

MEG TWYXCROSS

Robert. I am of your mind: for I haue heard our maister say, that this
apposing doth very much sharpen our wits, helpe our
memorie, and many other commodities.³⁴

They then turn to their Catechism, the other familiar context for apposing.³⁵

The whole teaching-and-learning methodology was interactive, public, intentionally stressful, and intrinsically theatrical. Besides this, schoolboys were often taught Latin vocabulary and idiom through dialogue, from Ælfric Batta's *Colloquy* to Erasmus' *Colloquies*. Coote's textbook shows that it could be used for English as well. No wonder they were adept actors.

In this scene from *Wit and Science*, Ignorance is being apposed by Idleness on something he is clearly meant to have learned: 'Say thy lesson, fool' (450). Fictionally, this is a one-to-one. In performance, it is a one-to-one with an audience, just like the real-life classroom master and boy. Ignorance becomes an object lesson. He also provides an assessment of the teacher's professional skills and success, since apposing was also used to showcase a student's progress, and thus a teacher's efficiency: John Brinsley (1612) speaks feelingly of being let down by his pupils' inability to remember their lessons 'when gentlemen or others come in and examine them, or their friends try them at home'.³⁶ Idleness invites the audience to view her teaching methods and their outcomes: 'mark what doctryne by Idlenes cumme[s]' (449) — a double-sided invitation — and suggests that it may be a test for her as well: 'ye shall see her tryde' (437).³⁷ Allegorically, of course, this 'trial' provides a further exposition of the natures of both schoolmistress and pupil.

Ignorance appears to enjoy the process and hurls himself into it, though he has to be prompted every inch of the way. He also seems to have a good relationship with his teacher. She, on her part, tries every possible technique to get the right answer out of him, even if it doesn't work.

There is nothing strange about her being a woman.³⁸ 'Dame schools' are not classified as such until later,³⁹ but it was accepted that early elementary teaching was likely to be 'a work for poor women, or others, whose necessities compel them to undertake it, as a meer shelter from beggery'.⁴⁰ They might add it to other sedentary jobs like spinning. Coote directs his *English Schoole-maister* 'to the vnskillfull, which desire to make vse of it for their owne priuate benefit; and to such men and women of trade, as Taylors, Weauers, Shop keepers, Seamsters, and such other as haue vndertaken the charge of teaching others ... thou maist sit on thy