

Greg WALKER, « Spoiling the Play ? : The Motif of Dramatic Intrusion in Medwall and Lindsay »,  
*Theta VII, Théâtre Tudor*, 2007, pp. 179-196,  
mis en ligne en 13 février 2007, <<https://sceneeuropenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta7>>

### Theta VII

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,  
dirigé par Marie-Luce DEMONET,  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

### Responsables scientifiques

André LASCOMBES & Richard HILLMAN

---

### Mentions légales

Copyright © 2007 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.  
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,  
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.  
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

---

### Date de création

février 2007

## *Spoiling the Play?: The Motif of Dramatic Intrusion in Medwall and Lindsay<sup>1</sup>*

Greg WALKER  
Leicester University

In 1491 (or thereabouts), after what one imagines was an impressive Christmastide dinner in the household of Cardinal John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, one of the diners began loudly and unexpectedly to berate the assembled diners over their seeming lack of gratitude for the meal that they had just enjoyed. Soon a second man, apparently a household servant, approached him, and they talked about a play that was going to be performed in the hall. There was initially some confusion, as the first man, our source calls him simply “A”, seems to have initially thought that the second (let us follow the source and call him “B”) was one of the actors, given that, as he said, “Ther is so myche nyce array/Amonge these galandes now aday/That a man shall not lightly/Know a player from a nother man” (Medwall, 53-56). But, after some discussion, they stood back to watch the play’s opening scene. After no more than a couple of minutes, however, B could apparently contain himself no longer and declared loudly his intention to approach one of the actors onstage for a job, as the latter

1. The opening paragraphs of this essay draw upon the introductory material in an earlier essay, “Fulgens and Luces and Early Tudor Drama”; I am grateful to the editors for the chance to revisit that material here.

had just announced his intention to look for a servant. This seeming confusion of the play world with reality evidently horrified A, who warned his fellow,

... Pece, let be!  
Be God, thou wyll distroy all the play. (362-63)

But B's response was dismissive. His intrusion, he confidently asserted, would improve the play not spoil it:

"Distroy the play", quod a? Nay, nay,  
The play began never till now!  
I wyll be doing, I make God avow,  
For there is not in this hondred myle  
A feter bawde than I am one. (364-68)

Such confidence might seem misplaced. But on this occasion B turned out to be right. His intervention did improve the play. For A and B were, of course, themselves actors—or rather, *are* dramatic characters—and their "intervention" in the action, moving fluidly from audience to stage, from *platea* to *locus* in Robert Weimann's useful terminology (and subsequently back and forth),<sup>2</sup> initiates the subplot of the play that they are a part of, Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Luces*.

It is worth foregrounding the strangeness of the play's opening in this rather coy way because it is easy to forget just how subtle is the interplay between what is seemingly real and what is overtly performed in Medwall's opening dialogue. And the teasing complexities of the play, and of A and B's parts in it, do not end here. For, if Meg Twycross is right, then the names "A" and "B" in the script are not the given names of characters at all, but flags of convenience indicating that the two roles were allotted to individuals in Morton's household (or perhaps to a regular member of the acting company [A] and a member of the household [B]), who would have effectively been playing themselves, and bringing their own names with them.<sup>3</sup> Notably, the script makes a point of never naming either character, having them rather refer to each other as "what calt" ("whatever your

2. See Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, pp. 73-84, and *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice*, pp. 180-207.

3. See Twycross, p. 79. I am very grateful to Bob Godfrey of University College Northampton for the chance to discuss the dynamics of these scenes with him on a number of occasions. His contention that A and B are rather signalled as members of the acting company from the first has prompted me to reconsider the scenes afresh. The suggestion that A may have been a professional actor and B a member of the household (perhaps More himself) combines the virtues of Twycross's reading with those of Godfrey's suggestion.

name is”), and making the noble characters address them vaguely as “thou”, “syr”, “Mayster Gayus[’s] man” (865), or “he/That I have sought” (1003-4). And at one point A even claims to have forgotten his own name, and offers to go and ask “som of my company” what it is (1782).

The point about names is not incidental, particularly if it prompts us to reconsider a well known and well roasted chestnut of a tale concerning a young and highly precocious servant in Morton’s household at about this time: Thomas More. In his son-in-law William Roper’s *Life of More*, the author famously relates how More’s interest in drama and talent for mimicry prompted him at times to make impromptu interventions into plays performed at Lambeth. “Though he was younge of yeares”, Roper noted,

yeat wold he at Christmas tyde sodenly sometimes steppe in among the players and, never studying for the matter, make a parte of his owne there presently among them, which made the lookers on more spote than all the plaiers beside. (p. 5)

Scholars have proved remarkably reluctant to accept the association of this story with the subplot of Medwall’s play; but this seems unnecessarily severe. Admittedly we have precise dates neither for the first performance of the play in the Cardinal’s house, nor for More’s period of service there. But the coincidence seems too strong to ignore, and the application of, if not Morton’s fork, then certainly Ockham’s razor would suggest that a recollection of a young boy who would apparently step in among the actors during a Christmastide play in the Cardinal’s great hall; and a play written for performance in that hall at roughly the same time, in which a couple of characters do indeed seem to step in among the players and make parts of their own (thereby providing more sport for the spectators than the rather dour events of the main plot), might very plausibly refer to the same event. Roper’s account may well, therefore, be an only slightly fanciful reconstruction of More’s own recollection of having played one of the comic servants in Medwall’s play—most plausibly B, who does indeed, as we have seen, promise to improve the play through his involvement.<sup>4</sup>

The possibility that the otherwise anonymous “B” was in fact the very clearly identifiable Thomas More, apparently playing the “role” of himself improvising in a play, is of more than simply biographical interest, however. For play-

4. See Nelson, pp. 17-18.

acting, and just such moments as A and B enact, stepping across the boundary between audience and actors and thereby threatening to “distroy the play” were to prove abiding images for More, and for a number of his fellow humanists in the early sixteenth century.

The humanists regularly rehearsed the stoic commonplace that all the world was a stage and all the men and women merely players. For the comparison between theatre and reality offered a favourite vehicle for criticisms of the hypocrisies and vanities of everyday life, and the collusive deceptions upon which the political sphere in particular relied for its operation. In *A Treatyce (unfynshed) upon . . . the last thynges*, More gravely compared the *hubris* of the actor to that of the human subject *tout court*:

If ye shouldest perceive that one were earnestly proud of the wearing of a gay golden gown, while the losel playeth the lord in a stage play, wouldest ye not laugh at his folly, considering that ye are very sure that when the play is done he shall go walk a knave in his old coat? Now ye thinkest thy self wise enough while ye art proud in thy players garment, and forgettest that when thy play is done, ye shall go forth as pore as he. No, ye remembreth not that thy pageant may happen to be done as soon as his. (p. 84)

Plays and real life were, then, very similar, but with the important difference that actors and real people were not the same at all. And in that difference lay the didactic value of many a comparison. In *The Boke Named the Governour*, Sir Thomas Elyot, discussing the difference between bragging and true courage, claimed that,

All though they whiche be hardy, or persones desperate have a similitude [of courage], and seme to be valiaunt, yet be they nat valiaunt, no more than kinges in May games and interludes be kinges. . . (sig. Miii)<sup>5</sup>

But what seems to have created the most interest for More and his friend Erasmus in particular was actually not so much the similarities or differences between drama and reality, but the boundary between the two spheres, and what hap-

5. In *The Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus tried to clarify the issues at stake: “If all that makes a king is a chain, a sceptre, robes of royal purple, and a train of attendants, what after all is to prevent the actors in a drama who come on stage decked with all the pomp of state from being regarded as real kings? // Do you want to know what distinguishes a real king from an actor? It is the spirit that is right for a prince: being like a father to the state. It is an understanding that the people have sworn allegiance to him.”, p. 17.

pened if one tried to cross it. For it is not drama's imaginative or political power, but its fragility, its vulnerability to the merest hint of intrusion from its audience that emerges on a number of occasions in their writings. And it is this idea of intrusion into a dramatic fiction, foregrounded by the example of A and B in Medwall's play, that I want to look at more closely here.

The best known account of an intrusion into a stage-play world is probably Thomas More's sardonic description in his *History of King Richard III* of the charade surrounding Richard III's unwilling acceptance of the crown:

Men must sometime for the manner sake not be aknownen what they know. . . in a stage play all the people know right wel that he that playeth the sowdayne [sultan] is percase a sowter [shoemaker]. Yet if one should can so lyttle good [be so naive] to shewe out of seasonne what acquaintance he hath with him, and calle him by his owne name whyle he standeth in his majestie, one of his tormentours might hap to breake his head, and worthy, for marring of the play. And so they said these matters be kynges games, as it were stage playes, and for the more part played upon scaffoldes. In which pore men be but lokers on. And thei that wise be, wil medle no farther. For thei that sometime step up and play with them, when they cannot play their partes, thei disorder the play and do themselves no good. (p. 83)

The imagined lines of force—and violence—at work here are complex. On one level the audience are powerless, “but lokers on”, whose only role is to witness the event and validate it by their presence. Any attempt to go beyond that passive role will result in violent expulsion and retribution, whether from the political pageant of Ricardian government, or the dramatic pageant itself. And yet there is also a hint of the dangerous power that such spectators might possess if they were unwise enough to forget the protocols that compelled their powerlessness and interrupt the proceedings. Simply by calling an actor by his real name, the illusion is punctured and the play thereby marred and disordered.

That More, who himself was famed for his ability precisely to step up and play with actors and not disorder the play but miraculously improve it, should be so aware of the perils of intruding into the actors' space is itself revealing. It was a conceit to which he was to return, of course, in his *Utopia*, when advocating the merits of his favoured, less obtrusive model of counselling kings, which tailored its message to the mood of its recipient. There is, “Morus” claims,

another philosophy, more practical for statesmen, which knows its stage, adapts itself to the play in hand, and performs its role neatly and appropri-

ately. Otherwise we have the situation in which a comedy of Plautus is being performed and the household slaves are making trivial jokes at one another, and then you come onstage in a philosopher's attire and recite the passage from *Octavian* where Seneca is disputing with Nero. Would it not have been preferable to take a part without words than by reciting something inappropriate to make a hodge podge of comedy and tragedy? You would have spoiled and upset the actual play by bringing in irrelevant matter, even if your contribution would have been superior in itself. (*Utopia*, pp. 48-50)

In *The Praise of Folly*, More's friend and ally Erasmus, drawing upon Lucian's *Menippus* (Baker-Smith, p. 53), made a similar point about the vulnerability of plays to spoiling intrusions from offstage:

If someone should unmask the actors in the middle of a scene on the stage and show their real faces to the audience, would he not spoil the whole play? And would not everyone think he deserved to be driven out of the theatre with brickbats as a crazy man? For at once a new order of things would suddenly arise. He who played the woman is now seen to be a man; the juvenile revealed to be old; he who a little before was a king is suddenly a slave; and he who was a god is now a little man. Truly to destroy the illusion is to upset the whole play. The masks or costumes are precisely what hold the eyes of the spectators. Now what else is our whole life but a kind of stage play through which men pass in various disguises, each one going on to play his part until he is led off by the director? And often the same actor is ordered back in a different costume, so that he who played the king in purple now acts the slave in rags. Thus everything is pretence: yet this play is performed in no other way. (pp. 381-82)

And anyone who points out the pretences of everyday life will, he adds pointedly, be thought equally crazy.

But the intrusion, and the violence, could work the other way too, and with equally unsettling results. If actors relied upon their audiences to know their place and remain in their seats, their disbelief duly suspended for the duration of the show, so too did audiences rely upon the actors to know theirs, and to restrict themselves to the playful art of representation. If the performance became too real, this too might threaten the violent end of the pageant. Hence the effectiveness of Lucian's anecdote in *The Dance* (a favourite of both More and Erasmus). An actor, Lucian relates, identified so closely with the role of the mad Ajax that during one performance he grabbed a flute from one of the musicians and beat the actor playing Odysseus over the head with it. He then ran amok into

the audience, belabouring two consuls sitting in the front row with his makeshift weapon (Branham, pp. 18-19).

When actors intruded into a non-dramatic situation, “bringing in” their play to a great hall or communal space full of people, they created a temporary ludic space—a playing place—in what appeared to be an otherwise earnest world. When non-actors (and here we might follow Tom Stoppard and call them “real people”, actors being, in his memorable formulation “the opposite of people” [Stoppard, p. 45]) intruded into a dramatic space, however, or actors were forced to respond to such an unscripted intervention in real-time, the results threatened to be wholly more serious. And as a consequence the aesthetic and dramatic rewards for successfully simulating such an event were all the greater.

On one level, of course, every entrance in a play is, or at least purports to be, an intrusion from outside, a “coming in” of a character from elsewhere with news, intentions, or attitudes that will change the dynamic of a scene. But those entrances that appear to break the barrier between the play and reality are distinct and special. Such intrusions, as with all crossings of boundaries, carry great power, and great threat, and the two are intimately connected. Part of the popularity of the device of bringing in the vices or devils as if from among the audience lay, no doubt, in the didactic value that it offered the playwright, suggesting as it did that the spectators all share in the sins that the play will seek to exorcise: that we are all sinners, and the devil and his minions are always among us. It also flagged in a very immediate way the relevance of the play-world to the concerns of the audience, suggesting that the one is merely an enhanced reflection or extension of the other. Such deliberate confusion and obfuscation of the notionally clear line between play and audience, fictional and real worlds, was endemic to the household plays, in which, to borrow Weimann’s terms again, the stage is at times all *platea* and no *locus*. But as the humanists’ comments cited earlier reveal, these crossings of the boundaries between stage and hall, scaffold and street, seemingly in earnest rather than game, were dangerous because the stakes involved, the forces released, and the potential consequences for all concerned were unexpectedly powerful and compelling.

The figure who steps up from the crowd and onto the stage was thus an especially powerful one for the writers of this period. For none more so than the Scottish dramatist Sir David Lindsay, who in his *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* created a play that explored, and in some cases pushed close to their limits, each of the concerns highlighted so far. In 1552 and 1554 he presented Scottish audiences with a



play in which not only do sowntars (metaphorically at least) play kings, but actors (possibly the same ones) also play sowntars, tailors, housewives and whores. In *The Thrie Estaitis* the discursive space of the play finds room for the whole community, and Lindsay allows the lookers on to intrude into the action (or at least appear to do so) not once but on many occasions, most notably when John the Common-Weil and Pauper step up from among the audience and into the playing space on separate occasions, although to very different effect, as we shall see in a moment.

The *Satyre* is a play that habitually blurs the boundaries between dramatic entertainment and other forms of spectacle. It reproduces some at least of the rituals and processes of a parliamentary session, and of a legal trial, before an audience many of whom would have been familiar with one or the other, if not both. It contains two sermons, one serious the other parodic, and the gruesome spectacle of three public hangings, the last of which, at least—the hanging of Falset (Falsehood)—deliberately mixes highly stylised elements, such as the release of a black bird symbolic of the deceased’s sin-blackened soul at the moment of his death (as specified by the stage direction following line 4271), with moments of grotesque realism. (The stage directions make clear that the actor playing Falset should be raised in person, and not in effigy, presumably so that he can provide convincing convulsions at the moment of death, as well as releasing the bird at the key moment.) But the most dangerous intrusion of realism in the play, and the most relevant for my concerns here, is the character of Pauper and his entrance into the action.

To the point where Pauper enters, the play had been largely conventional in its use of entrances and exits to and from the playing space. And the audience had been effectively marshalled to play its role as respectful “lookers on”, quietly attentive to the entertainment presented to them. Diligence begins the play with an injunction to “Tak tent to me, my frends, and hald yow coy” (14), and then instructs the spectators, with only a little more deference,

Thairfoir, till all our rymis be rung,  
And our mistoinit sangis be sung,  
Let everie man keip weill ane toung,  
And everie woman tway. (74-77)

Thus the audience is set up to be all the more susceptible to shock when one of their number seems to break those injunctions when Pauper enters the playing

space. It is worth briefly contrasting his entrance with that of John the Common-Weil, a character with whom he shares many similarities, in order to see just how deliberately striking Lindsay makes it. John the Common-Weil, as I have argued elsewhere (Walker, *Politics*, pp. 154-62), is a representation of the common people of Scotland within the play; and within the play he resolutely stays. He comes into the place only when invited to do so by Diligence's proclamation, and so, following the obvious cues, offers no threat to the boundaries of the production. And, once onstage, he is easily integrated into the dramatic and political fabric of the *Satyre*, precisely because he has never really threatened it. The only real risk entailed in his performance concerns the possibility that the actor may not be able to make the leap across the water-filled ditch dividing the audience from the parliament area, and even this is catered for by the eminently pragmatic stage-direction: "Heir sall Johne loup the stank or els fall in it" (following 2437).

Pauper, on the other hand, appears to threaten boundaries from the outset. His entry happens during an explicitly extra-dramatic moment, in what appears to be an interval in the play. Arguably, for those of us looking at the play through the printed text, the striking nature of this disruption is disguised by the fact that Pauper's lines appear set out before us in regular stanzas and with their rhyme-scheme evident on the page. Moreover, they appear in a section of the text headed "Interlude", a title that, while it signals difference from the body of the play, nonetheless implies integrity with it. This is just another part of the play that we are reading, albeit a special one. During the original performances audiences would have been allowed no such comforting markers by which to orientate themselves. All the signals would have directed them to believe that the play was in abeyance for the time being, and that they were now operating once more in real-time and real-space. The actors playing all of the characters in the first half had left the playing area, and Diligence had enjoined the audience to get up, have a drink and (where necessary) use the loos in preparation for the second half. What follows would thus have been not only unexpected but profoundly unsettling. It might, of course, be objected that an audience from a predominantly oral culture would be more attuned to the cadences of the spoken word than modern spectators, and so would quickly detect the fact that Pauper was speaking in rhymed verse. Hence his inauthenticity as a "real" inter-loper would have been discovered. But this is not, I think, a decisive objection. In performance a range of strategies might have been employed to elide the fact that Pauper's lines were metrical. The actor might disguise the regularity of the

rhymes and stresses by speaking them as prose (his opening speeches are, after all, relatively short—hence, the regular patterns would not have time to declare themselves definitively to even the best trained ears), especially if he was also pretending to be drunk and slurring his speech, as the subsequent action suggests. Alternatively, he might actually have stressed the rhymes mockingly, drawing attention to the fact with gestures to the audience, suggesting that he was mocking the formal qualities of the actors' speeches through his own "improvised doggerel". Either way, the audience could be misdirected to miss the crafted nature of the lines.

Once the playing area has cleared, a man in ragged clothes and of wild appearance enters the central space begging alms from the spectators "for gods love of heaven"—probably a common occurrence at any public gathering of this sort. Rather than address him in dialogue, the actor playing Diligence calls to members of the audience, the marshals and the civic authorities who control the playfield in real-time, to deal with him, threatening that if the situation is not quickly dealt with the play may have to be abandoned:

God wait gif heir be ane weill keipit place,  
Quhen sic ane vilde beggar carle may get entres.  
Fy on yow, officiars, that mends not thir failyes!  
I gif yow all till the Devill, baith Provost and Baillyes.  
Without ye cum and chase this carle away,  
The Devill a word yeis get mair of our play. (1940-45)

The kind of situation that Lindsay is recreating here—and the dangerous social and dramatic energies which it released—can be suggested through reference to an analogous incident recorded by James Melville in his *Diary* and analysed brilliantly in a recent essay by John J. McGavin. This was the case of Skipper Lindsay, "a known frenetic man", who "stepped in" to an arena set out for a play to be performed before James VI in 1580 and began to harangue the assembled spectators "with grait force of sprit and mightie voice" concerning his own spiritual failings, ending with what was interpreted by some to be a prophetic warning of the downfall of the Earl of Morton, who was present in the royal party.<sup>6</sup> Such potent, disruptive intrusions in public gatherings and spectacles by private individuals

6. I am very grateful to Dr. McGavin for his generosity in sending me a copy of the relevant reference, and for discussing Skipper Lindsay's performance and its implications with me.

with their own agenda to pursue may well have been a quasi-regular form of political protest in Scottish political culture, as McGavin's paper suggests. If so, then Lindsay's use of it in the *Satyre* would have been all the more resonant and troubling in its implications for the original spectators.

When no one in the crowd moves to help Diligence remove the interloper—and Lindsay was clearly confident that no one would, whether because there had been a prior warning to the officials not to, or, more plausibly, because social embarrassment would leave everyone paralysed in (or half out of) their seats, Diligence is seemingly forced to deal with the intruder himself. But his high-handed rebuke only exacerbates the situation. The man stops begging and climbs up onto the scaffold that represented the throne of King Rex Humanitas, the play's central prop and principal seat of authority—and there he begins defiantly to drain a bottle of ale, thereby adding credence to the possibility that he is dangerously drunk and unstable. Once the man has leapt down once more, Diligence seeks to reason with him and, like Medwall's A before him, tries to awe a would-be gatecrasher with the thought that his intrusion threatens to spoil the whole dramatic enterprise:

Swyith, beggar boggill, haist the[e] away!  
Thow art over pert to spill our play. (1962-63)

But the stranger's response is even more defiant than B's had been:

I wil not gif for al your play worth an sowis fart;  
For thair is richt lytill play at my hungrie hart. (1964-65)

In Medwall's play the possibility of spoiling the play had been sustained just long enough for the audience to experience a frisson of awkward excitement, before the playwright allowed the dramatic structure to absorb A and B within itself, signalling that there was no real problem, and everyone could safely relax and enjoy the added pleasures that these characters brought to the play. Lindsay, on the contrary, chooses to extend the period of danger beyond the initial moment of Pauper's entrance and seeks to retain the figure's power to shock and unsettle much longer. His success in this, and the way in which the situation itself and the conventions of playmaking finally contrive to render Pauper "safe", have much to tell us about the nature of dramatic illusion and the capacity of a play—or perhaps an audience—to sustain its capacity for belief in such situations.

Part of Pauper's danger resides in the fact that he, unlike John, is never named in the play. (The issue of John's name is quickly raised and just as quickly resolved; Diligence's first question to him is "Quhat is thy name, fellow?", to which he promptly replies "Forsuith, they call me Johne the Common-Weil" [2430-31], a process repeated eight lines later when Rex asks the same question.) Hence, so long as Lindsay pointedly refuses to give the character a name, he can keep the idea of his dangerous separateness from the world of the play alive. For in this play, as in allegory generally, names are crucial in telling audiences how to respond to a character.

Rather than allow the play to claim Pauper for its own and draw him into the audience's comfort zone, Lindsay accentuates his differences and separateness from what has gone before. He asserts a set of concerns that transcend the interests of the players and audience. As we have seen, he is too hungry to care about spoiling a play and too angry to be pacified by the thought that he will mar the enjoyment of all these wealthy, well-fed people if he does not sit down. Lindsay gives him an ostensibly real history and identity that endorse his claim to a level of our attention different to that we have offered to the players so far. He lives locally, in Lothian, about a mile from Trannent, to the east of Edinburgh. He is on his way to seek justice in St. Andrews, for his mother, father, and wife have all died, and he has been ruined by the clergy's demands for mortuary dues. This story takes the hitherto highly allegorical drama to a new level of realism. This individual seems to represent nothing but his own extreme and compelling case, and even Diligence (again, are we yet sure that it is not the actor who has earlier been playing Diligence?) forgets his concerns for the props and begins to be drawn into his story. "How did the person, was he not thy gude friend?" (2008), he asks, only to have Pauper launch into a further series of anguished denunciations, this time against his parish priest.

By introducing Pauper in this way, and having Diligence respond to him, not as a character in play-time, but as an actor in real-time, Lindsay is able to make a series of social points amounting to a protest on behalf of the rural poor, while the audience's defences are down. He can talk to them as if in earnest, rather than through the medium of drama, thus forcing them to respond in earnest in their turn. This is precisely the liminal territory of dramatic experience explored in the stories of More and Erasmus cited earlier, and most directly in Lucian's account of the actor running amok among the spectators. This is the territory in which plays are spoiled and heads are potentially broken. It is the

space in which spectators are at their most uncomfortably alert and volatile, and so their responses are at their most intense and dangerous. Such moments cannot be sustained for long, at least not comfortably, as Medwall (whose aim was simply to entertain and amuse) realised. So it is to Lindsay's credit that he was willing and able to sustain the "Pauper effect" for so long.

But eventually even Lindsay has to dilute the adrenalin and return to more conventional modes of stagecraft. And he does so with a signal gesture: the introduction of the highly stereotypical figure of the corrupt Pardoner, who enters with his formulaic greeting to the audience of "*Bona dies, bona dies./Devoit peopill, gude day I say yow!*" (2044-45). And from this moment onwards the conventional tones of drama begin to take over once more, and the audience can become aware that they are watching another section of the scripted entertainment rather than an interruption of it. No one could fail to note from the comic business that follows that they are once more watching a play, and so Pauper's role (given that he remains, lying in the field, ostensibly sleeping through the action) can be retrospectively fitted into that pattern too. The secret is out, as it would inevitably have to be if Pauper was to have any role once the play itself had resumed. Hence, it is no surprise that when he does speak again, having seemingly been woken up by the Pardoner's shouting, it is in a recognisably more "theatrical" medium. His stretching, and his carefully timed direct address to the audience—"Quhat thing was yon that I hard crak and cry?" (2227)—are much more obviously impersonations: actions in bad faith, part of a performance. And he begins to act, not as an intrusive voice, but as a player with parts to play in other character's stories. Hence, he falls quickly into the role of the rustic dupe of the Pardoner's patter, handing over his last coin in the hope of a pardon that he neither understands nor really trusts.

The moment of maximum disruption has passed, and the play quickly begins to reassert its own protocols and ethos upon the newcomer. The apparently dangerous intrusion proves capable of integration into the *Satyre's* dramatic textures after all. But Lindsay makes one last attempt to sustain our uncertainty as to Pauper's status. He and the Pardoner fall to fighting over the disputed coin, and when he, Christ-like, overturns the Pardoner's table of relics into the ditch, Diligence returns to the place and orders both to be apprehended and kept in ward until the play is over, at which point they will both, he says, be hanged. But this last gesture towards an extra-dramatic, real-time existence is no more than a gesture, for Pauper's capacity truly to disturb the audience has gone. Dili-

gence's very ability to restore order so swiftly, given his apparent difficulties with Pauper earlier, highlights the perfunctory nature of this conclusion. But, more importantly, the fight itself must be conducted, the stage-directions state, "with silence" (following l. 2297), a phrase used elsewhere to indicate the stylised, unrealistic modes of dumbshow or broad comic business. Thus the capacity for real violence inherent in Pauper's entry has already been absorbed within a purely theatrical form of "fighting" that threatens nobody beyond the confines of the play.

All is well again, and an end to the period of apparent disruption of dramatic protocols is further signalled by Diligence's renewed call for audience decorum at the start of the second half:

I mak yow supplicatioun,  
Till ye have heard our hail narratioun,  
To keep silence and be patient, I pray yow. (2304-6)

Thereafter the audience is allowed to settle back into its contracted role of "lookers on", and Pauper is integrated fully into the action of the play. It is, notably, the virtuous figure of John the Common-Weil who spots him in the crowd (where he is perhaps being held in ward awaiting his execution) and asks that he should be permitted to join him in guarding the (imaginary) "doors" of the Parliament chamber. And Correctioun's agreement tacitly ends the possibility that Pauper will face any real punishment after the play has ended, signalling his acceptance as a fully-fledged character—albeit still a somewhat volatile one—within the structures of the drama.

A comparison of Medwall's and Lindsay's use of intrusive characters prompts some interesting conclusions. Despite the fears expressed in More's and Erasmus' anecdotes, it does not seem to have been simply the case that realism and dramatic illusion are inimical. Arguably the "realism" inherent in the intrusion of A and B into *Fulgens* is more obvious and sustained than that in Lindsay's *Satyre*. A and B would have been known and recognisable individuals to many if not most of the audience in Morton's household, and the fact that they were "real people" probably increased the pleasure created for the audience by their intrusion into and subsequent involvement in the action. The fact that they had a part in the play while also remaining recognisably themselves made for a sophisticated, layered set of dramatic pleasures for the audience. Lindsay's Pauper, on the other hand, while less recognisably a "real" individual (probably no one in

the original Edinburgh or Cowper audiences would have identified him as a known poor man from Trannent), is nonetheless more “authentic”, and more authentically unsettling. The fusion of awkward laughter, anxiety and embarrassment felt by the audience at his first entrance is a product of the fact that he does indeed appear to come from outside the charmed circle of the community of actors and spectators, and does not recognise or accept the conventions of the event—the implicit contract between actors and audience. Like Skipper Lindsay half a century later, whose “stepping in” upset the decorum of a royal spectacle, he threatens both to spoil the play and to bring violent retribution upon himself in the manner of More’s unwise “lookers on” until the play finally claims him for one of its own. As Lindsay’s “experiment” effectively reveals, the dramatic stakes are set very high when a character walks the high wire between earnest and game in this way—and the audience’s response is correspondingly intense and potentially conflicted. (Might we not have felt a moment’s prim pleasure as well as sympathetic remorse, for instance, if Pauper had been instantly and violently expelled from the playing place on his entrance? After all, he probably hadn’t paid to get in.) But, as the experiment also demonstrates, the potential rewards for both playwright and audience were correspondingly high too.



## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- ELYOT, Thomas. *The Boke Named the Governor*. London: Thomas Berthelet, 1531.
- ERASMUS. *The Education of a Christian Prince*. Trans. Neil M. Cheshire and Michael J. Heath. *The Education of a Christian Prince, with the Panegyric for Archduke Philip of Austria*. Ed. Lisa Jardine. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Praise of Folly. Essential Works of Erasmus*. Ed. and trans. W. T. H. Jackson. New York: Bantam Books, 1965.
- LINDSAY, David. *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis. Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Ed. Greg Walker. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- MEDWALL, Henry. *Fulgens and Luces. Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Ed. Greg Walker. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- MORE, Thomas. *The History of King Richard III. The History of King Richard III and Selections from the English and Latin Poems*. Ed. R. S. Sylvester. Yale Edition of the Works of St. Thomas More: Selected Works. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Treatyce (unfynshed) upon these woordes of Holye Scripture, Memorare novissima, & in eternum non peccabis, Remember the last thynges, and thou shalt never synne, Made about the yere of our lorde, 1522. The workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght, sometyme Lorde Chauncellour of England, wrytten by him in the Englysh tonge*. London: John Cawod, John Waly, and Richard Tottell, 1557. 72-102.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Utopia*. Ed. Edward Surtz. Yale Edition of the Works of St. Thomas More: Selected Works. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964.
- ROPER, William. *The Lyfe of Sir Thomas Moore, Knyghte, etc.* Ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock. EETS, os 197. London: Oxford University Press, 1935.
- STOPPARD, Tom. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. London: Faber, 1968.

### *Secondary Sources*

- BAKER-SMITH, Dominic. *More's Utopia*. Renaissance Society of America Reprint Texts, II. Toronto: University of Toronto Press in Association with the Renaissance Society of America, 2000.
- BRANHAM, R. Bracht. *Unruly Eloquence: Lucian and the Comedy of Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- MCGAVIN, John J. "‘That Thin Skin’: Skipper Lindsay and the Language of Record". *Medieval English Theatre* 24 (2002): 15-31.
- NELSON, Alan H. Introduction. *The Plays of Henry Medwall*. Ed. Alan H. Nelson. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980. 1-30.
- TWYXCROSS, Meg. "The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays". *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Ed. Richard Beadle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 37-84.
- WALKER, Greg. "Fulgens and Luces and Early Tudor Drama". *Writers of the Renaissance I*. Ed. Andrew Hadfield and Garret Sullivan. New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- WEIMANN, Robert. *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*. Ed. Robert Schwartz. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

