

**PERFORMANCE AS RESEARCH:
Staging John Heywood's *Play of the Weather* at Hampton
Court Palace**

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What follows is a critical account of a collaborative project undertaken during the spring of 2007, involving Oxford Brookes and Leicester Universities, Historic Royal Palaces, and AandBC (theatre company), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council through its Speculative Research Grants scheme. The aim was to use a production of key scenes from John Heywood's *Play of the Weather*, performed in the Great Hall of Hampton Court Palace, as a means of exploring the political, social, and spatial implications of the interlude in ways which transcended the limitations of conventional textual or source scholarship, and to investigate the potential of the palace itself as a space for performance. Given the tight budget and limited rehearsal time (one week in rehearsal rooms and three days *in situ* at Hampton Court) we chose to perform only the opening 'scenes' of the play, from Jupiter's description of the 'parliament in heaven' to the exit of the Gentleman (1–329) and the scenes between Merry Report, Jupiter, and the Gentlewoman (766–867).

Rather than being simply an attempt at 'authentic' performance, we were determined to apply the insights of experimental archaeology, contemporary theatre practice, and textual scholarship to test a number of historically grounded hypotheses concerning the play's potential impact and effects in performance in the space of Henry VIII's Great Hall. How far might the particular circumstances, physical configuration, and cultural implications of playing the interlude in the Great Hall influence the 'meaning' of key scenes and individual lines, or influence relationships within the text, between the actors and members of the audience, even among the audience members themselves? What was the best way of using the space available in the Great Hall as a stage? How differently would the play be received if the actors in key rôles were of different ages, or a different sex? How fundamentally might the presence of the King as the principal spectator have affected both the performances themselves and their reception by spectators? To address these questions, we set out our acting space on the long axis of the hall (the details of our staging choices are described in more detail at pages 90–91 below), with a throne for