

**‘FAMILIER AND HOMELY’:  
The Intrusion and Articulation of Vice  
in Skelton’s *Magnyfycence***

*John Scattergood*

I

The last twenty years or so have seen a consensus emerge about the ‘occasion’ of Skelton’s *Magnyfycence*. It is now commonly accepted to be a play about Henry VIII and the Tudor royal household, and is usually dated 1519 or shortly afterwards. It is usually held to have been provoked by the expulsion of the ‘minions’ — the king’s particular young favourites — from the household in that year and their replacement by older more experienced servants who, it was felt, would look after the king, and particularly his personal finances, in a more responsible way.<sup>1</sup> Instead of being seen as a satire on Wolsey, as earlier editors and critics had proposed,<sup>2</sup> it is now seen as supporting his policy in relation to the king’s Privy Chamber, an influential area of his household, because it was composed of people who had routine, day to day access to the king, and hence influence with him simply because they could talk to him. And access and talk are very much at the centre of *Magnyfycence*: it is basically an intrusion story in which words are used as weapons.

The story is well known from Edward Hall’s account about how the king’s council became alarmed at the way in which certain ‘young men in his priuie chamber’ took advantage of Henry VIII’s ‘gentlenes & liberalitee’ and

... not regardyng his estate nor degree, were so familier and homely wyth hym, and plaied suche light touches with hym that they forgat themselves: Whiche thynges although the kyng of his gentle nature suffred and not rebuked nor reprod it: yet the kynges counsail thought it not mete to be suffred for the kynges honor, & therefore thei altogether came to the king, beseching him al these enormities and lightnes to redresse.<sup>3</sup>

Modern historians and modern interpreters of the play have largely seen a struggle for power, particularly financial power, as at the centre of this incident, and there is some truth in this.<sup>4</sup> But as Hall tells the story it is a matter of princely, or better regal behaviour: the king, because of his ‘gentle nature’, allowed persons about him to behave with inappropriate