

More Thoughts about John the Commonweal and Pauper

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Eleanor Rycroft's blog-post 'Who is John the Commonwealth?' identifies a crucial issue for our production of *The Three Estates*. Who speaks for the people of Scotland in the second half of the play, and to what effect? What are the political, regional, and social identities of the strident voices calling for reform to such striking effect?

In the 1540 interlude the petition for reform of church and state was voiced by a single figure, the Poor Man, who was situated very clearly in terms of his class and status as an impoverished rural small-holder, who, harried by high rents and cruel taxes, had been forced to 'skayle' (break up) his household and beg for bread. In the 1552 and 1554 versions of the Satire, however, the role of petitioner for the poor was divided between two distinct figures, the Pauper, a cottar from Tranent, who shares many of the features of the Poor Man, including the story of domestic ruin brought about by the new rental arrangement known as 'feuing', clerical taxes such as the corpse-present, and the rapacity of the clerical consistory courts; and John the Commonweal. Neither seems to be a highlander, certainly; Pauper is from Lothian, and John speaks broadly of issues as they affect the lowlands and Borders alone. Neither speaks Gaelic or uses Gaelic terms with any regularity. But within that broadly lowland perspective, who and what are these men, and for whom exactly do they speak? And what implications will our answers to those questions have on the nature and impact of our production, and our understanding of the play as a whole?

To begin with perhaps the most obvious question: how politically and dramatically radical are Pauper and John? The seminal Tyrone Guthrie production of 1948, performed at the Edinburgh International Festival, presented Pauper as an essentially comic figure with little direct political agency. While acknowledging that his entrance during the inter-act 'interlude' establishes 'the two main themes of the second part of the work, namely the oppression of the poor and the corruption of the church' (Programme, p. 7), the programme nonetheless describes his exchange with the Pardoner as 'a little farcical interlude', and calls John the Commonweal a 'symbolical figure of the Embattled Worker, and champion of the far weaker, sillier Poor Man.' (ibid.) But this description effectively trivialises Pauper and seems to me to represent both him and John.

Is John really a representative of the working class (an 'Embattled Worker'), or its early-modern equivalent, or indeed of any social class or estate? As Carole Edington notes (p. 120, and see 'Who is John the Commonwealth?') Lindsay seems carefully to avoid giving him the sort of detailed, socially-embedded back-story that he provides for Pauper, and which would allow his audiences to place him either socially or in terms of a specific place. (But, more on John in a moment.) The programme's description of Pauper seems still more puzzling. What is there about him that suggests that he is either 'weak' or 'silly'? I suppose it depends on what we mean by those words. He is disempowered within the world of the play, certainly, having been impoverished by the actions of his social superiors – and that is the issue which he enters it, powerfully, to protest about. But that does not necessarily make him weak, either in political terms within the world of the *Satire*, or in dramatic terms within the production. In each case I would argue that he is unsettlingly, dangerously, powerful. It is his sudden, unexpected, fall into poverty, the result of a series of personal tragedies, that gives his protesting voice its potency, just as his sudden, unexpected, irruption into the play gives him his dramatic power. Both his appearance and his story are shocking – and shockingly realistic (Lyall, *The Thrie Estates*, Introduction, p. xxix).

Unlike many analogous figures in the English drama of the same or later periods, Pauper is no simple stereotypical figure of comic rustic poverty. His situation, far from being abstract or symbolic, is very specifically and sympathetically drawn. As I suggested earlier, he was until very recently a cottar or small-holder with a very modest farm situated about a mile from Tranent in Lothian. He lived there with his parents and his wife (all now dead), their children, 'bairns either six or seven' (line 1935), and livestock (two mares and three cows). The livestock he has lost, owing to a combination of accident (one of the mares was drowned in the local quarry while on loan to a neighbour) and rapacious local taxes: the 'hyreild' or heriot paid in kind to his landlord on the death of his father, the tenant-in-chief, and the 'corpse-presents' and 'ummaist clais' (outer garment): death duties paid in kind to his parish priest on the deaths of his father, his mother, and Meg, his wife.

My father was ane auld man and ane hoar,	<i>grey-haired</i>
And was of age fourscore of years and more,	
And Mald, my mother, was fourscore and fifteen,	
And with my labour I did them baith sustain.	
We had ane mare that carryit salt and coal,	
And every ilk year sho brought us hame ane foal.	
We had three ky that was baith fat and fair,	<i>cows</i>
Nane tidier into the toon of Ayr.	<i>None better</i>
My father was sae weak of blood and bane	<i>bone</i>
That he died, wherefore my mother made great main.	<i>moan</i>
Then sho died within ane day or two,	
And there began my poverty and woe.	
Our good grey mare was baitin' on the field,	<i>grazing</i>
And our land's laird took her for his hierald. ¹	
The vicar took the best cow by the head,	
Incontinent, when my father was dead.	
And, when the vicar heard tell how that my mother	
Was dead, fra-hand he took to him another.	
Then Meg, my wife, did mourn both e'en and morrow,	<i>evening, morning</i>
Till at the last sho died for very sorrow.	
And when the vicar heard tell my wife was dead,	
The third cow he cleekit by the head.	<i>grabbed</i>
Their ummaist clais that was of rapploch gray, ²	
The vicar gart his clerk bear them away.	<i>made</i>
When all was gain, I might mak nae debate,	<i>gone, couldn't argue</i>
But with my bairns passed for to beg my meat.	(198-2005) <i>went, food</i>

Pauper's poverty is thus not 'natural' or emblematic, a feature of how life for folk like him always has been and always will be, but the consequence of very specific misfortunes and injustices. He did not start life poor, but became so relatively recently as the result of the tax system, and the lack of compassion of the local laird and clergy. His plight seems to call for an entirely serious and politically engaged response from the play's audiences.

¹ 'And our landlord took her for his heriot (the fee payable in kind on the death of the tenant-in-chief, usually the best animal on the farm).'

² 'The uppermost garments that were made of grey homespun.' 'The umest clayis' was another mortuary duty payable in kind to the parish priest.

It is useful briefly to compare Pauper with similar figures in the English drama of the same period, such as Commonalty in John Bale's *King Johan* and People in Nicholas Udall's *Respublica* (see Howard and Strohm for a similar comparative exercise). The most striking thing about them is the way that they speak. They voice their grievances in risible 'Mummersetshire' accents that no one spoke outside of a theatre, and which divert attention from the potential verisimilitude of the claims they are making to the absurd way that they make them. When People appears at court in Udall's play to appeal to Queen Respublica for the relief of his poverty, for example, he cannot get her name right, repeatedly calling her 'Ricepudding-Cake', and, while he is aware of the nature of his new-found poverty,³ is incapable of identifying its causes.

People

...let poor volk ha' zome part,
Vor we ignoram people, whom Ich do perzent,⁴
Were ne'er zo i-poled,⁵ zo wrong[ed], and zo i-torment.
Lord Jiss Christ when he was y-pounced and y-pulled,⁶
Was ne'er zo i-trounced as we have been of years late.

Adulation

How so? who hath wrought to you such extremity?

People

Nay, to tell how zo passeth our captivity.⁷

Respublica

It passeth any man's imagination.

People

You zay zooth, it passeth any man's Madge Mason;
Vor we think ye love us as well as ere ye did. (*Respublica*, 3.ii.12-19)

Commonalty in Bale's *King Johan* is equally incapable of addressing his own situation. Blind 'For want of Knowledge in Christ's lively verity' (1553), and so prone to the deceptions of the catholic clergy, who impoverish him, filling their bellies 'With my sweat and labour for their popish purgatory' (1567), he is swayed by whoever seeks to lead him. The agricultural labourer Hodge, in W.S' *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1575),⁸ Grim the Collier in Richard Edwards' *Damon and Pytheas* (1571),⁹ or Simplicity in Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of*

³ His analysis of what has gone wrong is actually detailed and astute: 'Bum vay, we ignoram people beeth not zo blind / But we perceive there falleth of corn and cattle, / Wool, sheep, wood, lead, tin, iron, and other metal, / And of all things enough vor good and bad, / And as comedians [he means 'commodious'] vor us as ere we had. / And yet the price of everything is zo dear, / As though the ground did bring vorth no such thing nowhere.' (3.ii.30-36)

⁴ We ignorant (i.e. unlearned) people, whom I represent.

⁵ Shaven (overtaxed)

⁶ Punched and pulled.

⁷ He means 'capacity'

⁸ 'See, so cham arrayed with dabbling in the dirt; / She that set me to ditching, ich would she had the squirt! / Was never poor soul that such a life had. / Gog's bones, this filthy clay has dressed me too bad. / God's soul, see how this stuff tears; / Ich were better to be a bear-ward and set to keep bears!' (2.i. 1-6)

⁹ 'Grim is my name indeed; cham not learned, and yet the king's collier. / This vorty winter cha been to the king a servitor. / Though I be not learned, yet cha mother-wit enough, whole and some.' (1095-97)

London (1584),¹⁰ are all similarly either guileless dupes of the villains, or themselves rogueish clowns, eager for a share of any spoils, treated with a broadly condescending mixture of affection and disdain by both their fellow characters and their creators. None seems either drawn from specific knowledge of the details of real poverty or genuinely distressed for long by the material conditions of their life.

The otherwise relatively politically sophisticated and engaged *Cambyses* (1570), by Thomas Preston, offers a portfolio of such marginal, trivialised and comic representations of the poor common people. The ‘clownish countrymen’ Hob and Lob and the inept petitioner, Small Hability are given away by their very names. The former, who are brought onstage to exchange rustic banter on the way to market and tricked into fighting each other by the Vice, Ambidexter, do not even seem particularly poor, if their inventories of the things they are hoping to sell at market is any index.

Lob

The clock hath stricken vive, ich think, by’r Laken!
Bum vay, vrom sleep cham not very well waken.
But, neighbour Hob, neighbour Hob, what have ye to zell?

Hob

Bum troth,¹¹ neighbour Lob, to you Ich’ll tell:
Chave two goslings and a chine of pork;
There is no vatter between this and York;
Chave a pot of strawberries, and a calf’s head
A zennight zince tomorrow, it hath been dead.

Lob

Chave a score of eggs, and of butter a pound;
Yesterday a nest of goodly young rabbits I vound;
Chave vorty things mo, of more and of less;
My brain is not very good them to express. (756-67)

By contrast Small Hability, the representative petitioner for the downtrodden poor, is allowed some dignity (although Preston cannot resist giving him at least one malapropism), but, as his name implies, he has little political agency or rhetorical force when he makes his brief petition to the unjust judge Sisamnes, and so is just as briefly dismissed.

Small Hability

I beseech you hear, good master judge, a poor man’s cause to tender;
Condemn me not in wrongful wise that never was offender.
You know right well my right it is; I have not for to give.
You take away from me my due that should my corpse relieve.
The commons of you do complain from them you devocate;¹²
With anguish great and grievous words their hearts do penetrate.
The right you sell unto the wrong, your private gain to win;

¹⁰ ‘Why, I’ll be no more a miller, because the maidens call me Dusty-poll; / One thumps me on the neck, and another strikes me on the nol, / And you see I am a handsome fellow: mark the comporknance [he means ‘comportment’] of my stature. / Faith, I’ll go seek peradventures, and be a serving-creature.’ (2.ii.19-24)

¹¹ By my troth (‘on my honour’)

¹² (That) you ‘call down’: probably a mistake for ‘derogate’ to destroy or take away the effect of the laws.

You violate the simple man and count it for no sin.

Sisamnes

Hold thy tongue, thou prattling knave, and give to me reward,
Else, in this wise I tell thee truth, thy tale will not be heard.
Ambidexter, let us go hence, and let the knave alone!

Ambidexter

Farwell, Small Hability, for helps now get you none;
Bribes hath corrupt him, good laws to pollute. [*Exeunt*]

Small Hability

A naughty man, that will not obey the king's constitute.
With heavy heart I will return, till God redress my pain. *Exit.* (326-40)

Such figures are not agents of reform, they appear briefly to petition those with real power, and have to rely on them to enact the reforms that they can only gesture inadequately towards. If the prince is unwilling or unable to act, such figures are impotent, and have to leave the stage frustrated. Commons' Cry, the embodiment of the protesting poor in *Cambyses*, exemplifies the role perfectly.

Enter Commons Cry, running in, speak this verse; [and] go out again hastily.

Commons' Cry

Alas! Alas! How are the commons oppressed
By that vile judge, Sisamnes by name!
I do not know how it should be redressed;
To amend his life no whit he doth frame.
We are undone and thrown out of door,
His damnable dealing doth us so torment.
At his hand we can find no relief nor succour;
God grant him grace for to repent! (357-64) *Run away crying.*

All of these English representations of the oppressed poor are far less detailed, much more emblematic representations of poor folk and their living conditions than Lyndsay's Pauper. Their poverty is an endemic feature, indeed the defining essence, of their role and identity. They are a fixed part of the life of the state, the poor who in Christ's words 'you will always have with you' (Matthew 26:11), and whose relief (but not long-term recovery) is a moral responsibility on every generation. In these plays, the well-being of such figures is primarily an index of the moral health of the sovereign and of the other characters they encounter. When Cambyses listens to Commons' Cry and subsequently to Commons' Complaint, and removes Sisamnes from power, he reveals himself to be a wise king. When he turns his back on them, he demonstrates that he has begun the slide into tyranny. The play does not require him to pass any legislation to address the plight of the poor, and their spokesmen are not heard of again. Despite, or in some case because of, their poverty and distress, these poor men are essentially marginalised and comic figures in their respective plays. They mistake any message that they are given by their social superiors, foolishly attempt to reproduce the linguistic formulations of the social elite with predictably malapropistical consequences, and generally dissipate the political and social urgency of the real social situations they gesture

towards in misplaced comic energy and pathos. Such figures might well deserve the terms reserved for Pauper by the 1948 programme: ‘weak’ and ‘sill[y]’.

Lyndsay’s Pauper, by contrast, does not seem at all like this. He may occasionally mistake what he hears. He briefly thinks that Robert Rome-Raker’s fraudulent pardon might be a means to secure the return of his cows, and he trusts naively that the law courts might grant him the justice he seeks. But when he struggles to comprehend the Latin terms and learned obfuscatory procedures of the lawyers, the satirical joke, along with the linguistically dextrous punch-line, is on them not him.

And I ran to the Consistory for to plenny,
And there I happenit amang ane greedy many. *crew*
They gave me first ane thing they call *citandum*,¹³
Within eight days I gat but *lybellandum*,¹⁴
Within ane month I gat *ad opponendum*,¹⁵
In half ane year I gat *interloquendum*,¹⁶
And syne I gat, how call ye it? *ad replicandum*,¹⁷
But I could never ane word yet understand ’em. (*Satire*, 3074-81)

He does not misspeak, and his accent is authentic, no more broad or regionally inflected than any of the other characters he encounters in the play. He is articulate, at times compellingly eloquent, passionate about his situation, and genuinely worthy of audience sympathy, without ever conforming to the stereotype of the deferential, pitiful representation of the ‘deserving poor’ so popular south of the border. He does not ‘know his place’. Nor does he want our charity, although he is reduced to begging. What he wants, and deserves, is justice: the restoration of his small-holding and the means to continue his livelihood and support his ‘motherless bairns’. The loss of that livelihood, when his cows were taken from him, has set him adrift in society, and he is seeking its return as a provocative, potentially dangerous rogue element in the Scotland of the 1550s. As Roderick Lyall notes, the very fact that he has left his parish with permission means that he is potentially in breach of the recently renewed 1535 Act against beggary (Lyall, p. ix). His attitude towards constituted authority and the power of tradition are caustic and dismissive. When Diligence warns him that his intrusion into the acting area threatens to spoil the play, he responds angrily, but not unreasonably,

I will give for all your play worth ane sowis fart,
For there is richt little play at my hungry heart. (1964-65?)

When Diligence goes on to tell him that the clerical taxes and prerogatives that he complains about are based upon ‘consuetude’, long practise and tradition, he responds boldly that,

Ane consuetude against the commonweal,
Should be nae law, I think, by sweet Sant Gile. (2222-23)

And he later replies, when told that this is how politics has always been arranged, that things would be very different were he king.

¹³ The opening word of a citation or summons.

¹⁴ The opening of a plea.

¹⁵ The formal response to a plea.

¹⁶ An interim decree.

¹⁷ The Plaintiff’s response to an *ad opponendum*.

John the Commonweal, on the other hand, while he is a forceful, abrasive critic of the shortcomings of civil and clerical government, is in many ways a less threatening figure, more willing to conform to the protocols and processes of the political establishment (Walker, *Politics of Performance*, pp. 155-57). He, like Pauper, pushes through the audience to get his voice heard ('Out of my gate, for God's sake let me gae!' (2424)), but he does so in response to a formal invitation: Diligence's proclamation that explicitly states that the King and Parliament want to hear the complaints of anyone who feels they have been ill-treated.

All manner of men I warn that be oppressed,
Come and complain, and they shall be redressed.
For-why it is the noble Prince's will,
That ilk complainer shall give in his bill. (2420-23)

His protest is thus licensed and sanctioned by those in authority in ways that Pauper's is not. This may be simply to say that he is cannier than Pauper, more able to use the political system to his own advantage, but his willingness to accommodate himself to the processes of government (on which see more below) prepare the audience for the striking moment later in the play when those processes in turn accommodate him, finding him a place among the Estates as a new member of a reformed parliament.

But who, then, is John, the voice of this new popular politics? He is to some extent the *vox populi* that is also *vox dei*, the voice of prophetic outrage who chastises a slumbering nation, king included, who has 'slept too lang' and allowed self-interest and corruption to overgrow the nation like toxic weeds. He is a voice of the people, but not in a way that maps neatly on to the preoccupations of modern leftist politics. Thus the suggestion in the 1948 programme that his acceptance of the 'gay garmoun' and admission into the Estates at the conclusion of the parliament is 'a sort of labour peerage' (p.7), while it hints at the uneasy compromise between thoroughgoing reform and vested interests implied at this point in the play, is a little too simplistic in its implications. John speaks up for the poor and downtrodden, and champions both Pauper's honesty and his claims for redress. But he is not *of* the poor people in the sense that Pauper is. He does not have a back-story that places him in either farmstead or burgh. He is 'raggit' (2773) and 'crookit' (2446), and lacks warm clothes, brought low by high taxes and feus, by governmental neglect and the deliberate oppression of the self-interested. But it is a more general oppression that he suffers than that visited on Pauper, with its local habitation and name. We do not learn precisely how it has come about, nor who precisely did it. It is more symbolic of the general low state of the Scottish commonwealth than Pauper's very particular story of misery and loss. And John himself seems to embody, as Edington suggests, 'the universal and public good of the whole community and not the interests of any single element' (p. 120). But how, then, is he to be performed, and to what effect? Again he seems to invite a more complex, nuanced, representation than the notion of an 'Embattled Worker'.

John, while he speaks passionately for Pauper and against his powerful oppressors, is also a scourge of what he defines as the idle 'strang beggars' (2608), the undeserving poor 'whilk labours not and been weel fed' (2623), an alarmingly broad grouping that includes not only the contemplative religious ('Lyn' in dens like idle dogs, / I them compare to weel fed hogs!' (2626-7)) but also musicians, artists, poets, entertainers (including presumably playwrights) and superfluous servants of the nobility,

Fiddlers, pipers, and pardoners,
Thir jugglers, jesters, and idle cutchers,
Thir carriers and thir quintacensors,
Thir bauble-bearers and thir bairds,
Thir sweer swingeours with lords and lairds (2609-13)

gamblers
sycophants, alchemists
(fools), bards

In its scope, and seemingly indiscriminate mingling of fraudsters and wandering false-beggars with those whose circumstances or trade force them to adopt an itinerate lifestyle, John's list has more than a hint of modern right-wing rhetoric against 'welfare scroungers' and suspicious-looking strangers. There is thus, nestling within his plea for reform, more than a hint, as Gerry Mulgrew and Tam Dean Burn both noted in rehearsing these speeches, of post-Reformation Scottish protestant objection to – and eventual suppression of – whole swathes of popular ludic and recreational traditions, from May Games and guising to dancing, singing, and drinking. There is a sense that, if left to his own devices, John might use Parliament to ban everything that was not recognisable as honest labour and piety, banishing any sense of fun in the process.

What, then, does the admission of John into Parliament signify? Not the arrival of a genuinely universal suffrage or representation. It does not mark the advent of the representation of the rural poor themselves among the three Estates. It is more a symbolic acknowledgement that parliament must adapt to represent the nation as a whole more effectively: government *for* the poor rather than actually *by* the poor. This is unsurprising in terms of the political contexts in which Lyndsay was writing. Universal suffrage would not begin to find purchase in western European politics for another three hundred years or more, and then only gradually, grudgingly, and initially only with men in mind. So expecting Lyndsay to advocate a Marxist version of political reform in the 1550s would be entirely anachronistic. But it is nonetheless a radical step that he does represent, and so bring into being within the political imaginary of the nation: an acknowledgement that the traditional governors need to take cognizance of a wider social perspective, and formalise that cognizance within the body of parliament, if they are to govern effectively for Scotland as a whole.

And in one respect at least, Lyndsay's reform of the Estates just may have been more radical than it initially appears, more radical indeed than anything the contemporary UK Parliament in London has so far been willing to contemplate. The crucial question here is, just how many Estates are there to be once John the Commonweal has found his place? What, that is, happens to the clergy? The catholic bishops are clearly dispossessed on grounds of their incapacity to fulfil their roles, and replaced by learned, university educated, preaching (and by implication, proto-protestant) divines. As Correction, prompted by Verity, declares,

With the advice of King Humanity,
Here I determine with ripe advisement,
That all thir prelates shall deprivit be,
And by decree of this present Parliament,
That thir thrie cunning clerks sapient
Immediately their places shall possess,
Because that they have been sae negligent
Suff'ring the word of God for to decrease. (3735-42)

Then Correction enjoins the Estates to give John ‘place in our parliament syne’ (3802), which they do, ‘set[ting] him down among them in the Parliament’ as the adjacent stage direction reads.

So do we now have three Estates or four? The proclamation of the Acts of Parliament, read out by Diligence, is issued in the name of three Estates.

The First Act: It is devisit by thir prudent Kings,
Correctioun and King Humanity,
That their lieges enduring all their rings, *subjects, throughout, reigns*
With the advice of the Estates Three,
Shall manfully defend and fortify
The Kirk of Christ and his religioun,
Without dissimulance or hypocrisy,
Under the pain of their punitioun. (3823-30)

So what has happened? Did John, by joining the assembly not add a fourth Estate? Did he perhaps take his place alongside Merchand as a representative of the non-noble laity? Or did one of the existing Estates make way for him? If so, then the clergy are the only plausible candidates, for it is explicitly stated that it is Temporality and Merchand who give John his ‘gay garmoun’ and show him to his seat. If it is the latter, then the play leaves us with a striking vision of a wholly secular parliament, and a Scotland in which church and state are formally separated. Frustratingly, the text is not explicit about what is to happen onstage. We see the orders of friars and nuns expelled from Scotland in their entirety, and by implication the abbots go with them, and they are not replaced, thus removing the heads of the abbeys and monasteries from the assembly. But do the new, reformed bishops take Spirituality’s seat (is that what is meant by ‘thir three cunning clarks sapient, / Immediately their places shall possess’?), or are they hereafter restricted to merely the ecclesiastical sphere? The evidence is ambivalent. That the ‘new prelates’ are said to ‘consent’ to the proposal that no temporal matters should henceforth come before the consistory courts (3889-90) might imply that they remain a part of the legislative body. But it might plausibly be that they agreed only in their role as future consistory judges. The injunction that ‘Ilk bishop in his diocese shall remain’ (3940), probably means only that they should normally be resident in their sees, rather than being long-term absentees (the inevitable consequence if they held more than one bishopric in plurality); not that they could not leave their diocese for events such as a meeting of parliament. So, has Lyndsay represented only a significant expansion of the representative assembly of Scotland, or has he, *sotto voce*, suggested a fundamental revolution in the nature of Scottish representative government and political culture, the dissolution of the church in Scotland, a good 130 years before the Glorious Revolution? The play remains tantalizingly ambiguous.

This position, just short of decisive clarity on a crucial issue, also characterises the play’s attitude to the possibility of reform as a whole. As we saw, the formal petition for redress of grievance (a plot device that had also been used in John Heywood’s courtly interlude, *The Play of the Weather* (1533) to dramatise the impossibility of pleasing a diverse and divided, self-interested political nation all of the time, and by Lyndsay himself in the 1540 interlude version of *The Thrie Estaitis* to tell James V (mostly) what he wanted to hear about the need for reform in the church) is used in the *Satire* of 1552 and 1554 to give John a voice within the Parliament House. And notably, as we have seen, it is a voice that the political establishment is willing and able to accommodate. John quickly acclimatizes himself to both

the pragmatic politics and the formal processes of the meeting, swiftly sensing which of the clerics he can subject to the full force of his hostility, and which he needs to be wary of, readily berating the Parson, but seeking Correction's protection before he will complain about the Bishop or stray into matters of doctrine. Similarly within a few hundred lines of his entrance he has adopted the terminology of the legislative process as if it were his own ('On that, sir Scribe, I tak ane instrument.' (2821)). And in turn Temporality and Merchand are, with a little prompting from Correction, ready to accept both John's complaints as genuine and pressing (not least, perhaps, as they are able to deflect attention from their own complicity in Pauper's plight), and John himself into the body of the Estates. Thus John is decorously and ceremoniously inducted into the political establishment in his new 'gay garmoun', as the parliament closes, and representational theory and practice readjust to reflect and accommodate changing social priorities. The voice of the community of the whole realm has found its place alongside the more obviously sectional interests of the landowning nobility and the urban burgesses as part of an emblem of a well-integrated political nation, just as Chastity, Verity, and Good Counsel have found their places alongside the throne of Rex Humanitas in an emblematic representation of good kingship, and Correctioun, inspired by Verity, provides an emblem of a severe, Calvinist-inflected model of religious reform.

But, and it is a significant but, the play explicitly acknowledges that this decorous, harmonious resolution of the play in terms of a shift in the balance of political representation at the centre is not enough to resolve the issues it has raised. And significantly it is Pauper who is the vehicle for that acknowledgement. He alone among the virtuous figures is neither comfortably accommodated among the estates nor found a rewarding new role to play in Rex and Correction's new, reformed Scotland. He remains outside of the Parliament hall itself, standing at the bar, voicing his complaints and cries for justice from this marginal position as he has throughout the play – and just as he has been to the play itself, having seemingly slipped in uninvited during the recess and just stayed there, refusing to leave, despite Diligence's injunction that he should be dragged away with Robert Rome-Raker the Pardoner to be kept imprisoned ready to be hanged at the end of the play.

Pauper's first words in the play are an awkward combination of petition and importunate demand ('Of your alms, good folks, for God's love of Heaven' (1934)), delivered at a point, '*the Kings, Bishops, and principal players being out of their seats.*' (s.d. following l. 1933) when spectators would be uncertain if he were a licensed part of the play or a disruptive intrusion from outside it (Walker, 'Cultural Work', pp. 90-93). And his last words are similarly awkwardly ambivalent. As the Acts of the Parliament are formally proclaimed, he alone does not fully share the Estates' sense of a job well done. He voices gratitude for what the assembly has done to address his grievances, but he also warns that in the politics of the real world Acts of Parliament are of little value if there is not the political will to carry them through in practice, and for the long term.

	I give you my braid benison,	<i> blessing</i>
	That has given Commonweal a gown.	
	I would not for ane pair of placks,	<i> fourpenny coins</i>
3985	Ye had not made thir noble Acts.	
	I pray to God and sweet Sant Geill	
	To give you grace to use them weel:	
	Were they weel kept, I understand,	
	It were great honour to Scotland.	
3990	It had been as good ye had slept,	<i> (But) it</i>

As to mak Acts and be not kept.

The Estates are thus put on warning by a common man that, while they may have put their own house in order by admitting John, they have not yet addressed the real plight of poor folk like himself. Hence we do not see him return to Tranent with a warrant in his hand for the return of his ‘three ky’, still less the grey mare taken by his laird. Henceforth priests will be ‘clean denudit / Baith of corse-present cow, and ummest claith’ (3930) and the lairds, ‘From thine-forth they shall want their herald horse’ (3934), but the legislation is not retrospective. Pauper still does not have the means to make a living for himself and his bairns. Injustice remains, and corruption still pollutes Scottish society at every level – that is the burden of the vices’ speeches from the scaffold, as they identify by name specific members of the Cupar audience as false and deceitful craftsmen and traders. And Flattery is still free in the world to work his mischief with princes and burgesses alike. By implication it is the audience who will have to do the work in the world that will ensure that Pauper’s grievances are redressed, and they will have to do so by first reforming themselves. Such a message, like the figure who delivers it, seems far from weak, and far from silly.

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