



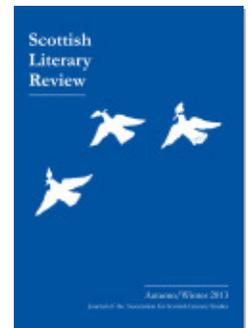
PROJECT MUSE®

Reflections on Staging Sir David Lyndsay's Satire of the Three Estates at Linlithgow Palace, June 2013

Greg Walker

Scottish Literary Review, Volume 5, Number 2, Autumn/Winter 2013,
pp. 1-22 (Article)

Published by Association for Scottish Literary Studies



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/slr/summary/v005/5.2.walker.html>

GREG WALKER

Reflections on Staging Sir David Lyndsay's *Satire of the
Three Estates* at Linlithgow Palace, June 2013

Abstract

This article reflects on the discoveries gained from performing the full text of Sir David Lyndsay's *A Satire of the Three Estates* at Linlithgow Palace in June 2013 as part of the AHRC-funded 'Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court' project. It describes the nature and aims of the project, and discusses the ways in which recreating the production suggests rather different conclusions about the nature of the play to those created by the seminal revival, directed by Tyrone Guthrie for the Edinburgh International Festival of 1948. By contrasting the two productions, the essay suggests ways in which staging the full text allows rather different political and dramaturgical agenda to emerge to those embraced by Guthrie's necessarily circumscribed version. In particular the role of Pauper emerges as a far more significant and radical figure, capable, like the play as a whole, of addressing contemporary issues and anxieties as powerfully in 2013 as it seems to have done in 1552 and 1554.

As part of the 'Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court' project, I spent much of the Spring of 2013 preparing for two productions of Sir David Lyndsay's *Ane Satire of the Three Estates* in Linlithgow Palace and Stirling Castle.¹ The first, and more ambitious, would stage the first professional production of the full text of over 4,600 lines since the 1552 performance in Cupar, Fife, and its reprise in Edinburgh in 1554. The second, more modest production would represent the 'best guess' that scholarship could offer of the 'lost' 1540 interlude played before James V, Mary of Guise, and their court in the great hall of Linlithgow Palace in 1540. This version has long been associated with Lyndsay's later play but never universally and definitively accepted as an earlier version of it.²

Underpinning the project was the concept of ‘practice-based research’, and the notion that additional forms of knowledge might be generated about texts, ideas, sites, and spaces by performing recreations of historical events in them, over and above those created by literary, archival, or archaeological research alone. In this case the idea was to see what additional understandings of Lyndsay’s *Satire* and the culture which produced and received it could be reached by performing a recreated 1540 interlude in its original setting of the great halls of Linlithgow Palace and Stirling Castle, and the whole of the 1552 text before contemporary Scottish audiences in Linlithgow Palace’s grounds, known locally as the Peel. In what follows I shall concentrate primarily on the challenges and discoveries generated by the larger, outdoor production, but I will also touch on the Interlude project where it seems to illuminate the larger endeavour.

The project was a collaboration between a team of academics (myself, Professor Tom Betteridge of Brunel University, and Dr Eleanor Rycroft, the Project Research Fellow at Edinburgh University, now of the University of Bristol, supported by the art historian Dr Sally Rush (Glasgow), the literary scholars Dr Sarah Carpenter (Edinburgh) and Professor John McGavin (Southampton) and the film scholar, Professor Ann Gray (Lincoln)), the curatorial and interpretative staff at Historic Scotland (notably Lorna Ewan, Alison Stalker, and Kit Reid) and AandBC Theatre Company, led by the director Gregory Thompson. The project was generously funded by a large research grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which allowed us both to employ a stellar cast of professional Scottish actors (see the cast list at the end of this article), each of whom brought their own insights and discoveries to the project, and to hire a film company specialising in outside broadcast events, Enthuse TV, directed by Richard Jack, to film the production in High Definition digital video for open-access presentation on the project website.

For Historic Scotland, one of the key aims of the project was to discover how far new audiences could be attracted to the sites in their keeping by recreating a large scale historical event there, something that they had not attempted before, owing in part to sensitivities about the use of the public space of the Linlithgow Peel for a restricted access event, concern for the preservation of surviving archaeological remains in the area, and a more general uncertainty about the likely level of return (financial and reputational) for what would be a significant investment of their staff time and

resources. For the theatre company, the project offered a unique chance to test the playability of a monumental piece of Scottish theatre in a production not constrained by the normal demands and limits of the commercial stage or independent experimental performance. For the academics, it offered an equally unique opportunity to test our hypotheses about the *Satire's* enduring capacity to move and unsettle spectators and embody a political challenge as relevant to modern audiences as to their Stuart forebears. The play has long been assumed to have spoken powerfully to early-modern Scottish audiences about their sense of individual and national identity, and their engagement with the political process in a period of dramatic political and religious uncertainty. What might it say to modern spectators when performed in its entirety at a moment when such issues were once again under intense scrutiny?

THE OUTDOOR PRODUCTION: THE SATIRE

We were from the outset acutely conscious of the place of *The Three Estates* in the canon of Scottish drama, and its unique position in recent stage history. Although the play had been almost entirely neglected as a theatre-work for four hundred years following the Edinburgh performance of 1554, it was triumphantly reclaimed as a piece of living theatre by Tyrone Guthrie's production for the Edinburgh International Festival in 1948. And following that revival, it had quickly claimed a place in the Scottish repertoire, being periodically performed at subsequent Edinburgh festivals, and significant moments in Scottish cultural history such as the mid-1980s and the millennium – always using variations of the markedly truncated text provided for Guthrie by Robert Kemp.³ We were thus very much aware throughout the project of playing in the shadow of Guthrie's monumental achievement, not least as members of the original audiences of 1948 came along to several of our performances and shared their memories and photographs with us. And the last surviving member of Guthrie's company, Jamie Stuart (who played Sandy Solace), now in his nineties, attended twice, introducing the last performance at Stirling with a gracious speech and a stirring rendition of Solace's opening lines.

We were also, however, certain that we wanted to approach the play very differently to the way Guthrie had presented it. Not least as his version,

and all those that followed it, save for a single production at the University of Glasgow in the 1990s, had used versions and adaptations of the much shorter Kemp script, a text that removed a good deal of the most contentious and challenging material from the play. What Scottish audiences and critics knew about the play as a performance piece – and thus about the Scottish dramatic culture of the Renaissance – was based upon edited versions of the play, created out of the exigencies and assumptions of Guthrie’s project of 1948. We needed to return as close as we could to the performances of 1552 and 1554 if we were to offer audiences a clear sense of how Lyndsay’s play worked, both dramatically and as a piece of political theatre. And thanks to the AHRC funding, we were able to do that, largely freed from the limitations to the size of the cast and length of performance that would have circumscribed a commercial theatrical production. A brief account of the differences between the Guthrie production and our own will suggest both what we hoped to achieve from the project and the magnitude of the challenge it presented.

When reflecting on his production, Guthrie identified the need for a number of significant changes to the original text if it was to work for modern audiences, each of which addressed a wider issue of acute interest to our project. The first concerned the sheer length of the play which, according to one contemporary account of the Edinburgh performance, took up to nine hours to play (*‘lastand fra ix houris afoir none, till vi houris at even’*).⁴ In Guthrie’s view this was clearly untenable, requiring him to insist on

a drastic abbreviation of the text and some adaptation to make it intelligible to the ordinary mortal, not just to the student of sixteenth century Scotland.⁵

We were determined, by contrast, to play the whole of the surviving text, and to play it as it survived in the 1602 Charteris printed edition, supplemented with the additional lines found only in the Bannatyne manuscript. In the event we made some very minor changes to accommodate our casting of a female actor, Gerda Stevenson, in the role of Good Counsel (on which more in a moment), changing male pronouns and epithets to female, and removing references to Counsel’s *‘boustous beard’* (line 1020).⁶ But, beyond these minor tweaks the play was performed in its entirety, lasting in fact for *‘only’* five and a quarter hours of performance time: a dis-

covery that suggests there may well have been several lengthy intervals, musical interludes, and dances in the original productions which extended their playing time substantially. Feedback from our audiences suggested that when played outdoors in good weather, with plenty of opportunities to move about, to eat, drink, and shift one's attention (all of which are referred to in the text itself), the playing time was clearly not a problem, even for audiences used to far shorter modern theatrical experiences, and unfamiliar with the play and the language in which it was written.

The second imperative for Guthrie was to remove the more obvious profanities, which would have been unacceptable to the audiences of 1948. Again we resolved to keep them in. The robust use of vernacular terms for the sexual act and sexual organs was a feature of the play as it was written, and we felt that it was important to reflect this in performance, not least to suggest to modern audiences how cultural values around sexual language taboo have changed since the Reformation. Hence the 'F' and 'C' words were retained – a decision which gained us the striking headline in the *Metro's* coverage of the production: 'Ancient Scots play to drop F-bomb again after 459 yrs' (*The Metro*, 7 June 2013, p.19). Significantly, Lyndsay used these words as a common descriptive verb and noun respectively, describing things one did and the things one did them with, without any obvious aggressive agenda. Only modern usage has turned them into taboo terms of titillation and aggressive abuse. Again it seemed important to reclaim the earlier use and to test the sensibilities of contemporary audiences to otherwise taboo words being spoken in purely descriptive contexts. And, despite the occasional start of surprise on first hearing them, our audiences seem to have quickly grown accustomed to their use. Certainly no complaints were received, at the time or since, even from those who (notwithstanding the guidance on the website about 'adult themes and language') chose to bring children to the shows.

The third of Guthrie's cuts to the play was more strategic and more political in nature.

We decided that most of the theology must go, including a brilliant but enormously long sermon – three quarters of an hour of unremitting pulpit-thumping at the penultimate stage of the evening. (viii)

Here we ran up against a decision that both altered the nature of the play

fundamentally and seemed to us to misunderstand it equally fundamentally. To cut the sermon on grounds of both length and tone seems a very curious decision. We played it in its entirety and demonstrated, I hope, that it can work dramatically. Certainly no one left their seats or indicated any annoyance at it during any of the performances. But then it is not quite as Guthrie described it. His response to it suggests, strangely in the case of such an eminent man of the theatre, a classic instance of allowing assumptions about the play drawn from reading about it to override what it can actually do in performance. Even delivered in full and at a moderate pace as it was by John Kielty, who played the Doctor, it is nowhere near three quarters of an hour long – more like seven or eight minutes. And it involves no Knoxian pulpit-thumping at all, but rather serves as a moment of quiet reflection in the midst of a scene of angry activity. The sermon is actually a brief, and highly conventional account of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and of the redemptive capacity of love. Following the angry denunciations of the parliamentary session which precedes it, the sermon actually offers a model of the true Christian spirit of forgiveness. Unremitting it certainly is not. Rather it offers remission, both theologically and theatrically, to spectators who have been bombarded with argument and counter-argument for the past hour. It is necessary in religio-political terms too, as it reinforces the point that Lyndsay is not pushing for a thoroughgoing Protestant reformation in the play, but for a more Erasmian, moral and economic reform of the church from within. There is nothing in the Doctor's sermon that would have been offensive to catholic doctrine, pre- or post- the Council of Trent. Guthrie's vision of a Knoxian firebrand could not be further from the truth. Indeed, there is precious little 'theology', in Guthrie's terms, in the play at all. Its anti-clerical satire, of which there is plenty, is based on moral and economic criticism of the clergy, not doctrinal critique. The nuns and friars may be expelled from Lyndsay's ideal commonwealth, but the monasteries are not dissolved, and the central tenets of catholic doctrine: the importance of works and grace (rather than faith alone) in the salvific economy, the existence of purgatory, and the centrality of the Eucharist are unchallenged. It is an educated, committed, hard-working clergy that Lyndsay is calling for, not a Protestant one: bishops who will preach in their diocese and ensure that their priests preach in their parishes. What they will preach is left largely unexplored, although the Doctor's sermon suggests it will be unexceptional doctrinally. Hence Correction (played for us

by Tam Dean Burn) pointedly tells Diligence (Liam Brennan) that he does not mind from which part of the church the preaching clergy are drawn, they can even come from among the soon to be banished friars, so long as they can preach truly and diligently:

Diligence

Quhat gif I find sum halie provinciall, *bishop*
Or minister of the gray freiris all, *i.e. the Franciscans*
Or ony freir that can preich prudentlie;
Sall I bring them with me in cumpanie?

Correction

Cair thou nocht quhat estait sa ever he be, *of what estate*
Sa thay can teich and preich the veritie. *so (long as)*
Maist cunning clarks with us is best beluifit, *beloved*
To dignitie thay salbe first promuisit. *promoted*
Quhidder thay be munk, channon, preist or freir, *monk, canon*
Sa thay can preich, failt nocht to bring them heir. (3182-91)

Lyndsay's theological position in the play is thus subtly nuanced rather than ideologically partisan. He lambasts ignorant and immoral churchman at length but, other than his controversial suggestion that the priesthood might marry (introduced into the Acts of the Parliament at the last minute by Diligence, seemingly without the Estates' agreement), his stance would have been broadly in keeping with the kinds of internal reforms mooted by Archbishop Hamilton and the catholic reformers in the ecclesiastical provincial councils of the 1550s.⁷ His version of Verity carries the New Testament 'In English toung, and printit in England' (1154), but she is no Lutheran reformer, for all the clergy's attempts to brand her as a heretic. Her choice of text would seem to be wholly pragmatic. She champions the ready availability of the Scriptures in the vernacular, and, in the absence of an authorised Scottish text, England was the obvious place to obtain bibles in English at this time.

THE VIRTUES

Mention of Verity brings us to another point of departure from Guthrie's production: our assumptions about the appeal of the play's moral agenda for the sensibilities of potentially more cynical modern spectators. We decided to play the play straight, not seeking to elide anything we feared might be too solemn or 'difficult' for modern audiences with humour or irony, whereas Guthrie had tried to make the virtuous characters more palatable through comedy. As Guthrie described him, his 'Good Council [. . .]' was not just a good and wise man; he was a venerable, if loveable, bore' (p.x). Similarly, Verity and Chastity were also played for laughs:

the former a lampoon upon the Lady Missionary, with a bible in one hand and a club in the other; the latter a sort of celestial Hospital Matron or Wardress, who moved with a crinkle of starched linen and thump of stout boots. Their downfall at the hands of the three endearing rogues (Flattery, Deceit and Falsehood) was consequently taken by the audience as a funny, not a pathetic, episode. (pp.x-xi)

This seems to take adaptation to modern tastes to the point where it completely reverses the dynamic and energies of the play. Gerda Stevenson's performance in our production as a female Good Counsel showed that the centre of the role was not a Polonius-like tediousness, but a quiet, patient authority: a wisdom that appealed to the king, but knew it could not prevail until he wished to hear it. It was striking how often during rehearsals Stevenson used the word 'patience', or demonstrated it in sitting, abiding, and paying witness to the truth of her words. And this seemed to us to identify the key to the role. Her first entrance, straight after the bawdiness and comedy of the Sensuality episode, introduced a new tone of quiet, benevolent authority to the play, from which the first inklings of moral reform would, in time develop, but which would and could not force itself on the king. It was a moment that revealed Lyndsay's deft technical abilities as a playwright adept at creating moral and aesthetic effects by switching prosodic form and tone – a moment that would have been lost if the role had been played for laughs.

Guthrie's decision to play the virtues comically was, as he admits, in part a consequence of his having cut most of the real bawdy comic material



Gerda Stevenson as Good Counsel, with Merchant (Michael Mackenzie) and Temporality (Paul Cunningham) sitting behind.

from Part One on grounds of taste. Hence he had to find his laughs elsewhere. ('I listed rather more heavily towards comedy than I think may have been Lyndsay's intention' (p.x), he noted of the virtues). As we were determined to play all of the comic scenes, obscenities and all, we were able to restore the balance of the play, a balance in which the dignity, and the emotional and moral appeal of Verity and Chastity (played by Alison Peebles and Cara Kelly respectively) were vital. Their failure to gain access to the king is striking evidence of the damage that Rex's negligence towards the commonweal while under Sensuality's influence has created. A production in which their marginalisation is applauded rather than regretted is actually a travesty of Lyndsay's intentions. Similarly, the trio of major vices, Flattery (Billy Riddoch), Falset (Barrie Hunter), and Deceit (Jimmy Chisholm), are entertaining and fun, but they are hardly 'endearing'. We are supposed to laugh at – and with – them at times, but we are never for a moment supposed to hope that they will retain a place in a healthy, functioning commonweal. That Flattery escapes the gallows and lives on to corrupt elements of the church (he leaves the stage promising to teach the hermit of Loreto how to flatter) is not a sop to audience sympathies, but a vivid example of how difficult it is to eradicate self-interest from church and state.

For Lyndsay and his society the kind of moral and political wisdom represented in *Good Counsel* evidently worked best when embodied in a male figure – the wisdom of the grey-bearded scholar or prophet, long-schooled in the foibles and needs of princes. (A similar figure, ‘Experience, clede like a doctour’, embodies much the same principle in the 1540 Interlude). Gregory Thompson’s decision to cast Gerda Stevenson in the role tapped into a still older tradition of biblical wisdom embodied as female (exemplified in Proverbs 1:20, ‘Wisdom preacheth abroad, she uttereth her voice in the streets’) which might work more effectively iconographically for modern audiences. Setting three suffering female virtues against the three male vices made for an effective visual differentiation of vice as well as giving a gendered embodiment to the contrast between the vices’ assertive, aggressive, yet ultimately unproductive hyperactivity and the virtues’ still, quiet witness to truth which is at the heart of Lyndsay’s affective dramatic strategy.

THE POLITICS OF PERFORMANCE: FROM INTERLUDE TO SATIRE

The attempt to reconstruct the 1540 Interlude from the eye-witness description included in a letter from Sir William Eure to Thomas Cromwell, and from the surviving play texts of the 1550s, brought into sharp focus which sections of the later play were clearly already in Lyndsay’s mind a decade earlier and which were not. The most obviously striking result of this exercise was a realisation of just how much of the 1552 play was already there in the 1540 production: the use of a Poor Man figure aggressively to open up the complacent ruminations of the political elite (symbolised by the personified Three Estates) to the real needs of the poor commonwealth; the concern with specific social and financial injustices: excessive death duties and land rents levied by church and lay landlords, the abuses of the feu-ing system, immorality, venality, and ignorance among the clergy, the lack of access to the king and to the law courts for those without the connections or the wealth to bribe their way in. Even such a signal moment of comic theatre as when *Temporality*, siding with the Merchant, tells the *Spirituality* that his objections to reform are irrelevant, since he is but one estate and they are two, was clearly already well formed in Lyndsay’s mind when he wrote the earlier interlude.⁸

The two plays were evidently driven by a single political agenda: a desire to open up the political sphere to the needs of the ‘deserving’ poor, and to reform the apparatus of church and state in the interests of good governance. What had changed between the two productions was, of course, the death of James V, an event which robbed Lyndsay of his master and protégé and the nation of the readiest agent of political and social reform. In the absence of a king to whom he might address his concerns and whose agenda he might in turn represent in dramatic form (for it is evident that the agenda of the Interlude was as much James’s as Lyndsay’s),⁹



Divine Correction (Tam Dean Burn) admonishes Rex Humanitas (James Mackenzie). Sensuality (Ruth Milne), Placebo (Richard Conlon) and Wantonness (Ewan Donald) look on.

the playwright was obliged to refashion the play in 1552 for a Scotland in which political power, authority, and the will to reform were considerably more precarious, fragmented, and internally conflicted. The differing contexts are readily evident in the two versions of the play.

The 1540 Interlude was a petition for reform, an appeal within the elite courtly world for James V to act and, implicitly, for the church to respond in order to forestall the worst aspects of the Reformation happening south of the border and elsewhere in Europe. The *Satire*, by contrast, enacts the reforms that the Interlude merely gestures towards: it outlines the problems

in detail, as the Interlude did, but it also provides the solution, in, if anything, still greater detail, while also tacitly acknowledging that even the full legislative programme it enacts, the purging of the kirk and the moral reform of the king and court, would not be enough to bring Scotland back to full social and moral health. The prime differences between the two plays politically, other than their length, are twofold. The first is the division in the *Satire* of the Interlude's single figure of the Poor Man into the eloquent, confident, well-informed John the Commonweal, with his strong sense of Scottish religious and political history, and the less articulate Pauper, whose needs are more basic and insistent.¹⁰ The second is the inclusion in the *Satire* of the figure of Divine Correction, the necessary, but necessarily supra-natural, lever that will set the reform process in motion. His role is both a bold gesture of confidence in the rectitude of the play's reforming agenda, but also a tacit admission of its likely defeat in the real world. Whereas in the Interlude the hope for reform had been invested outside the play in the expectation that James V would take up the baton and drive reform forward, in the *Satire* it is implicitly accepted that kings alone are not the answer. It takes divine intervention to purge the court and ensure that Rex keeps good company and receives the right kinds of advice. It is from Correction that the initiative comes to call a parliament and punish and expel the vices and erring clergy, not from within the political community of the play. The *Satire* is thus both a recognition of the need for reform and a covert acknowledgement of the difficulties of promoting and enacting it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PAUPER

It became increasingly clear through the rehearsals and performances that it is the arrival of Pauper in the play that marks the definitive shift in its tone and focus. Just as Correction's entrance towards the end of Part One turns the tide in the allegorical sphere, introducing a new note of apocalyptic utterance, scattering the vices, and bringing the virtues into Rex's court, thereby leaving the audience fully 'assurit of reformatioun' (line 29), so Pauper's entry during what we learned to call the 'interval play' brings that allegorical phase of the drama to a shuddering halt. In dramaturgical terms, his arrival, unexpected and seemingly unscripted, following Diligence's

declaration that the audience should take refreshment, and after the other actors have left their seats, contrasts signally with the carefully crafted finale to the moral drama of Part One. There is a conspicuous grinding of the theatrical gears, a disjunction, at this point that leaves the audience briefly uncertain whether this is art or reality, design or the disruption of design. The very clumsiness of Pauper's entry, as the other actors are leaving the space and audience members are beginning to move about, chatter, and stretch themselves, brings a new aesthetic into play. In our production this change of gear was accentuated by the casting of Davie McKay in the role of Pauper. His acting style and approach to the text was more naturalistic, conversational, and emotionally intense than most of the other actors. Rather than accentuate the rhythms of the verse and stress the rhymes, he elided them, concentrating on the sense of the words and the story he was telling, with a passionate conviction. The contrast with the acting throughout Part One was striking, and added considerably to the sense that we were watching something new, something less crafted and more dangerously unpredictable in his scenes, and especially at his first entrance. It was gratifying that several playgoers at each performance said that they were generally unnerved by MacKay's appearance at this point, dressed in shabby modern clothes and begging from the crowd, unsure whether to pay atten-



Pauper (Davie Mackay) begs for alms.

tion to him or not. Indeed, the on-site medical attendant told us that he had noticed Davie ‘hanging about’ in the backstage area, and thought he might be ‘up to no good’ until the point where Diligence started to speak to him in verse.

Pauper’s entry is equally crucial in political terms. Where the ending of Part One had been broadly allegorical and emblematic, offering an onstage tableau of the young king surrounded by the three virtuous principles that will govern his adult life: Good Counsel, Verity, and Chastity, with Divine Correction looming behind them all, Pauper introduces a new note of materialism, a gritty, scratchy particularity that gives the lie to the claim that simply a realignment of the king’s moral compass can solve the problems of Scotland’s broken commonweal. Pauper has real material needs, and grievances. He is not merely emblematically poor, he has a history, and tells Diligence and the audience just how it is that he has become poor, through a series of tragic events and the insensitive insistence of his landlord and vicar on their due rights to his property. He has lost his farm, his fine horse, and his three ‘fat ky’, and he wants them back. His story is not allegorical but naturalistic, and full of detail: he comes from a rural area in Lothian, about a mile from Tranent, his mother’s name is Mald and his wife’s Meg (the first non-figurative names we have encountered in the play thus far), and Mald, Pauper’s father, and Meg have all died in the very recent past. His story thus gives specific and personalised particularity to issues which have hitherto been addressed only obliquely, if at all, in the play’s discussion of the commonweal.

Pauper’s stubborn, insistent demand for the return of his ky becomes a leitmotif in the play, and a benchmark for the reforms that the king and parliament will seek to enact. In the course of Part Two the Estates, *inter alia*, purge the kirk of ignorant priests, reform the consistory law and its courts, and repeal the worst of the death duties that have brought Pauper to his present misery. Thus the future of the commonweal seems to be set on surer foundations: a suggestion symbolically acknowledged in John the Commonweal’s admission among the ranks of the Estates. But Pauper never gets his cows back. His story is thus ultimately a desperate one, a warning to everyone of the consequences of pursuing ‘singular profit’ at the poor’s expense, and a means of extending the affective effect of the play beyond its own boundaries and into the regular lives of the audience members themselves.

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In terms of our interim conclusions, then, we have discovered, I think, a number of significant things from the performances thus far. Collectively, we have learned that public audiences in Scotland have an appetite for historical re-enactment, and for the interaction between historic sites and ‘period’ events that goes beyond mere cultural tourism: a conclusion that offers Historic Scotland new avenues for showcasing the significance of the sites in their care to wider publics. We have learned that the play is eminently playable and explicable without glossing or extensive programme notes to modern actors and spectators, and we have learned emphatically that it still retains the power to touch nerves in contemporary Scotland and speak to issues of pressing importance, not least at a moment when national identity, good governance, economic malpractice, the causes and consequences of poverty, and the misdemeanours and responsibilities of governors and churchmen are once again at the forefront of the (inter)national conversation.

The *Satire* still works as a piece of theatre when performed in its entirety. Indeed, I would claim that it is *only* when it is performed whole by experienced and gifted actors committed to their craft that the full artistry of Lyndsay’s creation becomes evident. Only then can we fully appreciate the way that he carefully interposes moments of high comedy or violent contention with interludes of quiet wisdom or reflection, carefully juxtaposing different prosodic features and interweaving the musicality of staccato dialogue with longer speeches and set-pieces such as the sermons, the gallows confessions, or the formal reading of the Acts of the Estates. A clearer sense of, and admiration for, Lyndsay’s command of a range of dramatic modes and prosodic effects is a lasting legacy of the production for me.

Playing the *Satire* whole also demonstrates how Lyndsay structures his scenes for maximum audience engagement, repeatedly introducing a new character at a key moment, just as a mood and tone have been established, to shift the dynamics of the action and introduce new aesthetic effects, new pleasures for spectators which vary the audience experience and enrich the implications of the unfolding drama. Thus Good Counsel enters immediately following the Sensuality episode to place Rex’s seduction in a longer moral and political perspective, only for Flattery to follow him/her immediately and once again unsettle the dramatic trajectory. And in the same way

Folly (played for us by Gerry Mulgrew) enters as the play appears to be complete, casting all of the conclusions of the Estates into doubt once more, and shifting attention from the events onstage back to those beyond it and the responsibilities of the audience members themselves.¹¹ Long speeches of the kind spoken by the virtues, Correction, the Doctor, or Diligence himself thus prove in performance not to be ‘boring’ academic lectures but necessary moments of reflection and/or reassurance with a musicality of their own, which work both intellectually and aesthetically, injecting new rhythms, lexicons, and points of cultural reference (historical, biblical, philosophical) to vary the spectatorial experience (and also subtly to remind us that the vices live and think only for the moment whereas we need to take a longer and wider view).



Folly (Gerry Mulgrew) preaches, with Good Counsel (Gerda Stevenson), the Scribe (John Sampson) and Solace (Callum Cuthbertson) upstage.

Above all, perhaps, we have learned afresh to appreciate the importance, and the sheer power and radicalism, of the role of Pauper in both dramatic and socio-political terms. In him, a device that was perhaps becoming a commonplace of the English interlude drama, the intervention of what appears to be a character from the audience (one thinks not only of ‘A’ and ‘B’ in Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucesce* but also of Merry Report in Heywood’s

Play of the Weather and others) is revitalised to startling effect as a means of fundamentally transforming the nature and purpose of the drama from an artfully crafted allegorical and moral play into something more unsettling and dangerous. The ‘verisimilitude effect’ achieved by Pauper’s entrance sets all that has come before it into a new perspective, demanding a new level of attentiveness and concern from spectators and a new degree of realism and seriousness from the play itself. Hence the second half of the *Satire* is, I would argue, deliberately more ‘difficult’ and demanding, less obviously and conventionally entertaining, than Part One, less like a play, indeed, and more like a series of staged political events.

If the *Satire* as a whole is a piece of political theatre, then, Part One places the emphasis on the theatre, and Part Two emphatically on the politics. The second half requires audience members to work harder, and to invest and reflect more, offering less obvious pleasure in return. There are no bawdy interludes in Part Two, no secular songs, and even the vices are less mischievously engaging, more rebarbative and caustic. The humour, where it appears, is more biting, more politicised, directed at the exposure and humiliation of vice, corruption, and self-interest, both onstage and off. Hence Guthrie, and every commercial director since 1948, has cut much of Part Two. But to do so bowdlerises and eviscerates the play, turning the whole into an extended version of Part One, whereas the experience of playing it all suggests that Lyndsay carefully constructed the paradigm of Part One precisely in order to strip it away in the interval play and start afresh in Part Two with a new agenda and a new set of values. Indeed, in doing so he represents something quite new in terms of dramatic form by staging the redefinition of what play is and what drama could be. The difference between the two parts of the play goes far beyond the simple *use* of drama as a medium for opinions and belief such as we find in the work of John Bale in England, and becomes in itself a statement *about* play and drama and their capacities to reflect and represent the world, redefining the medium as well as the message.¹²

And Pauper himself is the centre – and the emblem – of that shift of mode and priorities. His entrance changes everything, unsettling the audience and the drama at the same time, and, if the performance works well, neither will be quite the same thereafter. Performing the play in its entirety foregrounded just how significant and radical Pauper can and should be in performance. He introduces not only a new tone and a new urgency to the

drama, he brings a whole new social class and political agenda into the purview of the British stage. In an age familiar with ‘in yer face’ theatre and agit prop, it is perhaps easy to lose sight of how significant and innovatory Lyndsay’s decision to bring onstage a figure of the common people would have been in the sixteenth century. Here is an uneducated, working man sharing the stage with princes and their advisors, and sharing the same language and register with them. And he is taken seriously, and on his own terms. He is not rendered comic through a rustic ‘mummerset’ dialect, demonised as a hypocritically self-interested rebel, nor allegorised into abstraction by generalised grievances or commonplace, proverbial utterances. His needs are real, concrete, and immediate, and he speaks of them to the king and to God’s avenging archangel without fear or favour, daring to suggest what he would do if he were king, or even pope, cursing them all if they do not live up to their promises. No equivalent figure can be found in British drama until well into the modern era, when politicised playwrights would again seek to recover the same sense of dignity and urgency in the common man. Even Shakespeare, for all the generous breadth of his theatrical commonwealth and the insights of his clowns, would put his most radical social observations into the mouths of kings and noblemen, allowing Lear on the heath briefly to voice the same kinds of insight into social injustice as Lyndsay’s Pauper voices in the heart of Parliament.

The *Satire* deserves, then, to be played in its entirety if it is to be played at all. And it deserves to be played because it is a striking, strident piece of political theatre for today as well as an embodiment of the vitality and richness of the otherwise lost tradition of the Scottish Renaissance theatre. Performing it again in a communal space in Linlithgow, before audiences of local people, regular theatregoers, theatre professionals, and scholars of drama, modern and historical, suggested once more how vibrant and challenging the play can be when played before a community with diverse values, interests, and concerns which it can appeal to, tease, and attempt to subvert. It also gave a strong sense of just how radically unsettling it would have been when it was originally played in the 1550s for communities far more hierarchical, deferential, and committed to the issues at stake. For a play to give serious attention to the angry voice of the common people, to stage the unfrocking of the clergy and a venal, parodic divorce ceremony, to propose a lengthy programme of serious social and legal reforms, and to challenge the right to govern of Estates and princes if they did not do so in the inter-

ests of the commonweal, would have been a truly radical undertaking. And it would have been an equally radical experience for those who witnessed it, and who were forced to address their own share of responsibilities for the failures of Scottish governance and social cohesion in the final speeches of the vices and Folly's closing assertion that everyone is a fool who does not follow good counsel and the teachings of Christ and reason.

All of this suggests just how robust Scottish court and civic culture must have been in the mid-sixteenth century, how open to criticism and vigorous debate, in ways that other Renaissance courts and public spheres seem not to have been. It also suggests how versatile, accommodating, and implicitly democratic were both the dramatic form and the Middle Scots language in this period. That Lyndsay could use the same dialect, and broadly the same lexicon to voice both a Cupar tailor and the king of Scotland, a poor cottar and the archangel Michael, suggests a capaciousness and social inclusivity to Scots 'English' that was not available to writers of the same period south of the border. Finally, the production showed convincingly that the play was no museum piece, to be dusted off simply as a curiosity or contribution to the 'heritage' industry. That the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop attended two performances and said it needed to be played again, and regularly; that the national media reviewed and reported on it; and figures from the First Minister to *Newsnight* presenters sent messages of support to the project indicates the play's capacity to engage contemporary political attention, just as the enthusiastic responses of our audiences attest to its capacity to address modern playgoers, their interests and anxieties, and to the contemporary relevance and importance of staging it again.

PRODUCTION DETAILS

The Satire of the Three Estates: Performed on the Peel, Linlithgow, 6-9th June, 2013

The Interlude of 1540: Performed in the Great Hall, Linlithgow Palace, 10-11th June and the Great Hall, Stirling Castle, 13th and 14th June 2013.

THE CAST

THE SATIRE

Deceit	JIMMY CHISHOLM
Verity	ALISON PEEBLES
Diligence	LIAM BRENNAN
Sensuality	RUTH MILNE
Danger/Sowtar's Wife	HELEN McALPINE
Flattery	BILLY RIDDOCH
Tailor/Covetice	MARTIN DOCHERTY
Rex Humanitas	JAMES MACKENZIE
Placebo	RICHARD CONLON
Solace	CALLUM CUTHBERTSON
Wantoness	EWAN DONALD
Hamelines/Tailor's Wife	SALLY REID
Good Counsel	GERDA STEVENSON
Spirituality	TOM McGOVERN
Pauper	DAVID McKAY
Falset	BARRIE HUNTER
Divine Correction	TAM DEAN BURN
Doctor	JOHN KIELTY
Pardoner/Abbot	PETER KENNY
Parson	MICHAEL DAVIOT
Chastity	CARA KELLY
Sowtar/Thift	STEPHEN DOCHERTY
John the Commonweal	KEITH FLEMING
Fund-Jonet	JOYCE FALCONER
Prioress	ANGELA DARCY
Oppression	GEORGE DRENNAN
Temporality	PAUL CUNNINGHAM
Folly	GERRY MULGREW
Wilkin/Sergeant 2	SCOTT HOATSON
Merchant	MICHAEL MACKENZIE
Varlet/Sergeant 1	KERN FALCONER
Scribe	JOHN SAMPSON
Licent	ANNIE GRACE
Jennie	ISLA RAMSAY
Stult	JAMES CUTHBERTSON
Glaiks	AMY McFARLANE

THE INTERLUDE

James V	SCOTT HOATSON
Sir William Eure	ALISON PEEBLES
Thomas Bellenden	GERRY MULGREW
Archbishop of Glasgow	BILLY RIDDOCH
Sir David Lyndsay/Experience	LIAM BRENNAN
Solace	CALLUM CUTHBERTSON
Spirituality	TOM McGOVERN
Temporality	PAUL CUNNINGHAM
Burgess	MICHAEL MACKENZIE
Poor Man	KEITH FLEMING
Player King	JAMES MACKENZIE

THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Director	GREG THOMPSON
Composer	JOHN KIELTY
Set Designer	ELLEN CAIRNS
Costume Designer	HILARY LEWIS
Production Manager	ZOË SQUAIR
Technical Manager	MARC SWANSON
Stage Manager	HEATHER WILSON
Deputy Stage Manager	NAOMI STALKER
Assistant Stage Managers	GREG SHARMAN, LINSEY JOHNSTONE
Hat Maker	MARK WHEELER
Costume Makers	GLEN HILL, JUDE WARD, JANE COLQUHOUN
Wardrobe Assistants	AISLING NI GHLOINN, CATE MACKIE

Notes

- 1 I am very grateful to my colleagues Professors John McGavin, Tom Betteridge, Olga Taxidou, and Dr Ellie Rycroft, and to Professor Joanne Kantrowitz for their advice and comments on this article. Essays and blogs on many aspects of the project, along with film of the productions can be found on the project website: <www.stagingthescottishcourt.org>. The images in this article are copyright Enthuse TV & Events Ltd, and are used with their permission.
- 2 For differing views of the relationship between the interlude and Lyndsay's play, see Sir David Lindsay, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, ed. by R. J. Lyall (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1989), pp.xi-xii; John MacQueen, 'Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 3 (1966), 129-43 (p.135); John Corbett, *Sir David Lyndsay's A Satyre of the Thrie Estates* (Glasgow: Association of Scottish Literary Studies, 2009), p.9; Carol Edington, *Court and Culture in Renaissance Scotland: Sir David Lindsay of the Mount* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp.50 and 238, fn 30; and Joanne Spencer Kantrowitz, *Dramatic Allegory: Lindsay's Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (Lincoln NA: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p.22.
- 3 The Millennium production at Cupar, Fife, used a shortened, modernised script by Alan Spence; see Alan Spence, *David Lindsay's The 3 Estaites: The Millennium Version*, with an Introduction by Angus Calder (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).
- 4 *The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount* ed. by D. Hamer, Scottish Text Society, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1936), IV, p.139.
- 5 Sir David Lindsay, *The Satyre of the Thrie Estates*, with an Introduction by Tyrone Guthrie (London: Heinemann, 1951), p.viii.
- 6 All references to the text are to the edition in Greg Walker, *Medieval Drama: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
- 7 See Jane E. Dawson, *Scotland Reformed, 1488-1587* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp.184-6; Alec Ryrie, *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp.8-14.
- 8 For a text of the letter and attendant eye-witness account of the Interlude, see Walker, *Medieval Drama*, pp.538-9.
- 9 See Walker, *Medieval Drama*, p.538 and Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.134-8.
- 10 For further discussion of the roles of John and Pauper, see the open access article 'Who is John the Commonweal', available on the project website at <www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/documents/>.
- 11 Walker, *Reading Literature Historically: Drama and Poetry from Chaucer to the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp.63-90.
- 12 I owe this last point to John McGavin.

University of Edinburgh