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## *Fart for Fart's Sake: Fooling through the Body in Grobiana's Nuptials<sup>1</sup>*

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The Early Drama at Oxford project explores the history and character of plays written and performed in Oxford Colleges in the late-medieval and early modern periods, and in this paper we will explore *Grobiana's Nuptials*, the last play that falls within EDOX's historical period of study.<sup>2</sup> The play is an excellent example with which to raise wide and significant questions about academic drama generally for a number of reasons: the play is remarkably metatheatrical; it is insistently intertextual and draws reference from a broad and fascinating range of material, both scholarly and general; and it looks backwards to various attitudes towards the proper relationship between drama and pedagogy throughout the period. In fact, the survival of the text itself provides an initial irony. MS Bodley 30 seems to have begun life as the presentation copy of a Latin play, *Physiponomachia* (c. 1609-11), written by Christopher Wren

1 We would like to thank scholars of the Tudor Theatre Round Table (2015) at the Université François-Rabelais de Tours, and of the Medieval and Early Modern Research Seminar at the University of East Anglia, who provided invaluable comment on parts of the paper here presented. We are particularly indebted to John-Mark Philo for suggesting our title.

2 Although this is the final Oxford play which we can positively identify, we have records to confirm that St John's College, from which it comes, continued to stage drama regularly until 1640. The play is entry no. 2561 in Wiggins.

and given to the President of St John's, John Buckeridge, as part of an apparent tradition at the college.<sup>3</sup> Once we get beyond the carefully spaced and neat Latin text, however, we arrive at the rather more chaotically written English play that occupies the second section of the manuscript.



The play was clearly seen as valuable enough to be preserved, even if it seems, at first glance, to be rather unpromising stuff. *Grobiana's Nuptials* is written in one act, divided into nine short scenes.<sup>4</sup> It opens with a prologue delivered by Old Grobian himself, who announces his search for a suitable son-in-law. In Scene Two, Pamphagus plans a feast, with his cook Lorrell and servant Oyestus: they discuss menu and guest list, and Oyestus is sent to issue the invitations. Scene Three presents the Grobian court held by Vanslotten, Tantoblin and Ursin: the nature of this court is elusive but its functions are both legal and institutional—it tries a case, and it also has the power to admit members to the society of Grobians: it is perhaps like the Governing Body of an Oxford College, since Colleges historically had the power to arbitrate crimes involving their members. Vanslotten, Tantoblin and Ursin complain that the court session is keeping them from other business, namely the making of candles in the case of Vanslotten and bear fighting for Ursin. Pamphagus enters and announces that he has discovered some new recruits in the streets. They discuss the feast, ordering food, specifically rancid butter. Games are set up: “foote ball” (l. 251) bearbaiting, and “the auncient sport of throwing snoweballs, or slangturd, or snot” (ll. 258-59). In Scene Four we meet Grobiana, Old Grobian's daughter, and her nurse Ungartred. We learn of Grobiana's unsightly looks and her bad breath, and hear that her charm makes all the young men follow her. Oyestus arrives to issue an invitation to Pamphagus's feast. In the fifth scene, candidates Hunch and Jobernole talk about their prospects with women: Jobernole is wooing Grobiana, whereas Hunch is happy with his kitchen maid. The Grobian feast is presented in Scene Six: Old Grobian commends all present to his daughter, who has fallen for Tantoblin. Tantoblin reveals, in Scene Seven, that he has been infected

3 For details of the manuscript, see Wren, ed. Weckermann, p. 23.

4 We follow throughout the scene and line numbering from the printed edition in *Grobianus in England*, ed. Rühl.

by love for Grobiana: “Is shitten came shites the beginning of love?” When Grobiana enters she is very encouraging, but their kiss is interrupted by Ursin, who sets upon Grobiana himself and is struck down by Tantoblin: Ursin cries murder and his friends Pamphagus, Lorrell and Oyestus enter to save him. Grobiana is sick, perhaps lovesick, in Scene Eight: she swoons and is revived by Oyestus and Old Grobian with a stinking, snuffed tallow candle, though they remark a turd would do the job better. Oyestus informs us that his wife is accomplished in the art of conserving excrement. Scene Nine shows Vanslotten presiding over the Grobian court as they examine the case of Tantoblin’s assault on Ursin. The two rivals are reconciled and set off for the nuptials. Jobernole and Hunch are admitted into the Grobian ranks after swearing an oath to follow Grobian rules. In the Epilogue, Old Grobian bids the audience leave since the play is now over.

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This short description may indicate why the play has been ignored by almost all scholars: it was edited by Ernst Rühl not because he was interested in its dramatic merit but as part of his study of the Grobian tradition. “Grobianism” is a much more familiar term in German than in English: the Middle High German adjective “grob”, “uneducated” and “unrefined”, is the root of the word “Grobian”, which appears in 1482 in Zeninger’s *Vocabularius teutonicus* as the German translation of the Latin “rusticus”, and “Grobian” is still used in German to describe a boorish, rude or simple person, and as a synonym for “peasant”.<sup>5</sup> In 1494 Sebastian Brant’s *Narrenschiff* introduced Saint Grobian as a popular new saint for the order of drunkards and gluttons: his followers *Ellerkunz* (Boorishblock), *Wüstgenug* (Uglyenough), and *Seltensatt* (Seldomsated) have taken charge of a town from *Sauberinsdorf* (Cleaninthevillage), who has gone blind, and the peasants are now all drunk and behaving badly (Brant, p. 262).

In 1495, Brant revised his work and added a chapter on table manners. The Grobian at dinner will not wash his hands, nor will he observe seating orders based on social precedence; he will spit out food, and wipe his nose on the tablecloth. These same themes were later imitated and expanded in another German

5 We would like to acknowledge our debt to Janine Barrett, who first drew our attention to the German Grobian tradition and whose University of Fribourg MA thesis on *Grobiana’s Nuptials* supplies valuable information on the German background. We are also indebted to her for the translations from German in this essay.

work of Grobianism, Dedekind's Latin *Grobianus et Grobiana* of 1549, which was translated into German by Kaspar Scheidt in 1551. Grobianism is used by Dedekind to parody books of manners, and to teach through negative example, although since it was composed in Latin its first audience is unlikely to have been the Grobian peasantry. Dedekind appears to develop the Grobian tradition as a veiled critique of the social order—it is difficult to argue with the logic of his Grobian who is unhappy with a seating plan:

Warum solt ich eim andern weichen,  
 So er doch eben ist meins gleichen?  
 Wir sind von einem vatter gleich,  
 Ob wir schon arm sind oder reich,  
 Und sind gemacht auß staub und erdt.

[Why should I give way to another, if he is the same as I? We are all from the same father, be we rich or poor, and are all made of dust and earth.] (Dedekind, ll. 651-55)

Dedekind's text also, importantly, introduced the female figure of Grobiana, heroine of our St John's Play. An English translation of Dedekind was published in 1605 by "R. F. gent". His title is satirical: *The Schoole of Slovenrie Or Cato Turnd Wrong Side Outward. Translated out of Latine into English verse to the use of all English Christendome, except Court and Cittie*. He does not name Grobian but instead evokes titles perhaps more likely to be familiar to English readers. *The Schoole of Slovenrie* may be juxtaposed to a school of good manners, such as F. Seager's *Schoole of Virtue*; Cato, who is turned inside-out, evokes the *Disticha moralia* by Dionysius Cato, a core text known to every English schoolboy. Similarly, in the play that is the focus of this essay, *Grobiana's Nuptials*, Grobiana herself makes direct reference to a "schoole of complement" at which young men prepare to pay her suit (l. 352).

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"R. F." explains his project in a fairly close translation of Dedekind's preface. He will attempt to teach by contrary example how to avoid the "ill conditions" which "infect" the times ("R. F.", l. 18), and he hopes that he will thus have more success than "oure Latine writers" who were unable to "prevaile" when they protested against "rusticke vices" (ll. 25-26): "Which tride indeede, but all in vaine, those vices to amend / Which did mens minds, by follies meanes, in beastly sort offend" (ll. 23-24).

Men's follies have led them to vicious behaviour no better than that of beasts: by portraying this bestiality in all its ugliness, the writer hopes to encourage the reader to pursue virtuous behaviour instead. The vices which must be eschewed are "rusticke"—those of the peasant, or Grobian, who is also characterized as a "clown" and a "knave":

Each clowne shall see what fits him best, and what his manners be,  
And I affirme that craftie deeds with crafty knaves agree.  
Perhaps when many see their faults so fitting their owne name,  
Such clownish manners from their minds the'le banish quite for shame.  
("R. F.", ll. 91-94)

But "R. F." also imitates Dedekind's veiled challenges to the social order:

Had we not all one father "Adam", and one mother "Eve"?  
Shall earth and ashes thrust thee downe? At that who would not grieve?  
When as our Grandsire "Adam" dig'd, and Grandam "Eve" span,  
Who then, I pray, amongst us all was the best gentleman? ("R. F.", ll. 424-27)

In citing the famous dictum by which John Ball stirred up the Peasants' Revolt (it is notable that the anonymous play *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* had been published in 1593), is "R. F." condemning Jack Straw as the ultimate Grobian? Is he indicating that the end of bad manners is social revolution? Or is he granting some validity to a Grobian class war?

Such contextualisation of *Grobiana's Nuptials* may start to indicate reasons for considering the play as more than simply base scatological farce. Its eponymous heroine is part of a satirical European tradition used to present radical challenges to the social order. In English, this tradition is also represented in prose by Thomas Dekker's *The guls horne-booke* (1609). Dekker addresses all who have "a monethes mind to haue y<sup>e</sup> *Guls Horn-booke* by heart" and assures them that by memorizing his words they "in time may be promoted to serue any Lord in *Europ*, as his crafty Foole or his bawdy Iester" (p. 3). Although Dekker's work fixes its satire on the behaviour of gallants, it is addressed, with heavy irony, to

any man, woman, or child, be he Lord, be he Lowne, be he Courtier, be he Carter, of y<sup>e</sup> Innes a Court, or Innes of Citty, that hating from the bottome of his heart, all good manners and generous education, is really in loue, or rather doates on that excellent country Lady, *Innocent simplicity*. (p. 3)

Although generosity and good manners should be the mark of the courtier, they are not exclusively so; nor are they always found at court, and the carter may be as vulgar, but also, implicitly, as courteous, as the lord.

#### IV

For a long time, *Grobiana's Nuptials* was considered to be the work of two students at St John's, Roger Shipman and William Taylor (*Grobianus*, ed. Rühl, p. 52). But the editors of the *Records of Early English Drama* (REED) volumes for Oxford unearthed an important piece of evidence which has caused the play to be re-attributed. More importantly, perhaps, it must also cause us to reassess the play's quality, as we shall go on to discuss. In a letter of 16 January 1637, the university's Vice-Chancellor, Richard Baylie, who was also President of St John's, wrote to William Laud, the University Chancellor and notable St John's alumnus, as follows:

Young Charles May presented us with a mock-shew on Saturday last, ye subject was slovenrie it selfe, ye marriage of Grobian's daughter to Tantoblin; but ye cariadg and acting soe hansom and cleane, that I was not better pleased with a merriment these many yeares. (cited in REED: *Oxford*, p. 556)

The date alone would undermine the previous identification of authorship: at the time of the play, William Taylor had been at the college for less than a month; Shipman would not even arrive until May 1637. Charles May, by contrast, had matriculated in July 1634, aged fifteen—he would take his BA in April 1638—and so he had spent two-and-a-half years at the college prior to the play (Hegarty, p. 361). St John's had a thriving and important theatrical scene throughout the period—helped enormously by the number of scholars from Merchant Taylors School who took protected places and were almost exclusively responsible for St John's entertainments. Indeed, May is relatively unusual in not having been at Merchant Taylors prior to St John's, although we do not know where he had been instead. Indeed, the fact that he wrote *Grobiana's Nuptials* is one of the few things recorded about him in the recent Biographical Register of early modern St John's alumni. Certainly we don't know enough about him for any biographical information to inform a reading of the text itself—other than perhaps to remark on the relationship between the play's sophistication and the relative youth of its author.



From Baylie's letter, not only can we attribute the authorship of the play correctly; we can also note that the Vice-Chancellor was delighted by the play when he saw it performed. What is the secret of the play's success?

*Grobiana's Nuptials* is, as far as we know, the only attempt to present Grobian in dramatic form; as a play, unlike Dekker's prose work, it can exploit the presence of actors' bodies, as well as the interaction between dramatic action and setting. To consider the second of these points briefly first, if, as seems likely, the play was presented in St John's dining hall, then its focus on feasting—the feast which occupies the central scene of the play, and the nuptial feast which is anticipated at the end of the play—becomes an important means by which the audience is drawn into the action: the audience occupies the space in which it is normally occupied with public feasting, and is thereby brought to reflect on its own table manners by comparison with those of the Grobians; the audience is also defined, perhaps, as “fellow dinner guests”, and becomes part of the set. The college kitchens, where food for feasts is prepared, are “offstage”, but are nonetheless brought to the audience's attention through the character of the cook, Lorrell, and there is reference too to books, which might be considered essential to a college, in a passage discussed below. The books mentioned include domestic college books as well as academic volumes (“Butteries bookes, kitchinge bookes, besides all declamations and theames” [*Grobiana's Nuptials*, ll. 211-13])—another aspect of the play's localisation in St John's College.

With respect to theatrical embodiment, the play exploits the limitations of the stage world, and of actors' bodies, through its—generally obscene—fooling. We might normally expect drama to create a sense of wonder through material devices, and indeed university plays are perhaps best known to us now through some of these—for example, the astonishing city of Troy in marzipan presented at the feast in William Gager's *Dido* (1583), with the rose water which showered the audience as Dido and Aenas entered their cave.<sup>6</sup> Such costly effects were a feature of University plays presented for important dignitaries, often with accompanying feasts: as with *Grobiana's Nuptials*, the audience participated in the feast and thus quite directly in the play. But *Grobiana's Nuptials* is a lower budget, college in-house production, and deliberately deflates such culinary-dramatic effects, emphasizing the material over the wondrous and, as it were, revealing

6 An account of these elements of the play, recorded in Holinshed, is provided in *REED: Oxford*, pp. 190-91.

the puppet's strings. For example, the cook, Lorrell, proudly explains the origins of his most celebrated dish thus:

*Lorrell.* You have heard off my flying pudding? How  
doe you thinke that was made? People tooke it for a piece  
of art; nothing else, Sir, I had newly stript him out of his  
warmed skinne, the bagge he was sodde in, but my puddinge  
slipt into the feather tubbe, and because I would not plucke  
him, I sent it in for a made dish, and the apes, my brother  
Cookees, have imitated this Chaunce as a piece of service (ll. 80-86).

Indicating the reason for Lorrell's name, Pamphagus declares that Lorrell "has't deserv'd the bayes from all poets else" (ll. 120-21)—poetry and cookery are made indistinguishable, and slovenly cookery at that. Perhaps the cook is to the character's body as the playwright is to the actor's body: one gives the other the material with which to work.

The play explores the connection between authorship and the body further through a consideration of the uses to which paper may be put. Pamphagus tells us that he has invited to his feast a "sweete natur'd gentleman" whom he met in the streete "turneing against a wall", and whose reply to Pamphagus's salutation was "such thankes it did my heart good to heare it" (ll. 205-8). Pamphagus's apparently gracious speech clearly nonetheless describes bodily functions, and Tantoblin picks up both theme and subject matter:

Thankes, my good friend, that's hee that makes  
the true use of feasts, sends all unto their proper places,  
hee is call'd the Auter, he hath a monopoly for all Butterie  
bookes, kitchinge bookes, besides all declamations and  
theames, *which* to the wonder of the world he spends very  
punctually, and constantly, you scarce can get any paper  
to put under pyes, against a good tyme for him. Pamphage,  
let there be order taken, the tarts have some honie in them,  
wee care not for them else, they have noe operation. (ll. 209-17)

The dramatic exploitation of the feast, as exemplified by the "Auter", is their "true use", and the author's placing of his characters is like the host's seating plan, having the power to put all in their place. The author's prolific use of paper, which we might expect to be for inspiration and composition—reading books and writing them—has deprived cooks of the paper in which they might bake pies. But the passage seems to suggest that the author has in fact

torn up papers for his personal use in the privy. This suggestion is reinforced by Tantoblin's allusion to the "operation" of honey, which was a laxative, and by Tantoblin's exit line: "Lets away, my belly rumbles. Ursin, hast any paper?" (ll. 283-84). So the author putting words onto paper is likened to a man wiping his excrement on toilet roll. If the comparison seems unflattering to the audience, it does not seem so to the Grobians, who consider bodily functions necessary and good—which of course they are, though rarely publicly so. Put in a more flattering light, perhaps the comparison suggests that play-writing is as natural and essential an activity as excretion.

After Lorrell's flying pudding and Tantoblin's laxative honey, another foodstuff, oysters, occasions the particularly revolting narrative about dinner guests eating oysters. First, Lorrell reveals that Oyestus' snot dressed the oysters, when he apparently sneezed on them after they were dropped; Pamphagus then ate them eagerly. Next, Pamphagus relates that the guests ate oysters from each other's noses:

*Lorrell.* Oyestus there did me great service at the fall  
of a dish of stew'd oysters, which the rogue pleanteously  
repaired, a cold haveing glandered him, and I ordered them,  
they past for good plump colchesters.

*Oyestus.* I never told *your mistress* of *that*, but it did  
mee good to see how heartily *your honour* fedde, beside the  
rest of *the reverences*, and truly it joy'd *your* worships  
poore Crier to see that he had any thing about him could  
content *your* Lordship.

*Pamphagus.* I remember the dish very well. By the  
same token Mr Simon Slouch; a sodaine yeast beeing broken,  
fell out a laughing, as he was eating them, and drove on  
up his nose which *presently* hee voided most *properly* to the  
plate from whence it came, and his next neighbor swallow'd  
it with better lucke. (ll. 91-105)

Oyestus comments, talking of himself formally in the third person, that he was delighted that Pamphagus found his snot pleasing: his courteously humble, even sycophantic, language reflects a hierarchical social order in which a servant hopes that he has "any thing about him" which can please his master. That it should be the base product of Oyestus'—diseased—body function, snot, that pleases his master perhaps parodies an idealised view of a loyal servant whose body is dedicated to his master's commands. The snot also seems to level rela-

tionships, since Pamphagus, by eating the snot, is debased to the level of the servants who served it up.

The passage makes an explicit connection between oyster flesh and snot before a more familiar association is invoked between oysters and women's bodies, and particularly prostitutes. Oyestus declares that Grobiana, wearing his cap, "look'd (I shall not offend, I hope) like, I pray pardon, an Oyestus wife" (ll. 801-2). Oyster-selling was a term for prostitution, and the idea that Grobiana might become Oyestus' wife (an idea only in Oyestus' mind) evokes the pun, while also associating Oyestus himself with both oysters and prostitutes. Oyestus' explicit concern to avoid giving offence may be motivated by his desire to avoid the hierarchical impropriety of suggesting that his master's daughter could marry him: for the audience, it is clearly a comical apology-in-advance for likening that same master's daughter to a prostitute.

Foodstuffs operate within *Grobiana's Nuptials* as part of the play's preoccupation with what goes into the body and what comes out of it. The things people eat are as debased as what people pass out, and if authorship is a form of excretion, romantic love is foul wind. When Grobiana is heart-sick for Tantoblin, she is able to find relief for her anguish in a good round of farting:

*Grobiana.* O, o my head, hold harder, wench, my braines will fly in pieces else. . . . Now it is past into another place; my heart has a whirlwine in't, o, o, now it is gon downward.

*Ungartred.* Bend your body and let it out, soe, soe it is gone, farewell it, they are but tenants at will, and may be turn'd out, when you list. (ll. 718-19, 732-34)

The actor is not actually required to fart on stage—rather his character explains that it is her plan to relieve herself in this way. Presumably it is difficult for an actor to fart at will, although the need to represent an onstage fart would have provided, as now, a good opportunity for physical and aural comedy. Other bodily functions which might prove difficult to stage are similarly narrated—for example, Pamphagus' encounter with the author pissing in the street. The limitations of the body are also, of course, necessarily the limitations of the stage, and the playwright seems playfully aware of this. So, when Grobiana is caught short at the feast, and "rises and exits" (l. 581 SD), Vanslotten demands, "Cannot she have a pot brought her in, why did shee goe?" (ll. 584-85)—relieving oneself at table presumably being conventional Grobian behaviour. But Oyestes explains that "necessitie has noe lawe" (l. 586)—drawing attention, perhaps, to the fact that drama does—and that asking an actor to relieve himself onstage

goes beyond the laws of drama. It might also be a gender joke. Grobiana is a female character, albeit presented by a man: anatomical differences between the actor and the character he presents might be comically foregrounded were the actor required to pretend that he were urinating onstage. Less scatologically, Grobiana's implicit stage direction to Ungartered—"Why doest scratch thy head soe?" (l. 326)—might be expected to describe a gesture indicating puzzlement or thought, Ungartered's reaction to Grobiana's comment that she has affected the habit of clapping her hand to her mouth simperingly to cover her lack of teeth. Here, however, it indicates rather that Ungartered has nits: "the rogueinge lice doe playe soe many pranks" (ll. 328-29). The playwright is frustrating the expectations of his audience in relation to the theatrical convention of head-scratching.

A suggested equivalence between play and body draws attention to the fact that everything comes down to the body—and, albeit in unconventional ways, the Grobians explicitly celebrate the body. Civility, taught by the conduct books which *Grobiana's Nuptials* parodies, equates to control of the body—as does acting. But within the world of the play, the narrative is all about the lack of bodily control. One Mr Cob is much admired for the witty line with which he "put off" the effect of a particularly rousing fart at table: "he said he could not avoid it" (l. 413). The fart is avoidable, and an un-avoidable consequence of the body. By contrast, the precise terms in which Baylie praises May's production are intriguing: the play's *subject* was slovenliness, but the *performance* of it was "handsome and clean". The student actors' skill seems to have exemplified everything that the subject matter condemns: their voices and bodies were admirably proper in their playing, even as they embodied characters exemplifying entirely opposite values.

So the play's dramaturgy is skilful: it uses the devices of theatre to make virtues out of the body's necessity; the virtuosity of the actors' performance of the play paradoxically indicates, nonetheless, cleanliness and control. At the same time, the playwright, alluding to impulses within the Grobian tradition which he has inherited, at least flirts with a Grobian challenge to many social values: the master eats his servant's snot; paper seems better used for pies than for learning; authors write shit; romantic love can be readily purged in a good round of farting. What is this play really about?

## V

Naturally, names are hugely significant. In her seminal study, *The Names of Comedy*, Anne Barton astutely argues for a comedic bias towards Cratylic names, those that reflect the innate essence or circumstances of particular characters, or indeed the comic “type” which they represent (pp. 3-15). And certainly this is the case with *Grobiana’s Nuptials*. The pun on “oyster” in Oyestus’ name has been noted. His name also refers to a public function, not merely that of town crier (he practises “oyes” for attention [l. 127]), but also, thanks to a play on “oyer and terminer”, the practice of a local court being empowered to hear and decide cases, as happens in the play. Ironically, however, whilst Oyestus has a smattering of legal diction, he is dim-witted and illiterate; when Pamphagus rehearses the list of invitees to the feast, there is a Dogberry-esque setpiece in which he mangles the words he has merely to repeat:

*Pamphagus.* All yee that are invited,  
*Oyestus.* All yee that are devited—  
*Pamphagus.* To the Grobian Festuall  
*Oyestus.* To the Grobian estuall. (ll. 128-31)

And so on. It’s simple, foolish stuff, but also clever, in that it helps to define and refine our understanding of Oyestus as a character through intertextual reference to a long literary tradition in English.<sup>7</sup>

The names of the invitees, as we might anticipate, confirm slovenliness and foolishness as shared characteristics: Sir Simon Slouch, Mr Grouthead (apparently a well-known synonym for a dunce), Lady Fustie, Mr Dulman. Other names provide cheap, albeit fitting, humour: a Physician is called Mr Lotium (lotium being medicinal urine); a lawyer is called Old Thump, which suggests a blunt physicality akin to Peter Thump in *Henry VI, Part Two*—or indeed “Hunch” within this text, albeit the joke is more effective here, if we anticipate that a lawyer and apprentice might behave differently. Also invited is a Mr Deawbeater of Houndsditch, apparently a location with an established Jewish population. How should we interpret his inclusion? Is it inherently amusing to have a char-

7 The tradition notably includes Garcio’s subversion of Cain in the Towneley *Murder of Abel* and Matthew Merrygreek’s deliberate misreading of Ralph Roister Doister’s letter in Udall’s play (III.iv).

acter whose occupation is beating Jews be seen as similar to one who slouches or one who smells a bit fusty? Is anti-semitism seen to be a folly, or is that being too optimistic and/or anachronistic?

Finally, we have “The Mayor and Aldermen of Gotham with the Towne Clarke”. Together with the more Cratyllic names of fools, the civic dignitaries from Gotham presumably refer to the “fools of Gotham”, mentioned in the Towneley Plays (12/260) and known equally often as the “wise men of Gotham”. The legend goes that Gotham folk pretended madness, which was a malady thought to be contagious, to dissuade King John from travelling through the village and thereby rendering the road a public right of way. This particular reference, to the feigning of madness that ironically demonstrates wisdom, can usefully be adapted to describe how the play performs bad behaviour in order to prove scholarly virtue. And indeed, as we have seen, this is precisely the paradox that Baylie articulates in his praise of a performance of “slovenrie” that actually asserts “handsomeness”.

The roll call of loaded names extends to characters beyond Pamphagus’ list: that of Tantoblin, the romantic lead, means both a small tartlet and a piece of excrement (*OED*, s.v. “tantadlin”); Jobernole is to be found in Marston’s book of satires, *The Scourge of Villanie*, where he writes: “Shall brainles Cyterne-heads, each iubernole / Poket the very *Genius* of thy soule?” (“In Lectores prorsus indignos”, ll. 25-26),<sup>8</sup> and so it is quite possibly a contemporaneous term for a fool and perhaps also an acute intertextual reference. Vanslotten, the presiding “judge” is more difficult to trace. In Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller*, a “gobbledegook” passage of Dutch from the Wittenberg leg of the tour includes the line, “*Vanhotten, slotten, irk bloschen*” (p. 247), which might have been in the author’s mind. This is obviously highly speculative, but it might be significant that the passage includes some jokes about oysters and also a pointed reference to *Acolastus*, the hugely successful prodigal play and archetype of Christian Terence drama. Ironically, what should have been seen as an explicitly pure Christian performance is instead described by Nashe’s narrator as having been “filthily acted”, in almost opposite terms to Baylie’s description of St John’s slovenly play. The name of Pamphagus, which means “Eating Everything”, also evokes *Acolastus*, since it is the name of one of the play’s main parasites. The allusion to *Acolastus* in *Grobiana*’s

8 In his edition, Davenport glosses the word as “Jobbernowl: a blockish or stupid head, a block-head” (p. 261).

*Nuptials*, and to the pan-European tradition of Christian Terence, may give a clue as to May's project in *Grobiana's Nuptials*.

## VI

Material deemed suitable for pedagogical drama was an understandably fraught subject throughout the early modern period. As David McPherson explains, “stern moralists have always been suspicious of comedy, especially of its supposed effects upon the young” (p. 19). The problem for early modern pedagogues, however, was that Latin comedy, particularly Terence, provided perfect examples of pure Latin and accreted *scholia* with which to teach both language and rhetorical technique. The authors of propaedeutic texts that taught through double-translation were able to avoid charges of immorality through simply reproducing anatomised phrases and sentences, as in the respective *Vulgaria* of John Stanbridge and Robert Whittington, both schoolmasters at Magdalen College School in Oxford, or Nicholas Udall's hugely successful *Flowers for Latin Speaking* (1533)—Udall, of course, also a schoolmaster, in London at the time of publication and soon to move to Eton. Pedagogues and theorists who defended the use of Latin comedy argued that Terence offered valuable moral lessons through negative example, Erasmus, who is certainly the most famous example, writing, “I am convinced that these [comedies of Terence], read in the proper way, not only have no tendency to subvert men's morals but even afford great assistance in reforming them”.<sup>9</sup> And Sir Thomas Elyot follows suit, arguing in favour of “fruitful” Latin comedy thus:

comedies, which they [the opponents of the use of New Comedy in schools] suppose to be a doctrinal of ribaldry, they be undoubtedly a picture or as it were a mirror of man's life, wherein evil is not taught but discovered; to the intent that men beholding the promptness of youth unto vice, the snares of harlots and bawds laid for young minds, the deceit of servants, the chances of fortune contrary to men's expectation, they being thereof warned may prepare themselves to resist or prevent occasion. Semblably remembering the wisdom, advertisements, counsels, dissuasion from vice, and other profitable sentences most eloquently and familiarly shown in these comedies, undoubtedly there shall be no little fruit out of them gathered. (pp. 47-48)

9 Erasmus, *Epistle 31*, quoted in McPherson, p. 20.



Indeed, when Erasmus comes to the end of his teaching manual, *On the Method of Study*, and concludes by describing how useful an excellent teacher, such as himself, could be, he pointedly demonstrates how one could *even* teach a Terentian play (pp. 687–89).

Concerns with comic immorality were far from definitively assuaged, however, and the Christian Terence tradition represents an attempt to harness the power and popularity of New Comedy, and the value of its numerous pedagogical *scholia*, to the morality of Christianity. Often, as Ervin Beck explains, the parable of the prodigal son was used to reverse the trajectory of generational conflict: “New comedy is *adulescens triumphans*; prodigal-son comedy is *senex triumphans*. . . . in actuality, [prodigal drama] resulted in a precise inversion of the paradigm of youth in New Comedy” (pp. 110–11). Alternatively, dramatists took the opportunity to demonstrate the due punishment for viciousness within their plays. George Gascoigne’s *The Glasse of Governement* (1575), for example, can be read ironically in its apparent condemnation of Terence generally, but it certainly places great emphasis on the judicial punishment of Terentian types: we learn of the offstage demise of the elder brothers, whilst the crafty servants’ prosecution and punishment are performed to serve as exemplary.

## VII

We have deviated somewhat from the immediate subject of *Grobiana’s Nuptials* in order to demonstrate an intellectual context for the play that provides its significance. This is a play that draws upon a tight connection of drama and education only to demonstrate an apparent lack of concern for reform—or indeed for what might usually pass as either morality or civility. For all the play’s satire, for all its parody of romance, education and social hierarchy, there is no fortunate turn of events by which the vicious lose out, nor indeed a Jonsonian frame to comment upon the disorder within. The Cratylic nature of the play’s names emphasises the fact that reform is impossible within the world of the play: indeed, the whole purpose of the plot is to celebrate the marriage of Grobiana and thereby to anticipate the continued legacy of Grobian behaviour. Law and social norms are bent to the alternative social code of Grobianism and not vice-versa. *Acolastus* is thus brought to mind simply so that we can appreciate how far from that paradigm the play has travelled.

The play's legal reference works in the same way. Oyestus' frequent parody of legal speech throughout the play is fully realised in the trial that forms the play's final scene. This trial provides a striking subversion of what by the time of the play was a long-established relationship between legal and dramatic epistemology.<sup>10</sup> As described above, the trial examines the case of Tantoblin's assault on Ursin when Ursin accosts Grobiana, appealing for a kiss. The assault, which Ursin describes, perhaps comically, as "Murder, murder" (l. 694), as he falls to the ground, is sufficiently serious for him to be knocked unconscious. But the trial ends not in punishment, but rather in a bizarre judicial collusion—a closing of ranks, or imposition of community around agreed behaviour—whereby the victim of an assault is brought to accept that the blow he received was just. In order to demonstrate the extensive nature of the cod-legal interactions and the comparative suddenness of the verdict, we will here quote at length:

*Vanslotten.* Tantoblin hath wrongd Ursin, and Ursin hath suffered an injury by Tantoblin. I cannot sodainly decide the matter. What was the cause?

*Oyestus.* I, now you speake judiciously, *causa sua*.

*Ursin.* A salutation betweene I and Grobiana made this disturbance.

*Vanslotten.* How, what, you bearheard salute Grobiana? Intollerable! My memory is shallow, Oyestus, write it downe, Ursin saluted Grobiana.

*Oyestus.* An't like your worship, *qua formula*?

*Vanslotten.* Trouble not my more serious meditations, you conceive me.

*Oyestus.* Soe, *Omnia bene*.

*Vanslotten.* But now to the matter, for as I conceive, we have not yet spoke anything to the purpose.

*Ursin.* Why, Sir?

*Vanslotten.* Nay, let Tantoblin speake, the wiser man of the two, I know by his longe silence.

*Tantoblin.* Sir, the cause is thus: To tell you true I tooke him a polt of the pate and a good on, beleeve it, for I tooke him a slubberinge of my Grobiana, and I nubbd his noddle to the purpose.

*Vanslotten.* Why, so then, Ursin, what needed you have this stirre, here he has confessed it, this is ample satisfaction, are you content?

*Ursin.* If you thinke fitt, I am. But there was sombody or other which strucke me suche a blowe on the face with a flint, that it made my eye sparkle.

*Oyestus.* O tace, peace in the bellfrie.

*Vanslotten.* Let that passe, a blow, twas nothings as longe as twas noe where but on the face. I could not blame Tantoblin much. Grobiana was betrothed his owne, and could not endure

10 This relationship is best explored by Hutson, *passim*.

any finger should be in the businesse butt his owne. I am to be at the solemnitie of the nuptials,  
soe shall you. Laugh upon there and be friendes. (ll. 847-81)

Vanslotten rules that Tantoblin's behaviour was perfectly acceptable within the bounds of the world performed by the play, as delineated by his personal sympathies and commonsense: he cannot blame Tantoblin, and Tantoblin was provoked—arguments which might weigh heavily in ordinary human experience but might be expected to carry limited weight in court. It is only in a comedic court that Vanslotten's sentence could be an appeal for a comic communal resolution: "Laugh upon there and be friends".

The humour of this scene depends on its happily inappropriate conclusion and on the effect of juxtaposed styles of speech: Oyestus' fake court-Latin lawyer meets Vanslotten's world-weary philosopher ("trouble not my more serious meditations"); Ursin's simple, monosyllabic puzzled plaintiff meets Tantoblin's dandified indignant suitor ("nubb'd his noddle"). The audience's enjoyment of the trial therefore depends on their capacity to hear these parodied speech types, and the theatrical caricatures they represent. Erudition is essential to the audience's entertainment, as is its sense of what should be the appropriate register for court speech. The play functions precisely because everyone watching and participating in it is educated in civility, the appropriate manner of speech to situation, and more generally of the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Those boundaries, shared, understood, and ultimately celebrated by the College, provide the play with its power.

At the play's conclusion, when we might anticipate some explicit moral or didactic judgement to be given, the Epilogue Grobianus simply asks everyone to leave because the play is finished. He asserts that he is *not* the theatrically conventional epilogue, and will not ask for applause:

O now tis right, I have matcht my daughter to my minde,  
Yet somewhat is left for me that am behind;  
Not to begge applause or desire your handes  
To joyne these jolly lovers in new bandes,  
But to tell you true, because I begunne,  
You may goe away, the play is done. (ll. 917-22)

Grobianus's insistence that he will not behave in the way expected of him by theatrical convention reminds the audience that in his prologue Grobian deni-

grated theatrical convention explicitly, asserting that he would only enter because there *was* no formal prologue:

Had you had a prologue, I had not enter'd,  
for to say *the* truth I am *old* Grobian; did you ever heare  
of old Grobian? That's I, and am he that hate manners worse  
than Tymon hated man. And *what* did he hate them for?  
Marrie for their foolish, foppish, apish complements, niceties,  
lispings, cringes; can't our buisnesse bee done, and *our*  
Play acted, but a Coxe-combe in a cloke must scrape his  
lease of leggs to begge *Sir* Tottipate's applause in dogrime  
verse? (ll. 1-9)

Grobian's attack is not on play-acting itself, but on the conventions that require actors to seek the applause of their audience. This is an attack on "manners": the prologue thus frames the play's entire discussion of manners within the framework of theatre—and uses a learned allusion to Timon of Athens, quite possibly to Timon as presented by Shakespeare's play, to do so. We may guess, from Baylie's positive account of the production, that the audience nonetheless applauded, in spite of Grobian. And we may assume, too, that in spite of his instruction, the audience will not go away at all: the play has occupied their shared collegiate space, and the conclusion frames the play by stressing exactly that fact. So, although the spectators have been positioned as guests at the Grobian feast, they ultimately resist Grobian behaviour through their collectively correct behaviour as an audience. The "mock-shew" asserts, albeit through negative example, the usual behaviour that would occupy the men assembled there to play and watch it.

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