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RECASTING A AND B:
HENRY MEDWALL'S *FULGENS AND LUCRES*
AND THE PARODY OF HUMANISM

Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez* was probably performed in the Great Hall at Lambeth Palace while John Morton was Archbishop of Canterbury in the last decade of the fifteenth century; however, the only surviving record of the performance is John Rastell's edition of the play-text, printed around 1512.¹ This 'godely interlude', adapted from Sir John Tiptoft's *Declamation of Noblesse* (c. 1460), presents a case in which two Roman suitors, one high-born but not wholly virtuous and the other self-made yet moral, rhetorically vie for the hand of the beautiful and virtuous Lucrez. *Fulgens and Lucrez* follows Tiptoft's humanist plot at its core, but Medwall frames the scholarly disputation with two new comedic characters who emerge from the audience in order to affect the outcome of the plot. While Rastell's printed text provides the names 'A' and 'B' for the characters, they are unnamed within Medwall's dialogue. They refer to themselves and one another only as 'what callt' (I. 25), and we have no obvious background information about them as we do for the other 'Roman' characters, Fulgens, Lucrez, Gayus, and Cornelius. Because the surviving play-text makes very little comment on the status of these two characters and the metatheatrical slippage between their roles as actors, audience members, and servants, those who study the play have only their dialogue to help ascertain how the play's Tudor audience would have received them.

A and B's resistance to the traditional outcome of the plot, in which the non-aristocratic Gayus wins the debate and thus the hand of Lucrez, and their ineptitude at their jobs have led to modern assumptions that these are no more than two low-class house servants who stumble into the plot, serving partially as comic relief and partially to reinforce the idealistic humanist message of the *declamatio* adapted from the source text. Specifically, scholarship on the play's engagement with the growing influence of the educated middle class tends to rely on the unfounded idea that A and B are servants in Morton's household who, on entering into the play-world, further ingratiate themselves as servants to Cornelius and Gayus. Certainly, Lucrez's final decision in favour of the self-made Gayus represents, on the surface, the victory of the rising class of educated, hard-working, and virtuous citizens; however, I argue that

¹ The title-page of John Rastell's printed text of *Fulgens and Lucrez* (c. 1512–16, the only surviving witness to the performance, published years later) reads: 'Here is conteyned a godely interlude of Fulgens cenatoure of Rome, Lucrez his daughter, Gayus Flaminius, and Publius Cornelius, of the Disputation of Noblenes, and is devyded in two partyes to be played at two tymes. Compyled by mayster Henry Medwall, late chapelayne to the ryght reverent fader in God Johan Morton, cardynall and archebyssshop of Caunterbury' (*The Plays of Henry Medwall*, ed. by Alan H. Nelson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1980), p. 31). All citations and quotations come from Nelson's edition.

our readings of the play as a whole have been influenced by some misleading assumptions about A and B's status as menial, low-class servants to Gayus and Cornelius, partially resulting from the lack of concrete reliable details about the two characters.

A number of scholars writing on the play have repeated negative assumptions about the role intended for the two nameless characters, and some go as far as to assert that A and B are low-class, roguish household servants, although there is little textual evidence to support this: Rick Bowers calls the two characters 'waiters' multiple times, and Olga Horner calls them 'two low-life male servants'; Ruth Lexton calls them 'two low-status characters' and later 'foolish, miscreant and disorderly household servants'; Robert C. Jones refers to 'their roles as knavish servants' and Robert Merrix says they exude 'a whiff of the chamberpot'.²

Instead, I argue that the two characters have much more in common with members of a growing class of educated, socially mobile subjects. Their position as 'servants' in the play should not align them with the kitchen staff, but instead reflects the employment of educated citizens as advisers and counsellors to those in power. A and B's speech and argumentative approaches provide ample evidence of their rhetorical training, which they use for their own advancement and the manipulation of the Roman characters, and they in fact resemble the clerky students of fabliaux more than the vice characters of a morality play. In this discussion I will argue that the two characters are part of the educated, yet not aristocratic, class who, like Medwall, spent time in school and searched for employment with prominent employers.

My argument has two purposes. First, it provides textual evidence for a rebranding of A and B's social roles in the play, reading them as ambitious and rhetorically educated would-be courtiers seeking to improve their conditions through employment by and intimacy with more powerful figures. Second, this reading of A and B results in the undermining of the humanist, idealized association of education with virtue, and the contemporary rise in political prominence of educated middle-class bureaucrats. A and B's manipulation and misrepresentation of their employers echoes a real worry that those in positions of power would fall victim to the flattery and eloquence of ambitious courtiers, bringing the play's theme close to that of Medwall's

² Rick Bowers, 'How to Get from A to B: *Fulgens and Lucrez*, Histrionic Power, and the Invention of the English Comic Duo', *Early Theatre*, 14 (2011), 45–59; Olga Horner, '*Fulgens and Lucrez*: An Historical Perspective', *Medieval English Theatre*, 15 (1993), 49–86 (p. 50); Ruth Lexton, 'Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez* and the Question of Nobility under Henry VII', in *The Fifteenth Century*, VIII: *Rule, Redemption and Representations in Late Medieval England and France*, ed. by Linda Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), pp. 163–82 (pp. 165, 177); Robert C. Jones, 'The Stage World and the "Real" World in Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 32 (1971), 131–42 (p. 135); Robert P. Merrix, 'The Function of the Comic Plot in *Fulgens and Lucrez*', *Modern Language Studies*, 7 (1977), 16–26 (p. 23).

Nature, which also highlights the dangers of ill counsel and of falling prey to flattery. Rather than presenting an unproblematic disputation in which Gayus is the obvious winner, A and B provide a foil to the unquestioned idealization of the humanistically educated employee, situating the play within a decidedly aristocratic context.

The Emergence of A and B

Although we have no proof that the play was performed in the Great Hall at Lambeth, or that it was performed at all, Rastell's printed play-text edition provides some hints towards possible occasions for Medwall's intended performance setting. The title-page dubs it 'a godely interlude [. . .] devyded in two partyes to be played at two tymes', which encourages the assumption that the play was written by Medwall to be performed in the Great Hall.³ This is further reinforced by the title's mention of Medwall's attachment to Morton: 'Compyled by mayster Henry Medwall, late chapelayne to the ryght reverent fader in God Johan Morton, cardynall and archebyssshop of Caunterbury'. Medwall served as notary for Morton in the 1490s, which could mean that he composed the play some time during those years.

The use of the term *interlude* here has helped scholars narrow down possible performance settings for the play, since interludes were often performed in the halls of noblemen or important hosts. Walker explains that the term 'has come to refer to an entire genre of early Renaissance moral and political plays performed in the great halls of noble households and other communal spaces and acted by small touring companies or actors drawn from the nobleman's own household'.⁴ Suzanne Westfall, who dedicates a chapter of her monograph on Tudor household revels to plays performed in noble households, describes how, in addition to *Fulgens and Lucrez*, 'virtually all early Tudor interludes address themes of vital interest to the aristocracy in languages and through structures that reflected life in the great households'.⁵ In addition to Nelson,⁶ a number of scholars have speculated that *Fulgens and Lucrez* may have been composed for a Christmas celebration, when such interludes were common, and the play's publication date and inclusion of a dance 'after the guyse | Of Spayne' suggests a possible association with marriage negotiations

³ For more on the proposed performance occasions and dates, see: Nelson, pp. 9–19; Greg Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 17.

⁴ Greg Walker, 'Fulgens and Lucrez and Early Tudor Drama', in *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, ed. by Garrett A. Sullivan and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 21–34 (p. 26).

⁵ Suzanne R. Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 152–99 (p. 152).

⁶ See Nelson, pp. 18–19.

between the Tudor Prince Arthur and Catherine of Aragon (II. 380–81). Evidence from the text does support the idea that the play was performed during a celebration that would span the time needed for two major meals, because the characters A and B refer a number of times to the guests eating (I. 1–16, 1413–26; II. 10–12).

If this is the case, and *Fulgens and Lucrez* was performed in the Great Hall at Lambeth Palace, the performers would be surrounded by tables and other furniture arranged in a very structured social and political hierarchy. At one end of the hall, Morton and any guests of honour would be seated at a table on a raised dais, while other important guests might be eating, drinking, and mingling. At the other end of the hall would be the screen, which would afford a barrier between the hall and the kitchen and where less important and less aristocratic spectators would stand and mingle. Tudor interludes frequently made use of these social and spatial hierarchies, directing the majority of the action towards the dais and associating the screen end of the hall with vice.⁷

It is from this end that our first players arrive, stepping out from the body of spectators, who were still moving about or eating, and possibly 'leaving the audience uncertain whether they are watching actors acting or impatient spectators threatening to spoil the play'.⁸ I do not think that A and B were interpreted as being in the employ of Morton at that time, but as casual guests relegated to the screen end of the hall, although it is very possible that the actors playing A and B would have been working in Morton's household.⁹ As it is, it is not clear that the two are meant to be understood as members of Morton's household because B notes that they are both there as guests, although perhaps liminally: 'we come to see this play | As farre as we may be the leve of the marshall', which indicates that they were not there to work, but neither were they well-respected guests (I. 148–49). It is important to observe a distinction between the modern idea of 'servant' and the kind of person who was a household servant in the Tudor era: educated male members of a nobleman's household who might fulfil the duties of chaplain, notary, or squire and could aid their employer in a number of ways.¹⁰ Both Medwall and the contemporary humanist writer Thomas More were employed by Cardinal

⁷ See in particular Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama*, pp. 53–59; Ian Lancashire, 'Order for Twelfth Day and Night circa 1515 in the Second Northumberland Household Book', *English Literary Renaissance*, 10 (1980), 6–45; and Philip Butterworth, *Staging Conventions in Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 24–27. Westfall and Peterson also discuss how these interludes often expressed current political tensions: Westfall, pp. 153–56; Noah Peterson, 'A and B and the Question of True Nobility in Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez*', *English Studies*, 97.3 (2016), 238–53 (p. 246).

⁸ Walker, *Fulgens and Lucrez and Early Tudor Drama*, p. 24.

⁹ Westfall, pp. 122–40. See Butterworth, pp. 78–84, for a description of the ways in which players emerged from audiences or interacted with guests.

¹⁰ See especially Suzanne Westfall's chapter 'Playwrights and Players', in *Patrons and Performance*, pp. 108–51.

Morton, serving him as notary and page, respectively. A and B's conversation and actions throughout the play once they have been hired to work for Cornelius and Gayus, as well as the ways in which their Roman employers delegate tasks to the two characters, imply that it is this type of employment that the audience was meant to recognize in the two characters. Whether or not audience members would recognize the actors themselves as members of Morton's household, I read A and B's opening conversation as an indication that the two characters are meant to portray casual guests in the hall, not waiters or servants of Morton's who abandon their post to work for Gayus and Cornelius.

As A steps forth first from the audience, having just finished eating, he asks why they all 'stond so still' (I. 2), taunting them for eating their fill at their host's expense, and acting generally oblivious to the entertainment about to take place. B emerges and explains that there is to be a play, describing the outline of the plot and its outcome. He states that he is 'of counsell— | One tolde me all the processe' and that it was 'tolde [him] ones or twyse' (I. 62–63, 67), intimating that he at the very least knows someone either associated with the play's production or else familiar with Tiptoft's translation. An audience watching this performance would recognize the interlude's association with the college *declamatio* and with humanist ideals as soon as B began his summary of the upcoming plot. As they anticipate the start of the declamation's plot, B expresses his desire to see a play in the traditional humanist formula of Horatian *utile dulce*: a proper combination of useful morals and sweet entertainment. B explains that he has seen many similar entertainments that provide 'Both gode examples and right honest solace' (I. 153), and he adds that

This play in like wyse I am sure
Is made for the same entent a[n]d purpose,
To do every man both myrth and pleasure.
(I. 154–56)

B then begins to describe 'all the substaunce of theyr play' to A, summarizing the story before it begins, a plot device common to both fabliaux and college dramatic entertainments. Thus, the audience would recognize the scholarly origins of what they were about to witness, if not the actual source in Tiptoft's translation. This association with the rhetorical and legal debates of the colleges would have been even more obvious to readers of Rastell's printed edition, which includes the word *disputation* in the title. The designations 'A' and 'B' given by Rastell were similarly apt: Horner remarks that 'A and B would be recognized, probably with some amusement, by readers as well as by the actors, as the conventional anonymous protagonists of specimen Chancery writs (like John Doe, Richard Roe, etc. in criminal indictments).'

¹¹ Horner, p. 63.

As the two characters enter the play, B explains that ‘finally they gave sentence and awarde | That Gayus Flamyneus was to be commende | For the more nobill man’, winning the right to wed Lucre (l. 119–21). A objects immediately to the outcome of the plot:

- A And shall this be the proces of the play?
 B Ye, so I understonde be credible informacyon.
 A By my fayth, but yf it be evyn as ye say,
 I wyll advyse them to change that conclusion.
 What? Wyll they afferme that a chorles son
 Sholde be more noble than a gentilman born?
 Nay, beware, for men wyll have therof grete scorn—
 It may not be spoken in no maner of case.
 (l. 126–33)

When B describes the play’s interest in truth and virtue (l. 157–60), A responds by doubting the necessity and benefit of telling the truth: ‘Ye, but trouth may not be sayde alway, | For somtyme it causith gruge and despite’ (l. 161–62). One should not always tell the truth, he objects, because some people do not want to hear it. He goes on to say that one ‘must both lye and flater now and than | That castith hym to dwell amonge worldly men. | In some courtis such men shall most wyn!’ (l. 166–68). According to A, those who know how to lie and flatter their employer are best positioned to gain the upper hand in matters of career advancement. B’s summary of his source, and his indication that Gayus will indeed be chosen by Lucre, becomes the jumping-off point for A and B to attempt a ‘rewriting’ of the plot as they further insert themselves into the performance.

The other characters enter and begin their dialogue, and A and B look on as Fulgens explains to Cornelius that the choice of husband will be left to Lucre; while Fulgens promises to further Cornelius’s cause if he can, Cornelius does not feel that the matter can be assumed to be settled and announces to the general assembly that

- a wise felow that had sumwhat a brayne,
 And of suche thingis had experience,
 Such one wolde I with me retayne
 To gyve me counseile and assistance.
 (l. 347–50)

Hearing this proclamation, B exclaims: ‘Now have I spied a mete office for me, | For I wyl be of counsell and I may | With yonder man’, vowing ‘The mariage utterly to mare or to make’ (l. 360–62, 379). Cornelius’s preference for a fellow to give ‘counseile and assistance’ and B’s indication that this is a ‘mete office’, a proper and appropriate job, for him indicate that this is not a position for a simple servant or messenger, but for a retainer who can aid Cor-

nelius in the use of rhetoric to win over Lucre. Cornelius grabs B's attention when he exclaims: 'I will spare no cost or expence | Nor yet refuse ony labour or payne | The love of fayre Lucre therby to attayne' (l. 351–53). When A seems hesitant about entering into the action of the play, B tells A, in a line worthy of Chaucer's Pandarus, that 'there is not in this hondred myle | A feter bawde than I am one' (l. 367–68). B suggests that A likewise seek employment with Gayus, promising that 'this gere shall us both avaunce' (l. 393). His use of the word *gear/gere* here (and elsewhere) is telling. According to *The Middle English Dictionary*, *gere* can refer to 'Behavior, conduct, ways, doings, affairs' yet also has connotations of deception and play: 'a way of acting or behaving; esp. a trivial or deceitful act, a trick, a wile'.¹² Once alone, A admits that

This felowe and I be maysterles
And lyve moste parte in ydelnes,
Therefore some maner of beseness
Wolde become us both well.
(l. 398–401)

This is again directly inconsistent with their assumed presence as servants in Morton's household. Further, when A is interviewed by Gayus for a position as retainer, B vouches for him, explaining that they both 'dwelled many a feyre day | In one scole' (l. 644–45).

A and B's bursting onto the scene and their self-conscious insertion into the plot has been compared to a description of Thomas More, who in his youth was a page in Morton's house:

thoughte he was younge of years, yeat wold he at Christmas tyde sodenly sometimes steppe in among the players, and neuer studyeng for the matter, make a parte of his owne there presently among them, which made the lookers on more sporte then all the plaiers beside.¹³

Critics often point to this comment in connection with the roles of A and B, even going so far as to state that perhaps More participated as an actor in *Fulgens and Lucre*.¹⁴ While there is no historical or textual evidence to support More's direct involvement with the play, his actions as described do resemble A and B's and may have served as an indirect influence on Medwall. I mention this not to stress the connection between More and A and B but to emphasize that critics have long adhered to a double standard about the roles that A and B adopt. Throughout the play the two characters often seem to overstep the bounds of what were deemed suitable actions for low-class staff: they are often late or behave discourteously, and Lexton correctly notes

¹² *The Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *gere* <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary>> [accessed 2 October 2018].

¹³ Nelson, p. 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* More later became the brother-in-law of the play's printer, John Rastell.

that B's 'tone to Lucrez would be insolent in a servant' during the scene in which he speaks to her on behalf of Cornelius.¹⁵ If we are willing to imagine More's stepping into the play as a young educated page, we should likewise be willing to accept that A and B could have held a similar rank: in service to their employer and yet still recognized as members of an educated and advisory class.

A and B as Fabliau Figures

While scholars have compared A and B to characters from the morality play or clownish folk drama, their characterization and their distaste for Gayus marrying above his place closely resemble the clerks or students of Old French and Middle English fabliaux. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* presents two different tales adapted from fabliaux featuring students making mischief in other people's affairs. A and B are particularly reminiscent of a number of these characters, who would have been recognizable to their late medieval audience; their wish to 'beholde suche myrthes always' (I. 150) makes them resemble the 'yonge povre scholers two [. . .] Testif they were, and lusty for to pleye, | And oonly for hire myrthe and revelrye' of the Reeve's Tale, who similarly thwart a father's attempts to 'bistowe [his daughter] hye | Into som worthy blood of auncetrye'.¹⁶ B resembles both clerks in the Miller's Tale, 'ful subtile and ful queynte' like Nicholas, yet vainly attired like Absalom (MT, A 3275), and they admit to being unemployed like the pilgrim Clerk: 'For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice, | Ne was so worldly for to have office' (CIT, E 291–92). The clerkly student of fabliaux was also no stranger to dramatic interlude; the Middle English fabliau *Dame Sirith*, which is structured largely in dialogue, was adapted into a contemporary dramatic analogue, the *Interludium de Clerico et Puella*. Both tell of a lovesick student who persuades an older woman to help trick a proud young girl into sleeping with him by means of wit and deception. The scene in which A and B battle to seduce Jone, Lucrez's maid, discussed in more detail below, contains the typical humour and physical humiliation that feature in fabliaux.

Like A and B, these stereotyped student figures are irreverent, randy, and too clever for their own good. They wreak havoc on proud virgins and over-protective fathers or husbands. While scholars of fabliau disagree on the specific intended audience for the fabliaux (Joseph Bedier argues that they had a bourgeois audience and Per Nykrog asserts a more courtly audience), Knud Togeby argues that, because they were in a position to laugh at both the bourgeois and the nobility, students or *clerics* were more likely to be the

¹⁵ Lexton, p. 181.

¹⁶ Reeve's Tale, A 3981–82, 4004–05, 4002. All Chaucer references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson and others, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

authors and intended audience in comic and parodic forms of the genre.¹⁷ Indeed, student characters are especially prominent in the surviving fabliaux, often triumphing over labourers, priests, knights, and other bourgeois in love triangles or contests of wit. Nykrog also states that clerks are the ‘unquestionable pet child of the fabliaux’, and Thomas Cooke goes so far as to assert that fabliaux were written almost completely by ‘young clerics—whose adolescent viewpoint is betrayed by their persistent attention to the male sex organ’.¹⁸ Medwall has taken an exemplar of a genre made for and by self-promoting humanists and planted within it two recognizably clerkly fabliau characters who serve to undermine that humanist message. The original plot’s exploration of the relationship between educated humanists and the aristocracy thus devolves into a farcical comedy.

Some of the most comedic scenes added by Medwall to the original plot are those in which A and B fail to do their job as messengers for the two suitors. While the ideal adviser or employee would facilitate clear and consistent communication between his employer and others, A and B in fact hinder their employers’ purposes throughout the play. Engaged to help the suitors in their goal of winning Lucre, they are tasked with delivering messages to her and reporting her response, yet throughout the play the two characters lose notes and forget or mangle messages. A even forgets his own name when trying to deliver a message to Lucre from Gayus, and B does not fare much better, completely misinterpreting Cornelius’s message to Lucre in one of the most comedic scenes in the play. In an effort to encourage Lucre to favour him, Cornelius asks B to

Go in hand with her anone,
How so ever thou do,
For to fele her mynde toward me,
And by all meanis possyble to be,
Induce her therunto.

(II. 170–74)

B tells Cornelius that his word will probably not be enough to lend authenticity to his message from Cornelius, whereupon Cornelius recounts a moment he and Lucre had shared that B could repeat so as to validate his position as Cornelius’s confidant. Cornelius’s narration of a past meeting in which he threw Lucre’s musk ball to scare away a bird becomes, in B’s retelling, an embarrassingly erotic misinterpretation:

¹⁷ Knud Togeby, ‘The Nature of the Fabliaux’, in *The Humor of the Fabliaux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Thomas D. Cooke and Benjamin L. Honeycutt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), pp. 7–13 (pp. 11–12).

¹⁸ Per Nykrog, ‘Courtliness and the Townspeople: The Fabliaux as a Courtly Burlesque’, in *The Humor of the Fabliaux*, ed. by Cooke and Honeycutt, pp. 59–73 (p. 64); Thomas D. Cooke, ‘Pornography, the Comic Spirit, and the Fabliaux’, *ibid.*, pp. 137–62 (p. 146).

CORNELIUS And therefore she toke me her musc ball,
 And thus it befell:
 I kyst it as strayght as ony pole,
 So that it lyghtyde in the hole
 Of the holow ashe.
 [. . .]
 B Ye say that ye kyst it evyn in the hole
 Of the holow ashe as strayte as a pole—
 Sayde ye not so?

(II. 200–04, 208–10)

B is hesitant about relating such a strange message, and as he sets off to find Lucrez, exclaims: 'I am but as a messenger perde— | The blame shall not be myne, but his' (II. 224–25). When he does finally meet and address Lucrez, he has unsurprisingly confused 'cast' with 'kissed' and 'ash' with 'arse':

B And than as he sayd, ye dyd no wors
 But evyn fayr kyst hym on the noke of the ars.
 LUCRES Nay, ther thow lyst falsely, by my fay!
 B Trowth, it was on the hole of thars, I shulde say—
 I wyst well it was one of the two,
 The noke or the hole.
 LUCRES Nay, nor yet so!
 B By my fayth, ye kyst him or he kyst you
 On the hole of thars.

(II. 282–89)

Getting over her initial shock, Lucrez corrects B, who says that Cornelius would have done better to write the message down for him. B's failure to relate the message, to the detriment of Cornelius's chances with Lucrez, once again provides an example of the more fabliau-type clerk or student who has been thrust into the idealistic world of this humanist plot and blunders in the execution of his responsibilities.

Schoolroom Rhetoric and Schoolyard Games

In the other key comedic scene, A and B further engage in typical fabliau-type buffoonery and demonstrate their ineptitude when they both attempt to seduce Jone, Lucrez's maid, a scene that is clearly set up as a direct parody of the final disputation between Lucrez's suitors. B attempts to get Jone to 'laugh and talke' with him (I. 890), which quickly develops into a marriage proposal and results in B enticing Jone into a rhetorical debate concerning her virginal status:

B Why, are ye a mayde?
 ANCILLA Ye, ellis I were to blame.

up a parodic jousting contest amusingly called 'farte pryke in cule' (l. 1169), the historical evidence for which has been scrutinized by Peter Meredith and Meg Twycross.²¹ In this game, the 'jousters' are bent over, bound to a spear and a stick, and left in extremely restricted and vulnerable positions, at which point each attempts to knock over and prod the other with his stick. While the belief that A and B are of low status has led to this 'joust' being called both a 'low-life game' and a 'burlesqued dramatization of the rhetorical debate' to come, Meredith finds a nineteenth-century analogue in Kipling's *Stalky and Co.*²² Here, young schoolboys engaged in cock-fighting are bound in a similar manner, involving 'the tying of the wrists, the positioning of the stump, and the helplessness of someone once "trussed"'.²³ Searching for other material analogues for the game to aid in visualizing the play's performance, Twycross also makes a connection between the joust and the schoolyard in contemporary misericords portraying similar activities from Saint George's Chapel at Windsor Castle and from Henry VII's Chapel in Westminster Abbey.²⁴ These depictions show boys 'trussed up' like A and B, and their locations suggest a connection with schools and indeed with Medwall himself: 'Medwall was a scholar at Eton from 1475–1480 (aged 13–18), just before the Windsor misericord was carved. After a period at Cambridge, he was back in the region again: his earliest notarial document was attested at Windsor on 18 August 1489.'²⁵ Twycross conjectures that the game was 'perhaps a schoolboy game at Eton', where Medwall would have learnt it, but neither she nor Meredith questions the status of the two characters who actually participate in the game.²⁶ While Meredith and Twycross are more interested in learning how to stage the scene, I argue that these connections point to games such as 'farte pryke in cule' being played by students rather than by servants ironically imitating the games of aristocrats, and this connection can be extended to analysis of the game's position within the play itself and of A and B's status. Since both Meredith and Twycross have independently established a relationship between the game and the schoolyard, A and B's obvious familiarity with it is a strong indication that they had spent time in school.

This last contest ends, not with a victor, but with A and B both getting knocked over and whipped by Jone as she skips away, claiming that she is

²¹ See Peter Meredith "'Farte Pryke in Cule" and Cock-Fighting', *Medieval English Theatre*, 6 (1984), 30–39, and Meg Twycross, Malcolm Jones, and Alan Fletcher, "'Farte Pryke in Cule": The Pictures', *Medieval English Theatre*, 23 (2001), 100–21, for in-depth analysis of how this may have been performed.

²² Howard B. Norland, *Drama in Early Tudor Britain 1485–1558* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 238; Merrix, p. 23.

²³ Meredith, p. 33.

²⁴ Twycross, p. 104.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

actually already betrothed. Her escape from the 'case' at hand, together with the deflation and lack of climax of this love triangle, certainly mirrors and foreshadows the rhetorical sparring of Gayus and Cornelius in the second part. This second love triangle also affords Medwall an opportunity to employ another fabliau motif: the summarizing of the story's plot before it has begun. Togeby explains that when fabliaux contain summaries or mirrored plots, they are able to assert themselves as parody; he states that 'The humor is attached to the structure itself, to the distance from the model genre, and to the oblique repetition of the scheme of the model genre.'²⁷ Thus, the love triangle between A, B, and Jone has been understood as a parody of that between Cornelius, Gayus, and Lucre,²⁸ especially if we recognize that both sets of suitors attempt to woo the object of their affection with skills acquired at school: A and B eventually fight over Jone using wrestling, singing, and a game we know was played by schoolboys, while Cornelius and Gayus employ rhetorical and argumentative methods to present their case to Lucre regarding their 'noblesse'.

This core rhetorical plot of *Fulgens and Lucre* would probably have been familiar to Medwall's audience, finding its direct source in Tiptoft's Ciceronian didactic text *The Declamation of Noblesse*, a translation into English of an earlier Latin work by Buonaccorso da Montemagno called *De vera nobilitate* (1428). Tiptoft's text was printed in Caxton's 1481 volume alongside two English translations of works by Cicero: *Of Old Age* and *Of Friendship*, the latter of which was also translated by Tiptoft. As a student, Medwall would have encountered Cicero's texts in either translation or the original Latin, and it is not unlikely that he encountered this edition of Caxton's, which was published the same year he entered King's College. While *Fulgens and Lucre* has stood out to scholars as 'the first known drama in England to draw on a humanist source text' and has been regarded as 'the first time, so far as we know, that the nature of nobility was discussed in a dramatic presentation', in reality the rhetorical performance of the *declamatio* was a familiar dramatized classroom practice.²⁹ The plot and text are not specifically of Roman origin, but the play and its sources participate in the classical rhetorical traditions of *declamatio* and *controversia*, exercises in which students would dispute and argue in fictitious courtroom cases. While the purpose was indeed to improve the students' skills in oratorical debate and the law, the exercises were also viewed as sources of moral and educational guidance for the humanist scholar. Rastell's title-page presents the play as a disputation, the *Disputation of*

²⁷ Togeby, pp. 12–13.

²⁸ Twycross; Wright, pp. 185–86; Bowers, pp. 50, 53; Peterson, pp. 243–44; Merrix, p. 20; Horner, p. 65; Jones, p. 132; Walker, 'Fulgens and Lucre and Early Tudor Drama', p. 27.

²⁹ Aaron Kitch, 'Medwall's "Condycion": *Fulgens and Lucre* and the New Tudor Drama', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 68 (2005), 1–8 (p. 1); Norland, p. 234.

Noblenes, a genre similar to the *declamatio*, in which parties would present arguments on philosophy or theology. These and other similar Latin texts were useful to stage in the classroom for the inculcation of Latin grammar, their illustration of proper techniques of argumentation, and their examples of virtuous ways of living.³⁰ Buonaccorso's and Tiptoft's texts participate in this format by creating fictional Roman characters who argue over the true nature of nobility before the Roman Senate in an effort to win the hand of the beautiful Lucre: is nobility, as Cornelius argues, hereditary, or is it, as Gayus argues, based on one's own accomplishments and virtues?³¹ During such a 'performance', the winner of the dispute is not explicitly revealed, although it is relatively clear that Gayus is the favoured suitor, making the plot especially attractive to scholars and students because it seems to favour education and associate that with virtue and 'nobility', over and above traditional aristocratic power.

The resulting relationship between the classroom and the dramatic entertainments became stronger as schools began to devote more time to their production; at this time, dramatic plays were written and performed in schools and classrooms, and King's College was well known for devoting much time and energy to hosting musical and dramatic entertainment while Medwall was there.³² Thus, while household dramas did often involve the participation of servants and staff, the play's educated audience would have been more familiar with participation by students and scholars in such a production, especially one based on rhetorical exercises adapted from a familiar school textbook. By the time Medwall arrived in Cardinal Morton's household, his years at King's College had given him first-hand experience of small-scale dramatic productions, and he was able to adapt humanist texts meant for the classroom (such as Tiptoft's *Declamation*) into entertaining and appropriate pieces for Morton's educated audiences. By including A and B's comedic plot, Medwall thus produces a text that is educational and entertaining, traditional and yet parodic.

³⁰ For more information on the play's resemblance to the genres of *declamatio* and *controversia*, see Michael Mendelson, 'Declamation, Context, and Controversiality', *Rhetoric Review*, 13 (1994), 92–107; Eugene Waith, 'Controversia in the English Drama: Medwall and Massinger', *PMLA*, 68 (1953), 286–303; and James McBain, "By Example and Gode Reason": Reconsidering Commonplaces and the Law in *Fulgens and Lucre's*, *Medieval English Theatre*, 28 (2006), 3–28.

³¹ The play's central debate on true nobility or *gentillesse* was a well-known and long-established humanist theme that could be found both in authoritative classical texts by Horace and Cicero and in popular medieval works such as Capellanus's *De amore*, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*.

³² George Charles Moore-Smith, 'The Academic Drama at Cambridge: Extracts from College Records', *Malone Society Collections*, 2.2 (1923), 150–230; and *College Plays Performed in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923); Walter Cohen, *Drama of a Nation: Public Theatre in Renaissance England and Spain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

While the *declamatio* was used as practice for argumentation in the courtroom or the real world, the situation it dramatized was often invented, and as these rhetorical debates rose in popularity and importance in the medieval classroom they began to distance themselves from the praxis they once advocated. While some cases were rooted in historical events, many of them appealed to students because of their fictional character and interesting features: ‘fantastic plots, an inflated style, and a general divorce from the actual procedures of the forum and law courts, procedures that declamation was initially intended to imitate’;³³ Eugene Waith remarks that ‘The wholesome pill of practice was heavily coated with sugar.’³⁴ Thus, while the story of Lucretia and her suitors does represent a rhetorical case study, the influence of the more popular burlesque and wooing tales is obvious even in Buonaccorso’s and Tiptoft’s earlier texts. While these scholarly exercises began increasingly to take on the trappings of drama, the creators of contemporary dramatic entertainments were also incorporating popular scholarly themes and methods that had their origins in the humanist classroom.³⁵ Waith’s ‘Controversia in the English Drama’ suggests that the *controversia* contributed plots to English plays and also influenced contemporary theories about literature and its style, just as those same exercises were adopting themes from popular romances and fables. Similarly, Tudor drama often employed legal situations or allusions to them, and Medwall’s two unnamed characters, given the referents A and B, reflect contemporary conventions in legal texts.

If A and B are meant to poke fun at the humanistic practice of classroom performance, they also call attention to the idealization of the messages propounded by those genres. The play’s association with virtue and education would be signalled immediately by the humanistic subject matter, especially since the theme was a favourite among humanists, who idealized the power of education to make virtuous subjects, who would then become useful and valuable employees. These examples and others were valued in the classroom because contemporary humanists perceived a close relationship between education and virtue, emphasizing that the most valuable and loyal citizen was the educated rather than the high-born one.³⁶ To the early humanists, one of

³³ Mendelson, p. 92

³⁴ Waith, p. 287.

³⁵ For more details of the influence of humanism on Tudor drama, and especially of the humanist goal to instruct and delight, see Christel Meier-Staubach, ‘Humanist Values in the Early Modern Drama’, in *Medieval and Renaissance Humanism: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reform*, ed. by Stephen Gersh and Bert Roes (Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 149–66; Helen Whall, *To Instruct and Delight: Didactic Method in Five Tudor Dramas* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), pp. 149–65; Dorothy H. Brown, *Christian Humanism in the Late English Morality Plays* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

³⁶ Pier Paolo Vergerio explains that studying the liberal arts is important for citizens because through them ‘virtue and wisdom are either practiced or sought, and by which the body or mind is disposed towards all the best things. For this source people customarily seek honour and glory,

the most valid and important uses of a humanist education was to advise and counsel a prominent ruler or magistrate, just as Medwall himself did in the employ of Morton.³⁷ Medwall's audience believed that persons with power, and especially kings, should be regularly advised by educated scholars, and scholars such as Thomas Elyot and Roger Ascham warned against the dangers of ignorant or unvirtuous instructors.³⁸

Tudor Ideals: 'New Men' and Lucre's Choice

It has been well established that A and B's participation in the plot, including their parallel plotline, incorporates and reflects on contemporary Tudor thoughts about social status, nobility, and especially the emergence of Henry VII's 'New Men': members of the educated middle class who, like Gayus, Morton, and Medwall, were rapidly displacing noble-born aristocrats in influential positions.³⁹ When Henry came to the throne, he replaced the hereditary power of aristocrats with the expertise of officials and advisers who were men of education and talent, '[s]ocially mobile, ruthlessly ambitious and newly powerful[,] [proving] to be highly adaptable and versatile politicians'.⁴⁰ Following the lead of classical Roman thinkers, Tudor humanists argued against practices in which a few established families possessed a majority of the civic power and wealth, lauding instead nobility acquired through virtuous thoughts and actions. Medwall and Cardinal Morton were both members of this growing class of 'New Men'; despite Medwall's own birth in the 'notorious suburb' of Southwark, he was able to secure a prestigious career and access to influential benefactors.⁴¹ Men of education were to be preferred over inept, ignorant, or unvirtuous members of the nobility, and knowledge came to be seen as the basis for all virtue and wisdom, regardless of birth or status.⁴² The audience for *Fulgens and Lucre* would have been composed of members of both the traditional aristocracy and this rising class

which for the wise man are the principal rewards of virtue. Just as profit and pleasure are laid down as the ends for illiberal intellects, so virtue and glory are goals for the noble'. And Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, in *De liberorum educatione*, states that 'All boys who are led to the summit of virtue must have a good disposition and a capacity for learning.' See Craig W. Kallendorf, *Humanist Educational Treatises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 29, 133.

³⁷ Brown, p. 113.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁹ See e.g. Lexton, p. 167; Kitch, p. 2; Alexander Grant, *Henry VII: The Importance of his Reign in English History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1985), p. 17; S. J. Gunn, 'The Court of Henry VII', in *The Court as a Stage: England and the Low Countries in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by S. J. Gunn and Antheun Janse (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), pp. 132–44 (p. 139); Sean Cunningham, *Henry VII* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 102; Horner, p. 52.

⁴⁰ Lexton, p. 167.

⁴¹ Nelson, p. 4; Kitch, p. 2.

⁴² For other studies which claim that the play lauds education while giving the wealthy nobility a gentle reproach see Gordon Kipling, *The Triumph of Honour: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan*

of 'New Men'. Both these classes would have been educated according to humanist principles and would thus recognize not only Medwall's use of his source texts and engagement with different academic and rhetorical genres, but also that he was parodying them with the inclusion of A and B.

Yet A and B depict a different and more contemporary version of the 'New Men' that challenges the idealism exemplified by Gayus; as ambitious social climbers, they are more worried about their own advancement than about their lords' best interests. They are more than bad at their jobs: not only do they lie, waste time flirting, and utterly butcher the messages they are sent to convey, but in addition they are out to further their own ends. As I discussed above, A and B were hired to counsel Gayus and Cornelius to aid in the wooing of Lucre. Counsel is a major theme of the first part of the play in relation to Lucre's consideration of the two suitors, and variations of the terms 'counsel' and 'advice' are used thirteen times in just 173 lines in relation to the suitors' goal.⁴³ A and B do indeed attempt to give counsel, but based on what they think will benefit themselves the most, for as A notes before attempting to secure employment with Gayus,

it is mery beynge
 With men in tyme of woynge,
 For all that whyle they do no thynge
 But daunce and make revell,
 Synge and laugh with greate shoutynge,
 Fyll in wyne with revell routynge.
 (I. 402–07)

They know that men are prone to spend money when wooing: on mummers, on wine, on new employees. And in both cases, A and B continuously manipulate their employers in order to benefit from their courtship of Lucre. A lies to Gayus a number of times, first in an attempt to convince Gayus that he does indeed need to hire someone in order to increase his chances of winning Lucre's hand. After witnessing Gayus and Lucre share an intimate conversation, A tells Gayus that he had seen her similarly intimate with another suitor, Cornelius, just before, thus putting Gayus into a state of doubt about the outcome of her decision (I. 575–609; 'Syr, ye seme a man of grete honoure, | And that moveth me to be so bolde', I. 575–76). This is not true—Lucre had had no such conversation with Cornelius—but A's lie persuades Gayus to hire him and to 'do by [his] rede' (I. 621). A later lies again to Gayus to cover up his fight with B over the maid Jone, telling him that it was Cornelius's men who

Renaissance (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1977), p. 21; David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 42–51; Horner, p. 52; Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading and English Literature, 1430–1530* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 173–90.

⁴³ In Part I, see lines 268, 324, 326, 335, 339, 350, 361, 373, 397, 421, 422, 430, and 440.

beat him. This assertion further stirs the controversy between Gayus and Cornelius and casts Cornelius in a light which was perhaps not fully deserved but which drives Gayus's and even Lucre's rhetoric later in the play. Eventually, A does give Gayus sound advice (whether out of a genuine desire to see him succeed or by sheer coincidence) once Lucre's announcement of a rhetorical contest is discussed. He advises Gayus to prepare his speech for Lucre, which is influenced by A's claims about Cornelius's servants and tasteless character:

yf ye wyll youre honour save
 And your intent in this matter have,
 It is best that ye go hens
 For to study and call to mynde
 Suche argumentis as ye can best fynde
 And make your selfe all prest.
 (I. 1316–21)

In view of Lucre's instructions about the upcoming contest, this is objectively good advice that Gayus agrees to follow.

B also flatters and manipulates Cornelius, but his advice is far less productive. At the beginning of Part II, B and Cornelius appear to be awaiting the arrival of the rest of the characters. B tells Cornelius that he should wait off stage because it is unseemly for one of his rank to wait for them:

Mary, it wolde becom them well inow
 To be here afore and to wayte upon you,
 And not you to tary

 For theyr laysyr and abyde them here
 As it were one that were ledde by the eare—
 For that I defy!
 By this mene you sholde by theyr druge,
 I tell you trought, I.

 And yet the worst that greveth me
 Is that your adversary sholde in you se
 So notable a foly—
 Therefore wit[h]draw you for a season.
 (II. 146–57)

Cornelius agrees, and asks that if B meets with Lucre in the meantime he should attempt to persuade her to choose him rather than Gayus (II. 188–89). If Cornelius had waited just one more moment, he would have met Lucre himself, but instead it is B who speaks with her in the comedic scene mentioned above.

The play thus becomes, not a straightforward vehicle to extol the triumph of the virtuous scholar or citizen over the unvirtuous aristocrat, but a timely reminder of the inherent dangers of hiring disingenuous and ambitious em-

ployees. Warnings against ill counsel were abundant in the literature of the later Middle Ages, which had seen the outcome of the Merciless Parliament's condemnation of Richard II's counsellors. For example, in his *Fall of Princes*, John Lydgate's narrative of Roboam (Rehoboam) describes how King Roboam 'gevyng feith to yonge counsaile lost the beneuolence of his peple and deied a fool'.⁴⁴ It features an admonition to beware of foolishness, insisting that kings and lords should employ wise counsellors rather than 'Hasty youthe',⁴⁵ which brings them to destruction. Roboam particularly falls victim to flattery, 'the deuelis taboureris',⁴⁶ which A and B discuss as a sure method to get into an employer's good graces. The theme was particularly central to the medieval and early modern morality play. Many late fifteenth-century plays included a main character inveigled into bad choices by wily confidants and counsellors; A and B exhibit characteristics similar to Pride characters found in the contemporary Digby play *Mary Magdalene* and in Medwall's other surviving play, *Nature*. In both texts the character referred to as Pride is depicted as a gallant who gets close to the main character, seducing him into a disreputable and unvirtuous life.

Although *Fulgens and Luces* does not follow the kind of plot typical of the morality play, I believe we should recognize A and B as exemplifying the type of middle-ranking and ambitious characters who seek to manipulate their employers. Rather than viewing them as low-class messengers, I argue that we should recognize A and B's addition to the source text as a playful warning to Morton's aristocratic guests about the dangers of surrounding oneself with flatterers and yes-men, a counter to and corruption of the 'New Men' ideal. If we read them not simply as lower-class messengers, but more as middle-class confidants, the warning to aristocrats is more pronounced; in the end, I argue, the status quo is indeed upheld, keeping in place the hierarchy and system that reward ambitious flatterers and deceivers.

While moral texts such as Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (translated into English by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561) laud the scholar gentleman with his prowess in eloquence and ability to entertain, these rhetorical skills could easily be used to manipulate those in power. Flattery is a particular point of contention in the treatises and advice literature to princes because men are easily deceived by their pride. As they discuss entering the play itself, A asserts that it is better for them to have the plot appeal to men's tastes and expectations: 'trouth may not be sayde alway, | For somtyme it causith gruge and despite' (l. 161–62). B replies and asks:

⁴⁴ John Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*, ed. by Henry Bergen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), pp. 216–21; II. 624–805 (Proem, between II. 623 and 624).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II. 784.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II. 652.

- B Ye, goth the worlde so now a day
That a man must say the crow is white?
A Ye, that he must, be God allmyght.
He must both lye and flater now and than
That castith hym to dwell amonge worldly men.
In some courtis such men shall most wyn!
(I. 163–68)

B explains that it is a sin to flatter and lie, but A wins him over with the assertion that flattery is necessary to ‘wyn’ in life and rise in station.

Although it is not explicit in Tiptoft’s *Disputation* that Lucrez decides to give her hand to Gayus, the audience would expect that outcome, on the basis of the implied values of the genre. Once Gayus and Cornelius have left the room after the debate, Lucrez immediately expresses her determination to choose the former, a feature unique to Medwall’s version:

to Gaius I wyll condyscend;
For in this case I do hym commend
As the more noble man, sith he thys wyse,
By meane of hys vertue, to honoure doth aryse.
(II. 755–58)

She emphasizes that she is not averse to those who come from aristocratic families, but that ‘unto the blode I wyll have lytyl respect | Where the condicyons be synfull and abject’ (II. 764–65). By itself, the outcome of the play does seem to promote this humanist ideal: Gayus is indeed a virtuous, self-made man whose rhetorical arguments are superior to those of the aristocratic Cornelius, who instead relies more on his lineage and the deeds of his predecessors. B challenges Lucrez to a certain extent, not quite understanding her decision to choose the less affluent suitor. As Lucrez explains her choice of Gayus, B enters and voices his astonishment that ‘suche a gentywoman did opynly say | That by a chorles son she wolde set more | Than she wolde do by a gentyman bore’ (II. 770–72). Lucrez protests at his misinterpretation, and explains that if a gentleman were to exhibit noble virtuosity, that would indeed be far more desirable, adding that she does not object to Cornelius’s noble lineage in itself. On the surface, it would seem that Lucrez’s decision as it appears in Medwall’s play, together with the subsequent conversation between A and B (discussed further below), follows its source in praising the victory of virtuous nobility over aristocratic nobility. Noah Peterson has explained how the play seems to challenge the old aristocracy, revealing it as corrupt and dated,⁴⁷ but A and B’s actions, I argue, also show not only a parody of the humanist ideals exhibited by Gayus, but the danger posed by those who would corrupt or take advantage of those values. The play clearly

⁴⁷ Peterson, pp. 239, 251.

lampoons short-sighted aristocrats such as Cornelius who fall prey to the wiles of courtiers and over-ambitious employees.

While they provide a humorous parody of the humanist ideals portrayed in Medwall's source texts, A and B's actions in fact uphold those aristocratic hierarchies that the play is sometimes seen as attempting to dismantle. While the victory of Gayus, a representative of Henry's 'New Men', seems to depict a shift in political and social power, the system still reinforces exchanges of reward for loyal service and encourages self-promotion, reinforcing the traditional hierarchies and establishment of the ruling class. This allows for a more reasonable interpretation of their reaction to Lucre's choice of Gayus over Cornelius as the more 'noble' man. Nykrog asserts that fabliau tales tend to exhibit a scholarly deference towards nobility, often showing disdain and contempt for middle-class attempts to move up the social ladder, especially through marriage: 'The conception of society as seen through the *fabliaux* thus remains dominated by the point of view of the old creative alliance between noblemen and men of learning.'⁴⁸ Again, it is A's disagreement with the plot's outcome, summarized by B at the beginning of the tale, and B's desire to aid Cornelius in winning Lucre that instigate the duo's participation in the dramatic action of the play.

Once Lucre has explained her decision and asked A and B to let their lords know the outcome, the two remain on stage and debate her decision:

- B By my fayth, she saide—I tell the true—
That she wolde nedis have hym for his vertue
And for none other thyng.
A Vertue? What the devyll is that?
And I can tell, I shrew my catt,
To myne understondyng!

(II. 839–44)

In fact, the two are so dumbfounded that they directly address the audience, asking 'How say ye, gode women? Is it your gyse | To chose all your husbondes that wyse?' (II. 848–49). Here, A and B are no longer putting the case: Lucre's choice is even beyond the fiction they have created, and they are unable to reconcile her decision with the way in which contemporary women actually choose their husbands.

This is perhaps the most pronounced site of rupture between the 'Tudor' and 'Roman' worlds, the world of the audience and that of the play they are watching. The resolutely fair-minded and rhetorically savvy Lucre makes the idealized choice promoted by the idealized humanist texts. This moment of continued incredulity at Lucre's decision and their appeal to the audience would probably be seen as a hilarious gesture: holding up a mirror to reflect

⁴⁸ Nykrog, p. 64.

the presumption that many of them, as members of a high social class, would *not* have chosen husbands based on their virtue or embodiment of humanist learning and ideals—if they had chosen them at all. If this play was associated with the marriage negotiations between Arthur and Catherine, that would be another rather humorous jab at the spectators' own situation. In an effort to promote the legitimacy and stability of the Tudor claim to the throne, one imagines a concentrated attempt to prove that the new Tudor dynasty was secure and strong, a family worth marrying a daughter into, the present display of wealth in the Great Hall providing additional corroboration. As A's final joke shows, the ideals promoted in the play do not match those of the Tudor guests. A and B's own attempted wooing of Jone, with its discussions of jointures and allowances, would feel more realistic. Jones emphasizes that A and B's regular reminders of the distance between the idealized humanism of the Roman world and the realities of their own make 'the distinction between his dramatic fiction and life as his audience knew it a central part of the play's lesson' (p. 132). Their commentary on the play, especially in their final conversation in which they discuss Lucre's decision, reminds the Tudor audience that the ideals imported into the play from Medwall's source are not principles that people actually live by. According to Merrix, Medwall's inclusion of A and B with their exposure and parody of the humanist message provides one of the play's central lessons, proving that 'moral absolutes, so distinct in theory, become blurred in practice' (p. 17). So blurred, I argue, that Medwall has used A and B to represent the corruptions of the class that purported to espouse those ideals, the very people who might be supposed to have benefited from a personal association with idealized and classical virtues.

Conclusion

As two figures representing a less idealized and more pragmatic and cynical version of Tudor 'New Men', A and B signal that the humanist ideals of service and good counsel do not reflect contemporary practice. While more of the government and bureaucracy was sourced from outside the aristocracy, the same social hierarchies remained in place and those seeking advancement would have an interest in maintaining existing structures of reward and personal gain. Just as the fabliaux seem to champion the clever social climber while continuing to uphold the age-old covenant between the clerk and the aristocracy, *Fulgens and Lucre* reveals that people seeking opportunities for advancement and promotion can also be a danger. Thus, while the source text was about the nature of true nobility, Medwall's adaptation and extension of his source shift the moral or lesson of the play to warn aristocrats of the dangers of bad employees who are motivated only by ambition rather than

a sense of loyalty to their employer. A and B show that it is ambition and flattery, not virtue, that effect a rise in station, and those who suffer from this are well-meaning aristocrats, often the easiest target for blame:

For syn is to be reprovyd
 More in them,* for the degre, *gentlemen
 Than in other parsons such as be
 Of pour kyn and birth.

(II. 895–98)

Medwall's A and B serve as a warning to members of the audience in a position to hire people who might swindle and cheat their employers: some of those present in the Great Hall were perhaps falling into such a trap at that very moment. The play, then, like so many others of the period, reinforces the social status quo and speaks to aristocratic concerns. A and B's representation as 'New Men' not only mocks the extravagance and egocentricity of the old court culture, with its maintenance of and reliance on hereditary pre-eminence, but also highlights the dangers and pitfalls of the new court culture, rife with its own forms of corruption and abuse.