

## 5 The Christmas drama of the household of St John's College, Oxford

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In the late-medieval and early modern period, several of the colleges of the University of Oxford were sites of regular theatrical activity. The *Records of Early English Drama* [REED] volume for Oxford gives evidence of plays and interludes being staged at Magdalen College from 1485 onwards; in the first half of the sixteenth century there are records of comedies, tragedies, and interludes being performed at New, Lincoln, Exeter, and Trinity Colleges; in the 1560s Christ Church and Merton were regularly theatrical venues.<sup>1</sup> Plays were staged in the colleges to mark special occasions, such as official visits by royalty or ambassadors, as well as for Christmas parties for staff and students: these plays were statements of a college's understanding of itself as a community. The choice of subject might reflect on a college's identity—for example, the first play for which we have a title is *St Mary Magdalene*, which was staged at Magdalen College in 1506–1507—or the occasion of a play might be relevant, as when Trinity College staged a spectacle for Trinity Sunday in 1564–1565. But Christmas plays have left the most abundant records, especially in the late-medieval period. The tradition of colleges marking Christmas with some kind of theatrical activity has medieval roots, and St John's Christmas drama must be understood in this tradition, though the first extant record of a play at St John's College is at Christmastime 1568–1569.<sup>2</sup>

Many plays, and the historical records of the circumstances of their performance collected by REED, provide more or less oblique insights into the functioning of the colleges not only as centres of intellectual activity but also as material households. The material life of the household becomes caught up in the presentation of material which is the official study of the students within colleges: classical texts. When dramatically presented, these texts become dependent on the labour of chefs, carpenters, and painters in the household staff of the colleges, and they are enlivened



and made contemporary through the household activities of the students, most notably eating. College hospitality was referred to as 'Domus'—to be a 'domus' guest is still to eat at the college's expense—and the term is richly suggestive in relation to college drama. As Tiffany Stern has recently shown, 'house' is a term commonly used in commercial theatre to refer to locations with specific functions—playhouse, tiring-house—and those functions included storage of valuable items such as costumes and props.<sup>3</sup> In Oxford, the term might prompt us to consider, in relation to drama, what was 'stored' in a college household. This chapter will define the 'materials' of a college household broadly as including: people who work within the college, whether as domestic servants, students, or tutors; elements of the university curriculum and the books that preserve the knowledge the colleges sought to impart; domestic furniture and objects such as tables, paintings, and candles, and the account books that, while household objects themselves, also record expenditure on domestic objects and labour.

Plays were often presented within college halls, which were also the focus of the household as the places in which members of the community met at meals. Unsurprisingly, several surviving plays feature feasts prominently in their action. For example, William Gager's *Dido* was staged in 1583 in Christ Church dining hall to honour a visit from the Polish Ambassador. As a royal establishment, Christ Church was expected to host the Queen's guests in royal style, and the production famously featured a storm of rose water, hunting dogs, and a marzipan reconstruction of the City of Troy.<sup>4</sup> When Gager's learned, Latin play was presented as a dinner entertainment, the feasting guests and the serving staff were identified with the guests and servers of the fictional feast presented—the feast at which Dido falls in love with her guest, Aeneas, but also the feast at which she displays her power as a lavish and generous host. Five decades later, by contrast, *Grobiana's Nuptials*, a short, vernacular, in-house and after-dinner production at St John's College, mercilessly and obscenely parodied the pretensions of learned and polite society through a staged dinner that again probably identified its feasting audience members with dinner guests within the play.

This chapter will focus on St John's College, where were written and performed a large number of the scripts that survive as examples of early drama from the University of Oxford. These survivals are early seventeenth century, but they participate in a late-medieval festive playing tradition, to which they sometimes



explicitly refer. They reflect and sometimes satirise, from their seventeenth-century perspective, aspects of the college household that survive from the medieval period into the early modern—and indeed in some cases to the present day. And they present, sometimes in earnest and sometimes in parody, material and ideas that were fundamental to the late-medieval, as well as the early modern, Oxford curriculum, rooted as it was in the study of Latin and Greek language, literature, and philosophy. This chapter will discuss the surviving plays written in English, which have been less frequently examined by scholars than those written in Latin. It will first briefly characterise the St John's College household as a site for dramatic performance, through description of pertinent features including institutional history, the identity of the students, academic curricula, college personnel, and dining habits. It will then discuss *The Christmas Prince*, an exceptionally detailed early dramatic record that illuminates many material details of dramatic performance at St John's including finance, play-texts, play language, rehearsal practices, stage construction, scheduling, audience and actor identities, and interaction with the world beyond the college through dramatic representation. The chapter will then examine in more depth two further St John's plays: *Narcissus*, which shortly pre-dates *The Christmas Prince*, and *Grobiana's Nuptials*, which post-dates it. *Narcissus* offers moments of insight into the influence of the commercial theatre on college theatre: the discussion here considers props and women's roles. *Grobiana's Nuptials* offers a parodic treatment of many aspects of college life and college plays, exemplified in this chapter through a close study of repeated, varied uses of candles in the play. The overarching goal of this chapter is to explore under-studied college drama by illuminating the relationship between dramatic form and the movement of objects, people, and ideas into and out of a particular collegiate household.

#### The St John's College household as a site for college drama

The College of St John the Baptist was founded in Oxford in 1555, on the site of the dissolved Cistercian St Bernard College. Strictly speaking, St John's is thus an early modern institution, though on a medieval foundation, and maintaining the function of the medieval colleges—training men for the Church. St John's was intended primarily to be a seminary for the secular clergy, and, being founded in the reign of Mary, to contribute to the reform of

a Church recently reconciled to Rome: it was thus both reforming and conservative, a college re-affirming the medieval, Roman Catholic, origins of Oxford.<sup>5</sup> Its statutes were 'almost a verbatim copy' of the 1517 statutes of Corpus Christi College.<sup>6</sup> The founder, Sir Thomas White, had been Master of the Merchant Taylors Company, and by 1564 twelve places at the college were allocated to boys from the Merchant Taylors School; there were also places for boys from Tonbridge, Bristol, Coventry, and Reading Schools. Boys could be admitted between the ages of thirteen and twenty. By 1583 there was a president and fifty fellows (the term applies to undergraduates and graduates, though fellows within their first three years came to be known as scholars).

The government of the college was in the hands of the president and the ten senior fellows, who included the Vice-President, the Dean of Theology, and two Deans of Arts—Deans of Law and Philosophy were subsequently added—who supervised students' attendance at lectures and disputations. These positions reflect the priorities of the Oxford curriculum. While it is difficult to be certain exactly what was studied in medieval Oxford, fundamentally, medieval concepts of the unity of knowledge prevailed well into the seventeenth century, and informed educational ideals. As Mordechai Feingold puts it:

Every educated man received instruction in the entire arts and science curriculum which ... included mathematics as well as logic, rhetoric, music and philosophy—and was deemed capable of contributing to any one of its constituents. Similarly, the conviction that grounding in the various arts and sciences was a prerequisite for the study of theology continued to command respect, as did the belief in the inherent interdependence of all the arts and sciences. The product of such an ideal of education continued to be the 'general scholar'.<sup>7</sup>

Elizabeth I's *Nova Statuta* (1564/1565) required for the BA three terms of arithmetic, two of music, four of rhetoric, two of grammar, and five of dialectic; Edward VI's Statutes (1549) had placed more emphasis on mathematics, including arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and cartography, and this emphasis was reasserted by the Savilian Statutes (1619) that were incorporated by Laud, along with moral philosophy. To qualify for his MA, a student had to be examined in geometry, astronomy, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and other liberal sciences that may have included, as at Cambridge, astronomy, perspective, and Greek.<sup>8</sup>

Residence within the college was required almost year-round: a probationer could be absent from St John's only thirty days in the year, a full fellow only sixty days. St John's, like other Oxford colleges, then as now, was therefore concerned with material as much as intellectual provision for its residents. Like the Inns of Court and Army barracks, the colleges of the universities became 'venerable institutions that provided domestic services for lone men', providing them with room and board, and society.<sup>9</sup> In the seventeenth century there was also increased interest among the upper classes in sending their sons to the universities, 'that their reason, and fancy, and carriage, be improved ... that they may become Rationall and Gracefull speakers, and be of an acceptable behaviour in their countries'.<sup>10</sup>

From the foundation of St John's, there were appointed two bursars who received rents and revenues and kept accounts in two books, one the president's and the other their own: the survival of many of these books ensures the preservation of many details of the historic domestic functioning of the college. There were various college servants; two servants allocated to the president, a manciple under the order of the bursars, whose primary duty was the purchase of food; the butler and the under-butler, to attend the company at meals; the cook and the under-cook; the porter, who had charge of the various gates and also functioned as the barber to shave and cut the hair of the president and fellows. There was also a clerk of accounts and a wood reeve. The butler and under-butler and the porter were required to be celibate, as of course were the fellows, so the college would have been an exclusively male environment. Laundresses were employed but did not work on site; they came to collect clothes on Monday or Tuesday mornings at 8am and brought back clean linen by 3pm on Saturdays.

Dining was of course materially and socially important. 'Quasi-domestic, but bother-free, institutional dinners were custom-made for ambitious bachelors.'<sup>11</sup> At St John's, as at many other colleges, board was provided not only for the fellows but also for a number of 'commoners', that is, men who lodged and ate at the 'common' table in the college without being fellows there. Often these commoners were former fellows who had given up their fellowships in order to marry, or because they declined the ordination that was, at the college's foundation, the envisaged purpose of St John's students; there were also some who, on ordination, took livings elsewhere. In 1600, in addition to the fellows of St John's, there were twenty commoners who had the right to dine

in college. These included for example Thomas Aldworth, who had taken his BD at St John's and then moved to a living in Somerset, and Jerome Kyte, who had taken his BCL and lost his fellowship on refusal to take holy orders in 1598.<sup>12</sup> The dinners at which these commoners and the college fellows met were the locus for occasional college plays; these commoners and fellows constituted the pool from which local audience members and performers might be drawn.

### Christmas at St John's, 1607–1608: *The Christmas Prince*

In the first century of the history of St John's College, one of its 'most characteristic' institutions was the Christmas revellings.<sup>13</sup> These could be on a very large scale. In one known case the festivities lasted from 31 October 1607 to Shrove Tuesday, 13 February 1608, and began with the election from among the students of a Christmas Prince to preside over the proceedings that included plays in Latin and in English. An account of the events of 1607–1608 is preserved in Oxford, St John's College Library MS 52, pp. 5–260, under the title: 'A True, and faithfull relation of the risinge and fall of THOMAS TUCKER Prince of Alba Fortunata, Lord of St. Iohns'. This text, known as *The Christmas Prince*, offers considerable insight into the use of college resources for culinary and cultural purpose.<sup>14</sup> These celebrations were costly. Money for the revels was raised from former members (£16. 10s.) and one of the college's most important benefactors, Sir William Paddy (£3), as well as from the residents (£52. 13s. 7d., including £9. 11s. 5d.). Resources were also donated by tenants of friends of the college, in 'extraordinary prouision against euery Feast ... Some sendinge money, some Wine, some Venison'.<sup>15</sup> The connection between dinner and drama is thus clearly demonstrated in these accounts. The letter with which Tucker sought donations alludes to 'y<sup>e</sup> fame of our Kingdome in y<sup>e</sup> entertaynment of forraine Princes & Embassadours'—suggesting the diplomatic purpose of academic plays like *Dido*. But Tucker alludes also to the need for resources to ensure 'y<sup>e</sup> safetie of our owne person, and y<sup>e</sup> whol Common wealth for the praeuentinge of warrs and tumults'.<sup>16</sup> This seems to indicate some rather rougher aspects to the Christmas Prince festivities, and some rather less stately activities that might include town–gown tensions or simply festive miscreancy on the part of a community of young men. When some students could not get into the hall to watch a performance of *Periander*, they made 'a hideous

noice, and raised ... a tumult w<sup>th</sup> breaking of windows all about the Colledge throwinge of stones into the hall, and such like ryott'.<sup>17</sup>

In total *The Christmas Prince* records the performance, in the extended festive period of 1607–1608, of eight plays: in Latin, *Ara Fortunae*, *Saturnalia*, *Philomela*, *Philomates*, *Ira Fortunae*, and in English, *Time's Complaint*, *The Seven Days of the Week*, and *Periander*. The significance of the language of composition of each play is not always clear. Although there was a prohibition for some years on Cambridge students performing publicly in English, this prohibition was apparently not always observed even there, and no parallel prohibition seems to have been enacted in Oxford.<sup>18</sup> Of the 'English Tragedy' *Periander*, *The Christmas Prince* does record that 'many arguments were alleged against it', including that it was 'English, a language vnfitt for the Vniversitie especially to end so much late sporte w<sup>th</sup>all'.<sup>19</sup> Maybe it was particularly inappropriate to perform *tragedy* in English; certainly, it was inappropriate to let an English tragedy be the climax of the Christmas Prince revels. *The Christmas Prince* also records further masques, processions, songs, and addresses that formed part of the festivities. The generous funding of the revels was not, apparently, sufficient to guarantee the quality of all theatrical productions, for Tucker himself walked out of one horribly under-rehearsed 'device' illustrating the twelve days of Christmas: 'most of them were out both in there speeches and measures, having but thought of this devise some few houres before.'<sup>20</sup>

This comment indicates, intriguingly, that at least some of the festive presentations were spontaneous, almost improvised events. Other productions were large-scale and required considerable planning, not least because St John's, in common with the other colleges, had no permanent theatre structure, and so employed carpenters in the construction of temporary stages and scaffolds. The most spectacular constructions were probably at Christ Church, which received financial contributions from other colleges to support the occasional grand entertainments required of it as a royal foundation. At St John's, it seems that some, but not all, plays were judged to merit the building of a stage—of the play *Ara Fortunae*, which was put on for the installment of the Christmas Prince, we read that

This Showe by our selues was not thought worthye of a stage or scaffoldes, and therefore after supper ye tables were onlye sett together, wch was not done without great toyle & difficult by reason of ye great multitude of people (wch by ye default of ye Dore-keepers,

an diuers others, euery mann bringinge in his freinde) had fild ye Hall before wee thought of it.<sup>21</sup>

The implication seems to be that the actors performed on the tables that were pushed together to provide a raised platform. This certainly provides a cheap and easy stage, its improvised nature indicated by the fact that the audience had arrived in the hall before the actors had come up with the idea.<sup>22</sup> There does not seem to have been any concern about damage to the tables from the actors walking on them, although where scaffolds were not used there may have been some concern about damage to the hall floor from the actors' boots. Perhaps, however, this is an aspect of parody where the actors are presenting working men, as in the case of *Narcissus*, in which the 'Second Actor' asks the College Porter to put something down to protect the floor from his boots, for 'wee have pittifull nailes in our shooes' that will otherwise make 'abhominable scarrs in the face on't'.<sup>23</sup> That the lack of bouncers at *Ara Fortuna* led to the St John's men each bringing along friends and filling the hall seems to imply the popularity of these events. Indeed in spite of the performers' reservations the audience enjoyed the show so much that their applause caused the backdrop to collapse:

ye Canopie wch hunge ouer ye Altare of Fortune (As it had binne frighted wth ye noise, or meante to signifie that 2 plaudites were as much as it deserued) suddenly fell downe.<sup>24</sup>

Where a play, or perhaps the occasion of its production, was thought to merit the building of scaffolds, there was a risk that the workmen might not prove reliable. Carpenters caused a day's delay in the performance of *Philomela*:

The next day being Innocents' Day, it was expected, & partly determined by o<sup>r</sup> selves, that the Tragedy of Phylomela should have been publikely acted w<sup>ch</sup> (as wee thought) would well haue fitted the day by reason of the murder of Innocent Itis. But the Carpenters beeing no-way ready w<sup>th</sup> the stage or scaffold's (whereof notwithstanding some were made before Christ-mas, wee were Constrained to differe it till the next day w<sup>ch</sup> was the 29 of December.<sup>25</sup>

This comment also reveals details about the scheduling of these plays. There were expectations of a performance appropriate to the Feast Day, and the performance was to be 'publik'. As *Philomela* is in Latin, 'publik' perhaps here implies only a broader university audience.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Ovid's tale of Philomela would have been familiar to any boy with a grammar school education.<sup>27</sup> Of the

play *Time's Complaint* the author notes that 'wee onely proposed to our selves a shew but the toune expected a perfect and absolute play'.<sup>28</sup> The 'publik' therefore may well refer to an audience of town as opposed to purely gown.<sup>29</sup>

*Time's Complaint*, for all that it apparently did not go down very well with its audience, is a play appropriate, perhaps, to a more general, less purely academic audience.<sup>30</sup> It is in English, and takes place partly at the pub of Good-wife Spiggot. It features other non-academic figures such as Humphrey Swallow, a drunken cobbler, Manco, a lame soldier, and Bellicoso, a 'casheere corporall', as well as Philonics, a rangling lawyer who has ruined the poor countryman Clinias. The Scholar, Studioso, is brought in by Clinias to help him search for Lady Veritas, Time's daughter. The play allegorises the process of learning, revealing, for example, that Studioso will 'live and die' to protect Veritas, that Veritas has a friend called Industrie, but only a very few studious scholars are interested in her, and that Opinion is great in his own eyes but small in those of others.<sup>31</sup> However, *Time's Complaint* is also a social satire in which Clinias and Bellicoso lament the corruption that has ruined them—the corrupt law, that has thrown Clinias off his land, and the brutal army that has not paid Bellicoso and has beaten him when he protested, so that he is now a vagabond.<sup>32</sup>

The play asserts that poverty endangers scholars' work, too, for Veritas explains that scholars who are poor are unlikely to attract her:

Schollars I graunt loue mee and speake mee faire,  
But there hard fortune is to plaine a baite,  
To sharp a hooke for truth to nibble at.<sup>33</sup>

Veritas has, we are told, been banished from the royal Court, the lawcourts, and the city, but when her father, Time, advises that she should therefore live in the fields, Veritas protests that she was not born to be 'a countrie lasse' and will instead live with Error and Opinion.<sup>34</sup> The idea of Veritas living in the fields might remind the audience of Clinias's earlier dialogue with Time:

Clinias: Why should not I recouer Veritas  
As well as Schollars? I am zure of this  
I tread more ground than they, I take more paines  
And can endure more hardnes.

Time: That doth shewe  
Thy grosser substance: finest worke's most weake,  
Though learning cannot toile yet it can speake.<sup>35</sup>

If Time here challenges Clinias's assumption that by hard physical labour and travel he should be able to win Veritas as well as any scholar, by the play's conclusion, Time, at least, seems to have been persuaded that Veritas could do worse than to live a humble, rural life like Clinias's. Certainly, this play, while engaging with anatomies of learning, seems also to reach beyond the immediate concerns of a scholarly community to the social order of town beyond gown. It features comic scenes in ale-houses, which were sites of town-gown encounter, and even throws in some pyrotechnics for good measure. When Time describes the grove in which Veritas has been enchanted by Error and Opinion, the stage direction enjoins: '*Here fire-workes beginne.*'<sup>36</sup>

The St John's plays seem to have been variously 'in-house' student shows, produced rather spontaneously and therefore presumably without constructed stages, and 'publik' performances which were open to the whole university and to Oxford townsfolk, and apparently involved more elaborate preparations, set, and rehearsal. These plays were perhaps 'expected' by the college officers, perhaps by the Oxford citizens, or perhaps by both. It is not difficult to imagine that some productions might have functioned to build 'town-gown' relations, that local people would look forward to once a year being welcomed into the college for an annual St John's Christmas play. By contrast, the appeal of some shows was their in-house intimacy. *Saturnalia* was performed for a private audience, 'After Supp'—once again food and performance go hand in hand.<sup>37</sup> The *Christmas Prince* writer comments that the private nature of the performance, together with the youth of its amateur actors, contributed to audience pleasure: 'This shew was very liked ... because itt was the voluntary service of a younge youth, Nexte, because there were no straungers to trouble vs.'<sup>38</sup>

It seems that St John's College sometimes hosted visitors from the town not as audience members but also as performers. In the 1602 play *Narcissus*, 'youths of the parish' appear as wassailers and present the tragedy in the hope of reward. The play's editor argues that the actors were in fact students, but that they were fictionalising an actual practice of festive performances for the college by parishoners.<sup>39</sup> *The Christmas Prince* records:

S<sup>t</sup> Steevens day was past over in silence, and so had S<sup>t</sup> Johns day also; butt that some of the Princes honest neighbours of S<sup>t</sup> Giles's presented him with a maske or morris w<sup>ch</sup> though it were but rudely performed yet itt being so freely and lovingly profered, it could not but bee as lovingly received.<sup>40</sup>

It is not impossible that the ‘neighbours of St Giles’ are fellow students, since St John’s College is on St Giles’s street, but the phrase seems more likely to indicate the local parishoners. Similarly on 10 January, the last day of the Vacation, there was ‘a Mocke play’ called *The Seven Days of the Week*: ‘after supper it was presented by one which bore the name of the Clarke of St Gyleses, and acted priuately in the lodging’.<sup>41</sup> The Prologue is spoken by the Clarke, who is ‘poore, though not vnletterd’ and who introduces ‘these yo’ subjects of S<sup>t</sup> Gyles his parishe’.<sup>42</sup> It is however possible that this play, like *Narcissus*, was actually presented by students pretending to be parishoners, because the production was apparently created for those whose voices and appearances were inadequate for public performance, but whom it was felt should be required to participate in some way in ‘so publicke a business’. It sounds as if the actors are co-opted members of the college. The days of the week are characterised, revealingly, in terms of class timetables and dining. Thursday describes himself as ‘Perpetuall play-day for the boyes at schoole’ and ‘I that in tender care and kinde compassion/ Giue scollers leaue to play for recreation’, referring to the practice of allowing grammar school boys and Oxford students Thursdays off.<sup>43</sup> He is also ‘A mortall enemy to fish and white-meats’, presumably by contrast with the fast-day to come.<sup>44</sup> Friday declares: ‘I am leane friday brought vpp in a Colledge,/ That never made good meale vnto my knowledge.’<sup>45</sup> It seems that Friday fasting was particularly resented in St John’s. As with the St John’s day performance the audience’s enjoyment of the production did not depend on top quality performance: the actors were typecast so that even their bad performances would prove enjoyable, and ‘it was resolved that the worse it was done, the better it would bee liked, and so it fell out’.<sup>46</sup>

#### Christmas at St John’s, 1602: *Narcissus*

In 1607 the Christmas Prince was elected for the first time in thirty years. By contrast with the expansive arrangements in that year, in 1599, 18 *d.* was given for one night of merriment, ‘to the schollers for the chardg of the sporte on twelfth night’. Slightly more lavishly, in 1600 £3. 5*s.* 9*d.* was given for the ‘expenses of a Comedie & a Tragedy publickly acted 23 & 24 February’. In 1601 the scholars presented ‘the Interlude’ at a cost of 2*s.* 6*d.*; and in the following year a similar sum, £3. 12*s.* 4*d.* was ‘allowed by the House towards the Tragedye over and above £4 put on the

Students Heads'.<sup>47</sup> 1602 was the year in which the play *Narcissus* was presented in English, and the Narcissus narrative is of course a tragic one, so the 'Tragedye' mentioned is presumably this production; however, the tone of the *Narcissus* play is far from tragic and is better characterised in the manuscript in which it is preserved as 'A Twelfe night merriment'.<sup>48</sup>

*Narcissus* presents a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which, like the story of Philomela discussed above, would be familiar not only to any Oxford student but also any schoolboy. Schoolboys would memorise passages from *Metamorphoses*, construe and parse them, pick out and define figures and tropes; they would learn the mythology connected with the proper names mentioned by Ovid, explore prose themes, and even glean moral teaching. From *Metamorphoses* they would also learn versification.<sup>49</sup> The *Narcissus* playwright has clearly been greatly influenced by Shakespeare's treatment of Ovid in his mechanicals' production of Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the professional playhouse, too, a knowledge of the *Metamorphoses* as source would have contributed to the appreciation of this celebrated scene.<sup>50</sup> Shakespeare heightens the already parodic tone of Ovid's breathless treatment of Pyramus and Thisbe's tragedy, partly through comedic versification of a text through which schoolboys were taught to versify, and partly by showing his actors' theatrical workings. His play-within-a-play is an after-dinner entertainment for a wedding, and is performed by amateur parishoners whom we see first in rehearsal: the mechanicals' over-literalism, their lack of faith in an audience's capacity to body forth anything with only words as prompts, leads them to insist on material presences to 'present' wall, moonshine, and a lion. *Narcissus* is presented for the feast of Twelfth Night by youths of the parish, and though we do not see their rehearsals we hear about them from the Porter: 'I tooke you all a gabling tother day in mother Bunches backside by the well there, when Tom at Hobses ranne vnder the hovell with a kettle on's head.'<sup>51</sup> The charming but comical image here presented, the domestic kettle enlisted, perhaps, to represent a military helmet, prepares the *Narcissus* audience to respond to a potentially tragic tale tamed to a household comedy. Where Pyramus and Thisbe have 'Wall', *Narcissus* has 'Well': 'Enter one with a buckett and boughes and grasse', who delivers a fairly close translation of Ovid's description of the well in which Narcissus falls in love with his reflection, and then explains his props:



Suppose you the well had a buckett,  
 And so the buckett stands for the well;  
 And 'tis, least you should counte mee for a sot O,  
 A very pretty figure cald *pars pro toto*.<sup>52</sup>

Wall's 'loam, roughcast, stone' are perhaps more costume than prop, since they simply reveal his identity; similarly, the lantern, thornbush, and dog that Moonshine brings with him are more like the attributes by which, for example, a saint is identified in art than props with which anything is done, theatrically. Well, featuring as he does in an academic drama (of sorts), explains not only the symbolism of his prop but also the rhetorical figure by which it can be defined: a prop can be a synecdoche, by which the part stands for all.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a collection of stories with one thing in common: each one concludes with a human protagonist being transformed into something different and non-human. While Shakespeare omits this ending from Ovid's tale, knowledge of his source text adds irony to the mechanicals' transformation of men (actors) into walls, moonbeams, and lions; *Narcissus*, on the other hand, makes great explicit play on the transformation with which Ovid finishes his story, when the fair Narcissus, having fallen in love with his own reflection, is transformed into a flower. The dying protagonist exclaims: 'The flower of youth, shalbee made flower againe', a process of physical metamorphosis that inverts the literary process of metaphorisation exemplified in the phrase 'the flower of youth'.<sup>53</sup> The metamorphosis also allows Narcissus to toy with his audience's expectation in a rather more sophisticated manner than the rude mechanical who, to reassure timorous ladies, explains that he is not in fact a lion but Snug the joiner:

For if you take mee for Narcissus y'are very sillye,  
 I desire you to take mee for a daffa downe dillye;  
 For so I rose, & so I am in trothe,  
 As may appeare by the flower in my mouthe.<sup>54</sup>

The audience, especially if acquainted with Snug, might expect at first that this is the actor explaining that they would be 'silly' to believe he is Narcissus. However, whereas Snug's lines collapse the theatrical tension between actor and character, Narcissus's lines create a different binary—not actor-Narcissus, but Narcissus-a narcissus flower. That the term 'daffa downe dillye' was used figuratively as an insult adds comedy to Narcissus's assertion that this is how he wishes the audience to understand him. How exactly



should the audience now interpret the acting body they see, or indeed the voice that they hear (itself complicated by the presence in this scene of the nymph Echo)? The audience are perhaps further disorientated by the pun on another flower name in the next line—'For so I rose'—before everything collapses in Narcissus's assertion 'so I am in trothe'. In truth the actor is Narcissus? Narcissus is a daffodil? The actor is a daffodil? The irresolution is unchallenged by the 'appearance' of a 'flower in my mouth'. Does 'appear' suggest a true or a fictional message? And, clearly, if the flower is in the mouth of Narcissus, or of the actor playing Narcissus, then the actor/Narcissus and the flower cannot be identical; neither can the flower be metonymic, *pars pro toto*, since it is not part of anything else; neither can it be a prop or attribute by which Narcissus is known, since the logic of metamorphosis implies that the young man and the flower cannot be present simultaneously. The impulse of Shakespeare's mechanicals to over-explain, which draws attention to the conventions of theatre, is shared by the parish youths who present *Narcissus*, but in the latter case they play not only with theatrical convention but also with pedagogical practice: the actors explaining their props parody the teacher explaining rhetorical tropes.

It would be entirely unsurprising if an in-house Christmas play at St John's College, Oxford, satirised set texts and teaching methods. However, *Narcissus* draws on sources that are far from being the exclusive intellectual property of the university household. The play-within-a-play structure that sets the actors up as local youths is perhaps designed to justify the play's dependence on an elementary Latin source, the Ovid known to every schoolboy, as opposed to a more intellectually exclusive source accessible to students of St John's, a more localised piece of household knowledge. The classical learning of the grammar schools is indeed parodied, a little Latin and less Greek, for example, in the comically laboured versification of Narcissus's mother Lyriope, who responds to Tiresias's prophecy that Narcissus will die if he comes to know himself:

I bethinke at Delph,  
One Phibbus walls is writte: Knowe thyselfe.  
Shall hee not know himself, and so bee laught on,  
When as Apollo cries, gnotti seauton?<sup>55</sup>

The comedy of a maternal nymph citing her *auctoritas* in Greek, and the rhyming of that Greek as a punchline with the English



feminine-ended ‘and so bee laught on’, provides a formally anti-climactic effect that is actually dependent on skilled, if parodic, versification. But, perhaps more importantly, the *auctoritas* presented in the bathetic half-Greek line is that on which the whole humanist educational project was built: the philosophical invocation, *nosce teipsum*, which informs humanist education. Lyriope indicates that a young man must acquire self-knowledge in order to win respect and avoid being ridiculed. This injunction was frequently reiterated in the grammar school syllabus, and discussed by numerous writers including Erasmus, whose *Adagia* ‘stressed the difficulty of knowing oneself, the obligation to improve oneself, and the need to observe others in order to understand oneself’.<sup>56</sup> However, this is clearly not knowledge acquired in the fourth form and then forgotten, but rather an underlying principle for education itself, the grounding in which scholars were expected to grow, and the challenge presented by the college household to the young men who lived so closely together in it. To ‘know himselfe from other men’ is both to understand oneself as distinct from others, and to learn about oneself from watching others, and colleges provided opportunity for intensive study of other young men alongside classical *auctores*.

That there is also a professional playhouse source for the St John’s *Narcissus*, Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, might be barely respectable: the playhouse, the plays presented there, and the actors who presented them were regarded with considerable suspicion within the universities. In 1584 and 1593, statutes forbade players from performing within five miles of Oxford.<sup>57</sup> There is evidence, much discussed by scholars of the university plays, that the authorities at Cambridge, at least, were very keen to differentiate the activities of student actors from those of professional players: academic drama was considered respectable, playhouse plays not.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the requirements of the curriculum and the obligation on students to remain within Oxford for most of the year ought to have curtailed student visits to the London playhouses. However, it is difficult to be certain that university authorities were consistent in their attitudes, between the universities and indeed across time. And of course letters and legislation can sometimes indicate, precisely by their efforts to assert or forbid something, that the undesirable thing is happening, the contradicted attitude common. If the student actors do not directly acknowledge their indebtedness to the playhouse Shakespeare, though, their play echoes him structurally and verbally. The Porter



is unafraid to acknowledge that he is an aficionado of the Globe. As he clears the stage at the end of the performance he remarks to the audience that he has 'seene a farre better play at the theater'.<sup>59</sup>

The all-male community of the college household inevitably required that men take on the roles of women: it was also true, of course, that the professional stage required male performers to play female roles, and perhaps this influenced the ways in which the students performing in college plays understood theatrical drag; certainly cross-dressing appears to have been occasion for anxiety and mirth in both playhouse and college settings. Flute tries to avoid playing the woman's role because 'I have a beard coming'; the 'Second actor' in *Narcissus* is apparently anxious about his ability to present femininity:

*Sec.* Have you ere a gentlewomans picture in the house, or noe?

*Por.* Why?

*Sec.* If you have, doe but hange it yonder, & twill make mee act in conye.<sup>60</sup>

Lee suggests that either the performance will be 'incony', meaning delicate, or that 'acting in coney' must mean to play a woman's part.<sup>61</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. *cunny*) supports the former reading, and the play does not elsewhere make explicit that Secundus plays a woman's role. It is thus possible that a woman's portrait simply inspires a 'delicate' performance of a man's role. However, given that at least some of the actors must undertake female roles in the play, it seems far more likely that Secundus seeks a painting to inspire a delicate performance as a woman: the immediate presence of a female portrait will enable him to play the female roles more convincingly. Or perhaps the implication is more that the actor must learn from art about that which is institutionally impossible in an Oxford college as on the professional stage: a woman. The lack of female portraits in Oxford colleges is often remarked today, and indeed there have been active campaigns, for example in Trinity College, to include women on the walls. Though unsurprising in historically all-male institutions, the dominance of portraits of men creates an ongoing sense for women of exclusion from the college household. Though not necessarily for theatrical purposes, students may benefit from having the images of influential women available for imitation.

The female characters within the play of *Narcissus* offer an intriguing view of womanhood as it appeared from inside the all-male



household. In addition to the Greek-citing maternal nymph Lyriope, there are two young women, Cloris and Florida, who adore Narcissus as if he were the sun, and seek, moon-like, to reflect his beams: ‘Shine thou on mee ... Ile beare thee light.’<sup>62</sup> The function to which they aspire is thus not dissimilar to the fate that befalls the other woman in the play, Echo, who is doomed only to repeat, to reflect, the words of others. Cloris, Florida, and Echo, female suitors of Narcissus, do not, apparently, learn to know themselves from others, though they could be mirrors in which young men can reflect (on) themselves. These women are, in a way, intra-theatrical female audiences—and the Christmas Prince provides intriguing evidence that actual women might similarly function as a female fanbase. After the Epilogue to *Periander*, which begins, ironically, ‘Gentlemen, welcome’ and then asks for applause—‘By many hands was Periander slaine, / Your gentler hands will giue him liue againe’—we are told that:

A Certain gentlewoman vpon the hearing of those two last verses, made two other verses, and in way of an aunswer sent them to the Prince, who having first plaied *Periander* afterwards himselfe also pronounced the *Epilogue*.

the verses were these.

If that my hand or hart him life Could give  
By hand and hart should *Periander* live.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly there were non-college members in the audience of *Periander*, as there was at least one woman of a certain social status. She ‘answers’ the Prince by mirroring his verse request for life-giving applause, and her letter appears to be an admiring, perhaps flirtatious one. She might remind us of the behaviour of women in the audience at the professional playhouse, who, at least if John Manningham’s 1602 diary entry is to be believed, set up trysts with actors they had admired on the stage.<sup>64</sup> However, this gentlewoman seems hesitant, if not in her admiration then in her confidence as to what that admiration will achieve. She seems to be sure neither that the Periander-actor will respond to the offering of her hand and heart, nor that her hand or heart could make the character of Periander live—whether by applause, or perhaps even by writing more than these two lines. She might, perhaps, aspire to write, but she is in the end only a female fan. *The Christmas Prince* does not relate how the Prince responds: Cloris and Florida are shortly spurned by Narcissus, and then depart with a revealing comment on the roles they have played: ‘Looke you for maids no more, our parte is done, /Wee come but to bee scornd, & so are gone.’<sup>65</sup>





The all-male nature of the college household as paralleling that of the early modern stage is also commented on in *The Seven Days of the Week*:

*Enter a woman Chorus.*

Woman:                   A play without a woman in't  
                              Is like a face without a nose;  
                              Therefore I come that strife to stinte  
                              Though I haue nought to say God knowes;  
                              And since I can no matter handle  
                              I'le come sometymes to snuffe their candles.<sup>66</sup>

This un-named character makes explicit that she is 'the token woman', appearing only because there has to be a female in a play; she thus seems to stand for womankind. Her apparent conviction of the importance of a woman to a play is intriguing and perhaps surprising: 'Woman' has nothing of her own to say, cannot be entrusted with any 'matter', and thus serves only to appear now and again for manual labour. This is certainly 'Woman' as seen by the college household—excluded from academic study, by which students learn to debate serious 'matter', and consequently unable to speak in her own right, women simply appear on a Tuesday to pick up laundry. Of course, 'Woman' is, presumably, being played by a male student and thus represents not female actors but female characters—this could thus also be a reflection on 'Woman' as the students perceive her in the plays they watch, read, and write. She may be present, even central, as a nose is on a face, but like a nose her role is receptive and she cannot speak her own words, nor carry the action or define the 'matter' herself.

#### Christmas and candles at St John's, 1636–1637: *Grobiana's Nuptials*

'Woman' appears at the end of each Act of *Seven Days* to change the candles, drawing attention to a material circumstance of dramatic performance in a college hall that is paralleled in the indoor theatres like Blackfriars, where the length of an Act may even have been dictated by the life of a candle and the necessity that candles be replaced. That the Acts of *Seven Days* are far shorter than the life of a candle must have added humour. But candles seem also to have held a particular significance at St John's, where an enormous Christmas Candle was burned on the high table during the twelve nights of Christmas. As John Brand records, an ancient stone candle-socket, carved with the *agnus dei*, was used to hold the candle, and can still be seen in the college buttery.<sup>67</sup> The *agnus*





*dei*, of course, is associated with the college's patron saint, John the Baptist, who declared on seeing Christ: 'Behold the lamb of God' (John 1:29). Furthermore, John the Evangelist writes of John the Baptist that 'he came as witness, to bear witness about the light'—that is, the light of Christ that is celebrated in Christmas readings. Thus, although the association of candle-light and Christmas is clearly far from unique to St John's, there may have been a particular association of Christmas Candles with the college, one that motivated a Christmas Prince play:

After Supp<sup>r</sup> there was a private Showe perfourmed in y<sup>e</sup> manner of an Inter-lude, contayninge the order of y<sup>e</sup> Saturnall's, and shewinge the first cause of Christmas-candels, and in the ended there was an application made to the Day, and Natiuite of Christ.<sup>68</sup>

As the St John's play *Saturnalia* shows, the pagan feast involved inversion of the social order, with masters serving their slaves—much like the Christmas Prince tradition; it also corresponded to the period of Advent in the Christian calendar, associated with the winter solstice and, as it was known through the writings of Macrobius, was celebrated with numerous candles symbolising the quest for knowledge and truth.<sup>69</sup> Details of the Roman Saturnalia could have been available to students in any number of classical writings including those of Horace, Justinus, Pliny, Lucien, and Suetonius.<sup>70</sup> In the ancient world gifts, including candles, were exchanged. Similarly, John Brand records, in English tradition candles were given by chaundlers and grocers to their customers at Christmas.<sup>71</sup> In the St John's play, Hercules declares 'sint hominu loco / Postea sacrati cerej accensi deo' [henceforth, let consecrated candles be lit for the god in place of men],<sup>72</sup> and the Epilogue to the play, explaining the parallels between the feasts of Saturn and Christ, notes that as *sacras lucernas* [holy lamps] were lit in the temple of Saturn, so the *vera lux* [true light] of Christ comes into the world.<sup>73</sup>

If *Saturnalia* brings classical knowledge to bear to explain a traditional practice of the St John's household—the Christmas Candle—a later student play satirises that practice alongside many other domestic details of college life. Charles May's *Grobiana's Nuptials* was presented at St John's during the Christmas revelries of 1636–1637.<sup>74</sup> Probably coincidentally, in 1637 the college invested 5s. in the purchase of two brass candlesticks for the chapel.<sup>75</sup> In *Grobiana's Nuptials*, candles feature heavily but are stripped of





all religious significance and endowed with decidedly non-spiritual significance—indeed the play as a whole is entirely unconcerned with spiritual matters, and satirises instead the social order, parodying table manners, sartorial fashion, and the conventions of law and romance through the basest scatological humour. It is a one-act play, in nine scenes, that presents Grobiana's many suitors and her choice of Tantoblin, who assaults another suitor, Ursin, but is then reconciled to him in court. There is a dinner at which Grobiana meets her suitors, and at the end, the characters depart for the heroine's nuptial feast. The play was presented to the St John's president, almost certainly after dinner or between the courses of a meal, so that the audience are identified with the Grobian guests. The kitchen is 'offstage' but brought onstage by the Cook, Lorrell, who is famous for a 'flying pudding'. This is a parody of spectacular works of culinary art like Christ Church's marzipan Troy, but is in fact nothing but an accident—Lorrell dropped a wet pudding in a barrell of feathers and could not be bothered to clean the feathers off. Nonetheless, Lorrell 'has't deserv'd the bayes from all poets else'—poetry and cookery are made equivalent, and slovenly cookery at that.<sup>76</sup>

The two primary functions of the St John's household, teaching the humanities and feeding its scholars, are also shown to be connected through their use of an important material resource: paper. Tantoblin tells us of the 'Auter', perhaps the playwright, Charles May, that

he hath a monopoly for all Butterie  
bookes, kitchinge bookes, besides all declamations and  
theames, *which* to the wonder of the world he spends very  
punctually, and constantly, you scarce can get any paper  
to put under pyes, against a good tyme for him.<sup>77</sup>

The numerous books at the author's disposal appear to be both the volumes of the household accounts and recipes, and scholarly tomes. However, he does not appear to read these books or write in them, but rather to 'spend' them, so prolifically that the cooks no longer have any paper to use in baking pies. The author has in fact torn up papers for his personal use in the privy. This suggestion is reinforced by Tantoblin's exit line: 'Lets away, my belly rumbles. Ursin, hast any paper?'<sup>78</sup> The characters effectively declare their own script to be toilet roll, though the comparison does not offend them since the Grobians consider bodily functions not only necessary but also good.



Two scenes feature the Grobian court, the precise nature of which is elusive, but the functions of which are both legal and institutional—it tries a case, and it also has the power to admit members to the society of Grobians. It is perhaps like the governing body of an Oxford college, since colleges historically had the power to arbitrate crimes involving their members. The Grobian court's proceedings, however, recall the inept legal blunderings and malapropisms of Dogberry and Verges ('But now to the matter, for as I conceive, we have not yet spoke anything to the purpose') and its final adjudication in the matter of Tantoblin's blow to Ursin is pragmatic, but scarcely attentive to the law: 'Let that passe, a blowe ... Laugh upon there and be friendes.'<sup>79</sup>

The Grobian court is presided over by Vanslotten, a chaundler, who complains that the court session is keeping him from his business of making candles. He is apparently over-worked because of the festive season. This chaundler, at least, is unhappy about having to give his customers Yule candles:

Vanslotten: I told my dislike concerneinge newyeares gifts, and I hope it is ordered soe that we shall have noe more Christmas Candles given.

Tantoblin: It was most superfluous, I have seene a candle soe bigge it would serve to take the altitude and profunditie of the great Mogulls barbadoes as well as my pole.

Ursin: Besides the intolerable charge of making snuffers for that great candle.

Tantoblin: Snuffers? Our uppon u'm, that's a thinge not to be suffer'd in a Grobian commonweale.

Vanslotten: True, Tantoblin, they cut of the theife that steales the tallow for our profit.

Tantoblin: Noe, every candle shall end of himself, goes out peaceably without an extinguisher, that the insence proper the burial may be smelt and perfume the roome.<sup>80</sup>

Tantoblin's reply to Vanslotten's complaint, played as *Grobiana's Nuptials* was in St John's, must surely describe the apparently celebrated college candle, so enormous it renders further candles unnecessary. Ursin's practical concern about the costs of snuffers is dismissed by the others because the guiding principle of Grobianism is the rejection of law and order, and of social convention and nicety. Vanslotten apparently has a racket involving thieves stealing back tallow for recycling; Tantoblin adds that a snuffer is unnecessary since a candle will go out of its own accord, and to the Grobian the resulting odour is a perfume to be savoured.

The stink of the extinguished candle is invoked as an aid to reviving the faint: when the love-sick (though also wind-afflicted) Grobiana swoons, her father, Grobianus, enjoins her maid Ungartered to blow out a candle and hold it to her nose. He explains that: 'There's nothinge so good, they say, to revive an old Grobian as this smell. Feathers are nothinge to it, a turd new laid is better then most receipts, but that is rare.'<sup>81</sup> Grobiana, like a candle, turns out to be 'not quite extinguish'd', and comes round with an exclamation on the 'ravishinge odor' that has revived her: Grobianus explains that the curative powers of the candle are a family secret, better than 'harts horne, or bezar stone, or patable gold'.<sup>82</sup> The absurd exchange parodies the treatment of the romantic heroine, whose swoon might more conventionally be treated with smelling salts or nosegays; household remedies are reduced to a scatological reference, and turds pronounced rare. The playful inversions of *Grobiana's Nuptials* seem to offer a Saturnalian revel in which the Fellows of St John's could recognise aspects of the college household life parodied, and its sacred objects brought low.

*Grobiana's Nuptials*, like *The Seven Days of the Week*, finally makes the candle a theatrical object. Ungartered comments to Grobianus, talking of his daughter: 'Did *your* highnes marke what a yawne shee gave, truely beyond my stretch, *when* I hold *your* worships candlestickes in a play night.'<sup>83</sup> Actors in indoor performances often had to carry their own light, or have a servant carry their lights for them.<sup>84</sup> Ungartered has clearly been employed in theatricals in the Grobian household as the candle-bearer for her master: as the Grobian court reflects the governing body of a college, so the Grobian household imitates the St John's College practice of in-house amateur theatrical entertainment. The playwright's satire seems concerned to parody theatrical, as well as collegiate, practices: Grobianus's Prologue comments scathingly on the Prologues of the theatre in which 'a Coxe-combe in a cloke must scrape his lease of leggs to begge *Sir* Tottipate's applause in dogrime verse'.<sup>85</sup> His Epilogue also attacks the obsequious nature of the theatrical Epilogue, for he comes 'Not to begge applause' but 'to tell you ... You may goe away, the play is done'.<sup>86</sup> The line is particularly offensive in an in-house production, since Grobian dismisses the men of St John's from their own home ground.

Grobian's blunt rudeness is his point of pride: he introduces the play as 'sport' in which the audience will see 'the true shapes of men, not in the visor and shaddow of garbes and postures, but verie pure pate man, such as nature made u'm'.<sup>87</sup> In the context



of the Prologue, the speech attacks the affectations of theatre, a place of 'shadows' where costumes and poses obscure men's true form, at the same time as attacking the performative conventions of polite society, the traditional target of Grobianism as a literary convention popularised by Sebastian Brant's German *Narrenschiff* (1494). Brant's 'Saint Grobian' is the patron saint of drunkards and gluttons, and has appalling table manners; Dedekind's Latin *Grobianus et Grobiana* (1549) expanded Brant's theme and was translated into English in 1605 by 'R. F. Gent', who explains that he seeks to teach men to eschew bestial behaviour by portraying its ugliness, but while describing vices as 'rusticke' also challenges the social order:

Had we not all one father 'Adam', and one mother 'Eve'?  
 Shall earth and ashes thrust thee downe? At that who would not  
 grieve?  
 When as our Grandsire 'Adam' dig'd, and Grandam 'Eve' span,  
 Who then, I pray, amongst us all was the best gentleman?<sup>88</sup>

In citing the famous dictum by which John Ball stirred up the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, 'R. F.' highlights the potential for Grobianism to be more than a comedy of bad manners.<sup>89</sup> Charles May's play, however, shows little interest in social revolution, and simply lampoons college institutions in a play that simultaneously lampoons the conventions of theatre. What connection is being drawn between college household and theatre?

According to *Grobianus*, the honesty of the Grobians is guaranteed by their lack of show. They do not dress fashionably, or perform according to convention. They are not polite, and they are not actors. It was apparently important to the student actors of St John's and other colleges to distinguish their theatrical activities from those of the professional theatre, to insist that they were not, by profession, actors. However, manners are, also, a type of performance, and are governed by rules developed in institutions like monasteries and colleges to facilitate communal living. Perhaps, also, since the seventeenth-century undergraduate intake was increasingly upper-class and dilettante, the Grobians represent a protest against St John's becoming a training ground for life in society rather than the Church or the academy. However, at the end of the play, the candidates Jobernole and Hunch are admitted to the Grobian hall, and are sworn in with the following oath:

You must sweare *never* to buy a suit but at Longe lane, and that  
 on of *our* fashion, its noe matter though it be lac'd like a footman,



never to weare stockins, but when they are ruff'd like a pigeon, not gloves, till they have beene twice dippt in a dripping panne, nor shoes, till the phisitian hath given them ore to a dunghill; you shall sweare allsoe never to eat beefe, till the salt be alive in't, nor any meat till on saviour has put out anothere, soe kisse the butter, *and* grease *yourselves* into our companie.<sup>90</sup>

The Grobian community rebels against the niceties of polite society and the order of institutions, but in breaking one set of laws they simply set up another.

The drama that was generated in the Oxford college households, as well as those of Cambridge and the Inns of Court, forms a significant proportion of the surviving scripts of early English drama. Oxford drama was often theatrically innovative, when it could draw on large budgets unavailable to the commercial—and economically precarious—playhouses.<sup>91</sup> At the same time it presents, from the medieval through the early modern periods, a continuous tradition of amateur playing; of household performance, often accompanied by a meal, in private spaces; of festive, occasional theatre. Nevertheless, it remains obscure by comparison with the drama of the playhouse, the conventions of which are more readily and generally accessible, transmitted in traditions that continue in the modern theatre. Many of the traditions of the Oxford college household do survive, but are opaque to all but the insider and indeed often observed but not understood by college students; and although there is plenty of play-making among today's students, the tradition of institutional college production is long gone. In order to appreciate many aspects of Oxford college plays, it may be necessary to study first, in the archives and volumes of a college history, the material contents of the medieval college household: the intellectual capital colleges preserved and transmitted, and the provision for the body they ensured—bed and board.<sup>92</sup>

## Notes

- 1 See *Records of Early English Drama: Oxford*, ed. John R. Elliott, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 846–8.
- 2 *REED: Oxford*, ed. Elliott, p. 848.
- 3 See Tiffany Stern's keynote speech at the conference 'Digitizing the Stage: Rethinking the Early Modern Theatre Archive', University of Oxford, July 2017.
- 4 An account of these elements of the play, recorded in Holinshed, is provided in *REED: Oxford*, ed. Elliott, pp. 190–1.

- 5 See William Conrad Costin, *The History of St John's College, Oxford: 1598–1890* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 4–5. The earliest, medieval colleges and halls of the University of Oxford, endowed by religious orders, guilds, and wealthy individuals, made higher education available to young men who, unlike the nobility, would not have been able to afford private tutors. This education in all cases was intended to prepare young men for service in the Church.
- 6 Mordechai Feingold, *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship: Science, Universities and Society in England, 1560–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 37.
- 7 Feingold, *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship*, pp. 16–17.
- 8 Feingold, *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship*: the first chapter of Feingold's book discusses the statutes of colleges and universities in helpful detail.
- 9 Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 57.
- 10 Seth Ward, *Vindicae Academiarum* (Oxford, 1654). Reprinted in Allen G. Debus (ed.), *Science and Education in the Seventeenth Century: The Webster-Ward Debate* (London: Macdonald, 1970), p. 50.
- 11 Feingold, *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship*, pp. 77–8.
- 12 Costin, *History of St John's College, Oxford*, p. 32.
- 13 Costin, *History of St John's College, Oxford*, p. 18.
- 14 See *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Frederick Samuel Boas (Oxford: Malone Society, 1922). Citations from *The Christmas Prince* are from this edition, by page and line number.
- 15 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 13, ll. 342–3.
- 16 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, pp. 11–12, ll. 300–3.
- 17 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 285, ll. 9230–4.
- 18 On the possible significance of the use of Latin or English for a university play, see Stephanie Allen, Elisabeth Dutton, and James McBain, 'Rehabilitating Academic Drama', in Pamela M. King (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Early Drama and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 221–36.
- 19 See *REED: Oxford*, ed. Elliott, p. 195 and discussion in Allen *et al.*, 'Rehabilitating Academic Drama'.
- 20 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 55, ll. 142–5.
- 21 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 27, ll. 841–6.
- 22 The 2013 production of Gager's *Dido* by the Early Drama at Oxford project was staged in the original venue, Christ Church hall, and deployed some of the tables as staging. Footage of the production is available at [www.edox.org.uk](http://www.edox.org.uk).
- 23 This play is discussed further below. It survives in one manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson poet. 212 ff. 67–82. See *Narcissus, a Twelfth night merriment played by youths of the parish at the College of S. John the Baptist in Oxford, A.D. 1602*, ed. Margaret L.

- Lee (London: David Nutt, 1893). References are to Lee's edition, by line number only, as there are no act or scene divisions. This citation is at ll. 104–5.
- 24 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 28, ll. 853–5.
- 25 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 56, ll. 1432–9. Boas suggests that the author of this play is also the author of *Narcissus*, though his evidence is inconclusive. See *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. xvi.
- 26 *The Christmas Prince* writes of *Time's Complaint* being 'publicly performed in the college hall before the whole university', by contrast with *The Seven Days of the Week*, which was acted 'privately in the President's lodgings' (ed. Boas, p. xv).
- 27 Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were taught at grammar school, most usually in the second half of the fourth form year. See further Lyn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), esp. pp. 175–80. The St John's dramatist, however, has expanded 150 lines of Ovid into a play about ten times as long. On the adaptation see *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, pp. xii–xiv.
- 28 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 130, ll. 4013–14.
- 29 Examples of performances of college dramas directed to town audiences do exist. *Club Law*, an English comedy, was performed at Clare Hall, Cambridge around 1600. Thomas Fuller's account of the play in his 1655 history of the university describes an audience including 'the mayor, with his brethren, and their wives'. The play lampoons the very townspeople who were in the audience. See Thomas Fuller, *The History of the University of Cambridge from the Conquest to the Year 1634*, ed. Marmaduke Prickett and Thomas Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1840), pp. 294–5. Note, though, that the play's modern editor suggests that Fuller's account of the performance may be somewhat fictionalised. See *Club Law: A Comedy Acted in Clare Hall, Cambridge about 1599–1600*, ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), p. liv.
- 30 *The Christmas Prince* comments that 'wee should bee ashamed heere to insert' the play in the manuscript 'if wee thought it would please no better in the reading then it did in hearing' (ed. Boas, p. 102, ll. 3034–5).
- 31 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 116, ll. 3516–17; p. 114, ll. 3433–7; p. 125, ll. 3822–3. Studioso is also the name of one of the two students whose academic progress, through the *trivium*, is the subject of the much more extended allegory of the anonymous play presented by students of St John's College, Cambridge, *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* (1598).
- 32 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, pp. 109–10, ll. 3257–97. Clinias' speech recalls the protest of the Poor Man that 'interrupts' Lyndsay's *Satire of*

- the Three Estates*, and Bellicoso's complaint about the army's failure to look after its veterans is echoed in Henry Chettle's *Tragedy of Hoffman*.
- 33 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 124, ll. 3791–3. The theme of student poverty seems a perennial trope of English literature, at least from Chaucer's treatment of the student Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale*. The sequel to *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus*, known as *The Return from Parnassus*, presents the difficulty experienced by the graduates Studioso and Philomusus in making a living.
- 34 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 129, ll. 3962–70.
- 35 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 115, ll. 3446–51. Clinias's rural accent is indicated by spellings such as 'zure' for 'sure' and 'chill' for 'I'll'. These appear to be conventional spellings for rural speech—compare for example the spellings of Edgar's speech when he is disguised as Poor Tom in *King Lear*. The convention is discussed in the fourth chapter of Jonathan Hope's *Shakespeare and Language: Reason, Eloquence and Artifice in the Renaissance* (London: Methuen, 2010).
- 36 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 114, l. 3415 sd.
- 37 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 46, l. 1167.
- 38 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 55, ll. 1405–6.
- 39 See *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, p. xx.
- 40 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 55, ll. 1407–12.
- 41 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 135, ll. 4150–2.
- 42 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 120, ll. 4170–1.
- 43 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 147, ll. 4500–1.
- 44 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 139, ll. 4253–4.
- 45 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 140, ll. 4268–9.
- 46 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 135, ll. 4148–9.
- 47 Costin, *History of St John's College*, p. 18.
- 48 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson poet. 212, ff. 67–82 (f. 67r).
- 49 See T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakespere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 4 vols (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), II. 395–5.
- 50 See further Elisabeth Dutton, '“My boy shall knowe himself from other men”: Active Spectating, Annunciation and the St John's College *Narcissus*', *Medieval English Theatre*, 36 (2017), 68–83.
- 51 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, ll. 91–4.
- 52 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, ll. 508–11.
- 53 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, l. 731.
- 54 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, ll. 736–9.
- 55 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, ll. 257–68.
- 56 See Rolf Soellner, *Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 3.
- 57 See *REED: Oxford*, ed. Elliott, p. 195, and discussion in Allen *et al.*, 'Rehabilitating Academic Drama'.
- 58 On this topic, and for further bibliography, see Allen *et al.*, 'Rehabilitating Academic Drama'.
- 59 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, l. 751.



- 60 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, ll. 118–22.
- 61 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, note to line 122.
- 62 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, ll. 394–6.
- 63 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee, ll. 9217–26.
- 64 John Manningham's Diary, entry for March 1602, in London, British Library Harley MS 5353, f. 29v.
- 65 *Narcissus*, ed. Lee ll. 448–9.
- 66 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 141, ll. 4310–15.
- 67 John Brand, *Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, 2 vols (London: Reeves & Turner, 1882–1883), I. 467.
- 68 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 46, ll. 1167–71.
- 69 Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.1.8–9. For commentary, see Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography: From Roman North Africa to the School of Chartres, A.D. 433–1177* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 71.
- 70 Horace, *Satires* 2.7.4, Justinus, *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus* 7, 43.3, Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 8.7.1, Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 71, Lucius, *Saturnalia* 1.
- 71 Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, I. 455.
- 72 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 53, ll. 1351–2.
- 73 *The Christmas Prince*, ed. Boas, p. 53, ll. 1389–90.
- 74 On Charles May's authorship of the play, see Elisabeth Dutton and James McBain, 'Fart for Fart's Sake: Fooling through the Body in *Grobiana's Nuptials*', *Theta: Théâtre anglais*, 12 (2016), 149–70.
- 75 Costin, *History of St John's College*, p. 70.
- 76 *Grobiana's Nuptials* is cited by line number from *Grobiana's Nuptials*, in *Grobianus in England*, ed. Ernst Rühl (Berlin: Mayer and Müller, 1904). This citation is from ll. 120–1.
- 77 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 210–14.
- 78 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 283–4.
- 79 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 860–1 and ll. 875–81.
- 80 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 152–82.
- 81 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 776–9.
- 82 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 788–9.
- 83 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 7732–4.
- 84 This practice has been recently been revived in the Sam Wanamaker theatre, which reproduces the lighting conditions of the early modern playhouse. The *Staging the Henrician Court* project at Hampton Court Palace, directed by Greg Walker and Tom Betteridge, experimented with reviving the practice in household—albeit royal household—drama.
- 85 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 7–9.
- 86 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 921–2.
- 87 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 18–20.
- 88 'R. F. gent'. *The Schoole of Slovenrie*, in *Grobianus in England*, ed. Rühl, ll. 424–27. These sources are cited and discussed in more detail in Dutton and McBain, 'Fart for Fart's Sake'.



- 89 The Revolt remained at the forefront of the English consciousness. The anonymous play *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* had been published in 1593.
- 90 *Grobiana's Nuptials*, ed. Rühl, ll. 896–904.
- 91 For example, Inigo Jones designed the first perspectival set for a performance at Christ Church.
- 92 The Early Drama at Oxford project seeks to reanimate appreciation of Oxford plays by staging them in ways that echo, creatively, the circumstances of their original creation. See the project website, [www.edox.org.uk](http://www.edox.org.uk)