

**‘TO THEXALTACYON OF NOBLESSE’:
A Herald’s Account of the Marriage
of Margaret Tudor to James IV.**

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Recent developments in performance studies and in theories of performativity have encouraged us to reflect on performance beyond the established confines of dramatic events. Performance is increasingly understood not as bound by the theatre, but as a fundamental medium both of social relationships and of individual identity.¹ While medieval and sixteenth century notions of public and private were very different from our own, the late Middle Ages shows an analogous and active consciousness of the power of performance in and of daily life. Perhaps especially in the arena of the court, there is a clear recognition and exploitation of performance as an important mode of social and political interaction which seems not separate from, but on a continuum with formal performance events.

One especially vivid source of documentation and commentary on this spectrum of formal and informal performance can be found in the accounts of the spectacular pageantry associated with occasions such as Royal Entries, marriages, and funerals which form an increasingly popular literary genre in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.² Often written by heralds, these narratives memorialise significant events; but they are primarily concerned not so much with the events themselves as with the ways in which they were embodied in public ceremonial and magnificent display. The occasions often include episodes easily definable as performances: pageants, tournaments, music. But within the narratives, such inset performances are not always easily separable from the wider spectacle of the events they celebrate. The overall choreography of the event offered a crucial means of enacting to a public audience the national, political, or social significance of the occasion.³

Political theorists of the time were alive to this active use of performance. Thomas Elyot, reflecting on the coronation ceremony in *The Boke named the Governour*, explains how performance draws spectators into its meaning:

For what purpose was it ordeyned / that christen kynges ... shulde
in an open and stately place before all their subiectes, receyue their

crowne and other Regalities / but that by reason of the honorable
circumstaunces than vsed / shulde be impressed in the hartes of the
beholders perpetuall reuerence: whiche ... is fountayne of
obedience / or els mought the kynges be enoynted and receyue their
charge in a place secrete / with lasse payne to them / and also their
ministers.⁴

The point of the ceremony, Elyot explains, is not purely functional or sacramental, but to 'impress the hearts of the beholders'. It is the responses of the witnesses that are central to the meaning of the ceremonial. The narrative accounts of this kind of spectacle may equally be concerned not just to record what happened, but to attempt to communicate or recreate for readers the experience of performance.

One particularly engaging example of this genre recounts events associated with the marriage of Henry VII's daughter Margaret Tudor to James IV of Scotland in August 1503. The account offers a vivid narrative of the month-long journey of the thirteen-year-old Margaret and her train into Scotland, her first meetings with her betrothed husband, Royal Entry into Edinburgh, and the marriage celebrations at Holyrood. The writer was John Young, the Somerset Herald of England who accompanied the convoy, apparently remaining with Margaret for some two years in Scotland.⁵ Although there has been no edition of the account since the eighteenth century, Young's narrative is well known to theatre historians, providing valuable eye-witness evidence of the pageantry and spectacle associated with Scotland's first recorded Royal Entry.⁶ As with similar narratives, the tendency so far has been to mine it for information about these formal pageants and shows.⁷ But there is much to learn about performance not just from extracting information from the narrative but from exploring its rhetoric, its point of view, its preoccupations and shaping of material. It was composed by a man who was both an eye-witness and a participant in the marriage celebrations: Young was a spectator but also in part a performer of the spectacle. This makes his perspective especially interesting if we want to understand more about the experience of late medieval performance. Issues of performance also inform his purposes as an author, and his shaping of the narrative for particular effects on his intended readers. All this may give us insight into what were understood as the aims and effects of the performance of the marriage.

Many sixteenth-century spectacle-narratives seem designed for wide public circulation, increasingly in print.⁸ Young's account seems closer to a slightly earlier group of reports, less explicitly aimed at a broad public