Tudor Interlude at Court: Reconstructing the Scenes behind the Scenes of Henry Medwall’s Fulgens and Lucre*

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Publish: The Journal of English Language and Literature Volume 58, Issue 3, p519–539, June 2012

ABSTRACT

The earliest wholly secular Interlude that still survives, Henry Medwall’s Fulgens and Lucre invites vigorous scholarly attempts to reconstruct the contexts behind its first staging in 1497. The play’s secular and humanistic concerns of marriage and true nobility, its political function as a diplomatic entertainment, and last of all, its indoor setting unique to the genre of Interlude necessitate the examination of the contextual circumstances that led to its composition and performance, such as the political and social backdrop behind Medwall’s commissioned writing of the play, the playwright’s relationship with the early Tudor Politics and contemporary dramaturgical practice, and the technical difficulties and solutions in staging indoors the play about an obscure common man having an ascendancy over a nobleman in the presence of diplomatic emissaries and noble audience. Mainly dealing with the social and political scenes both inside and outside the venue of the play’s performance, this paper aims to supplement other previous studies done on the play’s relation to the early Tudor politics and the performance aspects of Tudor Interlude in general.

KEYWORD

Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucre, Tudor Interlude, political and social contexts, technical issues of performance

I. “The First Secular Interlude that Has Survived”

Interlude, often derogated as a mere transitional type between medieval religious and Elizabethan drama, generally refers to the short indoor play mostly popular in the Tudor era. The “first complete and wholly secular Interlude that has survived” (Wickham 37), Henry Medwall’s Fulgens and Lucre (1497?) occupies a unique position in the history of English drama with radical contrasts to its predecessors, medieval cycles and morality plays. As F. P. Wilson noted, “We have to wait for many years before meeting with another play so free from religious and allegorical treatment and so original in its method of adding pleasure to instruction” (Wilson and Hunter 7). Despite the trace of morality tradition still visible in the play’s dual characterization of the main characters—Gaius Flaminius and Publius Cornelius, whose clean-cut moral opposition is apparently patterned after morality’s typical dichotomy between ‘Virtue’ and ‘Vice,’ or ‘Reason’ and ‘Sensualyte’ as featured in Medwall’s own morality play Nature (1495?)—its overall theme and characters are distinctively outside the preceding dramatic tradition which is marked by biblical episodes and themes, and characters as allegorical abstractions. The plot centers around a young Roman woman named Lucre who is wooed by young suitors in competition, one a virtuous plebeian and the other an idle patrician of high birth. This secular plot, ended with Lucre’s choice of the common man since “unto the [noble] blood [she] will have little respect / Where those conditions be sinful and abject” (II. 765-766), contains a debate between the rival suitors on the nature and origin of ‘true nobility.’ The debate, dubbed as “the disputacyon of noblenes” in the title-page of the original script archived in Henry E. Huntington Library in California, serves as a critical measure for the woman to make her final selection of a bridegroom while adding an ultimate ‘humanistic’ flavor to the whole play.

Critics and historians generally agree that Fulgens was premiered at the Cardinal John Morton’s court during the Christmas season of 1497, with the only exception of Alan H. Nelson, who dates it several years back to 1491 or 1492 taking as evidence the affinities between the characters ‘A.’ ‘B’ featured in the comic subplot of the play, and the young Thomas More circa 1491-2 as portrayed in his biography written by his son-in-law William Roper. One particular anecdote Roper related interests us illustrating the way Morton hosted dramatic entertainments within his own palace, with young More often jumping into the stage playing extemporary roles:

In all probability, Fulgens must have been offered as part of a banquet, with Morton as “the master of the feast” (Fulgens I. 1423), for the noble...
audience gathered at his Lambeth Palace located right across the River Thames from Westminster. The high class Londoners taking up the demographic majority of the audience are recognizable by the flamboyant costumes of the guests as observed by ‘A,’ the comical servant to one of the suitors—Cornelius—in the play: “There is so much nice array / Among these gallants” (I. 53-4). All these facts about the premiere venu of Fulgens point to a radical change in the choice of venues of dramatic performance in Medwall’s times: from the provinces of East Anglia, and the north of England where most performances of the Chester and the York cycles as well as morality plays were concentrated, to London.

If we accept the consensus by most critics regarding the premiere year of Fulgens, the true value of the play may be measured by its political function rather than its intrinsic literary quality. For the newly established Tudor monarchy, the year 1497 was a high time to consolidate its political alliance with the Continent, and it was John Morton, Archbishop and Cardinal promoted to the See of Canterbury, whose administrative works included superintending ceremonies and banquets for diplomatic emissaries and, in the case of the aforementioned year, for Spanish ambassadors visiting England to attend the royal betrothal between the children of the kings of England and Spain. Provided as a diplomatic entertainment with the purpose of impressing the Spanish and strengthening the English alliance with Spain, the political implication of Fulgens outweighs its pure literary value. What needs to be considered foremost of all is the fact that the spectators primarily gathered at Morton’s palace “for social ends rather than for theatrical ones” (Tydeman 140). This argument, succinctly summarizing the primacy of the social function of Fulgens, invites rather a contextualized approach to the play which weighs such various factors extraneous to the script as the system of patronage it was subject to, its historical and political contexts, and the immediate staging atmosphere within the court. Only with these extraliterary factors considered, we may be able to reconstruct a complete context of “the first complete and wholly secular Interlude that has survived” devised for “social ends” in its full complexity.

The goal of this essay is reconstituting the contextual circumstance of the play rather than giving it a conventional literary analysis or evaluation. This rather biased examination on the extraliterary and contextual background of the play, I hope, may supplement the enlightening work done earlier by T. W. Craik on the performance aspect of the Tudor Interlude in general as well as other scattered studies that have topically discussed the play’s political and social backgrounds.

1 ‘Interlude,’ put hereafter with the first letter ‘I’ capitalized according to its customary usage. 2 Quotations from Fulgens, cited hereafter by part and line number.

II. Outside the Venue—Early Tudor Politics and Diplomacy

Having wrested the throne from King Richard III and become the first Tudor monarch, Henry VII was faced with the urgent need to secure a bridgehead on the Continent and legitimize the crown he had usurped. He eventually found this chance in the alliance with Spain. Arthur, Henry’s first son born during the second year of his reign, was to play a critical part in the realization of this continental plan. Henry hoped to solidify his monarchy through the betrothal of his heir to Catherine of Aragon, the youngest daughter of Ferdinand, the king of Spain. While Henry “purchased” (Anglo, Spectacle 53) this alliance to reinforce the British position on the Continent, Spain on its part was also in need of a supportive ally in order to hold the threatening power of France in check. In 1488 a talk on the royal wedding began and a year later, it was settled consented by both monarchs. A friendly diplomatic climate was formed after the marriage settlement. When Arthur was graced with the title of Prince of Wales in 1489, a group of ambassadors were dispatched from Spain to congratulate on it while Spanish merchants crowded on the Thames celebrated the event “shooting off a great number of guns” and “casting apples” on their boats. Arthur’s betrothal which had occurred in August, 1497 was followed by the wedding in 1501.

The historical account above surrounding the early Tudor diplomacy with Spain is to contextualize the presence of Spanish ambassadors in 1497 at Lambeth Palace, the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Although the time discrepancy can be hardly resolved between August, the month of the betrothal, and Christmas, the season when Morton hosted the Christmas feast and put on the performance of Fulgens, the play’s reference to “a base dance after the guise of Spain” (II. 381-82) hints at the presence of Spanish emissaries at the feast and, in the second remove, the most critical diplomatic event of the year for the new English monarchy: the betrothal between the Prince Arthur and Catherine of Spain.

Not just an amusement or pastime to relieve the tedium of courtly life, court festivals under the reign of Henry VII served as crucial “instruments of prestige propaganda” (Anglo, Spectacle 106). This Lancastrian king, whose prime concern was to consolidate the political foundation of the newly established dynasty, understood well how to utilize courtly entertainments and pageantry for political purpose. Sydney Anglo states that Henry “wanted [political and diplomatic] value for the money he expended on display—and he usually obtained it” (Spectacle 105). The extant account books by John Heron, Treasurer of the Chamber, illustrate how magnificent the scale of Henry’s expense was for treating visiting ambassadors.4 To impress foreign dignitaries with well-devised spectacles became a natural means to show off stately power and prosperity. Citing P. E. Schramm’s observation in History of the English Coronation (Oxford, 1937) that “processions and banquets...are the occasion for once more making the rungs of the social ladder clearly distinct,” Anglo adds that “Chroniclers and ambassadors—English, Burgundian, French, Italian—all take[took] the utmost trouble to record the exact order observed at state ceremonial, and devote[d] many pages to a meticulous account of dress, jewelry, and other items of display” (Spectacle 104).

Treating and entertaining foreign envoys in the capacity of Lord President of the Privy Council and Archbishop of Canterbury, John Morton in fact stood proxy for the King. Thus the virtual master of his Christmas feast in 1497 was in fact Henry the King, and the subject of marriage central to the plot of Fulgens, which was a highlight program incorporated into the feast, served as an avenue to emphasize to the Spanish the timeliness of the new companionship between England and Spain and the virtuousness of the bridegroom—the Prince Arthur directly, and his father Henry metaphorically.

One puzzling issue, however, concerns the poor origin of this virtuous bridegroom. David Bevington asserts it was devised to defend Henry’s open policy towards hiring talents for state offices regardless of social ranks, which he strategically executed to counterbalance the old feudal system which was potentially threatening his crown. Even if it had been infeasible to repudiate the old system altogether, this introduction of a new criteria for social ascension was to curb its influence to a certain degree:
These “fortunate commoners,” who had emerged due to the newly available social fluidity under the rule of Henry VII and whose names and titles were later listed by Henry and are quoted below, redefined the qualifications of nobility in the Tudor regime:

As an administrative clergyman, Medwall’s patron John Morton himself was also a “fortunate commoner” who advanced to the supreme position paying loyalty to the House of Lancaster and playing a key role in reconciling the House with its rival York by Henry Tudor’s marriage to Elizabeth of York. Created a cardinal in 1493 and in service till his death in 1500, he was “preeminent among councilors and Henry VII’s most trusted advisor” (Norland 233). Morton’s allegiance pledged to his high Kings was again reenacted by Medwall to his clerical patron. A trusted chaplain to Morton, Medwall was deeply involved in Morton’s archiepiscopal affairs. This is demonstrated by an extant document related to a lawsuit filed against Medwall by Thomas Goldstone, Prior of Christchurch Canterbury. In the suit, the latter claimed the right of control over archiepiscopal officials and documents stayed with him during the vacancy of the See since Morton’s death (Nelson 13). The lawsuit indicates Medwall had control over virtually every document under Morton’s charge, and it is not a surprise, considering the biographical facts about his trainings as a student in civil law (as well as in art) and subsequently as a notary public.5

Throughout Fulgens, Medwall does not only praise his patron but he also vindicates Henry VII’s policy by idealistically portraying Flaminius, the new “fortunate commoner” “born of a poor stock” “but through his great wisdom and virtuous behaviour” “ruled the commonweal to his great honour” (I. 94-97). Here we see a young man indirectly “publicizing he policy of the relatively novel monarch…towards a larger part of he feudal aristocracy of whom [Henry VII] was rightly suspicious, and onwards the ‘new man’ of his choosing and creation” (Tydeman 143-44). A commissioned playwright, Medwall never forgot to slide into the comic conversation between ‘A’ and ‘B’ some complimentary words about the parish and clerical influence of his patron Morton:

Writers contemporary with Medwall resolved the nagging issue of financial insecurity by seeking patronage from the crown and other prestigious high class nobility, as explored in depth by Alistair Fox.6 The two Henrys of Tudor were the most preferred options for the authors aspiring to climb the social ladder of successful literary career. In addition to them, high-profiled churchmen’s patronage was much coveted as well. The panegyrical tributes to the patron displayed in Fulgens were necessary gestures of patronized writers like Medwall lest they should lose their hard earned support from patrons.

Medwall’s apparently unfavorable picturing of Cornelius, the idle patrician of “gentle blood” who was inherited with “great goods…that he wot never what to do withal. / But lacks it forth daily, escance / That he had no daily remembrance / of time to come, nor maketh no store” (I. 699-703) but now is accused of having led “so voluptuous and so bestial” (II. 631) a life by his rival that “it is marvel / The country suffereth him there to dwell” (II. 655-56), could have easily displeased and offended the aristocratic audience who were witnessing the performance in its sheer contrast to the idealistic presentation of the rival commoner Flaminius. The idea that “a churl’s son / Should be more noble than a gentleman born” (I. 130-31) by no means appears a message befitting such an audience group. Medwall cunningly has this feeling voiced in advance by ‘A’ in Part I, and thus forestalls the unfavorable reaction that could be stirred in the audience: after hearing the storyline of the play soon to be performed, ‘A’ speaks to ‘B’ that he “will advise them to change that conclusion”(I. 129) because he simply can not believe that a common man turns out more noble than a man of noble blood. He even swears that he will have no relation with the play:

Setting the play in Rome, a remote place and time (I. 178-82), works as a convenient maneuver to relieve the offensiveness of the subversive reordering of social hierarchy suggested in the play. Presented as a comic parody of the upper class wooing of the main plot, the subplot of ‘A’ an ‘B’ seeking the favor of Joan, the handmaid of Lucres, serves a similar purpose by showing such various entertainments as singing, wrestling, and jousting, and thus drawing good humor and charity out of the audience. This comic subplot rather turns the two serious suitors to Lucres into a joke putting a greater emphasis on the control and power of the woman wooed, which in turn reflects the common practice of courteously dating back to the twelfth century or earlier where it was usually right-handed— the woman—who was having the upper hand. Richard Axton associates the comic sub-plot with the English folk-play tradition,7 and asserts that the by-play and trifles between ‘A’ and ‘B’ help lessen the undesirable impact of Lucres’ final selection of a common suitor (9). In fact, as Howard B. Norland notes, the “ubiquitous and entertaining guides, A and B” (242) are not subsidiary but central characters, for their subplot “dominates more than 70 percent” (237) of the whole script. These seemingly lighthearted comedians are not actually minor characters.

Compared with its original source, Bonaccorso of Pistoja the Younger’s Controversia de Vera Nobilitate,8 Medwall’s work had the main plot substantially sized down sparing more room for the comic subplot. Medwall’s main plot shows two significant changes from the Bonaccorso version where Lucres’ choice is referred to her father Fulgentius and later to the Senate with no decision settled at the end: first, it is Lucre who plays the arbiter and final decision-maker between the suitors, not her father, in Medwall’s rewriting; second, Medwall clearly grants a man of low birth the moral superiority to his genteel rival. It seems that a more or less radical change was brought on to the Tudorian perception of woman and of social class, at least among such social elites as Medwall. What kind of social climate prompted this change?

One answer can be found in Medwall’s link with a group of playwrights, who cultivated new learning and interest in social reform and whom F. S. Boas called “a native English dramatic school” (2) of the early Tudor era. An informal group, with Thomas More at the center, it consisted of writers related to one another by family ties and friendship. Included among them were secular playwrights known today: the printer and writer John Rastell was More’s brother-in-law; More, when he was of a younger age, served Morton as a page along with Medwall; John Heywood, known today as the author of The Play of the Weather, was Rastell’s son-in-law; John Redford, the author of Wit and Science, was associated with Heywood as a musician and playwright. Medwall was related to this circle as a page and chaplain of Morton’s household as well as a liberal catholic humanist. In her dense study on the More circle and its influence on secular drama, Pearl Hogrefe asserts the “secular drama in England was largely developed by men who were connected with the More circle. But much of this drama was propaganda turned into dialogue” (345). “Débat,” which was “conducted according to the dialectical habits of mind acquired from training in humanist rhetoric” (Fox 245), was their characteristic way to dramatize socially ‘hot’ issues— education, the qualifications of nobility, and other issues carrying equal social weight. John Heywood’s The Play of the Wether, John Rastell’s(?) Of
Gentleness and Nobility, and Medwall’s Fulgens and Lucre are all exemplary cases in point. Validating the nobility of the self-made young man in Fulgens and of the plowman in Of Gentleness and Nobility, and also empowering the role of an educated woman in the first play are all aligned with the humanistic ideal and the ideas of social reform as proposed by More’s Utopia (1516) and his circle. It is hard to decide the degree of involvement of each of the writers in the circle, but the list of the plays Hogrefe raises as examples—The Nature of the Four Elements, Fulgens and Lucre, Of Gentleness and Nobility, and Calisto and Melebea—apparently exhibit the passion of the writers involved to promote the liberal Catholic humanist way of good life grounded on piety, virtue, wisdom, and education as well as the personal trainings needed to be a respectable citizen of the Christian commonweal. The quintessential idea underlying the programs and ideas suggested by the More Circle, Medwall provides in Fulgens. Pretty close to Moré’s utopian universe is the egalitarian view of men as championed by the commoner Flaminius: “this I wot well, / That both he[Cornelius] and I came of Adam and Eve: / There is no difference that I can tell / Which maketh one man another to excel / So much as doth virtue and goodly manner, / And therein I may well with him compare!” (I. 665-670)

III. Inside the Venue—Technical Issues

Following the previous discussion of political and social contexts of Fulgens, the immediate context or environment surrounding its performance now needs a full scrutiny. On the first page of John Rastell’s first printed edition of Fulgens stored in Huntington Library, the play is subtitled “a godely interlude.” Among all the traits of this genre, its domestic setting within the court generates a spatially restricted but unique dramatic environment distinguished from other outdoor morality plays such as Mankind which was played for the common people “in innyard” by itinerant troupes at one or half pence, although there were occasions when these troupes staged moralities within noble households.

One evidence indicating the existence of Interlude as an independent genre is a lawsuit raised by John Rastell in 1530 about his costume rental business. It was Rastell, Sir More’s brother-in-law, who first printed Fulgens somewhere between 1512 and 1516. Not only engaged in the printing business at St. Paul’s churchyard as the first printer of a vernacular play issued in England, but he also owned a theatre of his own and had the honor of producing pageants for Henry VIII and the Emperor Charles V when they were visiting St. Paul in the summer of 1552, and for the French ambassadors who were visiting to settle the marriage of Princess Mary in 1527 (Boas 6-7). Another intriguing fact about Rastell’s career, illuminating for Medwall’s vivid sartorial references to Cornelius’ outfits as well as Sensuayte’s in Nature, concerns his wife Elizabeth, Sir More’s sister, who designed and tailored costumes for actors. Medwall may have obtained some intimate knowledge about costumes from his future printer and his wife, whose acquaintance he perhaps made through More, then the page of Morton while he was writing Utopia—translated into English by John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, and later printed by William Caxton in 1481.

The lawsuit in question mentioned earlier is regarding some stage costumes lent to a carpenter named Walton but never returned to the Rastells. According to a semi-professional Interluder named George Mayler, Walton had lent out the costumes “about 20 times to stage-plays in the summer and interludes in the winter, and used to take at a stageplay for them and others, sometimes 2s, as they could agree, and at an interlude 8d, for every time” (Davis 10). The significance of this testimony is that it is the clear evidence that two distinct types of seasonal plays existed: ‘stage-plays’ of summer and ‘Interludes’ of winter. The reference to wintry occurrences of Interlude implies that it was played indoors because of the cold temperature outside and, naturally, on a reduced scale in comparison with the ‘stage-plays’ in summer which were granted more liberal use of space. The indoor staging of Interlude also accounts for the fireplace alluded to in Nature.

One important aspect of Interlude is its daily schedule. The original title-page of Fulgens clearly directs it “to be played at ii times.” Nicholas Davis cites a medieval Frenchman named Raoul and his timespecific definition of so called “interludia... because they happen to be between the two meals” (8). From this Frenchman’s standpoint, the prefix ‘inter-’ means primarily ‘between two meals’ although one should equally bear in mind the possibility, as raised by some others, that the prefix means ‘between two or more actors.’ Accordingly, the script of Fulgens seems built upon the premise of two meals catered before and after its staging. The first meal perhaps had been served before the play got started, and with the end of the play s first half, an intermission might have been given for the evening supper. The “First Part,” also named “Pars Prima” in Fulgens, was performed while the early meal, probably a mid-day dinner, was continued. This is evident when ‘A’ enquires the audience right at the beginning of the play if they have fully dined while referring simultaneously to the food and beverages being served for them at the moment:

At the end of “Pars Prima (First Part),” he requests another meal while proposing the play restart after, or upon the continuation of, the second dinner:
Here one can picture a crowd of distracted audience whose hands and mouths are engaged in nibbling food and gurgling beverages served on tables. Also imaginable are the busy traffic of servants catering for the banquet, their shouts trying to make their way from the kitchen through the press to the hall, the clinking noise of the tableware, the laughs and buzz of the crowd. Technical difficulty starting the performance is expected had the performers only counted on the usual convention of actors’ abrupt entrance to the stage. What could the actors have done to turn the attention of the distracted audience to the center of the stage, where ‘A’ would pop up sooner or later? Tydeman offers two possible scenarios about how the actors might have heralded the beginning of the performance: first, the entrance of torchbearers and second, the formal announcement of the ‘marshal’ who superintends the whole procedures of the feast (140). These are compelling scenarios since torchbearers were necessary presence to lighten up the stage in addition to the usual torches installed on the walls to illuminate the gloom between late afternoon and evening, the time of the day when Interludes were scheduled to be performed; the entrance of a marshal is apparently indicated in the conversation between ‘A’ and ‘B’ in which they insist on having nothing to do with the potentially controversial subject of the play soon to be performed:

Another scenario I would add to Tydeman’s is the use of musical instruments. Glynne Wickham’s footnote (to I. 188-189) that the sound of drums and trumpets may have accompanied the first entrance of Fulgens, Lucre’s father, may equally apply to the beginning of the whole performance. The entrances and exits of players occasion the most natural and convenient moments for playing music. Supporting this is one rare record of courtly entertainment in 1527 provided by John Stevens’ Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Courts (1961). The record demonstrates the role of singers in introducing courtly plays—in this case, a debate between Cupid and Plutus: “first of all there entered the hall eight singers singing certain English songs; in their centre was a very handsome youth alone, clad in sky-blue taffety...having presented themselves before the king, the singers then withdraw in the same order” (255). Stevens immediately adds to the quote that, along with this musical entrance, “exequit cantando (they go out singing)” was also commonly practiced. Sequencing a performance while drawing on simple stage directions like ‘entrance’ and ‘exit’ in the tricky staging environment of indoor Interlude with meals on the tables of the audience might have exacted some ingenuity from performers. Music might have worked as a clever device to go around such difficulty. Medwall might have been fully aware of this, for in Nature, his courtly morality, he clearly directs the play to end with singing (”Then they syng some goodly balle.”), a ‘hymn’ perhaps, judged from Reason’s last line (“let us pray thys wyse.”).

Fulgens is a type of Tudorian courtly plays combining a variety of amusements, among which dance and singing are the most predominant ones. Actors generally served as singers as well, for otherwise they had to share profits with professional singers on hire. However, not every actor of the group who staged Fulgens seems talented at singing because in the comic song contest between ‘A’ and ‘B’ to win the favor of Joan, the maid of Lucre, ‘B’ can not succeed because his throat went “hoarse” (I. 1123). As for the dance within the play, mummers’ dance inserted in the Second Part might have helped balance the otherwise inconsistent time distribution between the longer First and the shorter Second Part making their real-time lengths almost even. A popular dance form from the middle of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, the ‘basse-dance,’ translated in the modernized text into “a base dance after the guise / Of Spain” (II. 381-2), is, according to Nelson, “La basse daunce de Spayn’ whose forty-six steps are described in a Salisbury Cathedral manuscript, and whose music survives independently” (19-20). Nelson adds that it was usually performed by a couple in England, and two dances constituted a whole set. In the actual performance, at least two dancers may have danced to the tunes played by some instrument player(s) or minstrel(s). The fact that the woodcut title-page of the play is from a French dancing manual demonstrates the eagerness of Interlude as a genre to embrace dancing as its major component. Stevens describes the role of dancing as a favorite courtly pastime during the rule of Henry VII:

As for the players of musical instruments in the assistance to the dance, a pipe player seems missing on account of his “sore” lip. Otherwise, this may be a mere pretext for defaulting in the part. More pipe players are on standby, though, for ‘B’ says: “Marry! As for one of them, his lip is sore! / I trow he may not pipe, he is so sick! / Spiel up tambourine! Ich bid owe frelike!” (II. 388-90; italics mine) The part that I italicized, delivered in Flemish accent and translated as ‘Strike up the pipe and tabor, I bid you merrily,’12 indicates at least more than one pipe-and-tabor players were standing by. Perhaps they were Flemish, or, the accent is simply intended to flatter the ambassadors from Flanders attending Morton’s banquet as guests.

Stevens states that pipe-and-tabor was one of the favorite instruments for English indoor band along with lute (or harp) and rebec, as stipulated in the Northumberland Household Book: “Item, Mynstralls in household ii, viz. a tabertet, a lutey and a rebec” (qtd. in Stevens 246). Medwall certainly could design a play based on the availability of musical resource in noble households. A tricky job, however, is to judge whether the actors and the minstrels in the play belonged to Morton’s household or to some outside troupe. If they had been Morton’s, the interactions and communications among actors and minstrels may have been much more facilitated than otherwise. However, if an outside troupe had been in charge of the performance, they should have had to share profits with dancers and minstrels hired on either a temporary or a regular basis. Craik asserts that the demands for instrumental music and dance in Fulgens implies that it was for a “well-organized” performance which traveling actors could hardly afford, considering the high expense of recruiting musicians and dancers (46-47). Then, the play might have been performed by professional actors under a good financial circumstance—Morton’s own troupe perhaps—or some others that were well trained in both singing and dancing. The first possibility has more chance, as actor(s) look(s) poorly talented at singing in the failed song competition between ‘A’ and ‘B’ and as a result some other “minstrels” and dancing “mummers” are on demand.

Another interesting aspect of the performers is the possibility of their double-casting as many of the earliest Tudor Interludes drew on the custom: for example, the 1586 version of Ulpius Fulwel’s Like Will to Like clearly directs its sixteen parts divided by five actors (Happé 10). Craik argues Fulgens’ missing from the Second Part is probably caused by his double casting as Flaminius (31). It is possible, for the two characters never come across each other in the play despite every reason to do so. Strangely, Fulgens often encounter only Cornelius. Tydeman, however, dismisses this possibility on the ground of the insufficiency of time—“bare six lines”—assigned for the costume change to switch roles from Fulgens to Flaminius (149). The disappearance of Fulgens still remains a puzzle along with that of Joan, who, likewise showing up so frequently in the First Part, is completely missing in the Second.

With respect to the setting of Fulgens, the great hall of Lambeth must have been capacious enough to accommodate all the cast, dancers, and instrumentalists along with a crowd of spectators encircling them on every side. In addition to this, references to food and drink in the play demonstrate
Concerning the entry of the characters, a single entrance way walled in by screens seems to have been in use, for ‘B’ ‘marvels’ at Joan not having come across ‘A’ on her way in the First Part: “And I marvel greatly that ye / Met him not by the way: / For he is gone to speak with Lucre / From his Master” (I. 874-77). ‘B’ reasons that the two characters should have run into each other probably because only one entry is available. Tydeman, again, doubts this raising the possibility that the screens might have had two interstices keeping the characters from meeting each other (149).

Some crowd had to watch the play standing, as clearly indicated in the beginning of the play (“For Goddis will / What mean ye, sirs, to stand so still?” [I. 1-2]), probably around the screens due to the limited number of tables. This insufficiency in seating might have been worsened by the unexpected visit of uninvited guests as well as the servants’ trying to peek in the scenes performed. No wonder there had to be requests for room for the actors to pass through:

As shown, Interlude writers must have considered the presence of spectators gathered around the screens and the entrance. With the crowd concentrated around the screens at the lower part of the hall, the performance might have been staged “in the round” with the audience on four sides: “The Interluders then must be thought of as having an oblong, central-floor space at their disposal, and as being fully prepared to use every inch of it—in complete contradistinction to the modern conception of a ‘frontal’ performance, isolated at the far end of a hall or theatre” (Southern 53). Some interactions between the actors and the audience were inevitable, naturally. For instance, when questioned by Flaminius who would attend his disputation with Cornelius, ‘A’ replies, “this honourable audience,” addressing directly to them:

The intimate rapport formed between the performers and the spectators may have created a unique dramatic atmosphere. As Tydeman describes, the performers “utilize the servants’ quarters off the entry-passage as a green-room, make their entrances from the ‘entry’ into the hall through one of the two gaps in the screen, and immediately find themselves in close contact with spectators on at least two of the three sides of them, commanding as they did the centre of the floor” (138).

Given the crowded and noisy circumstance of the hall, making a perfect entrance on stage must have been a difficult job for the actors. Heralding entrance by speech was often employed to prepare both the actors and the audience. With no other technical device, drawing on verbal announcement was a convenient option. This verbal dependence again applies to the beginning of the play when ‘B’ relates the anticipated storyline of the First Part.

Offering ahead the summary of the play might have been a simple easy way to overcome the technical difficulty of indoor performance while generating something analogous to theatrical illusion.

Given the multiple accounts of uninvited guests as well as the servants’ trying to peek in the scenes performed. No wonder there had to be requests for room for the actors to pass through:

As shown, Interlude writers must have considered the presence of spectators gathered around the screens and the entrance. With the crowd concentrated around the screens at the lower part of the hall, the performance might have been staged “in the round” with the audience on four sides: “The Interluders then must be thought of as having an oblong, central-floor space at their disposal, and as being fully prepared to use every inch of it—in complete contradistinction to the modern conception of a ‘frontal’ performance, isolated at the far end of a hall or theatre” (Southern 53). Some interactions between the actors and the audience were inevitable, naturally. For instance, when questioned by Flaminius who would attend his disputation with Cornelius, ‘A’ replies, “this honourable audience,” addressing directly to them:

The intimate rapport formed between the performers and the spectators may have created a unique dramatic atmosphere. As Tydeman describes, the performers “utilize the servants’ quarters off the entry-passage as a green-room, make their entrances from the ‘entry’ into the hall through one of the two gaps in the screen, and immediately find themselves in close contact with spectators on at least two of the three sides of them, commanding as they did the centre of the floor” (138).

Given the crowded and noisy circumstance of the hall, making a perfect entrance on stage must have been a difficult job for the actors. Heralding entrance by speech was often employed to prepare both the actors and the audience. With no other technical device, drawing on verbal announcement was a convenient option. This verbal dependence again applies to the beginning of the play when ‘B’ relates the anticipated storyline of the First Part.

Offering ahead the summary of the play might have been a simple easy way to overcome the technical difficulty of indoor performance while generating something analogous to theatrical illusion.

9It was not an unalterably set rule that morality plays were performed for popular audience while Interludes for the noble, although the tendency is undeniable. Medwall’s Nature, which Bevington calls a “courtly morality” (Medieval 795), is a good case in point which validates such a generalization. It was played for the noble audience gathered at Lambeth, but its overall frame— allegorical figures and a man in struggle for redemption— faithfully follows the pattern of Mankind and other moralities. One should not forget that morality plays were sometimes written for the noble audience by well-known literary celebrities like Medwall, John Skelton, and John Bale. 10In First Part, ‘A’ reports that Lucre “had appointed” Cornelius “to be here” on stage “Soon in the evening, about supper” (I. 1358-59) for his disputation with Flaminius which is scheduled in Second Part. 11Michel Toulouze, L’art et Instruction de Bien Dancer. 12See Nelson’s note to line 389 in his 1980 edition (189). 13For a more detailed account of the development of British Great Halls, check Richard Southern, especially his chapter “The Tudor Great Hall.”

IV. Coda

Literary criticism in general tends to concentrate on the literary implications intrinsic to a given text whereas drama criticism calls for the equal assessment of the factors outside a written script related to its performance. The meaning of a play is ‘temporarily’ finalized through a particular rendition on stage. A performance in another setting or under a different theatrical circumstance could bring a changed nuance and meaning to a written text. This is the commonly shared idea of the uniqueness of drama, reconditioned and completed by the act of performance. A popular courtly entertainment and one of the antiquated dramatic subgenres out of use at present, Tudor Interlude demands much of this beyond-the-script approach to drama criticism because of its sheer historical distance from today, not to mention its special setting. Moreover, Medwall’s ‘secular’ take on the genre of Interlude further demands such an approach due to its social function as a diplomatic courtly entertainment. Aside from the literary analysis of Fulgens and Lucre, a full scrutiny of the play’s extraliterary aspects when premiered at Lambeth Palace which I have conducted through this essay— its social context and Tudor politics “outside the venue” as well as the physical conditions “inside the venue” surrounding its stage—seems a critical task in reconstructing such a historical play. Because only with those extraliterary dimensions counted into the reconstruction of the play—however tantalizing and limited such an imaginary reconstruction may be—we can get nearer the full complexity of the first extant secular Interlude staged at court.
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Henry Medwall’s Fulgens and Lucre dramatises the debate concerning the nature of true nobility found in Buonaccorso de Montemagno’s Latin De Vera Nobilitate, which Medwall encountered through John Tiptoft’s English translation published by Caxton in 1481. Medwall shifts the attention of his play to the legal and political concerns of the early Tudor court. The play is filled with references to contemporary court figures as well as legal concerns of the court in which Medwall served as a clerk. The two serve to illustrate what the “new-men” of Henry VII’s court viewed as problematic with the older court culture. View. Show abstract. Allegorical Causation and Aristotelian Physics in Henry Medwall’s Nature. Article. Mar 2015. Stud Engl Lit. Liza Blake. Henry VII built the foundation of a wealthy nation state and a powerful monarchy. His son Henry VIII kept a magnificent court and made a church in England truly English by breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church. During the Tudor age England experienced of the greatest artistic period in its history. There is however a less glorious view of the Tudor century. Henry VIII wasted the wealth saved by his father. Elisabeth weakened by government by selling official posts. The new monarchy Henry is less well known then either Henry VIII or Elisabeth I. But he was far more important in establishing the new monarchy than either of them. He had the same ideas and opinions as the growing classes of merchants and gentry and he based royal power on good business sense. His court became the centre of power and pageantry in England but in this feudal age society was rigidly structured and class was everything, individuals were born to greatness, it was never earned. The court is dominated by the nobel, landowning aristocracy. As men of blue blood they felt they had the right to advise the king on policy but Henry VIII has different ideas. Alongside his ego there was a dangerous insecurity and in this dramatised documentary we get a look into this darker side. Related Documentaries. 8.97 Henry VII: Winter King. Author Thomas Penn takes an extraordinary journey Howard B. Norland examines Tudor plays performed between 1485 and 1558, a time when drama reached beyond local, popular, and religious contexts to treat more varied and more secular concerns, culminating in the emergence of comedy and tragedy as major genres. The theater also imported dramas from the Continent, adapting them to English tastes. After establishing the popular dramatic traditions of fifteenth-century Britain, Norland discusses the critical interpretation of the Latin plays of Terence studied in the schools and the views of influential authors such as Erasmus, Vives, and More about Medwalls Fulgens and Lucre. 233. Notes.