play accessible to a modern public, often drawing some of them into close contact, sometimes physical, with the performers. That meant that we were all part of the moral tension which the play ruthlessly exposed. The production revealed Lyndsay's view of the role of the king as being deeply enmeshed in the interests of the community and the great need to ensure that the commonwealth was fair to all and brought justice. His view was shown to be one of high ideals set against a grim perception of a corrupted society which was satirized by a sourly entertaining comic exposure reminiscent of the bitterness of ancient classical precedents. The play expresses Lyndsay's grave anxieties and the production successfully involved the audience in theatrical and moral terms. After such a long sleep this memorable play lived again and Lyndsay's outstanding dramatic achievement has been recalled and revived.

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NOTES

1. I have followed the anglicised versions of most proper names used on the programme, but the performance, including the names, was entirely in Scottish.

THE INTERLUDE:
Linlithgow Palace June 2013

The other part of the research project on 'Staging the Scottish Court' was a reconstruction of the 1540 Interlude. All that survives of this is the abstract of the plot by an anonymous Scots eyewitness, which the English Borderer Sir William Eure, Deputy Warden of the East March and Governor of Berwick, enclosed in his report to Thomas Cromwell of a diplomatic conversation held a few days later at Coldstream with the Scots emissary and Protestant sympathiser ('I prefer to call myself a New Catholic') Thomas Bellenden.[1] Eure had not seen the interlude, and Bellenden may or may not have; in any case, their interest in it was not primarily theatrical. They discussed the event as evidence of the attitude of the Scottish King and Council towards the reformation of the clergy.

Thus the script[2] had to be reinvented from a deft blend of plot summary and diplomatic report with speeches from the *Satire* — which of course premised that the 1540 Interlude was by Lyndsay. What we saw

was set in a neat exposition of how the evidence has come down to us and, obliquely, of how academics interrogate their sources.[3] Eure (Alison Peebles) and Bellenden (Gerry Mulgrew) appeared with Lyndsay (Liam Brennan) as characters, framing the 'reconstruction' and setting it in its political context. It was presented as something of a reading: most of the actors carried their scripts (from necessity or to symbolise documentary evidence?), and there were several sets of modern eye-wear balanced on otherwise convincingly sixteenth-century noses.

This method of reconstruction may inevitably have unbalanced the overall effect. The opening scenes of the *Satire*, where Solace, Wantonness, and Placebo plot to introduce the King to Sensuality, could not easily be converted to the macho dialogue described in the report between the 'courtiours Placebo Pikthanke and Flatterye' (one of the Vice/fools in the *Satire*) boasting of their martial exploits; so this was fairly rapidly passed over. We did not even get a visual balance of frivolous and serious characters — only Solace (Callum Cuthbertson) appeared as a Presenter figure, though he was a very dominant one. The gist was the 'sad matter' of political reform, which Gregory Thompson the director described in an interview on the project website as 'a more intellectual exercise', and therefore inevitably 'less fun'.[4] This subscribes to the generally accepted idea of entertainment: but is having one's brain exercised on a hot political topic so much less 'fun' than being bludgeoned with scatology/slapstick? Judging from William Dunbar the Scottish Court enjoyed both. Here the humour was shifted to the ironic commentary provided by the historical figures on their own and our attitudes; not to mention the ever-present current subtext on the way Scotland should be governed.

Like all reports of plays by diplomats, this one was slanted consciously or unconsciously to the topics Eure thought Cromwell wanted to hear about, and we are dependent on it for our interpretation of what the Interlude was like, and about its reception. We do not actually know how heavily the political part weighed. After the colourful sunlit extravaganza of the *Satire*, the Interlude as presented to us came over, even via the same words, as a much more introverted and sombre political discussion, suited to its elite and influential audience.

A real and unexpected strength was that we were persuaded that we were watching real people. The costumes looked like real clothes, the actors looked and sounded like real magnates (though Archbishop Gavin Dunbar's mitre was somewhat exaggerated, Billy Riddoch looked as if he could well have been responsible for the Cursing now carved in granite and

PLATE 14: The Three Estates (Tom McGovern, Paul Cunnningham, and Michael Mackenzie) with Experience, a.k.a. Lyndsay (Liam Brennan).

PLATE 15: Thomas Bellenden (Gerry Mulgrew).

PLATE 16: 'And ... he loked to the King, and saide he was not the King of Scotland'

reputed to have brought down recent murrain and flood on the inhabitants of Carlisle;[5] and Liam Brennan is now firmly my vision of Lyndsay), and so the arguments gained real political force. The play characters belonged to the same substantial world. The only difficulty was that the Poor Man was rather too well-dressed for his speeches, which was apparently due to incipient hypothermia in the rehearsal: all too realistically, his intended rags and tatters did not keep out the cold, and he was hastily given something more substantial to wear — a neat demonstration of how a spur-of-the-moment decision can affect the balance of the whole play. The actor (Keith Fleming) played John the Commonweill in the *Satire*, but his complaints came largely from Pauper, played in the *Satire* by Davie McKay.[6] Most of the audience had seen Fleming as John on the previous day, and it is interesting how this translated itself into our perception of the role. How different would the message have been if McKay had played it? Did this particular piece of reform appeal to humanitarian or pragmatic political sentiment?

As a piece of 'practice-based' theatre research it took up the debate started in Hampton Court in 2009 about the double focus on the real king and the player king. It set up a tripartite division: the audience, the actors acting the original audience (King, Bishop, but alas no Queen, pregnant or

otherwise), and the actors acting the original actors. The setting was however resistant. Linlithgow Palace, roofless and unglazed on a freezing June night, may have been the original venue, but the sense of the original space and its acoustics has gone forever. The hall felt vast: it was a surprise later to discover that it was marginally shorter (at 100 ft) and ten feet narrower (at 30ft)[7] than the Great Halls at either Hampton Court[8] or Christ Church Oxford,[9] the other most recent venues for research performances. (I am sorry in retrospect that I did not also see it indoors in Stirling.) We were invited to imagine lavish tapestries and a magnificent roof, but they rapidly faded. The production did not attempt to site the performance physically as it might have been after a banquet, instead choosing to dispose the actors down one side of the hall, and the rather sparse (over-select?) audience facing them down the opposite side. As audience, we were encouraged to think of ourselves as James' courtiers, but it never really felt like that — possibly this would only have worked at a genuine banquet, as in the *Dido* performance at Christ Church. The Player King (James Mackenzie) was seated at one end of this acting area, and James V (Scott Hoatson) at the other, but there was no real sense of hierarchy or of conflicting foci. The eyewitness account suggests that there was a 'scaffald' on which the Player King (was he dressed as a replication of the real king, as in some Royal Entries?)[10] sat on a raised throne, with the Estates seated beneath him, also on the dais (an argument which was not mentioned in the website discussion about the positioning of the Parliament),[11] and with sufficient room for the Poor Man to walk up and down on it making his complaint. Presumably at the original event James V sat on his own dais at the opposite end of the hall in front of a roaring fire in the Renaissance fireplace, and it was a real challenge for the Poor Man to locate him at that distance.

As the end of the play pointed out, nothing immediately came of it. In the course of the next two years, both Cromwell and James V were dead: 'So', said Lyndsay, 'I had to write a different sort of play, for a Scotland without a king'. One immediately wondered quite how different the play that we have was from its predecessor.

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The video of the performance is online at <http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/filmed-performances/interlude-filmed-performance/>.

1. *Medieval Drama: An Anthology* edited Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 538-40. Online at <http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/letter-and-nootes.pdf>.
2. Online at <http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/S3E-1540-Interlude-linlithgow-and-stirling.pdf>.
3. Described as 'a performance about the research process' at <http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/filmed-performances/interlude-filmed-performance/>.
4. Online at <http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/category/david-lyndsay/>.
5. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cumbria/content/articles/2005/03/02/carlisle_cursing_stone_feature.shtm>.
6. Greg Walker writes about the difference between the characters in 'More Thoughts about John the Commonweal and Pauper' on the website at <http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/More-Thoughts-about-John-the-Commonweal-and-Pauper.pdf>.
7. Dimensions from David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross *The castellated and domestic architecture of Scotland, from the twelfth to the eighteenth century* (Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1887) 488. I could not find any more recent measurements.
8. *The Play of the Weather* in 2009, and Skelton's *Magnyfycence* in 2010; see <http://stagingthehenriciancourt.brookes.ac.uk/> and <http://stagingthehenriciancourt.brookes.ac.uk/resources/magnyfycence.html>.
9. 'Performing *Dido*', the Early Drama at Oxford (EDOX) project's staging on Saturday 21 September 2013 of William Gager's *Dido* (1583) directed by Elisabeth Dutton and Matthew Monaghan, and Christopher Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage* performed by Edward's Boys from King Edward VI School (Stratford-upon-Avon), directed by Perry Mills. See <http://edox.org.uk/00projects/performing-dido/>.
10. See Sarah Carpenter 'Plays and Playcoats: A Courtly Interlude Tradition in Scotland?' *Comparative Drama 46:4* (2012) 475–96, at 484–7, where she points out that the records suggest the Player King wore a theatrical version of James V's 'robe royal'.
11. 'Can parliament happen on the platea?' at <http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/category/research-questions/>.