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Folly in Lyndsay's Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis Revisited

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In an insightful paper originally delivered at the 2011 Tudor Theatre Round Table in Tours (“The Politics of Unreason”), Sarah Carpenter explored the representation of different forms of folly in Sir David Lyndsay’s monumental drama, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, performed in Cupar in Fife in 1552 and on Edinburgh’s Greenside in 1554. Drawing on Heather Arden’s tripartite taxonomy (in *Fools’ Plays*, 2011) of fools’ roles in medieval literary culture, she argued that not only those who perpetrate acts of foolishness or evil (the *evil-doers*), but also the innocent, downtrodden *victims* of such acts, and those who use the licence of the fool to expose folly (the *accusers*) all partake of different aspects of a rich, conflicted tradition of folly discourses which stretches back to classical times.¹

Viewing Lyndsay’s play through a lens in which vice is one form of folly, and virtue another, almost every character in the play can be seen as a fool in one sense or another at some point in the dramatic action. Folly himself makes an appearance only at the very end. But one could list among the *evil-doers* not only Flattery, who explicitly announces himself to the audience

1 For other aspects of the folly tradition, see Walker, “Folly”; Lyall, pp. xxiii-xxiv; and Mill, “Influence”.

as “your awin fuill” (l. 629),² but all of the other vices, from Falset and Dissait, through Sensuality, Hameliness, and Danger, to the laddish courtiers, Placebo, Wantonness, and Solace, each of whom has a hand in drawing Rex into sin and the realm into misery. Similarly, among the play’s *victims* of folly, one must list Rex Humanitas himself (who admits of the vices that they “have playit me the glaiks [*made a fool of me*]” (l. 1879); the Sowtar (shoemaker) and Tailor, downtrodden and possibly cuckolded by their insatiable wives (the former also robbed of his money by the corrupt Pardoner in return for a blasphemous non-divorce); Pauper and John the Commonweal, the representatives of the benighted commonwealth; and even Chastity, who, while she is wise enough to see through the clergy’s infidelities, naively assumes that the temporal estates will welcome her, until they too send her away. Meanwhile, among the *accusers*, Pauper and John the Commonweal fulfil many of the requirements of the role, as do the virtues, Good Counsel, Verity, Chastity, and Divine Correction, the latter being the wrathful, judgemental aspect of the godhead whose Second Person was and is divine folly incarnate.

Such an analysis offers an illuminating account of the breadth and flexibility of the folly traditions as they existed in the middle of the sixteenth century. But if we extend the definition of dramatic folly effectively to include everyone in the play—the perpetrators of folly (witting and unwitting), its victims, and those who seek to expose it—then the drama’s central confrontations between reason and unreason, laity and clergy, rich and poor, become somewhat blurred, and the revelation of Folly’s *sermon joyeux*, delivered at the very close of the play, that we are all fools (“I think na schame, so Christ me safe / To be ane fuill among the laife [*rest*], / Howbeit ane hundredth stands heir by / Perventure als great fuillis as I” [ll. 4507–10]) would be no revelation at all, but simply a recapitulation of that which we always already knew. The number of fools is indeed infinite (the text for Folly’s sermon), and it is only those who recognise that they are fools who have any hope of wisdom.

This may, of course, have been Lyndsay’s intention. But I would like to pursue an alternative thought experiment in this essay, based upon the idea that Lyndsay wanted Folly’s sermon, like his entrance itself, to come as a surprise to

2 All references to the play are to Walker, ed. A film of the 2013 production of the play can be viewed on the “Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court” project website at <<http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/>> (accessed 23 February 2014).

his audiences, coming as it does after roughly two hours of seemingly wise dealing in the parliament of the Three Estates, in which the vices have been expelled, Good Counsel followed in the reordering of church and state, and learned preachers given the pulpit to replace the dumb dogs of Spirituality's ignorant, self-interested cabal. Diligence, the play's surrogate for Lyndsay, has even painstakingly read out a formal list of the reforms agreed by the Estates, some requiring a stanza of explanation, others two or even three, revealing in great detail just how the commonwealth is to be ordered hereafter. The implication seems clear: here is order after chaos, defined and exemplified in careful, indeed even somewhat pedantic, detail.

Folly's entry at this point seems designed explicitly to reverse the prevailing dynamic of Part Two of the play, which appeared to be leading to the defeat of foolishness and the triumph of reason and self-discipline, and to reintroduce the idea that folly cannot be expelled so readily, as, for better or worse, it is an inherent part of what it is to be human. But, of course, it is not *all* it is to be human. If everything and everyone is always foolish, then foolishness would be just another word for the human condition, which might make good sense theologically, but would prevent folly from providing an effective tool for the exposure of particular injustices. And this, I would argue, is how Lyndsay seems to have wanted to use folly in the *Satire*.

Sarah Carpenter suggested persuasively how the representatives of the common people, Pauper and John the Commonweal, could be considered fools: the former as he is "a ragged and simple poor man who angrily but helplessly seeks redress from the courts", is laughed at by Diligence for his "unsophisticated lack of understanding" and called "the daftest fuill that ever I saw" (l. 2015); the latter as his intrusion into the Parliament to speak truth to power "carries some of the force of Marcolf, the comically wise and outspoken peasant fool who challenges the intellectual wisdom of Solomon" (Carpenter, pp. 43-44). But, while John and Pauper are clearly presented as victims of an avaricious, self-interested clergy and an ill-governed state, and both speak out powerfully to expose the injustices perpetrated by churchmen, lay landlords, and the legal system, this does not, I would argue, necessarily make them fools. Some fools are victims or accusers, and some victims and accusers are fools, but not all of them are both. Crucial to the identification of folly would seem to be the presence of laughter, laughter *with*, but also laughter *at* the character concerned. And neither John nor Pauper is laughed at or laughed with in quite the ways that Folly or the vices

are. Thus a distinction is created between those figures whom the play represents explicitly as fools and those who are simply victims or expositors of folly.

John the Commonweal is rarely laughed at. His initial entry into the place, with the striking stage direction that he should either “loup” (i.e., leap) over the “stank” (the water-filled ditch that separates him from the parliament), “or els fall in it” (l. 2437 SD), clearly suggests the possibility of physical comedy. But once he is inside the parliament house, he rarely occupies anything but the moral and political high ground, and he does so on his own terms. He alone, for example, can identify the vices whom the King and the other estates seemingly cannot see:

Thair canker cullours, I ken them be the heads: *rotten tricks*
As for our reverent fathers of Spiritualitie,
Thay ar led be Covetice and cairles Sensualitie. *reckless*
And as ye se, Temporalitie hes neid of correctioun,
Quhilk hes lang tyme bene led be Publick Oppressioun: *by*
Loe quhair the loun lysis lurkand at his back. *lies lurking*
Get up, I think to se[e] thy craig gar ane raip crack. *neck crack a rope*
Loe, heir is Falsset and Dissait, weill I ken,
Leiders of the merchants and sillie crafts-men. *simple*
Quhat mervell thocht the Thrie Estaits backward gang, *It's no wonder that*
Quhen sic an vyle cumpanie dwels them amang,
Quhilk hes reulit this rout monie deir dayis, *ruled, long days*
Quhilk gars John the Common-weill want his warme clais. (ll. 2451-63)

When the clergy try to put him down through abuse and argument, he responds effectively, either with bold mockery, dismissing the Parson with “Sir Dominie, I trowit he had be dum! / Quhair Devil gat we this ill fairde blaitie bum?” (ll. 2776-77), or with a surprisingly well-informed knowledge of Scottish history. Thus, when arguing with the Prioress over the reputation and legacy of King David I (reigned 1124-53), the founder of “sa mony gay abayise” (l. 2966), he can declare with confidence that

King James the first, roy of this regioun,
Said that he [David] was ane sair sanct to the croun. *sore/harmful*
I heir men say that he was sumthing blind, *somewhat*
That gave away mair nor he left behind. *more than*
His successours that halines did repent,
Quhilk gart them do great inconvenient. (ll. 2989-94)

John does not speak in the riddling paradoxes of the witty fool tradition, but rather in plain terms, mingling fact and invective in equal measure. And when he speaks, he is listened to by those in power, not with amused tolerance, but with respect. Once he has named the vices that beset the Three Estates, he asks Correctioun in no uncertain terms to expel them. And Correctioun responds without comment or hesitation: “As ye have devysit, but [i.e., without] doubt it salbe done” (l. 2474). This is the embodiment of the commonwealth speaking; to place him among the play’s fools would be to underestimate his seriousness.

Pauper is a more ambivalent case, but here again I would argue that the play does not seem to want us to see him primarily as a fool. His entry into the place, begging for alms from spectators at a point when the action seems to have paused for an interval (“*the Kings, Bischops, and principall players being out of their seats*” [l. 1933 SD]) is certainly striking, blurring the distinction between play-world and audience-world in unsettling and affective ways.³ And the scene between Pauper and Diligence flirts with the comedy of abuse and ridicule familiar from the folly tradition. The latter calls Pauper (ironically) a “gudly companyeon” (l. 1938), more directly a “fals raggit loun” (l. 1939) and latterly “the daftest fuill that ever I saw” (l. 2015), but the comedy of abuse works both ways. Pauper responds in kind, insulting Diligence as no better than a jumped-up convict (“Quha Devil maid the[e] ane getill man, that wald not cut thy lugs?” [l. 1947]), and co-opts the audience in his mockery of his fancy attire: “Quhat say ye till thir court das-tards? Be thay get hail clais, / Sa sune do thay leir to sweir and trip on their tais” (ll. 1952-53). And it is Diligence who is comically wrong-footed by the exchange: “Me thocht the carle callit me knave evin to my face!” (l. 1954). When the latter thinks he has outsmarted the intruder by taking away the ladder leading to the King’s throne, thus seemingly trapping him up there, drinking Rex’s ale (“Loup now, gif thou list, for thou hes lost the ledder” [l. 1958]), Pauper jumps down regardless and carries on his complaint.

Pauper is no natural fool, then, even though he momentarily seems unsure about how many children he has (is it “sax or seavin” [l. 1935]?). His account of his misfortunes at the hands of his landlord and vicar is eloquent and moving, bringing a new tone of sincerity and concrete verisimilitude to a play that had hitherto operated on the level of allegorical abstraction.⁴ Nor does he deal in riddles or

3 See also Walker, “Cultural Work” and “Reflections”.

4 See Walker, “Reflections” and “Personification”.

comedy. Indeed, a good deal of what he says is taken directly from the words of Experience, the wise authority figure in the long didactic poem, *The Monarch, or Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour off the Miserabyll Estait of this World* (1552), that Lyndsay was writing at roughly the same time as the *Satire*.⁵ His appeals are direct, heartfelt and compelling, and his predominant mood is anger. He wants back the cows which his vicar took as mortuary dues on the deaths of his father, mother and wife, and he is begging his way to St Andrews in the attempt to get them back via the ecclesiastical courts. This quest may, as Diligence tells him, be a foolish one: the church courts will never give judgement against the interests of churchmen. But his role is not that of the hapless fool; rather, he has more in common with the Piers Plowman tradition or with Skelton's Colin Clout than with the fools of medieval convention.

If we narrow our definition of the play's fools a little to include, not all those characters with some connection to aspects of the folly tradition, but only those characters who are dressed as fools, or explicitly admit to being fools—that is, to Folly himself, Flattery (“your awin fuill”), the other vices, and the senior male clergy (revealed as fools when they are disrobed in the final scenes)—then a rather different and perhaps more powerful dynamic emerges from the architecture of the play. And here the pattern seems to be a clear movement away from allegory and generality toward direct social and political allusions, and an increasingly direct and insistent assault on social injustice as Lyndsay saw it, not in notional terms or from first principles, but through reference to very particular institutions, laws, and practices.⁶ It is the vicious, self-interested and short-termedly materialist vision of Spirituality and the corrupt influence of Flattery that represent Folly in the second half of the play, and it is this folly that the agents of reform work hard to expel, through argument, political action, legislation and finally acts of judicial “punitioun”.

The entry of Folly himself at the close of the play is both the culmination of that process of reform and the agent of its transformation into a prompt for the audience not simply to seek to change the world around them but also to transform themselves. The impact of Folly's entrance comes from the fact that, after five hours of a play that shifts from allegorical abstraction to ever-increasing *ad hominem* specificity, he nonetheless manages to crank up the particularity and

5 See, e.g., ll. 2760–71 of the play, which reproduce almost verbatim ll. 4696–4708 of the *Dialogue*.

6 See Walker, “Flytyng”, and Lyall, p. xxix.

audacity of the play's socio-political critique a notch or two further. The vices' scaffold speeches having suggested that everyone in the audience is complicit in the corruption that the vices represent, whether by watering down their wine, selling shoddy merchandise, cheating on their spouses, or generally trying to do down their neighbours for their own advantage, Folly then tells them that they are also fools if they think that legislation and administrative reform alone can return the community to economic and moral health. Reform must begin at home, and in the heart. Everyone is indeed a fool if they do not accept that the satire applies directly to them. And his sermon will suggest that they are in exalted company in their folly.

The play had begun with a conventional denial of any specific satirical intention. Diligence, with his tongue very firmly planted in his cheek, had promised the audience that the actors would deal only in generalities, naming no one in particular in what he promised would be an entirely playful entertainment:

Prudent peopill, I pray yow all,
 Tak na man greif in speciall, *No-one take particular offence*
 For wee sall speik in general, *only generally*
 For pastyme and for play. (ll. 70-73)

But, in the course of Part Two, Lyndsay has his vices name virtually every prominent family, and many prominent individuals in the Cupar community watching the 1552 performance, among the followers of Thift, Falset and Dissait. The vices mention "the great clan Jamesone, / The blude royal of Cupar toun" (ll. 4094-95), the Andersons and Pattersons (l. 4097), Lucklands, Wellands, Carruthers and Douglasses (l. 4107), the Cupar burgess Tam Williamson (l. 4098), the tailors Andrew Fortune (l. 4154) and "Tailyeour Baberage" (l. 4157), "the barfut deacon, Jamie Ralfe" (l. 4160), Willie Cadyeoch (l. 4163), the Cupar brewers (l. 4166), and Geordie Sillie (l. 4184), to name only a few of the real families and burghers whom Lyndsay draws into the business of the play, to the point where the barrier between play-world and audience-world has been thoroughly dismantled. And then he ends the drama with the still more specific and *ad hominem* accusations of Folly, which widen the purview of the satire to take in the wider world of current religious and diplomatic politics and the microcosm of every spectator him or herself. The community, he suggests, has not been purged of vice and folly after all, for they lie within all of us. The effect of Folly's sermon is thus not to universalise foolishness to the point where it ceases to be a useful tool of social analysis

(which might seem at first glance to be the implicit burden of his text: infinite are the number of fools), but to particularise it still further. It roots the vicious, self-destructive folly he condemns (as distinct from the playful, nonsensical folly he himself embodies) in very specific institutions, practices, and individuals, some far away and long ago, but others very close at hand indeed.

It is just as Flattery is leaving the stage, not to exile, but to continue his work of subverting the clergy (“I will with ane humbill spreit / Gang serve the Hermit of Lareit, / And leir him for till flatter” [ll. 4299–301])⁷ that the text offers the laconic but ominous stage direction, “Heir sal enter Foly”. And Folly bursts into the place with a cheerful greeting to the audience, to tell Diligence about his unfortunate encounter with a sow whom he encountered running loose on Cupar’s Shoe-gate—an encounter that ended with Folly upended in a dung-hill. This story is an emblem of a world-turned-upside down and criminally neglected; the pig routs the human, and no one restrains their livestock or cleans the public streets, prompting Folly to curse the burgh officials whose responsibility it is to keep civil order:

I wald the officiars of the toun,
That suffers sic confusioun,
That thay war harbrait with Mahown,
Or hangit on ane gallows.
Fy, fy, that sic ane fair cuntrie
Sould stand sa lang but policie. (ll. 4330–35)

This is Good Counsel’s portentous opening lament, delivered afresh in a comic, and very local, vein.⁸ It seems to take away the vicious edge that characterised Flattery’s brand of folly and offer instead a carnivalesque vision of folly as a joy-

7 The reference to the Hermit is itself double-edged, as Lyndsay’s view seems to have been that, far from needing Flattery to corrupt him, he was already a prime example of clerical hypocrisy and corruption. The shrine of Loreto claimed to be the site of miraculous cures, and so became a magnet for pilgrims, who Lyndsay suggested were being defrauded. In *The Dialogue* he cited among those clerics who are motivated solely by “thare particular profiteit”, “specially that Heremeit of Lawreit. / He pat the comoun peple in believe / That blynd gat seycht and crukit gat thare feit, / The quhilk that pail[y]ard no way can approve” (ll. 2688–92).

8 “I have maid my residence / With hie princes of greit puissance / In Ingland, Italie, and France, / And monie uther land. / Bot out of Scotland, wa, alace, / I haif bene fleimit lang tyme space, / That garris our gyders all want grace, / And die befor thair day; / Becaus thay lychtlyit Gude Counsall, / Fortune turnit on thame hir saill, / Quhilk brocht this realme to meikill baill, / Quha can the contrair say?” (ll. 574–85).

ously protean form of human carnality, a shit-stained but ultimately harmless surrender to the body in all its perverse desires and anxieties. But more is to follow. When given the chance to preach, he turns from scatological humour and bawdry to more serious political comment. He has, he declares, “foly hats” (fools’ hoods) to sell, and hangs them on the pulpit as an advertisement of his wares (ll. 4488-89). Taking as his text the familiar words of Ecclesiastes 1:15, “*stultum numerus infinitus*” (the number of fools is infinite), he begins to enumerate the catalogue of fools, starting in general terms with “Earles, duiks, kings, and empriours” (l. 4514), indeed with any fools with their eyes set so fast on the present moment that they lose sight of the interests of their immortal soul: “Sum dois as thay sould [*as if they should*] never die, / Is nocht this folie, quhat say ye?” (ll. 4526-27). But then he narrows the focus to merchants who break the law and defy the elements to squeeze a little more profit from their overseas trade (of whom he could safely assume there would be some present in the audience), to old men who marry young girls (likewise), and then to spiritual fools, specifically those who “takes in cure / The saullis of great diosies, / And regiment of great abesies, / For gredines of warldlie pelfe” (ll. 4566-69). As Diligence hints, this is dangerous talk. The elephant in the room here is that the majority of those who have taken appointments as bishops or abbots for financial reasons in recent memory were not members of a professional clerical caste, easily scapegoated and symbolically expelled, but the younger sons of noblemen and the illegitimate sons of James V, four of whom were made abbots *in commendam* before they reached the age of ten during the 1530s (Cameron, pp. 261-62). Folly responds guardedly that if “fuillis speik of the prelacie / It will be hauldin for heresie” (ll. 4579-80), but “[*e*]x *operibus eorum cognoscetis eos*” (l. 4578) (by their works ye shall know them [Matt. 7:20]). For the noblemen present (and we know that a “great part of the nobility” of Scotland was present for the Edinburgh performance of 1554) this jibe would have struck uncomfortably close to home. Folly begins to look like a fundamental buttress of the Scottish political architecture.

And it is not just unnamed spiritual fools who must wear his folly hats, but specifically also the friars of nearby St Andrews, who had as recently as 1551 been engaged in a vociferous and public dispute over whether the Lord’s Prayer might be directed not only to God the Father, but to the saints as well:

Sa, be this prophesie plainlie appeirs, *by*
 That mortall weirs salbe among freirs. *wars among*

Thay sall nocht knaw weill in thair closters, *cloisters*
To quhom thay sall say thair *Pater Nosters*.
Wald thay fall to and fecht with speir and sheild, *Should*
The Feind mak cuir quhilk of them win the feild! (ll. 4636-41)

According to the martyrologist John Foxe, the St Andrews disputation was prompted by a sermon given there by the English Dominican friar, Richard Marshall, Prior of Newcastle, that stressed that the Pater Noster should only be directed to the godhead, when local practice had encouraged directing it to the saints. A local friar, named “Toittis” by Foxe (but perhaps, as Joanne Kantrowitz suggests, one Richard Cottis), was put up to defend the local practice, and the result was an unseemly squabble, in which mocking squibs were posted on the walls of the abbey church. The matter finally ended up on the agenda of the Provincial Council that closed in January 1552, and so was very recent news when Folly referred to it in Cupar in the following June, and in Edinburgh two years later.⁹ It was also contentious, as, rather than being merely a passing curiosity, the controversy touched directly upon an issue central to the reforming debates, and of considerable importance to Lyndsay himself: the status of the saints and the appropriate degree of devotion to be paid to them. A good deal of the heat in his poem *The Dialog* was generated by the poet’s contempt for the excesses of what he portrayed as saint worship in Scotland, the “idolatrours” veneration of their images, and the wasteful pilgrimages undertaken to their shrines:

[Y]e princis of the preistis that suld preche,
Quhy suffer ye so gret abutioun?
Quhuy do [y]e nocht the sempyll peple teche
Quhow and to quhome to dress thare orisoun?
Quhy thole [y]e thame to ryn from toun to toun
In Pylgrimage tyll ony Ymagreis,
Hopand to get thare sum Salvatioun,
Prayand to thame devotlye on thare kneiss? (ll. 2645-52)

So Folly’s allusion to the friars squabbling over whether even the Pater Noster might not be redirected to the saints was designed both to touch still raw local nerves and to push forward the most contentious of national debates.

9 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1576 edition), bk. 8, pp. 1489-90. See also Kantrowitz, pp. 17-21.

More audaciously still, perhaps, Folly accuses the great powers of Europe, including Scotland's ally and protector, Henri II of France, and the Pope himself, of being unchristian fools, an allegation which would, in the first case, seem politically and diplomatically incendiary, and, in the second, skirt dangerously close to heresy. Having sought, and gained, from Rex permission to speak of kings, he then produces his final hood, "Ane nobill cap imperiell" (l. 4590), which is, he says,

nocht ordanit bot for doings *only*
 Of empreours, of duiks, and kings.
 For princelie and imperiall fuillis,
 Thay sould have luggis als lang as muillis. *ears, mules'*
 The pryde of princes withoutin fail,
 Gars all the warld rin top ovir tail. (ll. 4590-96)

What is at stake here is the substantial and immediate business of European politics and war. Reminding his audience of the support that France has recently given Scotland against the incursions of the English, he laments that the Holy Roman Emperor is now shaping "for till be ane conqueror", moving his ordinance against "the nobill king of France" (l. 4603). Indeed,

All the princes of Almanie, *Germany*
 Spaine, Flanders and Italie,
 This present yeir ar in ane flocht: *a stir*
 Sum sall thair wages find deir bocht. (ll. 4609-12)

Even "the Paip with bombard, speir and scheid, / Hes sent his armie to the field" (ll. 4613-14):

Is this fraternall charitie,
 Or furious folie, quhat say ye?
 Thay leird nocht this at Christis scuill; *learned, school*
 Thairfoir, I think them verie fuillis.
 I think it folie, be Gods mother,
 Ilk Christian prince to ding doun uther. (ll. 4617-22)

The reference is, as Anna Jean Mill noted long ago, to the so-called Schmalkaldic War of 1551-53, fought between France and an Imperial-Papal alliance ("Representations", pp. 640-41). And that the criticism was aimed at all the princes involved,

friends and foes alike, is reinforced by the extended discussion of the same conflict in the *Dialogue*:

The Empriour movis his ordinance
Contrair the potent Kyng of France;
And France rychtso with gret regour,
Contrar his freinde the Empriour;
And rycht swa France agane Ingland;
Ingland also aganis Scotland;
And als the Scottis with all thare mycht,
Doith feycht for tyll defend thare rycht. (ll. 5396-403)

And what is the root cause of this dissension? “Iknaw no ressonabyll cause quharefore, / Except Pryde, Covatyce, and vaine glore” (ll. 5394-95). On one level, this is, of course, a familiar Erasmian condemnation of needless internecine conflict among Christian powers, but its immediacy, referring to a war that was still to be resolved in 1554, and implicating Scotland as well as her foes in the unchristian folly, gives it a potency beyond the commonplaces of refined scholarly debate.

Finally, Folly hands the “folly hat imperial” to Rex himself, telling him to part it among his fellow rulers, a gesture that would have made clear that he, and the king for whom he stands in some ways a surrogate, James V, was as culpable in folly as the others. For in 1540 James had conspicuously had his royal crown redesigned for the coronation of his queen, Mary of Guise, at Holyrood, converting it into a closed crown imperial, as part of a conscious programme of ceremonial and artistic self-presentation as an imperial ruler along Continental lines that also saw the ambitious renovation and redesign of his palaces at Falkland, Stirling and Linlithgow in the French style.¹⁰ When it was performed in Cupar in 1552, and still more when it was reprised in Edinburgh in 1554, before Mary herself, newly appointed as Regent, and her council, the self-lacerating nature of the allusion would have been all too plain. Among the royal fools who had turned their back on Christian wisdom had been Scotland’s last king, Mary’s own husband, and Lyndsay’s former pupil and much-loved master, James himself. If Folly is inbuilt into the foundations of church and state in Scotland, this exchange seems to suggest that it reaches to the very capstone of the structure: the king himself.

10 See Norman Macdougall, “Foreword”, in Cameron, p. xi, and Shire, pp. 69-72.

By the final scene, then, the *Satire* has come a long way from the “general” pastime promised by Diligence at the outset. Its final aim seems to have been to implicate everyone watching the play in the sinful folly that is its target, not by declaring consistently that everyone and everything is always foolish, but by revealing in a carefully staged sequence of declarations that here in Scotland folly is rampant, and every member of the audience bears a share of the blame for its success, and for its consequences. They do so, not simply because they are human, and to be human is to be inherently foolish, but primarily because they pursue particular short-term, seemingly self-interested goals at the expense of the longer-term interests of the commonwealth. Folly’s speech, like those of the vices which precede it, thus suggests that the politics of folly are both intensely personal, a matter for husbands and wives, the buyers and sellers of merchandise, the keepers of shrines and the pilgrims who visit them, and also Europe-wide. Its strongholds are in the palaces of Rome and Paris, Brussels and Stirling, as well as in every Cupar and Edinburgh household.

That it is Folly who delivers the final, political *coup de grâce*, declaring at the end of a play that had seemingly assured its audiences that all the abuses it listed would be put to rights, that fools we are and to folly we must return, is a fitting reflection of the paradoxical, multifarious, ambiguous power of the Fool on the sixteenth-century stage. Lyndsay’s Folly in himself embodies all three of the fool roles suggested in Arden’s typology. He is the seemingly innocent victim of his wife’s explosive illnesses and excessive alcoholic consumption (ll. 4371-410), and of the Cupar sow’s allegedly murderous, or at least castratory, malice (“Sir, scho hes sworne that scho sall sla me, / Or ellis byte baith my balloks fra me” [ll. 4352-53]). He is the would-be evil-doer who bawdily pursues the attractive woman in the audience on the strength of their, one assumes wholly imaginary, sexual history (ll. 4430-60). And he is the accuser and truth-teller who exposes the unchristian, unreasonable madness of princes, popes, friars, merchants, old men and young women, and their neighbours, in France, Germany and England, but most especially here and now, and in Scotland. His appearance as the last actor in a five-and-a-half-hour drama of collective self-exploration and communal reform brings something new to an already well-stocked table (and notably something that Lyndsay had not thought it necessary to include in the earlier, rudimentary version of the drama played before James V as an interlude in 1540). That something would seem to be the idea of folly as both a lacerating and a healing phenomenon. Folly inserts the sharpest of scalpels to lance the most pri-

vate of boils (the unacknowledged truth that our king, our nobles, our friars and ourselves must all share in the blame for the state of the commonwealth), but he also reaches out to embrace the audience in an ultimately salvific moment of shared laughter. The idea that the number of fools is infinite is thus both a troublesome idea and a comforting one—the first step in the journey to real reform, for commonwealth and each individual spectator alike.

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