

‘FAILL NOCHT TO TEME YOUR BLEDDIR’:

Passing Time in Sir David Lindsay’s *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*

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Thanks in part to the survival of a set of banns and other documentation, we know a good deal about the timing and circumstances of the two outdoor performances of Sir David Lindsay’s *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, the first on Whit Tuesday, 7 June 1552 on Castle Hill in Cupar, Fife, the second on Sunday 12 August 1554 on the Greenside, Calton Hill in Edinburgh. But there is more to the story than simply the chance survival of documents, I think. *The Thrie Estaitis* is a play that seems unusually concerned with the time it takes to play, with time itself, and the consequences of passing time for the desires and needs of the all too frail human body.

The Cupar Banns introduce the interest in time with the announcement that:

We sall be sene in till our playing place
In gude array about the hour of sevin.
Off thriftiness that day, I pray yow ceiss,
Bot ordane ws gude drink agains allevin. lines13–16¹

As it is the business of banns to drum up a crowd and ensure that they are in the right place at the right time for the performance, this seems unexceptionable. The suggestion that the audience get the drinks in ready for the end of the action at 11 a.m. also seems a prudent measure, but it proves on closer inspection to be part of a far wider concern with drink and drinking that the play reveals.

The idea of the conviviality of communal drinking is intimately associated with the play, and with playing in general, both within the drama, and in the references to audience behaviour. ‘With gude stark wine your flaconis see ye fill’ (line 19), the audience is told. The Cotter in the Banns, anticipating the pleasures of the coming performance, hopes to drink a quart in Cupar town with his gossip John Williamson (lines 25–30). His wife, seeing him in the audience, assumes he has been ‘doyttrand

and drinkand in the toun' (line 60). In response he predicts that if she comes to the play she will stir all the town, as

Quhen ye are fow of barmy drink
Besyd yow nane may stand for stink. lines 75–6

and the general (not necessarily ironic) assumption that permeates the text, that the audience will be less than sober might give us pause, when we consider the subtleties of the political and social content it seems to deliver.²

Within the play, drink also plays an important part in bonding characters to each other and in binding them into a notional relationship with the local community. Solace has been 'Drinkand into the burrows toun' (line 127) until he is 'wod drunken' (line 138), and asks 'sume gude fallow' to 'fill the quart' for him once he is on stage (line 148). When he and Wantonness go to the court of Sensuality, they are provided with beer-money for the journey by Rex Humanitas, and at their destination, Hameliness entertains Wantonness with further drink as the first stage of her executive hospitality package. Dissait too is described as having been 'drinkand in the toun' (line 649). And it is not only the Vices that crave a drink, so the simple identification of the pub and sin evident in some early moralities is avoided here. Chastity, of all people, drinks with the Sowter and the Tailor, to the evident vexation of their wives (lines 1300–75), and Diligence himself, in many ways the embodied spirit of the play, complains that he has worked a whole year without pay, and will not proclaim another word without a drink (lines 1819–22).

So drink is important in the play, but what, it might be asked, has it got to do with the temporal theme of this paper? Well, this brings me to the second part of the article, and yes, it is about time. The *Satyre* is, as has been established, a very long play, taking anything from four to nine hours to perform.³ And, interestingly, Lindsay expresses his concern about the length of the play, and audience toleration of it, chiefly in terms of bladders. The Cupar banns (lines 273–77) warn potential spectators to

... get up richt airly and disjune *take breakfast*
And ye ladyis, that hes na skent of leddir, *no shortage of pudenda*
Or ye cum thair, fail nocht to teme your bleddir *empty*
I dreid or we haif half done with our wark,
That sam of yow sall mak ane richt wait sark. *wet shirt*

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In winding up Part One of the play, Diligence again links patience, refreshment, and female urine in a potent comic cocktail,

And als I mak yow exhortatioun
Sen ye haif heard the first part of our play,
Go tak ane drink and mak collatioun,
Ilk man drink till his marrow, I yow pray. *fellow*
Tarie nocht lang, it is late in the day.
Let sum drink ayle and sum drink claret wine.
Be great Doctours of Physick I heare say
That michtie drink comforts the dull ingine. *brain*
And ye ladies that list to pisch,
Lift up your taill, plat in ane disch,
And gif that your quhislecaw criyis 'quhisch' *anus*
Stop in ane wusp of stray. *shove in a wisp of straw*
Let nocht your bladder burst I pray yow,
For that war evin aneuch to slay yow:
For yit thair is to cum, I say yow,
The best part of our play. *lines 1918–1933*

Women, the proverbially leaky vessels, are a running motif in the play, their squelching, insatiable, incontinent private parts presenting objects of fascination, fear, and horror for the husbands, lovers, and neighbours who come into contact with them, and, moreover, for the actors who must take them into account when legislating for the performance. Time is pressing — and pressing chiefly on the bladder. So the play's frequent references to how long it will take, how much material is left to play, and how the audience is to behave have a practical use. But it is more than that, too.

The *Satyre* ties its disparate, episodic material together by means of frequent overt glances backwards and forwards in time, offering announcements of what is to come, proclamations of future entrances, predictions, and prophecies, as well as recollections of the recent or distant past. Descriptions of long delays and swift returns, hurried journeys and lengthy exiles, are encompassed within its 'brief narratioun' without apparent difficulty. The first half of the play, indeed, reveals a number of different time-frames. It covers that part of the lifetime of a man, Rex Humanitas, in which he passes from innocence (while he is 'yit effiminate': line 1121) through experience to wisdom. But the morality

But these long time-scales — and the prolonged sleeps, exiles, and evasions of duty that they encompass — are seemingly to end in the course of the play, as time begins rapidly to speed up at the end of Part One, and long-held grievances and injustices begin to promise resolution. Veritie trusts that ‘within short space we sall be richt honorablie restorde’ (lines 1476–7) — and the much-heralded arrival of Correctioun promises, like the Arnold Schwarzenegger blockbuster, to bring *The End of Days* to a playfield near you now — or at least very soon. The unrepentant offender will, as Correctioun’s Varlet promises, ‘right sudanlie ... be dejectit’ (lines 1503–4). And Correctioun, who comes directly from God, and whose terms of reference are truly Universal (he will judge ‘*all* cuntries’ and throw down ‘*all* misdoars’ — lines 1583–4) begins to bring matters to what promises to be a fitting and speedy climax, ordering all and sundry to do his bidding and deal justice ‘incontinent[ly]’.⁴

So incontinence proves to be a theme of the play in more ways than one (the term takes on lavatorial, sexual, and temporal connotations in the course of the play). The time-frames converge at the end of Part One, and in Part Two all the characters proceed in the real historical time of the Parliamentary session until the speeches of the Vices from the scaffold bring the audience immediately into the here and now of the present; the time of individual and national repentance that is at hand.

When the incontinent Vices are drawn to the gallows, then, and Thift asks to be allowed to ‘make watter’ to spare him the indignity of ‘pisching’ in the ‘widdie’ (lines 4043–5), the implications are quite different to the proposed merry incontinence of the real spectators. But the kind of anti-social, unneighbourly crimes that the Vices identify within the audience’s own community turn the attention back to the latter,⁵ and especially, perhaps, to those women (and men) who may, after three or more hours of lubricated spectatorship, be contemplating their own chances of avoiding a right wet sark at this very moment. The pressing of time, both thematically, and anatomically, combines neatly with Lindsay’s radical dramaturgy here to bring home the audience’s identification with Vice and sin, and urge the need for repentance before it is literally too late.

The play ends, however, with both a prayer and a call to drink and dance — or more accurately to drink *or* dance.

Now let ilk man his way avance,
 Let sum ga drink and sum ga dance;
 Menstrell, blow up ane brawll of France;

Let se quha hobbils best!
For I will rin, incontinent,
To the tavern or ever I stent,
And pray to God Omnipotent,
To send yow all gude rest.

lines 4664–71

Play-time merges fully into real-time; and Community re-asserts itself once more at the close through the rituals of conspicuous and convivial alcoholic consumption. We end, as we began, with the filling and emptying of bladders, and again it is not without its symbolic significance.

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NOTES

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1. All references to the text are to that in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology* edited Greg Walker (Blackwell: Oxford, 2000) 541–623.
2. Note, for example, the assumptions about the audience's capacity to appreciate sophisticated aesthetic and political nuances of form and material in *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* edited R. Lyall (Canongate Press, Edinburgh, 1989) introduction; J.S. Kantrowitz *Dramatic Allegory: Lindsay's 'Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis'* (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1975); John J. McGavin 'The Dramatic Prosody of Sir David Lindsay' in *Of Lion and Unicorn* edited R.D.S. Jack and K. McGinley (Quadruga, Edinburgh, 1993) 39–66; and my own *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge UP, 1998) chapter 4.
3. The lower estimate is drawn from the suggestion in the Cupar Banns that the performance will begin at 7 a.m. and conclude at 'allewin' (11 a.m.). It is possible, of course, that the call for drinks to be provided 'against allewin' marked only an interval in the proceedings (I am grateful to Sarah Carpenter for this suggestion), and that the production might have continued for a number more hours after that point, in which case what appears to be a marked discrepancy between the length of the Cupar and Edinburgh

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performances of what is essentially the same play disappears. The figure of nine hours is taken from the statement in Henrie Charteris's Preface to the 1568 edition of Lindsay's *Works* that 'the play, playit besyde Edinburgh in the presence of the Queen Regent [Mary of Guise] and ane greit part of the Nobilitie with an exceding great nowmer of pepill, lestand fra ix houris afoir none [9 a.m.] till vi houris at evin [6 p.m.]', cited in *The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount* edited Douglas Hamer, 4 vols (Scottish Text Society: Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1931–36) 4 139. Given that a good deal of ceremony is likely to have accompanied this performance, and that the playing time cited may well have allowed for anything up to two hours at the end of Part One and prior to the beginning of the Interlude, during which time the élite spectators withdrew to dine and the remainder made their 'collatioun' (as Diligence instructs them to do at line 1920), the length of the actual performance may well have been considerably nearer to the four to six hours assumed for the Cupar production than Charteris's bold statement might suggest.

4. For Correctioun's use of this, his favourite adverb, see, for example, lines 1662, 1714, 1785, 3175, 3364, 3464, 3649, 3817.
5. See, for example, lines 4028–41, 4094–4117, and 4126–71.