

**ALLEGORY IN THE INTERLUDES:
Chronology, Taxonomy, and *Gorboduc* (again)**

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This essay will look at the nature and function of allegory in some sixteenth-century interludes. It will address briefly the chronology traditionally ascribed to the allegorical drama by literary critics, and will seek to answer a number of questions that grow out of the conventional scholarship on allegory as a literary genre or mode. Must allegory be always and only conservative and didactic in nature, capable only of repackaging the already-known in a more (or sometimes less) accessible or striking form? Or is there room for more experimental or playful forms of allegory that unsettle rather than confirm accepted orthodoxies?¹ And how far do both modern and sixteenth-century definitions of allegory account for the kinds of allegorical drama that survive from the period? In the course of the essay I shall look briefly at a number of interludes before focusing in the second part on *Gorboduc*, a play which, thanks both to its own hybridity and to the richness of the surviving evidence concerning its initial performances, provides an invaluable case-study of the allegorical drama in production.

Most critical accounts of allegory begin with an apology, motivated by a sense that it is a rather unfashionable and in some sense undignified form that needs to be rescued from critical neglect and disparagement. It is generally implied that this neglect is a failure on the part of contemporary criticism; but it may also be a function of allegory itself, of its elusiveness as a coherent subject for analysis. For, even in defending allegory from its detractors, many critics contrive to damn it with faint praise (as a limited form that English writers grew out of following the Reformation and which only a few rare souls have attempted since), or at best to cherry-pick certain privileged forms (almost exclusively poetic or prose texts rather than plays) to salvage from the generality, leaving the rest in the critical gloom².

Allegory occupies a territory somewhere between metaphor and simile on one side and historical narrative on the other, between symbolism and parable, between irony and synecdoche: distinct from but potentially partaking of all of these things. Hence it defies clear analysis and the kinds of definitive generic definition beloved of literary taxonomists. It is a 'dark

conceit', a mode of looking askance, of saying one thing and meaning another, rather than a combination of formal characteristics.³ Conventional taxonomies identify various sub-species of allegory. James Wimsatt, for example, felt that modern criticism had identified three kinds: *topical* ('in which fictional characters and a fictional story represent in some manner the real actions of historical people'), *scriptural* ('written in imitation of the allegory found by medieval exegetes throughout the Bible'), and *personification* ('in which the actions of persons representing abstract concepts portray events of general human significance').⁴ Of these, the topical was, for him, the least interesting, because, contrary to the desiderata of New Criticism, it was time-bound and specific rather than universalising, and was resolutely extra-literary in its resonances. The scriptural mode seemingly died out after following the Reformation. Only personification allegory really interested him; but even here he was hardly overwhelming in his appreciation of its possibilities in the sixteenth century, seeing it as an essentially simple form, baldly didactic in intent, and bound to a particular catholic world-view. It enjoyed a brief Indian summer of popularity in the mid-century, culminating in Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, but largely dwindled as a mainstream form thereafter. As we shall see, both the chronology and the hierarchy of the universal over the contemporary reverse the judgements of sixteenth-century commentators for whom the form remained evidently very attractive throughout the century, and for whom topical readings maintained their fascination, taking precedence over the timeless and universal in most surviving accounts.

Such modern, text-based readings as Wimsatt's make a number of assumptions that are presumed to apply to all manifestations of allegory, but which misrepresent the dramatic form fundamentally. In such readings allegory — and especially personification allegory — is assumed to be, not only a second-order affair, a means of demonstrating another prior, primary truth,⁵ but also essentially disposable, only one among many possible ways of demonstrating that truth. Thus, to take a familiar example, Everyman's ambush by death and subsequent journey to the grave might, it is implied, equally well be expressed by Humankind's sea voyage to the Isle of Judgement, in which the Luggage of Life had to be progressively jettisoned to keep the Ship of Spiritual Health afloat, or by Christian's climb up the Mountain of Salvation accompanied by a rapidly dwindling team of unreliable Sherpas of Worldly Felicity. The medium is largely irrelevant; it is the para-textual message that is assumed to be

paramount. This is, of course, a profoundly text-centred reading.⁶ There is no sense here of a response to the performative nature of allegorical drama, or a recognition of its reliance upon extra-textual factors for its allegorical effects.

While it might just be valid to claim that writing an allegorical narrative another way may not materially affect the para-narrative to which it points (although even this is a highly contestable claim, as Langland's constant reworking of *Piers Plowman* in an attempt to address precisely the para-narrative he had in mind amply attests) this is manifestly untrue of a dramatic performance. To play *Everyman* any other way, even with the script as we have it, would, of course, change profoundly what any given viewer might take away from the performance. Casting, costume, stage business, playing style, and most obviously of all the context of performance and the nature of the audience, all contribute to the experience of dramatic allegory. Where performance is concerned it is never just 'there in the text'.

So, we can make a number of basic observations about dramatic allegory that serve to unsettle the conventional evolutionary narrative in which this naïve, simplistic, conservative, essentially catholic form gave way to more complex, self-aware forms after the Reformation. We can, of course, point to the continued popularity of personification allegory, long after the disappearance of the catholic dispensation that apparently gave it its *raison d'être*.⁷ The mode is still evident in the post-reformation plays: *Lusty Juventus* (1550), W. Wager's *The Longer Thou Livest, The More Fool Thou Art* (1559) and *Enough is as Good as a Feast* (1560), *The Trial of Treasure* (1565), *Horestes* (1567), *Like Will to Like* (1568), and seems to be still alive and kicking in *Liberality and Prodigality*, performed in the Chapel Royal in 1601,⁸ and Thomas Tomkis's *Lingua: Or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses*, performed in Cambridge, probably around 1607, and revealingly analysed by Sarah Carpenter at the 2002 METH meeting in Nottingham.⁹ Such texts show that personification allegory was as useful to protestant ideologues as it was to their catholic forebears and opponents.

We can also stress the influence of allegory on the work of playwrights who, if the conventional narrative is to be believed, should have known better than to dally with such an outdated mode; of whom Shakespeare provides the most obvious example. Hamlet, for example, seems to be talking about an explicitly allegorical theatre when he says that drama should show 'Virtue her own feature, Scorn her own image, and the very

age and body of the time his form and pressure' (3:2.22–4) — especially if, following the first folio, we capitalise the initial letters of all the proper nouns. More certainly the presence of allegorical passages in otherwise 'historical' dramas: the gardeners in *Richard II*, Rumour in *II Henry IV*, and the affectionate cameo role given to Time in *The Winter's Tale*, suggests that Shakespeare found good use for the mode throughout his career.

We can also challenge directly the suggestion that allegory necessarily implies simplicity or straightforward didacticism. At times even ostensibly simple personification allegory can achieve a playful semiotic richness that effectively refutes the suggestion that it is a naïve or unsophisticated mode. When, in Lindsay's *Satire of the Thrie Estaitis*, the Sowtar and Taylour drink with Chastity, and their wives respond with horrified belligerence, Lindsay is clearly — and very knowingly — keeping at least two antifeminist mythologies in play at once, providing his audience with a dramatic experience that is both complex and doubly pleasurable *because* it is complex and allows no simple interpretation of its 'message'. On one level the wives are confirming the stereotype of woman as nymphomaniac through their distress at the thought that their husbands are literally entertaining chastity as a lifestyle choice. And the tradesmen's evident pleasure in the Virtue's company suggests their relief at the prospect of release from the obligation to pay the marital debt to their demanding spouses. So we can laugh at the wives for their correct understanding of their own allegorical situation and their husbands for being so sexually timid. Strip away the name of Chastity for a moment, though, and respond purely to what we see on stage, and the scene offers an equally conventional cameo of two jealous wives reacting to the news that their spouses are carousing in the pub with an attractive young woman. So we can also laugh at the women because they are completely *misreading* the situation at the same time. We might also, if Chastity is played by a young boy or youth, notice a potentially homophobic (or conceivably homophile) subtext, a possibility given added weight by the conventional association between tailors, especially women's tailors, and effeminacy. And we might, if we choose, laugh at both the men's self-revealed anxieties and their wives' discomfort as a result of all three implied 'meanings' of the scene, without necessarily being fully aware of the implied contradiction in what we are doing. Finally we can laugh again when Chastity reveals her name, an action that ought to resolve the wives' doubts and restore domestic harmony, but in fact only prompts the neat pay-off line:

I pray God nor he work on the[e] vengeance,
 For I luifit never Chastitie all my dayes. 1348–9

The wives, then, hate Chastity because, like allegory itself, she seems to be one thing, but ‘means’ another. She is both what she represents and also implicitly something else, here the exact reverse.¹⁰ Such a scene allows for the extraction of no simple didactic message, and gains its dramatic potency as a direct result of that fact.

So dramatic allegory fits neither the chronology nor the taxonomies suggested by conventional scholarship. It was not a simplistic form - not even in its overtly personified mode - and it did not dwindle after the mid-century. And its failure to conform to the conventional critical models is, I think a necessary consequence of the fact that dramatic allegory is actually a fundamentally different thing to literary allegory, with a very different relationship to its para-text, and to the processes of personification and abstraction it deploys.

As I have suggested elsewhere, the allegorical mode in drama tends to concretise its abstractions.¹¹ It provides a point of focus for an audience in the body of the actor, regardless of how abstract or abstruse, indeed how alienatingly *other* is the role performed. When personified in an actor, that otherness is always at least partially made familiar and identifiable. It was this dangerously affective, empathetic quality of drama, of course, that horrified critics of the religious plays, from the author of *The Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* to John Bale and beyond, and which helped to fuel the anti-theatrical prejudice more generally. Such critics recognised that the performance of the actor always threatened to distract the attention of the spectator from the nature of the role, and to engage their sympathies or antipathies on an emotional level to the detriment of the wider agenda of the play. As the *Tretise* protested, spectators who wept at a Crucifixion pageant were more likely to be engaging with the apparent bodily suffering of the actor playing Christ than with the para-narrative of their own sinfulness towards which the drama claimed to be pointing them, and so responding not ‘of þeire gode feiþ wiþinneforþe, but more of þeire sizt wiþouteforþ’.¹² The human medium, that is, had a strong tendency if not to become the message, at least to confuse it in ways that ideologues found frustrating. And it did so in the interludes not least because actors, and especially those playing the Vices, were likely at any moment to break out into other forms of performance — acrobatics, dance, song, mime, banter with the audience (both scripted and unscripted) — that would further dissolve the distinction between performer and role, and so confuse the

clarity of the allegorical para-text through direct interaction of actor and audience. Hence Hamlet's pointed injunction that, in his allegorical theatre, those actors playing the clowns should 'speak no more than is set down for them' (3:2.37–8).

So, while it may well be true, as Bob Godfrey has argued, that 'there is no such thing as personality represented on the stage', as 'thematic considerations ... attached as they inevitably are to character, will always sustain a tendency towards interpretation of ... [an] abstract kind'.¹³ It is also the case that in the current context this does not really matter. The act of impersonation itself is — or so critics feared — enough to engage spectators, who in turn infer a personality to accompany the persona. As structuralist and poststructuralist theory have insisted, the signifier not the signified is the active, promiscuous element in the equation, creating meanings through its web of relations with other signifiers. The same must also be true of drama, where the principal signifier is the human form.¹⁴ The fact that one is watching an actor speaking — short tall, attractive, ugly, dressed in a certain way, performing naturalistically or emblematically — engages attention in and of itself, generating a host of meanings that may or may not be aligned securely with the grain of the text they are performing. Thus the gender of the eponymous embodiment of the state in *Respublica* matters profoundly, as the very fact that one sees a woman (or a man playing a woman) on stage arouses a range of expectations about proper and improper social conduct and bodily decorum that would not have been present if the role was gendered male, which in turn have a significant impact on the range of meanings concerning the nature of the state that sixteenth century spectators might have drawn from a production. Allegory, then, is seldom simple and never pure when it is performed through the impure medium of a human actor. Simply by playing a role an actor gives it form, humanity, personality, gender — and all of these can be complications if all one wants the role to do is show that *Pride Comes Before a Fall*, or *Patience overcomes Ire*.

An extreme version of this concretising tendency, this following of the medium rather than the message, is the well-known and possibly apocryphal account of the elderly resident of Cartmel in Lancashire who, when asked to say what he knew about Christ, recalled having seen 'that man you spake of once in a play at Kendal, called Corpus Christi Play, where there was a man on a tree and blood ran down'.¹⁵ For this spectator the drama was all accident and no substance, no more and no less than the physical action presented on stage before him. This was a play about a

man on a tree bleeding. It gestured nowhere else, not even to the historical events it sought to represent. His nugatory review is thus probably the exception that proves Northrop Frye's rule that all acts of critical interpretation are of necessity exercises in allegorisation, attempts to find meaning beyond the surface narrative.¹⁶

But it is to the rule rather than the exception that we must look if we are to appreciate the power, and the value, that allegory was perceived to have by sixteenth century commentators and practitioners. At risk of trotting out an old war-horse for one more canter, it is worth looking again at *Gorboduc*, the supposed harbinger of dramatic modernity, for it both shows how the historical and the allegorical modes could coexist symbiotically, and demonstrates the importance of topicality for the contemporary reception of such plays. In this sense *Gorboduc* is a representative late interlude as well as an early tragedy.

'The Argument of the Tragedy', printed by John Daye in his edition of 1570, presents the play as entirely historical in theme and content.

Gorboduc king of Brittain, divided his realme in his life time to his sonnes, Ferrex and Porrex. The sonnes fell to disention. The yonger killed the elder. The mother that more dearely loved the elder, for revenge killed the yonger. The people moved with the crueltie of the fact, rose in rebellion and slew both father and mother. The nobilitie assembled and most terribly destroyed the rebels. And afterwards for want of issue of the prince whereby the succession of the crowne became uncertaine, they fell to civill warre, in which both they and many of their issues were slaine, and the land for a along time almost desolate and miserably wasted.¹⁷

There is no whiff of allegory here; no suggestion that the interlude is 'a mirror encleared' or a 'dark conceit' in or through which other matters might be viewed. Yet the production, as the text makes clear, was nonetheless packaged within an allusive, allegorical framework, courtesy of both Daye's printed text and the dumbshows that preceded each act in performance. These brief dumbshows, as we shall see, seem both to extract a nugget of wisdom – a lesson – from the act to follow and present it universalised in its boldest, most didactic form, and to offer a critical mirror through which to view the succeeding action in the light of wider knowledge and experience.

Daye also encouraged his readers to be alive to the allegorical potential of the play by preceding it with a short exercise in personification allegory

of his own. His preface related an account of the allegedly pirated edition of 1565 as the story of a 'fair maid' villainously ravished by a cruel printer, 'disfygured' and 'thrust ... out of doors dishonested' in such a state that 'she came at length home to the sight of her friends, who scant knew her but by a few tokens and marks remaining'.¹⁸ Only Daye's willingness to publish an improved text spared the maiden's shame and the blushes of her embarrassed authors. Through this brief sales pitch dressed up as narrative, readers were effectively alerted to the importance of allegory for this text even before they turned the page and met the first of the all-important dumbshows.

The first dumbshow, we will recall, involves the attempt by six wild men to break a faggot of sticks — a feat that they can only achieve when they divide the faggot and break each stick separately. Daye's prose description of the 'Order' of the dumbshows gives readers what is effectively an allegorical reading of that show in the manner of Origen's 'fourfold way' (striking, if unexpected, evidence of the survival of Wimsatt's 'scriptural' mode of allegory after the mid-century). The account of the first reads:

Hereby was signified that a state knit in unitie doth continue strong against all force. But being divided, is easely destroyed, As befell upon Duke Gorboduc dividing his land to his two sonnes which he before held in Monarchie. And upon the discention of the brethren to whom it was divided. Aiii

The literal, 'historical' meaning of the dumbshow is provided by the action itself, its allegorical meaning within the world of the play by its application to the action in the Act to follow ('As befell upon Duke Gorboduc ...'), and its moral meaning by the general principle or maxim that is extracted from it ('a state knit in unitie doth continue strong ...'). The same principle is applied to each succeeding dumbshow. Thus the second, in which a king refuses wine offered him in a clear glass by a grave counsellor in favour of poison offered him in a gold cup by a handsome youth, is interpreted for us as follows:

Hereby was signified, that as glasse by nature holdeth no poyson, but is clere and may easely be seen through, ne boweth by any arte: So a faythfull counsellour holdeth no treason, but is playne and open, ne yeldeth to any undiscrete affection, but geveth holsome counsel, which the yll advised Prince refuseth. The delightfull golde filled with poyson betokeneth flattery, which under faire seeming of

pleasaunt wordes beareth deadly poyson, which destroyed the Prince that receyveth it. As befell in the two brethren Ferrex and Porrex, who refusing the holsome advise of grave counsellours, credited these yong Paracites, and brought to them selves death and destruction therby. Cii^v

Again the text, describing the action itself, links it to both a piece of timeless wisdom and the specific events of the plot to follow, offering its readers thereby an opportunity to share vicariously the allusive, allegorical experience of witnessing the performance as it happened. All that is lacking is the fourth, highest level of interpretation, the anagogical, and this, it seems, was left to those spectators present at the performance to provide for themselves. For, as we now know, thanks to the discovery by G.W. Bernard of an eye-witness account of the Inner Temple performance of the play in January 1562, there was at least one spectator (and probably many more) prepared to add that fourth level of allegorical interpretation to those suggested in Daye's text.¹⁹ This was a reading (falling into Wimsatt's category of 'topical' allegory) that pointed directly to the context of the performance itself, in the Inner Temple before Lord Robert Dudley and the gathered Common Lawyers, and later at Court before Elizabeth I, and which related the dumbshows to contemporary mysteries: the most contentious political and diplomatic issues of the moment: the Queen's marriage plans and the royal succession.

Ther was a Tragedie played in the Inner temple of the two brethren Porrex and Ferrex, K[ings] of Brytayne betwene whome the father had devyded the Realme, the one slewe the other and the mother slewe the manquill[e]r. It was thus used. Firste wilde men cam in and woulde have broken a fagot, but could not, the stickes they brake being severed. Then cam in a king to whome was geven a clere glasse, and a golden cuppe of golde covered, full of poyson, the glasse he caste under his fote and brake hyt, the poyson he drank of, after cam in mourners.²⁰ The shadowes were declared by the chore[us] first to signifie unytie, the 2 [i.e. the second dumbshow] howe that men refused the certen and toocke the uncerten, wherby was ment that yt was better for the Quene to marye with the L[ord] R[obert Dudley] knowen than with the K[ing] of Sweden. The thryde to declare that cyvill discention bredeth mo[ur]ning. Many things were handled of marriage, and that the matter was to be debated in p[ar]liament, because yt was much banding, but th[at]

hit ought to be determined by the counsel. Ther was also declared howe a straunge duke seying the realme at dyvysion, would have taken upon him the crowne, but the people would none of hytt. And many thinges were saied for the succession to put thinges in certenty. This play was the [blank] daye of January at the courte before the Quene, where none ambassadors were present but the Spanyshe.

The anonymous spectator thus displays an admirable capacity to pursue a contemporary meaning in the play, and especially in the dumbshows. Indeed, he seems to have been interested in the latter even to the exclusion of the play itself, seeing them as the vehicle for the play's deepest, darkest, conceits. He carefully described each of the tableau, the Chorus's exposition of them, and his own topical reading of the action, while he summarised the plot of the play as a whole in two brief sentences. It was, seemingly, the topical allegory that engaged him, rather than either the historical narrative or the universal principles that might be drawn from it.²¹ And he recorded that allegory and its political para-text dutifully in his embryonic chronicle, making the benefits of his insider's exegesis available to whatever future readership he was writing for with evident satisfaction.

The sense of allegory as a covert, coterie mode that offered up its secrets to a select few with the knowledge and discernment to decode them, is, of course, one of the mode's principal pleasures. The idea is there in the word itself, of course, in the sense that allegory speaks 'other than' in the *agora*: whether that is assumed to mean the open assembly or the market place. And it was this aspect of the mode that Boccaccio stressed when he suggested that the allegorist should 'by every effort ... protect [the matters discussed] ... from the gaze of the irreverent, that they cheapen not by too much common familiarity'. The same point was made much later by George Chapman, who described allegory as the mode through which 'Learning hath delighted to hide herself from the base and profane Vulgare'.²² And it was evidently this sense of hidden secrets and stately mysteries that intrigued and delighted many sixteenth-century advocates. George Puttenham provided the lengthiest treatment of this idea. In *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) he discussed allegory among the 'instruments of ornament in every language' that are,

Also in sort abuses of common utterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the ear and also the mind, drawing it from

plainness and simplicity to a certain doubleness, where by our talk is the more guileful and abusing.²³

Yet this subtle abuse, what Puttenham elsewhere called ‘a duplicity of meaning or dissimulation under covert and dark intendments’ was what made allegory so apt for the court, and so effective a weapon in the courtier’s rhetorical arsenal.

The use of this figure is so large, and his vertue of so great efficacie as it is supposed no man can pleasantly utter and perswade without it...in somuch as not onely every common Courtier, but also the gravest counsellour, yea and the most noble and wisest Prince of them all are many times enforced to use it.²⁴

The value of allegory to the courtier has always been assumed to lie in its discretion, its capacity to conceal otherwise dangerous political observations under cover of its dark conceits. It was this protective quality that John Skelton had in mind when he asserted in his own courtly allegory, *Speke Parott* (1520–21) that he had ‘No matter pretendyd, nor nothing enterprysed, / But that *metaphora*, *alegoria* withal, / Shall be his protectyon, his pavys and his wall’.²⁵

But this is really only half of the story. It was not so much, of course, that allegory actually *did* exclude many of its spectators from its hidden meanings, only that it appeared to do so. After all, when his readers failed to follow Skelton’s cryptic political allusions in *Speke Parott*, he spelt out the hidden message for them in ever more explicit detail in a series of supplementary *envoys*.²⁶ What allegory, with its codedness, its subtle drifts and dark intendments, allowed writers and performers to do was to advise their patrons while not appearing to do so, and allow patrons to receive that advice in a non-confrontational context that did not necessitate what current academic jargon would no doubt term ‘demonstrable outcomes’. Elizabeth I did not have to respond formally to *Gorboduc* in the same way that she would to parliamentary petitions to marry or direct requests from her privy councillors to settle the succession. And this meant that, in theory at least, more could be said, and more perhaps received, in an allegorical interlude than in those more formalised modes of royal address. The secret inwardness of courtly allegory was thus one of those enabling fictions that allowed everyone to do the right thing while the stakes were set deliberately low. Only if the producers got the tone wrong and pushed too insistently at a door that had already been firmly closed, or if the recipient was in too prickly a mood to play the game, could the

consequences be more serious, as seems to have happened when Elizabeth took exception to the debate between Juno and Diana over the benefits of marriage presented by the lawyers of Gray's Inn in 1565, and turned to the Spanish ambassador and said, 'This is all against me'.²⁷

It was thus the fiction of exclusiveness created by allegory that allowed everyone to proceed on the tacit assumption that what was happening was not a public address to the monarch but a private affair, a hidden subtext evident only to dramatist and patron. Everyone else was just watching a play, only the elite spectators were assumed to see the additional political subtext. That is, perhaps, why John Daye did not add the topical allusion about the royal marriage to his list of allegorical meanings to *Gorboduc's* dumbshows in the printed text, maintaining the impression that this was an element of the conceit that would remain dark for non-courtly readers.

Allegory's doubleness was thus not so much a means of saying one thing and meaning another, but of being *seen* to say one thing and mean the other too. Its deceptiveness was deliberately visible, a mask worn askance to reveal the face of the wearer, rather than a real attempt to conceal. In this it was similar to that other characteristically courtly mode, Castiglione's notion of *Sprezzatura*. The courtly art that seemed not to be art was precisely a mode that insisted on being both false and seen to be false. The aristocratic courtier gained admiration for seeming to carry off a difficult act with casual indifference; but only if the difficulty of the act was also evident to all concerned. If the act was so convincing that the feat really did look easy, the whole effect would be lost. It was the subtle visibility of the hidden truth behind the surface deception that was characteristic of courtly feigning.²⁸

Allegory, then, is a strategy of reading as well as a mode of writing and playing, and it can be a product of context as well as of content. *Gorboduc* meant something very different – indeed, was a different sort of allegory altogether – in the Inner Temple to what it did elsewhere. In the courts of adult sovereigns in the sixteenth century, all literature, because it was aimed primarily at the monarch, was a species of *speculum principis*. As a consequence all literature – and especially drama – was potentially allegorical in that its ostensible meanings – its narrative path – might be assumed to point to other, unstated, meanings that could be applied directly to the circumstances and experience of the monarch. So allegory, in the particular contexts of the royal court or an aristocratic household (or indeed in any micro-culture in which a play might be assumed or inferred to have particular relevance to the watching audience), need not

employ personification allegory or overtly emblematic action for it to be read as allegorically intended.

So John Heywood's masque of King Arthur's Knights performed before Cromwell and at court in February 1539,²⁹ might be read in those places as a reflection on the duties of a good king, suggesting the need for a virtuous prince to consult widely, to gather to him the best knights and counsellors from across his land and forge them into an harmonious and unified body. And this might in turn suggest a coded critique of the divisive consequences of religious reform and an implied call for a more consensual approach to religious and social policy. Such a para-text would have less relevance beyond the court, where it might well appear to be a simply an entertainment based upon traditional romance material from the Matter of Britain. Perhaps to our probably unrepresentative resident of Cartmel it would seem no more than the story of a man on a horse where blood ran down.

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NOTES

1. For the idea that allegory is inherently conservative, hide-bound by its own procedures, see Don Beecher 'An Obstruction to Interpretation: The Authority of Allegory in *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*' in *Theta: Tudor Theatre 5* (2000) 159–68, at 159: 'Allegory is a mode characterized by constraint, because it surrounds its fables with controlling ideas and projects those ideas into dramatic representations clearly homiletic in intent, thereby creating a closed hermeneutic system'. See also 165: 'In its strictest sense, allegory is a closed system of encounters between characters, representing ideas for the purpose of clarifying those ideas in action'.
2. See, for example, James I. Wimsatt *Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature* (New York: Pegasus, 1970) 1–23; Maureen Quilligan *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1979) 1–15; Edwin Honig *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (Oxford UP, 1966) 1–20; Angus Fletcher *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1964) 1–5; Clara Mucci 'Allegory' in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* edited Michael Hattaway (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 298–306, at 299 and 301.
3. The 'doubleness' of allegory, its Janus-faced nature, was identified in the earliest attempts to define the mode, and continues to characterise modern scholarly discussion. Etymologically, *allegory's* Greek roots suggest a form that speaks 'otherwise' than is apparent, the word being compounded of *allo*, or 'other', and *agoreuein*, to speak in the *agora*, which can be either the political assembly or

the common marketplace, or both. Hence it implied to speak in a way that was other than open or common – a guarded and elitist mode of speech. See Jon Whitman *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 2. In our period Thomas Elyot's *Dictionary*, quoting Quintilian, defined *Allegoria* as 'a figure or inversion of wordes, where it is one in wordes and an other in sentence or menynges'. (Elyot *Bibliotheca Eliotae* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1542), sig Cii. Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (2nd edition, London: John Kingston, 1560), declared 'An Allegorie is none other thing but a metaphore used throughout a whole sentence or oration', calling it also a 'dark devised conceit' sustained through a text; Wilson *The Arte of Rhetorique*, sig. 169. Similarly George Puttenham observed, again following Cicero and Quintilian, that '*Allegoria* is ... when we speake one thing and thinke another, and that our wordes, and our meanings meete not'; Puttenham *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: R. Field, 1589) 155. In the twentieth century Empson suggested that 'the effect of allegory is to keep the two levels of being very distinct in your mind though they interpenetrate each other in so many details'; William Empson *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951) 346–7. Frye characterised it as a 'contrapuntal technique'; Northrop Frye *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957) 90. Most recently, Jon Whitman has observed, with an appropriate gesture towards personification, that 'Allegory turns its head in one direction and its eyes in another'; Whitman *Allegory* 2.

4. Wimsatt *Allegory and Mirror* 23.
5. As Wimsatt puts it, in personification allegory, 'the literal level of action exists for the sake of an action implied by the literal story. The literal story does not justify its own existence'; Wimsatt *Allegory and Mirror* 26.
6. Maureen Quilligan acknowledges the assumption overtly when she claims that 'All allegories are texts ... They are texts first and last: webs of words woven in such a way as constantly to call attention to themselves as texts ... [Unlike Epics, which may be oral] allegories are always written'; Quilligan *Language of Allegory* 25.
7. For the inherent Catholicism of allegory, see C.S. Lewis *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936) 322.
8. Michael Hattaway 'Allegorising in Drama and the Visual Arts' *Tudor Theatre* 5 187–205, at 189.
9. Sarah Carpenter "'My Lady Tongue": Thomas Tomkis's *Lingua*' *Medieval English Theatre* 24 (2003 for 2002) 3–14.
10. See Amanda Piesse 'Representing Truth in *Mankind* and *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*' *Tudor Theatre* 5 135–144.

11. '[W]hen allegory is presented as drama, the result is always concrete. The theatre abhors abstraction, its common currency is the human form, and when thus embodied allegory is inevitably solidified, personalised, and disabstracted'. Walker 'The State's Two Bodies: *Respublica* and the Allegory of Governance' in *Tudor Theatre* 5 119–35, at 119.
12. 'Þe wepyng þat falliþ to men and wymmen by þe sizte of siche myraclis pleyinge as þe ben not not principaly for þeire oune synnes, ne of þeire gode feiþ wiþinneforþe, but more of þeire sizt wiþouteforþe, is not allowable byfore God but more reprovabyle'; *The Tretise of Miraclis Pleyeinge* in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology* edited Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 199. In the same spirit Bale provided his God the Father in *The Three Laws* with a prophylactic speech to encourage spectators to look through the actor to the role beyond, that of 'a substauce invysyble', an 'incomprehensyble' combination of abstractions ('a ryghteousnesse, a prudence, / A mercy, a goodnesse, a truth, a lyfe, a sapyence'; *Three Laws* lines 35–40 in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*).
13. Bob Godfrey 'A Re-examination of Dramatic Forms in the Early Tudor Period' *Tudor Theatre* 5 39–54, at 49–50. Godfrey's discussion of the nature and impact of allegory onstage is characteristically sophisticated and suggestive. The relevant passage is worth quoting in full. 'There is no such thing as personality represented on the stage. Only the circumstances of impersonation in the figure of the actor complicates this perception, but it is not something inherent in the art of characterisation. Thus it is not inconsistent to see a named figure like Publius Cornelius in *Fulgens and Lucre*s interpreted as a type of Pride, just as in the same play Lucre's judgement confers Virtue upon Gaius. Thematic considerations, in fact, attached as they inevitably are to character, will always sustain a tendency towards interpretation of this abstract kind. Characters may appear as "persons" in drama but no more than they are in other fictional representation. In reality all dramatis personae are, even in a supposedly historical or documentary setting, merely, if that is the right word, personifications'.
14. See Elaine Aston and George Savona *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1991) 6–9, 46–47.
15. Quoted in Penry Williams *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 290, citing Isaac Disraeli *Curiosities of Literature* (London: E. Moxon, 13th edition 1843) 539.
16. Frye *Anatomy of Criticism* 89–90.
17. *The Tragidie of Ferrex and Porrex ...* (London: John Daye, 1570) sig. Ai^v.
18. *Ferrex and Porrex* sig. Aii.
19. BL Additional MS 48023 fol. 359. The text as a whole has now been edited by Simon Adams, Ian W. Archer, and G.W. Bernard, as 'A "Journal" of Matters

- of State Happened From Time to Time within and without the Realme From And Before the Death of King Edw. The 6th Untill the Yere 1562' in *Religion, Politics, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* edited Ian W. Archer and others (Camden Society Series 5, 22; Cambridge: Cambridge UP for the Royal Historical Society, 2003) 35–136. For a detailed account of this document in the context of Elizabethan marital politics, see Henry James and Greg Walker 'The Politics of *Gorboduc*' *English Historical Review* 110 (1995) 109–121, revised as 'Strategies of Courtship: The Marital Politics of *Gorboduc*' in Greg Walker *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge UP, 1998) 196–221. The association of the play with the succession question was initially expounded in Mortimer Levine *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question, 1558–68* (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1966) 38–44, and more fully in Marie Axton *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977) 38–60.
20. The modern editors read 'mommers' here (*Religion, Politics, and Society* edited Archer 90).
 21. It is worth remembering that allegory and historical narrative were not considered to be antithetical in the sixteenth century. Indeed they shared a common purpose in the eyes of many commentators. Each was supposed to offer a mirror in which readers or viewers, and princely readers or viewers in particular, could see their own roles, their shortcomings, and their responsibilities reflected back to them for their edification. Sir Thomas Elyot noted in his *Boke Named the Governour* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1531), sigs Evi^v–Evi^{vii} the 'incomparable delectation, utilitie, and commodite shal happen to emperours, kinges, princis and all other gentil men, by reding of histories', as they contained 'preceptes made to kynges and princes: [so that] ... in them he shulde rede those thinges whiche no man durst reporte unto his persone'. See also Wimsatt *Allegory and Mirror* 29. So the fact that a spectator like our anonymous commentator on *Gorboduc* might read history allegorically and allegory historically should not really surprise us.
 22. Boccaccio on Poetry: *Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's 'Genealogia Deorum Gentilium'* edited Charles G. Osgood (Princeton UP, 1930; reprinted New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956) 59–60; and George Chapman 'A Free and Offenceles[s] Justification of *Andromeda Liberata*' in *The Poems of George Chapman* edited Phyllis Brooks Bartlett (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1941) 327, both cited in Quilligan *The Language of Allegory* 27.
 23. George Puttenham *The Arte of English Poesie* 155.
 24. George Puttenham *The Arte of English Poesie* 155. See also 251, where Allegoria is defined as 'the Courtier or figure of faire semblant'. For 'is it not perchance more requisite our courtly Poet do dissemble not onely his countenances and

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conceits, but also his ordinary actions or behaviour, or the most part of them, whereby the better to winne his purposes and good advantages’.

25. *Speke Parott* lines 201–3, in *John Skelton: The Complete English Poems* edited John Scattergood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).
26. See *Skelton: Complete Poems* 238–46; Greg Walker *John Skelton and the Politics of the 1520s* (Cambridge UP, 1988) 89–100.
27. *Calendar of Letters and State Papers relating to English Affairs preserved principally in the Archives of Simancas* edited Martin A. S. Hume, 4 vols (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode for HMSO, 1892–1899) 1: (Elizabeth, 1558-1567) 404–5.
28. Baldasar Castiglione *The Courtier* translated Charles S. Singleton (Garden City NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959) 43.
29. *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* edited Ian Lancashire (Toronto UP, 1984) 201, no. 1029.