

**‘FAMILIER AND HOMELY’:
The Intrusion and Articulation of Vice
in Skelton’s *Magnyfycence***

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I

The last twenty years or so have seen a consensus emerge about the ‘occasion’ of Skelton’s *Magnyfycence*. It is now commonly accepted to be a play about Henry VIII and the Tudor royal household, and is usually dated 1519 or shortly afterwards. It is usually held to have been provoked by the expulsion of the ‘minions’ — the king’s particular young favourites — from the household in that year and their replacement by older more experienced servants who, it was felt, would look after the king, and particularly his personal finances, in a more responsible way.¹ Instead of being seen as a satire on Wolsey, as earlier editors and critics had proposed,² it is now seen as supporting his policy in relation to the king’s Privy Chamber, an influential area of his household, because it was composed of people who had routine, day to day access to the king, and hence influence with him simply because they could talk to him. And access and talk are very much at the centre of *Magnyfycence*: it is basically an intrusion story in which words are used as weapons.

The story is well known from Edward Hall’s account about how the king’s council became alarmed at the way in which certain ‘young men in his priuie chamber’ took advantage of Henry VIII’s ‘gentlenes & liberalitee’ and

... not regardyng his estate nor degree, were so famelier and homely wyth hym, and plaied suche light touches with hym that they forgat themselves: Whiche thynges although the kyng of his gentle nature suffred and not rebuked nor reproued it: yet the kynges counsail thought it not mete to be suffred for the kynges honor, & therefore thei altogether came to the king, beseching him al these enormities and lightnes to redresse.³

Modern historians and modern interpreters of the play have largely seen a struggle for power, particularly financial power, as at the centre of this incident, and there is some truth in this.⁴ But as Hall tells the story it is a matter of princely, or better regal behaviour: the king, because of his ‘gentle nature’, allowed persons about him to behave with inappropriate

regard either to 'his estate nor degree'. The 'minions', however, though they were not particularly good at acquiring it, were as interested in political power as any Henrician courtier, and Hall is not blind to what modern historians have exposed, but in this passage he highlights the means by which influence was obtained, and in many ways, it seems to me, Skelton's play is concerned with this. The play is a dire warning about the financial consequences, in a royal household, of trusting the wrong people. But it is also, like Hall's version of events, concerned with how that trust was acquired in the first place.

II

The play, in common morality form, deals with the deception of the protagonist — but here the deception is described partly in traditional terms, but partly in terms specific to the acquisition of influence in an opulent and complex sixteenth-century household. There are various aspects to it, all based on contemporary mores and practices which Skelton obviously felt were dangerous, and these are reflected in the way vice is shaped and articulated in the play, and particularly how the Vice figures get close to the prince, how they become 'familier and homely' with him.

In a justly influential essay on the development of the Tudor court, David Starkey contrasts Henry VII's style of handling his relations with the court, 'keeping of distance', with his son's encouragement of 'intimacy', 'good fellowship, boon companions, friends and favourites'.⁵ It is not too crude a generalisation to say that Magnyfycence begins by 'keeping of distance' from the Vices but is gradually inveigled into allowing them to become too 'familier and homely' with him. He does not enter the play until line 163, where he announces himself as of 'noble porte and fame' and relies on Measure, his steward, to introduce him to Felcyte and Lyberte, who have been arguing about the proper use of wealth: it is important at this stage that he uses a trusted intermediary to mediate (appropriately) between him and his would-be companions.⁶ It is Measure who responds to Magnyfycence's question, 'what hyght this mannys name' (165), by naming the characters and Magnyfycence, trusting him, welcomes them as 'frendys' (169). They commit themselves to be ruled by Measure and are accordingly admitted to the household:

Fel. Your ordenaunce, syr, I wyll not forsake.

Lyb. And I my selfe hooly to you wyll inclyne.

Magn. Then may I say that ye be servauntys myne.

181–3

To continue in his household, it is made clear, depends on their willingness to be guided by Measure — the Aristotelian ‘golden mean’ much adverted to in those books of rules which were meant to act as a reference point for the governance of noble households.⁷ So far so good: Magnyfycence keeps his ‘distance’ and retains his authority.

III

Magnyfycence’s initial exposure to vice is interesting because Fancy, who calls himself Largesse, is immediately ‘familier and homely’ with him and his counsellors in the matter of language: ‘Tusche, holde your pece! Your langage is vayne’ (251) are his first words, addressed to Felycyte, breaking in on the conversation. After putting up with his inconsequential nonsense for a short time, Magnyfycence decides to dismiss him from his presence because of the way he speaks. He does not show the appropriate deference to Magnyfycence’s ‘estate or degree’:

Your langage is to large 295

You are nothyng mete with us for to dwell,
That with your lorde and mayster so pertly can prate 304–305

He relents when Fancy produces a letter ‘closed under sele’ (312): this has been forged by Counterfet Countenaunce (531–5), but Fancy claims it was sent by Sad Cyrcymspeccyon from Pontoise (343). When Magnyfycence explains his fall to his real friends at the end of the play he stresses the importance of the letter, only to be told that he has been deceived:

Cyrc. Who brought you that letter? Wote ye what he hyght?

Magn. Largesse, syr, by his credence was his name.

Cyrc. This letter ye speke of never dyd I wryte.

Redr. To gyve so hasty credence ye were moche to blame. 2440–3

The last line is a harsh judgment because recommendations of favourable treatment to those bearing letters in the letters themselves were a standard part of medieval and renaissance life.

Richard Cely the younger, for example, writes from London on 22 May 1482 to his brother George ‘at Calais or Bruges’ about wool prices and advantageous marriage prospects (which the Celys treated in much the same way) but includes a recommendation:

Syr, Harry Bryan, the bryngar of thys, laburs me soor to goo and se Rawson[s] dowttyr. I am beheldyng to hym for hys labor, for I

know whell that he howlde I dyd whell, and I pray you delyuer
hym some mony at thys tyme and do whel by hym, for hyt ys seuyr
inow.⁸

This is not a forged letter — indeed, it is difficult to imagine how anyone could replicate Richard Cely's spelling in any convincing manner. But the Celys were exercised by the need to guarantee the authenticity of their correspondence. The family signed their letters and sealed them, but also, on occasions added 'a roughly drawn representation of the personal device of the sender, or more rarely the recipient'.⁹ This provided additional authentication. Richard Cely the elder, for example, used a quartered shield with a diagonal bar in the upper right quartering and a circle in the lower right quartering, as did other members of the family like William Cely.¹⁰ This is not an heraldic device (though it looks like one) but the family's merchant mark, used to identify goods shipped along with those of other wool staplers. Whether the letter to Magnyfycence is meant to have contained such additional authenticating features is not known, but because they were used one should be alert to the fact that forged documents of the sort that deceived Magnyfycence into allowing the Vices to enter his household were a problem.

By 1519 England had long been a country dependent on what Michael Clanchy calls 'written record' as opposed to the culture of memory. And with written record, as he shows, came a distrust of writing because of the possibility of forgery. And there are things in the play which show that Skelton was aware of this problem.¹¹ Documents were themselves evidence of authenticity, but as Clanchy says, 'Dates and places of issue had the added advantage of putting documents and their makers in a temporal and geographic perspective ...'¹² so as to further authenticate them. And Magnyfycence shows an awareness of this when he asks Fansy (Largesse) where the letter came from: 'Where was it delyvered you? Shewe unto me' (340). Fansy lies to him and then distracts him from pursuing the subject by giving an account of the difficulty he says he had getting out of France, which was only possible, he claims, through 'largesse' which here means money used as a bribe (346–67). There is also the 'sele', which in Michael Clanchy's terms was meant 'to bridge the gap between the literate and the non-literate'.¹³ Again this does not work as an authenticating device, because it too is forged. Magnyfycence only knows that the letter was not written by Sad Cyrumspeccyon when he tells him so (2443). This is authentication by oral testimony — a throwback to an earlier state of things.

Forgery was undoubtedly a problem and dated back to the acceptance of writing as a mode of record. Renaissance humanists demonstrated that the Pope's own title deeds, the Donation of Constantine, were forgeries, and it has long been known that a great many charters of English monasteries are spurious.¹⁴ Complaints in Parliament against those who forge title deeds and false muniments can still be heard in the fifteenth century.¹⁵ Seals were sometimes forged, including the king's Privy Seal.¹⁶ There is a complaint to the Commons in 1371 that those who counterfeit the Privy Seal should be *puniz par perpetuele prisone sanz relez de la peine* ('punished by perpetual imprisonment without release from the punishment').¹⁷ In 1376 there is mention of a false and forged document using someone else's seal.¹⁸ In 1380 some treasonable letters using the seal of Ralph de Ferrers were shown to have been forged by the French.¹⁹ And so it went on. In 1454 Walter Ingham petitioned the king complaining about how Thomas Denyes 'jmagynyng vtterly to destroye youre seyde besecher, contrived a lettre in þe name of my lorde of Oxenforde — he not knowyng of ony soch lettre — comaundyng youre seide besecher to be with þe seide lorde at Weuenho in youre shire of Essex þe xiiij day of þe seide month of Januar for diuers grete maters towchyng my seide lorde'. This, it transpired, was a device to lead him into an ambush, the perpetrators of which left him for dead. He recovered, he says, but was so badly beaten about the legs that he has walked on crutches since then.²⁰ Henry VIII got exasperated with the situation in 1535–1536 and a severe and stringent law was put in place to counter the laxity that had earlier prevailed:

For as moche as by the Lawes of this Realme small punyshment hathe byn hitherto provydid for forging and counterfayting the Kynges signe manuell or previe seignet, by reason whereof dyverse light and evyll disposid persones now of late have takyn the more boldenes and courage to committe suche offences to the greate audacite and boldenes of suche lyke offenders; For remedie whereof be it enactid by auctorite of the present parliament, That if any persone or persones at any tyme hereafter falsely forge and counterfaite the Kyngis signe manuell prevy signet or previe seale, that than every suche offence shalbe demed and adjudged highe treason ...²¹

This meant that those found guilty, and anyone found guilty of aiding and abetting them, would be liable to the extreme punishment of death, forfeiture of goods and so on. And in 1541–1542 another act was set in

place dealing with those obtaining goods through 'ymagined Privye Tokens & Counterfeyt letters in other Mens Names'.²² The punishments for this crime were the traditional ones of imprisonment and 'setting upon the pillorie' — physical punishments but not death. Crafty Conveyaunce, in his lengthy soliloquy, mentions the counterfeiting of letters and the punishment for writing them:

And some wyll take upon them to counterfet letters,
And therewithall convey hymselfe into a payre of fetters. 1364–5

It looks as though Skelton had thought hard about a problem which became serious enough for stringent legislation some years later, and saw it as one of the ways influence could be falsely obtained.

IV

The importance of the forged letter should not be underestimated: it is the counterfeit writing which appears to validate Fanny (under the name of Largesse) as a suitable household retainer, and allows him to vouch for the other Vices and get them into the household of Magnyfycence. Counterfet Countenaunce nearly gives the game away by calling to Fanny:

Magn. Who is that that thus dyd cry?
Me thought he called Fanny.

Fan. It was a Flemyng hyght Hansy. 326–8

This brief incident should alert one to another of the means by which the Vices become 'familier and homely' with Magnyfycence, disguising who they are by assuming false names. At one point Counterfet Countenaunce asks Crafty Conveyaunce if he keeps 'the olde name styll that thou had', but it emerges he would be thought 'mad' if he did (516–17). At another, when Folly is renamed 'Consayte', there is an allusion to baptism in the word 'godfather' and in the joke on 'masse' in the oath:

Fan. By the masse, he shall hyght Consayte.

Cra. Con. Not a better name under the sonne;
With Magnyfycence thou shalte wonne.

Fol. God have mercy, good godfather. 1310–13

And it is interesting here that it is the assumed name that is part of the means by which he is enabled to be accepted into Magnyfycence's household. Of course, the assumed names do not always fit very well.

When Fanny tells Counterfet Countenance that he is calling himself Largesse, the response is sardonic:

Cou. Cou. A rebellyon agaynst nature —
 So large a man, and so lytell of stature! 522–3

presumably because Fanny was played by the boy of the troupe, or its smallest member. And then there is much talk about clothes, another layer of disguise. But behind the humour is the assumption that a name should in some way be accurately descriptive.

Much of the impetus for this is traditional in terms of the morality genre: Vices often disguise themselves to suggest that morality protagonists do not always recognise the sins they fall into — and this is part of the strategy here. But there may be something else which concerns Skelton to which he adverts through the fluidity of identity which attends the Vices. This is the instability of names at this time, and hence problems in establishing identity. English surnames fall into four main groupings — patronymics, locational names, occupational names, and descriptive names (including nicknames). The hereditary principle of naming (now generally accepted) emerged slowly, but by the fifteenth century in England most of ‘our present family names received their first forms’.²³ But this was more common in the south of England than in the north, and more common amongst the rich than amongst the poor, who had very little to gain by stressing their ancestry. But even well-known people, such as the antiquarian and travel-writer, who died in 1482, and was usually called William Worcester (a locational surname) was sometimes referred to as William Botoner (an occupational surname).

A number of factors contributed to the instability of names and the insecurity of identity in the sixteenth century, as a perusal of the documents collected together as *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic* for the years leading up to the writing of this play makes plain. One, which needs no illustration, is the simple and habitual variation of spelling from one use to another. A second derives from women taking their husbands’ names — especially if they remarried frequently: a document of 24 July 1517 refers to ‘Katherine, wife of Matthew Cradok, formerly called Strangways and Gordon’.²⁴ Sometimes the writers have access to a forename only, sometimes to a surname. And foreign names often produced difficulty. A letter to Wolsey of 20 June 1516 informs him of the vacancy of a prebend in Tournai because of the death of ‘John d’Enghein alias de Tornaco’ — presumably someone who was born in what is now

Enguingatte but became identified with Tournai because he worked there.²⁵ A little earlier, on 20 May 1516, comes a record to the effect that:

John Mayer alias Hans Gonner is granted 6d a day for duties as a gunner in the Tower of London, in place of Humphrey Walter, deceased.²⁶

Here one occupational name (*mayer* means 'physician' or later 'bailiff / farmer') is replaced by another indicating John's/Hans's new status. But there is some instability of naming which is difficult to explain, except for the obvious reason that some people had or were known by two names. A few examples must serve for many. On 26 October 1515 a grant of lands in Gloucestershire was made to 'Thomas Balkey alias Spycer' — a locational name and an occupational name co-existing.²⁷ On 20 June 1516 'Roger Wygston and James Chaplein alias Cruse' were appointed receivers of the possessions of the late William, Viscount Beaumont — here an occupational name coexists with what may be a locational name, if 'cruse' means 'cross' and indicates someone who lived at or near a crossroads.²⁸ On 1 July 1517 William Burbank, chaplain to Wolsey and prothonotary apostolic, was presented to the church at Arthurstede in the diocese of Carlisle not only in the name that he had used consistently in his correspondence but as 'William Burbanke alias Smythson' — adding an unexpected patronymic to his normal locational name.²⁹ And when criminality is involved matters sometimes get even more complicated. Under 26 August 1517 various cases of assault at Lydde (Kent) are recorded which were judged by Sir Edward Ponynges, Warden of the Cinque Ports. Among them are details about 'John Co ...' for assaulting '... Wilson alias Jokye of Romeney ...'.³⁰ The very incompleteness of the record, as well as the two names, is eloquent testimony to the fact that Sir Edward Ponynges did not know precisely with whom he was dealing.

Names give stability if they are stable, or history in terms of family perspective, but in *Magnyfycence*, because they change their names, there is no stability of identity among the Vices, and Skelton makes it plain that this is one of the reasons why vice is enabled to intrude into his princely household, how the making of vice 'familier and homely' is achieved. Crafty Conveyaunce explains:

Cra. Con. Fаны and I, we twayne,
With Magnyfycence in housholde do remayne;
And counterfeted our names we have
Craftely all thynges upryght to save:

His name Largesse, Surveyaunce myne.
Magnyfycence to us begynneth to enclyne ... 639–44

Just as Magnyfycence is deceived by a forged letter, because he has no means of verifying its author, so he is fooled by assumed names, because naming, in his society, was not stable and so identity was hard to establish. The names the Vices have in *Magnyfycence*, as in most moralities, are descriptive names which were meant to convey something accurate about the bearer of the name, but here this process is subverted: evil characteristics are described as good. In circumstances where identity is fluid, Skelton appears to be saying, it is difficult for a nobleman to know exactly with whom he is dealing, who was being allowed into his presence.

V

Vice has a misleading appearance in this play, and this involves, as well as names, dress, and language.³¹ This is apparent when Magnyfycence fails to recognise the Vices, but is emphasised by the fact that the Vices do not immediately recognise each other either. Based on the quasi-ecclesiastical dress that Clokyd Colusyon is wearing, Counterfet Countenaunce hazards a guess that he is called ‘Syr Johnn Double-Cope’ (605) — ‘Sir John’ being a generic term for a priest. But it is Courtly Abusyon who is most confusing because he sends out extremely mixed signals. He enters singing (*cantando*):

Cou. Ab. Huffa, huffa, taunderum, taunderum, tayne, huffa, huffa!

Clo. Col. This was properly prated, syrs! What sayd a?

Cou. Ab. Rutty bully, joly rutterkyn, heyda!

Clo. Col. *De que pays este vous?* 745–8

Two of the songs appear to be English (‘Huffa, huffa!’, ‘Hoyda, jolly rutterkin’), one is garbled Flemish (‘Taunder naken’), and one is French (‘Roti bouilli joyeulx’).³² This last, and Courtly Abusyon’s French style of dress (see 777–9), cause Clokyd Colusyon to think he is French and he addresses him in that language.

But, as usual, appearances are deceptive and Courtly Abusyon is an English ‘gallant’ whose dress and mixed languages may be glossed by reference to Sir Thomas Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553):

Some farre iourneyed gentleman at their returne home, like as they loue to goe in forraine apparell, so thei wil pouder their talke with

ouersea language. He that commeth lately oute of Fraunce, will talke French English and neuer blush at the matter ...³³

And, here again in the case of Courtly Abusyon, Skelton renders the deceptiveness of vice in terms of a serious contemporary issue. Wilson's comments are made in the course of a discussion about the validity of extending the lexicon of English, which was thought to be deficient in vocabulary which allowed 'eloquent' writing, by adopting words from Greek, Latin, and the modern European vernaculars. Everyone had a view on the issue, including Skelton,³⁴ and there were almost as many different positions as writers. But Wilson's commonsense, middle-of-the-road attitude was shared by many: 'Now whereas wordes be receiued, aswell Greeke as Latine, to set forth our meaning in the English tongue, either for lacke of store, or els because we would enrich the language: it is well doen to vse them, and no man therein can be charged for any affectation ...' But as Wilson makes clear, 'oversea language' of the sort used by Courtly Abusyon is adopted for the purpose of vain eloquence, to impress by giving a false veneer of sophistication to mundane things. And in Courtly Abusyon's case this language is used with a cynical knowingness about its power: 'I coude holde you with suche talke hens tyll to morowe' (1588).

Magnyfycence is highly impressed by Courtly Abusyon's language. Partly this is because it is so complimentary: a lot of titles are used, 'syr' (1516, 1520, 1542), 'your grace' (1518, 1522, 1525), 'your noble grace' (1535). But, largely, Magnyfycence is swayed by the ornate eloquence of Courtly Abusyon's speeches, the elaborate syntax and the rich vocabulary which relies heavily on a Latin- or French-based lexicon: 'we delyte gretly in your dalyaunce' (1524), he says; 'Pullyshyd and fresshe is your ornacy' (1531); 'To here your comon, it is my hygh comfote' (1539). At one point Skelton, knowingly, has Magnyfycence say: 'your speche is as pleasant as though it were pend' (1538) — which, on one level, it is because Skelton has written it, but on another because it is essentially not a spoken but a written register: in fact, this sort of discourse was characterised by Wilson as depending on 'ynke horne' terms. It is here the high-style, aureate mode of late medieval poetry in the Chaucerian or Lydgatean tradition. Magnyfycence is so impressed that he takes the disguised Vice figure into his household (1536), whereupon he begins to offer the prince advice, to use his position to influence the prince's behaviour.

His first piece of advice is that Magnyfycence should acquire 'a fayre maystresse' (1550), called 'Carnall Delectacyon' whom he describes:

That quykly is envyyed with rudyes of the rose,
 Inpurtured with fetures after your purpose,
 The streynes of her vaynes as asure Inde blewe,
 Enbudded with beautye and colour fresshe of hewe,
 As lily whyte to loke upon her leyre,
 Her eyen relucent as carbuncle so clere,
 Her mouthe enbawmed, dylectable and mery,
 Her lusty lyppes ruddy as the chery —
 Howe lyke you? Ye lacke, syr, suche a lusty lasse. 1551–9

This is a paradigm of how vice is articulated in this play. The itemising nature of the descriptive technique — veins, complexion (*leyre*), eyes, mouth, lips — unmistakably associates this with the high-style rhetorical tradition, as do the traditional comparisons with the lily and the rose.³⁵ And again there are many words — mainly nouns and adjectives — of Latin or French origin. A number of words use intensifying prefixes (*inpurtured*, *enbudded*, *enbawmed*) characteristic of this mode of writing. But the final line — with its almost entirely monosyllabic words of native English origin — is devastatingly reductive of the high-tone register which has preceded it: in spite of the way her charms are articulated this is just a ‘lusty lasse’. What is more, it transpires that she can be acquired for money or ‘a goodly rybon, or a golde ryng’ (1580). Whether she is meant to be a prostitute is not clear. But the Latin proverb, quoted by Courtly Abusyon, would seem to suggest it: *omnis mulier meretrix si celari potest* (1586: ‘every woman is a whore if it can be concealed’). It had an English near equivalent.³⁶ But whatever the implications of this on a level of theatrical verisimilitude, the stylistic implications are plain. Courtly Abusyon talks Magnyfycence down the linguistic scale: he interests him in cynical proverbs like ‘Money maketh marchauntes’ (1574).³⁷ Magnyfycence is not a merchant, and what are supposed to be his values are contrasted with mercantile values earlier in the play (382–3). But here he is talked down the social scale, and the knowing cynicism of the proverbs suggests he is talked down the moral scale too.

Crucially, however, Magnyfycence allows Courtly Abusyon to talk him into arbitrary behaviour: ‘Let your lust and lykyng stande for a lawe’ (1607). And he is advised to feign sickness when he wishes to be rid of someone’s presence:

To styre up your stomake you must you forge,
 Call for a caudell and cast up your gorge,

With, 'Cockes armes! Rest shall I none have
Tyll I be revenged on that horson knave.

A, howe my stomake wambleth! I am all in a swete.
Is there no horson that knave that wyll bete? 1613–18

And this, later, is how he gets rid of Measure, who comes to reason with Magnyfycence over his dismissal from the household. He is not allowed to say 'a worde or twayne' (1721), because Magnyfycence goes into the feigned sickness routine as Courtly Abusyon forcibly removes Measure (1735):

Magn. Alas! My stomake fareth as it wolde cast.

Clo. Col. Abyde, syr, abyde. Let me holde your hede.

Magn. A bolle or a basyn, I say, for Goddes brede!
A, my hede! But is the horson gone?
God gyve hym a myscheffe! Nay, nowe let me alone.

1726–30

Clokyd Collusyon commends Magnyfycence's behaviour as 'a good dryfte' and 'a praty fete' (1731), but all that has happened is that Magnyfycence has followed Courtly Abusyon's advice, and has responded to his language, albeit in a reduced version of it: he swears by 'Goddes brede' and uses the word 'horson'. The household ordinances, which appear to underlie significant parts of this play, forbade swearing and are particularly precise about proscribing the use of the word *horson*. The anonymous author of *The Black Book of Edward IV* begins his section on swearing by quoting Ecclesiasticus 23: 12: 'The man who swears many oaths is filled with iniquity, and the scourge will not leave his house'. He proceeds to forbid swearing 'by Goddes body, or by any of his other parties vnreuerently' on pain of being deprived of wine at mealtimes. He then adds: 'There was a lyke mocion to be made for the customable word of hourson'.³⁸ The word occurs 14 times in Skelton's poetry — 12 are in this play, and two in other anti-court satires. Of the occurrences in this play the word is used 11 times by the Vices: this is the only use by Magnyfycence, and it is significant that it occurs when he is specifically following Courtly Abusyon's advice.³⁹ The Vices are becoming so intimate with him that he begins to talk like them.

This is apparent also in Magnyfycence's final confrontation with Foly, disguised as 'Consayte', his court jester. Foly treats Magnyfycence to a series of nonsensical incongruities — a type of comedy frequently used in interludes. Magnyfycence recognises it well enough for what it is: 'Thy

wordes hange togyder as fethers in the wynde' (1818). But he trades insults with Foly: 'I befole thy brayne pan' (1805); 'A, syr, thy jarfawcon and thou be hanged togyder' (1812). And he offers incredulous but approving comments:

By Cockes harte, thou arte a fine mery knave!	1826
If ever I herde syke another, God gyve me shame.	1833
Cockes bones! Harde ye ever suche another?	1841

But the contours of the language itself — the oaths which were forbidden in the royal household, the colloquial expressions — also demonstrate how complicit Magnyfycence has become with Foly and how 'familier and homely' vice has become to him in his own household.

And, after his household goods have been misappropriated by the Vices, after he has been assailed by Adversity and Poverty, after he has been reduced to beggary, he has a final confrontation with three of the figures who have ruined him and asks for vengeance. The Vices respond interestingly:

Cou. Cou. What begger art thou, that thus doth banne and wary?

Magn. Ye be the thevys, I say, away my goodys dyd cary.

Clo. Col. Cockys bonys! Thou begger, what is thy name?

Magn. Magnyfycence I was, whom ye have brought to shame.

Cou. Cou. Ye, but trowe you, syrs, that this is he?

Cra. Con. Go we nere and let us se.

Clo. Col. By Cockys bonys, it is the same.

Magn. Alasse, alasse, syrs, ye are to blame!

I was your mayster, though ye thynke it skorne;

And nowe on me ye gaure and sporne.

Cou. Cou. Ly styll, ly styll nowe, with yll hayle!

Cra. Con. Ye, for thy langage can not the avayle. 2238–49

In the first place, they do not recognise Magnyfycence: like Lyberte earlier they see a 'brothell ... bounde in a mat' (2106). These are the 'homly raggys' (2037) in which Poverté clothes Magnyfycence, and like Magnyfycence earlier in the play they do not know with whom they are dealing, until they go 'nere' to ascertain the truth (which Magnyfycence did not do). They are, albeit temporarily, deceived by appearances — which emphasises the point of just how easy this is and how slippery a

concept is identity. Secondly, they try to and succeed in silencing Magnyfycence so that he cannot use words to influence them as they had influenced him earlier in the play: *styll* here probably means 'quietly' in the sense of 'silently'. Thirdly, Skelton deploys the second person plural and singular pronouns of address in a most significant way. As they had attempted to inveigle their way into his household earlier in the play the Vices had used the second person plural when addressing him, *ye/you/your*, the pronoun of respect; but now they use the singular *thou/thee/thy* forms. The use of the singular where a plural would normally be expected because there is a wide social discrepancy between the speakers is usually interpreted as implying insult — and this may be the case here.⁴⁰ But there may be more to it than this. In a justly famous article, Roger Brown and Albert Gilman make the following point: 'The interesting thing about such pronouns is their close association with two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of all social life — the dimensions of power and solidarity'. The use of the pronoun of respect implies a power relationship and when it is not used solidarity is implied.⁴¹ Seen in this way, Magnyfycence has lost his power, his ability in relation to 'keeping of distance': at a basic linguistic level he has become intimate with vice, and complicit with it.

VI

Magnyfycence is, of course, rescued and given back some measure of dignity by figures who may represent the four 'sad and circumspect' people put into the Privy Chamber to replace the minions. But Skelton seeks to distance himself from the events, as he closes his play, and to draw general conclusions. Magnyfycence retains a sharp sense of how he has been deceived:

Magn. Alas, myn owne servauntys to shew me suche reproche!
 Thus to rebuke me and have me in dyspyght!
 So shamfully to me, theyr mayster, to aproche,
 That somtyme was a noble prynce of myght! 2277–80

The social hierarchies have been turned upside-down. Intimacy with his household servants has led to a loss of status for the 'prynce of myght': the rhyme on 'aproche' and 'reproche' is highly charged. This is essentially Hall's version of events: intimacy involved a compromise of Henry VIII's 'estate or degree', as, Skelton implies, it does for any nobleman.

But Hall's version of events can essentially be read back into the play in other ways with regard to the 'familier and homely' behaviour of Henry

VIII's servants. And here one needs to understand, historically, exactly what the phrase means and what it implies. The word *familiar* here means 'of or pertaining to the family or household', 'on a family footing, intimate; in a bad sense unduly intimate'.⁴² And *homely* has a similar range: 'of or belonging to the home, domestic, family', 'intimate'.⁴³ Hall, the most intelligent and subtle of the Tudor chroniclers, was not without allusiveness in his use of this phrase, for as it relates to households, and especially the governance of households, it is highly resonant. In English it has a proverbial status in several forms, the most prevalent of which, according to B.J. and H.W. Whiting, is 'A familiar enemy (foe) is the worst'.⁴⁴ The idea was given wide currency because of its use by Boethius: *Nulla pestis peior quam familiaris inimicus*, which is translated by Chaucer as 'what pestilence is more mighty for to anoye a wyght than a famylier enemy'.⁴⁵ This version occurs frequently, as in the Tudor period in the *Lisle Papers*, where it is referred to as an 'old proverb'.⁴⁶ Sometimes *homely* is substituted for *familiar* as in the gloss to the Wycliffite version of Ecclesiasticus 37: 1: 'No pestilence is myghtiere to anoye than is an homely enemye'. Quite often the terms are run together, as memorably by Chaucer in *The Merchant's Tale*:

O perilous fyr, that in the bedstraw bredeth!
 O famulier foo, that his servyce bedeth!
 O servaunt traytour, false hoomly hewe,
 Lyk to the naddre in bosom sly untrewē,
 God shilde us alle from youre aqueyntaunce ...
 God graunte thee thyn hoomly fo t'espye!
 For in this world nys worse pestilence
 Than hoomly foo al day in thy presence ...⁴⁷

This is written in the context of illicit sex: the squire Damien is intent on seducing the wife of January, his lord, but, as Paul Strohm has convincingly shown, this version of 'treason in the household' was not always simply personal: it could sometimes lead to violence and murder.⁴⁸ Lord Berners in his *Golden Book* (1532) has a more general statement: 'These myschevous people are our homely and familiar enemies'. And in its later form the proverb became elided with the idea of the prophet being without honour in his own country, as in Florio's translation of Montaigne's essays: 'Few men have been admired of their familiars. No man hath beene a prophet, not only in his house, but in his owne country ...'

Hall's clear allusion to this nexus of ideas is highly significant, it seems to me, because it shows that he sees the story as essentially one about treason in the household perpetrated by those who have been allowed to become too intimate with the ruler. And this, it seems to me, is how Skelton understood the incident too, as one of 'terestre trechery' (2559), though he is interested in how undesirable characters manage to intrude in the first place — which in his account of things is through forgery, disguise of true identity, and flattering language which misleads while it entertains. Skelton was in favour of 'keeping of distance', and the preservation of social distinctions. Skelton and Wolsey, in relation to the affair of the 'minions', were essentially on the same side, for according to Giustiniani, Wolsey was fearful that they had 'become so intimate with the king, that in the course of time they might have ousted him from the government'.⁴⁹ Yet a few years later Skelton wrote a series of increasingly vicious and increasingly open diatribes against Wolsey. His criticisms are many and varied, but one, which he reiterates, has to do with the fact that Wolsey was becoming too close to Henry VIII:

Set up a wretche on hye,
In a trone triumphantlye,
Make him a great astate
And he wyll play checke mate
With ryall majeste
Counte himselfe as good as he ...

Why Come Ye Nat to Courte? 585–90

Wolsey was the son of a butcher from Ipswich and Skelton could never manage to reconcile this fact with the eminence he achieved.⁵⁰ Skelton was not a democrat, nor even a meritocrat (except where his own advancement was concerned), and much of his satire is an attempt to preserve social boundaries at a time when they were becoming eroded. *Magnyfycence* is a play which appears to have, as its occasion, a political struggle in the royal household, especially the Privy Chamber, but the fact that the Vice figures could become 'familier and homely' with the prince at all appears to have offended his sensibilities at a more fundamental social level. Whichever way one looks at it, however, it appears to express serious reservations about Henry VIII's cult of 'intimacy'.

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NOTES

- 1 For readings of the play in these terms see David Starkey and others *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London: Longman, 1987) 101–105; Alistair Fox *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 237–40; and Greg Walker *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge UP, 1991) 61–72. Jane Griffiths dissents from this, however, preferring ‘c.1516’:
... the play’s anti-French satire is equally applicable to the earlier date.
Moreover, the Vices are not conclusively expelled from Magnyfycence’s court at the end of the play, so the action does not support Walker’s argument that the expulsion provided Skelton with the opportunity to portray Henry flatteringly as a decisive ruler.
John Skelton and Poetic Authority: Defining the Liberty to Speak
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006) 56 note 1.
- 2 For arguments that the play is a satire in Wolsey see *Magnyfycence* edited R.L. Ramsay *EETS ES 98* (1908, reprinted 1958) cvi–cxxviii; *Magnificence* edited Paula Neuss (Manchester UP, 1980) 31–42; and Suzanne R. Westfall *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 163.
- 3 See *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and Yorke ...* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548) fol. lxxvij (MMm ii r); reprinted as *Hall’s Chronicle* (London: J. Johnson and others, 1809) 598.
- 4 For an overview of the incident see Greg Walker ‘The Expulsion of the Minions Reconsidered’ *Historical Journal* 32: 1 (1989) 1–16.
- 5 See *The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* 74–83.
- 6 Reference and quotations are to the edition in my *John Skelton: The Complete English Poems* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Penguin Books, 1983) no. XVI, lines 140–214.
- 7 On these books and their relation to the play see my essay ‘Skelton’s *Magnyfycence* and the Tudor Royal Household’ *Medieval English Theatre* 15 (1993) 21–48.
- 8 See *The Cely Letters* edited Alison Hanham *EETS 273* (1995) no 168, page 155.
- 9 See *The Cely Letters* x.
- 10 See *The Cely Letters* Plate 1.
- 11 See *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edition 1993), especially 18–27.
- 12 See *From Memory to Written Record* 300.
- 13 See *From Memory to Written Record* 308.
- 14 See *From Memory to Written Record* 318–19.

- 15 See *Rotuli parliamentorum: ut et petitiones, et placita in parlamento* collected and arranged by R. Blyke and others, edited John Strachey, 6 vols (London: 1767–1777) 4, 10a (1413), 378a (1430–1431).
- 16 See *Rotuli parliamentorum* 2, 73a (1354).
- 17 See *Rotuli parliamentorum* 2, 308b (1371).
- 18 See *Rotuli parliamentorum* 2, 375a (1376).
- 19 *Rotuli parliamentorum* 3, 90b–91a (1380).
- 20 See *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century* edited Norman Davis, 2 vols (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1976) 2 86–7 (no 491A).
- 21 See *Statutes of the Realm* 3 532 (1535–1536).
- 22 See *Statutes of the Realm* 3 827 (1541–2).
- 23 See Basil Cottle *The Penguin Dictionary of Surnames* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 10.
- 24 *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII* edited J.S. Brewer (London: HMSO, 1864) 2: 2 (1517–19) no 3512 (page 1116).
- 25 *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic* 2: 1 (1515–16) no 2066 (page 616).
- 26 *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic* 2: 1 (1515–16) no 1918 (page 556).
- 27 *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic* 2: 1 (1515–16) no 1074 (page 273).
- 28 *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic* 2: 1 (1515–16) no 2019 (page. 637).
- 29 *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic* 2: 2 (1517–19) no 3423 (page. 1092).
- 30 *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic* 2: 2 (1517–19) no 3636 (page 1149).
- 31 On the importance of dress in the play see my article 'Dressing the Part in *Magnyfycence: Allegory and Costume*' in *Tudor Theatre: Allegory in the Theatre* edited Peter Happé (Collection Theta 5; Centre d'Études Supérieure de la Renaissance, Université François Rabelais, Tours; Bern: Peter Lang, 2000) 55–75.
- 32 For the songs see John Stevens *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Methuen, 1961) 380 and Nan C. Carpenter 'Roty bully joyse' *Review of English Studies* 6 (1955) 279–84.
- 33 See *The Arte of Rhetorique* edited G.H. Mair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909) 162–5 for the whole passage. For the more general problem of pretentious neologising see R.F. Jones *The Triumph of the English Language* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1953) 100–109.
- 34 See *Phyllyp Sparowe* lines 769–83.
- 35 For an interesting analysis of the 'misrepresentation' in this passage see Jane Griffiths *John Skelton and Poetic Authority: Defining the Liberty to Speak* 71: '... he conjures up not an actual mistress, but the verbal image of one'.

- 36 See B.J. and H.W. Whiting *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases, from English writings mainly before 1500* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968) W484: 'All women would be whores if men besought them'.
- 37 See Whiting *Proverbs* M629.
- 38 See *The Household of Edward IV: The Black Book and the Ordinance of 1478* edited A.R. Myers (Manchester UP, 1959) 165.
- 39 See *A Concordance of the Complete English Poems of John Skelton* edited Alistair Fox and Greg Waite (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1987) under *horson(s)*.
- 40 See, for example, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* 3: . 40-43.
- 41 See 'Pronouns of Power and Solidarity' in *Style in Language* edited Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1960) 253-76. The quotation is from the first paragraph.
- 42 See *Oxford English Dictionary* sv *familiar* adj. A. 1, 2c.
- 43 See *Oxford English Dictionary* sv *homely* adj. 1, 2.
- 44 See Whiting *Proverbs* E97 for most of the references in this paragraph.
- 45 See *Boece* Book 3 Prose 5, 68-70, in *The Riverside Chaucer* edited Larry D. Benson (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 426.
- 46 Quoted in Morris Palmer Tilley *A Dictionary of the Proverbs of England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950) 243.
- 47 Chaucer *Canterbury Tales* IV (E) 1783-7, 1792-4.
- 48 See *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992) 121-44.
- 49 See *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic* 3: 1 (1519-1521) no 235.
- 50 See *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?* lines 297-8, 487-94.