

“Which Play Was of a King How He Should Rule His Realm”:
Tudor Interludes Advising the Ruler

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Tudor interludes are a thematically heterogeneous *corpus*, but what they all share is an extremely tight link to their social, cultural and political context. Moreover, they do not just reflect their context, but endeavour to intervene materially on social reality in order to change it. A peculiarity of Tudor interludes is their deep involvement with power, which is due to their “centrality”: being performed at court and in noble households,¹ they were close to the political centre, to the place where decisions were taken, both at a national and at a local level.

The fact that they were performed before the patron and his household determined the dual function of Tudor interludes: they had to celebrate the magnificence of the patron, in order to enhance his prestige among his subjects, but, at the same time, they were allowed to counsel him. Such a dual function is itself the source of friction at the centre of the text: whereas the interlude is always deferential towards authority, it is also potentially critical of the patron’s policy.

The ambivalence towards authority is intrinsic to Tudor interludes, even to those that have a monarch at their centre. In such plays kingship is not only displayed, but is also directly addressed, for these interludes aimed at showing the sovereign “how to rule his realm.” As Baldassarre Castiglione and Sir Thomas Elyot² stated in their treatises, the principal duty of the perfect courtier was to offer good counsel to his lord, “without fear or risk of displeasing him.” Indeed, forming good counsellors was the very goal of the educational precepts the above-mentioned Renaissance moralists put forward in their works. For his part, the good ruler had to demonstrate that, differently from the tyrant, he was ready to accept good counsel: this was deemed a mark of wisdom.

The manner of address of the advisory interludes is implicit: the dramatist conveys his message by means of a “figura,” a character who is the dramatic embodiment of the sovereign. The involvement of the interlude with kingship is partly due to the conditions of the performance. As has already been noted, the ruler is not just one of the virtual addressees of the play, but, not infrequently, he/she was also a real presence in the audience since interludes were often presented at court or in the houses of the nobles during royal visits.

Counsel often entails criticism, and, even if neutralizing strategies are always activated (these plays were permitted to exist in so far as they were in the service of established

¹ Of course interludes were also performed outside of elite institutions (in squares, streets, market-places, inns and inn-yards, churches and churchyards...): this is another aspect of their immense versatility.

² E.g. Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il cortegiano* 1528 (translated by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561); Sir Thomas Elyot, *The boke named the Gouernour* (London: T. Bartheleti, 1531).

power), not infrequently the interludes of advice appear potentially disruptive, being a response to some failings on the part of the ruler. These monitory interludes, in working for the maintenance of social order while, at the same time, presenting the ruler with a disguised reproach, stage the conflicts of the ideological processes which have been termed “consolidation” and “subversion”:³ the authority of the ruler is simultaneously reinforced and threatened through such an embedding of kingship in the dramatic discourse.

Among the interludes which take kingship as their theme and the ruler as their implicit addressee are: *Magnyfycence* (1519), *King Johan* (1538), *Respublica* (1553) and *Gorboduc* (1562).⁴ In them, the potentially destabilizing import of the advisory mode is precariously counterbalanced by strategies tending towards the consolidation of the *status quo*.

1. *Magnyfycence*

Magnyfycence, by John Skelton, was most probably written in 1519. Both in its spirit and in its aims the play is close to the *Speculum Principis*, which the author had written in 1501 for his pupil, the future King Henry VIII. In the interlude, a prince, Magnyfycence, is misled by six evil counsellors (Fansy, Counterfet Countenaunce, Crafty Conveyaunce, Clokyd Colusyon, Courtly Abusyon and Foly), he becomes prey to lust and anger and is economically ruined. He is saved *in extremis* (when he is on the point of stabbing himself) thanks to the intervention of Good Hope, Redresse, Cyrcumspeccyon and Perseveraunce.

Magnyfycence disregards all the precepts listed in the *Speculum Principis* as pertaining to a good ruler:

Ante omnia gulam abominare. Sobrietatem et temperanciam cole. Crapulam proscribe. Luxuriam detestare. Prostibulum / scortorum fuge. [. . .] Non sis immemor beneficii. Facile non credas omni spiritui. Alteram partem audito. Affabilis esto. Adulatores prose-/quere odio. Acquiesce sano consilio. Non sis parcus. Scis cum ratione munificus, largus, benignus, et dapsilis.

Iram cohibeas. Neminem irrideas. Fidem serua. Scurras increpa. Susurros obiurga. Constanciam ama. / Cogita de fama. Sit bona non vana. Diu delibera. Loquere pauca. [. . .] Dissimulare noli. Non consulas tibi soli. Semper pius, semper propicius, semper mansuetus, clemens, mitis, et humilis. Esto fortis in

³ Jonathan Dollimore in *Political Shakespeare* defines “consolidation” as “the ideological means whereby a dominant order seeks to perpetuate itself,” and “subversion” as “the subversion of that order” (10).

⁴ *Gorboduc* is usually called the first English tragedy, but it can also be viewed as an interlude for a number of reasons: it was written before the opening of public theatres and it was performed at the Inner Temple and at court; its intent is overtly didactic and there is a character who is clearly descended from the abstract characters that dominate the interludes: the good counsellor Eubulus, whose name comes from the Greek (εὐβουλος) and literally means “of good advice, sensible, judicious, wise, prudent”. These are all features that *Gorboduc* shares with the other plays I have chosen to examine in this article.

aduersis, cautus in prosperis.⁵

He gives easily credence to the six evil counsellors, who embody all the faults a good prince should abhor in companions. For instance, in presenting himself to the audience, Clokyd Colusyon says that he is a flatterer, a slanderer and a double-dealer (ll. 716-40); Courtly Abusyon is a dandy (ll. 835-55) and Fansy is inconstant (ll. 1008-43). Under the influence of the Vices, Magnyfycence becomes vain, arrogant (his boasting, ll. 1457-514) and lustful (ll. 1545-86). The counsel offered by Courtly Abusyon seems a parodic inversion of the precepts in the *Speculum Principis*:

By waywarde wylfulnes let eche thyng be conuayed.
What so ever ye do, folowe your owne wyll;
Be it reason or none, it shall not gretely skylle.
Be it ryght or wronge, by the advyse of me,
Take your pleasure and use fre lyberte;
And yf you se ony thyng agynst your mynde,
Then some [o]ccacyon or quarell ye must fynde,
And frowne it and face it, as thoughe ye wolde fyght.
Frete yourselfe for anger and for dyspyte,
Here non man what so ever they say,
But do as ye lyst and take your owne way. [. . .]
Let your lust and lykyng stande for a lawe.
Be wrastyng and wrythyng, and away drawe.
And ye se a man that with hym ye be not pleased,
And that your mynde can not well be eased -
As yf a man fortune to touche you on the quyke -
Then feyne yourselfe dyseased, and make yourselfe seke.
To styre up your stomake you must you forge,
Call for a candell, and cast up your gorge,
With "Cockes armes! Rest shall I none have
Tyll I be revenged on that horson knave.
A, howe my stomacke wambleth! I am all in a swete.

⁵ Salter 35-36. A.R. Heiserman translates the extracts in *Skelton and Satire 74*:

Before all things, abhor gluttony. Cultivate sobriety and temperance. Outlaw drunkenness. Detest luxury. Flee the lewdness of whores. [. . .] Do not be forgetful of favours. Do not believe everyone easily. Hear the other side. Be affable. Hate the company of flatterers. Follow sound counsel. Do not be stingy. Know how to be munificent, liberal, mild, and magnificent (*dapsilis*) with reason.

Restrain anger. Mock no one. Serve the faith. Chide the dandies. Punish whisperers. Cherish the constant. Weigh rumour carefully. Be good but not vain. Deliberate slowly. Speak little. [. . .] Do not dissimulate. Do not consider only yourself. Be always pious, always gracious, always gentle, clement, and humble. Be strong in adversity, circumspect (*cautus*) in prosperity.

Is there no horson that knave that wyll bete?"
(ll. 1594-1604 and 1607-18)⁶

Having been inconsiderate in prosperity, Magnyfycence proves weak in adversity: he falls prey to despair and he even contemplates suicide (ll. 2320-22). The instructions given by Redresse, Cyrcumspeccyon and Perseveraunce after Magnyfycence has been restored to his state, again, echo the injunctions in the *Speculum Principis* (ll. 2478-97).

In showing how a good ruler becomes a tyrant the play is explicitly didactic; the key theme, "measure is treasure" (125), is frequently repeated:

Measure: Where Measure is mayster, Plenty dothe none offence;
Where Measure lackyth, all thyng dysorderyd is;
Where Measure is absent, Ryot kepeth resydence;
Where Measure is ruler, there is nothyng amyse
(ll. 121-24).

Lyberte: There is no prynce but he hath nede of us thre:
Welthe, with Measure, and plesaunt Lyberte
(ll. 159-60).⁷

Magnyfycence falls from his estate because he does not obey this precept and exiles Measure from the court: he does not maintain the liberal mean between the extremes of prodigality and meanness prescribed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the main source of both the *Speculum Principis* and *Magnyfycence*.

His fate is overtly offered as an *exemplum*:

Magnyfycence: For to be wyse all men may lerne of me,
In welthe to beware of herde Adversyte
(ll. 2158-59).

Cyrcumspeccyon: A myrrour incleryd is this interlude,
This lyfe inconstant for to beholde and se
(ll. 2519-20).

In Adversyte's words, the defeated king, lying motionless on the floor, becomes an emblematic figure and is presented to the audience as a warning:

Thys losyll was a lorde and lyvyd at his lust,

⁶ The edition I have used is the one contained in Happé *Four Morality Plays*.

⁷ As regarding the key theme, see also ll. 173-80, 192, 194, 197 and 1408.

And nowe lyke a lurden he lyeth in the duste.
 He knewe not hymselfe, his harte was so hye;
 Nowe is there no man that wyll set by hym a flye.
 He was wonte to boste, brage, and to brace;
 Nowe he dare he not for shame loke one in the face.
 All worldly welth for hym to lytell was;
 Nowe hath he ryght nought, naked as an asse.
 Somtyme without Measure he trusted in golde;
 And nowe without Mesure he shall have hunger and colde.
 Lo, syrs, thus I handell them all
 That folowe theyr fansyes in foly to fall: [. . .]
 Take hede of this caytyfe that lyeth here on grounde:
 Beholde howe Fortune o[n] him hath frounde
 (ll. 1886-97 and 1946-47).

The meaning of Magnyfycence's fall is supplied by the speaker in overtly moral terms.

It is equally clear that the lesson offered by the play, though it is extended to the whole audience, is chiefly intended for the ruler, since the concluding section of the interlude is full of illocutionary acts of a directive kind with imperative verbs which are directed to the prince of the play: Magnyfycence. Although advice to a sovereign was a literary tradition that dated back to classical times and was in vogue in England in the Middle Ages,⁸ the situation at Court in 1519 gave the play great relevance: the interlude allegorically portrays the rise and fall of the so called king's "minions," an episode which had a great resonance at Court, in the country and abroad.

In September 1518 a number of young favourites were appointed Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber. But the minions did not encounter the favour of the Council, which, according to Edward Hall's report, judged them profligate, extravagant and too frenchified, and thought they were exerting a bad influence on the king. As a consequence, the Council requested that the king find a remedy to such "enormities and lightnes" and the minions were expelled from the Court in May 1519 and replaced by "foure sad and auncient knightes." In the official version of the episode the decision to dismiss the favourites was presented to the country and to Europe as a witness to Henry VIII's responsibility and strength of character: a political mistake on the part of the king was transformed into evidence of his virtue.

The final regeneration of Magnyfycence is a tribute to such a virtue, and the interlude aimed at strengthening the king in his decision "to lead a new life." Nevertheless, there is also a criticism implied in showing a king who behaves as foolishly as Magnyfycence. The ruler is

⁸ Among the works nearest in time to Skelton's interlude, see the medieval translations of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secreta Secretorum* from both Latin and French versions, Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes* (dedicated to Henry V) and Erasmus's *The Education of a Christian Prince* (written for Charles V).

not equal to his task in the play, and the topicality of the events shown on the stage is asserted at length:

Adversyte: But nowe a dayes to stryke I have grete cause,
Lydderins so lytell set by Goddes lawes. [. . .]
For though we shewe you this in game and play,
Yet it proveth eyrnest, ye may se, every day
(ll. 1918-19 and 1948-49).

Lyberte: For Lyberalyte is most conveyent
A prynce to use with all his hole intent,
Largely rewardyng them that have deservyd:
And so shall a noble man nobly be servyd.
But nowe adayes as huksters they hucke and they stycke,
And pynche at the payment of a poddyng prykke.
A laudable Largesse, I tell you, for a lorde
To prate for the patchyng of a pot sharde!
Spare for the spence of a noble that his honour myght save,
And spende C.s for the pleasure of a knave
(ll. 2117-26).

Redresse: Full many thynges there be that lacketh Redresse,
The whiche were to longe nowe to expresse
(ll. 2415-16).⁹

Yet the destabilising import of representing a tyrant and offering the story as a mirror is counterbalanced by a series of “neutralizing” strategies. First, Magnyfycence has been deceived: he would not have taken Fansy with him if the petitioner had not produced a forged letter from Sad Cyrcumspeccyon (ll. 303 *et passim*). The prince is not a wilful culprit and the real blame is put on the counsellors, who also change their names in order to beguile him the better. This is in the morality tradition: the hero’s fall is due to the corrupting influence of the Vices; the emphasis is not primarily placed on his evil nature. In this case, the dramatic tradition helps to acquit the ruler, since in the moralities the human character must fall and there is no way of avoiding that.

Besides, the “Wheel of Fortune” *topos* contributes to discharge the prince of his faults. Human beings are not fully the makers of their own destinies:

Poverté: Syr, remembre the tourne of Fortunes whele,
That wantonly can wynke, and wynche with her hele.

⁹ Also ll. 279-80, 1241-42, 1677-78, 1743 *et passim*, and 1918-19.

Nowe she wyll laughe; forthwith she wyll frowne;
Sodenly set up and sodenly pluckyd downe.
She downsyth varyaunce with mutabylyte,
Nowe all in welth, forwith in poverte.
In her promyse there is no sykernesse;
All in her delyte is set in doublenesse.

Magnyfycence: Alas, of Fortune I may well complayne
(ll. 2022-30).¹⁰

Magnyfycence declares that he has been “dyssayvyd” by Fortune (ll. 2156-57). Lastly, it is the ruler’s final repentance that completes his redemption, and Magnyfycence’s restoration to wealth symbolises his moral rehabilitation.

Therefore, the transgressive import of showing an inadequate ruler and of declaring that the play is “a myrroure incleryd” is partly neutralized: the king had to take the interlude as a lesson, not as a criticism. Nor could the subjects be driven to rebel by the sight of a tyrant on stage. The audience had to be taught another lesson: the moral of resignation. The following comparison between Christ and Magnyfycence aims at showing the right attitude to adopt in the face of poverty:

Poverté: Therefore Poverté loke pacyently ye take,
And remembre He suffered moche more for your sake,
Howe be it, of all synne He was innocent,
And ye have deserved this punysshment
(ll. 2000-2003).

The message contained in the interlude is far from being revolutionary. According to the moral of the play, the king must be a good ruler and has to provide for his country’s good; however, both misfortune and poverty have to be borne with patience, for “better it is to begge than to be hangyd with shame” (2039). *Magnyfycence* aimed at teaching a lesson to the prince, but, at the same time, it was strongly concerned with maintaining the *status quo*.

2. *King Johan*

Much more potentially disruptive than Skelton’s interlude is *King Johan*, a play written by John Bale at the end of 1538. The association between King John and Henry VIII is overtly drawn in the play and this was functional to Reformation propaganda. This interlude aimed at persuading the audience that the separation from Rome was necessary and that the king was “justly and rightfully”¹¹ the supreme head of the Church of England. To reach his

¹⁰ The theme of the “Wheel of Fortune” is amplified in the conclusion of the play (ll. 2510-60).

¹¹ “The Act of Supremacy, A.D. 1534” and “26 Henry VIII, cap. 1,” Gee and Hardy 243.

goal, Bale performed a double operation: on the one hand the Pope and his helpers are shown to be utterly corrupt, on the other hand a king who was depicted as a monster in the medieval chronicles is made the embodiment of the ideal monarch.

The Catholic Church is repeatedly attacked and the arrogance and abomination of its agents are emphasised in various ways in the play. This justifies King John's attempts to bend the Pope's haughtiness and to reform the Church. Thanks to the identification between King John and the Tudor ruler, the steps taken by Henry VIII to declare England's independence from the Pope sound utterly necessary: the Reformation carried out by the Tudor sovereign seems as unavoidable as the one attempted by King John. In the play several legal measures taken by Henry VIII in the years 1533-38 are, more or less explicitly, hinted at: the "Supremacy Act" (ll. 1342-49 and 1500-18), the "Act in Restraint of Appeals" (l. 926), the "Treasons Act" (l. 1868), the submission of the clergy and the dissolution of the monasteries (ll. 1586-97). The interlude is, again, openly a "myrrour" (1086):¹²

The Interpretour: Thys noble Kyng Johan, as a faythfull Moyses,
 Withstode proude Pharao for hys poore Israel,
 Myndyng to brynge it out of the Lande of Darkenesse.
 But the Egyptyanes ded agaynst hym so rebell
 That hys poore people ded styll in the desart dwell,
 Tyll that Duke Josue, whych was our late Kyng Henrye,
 Clerely brought us in to the lande of mylke and honye.

 As a stronge David at the voyce of verytie,
 Great Golye, the Pope, he strake downe with hys slyng
 Restoryng agayne to a Christen lybertie
 Hys lande and people, lyke a most vycoryouse kyng,
 To hir first bewtye intendyng the Churche to bryng,
 From ceremonyes dead to the lyvyng wurde of the Lorde
 (ll. 1107-19).

But, if *King Johan's* endorsement of the separation from the Church of Rome and of the supremacy of the king was functional to Henry VIII's project, from another point of view the play was potentially subversive, in that it aimed at convincing the monarch that the Reformation should be pursued further and it even contains some religiously heterodox material.¹³ According to Thomas Cromwell and the archbishop Thomas Cranmer, Henry VIII was too mild a Protestant. He was anxious to get rid of Papal interference, but he did not

¹² For *King Johan* too, I have used Happé's edition (*Four Morality Plays*).

¹³ On the ambiguity and potential subversiveness of *King Johan*, see Caputo ch. 3.

seem ready to relinquish Catholicism and, above all, he did not like Luther and his doctrines. Consequently, the Reformation of Henry VIII was much more political than doctrinal. The documents which established the religious settlement of Henrician England prior to the notorious “Act of Six Articles” of June 1539 (the “Ten Articles of Religion” and the “Injunctions” of 1536 and 1538) are both ambiguous and vague: they were far from the Reformed standards of Cromwell and Cranmer.

King Johan contains explicit invitations to proceed with the Reformation.¹⁴ For instance, there is a reformulation of Henry VIII’s title of *fidei defensor* that sounds peremptory with its use of verbs in the imperative:

Cyvyle Order: Of the Christen faythe playe now the true defendar.
Exyle thys monster and ravenouse devourar
With hys venym wormes, hys adders, whelpes, and snakes,
Hys cuculled vermyne, that unto all myschiefe wakes
(ll. 2427-30).

A discontent with the contemporary situation appears behind Sedicyon’s triumphant words:

Sedicyon: In your parlement commaunde yow what ye wyll,
The Popes ceremonyes shall drowne the Gospell styll:
Some of the byshoppes at your injunctyons slepe;
Some laugh and go bye; and some can playe boo pepe;
Some of them do nought but searche for heretykes,
Whyls their priestes abroade do playe the scysmatykes.
Tell me, in London how manye their othes discharge
Of the curates there? Yet is it muche worse at large.
If your true subjectes impugne their trecheryes,
They can fatche them in anon for Sacramentaryes,
Or Anabaptystes. [. . .]

Imp. Ma.: Are those matters true that thou hast spoken here?

Sedicyon: What can in the worlde more evydent wytnesse bere?
First of all consydre the prelates do not preache,
But persecute those that the Holye Scriptures teache.
And marke me thys wele: they never ponysh for popery,
But the Gospell readers they handle very coursely,
For on them they laye by hondred poundes of yron

¹⁴ The most explicit invitation appears in the conclusion of the play, but, since it is Queen Elizabeth who is addressed in the epilogue, it is not possible to know to what extent the lines were changed for the representation before the Queen in 1561.

And wyll suffer none with them ones for to common.
 Sytt they never so longe, nothyng by them cometh fourthe
 To the truthes furtheraunce that any-thinge ys wourthe.
 In some byshoppes howse ye shall not fynde a testament;
 But yche man readye to devoure the innocent.
 We lyngar a tyme, and loke but for a daye
 To sett upp the Pope, if the Gospell woulde decaye
 (ll. 2522-32 and 2538-51).

Another means of trying to persuade the king to accomplish doctrinal Reformation is presenting it as a *fait accompli*. Among the Catholic practices attacked as superstitious in *King Johan* there are some that the Church of England was far from rejecting in 1538. For example, auricular confession is repeatedly attacked in the play (ll. 264-73, 848, 850, 853-62, 967, 1028, 1149-89, 1600, 2014, 2500 and 2658), although the Church of Henry VIII never rejected it. Similarly, rituals and liturgical objects which are defined as “good and laudable” in the “Ten Articles of Religion” and explicitly defended from criticism in the Proclamation of 16 November 1538 are bitterly attacked in the play; these are the practices of holy bread and holy water (ll. 1003, 1162 and 1829), of kneeling and creeping to the cross (l. 1835), of processions (l. 1836), and the setting up of lights (l. 1585). Likewise, the prayers for the dead are presented as superstitious and unnecessary in *King Johan* (ll. 420, 485-88 and 764-66), while they are defended in the “Ten Articles of Religion.” Even the numerous assaults on Purgatory (ll. 421, 1022, 1076, 1162, 1567 and 1626) are on the verge of heresy, since the Henrician Church never openly discarded the belief in Purgatory. Given the king’s dislike for solifideism, Bale’s treatment of works appears equally subversive (“*Englande*: There is no promyse for voluntarye wurkes, / Nomore than there is for sacrifice of the Turkes,” ll. 2154-55). In the same way, the dramatist’s enthusiasm for the English Bible which pervades the interlude was dangerous, since the sovereign did not seem to share it at all: whereas the “Injunctions” of October 1538 decreed that an English Bible should be placed in every church by Easter and that ministers should exhort believers to read and hear “the very lively word of God, that every Christian man is bound to embrace, believe and follow, if he look to be saved” (Gee and Hardy 276), a Proclamation of April 1539 imposed limitations on the reading of the Bible that believers, according to this new document, had to undertake “quietly and with silence by themselves secretly”;¹⁵ this, of course, meant that the illiterate could only have access to the Word of God through the intermediation of a minister.

The transgressive inclusion of material that risked being judged heretical goes with the use of strategies to make such potentially subversive material acceptable or, at least, to disguise its heterodox nature. For instance, the attacks on auricular confession are not

¹⁵ Cf. “Proclamation 191. 31 Henry VIII (1539),” Hughes and Larkin 284-86.

launched on doctrinal grounds, but on political grounds: the Catholic priests would employ auricular confession to extort information to use against monarchs and emperors in Papal conspiracies. As regards the assaults on ceremonies, a strategy of camouflage is enacted through the inclusion of heterodox arguments among orthodox ones.

Even the association between King Henry and King John was risky: in a way, it was certainly flattering, since, as has already been noted, King John is depicted as the perfect ruler; nevertheless, the monarch presented in the play is too zealous a Protestant to have met with the Tudor king's approval. This identification must be seen as an attempt to induce Henry VIII to carry on a Reformation that, at the end of 1538, he was blatantly trying to stop; to represent King Henry VIII as the ideal Protestant ruler on stage was meant to persuade him to assume that role in reality.

Some events shown in the interlude can also be read as advice given to the king on a matter of foreign policy. England was in a dangerous situation at the end of 1538, because Paul III's excommunication of Henry VIII represented a serious menace. It could carry with it both internal rebellions and foreign invasions. As far as civil war was concerned, the papal bull issued on 17 December 1538 (an earlier sentence of excommunication under Clement VII had been suspended) automatically released English subjects from their oath of loyalty towards their sovereign. Besides, the excommunication of Henry VIII authorised the orthodox powers (France and Spain) to invade England and to chastise the heretical monarch. The danger of a foreign invasion was heightened by the circumstance that Francis I and Charles V were at peace at the end of 1538, having signed the Treaty of Nice in June.¹⁶ Cromwell would have liked Henry VIII to side with the German princes, and to that end he brought an embassy of Lutheran divines over from Germany. But the negotiations with the Lutherans were wrecked when Henry VIII sent a long letter explaining his position on some doctrinal matters such as private masses, priestly celibacy and communion in one kind (the three issues would each form one of the "Six Articles"). Evidently, the king preferred to stress his orthodoxy (and in so doing to hold out his hand to the Catholic potentates) rather than ally himself with the German princes. In the play, King John is defeated because he is alone and his final capitulation to Rome does not avoid tragedy (*i.e.* he is poisoned by a monk). This can be intended as a spur for Henry VIII to accept an alliance with the German princes and to keep his distance from the Catholics (who are shown to be treacherous) at a moment in which the king seemed intent on regaining the trust of France and Spain.

King Johan is simultaneously propaganda, advice and even criticism in its endorsement of an uncompromising Reformation; and in pursuing its multiple goals a play like this can be seen as both a help and a hindrance to the Reformation sought by Henry VIII. Various interests were at stake in the play: the sovereign had to feel flattered, but, in fact, it was

¹⁶ The events would show that Cromwell's fears of invasion were not wholly unmotivated, since on 12 January 1539 France and the Empire would agree not to ally with the schismatic Henry VIII; furthermore, the German and Spanish ambassadors would simultaneously be recalled from England in February 1539.

Cranmer and Cromwell's idea of Reformation which was put forth in *King Johan*.

3. *Respublica*

Respublica belongs to the reign of Mary Tudor and the queen herself was probably present at the performance during the Christmas revels of 1553-54. In the play *Respublica*, who represents the country, is ruined through the depredations of Avarice and his accomplices: Insolence, Oppressyon and Adulacion, and she is finally restored to wealth thanks to the intervention of the four Daughters of God (Pax, Iustitia, Veritas and Misericordia) and of Nemesis, who is the goddess of redress and correction.

Respublica is doubly advisory: first, in its warning not to delegate royal responsibilities, and, second, in its appeal to mildness. *Respublica*'s fault consists in having delegated her own powers: she "put truste in other" (l. 1043),¹⁷ as she confesses to People. The advice that is implicit in such a statement and in the play as a whole is self-evident: a monarch should fulfil that role, since a country without a sovereign is a widow, like *Respublica* and like England during the Protectorate. Anyway, *Respublica* is not fully to blame for having misjudged the four evildoers because they have used aliases and they were disguised:

Avarice: ye muste have other garmentes, and soo muste ye all
ye muste for the season, counterfaite gravitee.

Ins. et Opp.: yes, what els? *Adul.:* And I muste counterfaite honestie.

Avarice: And I must tourne my gowne in and owte I wenwe
for these gaping purses maie in no wyse be seen.
I will tourne ytt een here. come helpe me honestye
(ll. 417-22).

Avarice's hidden bags become the emblem of his greed and of his duplicity. His punishment consists, primarily, in being deprived of his ill-gotten treasure.

In stressing the need for mercy, the play was openly a plea to the new sovereign. The theme emerges in the last act with the appearance of the character Misericordia. The word "mercy" is repeated thirteen times (ten times in the space of fifty-one lines) in Misericordia's monologue exalting divine compassion (ll. 1169-1208). Nevertheless, it is when the theme is openly associated with Nemesis, a character who is the dramatic embodiment of Mary Tudor (ll. 53-54), that the persuasive aim of such an insistence on clemency is revealed:

Mia: Ladie Nemesis now have yee Occasion,
And matier to shewe youre commiseracion.
[It] is m[uche m]ore glorie and standith with more skylle,

¹⁷ For this play, I have used the text edited by W. W. Greg (1952).

Lo[st]e shepe to recover, then the scabye to spill.
Iustice: But howe shall this redresse bee well prosecuted,
if Iustice with mercye shalbee executed?
Streight Iustice muste suche greate enormiteis redresse,
Severitee muste putt men in feare to transgresse;
Iustice muste geve eche manne that he dothe deserve.
Mia: If offendours were not, wherefore might mercye serve?
Avarice: Stike harde to it goode shwete Ladie Compassion
we are els vndoone / by cockes bytter passion.
Mia: Veritee how saie youe? have I not spoken well?
Veritee: mercie in one place with Iustice sometyme maie dwell,
and right well agree together
(1856-70).

Misericordia's appeal to Nemesis to balance justice and mercy in punishing those responsible for Respublica's ruin can be read as a plea to Mary Tudor not to be too harsh with the people who had collaborated with the previous government.

In showing how Nemesis grants Misericordia's request and forgives Adulacion, who is sincerely repented of his wrongdoing (ll. 1880-89), the pleading also becomes an encomium. The queen was implicitly praised for having forgiven so many exponents of the Edwardian ruling class and she was tacitly asked to continue to be merciful. At the time of the performance, Mary Tudor was certainly flattered in seeing such an image of herself on the stage because, as her Proclamation of 18 August 1553 praising her "most gracious disposition and clemency" shows, she aimed at appearing compassionate in this phase of her reign:

The Queen's highness, well remembering what great inconvenience and dangers have grown to this her highness' realm in time past through the diversity of opinions in questions of religion; and hearing also that now of late sithen the beginning of her most gracious reign the same contentions be again much renewed through certain false and untrue reports and rumors spread by some light and evil disposed persons, hath thought good to do to understand to all her highness' most loving and obedient subjects her most gracious pleasure, in manner and form following:

First, her majesty, being presently by the only goodness of God settled in her just possession of the imperial crown of this realm and other dominions thereunto belonging, cannot now hide that religion, which God and the world knoweth she hath ever professed from her infancy hitherto, which as her majesty is minded to observe and maintain for herself by God's grace during her time, so doth her highness much desire and would be glad the same were of all her subjects quietly

and charitably embraced. And yet she doth signify unto all her majesty's said loving subjects that of her most gracious disposition and clemency her highness mindeth not to compel any her said subjects thereunto unto such time as further order by common assent may be taken therein; . . .¹⁸

Most likely, even her decision to punish only those directly responsible in Northumberland's plot and her choice not to expel all the Protestants from the Privy Council and from her first Parliament were partly intended as public shows of mercy.

Anyway, the sovereign's clemency could not be allowed to induce the subjects to disobey. For that purpose, next to the flattering image of a compassionate female-ruler, *Respublica* offers the embodiment of the ideal subject. People is perspicacious, but, at the same time, he is passively obedient. He immediately understands who is to blame for his situation, but he does not do anything on his own initiative and follows *Respublica*'s instructions. Even when the villains are unmasked and People discovers that he was justified in his suspicions, he forbears from taking vengeance on his oppressor and hands him over to the authorities:

peopl. An ye bydde mee chill squease hym as drie as A kyxe.
Avar. Naye the pashe of godde I shall then die of the flixe.
Nemesis. Naie, thowe shalte deliver hym to the hedd Officer
which hathe Authoritee Iustice to mynister.
people. Chil lyver hym to the Counstable and come againe
(vv. 1906-10).

Presenting such a character had, obviously, a didactic import. In order to appreciate the present situation, the subjects had to become conscious of the faults of the previous government, but they could not be induced to react violently to difficult situations. They had to learn to wait patiently for justice to be done. The lesson contained in the quoted lines, in reflecting the warning of the already mentioned Proclamation, is symptomatic of an actual anxiety: evidently, at the time of the performance there were people who were all too ready to take the law into their own hands:

And her highness also further straightly chargeth and commandeth all and every her said subjects that none of them of their own private authority do presume to punish or to rise against any offender in the causes abovesaid, or any other offender in words or deeds in the late rebellion committed by the Duke of Northumberland or his accomplices, or to seize any of their goods, or violently to

¹⁸ "Proclamation 390. 1 Mary I (1553)," Hughes and Larkin 2:5-6.

use any such offender by striking or imprisoning or threatening the same, but wholly to refer the punishment of all such offenders unto her highness and her public authority, whereof her majesty mindeth to see due punishment according to the order of her highness' laws (Hughes and Larkin 2:7).

Furthermore, the play emphasises that forgiveness is subordinated to true repentance:

Scarce anie emendes maie mannes eagrenesse appeace,
yea and thoughe he forgeve, he wilnot soone forgette:
towards true penitens gods wrathe foorthwith doothe cease,
and he their past sinnes, behind his backe dooeth sett
(ll. 1173-76).

It grieveth hym sore whan he muste neades take veungeance
his delite and glorie ys mercie to practyse
his tender compassion on treue repentaunce,
he hath still from the beginninge sowte texercise
(ll. 1185-88).

Syth that tyme all comonweales he hath protected
and to suche as withe earnest prayer have made mone,
me Compassion he hath quickelye directed
to revive and recover theym everie one
(ll. 1197-2000).

The sovereign could only pardon *sub condicione*: in acquitting Adulacion Nemesis orders: “Goo, and see that from hensfoorth the thow bee perfeicte honestee” (l. 1889). Similarly, it is made clear that Misericordia can only intervene “where the membre maie recured bee” (l. 1415), while “thuncurable” must of necessity be “clene cutte awaie” (l. 1417): of the four vices it is only Adulacion who can be pardoned, since he is the one who has stolen the least and it is made evident that he is just a fool, and is neither utterly wicked nor malicious. Obviously, such limitations on mercy were instrumental in preserving order: the awareness of the ruler’s clemency could not be permitted to lead the subjects into insubordination.

Undoubtedly, *Respublica* is highly deferential towards majesty: Nemesis is a goddess and any identification between Queen Mary and Respublica, who is responsible (but not fully, since she has been deceived) for People’s pitiful condition, is carefully avoided. Nevertheless, the interlude betrays anxiety towards a new, and to some extent unprecedented,

situation: what the dramatist seems to fear from a female Catholic ruler is both a persecution of Protestants and a surrendering of royal authority into the hands of the wrong people. Far from being critical, once again the interlude can be defined “advisory.” Even if the new situation is celebrated in *Respublica*, its risks are lucidly stressed.

4. *Gorboduc*

The tragedy *Gorboduc* was written by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville and was performed at the Inner Temple on Twelfth Night 1562, and before Queen Elizabeth on 18 January 1562. This play was both intended as a lesson for the sovereign and as a lesson for the English people. The sovereign had to be persuaded to settle the succession and to settle it in the right way. To this end, the story is presented as an *exemplum* of what happens to a country when “for want of issue of the Prince [. . .] the succession of the crown [becomes] uncertain.”¹⁹ Again, the interlude is overtly a “mirror for princes”:²⁰

Chorus: And this great king [. . .]
A mirror shall become to princes all,
To learn to shun the cause of such a fall
(1.2.388; 392-93).

Each act of *Gorboduc* is preceded by a dumb show that offers a key to the moral meaning of what the audience is going to see. In underlining the theme of each act, the dumb show is a guide to its understanding. For the reader of *Gorboduc* each dumb show consists of an allegorical representation that is followed by an explanation and a moral application, while for the audience the meaning of what is presented in the dumb show is explicitly asserted only at the end of the act by the chorus.

There is a great emphasis on advice in the play. The words “advice” and “counsel” are repeated throughout the first three acts.²¹ The role of the counsellor is central, since, as is made clear, Gorboduc and his two sons are doomed because they reject the advice of the wise counsellors and follow the advice of the evil counsellors. The second dumb show illustrates, in allegorical terms, the wrong choice of the kings of the play, and in its exposition it is

¹⁹ See “The Argument of the Tragedy” for *Gorboduc* (I have used T.W. Craik’s 1974 edition).

²⁰ Thomas Sackville contributed to the *Mirror for Magistrates* in 1559.

²¹ For example, 1.2.1, 43, 73-77, 110 and 364; 2.1.73, 163 and 198; 2.2.71, 80 and 97; 3.1.28, 35, 50, 98, 132, 140 and 149. Also 4.2.159.

asserted that Ferrex and Porrex “refusing the wholesome advice of grave counsellors, credited these young parasites, and brought to themselves death and destruction thereby” (Craik 17). At the end of the play Eubulus opens his recapitulation of the chief events of the story with the idea that the failure to follow good advice is the underlying cause of the tragic events that have ensued:

Eubulus: Hereto it comes when kings will not consent
To grave advice, but follow wilful will.
This is the end, when in fond princes’ hearts
Flattery prevails, and sage rede hath no place
(5.2.234-37).

The didactic import of the story is heightened by working simultaneously on different levels: for instance, in the second act both the visual dimension (through the dumb show) and the verbal dimension (through the lengthy speeches) are exploited to the utmost in order to stress the importance of advice.

Parallel to the emphasis on advice is the value assigned to Parliament in helping the ruler to settle the succession. The succession to the crown has to be appointed by the monarch in Parliament:

Eubulus: No, no: then parliament should have been holden,
And certain heirs appointed to the crown,
To stay the title of establish’d right,
And in the people plant obedience,
While yet the prince did live, whose name and power
By lawful summons and authority
Might make a parliament to be of force,
And might have set the state in quiet stay
(5.2.264-71).²²

²² This is the reply of the wise Eubulus to Arostus who thinks that it is not too late for the Parliament to settle the succession, even if the king has died and there is no undisputed heir (see ll. 158-63).

Parliament has to take matters in hand while the sovereign is alive, since a country without an appointed ruler is like a “ship without a stern” (5.2.85):

Gwenard: Where empty place of princely governance,
No certain stay now left of doubtless heir,
Thus leave this guideless realm an open prey
To endless storms and waste of civil war
(5.2.111-14).

Not only is *Gorboduc* extremely direct in stating the necessity of appointing a successor to the throne, but it is also explicit in tracing an identikit of the ideal candidate. The right leader must be English-born and constitutionally designed:

Arostus: Right mean I his or hers, upon whose name
The people rest by mean of native line,
Or by the virtue of some former law
Already made their title to advance. [. . .]
With that same heart, my lords, keep out also
Unnatural thraldom of [a] stranger’s reign;
Ne suffer you, against the rules of kind,
Your mother land to serve to a foreign prince
(5.2.165-68; 176-79).

Many scholars have seen in V.ii, ll. 165-68 an attempt to advance the cause of Catherine Grey, a niece of Henry VIII and Elizabeth’s successor according to the will of her father. However, if *Gorboduc* is circumspect in advocating the cause of a recognisable claimant (Catherine Grey was in disgrace at the time of the performance), the play is much more direct (see 5.2.176-79) in expressing its hostility towards another candidate for the succession: Mary Stuart, the only foreign claimant to the English crown.

The “unnatural thraldom of a stranger’s reign” (l. 176) also seems to suggest that a foreign marriage, like the one contracted by Elizabeth’s predecessor, had to be avoided. Indeed, a contemporary account of the performance shows that the play placed great

emphasis on the issue of royal marriage. Whereas the surviving texts interpret the second dumb show as evidence of the dangers of giving credit to flattery, in his account of *Gorboduc* Robert Beale, the Elizabethan courtier and administrator, declares that the second mime signified:

. . . 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] knowen then with the K[ing] of Sweden. [. . .] Many thinges were handled of mariage, 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 councell.²³

Evidently, the original performance was explicit in recommending the Dudley match as the ideal solution to the issue of the succession at a time when a rival was suiting for the Queen's hand: Eric XIV, King of Sweden. Besides, both at the Inner Temple and at Court the play was presented with a masque (the masque of Desire and Lady Bewty) that allegorically advocated a marriage with Lord Robert Dudley.²⁴

The emphasis laid on advice, together with the stress on the necessity of choosing a successor, could be interpreted as an implicit reproach to a sovereign who had disappointed the expectations of her country regarding her marriage, and who had equally ignored the plea of the Commons who had requested their Queen to marry in February 1559. The complaint of Philander seems to give voice to that very deception:

O most unhappy state of counsellors,
That light on so unhappy lords and times
That neither can their good advice be heard
(5.2.69-71).

A counsellor has the duty to be sincere ("*Gorboduc*: My lords, be plain, without all wry respect, / Or poisonous craft to speak in pleasing wise," I.ii, ll. 29-30), and the students at the Inns of Court, who represented the future ruling class of England, with a play like *Gorboduc* wanted to remind a Queen who was not ready enough to accept advice that they were the right people to accomplish the task of counselling a monarch, as the Proclamation of 16 May

²³ BL, Add. MS 48023, fo. 359v. Cited by James and Walker 112-13.

²⁴ For a detailed description of the masque and its interpretation, see Axton 365-78.

1559 acknowledged:

And for instruction to every of the said officers, her majesty doth likewise charge every of them as they will answer: that they permit none [interlude] to be played wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonweal shall be handled or treated, being no meet matters to be written or treated upon but by men of authority, learning, and wisdom, nor to be handled before any audience but of grave and discreet persons. . .²⁵

In 1566 the Queen would forbid the Parliament to discuss the matter of the succession, but the reply she gave to the petition presented by the Commons in February 1559 already signified that she did not like any kind of interference in the subject:

. . . the manner of your petition I do well like of and take in good part, because that it is simple and containeth no limitation of place or person. If it had been otherwise, I must needs have misliked it very much and thought it in you a great presumption, being unfitting and altogether unmeet for you to require them that may command, or those to appoint whose parts are to desire, or such to bind and limit whose duties are to obey, or to take upon you to draw my love to your liking or frame my will to your fantasies; for a guerdon constrained and a gift freely given can never agree together.²⁶

However, the disillusionment engendered by the Queen's reluctance to settle the succession could not be permitted to become rebellion. Unlike John Ponet and Christopher Goodman, who argued for tyrannicide in their treatises,²⁷ Norton and Sackville do not justify revolt. Indeed, regicide is utterly condemned in *Gorboduc* and the sacredness of the ruler is declared (see also 5.2.55). First, the theory of non-resistance is expounded at length in the play: even tyrants must be obeyed:

Eubulus: That no cause serves, whereby the subject may
Call to account the doings of his prince,

²⁵ "Proclamation 458. 1 Elizabeth I (1559)," Hughes and Larkin 2:115.

²⁶ "The Reply of Elizabeth to the House of Commons Touching the Succession." Cauthen 76.

²⁷ John Ponet wrote a *Shorte Treatise of Politike Power and of the True Obedience which Subjects Owe to kynges* in 1556 and Christopher Goodman is the author of *How Superior Powers ought to be Obeyd*, published in 1558.

Much less in blood by sword to work revenge,
No more than may the hand cut off the head;
In act nor speech, no not in secret thought
The subject may rebel against his lord,
Or judge of him that sits in Caesar's seat,
With grudging mind to damn those he dislikes.
Though kings forget to govern as they ought,
Yet subjects must obey as they are bound
(5.1.42-51).

Second, the transgressive import of representing a regicide is neutralized in advance by making clear, in the dumb show that precedes the fourth act, that regicide is a crime against nature. It is equated with the murdering of parents by their own children:

First, the music of hautboys began to play, during which there came forth from under the stage, as though out of hell, three furies, [. . .] each driving before them a king and a queen, which, moved by furies, unnaturally had slain their own children. The names of the kings and queens were these: Tantalus, Medea, Athamas, Ino, Cambises, Althea; after that the furies and these had passed about the stage thrice, they departed, and then the music ceased. Hereby was signified the unnatural murders to follow; that is to say, Porrex slain by his own mother, and of king Gorboduc and queen Videna, killed by their own subjects (Craik 34).

Lastly, civil strife is shown to be the ruin of the realm and it is punished mercilessly in *Gorboduc*: the bloodshed that ensues from such a horrendous crime must be a deterrent to the generations to come:

Clotyn: I think the world will now at length beware
And fear to put on arms against their prince.
Manud: If not, those traitorous hearts that dare rebel,
Let them behold the wide and hugy fields
With blood and bodies spread of rebels slain;

The lofty trees cloth'd with the corpses dead,
That, strangled with the cord, do hang thereon.

Arostus: A just reward; such as all times before
Have ever lotted to those wretched folks.
(5.2.58-66).

The warning is intended to have both a universal value (“the world”) and a timeless value. Again, a monitory play like *Gorboduc* simultaneously wanted to chastise the Queen’s unwillingness to settle the issue of the succession, and to prevent the discontent it gave voice to from becoming insurrection.

5. Conclusion

The ambivalent attitude of the Tudor interlude towards authority (deferential yet critical, complying yet censorious) finds a parallel in the ambiguous and even contradictory attitude of the law towards this mode of theatre. As Proclamations, Acts of Parliament, chronicles and letters show, the Tudor government tried both to exploit the propagandistic potential of the political interlude and to check and repress its critical and disruptive potential.

In a letter of June 30th 1535 the imperial ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, related that King Henry VIII, in order to attend a performance based on a chapter of the *Apocalypse*, . . .

. . . went thirty miles from here, walked 10 miles at 2 o’clock at night with a two-handed sword, and got into a house where he could see everything. He was so pleased at seeing himself cutting off the heads of the clergy, that in order to laugh at his ease, and encourage the people, he discovered himself. He sent to tell his lady that she ought to see the representation of it repeated on the eve of St. Peter (Brewer 373).

The Revels Accounts for the first year of the reign of Edward VI mention: vestments for “ffryers” and “prestes in pley,” “cardynalles hattes for players,” and the “makynge of Crownes and Crosse for the poepe in playe.” And this is the description of the Twelfth Night revels of 1559 the Venetian ambassador, Schifanoia, gave in a letter:

As I suppose your Lordship will have heard of the farce performed (*farsa fatta*) in

the presence of her Majesty on the day of the Epiphany, and I not having sufficient intellect to interpret it, nor yet the mumery performed after supper on the same day, of crows in the habits of Cardinals, of asses habited as Bishops, and of wolves representing Abbots, I will consign it to silence (Brown and Cavendish-Bentinck 11).

But, while the above-mentioned documentary evidence shows that the Tudor rulers appreciated political interludes, the legal and punitive measures they took in order to keep such performances under control indicate that the Tudor governors were equally worried about the seditious effects the political interludes (especially the religious ones) could produce on the people. In 1539 the keeper of the Carpenters' Hall of London was cited for "procuring an interlude to be openly played, wherein priests were railed on and called knaves"(Foxe 5:443 and 446) and a Proclamation of 1545 forbade dramatic performances in "suspytyous darke and inconvenyent places" (Griffin 52). In 1549 a Proclamation prohibited interludes for two months providing the following reasons:

Forasmuch as a great number of those that be common players of interludes and plays, as well within the city of London as elsewhere within the realm, do for the most part play such interludes as contain matter tending to sedition, and contemning of sundry good orders and laws; whereupon are grown, and are daily like to grow and ensue much disquiet, division, tumults, and uproars in this realm.²⁸

A Proclamation of Mary Tudor prescribed that plays had "her grace's special license in writing for the same"²⁹ to be performed, and Elizabeth I's already quoted Proclamation of May 16th 1559 charged her officers. . .

[to] permit [no interlude] to be played wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonweal shall be handled or treated, being no meet matters to be written or treated upon but by men of authority, learning, and wisdom, nor to be handled before any audience but of grave and discreet persons.³⁰

²⁸ "Proclamation 344. 3 Edward VI (1549)," Hughes and Larkin 1:478.

²⁹ "Proclamation 390. I Mary I (1553)," Hughes and Larkin 1:7.

³⁰ "Proclamation 458. I Elizabeth I (1559)," Hughes and Larkin 2:115.

Thus, plays of a political nature were encouraged in so far as they could be useful in procuring the popular consensus, but, at the same time, political interludes could prove seditious and, for that reason, they had to be kept incessantly under control. The “advisory” interludes reveal a constitutional ambivalence between a propagandistic and a critical attitude. The four plays that have briefly been discussed are, to some extent, ambiguous: often, the advice they contain is not completely free of criticism, since they wished to induce the sovereign to adopt a different course of action, but, at the same time, they all aimed at keeping the subjects obedient. As it is, these advisory Tudor interludes are sites of conflict. They possessed a potential for both consolidation and disruption of the *status quo*, and not only the efficacy of these plays, but the very possibility for them of being performed depended on the capacity dramatists displayed in creating a balance between such conflicting possibilities.

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