

‘THAT THIN SKIN’: SKIPPER LINDSAY and the Language of Record

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Looking back from the early years of the seventeenth century, one of the leading Scottish reformers, the Rev. James Melville, constructed, or perhaps more accurately ‘reconstituted’, his *Diary* as a memorial account of many years at the heart of Scottish theological politics.¹ In addition to being one of the most moving and finely written prose documents of the period, it is an invaluable source for historians and, in the case of the episode I will discuss here, for students of early drama. His writing also provides an opportunity to reflect on the business of recording or interpreting records, and on the motivations which drive these activities.

The story of Skipper Lindsay is of a reputed madman who intruded upon the public space which a royal play was supposed to fill. Because of the nature of his intrusion and the political motives, memories, imagination, and desires of one onlooker, the intended play was consigned to historical silence, and we have been left with a different, culturally revealing and moving play of the mind. In the vibrant picture of the event we have also a portrait of the recorder. The passage is rather long, but needs to be read as a whole single episode. The year is 1580; the place St Andrew’s, Scotland.

That yeir was the kings first progress and Promene athort his
country with solemnities of entress in manie of his *highness’s*
brouches / and amangs the rest of *Sanctandros* whar we war for *yat*
present com from dondie with the supplication and articles of ye
Assemblie / and keeping a dyet befor the Counsall about *Alyxander*
Cunninghame in the mater mentioned befor. Whar on a day the
gentilmen of the cuntry about haid a gyse & farce to play befor
the king. his *Majestie* was in the new Innes of the *Abay*² befor the
windowes wharof the schow was to be maid / grait conflu-|ence of
peple conveyed and the place read with a fear circuit / it
continowd void for the space of a lang houre wither *yat* his *Majestie*
was nocht readie to behauld or the playars to present tham selues I
can nocht tell / bot whill [^]all³ ar gasing and langing for the play /
In stap-pes Schipper lindsay a knawin frenetic man and paesses vpe

and down in the circuit *with* a grait grauetie his hands in his syde looking verie big and hiche / The man was of a grait telyie weill bigget of a large face and guid manlie countenance all rouche *with* heire his browes grait tuftes of haire and als grait a tuft vpon his verie neb of his nease / his look was verie reasit and hiche / wherat first the peiple maid a noyse *with* lauch-ing / bot when he began to speak / he movit sic attention as it haid bein to a preatcher / And in deid for my part I was movit *with* it then *with* monie preatchings. Ther he discourset *with* grait force of sprit and mightie voice, crying vpon all of all ranks and degries to heir him and tak exemple be him / whow wicket and ryottous a man he haid bein / what he haid done and conquest be the sie and whow he haid spendit it and abosit him selff be land / And what maist iustlie for yat the grait God and iudge of the warld haid brought vpon him. he haid wit / he haid ritches / he haid strenth and abilitie of body / he haid fam and estimation passing all of his tread and rank bot all was vanitie yat maid him misken his God / wha wald nocht be miskenned namelie be the hichest / And turning him selff to the boss windo whar in the nedmaist the Erle of Morton was standing gnapping on his staff end / and the king and Monsieur d'Obignie abone / he maket sic application to him in speciall as movit him throw the hart / and was marvellus in the eares of the heirars / for my selff I was esto-nished and movit to tears heiring and seing the man. Amangs the rest he warned him nocht obscurlie yat his iudgment was neir and his dome was dichten. And in deid the verie sam tyme was the platt a dressin against the Erle of Morton, na wayes knawn nor suspec-^{ted} of anie ^ in comoun.⁴ Sa yat the plat leyers wald haiff suspected a discourie giff they haid nocht knawin the man to be lunatik and bereft of his wit. I market the Erle standing iust fornent him mikle movit *with* this first interlude as ernest and nocht play sa yat during all the sportes yat followed he altered never the grautie of his countenance.

It is not anachronistic to select and interpret this as a whole episode. Melville set out to enhance its narrative integrity through the *ordinacio* of his manuscript page. The entry for 1580 as a whole begins at the top of page 62, and this episode, which is the second section of his 1580 account, starts on 62 and ends at the very foot of page 63. He does not significantly alter the number of lines on the page to ensure this ending (page 62 has 38 lines and page 63 one less), but instead takes up more of the physical page,

ending one line lower down than on the facing page. Although Melville wrote his *Diary* twenty or so years after the event here described, it is probable that he used earlier notes, perhaps even earlier versions, and therefore had an idea of how much space he would require. He signals the conclusions of the account by a dismissive reference to the 'sportes yat followed', ending instead, with the bottom of the page, on the anxious reaction of the Earl of Morton. The reader is covertly invited to reflect on the meaning before turning the leaf. Melville's most frequent engagement with text would have been the contemplation and exposition of selected biblical passages; his own narrative style in the *Diary* seems designed to permit certain scenes generally, and in particular, Skipper Lindsay's theatrical intrusion, to be similarly read and meditated on as discrete extracts.

Into the writing of this record went very many motives, some of which would have been clear to Melville, some of which emerge unbidden in his style. He aspires to turn his reportage into future legend, and his chronicle of events into an interpretative history, but his work is principally driven by the teleology of reform, and shows here that blend of contemporary, new-style hagiography and historiography in which the acts and sayings of the Reformed Kirk were thought to be divinely validated through having their prophetic force proved by event. Inevitably with such an aim, the record of the event depends upon a value which it could only have had in retrospect. Writing down raw experiences *without* the benefit of hindsight would probably have appeared to Melville an abdication of responsibility to the truth and a lost opportunity for instruction. One must remember, if using the *Diary* or other reforming documents as primary sources for drama records, that a truth is not worthy of the name unless it has been varnished.

In 1580 when the event took place, Skipper Lindsay's preaching would have had meaning for Melville from its theological context and its own portentousness, but it took on full spiritual significance later when Lindsay's prophecy of Morton's downfall was fulfilled by the political plotting of the courtiers who were watching the play with him. Morton had been Regent of Scotland until 1578 but, though his power was now compromised, he was still an important figure in the administration of the realm. He was implicated by prior knowledge in the death of the king's father, Lord Darnley, and, at the time of the play, was a matter of months away from imprisonment and less than a year from death. He is represented in Melville's account as physically on his own, in the lowest

(‘nedmaist’) part of a bay window, and further isolated by his own anxious thoughts. Physically and metaphorically above (‘abone’) him, his supplanter, Esmé Stewart, Duke d’Aubigny, watches the play in the company of his close male kinsman, the young King James VI. Melville’s *mise en scène* is so emblematically revealing of the changing political affinities which were taking place in 1580 that one cannot tell whether it is a faithful depiction of Morton’s real alienation from the King, expressed at the time in the symbolic theatre of the court, or Melville’s retrospective construction of politics in the theatre of his imagination.⁵

Melville is careful to establish a theological context contemporary with the episode, which will support the revelatory meaning implied for it. The General Assembly at Dundee, from which Melville and his companions had just arrived in St Andrew’s with supplication and articles (as intimated at the start of the episode), had, at the instigation of Melville’s uncle, Andrew Melville, called for the abolition of bishops. It is this event which Melville notes against the entry in the margin and which he sets up as the moral environment of the Skipper Lindsay intrusion. Morton was a suitable target for he had previously appointed his chaplain, Patrick Adamson (against whom Melville is virulent in his *Diary*), to the Archbishopric of St Andrew’s whence he became *ex officio* the Chancellor of the university. This was the time of the ‘tulchan’ bishops, so named after the practice of creating a fake calf out of straw to encourage a cow to give milk, the implication being that these bishops were in themselves worthless, but were appointed to make the plundering of the church easier.⁶ Morton also had a record of appointing simoniacally, and the Rev. John Davidson, the ‘Thunderer’, who was a friend of Melville’s, had been banished after an attack on Morton. The ominous warnings about disdain (‘miskening’) God thus reflect the specific anti-episcopal environment of the time and the responsibility which Morton was thought to carry for episcopal damage to the emerging institutions of the Scots Kirk. Whether and to what degree Skipper Lindsay was conscious of it, or even politically aware in his application to Morton and presuming on a ‘fool’s privilege’, the contents of his speech must have reflected presbyterian sentiment in the town and university, and their current resentment at the imposition of a man by Regent’s mandate. Melville uses this context to underpin the exemplary and providential meanings which the reader is encouraged to infer from the episode: miskening God will bring its own reward just as it brought degradation and death to the Regent in 1581.

Interestingly, however, Melville does not make this significance explicit, and though he is clear about the remarkable truthfulness of Skipper Lindsay's prediction against Morton, he cannot quite say openly that God's providence was working on this occasion. Instead he focuses on a complex of specifically theatrical tensions and responses which tie the event to its audience. Morton is said to feel the effect of Lindsay's speech so deeply that this supposedly comic interlude casts a baleful shadow over the rest of the playing. Melville (and we through him) imagine the plotters' response to Lindsay. Although we are not told of their feelings, anxiety is implicit in Melville's account as we sense them weighing up whether it is more likely that the plot has been discovered or that a madman has fortuitously touched on the truth. While Morton's disconsolate demeanour would have been evident to all, one wonders how and when Melville could have known what the plotters were thinking. It seems highly unlikely that his appreciation of the plotters' situation was contemporary with the event. He could have heard about it later, of course, but it is equally possible that he subsequently inferred their likely reaction as he meditated on the episode. He frames it in his mind so that he, like Hamlet watching King Claudius faced with the theatrical representation of his crimes in the dumbshow, can mentally observe both the scene and the watchers, who are themselves political players in a larger drama. Whether he heard of the plotters' anxiety or opined it, however, what is particularly significant is his decision to foreground the theatrical tensions in the anxious minds of the spectators, and to remain inexplicit about the spiritual significance on which his theological history depends. There are two main reasons for this: his theological precision, and the broad range of issues which the episode touched on, the most significant of which was his own imaginative engagement with drama.

Melville's account has to negotiate the motif of 'prophecy fulfilled' delicately because the preaching comes from the mouth of a man whose madness Melville does not dispute, and whom he probably did not know. Instead of claiming divine inspiration for Skipper Lindsay, Melville allows the content and effect of Lindsay's speech only to *imply* that God has raised the humble up after punishment, and that He will put the once-mighty regent Morton down from his seat. The terms of the *Magnificat* remain shadowy instructors here because Melville does not wish to see either the Skipper or those who were plotting against Morton as God's direct implements. That is not to say that Melville lacked a major emotional and spiritual investment in asserting the prophetic truth of

Lindsay's preaching, and in signalling the rightness of Morton's downfall, because in the early years of the seventeenth century, the episcopalian threat to Presbyterianism had been exacerbated over twenty years by the very king before whose play Skipper Lindsay had preached. Melville was writing either during, shortly after, or shortly before exile; bishops were still in place with royal support and the Kirk was still feeling the loss of power and resources that they represented. The meetings of the Assembly were being interrupted; ministers had difficulty in getting the King's ear, and in 1600 the Kirk had complained that those whom they were pursuing for offences over which the church claimed authority were obstructing discipline by obtaining letters demanding that the reformed ministers appear before the 'Secreit Counsell'.⁷ Melville must have hoped that the punishment of Morton for his disdaining God by promoting episcopacy would have an early seventeenth-century parallel.

However, the episode was too rich in other issues for Melville to reduce it to a straightforward anti-episcopal agenda, even with the enticement of a retrospective comprehension of events. Skipper Lindsay's intrusive instruction would have represented for Melville, by the time of the *Diary*, an important re-assertion that the meanest in the realm, if infused with the spirit, could offer valuable instruction to the most powerful. Concerned by the opposition of secular powers to the aims and objectives of the reformed Kirk, Melville would have found the episode appealing because it showed that the workings of the spirit could demand the attention of the great; create fear in secular authorities such as Morton; unsettle other aristocrats such as the plotters around d'Aubigny, and perhaps also because it showed that theatricality of the spirit could displace the planned theatre of the 'gentlemen'. The presence of the young James VI to hear Lindsay's admonition, while no doubt an accurate depiction of what happened in 1580, would thus have seemed additionally appropriate later, after years in which James had argued that the true source of authority below God was the King rather than the people.⁸ Direct confrontation of the king, albeit across the *cordon sanitaire* of the windows in the New Inn, would have reasserted the right of access to the monarch which Sir David Lindsay so famously celebrated in *Johne the Commonweale's* rush into court in the *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, and which had provided a recurring test of royal character for Scottish chroniclers. Goodare and Lynch note of the Jamesian court that 'the nature of access to the king was changing, and disputes over access would dog the years until 1603'.⁹

Skipper Lindsay's preaching would also have struck Melville forcibly in 1580 because, at the Dundee General Assembly, he and his colleagues had just agreed to deal with those clerics who were 'unable to teach, unprofitable or curious teachers, negligent in preaching'.¹⁰ Lindsay's powerful amateur admonitions must have seemed at the time to support the wisdom of the Kirk in demanding spiritual vigour in their professionals. In the finished version of the early seventeenth-century *Diary* Melville still uses Lindsay to criticise weaker preaching, but the emotion on which he concentrates seems to escape the original context of the event and to imply regret, even reproach, for an apostolic fervour now compromised by the passing of time: 'And in deid for my part I was mair movit with it then with monie preatchings. Ther he discourset *with* grait force of sprit and mightie voice ... he maket sic application to him [Morton] in speciall as movit him throw the hart and was marvellous in the eares of the heirars / for myself I was esto-nished and movit to tears ...'. Part of the meaning of the event for Melville is that Skipper Lindsay's words *do* still ring in his ears twenty years on, and have not been drowned out by the preaching he has heard in the interim. Melville's emphasis on this continuing power conveys more than memory; it is inflected by present judgement and regret.

What emerges most powerfully in this account is, surprisingly, not a clear theological, political, or didactic agenda, but rather Melville's own nostalgia for theatre, which he, like other reformers, had enjoyed from his youth. Of course, part of him takes pleasure in the usurping of frivolous aristocratic play by the spiritual theatre of sermon, but at the same time, his own writing shows his strong commitment to the theatricality of the event, a commitment which draws him and his reader imaginatively through the strategies of the narrative into the event itself, and to the point where the words of Skipper Lindsay and of his recorder merge into a single performance. This is a theatrical re-creation embedded in a narrative of report. The location is established, the scene is set before the windows of the New Inn, the audience has arrived in great numbers, and the playing area is prepared. The opening description presents a picture, but in doing so actually takes us through the process of preparation. Expectancy for the event is thus not just reported but recreated for the reader. This involves moving from a couple of participial phrases with perfective aspect 'grait confluence ... conveyned' and 'the place read [cleared]' through a long parenthesis 'wither yat his Majestie was nocht readie to behauld or the playars to present tham selues I can nocht tell' to

participles with continuative aspect: 'gasing and langing ...' Melville's Latinate training would have made him sensitive to the rhetorical effect of grammatical form; he would have known that this shift from the completion of preparations for the play, through consideration of possible explanations for delay to the present participles of audience boredom, would have recreated the responses of the audience in the reader. The style supports narrative aims effectively as Melville sets up the coming play so that the reader can feel the mixture of excitement and bathos which ensues.

Though Skipper Lindsay may indeed have been self-dramatising, Melville flamboyantly brings that out, giving his entrance a separate powerful moment by shifting suddenly from the participles into the present tense indicative 'In stappes Schipper Lindsay'. The reader knows nothing of this man, and so the intrusion of the name itself brings the surprise and curiosity one would feel at a play with the entry of the first character, but, as in a play, Lindsay is then shown to have an identifiable 'character' and thus the curiosity gives way to recognition and expectation. It is a recognition which would have been immediate to the St Andrew's inhabitants who first observed him, would probably not have been immediate for Melville when he watched it, but which Melville permits us to have in a carefully controlled evocation of dramatic entrances. Others, in the Terentian plays to which the young Melville was introduced by his reforming uncle Andrew Melville, might be pantaloons, or braggadochios, or sly servants, but Lindsay is 'a knawin frenetic man'.¹¹ Although Melville never gets round to describing the real play, he is here recreating in his reader something much more striking: the sensations which a member of an early-modern audience would feel at a performance.

After the Skipper's entrance and 'character', Melville moves quickly on to the action and we see how this actor moves. The Skipper Lindsay figure dominates the acting area as one might expect of a Tamburlaine, and commands the space which has been previously cleared of the spectators: he 'paesses vpe and down in the circuit'. The reader is then told how the Skipper carries himself and, by implication, the kind of rôle he intends to play: 'with a grait grauetie his hands in his syde looking verie big and hiche'. The reader senses the event almost in real time as it would have been experienced by the original internal audience, whose viewpoint and judgement the reader alternately shares and rejects. Regardless of how this description contributes to the meaning of Melville's narrative, it also offers the modern reader some insight into how a theatrical character might have

been seen by the early-modern spectator, what that spectator would have noted and remembered, and, by extension, what the 'director' might have demanded from the actor in order to convey meaning and memorability to the part. Skipper Lindsay had no director. It is possible that he behaved in ways informed by play events he had seen, or in imitation of the commanding public presence of the preachers whom Melville regards him as emulating or surpassing. Possibly his self-dramatising was natural behaviour for a society in which one was always on show or the result of having lived for years as a public object, being seen and treated as a madman. But in Melville's mind's eye, Lindsay is an actor in a spiritual drama, and when the diarist invests him with theatrical qualities, these in turn offer a glimpse for the modern reader of the drama of his time.

Melville moves the reader from vacant theatrical space to entrance to character to movement to carriage and demeanour and then to physical and facial appearance, and it is here that the theatrical appearance challenges the original audience most, suggesting perhaps that the acme of an early-modern spectator's response to a character, before the character spoke, would be reached by moving from bodily appearance to the face: 'The man was of a grait telyie weill bigget of a large face and guid manlie countenance all rouche with heire his browes grait tuftes of haire and als grait a tuft vpon his verie neb [tip] of his nease / his look was verie reasit and hiche / wherat first the peiple maid a noyse with lauch-ing ...' Though actors of Melville's day might have wondered whether to do their part in the sable or the tawny beard, and those of the *commedia dell'arte* would have had to fix their masks and noses on, Lindsay is presented already made up by life.¹² Whether or not Lindsay genuinely looked like this, the semiotics of his portrait are tightly calibrated with the meaning Melville intends for the episode, and in that sense are identical with the semiotics of theatrical portrayal. Lindsay's distinguishing features carry the ambiguity of his character necessary for Melville's purposes: they convey large scale, which will be transmuted into his spiritual stature later, a manliness which is consonant with the persuasive and admirable rôle Melville sees him playing, and which lifts him out of the rôle of madman. But Melville also refers three times to his hairiness: his countenance is 'all rouche with heire', he has great tufts of hair on his eyebrows and another on his nose. Together with his large size, this hirsutism shifts Lindsay towards the feral, hinting strongly at the figure of the Wild Man. Twycross and Carpenter write that 'the strong cultural symbolism of the wild man made him a popular figure in all kinds of festivity, from courtly disguisings, where

playing in character licensed usually impermissible 'uncivilised' behaviour, to civic parades like the London Lord Mayor's Show, in summer as well as winter'.¹³ Perhaps it is speculating too far to consider that Lindsay himself had expectations of his appearance and reputation giving him cultural license, though it seems possible that a man who could expatiate so eloquently in a public arena would also have a sense of what public 'defence' he might rely on. But it seems more than likely that Melville's memory of this character is informed by the theatrical tradition of the wild man, and that Melville's intentions for him depend on balancing this presentation subtly with hints of nobility in spirit. The reader is allowed to hold the two possibilities in mind, but the ordering of details, whereby the description finally couples the great tuft of hair on Lindsay's nose incongruously with his 'reasant and hiche' look, permits us to appreciate how the original spectators saw him as a comic figure. Lindsay's theatrical antecedents thus prepare him as a 'mouse-trap' in which the audience will be caught so that they can be brought to their senses and can feel the force of an unexpected education in the spirit.¹⁴

There is a striking, literary intensity about this episode which derives from the fact that one of its moral themes, the importance of not 'miskinning' God, is integrated both with the narrative structure through which it unfolds and the affective dynamics which are reported in the story and recreated in the reader. Before the spectators, and Morton, are warned not to 'miskin' God, they have already 'miskenned' Skipper Lindsay. The word 'miskin' can mean 'not to know', 'be ignorant of' as well as, pejoratively, to 'disdain'. The spectators certainly misken Lindsay through their disdain, but also literally and theatrically: literally because their judgement of him as a madman has led them mistakenly to think that he could have nothing of value to say to them, and theatrically because his appearance, his tufted nose, and his raised and lofty look, have deceived them (and to a more qualified degree the reader) into believing that he is a comic character and will only play a comic part. It is this kind of theatrical misapprehension which Melville finally turns into a pointed irony when he refers to Morton as having been much moved with 'this first interlude', the word 'interlude' playing both on the episode as a drama in itself and as something preliminary to a perhaps greater event, which Melville and the reader know will have nothing like the seriousness of what has gone before.

Melville seems to be thinking intensely about the notion of 'not knowing' at different levels, perhaps because he is writing up his *Diary* from

a point in time when knowing the past properly has been made possible for him, and when passing on moral knowledge for the future is even more imperative. He is recalling how Lindsay was at first misunderstood by his reputation, and how Lindsay went on to denounce those who were ignorant of God's requirements and showed their ignorance as wilful in a disdainful failure to implement them. But in his mental theatre he is also blending this with knowing or being mistaken about a character on stage, and is thus inviting the reader to feel the effects of theatrical revelation. His account of the original spectators' transition from laughter to rapt attention is itself a vivid kind of drama record for the modern scholar since it both records and partially recreates the sensation. But for Melville, with no such intention or expectation that scholars would find his work interesting for its tangential evidence of early-modern drama, the episode of Skipper Lindsay has an even deeper value. It is a particularly intense instantiation of the driving force in the *Diary*: that during Melville's life God's truth has shone through a myriad of events, and people, sometimes surprisingly, and that grace and responsibility were given to Melville not to miscalculate the revelation of those events. Melville has, in a sense, never been out of God's theatre, and it is for this reason that the episode captures his imagination and brings into play so many of his prevailing interests. Without being intentionally meta-narrative, the story is so deeply embroiled with Melville's spiritual spectatorship of life that the *Diary* itself seems revealed in miniature by it.

Perhaps most revealing of the intimate engagement between the episode and its author is the way in which Melville's style seems to arrogate the theatricality of the episode to himself, thus permitting him to cross the gap of the years stylistically as he is doing in imagination. Had Melville actually wanted to *record* a drama in miniature rather than replay it in his mind, he might well have chosen to put the words of the Skipper in *oratio recta*, but there is no explicit signalling of direct speech. Instead the episode happens completely in *oratio obliqua*, with the Skipper's powerfully theatrical voice merged into Melville's. The doublet phrasing of his narrative style shifts into the doublet phrasing of Lindsay's sermon rhetoric. In the following extract the point of transition is reached: the reader begins with Melville's narrative voice but by the end seems to be hearing Skipper Lindsay's voice coming through Melville's:

Ther he discourset *with* grait force of sprit and mightie voice, crying
vpon all of all ranks and degries to heir him and tak exemple be
him / whow wicket and ryottous a man he haid bein / what he haid

done and conquest be the sie and whow he haid spendit it and
abosit him selff be land / And what maist iustlie for yat the grait
God and iudge of the warld haid brought vpon him. he haid wit /
he haid ritches / he haid strenth and abilitie of body / he haid fam
and estimation passing all of his tread and rank bot all was vanitie
yat maid him misken his God ...

Melville becomes at once the event and the reporter of the event, the mouth through which spiritual instruction is uttered and the ear which receives it; he is the voice crying in the wilderness and also the spectator touched to the heart by its message. Thus the final effect of this strange drama record is not only to record an historical episode of densely signifying public theatre or to recreate in the reader the sensation of being at the event or to indicate how early-modern spectators might have responded to theatrical semiotics, but to reveal the private emotional theatre of the diarist who is committed at once to speaking out and to speaking to himself. Melville imaginatively crosses the gap of years which separate him from the original event and from the excited hopes of the early Kirk fighting its battles for access and influence over a young King James. These are the years which also separate Melville from his prime — he was 34 in 1580. His rhetorical choices enable him to create a present literary reality in which the past is inextricably, and almost imperceptibly, blended.

Thomas Traherne's poem, 'Shadows in the Water', recalls the childhood experience of looking, with other playmates, into the reflection in a puddle, and imagining that there was indeed another world lying beneath the water, a world containing another sky, another sun, people 'drowned', yet walking to and fro, and among them versions of Traherne and his companions.¹⁵ However, the simile in which his two worlds are held together carries with it its own dynamic of separation: he can see the puddle world yet cannot enter it, and he recalls that

'Twas strange that People there should walk,
And yet I could not hear them talk. 25–26

Although this poem was written at the other end of the century from Melville's *Diary* it serves to comment on an activity which both he and the modern reader share: engagement with the past, whether that past is recent, as in Melville's case, or more distant, as it is when the modern reader confronts Melville himself. It is a moving reminder that the imaginative seduction of the past coexists with an apparently unbridgeable

separateness. Whatever spiritual meaning Traherne draws from his experience of the puddle world, his poem is actually concerned with time and the strategies through which its inexorable passage can be managed. Traherne shifts subtly from the remembrance of things past to a present consciousness of what time has taken away, and to recognition of the future when he will no longer be here; his poem incorporates memory into loss, and the chronological into the spatial. The images seen in the puddle change from the imaginative play of his childhood to being images which he has before him mentally as he writes: images of playmates now gone, but rescued by the hopeful lessons he can draw from the world of the puddle. They are drowned by time and walking in a world to which he has no immediate access, but because he *has* been vouchsafed this vision of an otherness that is recognisable, he can find grounds for greater hope that some day the simile's terms will be joined, and the Other will become the One.

Of all the Play-mates which I knew
 That here I do the Image view
 In other Selvs; what can it mean?
 But that below the purling Stream
 Some unknown Joys there be
 Laid up in Store for me;
 To which I shall, when that thin Skin
 Is broken, be admitted in.

73-80

It turns out that, therefore, the real nub of Traherne's poem is not the clever and appealing reversal of this world into another, not even the beauty of this world which is recognised in the breadth, loftiness, and grandeur of that seen in the puddle, but rather, it lies in the surface of the water, that thin skin which both shows one world to the other, and yet separates them.

Traherne, Melville, and the reader of drama records all look into the puddle for the images of things now past but which are seen with the eyes of the present. In every case, negotiation with the past is conducted through some strategy of language, for example, creative writing, memorial diary making, or writing an interpretative paper. Traherne stands on the water's brink attempting fruitless dialogue with his watery companions:

I call'd them oft, but call'd in vain;
 No Speeches we could entertain

33-34

His response is to replace the impossible conversation with the poem. For historical critics, dependent on written records rather than personal memories, the whole exercise is linguistic from the start: that paradoxical skin which Traherne mentions as joining and yet separating the present from the past is itself composed of language. Readers of drama records, I believe, cannot wholly abandon the belief that it is a language to which they have some kind of access, whether it is profoundly troped or not. In those records one sometimes recognises, or believes one recognises, the voices of people who read and write for a living or for pleasure; minute-takers, diarists, writers of memoirs, chroniclers, drafters of regulations, preachers, lawyers, administrators, assurers of quality. Surrounded by such people every day, we ourselves perform the same acts, drawing up strategic plans, pontificating, writing memos, departmental resolutions, and so on. Our motivation for conducting this dialogue with the dead may be extremely varied: perhaps an atavistic urge to recover what is lost, or to discover roots, perhaps a respect or love for what is human, perhaps a politicised search for proof of present beliefs, perhaps a hope that having understood, we will no longer be adrift in the present, but will be able to locate ourselves confidently in the 'now' by establishing a link to the past. We spend our time struggling to be admitted through 'that thin skin' whose penetration, Traherne was covertly acknowledging in a final pun, would not occur until his own thin skin was broken.

Melville, by contrast, does not hesitate on the brink of the past but uses his *Diary* and, in particular, his skills as a rhetorician to allow Skipper Lindsay from his past to speak through him. In the Skipper Lindsay episode Melville uses the separation of hindsight in order to assert his understanding of the past more confidently. It is the passage of time that reveals the truth: 'And in deid the verie sam tyme was the platt a dressin against the Erle of Morton, na wayes knawn nor suspected of anie ^ in comoun.^' Even as he recreates the original experience for himself and his reader, he takes pleasure in now being able to pin down the political fact which was hidden beneath the event, and his addition of the phrase 'in comoun' in the left margin shows his commitment to getting this fact exactly right. Melville seems here not to acknowledge that, under God's providence, separation from the past is anything but a benefit. But a reading of this episode shows that he is in no way immune to the problematics of thinking about the past. There is the same wistfulness as one finds in the Traherne poem, and his rhetorical strategy in re-writing the drama of the Skipper Lindsay episode shows his need for a closeness,

stretching even to a degree of identity, with the people and the world on the other side of 'that thin skin'. Furthermore, Melville's account may contain a significant error — one which poignantly reveals both his separation from the event and how his desires re-shaped it in his memory. There may have been many occasions when Melville returned to the Skipper Lindsay story, at dinner or in his private reflections, creating each time a new convergence of those forces which he believed significant for the nation and for his own destiny. However, somewhere in the process, perhaps at the very start, the protagonist of the 1580 event may well have acquired a name which was not his. There is no reference to a Skipper Lindsay in any St Andrew's or national records. There is record of a Skipper *Lesseli*, whose wife (not described as his widow) received alms from the St Andrew's Kirk session in 1574, possibly because her husband, though alive, was not then in a condition to receive them through mental incapacity.

Die Mercurie, xxiiij to Novembris, 1574

The quhilk day, George Blak granted hym to have resavit fra Daiud Crastaris, in name of Richart Smytht, xls., because the said Richart revelit nocht the harlatry committit in his | hows; and the sait ordeined the said George to deliuer to Skipper Lessillis wyffe, callit Besse Forbes, twenty schillingis, and utheris twenty schillingis to Duncan Daidson officiar of the sessioun.¹⁶

It seems at least possible that this man, who is significant enough to be named even though he is not the direct recipient of town alms, is the same man who felt able to stride into the town's playing area some years later, and presume upon his reputation in order to give moral instruction to the highest in the land. Melville may have misheard, miscopied, or misremembered, but he ended up with a name for his 'knawn frenetic man' and spiritual actor which, though common enough in Fife, was that of Scotland's most famous dramatist, a playwright whose figure of Folly had, in the *Thrie Estaitis*, been the medium for instructing a prince in wisdom. If this is indeed what happened in Melville's writing of the Skipper Lindsay story, one is privileged to be reading a drama record of a very special kind.

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NOTES

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1. *The Diary of James Melville*, National Library of Scotland, Adv.34.3.15, pages 62–[63].
2. The episode happened in late July, when the king was actually staying in the *Novum Hospitium*. The New Inn(s) was a building associated with the Priory of St Leonard, and Hay Fleming says that old tradition had it as the intended home for James V's first wife, Magdalene, who died before she reached it; the place where James received his second wife, Mary of Guise, in 1538; where Lindsay made the triumphal arch and descending cloud, and also the temporary home for Regent Moray, when he was Commendator of the Priory, and for John Knox (July 1571 – August 1582), *Handbook to St Andrews and Neighbourhood*, new edition (J & G Innes, St Andrew's, 1897) 44–45. Nothing remains of the building.
3. Insertion above the line.
4. In left margin.
5. For historical information on this period, see for example, Gordon Donaldson *Scotland: James V – James VII* (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1994) and *The Reign of James VI* edited Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000).
6. See C.J. Lyon *History of St Andrews, Episcopal, Monastic, Academic, and Civil* 2 volumes (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843) 1 378–418, 'Tulchan Episcopacy' and more recent histories of the reformation in Scotland.
7. *Acts and Proceedings of The General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland from the Year M.D.LX.*, collection from the most authentic manuscripts 3 volumes (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1839–1845). Volume 3 (1593–1618) gives the context of the years leading up to and including the time Melville wrote the *Diary*. *Acts and Proceedings of The General Assembly* 3 951–2; session 3 (held 19 March 1600).
8. Goodare and Lynch *Reign of James VI*, chapter 1, 'James VI: Universal King?' 1–31, at 27–8.
9. Goodare and Lynch *Reign of James VI* 17.

10. *Acts and Proceedings of The General Assembly* 3 455; session 6 (Assembly began 12 July 1580).
11. Melville recalls his uncle's favourable opinion of Terence. See *The Diary of Mr James Melville 1566–1601* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club) 36.
12. Bottom in *Midsummer Night's Dream* 1.2 offers to do his part in the straw-colour, orange-tawny, purple-in-grain, or perfect yellow beards. It is not know if Melville had any experience of the *commedia dell'arte*, though he would certainly have had experience of masks and noses used in drama.
13. Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) 50. See also 322 for records and discussion of hair and wigs, in one instance explicitly linked to 'wild men'.
14. The notion of evil being deceived by apparent innocuousness is ancient: St Joseph was often portrayed in his carpenter's workroom with the icon of a mousetrap indicating how the devil was deceived about Christ's divine nature by mistakenly inferring that St Joseph was his true father.
15. *Thomas Traherne: Poems, Centuries and Three Thanksgivings* edited by Anne Ridler (London: Oxford UP, 1966) 116–18.
16. *Register of the Minister Elders and Deacons of the Christian Congregation of St Andrew's, part I 1559–1582* edited by David Hay Fleming (Scottish History Society, 4; Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1889) 402–3.