

'As Strayght as Ony Pole':

Publius Cornelius, Edmund de la Pole, and Contemporary Court Satire in Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucre* [1](#)

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1. With the discovery of its text early in this century, Medwall's interlude *Fulgens and Lucre* became immediately remarkable in literary historical and critical circles for being the earliest extant drama in English that was purely secular. Printed first by John Rastell ca. 1512, it has appeared since its discovery in several editions -- the earliest by F.S. Boas and A.W. Reed, and more recently the near-simultaneous texts of the early 1980s by M.E. Moeslein and Alan H. Nelson -- and has been accorded a prominent place in the history of the English drama. It is a two-part piece with a disguising, requiring only a small company for performance, one which may have included a young Sir Thomas More, and is set in imperial Rome; internal references suggest that it was played in a large hall during the winter season, at a time of some festivities, and, as there are compliments paid to the Spaniards and Flemish, it is likely that it was intended originally as entertainment at a diplomatic event. Its author, Henry Medwall, was a notary for Cardinal Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, during the last decade of the fifteenth century, the time in which the interlude was most probably written and first performed.
2. Its critical treatment suggests that it accords well with expectations of a secular drama of its time, especially those expectations generated by the early Tudor regime's frequent employment of entertainments, literature, and drama as political vehicles. [2](#) Bevington (1968, 42 ff.) and Fox (1989, 245 ff.) have both discussed the political and satiric nature of this interlude, Kipling has noted its important diplomatic function (Kipling 1977, 20-1), and Colley has commented upon the drama's function as an approximate 'political mirror' in which the audience, with the help of the players, is asked to look at imperial Rome and see Tudor England (Colley 1975, 323, 329-30). *Fulgens and Lucre*, however, has for some time escaped notice as a drama which also exemplifies the early Tudor interlude's concomitant reliance upon topical and personal reference, [3](#) and it is this aspect of the drama that this paper seeks to explore: herein, I suggest that Medwall employs the person of Edmund de la Pole, a prominent figure in Henry VII's court and a very real threat to the throne because of his lineage, as a source for the character of Publius Cornelius.
3. *Fulgens and Lucre* is constructed around a debate on the nature of true nobility, in which the wise Fulgens allows his daughter, Lucre, to choose her husband from two aggressive suitors: Publius Cornelius, who is noble by birth, and Gayus Flaminius, who 'by meane of his vertue to honoure doth aryse' (2.758). [4](#) I say 'constructed around' a debate because the interlude possesses an unusual framing device which draws special attention to specific aspects therein. Before the action-proper begins, the plot and its conclusion are presented to the audience and reflected upon by the players A and B, who discuss the idea 'that a chorles son / Shoulde be more noble than a gentilman born' (1.130-1); following the drama's exposition, once Lucre's decision has been reached and presented, one player urges the audience to ruminare upon its meaning:

. . . all the substaunce of this play
Was done specially therfor
Not onely to make folke myrth and game,

But that such as be gentlemen of name
 May be somewhat movyd

By this example for to eschew
 The wey of vyce and favour vertue;
 For syn is to be reprovdy
 More in them, for the degre,
 Than in other parsons such as be
 Of pour kyn and birth.

(2.888-98)

With the players' presentation of the conclusion and engagement in discussion about it, the beginning of *Fulgens and Lucrez* gestures immediately toward its conclusion; so, too, do the words at the end encourage reflection again upon the matter of the play in its entirety. In short, the framing highlights the significance of that which the interlude is intended to present.

4. What Lucrez's ultimate choice of Flaminius over Cornelius presents, as is made quite obvious, is the notion that true nobility lies in virtuous action, not bloodline. That such a notion would be presented is significant for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that the interlude (as is explicitly noted in the passage quoted above) is to some degree intended to act as an exemplum to the nobility who would have chiefly composed the original audience, the majority of whom would have been threatened by such a conclusion. At its original performance, then, one might rightly expect that the conclusion would urge the audience into a self-conscious re-examination of what the framing emphasises, into a scrutinising of the development which works towards the interlude's outcome and a concentration on that which Medwall presents as the deciding factor of Lucrez's decision: the issue of character, which itself is grounded in the exemplifications of nobility he represents.
5. In the exposition leading up to this conclusion, Medwall works in the tradition of the negative example, stressing that a sinful and abject state in one of noble blood is ignoble, rather than depicting actions associated with the virtuous life. ⁵ Although Flaminius -- whose character, as David Bevington has shown, represents the political 'new men lacking family name' who were engaging in a 'power struggle taking place in Henry VII's court' (Bevington 1968, 44-5) -- clearly has the upper hand throughout, Medwall gives only slender details to sharpen his character for the audience; his dress warrants no special comment, his message to Lucrez (2.316-49) receives much less prominence than Cornelius's token, and his successful argument in the debate (2.585-705) calls attention not to his own positive attributes but to the other's negative ones. Conversely, it is the representative of false nobility, Cornelius, who receives Medwall's greatest attention and, when compared to that of Flaminius, Cornelius's characterisation is relatively well-detailed. His outlandish dress sets him apart from Flaminius (1.729-50), the horribly corrupted token he sends as a cognisance to Lucrez is the basis of two scenes (2.134-216, 217-307) and, in the debate from which Flaminius clearly emerges victor, Cornelius's spotted history and questionable character are chiefly discussed. Because he receives greater attention than Flaminius, Cornelius is considerably more personalised and, thus, more recognisably individual. This element of recognisability raises the question of Medwall's intentions: is he deliberately urging the audience to see, in this character, a specific figure from Henry VII's court?
6. Medwall's interlude is a courtly performance, concerns a courtly topic, and was written for a courtly audience by one who was not unfamiliar with court activities and personalities. As such, it is a vehicle well-suited for conveying court concerns and, inherent to those concerns, employing allusions to court figures, as is not uncommon in such literature. Considering this, it is not impossible that a well-detailed characterisation such as that of Cornelius represents an actual individual; Cornelius's unbalanced prominence when compared with the victorious suitor suggests that may be the case and, strengthening

this possibility, we may look to the number of hints Medwall provides that point toward a specific court figure.

7. The foremost of these hints is found in the token which Cornelius sends with B to Lucre in order to convey proof of Cornelius's identity. As the token is a cognisance, Medwall employs it to reveal something about the character of Cornelius and, by extension, about the man he wished people to see in that character. The token itself is in the form of a story recounting an episode shared by Cornelius and Lucre; while walking in a garden with Lucre and spying a bird in a tree, he throws her musk-ball at the bird in an attempt to stir it, but the ball misses the bird and lodges in a hole in the tree.
8. The token, however, is not transmitted properly, and the scenes in which Cornelius relays the token to B, and B in turn conveys it to Lucre, contain considerable word play, relying almost entirely on B's confusion with the puns *ashe* / *arse* and *cast* / *kyst*. [6](#) Cornelius's initial statement:

I kyst [the musk-ball] as strayght as ony pole,
So that it lyghtyde evyn in the hole
Of the holow ashe.

(2.202-4)

becomes in B's mind, and in his consequent exposition to Lucre, something quite different:

. . . And than ye delyveryd hym your muskball
For to throw at the byrd with all,
And than as he sayd, ye did no wors
But evyn fayr kyst hym on the noke of the ars.
. . . Trowth, it was on the hole of thars I shulde say --
I wyst well it was one of the too,
The noke or the hole.

(2.280-7)

Medwall here has chosen and used his words very deliberately, punning on elements of the token as it is presented in the first scene and, in this way, denigrating the sender.

9. In this carefully orchestrated passage, Medwall also repeats and, thus, draws considerable attention to the phrase 'as strayght as ony pole' (2.202; cf. 2.209) and its nominal centre, the word *pole*, which is rhymed with *hole*. While the phrase sounds as if it could be a popular contemporary proverb, this is not the case; it is particularly unique, as far as is known, to Medwall's interlude. [7](#) Even if the phrase was proverbial, Medwall's use of it falls outside that which one might expect. At first glance, Cornelius's statement -- 'I kyst [the musk-ball] as strayght as ony pole' (2.202) -- suggests that 'as strayght as ony pole' modifies Cornelius's cast, such that his declaration is that he threw the ball directly and in a undeviating manner toward his target. [8](#) But this is not the case, for if Cornelius had truly cast the ball straight at his target, the bird (2.185-8), it would not have 'lyghtyde evyn in the hole / Of the holow ashe' (2.203-4); rather, it would have hit its mark. [9](#)
10. The phrase, like the entire passage to some degree, presents difficulties when closely scrutinised. B's employment of it is simply confusing and, if the phrase is interpreted by following the model set out by the contemporary proverb *as straight as a line*, Cornelius's use of it does not make sense. However, if we are willing to accept an interpretation of the phrase outside of its proverbial and, seemingly, traditional limitations -- something which Medwall, in the two scenes surrounding Cornelius's token, urges his audience to do on the level of words by bringing the corrupting puns to the centre of the

exchange -- a sole possibility remains. If one considers that 'as strayght as ony pole' in Cornelius's line is a reference not to the cast but to the caster himself, the phrase has more sense: Cornelius, as straight as any *Pole* might, cast the ball at the bird and missed.

11. In light of the groundwork that Medwall lays for later punning on the elements of the token, one must assume that his construction of the passage on the whole is careful and deliberate. Given this, and considering that the most sensible interpretation of the phrase 'as strayght as ony pole' equates Cornelius with the word *pole*, the phrase and, especially, the word *pole* are a very important part of the token which acts as Cornelius's cognisance. It is implausible that Medwall could have accidentally made this allusion; therefore, while the matter of token presents one of many opportunities to ridicule the extravagant and immoral Cornelius, I suggest that by employing a rarely used proverb or by modifying a common, contemporary proverbial expression to pun on the word *pole*, Medwall also uses the token to allude to the court figure Cornelius is intended to represent: Edmund de la Pole.
12. References to Edmund's surname had been made in earlier literature in precisely the same way. Specifically akin to Medwall's technique, for example, is one anonymous poem written in the reign of Henry VI which comments upon the actions of Edmund's grandfather, William (d. 1450), a figure of Wolseyan proportions: [10](#)

The *Pole* is so [perilous] men for to passe
That few can escape hit of the banck riall . . .
Hit is a shrewd *pole* pounce or a well
That drownyth the doughty and bryngeth hem a beer

(*Excerpta Historica* 1831, 359-60)

Similar allusions are made in the later anonymous interlude *Hick Scorer* to Edmund's younger brother, Richard; the character Free Will wishes others to be 'in a mill *pool* above the arse' (Lancashire 1980, 196, l. 447) and Hick states that Free Will 'hath made a great hole in my *poll*' (Lancashire 1980, 197, l. 450). [11](#)

13. Edmund de la Pole, the current Earl of Suffolk, would serve Medwall well as the model for Cornelius because he most prominently exemplified the secure blood-lines of the old nobility, and also their abject state. Furthermore, at a time when Henry, who did not come to power because of his blood-lineage, was concerned with securing his claim to kingship and its proper succession, Edmund represented one of Henry's greatest threats ca. 1496-8. [12](#) Arthur's succession was jeopardised by three surviving claimants to the throne: the false pretender Perkin Warbeck, the Earl of Warwick, and Edmund de la Pole. Warbeck, who masqueraded as Richard Duke of York, was captured in 1497, and the Earl of Warwick was in the Tower, to remain there until his execution in 1499. Though each posed a threat to Henry, they were under his control. Edmund de la Pole, however, was a prominent member of court and had ancestral claims which could not be refuted; thus, he represented a real threat to the throne and Arthur's succession of it.
14. Edmund's claim was through his mother, Elizabeth, who was Edward IV's sister. His older brother, the Earl of Lincoln, was named Richard III's heir the year before Henry came into power (Thomson 1979, 536). [13](#) While Edmund fled England and announced his claim to Henry's throne in 1501, it is not clear if he had declared intentions earlier, but the actions of his older brother certainly made him suspect. Lincoln fought against Henry when he landed in 1485 (Thomson 1979, 516-7), and was later killed in the Battle of Stoke while rebelling in support of the pretender Lambert Simnel in 1487. For his rebellion, he was attainted. Through this, Edmund and Lincoln's father, John, remained curiously untouched; at Henry's 1485 landing John was uncommitted (Thomson 1979, 516-7), and Lincoln's later attainder specifically declared that nothing should be prejudicial towards John (*Rolls of Parliament*

1783, VI: 400). Though there were ties of a sort between Henry and John -- Henry's mother, Margaret Beaufort, had been a ward of John's father, William, and was married as a child to John, though this was dissolved in 1453 [14](#) -- Henry's trust of John was likely due to John's fortune, which was among the largest in the country, and his political usefulness, as John had proved to be an asset to several very different rulers (Thomson 1979, 537, 541). At John's death in 1491, Edmund became the head of this rich and powerful family, the first-born Lincoln having been killed in rebellion several years earlier; at this point, Edmund also became Henry VII's ward (*Rolls of Parliament* 1783, VI: 477).

15. With the death of the more trustworthy father, under Edmund the de la Poles became a threat to Henry's position and, having Edmund firmly under his control as ward, Henry began weakening the family. The largest depletion of the family's power occurred through Henry's handling of Edmund's inheritance, the details of which were not formally resolved until October 1495 when the forfeiture and attainder were legally treated (*Rolls of Parliament* 1783, VI: 474-9). Under the notable presence of Medwall's master, Cardinal Morton, who acted as feoffee for Edmund's estate, and possibly Medwall, who was a notary for Morton in the 1490s (Nelson [Medwall] 1980, 11-12), Henry impoverished Edmund. He lost much of his property and was forced to adopt the lesser title of Earl of Suffolk though both his grandfather and father had been Duke of Suffolk. [15](#)
16. While impoverished and of a lower title, Edmund still was influential and had a high level of visibility. Prior to the settling of his estate, he, with the Earl of Essex, was triumphant at the tournament commemorating the creation of Henry, Duke of York on 9 November 1494 (*Letters Henry VII* 1861, I: 396). In 1495, Edmund was trusted to examine and take charge of the possessions of William Stanley, who was tried for treason (*Cal. Patent Rolls* 1916, II: 29). He was made Knight of the Garter in 1496 (Fellowes 1939, 65) and, thereafter, was entrusted by the king with diplomatic affairs, being sent with the Bishop of London to meet the Venetian Ambassador (*Cal. State Papers* 1864, I: 263) and, later, with the Duke of Buckingham to entertain the French ambassador (*Cal. State Papers* 1864, I: 283). His visibility is noted by Trevisan, the Venetian ambassador, who describes Edmund as one of 'the chief personages of [Henry's] court' (*Cal. State Papers* 1864, I: 263).
17. Edmund's influence was, thus, not lost with his inheritance. Its extent would become even more apparent after his flight to Europe in 1501 and the declaration of his claim to the throne. As well, Henry's concerns about Edmund, because of Edmund's legitimately royal blood, were not unfounded. A letter from John Flamank to the king, recounting events occurring when Henry lay sick in 1503, confirms Edmund's royal status even as a traitor in exile, as he is mentioned as a possible successor over Henry's son. [16](#) Clearly, if Henry had wished to challenge ancestral claims to the throne, Edmund de la Pole, the chief legitimate claimant outside of Henry's own stock, would have to be dealt with. In *Fulgens and Lucreces*, where nobility-by-blood is devalued in light of nobility-by-virtue, Edmund provides the model best suited for one who represents the old nobility.
18. Edmund's high profile within the court and among diplomats also makes him suspect for identification with Cornelius because, being highly visible, Medwall's audience could be more assured to recognise his attributes in a fictional character. It is generally accepted, as Boas and Reed first proposed (xx), that *Fulgens and Lucreces's* audience was composed of Englishmen and the diplomat corps from Flanders and Spain, all groups with whom Edmund was familiar. [17](#)
19. In addition to providing the best model for the high-born Cornelius and having a level of visibility such that those in the audience, Englishman and foreigner alike, would know him, enough of the characteristics which Medwall gives to Cornelius are shared by Edmund to entertain seriously the notion that Edmund is represented in *Fulgens and Lucreces*. These similarities appear mainly in the three areas of the interlude which acquaint the audience with Publius Cornelius: the aforementioned token which puns on the word *pole* that Cornelius asks B to convey to Lucreces (2.181-209), B's mocking of Cornelius's clothing (1.729-50), and the debate between the two suitors in which details of Cornelius's

and his family's history are revealed (2.441 spff.). The first two of these, which discuss Cornelius's dress and present the ill-conveyed token, are of Medwall's own construction -- they are absent from his source -- but in all three scenes, to varying degrees, Edmund de la Pole's character can be discerned.

20. Cornelius's appearance on the stage would have differentiated him significantly from Flaminius. He dresses in the 'new maner of fasyon' (1.730). His style is considered 'somwhat straunge' (1.731) by B and wasteful; he pays 'twenty tymes' more than A's fair estimate of the worth of his hose (1.723) and he puts not two or three broad yards of cloth into his gown, as A conjectures, but a full seven (1.741-2). The newer, less wealthy administrators of Henry's court could not afford to dress in such grandeur, but the wealthier nobles could, and did, dress extravagantly. [18](#)
21. Noble in blood but depleted financially, Edmund himself was in no position to dress extravagantly, yet he still did, equalling, if not exceeding, the fashion of the court. [19](#) As with the clothes-satire in *Nature*, [20](#) Medwall links extravagance and wastefulness in dress to pride; it is this pride which makes Cornelius, because of his expenditures on clothing alone, 'worthy to be a kyng' (1.715). Edmund's own extravagance was also seen in his dress, which was beyond his means, like other aspects of the 'profusion of living' (Napier 1858, 167) that Edmund enjoyed. As Napier comments on Edmund himself, his dress is only one example that, even after the forfeiture, he 'still retained views more suitable to the rank and fortune which he had lost, than to his present condition'. [21](#) Additionally, like Edmund at the time of the play's performance, Medwall's Cornelius had recently come into a large inheritance (1.700) and was squandering it (1.715).
22. The clothes-satire alludes to more than the character's own pride and extravagance. His comic, bird-like appearance, which B says makes him look as if he has 'whingis behynd redy to flye' (1.747), suggests also escape from the country. Edmund's flight was a real concern for Henry, though Edmund had not done so before Boas and Reed's conjectured date of the interlude's performance, during the Christmas season of 1497/8 (Boas and Reed [Medwall] 1926, xix-xx). He did, however, flee the country twice without Henry's authorisation: once in July/August 1499, after which he heeded the king's orders to return to England, and again in 1501, when he left England to gather foreign support in an attempt to overthrow Henry.
23. In addition to the allusion to flight, a prominent feature of Cornelius's garb is his cod-piece (1.729-50). The player B, using hand gestures to describe it as 'almost thus large' (1.734), comments that it is Cornelius's cod-piece wherein 'restith the gretist charge!' (1.735). His costume, thus, urges the audience to 'question Cornelius's notion of vrai noblesse long before his rival does' (Moeslein [Medwall] 1981, 8). While those of true nobility would have service and virtue to draw upon in defence of their admirable qualities, Cornelius has only heredity. Edmund is in a similar situation. With only minor diplomatic and domestic business to his credit, depleted in fortune but spending excessively, and possibly entertaining ideas of flight (as he would do later) or rebellion (like his older brother), Edmund's actions were not his best claim to nobility; rather, that claim rested in his blood.
24. Edmund and Cornelius, visibly similar in their exaggerated fashion-sense and both identified by the token, are further linked by the reasoning Cornelius uses in the debate while attempting to prove his nobility. While his argument somewhat resembles that found in Medwall's source -- John Tiptoft's *Declamacion of Noblesse* -- his claims closely match those which Edmund de la Pole could make. Cornelius's statements that his ancestors were chief aides to the city by arms and by policy (2.461-4) and that they kept at obedience the other cities conspiring against their own (2.482-3) apply to Edmund's own family in a general way, and Cornelius's references to noble deeds and actions of this sort are easily transferred to Edmund. As Cornelius claims for himself, Edmund's family had helped govern, capture territory for, and defend England for a number of generations. The de la Poles were truly, as Cornelius states of his own family, 'fathers of the country' (2.489) and they had, historically, done the country good service and had been rewarded with position, property, and riches. [22](#)

25. Edmund's family could also be recognised in allusions to the triumphal arches and statues erected for Cornelius's ancestors (2.495-507) which are part of the interlude's Roman setting found in Medwall's source. Michael (d. 1389), who helped establish the de la Pole legacy, built three houses in Hull 'each with a brick tower, like the palace of an Italian civic noble', [23](#) and Edmund's grandfather had at least one statue erected in his honour at Ewelme, in Oxfordshire, [24](#) and monuments to his father, great-grandfather, and other family members in the parish church of St. Andrew in Wingfield, Suffolk. [25](#) Given the conventions of travel at the time, members of the court would have been hosted at one of the romanesque houses in Hull [26](#) or would have seen William's statue in Ewelme, as Henry VII must have on his visit of 29 September 1495 (*Excerpta Historica* 1831, 105) just prior to dealing with Edmund's inheritance. [27](#) More immediate to many of those making up the first audience of the interlude would have been Edmund de la Pole's London mansion, itself set among ruins of a Roman palace. [28](#) Considering the eminent position of Edmund's family in the past, no others in Henry's court could make claims so close to those presented by Cornelius; similarly, none could represent Cornelius's fallen state (as described by Flaminius) as Edmund could. [29](#)
26. Unlike Cornelius's defence, which loosely follows Medwall's source, Flaminius's speech in the debate against Cornelius is significantly altered, concentrating more upon exposing Cornelius's evil ways than promoting Flaminius; however, just as many of Cornelius's statements associate him with Edmund, Flaminius's argument against Cornelius is equally allusive. By drawing into question several of Cornelius's ancestors's actions, Flaminius emphasises those 'of contrary disposicion' (2.620) to characterise Cornelius in his present ignoble state. A contemporary response to Edmund de la Pole would be similar. As already mentioned, his brother, Lincoln, broke into open rebellion against Henry in 1487, [30](#) and Edmund's grandfather, the great governor William, ended his life disgraced and banished, finally to be murdered. Though Edmund himself had appeared in arms for the king [31](#) and was assisting in the King's diplomatic endeavours, his actions were less than those of his ancestors. Historian G. R. Elton's comment on Edmund's character -- that he was a 'romantic but unimpressive figure, popular but without either sense or purpose' (Elton 1974, 36) -- accurately summarises his status.
27. Though Cornelius's attire, token, and family history hint strongly at his identification with Edmund, Flaminius's accusations of Cornelius's dishonest, sensual, and lustful life (2.631-3) are more difficult to substantiate in Edmund's character. Possibly, this is because Flaminius's accusations of Cornelius depict a typical vice more than an actual person; [32](#) however, to dismiss this as dramatic convention or as Medwall's reliance on his source leaves much unexplained, especially considering that Medwall has already gone far beyond both convention and his source to individualise Cornelius. While documentation of this nature is sparse, certain aspects of his character are noted in the historical accounts surrounding his indictment for murder in 1498. [33](#) Although it occurred after Boas and Reed's conjectured dating of the interlude, the charge itself and Edmund's response to it tell us much about his character, and of Henry VII's view towards the young nobleman. As recorded by Hall,

Edmonde Poole . . . beyng stout and bolde of courage, and of wyt rashe and hedy, was endited of homicide & murther, for sleyng of a meane person in his rage and fury. And although the kynge perdoned him whom he might iustly haue condempned for that offence, yet because he was brought to the kynges Benche barre and arreynd (whiche facte he reputed to be a great mayme and blemish to his honoure) tooke it seriously, and shortly after for this displeasure fledde to flauders.

(Hall 1809, 495)

The fact that he was involved in a murder says much of his temperament; in such an action and response he displayed, by Hall's account, not attributes of true nobility, but characteristics unbecoming a man of his position. The spirit of this action is more associated with Cornelius than with Flaminius.

28. Edmund's response to being tried for murder -- that his royal blood alone ensured him a privileged place in Henry's court, one beyond prosecution for criminal acts -- reflects attitudes displayed by Cornelius about the benefits assured to those of noble blood. [34](#) The handling of Edmund's crime also reveals Henry's view towards the haughty earl's self-perceived position. Chronicler John Speed comments upon the motives behind Edmund's arraignment:

Henry was not sorry to have occasion of encreasing his popularity, by presenting so great a person to exemplary justice, and in the same act to blemish the honour of a man, whose quality was to him suspected, caused him for the same to be arraigned. [Edmund] was persuaded to confess, and thereupon had pardon . . .

(Speed 1611, 975a)

Speed's statements -- that Henry was *not sorry* to have this opportunity to punish Edmund, that he had suspected the *quality* of Edmund prior to the murder, and that he was willing to use Edmund in an *exemplary* fashion to blemish his honour -- strongly present Henry's motives in arraigning the earl. Speed also notes that the king later 'repent[ed] his clemency' (Speed 1611, 975a) in pardoning Edmund.

29. *Fulgens and Lucres*, then, like the indictment, would offer an opportunity to blemish the honour of Edmund and draw into question his quality; furthermore, Henry's ill-disposition towards Edmund made him a safe and well-chosen target for criticism and satire. Looking into the 'political mirror' of *Fulgens and Lucres*, as Colley has fashioned it (Colley 1975, 323), could an audience who knew Edmund de la Pole note the deliberate and prominent pun on the word *pole*, see the characteristics with which Medwall endows Cornelius -- his noble blood-line, arches and statues erected in his family's honour, his family's palaces and riches, his newly granted inheritance, his extravagance and careless squandering, his reprehensible moral character, and the concern of his flight from the country, among others -- and not notice the parallel?
30. There are other parallels in addition to these but, to consider them most clearly, the date of the first performance of the interlude, which has come under recent scrutiny, requires a brief examination. Boas and Reed, in the introduction to their edition, speculate that this date is the Christmas season of 1497/8 (Boas and Reed [Medwall] 1926, xix-xx). Reference to a fire in the hall (1.1302) shows that it is winter. B's comment to A that the content of the play shall stand in 'godely maner according to the season' (1.160) indicates a festive occasion, possibly the Christmas revels or a diplomatic event. References to the 'bace daunce after the gyse of Spayne' (2.380-1) and possibly to a Flemish musician, noted in the line of Flemish (2.389), have been seen as diplomatic compliments marking the presence of Flemish and Spanish ambassadors.
31. If there is a compliment at all in *Fulgens and Lucres*, however, it is more obviously Flemish. The relatively neutral reference to the musician is less potentially offensive to the Flemish than the association of the vile Cornelius with the Spanish is to that nation, and the matter of the interlude, moreover, compliments the Flemish. The main theme, 'that true nobility exists not in ancient lineage alone but more truly in a virtuous life dedicated to public service', is as Gordon Kipling notes 'one of the cherished notions of the Lowlands courts' (Kipling 1977, 21), [35](#) and Medwall's indebtedness to source material reveals Flemish ties as well. Despite making many significant additions of his own, Medwall draws recognisably from John Tiptoft's *Declamacion of Noblesse*, which was printed by Caxton in 1481. Tiptoft's work, in turn, was a translation (c. 1460) of Buonaccorso da Montemagno's *De Vera Nobilitate* (written c. 1428). Before the ideas of Buonaccorso were circulating in English, however, Jean Mielot, the secretary of Phillip, Duke of Burgundy, had translated this same work into French in 1449 (Mitchell 1938, 176-7). [36](#) Moreover, ideas such as those expressed in *Fulgens and Lucres* were current in the years 1496-7; in 1496, the royal librarian Quentin Poulet presented Henry with the Burgundian Romance *Ymaginacion de la vraye noblesse* (Kipling 1981, 122), and the following year court poet John Skelton presented Henry with what is speculated to have been an English translation of

that work (Edwards 1949, 58).

32. If the notion of true nobility presented by Medwall in the interlude was regarded as particularly Flemish, its dominant theme certainly compliments their ambassadors. Even if this is not the case, the interlude's substance, as the parallel sources indicate, at least offers a common link between the English and the Flemish which Medwall could exploit for diplomatic purposes. Furthermore, the matter of the play, which serves well to justify Henry VII's new breed of counsellors, would not have been foreign to the Spanish either, for King Ferdinand's diplomats were busy in the mid 1490s negotiating the marriage of Ferdinand's daughter, Joanna, to Maximilian's son, the Archduke Phillip of Burgundy, and likely saw similar entertainments (Kipling 1977, 21-2).

33. While Spanish and Flemish ambassadors were present in London during the Christmas season of 1497/8, the date put forward by Boas and Reed, the same corps were available as early as February 1496/7 -- the year of Joanna's betrothal to Phillip -- when the Flemish were negotiating the *Magnus Intercursus* with England, and the Spanish were beginning discussions toward the marriage of Katherine and Arthur (Kipling 1977, 21). Other references within the play equally support a date of February 1496/7. The reference to 'wylde Irish Portyngales' (2.394), said by B to be employed in the mummings provided by his master, may reflect the presence of Kildare, who was in England at the time under close examination (Crowson 1973, 53). [37](#) The dance provided by the ignoble Cornelius, then, associates him further with the less noble creatures of the Tudor world. Similarly, that the 'wylde Irish' are also 'Portyngales' could be a reference to the Portuguese who were, in the month of February, in London. [38](#) Seasonal references, too, are adaptable; the mention of a fire in the hall applies just as well to a cold February as to a cold December, and the good season to a diplomatic event as much as to Christmas celebrations. This earlier date, thus, deserves equal consideration.

34. During the period in 1496/7 when the Flemish were available with the Spanish -- between their February 1 arrival in London and the signing of the treaty on February 24 -- two entertainments were paid for by the crown. One of these is to a group of four minstrels from Rouen, dated February 14-19 and the other for a disguising (Anglo 1960, 27). This latter event, the sole performance on February 7, would have been used to compliment and cater to the tastes of the newly-arrived Flemish diplomatic corps, who were bargaining with the English for the first time since England imposed a trade embargo on their country. Though Medwall's work is more than a disguising, it does contain one (see 2.126, 2.389-40) and, with its line of Flemish and its lowland theme, *Fulgens and Lucrez* was fully capable of making this compliment.

35. *Fulgens and Lucrez*, then, is well-suited to the specific diplomatic conditions of 1496/7, and the drama's satiric allusion to Edmund de la Pole is more explicable at this earlier date. The delicate nature of the 1496/7 negotiations would ensure that Cardinal Morton, Medwall's employer, would be closely involved. Furthermore, the occasion for Medwall's debate on the nature of true nobility is that of competing suitors courting a woman for marriage, and Kipling, favouring this earlier date (Kipling 1977, 21), has asserted that the interlude itself was designed to encourage Ferdinand and Isabella to accept Prince Arthur, without questioning his lineage, as a husband for their daughter, Katherine (Kipling 1977, 21-2); if this is the case, and Flaminius is meant to represent Arthur, Edmund would be the court figure most suitable for the intended contrast. Moreover, at the same time as he was negotiating Arthur's Spanish marriage, Henry was also instrumental in arranging that of his ward, Edmund de la Pole, to Margaret Scrope. [39](#) Though not a condescending match for Edmund, it was one more suited to his current state, that of a financially depleted earl, than to his family's very recent position as the heirs of monarchs. Such a match would not have gone unnoticed in court circles, and an entertainment which dealt with the theme of marriage at a time when several court marriages were either being or had recently been negotiated would have attracted such conjecture.

36. Similarly, Edmund's prominence in court at the time of the 1496/7 negotiations -- he was involved to

the extent that he stood as surety for their observance (*DNB XVI: 22*) -- was heightened by his participation in the disguising of February 7 which was used to entertain the court and the visiting diplomatic corps. Remembering that Medwall's Cornelius provides a similar entertainment within the interlude, it is important to note that Edmund himself received a payment from the king for this diversion; [40](#) it assists in associating Cornelius with Edmund in a way that those present in court at that time, including Edmund de la Pole himself, could perhaps recognise by proximity alone.

37. The similarities which existed between the rejected suitor and the well-known nobleman would not have been wasted on Medwall's audience; the comparison would strengthen immensely the impact of the drama, and this temporal target would provide considerable fodder for Medwall's satiric cannon. Lastly, when considering the possibility of this shadowing, one must keep in mind the closing words of the player B regarding the purpose of the play itself: as noted earlier,

'that such as be gentlemen of name
 May be somewhat movyd
 By this example for to eschew
 The wey of vyce and favour vertue'.

Edmund de la Pole -- a member of a noble family whose actions were perceived by the king as ignoble, a prominent personality recently fallen in estate whose marriage was in the works at the same time as Henry's own son, and a courtier who was closely involved in the entertainments and diplomatic events during the negotiations with the Spanish and Flemish in 1496/7 -- was certainly in a key position to receive and benefit from the guidance offered by Medwall's interlude. However, as is shown by the path that he and his younger brother, Richard, took against Henry shortly after this date (which is given reference in the later interlude *Hick Scorer*), this was a lesson which Edmund did not take to heart.

Notes

1. I am greatly indebted to Ian Lancashire, with whom I had initial discussions leading to this paper, including reflections on the phrase 'strayght as ony pole', and who has commented upon my revisions since, and Steven Gunn, Graham Parry, and Glenn Black, who each provided valuable comments on previous drafts of this paper. [□](#)
2. For the early Tudor use of the drama, see Anglo (1969), Bevington (1968), and, more recently, Fox (1989) and Walker (1991). [□](#)
3. With special reference to the interlude, studies by Lancashire and Fox, among others, have reconstructed what appear to be intended links between dramatic characters and actual people. Refer to Lancashire's discussion of Richard de la Pole in the interlude *Hick Scorer* (Lancashire editor. 1980, 60-1), to his argument toward the character Manhood in *The World and the Child* being modelled after Richard Grey (Lancashire 1976, 101), and to Fox's identification of court minions as the vices of Skelton's *Magnificence* (Fox 1989, 245; see also Lancashire 1984, 18, no. 97). [□](#)
4. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations will be to Nelson's edition of the text. [□](#)
5. Cornelius, though noble by birth, is presented as being of a condition both 'synfull and abject' (2.765). [□](#)
6. Consider, also, the play on *oak/nock* and *hole/whole/hollow*. Moeslein comments on this while discussing 'the elaborate *enchainment* ("kyst"/"cast," etc.) which becomes the rationale for [the] entire

scene' (Moeslein [Medwall] 1980, 33-4). See also Colley (1975, 325), and the notes to lines 2.283 and 2.285-7 in Nelson's edition ([Medwall] 1981, 189). □

7. It is not noted by Tilley (1950), the *Oxford English Dictionary*, nor the *Middle English Dictionary* and, though Whiting documents it (1968, P290), the only record of its occurrence is in the episode of *Fulgens and Lucre's* that surrounds Cornelius's token. If Medwall, who frequently employs common proverbial phrases throughout the interlude, had wished to use one to refer to Cornelius's throw, he could easily have chosen *as straight as a line*; for examples of Medwall's use of established proverbs, as noted chiefly by Whiting, refer to 1.164 (C574), 1.182 (P39), 1.538 (Y7), 1.579 (B637), 1.705 (E88, Tilley E130), 1.805 (Tilley W276), 1.922 (C168), 1.945 (M155, cf. W163), 1.1174 (F312), 2.191-5 (C600-3), 2.535 (C169), 2.665 (A38), 2.747 (P350), 2.821 (H116), among others. This latter phrase, *as straight as a line*, saw considerable contemporary use and, though it would not suit the rhyme, with its documented variant *as straight as any line* it would scan properly on both occasions; see Whiting (L301), Tilley (L303), and *MED* (cf. 'streight' *adj.* [a], *adv.* [d]). Medwall, however, chose to use and repeat a phrase which, as far as is known, does not appear prior to his employment of it. □

8. *MED* cf. 'streight' *adv.* (a) and (d). The repetition of the phrase by B, who does not understand the token to begin with, provides no help in this regard:

. . . ye kyst it evyn in the hole
Of the holow ashe as strayte as a pole --

(2.208-9)

□

9. While it is difficult here to discern exactly what the phrase modifies, B's remote placement of it suggests that it does not modify the cast either; if anything, he associates it with the tree; see also Colley for a discussion of B's confusion with *pole* (Colley 1975, 325). Later, in his confused discourse with Lucre's, he drops the phrase altogether, relaying instead its rhyme, *hole*, and corruptions of the token's other elements. □

10. Others also make reference to William by his badge, the ape clog (*Excerpta Historica* 1831, 161-2, 279-80, 357-60, and 360-1), though this is not Medwall's technique. □

11. See also Walker (1991, 44-5). □

12. Boas and Reed, the first modern editors of the interlude, suggest that the date of *Fulgens and Lucre's* first performance was the Christmas season of 1497/8 (Boas and Reed [Medwall] 1926, xix-xx). At this time, Henry was engaged in legitimising his claim to the throne and, especially, ensuring its succession to Arthur in the event of his death. The *de facto* act of the 1495 parliament was one such measure (Elton 1974, 35-6); Elton also outlines the current concerns of court and provides background to the Tudor government in general at this time (Elton 1974, 1-41; for Edmund in particular, see 36-7). □

13. For a discussion of John and the de la Pole family, refer to Cokayne (1945, X: cf. *Pole*; XII: cf. *Suffolk*; XII: *Appendix I*). □

14. This was arranged by William de la Pole for John, who was his son by Alice Chaucer, the granddaughter of the famed poet. The marriage was solemnised, and a papal dispensation obtained (Thomson 1979, 528). □

15. Later, as pretender, Edmund would continue to fashion himself as Duke of Suffolk, as would his younger brother Richard after Edmund's death. □

16. Referring to the speculation of several nobles about who would succeed the king if he died, Flamank

reports that 'some of them spake of my lorde of Buckyngham, sayng that he was a noble man and would be a ryall ruler. Other ther were that spake, he said, in lykwyse of your troytor Edmond De La Pole, but none of them, he said, that spake of my lord prynce' (*Letters Henry VII* 1861, I: 231). □

17. He was known by the Flemish to the extent that he was one of the noblemen who stood as surety for the observance of the *Magnus Intercursus*; refer to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, hereafter referred to as *DNB* (XVI: 22). He was also well-known by the Spanish diplomats and, even after his flight, he passed greetings along to them in his correspondence (Ellis 1846, 127-8). Moreover, Edmund's flight and subsequent raising of the *White Rose* abroad revealed a network of connections which were in place long before his flight, and before the date of the performance, that included prominent English, Flemish, and Spanish figures alike. For details on Edmund's time as pretender, refer to Lancashire (1980, *Appendix I*). For a detailed account of Edmund and Richard's associations, see Gairdner (1904) and Leadam (1902). □
18. See Brooke (1937) and Byrde (1979) for a treatment of courtly attire in the last decade of the Fifteenth century. □
19. For example, when meeting with Phillip at Calais, the impoverished Edmund (though only an Earl) appeared quite similarly to the other nobles, and was noteworthy because of the large plume of his hat:

. . . the king, accompanied accordyng to his bille and soo richely beseen a compaignye, in especyalle the duc of Buckyngham, in soo large and so riche a gowne of clothe of golde, his courses richly trapped, and the trapper enamplished with a littel prety belles of silver and gilt, of a very goodly fascyon; the erlle of Northumberlond also in a large and a riche gowne of clothe of golde; *the erlle of Suffolke* in another garment of clothe of golde, and an hatte of silke garnysshed with a cheyne of gold, and the goodliest plumashes of whit austriche feders that I ever saw . . .

This description, from the 'Meeting of King Henry VII and the Archduke Philip at St. Peter's, near Calais, June 9, 1500', (MS. Arundel 26, f. xxxiii**j**) is reprinted in the Camden Society's *Chronicle of Calais* (1864, 49-51). □

20. See Medwall's *Nature*, in Nelson's edition (1981, 1.723-820). □
21. Napier (1858, 167). Among the things which Napier states Edmund could no longer afford, but still enjoyed, are minstrels who had, at least once, given service to the king (*Excerpta Historica* 1831, 88). □
22. Edmund's ancestor William de la Pole (d. 1366), Baron of the Exchequer, personally advanced money to the crown several times, performed duties for the city, and was granted many manors and much property by Edward II (*DNB* XVI: 48-50). William's son, Michael (d. 1389), was Lord Chancellor, Captain of Calais, and Admiral of the King's northern fleet, (*DNB* XVI: 29-33). Michael de la Pole (d. 1415) was Captain of men-at-arms in Calais and fought alongside the King at Harfleur (*DNB* XVI: 33-4). The military and diplomatic decorations of William de la Pole (d. 1450) were numerous: he was Duke and Marquis of Suffolk, Earl of Suffolk and Dreux, Earl of Pembroke, Chamberlain, Constable of Dover, Admiral of England, and Governor of Calais, among others. Aside from having Henry VII's mother as ward, as mentioned earlier, he also was charged with a young Henry VI. His career, however, ended in disgrace, and he faced charges that he wished to secure the crown for his son, John (*DNB* XVI: 50-6). Edmund's father, John de la Pole (d. 1491), inherited William's estate, was well-rewarded for his service to several English kings and was of status high enough to have married Elizabeth, Edward IV's sister (*DNB* XVI: 27). See also Doyle (1886, III: 433-40) and Cokayne (1945). □
23. See *DNB* (XVI: 33). Harvey notes that Michael likely introduced this style to Hull (Harvey 1957, 70).



24. The records for the Ewelme Almshouse, Oxford, show that in 1462 two statues were to be erected in honour of William and his wife, with daily attentions to be paid to each and the anniversary of the death of William to be celebrated forever (*Royal Commission of Historical Manuscripts, Eighth Report* 1881, 628). See also Horrox (1983, *De La Poles* 41). □
25. See Pevsner (1974, 491). □
26. They also would have seen the largest of them, Courthall, which Leland describes as being 'lyke a palace' (Leland 1964, 1: 49). □
27. In fact, it was a favorite of the early Tudors; and after Edmund's attainder, Ewelme reverted to the crown. See the *Victoria History of Oxford* (1907, 156). The almshouse escaped dissolution under Henry VIII, who became its adoptive patron. □
28. See Pevsner (1973, 288, 186); also see *Victoria History of the County of London* (1974, 95-6). □
29. Possibly the best claim to the family's prominence, aside from Lincoln being Richard's heir, is the privileged position they had at royal coronations as bearers of the royal sceptre with the dove; William (d. 1450):

. . . obtained a grant to himself, and Alice his wife, and the heirs of their bodies, of the manors of Neddyng and Kettelberston, to hold by the service of carrying a golden sceptre, with a dove on the head of it, upon the coronation-day of the king's heirs and successors; as also, another sceptre of ivory, with a golden dove on the head thereof, upon the day of coronation of the then queen, and all other queens of England in time to come'

(Banks 1808, II: 156).

This honour was lost because the king retained the manor in Kettelberston (Napier 1858, 166; see also *Rolls of Parliament* 1873, VI: 475a). Henry showed Edmund much disfavour by not allowing him to retain this inherited honour in the settlement of 1495. □

30. The significance, and memory, of Lincoln's actions was strong and long-lasting. Bernard André's poem of 1497 which commemorates Henry as Hercules in the twelve triumphs, portrays him defeating the wild Lincoln (*Memorials Henry VII* 1858, 139-40, 313-4). Lincoln was later dramatised as the leader of the rebellion in the play *Perkin Warbeck*; John Ford lists 'the high-born Lincoln, son to De la Pole' (Ford 1968, 1.1.91) as the most prominent member of the rebellion which supported Lambert Simnel's alleged claim. □
31. Edmund is noted at the siege of Bolougne in 1492 and as assisting in controlling the Cornish uprising (*DNB XVI*: 21-2). □
32. Nelson comments that Cornelius becomes more like a typical vice than an actual person in this regard (Nelson [Medwall] 1981, 191, n. 2.634-41). □
33. Though misplaced by Hall as having occurred after the celebration of Arthur and Katherine's marriage, Edmund was indicted for manslaughter during the Michelmas session 1498. See Napier (1858, 171). □
34. However, as Cornelius's blood does not ensure Lucre's preference, Edmund's estimation of the treatment he deserved clearly differed from that which he received from the king, and it was quite less than that which he felt was commanded by a prince of his noble blood. His subsequent flight to

Margaret of Burgundy, who had nurtured Perkin Warbeck and was seen as an enemy of the Tudor state throughout Henry VII's reign, shows his dissatisfaction. □

35. See also Kipling (1977, 20-3) and Reed (1926). □

36. See Nelson's 'Introduction' (Nelson [Medwall] 1981, 2). As Mitchell notes, Mielot's translation exists in the British Museum (MS. Harley 4402). □

37. References to the Irish need not be to Kildare specifically, however, for the Tudors often referred pejoratively to the Irish. □

38. Privy Purse expenses show that on 12 February 1496/7 money was paid 'To a Portingale for oranges' (*Excerpta Historica* 1831, 107). □

39. The first mention of the marriage is 10 October 1496; see *Cal. State Papers* (1864, II: 261) and Cokayne (1945, XII: 453). Margaret was the daughter of Sir Richard Scrope, the second son of Henry, Lord Scrope (Cokayne 1945, XII: 453). □

40. The record of the February entertainment provided for the Flemish (from the Privy Purse Expenses of Henry VII) includes payments to several people for the disguising; these include Edmund de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, Henry Bouchier, Earl of Essex, 'my Lorde William, and others' (Anglo 1960, 27). □

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