

WYT AND SCIENCE: A REPORT

A discussion of the « main facts » of the allegorical interlude *Wyt and Science* must necessarily frequently mention « perhaps », « probably », and « I don't know ». There is no record of its being performed or printed in its time, although, as Joseph Quincy Adams points out, « it is quite likely » that John Redford, master of the singing boys at St. Paul's Cathedral, « wrote the play to be acted by his boys » (p. 325n)¹. There is an abundance of ignorance concerning the dating of the play. For example, Adams in 1924 said « probably we should not be far wrong if we guessed 1530 » (p. 325n), but Samuel A. Tannenbaum in « *Philological Quarterly* » in 1935 stated that the last half of the sixteenth century was as good a guess as any².

With the exception of Tannenbaum, however, every critic has agreed that the date of the play certainly falls between 1530 and 1550. For example, Alfred Harbage chooses 1538 to 1546, T. W. Craik selects about 1540, J. S. Farmer guesses about 1550. Obviously Arthur Brown is correct in saying in his article *The Play of « Wyt and Science » by John Redford* in « *Philological Quarterly* », XXVIII (1949), pp. 429-442, that « With regard to the dating of the play and the manuscript the evidence is too slight to justify definite statements . . . » (430). Brown adds that the date is before 1547 since it is known that Redford died in 1547. Any date of composition, then, between 1530 and 1547 is « quite likely ». We simply do not know anything more definite.

The manuscript of *Wyt and Science* is preserved in the British Museum as *Additional MS.* 15233, which contains also various organ pieces by Redford. Henry Davey says in *DNB* (XVI, 821) that Redford's name is on a fragment of another morality play in the *MS.*, and this is why our play is accredited to Redford. Nothing is known of the early ownership of the *Wyt and Science MS.*, but on the final verso the scribbles « Ann Chuntle » and « Mr Heyborne » appear. The « Mr. Heyborne » may be one Edward Heyborn. The rest of the supposed history is recorded in the introduction to the Malone Society Reprint (1951): « The manuscript was first described in the sale catalogue of the library of B. H. Bright (Sotheby, June, 1844) when it was bought by Thomas Thorpe for £ 15; since, according to an inscription by Sir Frederic Madden, the British Museum purchased it from Thomas Rodd on 19 June 1844, there would seem to have been some private deal between the two booksellers » (v). Not until 1848 did the manuscript (save the musical portion) reach the press. Then Halliwell-Phillipps published it for the Shakespeare Society. It was included in J. M. Manly's *Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama* (1897), J. S. Farmer's « *Lost* » *Tudor Plays* (1907) and facsimile text (1908), and Adams's *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas* (1924)³.

No direct source of *Wyt and Science* is known, but of course it fits into the theme of those interludes where the bad and evil elements of the soul fight for possession

¹ All references to J. Q. ADAMS are to his *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1924.

² See S. A. TANNENBAUM, *Editorial Notes on « Wyt and Science »*, « *Philological Quarterly* », XIV (1935), pp. 307-326.

³ For detailed bibliographical information about *Wyt and Science* and the later *Marriage of Wyt and Science* (1569?), see C. J. STRATMAN, *Bibliography of Medieval Drama*, Berkeley 1954, pp. 167-168.

of man. Perhaps one of the closest parallels to *Wyt and Science* is a play by John Rastell (d. 1536) entitled *Interlude of the Nature of the Four Elements*. As the *Cambridge History of English Literature* notes, « Here, man is directed, by the allegorical figures of Sensual Appetite and Ignorance, from the study of geography, into which *Natura naturata* and Studious Desire are about to initiate him » (V, 63). The theme of the allegorical quest is as old as the allegorical romances.

Since Redford was master of the singing boys at St. Paul's Cathedral, and since he wrote organ pieces, it is not strange to see the number of songs in *Wyt and Science*. But what is interesting is the fact that an examination of the play reveals that the actors were also musicians — they exit as actors only to return moments later in a musical role. In fact, the piece is so arranged that one actor-musician represents Confidence, Honest Recreation, and Fame; another, Study, Comfort, and Favor; another, Dyligence, Quychnes, and Woorshyp; and yet another, Instruction, Strength, and Ryches⁴.

The stage directions in the play, which by the way are quite specific about comings and goings, reveal how this doubling occurs. For example, after Tediousness flees, « Study and Dyligence follow » and then Confidence exits a few lines later for no good reason except that they all re-enter almost immediately to sing « Wellcum, my nowne », and their exits are apparently needed to provide for the dramatic entrance of the song-answerers. The directions then say: « And when the song is doone, Reson sendyth Instruccion, Studye, and Dyligence, and Confidens out ». They are of course sent out to leave the major characters in the spotlight, but the utilitarian purpose is to allow them to pick up their viols and come on at the end as a choir: « Here cumth in fowre wyth violes and syng . . . ».

One other aspect of the play — not so practical as the first — which needs to be mentioned is Redford's sense of dramatic timing and his recognition that, for a school play at least, variety is no handicap. The comic relief scene between Ignorance and Idleness comes at the appropriate time: the serious action has built up to the scene of Wyt's falling into Idleness's lap and the dancers have already had the stage. By inserting a comic scene at this point, after the first climax and near the middle of the play, Redford recognizes the necessity for variety. It's time for the straight man-fool routine. Furthermore, the very nature of the comedy would appeal to the intended audience since it does require « learning or knowledge » to understand it. It appeals to the struggling speller as well as the more learned scholar. But the scene serves a dramatic purpose as well as a thematic purpose: it vividly portrays the character of Ignorance and his complete lack of learning *before* he exchanges coats with Wyt later on. Thus the significance of the exchange of coats is made more explicit. The comic exchange heightens the dramatic irony to follow since every schoolboy knows (but not Wyt) just how far he has fallen. The comic scene allows the moral to be drawn without its being preached.

Redford's economical use of a small number of players in a large number of acting-musical roles and his mixture of the comic and the serious in varied ways suggest, I think, that his dramatic timing was quite as good as his musical timing.

DONALD KAY

⁴ T. W. CRAIK, *The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume, and Acting*, London 1958, p. 47.