ROYAL THRONE, ROYAL BED:
John Heywood and Spectacle

Richard Axton

Heywood's only spectacular stage direction comes in *A Play of Love:*[1]

> *Here the vyse cometh in ronnyng sodenly aboute the place among the audyens with a hye copyn tank on his hed full of squybs fyred, cryeng* 'Water, water, fyre, fyre, fyre, water, water, fyre' ... 1297 *sd*

Real fire in the theatre is one of the most powerful fears an audience can experience. This eye-catching, heart-stopping display of fireworks brilliantly enlivens a play which, in most respects, resembles a formal debate. Such a dangerous effect of apparent improvisation needs to be skilfully practised to avoid disaster, and it is interesting that the vocal signals are carefully — even metrically — scored to discipline the visual effect of the actor running about:

> Water, water, / fyre, fyre, fyre,
> Water, water, / fyre.

The Vice of Heywood's play, rushing about under a high conical hat that shoots out firecrackers, is following an ancient tradition in making a spectacle of himself. *OED* cites as the earliest occurrence Richard Rolle's translation (c.1340) of Psalm 39: 'Hoppynge and daunceynge of tumblers and herlotis, and other spectakils'.[2] In *The Four PP*, Heywood tests the athletic skill of his actors with a formal hopping contest. In *A Play of Love* the 'harlot' (a unisex term at this date) making a spectacle of himself is likely to have been the playwright himself.

This firework display is only slightly less dangerous than the one in *Castle of Perseverance* which requires the actor playing Belial to have gunpowder burning in pipes in his hands and in his arse. Compared with the devils' munitions factory at Châteaudun, described by Graham Runnalls, England's best looks tame.

In *Love*, played by four actors before an audience (probably of lawyers) in a London great hall, the Vice's squibs are the only visual point of reference. Sudden and spectacular, they are also a sign of something unseen, off stage. The Vice reports that a house is on fire in the street outside. This news successfully punctures the complacency of Lover-Loved, sending him rushing from the acting place to discover the fate of

his beloved. Though the cynic's stratagem is quite nasty, the distinctive feature of Heywood's Vice is not so much his *viciousness* as his being full of *devices*.

The Vice has a double function here: he is both the spectacle and its interpreter. The two functions are often combined in fifteenth-century street pageants, which fit *OED*'s primary definition of *spectacle* as 'a specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature, especially one on a large scale, forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment for those viewing it'. Typically, the costumed figure of a prophet or a long-dead English king would explain his appearance and deliver moral advice. More often, the device or spectacle had separate exposition — verses inscribed or read aloud or both. Heywood himself was reader of Latin verses expounding a spectacle pageant at St Paul's Cathedral for Queen Mary's coronation in 1553.[3] For the meeting of Emperor Charles V and Henry VIII in 1522, the City of London paid Heywood's wife's father, John Rastell, to construct a spectacular pageant in Cheapside near his printing shop. Over the Conduit 'there was builded a place like heaven, curiously painted with clouds, orbs, stars, and hierarchies of angels'.[4]

Indoors, a similar device could occupy roof space. For the visit of Francis I to Greenwich Palace, on 6 May 1527, in the disguising hall at the Long House in the tiltyard there was an astrological ceiling design showing twelve zodiac signs and seven planets.[5] It formed a setting for a 'pageant of the father of heaven', apparently devised by Rastell, with model figures. Spectacle was joined to music: eight choristers sang English songs. The allegorical meaning of the harmony in the heavens and peaceful summer weather on earth was expounded in a Latin oration extolling the friendship of England and France: Henry was praised for granting peace, Francis for desiring it. The speaker was a youth clad in blue silk gown scattered with golden eyes, in the guise of Mercury. He announced that Jupiter, unable to decide the relative merits of Love and Riches, had appointed Henry VIII as judge.[6]

Father Rastell and son-in-law Heywood probably worked together at Greenwich. This aspect of Heywood as a kind of English Vitruvius, a maker of masks and machines, was recalled thirty years later by Ben Jonson in his *Tale of a Tub*.[7] What happened to the construction, the Greenwich Father-in-Heaven with 'the weather'? Even if it was not recycled in Heywood's *Play of the Weather*, the device surely suggested a scenario for the play. In the same way a snapping dragon or hobbyhorse or Easter

sepulchre provided groundplot for traditional parish drama. The history of stage properties is a sort of subplot to the history of texts. *Weather* is the only play of Heywood's six to have 'a specially prepared display of a more or less public nature'. This is the throne of Jupiter. It dominates Heywood's theatrical space and is the control centre of any production and of any interpretation.

The commonest way that Tudor interludes, hall-based and often minimally provided with scenic props, provide for the audience's need for spectacle is to 'bring in a disguising'. The 'bace daunce' in Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres*, performed by 'wylde Irissh Portyngales' for Lucres's 'lokynge on', is the first extant example in our English household drama.[8] Heywood follows Medwall in making his fictional space co-extensive with the hall, the space occupied by actors and audience alike. Even in *Johan Johan*, with its density of 'realistic' reference, the trestle table, the stools, the fire in the hearth, the pie itself, are all features of the dining hall. Any notion of the spectacular in the play must focus on the onanistic antics of John John chafing his wax candle to stop the hole in his wife's bucket. 'Merry' John Heywood, knowing how readily a Tudor audience would pick up verbal or visual *double entendre*, can be trusted to put the *tacle* back into spectacle.

The Play of the Weather combines these techniques of French farce with the tradition of royal pageantry, so that the spectators focus on a single visual property: the throne in which Jupiter appears in majesty to his mortal subjects. This simple, potent, theatrical idea transforms the hall into a model of the Presence Chamber. Greg Walker describes the effect:

> In one part of the hall sits Jupiter in his elaborate throne. Around him is the privileged domain of the politically powerful. Admission to it is governed by Merry Report who, on the opposite side of the hall guards a notional Chamber door. Each of the suitors must first appeal to him before either being granted the freedom to cross the place to Jupiter or told to leave via the screen doors.[9]

The throne is clearly distant from the door; it is said to be 'yonder', and some of Heywood's seven-line stanzas look well calculated to allow for travelling time across the hall. The throne's vertical dimension is not mentioned in dialogue until the last line, when Jupiter says he will *ascend* to his throne celestial. Whether the god climbed or was hoisted we cannot know. Rastell's pageant in the Greenwich banqueting hall had a 'caryag of the ffather' (a throne with hoist?).[10] The York God of Doomsday in the

Mercers' pageant had a mechanical throne which he 'sall sitte vppon when he sall sty vp to heuen'.[11]

The elevated throne contains a simple theatrical idea: the power to condescend, hear pleas, and pass judgement. Jupiter, King of Gods declares that the gods in heaven have ceded to him the resolution of their conflict in the 'hye parlement', a conflict between frosty Saturn, sunny Phoebus, rainy Phoebe, and windy Aeolus. In order to learn what his mortal subjects have to say about the weather, he engages Merry Report as his usher to receive suitors and report their pleas. Each of the eight voices a selfish interest in securing a special sort of weather. Having heard them, the King of the Gods wisely decides to grant no monopolies and to balance mortal interests by mixing the weather. The result is that 'we shall have the weather even as it was'.

The national meteorological obsession is such that it has taken scholarship a little while to wake up to the likelihood that this delightful piece is not just about reforming the weather.[12] But to guess its true subject, we need to know more than we do about the play's auspices and date of performance. There is no external evidence, except for publication in 1533. Internal evidence says this was a supper entertainment in the household of some nobleman or bishop. Scholarly opinion divides as to whether or not 'my lord' could refer to the King.[13] If you think Henry VIII was present to see his celestial counterpart this will affect your sense of the play's tone and consequently your interpretation of its allegory. The fictional action can be interpreted in relation to at least three sets of historical concerns within the period 1527 to 1533.

The earliest possible date, 1527, follows smartly on the Greenwich entertainment and relates the play to reforms of the royal household begun by Wolsey and spelled out in the Statutes made by the king at Eltham in January 1526/7. The Statutes tried to regulate access to the monarch's Presence Chamber. They list the duties and protocol of the Grooms of the Body, who attended the king in his Privy Chamber, the Squires of the Chamber, the Yeoman Ushers, who must 'avoyde and purge the haut-pace at the King's chamber-doore of all manner servauntes, raskalles, boyes, and other'.[14] Heywood himself was 'sewer' — in charge of seating guests — in Edward VI's household and maybe earlier.[15] From this point of view it is easy to see the theatrical space within the hall and throne as representing the royal Household and Merry Report as parodic of the office of Yeoman Usher.[16]

A date later than 1527 is required to take account of the play's frame of political reference; Jupiter has recently assembled a *parlyament*, whose warring gods 'have in conclusyon holly surrendryd / Into our handes ... The full of theyr powrs' (71—74). Following Wolsey's disgrace (November 1529), after six years without a parliament, six sessions were held within three years.[17] Greg Walker places *Weather* around 1530, at a time when the king intended to have no more favourites and 'was resolved to manage his own affairs'.[18] He sees Heywood as supporting a mystic notion of royal absolutism and ridiculing the idea of reform.

A painted canopy above Jupiter's throne with visual emblems of the weather-making gods might make the audience wonder about the historical identities of these Olympian personages — Saturn (frost), Phoebus (sun), Phoebe (rain), Aeolus (wind).[19] But the main tenor of the iconography of the 'heavenly' throne must surely have been to glorify absolute kingly power. The direction that 'the god hath a song played in his trone' (178 SD) indicates that Jupiter's throne, like God's in the Corpus Christi pageant plays, was spacious enough to hold musicians. At the end, as Jupiter ascends his 'trone celestyall', he commands all on earth 'to synge moste joyfully' (1252).

The effect of music would undoubtedly be solemn and festive, especially in the presence of Henry VIII. Royal presence cannot be assumed, of course, and there is a danger in taking Jupiter too much at his own valuation. The audience cannot ignore the extent to which their attention is held and guided by Merry Report and by his obsession with sex. These considerations lead to the third set of concerns.

It was a sense that the play's bawdy language is specifically and insistently topical that led Peter Happé and me to the hitherto unrecognised theme of marriage. We found that the jokes contain a great deal of speculation about Henry's great matter of a new wife. We also found sequences of verbal parody of the style 'supreme head'. The title *supremum caput* became controversial in January 1531/2, but was not established in the Act of Supremacy until 1534, by which time *Weather* had been published. We suggested performance at Christmas 1532 or Shrovetide 1533, i.e. very soon before publication. At Christmas Anne Boleyn learned she was pregnant, on 25 January Henry married her in secret. On Easter Sunday 15 April she appeared in public as Queen. At her coronation in June she was six months pregnant with the much-looked-for heir.

The question of marriage is introduced early in the play by Merry Report's apparently gratuitous mention of a wife and wives to the first and second suitors (Gentleman and Merchant). This strain of provocation culminates in his offer of the Gentlewoman to Jupiter with the insinuation:

> And if it be your pleasure to *marry* ... 782

A second clue is Merry Report's pointed swearing 'by Saint Anne' (three times) and once 'by Saint An-tony'. Heywood always chooses his saints' names pointedly. An agenda of sex, marriage, changing partners, insatiable wives, impotent husbands, is planted in the audience's minds almost subliminally by the Vice's virtuoso spate of double-entendre. Merry Report puts a stop to the economic dispute between Windmiller and Watermiller by hi-jacking the language of milling. He casts himself as the hen-pecked and impotent husband, whose 'stones wax right thin', having as he says, 'pecked a good pecking iron to nought'. The double-entendre is so insistent and protracted (even by Heywood's standards) that the audience is prepared to hear bawdy significance in any activity. Can it be fortuitous that the Schoolboy is called Little Dick — and that he asks Jupiter to help him make snow balls?

The climax of this sexual innuendo is the appearance of the Gentlewoman, whom Merry Report immediately treats as a sexual object. She is confused at finding 'so mych people' (767), an expression which takes in both the audience and the suitors, who crowd the audience chamber, waiting for the king to appear. At this point Jupiter is apparently not visible to the suitors and we must suppose that curtains have been drawn about his throne.

The situation is compromising — or Merry Report makes sure that the audience interpret it thus:

Gentylwoman. I know not how to passe into the god now.
Merry Report. No, but ye know how he may passe into you.
Gentlewoman. I pray you, let me in at the backe syde.
Merry Report. Ye, shall I so, and your foresyde so wyde?
Nay, not yet! But syns ye love to be alone,
We twayne wyll into a corner anone 768—74

Merry Report's relentless innuendo and the spectacle of his lewd antics with the Gentlewoman transform the scene. Without any change of locus, royal throne chamber becomes royal bed chamber.

The play world corresponds to the world of the royal household in that only the king has his own private space; the best Merry Report can offer is

a surreptitious 'corner'. Indeed this fantastical knave of dark corners has a one-track mind.[20] Leaving the Gentlewoman standing, as it were in the Presence Chamber, he goes towards the curtained throne as if to the Privy Chamber, to see 'Whether that the god will be brought in love' (779).

What follows is the only intimate exchange between Merry Report and Jupiter and it leads us to understand that Jupiter has dropped off to sleep:

> My lorde, how now, loke uppe lustely
> Here is a derlynge come, by saynt Antony!
> And yf yt be your pleasure to mary ... 780—2

If the audience can't see Jupiter, because his throne curtains are closed, then this inference is solely in our minds. But Jupiter's dignity isn't compromised and he rebukes the impertinence in a measured quatrain ('Sonne, that is not the thynge at this tyme ment' 786) and remains impassive within his own royal presence.

When Merry Report returns from the place we must now think of as the curtained royal bed he tells the Gentlewoman a fantastic tale of what is going on in the space we are not allowed to see: Jupiter is busy 'makynge of a new moone'. There are no marks for guessing what is Jupiter's *thing* that will *spring* as the result of the attentions of this new moon. I quote the Axton—Happé commentary on lines 782—815:

> The new moon, Jupiter's queen of the night, is clearly Anne Boleyn (hence the oaths by saints Anne and Antony) and the old moon Queen Katherine, whose 'goodness' is 'wasted' (a sad reference to her age and misfortunes in childbearing). This is the 'moste mater' of the 'grete wete' — the storm over Henry's divorce. On a literal level, this picks up the reference to recent heavy rains which have spoiled the harvests (We635) and which will be reformed. The theme is underscored by proverbial weather lore (Whiting M645):
>
> 'When the new moon lies on her back
> She sucks the wet into her lap'
>
> and there is also a possible play on 'making moan' (complaining) in love-songs of the period. The future of the *reign* is punningly seen to lie in the possible pregnancy of Anne Boleyn ('Ye get no *rayne* tyll her arysynge') — the 'thing' which will 'spryng' is both a new heir and Henry's waned virility, in which confidence is equivocally expressed:
>
> By saint Anne, he goeth to work even boldy!
> I think him wise enough, for he looketh oldly.[21]

Double talk feeds prurient imaginations. We are denied spectacle, made to speculate, as Henry's court did historically, about the king's sex life.

Jupiter's 'throne', then, is a complex property, lying within a number of force fields: the religious (god-in-majesty), the political (king-in-parliament), the public (king-in-household), the private (king-in-'privy'-chamber). Modern English notions of public and private domains — the tabloid press notwithstanding — really don't apply, which is why it would be so hard for the set designer of a modern production to convey the complexities of tone and meaning in the play. The architectural layout in Henry's royal palaces offers an analogy, though not an exact one. Henry VII's innovations to the royal Household, probably carried out in about 1495,[22] separated off the Privy Chamber from the two outer, public chambers: the Great or Watching Chamber with the Yeomen, and the Presence Chamber with its throne where the court gathered. Private life became possible and access to the royal body was strictly regulated. In terms of the architecture of royal lodgings, Heywood's momentary conflation of throne and bed is a ludicrous piece of cheek.

The cheekiness has some satirical point, however, if we look across the English Channel to Francis I, who had recently (in 1527) revived the legislative session known as the *lit de justice*. The ceremonial paraphernalia used by the French kings can be traced back to fourteenth-century royal *séances*. The *lit* was set up to display the king in royal majesty, cordoned off in a 'royal space'. Following the Louis XII's renovations of the Grande Chambre de Parlement, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the *lit* consisted of a *canopied throne* with gold and blue drapery, two large *side drapes*, and *five embroidered pillows*. For the two *lits de justice* convoked in 1527 Francis was enthroned more ostentatiously than before on a high dais, elevated above the parquet by seven steps.[23]

If there was one thing that motivated Henry VIII almost as much as anxiety about producing a son, it was keeping up with Francis I. And, of course, it was the occasion of the peace made between England and France in 1527 that brought Francis to London and Greenwich, to the astrological ceiling and to Rastell's device of Jupiter and Mercury.

Sarah Hanley has showed that this *constitutional* assembly was an *innovation* by Francis I and that it was resented by parliamentarians. As part of the French king's propaganda, it was a public display of his absolute authority over parliament by an appeal to the Estates. According to the Clerk of Parliament, the assembly had been called out of good will towards the king's subjects and the *chose publique* of the kingdom, and to discharge

the duty of his office by revealing to them recent events. Though he had consulted several high dignitaries, but found that he could act on his own in this matter, nevertheless, he wished to consult his subjects and had decided to assemble them in this forum to ask their aid and loyal counsel.[24] Plenty of scope for irony here.

The ever-present dimension of international rivalry opens up further kinds of meaning in *The Play of the Weather*. Possibly Jupiter's throne had seven steps like Francis's and the suitors (seven plus the boy) could have been ranked there 'each man in his degree' as Jupiter says. Even if the detail does not convince the similarity of general conception is striking. And, considering Heywood's liking for wordplay, it must be possible that the humour lurking in the old medieval term *lit de justice* applied to Francis's prestigious new constitutional assembly appealed to the playwright's theatrical imagination. At any rate that is the way Merry Report's mind works. Heywood certainly allows Jupiter to be expositor of his own spectacular glory but he also makes sure that we are constantly distracted by the merry harlot hopping and dancing, making a spectacle of himself. As interpreter of the royal spectacle, Merry Report reminds us that inside all that heavenly glory sits — or sleeps — a very mortal monarch on his throne — or bed — or something purely ceremonial and theatrical consisting of five cushions, a canopy and curtains, and from which justice is dispensed.

University of Cambridge

NOTES

1. Printed 1534. *The Plays of John Heywood* edited by Richard Axton and Peter Happé (Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge, 1991).
2. A spectacle of female dancing offended the pious Henry VI, according to John Blacman's *Memoirs* (STC 3123, *c.* 1471, printed *c.* 1510). 'A certain gret lord brought before Henry VI at Christmas a dance or show (*chorea vel spectaculum*) of young women with bare breasts, but he angrily averted his eyes, turned his back on them and went out to his chamber with the words, "Fy, fy, for shame, forsoothe ye be to blame"'. Cited by Ian Lancashire *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain to 1558* (Toronto UP and Cambridge UP, 1984) No. 244 and dated by him *c.* 1422—45.
3. See *Heywood* 8.
4. Lancashire *Dramatic Texts and Records* No. 721; Sydney Anglo *Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Policy* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969) 196—97.

5. Anglo *Spectacle* 217 considers this the work of Hans Holbein and Nicholas Kratzer, the 'kynges Astronimer'.
6. Anglo *Spectacle* 220.
7. Sig. ii^{v} 72—4, see *Heywood* 5.
8. *Fulgens 2*: 380ff. There is no indication that this spectacle pastime is thematically linked with the debate, though Meg Twycross's production skilfully mirrored the central situation by having two male maskers flanking a masked woman dancer. See Meg Twycross 'The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays' in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Theatre* edited Richard Beadle (Cambridge UP, 1994) 69.
9. Greg Walker *Plays of Persuasion* (Cambridge UP, 1991) 137.
10. Anglo *Spectacle* 222.
11. Quoted by Richard Beadle *Cambridge Companion* **94**. Meg Twycross notes that 'many of the cosmic plays call for lifts' (*Cambridge Companion* 48).
12. See David Bevington 'Is John Heywood's *Play of the Weather* Really about the Weather?' *Renaissance Drama 7* (1964) 11—19.
13. See Walker *Plays of Persuasion* 134.
14. 'Articles devised by the King's Highness ... Apud Eltham' PRO E/36/231, 25.
15. *Heywood* 8.
16. Walker *Plays of Persuasion d* 51.
18. Walker *Plays of Persuasion* 165 quotes Chapuys reporting Tuke.
19. See *Heywood* 289.
20. Merry Report might be seen as a fantastical knave of dark corners, for he seems obsessed by the word (e.g. 245—46, 720, 773). *OED* s.v. *corner* 6 ('a secret or remote place') was current at this time of furtive court sexuality.
21. *Heywood* 298.
22. David Starkey *The Reign of Henry VIII* (Collins & Brown, London, 1985) 25.
23. Sarah Hanley *The Lit de Justice of the Kings of France* (Princeton UP, 1984) 52—61.
24. Hanley *Lit de Justice* 4.

RÉSUMÉ EN FRANÇAIS

Royal Throne, Royal Bed: John Heywood and Spectacle

D'habitude dans la critique, l'œuvre dramatique de John Heywood est considérée comme une espèce de débat, sans intérêt visuel. Pourant, sa pièce la plus ambitieuse, *The Play of the Weather*, offre un tableau spectaculaire de la royauté absolue. Dans cette pièce, le roi d'Angleterre est représenté sous l'image de Jupiter, roi des Olympiens, recevant les pétitions de ses sujets. De quelle façon la présence royale, fut elle mise en scène? D'après nous, le trône de Jupiter et son 'ciel' furent recyclés du décor d'un spectacle de 1527, conçu et construit jpar John Rastell (le beau-père de Heywood), au palais de Greenwich à l'occasion de la visite de François I. Dans *The Play of the Weather* le trône à rideaux de Jupiter fait allusion au lit du roi. A travers des jeux de mots, Heywood fait des insinuations à la liaison amoureuse de Henry VIII avec Anne Boleyn. Par ailleurs, il se moque du *lit de justice* — c'est à dire, de l'assemblée royale récemment réinventée par François I.