" (II.iii.14), waiting for the errors and dissensions of overconfident enemies is his policy. And it proves political wisdom rather than folly. Learning from his mistakes when he was in power, when his "suspectless virtue" blinded him to the ills of the court—flattery, lechery and so on—is also political wisdom. Always on his guard, he recommends secrecy to Celso. When the latter impulsively cries, "let's mutiny and die!" (I.iv.25), Altofronto's answer is politically wise:

Oh no, climb not a falling tower, Celso;
'Tis well held desperation, no zeal,
Hopeless to strive with fate. Peace, temporise. (26-28)

Pietro, for whose rise "No stratagem of state untried was left" (21) by the Florentine father of Aurelia, is now "a falling tower", Mendoza having regained the favour of Aurelia. Initially, Pietro had appreciated Malevole's independent and frank malcontent foolery, of a kind inherited from carnival fools: "I like him, faith; he gives good intelligence to my spirit, makes me understand those weaknesses which others' flattery palliates" (I.ii.26-28). As his credulity concerning Mendoza proves boundless, Malevole shows his usurper the weapons the traitor has given him to murder him, and rails against his "foggy dullness":

Oh fool, fool, choked with the common maze of easy idiots, credulity! Make him thine heir!
What, thy sworn murderer! . . . Whose hot unquiet lust straight toused thy sheets, and now
would seize thy state. Politician! Wise man! (III.v.6-7, 16-17).

And when Pietro overreacts to the villain's malice—"Oh let the last day fall, drop, drop on our cursed heads! Let heaven unclasp itself, vomit forth flames!" (IV. iv.2-3)—he distances the potential pathos with his ironical advice: "Oh . . . do not turn player; there's more of them than can well live one by another already" (4-5). As far as he is personally concerned, Malevole responds to Mendoza's viciously alert plotting—the villain has, of course, given him instructions to poison the hermit and the hermit to poison him—with vigorous, sound rusticity: "Cross capers, tricks! Truth o' heaven, he would discharge us as boys do eldern guns, one pellet to strike out another. Of what faith art thou now?" (13-15).

Reconciled to Malevole's being "his affliction" rather than a servile flatterer, Pietro, whose own moral conversion is supported by his recent experience and by his fool's energetic and eloquent *contemptus mundi* speeches, repents having usurped Altofronto's dukedom, renounces power forever and vows to dedicate his life "to solitary holiness", "prayer" and "Restoring Altofront to regency" (IV.v.126-28). Undisguising himself, after declaring, "we accept thy faith" (129), the former duke does not waste time in self-congratulations. He shows his political wisdom in knowing when to temporise, but also when to seize opportunities for action. He shows it, too, in knowing whom he can trust and when. At the end of Act Four, Scene Five, having accomplished the first of his self-appointed tasks, he makes his first political appointments with his three allies—the faithful Celso, Ferneze, whose life he saved when asked by Mendoza to bury his body (II.v.118), and Pietro, his new ally:

The time grows ripe for action; I'll detect
 My privat's plot, lest ignorance fear suspect.
 Let's close to counsel, leave the rest to fate;
 Mature discretion is the life of state. (IV.v.145-48)

The change of tone, language and pace is immediately perceptible. Authority, aphoristic sententiousness, together with iambic insistence and rhyming emphasis, characterise the resolute statesman, who has had a secret counterplot ready in his mind and has decided to disclose it to his allies and quickly take "action", now that the "time" is "ripe".

As far as women are concerned, Altofronto is ready to find an exception in Maria, although, in this Genoan court, which resembles that of James I, several ladies, with the help of the cynical Maquerelle, "illustrate the licentiousness of a [place] where fidelity to one's spouse is subordinate to profit and pleasure" (Kay, ed., p. xxvii). Commissioned by Mendoza, he tests his wife's fidelity under his Malcontent disguise, offering jewels, money, love and shared power in the villain's name, while Maquerelle, also present, insists that honesty and constancy are but "fables feigned, odd old fool's chat, devised by jealous fools to wrong [women's] liberty" (V.iii.12-14). Maria is incorruptible, as expected. Retrieving her and his dukedom is now possible, if his own scheming can defeat Mendoza's machinations.

Of all dramatic malcontents, Altofronto is the first one to claim the malcontentedness of his namesake. He is also the least afflicted with political folly.

Laughter, sound judgement and final mastery of the action save him from ultimate disgrace, unlike later dramatic malcontents, including Marston's own Antonio.⁷ Altofronto's disguise has allowed him to expose the treacheries, predations and lecherous vices which pollute the court, to bring his usurper to desperation, repentance and renunciation, and finally to make him contribute to his own battle against Mendoza. His giving Pietro a hermit's garments and making him tell a moving story of his own death from despair because of his wife's adultery achieves two objectives: fooling Mendoza and the rest of the court about the Duke's death, and leading Aurelia to repentance. His foresight about the villain's intentions, gained by becoming his confidant, prevents a double poisoning. Altofronto becomes a trickster himself. He tricks Mendoza with boxes, one of which, he tells him, "being opened under the sleeper's nose, chokes all the power of life, kills him suddenly" (V.iv.38-39). Asked if he could poison, he had answered, "Excellently, no Jew, 'pothecary, or politician better" (32). (Here the theatre-goers were probably alert to Marston's Marlovian intertextuality!) As expected, Mendoza immediately opens the box under his nose, and Malevole pretends to be dead.

The comic tricks and the general mood of this tragicomedy prepare the audience for a happy end. Ironically, it is Mendoza himself who provides the opportunity and the means for Altofronto's last victory. The villain asks Celso to organise "some pretty show to solemnise / Our high installment, some music, masquery" (V.iv.54-55). The word "masquery" obviously denotes a dramatic entertainment based on mythological or allegorical themes, like those provided with great success at James I's court by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, but also the various disguises, false pretences and masquerades which are at the core of the play. Rising from the dead on Mendoza's leaving, Malevole exclaims, "Death of the damned thief! I'll make one i' the masque; thou shalt ha' some brave spirits of the antique dukes" (82-83). His ultimate victory over the villain in the final scene is, however, to scorn to kill him: "An eagle takes not flies" (V.vi.156).⁸ He and his friends, Pietro, Ferneze and Celso, entering, after Genoan dukes led by Mercury, which are part of Mendoza's installment masquery, "in white robes,

7 In *Antonio's Revenge*. I consider that Marston's Antonio, like George Chapman's Charles, Duke of Byron, and Bussy d'Ambois, both French historical characters, is a revenger rather than a malcontent type.

8 Cf. the Latin proverbial saying, "Aquila non captat muscas", implying that little things are beneath a great man's contempt.

with dukes' crowns upon laurel wreaths, pistolets and short swords under their robes" on the sound of cornets (V.vi.65 SD), have made Mendoza's and the ladies' presence "their Elysium; / To pass away this high triumphal night / With songs and dances" (56-58), each one taking his wife or lover to dance, before surrounding Mendoza, pointing their pistols at him, then removing their disguises, to his great dismay. The "pretty show" engineered by Altofronto has a happy end for all, audience included, but Mendoza. The restored Duke knows he has taken action at a propitious time: "there is a whirl of fate comes tumbling on, the castle's captain stands for me, the people pray for me, and the great leader of the just stands for me" (V.iv.86-89), he had told Celso encouragingly. Yet he is not overjoyed at his victory. This is part of the political wisdom of what Marston chooses to present as a man who trusts providence but also his newly acquired prudence. He is generous, but, like Prospero later, he asserts his right and imperiously disposes of good and bad characters, embracing the faithful, kicking out or dismissing the time-pleasers. He is no longer multivoiced. Having converted his usurper and outmanoeuvred the villainy of Mendoza, he can now remove his Malcontent disguise. When wearing it, he was mostly satirical. Very blunt in his playing the fool, he remained, however, vivacious and cheerful, on the whole, not averse to singing or dancing, jesting wittily, even egregiously, with parasites, various fools, licentious women and Maquerelle, a very comic creation of Marston, and Mendoza himself. He has not allowed his feigned malcontentedness to make him completely despair of mankind or womankind or become a murdering revenger. Above all, once his power is reestablished, he trusts he can exercise a virtuous influence on his duchy.

Marston's tragicomedy, although first published in 1604, was probably written in 1602. It seems to comply with the rules of tragicomedy as defined by Guarini's *Il Compendio della Poesia Tragicomedia* (1601). The pattern for the majority of plays including "malcontents" under the Stuarts is, however, mostly tragic, although the characters in question are less and less "great persons". Webster, who contributed "Additions" to the last expanded version of Marston's play, gives important roles to "malcontent types" – Flamineo and Bosola in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, respectively—but the next object of my study is an earlier play, which sets the tone for malcontent types in numerous revenge tragedies.

//

Vindice, the eponymous revenger of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, which appeared in print in 1607, is, in his own guise, a malcontent whose motives are immediately impressed upon the minds of the audience. The son of a man who “died of discontent, the nobleman’s consumption” (I.i.26-27), and, above all, the mourner of his “betrothed lady” (16), he holds and watches, with some morbid fascination, the skull of her whom, nine years earlier,

The old duke poison’d,
Because [her] purer part would not consent
Unto his palsy-lust. (32-34)

He vows to “give Revenge her due” (43). His malcontentedness, however, expands to include the whole Italian dukedom, from which purity, justice, and poor noblemen’s preferments have been exiled, a dukedom in which he, his brother, their sister and their mother live poorly, depending on Hippolito’s place at court, the Duke’s chamber and the Duchess’ pleasure (60, 61). At the end of the play, he claims his aim has been to “blast this villainous kingdom vexed with sin” (V.ii.60). The malcontentedness of Vindice as himself runs through the play, when he soliloquises, speaks in asides, or is alone with Hippolito, his brother and ally. The rest of the time, he puts on a malcontent disguise, then another one, so that the play illustrates three forms of malcontentedness, two of which are feigned in order to secure his presence at the court. Their interaction is often counterproductive.

In the first scene of the play, Hippolito shows some impatience at his brother’s “still sighing o’er death’s vizard” (I.i.50). He has found at the court the opportunity they had long been seeking. He can “prefer” Vindice for a job offered by Lussurioso, the luxurious son of the old lecherous Duke. Vindice agrees to put on a disguise in order to present himself as the malcontent defined by Lussurioso himself:

some strange-digested fellow . . .
Of ill-contented nature, either disgrac’d
In former times, or by new grooms displac’d
Since his stepmother’s nuptials; such a blood,
A man that were for evil only good —
To give you the true word, some base-coined pander. (I.i.76-81)

Disgrace, loss of a position or property, fall into discredit and unscrupulous poverty found a malcontentedness that breeds tool-villains and panders. Simple foolery gives way to utter villainy. Vindice says he has a costume that will fit the part “quaintly” (102). Whether this costume was worn out, very old-fashioned, messy or otherwise ungainly, by convention it was impenetrable. This disguise, like others, necessarily entailed a change of name, humour, mode of speech, circumstances, and varied according to the actor who played the part and the possessions of the company. Vindice, under his disguise and his new name, Piato, plays the Malcontent with such “strange-composed” (96) foppery, bold familiarity, sauciness and bawdy innuendoes in his first exchange with the Duke’s son and heir that his affectation appears politically foolish. Seemingly forgetting his rank, he impetuously embraces Lussurioso, who demands more restraint in public (I.iii.32-41). Vindice, as Piato, is, however saved by his bragging of having played the fool, or pander, on behalf of many knaves, and of being very knowledgeable in “Drunken procreation” (56), incest, adultery and all the forms of sinful betrayal. Lussurioso says he is “past my depth in lust” (88) and welcomes Vindice’s experience “In this luxurious day wherein we breathe” (110).

Vindice’s next act of political and moral folly is to swear he will make his brain “swell with strange invention” (120) in order to satisfy his new master’s desire to seduce a young virgin who is “foolish-chaste” (95). He then learns it is Hippolito’s and his own sister and mother that he is meant to “cozen ... of all grace” (112) with “a smooth enchanting tongue” (111). Foolish enough, unlike Altofronto, to feel morally bound by a promise which, he says, turns both brothers into “innocent villains” (170), he seems to consider forswearing as a greater evil than becoming a pander to his sister, Castiza, and his mother, Gratiana, who, as their names indicate, are chaste and virtuous. At this point, he commits himself to another murderous revenge, this time upon the son of his first offender:

Swear me to foul my sister!
Sword, I durst make a promise of him to thee;
Thou shalt dis-heir him, it shall be thine honour. (172-74)

Meanwhile, his impaired scale of values and his fierce misogyny hinder him from doubting the decision he makes:

And yet, now angry froth is down in me,
It would not prove the meanest policy
In this disguise to try the faith of both. (175-77)

A disguise meant to abuse villainous enemies is now somewhat perversely turned against Vindice's own family. His own basic malcontentedness interferes with the one he affects. The latter is made to serve a "policy" that is base, cruel and dangerous for his relations.

His chaste sister, Castiza, is impervious to temptation. It is in vain that this supposedly well-intentioned ambassador makes a brilliant vindication of the "pleasure of the palace" (II.i.199). Indeed, his eloquence vies with that of devils and vices in Tudor Moralities and Interludes. Piato plays his part with such conviction that we are given the impression that Vindice is not immune to the mad pursuit of luxury, revels and lust he denounces constantly. Neither humiliation, achieved through reminding his sister that it is very "foolish to keep honesty" when a woman is "not able to keep herself" (184-85), nor long disquisitions on the sad, lonely, secluded life that will result from her "honest" refusal of the favours of the future heir have any effect on Castiza, but the fortress of her mother's virtue proves less impregnable. The more foolish seems the policy of Vindice. Instead of being content with her brave resistance at first—"Oh fie, fie; the riches of the world cannot hire a mother to such a most unnatural task!" (84-85)—he uses his command of language and emotions with such impassioned power, and he makes money so tempting for the impoverished old woman, that, when he actually gives her many "angels" (86), asking, "can these persuade you / To forget heaven?" (121-22), she avidly rushes on the "shine" (127) of the coins, proving Lussurioso's words true. Scorning the novice who thought then that it was "mere impossible that a mother by any gifts should become a bawd to her own daughter" (I.iii.150-52), the Duke's son had declared that "nowadays" the name of bawd "does eclipse three quarters of a mother" (156-57). In the light of what follows, Vindice's answer, "Let me alone then to eclipse the fourth" (159), appears to be, not simply a precaution, but a foolish, vainglorious boast. When he sees his mother's virtue is weakening, he proves in an aside that his motives are rather cynical and misogynistic:

I e'en quake to proceed, my spirit turns edge;
I fear me she's unmother'd, yet I'll venture.
That woman is all male, whom none can enter. (II.i.110-12)

After "unmothering" Gratiana, and imprudently recounting this to Lussurioso, he takes a further foolish risk in allowing her to try to turn his sister "into use" (II. ii.99), as he realises later, when alone:

I was a villain not to be forsworn
To this our lecherous hope, the duke's son;
For lawyers, merchants, some divines, and all
Count beneficial perjury a sin small. (II.ii.100-3)

Having been encouraged by Piato's transmission of Gratiana's "promising words, ... / 'My lord shall be most welcome'" (59-60), Lussurioso, counting his "desires ... happy" and "freemen" (70), and thanking his "precious" (71) procurer with the prospect of a preferment, tells him he will visit Castiza this very night. Vindice's reaction recalls Hamlet's in the "prayer scene":

[Drawing his sword] O, shall I kill him o'th' wrong side now? No;
Sword, thou wast never a back-biter yet.
I'll pierce him to his face;
He shall die looking upon me:
Thy veins are swell'd with lust, this shall unfill 'em;
Great men were gods, if beggars could not kill 'em. (90-95)

A man of words rather than of action, he goes on vituperating about the degeneracy around him, even when his brother brings him news from the court. "You flow well, brother", says Hippolito. Vindice replies, "Puh, I'm shallow yet, / Too sparing and too modest—shall I tell thee?" (146-47). As a consequence, he has foolishly forgotten his decision to save his sister's honour, so that, when Lussurioso is on his way to Castiza's house, and wants Piato to accompany him, "I ha' no way now to cross it, but to kill him" (157), he first thinks. "Do it now!" must have been the response of the audience! But Vindice hits upon an idea to deflect his master's course: the Duke's bastard is making his father a cuckold, according to Hippolito. Lussurioso, informed by Piato, suddenly attempts to save his father's honour by killing the bastard. The two vengeful brothers gleefully anticipate this event: "Good, happy, swift; there's gunpowder i' th' Court, / Wild-fire at midnight" (171-72), exclaims Hippolito, hoping that Lussurioso's "heedless fury" (172) will turn against him. It does, indeed, being interpreted by the Duke, who was in bed with the Duchess, as an attempt to kill him (II.iii.4-17). "'Tis now good policy to be from sight"(29), decides Vindice. His revenge is delayed. His single achievement, access to the Duke's court, thanks to his malcontent disguise as Piato, has almost led him to pander his own sister. His improvised attempt to have Lussurioso's "vicious purpose ... cross'd" (30-31) is successful only to a point:

neither the Duke nor his heir is durably harmed, whereas Piato loses his job as “slave-pander” (36).

Two acts later, it is again Hippolito who offers Vindice an opportunity to serve Lussurioso, this time as his real self, since he is not known at the court, but he prefers to put on a new disguise in spite of his brother’s apprehensions:

How will you appear in fashion different,
As well as in apparel, to make all things possible?
If you be but once tripp’d, we fall forever.
It is not the least policy to be doubtful. (IV.ii.22-25)

The disguise Vindice chooses is that of a “discontented” (36) rustic man with a melancholy, “heavy sounding” (29) voice and an old-fashioned demeanour. Relishing this “quainter fallacy” (5), he snatches off his hat and bows to Lussurioso as he greets him: “How don you? God you god den” (42). The Duke’s heir wonders at this god-naming rusticity, then at a “parlous melancholy” (106) which, to illustrate the fact that it has been caused by twenty-three years in law, adorns its language with legal terms mingled with “Barbary Latin” (62). While the spectator may have enjoyed Burbage’s performance as two very different malcontents, he might also have questioned the political wisdom of the Revenger’s policy. The dramatist, however, makes his villain foolishly think of Vindice, “Has wit enough / To murder any man” (106-7), little supposing himself to be the man Vindice means to kill, having already killed his father, in a sequence to which we shall return.

Ironically, it is for killing himself as Piato that the “ill-monied” (108) malcontent is given means, Piato being a mad fool who, according to his employer, has attempted to corrupt his virgin sister and his mother. In fact, Lussurioso wants to rid himself of “a slave . . . when he knows too much” (193). “Deep policy in us makes fools of such” (192), brags the villain. Encouraged by Heaven’s thunderous response to his indignant appeal (199), Vindice decides to dress up the corpse of the old Duke in Piato’s disguise, “For that disguise being on him which I wore, / It will be thought I, which he calls the pander, did kill the Duke, and fled away in his apparel, leaving him so disguised to avoid swift pursuit” (219-22). His self-congratulation about his inventive device finds a new incentive when, in between two disguises, he and his brother frighten and scold their mother into weeping repentance and she says, in her defence, “No tongue but yours could have bewitch’d me so” (IV.iv.33). While her other son tries to interrupt the mor-

alising flow of Vindice – “O brother, you forget our business” (82) – she adds, “I’ll give you this, that one I never knew / Plead better for, and ’gainst, the devil than you” (87-88). To this he histrionically replies, “You make me proud on’t” (89). Like many revengers before and after him, he displays an excited enjoyment of role-playing and of outsmarting the powerful villains, who are made foolish by their constant pursuit of lust, debauchery and luxury. He even outdoes the sadistic machiavellism of these devilish characters. His staging of his great revenge makes his brother marvel at “the quaintness of thy malice, above thought” (III.v.109). “Quaint”, rather than pleasantly old-fashioned, suggests ingenious, odd and monstrous. Parody vies more and more with tragedy, as in many other contemporary revenge dramas, and morality is on neither side. The “malcontent type” is no longer primarily an agent of purification. He now serves theatrical horror.

Act Three, Scene Five, the climax of the play, starts with Vindice’s exulting, and probably bouncing, expression of a “joy” of such “violence” (27) he has missed telling his brother the plan he has hit upon: “o sweet, delectable, rare, happy, ravishing!” (1). Hired by the still-lecherous old Duke to procure a lady in a place safe from the eyes of the court, he has chosen the very place where the Duchess and the bastard are to consummate their incestuous adultery to “greet” him with a very quaint lady indeed. “Now nine years’ vengeance crowd into a minute!” (123), he says, just before instructing the Duke to be bold and immediately kiss the veiled and masked “country lady, a little bashful at first” (134) whom he has brought. “Give me that sin that’s rob’d in holiness” (141), says the Duke, before ravenously kissing what has become a very “ragged bone” (154). Vindice then invites Hippolito to place his torch so that the old man’s “affrighted eyeballs / May start into those hollows” (147-48) of the skull he holds, while he cries, “My teeth are eaten out” (161). Stamped upon, he is shown that the now undressed and unmasked lady is the poisoned skull of his victim, the “once betrothed wife” (167) of Vindice, himself one of the sons of another victim who “fell sick upon the infection of thy frowns / And died in sadness” (170-71). He is also told that he is made a “mighty cuckold” (179) by his bastard son, but his torture is not merely verbal, like Pietro’s. He is forced to watch, with open eyes and tongue nailed down by Hippolito’s dagger, the “damned clips” (184) of the two incestuous lovers. “Horrid laughter”, to quote Nicholas Brooke, is at its height among the audience when Vindice tells his brother:

If he but wink, not brooking the foul object,
Let our two other hands tear up his lids,

And make his eyes, like comets, shine through blood;
When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good. (202-5)

“And the revenger is mad”, the audience may think, especially when, far from having moral qualms about vengeance, Vindice invokes heaven to justify his ferocious actions: “Heaven is just, scorns are the hire of scorns” (187). His heaven is much more broadminded than that of Altofronto, who still believes in a providential order.

As we have seen, the two brothers go on gleefully cracking gruesome jokes when asked by Lussurioso to stab the drunken Piato, who is in fact the dead Duke’s body in Piato’s disguise. Their disguises and their sick jokes mingle, at the end of a play fertile in fiendish intrigues, with those of others. Borrowing the device of the final masque of revengers from Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* and *The Malcontent*, the dramatist duplicates it with another masque of revengers. Vindice has made sure that his men are wearing suits identical to those of the other masquers (V.ii.15-17). As a result, the malcontents, who think of themselves as good, are indistinguishable from the villainous characters, a resemblance which signals their having become morally alike. R. A. Foakes rightly says: “Vindice effectively undercuts his own moral stance and implicitly brushes off any concern with the possibility of life after death and punishment for sins” (p. 22). The Revenger completes his task: not only does the heir to the ducal throne die during the revels celebrating his installation, stabbed by Vindice (once more given his cue by thunder—God’s blessing for him, a conventional theatrical device for the spectator), but the other revengers, who include all the sons of the Duke and Duchess, finding their proposed victims dead, and, all aiming at power, turn their swords against each other and die.

Not satisfied with whispering in the dying Lussurioso’s ear that Vindice is his murderer (V.iii.78-79), he and Hippolito claim their responsibility for the murder of the new Duke and the fact that “’twas somewhat witty carried”, “well manag’d” and for the “good” of the next duke (97, 100, 103). Politically foolish to the end, they march to death on Vindice’s last boast:

This murder might have slept in tongueless brass
But for ourselves, and the world died an ass.
.....
We’re well, our mother turn’d, our sister true;
We die after a nest of dukes. Adieu. (113-14, 124-25)

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The two malcontents upon whom I have chosen to focus my analysis exemplify, I think, the quick evolution of the spirit of dramatic malcontentedness. They are both malcontents and revengers. They both put on malcontent disguises to hide their identities, enter or reenter the courts from which they were alienated and probe into their enemies' intentions. But the first one recovers the high position from which he had fallen without killing anyone. His malcontentedness is feigned. It is but a political tool. Although there are anger and frustration under the cunning satirical mirth he puts on as a court fool and a malcontent, he believes he can laugh the better part of his audience into reform, as Erasmus did with his *Praise of Folly*, *Adagiae* and *Colloquia*. Vindice's own malcontentedness mingles with those he adopts to serve the same purposes as Altofronto. He has, however, never been powerful. His vindictiveness is caused both by a sexual crime he has had no opportunity to avenge and an angry frustration at not being treated as he deserves. His treble malcontentedness reflects a world which has become more cynical, sadistic and desperate. While his satire still draws on old traditions—moralities, flyting and vice literature—his lurid images mirror new, deep-seated anxieties. His values are more and more ambiguous. He has, in fact, allowed affectation to become infection. Like his own, the later dramatic malcontents' options for getting preferment diminish. Flamineo, Bosola and their likes no longer believe in providential help, or in salvation. Their moral purpose becomes more and more ambivalent. Instead of feigning to render the services they are hired for, they really become spies, panders and murderers, although they are aware of being futureless even as tool-villains. Fascinated by the villainies they accomplish, they are made to serve a theatricality and sensationalism that blur all political and moral concerns. Horrid laughter has replaced mirth, and folly has become desperate madness. Stage malcontents no longer inhabit the world of comedy. For the dramatists who devise them under the Stuarts, the tragic mode has become more apposite.

The French political "Malcontents" of 1574 had some future. They gained more religious tolerance and the dissolution of the League for a while, after the Peace of Beaulieu in 1576. Some of their main leaders were preferred. The Duke of Alençon became Duke of Anjou, and Henri of Navarre began to pave his difficult way to the throne of France. On the Jacobean stage, Altofronto alone had a future. Whether the recent "Arab Spring" and "Indignants" movements

around the world have a future in the world's political arenas is still an open question. The answer will probably depend on the political foolishness of all parties. Whether "Indignants" will become important stage characters, successful or not, comic or tragic, is another open question.

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Pascale DROUET, « Madness and Mismanagement in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 139-152
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/ThetaX>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsables scientifiques

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Date de création

Avril 2013

Madness and Mismanagement in Middleton and Rowley's The Changeling

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Jacobean playwrights seem to have been fascinated by the issue of madness. As Robert Rentoul Reed puts it, there was “an abnormally extensive use of madness upon the Jacobean stage” (p. 4). If both Ophelia and Lear immediately cross our minds, Shakespeare’s contemporary playwrights take the lion’s share as regards the dramatic appropriation of another “stage”, that of the Hospital of Bethlehem, also known as Bedlam asylum. Thomas Dekker’s *The Honest Whore, Part 1* (1604), John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), John Fletcher’s *The Pilgrim* (1621) and Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s *The Changeling* (1622) have their respective inmates, whether genuinely insane or counterfeit. In contrast with *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, these plays do not explore individual characters’ disturbed psyches but rather question the way madmen are *socially*, that is, *institutionally* dealt with. The treatment of lunatics in the sixteenth century was known to be as brutal as ineffective. “Society,” as Gamini Salgado notes, “was not prepared to put up with a poor man who was insane and so he was treated in much the same way as witches, whores, vagrants and others whose conduct was likely to be socially nonconformist” (pp. 198-99). William C. Carroll observes: “Once they were inscribed in the discourse of poverty, then, the London mad could be classified as a social rather than a psy-

chological problem, and official management could turn from the untreatable ‘mind diseased’ [Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.iii.42] to the more easily managed body” (p. 107). The “official management” was that of Bedlam, whose bad reputation was, by early in the reign of James I, firmly established.

The Changeling is perhaps the best and most famous English “madhouse play”. The first record of its performance at Whitehall dates back to January 1623, but it is likely to have been performed at the Phoenix Theatre as early as 1622. Whatever the precise date, it seems significant that the play was performed *after* the 1620 “Petition of the Poor Distracted People in the House of Bedlem”, that is, after the appointment of Dr Helkiah Croke—one of James I’s private court physicians—as keeper of Bedlam in 1618. The timing suggests that Middleton and Rowley may be making topical connections between Dr Croke and their Dr Alibius.

To begin with, a brief diachronic survey of the hospital of Bethlehem from its creation in 1247 to Rowley and Middleton’s days will be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the sorry state the asylum was in and what might have been the Jacobean audience’s shared knowledge and expectations as spectators. Topically resonant allusions in the play to mismanagement will then be traced and analysed—that is, elements exposing the predominance of financial motives over medical competence and concern. These include suggestions of embezzlement, abuse of power, neglect and negation, exploitation, and so forth. Middleton and Rowley’s satirical target will finally emerge as having a broader scope. Our focus will shift from political to religious criticism, from “clinical” to human folly. But these categories may also prove permeable.

Originally, Bedlam was a priory established in 1247 for the bishop of St Mary of Bethlehem—hence its name. In 1330, it was converted into “The Hospital of St Mary of Bethlehem”, and it became more specifically a “hospital for lunatics” in 1402.¹ Things changed with the Reformation. In 1536, George Boleyn (Anne’s brother), who was the governor of the hospital, was beheaded and succeeded by Bishop Bonner, then by Sir Peter Mewtys, who was one of Henry VIII’s confidential agents. It comes as no surprise, then, that two years after his appointment, “the citizens set themselves to try and save from the greed and callousness of the king some of the London hospitals, of which Bethlehem was one” (O’Donoghue, p. 110). In 1538, the Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Gresham, petitioned the King to

1 Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “Bedlam”.

regard favourably the religious houses that had been founded “only for the relief and comfort of poor and impotent people unable to help themselves” (cited O’Donoghue, p. 111). As O’Donoghue observes, in his *Story of Bethlehem Hospital*, the Mayor carefully calculated his appeal to Henry VIII, being both diplomatic and persistent:

They were not founded for the maintenance of canons, priests, and monks to live in pleasure, nothing regarding the miserable people lying in every street, offending every clean person passing by their filthy and nasty savours. (cited O’Donoghue, p. 111)

It took no less than eight years for Henry VIII to agree, just before his death in 1546, to grant Bethlehem to the City of London, provided the City would pay for maintenance and restoration work. From 1547 to 1556, the hospital for lunatics was administered by the court of aldermen; in late 1556, it was transferred to the governors of Christ’s Hospital; in 1557, it was placed under the management of Bridewell, the London house of correction whose bad reputation would also be firmly established. Funding priority never seems to have been given to Bethlehem; as O’Donoghue puts it, “Bethlehem has always been the Cinderella among her disdainful sister hospitals” (p. 128).

Notorious mismanagement of Bedlam was brought to light in James I’s reign. An inquiry held at Guildhall in 1618 revealed that Thomas Jenner, the keeper of the hospital, was “unskilful in the practice of medicine” and possibly “guilty of harshness and neglect towards his patients” (O’Donoghue, p. 156). He was consequently dismissed, in spite of protests and appeals. His successor could have been deemed to be different at first glance. Dr Helkiah Crooke had been appointed physician to James I in 1604 and had written a book on anatomy entitled *Mikrokosmographia*, so he appeared worthy of trust when the hospital was placed under his direction in 1619. As Dr Crooke intended to reform the hospital, he immediately wrote a petition to James I. He urged that Bedlam should immediately be freed from the supervision of Bridewell, with the allegation that the union of Bedlam and Bridewell had been a disaster since 1557 (O’Donoghue, p. 158). The governors of Bridewell, who were also responsible for Bedlam, seem indeed to have been unconcerned with asylum matters. According to Patricia Allderidge, Dr Crooke undoubtedly “laid his finger with singular precision on both the cause and the symptom of Bethlem’s trouble over the preceding 100 years” (p. 156).

The king, however, interpreted Crooke's demand as a threat to the jurisdiction that he claimed over Bedlam and rejected it. Ken Jackson points out that "by 1622 the Crown was asserting its control over all charitable practices" (p. 204). As a result, Jackson goes on to say, "the exchange between the Court of Aldermen and James was a very real struggle between social actors to determine the nature and government of a charity" (p. 213). For O'Donoghue, the king's rejection might explain why Dr Crooke lost interest in the hospital and let it go—until he was forced to defend himself against the City's charges of corruption. For in 1620, "the Petition of the Poor Distracted People in the House of Bedlem" pointed to serious abuses; in 1622, Dr Crooke's servants were charged with "showing unnecessary harshness towards a patient;"² in 1625, Dr Crooke's misdemeanours were investigated, and he was finally dismissed in 1634, after Charles I's investigating commissions' reports proved his mismanagement to be quite beyond the pale.

Donald Lupton's depiction of Bedlam in 1632, therefore, in *London and the Countrey Carbonadoed and Quartred into Severall Characters*—a book of characters illustrating the habits and manners of Englishmen from the reign of James I—comes as no surprise:

It seemes strange that any one should recover here, the cryings, screechings, roarings, brawlings, shakings of chaines, swearings, frettings, chaffings, are so many, so hideous, so great, that they are more able to drive a man that hath his witts, rather out of them, then to helpe one that never had them, or hath lost them, to find them again. (p. 75)

Lupton questions nothing less than his contemporaries' ability either to manage or to cure madness. But let us now turn to the charges of mismanagement against Dr Crooke and see how they may have inspired Middleton and Rowley for their dramatic portrait of Dr Alibius.

The 1632 report on the hospital and that of 1633 on the keeper are crystal-clear. In *The Changeling*, we are shown Dr Alibius' cupidity. Alibius is not merely a greedy doctor; he is actually after his patients' inheritances. The patients' relatives are blindly ready to pay him handsomely so that their fools may have "good attendance and sweet lodging" (I.ii.116).³ What matters for Dr Alibius is that his patients come from a rich family and stand to be heirs to its fortune.

2 It is to be regretted that, as O'Donoghue informs us (p. 160), no copy of this pamphlet or broadsheet is now known to exist.

3 All quotations from *The Changeling* are taken from the New Revels edition of Bawcutt.

Hence, his indelicate question, “is there not one incurable fool / That might be begg’d? (IV iii.209-10)—meaning that he is seeking appointment as guardian in order to enjoy his patient’s estate. In the Caroline reports, what is exposed is no less than embezzlement: “It was proved by the commissioners of 1632 and 1633 . . . that legacies, fees from patients’ friends, and other money went without reference to the steward’s bills into the bulging pockets of Dr Crooke” (O’Donoghue, p. 167). The commissioners also found out that Dr Crooke’s steward appropriated the regular supply of food and drink put at the disposal of the hospital by the mayor and sheriffs. As O’Donoghue recapitulates the situation, “the steward and his wife—left with little but the bones by Dr Crooke—proceeded to take the choicest bits for themselves and to sell the remainders, which had cost them nothing, to their helpless prisoners at six times its value” (p. 168). In the play, Lollo is innocent of such practices, but the fools’ and madmen’s disjointed cries nonetheless suggest that they are hungry and undernourished: “the bread’s too little” (I.ii.195), “[g]ive her more onion” (197), “her permasant, her permasant!” (202-3). Their cries may echo the First Madman’s voice of starvation in *The Honest Whore, Part 1*: “I am starved, and have had no meat by this light, ever since the great flood”; “look you, here are my guts: these are my ribs—you may look through my ribs—see how my guts come out! These are my red guts, my very guts, oh, oh!” (Dekker, IV.ii [p. 181]).

It is not clear whether the lunatics are underfed in *The Changeling*, but their abnormal behaviours—which hunger may accentuate, as Piero Camporesi makes us aware⁴—are clearly exploited with a lucrative end in view. With Lollo’s help, Dr Alibius will exhibit “A mixture of our madmen and our fools” (III.iii.256) at the wedding-entertainment given by Vermandero. He is paid to organize “[o]nly an unexpected passage over, / To make a frightful pleasure” (III.iii.259-60), but he has a plan to get even more money out of his inmates. He tells Lollo:

could we so act it,
To teach it in a wild *distracted measure*,
Though out of form and figure, breaking time’s head,
It were not matter, ’twould be *heal’d* again

4 See Camporesi, p. 125:

The most effective and upsetting drug, bitterest and most ferocious, has always been hunger, creator of unfathomable disturbances of mind and imagination. Further lifelike and convincing dreams grew out of this forced hallucination, compensating for the everyday poverty.

In one age or other, if not in this:
This, this, Lollo, there's a good reward begun,
And will beget a bounty, be it known. (III.iii.261-67, my emphasis)

As if to accentuate the doctor's cynicism, the verb "heal" is symptomatic of a strategy of postponement and, even more significantly, misapplied: what might be "healed" in the future is not the distraction of his patients but the "distracted measure" of the "morris" (IV.iii.65) dance. His wife Isabella's ironic reaction articulates a criticism of such practices: "Y'have a fine trade on't, / Madmen and fools are a staple commodity" (III.iii.275-76). But what matters for Dr Alibius is "[b]y madmen and by fools" to "thrive" (279). Madmen are thereby reduced to "sights" such as the "bull with five legs" in *Bartholomew Fair* (Jonson, III.vi.4, 7)—that is, made profitable. As Carroll puts it, "the 'Bedlam poor' are just another form of popular entertainment, culturally equivalent to various urban curiosities, or to such theatricalized spectacles as bear-baiting or 'stage plays'" (p. 100). At Bedlam, Salgado explains,

both the harmless and the violent were available for important visitors to amuse themselves with. The general public had to pay for admission. . . . The entertainment regularly provided included the beating of the inmates with wire whips and the opportunity to harass those who were chained from a safe distance. (p. 202)

In *The Changeling*, Isabella ironically tells Lollo, "Afford me then the pleasure of your Bedlam" (III.iii.21). Alibius' man produces one of the fools, a "gentle nigget" (102), and reassures her: "you may play with him, as safely with him as with his bauble" (102-3). Far from being considered as an object of medical study, deficiency in understanding is reduced to a form of entertainment, even as it provides a useful satirical vehicle (another form of instrumentalization). "I'll undertake to wind him up to the wit of a constable" (I.ii.125-26), says Lollo mockingly about one of his newly acquired patients. All in all, Middleton and Rowley's play probably reflected the fact that "the show of Bethlem . . . had come under criticism for emphasizing its 'theater' rather than its charity" (Jackson, p. 204).

Charity is outshone by entertainment, and so is medical care. Among Dr Crooke's numerous misdemeanours was the fact that he "only appeared at the hospital on quarter days" (O'Donoghue, p. 160). For O'Donoghue, this invites a comparison with another doctor, Timothy Bright, the author of *A Treatise of Melancholy* (1586):

while he [Bright] was writing his book, he was neglecting his patients at St Bartholomew's, from which he was practically dismissed. Is Dr Crooke another example of the physician who sacrifices the responsibilities of his office and salary to more congenial pursuits and society? (p. 164)

In *The Changeling*, Dr Alibius too is notoriously absent from his asylum. His man laments: "Would my master were come home! I am not able to govern both these wards together" (III.iii.166-68). It is clear from the beginning of the play that the doctor neither "governs" his madhouse nor "cures" his fools and madmen, although he says he does: "I do profess the cure of either sort: / My trade, my living 'tis, I thrive by it" (I.ii.49-50). It is significant that the economic lexicon (instead of the medical one) should be predominant in his speech.

Infantilizing and whipping are resorted to by way of curing. Both madmen and fools are "under the whip" (I.ii.45), which is also termed "the wire" (201) and, quite tellingly, "poison" (III.iii.86). As Michel Foucault observes, in *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, "la folie relève, moins que jamais, de la médecine; elle ne peut pas appartenir davantage au domaine de la correction. Animalité déchaînée, on ne peut la maîtriser que par le dressage et l'abêtissement" (p. 200). In the play, the "real" fools and madmen are closely associated with the animal kingdom: "Sometimes they imitate the beasts and birds, / Singing, or howling, braying, barking" (III.iii.196-97). To take up Foucault's terms, "la folie emprunte son visage au masque de la bête" (p. 197). So what may have shocked Middleton and Rowley and their audience was, perhaps, not so much the way madness was contained and not cured as the neglect of basic human care combined with lucrative exhibition, the absence of both decency and charity, the dying of genuine charitable practices.

In *Separate Theaters*, Jackson reminds us: "Early modern Europe relied primarily on religion, and religious discourse to explain, justify, and manage its charitable practices" (p. 206). This being acknowledged, he argues that *The Changeling* is Middleton and Rowley's answer to *The Pilgrim*, to Fletcher's "valorization of Catholic good works" (p. 213). Rowley and Middleton, conversely, expose the mismanagement of the private hospital, that is, "the potential for perversion in the holy motivation for charity" (p. 223), the "corrupt uses that relied on the Catholic notion of *caritas*" (p. 222). In *The Changeling*, Jackson notes, "Antonio and Franciscus have come to the madhouse previously as visitors . . . masking cupiditas for Isabella with *caritas* for the mad" (p. 123).

What is Dr Alibius' main preoccupation, not to say obsession? That his man should watch his wife rather than his inmates, for fear she should cuckold him with "the daily visitants, that come to see / My brainsick patients" (I.ii.52-53). This is why he (ambiguously) tells Lollio: "Here I do say must thy employment be, / To watch her treadings, and in my absence / Supply my place" (37-40). His fantasies turn the asylum into a stage propitious for a vaudeville. The stakes are domestic, not medical; the asylum administration is perverted by the doctor's private obsession. Both the institution and its hypocritical visitors are exposed. It seems that what may be questioned, beyond the religious implications, is the change from individual charity to institutionalized charity, the emergence of a new sensitiveness towards madness that is no longer religious but social. Antonio's and Franciscus' counterfeit attitudes are part of a larger scheme, that of the hypocrisy of the institution, that is, of those in charge of it. Madness is exhibited, but what is exposed is mismanagement and misdemeanour.

In *The Changeling*, we are shown lunatics who "act their fancies in any shapes / Suiting their present thoughts" (III.iii.193-94). Lunacy is no prerequisite for that. The play encompasses the various dictionary meanings of the term "folly".⁵ Quite obviously, "madness, insanity, mania (French folie)", on the one hand, and "deficiency in understanding, want of good sense, weakness or derangement of mind", on the other hand, are epitomized by Alibius' madmen and fools. But "folly", in the sense of "a foolish action, error, idea, practice; a ridiculous thing, an absurdity", is the lot of all the foolish suitors, ranging from Antonio and Franciscus to Alonzo de Piracquo and Alsemero—not to mention De Flores. They love blindly. Alsemero finally realizes that Beatrice is "all deform'd" (V.iii.77). In Tomazo's view, his brother Alonzo is the very embodiment of "love's tame madness" (II.i.154). This acceptance of folly can be related to that of "lewdness, wantonness"; over the whole play, we are presented with what Foucault terms "la danse insensée des vies immorales" (p. 180). Finally, when the focus is on the main plot, folly comes to signify "wickedness, evil, mischief, harm". In this regard, the most evil "fools" in the play are Beatrice and De Flores, those whom Alsemero calls "twins of mischief" (V.iii.142). This exposes the permeability of categories, both within the subplot and in its relation to the main plot.

5 The definitions which follow are from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "folly": 4: "madness, insanity, mania (French folie)"; 1.a: "deficiency in understanding, want of good sense, weakness or derangement of mind"; 1.c: "a foolish action, error, idea, practice; a ridiculous thing, an absurdity"; 3.a: "lewdness, wantonness"; 2.A: "wickedness, evil, mischief, harm".

In Dr Alibius' madhouse, the patients are divided into "two sorts of people" (I.2.44), the fools and the madmen: "the one has not enough wit to be knaves, and the other not knavery enough to be fools" (I.ii.45-47). If the inmates of Vermandero's castle are taken into account, a third sort can be added: those who have knavery enough to be fools. It is not clear which sort is more harmful to society. For Susan Neal Mayberry,

The playwrights alternate their tales dramatizing a society's gradual disintegration with scenes depicting the antics of the inmates of an asylum. We are drawn into a nightmare where people who exhibit unconventional but relatively harmless behaviours are deemed insane while those who deliberately lie, deceive, commit adultery and murder but maintain a conventional appearance are not. The very structure of the drama asks us to question exactly who belongs to the madhouse. (p. 22)

The watertightness of reassuring and simplifying categories is questioned.

The Changeling is a play inviting reflection on the notions of change and exchange; it is about circulation and contamination, about porosity. In this respect, the very title is programmatic: the play offers various interpretations of who the "changeling" might be, apart from Antonio, who is labelled as such in the list of *dramatis personae*. As N. W. Bawcutt comments, the term "changeling" can designate both "the ugly or mentally deficient child which the fairies were supposed to leave in place of a normal child which they stole" and "the normal, stolen child" (Bawcutt, ed., p. 3, n. on the Title). So the title introduces the notion of reversibility. "Changeling" can also refer, as Bawcutt goes on to point out, to "an inferior substitute, a waverer or unreliable person, and an inconstant woman". The end of the play puts the emphasis on reversibility and mutability: the word "change", whether noun or verb, is uttered no less than nine times within the final twenty-four lines. The surviving characters learn lessons from the folly of human passions and from their own mistakes—whether mismanagement or misinterpretation; the playwrights suggest that we should beware of appearances and of what *lies* behind supposedly watertight categories. The play was adapted in Paris in 2002 with an interesting new title that had a witty twist in its spelling: *Vice(s), Versa*.⁶ This very convincingly connected the notions of vice and reversibility.

6 *Vice(s), Versa / The Changeling*, trans. Frédéric Jessua, dir. Frédéric Ozier, Acte6 Compagny, Sudden Théâtre, Paris, 2002.

Two further remarks may be made. First, although the asylum scenes of the subplot expose Dr Alibius' mismanagement, they are absolutely comic—at least they were in *Vice(s)*, *Versa*—and provide some successful comic relief. Second, at the end of the play, Dr Alibius' future “transformation” (V.iii.210) concerns only the domestic sphere: “I see all apparent, wife, and will change now / Into a better husband, and never keep / Scholars that shall be wiser than myself” (213-15). Exeunt his fools and madmen. Dr Alibius comes to realize that he neglected his wife, yet it never dawns upon him that he might have neglected his patients too. This raises the question of what the playwrights may have had in mind.

Dr Alibius' madhouse is, in fact, a stage for counterfeit lunatics, namely Antonio and Franciscus, and later on Isabella, when she disguises herself as a madwoman to make fun of Antonio and catch him out at his own game. The “genuine” fools and madmen are relegated to the background: they are mainly *heard*, and when they are *seen*, or rather *caught a glimpse of*, they are located “above” (III.iii.190 SD), that is, in the distance, as if “to make a frightful pleasure, that is all” (260). What Middleton and Rowley disclose about lunacy in the asylum scenes may have points in common with what Dr Alibius is asked to show for the wedding entertainment: in both cases, it seems that madness is exhibited just long enough to create a spectacular effect, no more, no less. But whereas Dr Alibius exploits “genuine” fools and madmen for what Lollo miscalls his “masque” (IV.iii.201) — miscalles because it is rather an anti-masque—the playwrights use counterfeit madness and appeal to actors to create dramatic irony and comic misunderstanding, to introduce a metatheatrical dimension to their play and leave room for body language and improvisation. It might be surmised that the power and subtlety of the play lay in the contrasted way “genuine” lunatics and counterfeit ones were impersonated—the latter to elicit laughter from the audience, the former, charity. The inmates' brief appearance in the asylum, “some as birds, others as beasts” (III.iii.190 SD), and their rehearsal of the morris dance there are key moments. If they invited from spectators the same comment as Isabella's, that is, “Alack, alack, 'tis too full of pity / To be laugh'd at” (III.iii.43-44), they would reconcile the notions of theatricality and charity that the Bedlam malpractices and lure of gain had tended to dissociate.

Madness is, no doubt, a remarkable dramatic tool. Yet there may be more to the subplot than comic relief; lunatics may create more than spectacular effects. The playwrights may have been suggesting that madness, in spite of its senseless micro-syntax, is part of society's macro-syntax. For Jackson, the hospi-

tal of Bethlehem was “an authentic, non-representational ‘theater’ that more fully incorporated madness in the world of reason” (p. 245). It might be suggested that the other theatre, the representational one, with plays like *The Changeling*, helped defer, on the level of social consciousness, what Foucault calls “le grand renfermement” (p. 67)—the Great Confinement.

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Claire BARDELMANN, « Valerius' Musical Folly and the Untuning of Politics
in Thomas Heywood's Tragedy *The Rape of Lucrece* »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 153-170
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/Theta10>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsables scientifiques

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Date de création

Avril 2013

Valerius' Musical Folly and the Untuning of Politics in Thomas Heywood's Tragedy The Rape of Lucrece

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This paper assesses the relationship between the politics of imbalance, the folly tradition and the convention of *musica speculativa* in Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* (1607). The play is based on Livy's account of the events leading up to the fall of Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome, in 509 B.C.E. (Books I, XLVI-XLVIII, LIII-LIV, LVI-LX). Heywood is very faithful to his classical source, as was noted by the play's nineteenth-century editor:

The Rape of Lucrece ... is nothing but the narrative of Livy divided into tableaux. ... It contains the whole story of Tullia's ambition and the death of Servius, the journey of Brutus to Delphi, the fulfilment of the oracle, the betrayal of Gabii, the camp at Ardea, the crime of Tarquin, the rising of the Roman nobles, the war with Porsena, and the stories of Horatius and Scevola. (Heywood, ed. Verity, p. xxiii)

The only major additions made by Heywood are two characters, the Clown and a courtier, Valerius, who is one of the main opponents of Tarquin and whose musical folly becomes the main vehicle for political criticism in the play. After he is banished from Tarquin's court, he undergoes a swift metamorphosis from courtier to jester, which is paralleled by a shift from the public to the private sphere and expressed through his songs. The musical character of this folly is thrown into relief by

the fact that, for most of the play, Valerius expresses himself only in song, which accounts for the fact that the play has an unusually high number of songs—particularly for a tragedy. Valerius sings all nineteen songs and ballads of the play, which indicates the extent of the political criticism conveyed by his music. Valerius’ meaningful music also underpins the play’s thematic economies because of its structural function: as the songs are interlocked with the politics of the body, the courtier’s critical music also links the public and private sides of the tragedy.

Musical harmony is a conventional means of political representation in *The Rape of Lucrece*.¹ It relies on the political version of the theory of musical harmony, which is so ubiquitous in the Renaissance as to be commonplace—*musica speculativa* being firmly tied to political philosophy.² Music, in its political guise, is equated with harmony or proportion, the mathematical ratios that describe the consonant intervals on the musical scale, while any other aspects of music, such as dissonance, are relegated to symbols of disorder. The political implications of musical harmony are particularly explicit in the books which address the education of courtiers like Valerius.³ Indeed, musical orthodoxy in a courtier signifies his symbolic adhesion to Neoplatonic models of musical harmony, and thus his political ability and moral righteousness. Sir Thomas Elyot describes musical education as a privileged “way to virtue” (*The Boke Named the Governor*, cited in Vale, p. 88), and in Lodowick Bryskett’s *A Discourse of Civil Life*, music and dancing are paths to moral virtue and balance (“measure”) between mind and body:⁴

And because the motions of the body, and the affections of the minde must have their measure and their rule, and the one and the other convenient exercise and moderate rest. . . . Touching the body . . . they did devise to strengthen and harden it with convenient and tem-

1 On allegorical readings of music in early modern drama, see Ortiz, pp. 144-157 (“Politicizing Harmony”).

2 This is clear, for example, from Barnabe Barnes’s preface to his treatise of political philosophy, *Four bookes of offices enabling privat persons for the speciall services of all good princes and policies* (1606); see pp. 1-3. Barnes develops a musical metaphor based on the analogy between two of the Boethian categories of music, *musica mundana* and *musica practica*, to describe the four “offices” he is to develop in the treatise (temperance, prudence, justice and fortitude) as “the harmonious consent of vertues in the State” (p. 3) and as implemental to the cohesion of the body politic.

3 See Collington, pp. 281-312.

4 The same idea prevails in Richard Mulcaster’s *Elementarie* (1582):

I saie therefor that these five principles, reading, writing, drawing, singing, and playing . . . be the onelie artificiall means to make a minde capable of all the best qualities, which are to be engraffed in the minde, tho to be executed in the bodie: which best qualities be two, vertew for behaviour, and knowledge for cunning. (p. 27)

perate exercises: as the play at ball, leaping, running, dancing. . . . For the minde, they thought best to stay and settle it with the harmonie of Musike. . . . By joyning both these faculties together in one, they sought to make a noble temper. (Bryskett, pp. 106-7)

This idea of musical virtue underpins the disjunction in the tragedy between Valerius' music and political realities. The gap is underlined from Act One, as attention is drawn, even prior to Valerius' metamorphosis, to the estrangement of the management of the state from the values of virtue and order associated with music. The musical folly which signals his degradation from courtier to jester is heralded by the musical rhetoric in the courtiers' bitter commentaries on their political uselessness. The very fact that Valerius becomes a musical character after he is banished from Tarquin's court provides an appropriate commentary on political disintegration, for his moral virtues, of which musical skills are a symbol, are not serviceable any more. Collatine says that Valerius' "sweet harmonious tongue" (since the music of its wisdom is now unwanted) has turned "harsh" (II.i [p. 346]), and Lucretius, one of the former counsellors of the king, in summing up this uselessness, employs the same image:

we are but mutes,
And fellows of no parts, viols unstrung,
Our notes too harsh to strike in Princes ears. (II.i [p. 345])

The metaphors of the "unstrung" or untuned instruments are among the most common interpretations of musical dissonance as political disharmony, as John Hollander underlines in *The Untuning of the Sky*: "the 'disordered string' is an emblem of the unrul'd, unruly state" (p. 148).⁵ Lucretius, moreover, mentions a viol—a significant choice, perhaps, because the viol was often used as a "part" in a consort rather than as a solo instrument:⁶ Lucretius thus evokes the tyrant's will to rule alone and unchecked, without a "consort" (a council) to hinder him.

5 The metaphor is commonplace in emblem books (for instance, Alciat's *Foedera*), which warn against the difficulty of keeping the instrument—the harmony of the state—in tune), and in political philosophy, where it is widely used as a commentary on political disintegration, as in John Stubbes's pamphlet, *The discouerie of a gaping gulf* (1579), published on the occasion of the proposed marriage of Elizabeth I with the Duke of Anjou, in which Stubbes uses the metaphor of the "strings out of tune" (p. 6).

6 As the musical images of political upheaval and private transgression are interwoven in the tragedy, the mention of the viol may also anticipate the rape of Lucrece. The viol was commonly used as a sexual metaphor and often linked with sexual transgression (as in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, I.i.81-85); see Ungerer, p. 80.

The nature of Valerius' songs highlights this musical assessment of Tarquin's "untuned" state. The idea of moral and political degeneracy is signified by the underlying opposition of the Boethian categories of *musica practica* and *musica mundana* in Valerius' music and songs.⁷ Valerius has become "a mere ballater": his music is popular and belongs to the lowest kind of *musica practica*; it is utterly inconsistent with the higher kind of music associated with political and moral virtues. The yoking together of musical and political dissonance, which Valerius' music epitomises, is based on this opposition. Valerius' "harmonious tongue" now sounds "harsh" in the ears of the tyrannous prince:

Collatine.

Note that: Valerius hath given up the court,
 And weaned himself from the king's consistory,
 In which his harmonious tongue grew harsh.
 Whether it be that discontent, . . .
 I know not, but now he's all musical.
 Unto the council chamber he goes singing,
 And whilst the King his wilful edicts makes,
 In which none's tongue is powerful save the king's,
 He's in a corner, relishing strange airs.
 Conclusively, he's from a toward hopeful gentleman,
 Transhaped to a mere ballater. (II.i [p. 346])

As Collatine makes clear, Valerius has also become melancholy. His metamorphosis into a "ballater" singing "strange airs" and crouching in a corner certainly answers the descriptions of musical melancholy,⁸ either genuine or feigned, which are commonplace in early modern drama. Music is indeed the privileged expression of an "untuned" mind, and, in drama, it often links the expression of disorder in the microcosm with major disorders in the body politic; thus does the musical melancholy of Shakespeare's Richard II express his personal grief as well as his political disintegration.⁹ In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the ambivalent power of music qualifies as the backdrop to Valerius' music, since music may express, aggravate or alleviate melancholy, depending on the musi-

7 For a summary of Boethius' codification of this doctrine, see Winn, pp. 32-34. On the dichotomy between *musica mundana* and *musica practica* as exposed in Franchino Gafforius' *Theorica Musicae* (1492) and *Practica Musicae sive Musicae actiones* (1496), see Bonicatti, pp. 19-20.

8 See Gouk, pp. 173-94.

9 See Williams, pp. 472-85, and Scott, pp. 110-16.

cal ethos used.¹⁰ Music is, according to Robert Burton, “mentis medicina moestae, a roaring-meg against melancholy, to rear and revive the languishing soul” (Burton, II: 227), and in *The Rape of Lucrece* the courtiers and Valerius certainly appeal to music’s restorative abilities, since the courtiers claim to use music as a foil to worry and sadness:

Collatine.

By my consent let’s all wear out our hours
In harmless sports: hawk, hunt, game, sing, drink, dance.
So shall we seem offenceless and live safe.

.

Brutus. I am of Collatine’s mind now. Valerius, sing us a bawdy song, and make’s merry: nay, it shall be so. (II.iii [p. 360])

However, as Collatine underlines, the courtiers do not really seek solace in music. Musical entertainment is merely the mask of folly in the tragedy, since music, drinking and sports actually serve to screen the courtiers’ conspiracy against the tyrant. Thus, it is in line with folly traditions¹¹ that Valerius’ songs illustrate music’s restorative abilities. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, this cathartic power stems from the use of satire, created by the ironic gap between the speculative assumptions which form the background to the therapeutic power of music and the low, degraded music of Valerius’ songs. For the musical conventions of folly encompass the ancient discrepancy between the Boethian categories of *musica mundana* and *musica practica*, from which stems the hierarchy of music instruments and of certain musical forms:

Dans la période de transition entre l’Ars Nova de la fin du xiv^e et la polyphonie de la première moitié du xv^e siècle, naît le concept de déraison attribué à un certain niveau de

10 See Bright, pp. 247-48:

Next to visible things, the audible object most frighteth the melancholicke person, especially besides then unpleasantnesse, if it carrieth also signification of terror: and here as pleasant pictures, and lively colours delight the melancholicke eye, and in their measure satisfie the heart, so not onelie cheerfull musicke in a generalitie, but such of that kinde as most rejoyceth is to be sounded in the melancholicke eare: of which kinde for the most part is such as carrieth an odde measure, and easie to be discerned, except the melancholicke have skill in musicke, and require a deeper harmonie. That contrarilie, which is solemne, and still: as dumpes, and fancies, and sette musicke, are hurtfull in this case, and serve rather for a disordered rage, and intemperate mirth, to reclaime within mediocritie, then to allowe the spirites, to stirre the blood, and to attenuate the humours, which is (if the harmony be wisely applyed) effectually wrought by musicke.

11 See Bonicatti, p. 22.

la culture musicale—autrement dit de l'exécution et donc aussi du rôle professionnel des musiciens. ... cette coupure reflète la grande différence de niveau culturel entre la théorisation sur la doctrine du monde classique, et la *Practica*, c'est-à-dire la composition et l'exécution de musiques dans la réalité vivante de l'époque. (Bonicatti, p. 19)

Similarly, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, the ethos and lyrics of the songs are attuned to the musical conventions of folly, as Valerius carries out his political criticism through the use of riddling, bawdy and ironical songs, the genre and subject of which are chosen for this purpose. The songs are mainly about drink, sports and women: there are eight love songs, a drinking song,¹² a song about eating and drinking habits around Europe, and a song about angling. All the songs are light music and use popular musical forms: they include a catch, a drinking song, ballads—all low-status music listed as “Country entertainments” or “City Rounds” in Thomas Ravenscroft’s popular song book, *Pammelia: Deut[er]omelia Melismata* (1609, 1611). It is quite possible that such an abundance of popular music was intended to suit the taste of Heywood’s citizen audience,¹³ which liked domestic drama better than classical subjects (Gurr, p. 152). Furthermore, the excessive, transgressive quality of many of the songs belongs to the folly tradition, as do the opacity of language and, as will be seen in the analysis of songs about women, a preoccupation with physicality.¹⁴ The lyrics of the songs illustrate the logic of linguistic reversal and upheaval associated with festival manifestations of folly:

The purpose of incongruous word associations, ambiguities ... is ... to introduce into discourse supposedly of a reasonable and seemingly nature, suggestions of revolt and other disruptive proclivities. (Laroque, p. 43)

The structural positioning of the songs also underlines the interlocking of musical folly and the criticism of Tarquin’s dysfunctional government. Throughout the tragedy, they are carefully matched to the major events of the plot, so as to form an ironical commentary, as in the song, “I’d think myself as proud in shackles”. The song merely transposes the courtiers’ predicament,

12 “The gentry to the King’s head”. Music for this song by John Wilson is described in Cutts, pp. 384–87.

13 *The Rape of Lucrece* was performed in 1607 or 1608 by Queen Anne’s company at the Red Bull (Heywood was the leading playwright of this theatre), then twice in the following decades, in 1628 and 1639, by Queen Henrietta’s company and Beeston’s Boys, respectively, both times at the Cockpit.

14 This preoccupation with physicality is reflected, as Laroque points out, in “the mutual interactions between the sphere of speech and that encompassing physicality” (p. 44).

since it tells the tale of a prisoner who has borne much tormenting but never lost hope. At this point in the play, the courtiers can glimpse the final victory, to which Horatius alludes and which is also reflected in the hopeful end of the song:

Horatius.
... if some prodigy have chanced,
That may beget revenge, I'll cease to chafe,
Vex, martyr, grieve, torture, torment myself,
And tune my humour to strange strains of mirth.
.
I know thou hast some news that will create me
Merry and musical for I would laugh,
Be new transhaped. I prithee sing, Valerius,
That I may air with thee.
Valerius. [*Sings.*] —
I'd think myself as proud in shackles
As doth the ship in all her tackles;
The wise man boasts no more his brains,
Than I'd insult in gyves and chains. (IV.vi [p. 400])

Yet, most often, the political criticism is more covert. Two of the songs of Act Two, “Let humour change and spare not” (II.i [p. 347]) and “Lament, ladies lament!” (II.i [p. 348]), mention Tarquin’s wrongdoings, specifically his treatment of Servius, quite clearly—clearly but not openly: Valerius, the other characters say, is allowed to be so outspoken only because his folly passes for madness.

The obliqueness of criticism in Valerius’ folly is also heightened by more devious linguistic strategies, such as the use of riddling in his song about angling in Act Two, Scene Five, which ends on an enigmatic, but threatening, note: “No fish is stirring / Yet something we have caught” (p. 367). Here fishing is used as a metaphor, with the nets hidden in the water referring to the conspirators in hiding, who bide their time until they succeed. The song also contributes to a more subtle scheme to convey political criticism: the angler is the embodiment of frustration. Indeed, Valerius’ songs, taken as a whole, are very effective in contrasting the quick pace of the tragic plot, which focuses on Tarquin, with the long days of waiting which the conspirators have to put with before they can take action. The songs take up considerable stage time, at least until Act Five; furthermore, nearly all the songs are in the form of long lists, a technique which in the context of the play conveys very powerfully the idea of useless time—all the more so because the subjects of the songs are mostly trivial. There is a blazon in praise of Lucrece

(“On two white columns” [IV.vi (p. 397)]), a description of fashions (“The Spaniard loves his ancient slop” [III.v (p. 383)]), a list of London taverns (“The gentry to the King’s Head” [II.v (p. 365)]), two songs listing the physical perfections of women (“Pompey, I will show thee” [II.v (p. 368)] and “Shall I woo the lovely Molly?” [II.iii (p. 361)]), and a list of wood birds (“Pack, clouds, away” [IV.vi (p. 396)]).

Valerius illustrates the satirical function of fools, since, as J. A. B. Somerset remarks, “the more violent or disordered are their worlds, the more folly is tinged with bitterness and disgust” (p. 81). In *The Rape of Lucrece*, musical satire, with its indirections and ambivalences, becomes a useful tool for a character with dissident ideas and exposes Tarquin’s despotic immoderation and lack of political acumen, as well as the way in which the body politic is increasingly divided into antipathetic factions. Valerius’ music becomes the breeding ground of rebellion in the play, the coded language of revolt playing on the intrinsic ambivalence of the fool and the persuasive value of his falsely jocular mood.

This subversive mockery is not aimed only at undermining authority: the rape of Lucrece is also drawn into Valerius’ satirical gaze, as Valerius’ musical folly targets the private sphere of the tragedy, in a parallel which is underpinned by the early modern idea of the continuity between the unity of the state and the unity of marriage, and of the continuity between the violation of the body (in particular the feminine body) and the disruption of political order.¹⁵ In *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece’s defiled body echoes the desecration of the body politic, and Valerius’ music of folly parallels the dramatic crescendo leading from the death of the king to the death of Lucrece.

Many of the songs of the play are about women, and especially about the feminine body. The use of the bawdy in many of these songs displays the way in which music is used within the frame of folly traditions. The crude lyrics of many of the songs, their cheerfully obscene laughter, link them with the conventional verbal obscenities of the Fool and “his associations with hyper-sexuality” (Laroque, p. 126). This obsession with physicality, which holds pride of place in folly traditions, also reinforces the implicit opposition between the disembodied

15 The cultural status of the feminine body was at the core of the economies of marriage and power. Tennenhouse particularly underlines the questioning of political and patriarchal hierarchies by the matrimonial status of the feminine body and by feminine authority (Tennenhouse, pp. 40-42), and Dusinger discusses the controversial parallel between the idea of marriage (between man and wife and between king and crown) as a mystical union (Dusinger, pp. 101-2).

music of the spheres and the bodily traces of music. Another effect is to highlight the contrast between Lucrece's virtue and Tarquin's bestiality.

This interlocking of music and folly traditions bolsters the function of these songs, which is also to foster dramatic irony in the private as well as in the political sphere, since all the love songs in the play are linked to the central figure of Lucrece. Thus the song, "Shall I woo the lovely Molly?" [II.iii (p. 361)], appears at surface level an innocuous list of the pretty maids and women in Rome. But, at the end of the song, Brutus proposes to add a few other names to the list of chaste and unchaste women, including chaste Lucrece. The song is also part of the choric presentation of Lucrece, who makes her first appearance on stage only in Act Two, Scene Four, in a domestic scene where she typically delivers a lecture on good husbandry to her servants. A second choric scene (III. iv) underlines her chastity again, and again through music—not in a song, however, but through a reference to dancing in Collatine's encomium of Lucrece's wifely virtues:

See, lords, thus Lucrece revels with her maids:
Instead of riot, quaffing, and the practice
Of high lavoltoes to the ravishing sound
Of chambring music, she, like a good huswife,
Is teaching of her servants sundry chares. (pp. 378-79)

Lucrece does not perform an unchaste dance like the volta, as some other women do in the absence of their husbands. (The volta was an energetic dance with high leaps and turns; it involved so much close physical contact between the partners that it was reputed to cause miscarriages—and unwanted pregnancies as well.¹⁶)

16 See Rust, p. 46. The dance is described by Arbeau:

Quand vouldrez torner, lassés libre la main gaulche de la demoiselle, & gettés vostre bras gauche sur son dos, en la prenant & serrant de vostre main gaulche par le faulx du corps au dessus e sa hanche droicte, & en mesme instant getterez vostre main droicte au dessoubz de son busq pour l'ayder à saulter quand la pousserez devant vous avec vostre cuisse gaulche. Elle de sa part, mettra la main droicte sur vostre dos ou sur vostre collet, & mettra la main gaulche sur sa cuisse pour tenir ferme sa cotte ou sa robe, affin que cueillant le vent, elle ne montre sa chemise ou sa cuisse nue: . . . Je vous laisse à considerer si cest chose bien seante à une jeune fille de faire de grands pas & ouvertures de jambes: Ey si en ceste volte l'honneur & la santé y sont pas hazardez & interessez. (p. 64)

On the symbolic use of the volta in drama, see Brissenden, pp. 30-31 and 104.

This presentation of Lucrece as the epitome of the perfect wife is ironically contrasted with the bawdy character and language of most of the songs about women in the play. Because the songs about wenching and whoring surround Lucrece's appearances on stage, they smother her in a threatening cloud of unchaste sexuality. Furthermore, the songs are proleptic: as the tragedy unfolds, the contrast between the music associated with Lucrece and the ribald songs increases, especially as the series of four songs about women leads to a portrait in the praise of Lucrece (IV.vi [p. 397]). Thus, from Act Three, Scene Five, Valerius' songs become the key element ironically heralding the unhappy climax of the play.

In this scene, while Sextus is on his way to visit Lucrece, his friends ask Valerius for a song to pass the time. Valerius sings a light love song, the bawdy refrain of which alludes to sexual intercourse, while the "good will" of the woman in the song contrasts ironically with Lucrece:

There was a young man and a maid fell in love,
 Terry derry ding, terry derry ding, tery derry dino.
 To get her good will he often did
 Terry derry ding, terry derry ding, langtido dille.
 There's many will say, and most will allow,
 Terry derry ding, terry derry ding, &c.,
 There's nothing so good as a terry dery ding, &c. (III.v [p. 383])

Besides ribald songs, Valerius uses a wide range of musical genres as vehicles of his ironical counterpoint on Lucrece's fate. Thus, the day after the rape, Valerius sings an aubade, and the choice of the genre is ambivalent and ironical in itself, since such songs were usually sung to newly-weds the morning after the wedding night.¹⁷ Bedding rituals included ribald songs and loud epithalamiums, whose indecorous music drew attention to the bride's loss of virginity.¹⁸ Yet, in

17 Laroque underlines the ambiguous character of the aubade in his analysis of Cassio's *mattinata* in *Othello*:

[it was] a custom attached to the popular rites of marriages. It was, in fact, close to charivari as it involved cacophonous music as well as various obscene songs and words designed to show the local community's disapproval of some atypical marriage. . . . But the *mattinata* remained an ambiguous custom since it was also a popular tradition to greet the newlyweds with music on the morning following the consummation of their marriage. (p. 289)

18 See Puttenham's description of epithalamiums and aubades (pp. 52-54). The epithalamium is in three parts: a song to be sung at the bedroom door ("the tunes of the songs were very loude and

stark contrast with these conventions, Heywood chose a pastoral lyric akin to a wooing song,¹⁹ in order better to highlight the tragic matter at hand:

Pack, clouds, away, and welcome, day!
With night we banish sorrow;
Sweet air, blow soft; mount, lark, aloft,
To give my love good-morrow.
.....
You pretty elves, amongst yourselves,
Sing my fair love good-morrow.
To give my love good-morrow,
Sing, birds, in every furrow. (IV.vi [p. 396])

And it is with bitterest dramatic irony that Valerius follows this song with another presenting a blazon of Lucrece, “On two white columns”, which praises in great detail a purity now gone. The song is all the more ironical because a somber-mooded Sextus makes his entrance while the song is being sung; so, to deride him by mocking him, Valerius caps Lucrece’s blazon with a dirge,²⁰ which serves as a strongly proleptic epitaph:

Come, list and hark;
The bell doth toll,
For some but now
Departing soul.
And was not that
Some ominous fowl,
The bat, the night-
Crow, or screech-owl? (IV.vi [pp. 388-89])

Thus the three songs, which are within the same scene, heighten the dramatic tension by evoking with deep dramatic irony the successive stages of Lucrece’s

shrill, to the intent there might be no noise be heard out of the bed chamber” [p. 53]); another song sung about midnight (“to refresh the faint and wearied bodies and spirits” [p. 53]); and the third sung in the morning as an admonition to the newlyweds (“then by good admonitions enformed them to the frugall & thriftie life all the rest of their dayes” [p. 54]).

19 Such pastoral songs (mainly madrigals, canzonets and ballets) are commonplace in the English repertoire. For instance, the pastoral mode, laden with Petrarchan conventions, is found in all twenty-one ballets of Thomas Morley’s *First Book of Ballets to Five Voyces* (1595). On the musical rituals of courtship, see Cressy, p. 244.

20 On the dirge and elegy, see Duckles, pp. 137-38.

story: the night of the rape, the desolation of the following morning and the young woman's suicide.

The last song of the play, "Did he take fair Lucrece by the toe, man?", epitomises the dramatic function of Valerius' musical folly, as well as its link with the folly tradition. At this moment in the play, Valerius and the other singers use singing to make a choric commentary on Lucrece's shame, a commentary whose bawdiness reflects the now-flawed reputation of the young woman. The song is a *catch* sung with the Clown and Horatius. Its effect is all the more dramatic because it is sung just before the news of the rape is broken by Lucrece herself, in a scene whose pathos couldn't possibly contrast more strongly with the courtiers' *catch*. The principle of list-making changes here from harmless merriment to a gruesome evocation of the actual rape: in the song, Lucrece's body is groped at and sexually possessed. This list creates an unwholesome suspense, through which the motif of waiting and the riddling found in so many songs of the play assume a wholly different meaning:

Valerius. Did he take faire Lucrece by the toe, man?

Horatius. Toe, man?

Val. Ay, man.

Clown. Ha ha ha ha ha, man!

.....

Val. Did he take fair Lucrece by the heel, man?

Clown. Heel, man?

Val. Ay, man.

Clown. Ha ha ha ha, man!

.....

Val. Farther than that would he be, man?

Clown. Be, man?

Hor. Ay, man.

Clown. Ha ha ha ha, man, hey fa dery, &c.

.....

Val. But did he do the tother thing, man?

Clown. Thing, man?

Val. Ay, man.

Clown. Ha ha ha ha, man. (IV.vi [pp. 401-2])

Thus, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, the political appropriation of music combines with its inscription within the folly tradition. Through the satirical function of Valerius' songs, the abuses performed on and by music are made to represent the widespread decay of political and social order, which is reflected in the private

sphere by the rape of Lucrece. It is also through his music that Valerius manifests a kinship with those Renaissance fools whose folly approaches wisdom.²¹ Valerius has the characteristic ambivalence of the fool: he becomes both the victim and the accuser of Tarquin, a righteous accuser whose challenging music pinpoints the bitter distance between the power of tyranny and his own frustrating powerlessness. Through his music, he thus displays a formulation of the paradox of wisdom in folly so well developed by Shakespeare; he, too, is a caustic and knowing character. Jaques' appreciation of Touchstone ("O worthy fool! One that hath been a courtier" [*AYL*, II.vii.36]) could safely be applied to Valerius turned fool, as could Viola's comment on Feste:²²

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
And to do that well craves a kind of wit.
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons, and the time;
And like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practice
As full of labor as a wise man's art. (*TN*, III.i.60-66)

Heywood's musical folly is subordinate to the dramatic construction and the symbolic economies of the tragedy: Valerius is not a fool, only a false image of that figure. But even the Chinese-box structure of the character illustrates the elusiveness of the fool and its ambivalence, "le langage dédoublé de la Sagesse" (Foucault, p. 63):

elle fait ... partie des mesures de la raison et du travail de la vérité. Elle joue à la surface des choses ... sur tous les jeux de l'apparence, sur l'équivoque du réel et de l'illusion, sur toute cette trame indéfinie ... qui unit et sépare à la fois la vérité et le mensonge. Elle cache et manifeste, elle dit le vrai et le mensonge, elle est ombre et lumière. (Foucault, p. 64)

- 21 The phenomenon is summarised by Michel Foucault as follows:
 La folie devient une des formes mêmes des la raison. Elle s'intègre à elle, constituant soit une de ses forces secrètes, soit un des moments de sa manifestation, soit une forme paradoxale dans laquelle elle peut prendre conscience d'elle-même ... la folie ne détient sens et valeur que dans le champ même de la raison. (p. 53)
- 22 This passage is indebted to Raymond Gardette's analysis of the Fool and the Philosopher in *As You Like It* (pp. 52-54) and to Jonathan Bate's study of Shakespeare's "foolosophy" (pp. 19-25).

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Michael HATTAWAY, « Falstaff the Woodman »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 171-190
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/Theta10>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

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Date de création

Avril 2013

Falstaff the Woodman

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Folly and Politics

The revelry and farce that inform *The Merry Wives of Windsor* reach out to two sources of uneasiness. First, to the heartless discomfiting not only of Falstaff but also of the unsuccessful lovers, Slender and Caius. Second, to an awareness of what Pistol calls “substance”: Ford, he says, “is of substance good” (Shakespeare, *Wiv.*, I.iii.26), and substance, social substance, that is, cannot be accommodated. These political and material facts have to be set against any hope we may have of cheering ourselves up by seeing Falstaff as a mythic scapegoat whose fate serves as a ritual purgation of riot and disorder from Windsor or as a figure that leads its citizens from winter to spring.

The play’s opening scene is a kind of induction, in that it sets a tone rather than beginning a story: Shallow claims that the injuries inflicted upon him and his estate by the deer-poaching,¹ as well as the riots of Falstaff and his crew, are compounded by the fact that he, Robert Shallow, Esquire, occupies a social rank only one below that of Sir John Falstaff, Knight. However, the Welsh parson, Sir Hugh Evans, slyly advises that the events did not

1 See I.i.62 and 87-88; see also Theis.

constitute a riot, an offence which would have gone to the King's Council sitting in the Star Chamber, but only "disparagements" (I.i.24), an affront to Shallow's sense of his own dignity. Shallow, of course, is not simply an aggrieved innocent: his "substantial" concern is to match Anne Page, an heiress, off to his ninny of a nephew, Abraham Slender.

Throughout the play we are aware of the solidarity of the burghers of Windsor when confronted by the depredations of the knight and his followers, Pistol, Bardolph and Nim. They obviously think of these as riff-raff, the dregs of the social order. It seems peculiarly fitting that Falstaff should be tipped from his buck-basket into the muddy ditch at Datchet Mead (which probably served as a sewer). Citizen aversion spreads equally towards the gentry: Fenton seems unacceptable as a match for Anne Page not only because of his former "riots" and "wild societies" (III.iv.8) but also because he is "too great of birth" (4)—and too scant of wealth.

Many modern productions, including the one at Shakespeare's Globe that drew in happy audiences over two seasons (2009-10), have gone for delight and missed any privy notes of melancholy or bitterness. In *2 Henry IV*, after all, Poins had called Falstaff "deal elm" (Shakespeare, *2H4*, II.iv.268), and when Falstaff does bounce back from adversity in *Merry Wives*, we may be more aware of pathos than able to delight in irrepressible energy and the *sprezzatura* of his linguistic invention. Indeed, in recent seasons, Shakespeare's Globe has tended to banish dull cares completely by the clap-along terminal jigs, which, all too often for me, signify the triumph of entertainment over awareness.

Either of these readings, of course, may be "authentic", in that we do not know the emphases of the earliest productions: as with *The Taming of the Shrew*, there is no "locating tone" (Jardine, p. 59). Perhaps the play was occasional—although claims for a secure date are contentious:² connections with the Garter feast at Whitehall Palace on 23 April 1597 at Windsor have long been abroad (see V.iii.59), and I deliberately conjecture further connections with Lenten rituals (see below), the memories of which might even in late April have been quite fresh (Easter Day had fallen on 6 April that year). We might equally think of the play as a prelude to a marriage.³ This kind of theatrical and historical uncertainty means that any generalisations must remain tentative.

2 See Sokol.

3 Compare the account of a *commedia dell'arte* troupe performing before a wedding in Germany (see Maxwell).

The Falstaff sequences are focussed on three acts of “baffling”—ritual displays of the wages of perjury. They constitute assaults not only upon Falstaff’s dignity but also upon his honour. Falstaff quaintly acknowledges to Pistol the injuries to his honour:

I, I, I myself sometimes, leaving the fear of God on the left hand and hiding mine honour in my necessity, am fain to shuffle [move evasively], to hedge [leave open a way of escape], and to lurch [avoid company]; and yet you, you rogue, will ensconce [conceal] your rags, your cat-a-mountain [wild cat] looks, your red-lattice [ale-house] phrases, and your bold beating oaths, under the shelter of your honour! (II.ii.17-22)

This is really about dignity rather than honour, and is a far cry from the fat knight’s honour soliloquy in *1 Henry IV*.

Dr Caius is baffled too: after he has insulted her, Mistress Quickly dreams of a “fool’s head” (I.iv.107) for him. That is the Folio reading: Oxford emended to “ass-head” (see Crane, ed., 1.4.106n.), but that emendation seems to me to be infected by memories of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Falstaff, of course, ends the play by confessing he has been made an ass (V.v.110) but enters wearing a horned buck’s head, a more complex image than the head of an ass.⁴ Unlike Falstaff, Caius is more of a fool than a beast.

Dramatic Form

The play combines two comic forms: as in New Comedy, young love triumphs over the humours of hypocrisy, maturity and custom. Fenton occupies the role of the *eirone*, the hero, even though Shakespeare allots to that role only a bit part. He does, however, eventually win Anne Page from his rivals, Slender and Dr Caius. Secondly, as in many other Shakespearean romantic comedies, Windsor with its adjacent forests—Herne’s Oak is its synecdoche—creates a festive green world. The Host of the Garter Inn in Windsor is a kind of master of the revels that fill in the intrigue. Falstaff has migrated from the court and Eastcheap, morphing from a court knight to a Carnival King. “Am I a woodman, ha?” (V.v.21), he exclaims: I presume this is a boast to Mistress Page and Mistress Ford—a “woodman” was

4 See Stockton.

a hunter of women, as well as of deer.⁵ The wives are saved from any response to his vaunted desire by the entrance of the Fairies.

This patterning may make us sceptical of the claim that the play amounts to little more than what Robert D. Hume calls “amusing antics”.⁶ Contrariwise, are we happy to consider the rituals at Herne’s Oak as basically satirical, creating what Hume calls an “ambiguous critique”, directed at a member of specific group, corrupt knights? The play’s pattern of correction is locked up when, at the end and in Plautine fashion, Falstaff, like the humorous characters of *Bartholomew Fair*, is invited to a celebratory supper—or, more exactly, “to laugh this sport o’er by a country fire” (V.v.210).

Antics and satire, certainly, but these do seem to rest on bases or memories of rituals and myths. Perhaps there is no need to excavate them, but their existence may inspire theatrical designers or remind us of ways in which Shakespearean texts are not simply theatrically but also culturally embedded. Perhaps Shakespeare felt that tapping into the “body of Celtic or Teutonic rites and legends” (Laroque, p. 188) served some kind of authentication. His deployment of folk motifs—horns and cross-dressing—creates a kind of mythic substance. Yet, when analysing the buck-basket sequence, the cudgelling and despatch of the cross-dressed “witch of Brentford”, and the pinching of the horned Falstaff, *historical* source- or analogue-hunting does create a surround sound but not one that cannot be keyed to evidential propositions. Shakespeare, after all, had proved himself perfectly capable of mythopoeic writing as early as *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, with its haunting juxtaposition of Owl and Cuckoo together with the songs of winter and spring.

As for “sources”, there is little fixity. Communities across Europe invented their own ways to represent mythic themes. Northrop Frye, much indebted to J. G. Frazer, signalled the presence of these:

In *The Merry Wives* there is an elaborate ritual of the defeat of winter known to folklorists as “carrying out Death”, of which Falstaff is the victim; and Falstaff must have felt that, after being thrown into the water, dressed up as a witch and beaten out of a house with curses, and finally supplied with a beast’s head and singed with candles, he had done about all that could reasonably be asked of any fertility spirit. (Frye, p. 183)

5 As in Shakespeare, *MM*, IV.iii.152. The conceit occurs several times in the first act of the anonymous pastoral piece, *The Maid’s Metamorphosis* (1600).

6 For Hume’s use of the terms “amusing antics” and “ambiguous critique”, see esp. pp. 196–202.

However, modern scholarship must make us extremely sceptical of importing evidence of seasonal practice from continental Europe into accounts of early modern English culture. Ronald Hutton, writing in 1995, pointed to the almost total absence of evidence concerning pre-Christian seasonal rituals in the British Isles (*Stations*, p. 218). He also offers copious evidence throughout his book of decrees on the part of both Church and State to purge images and purify rituals as part of a wide-sweeping reformation of matters. Maybe it happened that nothing was caught in those particular trawls, or perhaps the so-called “Puritans” were not as vexed by them as might be believed. But I am emboldened to make some of the following claims by Shakespeare himself, who so obviously constructed an effect or rhetoric of mythical change around Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays. There is no escaping the rhythm of the seasons, and all cultures seem to mark them with ceremonies. Moreover, it seems that the very patterns of drama contain or create mythic structures, and Shakespeare’s language, charged as it is with figures, is certain, if I might invoke Lévi-Strauss, to bundle mythemes together.

The three bafflings are *analogues*—I am carefully avoiding historical or textual connections—of three archetypes: the carrying or driving out of Death,⁷ the “burying of Carnival” and the “killing of the Tree-Spirit”. Such rituals were celebrated in diverse parts of Europe on Dead Sunday, often the fourth Sunday in Lent (Frazer, pp. 397-98, 404-16). In many places a Death figure was thrown into water to the accompaniment of songs that proclaimed the death of winter and the coming of spring (Frazer, pp. 408-16). The fact that Falstaff is thus ritually despatched three times not only demonstrates, in the words of François Laroque, that “if you chase Carnival out through the door, it flies back through the window” (p. 236), but also reminds us of the eternal contestation of the powers of order and disorder. Shakespeare indicated as much at the end of *2 Henry IV*, when Falstaff, having been banished, boasts to Justice Shallow, “I shall be sent for soon, at night” (V.v.83).

The Buck-basket

There may be few glosses necessary to enjoy Falstaff in the buck-basket. The episode draws mainly upon *sotties*, *novelle* and *commedia*: the trope of the passionate lover hiding from the jealous husband was of ancient lineage, although I think

7 See Frazer, pp. 165ff., and Bryant, “Falstaff”.

it is close enough to a story in *Tarlton's Jest*s (Halliwell-Phillipps, ed., pp. 95-105) for the latter to be considered a source—perhaps Tarlton originally played Falstaff. In stage performance, the sequence probably depends upon *lazzi* practised by the servants John and Robert, who had to carry the fat knight in the basket. It is tempting to conjecture that “John” may have been the hired man John Sinklo or Sincler, who was renowned for taking parts that matched his distinctive skinniness (Gurr, p. 241). (Sincler could have—just—doubled this part with that of Slender, although they do appear in contiguous scenes, III.ii and III.iii.) Few spectators are likely to have remembered the moral tradition that emerges “in the medieval romance of Virgilius, based on the treatment of Socrates in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, [where] the philosopher is suspended in a basket from an upstairs window” (Bullough, ed., II: 8).

However, although a “buck” was a quantity of washing, mention of the word impels the jealous and fantastical Ford into imagining himself cheated by his wife and bearing the stag’s horn of cuckoldry (III.iii.120-40), and the sequence seems to take place in a mythic time: Mistress Page calls Falstaff’s diminutive page Robin “You little Jack-a-Lent” (20). Ben Jonson offered a graphic description of the use of this puppet-like scapegoat, associated with Lent. Basket Hilt is insulting Miles Metaphor in *A Tale of a Tub*:

Thou cam’st but half a thing into the world,
 And wast made up of patches, parings, shreds;
 Thou, that when last thou wert put out of service,
 Travelled’st to Hampstead Heath, on an Ash Wednesday,
 Where thou didst stand six weeks the Jack-of-Lent
 For boys to hurl, three throws a penny, at thee,
 To make thee a purse. (IV.ii.45-51, modernised)

This therefore constitutes another myth of expulsion. Henry Machyn described a parade in 1553 that included the Jack figure (Pettitt, p. 194),⁸ and its killing was sometimes ritually enacted at the end of Lent. Frederick Jonassen offers a plethora of allusions to the figure and the rituals, but it seems to me that the force of the line derives from the word “wit” in the second allusion to the figure: Falstaff later exclaims, “See now how wit may be made a Jack-a-Lent when ’tis upon ill employment” (V.v.116-17). “Wit”, here as elsewhere, can denote the penis (Williams, *Glossary*, pp. 340-41), and Falstaff sees himself as a shrunken detu-

8 See also Hutton, *Stations*, pp. 172ff.

mescent comic butt to be assailed by all and sundry. In John Taylor's *Jack a Lent*, the figure of Shrove Tuesday was "a fat gross burden-gutted groom" (sig. B1^v)—akin to Falstaff. Now he is vanquished in the annual battle with Lent, before he too is driven away (Taylor, *Jack a Lent*, sig. C2^r).

Frazer reminds us of another mythic association between the end of Falstaff and water: in *Henry V*, Falstaff, Mistress Quickly reports, died "ev'n at the turning o'th'tide" (II.iii.12-13), a correlation between the ebbing and lowing of water and life that goes back to Aristotle (Frazer, p. 45). In this play he is dumped in the "muddy ditch" at Datchet Mead, "close by the Thames side" (III.iii.11-12)—before the construction of Teddington Lock after 1810, still presumably part of the Tideway—and at this time muddy because the tide was out. As he reflects to the audience in soliloquy, this was a near-death experience:

And you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity inn sinking. If the bottom were as deep as hell, I should down. I had been drowned but that the shore was shelvy and shallow—a death that I abhor, for the water swells a man, and what a thing should I have been when I had been swelled! I should have been a mountain of mummy. (III.v.9-14)

However, like the hero in a mummers' play, he comes back to life and lives to woo another day.

Cross-dressing and Beating

The beating of the Fat Woman of Brentford is another comical punishment. Perhaps this simply had the effect of analogous scenes in modern English pantomimes, but we have lost the sense of witnessing a painful shaming ritual in which a man was wearing women's attire.

In the visual arts, the shame is clearly brought out: examples include a painting of about 1585 by Bartholomaeus Spranger, "Hercules and Omphale", and a drawing by Rubens of about 1600.⁹ These are obviously to do with "unmanning", and, over and beyond showing the hero about to be beaten with a phallic club, suggest symbolic castration.

That may be the reaction from "elite" culture, but in "the little tradition", in local communities, the effect may well have been different. In some ways, the

9 These are, respectively, in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (<http://bilddatenbank.khm.at/viewArtefact?id=1818> [accessed 16 June 2012]) and the Louvre in Paris: http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Wave/image/joconde/0095/m503501_d0106931-000_p.jpg (accessed 16 June 2012).

sequence recalls elements of charivari, of skimmington and “riding the stang”, in that these were occasions that combined the penal with the festive (Ingram). How festive were these?

Bakhtin’s observations on the role of the lower bodily strata in carnival are obviously pertinent here. Falstaff, disguised as the “fat woman of Brentford” (IV.ii.60), is addressed as “mother Pratt” (148): the name could designate buttocks. Falstaff is beaten like a schoolboy: “I’ll pratt her”, says Ford (150), and then he calls Falstaff a pole-cat, a creature both noted for its fetid smell and associated with “sluttery” (V.v.39). But, alternatively, the episode may not be carnivalesque: Ford may be beating the old “woman” because, as a witch, she may have made him impotent (Cotton).

There may be an allusion here to *Jyl of braintfords testament*, a poem in doggerel couplets by Robert Copland (1567) that tells how Jyl (referred to in the text as the “fat woman of Brentford”) bequeathed a fart to all the wastrels of her acquaintance (Copland, sigs. Aiiiif ff.). Nashe quoted the tale in the prologue to *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (Nashe, p. 149). Cue for loud theatrical farts each time Falstaff is whacked on the backside? In fact, he shuffles off the burden of shame by his wit and theatrical performance; he seems to be he asking the audience to applaud, just as the people of Windsor may have done had they been able to see the ritual enacted, an occasion when they could have rejoiced at the outwitting of the constable, an authority figure:

I was beaten myself into all the colours of the rainbow; and I was like to be apprehended for the witch of Brentford. But that my admirable dexterity of wit, my counterfeiting the action of an old woman, delivered me, the knave constable had set me i’t’h’stocks, i’t’h’common stocks, for a witch. (IV.v.90-95)

Alternatively we might psychologise. Being beaten can give the victim a kind of mastery of the beater. We recognise this in Book III, Chapter 20, of Sidney’s *Arcadia*. Cecropia starts to beat Pamela:

For when reason taught [Pamela] there was no resistance . . . then with so heavenly a quietness and so graceful a calmness, did she suffer the divers kinds of torments they used to her, that while they vexed [hurt] her fair body, it seemed that she rather directed than obeyed the vexation. And when Cecropia ended and asked whether her heart would yield, she a little smiled, but such a smiling as showed no love and yet could not but be lovely.

And then, “Beastly woman”, said she, “follow on, do what thou wilt and canst upon me, for I know thy power is not unlimited. Thou mayst well wreck this silly body, but me thou

canst never overthrow. For my part I will not do thee the pleasure to desire death of thee: but assure thyself, both my life and death shall triumph with honour, laying shame upon thy detestable tyranny.” (Sidney, pp. 553-54).

Centuries *avant la lettre*, this narrative supports Theodore Reik’s contention that a masochist’s submission is a form of rebellion: “The purpose to obtain satisfaction *in spite of* all threats develops into the tendency to gain satisfaction *to spite all* threats” (Reik, p. 145; cited in Bromley, p. 562).

Another example from the period occurs in *The Nice Valour* (1622), a play recently attributed to Thomas Middleton. There Lepet [“the fart”], who inherited a fortune and purchased his gentry status, loves nothing more than a good kicking, and willingly submits to being beaten when he is at the court of the Duke. He publishes a table of masochistic postures, later to be enacted in a masque. His sadistic clown praises them:

Oh, master, here’s a fellow stands most gallantly,
Taking his kick in private behind the hangings,
And raising up his hips to it. But, oh, sir,
How daintily this man lies trampled on!
Would I were in thy place, whate’er thou art:
How lovely he endures it? (Middleton, ii.468)

As James Bromley writes:

His experience of violent subordination at court leads him to write and publish a book that he calls *The Uprising of the Kick and the Downfall of the Duello*. Lapet’s model of submission interrupts the escalation of violence into lethal duels. As his book title implies, he wishes to replace the jockeying for position that characterizes the courtly duel with the pleasures of submission, thereby emphasizing the eroticism implicit in these violent encounters between men. (p. 569)

Horned Falstaff

Samuel Johnson observed, with a degree of superiority: “there is no image which our author appears so fond of as that of a cuckold’s horns. Scarcely a light character is introduced that does not endeavour to produce merriment by some allusion to horned husbands” (Johnson, p. 186). But, I submit, there is more than merriment here. Claire McEachern has argued that it is important to remember

that the stag's horns of virility were visible, whereas the bovine horns of cuckoldry were invisible, and that

horn humour was prevalent because it allowed a ludic response—collective laughter and even enjoyment—to the anxieties provoked by the Protestant theology of election. The cuckolds' horns, because they represent ignorance of one's own status, resonate with the uncertainties of soteriology, while other widely disseminated symbolic registers of the horn expand the leverage of the ludic response. (McEachern, p. 631)

A woodcut that accompanies the ballad entitled “Cuckold's Haven, or The Married Man's Misery” (to the tune of “The Spanish Gypsy”), which was licensed in 1638, illustrates something of this (Chappell, ed., pp. 148-53).¹⁰ The ballad sports a head-verse:

The married man's misery, who must abide
The penalty of being hornified;
We unto his neighbours doth make his case known,
And tells [*sic*] them all plainly the case is their own.

This is a neat representation of a chronotope or social trope: the hornified husband morosely knows his bovine badge of shame is visible to all save himself; below him the horned devil capers before his wife; his house is badged by stag's antlers as an insecure haven for cuckolds, a place of sexual resort; and the *Sprecher* character (a cuckold himself?) lustily cries his warning, “Look Out”, to the accompaniment of yet another horn.

Falstaff's horns constitute a signifier that is, to say the least, highly ambiguous. The Herne's Oak episode is described by the New Cambridge editor as “open, delighted, undefended theatricality” (Crane, ed., p. 22). That is the challenge, but isn't it odd that it begins with Mistress Page suggesting that the figure who deserves discomforting should be disguised as the eponymous Herne, a figure who, addicted to hunting, made a pact with the devil which led to his being condemned to practise his sport for ever? He

Doth all the *winter* time, at still midnight
Walk round about an oak with great ragg'd [*wild*] *horns*;
And there he blasts the trees, and takes the cattle,

10 See also Simpson, p. 676, and Maus. A facsimile is to be found on <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30036/image> (accessed 26 May 2012).

And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain
In a most hideous and dreadful manner. (IV.iv.27-30, emphases added)

He is, therefore, a winter spirit, and her tone matches that of Reginald Scot, who tells us how “our mothers maids haue so terrified vs with an ouglie diuell hauing hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in his breech . . . and they haue so fraied vs with bull beggers, spirits, witches . . . *Incubus*, Robin good-fellowe, the spoorne [spectre], the mare, the man in the oke, the hell waine [i.e., a wagon from hell that might appear as an ominous portent in the night sky]” (Scot, pp. 152-53). Windsor’s Herne may be the “man in the oke”.¹¹

Does the tone of this suggest that Mistress Page is mocking a primitive “folk” belief, speaking as if to a sophisticated child who knows the bogymen does not really exist, but likes to pretend he does? Was this designed for an elite and sophisticated audience? Or is it meant to insert a *frisson* of danger?

The same questions arise a few lines later:

Mistress Page. The truth being known,
We’ll all present ourselves, dis-horn the spirit,
And mock him home to Windsor. (IV.iv.60-62)

Do these lines, as it were, set out the rules of the charade, or is jest turning to earnest as the two wives plan both a kind of exorcism of Herne and a symbolic castration of Falstaff by cutting off the badge of virility that he rashly wears?

Page, in the prelude to the Herne’s Oak sequence, also sees Falstaff as a horned devil, perhaps because he knows that, had Falstaff seduced his wife, he himself would have worn horns, the badge of the cuckold:

The night is dark. Lights and spirits will become it well. Heaven prosper our sport! No man means evil but the devil, and we shall know him by his horns. (V.ii.9-11)

As for Ford, Pistol’s repeated warnings (at II.i.97-99 and III.ii.32) to avoid the “odious” Actaeon, a figure of cuckoldry, do nothing to allay his freneticism.

A few lines later, however, Falstaff seems to be using the image to boast of his own phallic potency:

The Windsor bell hath struck twelve; the minute draws on. Now, the hot-blooded gods assist me! Remember, *Jove*, thou wast a bull for thy Europa. Love set on thy *horns*. O power-

11 For links with the classical Jupiter Cernenus, far-fetched but suggestive, see Peake.

ful love, that in some respects makes a beast a man, in some other a man a beast! (V.v.1-4, emphases added).

However, he is gloriously muddled: his self-presentation morphs from a bull into a stag, from Jove to Actaeon, who, presumably sexually aroused by his sight of the naked Diana (Phoebe in Ovid), was metamorphosed into a deer and dismembered by his own hounds (Steadman; Parten). As Golding translates: “They hem in on every side, and in the shape of stag, / With greedy teeth and griping paws their lord in pieces drag” (Ovid, III.301-2).

It was customary in the Renaissance to moralise the myth into an *exemplum* of the ravages attendant upon desire. Shakespeare translates the hounds into pinching fairies, with a glance at Lyly’s *Endymion*, where, in IV.iii, Corsites is thus tormented for seeing the goddess Cynthia, also, of course, known as Artemis or Diana:

Pinch him, pinch him, black and blue,
Saucy mortals must not view
What the Queen of Stars is doing
Nor pry into our fairy wooing. (Bullough, ed., II: 56)

This softening of the Diana / hounds story notwithstanding, with a bitter irony Falstaff serves up a banquet of images of dismemberment shortly thereafter:

For me, I am here a Windsor stag, and the fattest, I think, i’t’h’forest. Send me a cool rut-time, Jove, or who can blame me to piss my tallow. Who comes here? My doe?

[Enter Mistress Ford and Mistress Page] . . .

Mistress Ford. Mistress Page is come with me, sweetheart.

Falstaff. Divide me like a bribed buck, each a haunch. I will keep my sides to myself, my shoulders for the fellow of this walk, and my horns I bequeath your husbands. (V.v.9-21)

The reference is to a buck offered by a poacher to a forester keeper and to the ceremony of “breaking the stag”, a ritual cutting apart of the beast.¹² As staged, Falstaff is crowned with the horns he had desired for Ford. It is conceivable that this was followed by a horn dance—these were performed at various times, including winter (Hutton, *Stations*, p. 91; Gallenca). The Quarto text records that

12 See Theis.

the horns that were sounded immediately after this were the sound of hunters on his trail—although they conceivably could have been the rough music of a charivari. So this may be the kind of extemporal wit that audiences associated with Dick Tarlton (Bryant, “Tarlton”), but it also matches the tone of the eldritch humour we find in the comic scenes of *Doctor Faustus* (Bradbrook).

Pinching

Might we construe Falstaff’s final baffling as another amorous (masochistic) game? Cleopatra tells Charmian, “The stroke of death is as a lover’s pinch, / Which hurts, and is desired” (Shakespeare, *Ant.*, V.ii.289-90). The intention of the ladies of Windsor was to mock a fool, the aged Falstaff who thought he could take any woman. As we have seen, this stag’s horns symbolised the myth of phallic potency, serving to unite men, as they do in the song in the hunting scene in *As You Like It*:

Lords. What shall he have that killed the deer?
His leather skin and horns to wear.
Then sing him home,
The rest shall bear this burden:

Take thou no scorn to wear the horn,
It was a crest ere thou wast born;
Thy father’s father wore it,
And thy father bore it.
The horn, the horn, the lusty horn,
Is not a thing to laugh to scorn. [*Exeunt*] (Shakespeare, *AYL*, IV.ii.8-17)

Hutton notes that the donning of antlers or horns formed part of New Year festivities—another link with seasonal celebrations of rebirth or renewal (Hutton, *Rise*, p. 47; *Stations*, pp. 90-92). Was there some sort of horn dance enacted here?

The problem, of course, is that, in early modern shaming rituals, it was characteristic for the victim to become the hero. Hogarth, in 1726, gave us a famous engraving that shows Hudibras encountering a shaming skimmington.¹³

13 It can be accessed through the British Museum: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=1361456&partId=1&searchText=hogarth+skimmington&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10¤tPage=1&asset_id=167992 (accessed 16 June 2012). See also Parten.

Here what seems to be the shirt of the victim's wife is born aloft on a cross-piece surmounted by horns. Yet a horn could designate an ornamental (helmet) badge of honour (*OED*, s.v., n., 16). This is John Taylor on "A Bawd":

And this is her comfort when she is carted, that she rides when all her followers go on foot, that every dunghill pays her homage, and every tavern looking-glass pours bountiful reflection upon her; the streets and windows are full of spectators of her pomp. Shouts, acclamations and ringing on well-tuned Banbury kettle-drums and barbarous basins [rough music], proclaim and sound forth her triumphant progress, whilst she rides embroidered all over like a lady of the soil, conducted in state out of the eastern suburbs, to set up her trade fresh and new in the west. (*Workes*, p. 101)

And in an early seventeenth-century frieze in Montacute House in Somerset, we see a riding where the culprit (or a substitute) is playing pipe and tabor while he is being ostensibly humiliated or stigmatised.¹⁴ Keith Thomas demonstrated that "barring out", in which pupils locked out their school-master in order to gain an extra holiday, once a sometimes ferocious ritual of misrule, became a simulated one, celebrated with cakes and ale.

Similarly, throughout the seventeenth century, there are copious references to Horn Fair, held annually at Charlton in Kent on St Luke's Day, 18 October.¹⁵ Everyone processed with horns on their head, to the fair where ram's horns, horn toys, and hornified gingerbread figures were on sale (Williams, *Dictionary*, pp. 668-69). "We're all cuckolds now". Satire morphs into celebration of delightful naughtiness. The tone matches the lyrics of "The Lusty Month of May" from Lerner and Loewe's *Camelot*:

Tra la! It's May! The lusty month of May!
The lovely month when ev'ryone goes
Blissfully astray.

Perhaps there was something like that kind of softening in performances in Shakespeare's time—yet again, however, we have to avoid imposing a model of decadence upon history, a decline, to use the folklorist Jessie Weston's phrase, from ritual to romance.

14 See <http://montacutehouse.blogspot.fr/2012/04/skimmington-ride.html> (accessed 16 June 2012).

15 See *A New Summons*.

Yet if we impose a “hard” reading and see Herne’s Oak as the third in a series of “driving out” rituals, we may, deliberately, take issue with a generalisation about the play that Laroque, oddly, almost conceals in an endnote:

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* . . . the references to the myths of pagan antiquity are unlike those in *The Winter’s Tale* . . . where they are connected with the idea of rebirth and the re-creation of the world. In *Merry Wives* they remain associated with an atmosphere of bourgeois farce. . . . First [Falstaff] is a stag with a noble head of antlers, then an ass, like Bottom, before he ends up totally stripped of the trappings of virility as a plain ox [as Ford brands him at V.v.iii], the domesticated, castrated version of the wild and royal beast. The transition from stag to ox reflects . . . the decline from potential tragedy (the stage being a beast of the hunt, linked with the wild and the sacred) to the domesticated level of bourgeois comedy. (p. 282)

Walter Cohen suggests an “antiscapagoating outcome”, noting a moral levelling and a resolution of hierarchies (p. 1231). My quarrel with these conclusions is that against this pattern derived from classical legends of correction, punishment and eventual forgiveness, there seems to be a counter-current composed of unwritten local rituals, beginning to be unlearned, which, possibly seasonal in origin, make the play less closed. There are dangers in assuming that just because he was writing plays about citizens, Shakespeare was appropriating a “middle class” world view: he seems to have sensed, as did W. B. Yeats (addressing the question, “What Is ‘Popular Poetry?’”), that bourgeois art might not resonate beyond itself.

I am not the first to attempt to excavate down to the ritual and mythic substructure of this play. I may have come up with a couple of new sherds, but what I conclude basically is that nothing is fixed or provable. Is *Merry Wives* a play about carnivalesque renewal or clarification, is it informed in contesting ways by classical myth on the one hand and seasonal ritual on the other, or is it a sign of the emergence of a bourgeois, possibly Puritan, mentality and the foreshadowing of bourgeois realism? We can pose these questions: answers are to be found only in the rehearsal room or in the pressures of theatrical performance.

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Pauline RUBERRY-BLANC, « Savage Madness Meets with Comic Folly:
The Cases of Orlando and Philaster »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 191-202
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/Theta10>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

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Date de création

Avril 2013

Savage Madness Meets with Comic Folly: The Cases of Orlando and Philaster

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The dominant early modern view of the place of humour in civil society is the moralistic one—namely, that it has no place. As Giovanni Della Casa puts it in his courtesy book, *Galateo*, as translated into English by Robert Peterson in 1576: “No man should, for other mens pleasures, dishonest & dishonour him self. It is an arte for a Juggler & jester to vse: it doth not become a gentleman to do so” (p. 71). And generally in the English drama, if clowns are allowed to mingle with kings, they are finally segregated and variously disposed of, as Falstaff is by Prince Hal: “How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!”; “Reply not to me with a fool-born jest” (Shakespeare, *2H4*, V.v.48, 55). In this paper, however, I wish to draw attention to contrary examples, which point up the way wild or savage impulses may be defused and channelled by contact with humour. This is the case in *As You Like It* when Orlando violently intrudes on the forest banquet, demanding food, and Jaques puts him down with scornfully humorous retorts. In Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Philaster*, the Country Fellow who embodies the traditional clown function gets the better of the distracted and dangerous Prince, so that the ridicule he automatically attracts is refracted onto his social superior. In both cases, the effect is to defend the potential existence of civility even within a natural setting.

This cannot be taken for granted simply as a function of the pastoral tradition. As the sixteenth century ran on, the norms of civility came to be identified with city-based values and the orderliness of urban life, if also increasingly with “the qualities of the minde”, in the words of Stefano Guazzo, whose *Ciuile conuersation* (1574, trans. 1581) was influential in making the concept of “civility” into a criterion of individual social comportment, as well as of political order.¹ Even Edmund Spenser, in the Elizabethan pastoral romance *par excellence*, designated the “princes hall” as the locale where

That vertue should be plentifully found,
Which of all goodly manners is the ground,
And roote of ciuill conuersation. (*The Faerie Queene*, IV.i.1)

Yet Guazzo, writing from a different point of view and aiming at a wider audience, maintained that civility could be found in the countryside, in “gentlemen” and in those who “ought to be put in the midst betweene gentlemen and clownes”.²

By addressing the complex tensions in the plays in question between the pull of pastoral and the socialising claims made for civility by Guazzo, my reading will comment on the particular incivilities displayed by Orlando and Philaster, and paradoxically redeem incivility from the stereotype of a rustic, boorish condition to be abjected. On the contrary, we may here be witnessing a development of Montaigne’s recuperation of the Cannibals, to the extent that certain characters, in response to their exclusion from their “rightful” places in civil society, are shown to tap a well-spring of natural energy that functions productively in support of a comic ending. Both plays finally present such incivility as being necessary to challenge confining and flawed social structures, but also as being in need of humorous deflation.

To turn first to Orlando’s brutal incursion into the forest of Arden in Act Two, Scene Seven, the response of the banished forest dwellers resounds with a plethora of terms related to breeding, civil behaviour and manners. These terms are actually introduced by Duke Senior’s more reasoned moralising discourse, but it is Jaques’ repartee that serves as a catalyst to induce Orlando’s transformation. The melodramatically inflated “Forbear and eat no more” (II.vii.88) is

1 Guazzo is cited from Hale, p. 366.

2 Hale, p. 366, also makes the contrast with Spenser.

punctured by Jaques' quip, "Why, I have ate none yet" (89). And when Orlando acts like what Jaques will shortly call the "soldier", "sudden and quick in quarrel" (150, 152), his cynical interlocutor drily asks his fellow onlooker, "Of what kind should this cock come of?" (91). Finally, in response to Orlando's exaggerated threat (the exaggeration may be measured by the parody of the divine injunction in Genesis), "He dies that touches any of this fruit" (99), Jaques puts his finger upon Orlando's irrational loss of self-control by punning on the homonym "reason/raisin": "An you will not be answered with reason, I must die" (101).

Even more clearly because Orlando never directly replies to Jaques, the latter's pointed humour seems to make him malleable enough to allow the Duke to temper his violent behaviour:

Art thou thus boldened, man, by thy distress?
 Or else a rude despiser of good manners,
 That in civility thou seem'st so empty?
Orlando. You touched my vein at first. . . . (92-95)

The Duke's tactful way of dealing with the angry young man results in Orlando's chastened humility and engenders a reversion from the desperate famished fugitive who demands food only for himself ("I almost die for food—and let me have it" [105]) back to the caring "gentle master" (II.iii.2) of old Adam:

Then but forbear your food a little while,
 Whiles like a doe I go to find my fawn,
 And give it food. . . .

 . . . Till he be first sufficed,
 Oppressed with two weak evils, age and hunger,
 I will not touch a bit. (128-34)

Most fundamentally, Duke Senior's polite welcoming attitude jolts Orlando out of his preconceived idea that "all things had been savage here" (108).

In the next forest scene (III.ii), Shakespeare pursues the handy-dandy question of civil and uncivil conduct in contrasting contexts through the exchanges between the self-styled representative of court humour and the natural representative of the down-to-earth. To Touchstone's syllogistic reasoning about good manners existing only at court, the shepherd Corin retorts, "Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour

of the country is most mockable at the court” (III.ii.43-46). Touchstone’s ridicule is thereby appropriated, persuasively relativised, and turned back upon him.

He finds easier prey in the person of William, whom he is able to crush with his dexterous application (parodic, of course) of the sort of courtly quarrelling techniques that he describes while waiting for Rosalind’s magical revelation: “we quarrel in print, by the book, as you have books for good manners” (V.iv.89-90). His technique consists in aligning civil and uncivil ways of expressing various concepts, relegating William to the uncivilised status of “clown”:

Therefore, you clown, abandon (which is in the vulgar, “leave”) the society (which in the boorish is “company”) of this female (which in the common is “woman”). (V.i.47-50)

Given that William is glaringly incapable of defending himself against the double-talk onslaught (or perhaps even understanding it), and that Touchstone’s sophisticated exercise in ridicule serves the typically animal behaviour of laying claim to his female, it becomes an obvious irony that the savagery in the encounter belongs to him, while his initial designation by Rosalind as a “*clownish fool*” (I.iii.127, italics mine) tends to take on social as well as technical significance.



Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Country Fellow” (as the Second Quarto [1622] stage directions call him³) appears in Act Four during the hunting scene and muses about his hopes of getting a glimpse of the King. His speech mannerisms conform to the convention of rustic clownishness and to the naïveté of his preoccupations: his greatest fear is that he will miss seeing the King and therefore not be able to give an account to his sisters. He is dazzled by the “people better horsed than myself” (IV.v.78), stunned by the noise and bustle of the hunt around him: “These Kings had need of good brains, this whooping is able to put a mean man out of his wits” (79-81). Such an ambiance is not necessarily suggestive of “civil conversation” or living “civilly . . . in respect of the qualities of the minde” (to cite Guazzo again), and in fact the question of where civility lies is blurred. All of a sudden, he finds himself projected upon a stage of chivalric romance, almost like Rafe in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, when he espies Philaster—“There’s a courtier with his sword drawn” (81)—then sees him about to strike Arethusa:

3 My edition of reference is that of Gurr.

“by this hand, upon a woman, I think” (81-82). He immediately has recourse to the vocabulary of the chivalric saviour of the damsel in distress, as he intervenes with, “Hold, dastard, strike a woman?” (86), though too late to prevent the foul blow. But the contrast is sustained between the courtly language—what he calls the “rhetoric”—of Philaster and Arethusa and his own homely speech (“God ’uds me” [92]). He is actually condemned as “ill-bred” (90) by the woman he is trying to save and rebuked for interrupting the “private sports” and “recreations” (91) of the courtly couple. Yet he persists in claiming that his virtue makes him a match for Philaster: “I can lay it on if you touch the woman” (97-98). As for Philaster himself, he is absurdly out of control in a maddened state of jealous rage, totally blind to his transgression of all the norms of civil behaviour. His courtly discourse gives way to insulting terms such as “Slave” (99) and “boor”, even as he begins to intuit that “The gods take part against me” (103). He is already on the road to recovering his former right-minded “civil” self, to restraining and redeploying his native magnanimity.

To return briefly to the “Country Fellow”, once the rogue Prince has fled, he turns to Arethusa, wounded though he is, and claims the reward of a kiss. It is at this stage that we might question his true identity, which fluctuates between the more rustic “Country Fellow” of the Second Quarto and what the First Quarto (1620) terms a “Countrey Gallant”⁴—an expression that retains a trace of the chivalric romance tradition. What is more, the woodcut of the scene on the title page of the 1620 text (absent from the Second Quarto) actually labels him a “Cuntrie Gentellman” and seems to dress him accordingly.⁵ It is as if we have here a mobile signifier corresponding to the potential for acquiring civility which Guazzo, in *Civile Conversation*, allows to “gentlemen in the countryside” and to “those who ought to be put in the midst between gentlemen and clownes”.

Within the same scene, the Country Fellow is also used as a foil to bring out different aspects of the incivility of Pharamond, the Spanish prince betrothed to Arethusa. Despite the King’s attempt to overlook his glaring faults, Pharamond has already discredited himself, both in his speech, beginning with his initial self-displaying monologue (“This speech calls him Spaniard, being nothing but a large inventory of his own commendations” [I.i.156-57], Cleremont observes), and in his sexual intemperance. Not only does he try to persuade a horrified

4 See the note to IV.v.74 SD by Gurr, who, however, follows Turner in stating erroneously that the woodcut figure is also designated as a “Countrey Gallant”.

5 See Gurr, ed., p. ii.

Arethusa to sleep with him before the marriage is solemnised, but he takes up with the lustful Megra, whose preference for him over Philaster confirms her position as an emblem of physical incivility within the Sicilian court. The King works hard to make her a scapegoat for Pharamond's transgression, hence that of his court at large, and threatens her with the treatment reserved for common prostitutes, a sort of royal carting that will purge what he sarcastically terms her "courtesies" (II.iv.141):

... all the Court, shall hoot thee through the Court,
Fling rotten oranges, make ribald rhymes,
And sear thy name with candles upon walls. (144-46)

//

The foil function of the Country Fellow depends on his retaining his rustic character, and this he does in an overtly comic way. When he finds out that Arethusa is the princess, he falls back into his initial mode of royal-watcher ("Then I have seen something yet" [IV.v.123]), and his rueful last words confirm it:

Country Fellow. I pray you, friend, let me see the King.
² *Woodman.* That you shall, and receive thanks.
Country Fellow. If I get clear of this, I'll go to see no more gay sights. (144-46)

This in itself is a deft commentary on the shoddy quality of the "civile conversation" that he has been drawn into. The foiling itself consists most basically in the contrast between his aptness for action and Pharamond's extravagant empty threats against the fugitive Philaster. The Country Fellow's language is a homely accompaniment to his bold deed, expressed so as to remind us of his paternal inheritance, which apparently included the right to carry a sword, if only an old-fashioned broadsword: "I made my father's old fox fly about his ears" (IV.v.129-30), he tells Pharamond. Over against this is set the swaggering bluster of the foreign pretender to the status of warrior-prince. "How will you have me kill him?" (131), he asks Arethusa (having just learnt that Philaster has been seriously wounded), then goes on to boast, "By this hand, I'll leave never a piece of him bigger than a nut, and bring him all to you in my hat" (133-34). Praising oneself, of course, runs directly counter to a standard precept for courtly behaviour, and Count Lodovico in Book I of Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* might well be commenting directly

on the difference between the Country Fellow and Pharamond when he defines the ideal behaviour of the “gentleman-at-arms” (p. 57):

the man we are seeking should be fierce, rough and always to the fore, in the presence of the enemy; but anywhere else he should be kind, modest, reticent and anxious above all to avoid ostentation or the kind of outrageous self-glorification by which a man always arouses loathing and disgust among those who have to listen to him. (pp. 58-59)

The “loathing and disgust” that Pharamond inspires in the mob of Citizens become part of a carnivalesque process in which ridicule is the catalyst that enables all the characters to find their rightful places—that is, in the play’s own terms, to find themselves. The Captain, first described by the Messenger to the King as “an old grey ruffian” (V.iii.116), addressed by Pharamond as “you rude slave” (V.iv.22), and indeed full of uncivil threats and bluster, nevertheless holds a tight rein over his “brave myrmidons” (1). When Pharamond asks him whether he knows what he is doing, he answers in no uncertain terms:

My pretty Prince of puppets, we do know, and give your Greatness warning that you talk no more such bug’s words or that soldered crown shall be scratched with a musket; dear Prince Pippin, down with your noble blood or as I live I’ll have you coddled. (23-27)

Like the Country Fellow, the Captain dares to challenge the Prince to single combat, and the reminiscence of that scene is confirmed by the comic exchange between Pharamond and one of the citizens, who puts a premium on seeing a rare sight:

Pharamond. You will not see me murdered, wicked villains?

1 Citizen. Yes, indeed will we sir, we have not see one for a great while. (34-36)

In this scene, too, a parodic discourse of chivalric romance is attached to the Citizens, whom the Captain calls his “donsels” (55) and puts in service to Philaster under the name of “My royal Rosicleer” (78), the hero of the popular romance *The Mirror of Knighthood* (Gurr, ed., 78 n.).

Acting as a virtual stage-manager, the Captain controls and directs the surging energy discharged by the mob, who call for bits and pieces of Pharamond’s body (“I’ll have a leg, that’s certain”; “I’ll have an arm”; “I’ll have his nose” [58-60]) and are cast by the Spanish prince as “these wild cannibals” (102). In a way recalling Montaigne’s didactic apology, these supposed savages, untouched by the niceties of civilisation, are the instruments through which the Captain’s educative process

brings Pharamond to self-knowledge, notably the knowledge that his pretence to princely civility is a sham. The Captain observes the change in him through his fear, when Pharamond says, now addressing the mob respectfully,

O, spare me, gentlemen.

Captain. Hold, hold; the man begins to fear and know himself. (44-45)

As for Philaster himself, hailed by the Captain as “the King of courtesy” (132), his former excesses are now counterpointed by his urging of the mob to restraint in the name of his return to his true identity (“Hold and be satisfied. I am myself” [88]), as he mediates the proper relation between inferior and superior: “I am what I do desire to be, your friend; / I am what I was born to be, your Prince” (97-98). We are reminded of the educative process by his subsequent momentary relapse into excessive passion, when he gets things wrong again and supposes Arethusa and Bellario to be guilty after all; at this point, “*He offers to stab himself*” (V.v.131 SD) and actually needs to be restrained by the King (“Stay him” [132]). And it is the King himself, in resigning his falsely appropriated kingdom, who learns most profoundly of all and earns the right to enunciate the conventional lesson concerning civility on everyone’s behalf:

Let Princes learn

By this to rule the passions of their blood,
For what heaven wills can never be withstood. (223-25)

Nevertheless, Beaumont and Fletcher’s play, like *As You Like It*, has demonstrated the catalytic value of forms of incivility, including ridicule. When, in Act Three, Scene One, Philaster, addressing the Lords who urge him to rebellion, replies that they show “too much courtesy” (III.i.53), and that the time is not yet right for him to act—another manifestation of his mastery of civil principles, this time of a civic nature—he exposes the limits of his own control: the political situation will finally need to be taken out of his hands by the epitome of incivility, a citizen rebellion. In the same scene, he at first allows his “zeal to truth” to make him “unmannerly” (86), when he indignantly refutes the accusation against Arethusa. And while he is about to commit his major error of judgement by believing Dion’s false testimony, the emotional overreaction, the breaking down of the restraint he had earlier shown on the political level, is not necessarily an error in itself. Or at least it is a productive one, like comic errors generally. For it signals a necessary step in precipitating a crisis that, dangerous

as it is, ultimately conduces to the happy ending. The lords, who introduce the scene by terming Pharamond “born a slave / In that which should be his most noble part, / His mind” (13-15), wonder at Philaster’s unaccustomed display of “ill-tempered” and “extreme impatient” (121, 134) behaviour, but they put it down to “his virtue and his noble mind” (135). They thereby draw attention to the potential value of righteous anger and loss of control in a good cause. Ruling the passions of the blood may be the goal—the play harps on the concept of “taming”, and the central conflict is resolved when Philaster declares Pharamond “tame enough” (V.iv.122)—but the dramatic action positively thrives on and revels in those passions. Such is the double process mediated by the insistent and recurrent discourse of civility in both *Philaster* and *As You Like It*.

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Richard HILLMAN, « (Im)politic Jestings: Lear's Fool—and Henri III's »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 203-216
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/ThetaX>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

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Date de création

Avril 2013

(Im)politic Jesting: Lear's Fool—and Henri III's

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“My poor fool” (Shakespeare, *Lr.*, V.iii.304) indeed. It is not enough that he ends up conflated with Cordelia, left hanging in at least the metaphorical sense, and perhaps the literal one too, as a textual loose end. Another of the prices that the Fool in *King Lear* has had to pay for being in the wrong place (or play) at the wrong (or right) time is posterity's projection upon him of various forms of exalted literary and anthropological status. At least since the fading from living memory of the concrete reality—or realities—on which the character is ultimately based, those projections have been inflected by successive waves of post-romantic sensibility. The effect persists even within our resolutely post-structuralist, historicist and materialist perspective, if only in the fact that we habitually search for something like the character's essence in the literally oxymoronic convention of the wise-fool.

This is fair enough in terms of literary pedigree: how could we not relate the Fool in *King Lear* to Touchstone and Feste, placing him within the line of evolution from the cruder clowns that Shakespeare adapted for Will Kemp to those more complex figures that he developed to match the bitter-sweet specialty of Robert Armin? Moreover, the intrinsic metaphysical appeal of the aporia (wise folly, foolish wisdom) remains a

stubborn overlay on our perception, and that, ultimately, with the authority of Erasmus. So does a residual tendency to sentimentalise the relation between Lear and the Fool (plus Cordelia?), which is commonly encouraged in productions and becomes nearly irresistible in the storm scenes. Even there, however, it seems important to note that, whereas Lear certainly comes to express pity for the Fool (“Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That’s sorry yet for thee” [III.ii.72-73]) as part of his new gift for empathy, which relays Gloucester’s and Kent’s abundant compassion for himself, the Fool, in what he actually says, on the heath or off it, never blunts his bitter edge to the extent of feeling sorry for anyone, including himself.

These interpretative traps that we fall into hinder, I think, a clear sight of the uniqueness of the Fool in *King Lear*, not only as a conspicuous intrusion into the tragedy, without precedent in the sources, but as a commentator on its politics, which here, of course, are inextricable from Lear’s family politics, especially on the crucial point of authority. Touchstone and Feste are shrewd and witty exposers of pretences of all kinds, “corrupter[s] of words” (Shakespeare, *TN*, III.i.36) in the latter’s phrase, but neither is specifically tied to a major actor on the political stage, and neither casts more than a passing and distant glance at the politics of his play, which, however cushioned by comic structure, have their own claims to be considered starkly. By contrast, Lear’s Fool is incisively and aggressively political from his very first words, which explain why the disguised Kent deserves to wear his coxcomb: “Why? For taking one’s part that’s out of favour. Nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou’ld catch cold shortly” (I.iv.98-100). He is hostile at the first thought of Goneril (evoked as “Lady Brach” who “may stand by the fire and stink” [I.iv.110-11]), then confrontational at the first sight of her, flaunting his “all-licensed” (I.iv.191) credentials in the guise of stifling them: “Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say nothing” (I.iv.185-86).

The political keynote is sustained. Across the general “reality checks” that he provides, both mental (“Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool” [III.vi.51]) and elemental (“’tis a naughty night to swim in” [III.iv.109-10]), his preoccupations counterpoint Lear’s, which are, naturally enough, with the abuses of power, hypocrisy and multiple moral corruption native to the human condition but flagrant in the courtly one. It goes against this textual grain to impose a staging to match John Bayley’s downbeat deflating of him: “Made to play his part upon the stage of the court, the Fool shrivels into a wretched little human being

on the soaking heath” (p. 61). After all, he is sodden enough when the Folio text pointedly enrols him in the register of foolish political commentators by way of the prophecy of “confusion” for “Albion” that “Merlin shall make” (III.iii.91, 90, 95). Perhaps, on the contrary, a case can be made for an interventionist, activist fool, who belongs squarely where Goneril places him—amongst the hundred knights, the “other of your insolent retinue” (I.iv.192).

Making such a case would be easier, however, if there were a cultural model in clear view, and it is this paper’s business to propose one—a model, I hasten to add, not a source. Despite my long-standing promotion of the idea that the English of the period, notably including Shakespeare, were in the habit of looking and reading across the Channel, I would not insist that the example of Chicot, alias Antoine Anglarez, the Gascon court fool of Henri III (and later of Henri IV), had a higher claim on the playwright’s imagination than local material may have had. It is just that the traces of such material are frustratingly elusive and fragmentary. For what it is worth, it seems evident that Samuel Rowley had roughly the same sort of *engagé* jester in mind when, in the nearly contemporaneous *When You See Me You Know Me*, he has Will Sommers twitting Cardinal Wolsey. As to more concrete models, there would have been to some degree, for Shakespeare in 1605-6 when he was composing *King Lear*, the instance of Archie Armstrong, the current king’s official jester. Indeed, R. A. Foakes, the latest Arden editor, noting that “Archie was noted for an impudence verging on arrogance, but retained considerable influence throughout the reign of James and on into that of Charles I”, supposes that caution was in order lest the parallel become too apparent (p. 51). (A more dangerous one, after all, might thereby be dragged into play.) Hence, as Foakes believes, the play’s insistence on the Fool’s medieval costume, in contrast with the one in which Archie figures in one of his jest books, which makes him look “more like a courtier than a traditional fool” (Foakes, pp. 51-52).¹

Yet parallels are as parallels do, and are surely not to be overridden by costume effects. The full history of Archie has yet to be written, if it ever can be, but the “considerable influence” to which Foakes cryptically alludes points up the fact that, in ways that the jest books themselves would not necessarily suggest, he was indeed a courtier, as well as a Fool. John Taylor, the so-called Water Poet, published in the 1630 collection of his works a serio-comic versified account

1 For the illustration, see Foakes, p. 53.

of Archie (also cryptic, unfortunately) as a broker of peace between England and France. The point of departure is a pseudo-prophecy of Archie's destiny couched in the Merlin tradition. And there is at least a shred of evidence that Archie could be a "bitter fool" indeed: the gossipy recollections of the courtier Francis Osborne, published in the mid-seventeenth century, contain the claim that Archie drew tears (and literally poisonous thoughts) from James by taunting him about the greater popularity of his son Henry (Osborne, p. 531). No date is provided (the Prince's death on 6 November 1613 furnishes a particularly resounding *terminus ad quem*), but we are firmly in the same mixed realm of contested political and paternal authority occupied by Lear and his Fool.

My point is that Archie is part of a poorly grasped tradition of political commentators, and even actors on the political stage, amongst professional court fools, and it happens that the case of Chicot has come down to us more fully documented. The documentation remains scattered and of uneven quality, but it is strictly contemporary, remarkably diverse and generally coherent. It is therefore possible to define with some precision the discursive coordinates of the personage, as well as to deduce the extent of his notoriety. A number of pamphlets and letters survive, in print or in manuscript, either authored by or facetiously attributed to him. He is named in official documents and correspondence and mentioned by, amongst others, the memorialist Brantôme, the historian (and poet) Agrippa d'Aubigné, and, in especially helpful ways (as often), by that indefatigable chronicler of his time, Pierre de l'Estoile.

For better or worse, Chicot is most fully and vividly present in the French cultural imagination in the form of the character drawn by Alexandre Dumas in *La dame de Montsoreau*, a novel whose main business is sensationally to recreate the sensational enough history of Bussy d'Amboise. The problem is not just that the writer of fiction did his job very well indeed, but that his fiction has influenced the only historian, to my knowledge, to have made a thorough investigation and interpretation of the sources, some of which are very hard to come by. (I have certainly not tracked down the manuscripts myself.) The 1914 *Histoire de Chicot, Bouffon de Henri III*, by Jules Mathorez, is a serious, if concise, assessment, but it remains very much under the spell of Dumas. "[N]otre romancier national" (Mathorez, p. 37), we are assured, has "parfaitement saisi le caractère" (p. 7) of his subject, even if he has lent Chicot a somewhat sharper wit ("esprit" [p. 7]) than he actually possessed, even while cleaning up his language, which was rife with scatological and sexual allusions. The latter point is not incidental, pointing as it does

to a self-imposed limitation on the historian's part and a regrettable obscuring of source material: from the point of view of Mathorez, which reflects that of a self-consciously high civilisation about to shatter on the rocks of the First World War, it is unthinkable actually to print the vulgar texts by and about Chicot (he merely identifies them), and it has not since occurred to anyone else to do so. As for the extent and quality of Chicot's wit, if we leave Dumas aside (as we must) and rely on contemporary testimony (including the testimony of imitation), it seems indeed to have been of the rough-and-ready sort, apt to slide readily into personal insult and practical jokes. (His nickname, which he acquired very early in life, is related to the verb *chicoter*—to behave in a quarrelsome manner.)

This propensity, however, seems usually to have been enlisted in the cause of royal authority. There is support in the documents for Mathorez's portrait of a hard-edged but profound intimacy between Chicot and his master (who finally issued him a patent of nobility) of a kind that overlaps considerably, *mutatis mutandis*, with Shakespeare's royal-foolish pair:

... il combattit avec la langue; il tourna en ridicule les ennemis du roi, voire même ses amis; il leur donna des surnoms qui amusaient Henri III, il lui disait les nouvelles scandaleuses de la cour et de la province. ... Il possédait toute une philosophie morale résumée en quelques aphorismes. ... le gascon distrayait le roi et causait avec lui sur un pied d'intimité tel qu'entre deux facéties il lui pouvait glisser un conseil et un avis qui auraient été mal venus de la part d'une autre personne. Chicot était aussi dévoué à son fils Henriquet qu'Henri III lui était attaché. (Mathorez, pp. 21-22)

The overlap extends to the fool's universal licence—"Comme amuseur du roi, le gascon jouissait à la Cour d'une absolue liberté de langage" (Mathorez, p. 27)—including the freedom to critique the sexual mores of its denizens; the overlap extends also to familiarity of speech (Chicot regularly addresses Henri as "tu", in keeping with the Fool's pronoun usage) and the sort of familial nick-naming that runs through *King Lear*—not only the Fool's "nuncle" but the king's "boy", which otherwise would scarcely have suited the mature Robert Armin.

It should be stipulated straightaway that Chicot is far removed, in other respects, from Shakespeare's, or the standard, image of the professional jester, even more so than Archie Armstrong when the latter dabbled in diplomacy. That is part of my point: the function seems to have been compatible with a greater range of activities than we habitually recognise. Chicot was also, most notably, a soldier ("capitaine"), whom his royal masters entrusted with missions requiring reliability, initiative and valour. He may also have been an assassin at royal com-

mand: d'Aubigné has him surprising and killing the Count of La Rochefoucaud during the St Bartholomew's massacre, although Mathorez considers the case not proven.²

One of the more sustained texts concerning him—a pamphlet all of eleven pages long entitled (in brief) *Les inhvmanitez et sacrileges dv Capitaine Lignou envers les Religieux de la Chartreuse du Liqet ... avec l'emprisonnement de Chicot par ledict Lignou*—recounts his mission to negotiate with a local warlord (“Capitaine Lignou”) in the Touraine. Rather as Kent winds up in the stocks thanks to Regan and Cornwall—and this is not the only episode in Chicot's career that suggests a kind of amalgam of Lear's Fool with the blunt and diligent Caius—the king's messenger found himself imprisoned. It is Chicot's discomfiture that attracts the anonymous writer with the explicit aim of amusing his correspondent (“Tout cecy n'est digne de vous amuser dauantage, & laisseray là Chicot entre les mains du-dict Lignou ...” [*Les inhvmanitez*, p. 10]):

... [Chicot] ny pour apprehension d'estre captif, renaque, bouffe, deteste, grince les dents, & crie: car *simia semper simia*, renouuelant toutes les folies dont il resjouissoit son Maistre, qui ne meritent de parvenir jusques à voz pures oreilles: Toutefois, on dict qui donne sondict Maistre Henry à tous les Diables, & le maudict souuentesfois, & a essayé de sortir par vne infinité de ruses & stratagesmes qu'il inuentoit en soy-même. (p. 8)

In a proto-Shakespearean mingling of kings and clowns, a virtual jest book (Chicot produced none himself) thereby emerges to take possession of a pamphlet whose tragic purport is given portentous priority in its title (“*inhumanitez et sacrileges*”).

Also extant, both as separate publications and as transcribed by L'Estoile, are letters written during Chicot's temporary disgrace and banishment from court during the Estates General at Blois in the autumn of 1588. The reason for this is not spelled out; he claims not to know himself:

... m'ayant commandé de me retirer pour trois jours ou pour trois mois, je ne sçai pas bien lequel des deux, car je demourai si estonné que je ne peus bien entendre ton jargon. (cited in L'Estoile, III: 212)

At any rate, Chicot was evidently back in time to help the king give the Guises their fatal early Christmas present. That may have been part of the issue. Chicot

2 See Mathorez, pp. 15-16.

was noted for detesting the Guises, their League and their clan (he had been beaten and whipped by the brother of Henri de Guise, the duc de Mayenne, against whom he regularly threatened vengeance). Such a loose cannon might have proved a liability while Henri was playing along with the League and preparing his *coup*. Chicot was (it must be said) no fool—for that matter, he tells Henri that his place can readily be supplied from among the delegates at Blois—and he hints broadly when he enjoins him, “fay bonne mine à l’accustomé, pour mieux vendre la marchandise, et que chacun se face fouetter à sa guise” (cited in L’Estoile, III: 214, my emphasis). An accompanying letter asks the Queen for her intervention and facetiously urges her to enlist in his cause “ce grand vice-roy Guisard . . . puisqu’il gouverne tout” (cited in L’Estoile, III: 216).

“Tout” is not said casually. At this point in France, the stakes for the monarch, the monarchy and the unity of the country were every bit as high as those evoked in *King Lear*, where the head of state foolishly gives two of his daughters “all” (II.ii.439), omitting the one whom a wiser king renders “queen of us, of ours and our fair France” (I.i.259). In the unfair France of Henri III, the tension had been building for years, as the League grew in influence, and in late 1585 L’Estoile was transcribing numerous politically charged texts in circulation, several of which place Chicot on the political stage. I use the metaphor advisedly. One of the pieces (labelled as published in Paris in May 1585) actually describes a mock-trial played out in *commedia dell’arte* style in the “Court Matagonesque des Archifols”, in which fools stand in for the principal competitors, Chicot taking the part of Henri de Navarre (as indeed both Henri III and Chicot, in due course, would take his part indeed).³ Fools standing in for kings are not a novelty, of course, much less a Shakespearean one, but it is an idea that *King Lear* strikingly enacts in the context of a royal power vacuum and imminent political implosion:

That Lord that counselled thee to give away thy land,
Come place him here by me; do thou for him stand.
The sweet and bitter fool will presently appear,
The one in motley here, the other found out there. (I.iv.137-40)

The other writings preserved by L’Estoile are *pasquils* (or *pasquins*)—anonymous political epigrams which, I have argued elsewhere (“French Accents”), participate in creating a species of multivocal political drama. They include one text

3 See L’Estoile, II: 236-41.

which rings changes, line by line, on the word “tout” across a series of social and political affirmations reminiscent of the Merlinesque prophecies:

Les grands seigneurs demandent tout,
Le Roy leur accorde tout.
.....
La Ligue veult faire tout,
Le médecin guairist de tout,
Le Guizard s’oppose à tout. (cited in L’Estoile, II: 316)

This satirical evocation of carnivalesque abundance, with Guise cast as a *trouble-fête*, is counterbalanced by a poem that systematically echoes and undoes it, bringing fantasy down to earth by the thudding repetition of “rien”; Guise is now in his malcontent element:

Les grands seigneurs ne sont plus rien
Le Roy aussi n’entend à rien,
.....
La Ligue ne nous fera rien,
Le médecin ne guairist de rien,
Le Guizard se trouble de rien. (cited in L’Estoile, II: 316-17)

And from one vision to the next, Chicot is changed from a sweet to a bitter fool: “Chicot tout seul se rid de tout”; “Chicot ne peult rire de rien” (cited in L’Estoile, II: 316, 317). It is surely to the discursive point here that one of several bitter anagrams in circulation on the name of the French king, the absence at the political centre, figured him as “H. Rien”. Lear, of course, is similarly deciphered, or enciphered: “Now thou art an O without a figure. . . . I am a fool, thou art nothing” (I.iv.183-85).

In this context, it is irresistible, intertextually speaking, to conclude with an account of the concluding *pasquil* in the series, even though it does not mention Chicot, who, one might say, disappears silently into the bleak political landscape, as does Lear’s Fool, but equally so as to become a present absence. The third poem is a self-styled Sonnet “Sur le tout et le rien de ce temps” (cited in L’Estoile, II: 317), and it applies the cosmic perspective, imploring divine aid for the king. It does so in terms of the same mystery of creation *ex nihilo* that is blindly denied by Lear in rejecting Cordelia (“Nothing will come of nothing” [I.i.90]) and that human monarchs are figured as undoing:

Du Rien, tout ce grand Tout, ce nous dit l'Escriture,
Notre grand Dieu parfait, et toutefois nos Rois,
Effgies de Dieu, supportés de ses loix,
Réduisent Tout à Rien, contre toute nature.

Lear likewise, notoriously, gets Nature wrong into the bargain.

For the satirist, the Guises figure as what seem prototypes of Goneril, Regan and Edmund, rushing into the power vacuum, attempting, as Andrew Marvell would put it, to “ruine the great Work of Time” (“*An Horatian Ode upon Cromwel’s Return from Ireland*”, l. 34) by setting up a veritable anti-Nature as a goddess of their own, though in the name of a return to primal order (for the Guises claimed descent from Charlemagne):

Ce Rien, représenté par la vaine imposture
De nos ligüés Guisards, s’escrie à haute voix
De ce qu’on le refait ce qu’il fut autre fois,
Et que ce nom de Tout en France ne lui dure.

Of course, such a false divinity has no power to make anything, much less everything, out of nothing:

Accordez donc ceci: le Roy, de Tout, fait Rien;
Or de ce Rien restant, Guise ne fera Rien,
Ne représentant point la divine puissance.

The wheel must come full circle, we are told, with the support of royalists of good will:

Mais, qui de Tout fait Rien peult de Rien faire Tout,
Et pourtant nous suivrons le Roy jusque au bout,
Assurés que, de Rien, il peult Tout faire en France.

As it happened, Henri III played into the League’s hands, and attracted Jacques Clément’s arm, by trying to beat them at their deadly Machiavellian game. Divine succour was conspicuous by its absence—or, rather, decided to back a more promising horse, no doubt providentially foreseeing his conversion.

Ironically, the failed attempt at succour offered by Cordelia, who lets herself be drawn from the side of France’s fairy-tale king into the killing fields that Britain has become, tends to confirm that Lear’s tragedy depends on getting distracted en route to Dover and thereby missing the boat. In this admittedly

restricted view, that tragedy's essence lies, not in the horrible "image" of the "promised end" (V.iii.262, 261), but in Lear's earlier attempt to get his bearings without his best-informed interlocutor:

Lear. Am I in France?

Kent. In your own kingdom, sir.

Lear. Do not abuse me. (IV.vii.76-77)

Lear is right to intuit here that Kent makes a poor and partial substitute for the vanished Fool, and that in attempting to disabuse his master by offering the sweetness of *Tout*, he is occluding the bitterness of *Rien*. Like the Fool's closest stand-in, Cordelia, with her "no cause, no cause" (IV.vii.75), even Kent finally responds to Lear's overwhelming "nothing" by telling him that he is "everything" (IV.vi.104) after all. Neither Lear's true fool nor Chicot would so have allowed the profession of "corrupter of words" to corrupt their identity as "men o' their words" (IV.vi.103).

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Peter HAPPÉ, « “All mine own folly”: The Function of Folly in *The Winter’s Tale* »,
« Theta X, Théâtre Tudor », 2011, pp. 217-238
mis en ligne en avril 2013, <<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Publications/ThetaX>>.

Theta X

est publié par le Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsables scientifiques

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Date de création

Avril 2013

“All mine own folly”: *The Function of Folly in The Winter’s Tale*

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Sir David Lindsay, whose *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis* was published by Robert Charteris with a specially printed title page in London in 1604, shortly after the accession of James I, uses the theme “stultorum numerus infinitus” for the sermon delivered by Folie at the end of the play.¹ During the course of this episode, he has Folie say, “Ye are all fuillis, be Cokis passioun” (l. 1640). In about 1595 Shakespeare has Puck conclude almost the same thing: “Lord what fools these mortals be” (*MND*, III.ii.115).² In the rational world of St Thomas Aquinas, human irrationality was manifest, in that human beings were all fools because they were all sinners. In terms of morality, the state of the fool had been identified in the Bible: “Dixit insipiens in corde suo: Non est Deus”.³ Lindsay may well have been influenced by the French dramatic tradition, which around 1500 in the *sotties* presented a dramatic world in which all the characters

- 1 The comment appears at Ecclesiastes 1:15 in the Vulgate in a slightly different form. See also Lindsay, *Thrie Estaitis*, l. 1555 [4466] (II: 392), and n. to l. 4466 (IV: 235-36).
- 2 With the exception of *WT*, Shakespeare’s plays are cited from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Greenblatt *et al.*
- 3 “The fool says in his heart: There is no God” (Psalm 13:1 [Vulgate]). See the discussion of Thomist rationality by Duhl, pp. 49-55.

were actually dressed as fools (Arden, pp. 9, 14, 33).⁴ Another pertinent portrayal of the universality of folly appeared in Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (1494), translated by Alexander Barclay as *The Ship of Fools* (1509).

It is not my intention to propose that Puck's comment necessarily applies to all the characters in *The Winter's Tale*, but I should like here to consider certain aspects of the play which suggest that Shakespeare did indeed use some traditional aspects of the concept of folly. It is not a topic which has been much discussed for this play, but I hope to show that it is related to some of its major features, particularly its structure and its theatricality. However, I do not think that it constitutes such a large part in this play as it had done in some of his earlier works, particularly *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*. But in these plays we can see an awareness of the traditions and function of folly which inform its use in *The Winter's Tale*. As we shall see, there are a number of specific mentions of folly in the later play, and these we may connect with the two chief manifestations of it: the dramatic conceptions of Leontes and Autolycus.



The consideration of these two characters which follows involves what might be called the ideology of folly, as well as the use of the dramatic techniques of folly which had been established on the English stage and to which Shakespeare had himself had already contributed extensively. One may approach the former by noticing that folly was not seen necessarily as evil. Indeed, Erasmus, exploring the idea of the wise fool who exposes other fools, suggested that folly does teach us to be happy, and that life can be sweetened with the honey of folly.⁵ In doing so he underlined an ideological ambiguity which made the concept usable in many contexts. But for him folly embodied differing and conflicting feelings. His personification of her in *The Praise of Folly* made her a fool herself and yet a wise commentator upon other fools.⁶ This double perspective may have been pertinent to Shakespeare's presentation of folly in his plays, including the late group and *The Winter's Tale* among them. He seems to have made significant changes in relation to the latter, however, a play for which it has been found convenient

4 This identification is partly dependent upon the distinction between farces and *sotties* discussed by Arden, p. 9.

5 See Erasmus, esp. pp. 87 and 94.

6 See Happé, "Staging Folly".

and appropriate to use the term “tragicomedy”. This genre, falling between and dependent upon the ancient opposition of tragedy and comedy, has no doubt attracted much attention from stage practitioners as well as commentators precisely because of its position between the other two genres.

The Winter's Tale, then, is a play of contrasts in genre, theatricality and design, and it is not so surprising that Shakespeare's use of folly works very differently as between Leontes and Autolycus. In Leontes, folly is part of the characterisation, and it is demonstrated extensively that he is a fool. The development of the plot depends upon this demonstration, and once that is achieved it does not proceed to the final reconciliation without generating his recognition of folly within himself. But the dramatic mode of the play moves away from the intense psychological predicament of Leontes with the shift from Sicily to Bohemia. There we find that Autolycus is not a psychological portrait so much as a dramatic function. His exhibition of folly falls within metatheatrical parameters, and his characterisation is heavily weighted towards function rather than the psychological complexity discernible in the treatment of Leontes. Towards the end of the play, substantially in Act Five, with the move back to Sicily, the mood and dramatic styles change again.

The difference of this third section from the other two has been rightly noted by Pafford (Pafford, ed., *WT*, pp. lx-lxi), and it needs to be contrasted with the two-part reading which is commonplace. At this point in the play, the role of Autolycus is changed from that in Act Four. Nevertheless, the contrast between him and Leontes turns upon this substantial difference in the presentation of the two characters. With Leontes we find that Shakespeare has produced a character who acts foolishly and then comes to regret it: it is a return to the fall-and-rise structure of morality plays and interludes, though heavily aligned toward tragedy. Autolycus, on the other hand, may be himself a fool, but he works substantially with and upon the follies of others and comments upon them.

At this point I should like to take account of some aspects of Shakespeare's primary source for his play, Robert Greene's *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1588), which contained two persistent ideas likely to have attracted his attention and which may have suggested his interpretation of Greene's story. He did make major changes to the narrative in respect of the ending, turning it from a disaster—“with a Tragical stratagem” (p. 656), as Greene had characterised it—to resurrection and reconciliation, but Greene's emphasis upon the “infectious soare of Iealousie” (p. 620) in *Pandosto*, noted in the very first sentence

of his account, and his repeated emphasis upon folly appear to be ideas which Shakespeare chose to dwell upon. I shall later return to jealousy, which has a significant place in Shakespeare's work. Greene's condemnation of Pandosto's folly is conveyed in a distinctly moralistic tone, in compliance with the sense of rather sensational moral outrage running through his presentation. This has a psychological aspect, in that he associates it with Pandosto's emotional state: the phrase, "whose unbridled folly was incensed with his furie" (p. 626), is followed by a reference to his "witlesse furie" (p. 632). Later in the narrative this concept is made part of Pandosto's remorse, as he becomes ashamed of "his rashe folly" (p. 632), and he laments "those sackles soules whose lives are lost by my rigorous folly" (p. 633), referring also to his "forepassed folly" (p. 633). Greene's moralistic tone is partly conveyed by proverbial emphasis. Egistus (the original of Polixenes), speaking generally before the crisis over his son's affection for the shepherdess, remarks that "oportunities neglected are signes of folly" (p. 636) and that "Time past with folly may bee repented but not recalled" (p. 637).

It is striking that Greene also applies his discourse of folly to other characters. Fawnia, the precedent for Perdita, twice blames her own folly in her association with Dorastus (pp. 639, 642); Dorastus himself, not as loyal as Florizel, regrets the connection with Fawnia and finds that "his honour wished him to cease from such folly" (p. 643), and this leads to an inner emotional conflict for him as well. Meanwhile Egistus experiences "greefe for his sonnes reckless follie" (p. 649). The concept of "unadvised folly" is also applied to Porrus, the fostering Shepherd, who complains that Mopsa, his wife, speaks like a fool (p. 646). He also blames Dorastus, who he knows is a prince in disguise, for alluring his daughter to folly (p. 648). In the absence of Shakespeare's reconciliation in his last act, the disasters which conclude the tale of Pandosto are underlined as the result of folly. Dorastus, cast into prison by Pandosto, tells himself proverbially that "folly hath his desert" (p. 652), and Pandosto, who behaves with evil intent leading to his suicide in a state of melancholy, rages at Porrus in these terms: "thou old doating foole whose follie hath been such as to suffer thy daughter to reach above thy fortune" (p. 654).

The frequency with which folly is invoked by Greene is thus impressive and a key factor in his presentation, in that he sees folly in most of the principal characters. But I feel that we need to appraise Shakespeare's response to this lead with some discrimination. It is true that there are a number of specific references to folly in his play, as we shall see, but they do not give rise to an impression

that he perceives that folly is so extensive or dominant as it appears to Greene. The latter's perception of the general impact of folly is a staple of the moral interpretation informing his narrative. But for Shakespeare the observation of folly plays but one part among other concepts, and it is used practically, as a theatrical device, and more sparingly. In view of his much more extensive deployment of it in some of his earlier plays, this change of emphasis is both intriguing and informative. What might be termed the ubiquity of folly is also functional in these earlier plays, and it is notable that Shakespeare had used it for both a comic and a tragic effect.

This reference to a link between folly and genre must also play a part in our appreciation of folly in *The Winter's Tale*. From its first appearance in the 1623 Folio, the play has raised some doubt about its genre, and I think this issue is still alive today. There is no doubt that in the first half of the play, up to the deaths of Mamillius and, apparently, Hermione, Shakespeare is writing in a tragic mode. Typically, Leontes' obsessive slavery to passion and the wilful direction towards disaster match the behaviour and emotional turmoil of other Shakespearean tragic heroes. We notice that Erasmus opposed wisdom, which was ruled by reason, against folly, ruled by the passions.⁷ With Leontes there is a tragic sense that things are getting progressively and inevitably worse, and nothing that Leontes or those about him can do helps to deter the expectation of disaster. Even the appeal to the oracle at Delphos is a further step towards disaster, since Leontes so emphatically disregards its message. The words of other characters, particularly Paulina and Camillo, who in their different ways might have deterred Leontes and diverted him from his tragic entanglement, are actually part of the rhetoric of tragedy, as they act as measures of his decline into disaster. Shakespeare had worked through such declines before, and in *King Lear* the Fool helps to mark stages in Lear's decline and his terrified awareness of it: "I am a fool, thou art nothing" (I.iv.169); "thou wouldst make a good fool" (I.v.32); and Lear exclaims, "O fool, I shall go mad" (II.iv.281). In *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare appears to use his experience of having created tragedy in the past, but modifies it in terms of the pace as well as the structure that he needed to prepare for the changes to come in the second part of the play. We might regard the first half of this play as an accelerated tragedy.

7 See Erasmus, pp. 87 and 106.

As far as the genre of comedy is concerned, folly does not appear in this first half except for a few minor touches, and the contrast with the way it is deployed in *Twelfth Night* is remarkable. In the latter, the presence of the Fool is established and sustained, perhaps most prominently because he appears both in the house of Olivia and in the court of Orsino, acting as a link and a contrast, and because he is recognised as a fool in both. There is also the specific discussion between him and Viola which pinpoints his role in the world of the play (III.i.1-61). This exchange is particularly significant in that it draws attention to the metatheatricality of Shakespeare's use of a fool, even though Feste has a sort of reality within the play because, as he enigmatically claims, he lives by the church (3-7).

Nevertheless, there is a discourse of folly in the decline of Leontes, even though it is presented by other characters. There is also a process by which the audience is made conscious of his folly. This latter is a reflection of Shakespeare's stagecraft, as he engages the audience in a condemnation of the character. For example, the cause of Leontes' jealousy is not fully explained, and the suspicion may remain that it has no real basis. Notably, Shakespeare has greatly toned down the behaviour of Hermione from that exhibited by Greene's Bellaria, whose "countenance bewraied how her minde was affected towards [Egistus]", and who visited his bedchamber "oftentimes", so that "there grew a secret uniting of their affections" (p. 622). The enactment of the corresponding passage in Shakespeare is open to directorial decision, since some physical contact between Hermione and Polixenes may be inferred from the text, but the episode has nevertheless been treated with restraint by Shakespeare, compared with that in the source, and it is less markedly directed towards carrying blame for Hermione. If this is so, Leontes' suspicions may appear groundless, and that, indeed, might become part of the tragedy which reveals the growth of his destructive obsession.

Looking at the detail of this episode, we may notice that the perception of what is going on between Hermione and Polixenes is largely achieved through the already obsessive language of Leontes.⁸ When it comes to performance, that language is manifestly what the audience perceives, and the director and the performers have to decide how far to justify it. There is a case for allowing very little that is unacceptable, and it has been suggested that there is an uncertainty here

8 See I.ii.108-205. Unless otherwise indicated, *WT* is cited from the New Cambridge edition, ed. Snyder and Curren-Aquino.

which is quite deliberate and indeed usable. It may indeed be that we are not going to be told because the persistence of uncertainty is valuable and because the main thrust of the dramatic experience is to show the development of Leontes' foolish obsession. He may be certain about what he sees, and he reinforces his belief vigorously, but there is dramatic advantage in not having the off-stage audience of the same mind as the character. This isolation of Leontes within his obsession is made all the stronger because of the reaction of the other characters on the stage when he reveals his conviction.

That Shakespeare in the late plays reworked and modified ideas and techniques from his earlier experience as a playwright is undoubtedly a fruitful way of considering his continuing innovation. I mentioned earlier that Greene makes jealousy a key topic, and it is likely that Shakespeare was drawn to this theme by its prominence in his predecessor. He also worked with the theme himself in both *Othello* (1604) and, somewhat differently, in *Cymbeline* (1611?). What is striking about the former for our purposes is the association between jealousy and folly. The issue of folly appears a number of times in Iago's speeches about both Othello and others, and it has rather more emphasis than it does in *The Winter's Tale*. But the climax is the realisation of folly in the last act. Emilia, as she unpacks the detail of her husband's deception of Othello, exclaims, "O murderous coxcomb! What should such a fool / Do with so good a wife" (V.ii.240-41). Realising the truth of what she says, Othello changes his earlier accusation against Desdemona's folly, as he had supposed, to the self-condemnation of "O fool, fool, fool!" (V.ii.333).⁹ Somewhat similarly, Posthumus in *Cymbeline* realises his own folly as Iachimo unfolds the details of the deception he played upon him in pursuit of the wager:

Ay me, most credulous fool,
Egregious murderer, thief, anything
That's due to all the villains past in being,
To come! (V.vi.210-13)¹⁰

As the jealousy of Leontes is made more apparent to those around him, their condemnation of it as folly becomes more insistent. This is not seriously undermined by the uncertainty noted above about whether he has any cause.

9 See Cobb, pp. 31-35.

10 Posthumus is thus a fool, in some respects, like Leontes, but there is also an extensive discourse of folly surrounding Cloten.

Indeed, it seems more likely that the off-stage spectators in the audience become more and more inclined to the view that he is making a foolish mistake. This process is intensified as Leontes becomes increasingly impervious to suggestions that he is wrong, and his tyrannical enforcement of his response to Hermione's supposed adultery is a further reinforcement. Folly is presented first by Leontes himself very soon after he first shows his jealousy. He pretends that his "distraction" is a sign of weakness, without revealing to Hermione and Polixenes what is really troubling him. He claims that "sometimes nature will betray its folly / Its tenderness, and make itself a pastime / To harder bosoms!" (I.ii.150-53). But this preliminary manifestation of folly is developed shortly afterwards when he begins to question Camillo and seek his belief and support. With a certain irony, Shakespeare has Leontes accuse Camillo of foolishly not taking the charge of infidelity by Hermione with sufficient seriousness. He asserts that Camillo may be "a fool / That seest a game played home, the rich stake drawn / And tak'st it all for jest" (I.ii.246-48). The rather contorted syntax of Camillo's reply signals that the issues are not clear-cut and that Shakespeare may be playing with a number of possibilities regarding the effects of folly:

My gracious lord,
 I may be negligent, foolish and fearful;
 In every one of these no man is free,
 But that his negligence, his folly, fear,
 Among the infinite doings of the world,
 Sometime puts forth in your affairs, my lord.
 If ever I were wilful-negligent,
 It was my folly; if industriously
 I played the fool it was my negligence,
 Not weighing well the end. (249-59)

Camillo's defence hints at the ubiquity of folly, since all may be guilty of foolish negligence and of not being aware of the outcome of such folly. His courtier's discretion, as well as his instinct for self-preservation, may lead him not to accuse Leontes directly of folly, but that does not mean that such a view is not part of the experience of the off-stage audience. At this point Camillo may not be fully aware of what Leontes now believes about the Queen, but the aggression in Leontes' words to him must have made him cautious, especially the punning play on "satisfy" (229-32).

As this hostility increases and Leontes makes more obvious the intensity of his jealous and foolish anger about the sexual intimacy he believes in, Camillo temporises. He accepts the royal command to murder Polixenes, but as soon as he is free from the presence of Leontes, he reveals to Polixenes directly the threat he now brings to him. In doing so, his words again lead to the conceit of folly, but this time it is fully orchestrated as a judgement upon Leontes and the scope of his foolish error:

You may as well
Forbid the sea for to obey the moon
As or by oath remove or counsel shake
The fabric of his folly, whose foundation
Is piled upon his faith, and will continue
The standing of his body. (421-26)

The metaphors of piling, as well as those about the security of a building, bring out the depth and severity of Leontes' folly.¹¹

Although we have noticed that the idea of folly is extensively presented in *Pandosto*, it is notable that Shakespeare sustains and develops it through characters which are his own addition to the source, in particular Antigonus and Paulina, in the first part of the play, and Autolycus, whom I shall consider in the latter part of this essay. After the escape of Polixenes and Camillo, Antigonus and Paulina play their part in the discourse. Both express negation of Leontes' conviction. Antigonus is accused by Leontes of being born a fool for his insistence that Leontes should examine the basis of his conviction (II.i.173). But Antigonus is given the last words in this scene, as he gives a twist to Leontes' prophecy that these events will "raise [them] all" (198). Like a commenting fool, Antigonus twists this to suggest the raising will be "To laughter, as I take it, / If the good truth were known" (198-99).

But the role of the fool who brings wisdom is more markedly suggested and sustained by the words and deeds of Paulina.¹² Though the business she concerns herself with is deadly serious, she does introduce some comedy into the play by means of her challenge to authority and tyranny, and there is a sour comedy in the scene where Leontes seeks to force Antigonus to restrain his wife.

11 "Fabric" relates to the firm structure of a building (*OED*, I.1), but perhaps there is also a hint of the fragility of cloth.

12 The name Paulina may allude to St Paul.

Leontes calls her “Dame Partlet” (II.iii.75), recalling Chaucer, as well as Falstaff’s appellation for Mistress Quickly.¹³ Her comments on Leontes’ folly are made to other characters, as well as to the king himself. To Emilia outside the jail where Hermione is imprisoned, she speaks of “These dangerous unsafe lunes i’t’h King, beshrew them!” (II.ii.29). The attendants come to protect the king meet with her castigation as they force her away from the royal presence: “You that are thus so tender o’er his follies / Will never do him good, not one of you” (II.iii.127-28). Much like Lear’s Fool, she rubs salt into Leontes’ wounds before he begins to admit to his own foolishness. She impugns the lack of evidence, telling him that he is “Not able to produce more accusation / Than your own weak-hinged fancy” (117-18). At the terrible climax, when Leontes hears of the death of Mamillius, she brings the news that that Hermione is dead, and in doing so once again she proclaims his folly, linking it with tyranny and the jealousies which are “Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle / For girls of nine” (III.ii.178-79). Of the tyranny, she says,

For all
 Thy bygone fooleries were but spices of it.
 That thou betrayed’st Polixenes ’twas nothing;
 That did but show thee of a fool, inconstant
 And damnable ingrateful. (182-85)

She attributes the death of Mamillius specifically to the folly of Leontes. The boy’s honourable thoughts “Cleft the heart / That could conceive a gross and foolish sire / Blemished his gracious dam” (194-96). In these varied ways, she is the chief means by which the folly of the king is made clear, and as this is done, Shakespeare is bringing the audience to a clearer understanding of the extent of it and of its consequences. There are also two places where her link with folly is further developed. As she reminds Leontes of his past follies with apparent inadvertency, she accuses herself of folly: “Sir, royal sir, forgive a foolish woman” (225), and her next reminder is followed by “Lo fool again!” (226).

13 Shakespeare, *1H4*, III.iii.44; see the note on this line by Snyder and Curren-Aquino, eds, *WT*.

If, as I suggested earlier, Shakespeare may have been aware of the prominence of folly in Greene's *Pandosto* and embodied it in the tragedy of *Leontes*, he developed his presentation of it in a quite different way in the second half of the play. There is, I believe, an excitement to be found in the changes of tone which characterise the latter, though it is important not to see the second half of the play as a simple contrasting unit separated by Time, particularly as the scenes in Act Four set in Bohemia are markedly different from those in Act Five, when the narrative returns to Sicily, albeit a Sicily very different from that of the first half of the play. In the course of the change and refocus, the perception of folly now shifts and centres upon Autolycus, who is confined to this second half but is given great theatrical emphasis within it, even though his impact upon the development of the plot is not strong. But the change is such that if we see *Leontes* as a fool who does not perceive himself to be one—even though others emphatically demonstrate it—until it is tragically too late, we find that Autolycus is the means by which folly is demonstrated in others, and that he also embodies folly metatheatrically in such a way as to keep the issue active. If this is so, his function would be a kind of comment or reflection on the first half of the action. As such, it would also make for coherence in the play as a whole and help to explain Shakespeare's remarkable decision about the structure.

Shakespeare has made the character's impact stronger by giving him a close associate in folly, in theatrical terms, by the introduction of the Clown, who, like Autolycus, is not in *Pandosto*. They are not close associates, as far as their existence in the story is concerned, but together, through several passages of interaction, they do form a significant theatrical instrument in performance. Whilst they are not exactly a sustained double act, they do operate together several times to provide theatrical entertainment through their representation of folly.

As with his earlier, perhaps more prominent examples of folly as a theatrical device, Shakespeare depends in part upon external circumstances of the stage culture of his time. Folly's large ancestry outside the theatre, not least in the court, is also worth considering. One of its chief features, shown up by Erasmus and others, is its moral ambiguity. It could be a force for good in its moral implications, and it could also be seen as working through indulgence and self-gratification. Autolycus touches both these aspects, as we shall see, and in common with the clowns and fools who were his theatrical ancestors, he makes them

part of the moral concerns of the play, as well as providing theatrical enjoyment through his mirth and vitality.

More specifically, he also reflects some of the characteristics of the Vice, who was another forbear. Shakespeare is remarkable for his many and varied adaptations of this figure. These include Richard III, Falstaff and Iago, as well as Feste and Lear's Fool.¹⁴ Alongside this, it is noticeable that the presence and effectiveness of clowns, who became popular off the stage as well as on it, remain an influence. Indeed, it has been suggested by Norah Johnston that Shakespeare could not have avoided using clowns because of their entrenched position on the stage.¹⁵ It may well be, as she also suggests, that for the spectators the clowns provided a distinct and separate appeal from the rest of the plays on offer.¹⁶ A further aspect of what might be described as the tension between the performance tradition and that generated by literary playwrights, as suggested by Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster. Their theory implies that the performance of clowns or fools met an expectation in the audience which might be different from that generated by the playwright in pursuit of literary objectives.¹⁷

The independence of fools and clowns implicit in such practices may be discerned in many of Shakespeare's fools. They sometimes have acts which stand alone, contributing very little to the action and providing a theatrical force similar to that which we find in Autolycus.¹⁸ This starts with his dramatic intervention singing about the coming of spring—"When daffodils begin to peer" (IV.iii.1)—and in doing so contributing much to the change of tone which had begun with the Clown's conduct, as he watched the death of Antigonus taking place offstage.

We shall return to the links between Autolycus' performance and that of the Vice later, but for the moment the association between him and the Clown needs attention. The latter's intervention is part of a series of theatrical decisions which change the mood of the play, and as such it is essential to the overall

14 See Happé, "Deceptions". Links between Autolycus and the Vice have been part of critical discourse at least since Hastings (1940).

15 See Johnston, pp. 136-44.

16 Johnston makes the point that clowns often performed their acts at the end of the plays and that consequently some spectators delayed their entry so as to be present only for the clown epilogues (pp. 18-19).

17 See Weimann and Bruster, p. 41.

18 Lance (with his dog) performs such an act in *TGV*, IV.iv.1-33. This would originally have been played by Will Kemp.

structure. The death of Antigonus comes at the end of the tragedy of Leontes, but the presentation, which is distinguished for its seriousness, is also part of the change to comedy, largely because after the brief appearance of the bear, which may itself be farcical, it is the Clown who witnesses and describes his death. His words, which do express sympathy, are also near to being comic: “and how the poor gentleman roared, and the bear mocked him, both roaring louder than the sea or weather . . . nor [is] the bear half dined on the gentleman—He’s at it now” (III.iii.89-96). The effect is not to deny that the death is tragic and terrible, a consequence of the evil destruction loosed by Leontes’ tragic folly; but the shift of focus is brought about by making the Clown the observer and using his words for the narrative. These speeches by the Clown thus make a peculiar impression on us: we have to take them seriously, yet they are uneasily amusing. We notice, too, that as with some other sequences in the play, including the reuniting of Leontes with Perdita (V.ii.1-50), the choice of narration rather than enactment is significant because it allows a slant on what is narrated.

Subsequently, folly shows itself in the ascendancy in the relationship between the Clown and Autolycus, first in the robbing scene (IV.iii.30-105) and then in the ballad episode (IV.iv.210-305).¹⁹ The first shows Autolycus making a fool of the Clown, using impersonation as well as disguise, and, as far as the theft is concerned, his dexterity recalls the role of cutpurse beloved of the Vice. From a theatrical point of view, there are two noticeable aspects. Autolycus is very much in charge of the misfortune, and he makes clear to the audience the success of his manipulation of his victim, beginning with “If the springe hold, the cock’s mine” (IV.iii.34), and regarding the Clown as a “prize” (30). He also shows instant resourcefulness, which is a kind of improvisation, when he politely but rapidly refuses the Clown’s tender-hearted offer to mitigate his sufferings by making a consolatory donation from the money he no longer has, unaware that Autolycus has already stolen it.²⁰

The ballad episode shows different aspects of his versatility, this time as performer and salesman. During this passage he sustains his earlier manipulation of the Clown’s loss by blaming the theft on someone called “Autolycus”. Having performed one of the songs to stimulate the sale of his wares, which comprise trinkets as well as ballads, he makes a clean sweep of his market. In the

19 Wiles identifies the Clown as a foil for Autolycus (p. 146).

20 For improvisation by the Vice and by clowns, see Hornback, p. 48. For evidence of planned and unplanned improvisation, see Klausner, pp. 276 and 283.

manner of the Vice, he has a soliloquy in which he makes the audience aware of his off-stage success; he reminds the audience of the folly of his victims, using abstract personifications: “Ha, ha, what a fool honesty is! And trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman” (IV.iv.592-93). Claiming that he has “picked and cut most of their festival purses” (591), he then elaborates the extent of his own craftiness (575-94). But in spite of this triumph in making fools of others, he is also at risk, and, comically, he nearly gets caught: “If they have overheard me now—why hanging” (605).

Later in the scene, and with a change of identity related to an enforced change of clothes, he presents himself as a courtier who may be able to assist the Shepherd and the Clown in their attempt to avert the impact of the wrath of Polixenes. Once again there is close playing between the two, especially when the courtier describes to the Clown the terrible but also comically exaggerated punishment which might befall him (745-51). As in the earlier episodes with the Clown, there is a distinction between Autolycus, as the clever exploiter of folly, and the Clown as his foolish victim. However, in contrast to the self-serving Autolycus, the Clown is more or less honest.²¹ In the end the tables are turned, and Autolycus is subordinated to the Clown, once he and the old Shepherd have become gentlemen born (V.ii.127-29).

Autolycus shows himself as the exploiter of folly in the versatility of his playing. Perhaps because of the theatrical mode emphasising and exploiting energetic showmanship, which has been called “common playing” (Weimann and Bruster, p. 58), his stage presence does not constitute a coherent form of characterisation. In a Protean way, he changes his roles by the minute and in the process reflects the adaptability of the Vice and of the clowns to address different people and circumstances in appropriate ways. He has been described as having no centre, and in his roles, which range from peddler to puppet-master and from pickpocket to courtier, he also acts the ventriloquist in his speech style.²² Of all the roles he adopts, there is one which might point directly to another link between Autolycus and folly. He admits to having served as an ape-bearer (IV. iii.96). Captive apes were linked with court jesters, and were led about as a part

21 See Vial, p. 176.

22 Palfrey offers a list (p. 120).

of their trade. Iconographic representations of Folly leading apes, sometimes to hell, have been identified, one in a sketchbook by Louis Cranach.²³

But the absence of character consistency is part of the manifestation of folly which was traditional by the time Shakespeare created the part and also effective as a means of drawing attention to folly in its various forms. Like Haphazard in *Apilus and Virginia*, and Courage in *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*, in the previous generation of Vices, he is the supreme opportunist. When the Clown and Shepherd approach in a state of distress, and still unable to recognize him, he tells the audience:

Aside, aside, here is more matter for a hot brain. Every lane's end, every shop, church, session, hanging, yields a careful man work. (IV.iv.653-55)

The nature and techniques of folly he embodies may have been partially determined by the presence of Robert Armin in the King's Men. Armin specialised in performing the role of wise or artificial fools from when he joined them in 1599. Small of stature, he was particularly known for his skill in quick changes.²⁴ In another of his roles, that of Feste in *Twelfth Night*, he remains largely outside the action of the play, though his presence broods largely over it.²⁵ It is likely that Armin took the Fool's role in *King Lear*. In that play, the Fool remorselessly exposes the folly of Lear, and many of his lines are suitable to the convention of the artificial wise fool which Armin cultivated, though in view of the complex textual history of that play, it is not easy to decide whether this Fool is entirely artificial.²⁶ Here in *The Winter's Tale*, Autolycus also remains largely outside the action, except for his almost incidental involvement because his clothing is required by Florizel; and in a final twist he has to acknowledge the social supremacy of the Clown when the latter becomes a gentleman born (V.ii.114). Once again it seems that the

23 See Janson, p. 211 and plates XXXVIc (1540) and XXXVIIa (Cranach). I owe this reference to Professor Cathy Shrank. Erasmus was interested in a Greek proverb which stated that an ape was always an ape even if clad in purple (see Erasmus, pp. 67 and 88). Cf. Shakespeare, *Ado*, II.i.34.

24 See Thomson, p. 417.

25 In Terry Hands's production for the RSC in 1979, Feste (Geoffrey Hutchings) never left the stage, and when not actively engaged he was always perceptible somewhere around the edge, though not necessarily looking at the action.

26 For the revision of the bitter artificial Fool in the Quarto to the pathetic natural Fool in the Folio, see Hornback, pp. 144-64. A more sceptical approach to this possible revision is offered by Foakes, pp. 33-47.

role of Autolycus within the play was in part determined by the inheritance of folly and that it should be interpreted as such.

The change in style of characterisation is remarkable. The foolish Leontes is presented in realistic terms in spite of the blurring of motivation at the beginning. He is a study in obsession. He may be a fool, but he could be as foolish as he is shown to be. But for Autolycus the style changes, as he is inside the action, and also outside: he is a metatheatrical focus and commentator, and his character is not realistically presented.²⁷ There is also the possibility that, in some respects, the role of Autolycus embodies parodic reflections of events in the first half of the play and that in doing so he turns around the function of folly in the play.²⁸ If the performances he gives, which we have been discussing, are in themselves a demonstration of folly and ones which the audience might be already conditioned to recognize as such, they might make for a new perspective on the earlier tragic folly and yet not arouse the essentially disastrous consequences we have considered. Instead, they would offer a kind of distanced parody.²⁹ By his activities Autolycus isolates the ignorant foolishness of the Clown. He manipulates others, as indeed does Leontes, though he (Autolycus) is less in control in Act Five than previously.³⁰ He sings a song with Mopsa and Dorcas, the two amorous shepherdesses, which makes fun of their rivalry for the Clown's affections (IV.iv.283-94). He exploits the Clown's credulity, first over the robbing and then at the sheep-shearing festival. He presents and describes ballads which are staggeringly incredible, and yet he provides a rationalization for believing them by the accumulation of witnesses.³¹ It turns out that these monstrosities are believed by the willing listeners, at least for the time being. It may be that we, readers or audience, do not believe them but see them as a ridiculous joke or scam, and yet they raise in comic mode the question of what should be believed, and this is material to the tragedy of Leontes, as well as to the miraculous return of Hermione, which is the centre-piece of the last action of the play.

27 See Evans, p. 158.

28 See Sokol, p. 180. For the suggestion that Autolycus is an antitype of Leontes, see Pitcher, ed., p. 66.

29 See Hartwig, pp. 91-103. She notices that both Leontes and Autolycus are aware that they are playing roles, but that Autolycus shares this with the audience, whereas Leontes does not.

30 Frey, p. 143, notes that Leontes creates roles for himself and for others around him.

31 Felperin, p. 15, suggests that the ballads re-enact the fantasies of Leontes comically.

In that last action, the audience do not know what has happened to her, and in her restoration, by which she turns from statue to beloved wife, credulity is once again stretched. In the end, the action and the emotional content compel belief, or at least a suspension of disbelief.³² It may be that his final repentance also reflects that of Leontes. Perhaps this is anticipated by his acceptance that he will do good in spite of himself.³³ When Autolycus, prompted by the Clown, agrees to amend his life, the Clown's acknowledgement remains tinged with folly: "Give me thy hand. I will swear to the Prince thou art as honest a true fellow as any is in Bohemia" (V.ii.134-35). One of the things we may have learned is that oaths may not be believable.³⁴

The argument that I have presented here proposes that there is a shift in the way folly is manifested half-way through the play. This shift is in line with many other features which make this play so remarkable, though I do not claim it is the only feature concerned with the shift in the structure. Nevertheless, the theatrical contrast between Leontes as the embodiment of folly who comes to realise the extent of his folly, as my title quotation from late in the play suggests, and the dynamic and energetic second embodiment in Autolycus, the manager and quasi-professional fool, who operates metatheatrically, is innovative. In his exposure of the folly of others he touches upon other important themes in the play. For example, the Clown's assumption that clothes make him and his father gentlemen is part of a discourse about social mobility.³⁵ But in the end both the characters who are manifestations of folly have to come to terms with their mistakes. Leontes' folly is circumscribed by his recognition of it, and the energetic folly of Autolycus, though it may have revealed folly in others, has to come to terms with its own limitations. The structure of the play thus appears not as a big mistake, as it was once thought, but as one of the features which arouse our curiosity as well as our admiration.

32 Further aspects of belief may have a religious content, especially in regard to miracles; see Marsalek, p. 283.

33 In spite of calling Honesty a fool (IV.iv.592-93), he entertains the thought of being honest himself (IV.iv.680-81, V.ii.133).

34 On oaths, cf. I.ii.29-30.

35 See Richards, p. 90.

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