

JOHN RASTELL'S STAGE

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A tantalising piece of under-explored theatre history is the construction of a stage 'in Restalles gronde besides fyndesbury [Finsbury] in tymbre bourde nayle lath sprigge and other thynges'.¹ Details of this stage, such as they are, are confined to one piece of evidence: a lawsuit brought by John Rastell against one Henry Walton, whom he accuses of failure to return costumes left with him for safe-keeping while Rastell was out of the country. This stage is, as A.W. Reed pointed out many years ago, 'the earliest stage known to the historian of the Tudor drama',² yet it has received virtually no serious attention. (The relevant volume of the *Revels History of Drama*, for example, gives it one sentence.) Reed exceptionally devotes a little over three pages to it in an appendix, and Richard Southern pauses for longer than most by giving it one-and-a-half pages in his survey of Tudor stagecraft, but he notes with regret that the evidence of the lawsuit 'seems to come very near to being of no practical value at all' in helping us picture Rastell's stage.³ Though Southern is right about the absence of pertinent detail, it seems worth probing such evidence as there is a little further for what it may have to tell us about the conditions of performance in early Tudor London. I propose to look more closely at the lawsuit and at Rastell himself to see what possible perspectives on this stage emerge; but the speculative nature of what follows must be acknowledged.

The Date of the Stage

Rastell purchased the lease on a piece of land in Finsbury in 1524. He then proceeded to have a house and a stage built on it, though not necessarily at the same time.⁴ While construction of the house presumably began soon after the purchase of the lease, the stage could have been built at any point between the purchase of the lease and Rastell's visit to France, which Reed dates to 1529-30.⁵ It cannot have been built after Rastell's visit, since Walton, who built the stage, was filing a complaint against Rastell for non-payment for the work immediately on Rastell's return from France (see Rastell's account of the sequence of events, below). The visit cannot have taken place any later than this, since the lawsuit itself can be dated, on internal evidence, to 1530-31. (One of the deponents refers to 'the kinges banket ... at

Grenewiche' as 'iij or iiij yeres past' (317/68), a reference to the visit of the French embassy in 1527 to arrange a marriage between Henry's sister Mary and either Francis I of France or his younger son.)

The lawsuit concerns the hire of costumes belonging to Rastell, and it would seem likely, though not certain, that the stage was in place throughout most or all of the period in which the costumes are said to have been hired out. Establishing the parameters of this activity, however, is not entirely straightforward. Rastell himself (314/66) and two deponents (316-7/67-68) affirm that the costumes were in use at the time of the Greenwich entertainments, and a question to those deponents, called in Rastell's defence, who saw the Greenwich entertainments, called in Rastell's defence, may imply That they were used specifically *for* those entertainments (though not, apparently, for the first time).⁶ The question asks whether 'about iij or iiij yeres now past about whych tyme þe kynges grete banket was At grenewych whyþer þis deponent saw the seyð garmentes occupied þat somer ... & at that tyme they were fressh & new & semyd lytyll the wors for any weryng of them before' (314/66). This dates the costumes to at least 1527, and by implication not long before. George Birch, one of the two deponents claiming to have seen them in use in 1527, says they were even then being hired out by Walton, but adds that 'they semyd freshe and good' at that time (317/68). A deponent for Walton, however, Roger Taylor, claims that 'they were occupied iij or iiij yeres / in playeng and dysguysinges or they cam to the handes of thesaid walton or before any variaunce was bitwene them for the same' (319-20/71).⁷ Given the weight of other testimony, and the fact that Taylor's statement seems to parallel the time of the costumes coming into Walton's hands with the start of the dispute between Walton and Rastell, this is probably another way of saying the same thing as Rastell, Mayler, and Birch, rather than an indication that the costumes were in use before 1527.

The apparent contradiction here between Birch's statement that Walton himself was hiring the costumes out in 1527 and Taylor's statement that they had been hired out before 'they cam to the handes of thesaid walton' (in 1529-30) may hinge on a distinction between agency and possession. Birch, immediately before he says that Walton let the garments out to hire, specifies that he and his company played in the garments 'while thay remained in thandes of thesaid Restall' is followed by this deleted continuation: 'and oons he played in them / being in the handes of thesaid walton' suggests that either Birch or the clerk taking his statement finds the detail potentially confusing and has to correct for accuracy. Walton may have been hiring out the costumes as Rastell's agent in 1527, but on his own account, for personal

gain, in 1529–30. Either way, Rastell himself must have been involved in the costume hire at the earlier date, and the linking of Walton's name to the earlier date suggests the likelihood of Walton's ongoing involvement in Rastell's theatrical venture from an early stage. We know from other records that Rastell employed Walton as a carpenter in the construction of the necessary structures for the Greenwich entertainment of 1527;⁸ and we know from the lawsuit that Rastell employed Walton to build his Finsbury stage. Two ways of reading the evidence suggest themselves: either Rastell and Walton worked together first at Greenwich, and their joint concern in both stage and costumes at this point led to Rastell's employment of (or collaboration with) Walton in setting up his own theatrical venture; or Rastell employed Walton at Greenwich because he had already employed him in the building of his stage and perhaps continued to use his services in other areas of his theatrical enterprise. Though there is no evidence either way, I tend towards the second reading on the grounds that Walton seems to have been involved in the costume hire in 1527 as well as in building the stage at Greenwich, implying perhaps already-existing working relations with Rastell. Certainly Rastell's later decision to entrust the costumes to Walton in his absence would seem to indicate some kind of ongoing working relationship by that time. I would suggest, then, that the Finsbury stage was a collaborative venture between Rastell and Walton; that it may well have predated the Greenwich entertainments; and that there is no evidence working against the possibility that it was built at the same time as the house, c.1524.

The Place of Performance

Though the word 'garden' is often used by twentieth-century scholars making reference to the location of Rastell's stage, its current associations can be misleading, perhaps inviting us to construct an anachronistic and potentially patronising picture of a bourgeois amateur playing at theatre in private, quasi-domestic space.⁹ The piece of land on which Rastell purchased the lease in 1524 was sizeable, one-and-three-quarter acres. A house, even a large house, would occupy only a fraction of the property, leaving more than enough space for a stage and potentially large numbers of spectators. On the other hand, Pearl Hogrefe's reference to Rastell's stage as a 'public stage in Finsbury Fields' may be equally misleading.¹⁰ Just as we cannot assume that Rastell was staging private theatricals for his friends, neither can we assume that he opened his stage to an unselected public or that he charged for entry, as later notions of a 'public' stage imply. But it is worth remembering that the size of the property need not have constrained the size of the enterprise.¹¹

It is at least possible that Rastell conceived of the site from the start as a 'double' one that would accommodate both his house and a stage, together with a significant number of spectators. In other words, instead of thinking of the stage and the house as part of one domesticated space, we might do well to think of them as two separate but adjoining spaces. There are certainly analogies for this in the later ventures of the Red Lion stage and the playhouse at Newington Butts. Again, evidence for the Red Lion stage comes from a lawsuit, which describes it as situated 'wythyn the Courte or yarde lying on the south syde of the Garden belonging to the messuage or farme house called and knowen by the name of the Sygne of the Redd Lyon'.¹² William Ingram's recent analysis of the evidence may be cited to suggest the extent to which the structure (excluding the galleries) and its location may have resembled Rastell's earlier arrangement:

a piece of land 'belonging to' ... the farm contained a garden plot, and there was an open yard to the south of the garden; in that open space a stage and galleries were to be erected. Brayne's venture was thus not even a 'playhouse' in the strict sense of the term, as there was no building enclosing the stage and galleries.¹³

The Newington Butts playhouse differs from the Red Lion and Rastell's stage in that it consists of a building enclosing the stage, but the site offers a parallel with the earlier two in terms of its provision for both dwelling and performance structures on the same piece of land. It also offers a further parallel with Rastell's arrangement not shared by the Red Lion, so far as the evidence shows, in the fact that the dwelling is occupied, if Ingram's conclusions are correct, by someone with a direct interest in the adjacent stage.¹⁴

An indication of the value of Rastell's structure is also provided by the lawsuit: two deponents for Henry Walton specify 50s as the amount Rastell owed Walton for building the stage, though one of them adds that 'restall sayed it was to moche' (318/70). (Walton seems to have sued for a debt of 40s: (310–11/60). Perhaps Rastell had, or was supposed to have, according to Walton, made a first payment towards the total sum.) The figure of 50s suggests, as does the wording, payment for a stage alone. The construction of seating scaffolds or a building would have added considerably to these costs. The materials specified, however, indicate some kind of permanent structure and not simply removable boards on trestles, but it is unclear whether this might have been a free-standing platform stage or a fitting built inside an existing larger structure.¹⁵

The location of Rastell's house and stage in Finsbury Fields is interesting in the light of the later and better-known playhouses of 1576–77, the Theatre and the Curtain, sited in the same area. Could it be that Finsbury seemed an attractive site to James Burbage and Henry Laneman partly because it had been a place of performance within living memory, or perhaps even with a tradition of performance extending from the 1520s (or earlier?) into the 1570s? Certainly the area was already generally associated with recreation. Reed, taking Moorfields and Finsbury as one area, describes them as 'the playing fields of the apprentices', resorted to for archery, wrestling, and other games;¹⁶ and Hall's *Chronicle* describes how city-dwellers in pursuit of open fields to walk or play in were provoked in 1515–16 into summary action against the increasing enclosure of common fields by the inhabitants of the towns close to these areas. One morning, responding to a call of 'shovels and spades', they took collective action in such numbers that 'within a short space all the hedges about the townes were cast downe, and the diches filled, and every thing made plain the woorkemen were so diligent'.¹⁷

Finsbury Field, however, was also an industrial area, and it is notable that whereas by the early seventeenth century Moorfields had become a dedicated recreational area, Finsbury had increasingly taken on the character of a residential and working suburb. Leases dating mainly from the second half of the sixteenth century show that the area was particularly attractive to clothworkers, who used the field areas as tenter grounds. A large number of the leases are for simple pieces of ground or garden plots.¹⁸

The Economics of the Enterprise

The evidence of the lawsuit indicates that the costumes represented a significant sum of money in terms of both outlay and income, a sum worth going to law to recover.¹⁹ Rastell's suit begins by rating the total value of the costumes at 20 marks (£13 6s 8d) and proceeding to specify each costume in some detail, as in, for example, 'A garment of red & grene Saye panyd & gardyd with golde skynnes lyned with red bokeram And A shorte garment of gold skynnes & fustyan of Nape[l]s blak And slevd with red grene yelow & blewe sarcenet' (307/63).²⁰ Ten garments are itemised, together with two caps, two curtains, and six pieces of different cloth.

Their worth is estimated in different ways and at different amounts. Rastell's own statement ends with the claim that he stands to lose 'xj or xij^{li} (£11 or £12) or About' (309/60), a sum presumably estimated by calculating roughly the difference between his valuation of the costumes and Walton's (at 35s 9d; see below).²¹ Another document in the lawsuit, probably

emanating from Rastell, since the wording of it is so close to that of Rastell's deposition, lists and prices each garment and item separately, arriving at a total of 245s (£12 5s).²² All four deponents for Rastell agree that each costume is worth 20s or more; and of these the statement of Fishpole, the tailor employed to sew the costumes, seems to suggest that this value excludes the cost of his own hire at 4d a day together with his food and drink. (Rastell's wife, he further notes, helped with some of the sewing). He breaks down the cost of the garment of gold skins, for example, into the value of the fabric and the cost of the workmanship: 'it was better than xxs / and it was worth anoble the making' (315/66). Their material value, then, was substantial; and replacing them, furthermore, might be considerably more expensive than these figures imply, since they apparently exclude the cost of workmanship, and several statements indicate that the material for the costumes was not new at the time of their making: see, for example, the interrogatories for Fishpole (313/64–65), Fishpole's deposition (315/66–67), and Roger Taylor's deposition (319/71).

Walton, however, who claimed that Rastell owed him 40s (presumably in relation to payment for the stage, as the depositions of William Knight and Nicholas Sayer indicate), kept the costumes against the debt, as was the custom, and had the costumes revalued by Thomas Curtis and John Wilkinson, 'which wilkinson at the request & desyre of the seyd henry praysyd the seyd goodes & stuff but to the valew of xxxvs ixd' (308/60). (The words are Rastell's.) While it is not quite clear here whether Rastell is merely recounting the fact that Walton invited Wilkinson to revalue the garments or accusing Walton of persuading Wilkinson to set the price low, his reference a few lines later to the 'falskede s[u]bte & dysseyte of the said walton & of the said wylkyson & curteys whych were prayzers' (308–9/59–60) would seem to suggest the latter.²³ Walton's answer defends this low valuation on the grounds that they were no more than 'rotten and torne players garmentes' (310/61).

One point at issue, of course, was how much the value of the clothes had declined over the period of their use. Rastell, it should be noted, ties his own valuation of 'xx markes & Aboue' (308/59) to the same period as Walton's 35s 9d, thereby apparently refusing to accept any reduction in worth over the period of hire. (Walton's interrogatories also accuse Rastell of 'iniustely' claiming that 'the seid goodes were fresshe And new': 318/69.) It may be, however, that this figure allows for some reduction in the absolute value of the costumes, but adds in some consideration for the cost of replacement and

perhaps also for the income that Rastell has lost to Walton during the period of his absence.

There are difficulties in interpreting the various ways in which witnesses estimate the amount recouped from hiring the costumes, and indicators of time are especially problematic. Rastell's own testimony seems to concentrate on the period between his return from France and the bringing of the lawsuit. His narrative of events goes as follows: on coming home he asked Walton to return his costumes; Walton said he would bring them, but failed to do so over a period of two to three weeks, during which time he was constantly in Rastell's company but secretly entering his own bill against Rastell for the debt of 40s (non-payment for the stage, though Rastell does not say so, since he denies the debt); Walton then had the costumes revalued at the court's instruction; and it is 'syth the said praysement of them' (a period that Walton claims is more than a year and a day: 310/61)²⁴ that Walton has let the costumes out to hire and earned 'the somme of xx nobles [£10 or £6 13s 4d] or Aboue' (312/62).²⁵ On the other hand, Rastell also demands in his interrogatories to Fishpole, 'wheþer walton hath not þe same garmentes let to hym by rastell & whyþer walton hath not contynually this iiij yere sett [altered from *lett*] them to hyre in stage pleyes & interludes about iij or iiij skores tymes & what he vsyd to haue for a stage pley & what for an interlude / & how mych money he hath won therby' (314/65). This would seem to imply that Walton has been hiring out the costumes for his own profit over the whole period since the Greenwich entertainment.²⁶

The other witnesses, including those testifying on Rastell's behalf, concentrate on the period of Rastell's absence in France, but estimate Walton's earnings and the duration of the costume-hire business in different ways. George Mayler's statement first affirms that Walton lent the costumes out about twenty times in all for stage-plays and interludes, but follows this by stating that he hired them out 'by estimacion xx tymes a yere in enterludes' (316/67). (The distinction between stage-plays and interludes is a specific one, more fully considered below, though it is difficult to be certain of how specific its force is here). Mayler's two ways of estimating Walton's income from the costume hire seem to be at odds with one another, although one possible explanation is that the first estimate refers to the six-month period of Rastell's absence and the second to a longer period, probably the period between the Greenwich festivities, when Mayler says he first saw the garments in use, and the present date of the lawsuit. If Mayler's figure of twenty times a year is multiplied by the three to four years since the Greenwich entertainments, this produces a total number of hirings

corresponding closely to Rastell's own claim (implicit in the interrogatories to Fishpole) that Walton hired the costumes out 'about iij or iiij skores tymes' over 4 years (314/65).

Whatever the problems of arriving at a clear understanding of the exact period and frequency of the costume hire, it seems evident that the costumes were both the most costly and the most lucrative part of Rastell's theatrical venture. The figure of 50s as the estimated cost of building the stage represents about a fifth of the value set on the costumes by Rastell and his deponents. Several deponents in the lawsuit refer to Walton's probable income from hiring out the costumes. Rastell's figure of 'xx nobles or Aboute' (over £10 or £6 13s 4d) for the period between his return to England and the commencement of the lawsuit has been noted above. Mayler and Birch give details of two rates of hire: Mayler specifies 8d for an 'interlude' and anywhere between 2s (24d) and 40d for a 'stage play' (316/67); Birch agrees with the 8d rate for an interlude, which he says is 'common custome', and indicates a more flexible rate, 'as the parties can agree' (317/68), for stage-plays. Postponing for a moment the vexed distinction between a stage-play and an interlude, it is at least evident that the rates of costume-hire for the two were very different. We do not know, of course, how Walton's costume rental was divided between stage-plays and interludes, but we can calculate rough minimum and maximum annual incomes from the business using Rastell's and Mayler's shared estimate of sixty to eighty hirings, or twenty hirings per year.²⁷ The lowest annual figure, calculated on the basis of twenty hirings for interludes, comes to 160d (13s 4d). If we substitute twenty hirings for stage-plays at the top price of 40d cited by Mayler, the annual income rises to 800d (£3 6s 8d). If we add twenty stage-play hirings to twenty interludes,²⁸ we reach an annual figure of £4. Multiplying these figures by a period of three years produces a total income over the period of between £2—£12; and over four years the figures become £2 13s 4d—£16. Though these parameters remain apparently incompatible with Rastell's estimate of Walton's income during a period of a year or so at 20 nobles or more,²⁹ it is nevertheless clear why it was worth Rastell's while to take Henry Walton to law for the recovery of these costumes, even in their deteriorated condition.

The cost and frequency of hiring these costumes offer us a window on to more than just Walton's profits. They suggest the presence, as William Ingram notes in passing, of a thriving culture of performance in London beyond the court (court performers would have had access to costumes via the Revels Office). Such heavy use of one set of costumes indicates the existence of a regular demand for costumes from players who did not possess

their own, and Meg Twycross's discussion of the evidence for the activities of one Felsted of London between 1538 and 1556 would support this inference.³⁰ George Mayler even refers to having played in the costumes 'by the lending of othre players that walton had lent them to <to hyre>' (316/67). This level of demand in turn suggests the presence of players not necessarily organised into companies, of audiences ready to attend stage-plays and interludes with some regularity, and of more non-courtly and non-aristocratic venues for performance in London than Rastell's stage (though the existence of a stage may have been a characteristic that set Rastell's enterprise apart from more ad hoc performance spaces).

The Players

Those men who offer evidence on Rastell's behalf are identified in their depositions as a tailor (William Fishpole), a merchant tailor (George Mayler), a carrier (George Birch), and a stationer (John Redman). Such identification, however, should not be read as necessarily indicative of their primary means of livelihood. Though the tailor evidently earned a living by practising his trade, since the evidence he gave concerns his part in sewing the costumes for Rastell, the other three claim to have played in the disputed garments. Two of them, Mayler and Birch, were members of the King's company of players, which would certainly mean that acting was their primary employment. It was not uncommon for players to identify themselves in legal documents via a trade to which they are affiliated or which they had formerly practised. Another lawsuit describes Mayler as neither a merchant tailor nor an actor, but a glazier, despite the fact that the lawsuit concerns his conduct towards an apprentice he took on in the pursuit of his acting profession.³¹ James Burbage later identified himself as a joiner not a player, in the lease for the Shoreditch property on which he was to build the Theatre.³²

John Redman, the third player, may have been Rastell's apprentice. This suggestion is put forward by Sydney Anglo, who cites a payment to Redman by Sir Henry Guildford for scribal copying in connection with the Greenwich festivities of 1527. If Redman, aged about nineteen in 1627, had been apprenticed to Rastell at this date, Anglo argues, this is precisely the kind of work he would have been expected to do.³³ Further weight is added to the probability that Redman was Rastell's apprentice by the fact that Redman went on to become a printer,³⁴ and this in turn suggests that Redman's dramatic interests were never more than a sideline. If he was Rastell's apprentice he would have been breaking the terms of his apprenticeship by

leaving his master without licence, and the fact that he is later documented as a printer indicates that he successfully completed his apprenticeship.

There is nothing in the depositions to indicate that any of these actors ever performed for Rastell. Their evidence is required because they played elsewhere in Rastell's costumes. Yet this does not, of course, preclude the possibility that they may also have performed on Rastell's stage. In particular the fact that one of the three seems to have been Rastell's apprentice would suggest that he at least is likely to have performed for his master. Since apprentices commonly lived with their masters, and masters were responsible for their welfare and good behaviour, it seems more likely that Redman's performing skills would have developed as part of his master's dramatic enterprise than that his master would have allowed him the time or the leisure to pursue such an interest in an amateur way, far less take paid employment outside the terms of his apprenticeship. As for the two King's players, their status did not prevent them from taking other employment on occasion. Clearly they were accustomed to playing for other patrons on tour, and Chambers notes Christmas gifts to them from other court lords and ladies.³⁵ There is no reason to suppose that they were not free to take paid employment beyond the court in London, providing their services were not required at court.³⁶

While there is nothing to link these actors to Rastell, neither is there any evidence of a company playing specifically for Rastell, nor of any early Tudor company with a patron outside the ranks of the aristocracy.³⁷ Companies were operating within a still dominant system of patronage, whereby the king or a wealthy nobleman retained players in order to enhance his own status.³⁸ Rastell's own personal patron, Sir Edward Belknap, is known to have retained a group of players, but there is no known precedent for a man of Rastell's class attempting to do so. As the bonds between patrons and players began to loosen later in the century, and the Elizabethan companies began to attach themselves to public playhouses, the evidence always points to existing companies in place before buildings, not to theatre entrepreneurs setting out to form companies to play in their buildings. The argument from analogy, inadequate though it is, together with the greater dominance of aristocratic patronage in the early Tudor period, would therefore suggest that Rastell is unlikely to have formed a dedicated company for his stage, and may well have drawn on the combined services of a range of willing participants from the King's players to his own apprentice in an ad hoc way. (He may also, of course, have paid patronised companies. There is no need to suppose that Rastell always employed the same players.) The fact that the players

called as witnesses in this lawsuit had played in Rastell's costumes and gave evidence on his behalf makes clear that they were at least familiar with his dramatic project, if not actively involved in it. They are also very likely to have come into direct contact with Rastell during preparations for the Greenwich festivities of 1527 if they did not know him before that.

Alternatively, it has been suggested, Rastell's friends in the More circle may have participated in performing on his stage.³⁹ William Roper's account, in his *Life of More*, of More's own readiness, as a youth in Cardinal Morton's household, to 'sodenly sometymes steppe in among the players, and never studyeng for the matter, make a parte of his owne there presently amonge them, which made the lookers on more sporte then all the plaiers beside' is often cited.⁴⁰ Certainly, as Hogrefe has shown, More's circle was interested in writing, printing and staging drama; yet the tone of Roper's anecdote seems to me to work against any attempt to use it in defence of the possibility of More performing on Rastell's stage. In the first place, the story belongs to More's youth (he is specifically described as a 'child' on the same page, which is the opening page of Roper's *Life*) and may represent a kind of behaviour specific to youthful high-spiritedness; and secondly, the story highlights 'witt and towardnes',⁴¹ improvisational skills demonstrating the unrehearsed and spontaneous *sprezzatura* of the courtier, who can instantly turn his hand to any kind of performance, dramatic or otherwise. Precisely this emphasis on the unstudied nature of the intervention would suggest the unlikelihood of any studied or rehearsed acting meeting with approval at the élite level of More's class. There is all the difference in the world between a private and spontaneous act of performance within the confines of a noble household and treading the boards of Rastell's open-air stage as a costumed interlude who has learned and rehearsed his lines. (Even if Rastell's stage was in fact indoors, his household would scarcely conform to the model of Cardinal Morton's.)

Lack of evidence about Rastell's audience as well as his actors makes it impossible to determine how 'public' such a performance might have been. At one extreme we might picture Rastell opening his stage to the general public and charging for admission (in which case More's presence as an actor would be unthinkable); at the other extreme it might be that More and his like formed an invited audience for relatively private performances; and there are levels in between these two extremes which are perhaps more probable than either. Yet even at the élite end of imagination, it is difficult to conceive of More and his friends acting, even in front of friends drawn from the same class, in costumes hired out to other actors. It is this very businesslike aspect

of the enterprise that makes hired actors more likely than courtly amateurs as performers on Rastell's stage.

The Plays

It is time now to return to the question of stage-plays and interludes. Of the deponents in Rastell's lawsuit, only William Fishpole fails to yoke the two phrases together: he says that Walton used the costumes in stage-plays (315/66). But Rastell's testimony, together with the testimony of the three players and the questions put to Fishpole, all use the doublet, which is also generally widespread (see note 42 below). The statements of Mayler and Birch concerning different hire costs for each confirm that the deponents recognised a clear distinction between the two types of performance, and Mayler's statement adds a further dimension by referring to 'stage playes in the somer and interludes in the winter' (316/67).⁴² So we know that hiring costumes for a stage-play could cost more than four times as much as for an interlude, and that stage-plays were performed in the summer and interludes in the winter. Pollard, following Plomer, suggests that the distinction had 'nothing to do with the plays acted, but solely to [sic] the place of performance, interludes being acted indoors and stage-plays in the open air, where the dresses were exposed to greater damage',⁴³ while Reed suggests an alternative reading of the evidence: 'that stage plays were public performances with a charge for admission, and the Walton bargained with the actors accordingly, claiming, as it were, a share in the prospective profits'.⁴⁴ Nothing would seem to rule out either reading, nor is either reading completely incompatible with the other. Admission charges would be more likely to be linked to an outdoor venue, whereas the traditions of patronage were stronger for indoor performance.⁴⁵

There is no need to assume that the terminology of stage-plays and interludes indicates different kinds of play text. On the contrary, the use of the same costumes for both may point in the direction of the same plays receiving both kinds of performance. David Bevington's work on 'the popular canon' allows for the inclusion of some humanist plays; and some of the same plays he proposes as 'designed for commercial production by adult troupes before a diversified audience' have been linked with court or household performance by other writers.⁴⁶

Rastell wrote at least one play, which he also printed himself, calling it an interlude: *A New Interlude and a Mery, of the Nature of the Four Elementis*.⁴⁷ The play is scattered with various references suggesting hall performance, thus endorsing Pollard's linking of the term to indoor performance.⁴⁸ On the

other hand, Rastell, as both writer and producer of plays, may have been precisely in the business of remaking the definition of an interlude. It is evident from the prefatory matter that Rastell anticipated significant variation between individual performances:

whiche interlude, yf the hole matter be playde, wyl conteyne the space of an hour and a halfe; but yf ye lyst ye may leue out muche of the sad mater, as the messengers parte, and some of Naturys parte and some of Experyens parte, and yet the matter wyl depend conveyently, and than it wyll not be paste thre quarters of an hour of length.

As Bevington concludes, 'it is in trying to bridge the gap [between his intellectual peers and the wider populace] that he makes his distinctive mark'.⁴⁹

Greg Walker has argued that 'by the very fact of their written form, all the dramatic texts which we now possess are "élite" creations'.⁵⁰ Yet this effaces differences within the category of the 'élite': what was played at court might have been very different from what was played in one noble household or another, or in a wealthy gentry household, or on the privately-owned stage of John Rastell, though it is not impossible that those very different performances might have been versions of the same base-texts. Before Walker argues that all extant texts are élite by definition, he asks an important question, which remains unanswered:

Were there, perhaps, rival centres of dramatic activity outside the court which produced their own political plays in which alternative ideas about the nature of society and the policies of the Government were expressed and explored? Were there 'radical' interludes as well as courtly ones?⁵¹

The existence of Rastell's stage may offer a way of thinking further about this question. It certainly represents an alternative (if not 'rival') centre of dramatic activity outside the court, and one very differently inflected in class terms. Whether different texts were staged there from those staged at higher élite venues probably cannot be established, but is worth exploring.

John Rastell

In order to begin to ask questions about the kind of play performed on Rastell's stage we have to construct a picture of Rastell himself and his social circle. His connection with the More circle is well established, and the interests of that group in using drama as a way of communicating reforming ideas on issues of, for example, law, government, religion, education, and

morality have been thoroughly explored by Pearl Hogrefe. But Rastell's association with this group of élite and highly educated men, closely attached to the court, like More himself (men such as Erasmus, Vives, Linacre, Colet, Fisher, Elyot and Heywood), was one he rose to rather than one he was born into. His attachment to it was secured by ties of marriage: he married More's sister, Elizabeth, and his daughter, Joan, later married John Heywood, author of several extant plays. His roots, however, were gentle rather than noble, and civic rather than courtly.⁵² He was born in Coventry, educated at the Middle Temple and followed his father into the office of city coroner in Coventry. Geritz and Laine call him 'thoroughly middle class', a designation not utterly inappropriate, if somewhat anachronistic and lacking in subtlety.⁵³

He seems to have moved to London under the patronage of Sir Edward Belknap, a privy councillor, but his earliest associations with the court are extremely menial and oblique. He was appointed by Belknap in 1514 to supervise the unloading of armaments at the Tower. The documents recording this activity give Rastell's status as 'gentleman', and he is paid 1s (12d) per day to oversee the work of craftsmen and labourers (paid 5d or 6d).⁵⁴ This is barely court employment at all, despite the employer and the location, simply the operations of war. It was, however, Belknap's influence that brought him closer to the court through work first on pageant construction and subsequently on pageant design and text.⁵⁵ Belknap was instrumental in appointing Rastell to work on the roof decoration of the Banqueting Hall at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, and from then on Rastell's involvement in pageants through the 1520s became a more controlling and less menial one. It is important to note, however, that even at this higher level of activity, Rastell continued to work for wages, as an outsider to the royal household in its temporary employ. He was never attached to the court through any permanent office like Heywood, who was a court musician and later steward of the King's chamber,⁵⁶ or More, who rose to be Lord Chancellor. Though Rastell's association with courtiers like More and Heywood are often the route through which scholars come at him, we must be careful not to think of that courtly circle as his 'natural' or only environment. Rastell might equally be approached, as Sydney Anglo has shown, via a social grouping that links him with other men active in the production of entertainment for Henry VIII, men such as Clement Urmeston, Richard Gibson, and John Browne.⁵⁷ Urmeston, for example, began his career first as an apprentice, then a freeman, of the Grocer's Company, and worked with Rastell on the Banqueting Hall for the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. His association with Rastell extended over many

years and, like Rastell he became involved in later life with Cromwell's Reformation propaganda campaign.

There is a further and central ingredient necessary to any assessment of Rastell's class, interests and associations: his status as a printer. On the one hand this involvement in a trade gives him a very material place in the city of London, where he leased a printing house that included living accommodation, and lived for part of the year together with his workmen and apprentices.⁵⁸ On the other hand, as Geritz and Laine point out, printing was very much 'a secondary occupation', pursued by established men with enough capital to finance an uncertain and expensive undertaking,⁵⁹ and we must remember that Rastell, besides his many other occupations and pursuits, actively continued to practise law until he became too heavily involved in propaganda work for Cromwell.⁶⁰ Rastell had more than one residence as well as more than one occupation. In addition to his dwelling-shop at St Paul's and his Finsbury house he had leases on the manor of Monken Hadley and the nearby manor of Lydgraves (both close to North Mimms, where Heywood and the More family also had properties).⁶¹ One of the legal documents in the 'Bridge House' case examined by Henry Plomer includes a witness's statement that Rastell spent several months a year ('a quarter of a yere and sometyme more and sometyme les') at his country house (identified by another witness as the house in Finsbury Fields).⁶² Rastell moved between different social worlds, and needs to be differentiated from the other well-known names in the More circle in this respect.

In 1522 there occurs an event that seems to represent the intersection between Rastell's associations with the worlds of court and city almost emblematically: Rastell is invited to design a pageant for the state visit of the Emperor Charles V — and the pageant is staged virtually on the doorstep of his London printshop at Paul's Gate. As the procession traverses the traditional ceremonial route past St Paul's, City and Crown acknowledge the ties that bind them, and Rastell's business interests find themselves face to face with his imaginative and possibly also his mechanical skills (whether he only devised the pageant or was also involved in the construction of its special effects is unclear). He creates a piece depicting the hierarchy of heaven, and pleases his royal master, yet at the same time he takes time out of his other business interests to do so and is paid for his work. Courtly know-how and business acumen, patronage and professionalism, are here not separate but joined.

Rastell's printing activities register this same plurality. If printing itself is part of the world of business, firmly located in shop and city, the books

Rastell chose to print reflect the educated interests of an élite circle within the governing class. The very decision to print books reflecting these concerns brings together a financial and an ‘aristocratic’ motive: Rastell wants to educate his readers as well as sell books. Significantly, the project of printing such matter, and in English, indicates a personal concern to communicate ideas hitherto strongly associated with the governing class to a wider and less educated audience. In other words, the printing project may itself be seen as part of an attempt on Rastell’s part to bridge the gap between the two worlds he occupied, the world of More and the world of the less educated, but still literate, or semi-literate, professional classes.

From early on in Rastell’s printing career the bulk of his output was legal volumes.⁶³ It seems clear from his prefaces that for Rastell the law represents the basis of the good commonweal; and the commonweal, he insists, is the good of all, not of the few. In order that men ‘may be reduced to know God, to honour God, to love God, and to live in a continual love and tranquillity with their neighbours’, he believes, they must have ‘ordinances and laws’.⁶⁴ Clearly, if laws were the foundation of the common good, they had to be made available to the understanding of ‘the common man’. It is not surprising, then, to find that Rastell’s law printing soon moves to concentrate on abridgement and translation into English. In his preface to the *Abbreviation of the Statutes* (the first such abridgement in English and translated by Rastell himself), he makes his reasoning explicit: any law by which people are bound ‘ought and shulde be wrytten in such manere and so opynly publisshyd and declaryd that the people myght sone wythout gret dyffyculte have the knowledge of the seyd laws’.⁶⁵ Rastell’s concern is to reach and educate the widest possible audience.

Rastell was not alone among the More circle in his enthusiasm for educating a wider group of the population than ever before. Cranmer’s insistence that places in his school should be made available to poor boys is part of the same mind-set.⁶⁶ But Rastell was uniquely placed to carry out these plans at a level of personal involvement impossible for Cranmer or most men of elevated status. Rastell spent much of his time in the city, owned his own printing-presses and had a good enough income to finance projects he cared about without having to make the whole printing enterprise profit-driven. Indeed his last letter to Thomas Cromwell, written shortly before his death, describes with some bitterness how he has let his devotion to an ideal (in this case the furtherance of the Protestant cause erode the profits of his trade. He has, he writes, given priority to ‘complyng dyvers boks concernyng the fortherauns of the Kyngs causis and oppressing of the

Popes usurpyd auctorite, and therby gretly hyndered myn own bysynes'. Yet, as he says later in the letter, he is now an old man, little concerned with money beyond the need to stay out of debt; his greatest desire is 'so to spend my tyme to do somewhat for the commyn welth, as God be my Juge'.⁶⁷

Motives for a Stage

Around the same time as Rastell built his Finsbury house his printing output shifted significantly from legal to dramatic texts. It is eighty years since C.R. Baskervill first suggested that 'a number of the plays from Rastell's press owe a least their inception to his plan for a stage that should profit his community'.⁶⁸ In support of this view Baskervill argues, like Pollard before him, that the colophon to the interlude of *Gentleness and Nobility*, *Johannes Rastell me fieri fecit*, refers to Rastell not as printer but as producer (and probably also joint author) of the play.⁶⁹ In other words, he argues, those plays that Rastell was engaged in printing during the later 1520s may have been the same plays as he was also engaged in producing for his stage.⁷⁰

The only play widely agreed to have been written by Rastell, *The Four Elements*, is too early to have been written specifically for the Finsbury stage and is in any case written for hall performance, at least in its extant form, as discussed above. Its content and prologue, however, show a clear desire to reach an unusually wide-ranging audience, as does its title page (quoted above). In this way it offers a specifically dramatic context for Rastell's developing ideas about reaching a new class of audience that may suggest the kind of thinking that led up to the construction of the stage. The sheer length of the prologue is a significant indicator of the importance Rastell attached to setting out his purpose. The prologue is at pains to emphasise that what is unusual about this interlude is its presentation of serious philosophical matter in English, thus apparently combining elite content with vernacular mode.

We know, of course, that vernacular interludes were played in elite contexts: *Fulgens and Luces*, for example, printed by Rastell before 1516, was written by Cardinal Morton's chaplain, Henry Medwall, possibly for performance in the Cardinal's household. But Rastell emphasises the non-élite context for his piece and the necessary restrictions this places on his use of language. His serious matter, he admits, would be considered by some 'to hye / And not mete for an audyence unlernyd' (lines 106–7); but his own conviction that what he has to teach is necessary for all to know leads him to present it in dramatic form, and to do so in a language that refuses 'curyous termys' (line 42) and 'rethoryk' (line 131), in case 'much eloquence / Sholde

make it tedious or hurt the sentence' (lines 132–3). Some members of his projected audience, he knows, are more interested in 'myrth and sport' than serious matter, and will have to be lured to a production with serious didactic intent by the apparent frivolities it offers (lines 134–40). Rastell's plan, then, is to mix philosophy with 'mery conseytis' (line 137) so that group of the audience who would reject learning if it were offered to them unalloyed will absorb it almost unawares. So intent is Rastell on reaching and teaching an audience to whom this kind of material is not normally offered that he needs this lengthy prologue to explain and justify the novelty of his project.

The logical next step for someone with Rastell's aims, if this kind of material so rarely reaches a wider audience, is to establish a venue where that can happen. It may be that the plays presented on Rastell's stage, then, are adaptations of existing play texts previously targeted at elite audiences. Besides what he could write, translate, or adapt for the stage himself, Rastell was the father-in-law of John Heywood, whose interludes look easily adaptable for a wider audience than the court.⁷¹ *Witty and Witless*, for example, has a detachable epilogue preceded by the direction that '*thes thre stave next folowyng in the Kyngs absens are voyde*' (675),⁷² demonstrating that the king's presence is a possible but not a necessary condition of performance. All his plays are, as Axton and Happé sum up, 'suited as entertainment in private houses or at Court or Inns of Court,⁷³ and more or less easily adaptable to any other location. Though some may look more reliant than others on a hall setting (*John John*, for example, centres a good deal of action around a fireplace), there is ample precedent in medieval staging for imagining any location in an empty space, and, as noted above, it was common for plays performed to noble audiences to tour to more popular audiences.

There is one play in particular with which critics have repeatedly associated Rastell, as author or as theatrical producer, as well as printer: *Gentleness and Nobility*. It was noted above that its colophon has been read to suggest that Rastell was responsible for staging it. Its title page, furthermore, offers both similarity to and difference from the aims of *The Four Elements*, as outlined in its prologue and title page. This play is described as 'compilid in maner of an enterlude with divers toys and gestis addyd therto to make mery pastyme and disport'. Though the emphasis of the title pages is different (one adds where the other proposes subtraction), the statement here that 'toys and gestis' have been added for diversion is comparable with the suggestion of cutting some of the serious matter on the title page of *The Four Elements* and more directly imitative of the ending of its prologue where Rastell explains how 'merry conseytis' have been added as a lure.

The phrase 'in maner of an enterlude' may also give us pause. While *The Four Elements*, written before Rastell's stage was built, is described as 'a new interlude', this play, usually dated to the later 1520s, proclaims itself as somehow not quite the real thing, but something like it.⁷⁴ If Rastell was in the business of writing and/or producing plays that were like interludes insofar as their content resembled the content of plays usually performed in private, aristocratic, indoor locations, yet breaking with tradition by seeking to present that kind of play to a less aristocratic audience in an outdoor and perhaps less private space, this would seem to be exactly the kind of phrase he might come up with to describe his hybrid creation. The apparently clear distinction between 'stage-plays' and 'interludes' implied by the terminology of the lawsuit offers a further context for the need to find a way of describing plays which might straddle this distinction. The play is advertised in a way that simultaneously invokes the aristocratic tradition and acknowledges its difference from that tradition.

Critical responses to this play suggest an underlying tension between élite and non-élite in its content. Its subject, true nobility, was both a traditional one for learned argument, the kind of topic the More circle would have discussed within its aristocratic confines, and a potentially radical one, with the power to open up a challenging class discourse. *Fulgens and Lucrez*, known to have been performed in an aristocratic household, raises the same question and manages to come down in favour of virtue over wealth without approaching any politically radical position. *Gentleness and Nobility*, however, comes closer to the edge, particularly in the visual images it stages: the only two stage directions in a play primarily in dialogue-form direct the Ploughman to whip the Knight. Yet critics largely seek to defuse this political edge by marrying the play with aristocratic auspices. Hence for Greg Walker this 'violently expressed *animus* against the gentry' is made safe by the fact that its context is a 'courtly interlude';⁷⁵ for David Bevington the play examines society 'from an exaggeratedly iconoclastic viewpoint', but is also 'a particularly good example of humanist drama intended solely for sophisticated tastes';⁷⁶ for T.W. Craik the play is dependent on an aristocratic audience in order that its anti-aristocratic drive should be perceived as mere slapstick.⁷⁷ Though the play contains references to a possible élite presence in the audience, such as the Knight's rebuke to the Merchant:

Maister marchaunt, I here you ryght well.
But now in presumpcion me thynk ye excell
To call your self noble in presence here ...⁷⁸ 11-13

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I can see no good reason to argue that this excludes the possibility that it was designed either for a mixed audience or for adaptability to a more popular audience.

The play itself expresses interest in how its audience may respond to the picture of a ploughman beating a knight on the second occasion when this happens. The Merchant intervenes to stop the brawling (his plural suggests that the Knight is not completely passive), and the dialogue that follows concerns itself with what will most disturb or please the audience:

- Marchaunt* Kepe the peace, masters, hold your handys, for shame!
To make thys besynes ye be gretely to blame.
Ye wyll dysturb all thys hole company.
- Plowman* Nay, mary, it is a cause to make them mery,
To walke such a proude foole is but sport and game.
- Knyght* By cokkys body, were not for worldly shame,
I shuld cut thy flesh or elles see thy herte blode.
- Marchaunt* Sir, hold your tong, your wordis be nothyng good.
We lose here with thys lewyd altercacyon
Mych good pastyme and recreacyon.
- Plowman* Why, what better pastyme her canst thou have,
Then to here one to call an other knave
And see such a proud foole walkyd with a whyp? 715-27

This altercation raises the possible and competing responses of a mixed audience, suggesting in quick succession that this kind of rough behaviour on stage upsets an audience, amuses them, wastes time that could be used pleurably, or is itself the most pleasurable possible way of filling the time. Its address is very similar to the address of the prologue to *The Four Elements*: it demonstrates recognition of an audience bringing different wants and expectations with it and tries to answer opposing demands. Though we cannot rule out the possibility that Rastell's audience at Finsbury might have been an entirely invited and elite audience, that would be at odds with everything we know about both his ideals and his own social situation and at odds too, I think, with the tense address of this play, if it is accepted as the most likely extant play to be linked with Rastell's stage.

Rastell's interest in educating the wider populace is, as we have seen shared at a theoretical level by the More circle, but linked at a practical level to his own experience of living and working in social worlds that are poles apart from each other. This experience in turn places him in a unique

position to put ideas into practice. What Cranmer could only do indirectly by financing an educational institution, Rastell could do directly by printing a book — or by building a stage. To return to Walker's questions about rival centres of dramatic activity and 'radical' interludes (above), I would propose an answer based on this exploration of Rastell's stage. First, the sheer scale of the costume hire suggests the existence of numerous performances of both stage-plays and interludes beyond the court; secondly, Rastell's own theatre is a precise and known location of such activity; and lastly, there may be no need to suppose that radical interludes are necessarily or inherently different from courtly ones. It is the place of performance that makes the difference. What may be recognised as philosophical debate by an audience in a courtly setting may be heard as a call to action in a civic setting; and there can be places of performance that accommodate audiences sufficiently mixed to respond in these and other different ways to the same performance.

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NOTES

1. The quotation comes from the lawsuit between John Rastell and Henry Walton. The lawsuit is reprinted in Alfred W. Pollard's collection of *Fifteenth-Century Prose and Verse* (London: Archibald Constable, 1903), which follows Henry Plomer's text, as published in 'New Documents of English Printers and Publishers of the Sixteenth Century' *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 4 (1898) 153–83. I have quoted throughout from the original documents at the Public Record Office, since the existing printed versions are unreliable. A published version of my corrected transcription of the documents has appeared in *Leeds Studies in English* 28 (1997) 57–75. For readers' convenience I have included page references both to my own published version and to Pollard's edition. References cite numbering from *Leeds Studies in English* first, followed by Pollard's numbering and separated by a slash. Hence the reference for this first quotation is 70/319.
2. A.W. Read *Early Tudor Drama: Medwall, the Rastells, Heywood and the More Circle* (Methuen, London, 1926) 17.
3. *Early Tudor Drama* Appendix VIII, 230–3; R.W. Southern *The Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare* (Faber and Faber, London, 1973) 203.
4. We cannot, I think, be absolutely certain that the stage was outside the house, though the phrase 'in Restalles grounde' (319) strongly suggests it, and nearly all scholars who have mentioned it assume, as I do here, the probability of an outdoor stage. The only exception I am aware of is the passing reference by

Richard Axton and Peter Happé to 'Rastell's building a theatre in his house' (*The Plays of John Heywood* (D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1991) 27), though this is not implied by Axton's earlier sole account of it in his edition of Rastell's plays (*Three Rastell Plays* (D.S. Brewer, Cambridge and Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, NJ, 1979 8).

5. *Early Tudor Drama* 21. I have been unable, however, to establish Reed's source for dating Rastell's visit, though he does not suggest that this is in any way a speculative dating.
6. Chambers infers their use in the Greenwich entertainments from his reading of the documents: *The Elizabethan Stage* 4 vols (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1923) 2 81. Rastell was certainly involved in helping to create the visual display, and perhaps also some of the text, for these entertainments (see further 3 and 20–21 and note 55 below).
7. After 'cam to the handes of thesaid Walton' in the manuscript, the words 'by attachment' are deleted. The deletion suggests a concern to distinguish between the point at which the costumes came freely into Walton's hands, when Rastell entrusted them to him, and the point at which Walton legally appropriated the property against Rastell's unpaid debt.
8. See *Early Tudor Drama* 18.
9. The word is not anachronistic per se; it features in contemporary descriptions of the properties on which both the Red Lion and the playhouse at Newington Butts were built (see further below). It is its immediate associations for twentieth-century English readers that are potentially misleading.
10. Pearl Hogrefe *The Sir Thomas More Circle: A Program of Ideas and their Impact on Secular Drama* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1959) 255.
11. The Newington Butts theatre, discussed below, was built on a plot covering less than an acre and including a house, tenement, garden, and orchard as well as the playhouse. The ground area of the later public playhouse is usually measured in square feet: estimates put the Rose at 4,500, the Fortune at 6,400 and the Globe at 7,800 square feet: R.A. Foakes 'Playhouses and Players' in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* edited A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway (Cambridge University Press, 1990) 11. Even the largest of these would fill a relatively small proportion of an acre (measuring 43,578 square feet), and a negligible part of one-and-three-quarter acres.
12. The lawsuit was discovered and transcribed by Janet S. Loengard: 'An Elizabethan Lawsuit: John Brayne, his Carpenter, and the Building of the Red Lion Theatre' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34 (1983) 298–310. William Ingram has

recently re-examined the lawsuit and found other documents concerning the land adjoining the Red Lion property: *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of Adult Professional Theater in Elizabethan London* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1992).

13. *The Business of Playing* 108–9. Ingram completes his brief summary of the Red Lion structure with this sentence: ‘Both stage and galleries are described as “scaffolds,” which suggest a kind of construction different from that found in playhouse buildings after 1576’, and goes on to note Herbert Berry’s evidence from the records of the Carpenters’ Company as seeming to suggest that ‘scaffolds’ were made up of poles and lashings rather than timber and nails. A stage and galleries, Ingram concludes, ‘might both have been “scaffolds” to a carpenter’ (109, note 25). The bond contracting to build the structure uses the terms ‘stage’ and ‘scaffolds’ in parallel: ‘one Skaffolde or stage for enterludes or playes ... in height from the grounde fyve foote’ (Loengard 309). If the use of the term ‘scaffold’ here does indeed indicate a type of structure unlike that of the later playhouses, then it would seem that Rastell’s stage, in this respect, has closer affiliations than the Red Lion with the later Elizabethan playhouses, since several of the depositions in the Rastell v. Walton lawsuit specify the use of timber and nails in its construction.
14. Ingram (chapter 6) contests Ida Darlington’s assumption that Richard Hicke, lessee of the land on which the playhouse and dwelling stood, was the brains behind the construction of the playhouse, and suggests as a more likely candidate Jerome Savage, leader of the earl of Warwick’s players and tenant of the house on the property.
15. I am grateful to Andrew Gurr for sharing his expertise on materials and building costs with me. Rastell’s costs may be compared with the figures for erecting Cambridge stages recently discussed by Alan Nelson in *Early Cambridge Theatres* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), though these were not permanent structures, but dismountable stages. Because the timber was stored from year to year, expenses for most years represent labour costs alone; but, Nelson summarises, ‘judging from the few cases which allow comparison, materials and labour seem to have contributed in approximately equal amounts to the cost of a stage’ (115). Nelson provides figures for labour and materials for one stage built close in time to Rastell’s: the university commencement stage. The cost of materials for this stage in 1527–28 was 20s 8½d, while labour costs were 24s 4d, giving a total cost of just over 45s. Figures for the costs of actual theatre buildings are of course much later, but seem to indicate that the major element of the cost was the construction of galleries for the spectators: see e.g. Herbert Berry, ‘The Playhouse in the Boar’s

Head Inn, Whitechapel' in *The Elizabethan Theatre* I edited by David Galloway (Macmillan, London, 1969) 53.

16. *Early Tudor Drama* 230.
17. Edward Hall *Hall's Chronicle* edited by Henry Ellis (London: J. Johnson etc., 1809) 568.
18. Eleanor Levy 'Moorfields, Finsbury and the City of London in the Sixteenth Century' *London Topographical Record* 26 (1990) 78–96.
19. The figure Rastell claims of 20 marks (£13 6s 8d), may be compared with the daily wage of 4d paid to the tailor employed to sew the costumes (see below). Though it must be remembered that the tailor received food and drink in addition to his daily fourpence, it would have taken him between two and three years to earn this sum. A further comparison may be made with the daily wage of 12d that Rastell was himself paid to oversee the loading of ordnance in 1514 (see above). It would thus have taken him up to a year to earn such a sum by performing this kind of work. It is worth also comparing this figure of 20 marks with the figure of £10 for which John Husee is bound to Felsted of London for a set of costumes hired in 1538 (see Meg Twycross 'Felsted of London: Silk-Dyer and Theatrical Entrepreneur' *Medieval English Theatre* 10 (1988) 7). Though the date is later and the price lower, we are comparing the number of costumes hired for one play from Felsted with the total inventory of Rastell's costumes.
20. Pollard follows Plomer's mistranscription here and omits several words, so that the details of these two garments are wrongly collapsed into one. 'Fustian of Naples' is a recognised term, denoting a cotton velvet.
21. I cannot make sense of the statement by Albert J. Geritz and Amos L. Laine in their book *John Rastell* (Twayne, Boston, 1983) 17, that Rastell valued the costumes at about twenty shillings (£1) more than Walton's 35s 9d. I can only assume that we are using different relative values for pounds and marks. My own calculations are based on the understanding that a mark represents 13s 4d (the value recorded by the *OED*). The value of a noble is more problematic; see note 25 below.
22. Pollard's reprint is in error here. He prints an Arabic '1' for a Roman '1', thus giving a figure of 1s as the value of two curtains (20 yards), when the value is actually itemised as 50s. The document also omits to put a price on one costume. If this costume were priced around 20s, or slightly over (the other garments of comparable material are all valued between 20s and 24s), this would bring the total value indicated by this document roughly into line with Rastell's own valuation of £13 7s 6d.

23. Plomer misreads *dysseyte* as *dysseyen* 'design' here.
24. This is part of Walton's claim that Rastell failed to put in surety to answer Walton's suit for debt within the necessary period of a year and a day. Though Rastell claims that he did do so 'within the yere' (308), this does not work against the fact that at least a year had passed between Walton's action and the recording of Rastell's present action in the Court of Requests. Walton could not seriously have claimed that Rastell had missed the time-limit if such time had not in fact elapsed.
25. The value of a noble assumed in these documents is difficult to establish. Different coins could be referred to as nobles at different periods. Edward IV minted two coins, a 'noble-angel', worth 6s 8d (the previous value of a noble) and a 'rose-noble', worth 10s. Henry VIII, however, minted a 'George Noble' to replace the angel, also valued at 6s 8d, though, according to Charles Oman, its life was short. See further Oman *The Coinage of England* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1931) 220-1, 248-9.
26. The evidence is at its most apparently contradictory here. Rastell himself says that he was only in France for 'half A yere & more' (308), yet here accuses Walton of continually hiring them out since the Greenwich entertainments. Perhaps he is suggesting that Walton hired them out for his own gain over a period when they were supposedly collaborating in the business. Alternatively, perhaps Reed's dating of the French journey to 1529-30 is wrong. If Rastell went to France in 1527, immediately after the Greenwich entertainments, the garments would have been in Walton's possession ever since.
27. I do not think Mayler's statement above can be interpreted as ruling out income from stage-plays during the longer period, although it only makes reference to interludes. Perhaps Mayler is simply indicating a greater acquaintance with interlude performances, which allows him to estimate the number of interludes but not the number of stage-plays. Alternatively, and more probably, I think, despite the precise distinction implied between stage-plays and interludes when the terms are used in conjunction, it may be that it was possible to use either term in a looser sense too to include both kinds of performance. For a discussion of usage and a list of examples see Nicholas Davies 'The Meaning of the Word *Interlude*: A Discussion' and 'Allusions to Medieval Drama in Britain (4): Interludes' *Medieval English Theatre* 6 (1984) 5-27 and 61-91.
28. This way of estimating a possible annual income is based on putting Mailer's statements together and interpreting the distinction between stage-plays and interludes very rigidly. Thus stage-plays have to be added to the estimated twenty interludes a year. If Mailer's first statement, that Walton 'lent [the

costumes] out about a xx tymes to stage playes in the somer and interludes in the winter', is intended as a statement about habitual practice over the period of a year then we would end up with twenty of each kind of performance (forty in all), rather than twenty performances overall in a year. Equally, if the statement refers to Walton's activity over one six-month period, we end up with twenty performances in half a year.

29. The incompatibility remains whether the lower or the higher value for a noble is assumed. If, however, the dating of Rastell's journey to France could be shown to be earlier, as suggested in note 26 above, the figures would become compatible, representing Walton's income over a period of three to four years.
30. Ingram 71–2; Twycross 'Felsted of London'. On the employment of London 'property playeres' to supervise large-scale dramatic projects outside London see John C. Coldewey 'That Enterprising Property Player: Semi-Professional Drama in Sixteenth-Century England' *Theatre Notebook* 31 (1977) 5–12. As Ingram rightly points out, if we relied only on the number of extant playtexts as an indicator of the level of dramatic activity in this period we would produce a diminished picture very different from the evidence offered by Walton's costume hire. Ingram also offers the useful reminder that the accounts of the Office of the Revels show that their costumes too were often available for hire or sale. Looking back with hindsight from the perspective of the later decades of the sixteenth century, Ingram writes: 'Had the City and the crown not attempted, each for its own reasons, to regulate the terms and conditions of playing during the middle years of the century, then common players might have continued to flourish, operating as free agents and perpetuating an economic viability based on topical interludes, rented garments, and temporary playing spaces' (90).
31. E.K. Chambers *The Elizabethan Stage* 2 81.
32. Ingram 100. James H. Forse supplies a table linking players and others involved in theatre c.1530–1630 with their occupational backgrounds in *Art Imitates Business: Commercial and Political Influences in Elizabethan Theatre* (Bowling Green State University Press, Bowling Green, Ohio, 1993) 8.
33. Sydney Anglo *Spectacle Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969) 221 and note 3. See also 'La Salle de Banquet et le Théâtre Construits à Greenwich pour les Fêtes Franco-Anglaises de 1527' in *Le Lieu Théâtral à la Renaissance* edited by J. Jacquot (Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 2nd edition, 1968) 282–3.
34. See E. Gordon Duff *A Century of the English Book Trade* (The Bibliographical Society, London, 1905) 131–2.

35. Chambers *Elizabethan Stage* 2 81.
36. W.R. Streitberger cites evidence of the Gentlemen of the Chapel accepting engagements to sing, for example, for the Fraternity of St Nicholas: 'William Cornish and the Players of the Chapel' *Medieval English Theatre* 8 (1986) 8.
37. If the two King's players acted on Rastell's stage, they may have done so either with their company or with other ad hoc players assembled for the occasion. Birch, as cited earlier in this paper, says that he 'and his company' played in the disputed garments 'while they remayned in thandes of thesaid Restall' (316).
38. For a full discussion of the patronage of early Tudor players see Suzanne R. Westfall *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990).
39. Robert W. Bolwell makes this suggestion in his account of *The Life and Works of John Heywood* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1921) 22. Bolwell, however, offers neither evidence nor arguments as to why he thinks this is likely to be so; and, in an equally unsubstantiated way, suggests that it is also 'probable ... that Rastell had some stage arrangement at North Mimms, and presented theatricals there' (22).
40. William Roper *The Lyfe of Sir Thomas Moore, knyghte* edited Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, *EETS OS* 197 (1935) 5. The incident is cited by Reed *Early Tudor Drama* 100, and Southern *Staging of Plays before Shakespeare* 97.
41. Roper *Lyfe* 5.
42. Sir Thomas Elyot's entry on *ludii*, & *ludiones* in his dictionary of 1538 describes them as 'players in enterludes or stage playes'. His inclusion of both terms, separated by 'or', also suggests a distinction between two types of performance: *Dictionary* (Scolar Press, Menston, reprint, 1970). 'Presumably some such distinction', as Nick Davies argues, 'also underlies the *plays and interludes* catchphrase of Tudor condemnations and prohibitions' ('The Meaning of the Word *Interlude*' 10).
43. Pollard xix, note 1. Plomer first makes this suggestion in his own brief discussion of the lawsuit ('New Documents on English Printers' 157).
44. Reed *Early Tudor Drama* 233.
45. This is not to suggest either that charging for outdoor performance was routine or charging for indoor performance improbable, merely that the first was more dominant. This is partly because so many indoor performances were in private houses, though plays described as 'interludes' in earlier references turn up, as Davies records, 'almost anywhere' ('The Meaning of the Word *Interlude*' 9).

46. *From Mankind to Marlowe* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1962) 51 and chapter 4 generally. Bevington names, for example, *Four PP*, *The Pardoner and the Friar*, *John John*, *Three Laws*, *King John* and *Magnificence*. Axton and Happé's recent edition of Heywood's plays assumes a Tudor banqueting hall as the most likely setting. Greg Walker argues for performance of *Magnificence* in the royal household (*Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) chapter 3), and Bevington himself notes that it was certainly performed before a noble audience as well as a popular one (52–3); while *King John* almost certainly received a late performance before Queen Elizabeth.
47. Quotations from Rastell's plays are taken from Axton's edition. Evidence for Rastell's authorship is only internal, as the end of the play is missing and there is no colophon, but there is broad consensus about Rastell's authorship.
48. These references are collected and quoted by Richard Southern, 208–9.
49. Bevington *Mankind to Marlowe* 47. I return to this argument below.
50. Walker *Plays of Persuasion* 25.
51. Walker *Plays of Persuasion* 24.
52. For Pearl Hogrefe, see note 10. For details of Rastell's life I am mainly indebted to Reed's pioneering work (chapter 1 of *Early Tudor Drama*) and the more recent account in chapter 1 of Geritz and Laine.
53. Geritz and Laine, 104.
54. *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII, Volume 1, Part 2, 1476, 1481* edited J.S. Brewer, James Gardiner, and R.H. Brodie (Longman, London, 1862–1920).
55. Rastell's probable authorship of *Love and Riches*, a pageant devised for the Greenwich revels of 1527, is discussed by Anglo (*Spectacle* 221–2). He credits Reed with first making the case for Rastell's authorship, but it seems to me that Reed does not in fact do that. He recognises, as Anglo does, that the payment for writing the dialogue refers to scribal work rather than authorial work (see Reed 19, and note 1).
56. Heywood was admitted as a freeman of the city of London in 1523, but not because he had achieved an entitlement to the freedom by following a trade. The King wrote on his behalf to request his admission, and he had to pay an admission fee. The request is almost certainly linked with his marriage to Joan Rastell, since he moved to live in the city at this point (Reed *Early Tudor Drama* 45).

57. See Anglo's discussion of the activities of these men (*Spectacle* 164–8).
58. Geritz and Laine argue that good relations between Rastell and his workers are demonstrated by the fact that he left his printing house to them in his will (7). The will, however, as cited by Henry Plomer, states that Rastell leaves 'my house in St Martyns' to his wife: *Abstracts from the Wills of English Printers and Stationers from 1492 to 1630* (Bibliographical Society, London, 1903) 5–6. This printshop, the third occupied by Rastell in the city of London, was situated at Paul's Gate next to Cheapside. It was also known, by Rastell's sign, as the 'Mermaid', and is the same house as is referred to in the 'Bridge House' case cited below.
59. Geritz and Laine 6.
60. See the letter to Cromwell cited below. Rastell's Protestantism is too large a subject to pursue here, though it should be noted that his conversion towards the end of his life radically divided him from the rest of the More circle, and from his own son, William, all of whom remained loyal to the Catholic church. Ironically, Rastell was in prison for the extreme radicalism of his Protestant views when More was beheaded for his opposing principles in 1535. Rastell's affiliations in earlier life are difficult to read. Despite his publication of More's *Dialogue on Heresies* in 1529 and of his own *New Book of Purgatory* in 1530, there is the possibility of an earlier sympathy with reforming practices: in 1507 Richard Cooke, a Coventry merchant, made Rastell overseer of his will, in which he bequeathed English Bibles (presumably Wycliffite translations) to two parish churches (Reed *Early Tudor Drama* 3–4).
61. See further Reed *Early Tudor Drama* 64. Reed cites the well-known statement by Henry Peacham, author of *The Compleat Gentleman*, that 'Merry John Heywood wrote his Epigrams, as also Sir Thomas More his Utopia, in the parish wherein I was born (North Mims in Hartfordshire, near to St. Albans), where either of them dwelt and had fair possessions'.
62. 'John Rastell and his Contemporaries' *Bibliographica* 2 (1896), 438. The first witness's statement says that Rastell has spent these months in the country since the time of taking the lease on the Bridge House (his printshop). The fact that the Bridge House lease dates from 1520, while the Finsbury lease dates from 1524 might seem to raise a problem about the compatibility of this statement with Ralph Cressey's statement that Rastell's country house was in Finsbury Fields. On the other hand, the time phrase in Bonham's statement ('Sith which time [*i.e.* the taking of the Bridge House by Rastell] the same John Rastell hath used to ride down into the country, where he had one other dwelling, and there sometye taried a quarter of a yere' etc) may not intend any precise correlation between Rastell's taking the first lease and the beginning of his tendency to spend time

away from the Bridge House. The date of the lawsuit which is the occasion of these depositions is 1534–5, many years after the beginning of Rastell's tenancy of the Bridge House, and it is likely that the deponents' memories of events up to fifteen years before are not utterly reliable.

63. On dating the beginning of Rastell's printing activities see Reed *Early Tudor Drama* 8 and Geritz and Laine 7–8.
64. Prologue to *Liber Assisarum* cited Geritz and Laine 98.
65. Cited by Esther Cloudman Dunn 'John Rastell and *Gentleness and Nobility*', *MLR* 12 (1917) 272. I owe the recognition of Rastell's primacy in devising such a project to Dunn.
66. See Ralf Morice's account of Cranmer's ideas regarding Canterbury school in *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation* edited John Gough Nicols (Camden Society, London, 1859), 273–5. Compare Hogrefe's broad-based discussion of the ideas on education shared by the More circle.
67. Henry Ellis *Original Letters Illustrative of English History 3rd series, Volume 2* (Richard Bentley, London, 1846) 310–11. On Rastell's Protestantism, see note 60 above.
68. 'John Rastell's Dramatic Activities' *Modern Philology* 12 (1916) 558.
69. Though this is not the place to enter into a full discussion of colophons, it is worth noting that Rastell used another colophon at the end of *Calisto and Melebea* which identified him very precisely as printer: *Rastell me imprimi fecit*.
70. Baskervill also suggests in passing a more plausible role for More and his associates as 'assistants in the work of adapting these plays' rather than performers of them (588, note 3).
71. Heywood was married to Joan Rastell by 1523. See note 56 above.
72. Quoted from the edition by Axton and Happé.
73. Axton and Happé 11.
74. The same phrase is used on the title page of *Calisto and Melebea*, also printed by Rastell. Both plays are often ascribed to the same year (1527). The phrase is, as Richard Southern remarks, 'quite unlike anything else in the whole run of Interludes' (229). Southern discusses 'The Problem of Defining an Interlude' more fully on 304–12, concluding that it is a term that 'had once a distinct meaning ... but ... gradually lost its distinctness' (310).
75. Walker 32.

76. The first quotation is from Bevington's *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1968) 81, while the second is taken from his earlier study *From Mankind to Marlowe* 42.
77. *The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume, and Acting* (Leicester University Press, 1967) 23. Alistair Fox's recent study of Tudor politics and literature breaks with this tradition to argue that the play was not a court play but a city play: *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989) 247. The problem here, however, is that Fox's evidence will not stand up to this interpretation. To read the play as a city play purely on the basis of translating 'soferayns' (a term it uses to address the audience) as 'citizens' rests the case on a fairly arbitrary and certainly over-rigid translation.
78. The reference could, of course, be to the character of the Knight himself. Cf the Merchant's dismissal of the Ploughman's 'fond oppynyon' of himself as 'more gentyman than any of us' (1048-9), though this again might be a reference back to himself and the Knight. The extensive use of Latin, however, also suggests an élite element in the audience.