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with its contemporary reception. Although we have so little evidence for how audiences received and understood plays, we are beginning to recognise how audience response may confirm, complicate, or alter the meanings of performance events. The effect on the audience is, of course, the end purpose of all drama; but it is also a key to understanding those elements of meaning that are only created in the act of performance itself, and which are often incalculable from the records of how plays were written or staged. The rare responses that are recorded from or about spectators of early plays and performances can throw sometimes quite unexpected light on what they meant in their own time. It was the discovery of an eyewitness report of *Gorboduc*, for instance, that revealed the political meaning of the dumbshows taken by original spectators, which is not available from the surviving text.<sup>6</sup> It is the chroniclers' accounts of the royal entry of Anne Boleyn that reveal the onlookers' ribald interpretation of the formally decorative wreathed monograms of Henry and his new bride.<sup>7</sup>

The evidence discussed here has something of the same capacity to reveal unexpected responses that may alter our view of the plays in question. It comes from a wholly non-dramatic source, which is presumably why it has found its way into few modern studies of late medieval drama: the commentary by Vives on Augustine's *City of God*, first published in 1522. In Book 8, Chapter 27 Augustine distinguishes the Christian practice of honouring martyrs, from pagan customs of worshipping gods or the dead which involve ceremonial and shows. Vives comments on this passage by criticising the performance of contemporary Passion plays which are, he claims, little different from the ancient pagan practices. He describes the apparently vocal and volatile responses of the popular audience in vivid, though negative terms. The full passage in its original Latin is quoted here, followed by the earliest English translation of the work, published in 1610:

*At qui mos nunc est, quo tempore sacrum celebrant Christi morte sua genus humanum liberantis, ludos nihil prope a scenicis illis ueteribus differentes populo exhibere. etiam si aliud non dixero satis turpe existimabit quisquis audiet, ludos fieri in re maxime seria. Ibi ridetur ludas quam potest ineptissima iactans, dum Christum prodit. ibi discipuli fugiunt militibus persequentibus, nec sine cachinnis & actorum & spectatorum: ibi Petrus auriculam rescindit Malcho, applaudente pullata turba, ceu ita uindicetur Christi captiuitas. Et post paulum, qui tam strenue modo dimicarat, rogationibus unius ancillulae territus abnegat*