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***Ludi Magister: The Play of Tudor School and Stage***

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***Ludi Magister: The Play of Tudor School and Stage***

**by**

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**For Gordon Huth**

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***Ludi Magister: The Play of Tudor School and Stage***

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The humanist teaching of rhetoric in early Tudor grammar schools employed dramatic play in several forms, inculcating habits of artful impersonation broadly and deeply across English culture. The Tudor pedagogy of play thus stimulated social mobility by advancing the principle that a convincing performance is a truer indicator of social worth than the titles of official authority or inherited privilege. This ludic teaching also enlivened the study of literature and promoted dramatic writing, and made learning and the cost of knowledge central themes in early modern English drama.

Evidence for these conclusions comes primarily from school texts, and from the dramatic writings and life records of three playwrights closely associated with humanist schooling: Henry Medwall, John Rastell, and Nicholas Udall. School texts, particularly conversational phrases (*vulgaria*) and dialogues (*colloquia*), scripted daily rehearsals of a broad range of social roles, beginning in a boy's earliest years in school. The audacious tone of many of these texts leavened the rigor of learning classical Latin, and they encouraged a meritocratic optimism about social rising, tempered by an ironic irreverence about human folly and social pretensions. Over the period 1485-1550, we observe three stages of development in Tudor schooling and its effects in society and drama: an early expression of meritocratic ideals in the career and drama of Henry Medwall, for whom

learning was a route to honorable service; a full flowering of humanist optimism in John Rastell, whose work advances the New Learning beyond the schools into the enterprising life of the citizen; and finally a disillusioned and ironized critique of humanist promises in the work of schoolmaster-playwright Nicholas Udall.

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## Introduction

In the opening scene of Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (c. 1607), a London grocer's wife steps out of the theater audience, pushing her husband's young assistant before her onto the stage where an acting company is about to perform a play called *The London Merchant*. She exhorts the boy, "Hold up thy head, Rafe; show the gentlemen what thou canst do; speak a huffing part; I warrant you the gentlemen will accept it."<sup>1</sup> Rafe's impromptu audition reveals a remarkable set of cultural assumptions. The grocer and his wife, enthusiastic followers of popular drama, assume that boys make convincing actors, and that even a grocer's apprentice can win acceptance by gentlemen for his impersonation of a gentleman. Ralph rises to the occasion and delivers a speech from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1*, in which as Hotspur he "huffs," "By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap / To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon" (II.iii.201-2). Most remarkably, perhaps, the grocer's wife assumes that the best boy actors get their dramatic training from grammar schools. Admiring a young actor in the play she has interrupted, she asks if he was "never none of Master Monkester's scholars?" She infers that he learned his skills under the famous Richard Mulcaster, theorist of education and headmaster successively of two grammar schools famous for their boy actors.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (New York: Norton, 1996) Induction, line 74.

The boy players of London, the “little eyases” who drove Hamlet’s players from the city theaters, have been amply documented by historians of the English stage.<sup>2</sup> But the grammar schools that trained these young actors produced even more profound and enduring effects in English society and culture, and in English drama in particular. Though a grocer’s apprentice would not usually have attended a grammar school in the sixteenth century, he would have been keenly aware that boys of every social rank were attending such schools in the hope of plucking bright honor from the depths of Latin grammar and rhetoric. From at least the 1490s, humanist grammar schools employed methods of playful impersonation that fostered in generations of English boys ambitions like those that impelled young Rafe to impersonate a gentleman, or Hotspur to dream of unseating a king. When sixteenth-century grammar school boys grew up and wrote new plays, they almost always took up the theme of social ambition, informed by rhetorical learning. These developments began at least a century before Beaumont’s Rafe stepped forward to do his stuff, in the earliest days of humanist schooling in England.

In this study, I consider the methods and texts of those early Tudor grammar schools in relation to dramatic play. The evidence I examine comes primarily from school texts, and from the dramatic writings and life records of three playmakers closely associated with humanist schooling: Henry Medwall, John Rastell, and Nicholas Udall. I argue that the humanist teaching of rhetoric, especially through its use of dramatic play, encouraged performative self-promotion throughout the ranks of society, and shaped a

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<sup>2</sup> See especially Michael Shapiro, *Children of the Revels* (New York: Columbia UP, 1977).

central theme in early modern English drama. Tudor grammar schools taught boys to speak the language and act the actions of gentlemen, the masters of social and political authority. Boys rehearsed the rhetoric of mastery in schoolrooms, where a pedagogy of play emphasized familiar material reality, sportive improvisation, and role-playing that embraced a broad range of human experience, the duties of great men as well as the plight of the oppressed, the burdens and dignities of statesmen and the humiliations of prodigal schoolboys and Terentian slaves.

My larger argument is thus that early Tudor education inculcated the habit of artful impersonation broadly and deeply across English culture, with important effects both for social mobility and for the way society is portrayed in English drama. The thrust of that argument is frankly progressive: dramatic play in humanist grammar schools stimulated social mobility by advancing the principle that a convincing performance is a truer indicator of social worth than the titles and verbal formulae of official authority or inherited privilege; such play also enlivened the study of literature and promoted a vernacular poetic drama. But over the period 1485 to 1550, this story of progress takes on darker tones, important inflections in the historical narrative I propose. The pragmatic skepticism of the early humanists nourished in English drama not only a meritocratic optimism, but also an ironic irreverence about human folly in general and social pretensions in particular. When the escalating cruelties of dynastic ambition dashed the humanists' early hopes for the reign of Henry VIII, that strand of ironic irreverence hardens, and school rhetoric and the rhetoric of the stage diverge from one another. The schools, by this time embedded in the new Henrician power structure, continue to deliver a positive message of social rising through disciplined learning, while the drama begins

to voice a satiric disillusionment with the claims of a literary education and the pretensions of traditional authority and of upstart self-fashioners alike. Both habits of thought, the meritocratic optimism and the disillusionment with the promises of humanism, condition major developments of English social history and English drama up to and including the day when Rafe steps forward to try his skills on the stage.

My argument begins with the claim that Tudor schools developed texts and methods (often from older traditions) that required boys to play social roles very different from the ones into which they were born. To the extent that the Tudor grammar school was designed to train magistrates, citizens, and their clerks to implement Henrician reforms (and incidentally to regulate social mobility), the young players were taught not merely to replicate the old order, but to improve upon it by inventive performance. Lessons that began in Latin primers ideally culminated in the performance of learned oratory and high drama on public platforms, in the councils and courts of church and civil authority. To foster confidence and aplomb, “that the young may become better used to proper action and pronunciation,” and to vary the school routine, the humanist grammar school used dramatic play in several forms.<sup>3</sup> Even the cruelest *ludi magister* was sometimes a master of the revels, presiding over *ludi* that moved the performance of learned eloquence onto public stages both inside and outside the school.

This pedagogy of play grew up at the juncture of two other developments: the rise of a more or less meritocratic English bureaucracy, and the influx of humanist ideas from

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Leach, ed., *Educational Charters and Documents 598-1909* (1911; New York: AMS Press, 1971) 519. Cited below as “Leach, *Educational Charters*.”

the continent. A literary education in this period became required equipment for royal service, so that even aristocrats had to acquire it. J. H. Hexter summarized the changing requirements for such rising in early Tudor politics: “The day is past when there was almost a one-to-one coincidence between the number of a lord's ‘tall men’ or the extent of his acres and the role he could arrogate to himself in that manner.... The recognition by a gentleman of the paramount claim of prince and commonwealth to good service is almost always coupled with an exhortation or a plan addressed to the members of the aristocracy to educate themselves to the point where they can render such service.”<sup>4</sup>

Castiglione's ideal courtier in 1528 was, as John Lawson says, “not the celibate, tonsured clerk learned in Aristotelian philosophy or canon law but the accomplished noble-minded scholar-statesman trained for the disinterested service of the prince and the common weal,” a view expounded in England by such crown servants as Sir Thomas Elyot (a royal secretary) in *The Book Named the Governour* (1531).<sup>5</sup> Elyot and other Tudor theorists of education nominally directed their writing at the upbringing of noblemen, but as schooling became an inevitability for the ambitious, it tended to draw upper and lower ranks toward the burgher middle, assuring the ascendancy of a proto-bourgeois point of view. Richard Mulcaster, schoolmaster of the Merchant Taylors’ School in the late sixteenth century, made this shift explicit, judging that children of “the midle sorte of

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<sup>4</sup> J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 66.

<sup>5</sup> John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen, 1973) 92. Cited below as “Lawson.”

parentes which neither welter in to much wealth, nor wrastle with to much want, seemeth fittest of all” to be educated for the common good.<sup>6</sup>

Great civil servants of the Tudors, secular and spiritual, came from the merchant and yeoman—or even lower—ranks by way of a clerkly education. As Hugh Kearney explains, “Several ways were open by which gentle status could be achieved. The army was one route, the court another, but for most a year or two at the university and the Inns of Court became the cheapest and the easiest route.... There are numerous examples of this process. Nicholas Bacon's father was a yeoman, but after going up to Cambridge in 1523, Nicholas looked upon himself as a gentleman.”<sup>7</sup> Bacon rose to be Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. Thomas Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell were tradesmen’s sons who became gentlemen and rose to immense power by way of schooling and crown service; Thomas More and later William Cecil rose from the minor gentry by the same means, to name only a few famous examples.<sup>8</sup>

So for growing numbers of ambitious boys in Tudor England, sons of tradesmen or sons of the gentry, the path to worldly success led through grammar school, university, and the Inns of Court. Indeed, two of the three playwrights considered in this study enter recorded history through their school registers, the third through the records of the guild he joined as a schoolboy. One was the son of a parish clerk, the second the son a Coventry lawyer, the third the scion of an old county family. As Tudor schools became

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Mulcaster, *Positions Concerning the Training up of Children* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) 144.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Universities and Society in Pre-Industrial Britain, 1500-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1970) 27.

<sup>8</sup> Hexter 100.

gateways to a new social and cultural order, they occasioned an unprecedented mixing and mobility of ranks, capitalizing on the meritocratic dynamism of the Tudor dynastic program and the changes afoot in religion. Curriculum and pedagogy furnished a stage on which traditional, magisterial values were altered by contemporary social and political pressures. The humanist pairing of ancient textual authority and performative experimentation informed school books and school practice, and so found an enduring foothold in English culture.

The grammar school thus provided an arena in which boys of widely different social origins experimented publicly with self-dramatization as a preparation for—and a miming of—social advancement. By the late 1520s school drama was spilling out of the schools into public performances, first in great houses and later in public theaters. Working in tandem, school and stage built up a broad and enduring demand for a special kind of language experience that wedded learned rhetoric to public action in the performance of dramatic impersonations. School and stage marketed normative models for the performance of the language of social power, the rhetoric (or rhetorics) associated with the rank of the gentleman, a remarkably mobile station that could be derived from traditional inherited authority or from power earned with new wealth or office. The boys who played parts in school plays actively enhanced their potential for social mobility, but those who watched and listened also learned new parts, new language, and new rhetorics associated with the gentry. For the socially ambitious these language patterns conveyed

through humanist schooling were essential “equipment for living,” in Kenneth Burke’s phrase.<sup>9</sup>

Any discussion of Tudor schooling must take up a position in the ongoing debate about the social import of humanist study in the Renaissance. Some historians, all more or less following Jacob Burckhardt, emphasize the liberating and secularizing effects of the study of classical literature, put to work in the civic sphere.<sup>10</sup> Others, notably

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Burke, “Literature as Equipment for Living” in *Philosophy of Literary Form* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press) 293-304.

<sup>10</sup> I have relied on a literary critic, Wayne A. Rebhorn, and an historian, Ronald G. Witt, for overviews of the history of Renaissance humanism. Rebhorn, in *The Emperor of Men’s Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995) 31ff., uses Renaissance writings about rhetoric to amend the view of critics and historians (Garin, Skinner, Kristeller, and Seigel among them) who emphasize the humanist revival of classical letters as instrumental in advancing republican ideals in civic discourse. Rebhorn makes a distinction between the civic, republican uses of rhetoric in the ancient world and the use of rhetoric to seize power by signorial despots, absolutist monarchs, and moral reformers in the Renaissance. Thus he augments and complicates the idealized view of republican humanism, arguing that humanist rhetoric, in its emphasis on educating the ruler as orator and the orator as ruler, was identified on the one hand with legitimating despotism and on the other with fomenting popular subversion, as well as with fostering human dignity, liberty of thought and speech, and social mobility. Rebhorn’s argument is particularly germane to my study, as he draws much of his evidence, as I do, from “the rhetoric that schoolboys from every social class were being taught throughout western Europe in the period,” concluding that “if there are no truly discrete rhetorics for kings and commoners, and if rhetoric is indeed what Renaissance writers proclaimed it to be, an art of rule, then its subversive potential is at least as great as its potential to reinforce the status quo” (105). Witt, in a synoptic essay, “The Humanist Movement,” in *The Handbook of European History 1400-1600*, eds. Thomas A. Brady et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) reaffirms the emancipatory thrust of early Italian humanists. Witt emphasizes the “gradual historicizing of culture and ideas” that “transformed a scholarly movement into a powerful engine for the reform of contemporary culture and society” (94). Witt usefully contrasts Italian and northern humanism, arguing that “an increasing demand for political stability and control of cultural life... had a chilling effect on humanist creativity and encouraged conformity,” while “the extensive realms of northern monarchies favored a greater degree of cultural pluralism which, when humanism moved north, led to a rejuvenation of the movement” (110).



Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, have argued that humanist education was in fact an instrument for cultural and political despotism: “It stamped the more prominent members of the new élite with an indelible cultural seal of superiority, it equipped lesser members with fluency and the learned habit of attention to textual detail and it offered everyone a model of true culture as something given, absolute, to be mastered, not questioned.”<sup>11</sup>

The authoritarian aspects of humanism in Tudor England are inescapable and impressive. Humanist schools provided Tudor dynasts with a convenient apparatus both for building legitimacy through talent and for training a ruling élite for a newly authoritarian monarchy. We cannot avoid the fact that John Colet, though moved by a reformer’s ideals, gratified the ambitions of London citizens, who saw his new grammar school at St. Paul’s as a threshold between the city and the ruling élite. Though Grafton and Jardine focus their criticisms on Italian humanist teaching, those who accept their argument will find plentiful evidence for their view in the texts I examine here, especially in the emphasis on manners and rhetoric as equipment to police the barrier between the gentle and the vulgar.

But this judgment reckons without the ludic spirit regularly expressed in the daily lessons and festive observances of schoolboys. The grammar school practice of audacious innovation in rhetorical exercise worked with a debunking motive common to new humanist writing (consider Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*) and classical comedy (consider Terence’s clever slaves) to encourage a certain independence, if not impudence, in pupils. While Tudor schooling was often severely authoritarian in its work of teaching boys to

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<sup>11</sup> Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986) xiv.

play new social roles, that work necessarily involved a powerful emancipatory dynamic, implicit in the nature of playing roles, in the impersonation of authority by the boys themselves, and in their classical literary models of irreverence for authority. The liberating tendency of humanist learning was augmented by ancient school customs of festive role reversals, most famously the elevation of the Boy Bishop. Ironically, as boys studied the masters and labored over their books in humanist schools, they learned a set of language habits that guaranteed that they would question their masters and even suspect the authority of books.

More fundamentally, like all liminal spaces, Tudor grammar schools provided platforms for the messy and unpredictable process of turning social outsiders into practiced insiders, and so for refreshing and reshaping society from within in the process of passing on its traditions to new initiates. The term “humanism” in this study, then, refers specifically to the work of writers, teachers, and theorists of education who used classical learning to renew and revise the *status quo*, and especially to propagate a meritocratic ethic of social advancement based on the performance of learned eloquence. As such, humanism was often employed to serve the ambitions of New Men, some of whom in their turn became despots or magnates, corrupt or not. Yet humanism and its powerful proponents also set in motion a social shift away from instituting power primarily in dogmatic ritual, inherited privilege, and military might, toward deriving power from reasoned and eloquent speech about contemporary concerns. Schools and stages began to supplant some of the prerogatives of churches, families, and arms as ways of representing and concentrating authority in the roles and plots they scripted for themselves. Those scripts did not always produce the intended results. Over the period I

study political tyranny and rigid religious orthodoxy both steadily gain ground. I do not aim at a history of how accurately educators and dramatists in Tudor England predicted the outcomes of their liberal theories, but rather at an account of the fictions that these people created to express their ambitions, and to impress them on their children, even as the currents of politics went against them.

I propose here a narrative cobbled together from those Tudor fictions. In this story, English humanism proceeded in three stages, characterized in turn by three types, all variations on the classical type of the New Man: first the Learned Servant, then the Enterprising Citizen, and finally the Literary Wit. These three types are represented by Henry Medwall, John Rastell, and Nicholas Udall, respectively. Each of these men used a literary education to lay claim to a social authority that threatened to leave behind the hunting-and-hawking aristocrat, traditionally hostile toward bookish learning. In the first two stages, a meritocratic ideal seemed to become reality as wealth and power flowed first toward the learned servant, within old frameworks of service, and then toward the literate citizen, who in many new ways became his own master. In the third stage, the meritocratic expansion runs against the limits of traditional privilege, and the educated man parlays his learning into a new kind of authority, ironic and critical.

I conclude that the period embracing these changes was in some respects a golden age indeed for education and its effects on culture, not only on account of the brilliant courtiers who endowed the schools and patronized the acting companies, but even more because of men who rose by the performance of *Studious Desire* (in Rastell's term) to shape their own ends in service to the commonwealth and to English letters. In other respects, however, the first half of the Tudor epoch was an age of brass, in which

nervy self-promotion won the literary man nothing but a critic's shaky prestige, though he left behind a cultural tradition of humor and satire and skepticism.

The gold and the brass flowed together into a new English drama. As Tudor grammar schools disseminated a literary education more widely and deeply than ever before in England, they conditioned the growth of both a secular literary drama and an audience to appreciate it. School drama provided not only a schoolroom discipline to improve standards of grammar and speaking, but also a public demonstration of the school's success in turning boys into gentlemen, as newly defined by the code of clerkly learning. Playing in Terence could be shown to the world, as in later epochs rowing boats or playing football would be, as a symbol of the power of the school to discipline boys to demonstrate cultural ideals. In schools and universities, dramatists concocted the alloy of popular and classical traits that came to characterize English Renaissance drama at its best. From schoolboy players a growing theater public in the capital learned to expect didactic and eloquent *ludi* that offered public instruction in the learned language and manners of privilege, outside the confines of the schoolroom.

In the century before Shakespeare came to London, humanist clerics, scholars, schoolmasters, and printers—all men with a direct interest in grammar schools—wrote the earliest extant secular plays in English. At least as early as the 1490s, when Henry Medwall produced *Fulgens and Lucrez* for Cardinal Morton's guests at Lambeth Palace, English drama showed the effects of humanist innovations in schooling, publicizing both the literary values and the meritocratic ideals to which the humanists subscribed. The earliest humanist interludes were written for private performance in great houses, though by 1520 plays were being written for audiences assembled in semi-public places like the

theater John Rastell built next to his house in Finsbury Fields. Some plays, like those of John Redford and Nicholas Udall, began as school plays, with a view to taking them to a larger public.

The plays examined in this study all express in their plots and characters an evangelical enthusiasm for study and learning, repeatedly figured as the reforming discipline in redemption narratives, and also as the touchstone of worldly dominion, implicitly available by right to any boy, high or low, who would study diligently. At the same time, they all give eloquent voices to the forces resistant to the New Learning. To the extent that each of these plays figures a debate, explicit or implicit, between discipline and license, studious learning and blissful ignorance, my argument has been deeply informed by Joel Altman's work in *The Tudor Play of Mind*, and particularly by his claim that the grammar school practice of *argumentum in utramque partem* results not in a didactic conclusion but in an open-ended question.<sup>12</sup> This deliberate inconclusiveness appears in the plays I study here in the powerful appeal that each playwright gives to the forces arguing against learning, though finally each play reaches a convergent didactic conclusion. I suggest, however, that *prosopopoeia*, or impersonation, as practiced in the *vulgaria* and colloquies that Tudor boys learned to recite as building blocks for conversation and composition, may have had an even more fundamental importance than disputation in shaping what Altman himself eloquently calls the Tudor play of mind, whereby "plays functioned as media of intellectual and emotional exploration for minds that were accustomed to examine the many sides of a given theme, to entertain opposing

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<sup>12</sup> See Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 2ff.

ideals” (6). These exercises of impersonation were practiced throughout the school years, early to late, while the disputation that interests Altman was practiced primarily by the older pupil, for whom the habits of acting and speaking *non in propria persona* had already been formed. Moreover, the two-sided *argumentum* has about it some of the dialectical hair-splitting that the humanists were eager to leave behind, though Altman is careful to frame the practice as belonging to rhetoric, not to dialectic (3). Though Altman provided this study with a model of how grammar school practice informed Tudor drama, my own conclusion is that the psychological and social habits that most profoundly shaped that drama were formed well before boys began to learn how to argue *in utramque partem*.

Insofar as each of the plays I examine presents a *psychomachia* and a redemption narrative, I must also acknowledge a great debt to David Bevington, who revealed the importance of popular didactic drama and the underlying structure of the morality in much sixteenth century English drama.<sup>13</sup> Certainly the appeal of a Vice-like figure in each of the plays I study points to the importance of the morality structure in secular Tudor interludes. I have also had frequent recourse to Bevington’s explanations of the relations between political backgrounds and dramatic situations in these plays.<sup>14</sup> I suggest, however, that Bevington’s field theory might be usefully supplemented with my own findings: the genesis of the Tudor drama may depend at least as much on the

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<sup>13</sup> See David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1962).

<sup>14</sup> See David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

schoolroom practices of impersonation and on the ironic, irreverent perspectives of humanist writing as on the robust native morality tradition.

Elizabethan and Jacobean drama are not the subjects of this study, but I believe it will be of use to those who study them. The basic practices of humanist schooling, exercised daily over years by boys of many social origins, seem finally to account more fully for certain remarkable elements in drama of the late sixteenth-century than earlier critics have recognized. It seems clear that humanist schools nursed the ancestors of those characters of tragedy and city comedy for whom ambition and social rising by the exercise of wit are central concerns. The student prince—Navarre, Prince Hal, Hamlet, the young Prospero—learned to love letters and also to doubt them in the same kind of school attended by Redford’s ambitious upstart, Wit, a half century before. The boy Faustus polished the language of ambition and desire by playing roles like those performed by the imaginary schoolboys in William Horman’s *Vulgaria* or Erasmus’s *Colloquies*. Could the disciplined practice of impersonation as a way of life offer a convincing explanation for the crises of identity and the questioning of the terrible costs of knowledge that surface in every one of these characters, and perhaps most powerfully in Caliban, who in learning language learns to curse his master? Did the passionate intensity of each of these ambitious learners grow from some practices more profoundly disturbing than open-minded debate, and from some structure more deeply familiar than the holiday contest of Vice and Virtue? I answer both questions in the affirmative. Caliban’s curses and Peter Quince’s playmaking ambitions both sprang from the same experiences of learning new language habits in a grammar school classroom.

The first chapter of this study deals with the theory and practice of Tudor schooling and the development of humanist ideas and practices in England over the period 1485-1550. I propose a schematic three-stage narrative for that development, and examine in detail texts and school exercises associated with the first two stages. I look at many examples of the classroom exercises known as *vulgaria*, especially those that emanated from the grammar school at Magdalen College, Oxford, where many humanist innovations first appeared in English schooling. The *vulgaria* offered an immense variety of roles for schoolboys to assume in the act of learning to speak Latin, addressing concerns ranging from school life to lordly dominion and statecraft. I turn then to examine the grammar and rhetoric texts produced for St. Paul's School in London, with special attention to the books Erasmus wrote for John Colet's great foundation. I note in particular the cluster of images and examples that set up the Child Jesus as an exemplar of both pious learning and probing questioning. I conclude with a look at the *Colloquies* of Erasmus, in which this same tension of piety and questioning epitomizes the humanist project in England.

The second chapter concerns Henry Medwall, author of *Fulgens and Lucrez*, the first surviving secular comedy in English. His life records illustrate the confluence of medieval traditions of church drama and clerkly employment with the earliest stirring of the New Learning in England, coincident with the formation of the new Tudor bureaucracy. While the Tudor reliance on New Men only continued a Yorkist policy, the growth of grammar schools like Eton improved the machinery for advancement at the same time it promoted a literary culture. Medwall follows a not untypical *cursus honorum* from Southwark to Eton, on to Cambridge, and then to Lambeth Palace as



secretary to Henry, Cardinal Morton, Lord Chancellor to Henry VII. The interlude *Fulgens and Lucrez* expresses a lofty optimism about the power of learning and civic virtue to win a high place for a low-born man. At the same time the play uses low comedy and distinctly metatheatrical techniques that give a tang to the sober rhetoric of virtue while emphasizing the performative nature of such meritorious advancement.

This second chapter ends with a brief look at the dramatic writings of Thomas More, particularly his juvenile pageant verses. These bear witness to the importance of self-dramatization as an ethical strategy, as dear to More as to the masquing monarch whom he served. More's dramatic writings express a transcendent faith in the performance of learning wedded to virtue. This ambitious confidence, ironized by self-mockery but unabated, forms a defining moment in the history of Tudor culture.

The third chapter examines the life and dramatic writing of John Rastell. While Medwall and More demonstrate in different ways the access to princely status that humanist schooling could confer through the practice of the learned professions, Rastell (though often a crown servant himself) exemplifies the kinship of humanism and commerce. Printer, entrepreneur, and theater impresario, Rastell produced texts that testify to the growth of the New Learning and of English drama beyond their traditional auspices and into the commercial marketplace fifty years before the Burbages built their Theatre. Humanity, in Rastell's interlude of the *Four Elements*, can be redeemed from his fleshly vices and win worldly fame not merely by civic virtue based on study of ancient verities, but also by the empirical learning of practical sciences and the missionary quest for empire. Rastell qualifies his imperial and positivistic rhetoric of mastery, however, with a broad, coarse rhetoric of play, reaching out to a wide audience by expressing a

profound sympathy for the plight of the brow-beaten pupil. I conclude the chapter on Rastell with a brief examination of John Redford's school play, *Wit and Science*, which forms a link between Rastell's didactic drama and the commercial theater of the 1570s.

The fourth and final chapter deals with Nicholas Udall, a supremely academic classicist and schoolmaster who wrote both verse drama and an important school textbook. His life records demonstrate the commodity status of schooling and drama at mid-century, when his value in the cultural marketplace proved greater than the disgrace of his buggery conviction. His early dramatic writings, including pageant verses for the coronation of Anne Boleyn, show the humanist schoolmaster at his most confident, addressing the monarch on behalf of the powerful City of London. His school text offers the language and irreverent sentiments of Terence as models for schoolboy speaking and translation. Finally, his Plautine school play, *Roister Doister*, provides a new benchmark for the social value of the literary performance of wit, but also for ironic comment on the limitations of the humanist meritocratic ideal. The comedy plays havoc with the words and concepts of "gentleman" and "master," submitting a doltish gentleman and a dull, rich citizen to the antic manipulations of a penniless parasite. He is clearly their superior in terms of wit and learning, a master of critical faculties, but these do little to overcome the stubborn absurdities of social rank and privilege.

## Chapter One

### Playing the Lord: The Pedagogy of Play in Early Tudor Grammar Schools

Ther be many lordes that cannot pley the lorde, but I that am none can pley it rially.

Grammar school “vulgar” c.1490, British Museum ms. Arundel 249

In this chapter I will examine texts and practices of humanist schoolmasters in early Tudor England and their relations to social mobility and to drama. Grammar school exercises, ostensibly devised to improve facility in Latin grammar and public speaking, gave dramatic voices to serious social ambitions, cloaked in the genial banter of youthful competition. The plucky student (by turns a self-anointed young lord, an unrepentant prodigal, or the Child Jesus Himself) emerged as a humanist ideal of self-transformation, a character type who gradually took over a central role in English drama. This character, a questioning youth, replaced, more or less, the character of the wayward soul who finds salvation through penitence, the central figure both in late medieval school texts and in Morality plays.<sup>15</sup> Studious discipleship—initially of Christ, but also of secular masters and scholarly disciplines—gradually replaced pious self-denial and patient servitude as a

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<sup>15</sup> Marjorie Woods notes that in late medieval school texts the standard classical texts of the so-called *Sex Auctores* had been replaced “by newer works with more specifically Christian content, some of them penitential texts.” For example, one of these newer texts, the *Liber Penitencialis* or *Peniteas Cito*, offered morally improving advice in handy verses: “The avaricious man should give away his possessions; the lustful man should castrate himself”; see Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland, “Classroom and Confession,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 380, 386. Certain transgressive and playful strands (as in *vulgaria*) persisted throughout the late Middle Ages, but the penitential Christian texts dominated elementary education from the late fourteenth century until the humanists moved to re-instate “pure” classical texts, and to introduce secular, classicizing texts of their own.

model of youthful conduct, both in school texts and on the stage. Unlike the penitent convert or the sworn servant, models of virtue in earlier times, the self-fashioning *discipulus* works—and plays—to attain mastery in this world. This ethical model developed throughout the early Tudor period, emerging in the *vulgaria* (Latin-English phrasebooks) of fifteenth-century schoolmasters, dignified in the texts produced for St. Paul’s school, and reaching its fullest rhetorical and dramatic expression in the *Colloquies* of Erasmus, and in the plays I examine in subsequent chapters.

The influence of such exercises on English society generally and English drama in particular was occasioned by the rise of grammar schools as a route to secular success. Early in the Tudor period, civic merit and preferment for public careers came increasingly to depend upon the mastery of the clerkly skills of reading and writing in Latin and the vernacular. As a result, humanist grammar schools grew powerful, supplanting the church and the great house as the primary sites for the transmission of these skills, and therefore of social rank. The butcher’s son Thomas Wolsey, for instance, began his climb to the mastery of all England by playing his part well in school. Wolsey first came to the attention of a powerful patron by impressive performance as a grammar school master, trained at Magdalen College in the early years of humanist teaching in England.<sup>16</sup> At a more modest level, the lives of Henry Medwall and his schoolmates at

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<sup>16</sup> George Cavendish reports that Wolsey, “an honest poor man’s son” was sent to Oxford where he was made bachelor of art at the age of fifteen. As schoolmaster at Magdalen College’s grammar school he had charge of the three sons of Thomas Grey, first Marquess Dorset, who, pleased with the boys’ progress in learning, gave Wolsey his first benefice. *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, in Richard S. Sylvester and Davis P. Harding (eds.) *Two Tudor Lives* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1962) 5. Nicholas Orme dates Wolsey’s term as schoolmaster for only two terms in 1498 or 1499. This places him there in the middle of the period of humanist innovation in pedagogy that produced the

Eton in the 1470s show how the grammar school trained boys to rise by the performance of clerkly skills and learned rhetoric to preferments ecclesiastical and secular, by virtue of which they came to be styled “maister” or “gent.” Clerkly social climbing was not new in England at the end of the fifteenth century, but its scope and scale were augmented by state policies that appropriated talent from the church, the gentry, and the laity in general for crown service. Even aristocrats, many of whom traditionally scorned clerkly learning, sent their sons to grammar schools in ever-increasing numbers. School foundations sprang up to supply the growing need for clerks, narrowly defined as men who could read and write Latin.

While training for proficiency in Latin grammar and rhetoric, humanist schools in England inculcated an ethic of performance (as distinguished from inheritance) and of improvisation (as distinct from servile emulation). Tudor schoolmasters used play, both competitive and dramatic, to teach children to perform coveted roles of authority in church, city, and state. This pedagogy drew deeply on older traditions of role-playing exercises in reading and writing, no doubt enhanced by customs of festive drama. Schooling in any age may be understood as a time of regulated make-believe ordained by society to allow the young to rehearse certain approved adult roles (play in its mimetic and dramatic sense) and also to season the labor of learning with pleasure (play in its recreational and gaming sense).<sup>17</sup> This double play took place on a scale unprecedented

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widespread influence of Magdalen-trained masters that Orme refers to as “the Magdalen Diaspora.” See his *Education in Early Tudor England: Magdalen College Oxford and Its School 1480-1540* (Oxford: Magdalen College, 1998) 21. Cited below as “Orme, *Magdalen*.”

<sup>17</sup> The interaction of these two kinds of play may be usefully thought of in terms suggested by Roger Caillois. He proposes that highly ordered, “rational” societies

in England in the ritualized, liminal space of Tudor schoolrooms, often built by merchant gold on church ground. The goal of these foundations was the achievement of mastery at two levels, first of a marketable skill such as an apprentice learned from his master, and consequently a mastery of one's own destiny as a self-inventing individual. The Tudor schoolboy had to submit to a hard apprenticeship in grammar and rhetoric, but he was encouraged to play at being—and besting—the master.

Humanist pedagogy and curriculum thus encouraged a regard for established authority, while enabling a subtle shift in the ways that authority was constituted in society. Where status was customarily accorded to wealth, birth, or the special abilities of the soldier or the priest, the Tudor grammar school curriculum came to confer social distinction by virtue of the knowledge of secular, classical literature. Ironically, this literature, together with the ludic pedagogy of creative imitation and impersonation, often exhibited a satiric, comic irreverence for the pretensions of rigid, pedantic bookishness, and by extension a suspicion of static, inherited authority in general. Schoolboys practiced conversation by repeating the cheeky “vulgars” composed by English schoolmasters. They polished their diction by translating the quips of the impudent slaves of Terence and Plautus, before moving on to imitate the rolling periods of that relentless *novus homo*, Cicero. Such exercises instilled a habit of audacity, counterpoised by the

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distribute privilege through a system roughly parallel to games based on competition (*agon*) and the chances (*alea*) of heredity, while more primitive “Dionysian” societies confer power through ritual initiations that involve mimicry and a pleasurable loss of self and social constraints in vertigo (*ilinx*). In Caillois's terms, I suggest that the pedagogy of play in Tudor grammar schools relied on the symbolic forms of mimicry and vertigo to give boys confidence and aplomb for the agonistic struggle for social position. See his *Man, Play, and Games* (New York: Free Press, 1961) 82ff.

authoritarian practices of the schoolmaster and the other masters to whom the growing boy had to submit.

The role of the *discipulus* can only be understood in relation to the ambiguous role of the *magister* whom he was forced to obey, but whom he hoped to surpass in social rank and authority. Schoolmasters produced the texts that I examine in this chapter, all of which display the dramatic tension between authority and impudence, enforced labor and irrepressible play. The Latin title for the schoolmaster, *ludi magister*, recalls the ancient and enduring continuity among schooling, play, and drama.<sup>18</sup> The Latin *ludus*, like the English word *play*, enfolds overlapping denotations: sport or amusement, dramatic text or performance, mimicry or imitation, trick or deception. *Ludus* also denoted, quite simply, a school for elementary instruction, perhaps from the school's function as a field or staging ground for exercise, mental or physical.

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<sup>18</sup> Terence uses *magister* alone to mean a tutor (*Phormio* I.ii.21) and Cicero speaks of the most basic rhetoric in which “boys are trained at the masters’ place / *pueri apud magistros exercentur*” (*De Oratore* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996] 1. 57.244). Cicero uses *ludi magister* to mean a teacher of rhetoric (*Divinatio in Q. Caecilium*, XVI.47). In the *Colloquies* (Bibliotheca Latina online edition, 5 Nov. 2002 <<http://digilander.libero.it/Marziale/Grex/bibli/colloquia/>>) Erasmus prefers the terms *paedagogus* (in *Monitoria Paedagogica*, 1522) and *praeceptor* (in *Euntes in ludum literarium*, 1522) for the grammar school teacher. Stanbridge gives perhaps the most complete list of names for schoolmasters, and a list for masters more generally: “A mayster in schole. Preceptor & didasculus. Monitor. Instructor. Gimnasiarcha. Pedotripes. A mayster. Herus. Dominus. Mandator. Magister. A usher. Ipodidasculus” (*The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton*, ed. Beatrice White [London: Kegan Paul, 1932] 21). Vives calls the schoolmaster Philoponus a *ludimagister* in the dialogue “*Deductio ad ludum*”; see his *Exercitatio Linguae Latinae* (1538, Bibliotheca Latina online edition 14 Oct. 2002 <<http://digilander.libero.it/Marziale/Grex/bibli/vives/>>). The first Latin-English dictionary in print, Sir Thomas Elyot’s *Bibliotheca* (1548; Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles, 1975) defines *ludimagister* as “a schoole maister” and *ludus* as “a plaie in actes, mirthe in woordes, a sporte, a game, a pastime, also a schole or place of exercise, where any arte or feate is learned.”

While the term *ludi magister* embraces continuities between school and stage, work and play, it also enfolds a related set of paradoxes. In the grammar school (or the schoolroom of the great house) the *ludi magister* was a hired man, a servant playing the part of a master. Moreover, he presided over a form of play that was mostly grueling labor for all concerned. The goddess Folly in Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* describes the precarious lordliness of grammar masters (*grammatici*):

a kynde of men (doubtlesse) most miserable, most slavelike, and most contemptuous [who] do wast them selves awaie with continuall travailes amonges a meny of boies, waxe deaffe with noyse and crying, kyll them selves with stenche and filthiness. And yet through my benefite, they coumpt no men like them selves. So lordely a thing they take it, whan thei feare their feareful flocke, with a threthyng voice and countenance. So princely an execucion, to teare the poor boyes arses with roddes.<sup>19</sup>

The schoolmaster, like Shakespeare's Holofernes, was a *magister* only so long as the *ludus* lasted, like an actor playing a monarch on a stage or the boy who is captain of a football team. Outside the liminal playing space of the school where the grammarian was absolute ruler, his mastery was seen to be an artifice, a performance rather than an essential attribute, even a ludicrous self-delusion.

Yet school texts and plays of the Tudor century show how the schoolmaster acquired an abiding, if equivocal, role of authority in English culture. As schooling became more or less inevitable, boys of all ranks were subjected alike to the peculiar

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<sup>19</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *In Praise of Folie*, trans. Sir Thomas Chaloner (1549), ed. Clarence H. Miller (New York: Oxford UP, 1965) 52.



discipline of the grammar schooling. Literary learning was not necessarily either practical or pleasurable for many boys, but it functioned nonetheless as more than an empty item of conspicuous consumption or a class marker. As Richard Halpern has argued, “Rhetorical education was not something that merely signified an already existing class system; ... it intervened in the system itself, transforming both the ruling groups and the very nature of class distinction,” making the knowledge of Latin grammar the prerequisite for inclusion in the newly defined power elite, “even while its exclusionary function still worked to reproduce traditional lines of class distinction.”<sup>20</sup> This double power—to define and monitor standards of admission to insider status, and so also to consign some to outsider status—conferred on the schoolmaster an unwonted authority, though that authority remained unstable and ill-defined, and inspired as much laughter as awe.

The rise of humanist grammar schools as primary sites for education and drama was part of a broader shift of power from the ecclesiastical to the secular sphere. Like the church, the new schooling deployed symbols and rituals aimed at sanctifying an ideal: the child as redemptive font of wisdom, infant champion of a renascent order. This ideal shone from the icon that John Colet set over the high master’s *cathedra* in the new St. Paul’s School, an image of the Child Jesus, in the attitude of a teacher, with the inscription “*Audite ipsum.*” Under such an icon, boys prepared to follow the Child Jesus in renewing the church, but they also practiced the rhetoric of court and council, a learned eloquence for which Cicero and Quintilian were the supreme authorities. On festive

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 25-26.

occasions schoolboys took exalted adult roles, competing in learned disputation, or delivering sermons in the borrowed vestments of bishops. Boys in the upper forms composed and delivered orations in the *personae* of literary and historical figures. The performances of adolescent boys as grammarians, prelates, princes, or senators, no matter how earnest, depended for their force on the saturnalian dynamic of role-reversal, as illustrated in contemporary popular images of the reversible world. Early printed broadsheet vignettes show children instructing their elders, women ruling men, and fish flying while birds swim. The broadsheet scene of the child sage dictating to old men secularizes the strikingly similar image of Christ disputing with the doctors in the temple, a conventional theme in art, from which Colet's icon was probably taken.<sup>21</sup>

The role-reversal that concentrated redemptive promise in the icon of the learned child provided an apt symbol for the work of the humanists: they aimed at remaking Tudor children so that they might lead their elders in church and commonwealth to virtue, moving forward by turning back to the purifying influence of classical languages and literature. Erasmus assigned an oracular primacy to Latin and Greek grammar “because almost everything worth learning is set forth in these two languages.”<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> The theme commonly called “Christ Among the Doctors” had a long tradition in medieval manuscript illumination and stained glass, and was handled in the Renaissance and after by Giotto, Dürer, Rembrandt, and Rubens, among others. David Kunzle discusses the relation of the theme to child-parent and pupil-teacher reversals; see his “World Upside Down: The Iconography of a European Broadsheet Type,” in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara A. Babcock (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) 39-94. For a discussion of classical and Christian examples of the more inclusive topos of the *puer senex*, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 98-101.

<sup>22</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *De Ratione Studii*, trans. Brian McGregor, ed. Craig R. Thompson. *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 24 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978) 667. The Latin reads: “*quod his duabus linguis omnia ferme sunt prodita que digna*

only modern texts included in the Eton and Winchester timetables of 1530 (our best records of curricula in the period) are books by schoolmasters themselves, including *vulgaria*, the grammars of Stanbridge and Lily, and the *Copia* of Erasmus, all aimed at getting students to speak and write in pure classical Latin.<sup>23</sup> These schoolmasters may be felt to have staged a messianic return of ancient truths, issuing from the mouths of babes, though these truths were as often the rhetorical strategies of Cicero as the commandments of Christ.

We may just as readily observe, however, that humanist schools effectively fetishized Latin at a time when vernacular languages were rapidly replacing it even in law, liturgy, and literature. Walter J. Ong has famously argued that the teaching of Latin in the Renaissance curriculum constituted a puberty rite by which a boy passed from the domain of the family, where Latin was rarely if ever spoken, to the adult male domain of learned, Latin discourse.<sup>24</sup> As Ong explains, the split in the schoolboy's linguistic experience between home and school coincided with his passage from the realm of play and irresponsible liberty to the world of discipline and civic authority. And yet the grammar school not only used Latin grammar and the dreaded birch rod to instill discipline, but also role-playing, often comic and irreverent, to teach habits of authority

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*cognitu videantur.*" *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami I.2* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1971) 114.

<sup>23</sup> See "Winchester and Eton Time-Tables," in Leach, *Educational Charters* 448-51.

<sup>24</sup> Walter J. Ong, "Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite," *Studies in Philology* 46.2 (1959): 103-24. J. W. Binns offers a bold and cogent argument on the continuing universality of Latinity in the Renaissance, maintaining that "Latin culture interacted with, and always underpinned, the vernacular cultures of this period; but the works within it always had more in common with each other than with vernacular works." See his *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1990) 9-10.

and self-assertion. Moreover, the exaltation of classical models occasioned an outbreak of eloquence in English. These apparent paradoxes, dynamic and insoluble, reveal the function of the Tudor grammar school as a liminal space in a time of social and cultural crisis, a place where new social harmonies—new forms of mastery—could be negotiated in forms of play that used old symbols of power in rites of maturation and renewal.

### **Schools in England 1485-1550**

The pedagogy of play unfolded in three distinct stages in leading English grammar schools during the period 1485-1550. These changes correspond to the intellectual and cultural innovations that I will examine in the lives and work of the three playwrights, Henry Medwall, John Rastell, and Nicholas Udall, the subjects of subsequent chapters. In this chapter I discuss school texts associated with the first two stages, deferring the discussion of the third stage to Chapter Four. While any such *schema* proves reductive, these three periods and the plays I associate with each enable me to show the relation of changes in English schooling to parallel changes in Tudor drama.

The first stage may be usefully thought of as schooling to rise in service. In the last two decades of the fifteenth century, humanist ideas moved from aristocratic houses into public grammar schools, in particular the school at Magdalen College, Oxford. The *vulgaria*, or colloquial phrasebooks, produced there present a vivid record of medieval school practice transformed by classical Latin and humanist ambitions. In this period, both schooling and drama are still largely defined by the medieval ethic of clerkly service, though meritocratic ideas and the classicizing impulse begin to appear. A comic

resistance to the authority of schooling crops up throughout the *vulgaria*. In the drama of Henry Medwall this comic resistance takes the form of a reactionary response to the emerging social order of merit through learned service.

The second stage is marked by a huge expansion of ambition and expectation based on learning, in school and beyond. In the first two decades of the sixteenth century, the Magdalen innovations spread to Eton and Winchester, but also to London, where Colet and Erasmus brought a pious Christian humanism to the capital. The texts they produced for St. Paul's School show a deeply divided worldview, committed to both a celebration of human achievements and a purification of Christian practice. The *Copia* and *Colloquies* of Erasmus brought this divided message to the sons of London citizens, and soon to schoolboys all over Europe. The *Colloquies* in particular posed models of pious prosperity in a ludic, quasi-dramatic form. In this period, clerkly service in the church was no longer the primary goal of grammar school education, and developments in printing and government gave new power to vernacular literature and a citizen audience. Schooling promised spiritual and social advancement limited only by the imagination and abilities of the learner. In the exuberance of this period, learning spread beyond the limits of schools, carried in cheap print and didactic drama, with the ironic effect that humanist schooling in Latin, which had led the way in the New Learning, began, even at this early point, to become anachronistic, still honored but behind the curve of social and artistic developments in the vernacular.

The third stage reveals even more contradictory movements in humanist education: an expansion of the institutional authority of schooling and of dramatic pedagogy, but a contraction of the notion of mastery through literary learning, a pulling

back from the idea of clerkly dominion in the social sphere. From the 1520s to mid-century, as the English Reformation gathered force, humanist texts became standard fare in grammar schools, colleges, and universities. In these years, the school play also became a standard practice, as the boys of St. Paul's performed classical comedies and new plays, both in Latin and in English, at school and at court. Drama itself had long been used for school texts, particularly the plays of Terence and Plautus. These were now supplemented by Udall's *vulgaria* taken directly from Terence, and by purpose-written plays like John Redford's *Wit and Science* and Udall's *Roister Doister*. The performance of drama, and not just reading and translating it, became more important. In this period, the humanist ideal of social advancement through learning and merit came up against stiff obstacles. The naked exercise of inherited privilege and royal favor tempered humanist hopes with harsh realities. While the rhetoric of meritocracy persisted in pedagogy, the claims of eloquence, reason, and virtue were shown elsewhere to be hedged about by the intransigent powers of the established order. In response, humanist writers found in classical letters a certain comic irony, useful for dealing with the cruel fact that the ability and virtue of social inferiors must sometimes kneel to the stupidity and wickedness of their masters. The schooled rhetoric of this period, as typified in the writing of Nicholas Udall, brought into English drama the notes of intellectual dominion and alienation that would later characterize the self-concepts of Hieronimo, Doctor Faustus, Hamlet, Prospero, and others disillusioned with the ambitious promises of early English humanism.

**William Waynflete and Magdalen College Grammar School**

The ambitions of the early English humanists radiate from the story of William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester and patron of learning during the first stage of the transformation of English schooling. The founder of Magdalen College and Lord Chancellor of England began his career rather humbly, as grammar master at Winchester College, the leading grammar school in England, where he taught throughout the 1430s. Even in this early period the curriculum at Winchester may have absorbed the very first influences of humanist learning.<sup>25</sup> Waynflete himself may have composed a text with vernacular glosses, a format favored by Italian humanists. The college inventory of grammar manuscripts includes a *Compilatio de informatione puerorum* with English glosses, one of two works in the collection described as “being in the hands of the master of the scholars,” which could mean that Waynflete was the author of his own primer, as many schoolmasters were.<sup>26</sup>

The Winchester College accounts from Waynflete’s headmastership also indicate a thriving tradition of festive drama at the school: a performance by the “*mimis d[omi]ni cardinalis*” took place at Christmas 1433, one of many such performances by visiting troupes recorded in the accounts between 1400 and 1571. In 1425, five years before

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<sup>25</sup> The college’s library inventory from 1432 includes nineteen grammar texts, among them a work by the sixth-century grammarian Priscian, an authority throughout the Middle Ages but also respected by the humanist Valla, who abominated all grammarians after Priscian as “stutterers.” See Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 164 and 170.

<sup>26</sup> Virginia Davis, *William Waynflete: Bishop and Educationalist* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 1993) 12. The manuscript does not survive, but the catalogue shows the author used the vernacular for instruction, a practice that Paul Grendler identifies with the rise of humanism in Italy. See his *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 182ff. The phrase-book of schoolmaster John Drury, *Parve Latinitates*, with interlinear English and Latin, is exactly contemporary with Waynflete’s years as master at Winchester, a half-century before explicitly classicizing humanist texts took up the practice.

Waynflete's appointment, the "*joculatori ludenti*" of the early English patron of humanism, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, had played for the college.<sup>27</sup> The rigorous study of grammar, the tradition of festive drama, and the association with an early sponsor of English humanism form the relevant background to Waynflete's rise as a patron of the New Learning in England.

When Duke Humphrey's nephew, King Henry VI, visited Winchester College in August 1441, something about the headmaster inspired the royal confidence. Waynflete left Winchester soon after, chosen by King Henry VI to help organize the new foundation at Eton. Named provost of Eton the following year, Waynflete supervised the king's college until 1447, when the former schoolmaster was made Bishop of Winchester, the richest see in England. Within a year of receiving the mitre, Bishop Waynflete founded a hall at Oxford, and when a decade later he was appointed Lord Chancellor, his Oxford foundation profited, rechartered as Magdalen College. In 1480 he added a grammar school to the college. Magdalen College and its grammar school were, like King's College and Eton, conceived in tandem, on the model of William of Wykeham's twin foundations of New College and Winchester College. Magdalen, Eton, and Winchester, with St. Paul's in London, proved to be the sources and proving grounds for school texts for centuries to come.

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<sup>27</sup> See Motter, Appendix II C, pages 253-4.



## *Vulgaria*

Very early in the sixteenth century, an Oxford schoolmaster, probably at the Magdalen College Grammar School, gave his pupils the following passage to translate into Latin:

This boye playd the lord yester-day a-mong his companyonce, a-poyntyng euery man his office. Oon he mayd his carver, an-other his butlere, an-other his porter, an-other bi-cause he wold not do as he commandyd hym he toke and [made] all to bete hyme, and to make an ende at few wordes, lykewyse as Cyrus pleyd oons they kyng of boyes so he begane to play the kyng of his companiouns, how be it I trow in an un-lyke chaunce, for as cyrus was a noble man borne and at the last he came to the riallthe [royalty] of a kyng in veri dede, but as for this [he] is a knawe borne and be lykelyhode wyll play the knawe all the remnant of his lyffe, except he mend his vnhappy maners betyme.<sup>28</sup>

Though the tone is censorious, the details suggest that the schoolmaster celebrates the will to power of the boy who plays the king. And though the passage makes a distinction between “a nobleman borne” and “a knawe borne,” it includes the possibility that the born knave, if “he mend his vnhappy maners,” may hope to play a higher part. In reciting such passages, a schoolboy learned to regard social rank as the performance of roles, and also to aspire to play a role higher than the one to which he was born.

From at least the early fifteenth century, English schoolmasters composed collections of such passages, called *vulgaria* or “vulgars.” Nicholas Orme has defined

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<sup>28</sup> Item 52 in British Library Royal Manuscript 12.B.xx, c.1512-27. See Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London: Hambledon, 1989) 142-43. Cited below as “Orme, *ES*.”

these as “English sentences which illustrated the rules of grammar in operation and which the pupils were made to translate into Latin as a means of practicing their composition.”<sup>29</sup> As Orme explains, many of the sentences drew their appeal from “the everyday life of children, their humour, pleasures, problems, and emotions,” though “the schoolmaster’s chief purpose, as many other passages in his *vulgaria* make clear, was not only to sympathize with the child he portrayed but to censure and instruct him.”<sup>30</sup> Orme stresses the disciplinary and normative uses of the *vulgaria*, but we should also note their subversive potential. In practice, the *vulgaria* did more than leaven the rigorous and even brutal program of learning Latin. The use of *vulgaria* in early Tudor grammar schools linked literary instruction and dramatic play as rehearsals for social self-advancement. Such advancement was, after all, the main business of grammar schools in which the majority of boys were not the sons of gentlemen.<sup>31</sup> These phrases gave many voices to the ambitions of schoolmasters and the parents who paid them. The playful grammar exercises required acts of impersonation in a broad variety of social roles, and thus

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<sup>29</sup> Orme, *ES* 67. The term “*vulgaria*” appears for the first time in the title of Anwykyll’s printed collection of 1483, *Vulgaria quedam abs Terentio in Anglicam linguam translata* (ESTC 23904). An earlier term for such a phrase was simply “an English.” See Orme, *ES* 77. For a useful explanation of various kinds of grammar school exercises, including *latinitates*, *versus differentiales*, *vulgaria*, and *vocabula*, see Orme, *ES* 115.

<sup>30</sup> Orme, *ES* 69-70.

<sup>31</sup> A passage from the Bristol *vulgaria* c. 1428 illustrates the social mix in a school of the time, and hints at a meritocratic ethic: “Chyldryn stond yn a row, sum wel a-rayd, sum euel a-rayd; dyvers beth the wyttys.” See Orme, *ES* 95. Joan Simon points out that many school foundations of the late fifteenth century “were not intended to serve a parish, let alone the needy poor; rather it was for the sons of merchants and gentlemen that founders wished to provide, or at the least respectable citizens—though some of these might qualify as poor.” See her *Education and Society in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966) 31.

promulgated a strange mix of cultural discipline and social license. In reciting on demand the passage about the boy who played the lord, a boy performed the roles of both the subject and the object of authoritarian discipline. As a wealth of *vulgaria* make clear, that discipline was often violently humiliating. At the same time, the curriculum thrust boys into the pleasures and perils of adult powers, casting them in roles to which they might hope to become entitled by success in school and professional life.

In theory, the humanist curriculum was shaped to revive the practice of rigorously pure classical Latin while appealing to the gamesome interests of the boys themselves. Erasmus defends the early literary education of children, arguing that “certain forms of knowledge are so pleasant and congenial to young minds that it is more like play [*ludus*] than work to absorb them.”<sup>32</sup> Latin conversation was held to be a natural way to learn the language, and so lessons often included the study of *vulgaria*, in which schoolmasters mixed conventional pieties and practicalities with vital boyish themes like games, food, fighting, and the cruelty of the master: “My heed is full of lyce / *Caput meum est plenum pediculorum*” appears on the same page of a collection of 1519 with “The mayster gave me a blow on the cheke / *Preceptor colaphum male addit*” and “Be mery and flee care / *Gaude & curas fuge.*”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *De Pueris Instituendis*, trans. Beert C. Verstraete, ed. J. K. Sowards, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 26 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 298. The Latin text reads: *Tum autem sunt quaedam et cognitu iucunda et puerilibus ingeniis quasi cognat, que discere ludus est potius quam labor.* See *De Pueris Statim ac Liberaliter Instituendis*, ed. Jean-Claude Margolin, in Desiderius Erasmus, *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, vol. I.2 (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1971) 24.

<sup>33</sup> John Stanbridge, *Vulgaria Stanbrigiana*, in *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and The Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton* ed. Beatrice White (London: Kegan Paul, 1932) 19.

The use of *vulgaria* predates the humanist movement in England by at least half a century.<sup>34</sup> The earliest surviving English-to-Latin exercises model the practice of recitation *non in propria persona*, and express concerns that persist in the Tudor *vulgaria*: beating and other rigors of school, the vagaries of rank and service, the pleasures of holidays and feasting.<sup>35</sup> For example, in 1434, a Suffolk schoolmaster had his schoolboys learn such sentences as, “Myn ars coming to scole xal be betyn,” and “J

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<sup>34</sup> John Leland evidently caused his own students to turn English into Latin before 1415, and the play *Mankind* (c.1465-70) makes an irreverent reference to the practice. See Orme, *ES* 77. The eleven collections of *vulgaria* examined in this chapter were produced between 1420 and 1530: 1) “The ‘Lincoln’ sentences” (1425-50), Beinecke Library MS 3 (34) f 5, ed. Orme, *ES* 82-85. 2) “A Grammatical Miscellany from Bristol and Wiltshire” (c.1428) Lincoln College MS Lat. 129 (E) fols. 92-99, Bodleian Library, ed. Orme, *ES* 87-111. 3) John Drury, “*Parue Latinitates de Termino Natalis domini sed non pro Forma Reddicionis: Anno domini 1434*,” ed. Sanford Brown Meech, in “John Drury and His English Writings (Camb. Add. Man. 2830),” *Speculum* 9 (1934): 82-83. 4) “School Notebook from Barlinch Priory” (c.1480-1520), Luttrell MS, Somerset Record Office MS DD/L P 29/29, ed. Orme, *ES* 113-21. 5) John Anwykyll, *Vulgaria quedam abs Terentio in Anglicam linguam translata*, in *Compendium totius grammaticae* (Oxford: Theodoric Rood and Thomas Hunte, 1483; ESTC 23904). I have used the copy from the Bodleian Library in Early English Books Online. Page numbers are those I have assigned beginning with 1r (the printer’s ni) and running through 32v. 6) William Nelson, ed., *A Fifteenth Century School Book From a Manuscript in the British Museum (Ms. Arundel 249)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956). Cited below as “Arundel.” 7) and 8) *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and The Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton*, ed. Beatrice White (London: Kegan Paul, 1932). Cited below as “Stanbridge” or “Whittinton.” 9) William Horman, *Vulgaria* (1519; Norwood, NJ: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1975). 10) A manuscript collection of *vulgaria* probably from Magdalen College Grammar School c. 1512-27, in British Library Royal Manuscript 12.B.xx, ed. Orme, *ES* 134-51. 11) Nicholas Udall, *Floures for Latine Spekyng* (1534; Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1972).

<sup>35</sup> In his subtitle, Drury specifically associates the collection with Christmas term (*de termino natalis domini*) and the mistranslations may have been a schoolmaster’s idea of festive play. The last three sentences in the collection may evoke a school feast, rhythmically alternated with another familiar school ritual: “Haddistu nouth a capon at thyn diner? / Haddistu nouth to day a good stourid [well-beaten] ars? / J haue drynk j-now at myn mete, but j haue to lital breed” (83).

have drunkyn to-day many dyvers alis.”<sup>36</sup> Although the thematic continuities from the early fifteenth century are striking, I emphasize here the early Tudor collections that coincide with the growth of English humanism in the grammar schools at Magdalen College, Oxford, and St. Paul’s, London.<sup>37</sup>

Among the earliest English school texts in print, the *vulgaria* issued in about 1483 by John Anwykyll, master of the grammar school at Magdalen College, supplemented a brief grammar with colloquial Latin phrases culled from Terence (an authority commended by Cicero and Quintilian<sup>38</sup>) with interlinear English translations.<sup>39</sup> Forty years later Nicholas Udall would return to Terence in a similar format to bridge the gap between play and literature for his students. In the mean time, Anwykyll’s successors at Magdalen, John Stanbridge, John Holt, and Thomas Wolsey, each carried on his practice of composing grammar school textbooks that eased the learning of Latin by English

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<sup>36</sup>As Orme (*ES* 79) explains, Drury’s are examples of a pedagogical practice in which “a deliberately inaccurate English sentence is placed before an accurate Latin one” in order to illustrate the folly of translation that follows Latin word order rather than word agreement or good sense. Drury announces his method in his title, *Parue latinitates de termino natalis domini [s]jed non pro forma reddicionis* [Little latinities, but not with their proper translations]. The examples above, then, invite other translations: *Anus meus venientis ad scolam verberabitur* [When I come to school my arse will be beaten.] *Ego vidi te ebrius dum fuisti sobrius*. [I, being drunk, saw you while you were sober].

<sup>37</sup> Five or more of the eleven collections (Anwykyll, the Arundel ms., the Royal ms., Stanbridge, Horman, and perhaps Whittinton) came from what Orme has called the “Magdalen Diaspora,” emanating from the humanist grammar school at Magdalen College, Oxford, in the last decade of the fifteenth century. Two of the collections, by William Horman and Nicholas Udall, are closely associated with Winchester and Eton, and clearly share the concerns of the Magdalen schoolmasters with pure classical Latin and the use of “good authors.” See Orme, *Magdalen* 56ff.

<sup>38</sup> See Cicero, *De Oratore* II.172, 326; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* I.viii.11, and especially X.i.99, where Terence is called the *elegantissima* of the Roman comedians. In Chapter Four I discuss similar commendations of Terence by Erasmus and Melanchthon.

<sup>39</sup> Orme, *Magdalen* 15-16.

schoolboys. The Magdalen College grammarians began a vigorous tradition of domesticating Latin, and their influence was felt throughout the sixteenth century.

Magdalen *informator* John Stanbridge (a Wykehamist like Anwykyll) provided the earliest thematically organized set of original English *vulgaria*, printed 1519.<sup>40</sup> The book went into 107 editions before 1540.<sup>41</sup> Instead of using phrases from Terence as Anwykyll had done, Stanbridge composed new phrases of topical interest to boys. Where older manuscript collections set forth colloquial phrases in no discernible order, Stanbridge begins with a glossary of human body parts, organized from head to foot with admirable completeness and candor. Boys learned, for example, “*hic podex*: for an ars hole; *hic penis*: for a mannes yerde; *hec vulva*: *hic ubi puer concipitur*” [NB: this last item, with its pun on “conceived” and “taken in,” was left untranslated].<sup>42</sup> The glossary is followed by further vocabulary of clothing, furniture, food, plants, fish, animals, and diseases, with closely related words arranged in hexameter verses for easy memorization. The English translations were printed above the Latin. For example, a hungry schoolboy would read (or, more likely, copy from recitation into his notebook):

cheese	crust	gobet	a little bite
<i>caseus</i>	<i>et crustum</i>	<i>frustum</i>	<i>frustibulum adde</i> <sup>43</sup>

The final section in Stanbridge’s *vulgaria* comprises about five hundred phrases for conversation, beginning with “Good morowe” and ending with “our lorde be with

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<sup>40</sup> I note page numbers in parentheses in the text.

<sup>41</sup> Orme, *Magdalen* 57.

<sup>42</sup> Stanbridge 6-7.

<sup>43</sup> Stanbridge 10.

you.” Each English phrase is followed by one or more Latin equivalents. Many have to do with school life: “I was set to scole whan I was seven yere olde. I was beten this morning” (14-15). Some have the sound of proverbs, including this proud observation on servitude: “Profred service stynketh” (15). Most of the phrases furnish ordinary uses of daily life, but some, when memorized by schoolboys, cast the learners in unfamiliar speaking roles, as I shall discuss in thematic detail in a separate section below.

The printed *vulgaria* emanating from Magdalen College evidently became a schoolroom commodity, inspiring imitators and, around 1520, touching off industrial warfare. William Horman, a master at Eton and at Winchester, published his *vulgaria* with the emphatic claim that he used only the language of “good authors” rather than *the* botched schoolmaster Latin of his competitors. William Lily of St. Paul’s provided Horman’s book with liminary verses, conferring the blessing of the Colet circle on the work:

If you seek the language of the Ausonian race, and hope  
To speak a tongue more learned than the barbarous rap,  
Learn, boy, this work of Horman, a useful gift  
Bringing back the golden words of the ancient fathers.<sup>44</sup>

Lily and Horman thus became combatants on one side of a war of grammarians, defending the use of “good authors” against the attacks of Robert Whittinton, who published a competing *vulgaria* the year after Horman’s appeared. Whittinton, both in his introduction and in a bill of invectives nailed onto the door of St. Paul’s, attacked the

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<sup>44</sup> *Ausoniae gentis linguam si quaeris et optas / Pulsa barbarie doctius ore loqui / Hoc opus Hormani discas puer utile munus / Et veterum referens aurea dicta partum.*  
Horman 1v.

premature imitation of authors in the absence of a sound grounding in the precepts of grammar and syntax.<sup>45</sup> Erasmus, it should be recalled, recommended an early introduction to “good authors” after no more than rudimentary study of the rules of grammar, and Lily and Horman followed him implicitly. In commercial terms Whittinton won the war; his elegant little volume went into 181 editions, as against four for Horman’s fat tome.<sup>46</sup> Yet Horman, if only by virtue of his *copia*, provides an unparalleled treasury of information about the Tudor grammar school as a source of dramatic experience and social authority.

Horman takes pains to set himself up as an authority on “clean and fresh” Latin as spoken by the ancients. Perhaps purity was an especially marketable quality amid the anticlerical and reformist sentiments circulating around St. Paul’s in John Colet’s day, though Horman’s purifying impulses are spent on grammar rather than religion or politics. He takes occasion to deride the corrupt Latin of his predecessors and competitors, and to inculcate this derision in his pupils. Like a ventriloquist—or a dramatist—Horman has his boys voice partisan complaints for his side in the *bellum grammaticale*: “The moste parte of teachers of grammer make most of the worst authors” (85v) and more pungently, “The ranke savour of go[a]ts is applied to them that will nat come out of theyr baudy latyn” (90v). By contrast, his *vulgaria* make explicit the connections between the reading of “good authors” and speaking good Latin: “By readyng of substanciall authours thou shalte bringe about or atteyne to speke elegant and

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<sup>45</sup> The disarray in the marketplace eventually led to royal intervention, with the publication of the “official” grammar in 1542, based on the little grammar of Lily and Colet of 1515.

<sup>46</sup> Orme, *Magdalen* 57.



substanciall laten” (80r) . Horman’s schoolboys learned to say, “I have written Virgil” (83v) or “Lend me thy Terence for this sevensight” (86v) and even, “I am Arystottillys man” (88r).<sup>47</sup> The pure language of antiquity, like Udall’s phrase-book taken directly from Terence, ultimately supplanted English *vulgaria* like Horman’s, but for at least half a century they informed conversation—and role-playing—in Tudor grammar schools.

How *vulgaria* were actually deployed in the classroom remains a matter of speculation, though we have some important clues. In the Winchester timetables of 1530, the *vulgaria* are prescribed for the second, third, and fourth forms, omitting the very youngest and the most advanced students. In the Eton timetables of the same year, the translation of “latins” and “vulgars” was to be done every Saturday “after none” in forms two through six. At the Westminster school in 1560, pupils were to write out the daily “vulguses” in the morning, “and next day they shall say it in order by heart, before or about 9 o’clock.”<sup>48</sup> Certain passages in the Tudor *vulgaria* themselves show that boys took down the English vulgars as dictation, then wrote Latin translations, and then memorized them to be recited aloud on demand when the master “apposed” or examined

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<sup>47</sup> Succeeding generations of pedagogues learned to tout “pure” Latin and, ironically, to impugn the purity of Horman and his contemporaries who preached this gospel. Roger Ascham’s complaints about Horman very nearly echo Horman’s own complaints about his forebears a half-century earlier. Ascham wrote in 1563: “The master many times, [is] as ignorant as the childe, what to saie properlie and fitlie to the matter. Two scholemasters have set forth in print, either of them a booke, of soche kinde of latines, Horman and Wittington. A childe shall learne the better of them, that, which an other daie, if he be wise, and cum to judgement, he must be faine to unlearne again.” See Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (1570; Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1967) 14.

<sup>48</sup> See Leach, *Educational Charters* 448-51, 509.

them in class.<sup>49</sup> A passage from Stanbridge gives a sharp sense of the performance anxiety that a boy experienced when called on to recite: “It is evyll with vs whan the mayster apposeth vs. *Male nobiscum est cum preceptor examinat nos.*”<sup>50</sup>

If we take the *vulgaria* as reliable records of what the schoolmasters asked the boys to perform at such “evyll” moments, we must conclude that the *vulgaria* themselves constituted not only a pedagogy and a form of social conditioning, but also a rudimentary form of school drama that thrust boys into the performance of scripted impersonations. Often they spoke as schoolboys of familiar things, including the profits of learning, the competitive anxieties of reciting, and the constant threat of flogging. In reading the *vulgaria* now, however, we must remember that these scripted schoolboys were not, strictly speaking, the reciters themselves, but pupils as imagined by their schoolmaster, himself dreaming of profiting by their success. Boys performed in a remarkable variety of adult roles expressing the ambitions of the adults in their lives. They tried on the manners of gentlemen, the powers of magistrates, and even, as we have seen, the borrowed robes of kings, sometimes in earnest and sometimes in playful contexts.

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<sup>49</sup> Whittinton (87) presents a little dialogue that indicates that his pupils used the *vulgaria* for their written lessons:

–Hast thou wryt all the vulgares that our master hat gyuen unto us this mornynge. *Omni ne tibi (vel abs te) scripta sunt vulgaria? Que a preceptore (vel preceptor) nobis hoderno mane fuerunt tradita.*

–I haue wryt them euery one. *Omni quidem a me (vel mihi) sunt litteris mandata.* Horman reveals the use of *vulgaria* for written lessons, and also for dictation and memorization: “I have nat written my laten. *Prescriptum non descripsi*” (92r); “Recorde thy latten: *Meditare dictatum*” (89v). Stanbridge’s scholars learned, “It is a grete helpe for scollars to speke latyn” (14) echoing the Erasmian emphasis on Latin conversation.

<sup>50</sup> Stanbridge 25.

The *vulgaria* also cast boys in the roles of impudent, prodigal scamps, like the upstart boy lord. While the intention, as Orme maintains, must certainly have been to make models of the virtuous and laughingstocks of the delinquent, we know that drama does not work that way, and neither does the classroom. Scamps, from Pseudolus to the Vice in English moralities, have a way of stealing the show. Festive role reversals linger in the memory even after the ritual return to normalcy. In the springtime of English humanism, on the eve of Reformation, in schools supported by and for a rising burgher elite, such subversive role-playing must have been welcome seasoning for a diet of conventional piety and classical learning, forced down by violence.

First and last, however, the dominant theme in the *vulgaria* is the causal relation between schooling and the solid profits of social advancement.<sup>51</sup> One manuscript collection, probably from Magdalen College in the 1490s, casts the pupil in the role of proselytizer for the new learning when he recites: “Iff ye knew, Childe, what conseittes were in latyn tonge, what fettes, what knakkes, truly your stomake wolde be choraggyde with a new desir or affeccyn to lurne.... In this is property, in this is shyfte, in this all swetnes.”<sup>52</sup> Another makes explicit connections between learning, virtue, and worldly

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<sup>51</sup> The Bristol schoolmaster Thomas Schort, c.1428, rubbed the noses of his poor scholars in the fact that their studies were their only way of getting on in the world, obliging them to recite: “Pore scolares schold bysilych tan hede to here bokys, the whyche byth not y-ware of non othere help but of here one konnyng. *Pauperes scolares suis libris officiosissime insudarent, qui non considerati sunt de aliquo alio auxilio nisi de sua sciencia.*” Orme, *ES* 110, item 98.

<sup>52</sup> Arundel 74. The citation numbers for this volume refer not to pages, but to passages, as numbered by Nelson in his topical rearrangement. The same anonymous schoolmaster asserts a connection between profit and “good authors,” a shibboleth of humanist conviction: “ther is nothyng better nother more profitable to brynge a mann to

advancement for a poor scholar: “It is a syngyler solace vnto a man / whiche though he be poore of worldly substaunce: yet he is ryche in vertue / or connyng. / For vertue and connyng (as it is dayly proued) maketh many poore of substaunce / ryche in possessions at length.”<sup>53</sup> This theme rings throughout the *vulgaria* collections, and situates them securely in the meritocratic ferment of early Tudor England. The venerable Horman is perhaps most explicit: his pupils learned to intone, “Without lernyng thou canst never com to any honorable roume in the cyte.”<sup>54</sup>

Just as the *vulgaria* advertise that the path to civic glory leads through the rigors of Latin grammar, they assert that the journey upward begins with submission to the master’s authority.<sup>55</sup> Many passages remind the pupil that he is likely to be beaten brutally along the way. Such passages, written by the schoolmasters who delivered the stripes, voice a weird mix of threat, sympathy, and exhortation to stoical endurance. It is possible to hear both lamentation and boasting as students translate, “I was beten this

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connyng than to marke suche thynges as is left of goode auctours, and I mean not all, but the beste” (180).

<sup>53</sup> Whittinton 73.

<sup>54</sup> Horman 91r: *Sine literis non poteris assequi aut tueri conspicuum vel eminentem locum in ciuitate.*

<sup>55</sup> Several of the humanist *vulgaria* taught the pupils to attribute his future prosperity to the efforts of the schoolmaster, even to the extent of effecting a transference of authority from home to school: “He is that mann,” wrote the Arundel master, “whatsumever encresyng or riches or worshippys I cum to, I shall never forgete hys meryttes done unto me.” The master of the Royal Manuscript stages a little disputation between two boys that dramatizes the extent to which school supplanted home. The first boy states, “Me semeth I ame more bownd to my maisters than to my father or my mother,” despising them as breeders of his “damnyd body,” while his masters “bring me to lernyng and maner” of both livelihood and virtue; the second boy rejoins that his friend should think himself “more bownd to thi father and mother,” for they not only bore and nourished him, but “prouydyd the masters.” See Orme, *ES* 142, items 49 and 50.

mornynge. The mayster hath bete me. The mayster gave me a blowe on the cheke.”<sup>56</sup> One boy complains, “My mayster hath bete me so naked in his chaumbre that I was not able to do of[f] nor upon myn owne clothes.”<sup>57</sup> Other lines create a grim role for the loser in the game of school: “My minde is not set to my boke. I am the worst of all my fellows. I fere the mayster. I am wery of study. I am wery of life.” These take on a particular poignancy read alongside the declaration, “I am seven yere olde.”<sup>58</sup>

Every *vulgaria* collection dramatizes the often painful relation of the boy to his master, sometimes with strange transpositions of roles. Some passages oblige the student translator to assume the voice of the punitive master, whether to instill the habit of authority, or just to vent the schoolmaster’s own frustrations.<sup>59</sup> So one boy recites, “Thou

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<sup>56</sup> Stanbridge: “*Dedi penas aurora*” (15); “*Preceptor a me sumpsit penas*” (15); “*Preceptor colaphum male addit*” (19).

<sup>57</sup> Whittinton: “*Preceptor me nudatum sic deuerberauit / ne vestibus me exuere. Aut induere valerem*” (90).

<sup>58</sup> Stanbridge: “*Animus a studio abhoret*” (30); “*Indoctissimus sum discipulorum*” (30); “*Timeo preceptorem vel a preceptore*” (20); “*Tedet me studij*” (16); “*Tedet me vite mee*” (16); “*Septemnis sum*” (25).

<sup>59</sup> Stanbridge begins his collection with verses from “The auctour,” in English, adjuring his “lytell children” to accept beating for their own good if they fail study their “latyn wordes”:

***And yf ye do not / the rodde must not spare***

You for to lerne with his sharpe morall sence  
Take now good hede / and herken your vulgare. (13)

The Arundel manuscript includes a little dialogue that develops the theme of beating as a necessary antidote to boyish sloth:

–Gentle maister, I wolde desire iij thynges of you: onn that I might not wake over longe of nyghtes, another that I be not bett when I com to schole, the thirde that I might ever emong go play me.

–Gentle scholar, I wolde that ye shulde do iij other thynges: onn that ye ryse betyme off mornynge, another that ye go to your booke delygently, the thirde

arte worthy to be bette,” and another, in the bizarre patois of the schoolroom, threatens, “I shall mary my doughter to the.”<sup>60</sup> Beatrice White identifies this image of marrying the schoolmaster’s daughter as “a euphemistic term for flogging.”<sup>61</sup> One sequence of sentences develops this motif in lurid detail:

I maryed my maysters doughter to daye full soore again my wyll.

Me thynketh her so roughe and / soore a huswyfe that I cared not & she

were brend in hote coles.

She embraseth or enhaunseth me so that the prynt of her stykketh vpon my

buttokkes a good whyle after.<sup>62</sup>

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that ye behave yourself against gode devoutely, all menn honestly, and then ye shall have youre askynge. (139)

Ong, citing Leach, notes that the theme of the student embracing salutary beating appears in England as early as Ælfric’s *Colloquy* (c. 1005), where the master asks the pupil if he is willing to be beaten while learning (“*Vultis flagellari in discendo?*”), and the boy replies it is better to be beaten for learning than to remain in ignorance (“*Carius est nobis flagellari pro doctrina quam nescire*”). See Ong 111, and *Ælfric’s Colloquy*, ed. G. N. Garmonsway (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1978) 18-19.

<sup>60</sup> Stanbridge: “*Dignus es plagis*” (24); “*Collocabo tibi gnatam*” (20).

<sup>61</sup> See Beatrice White, introduction, Stanbridge 131 n.20, line 31. An early example of this theme gives the schoolmaster a chance to humble an arrogant boy: “Sum gay squyere of deuynschere schal wed my dowgter, the weche go to schole ap-on the new gate. *Cuidam armigero curioso de comitatu deuanie nubet filia mea / vel sic: quidam curiosus armiger filiam meam ducet in vxorem, qui scolatiso [sic] super nouam portam.*” Lincoln college Oxford MS Lat. 129 (E) item 20, in Orme, *ES* 101-2. Shall we take the “gay sqyere” to be a son of the gentry, or only a bumptious schoolboy, like the play king? Anwykyll includes a line from Terence (*Andria* I.5.255) that may have had a double meaning for his students: “Thou must wedd a wyf today / *Uxor tibi ducenda e hodie inquit*” (4r).

<sup>62</sup> Whittinton: “*Preceptoris filia mihi inuitissimo nupsit / vel nupta est hodie*” (87); “*Mihi adeo aspera et acerba videtur coniunx: ut si ardentibus prunis cremaretur nihili penderem*” (88); “*Sic me complectitur (vel sic ab ea complector) vt vestigia (dii post) natibus inhereant*” (88).

The sadistic eroticism of such sentences, used here to teach the active and passive senses of the deponent verb *complector*, may also have introduced some welcome levity, especially in the image of incinerating the cruel daughter. The idea that marriage to a schoolmaster's daughter would be a form of humiliation points also to the cruel ambiguity of the master's own place in society. Though the *vulgaria* often cast boys in the role of schoolmaster, there are subtle signals that his is not the kind of authority to which they should ultimately aspire.

Indeed, the strangest of the *vulgaria* lay bare the power of schoolroom violence to exact the worship of the oppressed on the one hand, and to stimulate dreams of resistance on the other. Robert Whittinton's *vulgaria* include a chilling dramatic dialogue in which flogging is characterized by one boy as good medicine for a frightened fellow pupil:

- What maketh the loke so sad.
- I am thus sadde for fere of the rodde and the brekefaste that my mayster promest me.
- Be of good chere man / I sawe right now a rodde made of wythye / for the: garnysshed with knottes. It wolde do a boye good to loke vpon it. Take thy medicine (though it be somewhat bytter) with a good wyll it wyll worke to thy ease at length.<sup>63</sup>

Here we can catch the scent of the prefect system with all its insidious power to make tyrants of little boys. As if conscious of his own tyranny, the schoolmaster had his

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<sup>63</sup> Whittinton 97. Note the similar sentiment in a Bristol passage from 1428: “Conyng ys an hy tre, of the whyche the rote ys ful byttyr bot the fryte ys ful swete. He that disspysyth the byttyrnasse of the rote schal neuer tast the swetenasse of the fryte.” See Orme, *ES* 103, Item 31.

students recite the revenge fantasies he invented for a brutalized pupil: “My mayster hath bette my bak and side / whyles the rodde wolde holde in his hande. He hath torne my buttockes. So that theyr is lefte noo hole skynne upon them. / If euer I be a man / I wyll reuenge his malice.”<sup>64</sup> As a boy can imagine himself to be a king ordering his own resistant servants to be beaten, he can just as readily imagine the point of view of his own schoolmaster tormentor, and envision himself as a man taking revenge on that tormentor. While this curriculum clearly teaches terror of the rod, it likewise teaches the boy to aspire to seize the rod himself.

Some humanist theorists deplored the use of flogging, and William Horman’s *vulgaria* for his Eton boys include the observation, “A dogged mynde is worse for betynge.”<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, the most violent *vulgaria* seem also to have been the best sellers.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps coincidentally, the collections that seem the most brutal seem also to value a defiant spirit over doggedness. In particular, the Stanbridge collection of 1519 excels in the language of defiance, including a litany of wonderfully pungent insults: “Tourde in thy tethe. Thou stynkest. He is a kokolde. He is the veryest cowerde that every pyst. Thou strykest me that dare not stryke agayne. I shall kyll the with my owne

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<sup>64</sup> Whittinton 102.

<sup>65</sup> Horman 94v. See Erasmus’s view on beating students in William Harrison Woodward, *Desiderius Erasmus Concerning the Aim and Method of Education* (New York: Teachers College, 1964) 205ff. Elyot and Ascham follow Quintilian and Erasmus in deprecating flogging as the disciplinary method of choice, but Vives enjoins, “The rod of discipline will be constantly raised before the eyes of the boy and around his back, for it has been wisely declared by Solomon [Proverbs xiii. 24] that it is specially good for that age, and extremely salutary.” Juan Luis Vives, *Vives on Education*, ed. Foster Watson (1913; Totowa, NJ: Rowan and Littlefield, 1971) 71.

<sup>66</sup> Stanbridge went into 107 editions and Whittinton 181, as against eight for Anwykyll’s sentences from Terence, and four for the gentle Horman. See Orme, *Magdalen* 57.



knyfe.”<sup>67</sup> The schoolmaster’s imagination required the battered boy to rehearse the language of insubordination along with the language of submission.

The schoolboy’s life as scripted in the *vulgaria* was not entirely one of labor and pain. Playing and plays figure throughout. Horman includes an entire section of sentences on hunting, fishing, dancing, dice, and tennis, and mixed liberally among these we also find passages on plays and disguisings. One student waxes enthusiastic: “I delyte to se enterludis.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the *vulgaria* give us our most valuable evidence of the use of dramatic play in the life of schoolboys. The following sequence is taken whole from Horman’s chapter “*De scolasticis*,” and affords a sense of the place of drama among other concerns of school life:

I have lefte my boke in the tennis playe.

This man is singularly well lerned.

We have played a comedi of greke.

We have played a comedy of latten.

An acte or a procedyng in divinitye/arte/lawe. &c.

This ynke is no better than blatche.

Alfons the .x. made the mappe and the tables.

Frobenyes prynt is called better than Aldus: but yet Aldus is never the less

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<sup>67</sup> Stanbridge: “*Male oles*” (17); “*Merda dentibus inheret*” (19); “*Alter supponit uxorem suam*” (20); “*Imbellissimus est omnibus*” (22); “*Me percutis que referire non audio*” (20); “*Proprio gladio te interimam*” (20).

<sup>68</sup> Horman: “*Me iuvat spectare ludicra*” (281v).

thanke worthy: for he began the finest waye: and lefte samples by  
the whiche other were lightly provoked and taughte / to devyse  
better.

Let yonge children be wel taken hede of: that they lerne no laytn / but  
clene and fresshe.<sup>69</sup>

The juxtaposition of tennis play, dramatic play, and professional acts shows a close association between schoolboy and adult roles, mediated by dramatic performances in Latin and Greek. Statements about performative occupations mingle with sentences about ink, maps, and the relative merits of contemporary printers Froben and Aldus (both closely associated with Erasmus). For the schoolboy reciting these sentences *seriatim*, there was a clear message that ancient eloquence—and drama in particular—together with modern technology offered a new way to prepare for performance in the learned professions of “divinyte / arte / lawe. &c.” And “clene and fresshe” literary style was again held up as a prerequisite to worldly success as new-made men in the rough-and-tumble of civic, professional, and even commercial life.

Another of Horman’s students boasted, “I am sent for to playe well a parte in a playe. I am pryncipall player. Who shal be players? I have played my parte without any

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<sup>69</sup> Horman: “*Reliqui librum in pilatorio. Hic est egregie vel impense doctus. Representavimus fabulam palliatam. Representavimus fabulam togatam. Comitia in theologia philosophia iure &c. Hoc atramentum scriptorium vel literarium non est atramento sutorio praestantius. Alfonsus decimus generalem & tabulas edidit. Officina chalcographica Frobenii vulgo fertur aldina praestantior: sed is non inferiorem laudem meritus est: quando primus tam elegantem formulam posteris reliquit unde facile possent argutiora commentari. Pueris sumopere fit cautum: ut nihil discant quod non latinum fit & elegans*” (87r-v).

fyale.”<sup>70</sup> From these *vulgaria* we can infer that humanist schools used the performance of classical drama to teach boys to play principal parts, two decades or more before the first school companies performed at court.

Roman comedy, adapted for use as *vulgaria*, took adult role-playing to new levels of sophistication and subversive potential. In an effort to encourage the speaking of pure classical Latin, John Anwykyl in the 1480s and then Nicholas Udall in about 1530 replaced home-grown vulgars with dialogue culled directly from Terence. When schoolboys practiced the cheeky rhetoric of Terence’s clever slaves, greedy parasites, randy old men, and scapegrace sons, the phrasebooks had the ironic effect of deploying “pure” Latin for potentially transgressive ends (a topic to which I return in Chapter Four). Though most of the sentences from Terence provided phrases for ordinary daily communication, many took the boys beyond their own experience, social circumstances, and conventions of morality. Anwykyl’s edition undercuts the pious observation, “There is no thyng bettyr nor more laudabyll than to subdue the desyres of the flesh,” with the withering riposte, “I hadd levyr dye.” His boys rehearsed the roles of lusty lovers—“Make the mery with hyr or take thy sport or plesure with-in in the mene whyle”—and of jaded

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<sup>70</sup> Horman: “*Evocatus sum ad aede[n]da[m?] nauiter operam I ludicro*” (281r); “*Sum princeps personatorum*” (281v); “*Qui ludicras partes sustinebunt?*” (281v); “*Aedidi operam procul omni lapsu aut cessatione*” (281v). The Arundel manuscript gives an elaborated example of a boy in the role of drama critic, implying that he had considerable experience in Oxford, where there was bearbaiting at the castle and “discontinuance” in Vacation for “sportes and plays.” The young connoisseur was to say, “I remember not that ever I sawe a play that more delityde me than yesterdays, and albeit chefe prayse be to the doer thereof, yete ar none of the players to be disapoyntede of there praise, for every mann plaide so his partes that, except hym that plaide kynge Salomonn, it is harde to say whom a mann may praise before other” (110). Nelson speculates that this play of Solomon may be the lost play by Thomas More that he mentions in his earliest extant letter. See his introduction in Arundel xxviii.

roués: “I am fourty yere olde / Sche that iche luf is syxtene yere olde no moore.”<sup>71</sup> Here, with the authority of the ancients, was a thorough training in gentle pastimes.<sup>72</sup>

With adult pleasures come adult responsibility, and perhaps power. Anwykyll’s young Terentians rehearsed lordly ways as they recited, “In huntynge and hawkyng I take my sporte.... Thou servyst me kindly gentilly or kurtisly. Itt longeth to a gentillman to be free and liberall of purse or expense.” They practiced a lofty disdain for wealth on the one hand—“Itt is grete wynnynge or avayle sumtyme to forsake money”—but they also practiced despising the poor, from the point of view of beleaguered men of property: “Thei that are in litell prosperyte are gretely suspicious.”<sup>73</sup> Horman’s boys recited a myth of *noblesse oblige*: “Gentyll mennys children shulde be most courtesie and redy to do well.”<sup>74</sup> What can these lines have meant to those schoolboys whose grandfathers and fathers were not gentlemen? Or what can the galvanic effect have been when a

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<sup>71</sup> Anwykyll: “*Nichil prius aut forcius est quam pravos carnis affectus superare. Mori me malim*” (7 r/v); “*Tu cum illa te intus oblecta interim*” (22r); “*Annos natus sum quadraginta. Ea si vivit annos nata est sedecim non amplius*” (9v).

<sup>72</sup> The non-Terentian collections also model conversation on adult pleasures. Stanbridge teaches his pupils three different ways to say “He is drunke” (27). The same boys learned to observe, “Here be many praty maydes” (25) and “He lay with a harlot al nyght” (23). Horman, by contrast, takes a conventionally censorious tone when he speaks of “An excedyng stronge hore” (64v) in his chapter on vices and dishonest practices [*De Vitiis et improbis moribus*]. Nevertheless, his students confront incest and pederasty in the same chapter, translating and reciting, “He kepte his suster openly as she had be his true wedded wyfe” (68r) and “He gropeth vnclenly children and maydens” (68v). Stanbridge offers more conventional outlets to his young clerks-in-the-making when he asks them to contemplate their adult roles: “What mynde arte you in / to be a preest / or a wedded man” (17).

<sup>73</sup> Anwykyll: “*Venando et aucupando me oblecto*” (19r); “*Michi serviebas liberaliter humaniter benigne*” (2r); “*Convenit virum nobilem vel ingenuum in expensis esse liberalem*” (31v). “*Pecuniam in loco negligere maximum interdum est lucrum*” (21r); “*Omnes quibus res sunt minus secunde magis sunt suspiciosi*” (24r-v).

<sup>74</sup> Horman: “*Ingenui pueri essent ad officium paratissimi*” (85r).

prosperous merchant's son had to recite, "I was not borne to a halfpenny," or, "I was not borne to a fote of lande"? What was the social fantasy value when the poor scholarship boy recited, "My fader is a grete man of landes. My purse is heuy with money. I lye in a feder bedde euery nyght. I haue the maystry." Certainly either boy, rich or poor, citizen or gently bred, was being groomed as a social arbiter when he learned to translate, "He hath all the maners of a gentyman."<sup>75</sup> And if he could judge manners in others, he could assume them himself.

Several passages produce rehearsals on a grander scale, as, for example, when a student takes the role of a man sending letters to a monarch, offering strategic advice on timing their delivery, "whether they be gevyn when he is troblede or vexide or else when he is mery. Therfor I commande my servaunt that I sent to the kynge that he sholde wayt a season to delyver his letters."<sup>76</sup> Horman's students likewise envisaged discourse with a monarch. One comes as a petitioner—"I will offer up a supplication to the kynge"—but another seems to be the bearer of the king's own authority, proclaiming, "I have the kyng's great charter with his great seal."<sup>77</sup> These fantasy rehearsals demand a tone of

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<sup>75</sup> Stanbridge: "*Neutiquam heres natus sum*" (22); "*Neutiquam natus sum*" (27); "*Pater meus est ample possessionis*" (27); "*Crumena mea est nummis referta*" (17); "*Quiesco in culcitra plumali singulis noctibus*" (18); "*Concedo mihi palmam*" (27); "*Cunctos mores nobilitatis habet*" (29).

<sup>76</sup> Arundel 266.

<sup>77</sup> Horman: "*Offeram principi libellum supplicem / pel petitorium*" (84r); "*Habeo diploma regium / eius signaculo munitum*" (84v). In a distinctly dramatic passage in the Arundel text (269) the pupil addresses a friend as a model citizen:

Thomas, thou arte worthy to be commendide for bycause thou spakist yesterday so well, so wisely, so nobly for the comynwelth. Methynke thou didist but thy duty, for every goode cytysin is bounde no alonly to prefare the comynwelth befor his private welth but also if eny jeopardy cum that he be redye to put hymselff in jeopardy.

sober, clerkly purposefulness very different from the blithe cruelty of the lad who plays at being king.

Always assuming that his Eton boys aim at “a great room in the City,” Horman presents dozens of passages in which pupils impersonate strategists in a perilous public arena: “Some wolde undo the realme: if theyr malice were nat repressed.... Take regarde of the comynwelthe.... A crafty countynance: kepeth great matters privy.”<sup>78</sup> And the chapter on judicial affairs offers scripts on an even darker side of public prominence:

Al were punysshyd indifferently gylty & ungyly.... Every word is taken for treason or death.... They that do execution for treason hang some, head some, & quarter some.... He smote hym with small choppis of the axe that he might suffer the crueler torment.<sup>79</sup>

To schoolboys in the age of Cardinal Wolsey these sentences must have been thrilling and chastening rehearsals of the realities of power. The *vulgaria* brought the high drama of great office into the Tudor classroom, to be spoken by boys who themselves had abundant experience of violence as a cost of advancement.

The threat of authoritarian violence resounds throughout the *vulgaria*, but finally it serves as an agonistic background to the dominant theme of self-advancement.

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The depreciation of “private welth” may be a burgher swipe at hereditary grandees, but the emphasis on effective speaking for the commonwealth rings with the piety of civic humanism.

<sup>78</sup> Horman: “*Quendam rempub. euerterent: ni talium conatibus iretur obuiam*” (193v); “*Consulas in commune*” (194r); “*Bene tegit vultus magna consilia*” (196r).

<sup>79</sup> Horman: “*Omnes promiscue / vel nullo diferimine sontes et insontes puniti sunt*” (204r); “*Omne verbum crimosum aut exitiabile habent*” (207r); “*Vindices rerum capitalium / quibusdam laqueo gulam frangunt / quibusdam caput adimunt quosdam dissecant*” (209r); “*Minutis secures ictibus eum feriebat / ut atrocius expenderet supplicium*” (209r).

Ambition and impudent humor coalesce in one little monologue that epitomizes the Tudor *vulgaria* as I understand them. The young speaker reflects on the inequities of the *status quo*: “Ther be many lordes that cannot pley the lorde, but I that am none can pley it rially. It is pite that I am non in verry dede, for while other men blouth the fyre, I slepe styll be I never so ofte callede upon.”<sup>80</sup> This boy conflates the roles of sleepy schoolboy and social critic, summoning up a vision of the lordly life as luxuriating in bed while others do the work. His understanding of social roles as playing parts, and his confidence that he can play the lord’s part “royally” while many born in such roles cannot, seem to promise historic consequences of the grammar school practice of dramatic impersonation.

### **John Colet and St Paul’s School**

As the texts that emanated from Waynflete’s school at Magdalen College, Oxford, characterize the first stage of humanist innovations in Tudor grammar schooling, the books produced for John Colet’s ambitious foundation at St. Paul’s School in London epitomize the second stage. At St. Paul’s Colet set precedents that changed English culture. First, he brought to the capital an institution of humanist learning, inevitably making it a monument to merchant wealth and power. Second, Colet used Christian symbolism to make the schoolboy Jesus a model for the citizen’s son who did not intend to enter the church. And finally Colet produced the school’s textbooks, custom-made by or with the help of Erasmus of Rotterdam, to teach copious, classical eloquence and wit for a worldly life in which piety and prosperity grew side by side. The cumulative effect of these innovations was the appropriation by London citizens of secular learning as the

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<sup>80</sup> Arundel 351.

symbolic and actual means of realizing social ambitions. The spirit of these changes soon emerged in the English drama, in the central theme of social advancement and in the central character of the questioning student-as-hero, subjects I explore in Chapter Three. Here I will examine the texts of St. Paul's, from its charter to its widely influential books of grammar and rhetoric, in which the pedagogy of play attained its most refined expression. First, however, I will consider the school itself, including its iconography and its ritual practices, as a kind of stage for the performance of burgher aspirations.

While Colet's project was not unprecedented, it certainly rivaled or surpassed the scale and scope of Winchester, Eton, and the grammar school at Magdalen College, and the books of St. Paul's surpassed their English predecessors in both depth and breadth. The innovations of Colet and Erasmus soon spread, and within two decades Eton and Winchester had adopted humanist curricula.<sup>81</sup> New grammar schools were founded on the pattern of St. Paul's, under lay control, with lay schoolmasters.<sup>82</sup> After Colet, the

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<sup>81</sup> The Winchester timetables of 1530 prescribe the Stanbridge accidence and *Parvula*, the grammar of Sulpizio Verulano (with whom Lily of St. Paul's studied in Italy), as well as Aesop, Cato, Terence, Cicero, Vergil, Ovid, Sallust, and the dialogues of Lucian (to which Erasmus gives "first place" for their power to entice pupils with "a certain charm;" see Erasmus, *De Ratio Studii*, trans. Macgregor, 669). The Eton timetables of 1530 include the following humanist texts: the accidence of Stanbridge, *De Copia Rerum et Verborum* of Erasmus, and the study of the classical authors Aesop, Terence, Horace, Cicero, and Vergil (the core of the school canon recommended by Erasmus in *De Ratione Studii*). The translation of "latins" and "vulgars" was to be done every Saturday in forms two through six. The 1541 refoundation charter of the King's School, Canterbury, requires Cato, Aesop, the *Colloquies* and *Copia* of Erasmus, Terence, Mantuan, Cicero, Horace, and others of "the chastest Poets and the best Historians." See Arthur F. Leach, *Educational Charters and Documents: 598-1909* (1911; New York: AMS, 1971) 448-51.

<sup>82</sup> The struggle for lay control of education predates Colet's innovation by at least a century. See Simon's section titled "The challenge to the church's monopoly of schoolkeeping," 19-32. After Colet, schools with lay trustees and lay schoolmasters were founded at Berkhamsted (1523) and Manchester (1524), and while other new schools



most influential grammar schools were concerned not only with the production of clerks for the church and state (though that certainly continued) but also with the education of the boy-citizen “in good Maners and literature.”<sup>83</sup> This key phrase from Colet’s statutes for the school encodes performative standards for the ambitious citizen’s son: the decorum and eloquence of a gentleman, the knowledge of “clean Latin” and scripture, and above all, for Colet at least, the application of manners and literature to a Christ-like life.

London in 1509 was a world about which Colet and his friends had new reasons to be optimistic, for in the same year they established their school the young Henry VIII came to the throne, trailing the clouds of glory of his own humanist education. There were early signs that the new king intended to continue his father’s policies of relying on (and sometimes ennobling) talented commoners and of encouraging reform in the church. On acceding, Henry chose two men who had studied literature in Italy for important household posts: Richard Pace, a friend of Erasmus and More, as his secretary, and Thomas Linacre as the royal physician. His chief minister, Thomas Wolsey, had, as we have noted, been a schoolmaster at Magdalen College. In the early days of Henry’s reign Erasmus found reason to muse that learning and piety had moved from the monasteries and universities into the courts of princes and noblemen.<sup>84</sup>

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were established in chantries and monasteries in the period, some of them hired lay masters, appointed lay trustees, and adopted humanist curriculum. See Simon 91-93.

<sup>83</sup> John Colet, “Statutes of St. Paul,” in J. H. Lupton, *A Life of John Colet* (London: George Bell, 1887) 271. I quote from Lupton’s transcription of the statutes in parentheses hereafter.

<sup>84</sup> Simon 66.

For all the optimism, the literature and pedagogy of humanist education were marked by apparent internal contradictions. The new St. Paul's School institutionalized these ambivalences. The school statutes, curriculum, and pedagogical theory of Colet's school seem to advocate both absolute authority and individual liberty, anticlericalism and Christian piety, the enshrinement of classical learning and an embrace of new information about the world. The texts that Colet and Erasmus prepared for the sons of London's burghers certainly urge piety, decorum, and obedience, but they also celebrate ambition, self-regard, and a critical skepticism. Colet ordained a curriculum that revived classical poetry and patristic (as opposed to Scholastic) theology, though he explicitly aimed to form both manners and morals in his own time. Colet was a devout Christian and an eminent officer in the church hierarchy, yet he used the wealth he inherited from his father, a prominent Mercer of London, to move education outside ecclesiastical authority.

For such a project, St. Paul's Cathedral provided a singularly important site, symbolically the intersection of church and city power. According to J. H. Lupton, "a row of bookbinders' shops" were pulled down to make way for the new building at the east end of St. Paul's churchyard, where "the folmotes [popular assemblies of the citizens] had from ancient times been held," neighboring the Old Change, "the bourse of their merchants."<sup>85</sup> The cathedral had for at least a century sponsored both a choir school and a grammar school, but Colet plainly aimed at a foundation of a different kind. His stated

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<sup>85</sup> Lupton 163.

goal, an “Educacion” (a new word in English<sup>86</sup>), centered on “good Maners and litterature,” combines two aspects of the humanist program. Good maners had heretofore been the focus of schooling in great households, where boys learned to be gentlemen of the world. “Litterature,” cited elsewhere in the Statutes as “good and clene laten literature” (272) and “good literature both laten and greke, and goode auctors suyche as haue the veray Romaine eliquence” (279), is standard humanist code for classical literature, as opposed to “all barbary all corrupcion all laten adulterate which ignorant blynde folis brought into this world and with the same hath distayned and poysenyd the olde laten speech” (279).

The focus on manners and literature can be taken to indicate that the new curriculum aimed to emulate the aristocratic fashion for humanism at courts on the continent and in England.<sup>87</sup> Yet the statutes and texts of St. Paul’s consistently reflect the idea enunciated by Erasmus that “the only perfect nobility consists in being reborn in Christ, to be grafted on to his body, and to become one body and one spirit with God.”<sup>88</sup> Likewise, manners, in theory at least, were taken to express morals. Erasmus, in his

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<sup>86</sup> Colet’s use of the word predates by almost two decades Thomas Elyot’s *The Boke of the Governour* (1531) the earliest use cited in the *OED*.

<sup>87</sup> Joan Simon argues that Colet’s project should be distinguished from certain misconceived notions of humanism: first, “that ‘humanism’ normally involved concentration on the classics and admiration for classical example almost in an eighteenth-century sense,” and also “that humanist educational plans related primarily to the upbringing of the aristocracy or governing classes. Colet is necessarily a stumbling-block here since it was his over-riding concern to promote a Christian education and the school he founded was designed primarily for the children of the citizens of London” (62). This argument does not, of course, dispose of the possibility that the citizens of London aimed to become members of the “governing classes.”

<sup>88</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, ed. John W. O’Malley, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 66 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 88.

manual *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium*, wrote that manners, though “the most humble part of Philosophy,” yet may be “of avail in conciliating good-will, and in giving currency to more solid gifts of mind.” He located true nobility in learning: “Let others have painted on their escutcheons, lions, eagles, bulls, leopards; those people possess real nobility who in place of all the quarterings on their shields can produce as their ensigns the proofs of so many liberal arts.”<sup>89</sup> As Foster Watson observes, “Erasmus’s view is that the young scholar should be trained to meet the best of the outside world, be they nobles or gentlemen, on equal terms of courtesy and good bearing.”<sup>90</sup> Watson’s Victorian view may be tinged with snobbery, but he makes a practical point that is not, finally, at odds with Erasmus’s notion of a nobility proceeding from the liberal arts: manners do not merely express subservience to the power structure; they also win access to it and may do good within it.

Colet shared with Erasmus the conviction that manners bespoke morals, and that manner of speech was the chief vehicle of both. In the statutes, Colet dwells on the threat of barbarous Latin with such fervor that he is driven to coin a neologism of his own: he abolishes “all such abusyon which the later blynde worlde brought in which more ratheyr may be called blotterature thenne literature,” and he stipulates that the children shall read only “suych auctours that hath with wisdome joined the pure chaste eloquence” (280). The theme of chastity-of-language-as-chastity-of-life figures throughout the writings of

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<sup>89</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *A lytil Booke of good maners for children, nowe lately compiled and put forth by Robert Whittyngton laureate poete* (Wynkyn de Worde, 1532), in Foster Watson, *English Grammar Schools to 1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1908) 105.

<sup>90</sup> Watson, *English Grammar Schools* 105.

Colet and Erasmus for St. Paul's, and is consistent with the dedication of the school to the boy Jesus, whose "understanding and answers" (Luke 2:47) presumably delivered with "pure chaste eloquence," so impressed the elders in the temple. Well before the Reformation, Erasmus attacked sexual license and worldliness in the clergy, the same clergy who produced the "blotterature" of Scholastic discourse and teaching. If such men, unchaste in their language or in their lives, dominated the church establishment, who could be trusted to teach and serve as models to the young?

In his account of the founding of St. Paul's, Erasmus emphasizes Colet's choice of the Mercers as trustees for the new school, as he held them to be "the class of men in whom he had found the least corruption" (237, 518).<sup>91</sup> The Mercers were the preeminent guild in London, and counted among their members influential Londoners who were not in fact mercers, men like Colet himself, who was inducted in 1508, and the common lawyer Thomas More, who was made a freeman of the company in the same year Colet founded his school. In effect, by putting the school's endowment under the Mercers Colet aligned the foundation with venerable traditions of city power, and also of citizen piety with a distinct anti-clerical bias. In the Reformation Parliament, it was to be the Mercers

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<sup>91</sup> Letter 1211, "To Jodocus Jonas," in Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P. S. Allen and H. M. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922) 225-44. Except where the Latin wording is material to my argument, I quote from the English translation of R. A. B. Mynors in *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1122-1251, 1520-1521, Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 8 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). I cite page numbers in parentheses. When I gloss the English with the Latin original I cite the English first, then the Latin.

Company who drafted the legislation attacking the unpopular clerical practices of mortuary and probate fees, citations, and excommunications.<sup>92</sup>

English humanists were clearly moved by what Simon calls a “bourgeois anticlericalism,” but we must remember that the new lay control of schooling did not aim to weaken Christian teaching; quite the opposite.<sup>93</sup> Simon argues, “What was new about Colet’s approach was the clear severing of school teaching from ecclesiastical ritual and the attempt to permeate education with Christian principle.”<sup>94</sup> Erasmus himself, in 1516, wrote to remind the boy who would become the Emperor Charles V that the true Christian was “not just someone who is baptized or confirmed or who goes to mass: rather it is someone who has embraced Christ in the depths of his heart and who expresses this by acting in a Christian spirit.”<sup>95</sup> Colet’s statutes for St. Paul’s and the books that Colet and Erasmus and others produced for the school emphasize Christian piety in secular life rather than in ritual observance.

Even so, the school was to have its share of ritual observances, potent demonstrations of literary study as a form of piety. The statutes provide for a chaplain to sing mass daily in the chapel of the school, while the children prayed at their seats in the adjoining schoolroom, taking their signal to kneel and to rise from the ringing of the bell at the elevation of the Host: “After the sacryng whenne the bell knillith ageyn, they shall

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<sup>92</sup> John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 126. Guy notes in the same paragraph that “the common lawyer John Rastell attacked heresy trials; and MPs met in committee to frame petitions against clerical abuses and the church courts.”

<sup>93</sup> Simon 68.

<sup>94</sup> Simon 80.

<sup>95</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, trans. Neil M. Cheshire and Michael J. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 18.

sitt downe ageyn to theyr lernyng” (276). One must wonder whether the time freed for learning Latin grammar was, from the boys’ point of view, an improvement over the hours spent singing the divine office or praying for the founders’ souls in chantry schools. The statutes required other prayers, set up on tablets, including the following *Oratiuncula ad puerum IESVM Scholæ præsidem*, composed by Colet and published in the primer he wrote. The prayer begins:

Sweetest Lord Jesus, who as a boy of twelve disputed among the doctors in the temple at Jerusalem, so that one and all they were struck dumb, marveling at your surpassing wisdom; I ask that you may so lead and protect this, your school, that I may daily learn that literature and wisdom whereby I may know you, first of all, Jesus, who are in yourself the true wisdom.<sup>96</sup>

Thus Colet introduces the figure of Christ Among the Doctors, a central image in the iconography and literature of the school and a prototype, as I will argue in Chapter Three, of the schoolboy protagonist in the drama of Rastell and others.

Erasmus recounts with pride the pains he took to invest the image of the child Jesus with ritual authority over the boys of St. Paul’s: “Above the high master’s desk [*Supra cathedram praeceptoris*] sits a remarkable representation of the boy Jesus in the attitude of a teacher, which is greeted by the whole body with a hymn when they enter or leave the school. Above is the Father’s face, saying, ‘Hear ye him’ [*Audite ipsum*, from the story of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17.5, Luke 9:35]; for [Colet] added these words at my suggestion” (236, 517-18). In 1511, Erasmus published a set of *Carmina* he

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<sup>96</sup> See Lupton 290 for the full Latin text. The translation is mine.

had composed for the St. Paul's, apparently to be set up on placards, as the prayers were, throughout the school.<sup>97</sup> One is titled "*Imago pueri IESU in ludo literario, quem nuper instituit Coletus,*" and was clearly meant to supplement the biblical injunction "*Audite*" beneath the classroom icon:

*Discite me primum, pueri, atque effingite puris*

*Moribus, inde pias addite literulas.*<sup>98</sup>

The striking juxtapositions of image and verse are artfully ambiguous. The commandment, "*Audite Ipsum,*" between the images of Father and Son, spills its transfiguring authority on the *cathedram praeceptoris* below; the *discipuli* are simultaneously invited to attend to the Child Jesus above and the schoolmaster below as divinely authorized. The epigram, meanwhile, invites the boys to imprint "me"—whether the schoolmaster or the Master *Ipsum*—in their manners and their "little letters."

The schoolroom icon and its inscriptions dignify childhood as a vessel of purity and piety and divine favor, and exalt *mores* and *literae* as the images of Christ himself. At the same time the epigram's final diminutive, *literulas*, cuts the *pueri* and their little writings down to size, significant only insofar as they are *pias*. Throughout the *Carmina*, Erasmus dwells on *puritas literarum*, and warns especially against the pollution of

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<sup>97</sup> Harry Vredeveld, note to Carmen 44 in Desiderius Erasmus, *Poems*, trans. Clarence H. Miller, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vols. 85-86 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 501-2. Vredeveld adds, "Erasmus was a great believer in the educational value of such inscriptions."

<sup>98</sup> "Learn me first of all, boys, and make an image of me by your conduct. Then add to that the rudiments of holy reading and writing." Erasmus, *Poems* 90-91.



*illiteratae literae.*<sup>99</sup> As James Henry Rieger observes, “Again and again Erasmus makes his point in the *Carmina* that the study of language undefiled is inseparable from faith in Christ and the attempt to serve Him with pure morals.”<sup>100</sup> That service began, in St. Paul’s schoolroom, by listening to pure Latin, like the gift of tongues, inspired not by the Holy Spirit, but by the third person in Colet’s own Trinitarian arrangement of Father, Son, and Grammar Master.

Colet’s statutes govern two other ritual observances that involve rhetorical and dramatic performances. On the one hand, Colet specifically forbids (along with cockfighting) “disputing at sent Bartilmews which is but foolish babeling and losse of tyme” (278). This ban was a break from the holiday tradition that Stow describes (see below, in Chapter II) and takes a swipe both at the Scholastic penchant for grammatical hair-splitting and at the ungoverned rhetorical flights of boys. In the same passage, however, Colet orders the observance of the Boy Bishop customs: “All these Chyldren shall euery Chyldermasse day come to paulis Church and here the Chylde Bisshoppis sermon and after be at the hye masse and eche of them offer a j<sup>d</sup> to the Childe bisshopp and with theme the Maisters and surveyors of the scole” (278). This old holiday tradition, first documented at York in the early thirteenth century, deployed the festive energies of

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<sup>99</sup> See “*Carmen Iambicum*,” in Erasmus, *Poems* 88-89.

<sup>100</sup> James Henry Rieger, “Erasmus, Colet, and the Schoolboy Jesus,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 9 (1962): 191. Rieger maintains that the poems for St. Paul’s “are patently the work of a man who does not understand children” (188) but that by “bringing learning back into society (which is not necessarily the same thing as secularizing it) Erasmus and Colet were proclaiming their faith in the ability of the individual Christian man to enlarge his soul and to define more justly his relationship to that neighbor whom God had commanded him to love. The image of the holy and wise Child was a fitting emblem of that faith” (193).

the Christmas season to exalt ambition both spiritual and secular. At the season when the church celebrated the advent of a poor boy born to be king of kings, a local boy was elected to enact the role of the bishop. E. K. Chambers supposed that the custom was justified by its proponents on the grounds “that it gave a spirit to the children; and that the hopes that they might at one time or other attain to the real mitre, made them mind their books.” If Chambers is right, the purpose of the Boy Bishop observances was not only a carnivalesque role-reversal, but also an outright encouragement of ambition through clerkly attainments.<sup>101</sup>

From the Boy Bishop ceremonies sprang the tradition of dramatic performance that grew so famously at St. Paul’s. Michael Shapiro notes that William Lily, Colet’s first headmaster, “had studied in Italy under Pomponio Leto (the first modern producer of Roman plays) and therefore probably accepted the pedagogical value of dramatic performance.”<sup>102</sup> In the following decade the tradition grew under the school’s second master (and Lily’s son-in-law), John Rightwise, who sent boys from St. Paul’s to court to perform plays in Latin.<sup>103</sup> Soon after, John Redford, Master of the Choir School, produced *Wit and Science*, which I will examine briefly at the end of Chapter Three. By the end of the century, the Children of Paul’s had become one of the most important

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<sup>101</sup> E. K. Chambers (*Mediaeval Stage* I.356) notes that Richard Pynson printed a “*Sermo pro episcopo puerorum*” by one J. Alcock and that Wynkyn de Worde published a sermon of the same title, both at some time before 1500. See “Richard Pynson” 5 and “Wynkyn de Worde” 4 in Duff, *Hand-Lists*.

<sup>102</sup> Shapiro 4. For a description of Leto’s experiments with Roman staging, in collaboration with the grammarian Sulpizio Verulano, see Grafton and Jardine 89-91. Vincent Flynn notes that Lily studied with both Leto and Sulpizio. See the introduction to his edition of William Lily, *A Shorte Introduction to Grammar* (1567; New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1945) iii.

<sup>103</sup> See Motter 127-130.

professional playing troupes in London, earning a notoriety the prim Dean Colet cannot have foreseen when he prescribed the rites of the Boy Bishop, or set the motto “*Audite ipsum*” above the child Jesus. Yet even from the time of Colet’s original conception, St. Paul’s was surely a prime site for the elevation of the schoolboy to the stage, not just as an actor, but also as a central character in the urban culture’s depiction of itself.

Who were the boys of St. Paul’s in the first decades of the school’s existence? The statutes stipulate: “There shalbe taught in the scole Children of all nacions and countres indifferently to the Nounber of a cliij acordyng to the number of the Setys in the scole” (277).<sup>104</sup> Some have explained the number 153 as coming from the miraculous draught of “great fishes” in John 21:11.<sup>105</sup> The statutes specify that the students are “to be taught fre” (272) except that each boy “at the ffirst admission onys for ever shall pay iiij<sup>d</sup> for the writynge of his name. This mony of the admissions shall the pore Scoler haue that swepith the scole, and kepith the scole clene” (277).<sup>106</sup> The fact that “the pore scoler” appears persistently in the singular, and that the statutes do not reserve other places for *pauperes scolares* as at Winchester and Eton, suggests that the clientele at St. Paul’s must usually have been sons of citizens who could afford to spare their sons’ labor and to keep them in school for years. While Simon insists that, unlike other guild and chantry

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<sup>104</sup> The sheer scale of the project is surprising when compared with the seventy scholars of Winchester and the twenty-five of Eton, even when those numbers were augmented by paying commensals.

<sup>105</sup> See Lupton 165.

<sup>106</sup> This same “pore Childe of the Scole” was also charged with cleaning the latrine, and awarded “the avayle of the vryn” (279) from which he might make a small profit, presumably by selling it to fullers for the finishing of cloth.

schools, St. Paul's was not organized "to provide especially for gentlemen's sons, nor to meet the practical needs of merchants,"<sup>107</sup> one assumes that in some measure it did both.

The earliest entries in the so-called Registers of St. Paul's are in fact largely speculative and far from exhaustive. Their compiler assembled lists of probable Paulines, and concentrated on claiming luminaries.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, his lists provide some information about the school's clientele in the period 1509 to 1748, from which we can make reasonable guesses about the students for the school's earliest years. Of the 1340 boys identified with the school over its first 239 years, McDonnell counts about 140 sons of noblemen or members of the gentry, one hundred sons of clergymen, twenty-four sons of "medical men," seventy sons of Mercers, fifty-three who were registered at Oxford as *plebeiorum filii*, and twenty-nine who were sons of university dons or schoolmasters. Over the same period, he finds among the boys' fathers occupations ranging from "an Admiral, an attorney, a Director of the Bank of England, a Collector of Customs, a consul in the Honourable East India Company's service, a Garter King of Arms and a York Herald," to "a soap-boiler, a stationer, eight tailors, a tobacconist, and two wine-merchants."<sup>109</sup> McDonnell reports that of the 1340 boys about seven hundred seventy went to Cambridge and about three hundred to Oxford, though he acknowledges that this

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<sup>107</sup> Simon 73.

<sup>108</sup> See Michael McDonnell, *The Registers of St. Paul's School: 1509-1748* (London: St. Paul's School, 1977). McDonnell's *Registers* for the years 1509 to 1748 in fact reconstruct the student body of the school from external documents before official registers began to be kept in the latter year. He bases his presumptions on such things as a "father's membership in the Mercers' Company, a family friendship with the High Master, the fact of the father or one or more brothers, or possibly even of a son, having been educated at the school, a home in close proximity to the School, benefactions made to the School, or other evidence of varying kinds" (xii).

<sup>109</sup> McDonnell xxiii-xxiv.

remarkable number found to have continued to university is skewed by the fact that the colleges at universities often kept registers, while other destinations did not.<sup>110</sup>

What do the registers tell us about the social impact of St. Paul's? How different was the social mix of students at Colet's St. Paul's from the students Thomas More knew at St. Anthony's School, or the ones Henry Medwall studied with at Eton? If the school took in twenty new boys each year (a conservative proportion of the 153 in the school's seven forms) over 239 years, then McDonnell has identified fewer than one in three of them. If we assume that the anonymous ones were more likely than not to have gone on to play roles that did not get their names onto registers, rolls, and legal records, we may suppose that many ended up in what McDonnell calls the "more humble walks of life." Based on an examination of the Eton Register in Medwall's time (in Chapter Two) I guess that the social mix in each school was fairly similar, made up mostly of boys from the middling ranks, book-ended between the ambitious poor and the younger sons of the gentry. St. Paul's seems to have lacked Eton's obvious social division between scholars and commensals, and I suspect the Paulines on the whole were from more prosperous families. But the same might have been true at other London schools, like St. Anthony's, where More studied, if Colet had never founded his school.

One obvious difference Colet made was the monumental prominence and wealth of his school, rising impressively at the epicenter of the capital in the churchyard of its cathedral. Erasmus says of the school that it "far exceeds the rest in beauty and splendour," and praises Colet for bearing alone the expenses, "which were clearly vast

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<sup>110</sup> McDonnell xxiv.

enough to appall an oriental potentate.”<sup>111</sup> The very existence of such a magnificent school for citizens’ sons must have conferred prestige and caused considerable excitement. The other great difference was in the curriculum organized for the school by Colet and Erasmus. They took the New Learning, heretofore the preserve of aristocrats like Tiptoft or scholars like the Magdalen grammarians, and planted it in the middle of the city, grafted onto the anti-clerical piety that the founders shared with many of the leading citizens of London.

Those engrafted elements grow together snugly in the books written for the school, beginning with the Latin accidence that Colet himself composed and prescribed in his statutes, along with the “*Institutum Christiani homines* [sic] which that lernyd Erasmus made at my request and the boke called *Copia* of the same Erasmus” (279). Colet’s accidence, printed under the title *Aeditio*, begins with the school’s rules of admission and attendance, followed by the twelve articles of the Apostle’s Creed, brief explanations of the seven sacraments, and a list of “Precepts for Living.”<sup>112</sup> The precepts prescribe the love of God, the “loue of thyne owne selfe,” and the love of one’s neighbor, pointedly including in the last category the “master that techeth me” and “My felowes that lerne with me” (288). Colet commissioned Erasmus to turn these devotions into Latin verses, the *Christiani hominis institutum*, printed as early as 1513, and

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<sup>111</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, dedicatory letter to John Colet in *De Copia*, trans. Betty Knott, ed. Craig R. Thompson, *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 24 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978) 284.

<sup>112</sup> Lupton reprints the devotional front matter from the accidence as Appendix B in his life of Colet. I cite in parentheses. I have also consulted a reprint of the earliest surviving printed edition: John Colet, *Aeditio* (1527, ESTC 5542; Menston, England: Scholar Press, 1971).

mentioned in Colet's statutes. Colet ends his "lytel proheme" to the *Aeditio* with the following injunction:

Wherefore I praye you, al lytel babys, al lytel children, lerne gladly this lytel treatyse, and commende it dylygently vnto your memoryes. Trustynge of this begynnynge that ye shal proced and growe to parfyt literature, and come at the last to be gret clarkes. And lyfte vp your lytel whyte handes for me, whiche prayeth for you to god. To whom be al hounour and imperial maieste and glory. Amen. (291)

Here is our clearest evidence that Colet intended that his boys should become "gret clarkes," though it is hard to say exactly whether he meant them to occupy "great rowmes in the city," great clerical offices like his own, or just that they should become fine scholars. The terms may have been as ambiguous then as now. The emphatic contrast of future greatness with present littleness urges growth on the one hand, but on the other idealizes childhood as a seed-time of particular potency, invoked by the founder in his personal request for the boys' prayers, and consonant with the icon of the child Jesus.

From this proem Colet proceeds directly to explaining the eight parts of speech, which, coming so hard upon the twelve articles of faith and seven sacraments, may be felt to take on a certain religious force. Indeed, the effect of the entire accidence is to conflate the performance of Christian duty with the learning of Latin grammar. Colet's choice of paradigms for the declensions of nouns calls attention first to the authority of classical verse and of the school itself (I. *Musa*, II. *Magister*), and then to more boyish objects of interest, including the longed-for mid-day recess (III. *Lapis*, IV. *Manus*, V. *Meridies*).

The verb paradigms begin with *amo*, useful for purposes worldly and spiritual, but proceed to the more school-centered *doceo*, *lego*, and *audio*.

After treating the other parts of speech and the principal irregular verbs, Colet concludes his little *accidence* with an interjection addressed to “welbeloued maysters & techers of grammer,” indicating that Colet self-consciously aimed to change schools beyond St. Paul’s. He ends with a plea for the improvement of Latin teaching along humanist lines, arguing that the “redyng of good bokes, diligent informacyon of taught maysters, studious aduertence & takynge hede of lerners, heryng eloquent men speke, and fynally easy imitacyon with tongue and penne, more auayleth shortly to gete the true eloquent speche than al the tradicions, rules, and preceptes of the maysters” (292). Thus the founder comes down squarely on the side of those who followed Erasmus in teaching practice over precept, a hotly debated issue in the grammarian wars that soon ensued.

At least two other grammars were composed for St. Paul’s, one by Colet’s friend Thomas Linacre, and another commonly attributed to the first high master of the school, William Lily, who would be a chief combatant in that *bellum grammaticale*. Colet rejected Linacre’s grammar as too difficult for beginners, though John Rastell soon printed it for sale, perhaps as a consolation to the offended author, with prefatory poems by More and Lily. These may have softened the blow for Linacre, but there was no second edition. Instead, Colet and Lily, with help from Erasmus, produced a little grammar in 1513, printed by the royal printer, Richard Pynson. An expanded grammar attributed to Lily (though also to Colet), *Rudimenta Grammatices*, appeared in 1527 and went into more than fifty editions in the sixteenth century, selling as many as ten



thousand copies annually.<sup>113</sup> Lily's *Rudimenta* and Colet's *Aeditio* formed the basis for the four-part "Royal Grammar" mandated by the crown in 1542 and produced with collaborators, including Lily's son-in-law Rightwise, his successor in the *cathedra* at St. Paul's School.<sup>114</sup>

Lily had been a pupil in the 1480s at Magdalen College Grammar School, presumably under Anwykyll.<sup>115</sup> He had traveled to the Holy Land and studied Greek and Latin literature in Italy, and he collaborated with More on translations from the Greek. He was, in other words, a "gret clarke" in learning and acquaintance, if not in office-holding. Erasmus tells us that next to the new school Colet built "a splendid house, in which two schoolmasters were to live, for whom he established ample salaries" (236). This was perhaps the most conspicuous attempt to date to dignify the place of the schoolmaster in England.

Printings of "Lily's grammar" sometimes included his *Carmen de Moribus*, an ingenious series of verses composed for his pupils at St. Paul's to illustrate grammatical constructions while teaching manners. Lily's verses go beyond the moral precepts of Colet's *accidence* in prescribing habits of personal hygiene and deportment: "Yet first thy hands and Visage wash thou faire, / Let all thy Clothes be neat, and combe thy haire."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> O'Day 81.

<sup>114</sup> For a brief account of the authorship questions, see the introductory note in Colet *Aeditio*.

<sup>115</sup> Lily's second surmaster or assistant, Maurice Birchinshaw, had also been at Magdalen, where he taught in the grammar school after taking degrees in grammar and civil law. See McDonnell 3.

<sup>116</sup> "Attamen in primis facies sit lota manusque: / Sint nitidae vestes, comptaque caesaries." William Lily, "*Guilielmi Lili ad suos discipulos monita paedagogica, sev*

In this Lily followed the pattern of the medieval verses like the *Stans Puer ad Mensam*, which laid down precepts for boys who served at table in a lordly household: “Pyke nat thy nose,” “By-fore thy souerayne cracche [scratch] nor rubbe nought,” “Pare clene thy nailes, thyn handes wasshe also / To-for mete, and whan thow dooest arise.”<sup>117</sup> But where the verses of the *Stans Puer* equip a boy with gentle manners for service at the lord’s table, the *Carmen de Moribus* focuses on making a perfect humanist schoolboy: one who is not merely on time for school, prompt in his answers, and neat in his notebook, but who shuns “barbarous words as rockie wayes,” and learns his “Romane eloquence” from Virgil, Terence, and Cicero. Two other instructions mark Lily’s *Carmen* as a document of humanist self-advancement. First, he urges his students to ask questions, and to express doubt: “Who doubts and often askes, my charge retaineth / But he that nothing doubts, no profit gaineth.”<sup>118</sup> Second, he counsels his boys to respect not birthright [*sanguine*], but actions: “And those there are that boasting of their stocks, / Disparage Others with unsavourie mocks: / Such evill patterns doe not thou regard, / Lest that thy deeds at length have just reward.”<sup>119</sup> Thus the *Carmen* seems to echo the injunctions of Erasmus both on literature and on behavior.

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*Carmen de Moribus*,” in Flynn [n.p.], lines 5-6. The translation is from William Lily, *The Fairest Fairing for A Schoole-Bred Sonne*, trans. John Penkethman (London: s.n., 1630; ESTC 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 19598.6) 1. Hereafter I cite the Latin line numbers only.

<sup>117</sup> “*Stans Puer ad Mensam*, ascribed to John Lidgate,” Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *Manners and Meals in Olden Time* (1868; New York: Greenwood Publishers, 1969) 26.

<sup>118</sup> “*Qui dubitat, qui saepe rogat, mea dicta tenebit: / Is qui nil dubitat, nil capit inde boni*” (23-24).

<sup>119</sup> “*Et alius, qui se dum clarum sanguine iactat, / Insulso, reliquis improbat, ore genus. / Te tam prava sequi nolim vestigial morum, / Ne tandem factis, praemia digna feras*” (69-72).

Erasmus himself composed four works for St. Paul's: a pedagogy manual, a rhetoric textbook, a sermon for the Boy Bishop, and a set of dialogues. Taken together, they show the development of the great Erasmian synthesis of Christian piety and classical splendor, high seriousness and playful irony. *De Ratione Studii* grew from his correspondence with Colet around 1511 as an outline of curriculum and pedagogy, emphasizing classical authors and instruction that appeals to the playful and curious nature of children. I have frequent reference to this seminal work throughout this study. Here I will examine selections from the other three texts, demonstrating how the secular riches of the rhetoric text and the pious vigor of the sermon grow together in the *Colloquies* as a dramatic expression of a new faith in a godly life in the City of Man.

*De Copia de Verborum Rerumque*, mentioned in Colet's statutes, was hastily composed in 1512 and revised repeatedly over the next two decades, becoming a standard handbook of rhetoric in schools all over Europe. In effect, it provides a treasury on which a grammar school boy may draw to compose Latin oratory distinguished by a wealth of rhetorical devices. *De Copia* presents in Book I instruction on the uses and abuses of the abundant style, and a catalogue of elegant variations on frequently used expressions, primarily drawn from classical sources. The very concept of *copia* can be seen as an expression of the wealth and sumptuary display of Erasmus's burgher clients, and the worldly examples in this very worldly book are sometimes strikingly at odds with Erasmus's ethical teaching in other works. The variations he offers on "Nobility and its opposite," for example, feature phrases for "a man of ancient family," "by no means a

parvenu,” and “the descendant of an illustrious line.”<sup>120</sup> There are no phrases for “noble by virtue of his learning.”

In Book Two, Erasmus explains a method of amplification in terms that seem calculated to appeal to a merchant: “the first method of enriching what one has to say on any subject is to take something that can be expressed in brief and general terms, and expand it and separate it into its constituent parts. This is just like displaying some object for sale first of all through a grill or inside a wrapping, and then unwrapping it and opening it out and displaying it fully to the gaze.” The example that follows depicts wealth and the accumulation of property as normative states:

Here is an example of the method. Let us take the sentence: *He wasted all his substance in riotous living*. This is expressed in summary fashion, and is, so to speak, wrapped up. We can open it out by enumerating all different types of possessions and setting out the various ways of wasting them: All he had inherited from mother or father or acquired by the death of other relatives, all that was added by his wife’s dowry (and that was nothing in the ordinary run of things) all the increase that accrued from various legacies (and that increase was very considerable) all he received by the prince’s generosity, all that he raked in during his military service, all his money, plate, clothes, estates and land, together with farm buildings and stock, in short everything, chattels and real estate, even his very household, he threw away on degrading affairs with low women, revelry every day, extravagant parties, nights spent wining and dining, luxurious foods,

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<sup>120</sup> “*Vir antiquae nobilitatis*,” “*homo minime novus*,” and “*ex illustri stirpe progenitus*.” See Erasmus, *De Copia* 542.

perfumes, dicing and gambling, and all in a few days so squandered, gobbled up, and sucked it out that he did not leave himself two half-pennies to rub together.<sup>121</sup> This account of prodigality (notably like the plot of a parable or a morality play) would serve as admonition the sons of the goldsmith and the gentleman, who had such substance to waste. But surely it must have worked as a spur to ambition to the sons of the baker, the barber, and the soap-boiler in McDonnell's list.

Erasmus's second example exalts more purely intellectual riches, and affords a splendid look at what Europe's leading arbiter of learning accounted a learned man. He shows his reader how to amplify the statement, "*He completed a thoroughly comprehensive education,*" expanding it to include all categories of learning. He moves from grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic to physical science, geography, history to "the heights of ultramundane knowledge," or theology, and then doubles back to include geography and history. He concludes, "in short, whatever learning has been discovered and handed on by distinguished authors, this one man has completely assimilated and understood and holds fast in his memory."<sup>122</sup> Erasmus's catalogue of subjects accords with his recommendation for an expanded curriculum in *De Ratione*, where he says, "Geography too, which is useful in history, not to mention poetry, must also be mastered."<sup>123</sup> We have scant evidence that the schools that adopted his recommendations

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<sup>121</sup> Erasmus, *De Copia* 572.

<sup>122</sup> Erasmus, *De Copia* 573.

<sup>123</sup> Erasmus, *De ratione*, trans. McGregor 673. Erasmus sees geography primarily as an adjunct to literary study and facility in speaking colloquial Latin, but his explanation in *De Ratione* (673-74), as in *De Copia*, hints at its having some intrinsic interest as well.

ventured beyond the literary core, to judge from the surviving school timetables of the period. In practice, a Tudor grammar school education was a literary one.

The second book of *De Copia* also taught a method of collecting literary gems in a commonplace book, which might be quarried for inspiration and examples in the future.<sup>124</sup> The first book of *De Copia* is in a way just such a collection, the literary equivalent of the rich merchant's cabinet of curiosities. There is, however, a peculiar omission from *De Copia*: the words of Jesus are mentioned not at all, and he is invoked as a moral example only rarely.<sup>125</sup> Betty Knott's index to sources includes no entries for "Jesus," and he appears as a topic only five times, once under "Interests" [*Studii*], wedged in between multiple references to business, law, and literature.<sup>126</sup> By contrast, Cicero is cited as a source several hundred times, Vergil, Quintilian, and Terence over a hundred times each, Horace, Livy, Plautus, and Sallust dozens each, and Catullus a dozen times. By contrast, Augustine, Boethius, and Jerome are cited only a few times each. Though the oratory of Jesus is arguably not a likely model for the abundant style in Latin, this omission from *De Copia* seems odd, as Erasmus dedicates his book to making "a small literary contribution" to Colet's project of providing "Christian principles together with an excellent literary education from their earliest years."<sup>127</sup> Yet Erasmus plainly decided to make a radical separation between his handbook in rhetoric and the Christian teaching of his *Institutum*.

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<sup>124</sup> See Erasmus, *De Copia* 635-48.

<sup>125</sup> Erasmus, *De Copia* 743.

<sup>126</sup> Erasmus, *De Copia* 525, *Opus Omnia* 174.

<sup>127</sup> Erasmus, Dedicatory letter, *De Copia* 284-5.

*De Copia* was assigned to advanced students; the Eton timetables of 1530 prescribe its use in the sixth and seventh forms, after students have mastered theme-writing and versifying in the fifth. The first form concentrated on the accidence and on lessons on manners (“*Quos decet in Mensa*”) and the second form on Cato, presumably the *Distichs* (of which Erasmus had prepared an edition in 1514, with his *Institutum* in the preface and a running commentary).<sup>128</sup> Did the image of the child Jesus fade as pupils moved to higher forms, and did the curriculum become increasingly secular and classical? Was the principle of *copia*, a wealth of both manner and matter in the Latin language, irreconcilable with the language and example of Jesus? We search in vain for a neat resolution to this apparent split between the Christian context and the pagan text in Erasmus’s curriculum.

Instead, Christ and Cicero coexist without unseemly mixing of their messages, even in the same volume. The first printed edition of *De Copia* contained other works written for Colet’s school, including one that aims to bring the image of the child Christ to life in a pulpit.<sup>129</sup> The *Concio de Puero Jesu* is a sermon written, as its subtitle tells, “To be spoken by a boy in the school recently founded by Colet in London.” The sermon begins:

I, a child among children, shall now speak to you of the child Jesus, who cannot be expressed in words; so I should not wish to possess the eloquence of a Cicero, to delight the ears with a short-lived, meaningless pleasure. For Christian

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<sup>128</sup> Leach, *Educational Charters* 541.

<sup>129</sup> For a description of Josse Bade’s 1512 edition of *De Copia, De Ratione Studii*, the *Concio*, and the poems for St. Paul’s, see the introduction to the *Concio de Puero Jesu*, trans. Emily Kearns, ed. Elaine Fantham and Erika Rummel, Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 29 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 52.

eloquence should be as far removed from the eloquence of the world as is the wisdom of Christ from the wisdom of the world, and such a distance is immeasurable.<sup>130</sup>

Thus Erasmus tells Colet's pupils, through the mouth of one of their fellows, that the classical rhetoric studied by the top forms from *De Copia* was not to be confused with divinely inspired eloquence. Emily Kearns observes that Erasmus's sermon follows closely the form of a medieval sermon, and employs "elaborate word play and paradoxes."<sup>131</sup> The boy preacher invokes help from the God whose "fruitful spirit makes eloquent the tongues of infants," and he asks Christ "that he may not be displeased to pass through the medium of my voice as through a channel" into the souls of his listeners" (56). The sermon copiously proclaims the special grace that God shows to children, with examples from scripture: "He became a wailing infant" to reveal himself to us (58); Christ bid his disciples allow the little children to come to him (61-62); "he compels even old men to become children again if they wish to be admitted to that society outside which there is no salvation" (62). "The child, then, and childhood, in which Jesus took such pleasure, are great sacraments" (62).

Erasmus does not, however, idealize childhood indiscriminately. He wants wise, paradoxically "old" children: "It is then a new kind of childhood which Christ approves; a childhood that is not puerile, a sort of aged childhood," that craves, as Peter preached, "the milk of reason" (62). The prime example of this wise child, of course, is Christ among the doctors in the temple. Erasmus has his boy preacher meditate at length on this

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<sup>130</sup> Erasmus, *Concio* 56.

<sup>131</sup> Kearns, introduction to *Concio* 53.



episode, explaining that Jesus slipped away from his earthly parents to reveal the special wisdom given him by his heavenly father. Then the boy Jesus submits himself anew to Mary and Joseph to teach boys meekness, though Erasmus qualifies this interpretation: “The duty and respect that we owe our parents requires that we should sometimes give way to their will, even if we ourselves know better” (66). Soon the wise child, unspoiled by the passing of years, will rise like Jesus above the bonds of this world. When the boy preacher addressed his school-fellows as if they had already achieved this mature *contemptus mundi*, the boys of the sixth form may have noted the contrast with *De Copia*:

You have scorned wealth for the love of Christ; in him you will find true riches. You have rejected false honours; in him you will gain far greater glory. You have spurned the love of your parents; all the more lovingly will you be cherished by your true Father, who is in heaven. You have regarded earthly wisdom as nothing; your wisdom in Christ will be far more true and more happy. (68)

The image of the aged child, meekly accepting the world’s authority, knowing better than his parents, and growing patiently away from them toward heaven, expresses the paradoxical—some would say incoherent—nature of Colet’s project, serving the purposes of both the Heavenly Father and the city fathers.

Neither Cicero nor Christ can be counted on to appeal to all boys all the time. The idea of slipping away from one’s parents and confounding one’s teacher with questions and answers may have attracted the attention of some restive youth, but Erasmus adds to the *Concio* a second commanding image, apparently as a pathetic appeal to the would-be soldiers in the congregation. The boy preacher addresses his fellows as “comrades-in-arms” under “our teacher and commander Jesus” (56). He refers to this

image at regular intervals throughout the sermon—"my fellow soldiers" (61) "Up, then, brave comrades!" (70)—but he does not develop the metaphor in any depth; there is no marching into battle under the cross, or smiting the foe hip and thigh. Instead, the boys are to internalize their commander in their schoolwork, as the peroration urges:

Let us admire only Jesus our commander, than whom nothing can be greater—or rather, without whom nothing is great at all.... May our studies and even our play bear his imprint; may we grow through him and in him, until we attain perfect manhood, and when we have bravely completed our service, may we enjoy with him the everlasting triumph in heaven. My speech is at an end. (70)

Erasmus's half-developed concession to the martial spirit in his young audience helps situate St. Paul's in the cultural universe of early Tudor London. The hopes of the pacifist Erasmus for a golden age, ushered in by the young humanist Henry VIII, were disappointed by preparations for a French war just at the time *De Copia* was published in the same volume with the *Concio* and the pious school verses. Erasmus, ever the master of having it both ways, thus unwraps classical eloquence like fine goods for discerning mercenaries, while on the next page unfolding a pious contempt for the world. The two texts also presented distinctly different performance opportunities: from *De Copia*, a boy learned to play the role of a great clerk like Erasmus himself, gleaning classical treasures to incorporate in his own writing; from the *Concio* (taken as a sermon to be delivered and heard rather than as a text to be read or studied), many boys learned to play the parts of dutiful members of a congregation, attending to the eloquence of the one boy who learned to act the role of the bishop.

Significantly, Erasmus's *De Ratione Studii*, which details the classical curriculum, demands highly educated teachers, and counsels kindness and play in teaching, was printed in the same volume with these two works. The dual purposes of Christian humanism were thus bound together, but not yet fully integrated. That integration was to come in the *Colloquies*, the school book that escaped the boundaries of school to become an international best-seller. Erasmus himself, the quintessential "gret clarke," bridled at the institutional limits of clerkly ambition, slipping away repeatedly from the confinements of tutoring, university appointments, even imperial and royal sinecures. So too humanism, like the Christian message, was ultimately bigger than the institutions that propagated it.

Quintilian, the prime authority on pedagogy for humanist educators, recommends beginning the study of literature with Homer and Vergil, that the student's mind might be "lifted by the sublimity of heroic verse, inspired by the greatness of its theme and imbued with the loftiest sentiments."<sup>132</sup> Erasmus departs from the master in prescribing the tone of the curriculum; instead of sublime sentiment, Erasmus calls for "Gaiety and Charm [*iucunda et amoena*]-these are the qualities that belong to youth. In fact, dullness and harshness ought to be entirely banished from all study."<sup>133</sup> To this end, the curriculum recommended by Erasmus and his followers moved quickly from elementary grammar to the classical authors most likely to capture the interest of little boys, turning first to Aesop and the dialogues of Lucian.

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<sup>132</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* I-III, trans. H.E. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard, 1996) 149.

<sup>133</sup> Erasmus, *De Pueris* ed. Sowards 298.

## Colloquies

These classical texts were soon supplemented with the schoolroom dialogues, or colloquies, of Erasmus, Vives, and others. Schoolroom dialogues were, like the *vulgaria*, part of a long tradition, going back in England at least to the colloquies of Ælfric, schoolmaster and Bishop of Eynhsham at the beginning of the eleventh century.<sup>134</sup> The colloquies of the great humanist schoolmasters took the light-hearted colloquialism of the *vulgaria* to a new level. Though we cannot be sure how the dialogues were deployed in the classroom, they are distinctly dramatic, inviting the schoolboys who spoke or translated them to try on a remarkable range of *personae*, often engaged in ethical and social conflicts with each other. Erasmus's *Colloquies* in particular are little masterpieces of genial wit and irony, treating subjects ranging from schoolyard games to the conduct of a pious and cultured life, fusing classical and Christian ideals and salting the mix with wry observations on clerical abuse and other familiar forms of human folly.

Soon after the appearance of the first books for St. Paul's, Erasmus printed the first edition of his *Familiarum Colloquiorum Formulae*, which would occupy him at intervals for the rest of his life and take his fame further than any of his works, except perhaps the *Moriae Encomium*. The story of the production of the *Colloquies* follows, more or less, the trajectory of humanism in this period, a centripetal spiral from school outward into the city and the world. The *Colloquies* began as a school text, Erasmus's

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<sup>134</sup> Ælfric, ca. 1005, wrote dialogues in Latin and English and obliged his students to answer questions in the *personae* of various vocations. See the introduction by W. M. Lindsay, in W. H. Stevenson, ed., *Early Scholastic Colloquies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929) v-x. See also *Ælfric's Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway.

“Formulae” of 1499, but became a popular work of fiction.<sup>135</sup> The “Formulae” initially provided, like the *vulgaria* and like *De Copia*, topical phrases for schoolboy conversation. The *Colloquies* ended up as extended reflections, in the form of quasi-dramatic dialogues, on wide-ranging topics including religious and moral ideas and practices, social and cultural issues, and the whole scope of the New Learning. They are infused with outspoken Christian piety, but also with Ciceronian eloquence and Terentian wit and irony. Several of the colloquies have direct references to More and Colet, and one in particular presents a striking new figure of the schoolboy as a self-fashioner, the protagonist in his own self-willed redemption narrative. Most of the dialogues present the schoolboy with opportunities to learn and perform roles that figure on the one hand a questioner who is by turns skeptical, resistant, or receptive, and on the other a person of conviction, sharing his or her perspectives on a good life with the questioner.

Erasmus’s earliest *Colloquies*, published between 1518 and 1523 in dozens of editions, reach beyond school topics to include dialogues on courtship and marriage, war and soldiering, the snares of religious vows and relations with prostitutes. Three of the early dialogues present idealized visions of *convivia*, feasts at which highly cultivated men converse about religion, literature, and the good life in ways that offer adult models of good humor, simple piety, literary eloquence, scorn for hypocrisy, and a diligent application to learning. In one of these dialogues, the *Convivium Religiosum*, as Wayne Rebhorn has observed, Erasmus has “imagined an ideal environment perfectly suited to

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<sup>135</sup> For an outline history of the *Colloquies* from their inception in the late 1490s, while Erasmus was teaching in Paris, to their pirated first printing in 1518 and first authorized printing in 1519, through many editions and revisions over the ensuing years to the final authorized edition 1533, see Thompson’s introduction to the *Colloquies* xx-xxvii.

the alienated Christian reformer, ...an extension of the schoolroom into the adult world.”<sup>136</sup> This dialogue provides, as it were, a sequel to the *Concio*, in which the genial host shows his guests the distinctly humanist ornaments of his home, answering their questions as they move about the house and garden. These grown-up boys carry on their genial banter in unspoiled innocence, though in surroundings of impressive comfort and refinement.

Several details of the colloquy relate it to the school at St. Paul’s: in the garden of this godly home, in place of the “filthy Priapus” (the usual tutelary deity of gardens) the host has placed a little shrine in which is figured “Jesus Christ, looking up to heaven, whence his Father and the Holy Spirit look out, and he points to heaven with his right hand while with his left he seems to beckon and invite the passer-by” (177). Jesus the teacher also is represented in the host’s library: among painted scenes of Herod, Lazarus, and the Last Supper on the one hand, and Cleopatra, Theseus, and Alexander on the other, “Christ, seated on the mountain with his hand outstretched, has the foremost place. The Father appears above his head, saying ‘Hear ye him’” (205). Note that the Christ figure in both pictures seems to be the adult Jesus, grown to fit the context, though in other details the iconography is that of the presiding figure at St. Paul’s. Likewise, the surrounding classical scenes suggest a school for grown-ups, as the virtuous adults at this *convivium* are held to be capable of profiting from images both sacred and profane without moral compromise.

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<sup>136</sup> Wayne A. Rebhorn, “Erasmian Education and the *Convivium religiosum*,” *Studies in Philology* 69 (1972): 143-44.

This library is also furnished with modest treasures and images of the terrestrial sphere. The host, Eusebius, explains:

Here you see the main part of my wealth. On the table you saw nothing but glass and pewter. There isn't a silver vessel in the entire house except for one gilded cup, which I treasure out of affection for the person who gave it to me. This suspended globe puts the whole world before your eyes. Here on the walls every region is painted in a large scale. On the other walls you see pictures of famous authors. (205)

The chaste and moderate *copia* of this setting celebrates the created world under the image of the word made flesh. The modest splendor of the loving cup is set off by the globe and maps, which may be read as texts to be learned, or signs of a conqueror's ambitions. It is as if Colet's seventh form had passed to yet a higher form, now fully capable of living both with Christ and in the world. "But," Rebhorn notes, "the world of the '*Convivium religiosum*' is an extension of the schoolroom only up to a point. Eusebius and his friends are not children, and there is no master present to guide their responses. None is needed because, in a sense, he has been internalized in each of the figures in Erasmus' colloquy."<sup>137</sup>

Indeed, Erasmus sometimes depicts school as an expedient to be got beyond. Some of the early *Colloquies* figure the schoolmaster as a grim figure, study as drudgery, and school as a cruel place. A dialogue modeling *formulae* for "Inquiry on First Meeting," dating from Erasmus's stay in Paris in the 1490s, reflects on the starvation diet and lice of his school there, the Collège de Montaigu (11). Another presents a

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<sup>137</sup> Rebhorn, "*Convivium*" 147.

conversation between two boys as they take a walk, in which one tries to dissuade the other from too much study: “I approve of lingering over books but not of malingering over them” (20); another colloquy in the same set sounds a similar note: “Studies are not to be neglected, certainly, but they should be interrupted sometimes” (22). A libertine, benefice-seeking cleric, on the other hand, sings the praises of study: “I intend to relieve the tedium of solitude by the conversation of books” (48). It is as if Erasmus, who read and wrote all day, all his life, to his eternal fame, were nonetheless warning us against what Bacon later called the distempers of learning, and urging us to move beyond the confines of schools.

Erasmus represents the schoolmaster as a tyrant in at least two dialogues. In *Herilia* [“The Master’s Bidding”], the pupil is also the master’s servant, and the master corrects his servant-pupil’s manners (scratching his head, stretching, and yawning) while snapping out orders for demeaning tasks, including scouring the chamber pot and cleaning the master’s boots. The pupil shows some spirit, if only in muttering about his hunger and his labors. The lessons in manners continue in *Monitoria paedagogica* [“A Lesson in Manners”], in which a somewhat more compassionate master offers exacting instructions on deportment while speaking, rules reminiscent of those in the *Stans Puer*: “Don’t shift from one foot to the other or gesticulate with your hands or bite your lip or scratch your head or dig out your ears” (71).

This dialogue, however, reaches beyond manners to the feelings of others, if not to morals: “Don’t disparage anybody, or put on airs. Don’t boast about your things, or belittle another’s. Be cordial even towards companions who are poorly off” (71). A sequence of short dialogues, *De lusu*, deals with sport of various kinds, commencing with



a charming little scene in which one boy is sent by his fellows to beg the master for a “remedy,” an afternoon off to play. This crusty master shows he may have been young once: “I know how risky it is to trust you, but I’ll take a chance this time and see how you keep your word. If you deceive me, you’ll never get anything from me again. Let them play, but together in the fields. They must not do any drinking—or worse. They must return home early, before sunset” (76). One must wonder what Erasmus thought of Colet’s statutory interdiction on such “remedies.”<sup>138</sup>

Yet if Erasmus seems sometimes to understand the motivations of real boys, he never leaves off imagining that they will love literature. At the conclusion of *De lusu*, two boys, Gaspar and Erasmus,<sup>139</sup> agree that the prize in a ball game will be that “the loser shall compose extempore and recite a couplet in praise of the winner.” So the loser wrote: “Let all applaud the victor, boys, for what he’s done. / He beat me: so the clever fool has won” (81). The couplet is a prime example of an internalized mastery of two senses of *ludus*, both play and school-work, projected into the student by Erasmus himself. Here and throughout the *Colloquies* he gives voice to the boy who longs for playful release from the drudgery of school routine, but whose intelligence is fired by eloquence.

That tension informs the dialogue called *Confabulatio pia*, which Erasmus sometimes called *Pietas puerilis* [“The Whole Duty of Youth”], the most important of the

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<sup>138</sup> Colet’s statutes command: “I will also they shall haue noo remedies yff the Maister grauntith eny remedies, he shall forfeit xls. *Tociens quociens* Except the kyng or a archebisshopp or a bisshopp presente in his owne persone in the Scole desire it” (Lupton 278).

<sup>139</sup> Erasmus’s godson, Erasmus Froben, the son of the Basel printer Johann Froben, was about seven years old in 1522, when Erasmus dedicated an edition of the *Colloquies* to him. The name appears in several of the dialogues.

*Colloquies* for my argument here, as it models a self-fashioning to fit a boy both for the City of God and a “great room in the City.” Its principal speaker, Gaspar, a deeply devout and virtuous boy of sixteen years, wins the respect of his skeptical interlocutor, Erasmus (or, in some editions, “Erasmus”) by describing his daily routines of prayer, obedience, and study. The rigor and even inventiveness of Gaspar’s devotions are remarkable, if not actually alarming, and, not surprisingly, he mentions that he has been a member the household of John Colet (99), “who steeped my childhood in lessons of this kind.”<sup>140</sup> It is supposed that the character of Gaspar may be based on that of Thomas Lupset, the boy whom Colet called “my scholar.”<sup>141</sup> Gaspar’s strong-minded remarks on confession and premature religious vows offended some critics, and Erasmus defended the colloquy by asking if the dialogue did not “inspire the young mind, by means of godly precepts, with a zeal for righteousness?” (1100). Yet the key word in this defense is “young,” for the paragon Gaspar deploys not just his pious example but his frank, genial bonhomie to seduce, in effect, the wise-cracking Erasmus to his point of view.

Gaspar is no mere prig, typifying instead a broad-shouldered, clear-eyed, muscular Christianity. An unflappable, unassuming campus crusader, he disarms the scoffer with the fresh confidence of his answers, the vigor of his appetite for learning and goodness, and the combination of pragmatic skepticism and humility he shows in his cautious attitude toward ritual observances, fasting, and vows. He is a boy who welcomes relaxation and games with a friend after lunch (93) but who prays to a now-familiar image of Christ:

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<sup>140</sup> Erasmus, *Colloquies* 99.

<sup>141</sup> See Thompson’s introduction to “The Whole Duty of Youth,” in Erasmus, *Colloquies* 88.

I pray that he who as a boy of twelve, sitting in the temple, taught the doctors themselves, and to whom the heavenly father with his own voice gave authority to teach the human race when he said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him,” and who is the eternal wisdom of the almighty Father—I pray that he will be pleased to illuminate my understanding for the learning of good letters, which I may use to his glory. (92-93)

This confession of devotion to the boy Jesus is balanced by a confession of a more intimate and physical nature, concerning the details of how he prepares his body for sleep. Gaspar specifies that, having prayed to be preserved “from the wiles of the devil and from unclean dreams,” he settles down to rest:

I don’t sleep prone or on my back, but resting first on my right side I cross my arms in the form of an X, so that they guard my breast by the sign of the cross—my right hand reaching to my left shoulder and my left hand to the right shoulder.

Thus I sleep gently until I wake up or am called. (94)

The young Erasmus responds, “You’re rather saintly to be able to do that,” and Gaspar replies, “No, you’re rather silly to say so.” When Erasmus says, “I commend your practice and wish I could follow it,” Gaspar assures him that if he resolves to do so, “these practices will be so agreeable they’ll become second nature.” Is Erasmus recommending this posture, a self-embrace with the hands chastely disposed, as a safeguard against temptation to masturbation? If so, the colloquy is a rare example of Renaissance adolescent guy-talk. Erasmus’s leading question—“How do you settle yourself?”—invites schoolboy confidences with a vaguely erotic charge. The candor and

physical detail of Gaspar's response draws the skeptical Erasmus into an intimate exchange about forbidden things, and then wins him over to declare for the side of piety.

Erasmus is at pains to distance Gaspar's piety, however, from conventional, or conventual, forms of religious life. Mockingly challenged to take the cowl, he says he would do so, "if a cowl provided as much piety as warmth" (91). Describing pressures on him to take up the religious life, he reports, "They set to work with wonderful ingenuity both on me and on my parents. But I'm resolved not to commit myself to marriage, the priesthood, monasticism—or any other mode of life I can't free myself from afterwards, until I know my own mind very clearly" (98). In the independence of his thoughts and his care for his own future Gaspar is the model of the Christian self-fashioner, while Erasmus presents the mocking alter-ego of Erasmus himself, skeptical of formulaic pieties but open to the surprising possibilities of genuine godliness in the world.

Gaspar is determined to leave open his options for studying the learned professions as secular routes to a virtuous life: "I've not yet committed myself fully to any; I sample them all, so that I won't be wholly ignorant of any and so that by having tried each, I may choose more confidently the one I'm suited for. Medicine is the surest provision anywhere in the world. Skill in the law opens the door to public office. Theology would please me best, did not the manners of some theologians and their ill-tempered quarrels with one another disgust me" (99). Such pragmatic, not to say calculating, appraisal of the *copia* of professional life must warm the heart of any ambitious parent, and it wins over Gaspar's questioner as well. The dialogue concludes with a boyish version of conversion, cast in terms of a mutual challenge, with a strong dose of male bonding:

E: You won't be jealous if I offer to rival your practice?

G: No, on the contrary you will be dearer to me for this very reason. For you  
know that close friendship and good will are cemented by common habits.

E: True, but not among rivals for the same civil office when both are bitten by the  
same bug!

G: Nor among suitors for the same bride when they are equally desperate with  
love.

E: But joking aside, I'll try to imitate this system of yours.

G: I pray you may meet with every success.

E: Perhaps I'll catch up with you.

G: I pray you overtake me. Meanwhile I won't wait for you but I'll attempt to  
better my own record every day. But try to beat me if you can. (99)

Erasmus gives piety a virile ethos here, placing learning in service to the adult life of a married man in a learned profession. The dialogue epitomizes the peculiar achievement of the *Colloquies*, synthesizing the wry worldliness of Erasmus and the manly purity of Gaspar in a model of eloquence at once playful and grave.

As an example of how this colloquy was used by a teacher, we have the letters from the tutor of young Gregory Cromwell (c.1514-1551) to the boy's father, Thomas Cromwell. The tutor, Henry Dowes, reports on the plan of young Gregory Cromwell's school day: "And firste, after he hath herede Masse he taketh a lecture of a Diologe of Erasmus Colloquium, called Pietas Puerilis, whereinne is described a veray picture of oone that sholde be vertueouselie brought upp; and forcause it is so necessary for hime, I do not onelie cause him to rede it over, but also to practise the preceptes of the same, and

I have also translated it into Englishe, so that he may conferre theime both to-githers, whereof (as lerned men affirme) cometh no smalle profecte.” The boy spent the remainder of his day in an ambitious program that combined traditional aristocratic pastimes with humanist learning, riding (while his master told him “some historie of the Romanes or the Greekes,” hawking, and hunting, and reading history from Fabian’s *Chronicles*.<sup>142</sup> Thus the son of the king’s principal secretary (himself the son of a blacksmith) imbibed Erasmus’s vision of manly virtue along with the skills and recreations of the landed gentleman. We can reasonably guess that “taking a lecture” meant either writing out a segment of the dialogue from dictation, or reading and perhaps copying it, but what kind of performance was involved in practicing “the precepts of the same”? Did young Gregory address his prayers to Christ among the Doctors, or practice lying on his right side with his arms chastely crossed on his breast? In any case, his tutor understood the *Colloquies* not only as a model for rhetorical exercise, but also an attractive script for the performance of virtue.

Perhaps because of their deft mixture of ancient eloquence with timely concerns and good humor, the *Colloquies*, along with *De Copia* (and later the dialogues of Vives and Cordier) were soon placed on a footing with the classical canon in the schoolroom, as Donatus and Mantuan had been earlier. In about 1530, the headmaster of a newly founded grammar school at Saffron Walden in Essex, charged by the school endowment deed with following “the order and use of techyng gramer in the scolys of Wynchester and Eton,” requested that the masters of those venerable colleges send timetables of their

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<sup>142</sup> See Henry Ellis, *Original Letters*, Ser. I., vol.1, 343-44; quoted in Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.), *The Babee’s Book* (1868; New York: Greenwood Press, 1969) xxi.

curriculum. Though each timetable has its own emphasis, both show the marks of humanist influences, assigning Aesop, Terence, Cicero, Horace, Ovid, and Vergil. The choice of grammar books most clearly indicates the influence of Magdalen and St. Paul's: Winchester boys used Stanbridge and the grammar by Lily's teacher Sulpitius, and Eton boys used Lily, Stanbridge, and *De Copia* of Erasmus.<sup>143</sup> It seems likely that the school at Saffron Walden, and others like it, must have followed close behind. A decade later, when the cathedral school at Canterbury was refounded as the King's School, its statutes prescribe the *Colloquies* for the Second Class, *De Copia* for the Sixth.<sup>144</sup> If this is an indication of broader practice, then the *Colloquies* were probably used, as the *vulgaria* were, to engage younger students in speaking Latin to one another, rather than as models for prose composition. English schoolboys would therefore have learned to perform the rhythms of Erasmian dialogue, with its patterns of probing questioning, ironic humor, and modest optimism about a good life in the world, in the decades when these same patterns began to emerge in dramatic dialogue on English stages.

By midcentury, the *Colloquies* and *De Copia* had appeared all over northern Europe.<sup>145</sup> Designed to be studied with Terence, Virgil, and Cicero, the books of St. Paul's carried the double messages of Christian humanist learning: they showed people how to return to an understanding of pure Latin, and by doing so how to build true eloquence in the vernacular; they modeled the use of textual study, history, and etymology to get at the original meanings of scripture, but also the application of such

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<sup>143</sup> See Leach, *Educational Charters* 448-51.

<sup>144</sup> See Leach, *Educational Charters* 466-69.

<sup>145</sup> For the publication history of each book, see Thompson's introduction in Erasmus, *Colloquies* xxiv- xxvii and Knott's introduction in Erasmus, *De Copia* 282-83.

scholarship to leading Christ-like lives in the modern world. Such studies promised unmediated access to the words of Christ, and also to the codes of worldly authority, promises with a powerful appeal and immense ramifications for English religion, society, and culture. For the purposes of this study, their most important effects appeared in the way English dramatists represented learning and eloquence as instruments of social advancement.

In emphasizing the quasi-dramatic *vulgaria* and colloquies, and the iconic practices and texts of St. Paul's School, I have omitted from this chapter discussion of important and closely related school exercises like *imitatio*, or the artful copying of style, and *prosopopoeia*, or impersonation in the first person. Such exercises in imaginative writing are of great importance in making the leap from school composition to writing for the stage, and merit a separate study. In the top forms of the Erasmian grammar school, boys put their painfully acquired Latin to work in the composition of oratory and verse. These compositions relied on a kind of imitation that was itself a form of play, both in the sense of mimetic representation ("I could play Ercles rarely," *Midsummer Night's Dream* 1.2.25) and in the sense of manipulation or use for private ends ("You would play upon me..." *Hamlet* 3.2.344). The ideal in such imitation was not just to memorize and copy faithfully, but also to improve judiciously upon the masters in fresh performances of eloquence. Humanist pedagogy, developing a tradition from Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian, promoted a model of playful imitation that encouraged both literary and social self-invention. Erasmus echoed Horace's scorn for the "servile flock of imitators," and admonished those who try to "equal someone else by merely treading in his footsteps; it



is inevitable, again according to Quintilian, that one who follows must always remain behind.”<sup>146</sup>

As part of this practice of free imitation, Erasmus, again following Quintilian, prescribed the imaginative creation of *personae* as rhetorical exercise.<sup>147</sup> In *De Ratione Studii*, he proposed the composition of persuasive monologues in the voices of characters from ancient literature and history:

For instance: Menelaus should reclaim Helen before the Trojan assembly: or Phoenix should persuade Achilles to return to battle: or Ulysses should urge the Trojans to give back Helen rather than endure the war...; a friend should urge Cicero not to accept the terms offered by Antony, an argument which is found in Seneca.<sup>148</sup>

Such exercise in impersonation demanded an impressive mastery of materials and techniques received from the ancient masters, improved for a new audience. Here we find

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<sup>146</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Conficiendarum Epistolarum Formula*, trans. Charles Fantazzi, ed. J. K. Sowards, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 25 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1985) 261. Ascham, 114ff., treats the theory and practice of imitation at great length, citing several authorities in the controversy on its uses and abuses in schooling, concluding that the “order and doctrine of imitation would bring forth more learning and breed up truer judgment than any other exercise that can be used,” in spite of those who say “it were plain slavery, and injury too, to shackle and tie a good wit and hinder the course of a man’s good nature with such bonds of servitude in following other” 118-119.

<sup>147</sup> In the *Institutio* (III.viii.49) Quintilian writes of the enhancement of ethical appeal in composition by the practice of *προσοποποιεῖα*, or impersonating the voice of one of greater authority: “Consequently I regard impersonation as the most difficult of tasks, imposed as it is in addition to the other work involved by a deliberative theme. For the same speaker has on one occasion to impersonate Caesar, on another Cicero or Cato. But it is a most useful exercise because it demands a double effort and is also of the greatest use to future poets and historians, while for orators of course it is absolutely necessary” 503.

<sup>148</sup> Erasmus, *De Ratione*, ed. Thompson 681-82.

the crux of the humanist play with ancient authority: a rhetorical response, on one hand, to a desire for distinction conferred by mastery, to speaking as Caesar would speak, and on the other for easy pleasure imparted by identification and recognition, imagining that Caesar might feel and think as the pupil feels and thinks. Such a magisterial rhetoric demanded the accumulated arts of memory and correctness of expression, and a copious supply of authoritative matter. But humanist eloquence also demanded the resources of improvisation and audacity. Imitate the great and improvise anew: these were the twin imperatives of many of the texts of Tudor schooling, and consequently the formative impulses of much early Tudor drama.

## Chapter Two

### Henry Medwall: The Education of an Interlude

A: Pece, let be!

Be God, thou wyll distroy all the play!

B: Distroy the play, quod a? nay, nay,

The play began never till now!

Henry Medwall, *Fulgens and Luces* (c.1491)

In *Fulgens and Luces*, Henry Medwall made something new in English drama, a play in which the central conflict and resolution come from a competition for social rank rather than from a struggle toward spiritual redemption. *Worship* in its worldly sense supplanted worship in its ecclesiastical sense on Medwall's stage. His play was new not only in its civic and secular emphasis, but also in its setting in classical Rome, its display of classical rhetoric, and its comic, humanist perspective. The play culminates in a marriage, an optimistic beginning in the world, by contrast to the death and transfiguration toward which much medieval drama moves.

The new elements in *Fulgens and Luces*, with all their implications for social change and self-advancement through meritorious performance, were moving into the main stream of urban culture in England in the 1490s. Humanist ideas had been fostered for several decades in the great houses of noblemen and prelates.<sup>149</sup> In about 1460, one such nobleman, John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester (1427-1470), translated the Italian

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<sup>149</sup> Roberto Weiss dates the beginnings of humanism in England in the 1430s, when Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and regent, first had Italian humanist secretaries in his service. Weiss notes that Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini, "one of the greatest humanists of his time," had been in England from 1418 to 1422, but that he "had no lasting influence." William Grey, later Bishop of Ely, and John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, studied with humanist scholars in Italy in the 1450s. See Weiss's *The Spread of Italian Humanism* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1964) 90-92.

humanist *controversia* that Medwall later used as his source for the debate on true nobility in *Fulgens and Luces*.<sup>150</sup> After 1475, scholarly translation and printing accelerated the dissemination of humanist texts. Caxton printed Tiptoft's translation in 1481, when Medwall was an undergraduate at Cambridge. By the 1480s humanist texts reached the middle ranks of English society in a few grammar schools and colleges, most notably in the grammar school at Magdalen College, Oxford. E. K. Chambers notes that dramatic interludes were first performed at universities in this same decade, and it must be more than coincidence that the earliest he noted "are at Magdalen College, Oxford, where they occur pretty frequently from 1486 onwards."<sup>151</sup> Medwall studied and wrote, therefore, during the first flowering of the humanist movement in England, though such education was the exception rather than the rule. In general, English schooling in the late fifteenth century was still dominated by the church, and the well-to-do often sent their sons "to be trained in service in the households of others."<sup>152</sup> The Magdalen texts and Medwall's play were, then, parts of a humanist *avant-garde*.

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<sup>150</sup> Medwall's immediate source was "A Declamacion of Noblesse," translated around 1460 by Tiptoft from *De Vera Nobilitate* of Buonaccorso da Montemagno (c. 1428), or perhaps from a French translation made in 1449 by Jean Mielot. Caxton printed Tiptoft's translation of this work with a translation of Cicero's *De Senectute* in 1481 (STC 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 5293). For a transcription of Tiptoft's work, see R. J. Mitchell, *John Tiptoft* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1938) Appendix I, 215ff. Hereafter I use parenthetical citations for quotations from this text. I rely on Mitchell for the probable dating of Tiptoft's translation.

<sup>151</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903) 194.

<sup>152</sup> Simon 58. The great households, as Simon describes them, were not only "the focus of government and administration," but also "the centres providing and education for lay pursuits. Drawing men together in the performance of a wide variety of duties, they provided training for many functions in the form of an apprenticeship in service, a form which extended to cover the upbringing of young men of birth" (7).

The choice of an English aristocrat's translation of an Italian humanist text as a basis for his interlude may have been Medwall's own, or his master's. His master, Archbishop John Morton, a leading figure in the new Tudor regime, had every reason to extol meritocratic ideas, but the choice of text may well have had more to do with fashion than with conviction. Indeed, the humanist movement in England may have had more to do with expedience than with principle, as the new Tudor dynasty and its City allies found in the reform of schooling a convenient apparatus to educate a new ruling elite. Whatever the motive and depth of conviction, people around Medwall, many of them clerks or lawyers at various ranks of service to crown or church, were reading and writing new texts that deployed classical learning for social change.

In the new school texts, as in Medwall's play, old notions of hereditary mastery were alloyed, however uneasily, with a rhetoric of merit, promoting a shift within the prevailing hierarchy of service. Of course that hierarchy never disappeared. Throughout the sixteenth century, a man's rank was still told by the rank of his master. Patronage remained the rule for establishing one's social position, and birth continued to provide the readiest way to win patronage at high levels. Nevertheless, opportunities for winning patronage, and particularly for attaining the rank of gentleman, expanded both in scale and in kind. More than ever before, the mastery of clerkly skills—reading, writing, and speaking in Latin and in English—could win a man gentle status through service to masters either ecclesiastical or secular. School and stage gave impetus to this shift by their circulation of a newly compounded rhetoric to a shared clientele, who were in this period largely urban, literate, and upwardly mobile.

An examination of *Fulgens and Luces* and of school texts from the period 1485 to 1512 reveals, however, deep uncertainty about these changes, reflecting the fact that the social order itself retained much that was ancient, traditional, and even reactionary. Medwall expresses this uncertainty in the double action of the interlude, a wooing plot that advances a meritocratic ideal of virtuous action and public service as authentic nobility, and a subplot that uses upstart servants to debunk social role-playing as an expression of ambition through impersonation. The marriage at the end of the play, uniting the wise daughter of an ancient family with a virtuous and eloquent (though plain-spoken) *novus homo*, figures the new social and cultural order emerging in England itself. Yet the servant Medwall has moderated the humanist enthusiasms of Tiptoft's source material, emphasizing the civic and soldierly virtues of the New Man where the earl had emphasized his education in Latin and Greek.<sup>153</sup> It is as if the clerkly Medwall, like the nameless servants in his play, does not want to risk being identified too closely with foreign notions of social subversion.

To be sure, the play presents subversive ideas, both in its model of an ambitious common man ennobled by service to the commonwealth, and in its examples of the humiliations of service to a capricious aristocratic master. Yet the play pays due respect to responsible aristocratic privilege, and holds even menial service to be better than remaining masterless. Although the servants in the interlude, like schoolboys in the

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<sup>153</sup> My reading of Medwall's adaptations of the Tiptoft translation of Buonaccorso accords in most points with David Bevington's, which he summarizes thus: "Whereas Buonaccorso glorifies the humanist himself, Medwall self-effacingly transforms his hero into a politician who befriends humanism but is not primarily an intellectual." See his *Tudor Drama and Politics* 46. In my reading of the play below I make specific reference in footnotes to Medwall's reworking of his source material.

*vulgaria*, voice witty, even moving complaints against their masters, this emancipatory chorus is undercut by characterizations of bumbling servants and lazy scholars, often ironically suspicious of the new learning and social change. Although the self-made man wins the prize, both in the school texts and in the play, his triumph is hedged with reminders that he is a parvenu, profiting from a new social order that at this stage still had rough edges for all concerned. Learning and eloquence in public discourse had opened new routes to mastery, but they had not entirely replaced more traditional routes through martial prowess and hereditary wealth and position. Adept as he is at the arts of persuasion, Medwall's Gayus pointedly identifies himself as a soldier who speaks "short and plain" (I.526).<sup>154</sup> Thus Medwall distances his New Man both from courtly niceties and scholastic subtleties. Instead, Medwall identifies him with a kind of muscular humanism that would appeal to the new Tudor elite who rose by their clerkly educations, but who were eager to be more than mere clerks.

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<sup>154</sup> Gayus is an early exemplar in English drama of a man who disdains gallant speech in wooing, a gambit most familiar in Shakespeare's Henry V, who claims to speak only "plain soldier" (V.ii.153) in courting the French princess. But the tradition of antirhetorical rhetoric harks back at least to Plato, and had by Medwall's day been introduced into discussions of rhetoric by such humanists as Pico della Mirandola, who argued that "long-haired speech is always sodomitical," and like Gayus preferred, or claimed to prefer, a more manly plainness. See Pico's "Letter to Ermolao Barbaro," in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. Wayne Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000) 60. Kenneth Graham, in *The Performance of Conviction: Plainness and Rhetoric in the Early English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) has dealt in great depth with the antirhetorical tradition in rhetoric, and his ideas are particularly useful in considering Gayus's plainness as a form of common-sense truth-telling that expresses both reverence for the status quo and dissent from its abuses, seeking "between learned and unlearned, governor and governed, a true common denominator" (18).

The life records of Henry Medwall himself provide evidence of the growing relation between schooling and drama in early Tudor culture, and of the deep ambivalences in the society that was shifting around them. Medwall himself appears as a liminal figure in this history of change and continuity. He rose to gentle status through his own abilities and celebrated the self-made man in his writing, but he remained wholly dependent on his patron, and in his play he contained his celebration of self-advancement within familiar festive conventions. In his role as a master of learned arts in service to a mighty lord he partook of an old tradition of clerkly advancement through literary service, reaching back from Lydgate to Alcuin and beyond. But he also partook of new opportunities, widespread and systematic, for advancement through literary learning. His progress from his middling origins through Eton and Cambridge to service in Lambeth Palace brought him close to the centers of state power and education, and so to the halls of colleges and great houses, the festive sites for the art of the Tudor interlude.

An optimistic belief in such advancement through learning and service informed his interlude *Fulgens and Lucres*, which he wrote for a powerful audience. Probably performed in Archbishop Morton's great hall at Lambeth in the early 1490s, the play is our earliest surviving secular drama in English. Like its author, it stands on a threshold, contained by old forms but inspired by new possibilities. Although Medwall and his interlude both served powerful masters in the strictly defined hierarchical structures of the old dispensation, the play shows that a meritocratic ferment was at work in their world, posing a potent challenge to inherited privilege and the master-servant relationship as ways of organizing culture.



Medwall's dramatic art, like the pedagogy of the period, combines traditional medieval elements with humanist innovations. In its meritocratic attitudes toward honorable service, classical learning, and civic virtue Medwall's interlude shows the influence of humanist values. He temporizes, however, reducing the classical and historical elements in his more scholarly source material, and using familiar conventions of festive foolishness to cloak the serious (and potentially unsettling) moral purpose of his ideas. He also deploys forms (formal disputation and the snappy repartee found in *latinitates* and *vulgaria*) that were common grammar school practices long before humanist innovations appeared in English grammar schools, but that contemporary schoolmasters were turning to humanist uses. When the play appeared, the masters of the Magdalen College grammar school were producing the first humanist school texts in England, installing Terence in particular as a model of good Latin.<sup>155</sup> A striking combination of Terentian impudence and civic *gravitas* thus characterizes the *vulgaria* of the Magdalen schoolmasters. Similarly, in his saucy servants Medwall alloys the native morality tradition with the comic license of Terence to criticize the excesses of self-indulgent gentlemen, while in the triumph of a low-born man of true nobility he advances the humanist meritocratic ideal. By framing potentially subversive social ideas like meritocracy and the questioning of authority in terms of civic virtue and comic mischief, both the school books and Medwall's play made such ideas speakable, while containing them in conventional forms. Thus in the interlude and in the schoolrooms of Medwall's

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<sup>155</sup> Two Magdalen scholars had produced humanist school texts by the time Medwall worked for Cardinal Morton. John Anwykyll's works (with *vulgaria* from Terence) were published in Oxford in 1483, and stayed in print until 1529. John Holt, who taught Morton's wards at Lambeth Palace during Medwall's years there, produced a grammar, first printed in the late 1490s

time, self-invention began to acquire a rhetoric of its own, while traditional forms of lordly sovereignty and loyal service were reassuringly preserved.

The social framework of service relationships, ironically, furnished both the support and the target for much of the new rhetoric. “Service has some claim to be considered the dominant ethic of the Middle Ages,” argues historian Rosemary Horrox. “For the servant, his links with a lord constituted a public statement of the value attached to his abilities or standing.”<sup>156</sup> The careers of Medwall and of his own master, John Morton, who rose through service to be Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor to Henry VII, amply illustrate Horrox’s suggestion that service was “perhaps the most effective method of social advancement in the later Middle Ages.”<sup>157</sup> Self-fashioning emerged as a competing ethic in the Renaissance, and Medwall may be regarded as a forerunner of the change, which I take to have been neither inevitable nor uncomplicated. Service to a patron was still necessary for the advancement of a clever man a century later, in the golden age of self-fashioning, as we see in the very different careers of Sidney, the Cecils, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Bacon.

So precisely what change was set afoot in Medwall’s day, and what did humanist schooling and drama contribute to that change? Horrox distinguishes between menial and honorable service in a way that helps answer those questions: “The menial servant has no independent standing aside from the performance of his task; the honourable servant has. It is the difference between the tapster in a tavern and the esquire pouring the king’s wine

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<sup>156</sup> Rosemary Horrox, “Service,” in *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 61, 66.

<sup>157</sup> Horrox 67.

at dinner.”<sup>158</sup> The cultural and social shift I detect opens a middle space between those old categories, a liminal social territory in which the performance of literary service became a publicly offered commodity (though never wholly free of patronage), and the literary servant became more nearly his own master, honorably known by his own name and deeds. Henry Medwall himself, though he was eventually styled “master” and “gentleman,” may never have crossed entirely into the promised land of independent standing. But the school books of his time held up models, ancient and new, of successful self-fashioning, and taught a rhetoric that enabled boys to imagine and articulate independent identities for themselves. And Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucrez* put such voices on the stage in the great hall of Lambeth Palace, near the center of power in England in the 1490s.

In the pages that follow, I will look first at the social position of the clerkly servant in late medieval England, a position occupied by Medwall’s father, his schoolmasters, his own lord, and Medwall himself. In that context, I will consider Medwall’s life and circumstances, situating them in the context of the school curriculum, the public and private drama, and the systems of clerkly service he would have known. I will turn then to a reading of *Fulgens and Lucrez* in the light of Medwall’s biography. The interlude expresses a preoccupation with the ambiguities of service and mastery, and connects the achievement of social position to play-acting and the public performance of learned discourse. At the conclusion of the chapter I will consider a closely related example of early Tudor dramatic writing, the pageant verses of the young Thomas More, who served as a page at Lambeth during Medwall’s years of service there. More’s

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<sup>158</sup> Horrox 63.

triumphal verses advance the claims of literary power a long step beyond Medwall's assertions, breaking out of the confines of service and setting the stage for the innovations of John Rastell that I will consider in the next chapter.

### **The Late Chaplain: Henry Medwall and Literary Service in the Late Middle Ages**

A fine irony attends Henry Medwall's slender claim to literary fame. We acknowledge him as the author of the earliest surviving secular play in English, which also happens to be the earliest English play for which we have an author's name. This historic ascription depends on the title page of the single surviving copy of John Rastell's edition of *Fulgens and Luces*, printed around 1512, two decades after its presumed performance:<sup>159</sup>

Here is conteyned a godely interlude of Fulgens cenatoure of Rome,  
Luces his doughter, Gayus Flaminius, and Publius Cornelius, of the  
Disputacyon of Noblenes, and is devyded in two partyes to be played at  
two tymes. Compyled by mayster Henry Medwall, late chapelayne to the  
right reverent fader in god Johan Morton, cardynall and archebyssshop of  
Caunterbury.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> The Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California acquired the unique quarto in 1919. Huntington shelfmark 62599; STC (2nd ed.) 17778. For want of a more convincing date of composition, I accept Alan Nelson's attractive suggestion that the play may have been performed at Christmas 1491, when Thomas More was a page in Morton's court and Medwall had been in Morton's service for a year or more. See Nelson's introduction to his edition of *The Plays of Henry Medwall* (Totawa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980) 17. All references to Medwall's plays are from this edition, cited hereafter as "Nelson."

<sup>160</sup> Nelson 32.

So it happened that our first named playwright was thought fit to be known to his earliest reading public not so much by his own name and title—"mayster" indicates his Cambridge degree—as by the name of the prince of the church whom he served as a chaplain.

Rastell's word is likewise our sole authority for Medwall's position as Morton's chaplain.

Surviving records suggest that Medwall attended more to Morton's legal affairs than to a cure of souls, though chaplains in medieval great houses sometimes performed both ecclesiastical and administrative duties.<sup>161</sup> Medwall may also have supervised, as other chaplains in great houses did, a household school for chapel choristers, from which the youngest actors in a play could have been drawn.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Medwall's notarial seal appears on thirteen significations of excommunication surviving in the Public Record Office, spanning the years 1491-99, all presumably in service to Archbishop Morton. See Nelson 9-12.

<sup>162</sup> T. H. Vail Motter speculates that Medwall was "possibly schoolmaster in the household, much as Nicholas Udall was under Bishop Gardiner in Queen Mary's reign"; see his *The School Drama In England* (New York: Longmans, 1929) 3. Nicholas Orme notes an early instance of a chaplain-tutor: "In 1413 William Lord Ros of Belvoir castle made provision in his will for a chaplain to be hired to teach grammar to his sons"; see his *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973) 35. Thomas Schort, the author or transcriber of a substantial grammatical miscellany from Bristol, c.1428, was probably a schoolmaster, though described only as a chaplain in records and on his tomb; see Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London: Hambledon Press, 1989) 95. John Lawson relates household chaplains to the spread of clerkly learning among "the magnate class" who famously resisted it: "Nevertheless throughout the fifteenth century literacy in English and even knowledge of Latin was spreading among the nobility and gentry. More of their sons received a clerkly type of education in grammar, perhaps from a household chaplain or tutor.... The Chapel Royal in the king's household had a songmaster and a grammar master, who taught not only the singing boys and almonry clerks but also the king's pages and squires and other sons of gentlemen and noblemen at court"; see Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen, 1973) 81. C. M. Woolgar records relations between chaplains and the education of the choristers in their charge: "In the 1470s Edward IV had eight children of the chapel, who would remain there until the age of 18 when, if there was no room at court or in the Chapel Royal, they were to proceed to Oxford or Cambridge. The children of John Howard's chapel were under the control of his priest, William Davies, who organized the boarding arrangements for them in 1481";

Literary service in a great house was probably a coveted place for a clerk and play-maker, as it was for a schoolmaster, at the beginning of the Tudor century. A drawing in the manuscript known as the Beauchamp Pageant, c. 1485, shows a chaplain seated in the place of honor next to his master, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick.<sup>163</sup> A courtesy book of the late fifteenth century prescribes the order of seating in a lord's hall: while the lord and his knights customarily withdrew to dine in a great chamber at this period, the head officers' board in the hall had places for "gentleman guests and chaplains," who were seated above the yeomen of the chamber and other gentleman servants.<sup>164</sup> C. M. Woolgar observes the mix of clerical and literary services performed by the clergy attached to great houses: "Clerical personnel were ever present in the household, to conduct services, to act as confessors, almoners and advisers, besides performing the more secular tasks of writing letters, administrative records and accounts."<sup>165</sup>

The career of William Worcester, secretary to Sir John Fastolf, demonstrates the range of household duties of the literary servant, and gives us a sense of Medwall's social position. Worcester (sometimes known as William Botoner, from his mother's family

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see his *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 102. The Chapel Royal evolved into the nursery of court drama under its master William Cornish (1509-23); see F. P. Wilson, *The English Drama 1485-1585* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 152. The grammarian Robert Whittinton represents himself as "*capellanus et scholaris artis rethorice*" in his Oxford supplication for laureation in grammar, 1513; see Beatrice White, ed., *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton* (London: Kegan Paul, 1932) xxii.

<sup>163</sup> The manuscript is British Library Ms. Cottonian (Julius E IV); see the plate and interpretation in Woolgar 71.

<sup>164</sup> Woolgar cites the courtesy book as British Library Harley 6815; see the diagram in Woolgar 162.

<sup>165</sup> Woolgar 176.

name) was educated at Sir John's expense at Oxford (MA 1439), and remained in his household until his master's death in 1459. A distinguished antiquary and topographer on the side, Worcester served Fastolf as a business manager, writer of letters, astronomer, genealogist, expert on heraldry and laws of inheritance, translator of Cicero, and author of a *Boke of Noblenes*, in which he is said to have deployed a detailed knowledge of history in defense of his master's political views.<sup>166</sup> He was not a chaplain, though in 1455 he occupied the "chapel chamber" in Caister Castle.<sup>167</sup> Worcester was a member of a new class of lay clerks whose services had traditionally been performed by chaplains. Lay literary servants were clearly more expensive for their masters to maintain than were their clerical counterparts, like Medwall, who were supported by church benefices. Fastolf apparently begrudged the expense, as Worcester remarked to John Paston I in a letter (ca.1454) filled with wry reflections on the dependence of the literary servant on his master:

And where as ye of your pleaser wryte me or calle me Maister Worcestre,  
I pray and requyre yow foryete that name of maistershyp, for I am not amended  
by my maister of a ferthyng yn certeynté, but of wagys of housold in commune  
*entaunt comme nows plaira* [so long as it will please us]. By Worcestre or  
Botoner I hafe v s. yerly, all costys born, to help pay for bonettys that I lose. I told  
so my maister thys weke, and he seyde me yerstenday he wysshed me to hafe be a  
preest so I had be disposed, to hafe gofe me a lyvyng by reson of a benefice, that

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<sup>166</sup> Jeremy Catto, "Masters, Patrons and the Careers of Graduates in Fifteenth-Century England," in *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Latter Middle Ages*, ed. Anne Curry and Elizabeth Matthew (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2000) 55.

<sup>167</sup> Woolgar 66-67.

another man most gefe it, as the Bysshop, but he wold. And so I endure *inter egenos ut servus ad aratrum* [among the needy as a slave at the plough].

Foryefe me, I wryte to make yow laugh. And Our Lord bryng my maistre yn a better mode for othyrs as for me.<sup>168</sup>

While the letter expresses a bitter irony that the “maystership” of the master of arts depended utterly on his own master’s grudging pleasure, it also evinces an expansive—even magisterial—sense of humor, along with a bit of scholarly ostentation. Four decades later, Henry Medwall, notary, and sometime interluder, served his learned master much as Worcester had served the soldier Fastolf, though Medwall labored in the older (and fading) tradition of the beneficed priest.

From Worcester and Medwall we can get some sense of the value of literary production in their culture. Lisa Jardine explains the phenomenon of the literary servant as part of the commodification of luxury goods, including learning, in the stately households of the Renaissance: “The basic skills of the trained individuals with expertise in the fine art and literature of classical antiquity were those of the professional secretary and amanuensis. It was for their ability to write letters for the members of the family in exquisite Latin, to compose a flattering speech for a special occasion, to provide appropriate classical references round which to design a theatrical spectacle for celebrating a memorable event that they were retained in great households.”<sup>169</sup> So, Jardine tells us, household humanists in Italy were commissioned to write dirges for the

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<sup>168</sup> William Worcester, letter 508, in Norman Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 101-02.

<sup>169</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods* (New York: Norton, 1996) 252-53.



passing of a lord's favorite falcon or a lady's beloved lap dog.<sup>170</sup> Worcester's productions for Fastolf may well have served his master's vanity, if in a less overtly frivolous way. Medwall's interlude of *Fulgens and Lucrez*, however, though certainly commissioned as an occasional piece, cannot be classed as servile fawning. Rather, it is instruction for "gentylmen of name," advanced by a serving man of no name but emboldened by the authority of classical letters and the tradition of festive fooling. Medwall wrote not for a Sforza or a d'Este court, but for an English archbishop who had himself risen to his lordly state by the practice of law.<sup>171</sup>

We can trace a genealogy of performative impulses and clerkly service in Medwall's family and in his schooling, in the ambient culture of burgher self-advancement, and in the Tudor government's diversion of court preferment from the merely well-born to the capable humbly-born public servant.<sup>172</sup> Medwall's family circumstances placed him just on the lower edge of gentility, but squarely in the middle of a tradition of clerkly service to the church, and coincidentally to church music and drama. Experiences at Eton and at King's College, Cambridge informed his literary and dramatic craft, but only as a by-product of inculcating the grammatical and rhetorical

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<sup>170</sup> Jardine 253.

<sup>171</sup> Though the *Dictionary of National Biography* says of John Morton (1420-1500) that his "family has been traced back to Edward III's time," it is clear that he rose through the practices of law, dynastic politics, and statesmanship. After proceeding Doctor of Civil Law from Balliol he came under the patronage of Cardinal Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury, and later served both Lancastrian and Yorkist regimes, eventually succeeding to the see of Canterbury himself.

<sup>172</sup> For a helpful synopsis of early Tudor policy in its relation to court preferment, education, and social mobility, see David Bevington, "Chaplain Medwall and the New Tudor Ruling Class," in his *Tudor Drama and Politics* 42-45. My argument follows Bevington's reading of history in most points.

skills necessary to secure a place in the household of a great man and entitlement, however slippery, to be called a gentleman.<sup>173</sup> Service to John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury (after 1486), Lord Chancellor to Henry VII (after 1487), and Cardinal (after 1493), gave Medwall opportunity to win modest church preferment and heady state responsibility through his practice of law.

Medwall's position also allowed him—or obliged him—to produce occasional plays, whether with professional actors or amateurs from the archbishop's household. As it happens, the young Thomas More was a page and student in Morton's Lambeth Palace at the same time that Medwall worked there. Roper's life of More tells us that he would "sometimes step in among the players" at the Christmas revels, extemporizing a part in a play and prompting the old archbishop to prognosticate greatness for the clever lad.<sup>174</sup> Though More started life several knots up the social rope from Medwall, both made their careers by means of their own self-dramatizing wits. One broader significance of Roper's story, as of Medwall's, comes from its relation to a cultural movement that recast traditional ideas of service and mastery, baseness and gentility, in literary terms: the champion of this new age showed his mettle in speech, on a public platform rather than in the tilt-yard. In large part this movement was propagated through the newly powerful institutions of school and stage. The interluder was linked to the *magister ludi* by a ludic

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<sup>173</sup> Medwall styled himself "Henr. Medwall Gentilman" as early as 1486, three years out of university, when he witnessed a petition of John Medwall to Morton, Henry's future patron, for repayment of debt owed the elder Medwall by the Abbot of Bermondsey. During his years of service to Morton in the 1490s, Henry was styled both "Master" and "Sir" in legal documents, both honorifics due to a cleric as translations of the Latin *dominus*. See Life Records 13, 23, 28, and 29, in Nelson 165-77.

<sup>174</sup> William Roper, "The Life of Sir Thomas More," in *Two Early Tudor Lives*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester and Davis P. Harding (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) 198.

practice of rhetoric yoked to social ambition and moral seriousness, and in Tudor England they found a wide market for their performances.

Our earliest record of Henry Medwall occurs in the election indenture rolls of Eton College for August 1, 1474, where he appears as “H. Medwale, aged 12, festival day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, of Southwark, Surrey.”<sup>175</sup> There was apparently no place for the boy at Eton that year, and presumably he returned to Southwark to wait his turn. This borough at the south end of London Bridge figures in literary history as the site of Chaucer’s Tabard Inn and Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, and incidentally as one of the suburbs where brothels (and later bear gardens and theaters) might prosper beyond the reach of London law. John Stow records in his *Survey of London* (1598) that Henry VIII had a row of brothels in Southwark pulled down in 1546, and issued a proclamation (to the sound of a trumpet) that the neighborhood should mend its ways.<sup>176</sup> An historian of the borough protests: “We must not exaggerate the criminal element in Southwark society; the great majority of inhabitants earned their living honestly, employing their manual skills in hard work or serving long hours as small traders.”<sup>177</sup> The cloth and leather trades in particular flourished there in the fifteenth century, but the tradesmen of Southwark produced a vast array of manufactured goods and foodstuffs, sometimes using cheap foreign labor and often raising the competitive ire of London’s guilds, whose rules

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<sup>175</sup> Nelson 163.

<sup>176</sup> John Stow cites proclamations regulating the “stews” as early as the reign of Henry II, and others from the reigns of Edward III, Richard II, Henry VI, Henry VII, and Henry VIII; see Stow’s *A Survey of London*, vol. 2, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908) 54-55.

<sup>177</sup> David J. Johnson, *Southwark and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) 76.

did not always reach across the Thames to this rough-hewn cradle of English secular drama.

The Southwark of Medwall's childhood, then, bustled with commerce, much of it conducted under the auspices of the church. The general impression of a low-rent industrial quarter must be inflected by the prominence of religious houses in the borough, chief among them the priory of St. Mary Overey, the abbey of St. Saviour Bermondsey, and St. Thomas's Hospital, foundations with extensive tenement holdings, including commercial enterprises. The records from the dissolution in the 1530s confirm that these were rich properties.<sup>178</sup>

Parish and court records reveal that the Medwalls of Southwark were prosperous enough to be involved in legal disputes over debt. One John Medwall, presumably Henry's father, was enrolled as a member of the Fraternity of St. Nicholas, a London company of parish clerks, from 1449 until his death in 1491.<sup>179</sup> The records of St. Margaret's church, Southwark, suggest that this Medwall served as parish clerk in the 1450s and 1460s, at the time Henry Medwall was born. When, therefore, some twenty years later, Henry entered church service on leaving university, he was joining his

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<sup>178</sup> Johnson 95ff.

<sup>179</sup> Sally-Beth MacLean and Alan H. Nelson, "New Light on Henry Medwall," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 28 (1997): 77-83. I rely on MacLean and Nelson in general for the interpretation of the Medwall life records, though I also consulted the rather different interpretation in the introduction of M. E. Moeslein's edition, *The Plays of Henry Medwall* (New York: Garland, 1981), hereafter cited as "Moeslein."

father's business, though as a beneficed clergyman, considerably up the career ladder from a parish clerk.<sup>180</sup>

Recent archival research reveals a more striking patrimony.<sup>181</sup> Parish accounts show that John Medwall was actively involved in church music and drama as a skilled musician and artisan. He was paid for playing the “peyre of Newe Organs” at St. Margaret’s, and may well have witnessed the installation of the instruments in the rood loft of the church in 1446-47, sixteen years before Henry’s birth. In 1456 and 1459, during his tenure as parish clerk, John Medwall must also have taken part in the production of the plays mounted in those years for St. Margaret’s day (20 July). Clerks often acted in parish plays, and John’s guild, the Fraternity of St. Nicholas, had a long tradition of producing plays, including a famous cycle at Clerkenwell in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The St. Margaret’s plays ended inexplicably in 1459, though the parish inventory of 1485 includes the vestments used for the celebration

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<sup>180</sup> On the duties of the parish clerk, MacLean and Nelson note: “James Christie, in what remains the most detailed study of the Fraternity of St Nicholas, describes the following requirements for the parish clerk in the later medieval period: the clerk should be able to read, write, and keep accounts; he should take part in the cleaning of the sanctuary, vestments, and sacred vessels; he must make arrangements for services under the direction of the priest as well as be able to read epistles and lessons and to sing parts of the services in order to assist at mass, matins, and canonical hours. A special function of the parish clerk was the superintendence and training of younger singers, as well as oversight of ‘conducts’ or hired clerks. An extension of this responsibility could be the organization of the boy bishop ceremonial during Christmas season. Parish clerks typically belonged to minor priestly orders and were allowed to marry” (78). Orme argues that the position of parish clerk was held to be a suitable job for a youth in the medieval English church, and that the position was often filled by scholars on the way to taking holy orders. He calls to evidence Chaucer’s Absolon in “The Miller’s Tale” and several other examples, literary and archival, and points out that the post was increasingly held by older men, including married men, by John Medwall’s time; see his *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 229-31.

<sup>181</sup> Maclean 79.

of the traditional Boy Bishop ceremonies on “synt nyclasys day.”<sup>182</sup> From his earliest youth Henry Medwall must have at least stood in the wings as such liturgical dramas were performed, and he may well have taken part in them.

By 1478, when Henry was at Eton, John Medwall had risen in dignity to be a church warden, no longer an employee but a lay trustee elected from the community. He continued to serve the church in other capacities, occasionally being paid for singing and for providing ceremonial furniture, including banners and cloth. Nor was his involvement in church business confined to St. Margaret’s. In 1486, a year after Bosworth and three years before our first record that Henry is working for the archbishop, John Medwall petitioned none other than John Morton, Henry’s future patron (then Lord Chancellor and Bishop of Ely), for reimbursement from the abbot of St. Saviour Bermondsey, who owed Medwall for services as clerk and rent-collector. One of the witnesses to the petition was “Henry Medwall, Gentilman,” our best record of a relation between John Medwall and the dramatist.<sup>183</sup>

In sum, the records of John Medwall build an impression of a man much involved in the life of the borough, making a modest profit from art and industry, and moving up the homely *cursus honorum* of parochial office. If indeed this John Medwall was Henry Medwall’s father, the son must have been witness to the making of plays as a marketable sideline of ecclesiastical and civic service. Moreover, Southwark in his time was a place where an ambitious father could find reasons to hope for his son to rise above

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<sup>182</sup> Maclean 85, n.9.

<sup>183</sup> Record 13, Nelson 165.

his beginnings, to return one day as a “gentilman.” In 1475 the path to such promotion that opened to Henry Medwall led through grammar school and university.

Of Medwall’s earliest schooling we know only that he was eligible to be admitted to Eton College at the age of twelve, which meant that he must already have learned to read English and a little Latin, to sing, and to write. He might have learned these basic clerkly skills from his own father, perhaps in a parish school at St. Margaret’s, or he may have attended the venerable song school at St. Saviour Bermondsey.<sup>184</sup> Something exceptional, perhaps his own talent or his family’s ambition, sent him on to Eton, where only twenty to thirty boys were enrolled each year, chosen from all over the kingdom and from a wide variety of social origins.<sup>185</sup>

So the boy Medwall embarked on a career that was relatively new in England, though it grew from an ancient tradition of social advancement through the church. Endowed grammar schools sprang up in England in astonishing numbers in the fifteenth century; eighty-five were founded between 1450 and 1499, though many soon fell on hard times in the Wars of the Roses.<sup>186</sup> King Henry VI’s twin foundations of Eton

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<sup>184</sup> Stow, extrapolating from James Fitzstephen’s account of about 1190, lists St. Paul’s, St. Peter’s Westminster, and St. Saviour Bermondsey as London’s “three principal churches, which had famous schools, either by privilege and ancient dignity, or by favour of some particular persons, as of doctors which were accounted notable and renowned for knowledge in philosophy” (vol. 1, 72-73).

<sup>185</sup> Moeslein 13.

<sup>186</sup> Guy, *Tudor England* 17. Orme’s count is more carefully qualified: “At least thirteen schools were endowed between 1430 and 1450, after which the impetus weakened for a time, perhaps because of the civil disorders which darkened the closing years of Henry’s reign. There seems however to have been a steady revival of interest during the last third of the century, and by the early 1500s the number of new foundations

College and King's College, Cambridge (1440, 1441) may have started the trend, and they were in turn modeled on William of Wykeham's double foundation (1382) of Winchester College and New College, Oxford. These were the most influential schools in England before the humanist innovations at Magdalen College in the 1490s. Eton's charter of 1447 provided free schooling for "70 scholars whose duty it is to learn the science of grammar, and 16 choristers whose duty likewise it shall be, when they have been sufficiently instructed in singing, to learn grammar." The charter prescribed a mighty destiny for the school itself:

as it surpasses all other such grammar schools whatsoever of our kingdom in the affluence of its endowment and the pre-excellence of its foundation, so it may excel all other grammar schools... and be called the lady mother and mistress of all other grammar schools.<sup>187</sup>

Most remarkable, this ambitious royal project provided a place where poor scholars mixed with the sons of gentlemen (called "commensals" or "commoners," as they paid for their own board or "commons") to learn the grammar thought to be necessary to the business of church or state.

Medwall's education at Eton, and afterward at King's, was shadowed by the violence of the wars for the English throne. The school was only thirty-five years old when Henry Medwall matriculated in 1475, and it was probably only beginning to recover from a period of royal disfavor (and lost endowment) following the Yorkist overthrow in 1461 of the college's Lancastrian founder. Even so, there was enough

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had reached a dozen a decade, rising to over two dozen the 1520s"; see his *English Schools* 197.

<sup>187</sup> Leach, *Educational Charters* 413.



demand for places that Medwall failed of election on his first try in 1474. He competed against the odds, for preference went to natives of the parishes in which Eton held property, then to natives of the counties of Buckinghamshire and Cambridgeshire, and last to boys from the rest of the kingdom, into which group Henry Medwall of Southwark, county Surrey, fell.

He entered the college ranked twenty-second of the thirty-three boys in his year, just behind one John Gundys, who proceeded with him to King's five years later, where he was still ranked one place ahead of Medwall.<sup>188</sup> These ranks were reflected in seating in hall:

At the first or high table sat the Provost and Fellows and Headmaster and distinguished strangers; at the second or chaplains' table the chaplains, the four gentlemen clerks, the usher and the higher class of commensals; while at the third table sat the scholars, choristers, and the lower class of commensals.<sup>189</sup>

As a scholar at the lowest table, Medwall saw even a chaplain's place as clearly one step up from his own.

Of eighty-three students in the college register whose Eton careers overlapped with Medwall's by one year or more, fifty-three proceeded to King's College, Cambridge. Most of those took degrees, and eight of them stayed on at King's as fellows. Though all Eton boys were in some sense "clerks," as they were literate in Latin, and

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<sup>188</sup> Wasey Sterry, *The Eton College Register 1441-1698* (Eton: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne, & Co., 1943) 151, 229. These rankings appear to rate social rather than academic standing. Sterry and Moeslein (11-12) cite them as if they were self-explanatory, and I base my inference on the fact that the ratings were assigned when the boys enrolled and changed little in the course of their school careers, which were typically five years long.

<sup>189</sup> Sterry xvi.

though many took minor orders as Medwall did, only seventeen of his contemporaries seem to have been ordained as priests, from which number came a few canons, prebendaries, and bishops.<sup>190</sup> The major success story among Medwall's contemporaries appears to have been that of Nicholas West, who came to Eton in 1478 from Putney where his father was a baker. He proceeded to King's, and rose to be in turn a rector, a vicar, a dean, and finally the Bishop of Ely, and was said to have had a retinue of one hundred servants. West served as chaplain to Henry VIII's first Queen Catherine, and also as her advocate in their divorce proceedings.<sup>191</sup>

Indeed, the four or five of Medwall's Eton contemporaries who became chaplains in high places form a suggestive constellation of clerkly successes: West, chaplain to Queen Catherine; James Denton, almoner to Mary, Dowager Queen of France; Roger Philpot, chaplain and fellow of Winchester College; William Birley, perhaps chaplain to Sir Henry Wyatt (father of the poet); and Henry Medwall, chaplain to John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury. Their work, to judge from Medwall's and West's, must often have been that of trusted administrators in great households. To appreciate the significance of this quintet of chaplaincies conferred on boys of no apparent family distinction, it may be useful to recall that Thomas Wolsey himself, son of an Ipswich butcher, first came to court as a chaplain to Henry VII, after taking his degree at Magdalen College, Oxford.

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<sup>190</sup> See Orme, *English Schools* 48-49 on benefit of clergy and the spread of lay literacy from the late fourteenth century, a useful index to the transfer of clerkly craft to the laity by Medwall's time.

<sup>191</sup> Sterry 359.

Two other groups among Medwall's contemporaries may help us understand what an Eton education meant in social terms. Eight boys, or one in ten, were identified in the indenture rolls as sons of tradesmen: two clothmen, an apothecary, a baker, a "citizen taylor," a shipwright, a saddler, and a draper. Five of the eight proceeded to King's, or the same proportion as in the whole cohort. If we consider that Medwall, the son of a member of a city company of clerks, was not identified as such in the rolls, we may presume that there were at Eton more sons of tradesmen and craftsmen likewise not identified here.<sup>192</sup> Though the sample is far too small from which to make any broad conclusions, it appears that the sons of tradesmen in Medwall's time at Eton moved through the Eton-King's system with a success rate equal to or greater than that of the group as a whole. Only two of this group of eight, however, can be shown to have entered the church as secular priests, though a third took holy orders.

By comparison, six boys are clearly identified in the rolls as the sons of gentlemen, admitted as "commensals" or paying boarders, eligible to sit at the higher table with chaplains and "gentleman clerks."<sup>193</sup> Of the six, four went from Eton to Kings

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<sup>192</sup> I lump the trades and crafts together here in spite of the evidence that they were often at odds with one another. See Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England* (New York: Viking, 1983) 99. My point is simply that they would probably have been grouped together thus as guild-members and skilled, unlanded money-makers, particularly when viewed by members of the landed gentry or of the peasantry at the time.

<sup>193</sup> Edward Audley, eldest son of the sixth Lord Audley, was admitted in 1478 and died in the same year. William Clovyl, perhaps the second son of Henry Clovyl of Clovile's Hall, proceeded to King's and apparently occupied a series of rectories. Thomas Fitzherbert, son of Sir Ralph Fitzherbert, likewise served as a rector and predendary on leaving King's. Thomas Reynes, son of Thomas Reynes of Clifton Reynes, served time in rectories before succeeding to the family property at the death of his brother. John St. George, possibly a younger son of Sir Richard St. George of the manor of St. George in Bourn, went into a Carthusian priory after his time at King's. The scholars are listed in alphabetical order in Sterry.

and then entered the church, perhaps because their social positions assured them comfortable livings there. Another of the six gentleman, William Paston, of the epistolary Pastons of Norfolk, did not go to King's but married the daughter of the second Duke of Somerset. Again, the samples are too small to say much about, though they do suggest that presentment to rectories and vicarages, the experience of Bishop West notwithstanding, may have been more closely associated with family connections than with success in college.<sup>194</sup> Service like Medwall's to Morton may, by contrast, have been conditioned on talent as demonstrated by academic performance. Taken as a whole, the Eton record shows a clear pattern of a mixing of social ranks, but while performance might earn advancement in service for the sons of tradesmen, certain preferments were indexed to the cadet sons of inherited privilege.

Even so, a literary education was clearly becoming a common denominator across the ranks of society. Though William Paston II, son of William Paston I, inherited and married privilege, we know the Pastons to have been a literate and ambitious family, much concerned with property disputes and often having recourse to the law. Perhaps we see the family ambition in William's career at Eton, preparing a fourth son to earn a gentleman's keep for himself in professional life. His education is remarkable for following the same clerkly curriculum as that prescribed for boys from much humbler

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<sup>194</sup> Virginia Davis has examined patterns of church preferment in relation to benefices in fifteenth century England, concluding "that there are clearly two classes in the late medieval church: those who attain the desirable benefices become beneficed at an early stage in their ecclesiastical career, while those without the requisite connections, talents or patrons tend to remain unbeneficed, or at best to obtain a parish at a late stage in their career"; see her "Preparation for Service in the Late Medieval English Church," in Curry and Matthew (49). Davis's findings would explain the preferment of Medwall's commensal schoolmates by family connections, but not Medwall's own preferment by way of "talent" and a university degree.

circumstances, boys like Henry Medwall. Nicholas Orme notes, “William Paston, who was still at school at Eton in 1479 when he was nineteen [two years beyond the usual leaving age], apparently stayed on to master versifying ‘whyche,’ he wrote to his brother John, ‘I troste to have with a lytyll contynuaunce.’ He could not resist including one of his exercises in the letter.”<sup>195</sup> Paston’s clumsy Latin epigram may have a youthful charm, but it also confirms Richard Halpern’s observation that “grammar schools, in particular, seem to have been miracles of impracticality when judged as means to vocational training.”<sup>196</sup> From antiquity throughout the Middle Ages, boys practiced Latin verse composition, along with the equally useful exercise of literary criticism, as the culminating phase of grammar school studies.<sup>197</sup> Paston’s verses may have served him in winning a duke’s daughter, but they cannot have been programmed to provide useful knowledge for running his estates, unless versifying was supposed to teach him eloquence for use in pleading cases or deliberating in council. We may say with more confidence that an Eton education served his classmate Henry Medwall in a more direct and public way, forming the basis for acquiring legal skills, and providing a literary foundation for the interluder’s art.

When Medwall and Paston studied at Eton in the late 1470s, humanist influences were still largely contained in the great households of noblemen and prelates, but had begun to be felt in colleges and schools. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (1391-1447), and John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester (c.1427-1470), had brought scholars and books from

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<sup>195</sup> Orme, *English Schools* 101, quoting *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Davis, i., 650-51.

<sup>196</sup> Halpern 24.

<sup>197</sup> Orme, *English Schools* 87ff.

Italy to England and made gifts to Oxford that led to the building of the university library, completed in 1488. William Grey (b. 1408), scion of a noble family, studied in Italy under the humanist teachers Guarino da Verona and Niccolo Perotti, and accumulated a manuscript collection that eventually formed the nucleus of the Balliol College library. Grey rose in the English church to become Bishop of Ely in 1454, holding that see until his death in 1478, when he was succeeded by Medwall's patron John Morton, himself a son of lesser gentry and graduate of Balliol. Recall that the bishopric of Ely passed to Medwall's classmate Nicholas West in 1515. It is tempting to see a significant trend in the episcopal succession from a nobleman to a gentleman and then to a baker's son, a diverse trio united by humanist learning and service to the church.

These developments in the fifteenth century form the proximal background to Medwall's education and to the writing and performance of *Fulgens and Lucrez*, and they are clearly linked to Medwall through Morton. But to what extent was the dramatist's own grammar school and university education in the 1470s actually shaped by humanist texts and practices? Joan Simon concludes that while "teaching on new lines became available in some of the great households, there is less evidence that it was prevalent at the universities," or at other collegiate institutions before 1480, when William of Waynflete founded the grammar school at Magdalen College, in part to train grammar teachers.<sup>198</sup> In Waynflete as in Medwall we find a transitional figure, moving between older traditions of clerkly schooling and an acquired enthusiasm for the new learning. At

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<sup>198</sup> See Simon 51-52. Waynflete's statutes for the school foundation stipulated that "two or three out of the thirty [scholars] shall diligently apply themselves to the mysteries of grammar and to verses and other arts of humanity... [so that they] may be able and have power to instruct and inform others also, ad have skill and competency for the purpose." See Orme, *Education in Early Tudor England*, 8.

Eton and elsewhere Medwall must have felt, if indirectly, Waynflete's generosity and commitment to educational innovations. Waynflete became Eton's principal patron after 1467, when its fortunes were at low ebb, its founder in the Tower, and its means much depleted. Waynflete took a very active role in completing the construction and painting of the college chapel during Medwall's years there.<sup>199</sup>

One other detail of Waynflete's gifts to education is of interest in building up a picture of Medwall's world. The dedicatory verses in the 1489 edition of Anwykyll's *Compendium totius grammaticae* praise the bishop as patron of the work, "For the author John wrote this book at your persuasion, whence your fame will be forever."<sup>200</sup>

Anwykyll's work gave English boys the words of Terence, a model of pure Latin for Cicero and for the Renaissance humanists.<sup>201</sup> Anwykyll probably produced the work for

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<sup>199</sup> See Davis, *Waynflete* 54.

<sup>200</sup> *Hoc opus auctor enim te persuadente joannes / Edidit unde tibi fama perennis erit.* I use the translation from Davis, *Waynflete* 87.

<sup>201</sup> See Cicero, *De Oratore* II.172, 326; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* I.viii.11, and especially X.i.99, where Terence is called the "elegantissima" of the Roman comedians. According to William Harrison Woodward, among Italian humanists, "Terence was regarded with favour as a guide to Latin conversation, which is the true justification for reading Plautus: 'quod hi plurimum eloquentiae conferrent'" [because they most of all assemble fine speaking]; see Woodward's *Education During the Age of the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924) 15. Woodward adds, "Terence, as possessing advantages of a peculiar kind, both as a stylist, as a model for conversational Latin, and as providing us 'with a store-house of dignified judgments,' was probably, next to the *Letters* of Cicero, the author principally read in humanist schools both in Italy and in Germany. Erasmus, for example, had an even higher opinion of the educational value of Terence than had Guarino" (43). Sylvius Piccolomini (afterwards Pius II) in his treatise *De Liberorum Educatione* (c.1450) writes "Plautus and Terence must be studied for diction," in William Harrison Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* (New York: Teachers College, 1963) 151. In his *schola privata* in his house in Wittenberg, Melanchthon had his students perform classical plays, "partly as relaxation, but mainly as an aid to conversation. [He] wrote prologues defending the practice, and offering moral interpretations of the scenes selected. He

his students at Magdalen College Grammar School, Waynflete's foundation. Anwykyll cites the humanist Niccolò Perotti as one of his sources, and a copy of Perotti's grammar was in the collection of John Nele, Waynflete's own chaplain.<sup>202</sup> The chaplain Medwall would have known one of the Magdalen grammarians, John Holt, who taught the Archbishop Morton's pages at Lambeth, among them the young Thomas More. Medwall, in other words, was educated and pursued his career among the people directly responsible for the most dynamic developments of humanism in the early years of the Tudor regime.

We have, however, no reason to believe that Etonians followed a humanist curriculum in Medwall's time there. Our earliest documented evidence of Vergil, Ovid, and Terence at Eton dates from about 1530, more than fifty years after Paston and Medwall left.<sup>203</sup> Valla's *Elegantiae* only reached Oxford in 1474, the year before Medwall came to Eton.<sup>204</sup> A decade or more elapsed before the innovations of the Magdalen College grammarians. In Medwall's school and university years, the movement to teach "pure" classical Latin and Greek in England was fledgling at best, and probably penetrated Eton only as exciting news from abroad.

Yet medieval schoolmasters used several kinds of pedagogical texts and practices later associated with humanism. English schoolboys studied important classical texts (often with moralizing commentary) throughout the Middle Ages, and favorite medieval

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preferred Terence for the purpose, but included Seneca and at least one play of Euripides"; see Harrison, *Education* 218-29.

<sup>202</sup> See Davis, *Waynflete* 87, n. 59.

<sup>203</sup> See "Winchester and Eton Time-Tables. 1530," in Leach, *Educational Charters* 448ff.

<sup>204</sup> Orme, *English Schools* 106.



school texts persisted well into the Renaissance. The grammars of Priscian and Donatus were standard texts from antiquity through the Renaissance. Donatus's commentaries on Vergil and Terence brought those authors to schools all over medieval Europe. Chaucer knew his Ovid and Vergil a century before Medwall, and Shakespeare knew his Priscian a century after. We can be confident that Medwall and his fellows at Eton made an exacting study of grammar and eloquence in Latin, including the emulation of venerated authors of great moral seriousness, and the production of new Latin writing for contemporary purposes.<sup>205</sup> The art of *dictamen*, the rhetoric of writing letters and deeds, which must have informed much of Medwall's work as a notary for Morton, was much in demand in grammar schools of the fourteenth century as a commercial subject, and it persisted in various grammar schools, though in a kind of second-class relation to the arts course of which grammar formed the basis.<sup>206</sup> The colloquies of Aelfric and the *Parve Latinitates* of John Drury of Beccles show that the prosopopoeic exercises so important to the argument of this dissertation were not humanist innovations. English humanists appropriated and adapted such exercises.

Whether Medwall learned *ars dictaminis* at Eton or not, we can be reasonably sure that he partook of three other customary grammar school practices: the translation and recitation of *vulgaria*, and the performance of disputation and festive drama. As we have seen, schoolmasters from the fourteenth century forward used *vulgaria* to build facility in speaking Latin. Disputation in several forms was practiced in schools to teach

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<sup>205</sup> I rely on Leach, Orme, and Simon, and Lawson for their accounts of grammar school pedagogy in the late Middle Ages. They agree on all major points, though none of them provides a detailed timeline of the appearance of classical poets, including the dramatists, in curricula of the Middle Ages.

<sup>206</sup> Orme, *English Schools* 78ff.

eloquence and audacity in pleading. The festive drama of holidays occasioned saturnalian play with gender, rank, and age.

Though I examined the *vulgaria* of the Magdalen College tradition at length in the previous chapter, certain examples from earlier manuscript collections offer valuable examples of schoolboy humor as it circulated in Medwall's time, often in close conjunction with bitter reflections on the hard realities of rank and service. The alternation of *vulgaria* with standard texts such as Donatus or Priscian in school would have made the juxtaposition of low humor and high sentence familiar to Medwall and to much of his audience. We can make cautious claims about the relation of the *vulgaria* to the impudence of the nameless and masterless servants, A and B, who dominate the first half of *Fulgens and Lucretia*. Their preoccupation with food, drink, apparel, money, and a girl, all discussed in the most puerile terms, contrasts sharply with the play's serious discourse on true nobility. In the same way, *vulgaria* contrasted with the classical rhetoric the schoolboy studied, the two together providing the combination of the aplomb, audacity, and eloquence needed in men of affairs. This audacity may be identified with the kind of pluck that drives the "maysterles" men A and B to give orders to the audience, and later to win themselves places in service and even to presume to advise their new masters.

A remarkable similarity in tone and content suggests that we can take early fifteenth century school texts, like the manuscript *Parue Latinitates* of John Drury, a Suffolk schoolmaster of the 1430s, and a later collection of *vulgaria*, like that of John

Stanbridge, printed c. 1509, as typical of a continuous pedagogic tradition.<sup>207</sup> If so, we can infer that schoolboys at Eton in Medwall's day were speaking in Latin not merely about grammar, but about contemporary life at school and at large. Thomas Schort, the Bristol chaplain who transcribed a grammatical miscellany c.1428, warned ambitious poor boys like Medwall that their studies alone would help them rise: "Pore scolares schold bysilych tan hede to here bokys, the whyche byth not y-ware of non othere help but of here one konnyng."<sup>208</sup> Nearly a century later, Whittinton's boys learned to aspire by reciting, "Many a ragged colt proued to be a good horse. Many a poore mannes sone by grace and vertue ascendeth to hie rowmes and authoryte. And so he auoydeth the incommodytes of pouerte and seruytute."<sup>209</sup> The richer commensals at Eton may have repeated such phrases with a yawning complacency, but for poor scholars like Henry Medwall these *vulgaria* may have been seeds of social ambition.

Service, whatever its "incommodytes," was in Medwall's time still the principal determinant of one's place at table, and the early *vulgaria* show a keen awareness of this fact. John Drury set his boys to learn the ambiguous claim, "J am set were j served / *Sedetur a me si michi serviretur.*"<sup>210</sup> Drury's obviously deliberate mistranslation of

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<sup>207</sup> John Drury, "*Parue Latinitates de Termino Natalis Domini [s]ed Non Pro Forma Redicionis: Anno domini 1434,*" transcribed by Sanford Brown Meech, in "John Drury and His English Writings (Camb. Add. Man.2830)," *Speculum* 9 (1934): 82-83. John Stanbridge and Robert Whittinton, *Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton*, edited by Beatrice White (London: Early English Text Society, 1932). For *vulgaria* I note page numbers in parentheses in the text.

<sup>208</sup> See "A Grammatical Miscellany from Bristol and Wiltshire" in Orme, *Education and Society* 110.

<sup>209</sup> Whittinton 108.

<sup>210</sup> Drury 82. Recall that Drury's *latinitates* were *non pro forma redicionis*, often deliberately mistranslated, presumably to trip up the lazy or unwary, like those given to

several other of his Latin phrases make us wary of accepting his translation of this one. It could mean two very different things, depending on the construction of the passive verbs in the third person: if they are taken as impersonal-passives-for-impersonal-actives with “a me” and “michi” taken as agentive, the line may be construed (more or less as Drury offers it) as “It is sat by me as it is served by me,” or “I am seated [ranked, esteemed, regarded] as I serve.” That is, one’s position at table (and in society) depends on one’s place in service. But, considering that Drury deliberately set traps for his boys to discover two possible meanings in a single sentence, might this one not have been construed, more directly, “He is seated [ranked or esteemed] by me as he was of service to me,” thus reversing the roles, casting the speaker as the master rather than as the servant?

Later *vulgaria* offer useful glosses for Drury’s use of “set” to mean “esteem” or “regard.” They also give other striking statements of deeply felt ambivalences about service. Medwall’s contemporary John Anwykyl includes a complaint—“He setteth less and less by me / *Iam michi minus minusque obtemperat*” (16r)—and instructions on humble bearing: “Sett the nott so frowardly. *Ne tam obfirma*” (18v). This same collection provides various *formulae* for offering service, but also for bemoaning the odium of service, both perhaps echoing the restive slaves in Terence, Anwykyl’s source. So, on the one hand, a boy learned three ways to say, “I shall wayte upon you [*Dabo opera vobis / Observabo vos / Obsequium vobis prestabo meum*” (31r)], and other canons of good service: “Doo as he biddeth the do and speke lytell” (17v), and “He is a proude or a

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following Latin word order rather than word forms. I am grateful to Prof. Ernie Kaulbach of the University of Texas at Austin for his reading of the line in the first, “middle” sense of the verbs, which affirms the use of “si” as “as” (perhaps from the French influence). Prof. Kaulbach also points out that the Latin phrase is in the form of a chiasmus, perhaps as a mnemonic.

trusty servaunt [*servus*] that taketh care for his maister or lorde” (25v). But on the other hand the pupil learned to groan, “There is no thyng so light or esy butt that it is harde if a man do itt ageyns his wyll” (17v). One passage notes the fact that the rich get richer at the expense of the poor: “It is full evyll ordeyned that they that have lesse shall allwey giff to the rychere men” (26r).

In a similar vein, the Arundel manuscript of the 1490s offers a cruel illustration of how arbitrarily a man in service may be “set”: “When a mann is in his lusty yough and in his parfytt age, thoo he be never soo poore, yete while he hath all his lymes and cheffe strength every man wyll gladely accept hym to his service, but when age comyth upon hym he is shortely sett nought by and lightly is put out of his service.”<sup>211</sup> This schoolmaster elaborates on a proverbial observation that the rewards of service are fugitive:

Service is none heritage, and that we se daily, for and the maister like not his servaunt, or the servaunt his maister, they moste depart. Furthermore, we se but few successours cheryshe suche servauntes as were great with ther predecessours. Therfor, my frende, take hede to thiself while thou haste a maister and maist do moche with hym, that thou maist have wherewith to lyve when he is gone.<sup>212</sup>  
(263)

Medwall’s wily servants scheme to “do moche with” their Roman masters, but their profits are limited by their ineptitude. The author of the Arundel manuscript presents a

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<sup>211</sup> Arundel 264.

<sup>212</sup> Bartlett Whiting lists numerous variants on the proverb “Service is no heritage,” beginning with Hoccleve. See his *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1968) 509-10.

more stoical comment on the odium of servitude in the republican ideals of ancient Rome:

The olde romans hade so great a love to the comynwelth that rather thei wolde sley themselfe than they wolde departe from that that was the comyn welth, as we rede of the noble mann Cato that herde that he sholde be takyn of Julius Cesar and so to be brought in serviture. He slew hymselfe, and many other were so cusomyde in that maner of deth that they thought it was the best deth that coulde be. (271)

The Arundel schoolmaster probably taught at Magdalen School, Oxford, two decades after Medwall's time at Eton, though at about the same time *Fulgens and Lucrez* was produced at Lambeth Palace, where the Magdalen-trained schoolmaster, John Holt, taught the archbishop's wards and pages. Archbishop Morton was made Chancellor of Oxford University 1494, and in that same decade William Grocyn and John Colet lectured at Oxford on humanist themes. The connections are circumstantial, but we can safely infer that the humanist revival of classical letters had introduced into the ambient culture of Medwall's place and time proud and plaintive notions of service that complicated the medieval ideal.

Part of that complication involves the acknowledgement of the competitive nature of the service market, and the ignominy of going masterless. Among Stanbridge's *vulgaria* (also contemporaneous with Medwall's time at Lambeth), we find another proverbial pronouncement that must have had special pungency for boys who aimed to obtain a place at the table of gentleman servants: "Profred seruyce stynketh. *Ministerium*

*oblatum sordescit.*”<sup>213</sup> A and B, Medwall’s self-promoting, masterless men, certainly illustrate this proverb in their bumbling and conniving servility, and the boy reciting the proverb may have felt himself to be playing the part of a discerning master, despising shoddy service. *Vulgaria* often gave boys practice for playing the lordly part. At the same time, a boy like Medwall knew his education prepared him to proffer clerkly service, and when he recited “*Ministerium oblatum sordescit,*” he must have caught the scent of his own dependency on market forces. Throughout the *vulgaria* we find such reminders of a phenomenon Frank Whigham has pointed out in a later generation of men on the make:

The humanist student had all too often been promised and denied not only the chance to serve at a high level of government, but also the expected material reward for his services. Enticing analogies between the modern courtier and Roman senators or prince-tutors like Aristotle bore little resemblance to the careers of men modestly endowed in intellect and patronage.<sup>214</sup>

The stink of their own servitude must have had a bitter redolence for profferers at several levels in Archbishop Morton’s great hall. Though the prevailing tone in Medwall’s interlude, as in the *vulgaria*, is one of optimism and energy, we hear these persistent darker notes.

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<sup>213</sup> Stanbridge 15. Stanbridge succeeded Anwykyll at Magdalen, serving as *informator* 1488-94. Whiting (509) notes the use of the phrase proverbially by authors from Chaucer to John Heywood. Beatrice White (131) glosses the phrase with reference to St. Jerome and Erasmus. The consensus seems to be that cut-rate services or goods are of suspect value.

<sup>214</sup> Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 20-21.

If the broad, sometimes bitter humor of A and B summons up the spirit of the *vulgaria* for Medwall's audience, the debate of Gayus and Cornelius in the second part of the play surely evoked the school practice of disputation as part of instruction in grammar and rhetoric. An early grammar primer features an argument *in utramque partem* on the question of "whether the noun *leopardus* is to be declined as one or two words," and "at Eton College a solemn disputation was held between two of the scholars every 7 July in the chapel nave, with the whole school looking on."<sup>215</sup> One of the Royal Manuscript *vulgaria*, c. 1512-1527, presents a spontaneous schoolboy disputation over grammar, with the assumption that another scholar would have been competent as a judge:

I had moche a-do yesterday with a rewde gramarion wich dispisid al good lernyng  
laten, and prusus only his barbarusnes. We wer at bate for many thynges that we  
spoke, wiche me thought wer far from good latyn. Y wold god thu haddist byn by,  
for we lacked a juggle to ende the stref that was between us.<sup>216</sup>

Whittinton's *vulgaria*, especially rich in school lore, include the question, "Was thou present at the dysputacyon? / *Interfuiisti disputatiunculus?*"<sup>217</sup> From his youth in the time of Henry VIII Stow recalls a practice of disputation which may have long predated him, and which powerfully figures the rise and fall of men by their eloquence:

I myself, in my youth, have yearly seen, on the eve of St. Bartholomew the  
Apostle, the scholars of divers grammar schools repair unto the churchyard of St.  
Bartholomew, the priory in Smithfield, where upon a bank boarded about under a

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<sup>215</sup> Orme, *English Schools* 98.

<sup>216</sup> See Orme's edition of British Library MS Royal 12 B xx, fols. 35-49, in his *Education and Society* 64.

<sup>217</sup> Whittinton 104.



tree, some one scholar hath stepped up, and there hath opposed and answered, till he were by some better scholar overcome and put down; and then the overcomer taking the place, did like as the first; and in the end the best opposers and answerers had rewards.<sup>218</sup>

The prize went most often, Stow reports, to the boys of St. Anthony's school, the preeminent London school until the refounding of St. Paul's by Colet.<sup>219</sup> Thomas More studied at St. Anthony's before his father placed him as a page in Archbishop Morton's Lambeth Palace.<sup>220</sup>

In schools like St. Anthony's, advanced students studied rhetoric to prepare for public life in the pulpit or at the bar, and to this end the boys competed in disputation. That grammar itself was the topic of schoolboy debate indicates its commodity status: it promised advancement in the world. As Stow's report shows, such disputations clearly persisted into the sixteenth century, even though Colet's statutes for St. Paul's specifically forbid "disputing at sent Bartilmews whiche is but foolish babeling and losse of time."<sup>221</sup> The king-of-the-mountain aspect of the competition at St. Bartholomew's presents an interesting analogue to the tournaments and jousts of court, or to the annual

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<sup>218</sup> Stow, vol. 1, 74-75. Note that Drury's *parve latinitates* of 1434 include an apparent reference to disputation, parallel to the opposing and answering of Stow's description: "Set, if j set be; opposid, if j opposid be; concluded wil j nouth be" (83).

<sup>219</sup> St. Anthony's was one of the five grammar schools "sette and ordeigned" in the city by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London and chartered by Henry VI in 1446 to remedy the "greet abusions that have ben of long tyme withinne oure Citee of London that many and divers persones not sufficiently instruct in gramer presumynge to holde commoune gramer scoles." Leach 417.

<sup>220</sup> More's first biographer, his son-in-law William Roper, reports that More was "brought up in the Latin tongue at St. Anthony's in London" (Sylvester and Harding 197).

<sup>221</sup> See Lupton 278.

Boy Bishop observances in cathedrals all over England. All these festivities dramatize a rise to the top by meritorious individual role-playing, though on the elaborately structured stages of disciplinary power. Where *vulgaria* introduced the salt and flesh of ordinary life into school and interlude, *controversia* created the tension of competition, the necessity that there be winners and losers (as in the struggle to win a place in service), and that eloquence and reason be their arms. In *Fulgens and Lucretia*, Medwall imported that tension from the school (and court) onto the English stage.

The distance was not a great one after all. The academic imperative that any scholar be ready to argue on either side of a question introduces the necessity of *prosopopoeia*, rhetorical impersonation, which is just a step away from drama. Such histrionic energies, familiar to men and boys from grammar school disputation, must have circulated through the audience when Medwall presented his interlude in Morton's great hall. The performance offers an early and powerful prototype of a public occasion when the ruling elite of England were drawn into entertaining the earnest claims of merit over birth. The comic pratfalls of the vulgar A and B served, no doubt, to place the triumph of the commoner over the nobleman in the *controversia* in a familiar saturnalian context, rendering the reversal of the established order temporary merely. Medwall's own experience of the carnivalesque up-ending of degrees must have been ritually amplified at Eton, where the founder's statutes, following Wykeham's at Winchester, provide for a version of the Boy Bishop on the feast of St. Nicholas.<sup>222</sup> We can assume that many members of his audience would have observed or taken part in similar celebrations in their own dioceses and grammar schools. Medwall's new contribution was the fusion of

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<sup>222</sup> See Chambers 365.

those festive energies with the closely-related histrionics of grammar school translation and disputation, cast in terms of classical rhetoric rather than liturgy or homily.

Certainly Medwall's experience of drama would inevitably have been enlarged in his time in Cambridge, where he matriculated at King's College in the summer of 1480. Amid the dangerous uncertainties of the last years of Yorkist rule—a time of high drama in England's history—the collegians at King's kept up a tradition of festive play-making. Nelson reports that the bursar's accounts of the college in Medwall's time show that King's devoted “a surprising portion of its time and revenues to banquets and to musical and dramatic entertainment.”<sup>223</sup> Payments regularly went to musicians or *mimi*, the town waits of Cambridge, visiting organists and singers, and college choristers. Though visiting players performed at King's, its own fellows also produced plays, as at Christmas of 1482, when two of them were paid for costumes and music.<sup>224</sup>

That was to be Medwall's last Christmas season as a scholar. The college Mundum Book indicates he had withdrawn from King's abruptly in the summer of 1483.<sup>225</sup> Perhaps he was drawn into the drama of dynastic struggle. His sudden departure coincided exactly with the accession of Richard III and the arrest of John Morton, Medwall's future patron. Moeslein speculates that Medwall may already have been a

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<sup>223</sup> Nelson 6-8. According to the REED tabulation for Cambridge, King's College disbursed funds to *mimi*, *lusores*, or other players no fewer than thirty times in the decade 1479-1489.

<sup>224</sup> See Alan H. Nelson, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1989) 60. See also in this volume the King's College statutes of 1542, which ordained Christmas festivities (29), and the college Mundum Book records payments for plays from as early as 1448 (31ff.).

<sup>225</sup> Life Record 8 in Nelson 164.

protégé of the disgraced bishop, whose arrest may have precipitated Medwall's untoward departure.<sup>226</sup> He alone among his King's classmates did not proceed to a college fellowship, but the college rolls indicate that Medwall returned to college often as a guest in the 80s, and he took his degree, a Bachelor of Civil Law, in 1490. By that time he had been practicing as a notary for some time, and Henry Tudor had been king for five years, with Morton at his side.

Medwall executed his first surviving notarial testification, for the renewal of a treaty between England and Portugal, at Windsor Castle in August of 1489. The majesty of the occasion, attended by the king, the archbishop, a bishop, and two earls, suggests that Medwall must already have established himself in an office of some trust, probably in the service of Morton. The archbishop had returned from exile with Henry Tudor to serve as the new king's most powerful and trusted minister and prelate, the leading figure in an inner circle of men "chosen solely on the basis of competence and willingness to serve the Tudor regime."<sup>227</sup> As David Bevington has shown, Medwall's meritocratic vision must have been fostered by the patronage and bureaucratic practices of early Tudor government in its efforts to supplant fractious noble magnates with a brain trust loyal only to the crown. Yet Bevington notes that Tudor policy embraced both tradition and innovation: "The new order naturally endorsed hierarchy of order and degree, but placed novel emphasis on professional ability, literary training, and the innate qualities of

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<sup>226</sup> Moeslein 18.

<sup>227</sup> John Guy, *Tudor England* 56. See also Guy's discussion of the Great Councils of Henry VII, which twice included burgesses (59), and the enhancement of the powers of crown-appointed Justices of the Peace to create a broad-based, centrally controlled magistracy, to the detriment of the power of feudal lords (63).

‘gentillesse’ that might be found in untitled men as well as in nobility.’<sup>228</sup> Of 227 Privy Councilors between 1485 and 1509, 43 were nobles, 61 ecclesiastics, 45 courtiers, 49 officials, and 27 lawyers.<sup>229</sup> An analysis of that list must lead us to conclude that clerkly expertise moved closer to the centers of English power than ever before. Learned councilors in turn staffed their own offices with able clerks like Medwall who had proven themselves in colleges or at the Inns of Court.

We know of Morton, for example (if Thomas More’s Hythloday can be trusted), that the lord chancellor’s virtues were those of a wise and learned clerk of long experience:

His speech was polished and pointed, his knowledge of the law was great, he had an incomparable understanding and a prodigious memory, for he had improved excellent natural abilities by constant study and practice. At the time when I was in England, the King depended greatly on his advice, and he seemed the mainspring of all public affairs. He had been taken straight from school to court when scarcely more than a boy, had devoted all his life to important business, and had been whirled about by violent changes of fortune so that in the midst of great dangers he had learned practical wisdom, which is not soon lost when so purchased.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* 44.

<sup>229</sup> Guy, *Tudor England* 11.

<sup>230</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia: Latin Text and English Translation*, ed. George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams, and Clarence H. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 55.

We do not know what caused Archbishop Morton to engage the services of Henry Medwall. We do know that when Medwall returned to King's to dine in 1491, after a long absence, his dinner was charged to "mayster Maydwell," and he was accompanied by a clerk of his own.<sup>231</sup> The scholar who had left the college in haste thus returned in modest splendor, having become a master by virtue of his education and his labors as a clerk.

The documents of Medwall's years of service to Morton form a pattern that ultimately reminds us that service was no heritage: his practice of letters and law runs parallel to his own advancement to modest preferment, all of which appears to break off abruptly with the death of his patron in 1500. Throughout the 1490s Medwall incurred debt, a reliable sign of prosperity. He collected the profits of an ecclesiastical appointment (he had taken minor orders in 1490), and he notarized writs of excommunication, the ultimate expression of the archbishop's spiritual authority.<sup>232</sup> When Morton died, Medwall apparently took the archbishop's papers into his own custody for a time, for which he had to seek the king's protection from the threats of the prior of Christchurch Canterbury.

Within a year of his master's death Medwall had resigned his parish living, which reverted to the gift of the new archbishop. He was thirty-nine years old. Here his life records end. We do not know if he was still alive a decade later when Rastell printed *Fulgens and Lucretia*. The "late chapelayne" of Rastell's title page may denote either a

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<sup>231</sup> Nelson 11.

<sup>232</sup> Moeslein 20-3.

former one or a dead one.<sup>233</sup> Medwall's story illustrates, if nothing else, the fugitive nature of clerkly power, as do the parallel stories of a Morton or even a Wolsey, clerks of another magnitude whose labors made kings rich and strong. As Wolsey's resounding fall from grace demonstrates, even the mightiest clerks had only a tenuous grasp on authority, and their names survive mostly in the stories of their powerful masters.

### ***Fulgens and Lucrez: The Clerk Among the Players***

I read the text and imagine the performance of *Fulgens and Lucrez* in the context of such fugitive power, framed with the greater and lesser successes of Morton and his chaplain, resonant with the sounds of the schoolrooms and courtrooms where they exercised the learned the codes of authority and authorship. The audience in Morton's palace probably included several overlapping groups brought together by the realities of early Tudor government: persons who got there because they were able public servants even though, like Morton or Medwall, they were humbly born; those who got there because of inherited privilege; others who were both well-born and capable clerks, including peers of Henry's council; the women who came with them; their household servants.<sup>234</sup> We get some inkling of the way these groups interacted from William Roper's much-quoted account of an audacious page stepping forward in the Christmas

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<sup>233</sup> Nelson 14.

<sup>234</sup> André Lascombes remarks that the aristocratic hall in Medwall's day "housed a social mixture that we have trouble imagining even today, as the taste for such a medley of people has receded with the passing of the Renaissance." See his "Time and Place in Tudor Theater: Two Remarkable Achievements—*Fulgens and Lucrez* and *Gorboduc*," in *French Essays on Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1995) 71.

revels and winning his master's praise, in the hall of the same palace in which Medwall served:

Where, though he was young of years, yet would he at Christmas-tide suddenly sometimes step in among the players, and never studying for the matter, make a part of his own there presently among them, which made the lookers-on more sport than all the players beside. In whose wit and towardness the Cardinal much delighting would often say of him unto the nobles that divers times dined with him, "This child here waiting at the table, whosoever shall live to see it, will prove a marvelous man."<sup>235</sup>

Stephen Greenblatt has led a generation of scholars in thinking about what it meant for a man in the English Renaissance to "make a part of his own" by the practice of literature. In *Fulgens and Lucrez* we have an example of self-fashioning remarkable for its subversive potential precisely because it emanates from a nameless clerk who insinuates his unsettling assertions into the center of power by the apparently innocuous, familiar means of festive drama alloyed with schoolroom rhetoric, all in the line of service.

Although Medwall's world was still largely organized on the basis of hereditary privilege and rigidly observed hierarchies, he boldly represents those hierarchies as permeable. In its wooing plot and *controversia* on true nobility, Medwall's play celebrates the self-assertive performance of civic virtue and secular success as means of social advancement. "In this respect," as Joel Altman explains, "*Fulgens and Lucrez* is a radical document, even though its question is one previously rehearsed by Boethius, Dante, Chaucer, and others. For Medwall, like his predecessors, is breaking out of a

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<sup>235</sup> Sylvester and Harding 198.



perspective and a vocabulary that has hardened in the process of time, and which under the pressures of daily political existence tends to regard nobility in its social aspect alone. He is acknowledging a moral signification that enlarges the term.”<sup>236</sup> A virtuous self-made man, Gayus, challenges conventional forms of inherited authority, represented by the claims of the prodigal patrician Cornelius. The willing assent of the wise and virtuous trophy bride, Lucre, daughter of a rich senator of noble family, represents a union of merit and birth. The play’s potentially inflammatory subversive force is partly neutralized by its unexceptionable appeal to civic virtue, and also by the festive fooling of the servants A and B. Their fecklessness and their reactionary political views reassure the audience that the meritocratic revolution will not spread too far or too fast. So the play balances its humanist moralizing with festive role-reversals that carry an inherent promise of restored stability and containment.

Medwall’s contributions to English dramatic form show the marks of his schooling. Long before his interlude was performed at a banquet in Morton’s great hall, medieval church and civic drama were rich in both comic fooling and moral uplift. In Medwall, however, and perhaps in other interluders among whom he may be only a chance survivor, festive mirth is joined to high sentence in rhetorical forms more suited to the barrister or the councilor than to the preacher. The *controversia* that forms the play’s main plot has been identified as one of the basic forms of grammar school pedagogy, and also of training for the law.<sup>237</sup> The drama of previous generations had

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<sup>236</sup> Altman 25.

<sup>237</sup> Eugene W. Waith, “*Controversia* in the English Drama: Medwall and Massinger,” *PMLA* 68 (1953): 286-89. Waith argues that “the *controversia* gave much more than plots to the English playwrights—that it influenced literary theory, method, and

centered on the salvation of a soul by repentance and submission. Medwall's other surviving interlude, *Nature*, is usually classed with morality plays of this kind, though some critics have detected in it signs of incipient humanism.<sup>238</sup> In *Fulgens and Lucrez*, by contrast, Medwall looks to the making of new men through laboriously acquired skills, including self-advocacy. Gayus, the new man, confronts his rival, the degenerate scion of an old noble family, thus:

...both he and I cam of Adam and Eve.  
There is no difference that I can tell  
Whiche makith oon man an other to excel  
So moche as doth vertue and godely maner,  
And therein I may well with hym compare. (I.665-69)

This meritocratic theme in drama developed just as a similar change occurred in schooling, when, as Joan Simon says, "there began to emerge a system of education in the modern sense in place of forms of upbringing designed to fit men for different estates of society."<sup>239</sup>

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style" (286), and he demonstrates a clear relation between taking parts in *controversia* and the creation of type-character in "the stage tradition which extended back through Plautus and Terence to New Comedy" (289). While drama borrowed thus from school forms and texts, schooling borrowed the proto-dramatic techniques of *ethopeia* and *prosopopeia* (personification and impersonation) in its rhetorical and poetic exercises.

<sup>238</sup> Moeslein says, "*Nature*—though its frame of reference is theological—works out its pattern of sin and redemption within the precincts of humanist ethics, where misconduct is more unreasonable than unholy" (5). Joel Altman sees *Nature* as "a humanist morality" in which truth is obtained through syllogism, by contrast to the inductive inquiry of *Fulgens and Lucrez* and later Tudor drama; see his *The Tudor Play of Mind*, 13ff.

<sup>239</sup> Simon 4.

The auspices of Medwall's play likewise suggest that it must be understood in the context of meritocratic stirrings in England. In *Fulgens and Luces*, English drama can be situated between the street pageant and the public theater, moving via the halls of colleges and great houses, where it began to manifest crucial affinities with the humanist curriculum: its use of oratory and disputation, its emphasis on themes of rank achieved by self-conscious performance of virtue, and its tone of audacity tempered with sober purposes.<sup>240</sup> The great hall setting of Morton's banquet both nurtured and confined the ambitious impulses of players and students of his household, and from our perspective prefigures the performance spaces of the public schools and public theaters that followed in the sixteenth century. Likewise, the ambiguous status of the clerk-dramatist, both servant and gentleman, reflected the similarly ambiguous opportunities for advancement through crown service in the early Tudor state. Such service led on to the advancement of

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<sup>240</sup> Literary history has consistently made note of the importance of the hall setting of Medwall's play. A. W. Reed, writing shortly after the only surviving copy of the play surfaced at a Sotheby's sale in 1919, identifies the Tiptoft source and the "comic underplot as clearly defined as that of *Twelfth Night* and conceived in the same spirit," and connects the play, perhaps for the first time, to Roper's account of More stepping in among the players in Morton's household. See his *Early Tudor Drama* (London: Methuen, 1926) 96-100. F. P. Wilson provided what may be taken as the standard historical estimation of *Fulgens and Luces*, identifying it as a step beyond the fifteenth-century morality play, as possessing a secular theme "in the favourite medieval manner of a *débat*," and acknowledging its humanist source, though cautioning that "Humanism is a word to avoid in any consideration of early English drama, for it if means the ability to write humanistic Latin, our dramatists were much better occupied in making their own language more expressive." Most important, however, "is the introduction of a sub-plot attached to the main plot and illuminating it at a comic level" (8-9). Finally, Wilson places Medwall's play at the beginning of the tradition of the interlude, "distinguished from our earlier morality plays by its brevity, a smaller cast of actors (often four men and a boy), and an absence of scenery," sometimes associated with "the gargantuan feasts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries"(10). Peter Happé emphasizes "the extent to which Medwall makes the most of the setting, interweaving it with the substance of his play to make a remarkable entertainment." See his *English Drama Before Shakespeare* (London: Longman, 1999) 57.

clerks and secretaries, schoolmasters and players beyond menial household service into new, relatively autonomous dignities, though always tenuous and liminal. The literary form and thematic content of *Fulgens and Lucrez* show that secular humanism and its ethic of self-definition through the performance of rhetorical skill and civic virtue already had a strong foothold in English culture among clerkly servants. The optimism of the kind that once surfaced in the civic pageant, celebrating identification with the craft guild and the city, surfaced in the Tudor century in a drama of personal achievement, made by clerks who would be heard.

In an overtly didactic structure, Medwall's little play counterpoises two well-established elements of English drama, an antic spirit and a vigorous moral seriousness. The antic spirit provides both entertainment and containment in a metatheatrical framework of festive fooling by two servants of the great house who cross from the banquet into the action of the play. They comment impudently on the vanity and prodigality and ambition of their social superiors. But the bumbling of these clowns provides cautionary *exempla* of base natures on which nurture will not stick, and also guarantees that these low-born bounders, at least, pose no real threat of subverting the social order in which wealth and inherited privilege rule. Ironically, that order is deliberately and eloquently subverted in the more serious plot of the wooing competition, in which humanist notions of true nobility prevail. I will summarize the play briefly here, and then move on to a closer reading, proceeding sequentially through the action of the play to show how Medwall uses its linear structure to unfold a lesson in social role-playing.

The interlude is divided into two parts, separated by an interval for feasting. The two parts are framed by the running dialogue of two men, designated only as A and B in the printed text, who emerge from the audience discussing the upcoming play, and who comment in the end on the outcome of the main plot. In the first half, these masterless men cross over into the action of the play, which is set in ancient Rome. They take roles as servants to two men who are rivals for the hand of Lucre, daughter of the rich senator Fulgens. Lucre emerges in the first part not only as the prize of the wooing competition, but also as the ethical center of the play. One suitor, Cornelius, is a dissipated nobleman of great wealth and high birth; the other, Gayus, is a virtuous, self-made man. Their comically inept servants enact a wooing contest of their own for the hand of Lucre's maid, who humiliates them both. In the second half, Gayus and Cornelius dispute, in the manner of a learned *controversia*, for Lucre's favor. She chooses the worthy Gayus, whose eloquence and learning match his virtue, though she qualifies her judgment by saying that it is not to be taken as a general precedent, and that nobility of both birth and worth would as a rule be preferable. The serving men end the play expressing their dismay at the aristocratic girl's subversive choice.

Service and mastery are twin themes in the interlude, mirroring concerns with baseness and nobility as played out in and around the "Disputacyon of Noblenes." Medwall embodies these themes in characters who operate as *exempla* at four distinct levels, colliding in the twin wooing plots of servants and masters. The sequential experience of each of these levels leads the audience, as in a lesson, from ignorance and error to learning and wisdom: 1) The nameless, masterless A and B, whose antics frame the main action of the play, figure the stinking aspects of service, comically associated

with ignorance, lies, bawdry, and impudence. At the same time, they are given a truth-telling role, as fools and clowns often are, skeptically reacting to the pretensions and self-delusions of the ruling elite and of social climbers alike. A and B also provide the mechanism for Medwall's remarkable metatheatrical effects, collapsing time and space in their roles as servants, initially in Morton's hall but then also in the ancient Rome of the play. The transliminal clowning of these two servants is arguably Medwall's boldest achievement, as it uses a familiar festive convention to create a framework in which a radical social critique can be safely asserted. 2) The abuse of inherited mastery is figured by Cornelius, the dissolute rival suitor, "Borne of Noble blode" (I.92). The play must present his displacement from authority in some manner that is both exciting and acceptable to the audience. Cornelius soon shows that he does not merit his privileged place. He presumes, mistakenly, that his wealth and high birth will win the day. By contrast, Fulgens, the noble senator whose daughter Lucre is the prize of the wooing contest, from his first lines models liberal aristocratic values, with an emphasis on talent, understanding, and obligation. Thus a figure of abusive aristocracy is counter-balanced by a figure of responsible nobility in service to God and the commonwealth. 3) The upright Gayus, though "Borne of Pore stocke" (I.94), figures civic humanism's ideal of meritocratic service to the commonwealth through "his grete wisdom and virtuous behaviour" (I.96), both explicitly associated with study and truth-telling eloquence, joined in him with more traditional soldierly abilities. We know from the prologue that he will triumph in the disputation on nobleness, so the suspense in the plot depends not on whether he will win that triumph, but on how. In dramatic and rhetorical terms, Gayus is admirable but rather stolid, and his triumph is largely due to the discernment and wit of

the noble lady. Medwall thus in some measure preserves the prerogatives of inherited power, while ennobling the commoner's merit as a source of renewed virtue and vigor. 4) The disparate claims of service and mastery intersect in the main wooing plot, as a result of which Lucrece will submit to the mastery of the triumphant suitor. Lucrece, like the clownish A and B, inhabits a liminal world, outside the *status quo*, though her sphere is based on humanist ideals rather than festive conventions. Ironically, she alone embodies her stated ideal of true nobility, a self-mastery in which gentle birth and virtue are joined. Her qualified judgment ends the disputation in a way that does honor to the best aspects of inherited nobility, while awarding the palm to true merit.

The collision of conflicting notions of true nobility must have been richly complicated by the mix of inherited and merited rank in the audience in Archbishop Morton's hall, not unlike the cross-section of society Medwall would have known first in the halls of Eton and Cambridge. The interluder revels in the ambiguities of that mix, demonstrating finally that everyone present in the hall is playing an assumed role. From the first words of the play the masterless A and B destabilize the conventions of drama that separate the worthy audience from the servants performing on stage. Morton's hall, surely one of the *penetralia* of power in its time and place, must have operated in and around the play as a force field in itself. The eminence of the host and of the audience throws the irreverence of the play's subversive assertions into a higher relief.

The hall also functions in more generic way as the ritual site of the banquet mentioned in the first lines, a festive space for holiday feastings in which saturnalian disorder is the traditional order. Finally, the audience is asked to accept that the stage in the hall is a place in ancient Rome. A and B move between the festive hall and ancient

Rome in a way that blurs the boundary between them. The free play with time and space implicates the audience in the hall as judges in the *controversia* on true nobility. The collapse of conventional barriers between audience and actors likewise effects a suspension of rank and privilege, as saucy servants boss a lordly audience, who by being drawn into the action are themselves made aware that their social positions are roles they play. In the free-for-all space thus created, reminiscent of schoolrooms and of festive rituals in the street and the church, Medwall's actors, themselves servants, confront the audience with their own morals and manners, the presumptions of wealth and privilege. Thus, as Lascombes explains, "the play's spectator is brought to see the drama in performance through the eyes of those who produce it."<sup>241</sup> Both plot and subplot interrogate the privileges of birth, the worship of wealth and sumptuary display, even the wisdom of male elders.

Altman has argued that the dynamic of the play is inquiry rather than syllogism, exploration rather than demonstration. The conclusion, he points out, is equivocal, as Lucre chooses Gayus but acknowledges that a nobly born man of virtue would have been preferable:

In effect, the play does two separate and not entirely congruent things: intellectually, it summons up the vision of an ideal; physically, it embraces the actual that most closely resembles the ideal. The good frog never turns into Prince Charming. The fact that the plot arrives at one solution and the heroine points to another suggests that the function of the play has not been to demonstrate

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<sup>241</sup> Lascombes 72.



anything but rather to lead the audience to envision, and ultimately to achieve, the ideal solution itself.<sup>242</sup>

The immediate effect, in Altman's view, is to posit the performance of inquiry itself as a new ideal, the prime mover in a universe where value is negotiated by reasoned eloquence. The meritocratic ideal triumphs not only in the final victory of Gayus's sober virtues, but earlier, at the moment that A announces Lucre's intention to hear her suitors in a "reyal disputation" (I.1410) in which "eyther of them bothe must tell / And shew the best he can / To force the goodness of his owne condycion / Bothe by example and gode reason" (I.1404-7). That is, the victory is not just for the reasoned eloquence of one argument or another, but for reasoned eloquence itself. Morton's guests gain access to this ideal universe through the rabbit-hole of vulgar comedy, as the disputation is announced, accompanied, and critiqued by the contrapuntal kibitzing of A and B. Altman sees this comedy as essential to the lesson of the play: "Finally, as comic artifact, it locates its resolution not in a correct choice but in the image of an ideal synthesis of two imperfect alternatives. It is a comedy of inclusiveness, not conversion."<sup>243</sup>

Altman's reading of Medwall is part of his larger argument that Tudor drama embraced the form of *argumentum in utramque partem*, replacing the conversion narratives of morality plays with "the exercise of wonder" and producing wide-ranging

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<sup>242</sup> Altman 23.

<sup>243</sup> Altman 25. Note that John Scott Colley, on the other hand, reads Medwall's interlude as "a 'political' play that is addressed to what certainly could have been a hostile audience. Medwall manipulates his commentary on dramatic illusion, and the actions of A and B, primarily to support his rhetoric, and not only in allusion to the metaphysics of art.... The play is an early 'looking glass for London and England,' and is not a self-contained treatise on art and fantasy in the manner of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*"; see his "*Fulgens and Lucre's: Politics and Aesthetics*," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 23 (1975): 329.

effects in English literature and culture.<sup>244</sup> Altman's argument is attractive in its emphasis on intellectual ideals and all-embracing synthesis, and useful in explaining the unresolved conflicts in this play and the other Tudor plays I examine in subsequent chapters.

In my own reading, I build on Altman's idea of the dynamic of *Fulgens and Luces* as inquiry embraced by comedy, though finally I understand the play's action and conclusion in more convergent terms. I find that those elements of the play that suspend its meritocratic assertions in comic uncertainty function primarily as rhetorical insulators against giving offense, not as fully developed arguments; the social conservatism of the clowns and the claims of the degenerate Cornelius are not equal to the task of carrying one side of a convincing *argumentum in utramque partem*, the equivocations of Luces notwithstanding. Instead, I argue that the play leads the audience through an inquiry into the nature of true nobility that develops as a lesson in rhetorical role-playing, clearly directed at the internalization of a humanist ideal and the rejection of outworn aristocratic notions. The dramatic lesson moves contrapuntally between the comic plot and the humanist *controversia*. The comedy ridicules the ambitions of presumptuous servants and the arrogance of corrupt aristocrats, contained by their own ignorance and folly, while the *controversia* figures in classicizing oratory the triumph of merit and virtue over the privileges of birth.

Medwall's special contribution to English drama lies, I suggest, not just in the crackling fusion of these two plots, but in the liminal space created between them, a world, like the school, in which subversive social ideals can be aired with the detachment

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<sup>244</sup> Altman 1.

of a lesson in rhetoric, and also a world in which ignorant representatives of the *status quo*, whether noblemen or their slavish servants, can be made to wear the fool's livery. At every stage Medwall figures human folly in the generous, even affectionate manner of a teacher who would correct rather than condemn. But finally the correction of folly matters more than the process of detached inquiry, which functions instrumentally, not so much to equivocate on the outcome as to suspend the privileges of the *status quo*. Medwall uses the liminal space not for the free-for-all play of conflicting ideas, but as a site in which he instructs his audience in the virtues of a new social ideal and purifies them of the vices of an outworn one. The play's movement between low comedy and high-minded disputation tracks the progression from *vulgaria* to moral philosophy in the humanist curriculum, and a parallel trajectory from self-seeking, private concerns to social and public ones. While the comic framework and the equivocation of Lucretius's final disclaimer may have a palliative effect on the audience, they finally function not to qualify this instruction, but to enforce a categorical separation between those who are worthy of mastery and those who are not.

From the first moment of the interlude Medwall uses the conventions of festive comedy to throw into confusion the conventions of social rank. A nameless man (called A in the printed text) appears as an interloper at the banquet that provides the occasion for the interlude. In the opening words of the play, A upbraids the other banqueters for having fallen quiet and, a self-appointed Lord of Misrule, urges them to make merry:

A, for Goddis will,  
What meane ye, syrs, to stond so still?  
Have not ye etyn and your fill  
And payd no thinge therefore?

...

Ye ar welcom eche oon  
Unto this house withoute faynyng.  
But I marvayle moche of one thinge,  
That after this mery drynkyng  
And good recreacyon  
There is no wordes amonge this presse—  
*Non sunt loquela neque sermones—*  
But as it were men in sadness. (I.1-19)

This interloping *arbiter bibendi* has something of the Plautine parasite about him, celebrating the fact that the bountiful feast is paid for by someone else. Most significant, he is an *arbiter loquendi* as well, demanding “wordes,” even brandishing the Latin of the Vulgate, a language of power to which the meanest servant had daily access in church. A shows some learned wit in alluding to a psalm that states that the glory and power of the Lord reverberates wordlessly through all creation.<sup>245</sup> In applying this to the silence of the guests in Morton’s hall, he emphasizes their lordly power, and by contrast his own pluck in confronting them. He interprets their silence more topically as anticipation of an entertainment, and he worries that he might be ejected: “I am sure here shalbe somewhat

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<sup>245</sup> Medwall quotes from Psalm XIX, which many of Morton’s guests would have recognized. Judged from our perspective, the psalm is an apt choice for Medwall’s play, as it discourses on the powers of speech and of knowledge, and also invokes images of a bridegroom and of a strong man running a race. Verses 2-5 seem especially apposite to the themes of Medwall’s play: *Dies diei eructat verbum, et nox nocti judicat scientiam. / Non sunt loquela, neque sermones, quorum non audiantur voces eorum. / In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum: et in fines orbis terrae verba eorum. / In sole posuit tabernaculum suum: et ipse tamquam sponsus procedens de thalamo suo: Exultavit, ut gigas, ad currendam viam.* [The day unto the day pours forth the word, and night unto the night proclaims the knowledge. / There is no language or speech, no voices may be heard. / But their sound goes out into all the world, their words to the ends of the earth. / In them he has placed his tent for the sun, who, stepping forth like a bridegroom from his bridal chamber, has rejoiced like a strongman at a race about to be run.]

ado, / And iwis I will know it or I go / Withoute I be dryvyn hens” (I.25-57). The precarious position of the parasite thinly masks the similar position of the player (and also that of the dramatist) who has in fact begun the play he pretends to anticipate. The first speech in our earliest secular play thus announces very plainly that it will be, in part at least, a play concerned with the insecure standing of the player-servant in the lordly crowd he addresses as “ye, syrs.” The insecurity is opposed by his audacious rhetoric, and both are made socially tolerable by comic license, the conventions of which allow the audience to assume that the social reversals of the play are temporary merely.

Another nameless man (called B in the text) emerges from the crowd and reassures A that he can remain in the hall. The reassurances of B invoke the spirit of festive drama, proclaiming the stage as a space that levels the standing of master and man:

Nay, nay, hardely man, I undertake  
No man wyll suche mastryes make!  
And it were but for the maner sake,  
Thou maist tary by licence  
Among other men and see the pley—  
I warand no man wyll say the nay. (I.28-33)

So “mastryes” are characterized not as the inherent rights of rank, but as deeds performed by men and limited by “maner.” Perhaps Medwall’s audience could hear an invidious quibble on the privileges of “mastryes” in “maist tary by licence.” A receives the announcement of the play as a source of “myche plesure and comfort” (I.41), but betrays his ignorance of the niceties of degree when he mistakes B for “oon / Of them that shall

play” (I.44-45). B takes umbrage at this mistake: “Nay, I am none. / I trowe thou spekyst in derision / To lyke me therto” (I.45-47). A excuses his confusion on account of B’s “apparell,” commenting that “there is so myche nyce array / Amonges these galandis now aday / That a man shall not lightly / Know a player from a nother man” (I.53-6). The confusion of A (whether played as sly or genuine), suggests that B may be ostentatiously overdressed, that despite his gracious reassurances he is transparently impersonating a gentleman, and by implication that rank in general may be questioned as a form of impersonation.<sup>246</sup> So from the outset the gentle audience is put on notice that their own sumptuary excesses are to be lampooned by being identified with the pretensions of the players and bumptious servants.

B, still scrambling to assert his insider status relative to the newcomer A, claims to be “of counsell” with the players, and unfolds to A, prologue-like, the plot of the contest for the hand of Lucre. B’s synopsis lays out the universe of the play explicitly in terms of dominion, with particular emphasis on nobility and rank:

When thempire of Rome was in such floure  
That all the world was sugett to the same,  
Than was there an nobill senatour,  
And as I remember, Fulgens was his name,

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<sup>246</sup> Suzanne Westfall explains A’s confusion simply as a function of the loosely defined boundaries in household theater: “The generalized performance space of the great hall or tilyard could easily lead to mistaken identities, a fact that Medwall capitalizes on in *Fulgens and Lucre*.... Neither costume nor physical position distinguishes spectator from the spectacle.” See her “A Commonty a Christmas Gambold or a Tumbling Trick: Household Theater,” in *A New History of Early English Drama*, eds. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 53.

Which had a daughter of nobill fame.  
And yet, as thuctor sayth in veray dede,  
Her nobill vertue dide her fame exceed. (I.70-76)

The prologue develops the contrast between “nobill fame” and “nobill vertue” in introducing the rival suitors:

One of them was called Publius Cornelius  
Borne of noble blode, it is not nay.  
That other was one Gayus Flamyneus,  
Borne of pore stocke, as men doth say.  
But for all that, many a fayre day  
Thorough his grete wisdom and vertueous behavvour  
He rulyd the comen wele to his grete honoure. (I.91-97)

Honor, wisdom, and virtuous service in the rule of the commonwealth clearly set Gayus apart even before we meet him.

And how so be it that the vulgare opynion  
Hade both these men in lyke favour and reverence  
Supposing they had bene of lyke condycion,  
Yet this seyde woman of inestimable prudence  
Saw that there was some maner of difference,  
For the whiche her answer she differed and spared  
Tyll both theyre condycions were openly declared. (I.98-104)

Open declaration, the performance of rhetoric, is the battlefield on which each suitor will show his true “condycion,” which in this play clearly denotes not just rank but character

or merit. B, as chorus, enjoys a superior position relative to the audience, who at this point are still in the position of those whose “vulgare opynion” puts the nobly-born man on an equal footing with the base-born man. They are ripe to be instructed in the “maner of difference,” discerned by the prudence of the noble woman.

Though Medwall later makes the lady the judge of the disputation, B’s prologue follows the humanist source, Tiptoft’s translation of Buonaccorso’s *De Vera Nobilitate*, in granting jurisdiction to the senate:

They to gyve therin an utter sentence  
Which of these two men sholde have the preeminence.  
And finally they gave sentence and awarde  
That Gayus Flamyneus was to be commende  
For the more nobill man, havynge no regarde  
To his lowe byrthe of the whiche he dyde dyscende,  
But onely to his vertue thay dyde therin attende,  
Whiche was so grete that of convenience  
All the cyte of Rome dyd hym honour and reverence. (I.117-25)

If the audience, ignoring finer historical distinctions, drew analogies between the Roman senate and English parliament, and the “cyte of Rome” and the City of London, they would at this point be anticipating a drama in which the growing authority of a gentrified burgher élite would be extolled. Moreover, the use of the anonymous B as an expert on both the classical past and the immediate future actively demonstrates that historical information is a powerful medium of exchange in this liminal world, as in school, conferring authority even on a man of no name.



The comic framework has functioned thus far to blur social and dramatic borders, placing the audience in the position of submissive learners, but here the subversive elements of the prologue evoke a reactionary move toward containment. A responds to B's synopsis of the plot indignantly, intending to advise the actors that the audience will not tolerate "that conclusion":

What? Wyll they afferme that a chorles son  
Sholde be more noble than a gentilman born?  
Nay, beware, for men wyll have therof grete scorn—  
It may not be spoken in no maner of case. (I.130-33)

B reassures him, first by deference to the power of reason and rhetoric:

Yes, suche consyderacions may be layde  
That every reasonable man in this place  
Wyll holde hym therin well apayde—  
The matter may be so well convayde. (I.134-37)

A senses a real threat, however, presumably from the incensed audience:

Let them convay and cary clene than,  
Or els he wyll repent that this play began. (I.138-39)

The dramatic tension of the play is thus situated not only between the noble Cornelius and the base-born Gayus, but also between the noble audience and the upstart actors.

The tension makes A uneasy, and he maneuvers to distance himself from any offense the play may give, again blurring the limits of what is on stage and what is not:

How be it, the matter touchith me never a dell,  
For I am nether of vertue excellent

Nor yet of gentyl blode. This I know well,  
But I speke it onely for this entent:  
I wolde not that any man sholde be shent!  
And yet there can no man blame us two,  
For why in this matter we have nought to do. (I.140-146)

The immediate effect of Medwall's use of A and B as prologue and chorus is to heighten the sense that something subversive is about to be enacted, while creating an equivocal point of view, authorial insofar as it is understood as deliberately performed from a script in verse, yet not authorial insofar as these men are themselves clearly not clerks, but stand-ins for common men who long to see the goings-on inside the halls of power. They place themselves outside both rival claims of "vertue excellent" and "gentyl blode," and initially the author stands with them, as if hoping to comment with immunity, to satirize but to avoid shame and blame. B joins A as an observer-actor, having "nought to do" in this matter:

We? No, god wott, no thing at all,  
Save that we come to see this play  
As farre as we may by the leve of the marshall.  
I love to beholde suche myrthes always,  
For y have sene byfore this day  
Of suche maner thingis in many a gode place  
Both gode examples and right honest solace.  
This play in like wyse I am sure  
Is made for the same entent a[n]d purpose

To do every man both myrth and pleasure.  
Wherfor I can not think or suppose  
That they wyll ony worde therin disclose  
But suche as shall stond with treuth and reason  
In godely maner according to the season. (I.147-60)

If “godely maner according to the season” introduces festive license, it is remarkable to see it linked to “treuth and reason.” In yoking mirth and truth, B connects comic liberties to the logical appeal, obliging the audience to detach themselves from their privileged vantage and to entertain the arguments on their merits. This invocation is ironically reinforced by an appeal to authority, first in the person of “the marshall” who keeps order in the hall as a servant of the host, who by implication has approved the play, and also by reference to other such plays “in many a gode place,” implying that such risky truths have been considered on stages in other great houses. Thus the radical possibilities raised in the interlude, framed at first as comic play, begin to gather instructive authority.

A, however, is not easily comforted, pushing the sense of risk up a notch. In their next exchange the nameless men emerge as would-be defenders of the truth against the lies and flattery of “worldly men,” especially in court:

A: Ye, but trouth may not be sayde always,  
For somtyme it causith gruge and despite.

B: Ye, goth the world so now a day  
That a man must say the crow is white?

A: Ye, that he must, be God allmyght.  
He must both lye and flater now and than

That castith hym to dwell amonge worldly men.

In some courtis such men shall most wyn!

B: Ye, but as for the parish where I abide,

Suche flaterye is abhorride as dedly syn. (I.161-70)

The chorus thus casts the *controversia* as a debate between worldly falsehood and godly truth, situated on the one hand in courts and on the other in “the parish where I abide,” which may be understood as both the homely site of the common man’s life, and as Lambeth itself, seat of the host’s spiritual dominion, and venue for this play. In thus making a parish of a court, Medwall distances the archepiscopal court from courtly abuses. At the same, time he distances his own exposition of the powers of rhetoric to lift a common man and to serve the commonwealth from some of the standard grounds for attacking rhetoric as the glozing trickery of courtiers and lawyers.<sup>247</sup>

B expresses confidence that the actors need not fear the consequences of their plain-speaking, first as truth is its own defense, and second as the play’s setting in the ancient past will keep the audience from being offended by its subversive content:

Wherefore I can think these folke wyll not spare

After playne trowth this matier to procede

As the story seyth. Why shulde they care?

I trow here is no man of the kyn or sed

Of either partie, for why they were bore

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<sup>247</sup> The image of the white crow, for example, is strikingly like an image in Pico’s attack on rhetoric in his letter to Ermolao Barbaro: “For what is the office of the rhetor other than to lie, deceive, circumvent, practice sleight-of-hand tricks. It’s your business, as you say, to turn black into white and white into black as you will;” see Wayne Rebhorn, *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000) 59.

In the cytie of Rome as I sayd before (I.175-80).<sup>248</sup>

B, in the role of a chorus, thus acknowledges the claims both of disinterested truth and of self-interested partisanship, placing the play in a liminal territory where universal verities can be considered at a remove from local interests, but not in defiance of them.

Classical Rome, with its layered associations of imperial power, republican government, and religious authority (present in the person of the master of the house), provides the outward trappings and philosophical structures for this dramatic borderland. Common English men, however, serve as observer-commentators there, and as spokesmen for skeptical common sense. While B sees the play as an inoffensive and amusing look into “playne trouth,” he appreciates A’s apprehensions about the play’s assault on the conventions of rank. B proposes to suspend judgment, to “leve all this doutfull question, / And prayse at the parting evyn as ye fynde” (I.181-82), and A agrees, but reserves the right to ridicule the results: “Praise who wyll or dispraise, I will not be behind. / I wyll gest theron what so every shal befall / If I can fynd any man to gest withal” (I.185-87). By thus reserving the chorus-commentator role for an interloper of subservient rank, Medwall suspends the *controversia* in a festive ambiguity, obliging the audience to consider at length and in detail the viewpoint of the less privileged, at once subversive and conservative, comically outrageous and pragmatically conventional. The

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<sup>248</sup> Robert C. Jones argues that Medwall conflates the two worlds of the play, Morton’s hall and Fulgens’s Rome, in order to heighten satire of the follies of the contemporary world. He sees this happening most clearly in the failure of A and B to understand, even at the end, the ideals of the ‘Roman’ world of meritocratic virtue. See his “The Stage World and the ‘Real World’ in Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucrez*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 32 (1971) 131.

audience is primed for instruction, expecting excitement, and assured that it will give no offense.

The clown-chorus B steps up his instructional mastery over this expanded liminal stage, commanding the audience, “Give rome there, syrs” (I.193) and naming the first actor as “Fulgence the senatour,” “father of the foreside virgin” (I.197, 199). Enter Fulgens, offering prayers of gratitude for having, among his manifold worldly treasures, so virtuous a daughter as Lucres. Here the play moves to a second plane, on which Fulgens, and then Lucres, enact an ideal of responsible inherited nobility. The senator’s thanksgiving serves primarily as a setting in which to place his daughter as his “chief jewell and riches” (I.281), remarkable for both “beaute and clere understanding” (I.263). The prayer of Fulgens establishes in some detail an ethic of humanist piety, with a clear emphasis on “talent” as treasure, variously distributed throughout humankind. Thus with his first words he praises “our most drad Lord and Savyour” (I.203), who does not reserve his bounty for men of high rank:

But lettith his son shyne on riche and poore,  
And of his grace is ever indifferent  
All be yt he diversely commytteth his talent.  
To some he lendith the sprete of prophecy,  
To some the plenty of tonges eloquence,  
To some grete wisdom and worldly policy,  
To some literature and speculatyf science,  
To some he geveth the grace of preemynence  
In honour and degre, and to some abundance

Of tresoure, riches, and grete inheritaunce. (I.206-15)

In this sequence Fulgens gives the liberal arts a vatic authority by association with “prophecy” and “preemynence,” and piously interprets his own good fortune as a call of *noblesse oblige*, “The larger recompense and thank therfor to make” (I.219). Fulgens sees his duty as divided between the duty to “serve and prayse” (I.274) God in gratitude, and “the promocyon of my doughter Lucrez / To some metely marriage” (I.279-80). If Fulgens represents all that is upright in the established order, Medwall takes that to include humble obeisance to the *status quo* from which he has profited, and at the same time an ambition for social advancement through his daughter. Scratch a noble Roman senator, find an ambitious burgher.

The didactic action moves from the positive exemplum of Fulgens to the cautionary counter-example when Cornelius approaches Fulgens to ask for Lucrez in marriage. The suitor appears at first to be innocent enough, and the audience may be easily taken in, as Fulgens is, uncritically accepting the obvious advantages of this rich man’s offer “to honour and advaunce” her “if she will agree / That I so pore a man her husbonde shuld be” (I.303-4). Fulgens parries this false modesty, acknowledging Cornelius’s “grete birth and substaunce” (I.308) as superior to his own:

My doghter Lucrez is full unworthy  
Of birth and goodis to loke so hye,  
Savyng that happily her gode condicyon  
May her enable to suche promocyon. (I. 309-12)

The rhyming words “condicyon” and “promocyon” carry much of Medwall’s argument: throughout the play, “condicyon” denotes both social rank and moral character, implicitly

joined by merit. It is finally Gayus's "condicyon," like Lucre's here, that makes him worthy of "promocyon." Fulgens affirms such social promotion with all the weight of his noble authority, and puts the onus for the wooing back on Cornelius: "Why do ye not laboure to her therefore?" (I.314). Cornelius protests that he is "so brent in loves fyre / that no thing may my payne aslake / Withoute that ye wyll my cure undertake" (I.331-33). Thus he portrays himself as a languishing lover of the courtly tradition, but also as a conventional suitor in a patriarchal system, appealing for relief not to the lady but to her father. Fulgens further shows himself to be a liberal nobleman by insisting that Lucre shall have "the liberte / Of her owne choice" (I.337-38) in the question of the marriage, though he shows his conservative stripe by promising Cornelius that he will "her advyse / To love you before other in all godely wyse" (I.339-40). Medwall thus constructs the drama's dilemma in such a way that the *status quo* of inherited privilege seems to have a clear advantage in the ensuing contest, if only its scion can rise to the occasion.

Left alone, Cornelius promptly shows that he feels himself unequal to the task, revealing his own inadequacy specifically in terms of intelligence. Turning to the audience, he confides that he needs help with performative expertise to press his suit:

Now a wise fellow that had sumwhat a brayne,  
And of suche thingis had experience,  
Such a one wolde I with me retayne  
To gyve me counseile and assistence.  
For I will spare no cost or expence  
Nor yet refuse ony laboure or payne  
The love of fayre Lucre therby to attayne.



So many gode felowes as byn in this hall,  
And is ther non, syrs, among you all  
That wyll enterprise this gere?  
Some of you can do it if ye lust!  
But if ye wyl not, than I must  
Go seche a man elliswhere. (I.347-59)

So the representative of irresponsible inherited privilege shows himself ready to depend on a servant for “brayne” and “experience,” laughably confused with his own “expeñce” and “laboure.” His appeal directly to Morton’s guests for wise “counseile and assistence” may have raised a laugh, considering how many in that audience were counselors to the great, even Privy Councilors like the host himself. Medwall thus places the audience in the superior position of supplying the deficiency of the feckless nobleman, while at the same time he invites them inside the ambiguous point of view of clerkly retainers.

This awkward vision provides an apt opportunity to show that service and mastery are assumed roles, ultimately contingent on intelligence, by providing the nobleman a “brayne” from the lowest ranks. B, who has overheard Cornelius’s lament, declares, “Now have I spied a mete office for me, / For I wyl be of counsel and I may / With yonder man” (I.360-62). A, ever cautious, protests that B will thus “distroy all the play,” but B rejoins, “The play began never till now” (I.363, 365). B penetrates the dramatic boundaries he himself established, now vowing to enter the plot as a “bawde” (I.368) for Cornelius. He suggests that A offer like service to Gayus, characterizing such service as “a nother pageant” (I.372). When A questions how this performance may profit him, B hushes him:

Speke not so hye,  
Leste any man of this company  
Know oure purpose openly  
And breke all oure daunce!  
For I assure the faithfully,  
If thou quyte the as well as I,  
This gere shall us both avaunce. (I.387-93)

Medwall thus aligns serving a master with playing a role, and also with social advancement. In the same stroke he makes the audience privy to this “daunce,” while also implying that they have some custodial interest in preventing the “avaunce” of A and B. A follows B’s lead willingly enough, justifying their new roles as antidotes to the social threat posed by masterless men: “This fellow and I be maysterles / And lyve moste part in ydelnes, / Therefore some maner of besenes / Wolde become us both well” (I.398-401). This justification exposes a weakness in the ethic of service that demands a place for everyone and that everyone be in his place: the proffered service of idle men to inept masters inevitably “stynketh,” as the *vulgaria* warn. In festive drama, that weakness promises comic reversals in which masters are shown to be no better than their servants.

But Medwall interrupts the comic cautionary tale to counterpoise exemplary images of mastery, ennobled by the humanist attributes of liberty, good counsel, and worldly advancement. Fulgens and Lucre enter, discussing her choice between her two suitors. The father frames the discussion as a question of his daughter’s “promocyon,” (I.411). Lucre declares that she values her “fre choyse,” but also her father’s “counsel” (I.428, 430), showing herself to be both self-assertive and dutiful. Father and daughter

agree that she should accept “hym whiche is most honorable” (I.454), to which end she will “make inquisicyon / Whych of this two men is better of condicyon” (I.457-58). This decision embraces two conclusions of historic import, both for English drama and English society. First, “condicyon,” part rank, part character, but wholly social rather than spiritual and largely merited rather than inherited, is made the determinant of “honourable” status. Second, “inquisicyon,” part reasoning, part rhetoric, but entirely discursive rather than penitential or military, is made the method of determining “condicyon.” At this point the audience in Morton’s hall found itself contemplating the lesson unfolding at two complementary levels: the confusions of servants and masters promised by the festive comedy, and the reasoned discernment between the more and the less honorable promised by the inquisition. Suppose that a bright young scion of the City, like Morton’s page Thomas More, witnessed Chaplain Medwall’s interlude of *controversia* embedded in feasting, much like the grammar school disputations inserted by his schoolmasters into the carnival festivities of St. Bartholomew’s day. What impression can he have taken away from each, but that learned discourse was like festive performance, a competitive form of play by which social ambitions were made public?

Lest too light winning make the prize light, Medwall raises doubts about the wisdom of deciding matters of such weight by eloquence alone. Lucreces confesses to her maid that she has misgivings about trusting so much to the language of lovers: “So greate dyssemblynge now a daye / there is conveyed under wordes gaye” (I.475-76).<sup>249</sup> Her

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<sup>249</sup> Schoolboys in Medwall’s day memorized *vulgaria* that expressed a very similar ambivalence about rhetoric. The author of the Arundel manuscript had his Magdalen boys learn to value the power of speech: “I counsel you, be not aferede to speke for yur availe, for it is a comyn sayng, ‘Spare speke, spare spede’ (255). Yet they

suspicion of “wordes gaye” can also be identified on the one hand with the antirhetorical sentiments already expressed by A and B, and also with the suspicion of sumptuary display in dress and entertainment expressed throughout: theatrical struttings of speech and costume can be read as courtly excesses on the one hand, or as the pretensions of social climbers on the other. Medwall thus confronts the risks of assigning merit on the basis of performances, but immediately answers them with the entrance of his virtuous protagonist.

Here the play moves to the least familiar territory thus far, that of the worthy New Man. Medwall makes this potentially threatening creature a study in solid, even dull, civic virtues. Though Gayus begins his wooing by paying respect to the courtly ideal of “obedyence / Unto love” (I.488-89), he proceeds with a bluff antirhetorical rhetoric, eschewing “the gise / Of wanton lovers now aday, / Whiche doth many flatering wordis devise” (I.519-21), declaring his intentions to Lucre in words “short and playne” (I.526). In this soldierly approach to the lady, Medwall departs markedly from Tiptoft’s translation of Buonaccorso, where Gayus engages first to last in overwhelming Cornelius with torrents of eloquent argument and classical learning, addressing himself to Lucre only in passing. Medwall’s sturdy Roman lady, who so recently expressed concern about

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also recited a warning against the filed tongues of city sharpers who “study nothing in the worlde ellys but for to decyve menn with fair speech” (232). Whittinton’s boys learned to mock the histrionic pretensions of a schoolmaster whose reading aloud showed him to be “to curyose (bycause to shewe himself) in declaracyon,” when instead he should “studye to make euydent and playne to the profet of the herers” (103). Horman likewise taught his boys to attend closely to style in writing, but to value plainness: “This maner of writing is to exquyfite / and to moche labourde and fo is darke and vnfaury” (90v); “The olde men dyd nat fet by the fmothe and floryffhed ftyle the whiche is nowe moche made of” (90v); “Ye paint your maters with colours of rethoryke” (92v); “In thy piftyl there is gay flifteryng of wordis and no grauyte of fentence” (96r).

dissembling language, like Gayus's style: "Nay, nay, syr, that guyse is best!" (I.549). Medwall's departure from his source suggests that he reckoned that his audience, like the lady, would accept the ambitions of the New Man more easily in this guileless guise, this rhetoric that disclaims rhetoric. Gayus departs, all but assured of success, and the conclusion of the play and its lesson seems forgone.

But Medwall has set snares for his exemplary protagonist, tests of his discretion to be passed before he can claim his prize. Gayus encounters A, who falsely informs him that Lucre has offered the same assurances to Cornelius. A offers his services to Gayus, pretending to be moved only by *noblesse oblige* to save the honor of the deceived suitor: "Though it be unto me no profyte nor gayne. / But therefore I speke and have dysdayne / To se in a woman suche dyssemblaunce / Towarde a gentylman of youre substaunce" (I.599-602). So the masterless man assumes the role of a benefactor, and flatters Gayus by suggesting that his "substaunce" makes him superior to the dissembling lady. Gayus asks for "surete" (I.623) before engaging A's services, and A calls in B as a character reference, "a gentilman that wolde truste me" (I.626). B affirms A's honesty by an ambiguous reference to their education: "He and I dwelled many a feyre day / In one scole, and yet I wot well / From thens he bare never away / The worth of an halfe peny that I can tell" (I.644-47). The evocation of schoolboy innocence stakes a claim to a spurious gentility on the one hand, as only a privileged minority went to school. This claim is slyly undercut by the ambiguous remark that his friend took nothing from his school, whether as a pilferer or as a scholar. The line may be offered as typical of a serving man's skeptical view of the profits of learning, but it also resonates with the

traditional contempt expressed by gentlemen for “clerkly” learning, as for *arrivistes* like Gayus.

At this point, the instructor seems to be asking if the New Man, caught between an aristocratic opponent and a truant servant, can show himself worthy of social mastery. Gayus acknowledges his rival’s “better blode” (I.661), but places his faith in Lucre’s discernment as to “Whether his condicyons therto agree” (I.664). Though somewhat skeptical of A’s abilities, he sends his new servant to ask Lucre for a “redy answer” (I.677), thus affirming the virtues of plain speaking and good reason on the one hand, but entrusting his fate to an untested servant on the other. If, in the ethic of service, the master is known by the abilities of his servants, then Medwall has placed the two suitors on an equally precarious footing.

Having thus leveled the playing field, Medwall returns to develop his cautionary counter-example from the point of view of the servants themselves. A and B, left alone, carry on a merry dialogue which reveals the liberality of Cornelius as ridiculous prodigality, although a source of profit to his servants: “It is no maystry to thryve at all / Under a man that is so liberall” (I.697-98).<sup>250</sup> Indeed, B extols an economic system based on the profligacy of the rich man:

Why sholde he those goodis spare,

Sith he laborede never therefore?

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<sup>250</sup> Olga Horner marshals persuasive evidence that Cornelius’s prodigality is to be identified with the hereditary magnates whom Henry VII systematically excluded from his government in favor of new men of proven ability. Horner builds her argument around the “uniquely English offences of maintenance and retaining,” or the keeping of private armies by English magnates (51). Gayus accuses Cornelius of “open maintenance” (II.635). See her “Fulgens and Lucre: An Historical Perspective,” *Medieval English Theater* 15 (1993): 55ff.

Nay, and every man sholde care  
For goodis, and specially suche as are  
Of gentil blode, it were grete syn,  
For all liberalite in them sholde begyn.  
Many a pore man therby doth wyn  
The chief substauns of his lyving. (I.707-14)

This cynical view of trickle-down (or skim-off) economics pillories the interlocking dependencies of the service ethic (not to say of Christian charity). Ironically, this view from below reveals that idle, unwary masters actually undermine true gentility and make a mockery of liberality. B comments at great length on Cornelius's extravagance in dress (I.720-76), and on how his servants are dressed "in the same wyse" (I.762). Service for such stinking servants is an opportunity to strut in plundered finery, following the example of prodigal masters. Thus Medwall shifts the economic values of true nobility away from aristocratic largesse and splendor, in the direction of sturdy burgher husbandry.

Medwall uses his liminal stage not only as a place for servants to send up the sumptuary excesses of irresponsible aristocrats, but also as a platform on which to purify the courtship ritual of courtly associations which reduce the marriage bond to the status of a prize in a jousting match. A and B make fun of their lovelorn masters in a series of rude jokes about marriage, and then throw themselves into a parody of the courtship in their competitive wooing of Lucre's maid, Jone. A confides that he has already "marrayed two or thre" women of questionable character who "labore nyght and day / And ease many a man in some case" (I.792, 802-3). In a series of jokes with "gentyll Jone"

the men compare marriage unfavorably to bawdry, while Jone puts down matrimony as a state of poverty and strife. So stirred to gallantry, her rival suitors challenge each other to courtly combat for her favor. The servants thus align themselves with archaic aristocratic methods of demonstrating mastery.

Jone has an appetite for solid profit as well, but would prefer to see her knights prove their “maystry / Be it in cookery or in pastry / In fettis of warre or dedys of chivalry” (I.1095-97). Unmoved by her pragmatism, the rivals prefer schoolboy versions of courtly competitions: singing, wrestling, and finally a bout of “farte pryke in cule” (I.1169). This contest, a grotesque parody of jousting, involves their being bound hand and foot by Jone herself, then, squatting on the ground, poking at each other with sticks held between their legs, extending up in front and down behind, like stick-horses.<sup>251</sup> The name of the contest mysteriously conflates flatulence with anal copulation, and so the would-be gallants offer their lady a stinking spectacle of their proffered service, parodying not only the noble sport of jousting, but the conjugal embrace itself. The mock-heroic contest enacts the regressive descent of the servants into puerile travesties of courtly conventions that are nearly passé, fit to be handed down to the servants like the lord’s cast-off finery. The servants play at being jousting lords in a thick cloud of fart jokes, notably one in which B equates the mastery of A’s intercrural weapon with mastery of his anal sphincter: “But see ye hold fast behind / Lest ye troble us in all”

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<sup>251</sup> This same game appears in Rudyard Kipling’s stories of school life where it is called “cock fighting”; see his “The Moral Reformers,” in *Stalky and Co.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 126ff. The connection of Medwall’s high-jinks to Kipling and to the joust is explored, with diagrams of a contemporary reenactment of the contests, by Peter Meredith and Meg Twycross, in “Farte Pryke in Cule’and Cock-Fighting,” *Medieval English Theater* 6 (1984) 30-39.



(I.1181-82). So the play reaches the climax of its festive mirth. The low comedy sets up a contrast to the high, sober disputation to come, in which reason and eloquence will, as the prologue has warned, assert a new order in which marriage is a freely chosen union of kindred minds.

The jousting contest concludes as B unseats A, who cries *in extremis* for a priest to whom he can confess, cuing another stinking joke from B: “For he is not in clene lyfe in dede: / I fele it at my nose” (I.1211-12). B’s victory proves hollow, as Jone breaks the news that she is already promised to another man, whereupon she rewards the two upstarts by beating them soundly and leaving them trussed and whimpering. Gayus finds them thus, and to his inquiries A, complaining of his wounds, delivers a final fart joke:

And I have a grete garce here byhynde  
Out of the whiche ther commythe suche a wynde  
That yf ye holde a candyll therto  
Hytt wyll blowe it oute—that wyll hyt do! (I.1262-65)

Falstaff-like, A claims that they have been humiliated in the act of bravely defending Gayus’s interests against Cornelius’s servants, and even calls B to corroborate his story. Gayus is not deceived by the windy protestations of proffered service, concluding, “Well then, ye lye both two!” (I.1286). The festive reversals of the play’s first part thus conclude, and it is the New Man, not the hereditary lord, who distinguishes true service from false and restores rightful order.

Reminded of his duty as chorus, A announces the disputation on true virtue to be held in the second part, after more feasting. The wounded servant counsels his master to study rhetoric in the interval: “It is best that ye go hens / For to study and call to mynde /

Suche argumentis as ye can best fynde” (I.1318-20). Assenting, Gayus generously restores his servant’s dignity, though only as an extension of his own: “Thy counsel is gode—be it so, / and evyn thereafter wyll I do, / For I holde it best” (I.1322-24).

Left alone, the two servants discuss the promised disputation in terms that set it forth as dramatic instruction. When A asks B’s opinion on which of the suitors “is moste noble of condycion” (I.1375), B cynically replies, “He that hathe moste nobles in store” (I.1377), punning on “nobles” as gold coins. He also refers to the aristocratic practice of hiring thugs, and to Cornelius’s “store” of noble kinsmen, as he explains: “I am sure Cornelyus is able / With his owne goodis to bye a rable / Of suche as Gayus is! / And over that, yf nobleness of kynn / May this womans favour wynn, / I am sure he can not mys” (I.1380-85). To this A responds: “Ye, but come hether sone to the ynde of this playe / And thou shalt se wherto all that wyll wey— / It shall be for thy lernynge” (I.1386-88). While this lesson is ostensibly aimed at the reactionary B, we may feel the audience’s skepticism to be addressed as well. B seems to take their point of view as he huffily protests the continuation of the play: “It is a gentylmanly thinge / That I shulde awayt and come agayne / For other mennys causes and take suche payne! / I wyll not do it, I make God avowe. / Why might not this matter be endyd nowe?” (I.1391-95).

A excuses the delay by further blurring the time of the play with the time of Morton’s banquet: in Rome “Lucrez and her father may not attende / At this seson to make an ende” (I.1412-13) and the rivals need time to prepare their arguments, while in Lambeth the “folke that sitt here in the hall” cannot be kept “fro theyre dyner all day” (I.1413, 1416). Fully resurrected from his humiliations, A seizes the part of the *arbiter bibendi*, proclaiming, “Ussher, gete them goode wyne therto, / Fyll them of the best. / Let

it be so or ye wyll be shent, / For it is the wyll and commaundment / Of the master of the fest” (I.1422-26). So Medwall suspends in a self-renewing festivity the promise—or threat—of instruction on self-fashioning.

Here we must try to imagine how Morton’s guests, as they turn to meat and drink, registered pleasure at these carryings-on. I suggest that the men in the audience—and the women, to the extent that they knew the men’s stories of school days—may have identified as readily with A and B as with the rather wooden figures of the main plot, and that this split identification was grounded in the familiar, puerile quest for mastery that is the inner life of schoolboy *pícaros*. Like the schoolmasters who scripted *vulgaria* that complained of cruel schoolmasters, the clerk Medwall, new to the gentry himself, scripted vulgar servants who were contemptuous of gentlemen and suspicious of clerks. They afford a double pleasure to the gentle audience, the carnival satisfactions of reversals of authority, along with the patriarchal gratifications of feeling superior to the infantilized servants. The first part of the interlude thus conditions the audience to expect standard festive fare in which the social order is reaffirmed, so they return from feasting susceptible to the more radical reversals of the second half.

The second half of the play begins as A enters at a run, apologetic for being late, to recapitulate the action of the first half and to deliver a little prologue in apology for the “Dyvers toyes mengled in the same / To styre folke to myrthe and game / And to do them solace” (II.22-24). The voice of the son of a clerk of St. Margaret’s church, Southwark, may be detected in the disclaimer that, though these “tryfyllis be impertinent / To the matter principall /... It is the mynde and intent / Of me and my company to content / The leste that stondyth here” (II.26-27, 42-44). In deploying festive “trifyllis” to please the

“leste” in his audience, Medwall explicitly embraces a populist dramaturgy, but in contrasting those “trifylles” to the “matter principall” he appears to distance his argument about true nobility from populist politics. Yet he immediately undermines that distinction as he renews the metatheatrical telescoping of hall and stage, servants and masters, when an insistent knocking is heard at the hall door and A, reversing roles and collapsing boundaries, commands the audience to act the servant’s part: “One of you go loke who it is” (II.75). B enters, complaining like a lord about sluggish service:

Nay, nay, all the meyny of them iwis

Can not so moche gode.

A man may rappe tyll his naylis ake

Or ony of them wyll the labour take

To gyve him an answeare. (II.76-80)

B announces that Cornelius is on his way with “straungers freshly disgisyd / Att his own expens” to perform a “mummynge” (II.120-21, 126). Once again, the extravagance of the gallant is identified with the trifling disguisings of drama, while it is drama itself that is ironically pointing out the frivolity. From his table with the other “gentleman servants” we detect Medwall poking an accusing finger through the boundary between drama as courtly diversion and drama as truth-telling.

The permeable boundary all but disappears when Cornelius enters, only to be advised by B to go away in order to make a more timely entrance rather than allowing his hired mummers to upstage him: “Ye do not accordynge to your degree. / I pray the, tell me why? / ...By this mene you sholde be theyr druge” (II.144-45, 152). The servant acts as schoolmaster and dramaturg, teaching his own master to play his lordly part. Obedient

to this *servus callidus*, Cornelius withdraws, but only after sending B as an emissary to Luces. B asks for a token to prove he is an authentic messenger, and Cornelius bids him remind her of a time when, walking with her, the noble suitor took up her musk ball (a pomander) to throw at a bird. He “kyst [cast] it as straight as ony pole, / So that it lyghtyde evyn in the hole / Of the hollow ashe” (II.200-4).

Worthy masters choose well-spoken ambassadors, but Cornelius’s emissary makes a stinking mess of his mission to Luces. B introduces Cornelius’s suit by proclaiming, “He had lovyd you so in hys hart / That he settyth not by hym self a fart” (II.253-54), and then he jumbles the message obscenely, saying “...ye dyd no wors / But evyn fayr kyst him on the noke of the ars” (II.282-83). When Luces protests, B digs himself in deeper: “Trowth, it was on the hole of thars I shulde say” (II.285). When she protests again, he gets utterly muddled, crying, “By my fayth, ye kyst hym or he kyst you / On the hole of thars, chose you now,” but offers an empathetic excuse for such kisses: “I speke it not in reprove, / for it was done but for gode love / And for no synfull pleasure” (II.291-93). In Medwall’s moral universe, inattention to the details of rhetoric—an ill-timed entrance or a garbled message—unmasks the churl, who may be highborn or low. This servant and his master are bound to one another by their mutual ineptitude. Luces, by contrast, treats B’s gross bungling graciously, showing herself to be not just virtuous but generous and forthright: “I know what thyn erande is.... / For thou shuldis have sayde the hollow asshe: / That hole thy mayster ment” (II.295, 298-99).

At this point, the audience may recognize that the interlude has moved, suddenly and ironically, from its comic nadir to its highest plane, where Luces presides with a gracious nobility, a mastery established through wise discernment and measured

liberality. Immediately Gayus's servant A blunders in to try her generosity. He cannot find the letter he is supposed to have brought her, and turns to the audience to ask if they have it. Lucre asks him first his master's name, and then his own name. He cannot summon a name for either, scratching his head and explaining, "By this light, I have forgotten! / How be it, by that tyme I have spoken / With som of my company, / I shall be acerteined of this gere" (II.350-53).<sup>252</sup> Here his master Gayus's claim to a good name hangs perilously on the ability of his servant, and the social position of both is clearly tenuous, by contrast to the "gentlemen of name" addressed in the epilogue, who will be discussed below. That A must "acerteyn" his own name from his "company" implies that his identity proceeds from community, whether from the household he serves or from his trade itself, as indeed it did for the anonymous interluder Henry Medwall.<sup>253</sup>

Cornelius then enters hard on the heels of A and B, and he soon shows himself to be the third in this series of bumbling clowns who approach Lucre to ill effect, different in degree but not in kind. He appears as a fool-master who engages fools, takes fools' advice, entrusts fools with delicate embassies, and then outdoes them in his own folly. He tries to begin the disputation in Gayus's absence with an arrogant claim, "That, as towchyng the degree of noble condycion, / Betwyxt me and Gayus there may be no

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<sup>252</sup> The Latin stage direction for A's discomfiture is disarming, and unusually exact, whether it be Medwall's or a compositor's: "*Et scalpens caput post modicum intervallum dicat* [And scratching his head he should speak, after a little pause]" (below II.349).

<sup>253</sup> Here and elsewhere I find evidence for a growing sense of group identity, though this runs counter to the usual understanding of class consciousness, or lack of it, in this period. David Bevington, for example, says of men like Gayus and his servant, "The rewards of office meted out to persons of lower birth did not bolster the status of the bourgeois as a whole, nor were meant to. This social class lacked as yet any cohesive political ambition, and the more fortunate among its membership simply aspired to join the elite." See his *Tudor Drama and Politics* 43.

comparison" (II.361-62), only to be admonished by Lucre, who forbids him "utterly all manner of violence / Duryng this matter." Olga Horner explains this jarring note in these heretofore civil proceedings as a reference to "the uniquely English offences of maintenance and retaining" whereby lawless aristocrats maintained private armies of thugs, a problem with which Henry VII struggled mightily.<sup>254</sup> Significantly, it is Lucre, the figure of gracious discernment, who recognizes the implicit threat in Cornelius's speech and outlaws the practice. Cornelius accepts Lucre's terms and brings in, instead of hired thugs, hired minstrels to perform "a bace [i.e. Basque] daunce after the gyse / Of Spayne" (II.380-81). In this extravagant wooing gesture, Cornelius replaces one aristocratic excess with another less offensive one. He has accepted that the contest for Lucre's hand, and the definition of nobility itself, will be determined not on a battleground, but on a stage. That his first gambit in the contest is to present a hired spectacle of music and dance works to amuse the audience, but also to call into question the probity of such extravagant theatrical amusements. We know Cornelius is a wastrel and that he is doomed to lose the debate. Thus the person of the prodigal nobleman is indicted both as an agent of civil discord and of foolish extravagance, and the audience is obliged to feel themselves implicated in his excesses. The instructor Medwall also calls into question the very medium of his instruction: will his play prove to be an expensive toy to pass the time, or a valuable instrument to redeem it?

The play thus far has maneuvered the audience into a vulnerable state of cognitive dissonance by amusing them, involving them in the action, and calling into question comfortable conventions of social status and festive drama. Now Medwall turns

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<sup>254</sup> Horner 51ff.

resolutely from comic entertainment to the serious business of the disputation to drive his lesson home. In bringing Tiptoft's translation of Buonaccorso's *De Vera Nobilitate* to the English stage, Medwall adapts freely, turning written discourse into drama, but also adjusting a decidedly humanist argument for an audience not fully prepared to appreciate the glories of Ciceronian eloquence and classical erudition in the interlude of a princely banquet. As I mentioned above, Medwall's characterization of Gayus differs from the one he found in his source material, in the bluff brevity of his speech and in the shift of emphasis, as Bevington points out, "from the rhetorical triumphs of neoclassical humanism to other virtues, such as Christian charity and performance of public duty."<sup>255</sup> This adaptation makes Gayus more acceptable to an audience who may have been inclined to be suspicious of foreign influences and clerkly learning, but even so brings mild doses of humanist eloquence to those who were eager to claim places in the new Tudor hierarchy over which their host held sway. Medwall's revision of Gayus is no mere dumbing down, but a radical remodeling to produce an English civic ideal. His other innovations, notably in the role of Lucre and the epilogue by the servants A and B, likewise cut two ways, first to accommodate a local audience's normative expectations, but finally to challenge those norms, perhaps even more radically than the Italian original.

Gayus enters, and the debate is joined. The lady Lucre will be the judge by common consent. Here, as I have noted, Medwall departs significantly from the plot of

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<sup>255</sup> *Tudor Drama and Politics* 46.



his humanist source, in which the Roman senate decides between the two suitors.<sup>256</sup> In effect, Medwall's innovation works on the one hand to unseat traditional male authority, thereby threatening social norms, but on the other hand to personalize the judgment, reducing it from a matter of state to an elective affinity, and so diminishing the threat to social norms. Lucre's herself emphasizes "That what so ever sentence I gyve betwixt you two / After myne owne fantasie, it shall not extende / To ony other person.... / It may not be notyde for a generall precedent" (II.428-32). Medwall may have felt that his own humble position and the public nature of a dramatic performance constrained him in ways that the Earl of Worcester, who follows Buonaccorso in dignifying the judgment by assigning it to the senate, may not have had to contemplate. Yet Lucre's judgment, while lacking the authority of patriarchal convention, models a radical recentering of such authority in a just and good society, liminal and imaginary though it be. So framed, the suitors' debate begins.

The patrician Cornelius holds forth at length on his family's historic deeds, their monuments and castles, and the inheritance he enjoys. He boasts that the citizens of Rome are compelled by law to "make a due reverence" to images of his ancestors on a triumphal arch, and that such reverence belongs to him as well, "For I am theyr very ymage and relyque to / Of theyr flesch and blode, and veray inherytoure / As well as of theyr godes as of theyr sayde honoure" (II.512-14).<sup>257</sup> In identifying inherited nobility

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<sup>256</sup> See Tiptoft in Mitchell, Appendix I. Cornelius and Gayus both address the "ffaders conscript" (217, 225) of the Roman Senate, though each makes a direct appeal to Lucre's in his peroration (223ff., 239ff.).

<sup>257</sup> In the Tiptoft translation of Buonaccorso, Cornelius develops at length his descent from the Scipios, a pedigree that might in fact be impressive to an audience familiar with Roman history or with humanist writers including Petrarch. In omitting this

with “images and relyques,” Medwall seems to introduce a familiar note from medieval satire of clerical abuses, invoking a well-known contrast between hollow forms and vital virtues. That contrast plays out in the secular sphere as a competition between blood and behavior, high birth and upright life. So Cornelius challenges the quality of Gayus’s blood, saying “Parde, thow canst not say fro thy deffence / That ever there was gentilman of thy kyn or blode!” (II.531-32) When Luces reproves Cornelius for such ungentle tactics, Gayus interjects a comment on the nobleman’s ignoble education: “Nay, let hym along—he spekyth after his lernyng!” (II.539). Thus Medwall explicitly asserts the radical notion that gentleness is learned.

By contrast, Cornelius augments his argument for his own merits by offering Luces a life of luxury:

With me shall ye do non other maner of besynes  
But hunt for your solace at the hart and hynde,  
And some tyme where we convenient game fynde  
Our hawkis shal be ready to shew you a flight  
Whiche shall be right plesaunt and cheerful to your sight.  
And yf so be that in hunting ye have no delight,  
Than may ye daunce a whyle for your disport.  
Ye shall have at your pleasure both day and night  
All maner of mynstralsy to do you comfort. (II.552-60)

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connection Medwall may have judged that his audience would not know enough to be so impressed, or he may have feared that they would.

Medwall thus invokes hunting and hawking as shibboleths of the landed gentry who were being displaced by the new clerkly courtier in Tudor England, identifying them with the losing party in his interlude. But what can we make of the fact that he also identifies the loser with dancing and minstrelsy, close cousins of the interlude in progress? The interluder seems to draw a self-conscious distinction between traditional courtly forms of dramatic amusement and his own learned art, suggesting that the former is as decadent as Cornelius himself.

Cornelius concludes his speech with a sneering depiction of Gayus as a scrambling *parvenu*:

Bycause that he wold a gentilman be,  
He hath hym gotten both office and fee,  
Whiche after the rate of hys wrechyd sparyng  
Suffiseth scarcely for hys bare lyvyng. (II.567-70)

In deprecating “office and fee,” Cornelius opposes the values of civic humanism as practiced by the rising professional classes, probably well-represented among Morton’s guests. In sneering at labor for the commonwealth and its earned rewards, by contrast to gentlemanly leisure and inheritance, Cornelius plays the aristocracy’s trump card. By this point in the play (and in Tudor society itself) the audience may well feel that the game has changed, and that in playing this card Cornelius unknowingly condemns himself to obsolescence.

Gayus then embarks on his own argument, reframing his dispute with Cornelius as a choice “of myn owne merit is or of hys insolence” (II.589). Tiptoft’s Gayus expounds (with nearly six thousand words) on the nature of nobility. He adduces lengthy chronicles

of low-born men of noble deeds and high-born men of ignoble ones. He presents in detail his own *curriculum vitae*, emphasizing his devotion to study with “plente of maisters and techers,” and his application of the “doctryne of vertue” to “serue therwith the estate publyque,” to which end he has had the command of “ten shippis” for hunting down pirates (235). In his peroration this soldier-humanist does honor to Lucrece for her own devotion “to the vertuouse besynesse of studye” (239), and he offers her the freedom of his “lyberary, wel stuffed with fayr bookes of Greke and latyn” (240). Medwall’s Gayus, by contrast, succinctly exposes the weakness of Cornelius’s claims by pointing out that the nobleman has spoken only of his ancestors, never of his own deeds. Challenging Cornelius, Gayus shifts the definition of nobility to emphasize self-generated merit: “Yf ye wyll the title of noblenes wyne, / Shew what have ye done your self therefore. / Some of your owne meritis let se bring in, / Yf ever ye dyde ony syth ye were bore” (II. 620-23). Unrestrained by Lucrece’s rule against *ad hominem* attack, Gayus lays bare Cornelius’s life of vice “so voluptuouse and so bestiall” (II.630), in contrast to own upright life as a scholar and a soldier: “One tyme with study my tyme I spende / To eschew idelnes, the causer of syn. / An other tyme my contrey manly I defend...” (II.679-81). Medwall thus fleshes out his hero with the unexceptionable attributes of religious and patriotic virtues, forms of service that make him fit for mastery.

Reliance on such virtues, however, can too easily leave a kingdom in a perpetual state of heroic one-upsmanship, the potentially bloody cost of meritocracy in the absence of dynastic guarantees of stable continuities. Morton and his audience had fresh memories of the horrors that follow when able men fight to supplant feeble hereditary lords. In another departure from the source material, Medwall’s Gayus seeks to supply

this deficiency. In his final appeal, he extends his meritocratic argument to redefine notions of hereditary nobility for his own heirs, and for Cornelius's vaunted ancestry as well:

By these wayes, lo, I do aryse  
Unto grete honoure fro low degre,  
And yf myn heires will do likewise  
They shal be brought to nobles by me.  
But Cornely, it semyth by the  
That the nobles of thyn auncestors everycheon  
Shall utterly starve and die in the alone. (II.686-92)

Nobility can, then, be inherited, but never in the absence of noble deeds by the heirs themselves. Gayus confidently submits his own deeds to popular judgment: "As for my parte, I wyll stonde gladly / To the commune voice of all the contrey" (II.720-21), and he challenges Cornelius to do the same. Most remarkable perhaps, Lucre, daughter of the nobility, assents to this populist test, declaring, "I shall go enquire as faste as I may / What the commune fame wyll theryn reporte" (II.735-26). In the event, she talks with no one but A and B, voices not likely to inspire confidence in "the commune fame." Nonetheless, Medwall has placed in front of his audience a model of nobility that is not only to be defined primarily by merit, but also to be confirmed by popular authority.

Tiptoft's translation of Buonaccorso ends as Gayus defines the issues for the "faders conscript" of the Senate in rolling Ciceronian periods, appealing for their judgment rather than Lucre's, emphasizing learned "lectrure" among his virtues: "This day honeste stryueth with vnshamefastnes, continence with luste, Magnanymyte with

Cowardyse, lectrure with Inscience, and vertue with neglygence” (241). Medwall instead draws out the lesson. He turns the judgment over to Luces, but first he gamely gives Cornelius one more chance to make a courtly appeal to the lady: “Well Luces, will ye commaunde me ony servyce?” (II.749). Her mystified reply suggests that she already inhabits a country where such courtly service has already been supplanted: “No servyce at all, syr. Why say ye so?” (II.750).

Medwall thus firmly sets the conclusion of his lesson in a state where judgment is vested not in the “faders conscript” of a classical ideal, nor in the courtly conventions of an aristocratic ideal, but in the “gode adysement” (II.739) of a lady. To be sure, her discernment in matters of worth has so far been tested mostly by the obscene blunders of her suitors’ servants. Her jurisdiction, granted her by her father and her suitors, is thus conveniently qualified, so that if it gives offense it is easily dismissed, as in the end it is by the disgruntled B, as merely a “wrong...doo[n] / By a woman” (II.815-816). If the upshot of the play is no more conclusive than Luces’s qualified judgment, then the lesson has been, as Altman suggests, situational merely, not a demonstration of a general precedent, but a personal judgment of the merits of “*this churl and this nobleman, within the special circumstances of the play.*”<sup>258</sup> We can only accept with Altman that in the play thus far “we have progressed from ignorance and uncertainty about a fact to a reasoned understanding of it, and have formulated a tentative and delimited premise based upon our investigation.”<sup>259</sup> But the conclusion of the play that follows, both in

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<sup>258</sup> Altman 24.

<sup>259</sup> Altman 25.

Lucre's judgment and in the author's epilogue, advances a moral and social lesson that is anything but tentative.

Lucre dismisses her two suitors, promising to send them her judgment in writing. After the rivals depart, she immediately announces to their serving men that she has decided "that to Gaius I wyll condyscend, / For in this case I do hym commend / As the more noble man, sith he thys wyse / By meane of hys vertue to honour doth aryse" (II.755-58). Though she makes explicit her condescension in this match, it is clearly a willing assent and not a disdainful stooping. And though she takes pains to declare that she "wyll not dispise / The blode of Cornelius," she explains that "unto the blode I wyll have lytyl respect / Where the condicyons be synfull and abject" (II.759, 764-65). She has not, in other words, disqualified noble blood as deserving of respect, but she unequivocally judges Gayus's virtues to be superior to the degenerate blood of Cornelius. B is scandalized, as A was before, that "a gentywoman did opynly say / That by a chorles son she wolde set more / Than she wolde do by a gentyman bore" (II.770-72), but Lucre reproves him in terms that concisely state her categorical judgment:

I say evyn as I saide whan I began,  
That for vertue excellent I will honoure a man  
Rather than for hys blode, if it so fall  
That gentil condicyons agre not with all.

Her all-important "if" distances her, and the responsible nobility, from the radical claims of all-out meritocracy, but the final affirmation of "condicyons" as the telling factor in judging nobility in effect hands the victory not just to Gayus, but to a meritocratic future.

Lucrez departs, commanding the servants to deliver her judgment to their masters, and leaving them to end the play, as they began it, as intermediaries for the audience in the hall. Does this mean that the final word on Medwall's lesson will be left to the "commune fame"? If so, then unworthy servants and masters, Medwall's representatives of the moribund old aristocracy, sink together in the infamy of this pair of unreliable witnesses. B, once Lucrez is gone, retorts to her command, "Shall I do that errand? Nay, let be! / By the rode, ye shall do it your selfe for me" (II.808-9). Medwall's servants can be boldly insubordinate, but only in their masters' absence, and even there they are fearfully reactionary, clearly unsettled by the radical implications of Lucrez's judgment. Nobility and virtue may appear among common men, but not among all common men, as A and B clearly don't understand the meaning of the terms. At the end of the first part B equated nobility with gold coins (see above, I.1377-78). Here at the end of the second part, A struggles with the idea of virtue:

That she wolde nedis have hym for his vertue

And for none other thyng.

Vertue? What the devyll is that? (II. 840-42)

A turns once again to the audience, as if for guidance: "How say ye, gode women? Is it your gyse / To chose all your husbandis that wyse?" (II.848-49). His question ironically elicits a laugh while pointing out an inevitable deficiency of both choice and virtue as standards for marriage among the couples in his audience. B turns to offer advice to the men of the audience, but A silences him, and still grumbling about the conclusion, pronounces the play done. Their service ends when the play ends: "Mary, we may goo hens whan we lyst- / No man saith us nay" (II.873-74). Thus the masterless men



who began the play afraid of being ejected from the hall, end it as they started, ambiguously at liberty. A's last words express his lingering wish that the play "sholde have procede / to som other conclusion" (II.879-80). B responds, "Ye, thou art a maister mery man!- / Thou shall be wyse I wot not whan" (II.881-82). This "maister mery man" was briefly master of festive reversals that traditionally should be righted here at the end of the play, the servants returning to the kitchen and the masters going to bed, all wiser for the merriment. But Medwall has complicated the festivities and upset the conventional outcomes, sending a churl's son to bed with the lady and turning the servants out of service, to grow "wyse I wot nere whan." Though there may be people in the audience like A and B who cannot grasp the meaning of nobility dependent on civic virtue, this is no tentative conclusion: the age of a new notion of nobility has arrived, proclaimed at the furthest edge of the liminal space of a festive stage, just before the audience is called back into a hall at the center of power in Tudor England.

B finishes his job by delivering an epilogue in the form of a message from the author, for the last time adjuring the audience to recognize their part in the play. The festive phase of this liminal instruction ends, to make way for clear moral imperatives, the final charge to new initiates. The play was done "Not onely to make folke myrth and game, / But that such as be gentilmen of name / May be somewhat movyd / By this example for to eschew / The wey of vyce and favour vertue" (II.890-94). Finally, "the auctour" excuses any offense he may have given:

It is only for lacke of connynge,

And not he but his wit runnyng

Is therefore to blame.

And glade wolde he be and right fayne  
That some man of stabyll brayne  
Would take on hym the labour and payne

This mater to amend–

And so he wyllyd me for to say.

And that done, of all this play

Shortely here we make an end. (II.912-21)

So the anonymous author, excusing his excesses as “wit runnyng,” after showing “gentlemen of name” how witless they sometimes look to the nameless. The stage has served not merely as a mirror for such gentlemen, but as explicit instruction in a new kind of gentleness, taught by a clerk. This schoolmaster-chaplain challenges his masters, who are also his pupils, to correct his work, if any has the “stabyll brayne” to do it, and the willingness to “take on hym the labour and payne,” as against “all this play.” Who in the audience recalled at this point that Cornelius hired the feckless B specifically to provide “brayne,” to save himself “labour” and “payne”? The chaplain’s apology is a nervy challenge to his masters, softened only by the self-deprecation of the scholarly gentleman servant whose labor was sometimes making plays.

### **Coda: Thomas More’s Pageant Verses**

Henry Medwall’s turn on the stage of literary history is a brief one, and to call it important or memorable is to emphasize how little known he is. His period in English literature is dominated by that other servant of Archbishop Morton, Thomas More.

More's life and death on public platforms, from Morton's hall to the executioner's scaffold, is hugely dramatic and elaborately documented by comparison to Medwall's, though the careers of both men illustrate the fugitive rewards of clerkly service to the Tudor dynasty. More important for my argument, the young More, probably while a scholar at the Inns of Court, produced a little piece of dramatic writing that makes an apt companion for *Fulgens and Lucrez*. Written not long after Medwall's play, More's juvenile "Pageant Verses" express a brash confidence in the power of men of letters that complements Medwall's more cautious and politic performance as an early example of humanist drama.

In the first edition of More's *English Works*, published by his nephew William Rastell in 1557, we find a rubric explaining a curious set of verses:

Mayster Thomas More in his youth deuysed in hys fathers house in London, a goodly hangyng of fyne paynted clothe, with nyne pageauntes, and verses over every of those pageauntes: which verses expressed and declared, what the ymages in those pageantes represented: and also in those pageauntes were paynted, the thynges that the verses over them dyd (in effecte) declare whiche verses here folowe.<sup>260</sup>

Can we read these verses as a form of dramatic writing? The word *pageant* was usually taken to mean a scene acted on a stage, though this very passage is adduced by the OED as the sole example for the meaning "A scene represented on tapestry, or the like." We may safely hazard a guess that William Rastell, son and brother-in-law of dramatists,

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<sup>260</sup> Thomas More, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Anthony S. G. Edwards et al. (New Haven: Yale, 1997) I. 3.

may have assigned to the word *pageant* the kind of dramatic associations we give to the word *scene*. More himself certainly uses the word in this sense, as in "The Four Last Things," where he says: "Now thou thinkest thyself wise enough while thou art proud in thy player's garment, and forgettest that when thy play is done, thou shalt go forth as poor as he. Nor thou remembreth not that thy pageant may happen to be done as soon as his."<sup>261</sup>

Moreover, the verses themselves, a series of monologues, present a sequence of related triumphs (in the iconographic tradition of Petrarch's *Trionfi*), in which the four ages of man and then Deth, Fame, Tyme, and Eternitee each conquer the preceding figure.<sup>262</sup> Ackroyd suggests that the Pageant Verses are remarkable not so much for their relation to Petrarch as for their debt to academic rhetoric and, in their pictorial and moral aspects, to guild pageantry.<sup>263</sup> The Pageant Verses show two other powerful strains as well. Early though they are in More's *oeuvre*, they are quite close to his later devotional works, including "The Four Last Things," in their emphasis on the laughably mortal pretenses of human *dramatis personae*. The penultimate pageant, Eternitee, appears "sytyng in a chayre under a sumptuous clothe of estate, crowned with an imperial crown. And under her fete lay the picture of Time, that was in the seuenth pageant." Eternitee says, "Thou mortall Tyme every man can tell, / Art nothyng els but the mobilite / Of sonne and mone chaungyng in every degre, / When they shall leve theyr course thou shalt be brought, / For all thy pride and bostyng into nought."<sup>264</sup> In their millenarian admonition the Pageant Verses may be more typical of More's prevailing consciousness than *Utopia's* heady make-believe.

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<sup>261</sup> Thomas More, *The English Works of Thomas More*, ed. W. E. Campbell et al. (London: Spottiswoode, 1931), I. 479.

<sup>262</sup> More, *Complete Works*: I. xix.

<sup>263</sup> See Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (London: Vintage, 1999) 47-48.

<sup>264</sup> More, *Complete Works*: I. 6. lines 100-104.

And yet the dramatic structure of the verses cuts the other way. If each of the pageants is seen and felt to vanquish the former, as the first eight do, then it is The Poet—and a Latin poet at that—who has the final triumph. His posture in the painting suggests he is to be read in apposition to Eternitee: "In the nyth pageant was painted a Poet sitting in a chayre. And over this pageant were there written these verses in latin folowyng."<sup>265</sup> The Poet's lines piously warn us away from the fleeting nature of joy, fame, and office, as from the "*fragilis bona lubrica mundi*" [the fleeting goods of this frail world].<sup>266</sup> But they structurally assert humanist claims to enduring fame, both by their position in the triumphal sequence and by their sudden introduction of the Latin, the ancient language of authority, continuity, and sacred institutional power, for the Poet's *peroratio*. In this final dramatic gesture, More couples medieval admonition with humanist invention, and identifies the Poet himself with the "*permansuro deo*" [the everlasting God] of the Pageant Verses' last line.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about More's pageant verses is that his father—the father to whom the adult More would dutifully kneel in public all his life—saw fit to have them painted on cloth and hung up in his house. When Henry Medwall's father put his son forward for a place at Eton, he committed the clever boy to a career as a clerk. At school the boy learned how to rise by his work to play the role of a gentleman servant who could amuse his own ambitious master, not without irony, by exalting clerkly service. When Thomas More's father hung his son's adolescent vision of the poet in his London house, he advanced the far bolder claim for literary learning, that it might slip the servile bonds of time itself.

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<sup>265</sup> More, *Complete Works*: I. 6.

<sup>266</sup> More, *Complete Works*: I. 6. line 113.

### Chapter Three

#### John Rastell: A Stage for Studious Desire:

Humanyte: O excellent prynce, and great lorde Nature,  
I am thyne owne chylde and formyd instrument.  
I beseche thy grace, take me to thy cure,  
And teche me suche scyens thou thinkyst expedyent.

John Rastell, *The Nature of the Four Elements* (c.1517)

A decade after John Colet brought humanist schooling to the sons of the citizens of London, one of those citizens, John Rastell, a lawyer, printer, and maker of interludes, built next to his house in Finsbury Fields the first permanent stage in England since the Roman occupation. On it, he probably produced his own interlude, *The Nature of the Four Elements*, a Morality play *cum* geography lesson in which the “excellent prynce and great lorde Nature” provides instruction for Humanity with the help of Studious Desire and Experience.<sup>267</sup> The dramatic conflict comes from the temptations offered Humanity by Sensual Appetite and his agents, Ignorance and a comic Taverner. This didactic play, of which we have only one imperfect copy, signals an epochal shift in the history of English drama in its relation to education. The performance and printing of *The Four Elements* mark the period when the New Learning and the new literature it inspired outgrew not only the great house but also the schoolhouse to become the property of the London citizen, on both public stage and printed page.

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<sup>267</sup> John Rastell, *Four Elements*, in Richard Axton, ed., *Three Rastell Plays* (Totawa, N.J.: D. S. Brewer, 1979) 36. This volume includes the editions of *The Nature of the Four Elements*, *Gentleness and Nobility*, and *Calisto and Melebea* to which I will refer with line numbers in parentheses.

In this chapter I analyze and evaluate the significance of the life and work of John Rastell in the context of contemporary changes in education and drama. I begin with an overview of the two main points of my argument, each developing links to the historical narrative in preceding chapters. In the first section of this overview I present the case for Rastell's importance in extending humanist learning beyond the school into the broader urban market; in the second I claim that Rastell's innovations established a secular English drama that was both learned and popular, literary and yet framed to please and instruct a citizen audience. I move from this two-part overview to develop these arguments, the first in a biographical essay that examines the records of Rastell's life and work in their cultural milieu, and the second in a close reading of Rastell's interlude *The Nature of the Four Elements*. The chapter ends with a brief coda, a look at John Redford's school play *Wit and Science*, the only school play considered in this dissertation, as a further expression of the theater of instruction and as a direct link between Rastell, school drama, and the professional theater of the 1570s.

The first portion of this chapter will examine Rastell's life, for his adventurous *curriculum vitae* as a whole may be more significant than any single accomplishment in it, presenting as it does a remarkable intersection of important developments in learning, literature, and society. Rastell's life records constitute a portrait of an archetypal Renaissance citizen of many skills and interests, a scion of solid burgher stock who speculated in the newest arts and sciences of the day with pluck and enterprise and no particular genius. His biographers usually introduce him with a list of his vocations

(lawyer, printer, translator, play-maker, New World explorer, and Protestant apologist), or with a roster of his family and matrimonial relations: he was son of a Coventry lawyer, Thomas More's brother-in-law, John Heywood's father-in-law, and, through Heywood, great-grandfather to John Donne.<sup>268</sup> Rastell appears in histories of English literature along with Heywood among the dramatists closest to the group of humanists around More, whose sister Rastell married in the late 1490s. Compared with the accomplishments of this literary coterie, Rastell's life and writing exemplify a more practical spirit of enterprise and exploration in Tudor culture.

This spirit, manifest in his printing and dramatic writing, marks a spread of humanism in England beyond its origins in aristocratic houses and clerkly service. By 1520, the New Learning was being propagated in the schoolhouses built for the sons of ambitious citizens, most notably Colet's new foundation at St. Paul's. The school was a few steps away from the growing cluster of printing shops, including Rastell's own establishment at the sign of the Mermaid at Paul's Gate. More to the point of Rastell's story, humanism had also begun to spread beyond the schools and into the houses that the proud masters of the city's mysteries built for themselves and furnished with books, printed by men like Rastell. I assume that Rastell wrote his play for the people who bought his books. Their sons would go to humanist grammar schools, though they, like Rastell, had not. If they were to have a share in the New Learning, they had to get it outside school. Rastell and other printers offered them access to it through books.

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<sup>268</sup> See A. W. Reed, *Early Tudor Drama* (London: Methuen, 1926) 1, and Arthur Kinney's Editor's Note in Albert J. Geritz, *John Rastell* (Boston: Twayne, 1983) [n.p.]. Cited hereafter as "Geritz, *John Rastell*." For a discussion of Rastell's relationship to More, see Albert J. Geritz, "The Relationship of Brothers-in-Law Thomas More and John Rastell," *Moreana* 36 (1999): 35-38.



Moreover, Rastell brought an active, pragmatic extension of the New Learning to a public stage. Indeed, every episode of his own life offered a public example of the quest to get and to market new knowledge, the key to the mastery of the world that humanism seemed to promise.

Rastell began to expand and market the New Learning for London citizens just at the time that St. Paul's School set forth an iconic model of inquisitive youth for the citizen's son. The school's founders developed the motif of Christ Among the Doctors (Luke 2:40-52) both in iconography and in writing. This episode exalts the study of ancient wisdom as a fulfillment of the divine will, but it also models the questioning of traditional authority and the pursuit of an active life in the world. The grammar and rhetoric books that Colet, Lily, and Erasmus wrote for St. Paul's glorified this studious, curious child. But they also gave vivid and dramatic voices to the material realities of English boys learning to be both pious and prosperous in the contemporary world. John Rastell, circumstantially related to the new St. Paul's in time and place and acquaintance, interpreted this Christian humanism in the vernacular for the common citizen, eventually remodeling the school's emblematic learned child into the character of Humanity, the struggling student of his Morality play. Rastell produced numerous polemics for learning as a way of enriching both the individual and the commonwealth. Thus he took humanism's central lessons beyond the limits of classical schooling, and put them in English books and on the English stage for an audience of men like himself.

The founders of St. Paul's School provided John Rastell with another important precedent: they made pedagogy more playful, and drama more learned. We have looked briefly in Chapter One at the early relation of St. Paul's to London drama, perhaps an unintended outgrowth of Colet's statutes or of Erasmus's pedagogical ideas. In *De Ratione Studii* and in *De Pueris Institutuendis*, Erasmus tells schoolmasters to make the

hard labor of learning Latin grammar into play. Ludic instruction was advanced through new texts like the *Colloquies* and the *vulgaria* of the Magdalen tradition, books that mixed grammar and schoolboy concerns. The result was a pedagogy that, as Rebecca Bushnell has observed, “oscillated between play and work, freedom and control, submission and mastery,” and also a social order in which “humanist teachers themselves constituted a paradox in their social and political roles: at once high and low, marginal and at the center of political life.”<sup>269</sup>

I argue in the second part of this chapter that John Rastell brought that humanist pedagogy of play and work into English dramatic literature and onto the English stage. Rastell made innovations in English drama, through his printing, his own writing, and his theater. First, beginning in about 1515, he printed humanist plays by his contemporaries, beginning with Henry Medwall’s *Fulgens and Luces*, our earliest surviving secular drama, which I discussed in Chapter Two. In printing Medwall’s play Rastell was the first to provide English drama as printed text rather than performance. Second, Rastell himself wrote at least one humanist play, *The Nature of the Four Elements*, probably around 1517. This play uses the allegorical forms of the Morality tradition to create a new kind of secular didactic drama, offering direct instruction about newly discovered information and its application to self-advancement.<sup>270</sup> Third, at some point in the 1520s

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<sup>269</sup> Rebecca Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996) 17.s

<sup>270</sup> Two other plays from Rastell’s press, *Calisto and Melibea* (STC [2nd ed.], 20721) and *Gentleness and Nobility* (STC [2nd ed.], 20723), both printed around 1525, are sometimes attributed to Rastell. See David Bevington, “Speculations in Democratic Idealism,” in his *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968) for cogent arguments that the plays both show a tendency to preach very like Rastell’s in *The Four Elements*. Both plays operate in the humanist tradition of Morality advanced by reason,

Rastell built his suburban theatre and stocked it with lavish costumes, presumably for public performances of the plays he wrote or printed. Taken together, these contributions justify F. P. Wilson's claim "that with John Rastell we feel ourselves to have arrived at a New Age."<sup>271</sup> Rastell's contributions to English drama expanded its auspices and its audience and changed its content accordingly. He brought humanist ideas of self-improvement to a city audience that was at the same moment taking possession of humanist learning through reformed grammar schools. But Rastell's rhetoric, both on stage and in his printing, responded to that city audience in a manner and with matter that pushed the pursuit of knowledge well beyond the limits of humanist schooling. The telling feature in all three developments is the transference of knowledge and authority by and to citizens, a shift of cultural authority from the aristocracy toward the urban marketplace.

The promise of humanist drama that was inchoate in Medwall's time, fostered in such avant-garde outposts as Lambeth Palace, bloomed exuberantly in Rastell's London, in printed plays and in a new drama, a hybrid made to suit the urban audience. The hybrid nature of *The Four Elements*, part polemical "sad mater" and part broadly comical "mirth," recalls the similar split in Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucretia*, but with important

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and either, if accepted as his work, would inflect our understanding of Rastell's contribution in ways that are consistent with my argument. I address them briefly below, because their appearance from Rastell's press at about the time he built his stage in Finsbury contributes to the general impression that he was much engaged with humanist drama in several capacities in the 1520s.

<sup>271</sup> Wilson 23.

differences.<sup>272</sup> Medwall's universe is wholly circumscribed by the ethic of service, and he tells an inspirational story of an exceptional man whose learning and service open a path to nobility within that ethical framework. Thus Medwall serves up humanism for the noble few, though he urges a new, meritocratic definition of nobility. Two decades later, Rastell takes as his universe the *orbis terrarum* of the age of discovery, unfolded on stage in a geography lesson. But rather than telling the particular story of one heroic explorer, Rastell employs allegory, familiar to his urban audience from Morality plays, to insist that Humanity itself, with all its weaknesses, is eligible for all the profits and privileges of learning. In humanist drama, Rastell represents a zenith of optimism about human capacities, and he takes these ideas to a new kind of élite audience, self-made by their ambition and knowledge.

As I will unfold in a close reading below, the interlude that John Rastell wrote in about 1517 shows the force of contemporary changes in education and society. A heightened awareness of teaching and of learning appears in two ways. First, Rastell uses the stage for direct instruction of the audience, converting the homiletic tradition of church drama to a secular didactic one. Second, he depicts Humanity as a truant schoolboy whose redemption can only be paid for by painful application to study as his proper part, however counter to his weaker nature that part may be. Thus Rastell invents a character who may be felt to be the humanist heir of the fallible Everyman figure of Morality and prodigal traditions,<sup>273</sup> but also the obscure ancestor of such wayward

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<sup>272</sup> Reed (104) supposes that Rastell must have known Medwall, and that Medwall's *Nature* influenced Rastell's *Four Elements*.

<sup>273</sup> Howard B. Norland offers a handy genealogy: "The movement toward youth-oriented Morality drama, beginning with Medwall's *Nature* (1490-1501) and continuing

scholars as Faustus, Hamlet, Prospero, and Ralph the grocer's boy in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. For each of these central figures in Renaissance drama, the crux of the human dilemma is the price one pays for knowledge. One feels that Medwall's admirable young Gayus could never have generated such various and engaging offspring.

### **John Rastell: Study for the Common Wealth**

John Rastell's life illustrates the rise of the enterprising citizen who rode the swelling wave of opportunities that came with the New Learning, city prosperity, print technology, and the European discovery of the Americas. Rastell's career traces the dual movements of early Tudor social history, both toward the center of power in London and out toward the far-flung reaches of English dominion. It is a life of exploits, I argue, that can be subsumed under the name of Studious Desire, a character in Rastell's own play, and explained by the nature of playing itself: Rastell invested his life in the ambitious notion that he could learn to play any role, given the necessary texts to study. That notion

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in *Youth* (1513-29), *Hickscorner* (1513-16), and Rastell's *Nature of the Four Elements* (1517-18), developed after the Reformation into a distinct dramatic type in which education of the adolescent became the central focus. The educational interludes adapted the traditional Morality pattern of the fall and redemption to more specific and more secular purposes." See his *Drama in Early Tudor Britain 1485-1558* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 149. Edgar T. Schell and J. D. Schuchter implicate other next-of-kin in their introduction to *The Interlude of Youth*, which they call "the finest of the 'youth' Moralities" and trace from *Everyman*: "If the action of *Everyman* may be said to be informed by the *totentanz*, the action of *Youth* is informed by the parable of the Prodigal Son. And in presenting the education of the Prodigal, the play opens out on one hand toward humanistic experiments in Christianizing Terentian comedy, and on the other toward more formal educational Moralities, *The Nature of the Four Elements* (1517-1518), the 'wit' plays, and the Parnassus trilogy." See their edition of *English Morality plays and Moral Interludes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969) 141.

was fostered on a huge scale by humanist grammar schools and their dramatic pedagogy, and then augmented in turn by apostles, like Rastell, of the newer New Learning, for whom the texts informed secular social roles more various and more daring than the classicizing humanists of Medwall's generation could have imagined. Rastell's various roles placed him remarkably close to major developments in the Tudor state, education, print technology, dramatic entertainment, and religious reform. He seemed to aim always to become his own master, though, like Medwall and More, Rastell served powerful masters, including the monarch and his first secretary, Thomas Cromwell. Perhaps more dramatic than his writing, Rastell's personal exploits make a compelling story of self-invention through the deployment of new knowledge.

Rastell grew up the scion of a prosperous family in Coventry, a center of mercantile wealth and civic drama. There he practiced law after training at the Inns of Court in the 1490s. He rose to high office before moving in 1509 to London, where he was, at least by marriage, a member of the so-called More Circle. He soon ventured beyond the practice of law (though he never gave it up) to become one of the first English printer-publishers of law texts, school texts, plays, jestbooks, and histories. In 1517 he obtained a royal patent to colonize in America and he set off on an expedition, only to be marooned in Ireland by a mutinous crew. This evidently was the precipitating event for his composition of *The Nature of the Four Elements*, composed in Ireland or soon after his return to London. Then began a period in which he occasionally served the crown in the production of entertainments, as at the Field of the Cloth of Gold and the pageants for state visits to London by European monarchs in the 1520s. From 1529 he served as an MP in the Reformation Parliament and as a Protestant propagandist in service to

Cromwell. Rastell died in the Tower in 1536, having been imprisoned the year before for a taking a stand on tithing even more Protestant than his masters could tolerate.

Rastell's accomplishments are remarkable for their spirit of experimentation and exploration on the one hand, and on the other for a particular talent for adapting ancient forms to new uses. Rastell's packaging for new markets should be understood in the tradition of humanist imitation, translation that improved on the original to reach a contemporary audience. Just as early printing incorporated the precious beauties of the manuscript tradition (identified with ancient forms of elite authority) in a new, mass-produced medium for dispersing learning, so Rastell translated traditional forms of civic and church drama and the great house interlude into a secular drama of humanist propaganda and worldly information.

The records of William Rastell's upbringing and education establish a pattern that marks him from the start as an archetypal Enterprising Citizen, by contrast to the Learned Servant, Henry Medwall. Even so, the two had certain important things in common. Though Rastell started life more prosperously placed than Medwall, both men had close family connections to civic life and guild membership and early familiarity with local drama, and both men rose to office through the practice of law. There the similarities stop. Medwall went to Eton and Cambridge and practiced civil and canon law, while Rastell studied at the Inns of Court and practiced common law, the body of English customary law that was practised in the royal courts at Westminster.<sup>274</sup> Medwall's more

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<sup>274</sup> On the relation between common law, Tudor reforms, and the Reformation, see Simon 55. She seems to follow closely the arguments of S. B. Chrimes, who relates

academic education led to a life in clerkly service, whereas Rastell's education, which amounted to an apprenticeship in the law, more or less guaranteed him a secure place among the leading citizens of Coventry, if he had chosen to stop there.

Growing up in Coventry in the last decades of the fifteenth century, Rastell was constantly reminded of the burgher's prominent place in society. Early experiences furnished considerable experience of drama as a vehicle of burgher ambitions, and an abiding link to the citizenry as a natural audience for his own performances. He also received powerful stimuli for his own evident propensity to explore beyond established boundaries. He grew up in a proud tradition of self-assertion by burghers and guildsmen, whose prosperity depended on trade beyond the seas.<sup>275</sup> Their corporate confidence was evident in local customs relevant to this history, especially their insistence on maintaining lay control of education against the claims of the powerful local priory, and in a certain tolerance for religious non-conformity. I will return to both these points in more detail below. But by far the most important demonstrations of Coventry's citizens' sense of their own dignity were the famous plays produced there in connection with the annual Corpus Christi celebrations.<sup>276</sup> The City Annals report a sequence of events in 1485

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the fifteenth century English jurists Sir John Fortescue and Sir Thomas Littleton, both champions of the common law, to Renaissance humanism and even to the nonconformity of Wycliffe. See Chrimes's introduction to his edition and translation of Sir John Fortescue, *De Laudibus Legum Anglie*, trans. S. B. Chrimes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1942) xvi-xix.

<sup>275</sup> I am indebted to A. W. Reed for this idea, which he states with characteristic caution: "It cannot be postulated that it was Coventry that bred in him the spirit of the venturer, but it is unlikely that a lawyer more than forty years old should attempt a voyage to the New Found lands with a cargo of stuffs, unless the impulse of adventure, speculation and travel had been confirmed in him when he was younger" (6).

<sup>276</sup> The feast of Corpus Christi is celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, the eighth Sunday after Easter.



which must have impressed on the young John Rastell, about age ten, the relations between his city's wealth, displayed in its famous plays, and the vicissitudes of power at the highest levels:

In the year 1485 Sir Robert Only Marchant Mayor, att whitsontide K Richard 3d Came to Kenellworth, & att Corpus Christy Came to Coventry to see their playes, the 22d of August the Battle att Bosworth Field was fought between K Richard & the Earle of Richmond, wherein the King with Divers others was Slain, K Rich was shamefully Carryed to Leicester & Buried their when he had reigned 2 years 2 Month & one day, the Earle being proclaimed King in the field Came to Coventry & the Citty gave him A Hundred pounds & a Cup [of] <...> soe hee departed.<sup>277</sup>

Bosworth Field is about twenty miles from Coventry, so the Wars of the Roses ended and the Tudor dynasty began more or less outside the young Rastell's door. He may have felt in his father's house a certain anxiety about the dynastic change, as his grandparents had given money for the Yorkist army a quarter century before.<sup>278</sup> The city's gift of money and a cup to the new king, if understood as a gesture like giving the ceremonial keys to a city, offered not only an tribute to the victor, but also a reminder of the city's prerogatives with regard to their considerable resources. This was, at least in name, a gift, not a levy.

While such a distinction may have been lost on a boy of ten, John Rastell was surrounded with reminders that kings came to Coventry to see its plays and to seek the

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<sup>277</sup> R. W. Ingram, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981) 66. As Easter fell on April 3 in 1485, Corpus Christi would have been relatively early that year, on Thursday June 2. The battle at Bosworth, then, was almost eleven weeks after Richard III's visit to Coventry to see the plays.

<sup>278</sup> Geritz, *John Rastell* 1.

support of citizens like his own father. Moreover, he saw that one king could be killed and another installed when such support shifted. Two years after Bosworth, King Henry VII came to Coventry again to raise an army to put down rebels in the North who had rallied around a pretender. This time the boy Rastell could have had a closer look at public displays of might, alternating with guild drama as forms of public spectacle.

In ye year 1487 Thomas Bayly Mayor, King Henry Came to Coventry & with the ArchBishop of Canterbury & others of his Councill Lords Spirituall & temporall Held a Councill & Raiseth an Armye to Goe to Newarke vpon Trent, where he Slew ye Earle of Lincolne, Martin Smart tooke the Organ Makers Son the pretended duke of Clarances Son, & brought him to Coventry, the Battaile was fought ye 16<sup>th</sup> June, the King Came to Coventry to see there playes on St peters day, Hee Lodged att Sir Robert Onlyes in Smithford Street on wensday after St Peters day<sup>279</sup> on[e] Thomas Harrington was beheaded on ye Conduite by the Bull and was buried att the Grayfryers Hee Called himselfe the duke of Clarences Son.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> The feasts of St. Peter (June 29), Midsummer (June 24), and Lammas Day (August 1) might come soon after Corpus Christi in a year in which Easter (the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox) fell relatively late. Together these might constitute an extended season for the reprisal of the plays to accommodate the visits of important guests. As Easter was on April 15 (Julian calendar) in 1487, then Corpus Christi would have been on June 16, the very date of the Battle of Stoke at which Henry VII defeated Lincoln's forces. As this was less than two weeks before St. Peter's Day, we can reasonably speculate that the plays the king saw on St. Peter's Day had been postponed while troops, including men from the local levy, were in the field nearby.

<sup>280</sup> Ingram 67-68. The annals account seems to confuse Harrington, a member of Lincoln's rebellion in support of Lambert Simnel, with Simnel himself, who was put forward as Clarence's son. Simnel was not put to death after the battle, but rather was set to work in the royal kitchens.

These passages from the city's annals offer information about Rastell's early impressions of rank and authority. The boy would not have been far wrong in surmising that a citizen was a man of power, and that civic drama attracted a powerful audience. In Coventry, he saw, a king would lodge in the house of a former mayor, whose rank was not very different from his own father's. That same king needed the help of such men to vanquish his enemies, and when execution was done on one of them the city made a public show of it. The beheading probably took place at a site where the same audience saw civic pageants.<sup>281</sup> The king in turn came to do the city honor and to take refreshment at Coventry's famous festive entertainments. He and his queen came again in 1492 "to Coventry to see our plaies at Corpus Christi tide & gaue yem great commendacions."<sup>282</sup> When they returned in the year 1500, fifteen years after the battle at Bosworth, they "were made brother & sister of corpus Christi, & Trinitie gild."<sup>283</sup>

Membership in the city's crafts guilds and religious fraternities conferred a sense of corporate authority evident in the citizens' dealings with church and crown. Where our earliest documents of Henry Medwall and Nicholas Udall are their grammar school enrollment records, the earliest mention we find of John Rastell is his enrollment in the

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<sup>281</sup> The "Conduite by the Bull" may indicate the public conduit, or water supply, near the bull ring of the public market at Cross Cheaping, the site at which the city also presented one of its pageants for the royal entry of Queen Margaret of Anjou in 1456. See Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson, eds., *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2000) 159, and also the glossary entry on "condite, cundit," 301. Conduits and crosses, as they were in large public places, provided sites for most of the pageants in Hardin Craig's survey of the Corpus Christi procession route. See his *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* (London: Early English Text Society, 1957) xiii-xiv.

<sup>282</sup> Ingram 77.

<sup>283</sup> Ingram 95.

Guild of Corpus Christi, an élite, quasi-religious organization, founded in 1348. Its membership “was drawn from the most prosperous of Coventry’s society, but many wealthy merchants and noblemen from all parts of England were members also, as were kings, queens and princes.”<sup>284</sup> Rastell’s grandparents were both members of the Holy Trinity Guild, the city’s other socio-religious fraternity of leading citizens. His grandfather served at various times in high city offices and councils and as a crown servant, and John’s father likewise served in various public posts, including as a commissioner for Warwickshire with the famous jurist Sir Thomas Littleton (1407-1481) whose *Tenures* (ca. 1470?) are a cornerstone of English common law. When in 1525 John Rastell printed the first English translation of Littleton’s *Tenures*, he modernized a text that had for him both professional and family associations.<sup>285</sup>

When the boy John Rastell reached the age (traditionally fourteen) to join the Corpus Christi Guild, his sponsor was the widow of a former mayor of Coventry.<sup>286</sup> Rastell’s dealings with this same widow, Joan Symonds, illustrate an early and lasting influence of burgher solidarity and a related impulse to produce drama. She continued to pay Rastell’s annual guild dues for some years, and when she died in 1507 he served as executor of her will, from which he profited handsomely. Joan Symonds also made provision in her will for Rastell’s daughter Joan, who later married the dramatist John Heywood, and yet another provision for local observance of the rites of the Boy Bishop:

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<sup>284</sup> Ingram xliii.

<sup>285</sup> On Rastell’s edition of Littleton’s *Tenures*, see E. J. Devereux, *A Bibliography of John Rastell* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1999) 117.

<sup>286</sup> Geritz, *John Rastell* 1-2.

*Item* to the childe-bisshop for the tyme being my cloke of scarlet to make him a Robe of on the condition that the bishop with the children shall come to my husband's grave and myn and there say *De Profundis* for my husband's soul and myn the same day that they do at the grave of Thomas Wyldegresse in the Draper's Chapell.<sup>287</sup>

In executing this will, Rastell may well have felt a shared interest with the Boy Bishop who, like him, received the benefactions of the mayor's widow so that he might take his part in dramatizing the dignity of proud citizens. He returned throughout his life to such drama, often voiced by a learned child.

The Corpus Christi Guild produced the annual Corpus Christi procession, which Ingram estimates to have been "the most splendid" of the civic processions that were "the best indicators of Coventry's sense of its dignity and power."<sup>288</sup> The procession exhibited the wealth and authority of the fraternal guilds, whose members invariably included the mayor and council. Rastell's father and grandfather must often have marched in the procession, as John Rastell himself must have done when he succeeded his father as the city's coroner, presiding over the Court of Statute Merchant from 1506 to 1508. While the procession was dominated by the elite fraternal guilds, the plays themselves were presented by the crafts guilds, each of which took responsibility for certain episodes in the portrayal of bible stories from the Annunciation to Doomsday.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> See Reed 4.

<sup>288</sup> Ingram xxiii.

<sup>289</sup> For a speculative reconstruction of the order of episodes in the Coventry cycle, see Craig xiii-xvii. Charles Phythian-Adams argues that the "the social topography of Coventry was remarkable chiefly for the evident intermixture of all types of person," and

Only two of the ten or so groups of plays survive, in copies prepared in 1535 from older texts. From close similarities to fifteenth-century survivals from York, Chester, and Towneley, we can safely infer that the surviving Coventry plays are essentially those that Rastell would have seen, in all likelihood every year of his early life.<sup>290</sup> As it happens, the two surviving plays comprise the earliest episodes in the Christological cycle, the Annunciation, Nativity, Slaughter of the Innocents, Purification, and Christ Among the Doctors. We can assume that these events in the life of the Child Jesus would have been of particular interest to children.

The Coventry plays gave the young Rastell memorable examples of drama that improvised freely on scripture and satirized the abuse of authority. In the first of the surviving Coventry plays, *The Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors*, St. Joseph, learning of the pregnancy of his wife Mary, is cast in the comic dilemma of the cuckold, “Begyld as many another ys.” In the same play, Herod’s rage provides an archetype for the ranting tyrant in overdone acting, recalled in Hamlet’s admonitions about the Termagant who “outherods Herod” (3.2.14).<sup>291</sup> The Coventry Doctors Pageant, the culminating episode in *The Weavers Pageant*, offers some especially valuable evidence about Rastell’s early experience of didactic drama.

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that the ceremonies of Corpus Christi and Midsummer served both as “the spectacular advertisement of specific status” and provided “opportunities for bringing together those who might otherwise be opposed or separated in their respective spheres.” See his essay “Ceremony and the Citizen: The Communal Year at Coventry 1450-1550,” in Peter Clark, ed., *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) 62-65.

<sup>290</sup> For a systematic comparison of versions of the so-called Doctors Pageants demonstrating their close affinities, see King and Davidson 174-189.

<sup>291</sup> See King and Davidson 86, line 116, and 105, line 722.

Freely adapted from the events described in Luke 2:40-51, the pageant takes occasion to satirize the self-importance of scholarly law-givers, the Doctors who “sytt in there furis fyn” (1033), holding forth on Mosaic law.<sup>292</sup> They challenge the audience “to holde dyssepyssions [disputations] here, / Be polatike syence of clarge clere” (862-63), whereupon the Child Jesus, having slipped away from his parents, steps forth as if to answer the challenge. The Doctors try to send the boy away, the most genial of the three explaining, “Good sun, thow art to yonge to lerne / The hy mystere of Mosess law” (953), but Jesus confidently rejoins, “E, surs, whatsoeuyer to me you sey, / Me nedith not of you to lerne nothing” (894). When another doctor reiterates that the boy is “to yonge, / Be clarge clere, to kno owre lawis” (898), Jesus declares that he has come from the place “Where all owre lawis furst were wroght” (904). The doctors seat the boy among themselves to question him, and he discourses impressively upon the Decalogue and the new commandment, “asse thysel loue thy neybur” (962). The doctors are at first moved by professional jealousy, “For yff this abrode were knone perfettly / The peple wolde geve hym more prese / Then we docturs for all owre clarge” (999-1001). The confrontation between august old age and visionary youth in this scene strikes deeper than the customary reversals of the Boy Bishop festivity, promising not temporary transposition of points of view, but an eternal change.<sup>293</sup>

What can the young Rastell have made of this humbling of the “nobul docturs,” or the expounding of a new law by a boy? When the adult Rastell came to write a play, he

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<sup>292</sup> I cite line numbers from the Doctors pageant in parentheses. All are taken from *The Weavers' Pageant* in King and Davidson 112-49.

<sup>293</sup> For a wide-ranging overview of the topos of the *puer senex*, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 98-101.

chose the more conventional story of a youth brought to admit the superior wisdom of his patient and learned elders. But *The Four Elements*, like the Doctors Pageant, places a youth who is heir to the authority of the ancients at the center of the drama, and advances above all the proposition that new knowledge can fulfill the promise of old learning and should be studiously welcomed.

The burghers of Coventry themselves sometimes resisted the ancient authority of the church, and in the matter of grammar schooling they asserted a determined independence, with the result that the sons of burghers were provided with a schoolmaster outside church auspices. In 1439 the Leet, or governing body of the city, voted an ordinance:

They orden that they Meire with vj off hys Councell go vnto the prior and Comien [i.e. discuss] the matier, Wyllyng hym to occupye a skole of Gramer, yffe he like to teche hys Brederon and Children off the aumbry [almonry], and that he wol-not gruche ne meve the contrary, but tha[t] euery mon off this Cite be at hys ffre chosse to sette hys chylde to skole to what techer off Gramer that he likyth, as reson askyth, etc.<sup>294</sup>

Harris explains, “The orders of leet reveal the existence of a town grammar school probably supported by the Trinity gild as early as 1425, and the rivalry that had sprung up between this and the Priory grammar school fourteen years later. Earlier than this it would seem that Coventry teachers had fallen under suspicion of Lollard sympathies, and the heads of the Priory school, founded as early as 1303, may well have grudged at the

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<sup>294</sup> Mary Dormer Harris, ed., *The Coventry Leet Book or Mayor's Register*, 3 vols. (London: Early English Text Society, 1907) 190.



desire of the townsfolk to put their children to a teacher of grammar.”<sup>295</sup> Even so, the citizens prevailed against the priory. As the Trinity Guild payments to various schoolmasters span the period 1425 to 1543 we can assume that there was a secular grammar school in Coventry in the 1480s, when John Rastell would have reached school age.<sup>296</sup>

Our single record of Rastell’s education, however, is a citation in the Middle Temple archives for a fine levied against one “Rastall,” a barrister, in January 1502.<sup>297</sup> It has been generally assumed that this is John Rastell, because of his contemporary practice of law in London and Coventry, and because of his association with Thomas More, who was at Lincoln’s Inn in the 1490s when Rastell would have been an inner barrister, or student, at Middle Temple. From his links with the Inns and the practice of law we can confidently infer several things about Rastell’s grammar school training. To enter the Inns he must already have acquired Latin and law French, whether in a local grammar school, in his own household (as his father knew and practiced law), in the Inns of Chancery attached as preparatory schools to the Inns of Court, or perhaps at the university schools.

Given his choices of preparation for entering the Inns, it seems likely that Rastell’s grammar schooling followed pre-humanist traditions, untouched by the revolution gathering force just then at Magdalen College, Oxford. Nevertheless, his law school education would have inculcated habits of empirical inquiry, skepticism, and close

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<sup>295</sup> Harris, *Leet Book* xxx.

<sup>296</sup> Harris, *Life* 316.

scrutiny of texts, as well as the manners practiced by gentlemen. These habits and manners, while not specifically humanist, help explain why humanism grew and spread among lawyers both on the continent and in England, and why Rastell took upon himself the tasks of printing and playmaking.

An entry in the Bench Book of the Middle Temple for 29 January 1502 is our only record of Rastell's supposed connection with the Inns of Court:

It was resolved by the Company that Nicolls, Seynt German, Maidston, Luke, Bowryng, Rastall and Spark should forfeit, each of them, 3 shillings 4d because they were Utter Barristers and did not attend [the Inn's] Parliament.<sup>298</sup>

That this "Rastall" is John Rastell has been inferred from a series of connections through the More family. An utter, or outer, barrister was admitted to plead at the bar, and so was an Innsman of middle standing, between the inner barristers, or law students, confined to observe proceedings from behind an inner bar, and the benchers, who pled for the crown or heard cases, and served as readers or instructors in the court's vacations. Rastell was about twenty-seven years old in 1502, already married with a son of five years. If he entered Middle Temple around 1493, at age eighteen, he could have been admitted to the outer bar as early as 1497, the year his son was born. Thomas More entered Lincoln's Inn in 1496, and Rastell married More's sister, Elizabeth, presumably that year or the next. In 1499 Rastell entered into a debt of one hundred marks with Thomas and John More, a business transaction that suggests he may already have been making money by practicing at the bar.

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<sup>298</sup> Charles Henry Hopwood, ed., *Middle Temple Records* (London: Butterworth, 1904) 2.

Besides bringing him into the More circle, Rastell's time at the Inns of Court supplied him with other important influences on his habits of thought. Legal practice requires a working respect for the authority of the minutiae of written text, but also for the need to supplement statute with new case material as required by the empirical nature of common law. Rastell would also have developed an identification with the guild of common lawyers, and a concomitant confidence in their corporate authority as against the authority of the nobility and the church. Moreover, he would have obtained the refinement of gentlemanly deportment gained from contact with the sons of the landed gentry who came to the Inns for finishing-school instruction as much as for legal learning. Most important, perhaps, he would have had extensive contact with rhetorical and dramatic performance, not only in the famous revels of the Inns, but also in the moot courts which were an important part of rehearsal for legal practice.

On the face of it, Rastell's legal instruction had little in common with the New Learning, but the goals and the student body of the Inns overlapped with those of humanist schools in important ways. As Simon says, although "there was no particular interest in cultivating the humanities at the Inns of Court, there were important developments in what was by now a century-old system of lay education, closely integrated with an expanding legal apparatus."<sup>299</sup> Erasmus, though decrying the study of

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<sup>299</sup> Simon 53. Simon argues that Fortescue's *De Laudibus* follows a method that is essentially humanist: "Since the scope of common law had been rapidly extending he could see this as a developing system and, though he evinces all the conservatism associated with a law grounded in precedent, Fortescue adopts a critical and historical approach which may reasonably be classed as humanist. He derives legal theories from observation and practice and, making a comparative analysis of political institutions in different states, relates differences to underlying differences in economic and social structure; in so doing he stresses the role of the English parliament which serves to make

law as “far-removed from true learning,” observed that in England the “nobility are recruited from the law.”<sup>300</sup> Our prime example of such recruitment from this period must be Thomas More, who received his knighthood and then the chancellorship through his practice of the common law, whereas his predecessors Morton and Wolsey had been churchmen. The registers of St. Paul’s school provide several examples of commoners ennobled through crown service after careers at the Inns of Court.<sup>301</sup>

The Inns of Court occupied a middle ground, both literally and symbolically, between the City and the court at Westminster. A. Wigfall Green describes this liminal position: “The inns were, in effect, the legal guild of England, superior of course to the merchant and trade guilds, because the gentlemen of the Inns were of the social and intellectual aristocracy. Nevertheless, their tradition was much the same as that of the crafts: they had chaplains and temples in which to worship.”<sup>302</sup> Sir John Fortescue left a much-quoted description of the social situation at the Inns in the period 1468-71, a generation before Rastell’s time there. Fortescue emphasizes the great expense of the Inns as a factor in limiting enrollment to noblemen’s sons: “For poor and common people cannot bear so much cost for the maintenance of their sons. And merchants rarely desire to reduce their stock by such annual burdens.” The supposed preoccupation of noblemen

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the monarchy, by contrast with more absolute monarchies on the continent, a limited monarchy, limited because of its parliamentary character” (55).

<sup>300</sup> Simon 55.

<sup>301</sup> See McDonnell: Among the earliest students (or supposed students) of the school, the biographical sketches of the following show the pattern of rising through training in the common law: Edward North (4), Peter Temple (21), and John Gresham (24).

<sup>302</sup> A. Wigfall Green, *The Inns of Court and Early English Drama* (1931; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965) 8.

with “the preservation of their honour and reputation” caused each Inn to function not only as a school of law, but also as “a kind of academy of all the manners that the nobles learn,” including music, dancing, and “all games proper for nobles.” Fortescue concludes that the finishing-school function of the Inns’ double curriculum was the more important part for its élite clientele: “So for the sake of the acquisition of virtue and the discouragement of vice, knights, barons, and also other magnates, and the nobles of the realm place their sons in these inns, although they do not desire them to be raised in the science of the laws, nor to live by its practice, but only by their patrimonies.”<sup>303</sup>

Fortescue’s estimate of the social origins of the students of the Inns may, however, be as unrealistic as his idealized view of the moral climate there. He relates nobility to the ability—and willingness—to pay, yet the Inns were obviously taking in students intended to earn their livings by the law. A generation after Fortescue wrote, young John Rastell, scion of mercantile stock, came to learn the law, apparently so that he might live by its practice. Though he arrived at Middle Temple with the manners and expectations of the prosperous provincial burgher, he departed confirmed in the status of a London gentleman.<sup>304</sup> His subsequent career as a printer and writer shows, however, a strong identification not with the man who lived by his patrimony, but with the man who

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<sup>303</sup> Fortescue 119.

<sup>304</sup> Lawson (77) notes that the finishing-school function persisted in Rastell’s day, even as the rising authority of the common law made it “more valuable than canon or civil law for a career in public service and administration. The landowning gentry increasingly turned to it for professional training as well as for rounding off a general education....Until the mid-seventeenth century the Inns continued to fill this dual function, providing a technical training for the practice of the law whilst also serving, less seriously, as finishing schools for country gentlemen.”

produced goods and services, both for public sale and in service to his king, confident in their value to the common weal.

A student at the Inns of Court had opportunity to develop confidence in the public performance of his learning at the moots held each year during the courts' vacations, which were in fact the time of most intense instruction at the Inns. During court terms, the inner barristers were expected to attend court regularly, to learn by observation of the utter barristers and benchers. The drama of the courtroom, expository and oppositional, informs Rastell's interlude. His experience of festive drama at the Inns must have been considerable as well. Accounts of the holiday revels figure among the earliest surviving records of the Inns, from 1422.<sup>305</sup> By 1455 the Christmas revels had grown to the point that Lincoln's Inn appointed a "marshal," who in turn supervised a master of the revels and a considerable retinue just for the holiday season. The Middle Temple, Rastell's own inn, held its "solemn revels" and "post revels" on All Saints and Candlemas days, and on the Saturdays between these dates, as well as its "solemn Christmases."<sup>306</sup>

The interludes at the earliest recorded revels seem often to have been provided by professional *lusores* rather than by the barristers themselves.<sup>307</sup> Yet by Rastell's time

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<sup>305</sup> The Inns held revels so often for saints-day observations that there was apparently a productivity problem. "It was therefore decreed at Lincoln's Inn, in 9 Henry VI (1431), that "there should be four Revells that year, and no more; one at the feast of All-hallow, another at the feast of St. Erkenwald; the third at the feast of the Purification of our Lady; and the 4<sup>th</sup> on Midsummer day." See Green 10.

<sup>306</sup> See E. K. Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage* I.413-14.

<sup>307</sup> E. K. Chambers says, "The gentlemen of the Inns of Court were always ready to follow in the wake of courtly fashion. Their interludes were famous and important in the days of Elizabeth, but, although Lincoln's Inn entertained external *lusores* in 1494 and 1498, Gray's Inn is the only one in which amateur performances are recorded before 1556." See his *Mediaeval Stage* II.194.

there was also evidently a tradition of participation by the barristers in the revels, whether dramatic or administrative. In the records of the Middle Temple parliament immediately before the one in which Rastell was fined, the Company appointed first its reader, or instructor, for the next vacation, and then a steward, a butler, a marshal, two masters of the revels, and a “Constable of the Tower” for the “feast of Christmas then next following.” That these *ad hoc* festive officers were members of the Inn and not servants is made clear by the fact that one who declined the office incurred a fine of 100 shillings. Only after these officers were appointed did the Parliament turn to the admission of new members, and finally to a collection of fees to “have a place to see the jousts” held in honor of the arrival of “lady Katharine de Espanea at Westminster.”<sup>308</sup> The members of Middle Temple’s Parliament saw the management of their festive entertainments as essential to the business of the Inn, and likewise assumed that they should appear as a body at the entertainment of the princess we know as Katherine of Aragon when she arrived to marry Prince Arthur.

That the four Inns formed a collective enterprise is suggested by cooperation among them in their holiday festivities. In 1490, Inner Temple performed a “disguising” at Grey’s Inn on January 3, and Gray’s Inn performed one at Inner Temple January 10.<sup>309</sup> Moreover, that the Inns were viewed as a powerful, perhaps dangerous, force to be reckoned with is clear from a notorious incident of holiday drama that occurred three decades after Rastell’s student days, at the same period he was operating his theater in Finsbury.

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<sup>308</sup> Hopwood 1-2.

<sup>309</sup> Lancashire 184.

In 1526 the men of Gray's Inn presented a "goodly disguising" composed by a bencher, John Roo, some twenty years before, "long before the Cardinall [Wolsey] had any auctoritie." Edward Hall describes its reverberations at the highest levels: the play represented "that lord governaunce was ruled by dissipacion and negligence," and was understandably construed by Wolsey to have seditious intent. The Cardinal "in a great furie sent for the saied master Roo, and toke from hym his Coyfe, and sent hym to the Flete, and after he sent for the young gentlemen, that plaied in the plaie, and them highly rebuked and threatened, and sent one of them called Thomas Moyle of Kent to the Flete."<sup>310</sup>

When this Morality play (with its striking resemblance to Skelton's *Magnificence*, c.1520) was presented at Gray's Inn, Rastell was engaged in the practice of law, and in writing and printing both for the law and for the stage. In this period he printed (and perhaps composed) a debate-interlude, *Of Gentleness and Nobility*, that put forth in its conclusion proposals so radical the Cardinal might well have taken umbrage had the play come to his notice. The Phylosopher, a typical Rastellian chorus figure, speaking of "these hedys, rulers, and governours all" asserts that "in auctoryte they ought not contynue / Except they be good men" (1124-25), and moreover that they should "be brydelyed and therto compellyd / By some strayt laws for them devysyd" (1154-55).<sup>311</sup> Rastell's point of view, as printer and dramatist, is in important ways that of a common lawyer of the Inns of Court, a man who sees the world as an opportunity for making a fortune by the exercise of learning. He takes festive mirth and spectacle as deserving

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<sup>310</sup> Edward Hall, *Henry VIII*, ed. Charles Whibley, vol. 2 (London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, 1904) 79.

<sup>311</sup> Rastell *Four Elements* 123-4.



official notice, sees the law as the rule of reason, and regards himself as being on a footing with the mighty as subjects to that law.

That point of view had an important ramification in Rastell's expansion and marketing of the New Learning through popular drama. The Inns and the universities became, in the half-century after Rastell's death, the seedbeds for new developments in drama. As Darryl Grantley explains, "One of the most direct ways in which the academic institutions were able to influence the nature of writing for the commercial stage, was as auspices for the humanist importation of foreign and classical models. The Inns of Court were especially instrumental in making available foreign material, as several translators of Seneca were Innsmen including Arthur Golding, John Studley and Thomas Newton. If the humanist revolution in education was responsible for the introduction of classical and foreign narratives, what followed was the proliferation of these in popular translations."<sup>312</sup> In his publication (and perhaps composition) of *Calisto and Melebea*, c. 1525, adapted from *La Celestina* of Fernando de Rojas, Rastell was a forerunner of this tradition of literary importers.

Rastell returned from the Inns to Coventry with a wife and a preparation to practice law, though he would not remain there long. As we have seen, his home-town practice prospered, and he soon succeeded his father in the coronership, presiding over the Court of Statute Merchant from 1506 to 1508. But in the following year, Rastell moved back to London, where he lived for the rest of his life. 1509 was an auspicious year to begin a new chapter in life: the new king Henry VIII acceded to the throne, John

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<sup>312</sup> Darryl Grantley, *Wit's Pilgrimage: Drama and the Social Impact of Education in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) 79.

Colet began to endow the new St. Paul's School, and Erasmus wrote his *Praise of Folly* dedicated to Rastell's brother-in-law More. Perhaps Rastell was attracted to the capital by the intellectual ferment and the prominence of his wife's family connections there. Coventry's troubles may have given a material stimulus to the move. The city's economy, based on the cloth trades, was in steep decline at the end of the fifteenth century, and its population as well. People of his own rank went elsewhere to seek their fortunes, leading to a "glaring shortage of really substantial citizens" in Coventry itself.<sup>313</sup>

Rastell's move to London placed him again among decidedly substantial citizens, if only by virtue of his marriage into the More family. Thomas More became an MP and a Burgess of the city of Westminster in 1509-10, and he was already well connected at court. Rastell himself had the basis for a legal career, and he also had the capital and the learned acquaintance needed to set up in the fledgling London printing trade.

Rastell's printing career brings us to the crucial question of how written knowledge circulated outside schools in the first decades of the fifteenth century: who could read his books? Estimates of the literacy rate based on recent research vary widely: W. B. Stephens accepts as likely that as few as ten percent of English men were able to sign their names at the end of the fifteenth century, but Rosemary O'Day reports that that as many as fifty percent of London merchants were literate by the 1470s, and that up to 78 percent of Londoners were literate in the later sixteenth century.<sup>314</sup> Estimates from

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<sup>313</sup> Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979) 47.

<sup>314</sup> W. B. Stephens, "Literacy in England, Scotland, and Wales, 1500-1900," *History of Education Quarterly* 30 (1990): 555. Rosemary O'Day, *Education and Society* 226

contemporary observers range even more widely. Stephen Gardiner (who, like More, argued that literacy was not essential to salvation) estimated the literate at “not the hundredth part of the realm.”<sup>315</sup> More, by contrast, estimated that “far more than four parts of all the whole divided into ten could never read English yet,” or that half or more could read.<sup>316</sup> Rastell himself was perhaps the most optimistic, reckoning (in the preface to his *Great Abridgement*, 1527) that since the time of Henry VII “the universal people of this realm had great pleasure and gave themselves greatly to the reading of the vulgar English tongue.”<sup>317</sup> For the history of English culture, these contemporary estimates, biased, inexact, and wishful though they must be, establish a useful array of records of what English people thought of themselves and their countrymen as learners. The estimates confirm, on the one hand, what we might guess, that conservatives like Gardiner had a very low opinion of popular abilities. On the other hand, it is a surprise to find that More, whose Utopians read for pleasure and esteem print and paper above all European imports, believed so many of his own countrymen could read.<sup>318</sup> I am inclined to accept, with reservations, the optimistic estimates of More and Rastell, because both had such extensive business with ordinary people.

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1500-1800 (London: Longman, 1982) 13-14, and “An Educated Society,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Tudor and Stuart Britain*, ed. John Morrill (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 121.

<sup>315</sup> See David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 43.

<sup>316</sup> Cressy 44.

<sup>317</sup> Cressy 44.

<sup>318</sup> See Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. Edward Surtz (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964) 103-7. Cressy cautions that More offered his estimate of English readers as an estimate of how few could read, and as part of an argument that reading was not a prerequisite for salvation.

On that basis I suppose that in Rastell's London more people could read, or could get easy access to reading through others, than could not. Moreover, I suppose that the majority of those who could read never learned Latin grammar or rhetoric, but read in English, for pleasure or profit. Certainly the city had a high concentration of clerks and lawyers who must have gone to grammar schools. But London readers also included merchants, apprentices, yeomen, and masters in trades that required literacy in English, but not necessarily in Latin.<sup>319</sup> As O'Day points out, "After 1300 Latin had considerably reduced importance in the work of the common lawyers."<sup>320</sup> Moreover, as Cressy shows, reading in English was increasingly held "to have immediate and useful applications for people who never aspired to grammar"; it was promoted as "a tool for godliness, a weapon against anti-Christ, and an essential component in leading a proper Christian life"; and it also had more mundane applications: "Almanacs and prognostications, jest books and chap books, travelers' tales and histories, and advice for farming or housekeeping, were all available from London booksellers and their provincial agents."<sup>321</sup> The rise of popular reading (including reading aloud to non-readers) was officially viewed as a widespread destabilizing force. The Act of Advancement of True Religion of 1543 ordered that "No women nor artificers, prentices, journeymen, serving-men of the degrees of yeomen or under, husbandmen nor labourers" should be allowed to

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<sup>319</sup> For a recent analysis of apprenticeship in this period, see Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994). Ben-Amos estimates that apprentices made up one-tenth of London's population "within the walls" (84), and shows that many masters undertook to send their apprentices to school (112), as many trades required literacy (198).

<sup>320</sup> O'Day, *Education and Society* 12.

<sup>321</sup> Cressy 6-7.

read the Bible in English.<sup>322</sup> Many of these people must have been reading if the law was held to be necessary to stop them.

When Rastell started printing, however, the radical potential of popular reading was not so widely apparent as to stimulate state controls. Indeed, the role of popular literacy in the circulation of anti-authoritarian skepticism in Tudor England has not yet, to my knowledge, been thoroughly studied. This chapter may contribute to that study only insofar as I argue that Rastell, a person of middling rank, used the conjoined auspices of the printed page and the public stage to issue some remarkable, early expressions of historical skepticism and endorsements of self-rule under law. His explorations of such ideas were consonant with the pragmatic, historical, and text-based thrust of humanist criticism, and their circulation must have profited from the general boost that learning got from monumental schools like St. Paul's. Indeed, Rastell's publications are often directly related to the circle of intellectuals close to St. Paul's. But the force of Rastell's own ideas on the commonwealth, of his own writing about history and law and the vernacular, in many ways pulled away from the humanist grammar school's basic assumption that literacy was latinate. Rastell rode the rising tide of humanist thought, but his ideas for the spread of learning were not to be confined to Latin, or to schools.

It is important to appreciate that Rastell was among the very earliest printers in London, those who invented the industry as they went along. Simon notes that England at the time was a laggard in embracing the new technology of printing: "by 1500 there were printing-presses in only four English cities as compared with 73 in Italy, 50 in Germany,

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<sup>322</sup> Cressy 44. See also R. S. Schofield, "The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968) 313.

and a Greek press had been set up in Milan before Caxton issued his first book from Westminster [c.1476-77].<sup>323</sup> Isolated as they were, Caxton and the early English printers, including Rastell, were much more than print technicians. They selected, edited, translated, and marketed their books, in competition with a brisk import trade. Caxton edited and augmented his first work, *Dictes or Sayengis of the Philosophres*, a translation from the French by Anthony Woodville, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Rivers, who also seconded the cost of printing.<sup>324</sup> Significantly, the first book printed in England was sponsored by a noble patron, but printed in the vernacular in his own translation. The English works of Chaucer and Lydgate were profitable items for Caxton, as were romances, breviaries, courtesy books, and chronicles. So, too, were grammar school books: he printed an Aesop in his own translation, two editions of Donatus, several of Cato, and a single edition of Lydgate's translation of "*Stans Puer ad Mensam*."<sup>325</sup>

From the beginning then, London printers provided their buyers with humanist texts and also with more popular or practical works produced by Englishmen. After Caxton's death in 1491 the London printing industry came to be dominated by Wynkyn de Worde and Richard Pynson, the principal competition to Rastell's printing business.<sup>326</sup> Both sought a popular market, and each found a profitable specialty market as well: de Worde did a brisk business in school texts, and Pynson was the leader in printing for the

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<sup>323</sup> Simon 58.

<sup>324</sup> This book is ascribed by the STC 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (6826) to an eleventh-century philosopher, Mubashshir ibn Fatik, Abu al-Wafa'.

<sup>325</sup> I made this brief survey of Caxton's early work using the *English Short Title Catalogue* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) online.

<sup>326</sup> For a helpful synopsis of early English printing up to the death of de Worde, see H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers 1475 to 1557* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1952) 181-93.

law. By the time Rastell moved to London, de Worde had printed the grammar of the Italian humanist Sulpitius (used, as we have noted, at Winchester), two editions of Donatus, two school vocabularies (including one by Stanbridge), two accidentes, the *Introductorium Linguae Latinae* of William Horman, and several editions of the *Parvula*, a grammar sometimes attributed to Stanbridge. Between 1509 and 1535, in the years of Rastell's printing career, Wynkyn de Worde produced dozens of textbooks from the Magdalen grammarians; in 1521 alone he printed sixteen titles by Whittinton, two by Stanbridge.<sup>327</sup> Textbooks were profitable for Pynson, too, who had by 1509 printed two editions of Sulpitius, a volume of six comedies of Terence, a Donatus, two anonymous works on Latin grammar for boys (*Promptorius puerorum* and *Informatio puerorum*), and two works by Stanbridge. But Pynson made a market niche as printer of books of English common law, beginning in the 1490s with the systematic publication of the *Year Books* (annual digests of current case law), and followed by the publication of Littleton's *Tenures* in 1496 and the *Abbreuiamentum statutorum* in 1499.<sup>328</sup>

Such was the printing business when Rastell first set up shop in Fleet Street. He soon moved to a building on the south side of St. Paul's Cathedral, "beside Paul's Chain."<sup>329</sup> Here he adopted the two printer's devices seen in his work. One is an

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<sup>327</sup> See "Wynkyn de Worde" in E. Gordon Duff et al., *Hand-Lists of Books Printed by London Printers 1501-1556* (London: Blades, East, and Blades, 1913).

<sup>328</sup> See "Richard Pynson" in Duff *Hand-Lists*.

<sup>329</sup> Paul's Chain was the passage connecting St. Paul's Churchyard to Carter Lane, to the south. Duff's *Hand-Lists* record only four other London printers whose works predate Rastell's first imprint, and their addresses give a sense of the neighborhood: Julian Notary printed from about 1496, moving to Paul's Churchyard at the sign of Three Kings about 1510. William Faques printed books including an accidente, *Vulgaria Terentii*, a Donatus, and statutes of Henry VII from 1504 in

elaborate image incorporating both fancy and cosmography, as figured also on the sign for his shop (and in the lessons of his interlude). At the bottom, a hemisphere of Earth, with three turreted towns among its hills, is bound by concentric arcs of Water, Air, and Fire, under a black sky spangled with stars, sun, and moon. A mermaid emerges from Water into the sky at the right, and a merman at the left, holding between them a tablet inscribed with the printer's monogram. Above the tablet, a banner proclaims the jussive "*Fiat,*" as *lux* pours from above, from a figure of the adult Christ, offering a benediction and framed by the arms of the King and the Prince of Wales. The sun and the merman both gaze attentively at the mermaid, who gazes back, combing her long hair. The fluid composition and the sweet sensuality of the figures emphasize a material abundance, illuminated from above but rich and dynamic in its physical details.

The image of the Redeemer presiding over an orderly universe into which He is pouring illumination invites us to consider the printer's device beside the icon of the Child Jesus from Colet's schoolroom, especially as each appeared in London at just the same time, and to closely related audiences. In both compositions Jesus holds the central, commanding position, but in the printer's device he is framed with the arms of the local principate, as if his benedictions come with royal support. Colet's schoolboys saw "*Audite Ipsum,*" the words of the Transfiguration, with their injunction to a wayward world to receive redemptive instruction, conveniently embodied in the schoolmaster in

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Abchurch Street, and Richard Faques printed at the sign of the Maiden's Head in Paul's Churchyard from 1509. Robert Copland printed at the sign of the Sun (de Worde's house) and the Rose Garland from about 1515. Rastell's output exceeded all but Notary's, whose career was of about the same length as Rastell's. Sixteen more printers are shown in Duff to have begun work by 1535, the year of Rastell's death.



the chair beneath the image. The printer's device offers instead an ordinary fantasy, the "Fiat" of creation, a promise of a new birth from the light of learning, embodied in the book in hand. The place of schoolmaster is occupied by the monogram "JR," representing the Word made print, held up between two lissome merpeople. They, given the circumstances, can only invoke a new Adam and Eve, rising with dual natures from the spheres of the elements, terrestrial and yet also sprung from the living waters of the new dispensation. Their naked torsos, intent mutual gazes, and scaly, sinuous nether parts dominate the composition, and the Redeemer's beams aim directly at their heads. The concentric arcs of the four elements, gradients from sullen earth to heavenly fire, may even be imagined to parallel the rising platforms of Colet's classroom, and by extension the social rising afforded by learning. Rastell's device, in brief, advertised that his printing would furnish a *schola universalis* so that men (and women) could ascend toward the light of knowledge that Colet, under a similar emblem, reserved for his schoolboys.

Rastell's second printer's device appears deceptively modest by comparison: on a black rectangular field, the JR monogram appears on a shield, from which flows the banner proclaiming, "*Justicia Regat.*" Yet only a fiery self-assertion could conflate the printer's initials with the initial letters of this noble imperative. Rastell advances a lawyerly claim to authority, appropriate to the printer of law books, and implicitly offers a challenge to the *rex* whose arms figure in the other device: Let Justice Rule.

Devereux holds that Rastell himself may have had little to do with typesetting or press work, since his status "as a gentleman and a barrister would probably have prevented him" from doing manual labor, and since the printing itself over time seems to

show signs of several hands at work.<sup>330</sup> The dates of Rastell's publications suggest that his interest in printing waxed in distinct periods and waned for years at a time. But the content of his books shows that he was, when interested, deeply engaged in their selection, translation, and editing, and often in their composition. Rastell clearly aimed to make money as a printer, and his final surviving letter confirms that he did so, but he always kept several revenue streams going at once. Ultimately, printing was more than a livelihood to him: it was a platform, a stage on which he performed what he took to be his part in the new commonwealth.

The works that issued from Rastell's press fall into a few clear categories: humanist books, including school texts and plays; books of law, for which Rastell himself provided considerable scholarship, including translation into English; popular reading, including jest books and a history of England; and finally, books of religious controversy.

Rastell's most immediate link to humanist books may have been through the schooling of his own children. The latter-day registers of St. Paul's School list John's son William (1508-1565) among the boys who probably attended the new school. The assumption is reasonable enough, considering the proximity of the Rastell shop and dwelling to the school and the closeness of the family connection through More to Colet's circle. William would have begun school around 1513, just as his father's printing was taking off. Yet the boy might as easily have been educated at an older school, like St. Anthony's, More's old school. Indeed, the younger Rastell seems to have been in some ways more influenced by More than by his own father. William never

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<sup>330</sup> Devereux, *Bibliography* 28.

converted to Protestantism even after John Rastell's conversion to the new faith, and he championed his uncle's cause in his own printing and publishing. Like More, William Rastell spent some time at Oxford without taking a degree, and then, after working for a time as a printer, he followed his uncle's path to Lincoln's Inn, the bar, and eventually the bench.

But the books of humanism are primarily important in John Rastell's story insofar as they show his own commitment to the New Learning without benefit of humanist schooling. His printing *oeuvre* shows the convert's zeal, as the first period of his printing work is dominated by humanist works. Around 1510, Rastell issued the life of Pico della Mirandola, a work by Pico's nephew, translated by Thomas More.<sup>331</sup> Soon after, Rastell issued three school-related texts: the *Long Accidence* of John Stanbridge, a devotional book attributed to Donatus, and the grammar that Thomas Linacre had written for St. Paul's. Recall that Colet had rejected Linacre's grammar as too difficult for beginners. Rastell's edition, with prefatory poems by Lily and More, may have been a propitiatory gesture to the offended author. In any case, these early publications link Rastell closely to More and St. Paul's, and to humanism in its specialized literary sense. His printing soon cast a broader net, however.

Around 1515 Rastell broke new ground when he issued his edition of Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez*, the earliest surviving English play in print. In about 1520 he printed his own *Four Elements*, and in the mid-1520s he issued *Calisto and Melebea* and

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<sup>331</sup> For a bibliographical description of each of Rastell's publications, including STC numbers, title page contents, and colophons, see Devereux, *Bibliography* 86 ff.

*Gentleness and Nobility*, both of which he may have helped to write.<sup>332</sup> By Wilson's count, Rastell and his son William were the leading printers of English drama at the time: "of the eighteen dramatic pieces which got into print before 1534, no less than twelve were printed or published by him or his son."<sup>333</sup> The four plays from John Rastell's press carried distinctly humanist messages about the powers of learning. I have looked at Medwall's meritocratic humanism in the previous chapter, and I will consider in detail Rastell's drama of instruction below. The other two plays are worth considering briefly here, as each shows impulses to experiment with heterodox ideas, to adapt traditional forms to new social conditions, and to put direct instruction on the stage.

*Calisto and Melebea* is adapted from a novella, *La Celestina* of Fernando de Rojas, which was first published as a printed, illustrated book in 1499. Aaron Kitch astutely points out that the author of the interlude chose a popular print source that "not only draws on classical learning [but] also depicts the misappropriation of that learning for evil purposes."<sup>334</sup> The novella tells the story of the seduction of a virtuous girl by a spoiled aristocratic youth, through the eloquent persuasions of the bawd, Celestina. The Spanish novella ends in suicides, but in the English play the embattled virgin deflects seduction, and her father steps forth to deliver a moralizing harangue against the idleness of youth. He enjoins "ye faders, moders, and other which be / Rulers of yong folkis" to teach them "some art, craft or lernyng, / Whereby to be able to get theyr lyffing" (1046-

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<sup>332</sup> The colophon of *Gentleness and Nobility* bears the ambiguous claim "Joh[ann]es rastell me fieri fecit" [John Rastell had me made]. See Devereux, *Bibliography* 125-26 on the authorship debate.

<sup>333</sup> Wilson 23.

<sup>334</sup> Aaron Kitch, "Paper Stages: The Intersection of Printing and Drama as Cultural Institutions in Tudor and Stuart England," diss., U of Chicago, 2002. 130, 133.

47, 1051-52). Moreover, he charges that “The heeds and rulers must first be diligent / To make good laws, and execute them straightly, / Upon such masters that be negligent” (1061-63). Bevington (who accepts the play as Rastell’s) argues that the play’s “central topic is aristocratic idleness as contrasted with virtuous poverty,” and that it reflects “the humanists’ penchant (especially Rastell’s) for using drama as an ideological sounding-board.” Bevington sees *Calisto* as “close in spirit to the idealistic social speculations of Hythloday” in More’s *Utopia*.<sup>335</sup>

Joel Altman uses almost the same language in describing *Gentleness and Nobility*. Comparing it to Heywood’s *Play of the Weather*, Altman says *Gentleness and Nobility* is a “serious essay in social speculation” that “resembles More’s *Utopia*, not only because it contains similar ideas, but because it uses the stage in the way More uses the printed page—as a privileged sanctuary where heterodoxy may be expressed.”<sup>336</sup> The play takes the form of a debate between three estates of society. But, as Aaron Kitch observes, “where the medieval estate satire normally featured a knight, a plowman, and a member of the clergy, Rastell [replaces] the latter with a Merchant, perhaps gesturing toward a change in the society of sixteenth-century England.”<sup>337</sup> Each of the debaters argues for the nobility of his own estate, and the old quarrel between birthright and merit is extended even to a questioning of property rights and the value and rights of labor. The Knight argues that the “wysedome and wyt” of his ancestors brought order and justice to the land (124), and that “inherytaunce” guarantees “contynuaunce” of those things (31-

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<sup>335</sup> Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* 82-83.

<sup>336</sup> Altman 124.

<sup>337</sup> Kitch 142.

32). The Merchant asks, “How can lordys and estatis have ought in store / Except thartyfycers do get it before” (69-70). The Plowman confronts these “Two proude folys” (202) with the leading question, “What is the noblest thyng that can be?” (279), to which he himself posits the answer, “That of all other thyngis hath lest need” (282), and the Knight and Merchant assent. The Plowman then handily demonstrates that while they need his labor, they have nothing that he needs, as his labor fills his own belly as well as theirs. He asks the ancient question, “For when Adam dolf and Eve span / Who was then a gentyman?” (485-86). Against the Knyght’s argument that inherited property brings stability, he replies that “possessions began by extorcyon” (606).

The value of learning takes a surprising drubbing in the debate. The Plowman scorns “these fonde clarkes that go to scole” (828) and must “alodge some auctoryte” to defend “theyr parte” (831-32). Indeed, the Plowman has little faith even in the value of the debate at hand to make any difference. He voices a withering skepticism about the effects of rhetoric:

For exortacyons, techyng, and prechyng,  
Gestyng, and raylyng, they mend no thing.  
For the amendment of the world is not in me.  
Nor all the grete arguments that we thre  
Have made syth we resonyd here togedyr  
Do not prevayle the weight of a fether  
For the helpyng of any thing that is amys. (1002-8.)

The Knight makes a plea that learning actually causes harm, as when rulers are chosen “by eleccyon,” presumably for their merits, they often end up “grete tyrauntys” (1028, 1030):

And though they have grete wyt and lernyng,  
Yet so proud they be therof, they fere nothing,  
Nother god nor man, but evermore styll  
Without counsell or advyse follow theyr own wyll. (1032-35)

By contrast, “they that by enherytaunce rulers be / Though they have no grete lernyng” are likelier “To follow wyse mens counsell and advyement” (1036-37, 39). Rastell may have folded into his debate humanist frustrations with scholastic disputation, or contemporary discontent with the tyranny of the “grete clarke” Wolsey, but either way rhetoric and meritocracy take a hit.

The debate format allows the voicing of many views without implying commitment to any, though in this play as in *Calisto* a narrator appears to have the last word. A Philosopher takes the stage at the end of the play, addressing “Ye soferayns all” (1100), and admonishing them to prevent abuse of power by any estate, first by public teaching (presumably like this play itself) and also by strict laws:

For the best wey that is for one to begyn  
To convert the people by exortacyon  
Ys to perswade them by naturall reason. (1132-34)

As we noted before, the final exhortation of the play is to limit the authority of governors and judges “By some strayt laws for them devysyd” (1155). In its emphasis on legal controls, *Gentleness and Nobility* finally propagates an activist and even a republican

humanism, but with more faith in common law and natural reason than in learned discourse for the sake of knowledge itself.

Aside from their importance for the humanist cause, Rastell's printed plays also began to change the way in which drama was conceived in England, paradoxically through the relative fixity of print and its potential for wide circulation. The printing of plays made wider dissemination and accurate transmission of verse drama possible, and fixed in some measure the authority of individual playwrights. We recognize Medwall as our first named dramatist, for example, only because of the title page in Rastell's edition of *Fulgens and Luces*. But printing plays also multiplied opportunities for performance and so for adaptation. The prefatory advertisement in Rastell's edition of *The Four Elements* suggests that the play could be trimmed to suit, as I discuss at more length below. Rastell the printer promoted drama as a portable and durable commodity that could be bought and sold and adapted by consumers for their own ends. Those ends potentially included both humanist attainments and popular entertainment, and Rastell acknowledges the claims of both.

Rastell's printing for the legal profession vigorously advanced an idea that we noted in the plays issued by his press, that strong laws are the guardian of the commonwealth. His publications for the law advanced that idea not only in his hortatory prefaces, but also in their broader project of condensing, indexing, and translating law into the vernacular for more convenient use. In about 1513, he issued the *Liber Assisarum*, a compilation of the statutes of Edward III, the first of the several important law books to come from his press. From its preface (the earliest example we have of



Rastell's prose) it appears that he edited and indexed the book himself.<sup>338</sup> He chose the statutes of a monarch, as Rastell was later to write, who "though that he was occupied all the tyme of his lyfe in warre, yet he was so cyrcumspecte, that he euer toke hede to the commen welthe of his realme, and ordred and stablysshed his lawes maruelously well."<sup>339</sup> The preface to the *Liber Assisarum* constitutes an inquiry into the right meaning of the term "commonwealth," which, Rastell concludes, "restith nother in increasing of riches power nor honoure but in the incresyng of good maners & condicions of men wherby they may be reduced to knowe god to honoure god to loue god and to lyue in a continuall love & tranquilyte with theyre neighbors."<sup>340</sup> This idea of a commonwealth under laws, independent of "riches power nor honoure," predates the Philosopher's similar argument in *Gentleness and Nobility* by more than a decade. During that time Rastell was engaged in the practice of the law, the making of pageants, and the continual publication of important law books.<sup>341</sup> These books figure here only as collateral evidence that the New Learning, English drama, and arguments for the rights of the commons under law were pouring forth from the same quarters, the printing houses around St. Paul's churchyard.

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<sup>338</sup> See Devereux, *Bibliography* 88-90.

<sup>339</sup> John Rastell, *The Pastime of People, or the Chronicles of Divers Realms, and Most Especially of The Realm of England* (1529; London, Rivington et al., 1811) 228. Cited hereafter as Rastell, *Pastime*.

<sup>340</sup> Quoted in Devereux, *Bibliography* 89. See also Reed 206-10.

<sup>341</sup> Devereux catalogues more than a dozen important printings of law texts from Rastell's press, as well as a "*Dialogus de fundamentis legum Angliae et de conscientia*," commonly called *Doctor and Student* (1528). This dialogue, according to Devereux, "had some importance in the intensifying Reformation crisis" and "was also important in the development and history of common law, as virtually all legal historians have noted." See his *Bibliography* 150.

Four other works from Rastell's press merit mention as they are contemporary with his most intense dramatic activity and as they all advance the cause of learning, or at least reading, for the commonwealth. Indeed, they establish a personal link between scholarly humanism and popular literature through a well-placed servant who was also a versifier. Walter Smith, a member of More's household, composed a jest book called *The Wydow Edyth*, printed by Rastell in 1525. In lumbering couplets the book unfolds the exploits of a naughty widow who made her way through English society by gulling, in succession, "Both men and women of euery degree, / As wel of the Spiritual, as temporaltie: / Lordes, Knights, and Gentlemen also: / Yemen, Groomes, and that not long ago."<sup>342</sup> The setting is contemporary England, and the work is highly topical. The widow's victims include "her Hoste at Brandonfery" and "a Doctor of diuinitie" at S. Thomas of Akers in London," but also actual magnates or members of their households, including "a servant of Sir Thomas Neuell," the Earl of Arundel himself, "three young men of Chelsey, that were seruantes to Syr Thomas More" (among them the author himself), and "three yong men of the Lord Legates [Wolsey's] seruants" (31-32). In some ways the book seems to be written for a coterie of More circle insiders, but there is evidence that it had a wider circulation as a popular book. In a preface to another jest book, the printer Robert Copland (active 1515-33) quotes a customer asking him, "Hast thou a boke of the wydow Edith / that hath begyled so many with her wordes?"<sup>343</sup> The beguiling widow has much in common with the glib Celestina of *Calisto and Melebea*,

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<sup>342</sup> Walter Smith, *The Mery Jestes of the Widow Edyth*, in W. Carew Hazlitt, ed., *Shakespeare Jest-Books*, vol. 3 (London: Willis & Sotheran, 1864) 33.

<sup>343</sup> See Devereux, *Bibliography* 120.

and her popularity attests to both a fascination with and an anxiety about audacious eloquence.

A year later Rastell printed *A Hundred Merry Tales*,<sup>344</sup> another jest book that may be of his own composition. It comprises jokes about corrupt clergymen, cuckolds, clever apprentices, stupid Welshmen, rich widows, and greedy merchants. The author identifies these types with settings specific to London (Holborne Bridge, Bowe Parish, St. Paul's, the court of Arches), or to various corners of Britain (Middlesex, Suffolk, Northamptonshire). One tale tells of the mishaps of a fellow who went home in his costume after playing the devil in a stage play "in a market town in the county of Suffolk" (67). Another recounts the misadventures ensuing when a "scholar of Oxford lately made master of arts came to the city of London and in Paul's met the said merry gentleman of Essex" (100). A third tells of "a great variance between the Bishop of Norwich and one Master Skelton a poet laureat" (102).

Rastell in fact issued several of Skelton's poems in this very period,<sup>345</sup> and the *Merry Tales* have a certain Skeltonic flavor, satiric and sometimes salacious slices of life of the kind Boccaccio and Chaucer offer in their popular register. We can probably take the tales to be a reliable reflection of attitudes from the coarser side of city life in Rastell's time. Two of the tales in particular offer interesting evidence about popular ideas of schooling and burgher largesse. The first depicts a confrontation between a scholar and a cobbler:

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<sup>344</sup> For a modern edition, see P. M. Zall, ed., *A Hundred Merry Tales and Other Jestbooks of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963). I cite page numbers from this text in parentheses.

<sup>345</sup> Rastell published Skelton's *Against a comely Coystrowne*, *Diverse Ballads*, *Philip Sparrow*, and *Ware the Hawk*, all c. 1525-27. See Devereux, *Bibliography* 134-37.

In the University of Oxenford there was a scholar that delighted much to speak eloquent English and curious terms, and came to the cobbler with his shoes which were peaked before—as they used that season—to have them clouted and said this wise: “Cobbler, I pray thee set me two triangles and two semi-circles upon my subpeditals and I shall give thee for thy labor.” This cobbler because he undersood him not half well answered shortly and said: “Sir, your eloquence passeth mine intelligence but I promise you if ye meddle with me, the clouting of your shoon shall cost you three pence.” (72-73)

The joke foretells the rebellion against inkhorn English, but it may cut both ways. The schoolboy or citizen with a little Latin could also enjoy making perfect sense of the scholar’s grandiloquence, and yet still appreciate the idea that such excess of learning may cost the scholar more than it profits him. The joke depends on an audience’s recognizing the character type of the young man refashioning himself by learning.

A related moral about an embarrassment of riches emerges from another salient example from the *Merry Tales*, this one less a joke than a cautionary tale. The central character is a rich citizen, “one Master Wittinton,” who, intent on earning glory by a pious benefaction, “had builded a college,” here probably not a school but a collegiate church for a chapter of canons.<sup>346</sup> Such collegiate foundations often took students and

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<sup>346</sup> The story seems to identify the public benefactor with the semi-legendary Dick Whittinton, the archetypal self-made man who indeed was buried in a collegiate church he had endowed. Stow records that the church of St. Michael Paternoster “was new built, and made a college of St. Spirit and St. Mary, founded by Richard Whittinton, mercer, four times mayor, for a master, four fellows—masters of art, clerks, conducts, chorists, &c., and an almshouse called god’s House, or hospital, for thirteen poor men, one of them to be tutor, and to have sixteen pence the week; the other twelve, each of them to have fourteen pence the week for ever, with other necessary provisions.” See Stow I.242.

kept a choir and an almonry, all for the glory of the founder. In a dream Master Whittinton is humbled, as Our Lady distributes “a goodly ointment” to simple people who had suffered for their faith, but passes over the expectant merchant. The author concludes, “By this, ye may see that to suffer for God’s sake is more meritorious than to give great goods” (139-40).

The Mariolatry of the story may refer to the fact that the Mercers’ Company was dedicated to Mary, while the camel-through-the-eye-of-the-needle theme reminds the mercers themselves that their riches, like the scholar’s eloquence, may be an attractive stumbling block. For the story of John Rastell, this tale in particular and the *Hundred Merry Tales* in general offer a useful reminder that “citizens” were not a heterogenous block, that cobblers mocked scholars and common lawyers laughed at merchants. While Rastell was printing grammars for the school trade, he also acknowledged a popular skepticism about the value for the common weal of high-flown scholarship and colleges founded on burgher pride.

In 1529 and 1530, Rastell compiled and printed his *Pastyme of the People*, a chronicle history of the English people. As Reed has noted, Rastell’s work shows a marked advance in historiographical skepticism over his source, Fabyan’s *Chronicle*, printed by Pynson in 1516. Reed notes that Rastell follows his Fabyan so closely in most matters that Rastell’s revisions and interpolations stand out clearly, especially in the treatment of traditional legends and ancient prejudices. These changes seem to follow the pattern that Jack Goody and Ian Watt describe for the development in literate societies of

critical history, as distinct from oral traditions of legendary history.<sup>347</sup> Where Fabyan, following Geoffrey of Monmouth, passed on the legendary origins of Britain from Brute, descendant of Aeneas, Rastell compares several early sources, and points out that Gildas and Bede do not mention Brute. He invokes authorial responsibility, commenting, “I maruell in my mynd that men hauyng any good naturall reason wyll to sych a thing gyue credence; for no man can tell who is the auctour of this story.”<sup>348</sup> Further, he cites recent geographical evidence for the improbability of Brute’s legendary voyage of discovery, “as they that be seen in Cosmogrifye may well perceyue by the syght of the quart [chart] or *Mappa mundi*” (5). In contrast to authorless legend, Rastell affirms that “ye oldest writing that we rede of any auctor, is the boke of the comentaryes of Julius Cesar, which indyteyd the work him self at the tyme when he conquereyd this land and made it suiect to the Romayns, which was .xlviij.yere before the byrth of Christ” (5). Reed notes that Rastell adds to Fabyan considerable detail about legal developments from Magna Carta, the keeping of dated legal records after Henry VI, and changes in the value of money

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<sup>347</sup> “In oral societies the cultural tradition is transmitted almost entirely by face-to-face communication: and changes in its content are accompanied by the homeostatic process of forgetting or transforming those parts of the tradition that cease to be either necessary or relevant. Literate societies, on the other hand, cannot discard, absorb, or transmute the past in the same way. Instead, their members are faced with permanently recorded versions of the past and its beliefs; and because the past is thus set apart from the present, historical enquiry becomes possible. This in turn encourages skepticism; and skepticism, not only about the legendary past, but about received ideas about the universe as a whole. From here the next step is to see how to build up and to test alternative explanations.” See Jack Goody and Ian Watt, “The Consequences of Literacy,” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968) 67-68.

<sup>348</sup> John Rastell, *Pastime* 4. I cite page numbers in parentheses hereafter.

over time.<sup>349</sup> He deals more impartially with traditional enemies of England, mentioning without opprobrium the life and death of “la Pusell de Dieu or the Mayde of God”(259) and eschewing Fabyan’s reference to Joan’s “sorcery and devilish ways.”<sup>350</sup>

Nonetheless, Rastell’s historiography has its own agenda. He speaks with approval of the Roman practice of holding their dictators accountable for their deeds at the end of their terms, the origin of a great tradition of “indyffrent justice”: “Wold God it were so usyd at this day in England, that every jugge or other officers havynge auctoryte to execute ye lawis or to gouverne or to rule in any office shuld be remouable at IIII or V yere or lesse, and then to answere to all complayntes that shuld be alleged agayns him ... and then there wold not be so mich extorcione and oppressione of the pore people, nor so many iniuries as is now a days” (14-15). He notes the arrival of printing in England, and comments that the “craft is now marvaylously increased ... and have been the cause of many thynges and great changes, and is lyke to be the cause of many strunge thynges here after to come” (269). Reed’s analysis shows that Rastell the printer-historian sees his job first as establishing the records of the past in an independently verifiable way, even if they vary from patriotic propaganda, and second as holding up models of justice and liberty where he finds them, even when they vary from contemporary English practice.

Taken as a whole, the array of materials printed (and often written) by John Rastell, considered alongside the limited, literary scope of grammar schools, shows an energetic citizen-printer outpacing the schools in achieving certain humanist objectives.

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<sup>349</sup> Reed 213.

<sup>350</sup> Reed 216.

Much of the ambitious curriculum that Erasmus recommends in *De Ratione Studii*, including early instruction in Greek, never took root in the public schools of his own time.<sup>351</sup> Erasmus also calls for the study of history and cosmography, if only as useful adjuncts to understanding the poets. Yet the timetables of Eton, Winchester, and Canterbury give us no evidence that history and geography were incorporated systematically in the curriculum. The publication lists of printers like Wynkyn de Worde and John Rastell, however, show that history and geography and other new studies of the physical and social facts of the contemporary world were being taken up by printers and book-buyers as valuable in themselves, and not merely as glosses on Vergil and Homer. The ambitions of the humanists were increasingly gratified not in the schools but outside them, even as the schools grew in authority.

By the time Rastell wrote the *Pastime of the People* he could comment on justice and the conduct of the state with the authority of long experience. He had not only practiced law for some three decades, but had also served the crown in various capacities since at least 1514, when records show him engaged in moving armaments in the service of Sir Edward Belknap, privy councilor to both Henry VII and Henry VIII.<sup>352</sup> The relation with Belknap was a profitable one for Rastell, and may in fact have provided the means for his printing ventures or his New World expedition, an episode I discuss below

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<sup>351</sup> Erasmus, like Quintilian, places instruction in Greek foremost, but the timetables sent to Saffron Walden in 1530 mention no Greek at Eton or Winchester. See Leach 448-51. Most English boys would have to wait to get their Greek, if at all, at universities, where it was taught with increasing vigor during and after the Reformation. See Lawson 97-98. See Simon (85) for an account of the earlier introduction of Greek at Cambridge, which led to riots in 1518. The king supported the innovators, and sent More to defend the study of Greek as useful to lawyers, who were in turn deemed essential to the state.

<sup>352</sup> See Geritz, *John Rastell* 5.



as the precipitating event for the composition of his *Four Elements*. Belknap also seems to have been Rastell's connection to the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, the first of three important state occasions to which Rastell contributed pageantry. For the procession of the Emperor Charles V through London in 1522 Rastell devised a street pageant with elaborate machinery, and he may also have contributed verses, now lost, though we have the verses composed for the same occasion by William Lily, high master of St. Paul's School. In 1527, Rastell helped to furnish the royal entertainments at Greenwich for the French ambassadors, including a set piece of some sort called a "Pageant of the Father of Heaven."

The records of Rastell's specific contributions to two of these three events are slight, but two general patterns emerge. First, Rastell seems to have been engaged, perhaps primarily, as a scenic designer, and his designs for all three represented in some way the heavens, not unusual as a decorative motif, but clearly related to the iconography of his printer's device and the cosmography of the *Four Elements*. Arguably, this motif dignifies the cosmographer, be he geographer, printer, or poet, as much as it celebrates the cosmos he represents. Second, and more important for this story, Rastell, a lawyer and gentleman, acted the role of the artisan, bringing the crafts of the city to the stage of royal diplomacy. In the royal entertainments at Guisnes and at Greenwich, his arts embellished displays of English royal magnificence. But in the emperor's procession, the royal persons came into the city, where the citizens displayed their own magnificence. The three events taken together show the ambiguous situation not just of Rastell, but of More and Lily and other humanists directly involved. They played their roles as loyal servants of the commonwealth and king, delivering on command speech and spectacle

with humanist trappings, while in their own writing and thinking deploring unbridled absolutism, sumptuary waste, and war, the sport of kings.<sup>353</sup> Rastell, even in his role as a crown servant, expresses the point of view of the citizen.

Reed has developed an ingenious argument about the “astronomical character” of Rastell’s pageant devices on all three occasions, linking their imagery to his printing and his interest in mathematics.<sup>354</sup> The astronomical motif is clear enough in the two later events, but not so clear at Guisnes in 1520. There, for the English banquet house built for the Field of the Cloth of Gold, Rastell had been engaged by his old master Belknap to help decorate the roofs, described as “curiously garnished under with knots and batons gilt and other devices.”<sup>355</sup> Hall, with his usual enthusiasm for costly décor, says the roof was “furnished so to mannes sight that no living creature might but joye, in the beholding thereof,” and so on at elaborate length.<sup>356</sup> A roof (in this case meaning a ceiling) spangled with gold may sometimes suggest the heavens, but knots and batons of gold? The roof of the great French pavilion described by Hall, by contrast, has an explicitly celestial décor:

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<sup>353</sup> Of the diplomatic value of the Field of Cloth of Gold for making a durable Anglo-French peace, Anglo observes that this “late flowering of the most extravagant medieval chivalry” was finally only a “spectacular affirmation of Anglo-French rivalry,” ending in open warfare (169). The alliances of Charles V and Henry VIII formed against France in 1522, after the emperor’s entry into London, unraveled soon after when Charles abandoned the marriage to Mary and took Italy from France on his own. Wolsey then embarked on a pro-France, anti-imperial policy, widely unpopular in spite of the imperial army’s sack of Rome on May 6, 1527, the day after the great entertainments of the French embassy at Greenwich. All of Wolsey’s French schemes came to nought as his own influence crumbled because of his failures in obtaining a divorce for the king.

<sup>354</sup> See Reed 19-20. See also Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 165-66, for further possible astrological associations.

<sup>355</sup> Geritz, *John Rastell* 15, quoting *L & P*, vol. 3, pt. 1, 259-67.

<sup>356</sup> Hall 1.191.

“the colours of the same was all blewe, set with stares of gold foyle, and the Orbes of the heavens by the crafte of colours in the stoffe, were curiously wrought in maner like the sky, or firmament.”<sup>357</sup> The comparison suggests not only that Rastell’s roof at the Field of the Cloth of Gold may not have represented a sky, but that if it did, it was not remarkable or unique in doing so.

The cosmographic theme is, however, richly developed in the pageant Rastell mounted on behalf of the City of London for the procession for the emperor on June 6, 1522. The Court of Aldermen voted a month before that Rastell’s proposed pageant should “goo fforth and take effecte so allweye that the charges therof exceed nott xv<sup>li</sup>.”<sup>358</sup> The king and the emperor, dressed alike in gold and silver, were met outside the city by the mayor and aldermen, in whose name Sir Thomas More greeted the monarchs with an oration in Latin. The royal procession stopped for the first pageant (of a series of eight) at the City gate near London Bridge, where Samson and Hercules represented the collaborative might of the two monarchs, a theme throughout the procession. The subsequent pageants represented 2) Jason and the Golden Fleece, 3) the emperor’s descent from Charlemagne, 4) the descent of both monarchs from John of Gaunt, 5) the realm of King Arthur, 6) the friendship of the two sovereigns and the ensuing reign of peace (this one staged by Rastell), 7) the common descent of Henry and Charles from Alphonso X of Castile, and finally 8) the Assumption, with saints.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Hall 1.194.

<sup>358</sup> See Anglo 196-97.

<sup>359</sup> See Anglo 190-202 for a detailed summary of the procession. See also Hall I.250-55.

William Lily wrote Latin verses for all the pageants except the one managed by Rastell, for which Rastell himself presumably provided a text, now lost. Lily's Latin verses survive in Hall's account of the procession, and also in a pamphlet printed after the occasion by Richard Pynson, with an English translation and framing verses. These anonymous verses honor the schoolmaster-poet as "that maister moost humayne / Cleped Lily" and propose "his fresshe verses to translate / In to our tonge / out of their ornate vayne / Of pure latyn. To thende that to eche state / Lernernd and vnlernd / they shulde be celebrate."<sup>360</sup> We can assume that the missing verses for Rastell's pageant were not unlike Lily's, which extol Charles in particular as (in the words of the anonymous translation) the "onely hope in euery doutfull chaunce / In afflictions / to cause welthe / peace / and rest," and the best defense against "Moores / sarazins / turkes / people without pyte."<sup>361</sup> Lily strikes a particularly Roman chord in his characterization of the city fathers and the citizens as "*Prator. Consul. Sanctus cum plebe Senatus*," a somewhat mysterious sequence that the translator renders as "The honorable mayre / with all the hole [holy, for *sanctus*] senate / ...the gentle citizens...of high and lowe estate."<sup>362</sup>

The translator concludes his framing verses with other flourishes of civic pride, first with a direct address to "Right honorable mayre / and prudent senatours, / Of this noble cite," commending them for showing "what longeth to highe honours / to largesse / noblesse / and royall soueraynte / In the house of Fame registred shall it be / For certayne shortely / thyder it shall be send / And there it shall remayne / ... And there it shall

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<sup>360</sup> C. R. Baskervill, "William Lily's Verse for the Entry of Charles v into London," *Huntington Library Bulletin* 9 (1936): 9.

<sup>361</sup> Baskervill 10.

<sup>362</sup> Baskervill 11.

remayne / euer without ende.” Yet his very last word is “to the cytezens,” commending them, with suitable classical references, for producing so learned a poet, Lily himself:

Worthy citezys / contented ye can nat be  
Only with Iuno: but ye wyll haue also  
The lady Minerua / to florisse in your cite  
That is to say plainly / without wordes mo  
Good lernyng / and eke doctrine. Ye and therto  
Ye have geat a mayster / the flour of Poesy  
Your children to instruct. Whose name is Lily.<sup>363</sup>

The author of Pynson’s pamphlet plainly held that the citizens were his primary audience, and that the role of their schoolmaster in the imperial entry was a source of pride for the city. The verses advance, most significantly, the idea that the city acted as a powerful corporate entity, first in producing a noble welcome that would live in “the house of Fame,” second in making a home for the “Good lernyng” of Minerva alongside Juno, who presumably represents domestic stability and prosperity. While the meeting of Henry and Charles produced no lasting or profound diplomatic advances, it occasioned an historic display of the united forces of humanist learning, civic identity, and dramatic expression, not in a college or a palace or on a jousting field, but on the city street.

It is worth considering the two surviving accounts of Rastell’s pageant against the background of the verses in Pynson’s pamphlet. First, Hall describes the arrival of the procession:

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<sup>363</sup> Baskervill 14.

they came to the Stockes where was a quadrant stage where on was an Herber full of Roses, Lyllies and all other flowers curiously wrought, and byrdes, beastes and all other thynges of pleasure. and aboute the Herber was made the water full of Fyshe, and about it was the Elementes, the Planettes and Starres in their places and every thyng moved, and in a type in the toppe was made the Trinitie with the Angels singyng, and the Trinitie blessed the kyng and the Emperor, and under his feete, was written, *behold the louer of peace and concorde*. And so they passed through the Poultry to the great Conduite in Chepe.<sup>364</sup>

The composition might almost be taken as an advertisement for Rastell's printing business, so closely does it seem to reflect his printer's device. The entire Trinity take the place of the Christ figure atop the device, and its mermaid and merman are replaced in the pageant by the king and the emperor, receiving the blessing from above and enacting the rule of peace, rather than learning, on the earth below.

Hall passes along briskly, but at the end his description of the pageants he pauses to emphasize the place of the citizens:

Yet you must not forget for all the pagiantes how the Citezens well apparelled stode with in railles sette on the left side of the stretes and the clergie on the right side in riche copes, which sensed the princes as they passed and all the stretes were richely hanged with clothes of golde, silver, velvet and Arras, and in every house almooste Mynstrely.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Hall 1.253.

<sup>365</sup> Hall 1.255.

So the citizens and clergy, two estates sometimes in competition as we have seen, framed the great drama of the procession, not only as audience, but also as a costumed chorus. The very houses of the citizens, richly ornamented, provided both backdrop and music for the scene. And while the procession ended with a mass sung by the Archbishop of Canterbury at St. Paul's, it had begun with More's oration for the welcoming committee of mayor and aldermen.

The second and more detailed account of Rastell's pageant survives in a manuscript in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. It describes the artifice of "the Ile off englonde," complete with a shimmering sea, fields, woods, and mountains, furnished with "dyuers bestes goyng abowte ... by [de]vices." When the emperor arrived at the pageant, "the bestys dyd move and goo, the fishes dyd sprynge, the byrdes dyd synge reioysing the coming off the ij princes the emprowr and the kynges grace." Then a castle and garden, with figures of the emperor and king casting away their swords, "dyd Ryse by a Vyce." To culminate this vision of princely amity, "an ymage off the father off hevyn all in burnyd golde dyd disclose and appere and move in the top off the pageant with thys scripture wrytyn abowte him—*Beati pacifici qui filij dei vocabuntur.*"<sup>366</sup> Anglo adds, "As the machinery creaked into action two children, one speaking in French and the other in English, greeted Charles and Henry and explained the significance of the scene 'in ordyr as hitt was done and playede.' There are no Latin verses composed for this pageant, and it is safe to assume that Rastell, pageant-maker, playwright, and poet,

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<sup>366</sup> See Anglo 197, quoting from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS. 298, No. 8, fols 132-142.

eschewed the services of Wiliam Lily.”<sup>367</sup> The use of children as speakers at several stages in the procession was typical of pageantry for royal entries, but their use seems especially significant in this celebration of the city’s contract with Minerva, and it seems more than likely that some of the speakers would have been Lily’s pupils at St. Paul’s.

The Corpus Christi manuscript adds the dimension of time to our understanding of the pageant, letting us see it unfold sequentially, as the emperor would have seen it. First we behold the island-earth, which this patriotic redactor identifies as England, though one wonders why the emperor would have a castle there. The land is unpeopled and inert as at the creation, and then its creatures are animated by the appearance of the monarchs, or rather the images of the monarchs. It is hard to tell whether these were actors, or mechanical devices, and indeed whether Rastell’s pageant should be understood as an acted performance or a clockwork curiosity. The first appearance of the “ymages” of the monarchs with their swords bared is strangely at odds with their Edenic setting, so like the little *orbis terrarum* in his printer’s device, where by contrast Rastell put the naked innocence of merman and mermaid (a suitably English Adam and Eve in their amphibious natures). The martial gesture in the pageant brings to bear the whole ethos of chivalry, and echoes a similar moment at the first meeting of Henry and Francis at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, when their appointed marshals rode before them each bearing a naked sword.<sup>368</sup>

The casting away of the swords after “the ymages dyd behold eche other” and the mechanical embrace “with another vyce ioyned eache to other” evokes prophecies of

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<sup>367</sup> Anglo 197.

<sup>368</sup> See Hall 199.



turning swords into ploughshares, underlined by the final appearance of the “father of hevyn” (not the Trinity as in Hall) and the quoted beatitude about the peacemakers as the children of god (Matthew 5:9). The overall focus of the piece moves from earth, up to royal power and amity, and up again to divine blessing, and it seems from this description that the pageant must have grown in height at each successive stage. That is, though the focus moves from earth to heaven, the emphasis of the whole is the materiality of the device itself. In the absence of the verses, it seems to me that Rastell made a contribution to theatrical spectacle rather than to literary drama, celebrating the pageant machinery, “so craftily made,” rather than figures from classical myth or history, biblical tradition, or royal bloodlines, as in the other pageants of the procession. The power of kings and of the deity is all compassed in a machine of Rastell’s invention, and the privileged place of language is restricted, however slenderly, to the treble voices of schoolboys and the final appearance of the “scripture wrytyn” at the top of the pageant. The figures of the monarchs themselves, moreover, come off as figures on a cuckoo clock, going through the motions of progress that turns out to be unregenerate.

What we know of Rastell’s contributions to the royal feasts for the French ambassadors in 1527 accords with the impression that he was engaged primarily in royal entertainments as a scenic designer, though both Reed and Anglo suppose he may well have provided the script for a dialogue “of Love and Riches” as well. The accounts for the occasions show an outlay for “Dyuers necessaries bought from trymmynge of the pageant of the father of hevyn. Lyons dragons and grayhoundes holding Candelstikes as more playne hereafter aperith in the Reknyng of John Rastall.” The accounts also mention payment to a painter “for drawing the pictures,” “Carryag of the father,”

eighteen yards of cloth for a “clowde,” a mould for a “grete angel,” carving of wooden “Angelles wynges,” five hundred “swete” singing birds, and a carved mould for the “virgins hedde.”<sup>369</sup> On the basis of these details Anglo concludes that the pageant of the father of heaven was not a dramatic entertainment, but a display piece like the mechanical isle of England in the emperor’s procession.<sup>370</sup> Rastell was evidently paid to devise a pageant for the feasting, and it seems to have been thematically similar to other work we have seen: a father of heaven, perhaps in a cloud, surrounded by angels, but this time with a virgin, royal beasts holding candles, and a flock of songbirds.<sup>371</sup>

Hall describes the “dialog theeffect whereof was whether riches were better then love, and when they could not agre upon a conclusion, eche called in thre knightes,” who “fought a fair battail.” The decision in the contest between love and riches comes at last from an “olde man with a silver berd,” who concludes “that love and riches, both be necessarie for princes (that is to saie) by love to be obeyed and served, and with riches to rewarde his lovers and frendes.” The masking ended with the king and “the viscount of Torayne” taking parts in the dance in rich Venetian costumes, which the king presented to the ambassadors as a gift at the end of the disguising.<sup>372</sup> While the pageant was being performed, the emperor’s troops were moving on Rome, which they sacked soon after.

The pageant’s “romayne fashion” and the mediation of the philosophical “olde man with a silver berd” in the indecisive battle vaguely suggest a humanist influence. The affirmation of love as popular support for the crown, and riches as a way of encouraging

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<sup>369</sup> See Anglo 221, quoting P.R.O., E. 36/227, fols. 31v-35v.

<sup>370</sup> Anglo 222.

<sup>371</sup> Anglo 222.

<sup>372</sup> Hall 2.87-88.

such love, show a bankerly pragmatism, with no special brief for sworn loyalties. If this was Rastell's last recorded dramatic production, it tells us only that humanist values were introduced at court merely as a tempering influence in dynastic business as usual: royal promises magnificently made and soon forgotten. Perhaps the most interesting detail comes as a postscript, suggesting the relation of the monarch's magnificence to the local citizens. Of the two banqueting houses constructed and ornamented for the occasion, Hall writes:

These two houses with Cupbordes, hangings and all other thinges the kyng commaunded should stand still, for thre or foure daies, that al honest persones might see and beholde the houses and riches, and thether came a great nombre of people, to see and behold the riches and costely devices.<sup>373</sup>

This pageant marks the end of our surviving records of Rastell's dramatic activities for the crown. In all he served his king and his adopted city as an artificer like Daedalus, putting the most splendid face on the crude realities of dynastic ambition and communal pride. But this high service was a low flight, and Rastell showed his loftier aspirations in other venues more suited to his identification with the London citizen.

Rastell built his house and stage in Finsbury Fields at some point in the five years after leasing land there in the fall of 1524. The stage, then, went up within a few years of the emperor's entry into London. In the same period Rastell printed Littleton's *Tenures*, the popular tales of the Widow Edyth, and the plays *Calisto and Melebea* and *Gentleness and Nobility*, and produced the disguisings at Greenwich. We have no record of any

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<sup>373</sup> Hall 2.88.

performance on Rastell's stage, and scholars have speculated on whether the performances were private entertainments or public shows.<sup>374</sup> I suppose that they were in some sense both. If Rastell did not charge admission, we know that he did sell play-books, the value of which could be enhanced even by amateur performances. We also know from a lawsuit that at the time of the Greenwich disguisings he already owned a store of valuable costumes, and that he charged rental fees for the use of his costumes by players.<sup>375</sup> Rastell probably produced on the Finsbury stage the plays he sold as books, with hired actors or amateurs. His audience may have been only his friends, but, as we know from Stow, Finsbury Fields was a traditional place of resort for London's apprentices to practice archery and games. At the end of the century Stow complained that the playing fields had been subdivided "for Gardens, wherein are builded many fayre summer houses, and as in other places of the Suburbes, some of them like Midsommer Pageantes, with towers, turrets, and Chimney tops, not so much for vse or profit, as for shewe and pleasure, bewraying the vanity of mens mindes."<sup>376</sup> Rastell built a folly of his own, for a "public," whether they were friends or paying strangers, in a place that was and would be a pleasure-ground for Londoners. His building of a stage at his own house may be read as social-climbing, a commoner's imitation of an aristocratic practice. It is a gesture not unlike his brother-in-law More's practice of keeping a

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<sup>374</sup> For discussions of the professional or commercial nature of Rastell's stage, see Reed 232-33; Geritz, *John Rastell* 17-18; Janette Dillon, "John Rastell's Stage," *Medieval English Theatre* 18 (1996): 17-18.

<sup>375</sup> For a description of the costumes, see Dillon 19. For details and a transcription of the suit, see Janette Dillon, "John Rastell v. Henry Walton," *Leeds Studies in English* 28 (1997): 57-75.

<sup>376</sup> Stow, vol. 2, 78. For a fuller description of Finsbury Fields and the location of Rastell's theatre see Reed 230-32.

schoolmaster for his children and wards in his extended household.<sup>377</sup> Both of these appropriations of great house customs have a double valence, self-aggrandizement on the one hand, benefit to the common weal on the other. The net effect of each was to dignify city culture.

Rastell's private theater in Finsbury Fields is also a forerunner of the commercial theater of half a century later. This timber structure in a suburban plot signals the changing cultural authority of drama itself as it moved from traditional auspices toward a more entrepreneurial and authorial model, and consequently toward the audience-as-consumer. For whatever reason, Rastell's innovation did not start a trend in theater-building. Four decades would pass before a London grocer, John Brayne, built the Red Lion in Whitechapel in 1567, the next purpose-built London stage for which we have records. Another decade would elapse before Brayne and James Burbage built the Theatre in Shoreditch, not far from Rastell's site in Finsbury.<sup>378</sup> During that half-century literary drama was transformed, primarily in the schools and Inns of Court and universities, while the interlude and the Morality continued to flourish in halls and in the street. If Rastell's stage did not immediately spawn imitators or start a booming business,

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<sup>377</sup> For a description of the household *schola* that More organized around 1511, see Ackroyd 143-46. Ackroyd says of More's experiment, "He had turned his household into a form of the community with which he was most comfortable, part monastery and part school" (146), though I would argue that More may have had in mind the similar school in the archepiscopal palace at Lambeth where he studied as a member of Cardinal Morton's household. The difference is significant: a household school like the one at Lambeth was the benefaction of a great lord for the edification of his *familiares*, who might aim at lordliness themselves.

<sup>378</sup> On these earliest public playhouses in London, see John Orrell, "The Theatres," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 102-4.

it did provide a prototype for a public commercial theater, built by a man with close connections to power in the court and in the city.

Rastell had composed a soaring expression of his hopes for the stage some ten years earlier, around 1517, in *The Nature of the Four Elements*, though it may not have been performed, if indeed it ever was, until he built his own theater. Two events precipitated his writing of the play: his service to Belknap brought him a fortune (though a troubled one),<sup>379</sup> and this funded his plans for an expedition to and settlement in the New World.<sup>380</sup>

The bare facts of the expedition suggest that Rastell was considerably bolder than the professional mariners he engaged for the voyage. With two London associates he obtained letters of introduction from the king, to inform any foreign ruler that the bearers were “*Cives Civitatis nostrae Londoniae in Anglia,*” and that they ventured “*pro certis Negotiis nostris et suis expediendis.*”<sup>381</sup> In Rastell’s own words, “he entendid a viage unto the new found land” (189), with a cargo of “fyne white flowre and bay salt wt certyn

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<sup>379</sup> Belknap arranged for Rastell to receive the profits of the estate confiscated from Richard Hunne, the rich Merchant Taylor who was found hanged while in custody for heresy in the Lollard’s Tower. Hunne was arrested for resisting payments to the clergy, a crime very like the one for which Rastell himself was imprisoned twenty-one years later. See Reed 9; Devereux, *Bibliography* 7-8; and Geritz, *John Rastell* 13.

<sup>380</sup> My summary of the expedition narrative is based on Reed 11-12 and his Appendix I, 187-201, which reprints the court records of the proceedings Rastell brought against the mutinous purser, John Ravyn. Reed develops the argument that the mutiny was encouraged by the Lord Admiral, Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, who wanted to keep his ships for defense of the Channel. John Ravyn testified that he was following Surrey’s orders in resisting the western voyage where profits were available closer to home. I cite page numbers from Reed in parentheses.

<sup>381</sup> See E. J. Devereux, “John Rastell’s Utopian Voyage,” in *Moreana* 13 (1976): 120.

pakks of frysis [frieze, a woolen cloth] and canvas and cofers of silks and tukes [a canvas-like cloth] and other mercery ware wt divers other goodes and howsold stuff / as fedyr bedes napery pannes pottes and divers other wares as salt / hiddes tallow and other thynges” (190). He probably intended to found a colony rather than to trade these goods, as he also carried “xxx or xl souldiars besyde mareners” and “tolys for masyns and carpenters and other ingynges that he had prepyard for the new lands” (196). The expedition set out from Gravesend in two ships in the summer of 1517, but the purser, one John Ravyn, caused delays in provisioning in Falmouth, and soon tried to persuade Rastell to change his plans. He “exortyd the seyd Rastell in the see appon the cost of yreland to gyff up his viage and to fall to robbying upon the sea,” maintaining “that he myght do it by the law of the see and that hit shuld be as profitable for hym as his fysshing in the new lands / which the seyd Rasell refused to doo but went a land at Waterford to prepare more vitell for his viage” (197). The purser and crew took possession of the ships and sailed for Bordeaux to sell off the cargo, leaving Rastell in Waterford.

There he seems to have stayed for two years. When he returned to London he brought suit against Ravyn for the loss of his goods. If Rastell had succeeded, English colonization of the New World would have begun a century earlier than it did. The documents in the law suit demonstrate that Rastell was not primarily motivated by quick profits. He aimed at least to build a colony as a base for English fishermen, but he probably envisioned an empire for England, as the diatribes in *The Four Elements* suggest. Either way, his ambitions for world exploration receded to London and its suburbs, where he turned to making plays and popular books. Rastell’s career trajectory

closely resembles an inverted *cursus honorum* followed by frustrated Renaissance humanists, as described by Frank Whigham (building on the work of Daniel Javitch). Whigham observes that the ambitious and learned man of the period, failing to obtain the great clerkship promised by his education, sometimes turned first to producing “advice to princes” and then to “less annoying” fictions, “while still employing the powers his education had taught him to see as his defining capacities.”<sup>382</sup> John Rastell insinuated himself into this tradition of humanist letters without the discipline of humanist schooling. He brought instead the defining capacities of the citizen-adventurer, refined by his education as a lawyer and a printer, thwarted in his personal bid for world conquest but eager to send others after him.

In sum, John Rastell’s life’s work augmented the cultural authority of his several professions, his social peers, and England itself, though his visionary patriotism cannot be separated from the profit motive. Rastell often appears to be a restless opportunist. Nonetheless, in the closing episodes of his life (beyond the scope of this study) he seems to have been moved by an unshakeable conscience. The history of Rastell’s conversion to Protestantism, his break with More, his work as a propagandist for Cromwell’s reforms, and his death in the Tower consequent on his subversive pamphleteering represent the final expressions of this life of exploration and quest for self-mastery.<sup>383</sup> He died in the

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<sup>382</sup> Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege* 13-14.

<sup>383</sup> For accounts of Rastell last years, see Reed 21-28; Geritz, *John Rastell* 19-27; Peter C. Herman, “Early English Protestantism and Renaissance Poetics: The Charge is Committing Fiction in the Matter of Rastell v. Frith,” *Renaissance and Reformation* ns 30 (1994): 5-18; J. Christopher Warner, “John Rastell’s *New Book of Purgatory* and the Obligations of the Christian Prince,” *Moreana* 33 (1996): 29-40.



Tower, having defied a royal proclamation on tithes, in effect denying any authority other than holy writ and his own conscience. But to the end he declared himself a loyal servant to Cromwell and to the king, and he retained a passionate wish to influence the commonwealth. In his last years, he wrote to Cromwell:

Syr, I am an Old Man. I loke not to lyff long, and I regard ryches as much as I do chypps, save only to have a lyffing to lyff out of det; and I care as mych for worldly honor as I care for the fleyng of a fathyr in the wynd. But I desire most so to spend my tyme to do somewhat for the commyn welth, as God be my juge.<sup>384</sup>

That strong identification with the commonwealth informed the interlude he wrote twenty years earlier, just after his failed expedition.

### ***The Nature of the Four Elements: The Stage as a Commonwealth of Knowledge***

In *The Nature of the Four Elements*, John Rastell fuses principles and forms of humanist schooling with current information about the material world to produce a secular didactic drama. The logical appeal of Rastell's interlude builds on two principles of civic humanism: learning equips a man to serve the commonwealth, and such learned service opens an honorable path to wealth and social advancement. Henry Medwall's sober *New Man* embodied the same ideas for an élite audience at Lambeth Palace in the 1490s, and in 1512 Colet made them articles of faith at St. Paul's School, in the center of burgher London. Rastell, however, teaches these lessons with a difference: for him, learned service to the commonwealth requires more than clerkly literacy and the virtues

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<sup>384</sup> See Geritz, *John Rastell* 23-24.

of the Christian soldier. Rastell's Humanity, the central figure in his play, must also acquire a practical knowledge of the expanding world, the questioning mind of a natural philosopher, and the spirit of an explorer. Moreover, Rastell understands advancement not so much as a movement of the pupil up into an established power élite, but rather as a movement of power out into the citizenry, and through them out into—and over—the world.

These revisions of the *logos* of humanist rhetoric require adjustments in its pathetic and ethical appeals. Rastell anticipates the impatience of his audience with abstruse learning. He infuses the rhetoric of learning with a worldly pragmatism, conveyed through print technology and popular dramatic forms. Against these he sets up a powerful competing rhetoric of sensual self-indulgence that tests the will of Humanity, while giving full play to the claims of vital sensory experience. In working out this contest, Rastell employs by turns reasoned exhortation and comic pratfalls to win his audience to a program of study for practical ends. He takes special pains in his introduction to represent himself as no "great clerke" (11) but rather as a patriot and good fellow, suspicious of high-flown rhetoric, but stoutly convinced that Englishmen should be ready to spread their imperial wings for the glory of the commonwealth.

The "commonwealth" works in Rastell's play as a coded expression of more complex ambitions, by which commoners who were gentlemen by dint of their knowledge and enterprise should own and run England, if not the world. Humanity, the "chylde and formyd instrument" (219) of Nature, takes center stage as a stand-in for such common Englishmen, and the drama proceeds from the struggle of his two natures, "intellectyve" and "bestyall." His virtuous instructors, Studious Desire and Experience,

embody the values of curiosity, skepticism, and devotion to self-improvement through study, familiar now from humanist school texts. But these masters take as their subject matter the earth itself, its lands and resources, rather than classical literature and Christian duty. These earthly studies are opposed by the earthy temptations of Sensual Appetite and the wastrel Ignorance, who embody not only heedless vice, but also the abuses of deceptive servants and foolish, unlettered lords. The outcome of the contest is not, however, an utter rout of these ancient forces of resistance. Though the play is incomplete, the most likely conclusion, signaled by the final surviving speeches and even by a shift in verse forms, appears to be a new, rather open-ended synthesis: Sensual Appetite is subjugated to serve Humanity with both “counsel” and “comfort” (1429, 1434), but Humanity himself has been ennobled by Studious Desire and Experience so that he sees clearly the relative merits of learning and license. Rastell’s commonwealth thus unfolds not only as a philosophical and rhetorical ideal, but also as a community of knowledge of social and material realities.

Literary historians have long noted Rastell’s identification with the commonwealth. As A. W. Reed observed, “The stage, like the printing press, was an instrument for Rastell for the mission he so often speaks of, his work for the ‘Commonweal.’”<sup>385</sup> Wilson proposes that Rastell saw didactic drama as a medium through which “he might serve the state by disseminating knowledge among a public that could not or would not read.”<sup>386</sup> Wilson also emphasizes Rastell’s patriotic assertion in the prologue to *The Four Elements* that “as the Greeks and Romans used their mother

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<sup>385</sup> Reed 197.

<sup>386</sup> Wilson 23.

tongues for the dissemination of knowledge, so should we, ‘our tongue maternal’ now being sufficient ‘To expoun any hard sentence evident.’”<sup>387</sup> As we have seen, Rastell certainly promoted reading and explored new territory in vernacular literature. Yet there are signs throughout *The Four Elements* that he was keenly aware of, and even sympathetic to, the resistance of the public to literary learning, which still carried clerky associations.

Drama presented an alternative platform for a didactic program with popular appeal. E. J. Devereux assesses Rastell’s civic ambitions thus: “Rastell’s idealism was almost utopian, yet his eye for the main chance during his lifelong search for honour and wealth was much more typical of his age.”<sup>388</sup> If we look with this “eye for the main chance,” we see that Rastell’s contributions both to learning and to drama had more to do with his response to the local cultural marketplace than with veneration of classical ideals or national pride. Though he held that the concerns of the commonwealth must precede those of mere personal wealth, he was clearly not averse to the accumulation of private wealth in good measure. Rastell saw his “main chance” in the English domestication of Renaissance humanism. In *The Four Elements* he supplements literary learning and Christian teaching with new information about cosmography and geography, and he moves the seat of learning itself beyond princely and academic monopolies. The play constitutes an ingenious packaging of new information about the world, framed to supply a market that I take to be more or less identical with the urban market for humanist

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<sup>387</sup> Wilson 24.

<sup>388</sup> Devereux, *Bibliography* 4.

schooling. Rastell's play responds to the demand for imported knowledge, but also to the uneasiness such knowledge inevitably aroused.

I offer here a rhetorical analysis of the play, considering as they unfold the layered appeals of its didactic purpose, its mixed urban audience, and its entrepreneurial author. I argue that the play proposes a new cosmography in which the world is laid out like a text for Humanity to master, just as the printed text of the play is laid out for the reader to use as he will. The play envisions the whole of the natural world as the dominion of this English Humanity, newly equipped with a map of the universe and the disciplined will to use it.

The physical packaging of the interlude is all-important in understanding its potential uses. Rastell's play comes to us only as a printed text from his own press, with no stage history. The text explicitly invites us to consider the play both as a book and as a script for performance, and to choose how we will put it to use. The book opens with a prefatory advertisement that frankly acknowledges a split between expository instruction and comic drama:

**A NEW INTERLUDE AND A MERY,  
OF THE NATURE OF THE FOUR ELEMENTIS,**

declarynge many proper poyntys of phylosophy naturall, and of dyvers straunge landys, and of dyvers straunge effectis and causis, whiche interlude, yf the hole matter be playde, wyl conteyne the space of an hour and a halfe; but yf ye lyst ye may leve out muche of the sad mater, as the messengers parte, and some of Naturys parte and some of Experyens parte, and yet the matter wyl depend conveyently, and than it wyll not be paste thre quarters of an hour of length.

This advertisement, very like Peter Quince's prologue to his tedious brief scene of very tragical mirth, promises the reader curiosities both "proper" and "straunge" of "phylosophy naturall," mixing matter both "sad" and "mery." Having thus collapsed the logical and pathetic appeals into one, Rastell immediately offers control of the text to the reader, whom he casts as a play-maker who can choose to play the "hole matter" in a fixed amount of time, or to trim the "sad mater" to produce a play "conveniently" half the length.

The advertisement shows more concern with selling the play and getting parts of it onto the stage than with preserving the integrity of the text as written. The presumption that book-buyers are looking for interludes to perform implies a market for printed plays, though by 1520 only a handful had been published in England. What readers and what auspices for performance can Rastell have imagined? The interlude form and small cast imply performance in a banqueting hall, and the chaste and didactic matter would be appropriate for the Inns of Court or a school performance, or for dinner entertainment at his master Belknap's house, at More's house, or even at court. Rastell may have written hoping that any of these venues might open through his personal connections, but printing the play shows hopes of an even broader dispersal. His printing of Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez* may have revealed a market for printed plays. But Rastell is also clearly aware that *The Four Elements* is a new kind of play, in which the instructive "sad mater" may be hard to sell. The play's message, then, would seem to be not only in the speeches, but in the medium itself, a modular text that enjoins its buyer to make it his own, to perform it "convenyently," shaped to his own purposes.

Even so, a humanist message deeply informs both the “sad” and the “mery” parts of Rastell’s interlude. The “sad mater” is conveyed primarily by a long prologue delivered by a Messenger, and then by the lessons that Nature, Studious Desire, and Experience offer to Humanity. As Erasmus provided this audience the classical bounty of the *Copia* for judicious picking and choosing, Rastell’s instructors present a map of the world, with copious details about its commodities, available for the taking to any enterprising Englishman willing to venture out. Rastell thus uses the dynamic of the New Learning to promote commercial interest in the whole world, Old and New. Yet even if these expository passages are cut as the advertisement suggests, the merry struggle between Humanity’s “intellectyve” and “bestyall” natures still delivers a secular humanist argument. Both the expository and the dramatic parts of the play insist on the ethical and practical superiority of attaining dominion by embracing the discipline of study and learning.

The play itself begins with a prologue by a Messenger, 147 lines of the “sad mater” that Rastell gives his reader-playmaker leave to omit. Yet here perhaps we hear Rastell’s own voice most directly on the theory and practice of learning and drama as ways of dignifying humanity for service to the “commyn wealth.” In a series of stanzas in rhyme royal, the Messenger unfolds an ideal universal order in which a benevolent deity illuminates an audience of theater-goers so that they may play their proper parts in the English commonwealth. In this universe the goods of the world are held in common, and the rich have their riches only in keeping, with an obligation to help the poor. The learned are likewise bound to teach the ignorant for the common good, and to produce new learning in English as a patriotic duty.

This vision of communitarian civic engagement and entrepreneurial self-assertion, a commonwealth enriched by abundant personal wealth, had built-in appeals for a pious burgher audience, but it posed rhetorical problems as well. Rastell's Messenger takes pains to reassure the audience that the recondite matters of "phylosophy naturall" have applications that are practical, and that the lessons proceed gently from familiar, lowly things to the knowledge of God. Indeed, the Messenger proposes a metaphysics, an epistemology, and an ethics that make Humanity a partner with the deity in the earthly commonwealth. Thus Rastell's Messenger, in one of the longest speeches in early English drama, proposes new solutions to the dilemmas of humanist rhetoric in its move to the city. The speech reconciles the conflicts in the ambitions of the audience, the authority of the speaker, and the claims of the author, all deeply divided between self-assertion and community duty, between condemning old ignorance and making new knowledge seem accessible and useful.

The Messenger's first lines invoke an image of a deity sending down illumination, as in the presiding images in Rastell's printer's device and in Colet's classroom. Here, however, the deity's instructive beams are aimed at a theater audience, constituting them as a congregation of believers and as a commonwealth of learners, charitably inclined to hear the play and to act on it:

Thaboundant grace of the power devyne,  
Whiche doth illumyne the worlde invyron,



Preserve this audyence<sup>389</sup> and cause them to inclyne

To charyte, this is my petycyon. (1-4)

The Messenger begs “pacyens and supportacyon” (5) of for his “conclusions” (8) and “poynts of phylosophy naturall” (9), and thus emphasizes from the beginning the conjoined functions of drama and learning, even as he modestly declares himself no “great clerke” (12).

Indeed, the Messenger professes that his first goal is the production of a new literature outside the clerkly Latin grammar school canon. He urges the audience to acknowledge a patriotic duty to remedy the lack of serious writing in English, and to balance the “nombre of bokys in our tonge maternall / Of toyes and tryfellys” (16-17) with “warkys / Of connyng that is regardyd by clerkys” (20-21). This champion of the vernacular boldly adduces the venerated classics themselves as models of national literatures: “The grekys, the romayns, with many other mo, / In their moder tonge wrot warkys excellent” (22-23), and “our tonge is now suffycient / To expoun any hard sentence evident” (25-26). Here he proposes, as it were, an honest occupation for clerks, and he asserts that their “workys of gravyte” in English will attract readers of both high and low rank: “For dyvers prengnaunt wyttes be in this lande, / As well of noble men as of meane estate, / Whiche nothyng but englyshe can understande” (29-31). Thus Rastell reminds us that Latin was still the language of the clerisy, but not of all literate people. The fact that readers who knew only English might nonetheless be ready to cope with

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<sup>389</sup> Rastell’s use of “audience” is one of the earliest recorded uses of the word in relation to drama. See “audience,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., CD-ROM (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989). Hereafter cited as “*OED*.”

“any hard sentence” testifies to Rastell’s confidence in the spread of schooling, but also to his perception of its limitations in confining learning to Latin grammar.

Rastell’s *Messenger* takes an ambivalent, rather schoolmasterly stand toward his audience. Though he dignifies the community as deserving a serious literature of their own, he also deplores the current state of his countrymen’s learning and taste. So Rastell gives us a rare glimpse of an early printer-publisher’s estimate of the ways of authors and readers. More to the point, he distances his own didactic purpose from mere entertainment on the one hand, and from “curious” abstruse learning on the other. He laments that even the Englishman “that can but rede and wryte, / For his pleasure wyll oft presume amonge / New bokys to comyle and balates to indyte: / Some of love or other matter not worth a myte; / Some to opteyn favour wyll flatter and glose, / Some wryte curyous termys nothyng to purpose” (37-42). In despising ballads, love stories, fawning epideictic, and “curious termys” he disclaims kinship with popular, courtly, and academic writing, despising them all as self-indulgent: “Thus every man after his fantesye / Wyll wryte his conseyte, be it never so rude, / Be it vertuous, vycyous, wysedome or foly” (43-45).

The *Messenger*, by contrast, offers knowledge to build a new, shared mastery of the world. His commonwealth evinces the meritocratic and communitarian ideals of Erasmus and More. Just as the child preacher of the Erasmus’s *Concio* urges his young congregation to despise wealth for the love of Christ, Rastell’s *Messenger* attacks the popular wisdom that honors the man “which to be ryche studyeth only” (53), and that despises the man “that for a commyn welth bysyly / Studyeth and laboryth and lyvyth by Goddys law, Except he wax ryche” (54-56). Study and labor for the commonwealth

resonate with the citizen's wish to advance the authority of the commons, and also with the Christian message of brotherhood.

Even so, the Messenger's contempt for the common adulation for riches seems strangely at odds with the commercial interests of a burgher audience, unless they identify themselves primarily as working men with a common purpose. Thus Rastell reveals the moral center of his social ideal: "For every man in reason thus ought to do, / To labour for his owne necessary lyvyng, / And than for the welth of his neyghbour also" (64-66). Rastell seems to assume that his audience will identify with the common laborer when he reminds *Dives*:

Yet all the ryches in the worlde that is  
Rysyth of the grounde by Goddys sendyng,  
And by the labour of pore mennys handys,  
And though thou, ryche man, have therof the kepyng,  
Yet is not this ryches of thy gettyng. (71-75)

The rich man's duty to the commonwealth involves good works traditionally associated with the clergy, here transferred to the theater audience: "To releve pore people with temporall goodys" (87) and "to bryng / People from vyce and to use good lyvyng" (88-89). Most important, the Messenger (and his author) justify their own study and labor as teachers: "Lykewyse for a commyn welth occupyed is he / That bryngyth them to knowlege that ynignorant be" (90-91). The Messenger places the audience in a pivotal position: as he instructs them, they are ignorant; as they become initiates, they must in turn take instruction to the ignorant.

Having risked giving offense by identifying the audience with the ignorant, the Messenger hastens to include himself in a more general ignorance and to propose a suitable pedagogy for the community of learners. Since for “man to knowe God is a dyffyculte” (92), it were best to begin with earthly knowledge, “And so by lytyll and lytyll ascendynge / To knowe Goddys creaturys and mervelous werkinge” (97-98). The goal of this ascent is not finally “knowlege of God and his hye mageste” (100), but rather that man might “lerne to do his dewte, and also / To deserve of his goodnes partener to be” (101-2). The notion of being a “partener” in God’s goodness stands at the heart of Rastell’s idea of knowledge. At this period the word “partener” was evidently used primarily to denote a partaker or sharer, but was coming to denote also a colleague in an action or deed or a share-holder in a commercial enterprise.<sup>390</sup>

Rastell’s interlude aims, then, at nothing less than making citizens worthy partners with the deity. This joining together of low and high elements is exactly to the point of the interlude’s title and topic. In teaching “of the elementis the sytuacyon, / And of their effectis the cause and generacyon” (104-05), he offers access to the lowest step in the ladder to divine knowledge. He also finds in the four elements a ready defense against detractors, real or rhetorical, who would “thynke this matter to hye / And not mete for an audyence unlernyd” (106-07). For indeed, “a matter more lowe can not be arguyd / For though the elementis Goddys creaturis be, / Yet they be most grose and lowyst in degree” (106-12). He offsets the rhetorical cost of identifying an audience as ignorant and “unlernyd” (and perhaps even gross and low) by thus converting their lowness into something elemental and close to God. Moreover, in leading them from knowledge of the

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<sup>390</sup> See “partner,” *OED*.

base elements to a higher knowledge, he implicitly leads them toward the requisite knowledge for higher social standing.

In developing the theme of lowly wisdom, the Messenger evokes popular anti-clerical sentiment to set up a materialist and empiricist message: “How dare men presume to be callyd clerkys. / Dysputyng of hie creaturis celestyall, / As thyngys invysyble and Goddys hie warkys, / And know not these vysyble thyngys inferyall?” (113-16). The play expresses a persistent ambiguity about clerks: they are revered as authorities but condemned for their excesses, especially for forgetting the lowly while gazing too intently on the celestial. By contrast to such intemperate clerks, the Messenger’s author has a materialist’s suspicion of the invisible, and a pragmatist’s confidence in the measurable: in such “effectis” as “dayly appere here at eye. / Such thingys to know furst were most mete study” (125-26). Declaring that such “matter before your presence shortly / In this interlude here shall be declaryd” (127-28), he recruits the theater audience as witnesses to a lecture-demonstration in natural philosophy.

This subject matter raises the rhetorical problem of offering a lecture to people who came hoping for entertainment, but Rastell takes pains to distance his play from the language, at least, of academic discourse. The Messenger protests that the lessons will be delivered in a decidedly unclerkly style, “Without great eloquence, in ryme rudely, / Because the compyler is but small lernyd / This worke with rethoryk is not adournd” (129-31). Such anti-rhetorical rhetoric, though conventional enough in popular appeals, may seem surprising in humanist drama. The idea that “muche eloquence / Sholde make it tedyous or hurt the sentence” (132-33) seems on the face of it to cut against a basic tenet of Erasmian grammar school education. Yet in identifying his didactic program

with a bluff, nativist style, Rastell signals a move beyond Latinate, grammar-school eloquence in both subject matter and rhetoric. Instead, he practices a form of eloquence practiced by Erasmus himself, creating a comic narrator who affords his audience the double pleasure of familiarity with a learned style and contempt for its abuses: the citizen audience pays well to have their sons schooled in eloquence, and to hear it on the stage, and so they may smile in a superior way at the Messenger's earthy protests about rhetoric; at the same time, they know very well what a bore studied, plodding eloquence (like the Messenger's own) can be.

The Messenger's conclusion shows, in fact, that his pedagogical principles are precisely those of Erasmus, as he promises an infusion of mirth to sweeten instruction:

This phylosophycall work is myxyd  
With mery cunseytis, to gyve men comfort  
And occasyon to cause them to resort  
To here this matter, wherto yf they take hede  
Some lernynge to them therof may procede. (136-40)

In fine, the Messenger delivers what amounts to a lecture on the morals and educational ideas of Christian humanism. If we imagine that most men in Rastell's audience in the 1520s had not read More's *Utopia* or Erasmus's works, available to them only in Latin, then Rastell's discourse on the commonwealth and the folly of abstruse speculation may have been among their first experiences of these ideas in literature. Yet Rastell framed these ideas for citizens already inclined to suspect the higher flights of the clerisy and to favor the vernacular. In effect the Messenger's lecture isolates the classicizing humanism of St. Paul's, rendering it anachronistic just as it is taking hold in urban culture. The

triumph of breaking the clerical monopoly on Latinity is shown to be only a prelude to breaking Latinity's monopoly on learning.

Though the prologue promises plain speaking and “mery cunseytis,” the play nonetheless vigorously promotes humanist learning and New World colonization as duties of the citizen of the commonwealth. These were still new concepts in 1520, and would have met with considerable resistance even in an audience of prosperous citizens who sent their sons to schools like St. Paul's. Rastell needed more than promises to sell these daring ideas to an audience of literate citizens and gentlemen. For just such an audience at exactly this period, Erasmus deploys comic strategies in *Moriae Encomium*, and also in the *Colloquies*. He alleviates the rigors of the New Learning and acerbic social criticism with laughter that is pitched to the interests of the thoughtful citizen. Rastell, like Erasmus, wins friends for his difficult ideas by a deft comic rhetoric in a popular dramatic form that allows him to acknowledge the qualms of the reluctant while demolishing their arguments.

Rastell adapts the forms of the popular Morality play to provide a salvation narrative in which competing rhetorics do dubious battle. The alternation of moral teaching and profane humor serves Rastell's humanist and materialist purposes in much the same way it serves godly and spiritual purposes in the earliest English Morality, *The Castle of Perseverance* (c.1350-1399), or more pointed political purposes in Skelton's *Magnificence* (c. 1520).<sup>391</sup> The sober (and ultimately victorious) message of Studious

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<sup>391</sup> Note that both plays start with a long prologue like the Messenger's. In *The Castle of Perseverance* Mundus delivers this prologue, cataloguing the countries of his wide dominion; see Schell and Schuchter 10. Another Mundus introduces (more briefly)

Desire must overcome the forces of Sensual Appetite, the Vice figure who gives a strong, appealing voice to cultural forces still suspicious of the New Learning and its “losophy.”

Rastell therefore seasons the serious work of instruction (not to say cultural revolution) with the earthy humor and pitched competition of the Moralities, in which the appeal of vice is given its due. The comic subplot that interlards the “sad mater” of the play in fact carries the weight of the play’s conversion narrative, but it is a distinctly humanist Morality rather than a traditional Christian one, a story of preparation for a good life rather than for a good death.<sup>392</sup> Comedy, like the common schoolroom, provides an ample arena for the conflict—and synthesis—of high and low forces. Where Medwall and earlier Moralities use comedy to diminish the “low” and ultimately despicable temptations of life in the world, Rastell, an empiricist before his time, offers a more embracing comic vision. Sensual Appetite makes the memorable point that Lord Nature does not forbid Humanity to keep company with him, “For he knoweth well no creature / Without me can lyve one day” (492-93). Appetite and his forces are not banished or destroyed, but brought to heel as servants to Humanity.

Rastell adapts the structure of Christian Morality plays in other ways to give familiar, popular forms to new kinds of instruction in worldly knowledge. The embattled protagonist, Humanity, appears as a wayward pupil, and study rather than religion becomes his means of salvation, achieved only after he strays from his devotion to learning. Where the prodigal plays of the period figure redemption in a forgiving father

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*Mundus et Infans* (1508-22); see Schell and Schuchter 169. Skelton’s play begins with Felicity speaking, as Rastell’s Messenger does, of the perils of wealth.

<sup>392</sup> *The Interlude of Youth* similarly aims to prepare its protagonist for life rather than for death; see Schell and Schuchter, Introduction, *The Interlude of Youth* 141.



or angelic messenger with a distinctly religious message, a patient teacher of cosmography leads Rastell's Humanity back to the light. Rastell sets up study and learning in the role of kindly elders to be resisted, then embraced and emulated.<sup>393</sup> By figuring instruction thus in a parental role, Rastell naturalizes learning, and by extension schooling, as an element of culture no less essential than religion or family.<sup>394</sup> Moreover, he appeals to his burgher audience by emphasizing practical learning. The allegorical instructor, Studious Desire, assisted by Experience, teaches Humanity a body of useful knowledge for getting and using power in a rapidly expanding world. Rastell thus converts the homilies of the Morality into school lectures, providing direct instruction in geography and imperial economics and patriotic duty. These topics go well beyond the limits of humanist school curriculum, into the arena of state and civic concerns.

The play proper begins with a modest bit of spectacle that visually proclaims its cosmographical content. The stage directions, in pidgin Latin, announce: *Hic intrat Natura Naturata, Humanyte et Studyous Desire portans figuram*. So three new characters occupy the stage, one carrying a stage property which we soon learn to be a map of the

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<sup>393</sup> For examples of the prodigal or "youth" Moralities, all composed within a decade of Rastell's play for performance in banquet halls, see *The Interlude of Youth* (c.1513), in which the title character is won over from Riot and Pride by Charity and Humility; *Mundus et Infans* (c. 1508-1522?), in which Infans, grown into Manhood and then Age, grows at last into Repentance, led on by Conscience; and *Hickscorner* (c.1514), a psychomachia in which Free Will is corrupted by the worldly and widely-traveled title character and by Imagination, only to be converted to virtue by Pity, Contemplation, and Perseverance. See Ian Lancashire, ed., *Two Tudor Interludes* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980), and *Mundus et Infans* in Schell and Schuchter.

<sup>394</sup> Kent Cartwright notes the relation between the prodigal son narrative and the humanist attempt to supplant parental authority. See his *Theatre and Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 51.

world. If the figures enter and stand in the order noted by the directions, Humanity, the learner in this didactic drama, would occupy the center.

The first speaker identifies himself as Natura Naturate, whose task is headmasterly, evaluating Humanity's place in the order of things, directing him to study cosmography and physics, and then turning him over to suitable masters. Natura immediately calls Humanity's attention to the *figura* mentioned in the stage direction, and his description makes the map sound very much like Rastell's own printer's device, divided into two regions, "The etheriall region with the hevyns hie" (164) and "The lower region callyd the elementall / Conteynyng these four elementis below" (166-67). Though Natura Naturata discourses on the influences of the ethereal bodies on "corrupcyons and genercyons" (174) in the elemental sphere, and on the irreducible nature of the four elements themselves, his primary function is to relate Humanity to the cosmos of the *figura* in terms of potential dominion. He adjures Humanity to remember on the one hand that he is "compound and create / Of these elementis, as other creaturis be" (205-06), but that "by reason of thyne understandyng / Thou hast domynyon of other bestis all" (211-12). Natura Naturata's equation of "soule intellective" and rightful "domynyon" provides a principle on which to base the theme of manifest destiny that rises later in the interlude.

Likewise, in asserting that "understandyng" imposes a natural obligation to "desire connyng / To knowe straunge effectis and causys naturall," and that to study anything lower is degrading, Rastell frames his introduction of Studious Desire as a redemptive force, essential to humanity. "Studious" can, of course, merely mean "eager" or "diligent," as in the Latin *studiosus*, but at this period it already had the primary

meaning of “devotion to the acquisition of learning” (OED). Meanwhile “desire” already denoted both craving in general and sensual appetite in particular. Rastell’s “Studious Desire” thus in some measure eroticizes learning, making it an elemental, “naturall” appetite, though one that distinguishes the desirer from other animals—or from New World natives who fail to register such desire. Thus *Natura* implies that “connyng” and “understandynge” are virile qualities, markers of men who are fit for “domynyon.” This manly lust for learning is the value added by Rastell to the image of Christ among the Doctors. Moreover, it reduces the distance between the antagonists in the *Morality*’s central contest between Desire and Appetite.

In *Natura*, as in the other instructors, we find decidedly secular figures in whom we can detect the paganizing influence of humanism, grafted onto the allegorical form of the *Morality*. Yet *Natura* and the other instructors represent a departure from the grammar school forms of humanism, as well as from the moral guides of the *Moralities*. Although “scyens” was generally equivalent to art or knowledge of any field acquired by study, Rastell’s teachers offer not a literary or theological education, but instruction in “natural philosophy,” cosmography and geography, figured in the centrality of the *figura* on stage from first to last. The map makes a significant contrast to the centrality of the Child Christ or the master’s *cathedra* in Colet’s schoolroom, or of Hell Mouth or the grave in other *Moralities*. Thus Humanity, with the city audience for whom he is a stand-in, skips over, as it were, the conventional stuff of school education and religious *Moralities*, as his instructors prepare him to master the world.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Erasmus, as I have noted, prescribes the study of geography, through Mela, Ptolemy, and Pliny, as a gloss on literature and history. See *De Ratione* 673. Vives, in *De* 283

Humanity thus takes center stage as a surrogate for such common Englishmen, and the drama proceeds from the struggle of his two natures, “intellectyve” and “bestyall.” The deep division of his nature is not at first apparent, as initially he seems only noble, grateful, and intellectually engaged in his lessons. He acknowledges himself the “chylde and formyd instrument” (219) of Natura, and humbly beseeches him to “teche me suche scyens thou thinkyst expedient” (221). Rastell’s Humanity is no Edmund of Gloucester, whose sworn devotion to the goddess Nature takes a lower road, but the two young men share some important assumptions: they both appeal to the natural order rather than the social or religious hierarchy, and they both seek the “expedyent,” the advantageous rather than the strictly righteous or conventional. Yet if Humanity is Edmund’s ancestor, he is clearly a virtuous one, who humbly expresses allegiance to his teachers. Nature appoints Studious Desire to have “contynuall habytacyon” with Humanity, “The[e] styll to exhort more scyens to adquire” (287-88). The pupil, addressing Nature as “O gloryous lorde and prynce moste plesant” (303), thanks him for “soch noble doctryne as thou hast here shewed me!” (306). Though he proves weak, he is not insincere.

The tutor accepts his charge in terms of sworn service, whose duties sound not so much like those of the schoolmaster as of a household attendant, a trainer of young squires, though a learned one. Studious Desire, assigned as a live-in exhorter, has the divided nature of a *paedagogus*, part master, part servant. Nevertheless, he embodies that

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*Tradendis* (pub. 1531), recommends that the student study nature through Aristotle, cosmography through Apuleius, and geography through Strabo, “the maps of Ptolemy,” and accounts of modern discoveries, though these seem to be adjuncts to schooling and not the stuff of instruction. See *Vives on Education*, ed. Foster Watson (Totawa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971) 168-69.

desire that makes a man a man: “For the more that thou desyrest to know any thyng, /  
Therin thou semyst the more a man to be / For that man that desireth no maner connyng,  
/ All that wyle no better than a best is he” (289-92). In repeating this charge throughout  
the play, Rastell indicts both the hunting-and-hawking aristocrat and the naked New  
World savage as less than human for lacking this desire. Likewise, they are less vital to  
Humanity than even so marginal a figure as the pedagogue, who expresses the essential  
nature that the others neglect. Studious Desire claims a seminal authority over Humanity  
in his promise to “quikkyn his wyt / And dayly put hym in remembraunce” (312-13). By  
enhancing “courage and desire” (314) he makes Humanity more virile, though the object  
be study and the “serche for causys naturall” (316). Here, then, is a new form of “noble  
doctryne,” training up the young master in knightly virtues alloyed with natural  
philosophy.

Humanity evinces his “intellectyve” nobility in a persistent questioning like that  
of Christ among the Doctors (though he may be a less gifted student), and in the far-  
reaching curiosity of an explorer, in which he shows himself to be the bold son of a noble  
father. Though he accepts the lessons of Natura and Studious Desire deferentially, he  
questions their “pointys,” confessing “My mynde in them as yet is not content, / For I can  
no maner wyse perceyve nor see, / Nor prove by reason” their claims for the earth’s place  
in the firmament (335-37). Studious Desire, all but confounded by Humanity’s  
questioning, is moved to call in an expert, “a man callyd Experyens” who, armed with  
“dyvers instrumentys,” can “prove all these poyntys” (392-93), and more: “His  
instrumentys cowde shew them so certain / That every rude carter shold them persayve  
playn” (396-97). The lesson on cosmography indicates that even Studious Desire must

finally rely on the sense experience of physical demonstration. Thus Rastell responds to the rhetorical demands of his own task of dramatic instruction: the stage may give more immediate access than a school or a book to the mysteries of the *figura* as explained by a learned man, but the audience, whom Rastell associates with both hard-headed humanity and rude carters, nevertheless requires proofs more than precept or reasoning. On hearing of Experience, Humanity declares, “Now wolde to God I had that man now here” (398), reaffirming his “intellectyve” nobility.

In responding to Humanity’s need for sense experience, Rastell introduces his vice figure. Significantly, as Studious Desire goes in search of Experience, he literally runs into Sensual Appetite, who responds to the collision with a rude joke and an insult:

Well hyet quod Hykman, when that he smot

Hys wyffe on the buttockys with a bere pott.

Aha. now, god evyn, fole, god evyn

It is even the, knave, that I mene.

Hast thou done thy bablyng? (405-09)

The promised mirth has arrived at last, but in addressing Studious Desire as a “bablyng” fool the rowdy newcomer also throws down a challenge to the method of Humanity’s education. The intruder (as yet unnamed but clearly a member of the Vice family) incites both Humanity and the audience to mirth and song: “Make rome, syrs, and let us be mery, / With huffa,<sup>396</sup> galand, synge tyrll on the bery” (416-17). The verse itself shifts from rhyme royal to the rollicking six-line stanzas that persist to the end of the surviving

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<sup>396</sup> Cf. Riot’s first line in *The Interlude of Youth*: “Huffa, huffa! Who calleth after me? / I am Riot, full of jollity.” See Schell and Schuchter 149.

text.<sup>397</sup> The newly arrived reveler introduces a shift not only in the language of the play, but also in its treatment of studious learning, which he rejects as clerkly nonsense: “For rather than I wolde use suche foly / To pray, to study or be pope holy, / I had as lyf be ded” (422-24). He offers a friendly warning to the young scholar about his tutor: “For yf ye knewe hym as well as I, / Ye wolde not use his company” (431-32), and offers himself as a more useful attendant to Humanity: “I am content, syr, with you to tary, / And I am for you so necessary / Ye can not lyve without me” (450-52). Finally he introduces himself in terms that smack less of vice than of vitality: “I am callyd Sensuall Apetyte, / All cratur in me delyte, / I comferte the wyttys five” (454-56). He then catalogues his services: relieving hunger and thirst and pain, refreshing the weary, delighting the senses. As the play turns to examine the claims of sense experience, it boldly intertwines sound, material arguments with the more disreputable appeals of sensuality, more or less contained as comic relief. The pleasures of Sensual Appetite’s playful language destabilize the moral gravity of the play’s opening passages, and pile up evidence to suggest that the supposed triumph of the forces of high-minded study at the end of the play may be equivocal at best.

Rastell further complicates the conflict between Studious Desire and Sensual Appetite by showing the appeals of the latter to Humanity’s noble “intellective” side. Recently so inclined to question the claims of Studious Desire, Humanity now uses the

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<sup>397</sup> I am indebted to Wayne Rebhorn (private correspondence) for this observation, and for his suggestion that this shift in verse form subtly signals “a limited kind of triumph” for Sensual Appetite in the play’s open-ended conclusion. The six-line stanza comprises two couplets of nine syllable-lines alternating with six-syllable lines, rhyming aabccb, though this pattern is somewhat irregular, perhaps appropriate for the “low” characters who introduce it.

language of logical disputation to affirm the rival claims of Sensual Appetite: “I cannot see the contrary / But ye are for me full necessary / And ryght convenient” (478-80). Studious Desire resorts to invoking paternal authority, warning his pupil that “Lorde Nature wyll not be contente” (483) if Humanity forsakes study to follow Appetite, but the Vice rejoins with a scrupulous lawyer’s question: “Dyde Nature forbyde hym my company?” (488). The student himself volunteers, “As for that I know well nay” (490), and Appetite clinches his case: “For he knoweth well no creature / Without me can lyve one day” (492-93). The Vice in *Moralities* is conventionally an attractive and persuasive figure, but Rastell has gone further, giving his Sensual Appetite a credible claim to being essential to life and learning. As Rastell leads his audience to see Nature, Studious Desire, and Experience as the guarantors of humanizing instruction, so Sensual Appetite might reasonably be felt to be apposite rather than opposed to their materialist regime.

Rastell gives Sensual Appetite other persuasive appeals as a potential tutor. The Vice warns Humanity against the vanity of Studious Desire, for continual study and “musynge / As he wolde have you, it wyll you brynge / At the last unto your grave” (503-07). He offers instead a form of study more consistent with Humanity’s nature and “estate”:

Ye shulde ever study pryncypall  
 For to comfort your lyfe naturall  
 With metis and drynkes dilycate,  
 And other pastymes and pleasures amonge,  
 Daunsynge, laughynge or plesaunt songe  
 This is mete for your estate. (510-15)



Sensual Appetite thus makes an appeal indexed to the social rank and “nature” of the gentleman: feasting and dancing, recall, were part of the curriculum of the Inns of Court as prescribed by Fortescue, and indeed the interlude that contains these remarks may be felt to aim at gentlemen’s revelry. Humanity’s furlough from Studious Desire and Experience may, at this point in the play, be felt (by the socially ambitious) to be not a dangerous alternative but an adjunct to balance a proper education for would-be gentleman.

And yet in Humanity’s first assent to the blandishments of Appetite Rastell issues a nicely ambivalent warning: Humanity, accepting the appeal to nature, says, “Me thynketh my wyttes wery. / My nature desyreth some refresshyng” (520-21). Though study weary the wits, what will follow as his desire vacillates between refreshments intellectual and bestial? Appetite agrees to give Humanity “good and trew service” (530), but in swearing loyalty he lets slip his true nature: “And yf that I ever forsake you, / I pray God the devyl take you!” (532-33). Rastell, having complicated our view of a gentleman’s education in a sophisticated way by making sensory experience seem as attractive and essential as study, thus sounds a more conventional warning, associating the senses with flattering and treacherous servants.

Rastell develops both the dangers and the appeals of gross appetites and servile panders in the character of the Taverner, whom Appetite summons to unroll the details of Appetite’s new curriculum for Humanity: wine, food, and women. The Taverner rattles off a list of wines from distant lands, “spayneshe wyne and gascoyn, / Rose coloure, whyt, claret, rampyon, / Tyre, capryck, and malvesyne” (561-63) and more, with the curious boast that “yf ye drynke a draught or too, / Yt wyll make you or ye thens go, / By

Goggys body, starke madde” (567-69). The counterpoise of *copia* and threat is curious; the threat may be delivered as an aside, or as an enticement to Dionysian abandon.

Whereas Studious Desire uses geography to sharpen the mind of Humanity, Sensual Appetite deploys his oenological *copia* to addle it. Likewise the Taverner confounds his menu of meats with venery, offering to provide a hen that “lay at the stewes all nyght” (586), and then piling on coarse misogynist jokes. Neither “sad mater” nor “mirth” comes off very gently in this backstairs school for gentlemen.

Rastell contrives for Humanity to be true to his “intellectyve” nature up to a point, showing himself disgusted and reproving the Taverner’s grossness in a new tone of masterly confidence. The moral message seems clear, as Humanity thus signals that he must ultimately be master to his servant appetites. But not yet; the merry contest first requires a convincing fall from grace. Humanity embraces the suggestion of Sensual Appetite that they seek the company of “lytell Nell,” “Jane with the blacke lace,” “bounsynge Besse,” and “two or thre proper wenchis mo” (637-42). So a countervailing message is equally clear: the keenest appeals of Appetite cannot be discounted in a scheme of education. At this point in the play, Humanity’s commitment has been too easily won, first by Study and then by Appetite.

Rastell steps up the level of the conflict in the two remaining episodes, in which he balances the worldly knowledge of Experience against the crude but unquestioned powers of the lordly Ignorance. Rastell develops an extreme contrast, presenting the lessons of Experience in a lengthy geography lesson with detailed reference to the *figura*, while the appeals of Ignorance appear in boasting and boisterous song. Rastell does not make the choice look easy. Although Experience appears to redeem Humanity from his

lapse into sensuality, the redemption is temporary. Small wonder, as Experience makes steep demands on the attention of Humanity and of the audience. Experience's initial dialogue with Studious Desire comprises a world tour by means of the map, while the student Humanity rosters offstage. Rastell thus places his audience in the privileged position of overhearing, as it were, an exposition of expert knowledge for which Humanity is clearly not yet prepared.

Rastell imbeds in the lesson an impassioned statement of his imperialist ambitions, with a bitter reference to his own failed voyage. He introduces the theme of world exploration with a question about the distance involved in a "pylgrimage / Jheruzalem unto " (679-80), thus overlaying modern ambition with the ancient quest for holiness in an arduous journey. Experience transposes this conventional medieval itinerary onto the modern map, and turns the audience's attention to the prizes to be won by another kind of dangerous travel, to the lands beyond "the great Occyan" (733), discovered "within this twenty yere" (736). The newness of these lands is fresh in Rastell's lines, written only a quarter-century after the first Columbian voyage:

Westwarde be founde new landes  
That we never harde tell of before this  
By wrytynge nor other meanys,  
Yet many nowe have ben there. (737-40)

Rastell's envy of the many who "have ben there" seems palpable in that final line, by which he frankly seeks to entice an audience to essay the same terrible journey.

He offers other enticements to a burgher audience to visit those new lands: untold wealth, for "what commodytes be within, / No man can tell nor well imagin" (747-8), and

a chance to glorify the English commonwealth, for those who can claim to the New World's "furst buyldynge and habytacion" may therefore claim a "memory perpetuall" (766-67). In the failure of Rastell's own expedition the king lost a chance to "have had his domynyon extendynge / There into so farre a grounde" (770-71), and Christendom lost an opportunity "to have the people instructed / To lyve more vertuously" (776-77). Thus the instructor Experience implicitly charges the audience with a patriotic and religious duty to redeem his failure, to carry their instruction to the new lands, where the people "nother knowe God nor the devell, / Nor never harde tell of hevyn nor hell, / Wrytynge nor other scripture" (781-83).

In this dialogue Rastell offers a dramatic prototype for the use of geography lessons as the vehicle of evangelical imperialism, and so extends the dominion of the commonwealth onto the stage itself. He balances descriptions of native savagery (so unlike the "intellectyve" part of Humanity) with details of their unexploited riches. The indigenous people worship the sun, build no houses, and "use no maner of yron" (796). In the south they "go nakyd always" (812), and in the north they wear "but bestis skynnes" (815). Yet they have a great "haboundaunce of woddys" (798), and "Great ryches myght come therby, / Both pyche and tarre and sope assys" (801-2). Moreover, the French and other people have already discovered the rich fishing grounds, "That yerely of fyshe there they lade / Above an hundred sayl" (809-10). Thus the first stirrings of the race for empire appear in the form of instruction on an English stage, ninety years before the first English settlement in Virginia. Indeed, Experience uses the *figura* to demonstrate the possibility of the circumnavigation of the globe, though Rastell wrote and printed his play a year or more before Magellan's expedition returned to Europe. This geographical

information had been available since at least 1507, when Martin Waldseemüller printed his map of the world. But Rastell's play brought Londoners this cutting-edge geography lesson at a time when such lessons were not taught in schools. This curious dialogue perhaps redeems Rastell's failed venture in some measure, as he claims the stage itself as a rich new ground for the commonwealth.

In making this dialogue, like the Messenger's speech, part of the omissible "sad mater," Rastell offers to cancel his personal experience and frustration in favor of the more palatable comic contest for Humanity, whose story resumes when he reappears, reeling from the pleasures of the tavern. Rastell uses the regalia of festive reversals to signal that the young gentleman Humanity has been brought down to the level of his fast company, as the prodigal student rewards the Taverner with "a knavys skyn" (934), some version of a fool's coat, and the Taverner reciprocates—"And therefore thou shalt have nother" (938). Studious Desire and Experience attempt to reclaim the student at this low point, and Humanity's better self revives for a time. He resumes his old line of questioning on the roundness of the earth, and Experience offers to use "instrumentis" to "shew the[e] playne experimentis" (1122-23), apparently involving a candle and a globe on stage. So Rastell unites his city audience and prodigal student in the privileged position of observing scientific demonstration as theatrical spectacle, long before any school or learned society offered such instruction to the public.

Humanity (if not the audience) proves ungrateful for the privilege. At this point eight leaves are lost from the sole surviving copy of the play, but in the missing section Humanity evidently loses interest in his lessons once more. When the text resumes we find him in the company of the dissolute Ignorance, the agent of Humanity's final test.

Rastell embodies an aristocratic suspicion of learning in the strutting Ignorance, who inveighs against these “horseson losophers / Nor this great conning extromers” (1137-38), while boasting of himself as a lord “of gretter pusanse / Than the kynge of Yngland or Fraunce, / Ye the grettyst lord lyvyng” (1143-44). Ignorance measures his power by his “retynew” (1145), which in England alone includes “Above five hundred thowsand” (1150). Rastell thus gives his city audience the chance to laugh at their ignorant social superiors and at their countrymen who swell the retinue of such a magnate, and so to place themselves as free men squarely on the side of learning. They must likewise feel themselves superior to Humanity himself, whose unconscious body, clad in motley, lies sprawled on the stage, oblivious to the advantages of education.

Rastell reminds his audience one last time of the considerable appeals of Sensual Appetite, showing him at his charming, ne’er-do-well best. In a scene that anticipates Falstaff’s antics as a robber and a soldier in *Henry IV, Part I*, Sensual Appetite enters, swearing that he has “payed som of them” in “a shrewd fray” (1151, 1153), including one unfortunate who had already had his head “smyt of” (1173). Ignorance, in an ironic dig at the chivalric ethic, praises Appetite for having “quyt the lyke a tal knyght” (1174). Then the two turn to reviving the unconscious Humanity, of whom Ignorance, stimulated by Appetite’s tales of decapitation, says, “Hit were evyn great almys / To smyte his hed from his body” (1184-85). Sensual Appetite objects, characterizing the hapless young gentleman in his fool’s coat as “but an innocent, lo / In maner of a fole” (1188-89), and boasting of his own power to “torne his mynde clene / And make hym folowe my skole” (1191-92).

Rastell explicitly extends the aim of this contest between schools to include winning the minds of the audience in the hall. When Humanity rouses himself, his companions blame his sorry state on study: “this folyshe losophy hath made you mad” (1204). When Humanity falls once more for sensual amusements, Ignorance commends his resolve, pointing out that his “folyshe arguynge” with “that knave Experiens” (1298-99) has even alienated the audience of the interlude itself:

For all they that be nowe in this hall,  
They be the most part my servauntes all,  
And love pryncypally  
Disportis, as daunsynge, syngynge,  
Toys, tryfuls, laughynge, gestynge;  
For connyng they set not by. (1301-06)

Where Rastell had earlier allowed the audience to laugh at Ignorance’s retinue, now Ignorance claims the audience, too, as his own, offering their pleasure in revelry as proof. They are no better than Humanity, and the singers and dancers, perhaps including the audience, take the stage to prove the festive point. The school of Sensual Appetite seems to have carried the day.

The musical revels, however, confirm that this ascendancy of Sensual Appetite is a only a festive reversal. The Vice leads the singing himself, and the boasting words emphasize that his claims to power are a mocking masquerade, a parody of lordly excess:

And I can lepe it lustly,  
And I can torne it trimly,  
And I can fryske it freshly,

And I can loke it lordly. (1342-45)

Just as Rastell associates armed bombast with the “tal knyght,” so he relates looking it lordly to dancing to Appetite’s tune. Rastell, the first printer of music in England, ornaments his interlude (and relieves its didactic monotony) with musical revelry, but he nonetheless reserves the moral high ground for sober citizens who despise such things as the toys of idle aristocrats. In the final throes of their festive abandon, Humanity and the noble Ignorance fall to singing an utterly nonsensical ballad, cobbled together of bits of popular songs, with Humanity providing the “bordon,” significantly “Downe, downe, downe, downe, etc.” (1395).<sup>398</sup> Thus abandoned to Ignorance, Humanity reaches his woozy nadir.

Rastell finally invokes patriarchal authority *ex machina* to redeem the prodigal, but he allows a remarkable inclusiveness in the concluding synthesis between the competing schools of Studious Desire and Sensual Appetite. When Natura appears to rebuke the erring student, Humanity, all legalistic innocence, replies that he has done nothing against his master’s commands, having “folowed the counsell clere / As ye me bad of Studyouse Desire, / And for necessity amonge / Somtyme Sensuall Appetytes counsell, / For without hym, ye knowe ryght well, / My lyfe can not endure longe” (1425-31). Thus Humanity argues for an alloy of study and sensual delight, driven by vital “necessyte.” Depraved and debauched as he may be at this point, his argument has merit, though he errs in emphasis.

Rastell concludes his Morality by dignifying the sense experience of Humanity, even while reasserting the authority of disciplined study as the key to worldly

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<sup>398</sup> See Axton 139 n. F.1396-[14]19.



advancement. Natura grants the pupil's premiss about the necessity of such experience, but corrects his conclusion: "Though it be for the full necessary / For thy comfort somtyme to satisfy / Thy sensuall appetyte, / Yet it is not convenyent for the / To put therein thy felycyte / And all thy hole delyte" (1432-37). Moreover, Nature specifically makes learning a condition of advancement in the world and the esteem of mankind:

For if thou wylt lerne no sciens,  
Nother by study nor experiens,  
I shall the never avaunce,  
But in the worlde thou shalt dure than,  
Dyspysed of every wyse man,  
Lyke this rude best Ygnoraunce. (1438-43)

Appetite, in other words, must be a servant, kept in check by a learned master. Ignorance, close cousin of Medwall's debauched nobleman and Udall's Roister Doister, is the very type of the undeserving master. Though his retinue be large, this unlettered magnate's days are numbered in Rastell's ideal commonwealth. Advancement there requires turning away from degenerate aristocratic practices and privileges, toward the "wyse man" who, armed with study and experience and the favor of Lord Nature, will supplant Lord Ignorance in the social order.

The last few lines of Rastell's text are lost, but we can safely infer the conclusion as Axton does: "All that the plot requires is Ignorance's banishment, Humanity's repentance, and reinstatement with his former tutor Studious Desire."<sup>399</sup> I suggest that Sensual Appetite might also be brought to serve Humanity meekly, in tandem with

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<sup>399</sup> Axton 139 n.F.1433.

Experience. Whether this resolution occurs in the lost conclusion or not, the allegory sets up an implicit pairing of the empirical servants Experience and Appetite, subject to the supervision of Nature and Desire.

I have argued that Rastell's play and his stage signify important changes in Tudor society and English drama. In the social sphere, Rastell's theater of instruction takes a distinct step in the direction of self-determination and away from old strictures of inherited privilege and sworn service. Where Henry Medwall might expect to advance to gentle status through clerkly service to a mighty lord, and his protagonist through a good marriage to an aristocrat's daughter, John Rastell used the New Learning as a map to get his protagonist, Humanity, beyond lordliness and service, to a New World where each man might be his own master, lord over less learned creatures. In this vision Rastell was certainly the most outward-looking and aggressively optimistic of the three dramatists in this history. Udall, who follows Rastell chronologically and whom I study in the next chapter, in many ways represents a retrenchment of more conservative values, laced with irony, a change we can explain as a reaction to the hideous turmoil of the 1530s, but also as a measure of just how radical Rastell's ideas were.

In delivering his message through drama and in appropriating the didactic tradition of the Morality play, Rastell advances the claims of the public theater as a site of instruction for the commonwealth, and so of the transfer of power in a shifting social order. On Rastell's stage, ideas and information were shared outside the ambit of state or church, on a new ground where the author may be felt to exercise a disciplinary authority in the matter and manner of schooling, and also a ritual authority transferred through the

audience's familiarity with church drama. This stage, like the Tudor schoolroom, is paradoxically exclusive and inclusive, private and public, a liminal space for a ritual contest of initiation. The issue is not whether Humanity will win admission to the élite of the old order, but whether he will be moved by Studious Desire to claim new worlds, for God, for the commonwealth, and for himself.

Rastell's use of the stage raises a question for the literary historian: To what extent should this new didactic drama be identified with humanist schooling, from which it seems to break away? Certainly *The Four Elements* demonstrates the new cultural centrality of schooling in Tudor England, relying as it does on the truant pupil for its central dilemma. The play voices a ludic skepticism about enforced study, showing the appeal of truancy just as the Moralities show the appeal of vice. Ironically, this skepticism confirms the power of institutional education, now as worthy of satire as the church. But the resistance to enforced discipline also registers confidence in a broader notion of learning itself. Just as the humanists argued that Christian piety is bigger than the church and its rituals, Rastell advances the proposition that learning is bigger than the schools and their rigors. The play works to redeem the promise of humanism, not always fulfilled in schools, that learning is a labor that is also a source of pleasure and profit in this world. As Devereux observes of Rastell's mixed motives, "Clearly, like most other men in Tudor England, he saw no reason why he should not grow rich in a good cause," and accumulate wealth while serving the commonwealth.<sup>400</sup> Rastell's Humanity, on behalf of his burgher audience, learns at last that learning itself is a good—and enriching—cause.

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<sup>400</sup> Devereux, *Bibliography* 4.

The rhetorical gestures Rastell makes for the benefit of his city audience provide, moreover, important evidence for the debate among historians on how we should understand the liberating potential of Renaissance humanism itself. Rastell gives us good cause to consider humanism again not only in its narrow, literary sense, but in broader terms, now out of fashion, exalting the pursuit of all forms of knowledge as a way of realizing human potential, liberated from prejudice and superstition. Such an expansive view of humanism accounts for the life and work of John Rastell and other men of the More circle better than the narrow view of humanists as grammarians training notaries to rise in the established social order by the practice of rhetoric.

That narrow view works well enough to explain the education and career of Henry Medwall, as I did in the previous generation. In Chapters One and Two I examined how humanism touched medieval schools in the early Tudor period, when the clerkly ranks of church and university were increasingly called into state service and clerkly learning began to be respectable among the gentry and the citizenry. We have seen how Waynflete's school at Magdalen College Oxford introduced humanist innovations, often integrating them with older traditions like the *vulgaria* and *latinitates*. In those earliest days of humanist schooling in England, Medwall took the meritocratic message of learned service to the élite audience at Lambeth Palace. If the story of English humanism had stopped there, historians like Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine might be justified in claiming that its main object was the preparation of competent and compliant clerks.

To appreciate fully the broader learning that Rastell promoted outside school in the generation after Medwall's, we must recall the unfinished state of the movement that began when humanism came to the capital. As I argued in Chapter One, the founders and

followers of St. Paul's School certainly liberalized medieval practice, and put in its place a kind of secularized and classicized clerkliness. But their system was in its way as parochial as that of the medieval grammar school, and perhaps even more distant from the immediate concerns of the burghers' sons who did not aim at clerkly careers. A broad view of humanism takes this limitation of mere schooling into account. Simon points out that the move toward literary studies, toward "rhetoric and declamation as against logic and disputation...was both a symptom and a cause of much wider developments in the whole range of the arts, vernacular literatures, scientific and political ideas, psychological attitudes which mark the transition from the medieval to the modern world."<sup>401</sup> No grammar school curriculum took in the whole scope of those new developments until the nineteenth century. In Colet's school, rhetoric and declamation, as modeled by classical authors and by Erasmus, provided a highly visible public ethos for the New Learning as a key to a new life. But classical grammar and rhetoric, embracing as they are, have limited appeal and application.

Rastell and men like him, working just at the edge of St. Paul's churchyard, used print and stage to go beyond those limits, expanding both the content and the audience of learning. To be sure, such marketing of extra-curricular instruction clearly profited from the momentum and distinction of learning provided by Colet's school. Indeed, in the character of Humanity Rastell takes up the presiding symbol of St. Paul's School, the learned child, but extends the curiosity of this schoolboy paragon beyond "manners and literature," in ways that Simon's broader view of humanism takes in. When Rastell urges Humanity to follow Studious Desire and Experience, he proposes to make him an empire-

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<sup>401</sup> Simon 61.

builder, not a docile clerk. No doubt Grafton and Jardine are right in supposing that humanist schools sometimes produced docility, as even the most humane schooling must do in certain students. Moreover, the humanist reverence for Rome, for Augustan dominion and pacification as models for modern rulers, certainly suggests affinities with imperialism itself, some of which Rastell clearly shares. Yet in Rastell's England, the New Learning that he helped to spread may perhaps most precisely be charged with fueling the rise of a bumptious bourgeoisie, with all the benefits and all the damage that has entailed.

**Coda: Redford's *Wit and Science***

In English drama, Rastell's didactic drama had an easily traceable influence on school drama, and may also have contributed, as I have suggested, to the development of the great theme of the cost of knowledge in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. In closing this chapter I will note only the close link between Rastell's play and a school play of the 1540s, in the belief that both may have contributed genetic material to the student princes of the London stage in Shakespeare's time.

E. K. Chambers lumps Rastell's interlude with another didactic play produced in his city neighborhood: "*The Nature of the Four Elements* and John Redford's somewhat later *Wit and Science* preach the importance of devotion to study."<sup>402</sup> About two decades after Rastell printed his play, Redford, the songmaster of St. Paul's School, composed this Morality for performance by the boys, who were by this time actively engaged in the public performance of drama. Redford's play, even more boldly than Rastell's, advertises

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<sup>402</sup> E. K. Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage* II.200.

wit and learning as a way of rising in defiance of “base” birth. One reading affirms the kinship of the two plays: the protagonist Wit receives from the great lord Reason the services of Instruction, Study, and Diligence, only to be led astray by Idleness and Ignorance. Redford introduces some lively changes of his own. Wit is preparing not merely for lordliness, but to deserve the love and the hand of Science, the daughter of Reason and Experience. Idleness is a blowsy wanton, and Ignorance her idiot child. Wit dons the fool’s coat and Ignorance makes off with the scholar’s gown. The greatest threat to Wit’s progress, however, comes from the giant Tediousness. Wit, armed for combat by Comfort, Quickness, and Strength, ultimately vanquishes the giant, and receives the gifts of Fame, Riches, and Favor, with the hand of Lady Science. Redford makes more explicit than Rastell the difficulty and boredom of study, as well as the temptations to abandon it, but he emphasizes the worldly rewards it brings, closely associated with the wooing theme.

Indeed, the marriage of Science to Wit develops the theme, familiar from *Fulgens and Lucres*, of the young man who marries up the social scale by dint of his brains and learning.<sup>403</sup> Early in the play, Lord Reason turns to the audience to defend his decision to marry his noble daughter to a base-born youth:

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<sup>403</sup> *The Marriage of Wit and Science*, an anonymous play of the 1560s, is closely based on Redford’s play. Norland notes that *The Marriage of Wit and Science* was produced by the Children of Paul’s, “apparently at court,” and that it was “probably created by Sebastian Westcott, Redford’s successor at St. Paul’s” (170). A later adaptation of Redford’s plot, *The Marriage Between Wit and Wisdom*, was composed by Francis Merbury, evidently in the 1570s. Norland supposes that “this interlude adapts the school play action for performance by a professional troupe and adds several new comic characters” (172). This is the most direct line of development I know of between a school play and a play for the professional stage.

If anye man now maryvell that I  
Woolde bestowe my dowghter thus baselye,  
Of truth I, Reson, am of this minde:.  
Where parties together be enclin'de  
By giftes of graces to love ech other,  
There let them joine the tone with the toother.  
This Wit such giftes of graces hath in him  
That mak'th my dowghter to wish to win him:  
Yoong, painefull, tractable, and capax--  
Thes[e] be Wites giftes which Science doth axe. (11-20)<sup>404</sup>

Where Rastell chose Humanity to carry the redemption narrative, Redford has chosen a single faculty, Wit, which here seems to signify native intellect rather than verbal sophistication.

His appeal to the maiden Science is not in his civic accomplishments, as in Medwall, but in his unformed promise and strength: “Young, painefull, tractable, and capax.” The would-be father-in-law approves the romantic attraction between them, and calculates their prospects like a rich citizen taking a likely lad into the family business:

And as for her, as soone as Wit sees her,  
For all the world he woold not then leese her.  
Wherfore, sins[e] they both be so meete matches  
To loye ech other, strawe for the patches

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<sup>404</sup> John Redford, *Wyt and Science*, in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, ed. John Quincy Adams (Cambridge: Houghton-Mifflin, 1924).



Of wo[r]ldly mucke! S[c]ience hath inowghe

For them both to live. If Wit be throw[g]he

Striken in love, as he si[g]nes hath show'de,

I dowte not my dowghter welbestow'de.

Th'ende of his jorney will aprove all:

If Wit hold owte, no more prooffe can fall. (21-30)

The speaker is no *pater familias* of the old order, but Reason himself, unbound by the prejudices of rank, both rich and scornful of “worldly mucke.” Did Redford’s boys perform the play on a dais in the schoolroom at St. Paul’s, beneath the image of the Child Jesus placed there three decades before? There, or in the chapel, or at court, the boys who played Wit and Reason and the maiden Science carried a message of meritocratic optimism, stripped to its bare essentials: if wit hold out, the treasures and privileges of the world and its knowledge must follow.

## Chapter Four

### Nicholas Udall: Learning to Play the Man

*Omnia habeo, neque quicquam habeo.* / I have all thynges, and yet I have nothyng.

Terence, *Eunuchus* / Nicholas Udall, *Floures for Latine Spekynges*, 1534

My purpose in this final chapter is to consider the overlapping uses of antique literature and antic impersonation by the schoolmaster-dramatist Nicholas Udall in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, when the early optimism of English humanist learning ran up against the cold facts of Tudor absolutism. Meritocracy met its limits in the labyrinth of court favor, and the dream of a rule of reasoned eloquence, purified by a robust Christian piety, gave place to the rougher dictates of dynastic succession. Throughout this dangerous time, Udall wrote grammar-school textbooks, plays, and translations. All of these writings, as well as a remarkable letter that survives in his own hand, register a distinctly humanist disillusionment with the promises of humanism. They also illustrate the closely related developments of drama and learning in the period: on stage and in school, Terentian comedy comes to the fore with a rhetoric of Protean self-transformation, nudging to one side the earnest civic and imperial rhetoric of Ciceronian self-development.

Udall's life and works track the early course of the English Reformation, and coincidentally of school curriculum and academic drama up to mid-century. Alone of the three principal figures in this study, Udall embodies the schoolmaster as interluder, playing an ever-adapting part of his own composition, often dancing attendance on the

most powerful agents of change. His earliest surviving work, a set of pageant verses in English and Latin, was written for an epochal occasion, the coronation of Anne Boleyn in 1533. At about the same time Udall published a school text based on Terence, and rose soon after to be headmaster at Eton. He lost that job when he confessed to buggery with one of his students. His fall came at about the time Cromwell, his sometime patron, also fell, but Udall was soon rehabilitated and engaged as a court humanist and interlude in the courts of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary I. Udall's chameleon-like nature was such that either the Protestant court of Edward or the Catholic court of Mary may have provided the original venue for *Roister Doister*, the farcical comedy for which he is best known. In his last year he was made headmaster of the grammar school adjoining Westminster Abbey. At every stage in this career, Nicholas Udall advanced his own version of the humanist program, infusing English letters with classical forms and figures that model a nervy, quick-witted opportunism.

Unlike Henry Medwall and John Rastell, Udall had a thoroughly humanist schooling, first at Winchester and then at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. His classical learning and rhetorical refinement distinguish his work from that of Medwall and Rastell, but a new ethical and social attitude sets his writing most clearly apart from theirs. He emerges as a nimble survivor, but also as a social critic who comments on the scene, always with a certain learned detachment, from the shifting perspectives of a scholar-poet, a grammarian, a penitent servant, and a shameless parasite, while the ancient verities of moral authority and social standing are changing shape around him. He models rhetoric as a method to navigate perilous times, but also as a way to unmask the absurdities of social rank and worldly "worship." Where Medwall finds in ancient

literature a model for the virtuous citizen who advances through service to the commonwealth, Udall finds the clever slave who uses his wits to make the best of a world in which he must serve men less able than himself. Where Rastell uses the morality play to advertise the limitless possibilities of exploration and empire for a city audience, Udall uses Roman comedy to satirize the social limits met by a city man who has wit but no property. The early English humanists taught the performance of studied impersonation as a way to move up the social scale, but Udall, having tried the ascent himself, ironized the concept of such striving. His life and work offer wry versions of the meritocratic promise of humanism, hedged with a smart servant's deference to established authority. He presents antic impersonation as a way for a clever man to win the rhetorician's precarious eminence as a critic, even when a material or social ascendancy was not to be had.

Such critical mastery comes at a moral cost, however: Medwall and Rastell, in their different ways, express humanist ambition with an emphasis on sincerity and integrity, using rhetoric that is often anti-rhetorical. By contrast, the Protean Udall exuberantly commits most of the sins conventionally associated with rhetoric: opportunism, duplicity, amorality, and social subversion. More remarkable, in his life and in his comic drama Udall made these aberrations seem like pragmatic compromises with social contingencies. In such an unstable moral universe, the exercise of wit for personal ends and public amusement becomes an individual virtue, an assertion of selfhood meriting public approval, even to the extent of being held up for emulation in the school and on the stage.

The Udall texts provide prime examples of how this ironized humanism reached the public through the interplay of drama and schooling from the 1520s to midcentury.<sup>405</sup> As school curriculum became more classical and more dramatic, it incidentally became more unabashedly opportunistic. Humanist schoolmasters taught Roman comedy for the supposed purity of its colloquial Latin, but they got a rhetorical model of audacious, often impudent self-presentation into the bargain. Udall's *Floures for Latin Speaking* offered schoolboys phrases culled directly from the plays of Terence as model sentences for conversation and composition, in place of the older, home-grown "vulgars" he would have known in his student days at Winchester College. The *Floures* extended the dramatic and social effects of the *vulgaria* by requiring boys to play the smart and appealing scapegrace types of classical comedy.

Udall and other schoolmasters moved easily from such exercises to full-blown dramatic productions in the same audacious vein, and from the late 1520s staged classical drama and wrote new plays to be performed in school, in public, and at court. Schoolboys performed Udall's pageant verses for the coronation of Anne Boleyn and his Plautine comedy *Roister Doister*. The increase in dramatic activity in schools had social and literary consequences that cut two ways. School drama reinforced conventional models of gentlemanly decorum and classical rhetoric on the one hand, while on the other encouraging—indeed requiring—boys who were not born gentlemen to speak the parts of

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<sup>405</sup> I draw my examples for this chapter primarily from four literary texts known to be Udall's: his pageant verses for the coronation procession of Anne Boleyn; his school textbook, *Floures for Latine Spekyng*; his letter to an unnamed patron after his dismissal from the headmastership of Eton; and his Plautine comedy, *Roister Doister*. I have omitted discussion of the interludes *Thersites* or *Res Publica*, though some scholars assign them to Udall. Both are written for student performers, and they would certainly complicate Udall's story in interesting ways.

those who were. Literary drama in Udall's day thus became at once more academic and more closely identified with the ambitions of the citizens, the principal consumers of grammar schooling.

In Udall's two known dramatic works we find not merely the fusion of classical controls and exuberant popular elements, the textbook signs of academic drama under the Tudors.<sup>406</sup> We also note striking assertions of the dignity of the burgher and his learned servant, the master of rhetoric. In Udall's coronation verses the poet assumes a Parnassian stance in greeting the monarch and his bride, asserting from that height the authority of the pageant's sponsors, the City companies. Udall develops the dominant role of the burgher and the liminal role of the master of rhetoric even more freely in *Roister Doister*. There the mercurial parasite Matthew Merrygreek, allied with a rich City widow, flaunts the ascendancy of sophisticated wit over inherited privilege, represented by the ridiculous Roister Doister, the only character of gentle rank in the play. In the comedy as in the pageant verses, burgher propriety and prosperity (rather than aristocratic privilege) provide the ethical foundation, but the distinctions of rhetorical brilliance are the preserve of the witty scamp.

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<sup>406</sup> Happé (91ff.) emphasizes the effects of humanism on secularizing English drama with the introduction of classical forms. Bevington, in *From Mankind to Marlowe*, famously argues for the ascendancy in the sixteenth century of popular forms adapted from the moralities, but points to the outlines of the received fusion tradition: "It is often observed in *Rafe Roister Doister* that the "parasite," Matthew Merrygreek, embodies more than a touch of the old Vice, and that the play combines with its five-act structure and unities of time and place a spirit of English humor that is genuine" (32). The fusion is handily summarized by F. P. Wilson in *The English Drama: 1485-1585* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976): "Plautus and Terence made no attempt to conceal their debts to the New Comedy of Greece, and in their plays settings, names, costumes, manners, were all Greek. What surprises us about these earliest remains of Anglo-Latin comedy [*Jack Juggler* and *Res Publica*, sometimes attributed to Udall] is the success with which they are adapted to English manners" (107).

Nicholas Udall's most striking contribution to social history may be in his role as an emblematic humanist-for-hire, a type of the teacher and writer whose wit, like the comedies of Plautus and Terence he used, supplied rhetorical dazzle along with a *frisson* of impropriety. Udall seems to have fashioned himself from scraps of found material. Stephen Greenblatt has shown that self-fashioning involves self-cancellations, censorings, as it were, of the embarrassing errancies of the outgrown self—or selves. Udall's self-cancellations work so well (along with the obliterations of time) that we cannot tell for certain whether he should be understood as the protagonist of a humanist success story, or as a pitiful overreacher whose marginal social status signals the shallowness of the penetration of literary learning into the existing power structure. Udall's peculiar comic power proceeds from his liminal position, which he parlays into a critical authority that neither wealth nor birth can buy.

This inherently ambiguous role was further complicated by the eruption of homosexual behavior that ended Udall's Eton career in 1541. Recent scholarship on his writing has tended to emphasize sexual ambiguity, especially in connection with his confession of buggery with one of his students from Eton.<sup>407</sup> I argue that Udall's sexual

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<sup>407</sup> Elizabeth Pittenger, "'To Serve the Queere': Nicholas Udall, Master of Revels," *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke UP, 1994) 162-89. Many of the ideas of the mutual exploitation of the servant-master relationship which I develop in my reading below of Udall's penitent letter (Cotton Ms. Titus B VIII: 386r -88v) were first suggested to me by Pittenger, who also notes the similarity between Udall's role and that of Matthew Merrygreek, and of the coincidence of this ambiguous letter and the famously mis-pointed one in *Roister Doister*. Pittenger acknowledges her debt to Jonathan Goldberg's "Colin to Hobbinol: Spenser's Familiar Letters" (*South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 [1989]: 107-26) for the idea of "the teasing play between revelation and reveiling" that "has the structure of the open secret" (115). Alan Bray argues that Udall's relatively light sentence demonstrates the extent to which "homosexuality was institutionalized not only at the universities but also in grammar schools"; see his

transgressions are emblematic of a more important social collusion. The crime itself, as well as Udall's light punishment and swift rehabilitation, may tell us more about the circulation of social aspiration in 1543 than about sexual desire. The preserves of elite privilege sheltered the schoolmaster, even in his role as the invading bugger, apparently because he was a master of rhetoric, a humanist scholar, and a writer of interludes. These skills, as he reveals in his pageant and comedy, and in his letter of contrition after the crime, clearly served the ambitions of certain other people to play new social roles of their own. Curiously, school and stage opened very similar public arenas in which those ambitions could be realized.

In Udall's time, school and stage may be seen as conjoined and powerful normative forces that challenged the fundamental assumptions of old traditions of power and new illusions of autonomous individuality. When the schoolmaster buggered the gentleman's son, both master and boy were enmeshed in a shifting matrix formed by urban wealth, absolutist government, and the growing vigor of schools and universities as cultural power brokers. The role of the schoolmaster Nicholas Udall demonstrates the ambiguity of the idea of mastery in such an agglomerative power structure, illustrating a truism we might borrow, *mutatis mutandis*, from the parlance of late twentieth century business management: all mastery is middle-mastery. Udall is much occupied with showing how a learned and intelligent man in such a world is never narrowly defined as either master or servant. In the pages that follow I consider in turn how these developments in school

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*Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982; New York: Columbia UP, 1995) 52. Bruce Smith adduces Udall's confession to illustrate his point that "[a]bout what actually went on in schools, colleges, and the inns of court there is very little direct evidence"; see his *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 84.



curriculum, in drama, and in the social uses of both play out in the life and writings of Nicholas Udall.

### **Nicholas Udall: Schoolmaster and Playmaker**

We know nothing certain about Udall's parents or childhood, beyond the fact of his birth in 1504 or 1505, as attested by an oath he took in January 1520 at Winchester College.<sup>408</sup> His schooling provides defining documents in other ways, as the books Udall probably knew as a student and as a young teacher tell us much about childhood and youth in the early sixteenth century, and also allow us to trace the use of drama in the humanist grammar school after the great innovations of the schoolmasters of Magdalen College, Oxford, and St. Paul's school, London. The earliest school books printed in England had appeared in the decade before Udall's birth. The grammar and *vulgaria* issued in about 1483 by John Anwykyll, master of the grammar school at Magdalen College, took a form that Udall would follow and adapt: grammar supplemented by colloquial Latin phrases culled from Terence (this continuing a tradition from Cicero and Quintilian) and translated into English.<sup>409</sup> I discussed in Chapter One how the *vulgaria* that spread from Magdalen College, Oxford, in the years of Udall's youth promoted role-playing with audacity, and even with impudence. He would later amplify these attitudes in his own work.

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<sup>408</sup> A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford A.D. 1501 to 1540* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 586. Emden states that Udall ("Owdall") took the statutory oath at Winchester 15 January 1520, citing the Winchester College Register.

<sup>409</sup> Nicholas Orme, *Education in Early Tudor England: Magdalen College Oxford and Its School 1480-1540* (Oxford: Magdalen College, 1998) 15-16.

Udall began his own grammar schooling at Winchester College in 1517, at the time Colet's innovations and Erasmus's writing for St. Paul's School were becoming widely known. The Winchester curriculum would certainly have been influenced both by the Magdalen grammarians, with their emphasis on the lively daily use of colloquial Latin, and by the books written for St. Paul's, with their emphasis on the Latin of classical, as opposed to medieval, authors. Both traditions inform the remarkable *vulgaria* of William Horman, a Wykehamist like Udall who became headmaster of Eton (1485-1494) and then of Winchester itself (1494-1503).<sup>410</sup> Horman collected and published *vulgaria* comprising six thousand sentences gathered from the lessons dictated to his own students, first printed in 1519 with prefatory verses by William Lily, headmaster at St. Paul's.

Udall must have known Horman's work, probably as a student, but certainly as a schoolmaster. Horman was vice-provost at Eton in the first year of Udall's tenure as headmaster there. On 12 April 1535, nine months after Udall's arrival, Horman died at Eton and was buried in the chapel. He bequeathed to the college a collection of manuscripts and books, including works of Aristotle, the church fathers, and an anatomy. To Nicholas Udall he gave a commentary on Pliny, our best evidence of contact and esteem between the two teachers.<sup>411</sup> Horman's book of *vulgaria* illustrates three related points about schooling in Udall's youth, as I have argued in previous chapters: the teaching of Latin grammar was a hotly contested market commodity; classical purity and worldly pragmatism were set forth as compatible values in grammar and rhetoric

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<sup>410</sup> For Horman's chronology I rely on White's introduction in Stanbridge xxiv.

<sup>411</sup> A. B. Emden, "William Horman," in *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) 964.

instruction; such instruction obliged schoolboys to play roles and to imagine themselves in distinctly dramatic ways that tested the limits of social rank and conventional morality.

Though the great bulk of Horman's collection rehearses the language of an active life in law, court, council, and business, Horman's boys also had occasion to contemplate the realities of the teaching profession. They learned such sentences as "He hath founded a reder in greke for a .C. ducats a yere" (88v), or "I shall rede openly a lectur of greke if it be that honest wagis be assigned out for the yere" (90v). The proud tone of this contract negotiation may have been of particular interest to Nicholas Udall who, some seven years after Horman's *vulgaria* were printed and six years after his own matriculation at Winchester, served time as a lecturer in Greek at his Oxford college, and then at least three separate stints as a schoolmaster.

These fleeting references to teaching for pay make some promise of profit and clerkly dignities, but they are overwhelmed in Horman's book by whole chapters devoted to the more august offices of councillors, lawyers, judges, civil administrators, and courtiers. A representative sampling gives some idea of the civic lives for which Horman's pupils were rehearsing, often assuming roles of a gravity and grandeur beyond their years and social rank. They committed to memory and recited saws and sentences that must often have had the quality of fantasy for them. Under the heading "*De Principis Ornamentis et de Honestamentis*," a tradesman's son could find himself projected into the loftiest circles: "He is promoted as hye as he may be....The embassaddours be sente to the pope....The duke of Bokyngham ke[p]eth a noble housolde" (182v-83v). Civic drama and city power jostle with royal splendor: "There were made many gay pageantis and pleasures: for love of the kyngis coming: and some devised one thyng: some an

other.... He was received with the best of the cite & a great syght of the clergie.... The meyre with all the craftis receyved hym” (187v-88r). A little fantasy of unsought promotion takes a particularly dramatic tone of surprise: “He offred me that dignyte whan I medled nothing nother thought on it” (189v-90r). Horman dwells at length on rank and changes in rank, observing a *cursus honorum* in which the city man becomes a royal servant and obtains land, the traditional mark of the gentleman: “He begynneth to growe in honour...The kyngis grace hath put me in this roume...He is redy to go about change or rysynge....Marchauntis of London have goodly placis upon the lande” (190v-91v). Udall’s schoolmates were thus conditioned to aim at higher things than schoolmastering. Of the eighteen boys who entered Winchester with Udall in 1517, two took the LL.B. degree at New College Oxford, three are known to have entered the church, and two, including Udall, became schoolmasters. In the subsequent decade Winchester boys rose in law and the church in roughly equal numbers.<sup>412</sup>

In the two decades after Horman’s *vulgaria* were published, the schoolboys of Udall’s generation saw England divorce itself from Rome and many a great room vacated by violent changes. In this period of social and moral turmoil, the collective rights and individual ambitions of the commons took on a fresh importance.<sup>413</sup> At the same time the

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<sup>412</sup> See Thomas Kirby, *Winchester Scholars* (London: Henry Frowde, 1888) 108ff.

<sup>413</sup> John Guy summarizes the Tudor reliance on talented commoners: “In achieving the restoration of the monarchy, the Tudors practiced their belief that ability, good service, and loyalty to the regime, irrespective of a man’s social origins and background, were to be the primary grounds of appointments, promotions, favours, and rewards”; See his “The Tudor Age,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*, ed. Kenneth O. Morgan (New York: Oxford UP, 1984) 232-33. Guy likewise affirms the rising importance of Parliament, as for example in declaring the royal supremacy in the church: “For as early as 1532 it was on the cards that the Tudor supremacy would be a

vanities of social climbing were cruelly exposed, most notably by the fall of Wolsey and then of Cromwell. Horman gives us abundant evidence that the ambitions and the suspicions associated with social advancement were heard in the classroom even in the earliest years of Wolsey's tenure, as in these sentences from the chapter "*De Civilibus*":

He is growen in favoure and aqueyntaunce with great estates....The comynalte [*plebs*] is oppressed of the great cobbis [*divitibus*, the rich]....Many one that be set in a mynde and desyre to have theyr name spred for ever jeopardde them selves above theyr power....I owe obedience to the: but no bondage....A gentyلمان of the firste heed taketh over moche upon hym....Money and favour gotyn by quaynt wayes be[a]reth a great roume....I came by my degree by good ryght (215v-25r).

Thus schoolboy voices piped cautions against the dangers of overreaching mixed with praises of the powers of the commonwealth, all as imagined by a schoolmaster. This same teacher taught his students to imagine themselves as wielding power for the common good: "It wolde have behoved the comen welth that thou haddest borne a greater rule" (225v). Yet Horman sometimes obliged his young readers to imagine themselves playing a shameful part, whether for policy or for sport. For example, they recited, "Let us devyse sum thing to cloke this sham[e]ful mater" (206v), or, "Some thyngis be somewhat shamfull whan they be consyderedde alone by them selfe and yet they do good service at a need and ieopardye" (220r). Given the book's emphasis on ambition for success in the civic arena, these lines suggest a Machiavellian pragmatism more

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parliamentary supremacy, not a purely royal one, and only the despotic king's dislike of representative assemblies ensured that Parliament's contribution was cut back to the mechanical, though still revolutionary task of enacting the requisite legislation" (248).

conditioned on performance than principle, and wholly consonant with the moral relativism Udall calls into play at crucial moments in his life and work.

Horman's deep ambivalence about the powers and perils of the "great rooms" of civic authority must reflect not only the uncertainties of the early Tudor state, but also the middling social position of the schoolboys (and schoolmasters) themselves as they contemplated playing mighty roles. This ambivalence sometimes amounts to anxiety about class slippage, as when Horman contrasts the performance of gentlemanly probity with the playing of unwonted roles, including that of the common actor: "I take my selfe better borne than to come forthe at a feste before all men lyke a pleyar" (226v). While the tradesman was certainly socially above the place-less player, what "better" birth was the tradesman's son to imagine for himself as he recited this? What temptation to put himself forward at a feast is he to imagine himself refusing? The refusal of the player's part bespeaks an ideal of grave dignity, somewhat at odds with the humanist ideal of copious, multivocal eloquence. The line also betrays contempt for the player's profession, situating it as festive foolishness, outside respectable society. When the boy recited this line, he played the ironic role of a man so dignified as to despise the playing of roles.

Despising the festive player was, however, only a rhetorical stance, one of many rehearsed by Horman's pupils, who also had abundant occasion to play at being players who were proud of their performances: "I am sent for to playe well a parte in a playe....I am pryncipall player [*princeps personatorum*]....I have played my parte without any fayle" (281r-v). In the chapter "*De Exercitamentis et Ludis*," these sentences about festive drama are mixed with sentences about fishing, swimming, tennis, horses, dogs, dancing, and games. Horman thus places drama among the leisure activities of the

prosperous citizen, and even of the gentleman, as the chapter begins with observations on hunting, traditionally a marker of gentle status. The schoolboy speaker is cast not only as player, but also as observer, critic, and even producer of civic drama: “The mayre made shewyngis and pleyes throught al the wardis of the cyte....I will have made V stages or bouthes in this pleye.... We lacke pleyers garments both for sad parties and mad.... I would have a place in the middyl of the pley that I might se every paiaunt.... The apperel of this pley coste me moche money.... Who did the coste of this pley [*Quis fuit choragus*] for the plesure of the people?.... I delyte to se enterludis.... The stages of the play fel al downe and no man hurt that sate in the setis” (279v-281v). If we set these lines next to Horman’s earlier references to playing “a comedy of greek” and “a comedy of latten,” we see that the grammar school boy in Udall’s day learned to think of drama as operating on at least three levels: as festive amusement, as an instructive representation of the duties and dangers of the prominent places in civil society for which he was being prepared, and as part of the humanist curriculum in grammar and rhetoric devised to prepare him for that place.

Thus Winchester boys in Udall’s day engaged in dramatic exercises as practice for adult life in a wide variety of roles, among them the learned professional, the landed gentleman, the civic leader, and even the common player, though few if any parents could have hoped for that profession for their sons. Horman’s collection, comprehensive as it is, offers no model of the man who deals cheerfully with the failure of humanist schooling to produce the promised results in social mobility. Udall would supply that deficiency in his own textbook, and in his comic drama.

Schoolroom roles entailed assuming a wide variety of ethical stances, including those of the pious Christian and loyal subject, the proud and self-assertive citizen, and the calculating pragmatist capable of moral relativism. Udall's university education in the first years of the Lutheran Reformation gave him occasion to see that ethical positions entailed mortal consequences, sometimes of a distinctly dramatic kind, when his own experiments with religious nonconformity embroiled him in a heresy hunt and expiatory public ritual. Udall went from Winchester to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he matriculated on June 18, 1520. Of the seventeen boys who had entered Winchester with Udall in 1517, ten are known to have proceeded to university. Nine of the ten went to Winchester's affiliate, New College, Oxford, whereas Udall alone went to Corpus Christi College. Indeed, Udall appears to have been the only Winchester scholar in decades to have chosen any Oxford college other than New College.<sup>414</sup> Though Udall was at most sixteen years old, this choice of college suggests nonconformist and even *avant-garde* tendencies that may have been typical of an intellectual minority in the decade before the English reformation. Perhaps the young Udall was influenced by a patron. Corpus Christi had been founded only three years before as a nursery of the New Learning. In the decade Udall spent there, the eminent humanists Thomas Lupset (John Colet's pupil) and Juan Luis Vives were lecturers in Latin, and Udall himself became a lecturer in Greek and

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<sup>414</sup> Kirby's records of Winchester scholars from 1497, twenty years before Udall entered, to 1540, twenty years after he left, show the vast majority of scholars proceeding to New College, a small number proceeding into service ("*Ad servitium*") or monastic orders ("*Ad religionem*"), and several dying in college. In 1538 and again in 1540, a generation after Udall, a Wykehamist proceeded to Corpus Christi, and in 1561 another Wykehamist, Thomas Greneways, became President of Corpus Christi. Of the roughly two dozen colleges then at Oxford or Cambridge, no other college appears in Kirby's records for the period. See Kirby 96-123.



logic. He became an expert classicist and a convinced humanist in his years in Oxford, accomplishments that shaped his career and his writing.

Udall may also have become a convinced Protestant at this time, more than a decade before England's break from Rome. He was a member of a group of young men who read Tyndale, Erasmus, and Luther at the very time Wolsey chose to clamp down on such heresy. In 1528, Udall, by then a fellow and lecturer in the college, was implicated in a hunt for Lutheran sympathizers and was forced to participate in an expiatory book-burning. Foxe records the story in *Acts and Monuments*, as told by Anthony Dalaber, one of this band of "lovers of the gospel."<sup>415</sup> Dalaber identifies "Udal" of Corpus Christi as one of these "faithful brethren" (423), and develops a harrowing tale of the events surrounding the arrest of Thomas Garret, a priest who sold heretical books to the young brotherhood in Oxford. Wolsey's agents pursued Garret to Oxford, "to take and imprison him if they might, and to burn all and every of his aforesaid books, and him too, if they could: so burning hot was the charity of those most holy fathers" (421).

As news of Garret's arrest spread among Garret's Oxford brethren, they gathered at Udall's college, where Dalaber joined them. Their fear is palpable in his account:

When I came to Corpus Christi College I found together, in Sir Diet's chamber, tarrying and looking for me, Fitzjames, Diet, and Udal. They knew all the matter before...but yet I declared the matter unto them again. And so I tarried there, and supped with them in that chamber, where they provided meat and drink for us, before my coming: at which supper we were not very merry, considering our state

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<sup>415</sup> John Foxe, *Acts And Monuments Of John Foxe*, ed. Josiah Pratt, vol. 5 (London: G. Seeley, 1870) 421ff.

and peril at hand. When we had end our supper and committed our whole cause, with fervent sighs and hearty prayers, unto God our heavenly father, Fitzjames would needs have me to lie that night with him, . . . and so did I. But small rest, and little sleep, took we both there that night. (424)

Foxe completes Dalaber's story with an account of a penitential procession in which Garret's Oxford customers were paraded through the streets and forced to destroy the offending books in a dramatic public ceremony.

The list of the offenders shows the variety of Oxonians drawn into the reading of these dangerous texts:

There were suspected, beside, a great number to be infected with heresy, as they called it, for having such books of God's truth as Garret sold unto them: as Master Clark, . . . Master Bets, Taverner the musician, Radley, with other of Friswide college; of Corpus Christi college, as Udal and Diet; with other of Magdalen college; one Eden, with other of Gloucester college, and two black monks, . . . two white monks of Bernard college; two canons of St. Mary's college, one of them named Robert Ferrar, afterward bishop of St. Davies, and burned in queen Mary's time. (428)

The ceremonial burning of books at Oxford's main crossroads must have been a deeply impressive dramatization of the power of Wolsey's church over these heterodox academics:

Against the procession time there was a great fire made upon the top of Carfax, where into all such as were in the said procession either convict or suspected of

heresy were commanded, in token of repentance and renouncing of their errors, every man to cast a book into the fire, as they passed by. (428)

For Foxe, telling the story in 1559, after the triumph of the reformation in England, the book burning had taken on the sanctity of sacrifice. To young Udall in 1528, however, the religious significance of the ceremony may have been less important than the dangerous brush with power. Did he feel some relief in abjuring “error” and burning the book? The drama of the book burning provided a memorable demonstration of the power of pageantry to re-fashion men. In playing his role in the procession submissively, he transformed himself from *persona non grata* to a loyal, penitent subject with an interesting past, a role he revisited throughout his life.

John Garret, the bookseller-priest, survived his tormentor Wolsey, but he was pursued until 1540, when Protestantism was again in disfavor, and was burnt as a heretic at Smithfield. A closely related account in Foxe underlines a peculiar connection between Roman comedy, reformation, and resistance. The story involves Dr. Robert Barnes, a non-conformist scholar who was burnt with Garret. Foxe reports that Barnes, a member of the circle of Latimer, Cranmer, and Coverdale, when master of the college of Augustinians at Cambridge, brought from the University of Louvain a zeal for Terence, Plautus, and Cicero, all of whom he caused his scholars at Cambridge to study. The classical exemplars of “good letters,” Foxe explains, were only prelude to the neglected study of scripture, and to the exclusion of the “rudeness and barbarity” of orthodox Scotist scholasticism: “After these foundations laid, then did he read openly in the house

Paul's epistles, and put by Duns and Dorbel" (Foxe 5.415).<sup>416</sup> The leap from Roman oratory and comedy to St. Paul resonates with the program of Colet and Erasmus: seekers after truth must value both classical eloquence and sound philological scholarship in scripture.

If Udall's education at Corpus Christi was similarly structured, we have a key to a consonance in the apparent dissonance of audacity and piety in his later activities and writing. Barnes seems to have found in Terence and Plautus a purity of language that rebuked medieval barbarisms and emboldened his study of scripture without the mediation of orthodox commentary. Udall found in the Roman plays a comic resistance to authority that reinforced his own nonconformist inclinations. Barnes's unswerving purity got him burnt, and in the light of such flames Udall seems to have seen another path to self-assertion: the way of the *servus callidus*, by turns subversive and penitent, resistant and submissive. This character, in one form or another, dominates Udall's writing both for school and stage.

In his early life, Udall witnessed a series of mortal reversals in which learned men like himself were used as fuel for the fires of religious and political controversy. No wonder, then, if he formed a close identification with the Protean shape-changer, less committed to any ideology than to survival itself. He left Oxford the year after the ritual burning, and though it appears that the awarding of his M.A. was delayed on account of his flirtation with heresy, we know of no other consequences. When he surfaces again

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<sup>416</sup> For a concise account of the persecutions of Garret and Barnes in the context of the heresy persecutions of the 1520s, see Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 56-71.

four years later, it is to write pageant verses for the coronation of Anne Boleyn, an event for which even the suspicion of a Protestant past might have been a useful qualification.

We have reason to believe Udall taught at a grammar school after he left Oxford in 1529, before he reappeared near the center of Protestant power and civic humanism, collaborating with John Leland to write pageant verses for the coronation procession of Anne Boleyn.<sup>417</sup> The verses are clearly ascribed to “Lelandus” or “Udallus” by turns. Leland contributed declamations and tableaux inscriptions in Latin, while Udall devised speeches in Latin and in English, almost all assigned to dramatic *personae* from classical mythology, the Muses, the Graces, the Trojan Paris, and various deities. Boys, probably from the choir schools of St. Paul’s and other churches, spoke and sang major parts. This was, in short, civic drama as transformed by humanist schooling. The verses show the young Udall in his role as humanist scholar-poet, confidently asserting the proud claims of the London citizenry, even over the queen’s own person. The pageant verses thus present, though in highly decorous form, the double action of obeisance of the king’s loyal subjects and the self-assertion of the rich City.

Anne’s triumphal entry into London followed days of celebration, fireworks, a river procession, and the wholesale conferral of knighthoods, all financed by the citizens of London.<sup>418</sup> The procession on June 1, 1533, assembled nobility, clergy, city magnates,

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<sup>417</sup> Leland was himself an accomplished humanist scholar, educated at St. Paul’s under Lily, and at Christ’s College, Cambridge, All Souls, Oxford, and on the continent. He served in 1525 as tutor to the younger son of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. By 1533 he had been made the king’s antiquary and keeper of the king’s library.

<sup>418</sup> Eustace Chapuys, the Spanish ambassador, reported the financing of the coronation thus in a letter to the king of Spain: “*Ceulx de ceste cite sont apprez pour fere*

and commons to enact not only a ceremony of celebration, but also a rite of submission to the official view of the king's divorce and marriage. Udall's rhetoric is not, however, the language of servile submission, but of civic self-assertion, ornamented with a voluptuary display of humanist learning. The city was ready to submit to the king's great changes, but not without submitting the queen to the public gaze and to the city's own ceremonials, in which she was assigned a role, mostly as a symbolic vessel for dynastic purposes, and paraded before the city audience.

The queen and her retinue encountered a sequence of pageant scenes that linked images of city wealth, scriptural ideals of chaste fecundity, heraldic images of power, and classical images of sensual beauty conjoined with imperial might.<sup>419</sup> Every stage of the procession offers evidence of the extent to which humanist education informed civic drama. On her entrance to the city Anne was greeted by a "a pageant, all with children appareled like marchautes, whiche welcomed her to the Citie," a remarkable instance of children, presumably schoolboys, acting in public adult roles like those they practiced in reciting their *vulgaria*.<sup>420</sup> Though London merchants were themselves still beneath the

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*contribuer tous les habitans pour les frais de ceste couronation, que monteront a leur charge environ de cinq mille ducatz, dont les troys seront pour le present de la dame, et le surpus pour le triomphe*" [The citizens of London are trying to make all the inhabitants contribute their share towards the expenses of this approaching coronation, which will amount to about 5,000 ducats, one-third of which sum will be spent in a present for the Lady, and the rest in a pageant for the occasion]. See Pascual de Gayangos (ed.), *Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain* (London: Longmans, 1882) 682.

<sup>419</sup> "Leland's and Udall's Verses before the Coronation of Anne Boleyn," in Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.), *Ballads from Manuscripts* (London: Ballad Society, 1868-72) I.364ff. Hereafter I cite from Furnivall in parentheses.

<sup>420</sup> Horman's pupils rehearsed the merchant's part, reciting, "Yronne waxe and oyle be good and sure waris in marchaundyse" (234r), and "I shall nat fayle whyle my

threshold of “gentle” status, they provided the Tudors with talent and gold. So in 1533 they proudly sent their own carefully schooled children out to remind the crown who was paying for the queen’s welcome. The royal procession moved on to pageants of Apollo, the nine muses, and a poet; St. Anne and the three Marias; the heraldic devices of Anne Boleyn; the Three Graces and the Choice of Paris; a group of virgins; and the children of St. Paul’s school reciting verses on a scaffold. The mingling of classical mythology and Christian themes resembles the grammar school curriculum now familiar to the London audience. At each stage there were performances of verses and songs in English, but also verses in Latin, either performed or written on the pageant scenery.

In several striking instances Udall’s pageant verses give voice to a civic wish for (and uneasiness about) the dynastic continuity that should flow from the royal marriage, specifically from the queen’s body. Udall claims that he speaks for the commons, rich and poor (“*dives inops que*,” 382), of whatever station, kind, rank, and place (“*Quilibet...Conditio, genus, ordo, locus que*,” 387). He refers boldly to the queen’s advanced pregnancy in his pageant of the nine muses, as Urania intones, “Already swelling, the womb of Anne will soon bring forth a sweet Prince for you, O soon!” (“*Iamdudum Annae uterus tumens, / Mox dulcem pariet mox tibi Principem*,” 386). The muse further appropriates the queen’s body to the public gaze, reminding Anne directly of her singular role in the spectacle of the commonwealth: “The citizens in their rejoicing gladly look on you alone, and for them you alone are the fulfillment of this triumph. They

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stocke holdeth” (235r), among several dozen other phrases in his chapter on commerce, “*De Commutativis*.”

fix their eyes on you alone, and will not be satisfied by any other sight.”<sup>421</sup> At the next stop, a child speaks verses about the biblical Anne, progenitor of Christ himself, and another child introduces her through her heraldic device, the white falcon, who lights on the Tudor rose after much painful uncertainty. As the queen’s procession moves on, a chorus explicitly appropriates the queen’s person to the public weal, implicitly affirming that her prolonged uncertainties have been the people’s as well, borne by her slender frame:

Of body small,  
Of power regal,  
She is, and sharp of sight;  
Of courage hault  
No manner fault  
Is in this Falcon White  
In chastity,  
Excelleth she,  
Most like a virgin bright:  
And worth is  
To live in bliss  
Always this Falcon White.  
But now to take

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<sup>421</sup> *Te solam spectant laeti, sua gaudia, cives,  
Tu sola hijs plaenissima pompa.  
Te solam spectant in te sua lumina figunt,  
Non sacianda [=satienda] tui conspectus* (Furnivall 387).



And use her make  
Is time, as troth is plight;  
That she may bring  
Fruit according  
For such a Falcon White.  
And where by wrong,  
She hath fleen long,  
Uncertain where to light;  
Herself repose  
Upon the Rose,  
Now may this Falcon White.  
Whereon to rest,  
And build her nest;  
GOD grant her, most of might!  
That England may  
Rejoice always  
In this same Falcon White. (390-1)

While epithalamic poetry, apt for a queen consort's coronation, conventionally refers to the bridal bed, Udall's maiden outing as a dramatic poet may be felt to go beyond the convention. The image of the falcon's small body, attaining regal power through courage and sharp sight, looks like a pointed observation on the shrewd character of the new queen. The fact that the coronation took place on Whitsunday, or Pentecost,

may further complicate the sense of the falcon's flight. In using the image of a bird who comes to earth to herald a new era and a new line of kings Udall may be adapting the iconography of the descent of the Holy Spirit to the uses of dynastic pageantry, at the same time working a curious gender reversal, as it is Anne's bird who comes to bring fertility to the Tudors. So Anne's right to "use her make" appropriates the king's seed to the queen's use, and both to the public weal, while making the celebration distinctly contingent on the presumptive "Fruit" of the royal marriage. The prosperity of this Falcon's "nest," implicitly the royal nursery, is prerequisite to England's rejoicing. In deploring the "wrong" that "long" kept the falcon from lighting on the rose, the poet takes a royalist stance, signaling an expedient affirmation by the citizenry of the king's divorce and remarriage. In itself, this stance seems to be a politic accommodation to power, especially as the cast-off queen had enjoyed a popular following in the city, while the new one had been met with some open suspicion.<sup>422</sup> Yet the effect of the ballad as a whole is not so much to celebrate the descent of the falcon onto the Tudor rose as to assert the public interest in the issue of the royal marriage. Here we find civic humanism at the zenith of its confidence, embodied in a scholar-poet presuming to interpret the heraldic device of the queen's arms on behalf of the commons.

Udall's verses pass from biblical and heraldic tropes to frankly erotic classical devices in the final pageant pieces. The procession is greeted by a figure that epitomizes the union of humanist education and civic drama, "a child, appareled like a poet," who "pronounced unto the Queenes grace these verses, first in latin, and eftsons in Englishe"

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<sup>422</sup> On popular support for Catherine of Aragon and hostility to the divorce, see Scarisbrick 216. On the organized opposition to the divorce among the commons, see Guy, *Tudor England* 124-25.

(393), introducing a scene of the Three Graces. Then Udall represents the judgment of Paris, a theme that identifies the king's choice of Anne with Paris's choice of Venus over Juno and Pallas. Udall's Paris declares that the queen combines the virtues of all three, and that he would give the golden apple to her, but it is "too simple a reward." "A Child" protests that Anne shall not have the unworthy apple, but instead a Crown Imperial. The chorus that ends this final pageant rewards both Venus and Anne, validating beauty (as against the wifely Juno's "riches and kingdoms" and Pallas's "incomparable wisdom") but setting Anne above them all:

The golden ball,  
Of price but small,  
Have VENUS shall,  
The fair goddess!  
Because it was  
Too low and base  
For your good Grace  
And worthiness!

So Nicholas Udall's earliest public verses bring together humanist learning, civic and schoolboy drama, and a confident rhetoric of self-assertion, boldly presuming to assign value to royal prerogatives of the most intimate kind. The scholar-poet speaks for the citizens who sponsored the procession, and employs the voices of their own children. But the vantage is Parnassian, concerned with the world but lifted above the common fray by

ancient learning and the arts of verse. Udall invokes this literary superiority throughout his life, a common theme in each of his several roles.

Udall's role as the scholar-poet overlapped with his role as schoolmaster and grammarian. In both roles he served the ambitions of men who wanted to make their voices heard on high, and in both roles he asserted a personal authority based on his confident command of literary learning. His preface, translations and glosses of Terence may be our most direct access to the voice of Udall the schoolmaster, and it is the voice not only of a confident Latinist, but also of an adroit English stylist who takes pleasure in the play of language.

When Udall wrote the pageant verses in 1533, he may already have been teaching at a grammar school in London. Such a post would have given him easy access to choristers and grammar school boys to perform in the pageants, and to printers for his book. In any case, Udall situates himself as a teacher in London only ten months later, when he signs the introduction of his new textbook, "At London, from the convent of the monks of St. Augustine" [*Ex Coenobio Monachorum ordinis Divi Augustini*].<sup>423</sup> We do not know which Augustinian house this was, though it is interesting to note that Robert Barnes was head of an Augustinian house at Cambridge at the time of Wolsey's heresy hunts in the 1520s, and was committed as "a free prisoner at the Austin Friars in London"

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<sup>423</sup> Nicholas Udall, *Floures for Latine Spekyng* (1534; Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1972) [6v]. I cite the unnumbered introductory pages in square brackets, assigning numbers starting with the title page as 1r. I cite in parentheses the pages numbered by the printer.

when he was arrested by Gardiner in 1539.<sup>424</sup> We must ask if the English Augustinians were, like Barnes, inclined to be reform-minded humanists, and if “the sweet flock of his students” to whom Udall dedicates his *Floures of Latine Spekyng* were students in a humanist school of the same friary. As Barnes turned away from the scholastic barbarism in which he had been schooled to the purity of expression that he found in Plautus, Terence, and Cicero, so Udall replaced the schoolroom Latin of the *vulgaria* (though composed by men like Horman who aimed at classical Latin) with the Latin of Terence himself. He adds a fresh translation and commentary as if written for his own pupils, though he clearly intended the book for publication and a wider circulation. The book was printed by the royal printer, and went into three editions in Udall’s lifetime, and at least two more after his death.

In the book’s introduction, Udall writes that he came to teaching “not of my own will, but at the urging of friends” [*non mea voluntate...sed importunissimis amicorum,*” 1r]. Nevertheless, he writes (in the second person, as to his students) that he was soon moved by the hope that they might attain erudition, and that he came to hold nothing to be more important than teaching.<sup>425</sup> Udall thus produces for himself the role of the reluctant prophet, and whether we believe it or not, his conversion narrative is suggestive of the schoolmaster’s lot: then as now, the job had a low social status relative to the other

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<sup>424</sup> Foxe I.419.

<sup>425</sup> I am much indebted to Agnes Juhasz-Ormsby whose unpublished translation of the introduction to the *Floures* I have used throughout this section, whether quoting or, as here, paraphrasing. Juhasz-Ormsby has examined Udall’s sources for the *Floures*, amplifying T. W. Baldwin’s examination in *Shakspeare’s Five-Act Structure* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1947). Udall apparently worked from Estienne’s 1529 edition of Terence, relying on Valla, Linacre, Erasmus, and others for notes and commentary. See her “The Unidentified Sources of Nicholas Udall’s *Floures for Latine Spekyng*,” *Notes and Queries* 49 (2002): 203-06.

learned professions, though it could be propped up with the rhetoric of duty, and made more appealing by the promise of talented students. We cannot know whether the sentiments about teaching in Udall's introduction were sincere or merely conventional, but the book itself makes one thing clear: classical drama provided a dynamic framework for teaching grammar and rhetoric, and also timely matter for advancing the ambitions of the humanist schoolmaster and translator as an *auctor* in his own right.

Udall, like Horman and Stanbridge before him, saw a duty, as he describes it in the introduction, "to labor mightily in order to snatch [his flock] out of the monstrous jaws of barbarity as quickly as possible, and to win [them] back from the murky and impassable darkness of ignorance, to the purity, light, and clarity of refined literature."<sup>426</sup> In his embrace of the quest for purity in Latin rhetoric, Udall reaches back to Terence, probably by way of the tradition of Anwykyll, whose *Vulgaria quedam abs Terencio in Anglicam traducta* had been printed fifty years before, only to be superseded by home-grown *vulgaria* of Stanbridge, Horman, and Whittinton. Udall cites not Anwykyll but Cicero as his precedent for using Terence as a model.

More important, Udall cites Terence himself as authority for the artful practice of translation from an ancient language as a way of enriching the vernacular. The preface notes that "Terence regarded it as more praiseworthy and laudable to translate the old plays of the Greeks rather than inventing new ones, and the same Terence did not consider it less clever a thing to produce good Latin from good Greek than to invent new

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<sup>426</sup> "*insigniterque in eo elaborare, ut vos ex immanissimis barbariei faucibus quamprimum eripiam, atque ex tenebrosa obstrusaque inscitiae caliginae vindicem, ad politoris literaturae puritatem, lucem, claritudinem*" (Udall *Floures* [3v]).

writings for himself, and leave those for posterity.”<sup>427</sup> While the *Floures* establish Udall as an important Tudor grammarian, they also show him to be an agile translator and rhetorician in his native language. Thus Udall follows Terence in making ancient letters live in new times and places, profiting from both the cultural cachet of ancient texts and the market value of attractive new writing in the vernacular. Though he was perhaps the most skilful translator and adapter in the vernacular movement of his time, he was not the first. Udall probably knew the *Terens in englysh*, a translation of Terence’s *Andria* printed in 1520, the same year that Rastell printed *The Four Elements* with its defense of English for literary purposes.<sup>428</sup> The *Terens in englysh* includes in its preface an apology like Udall’s for translation into English from Latin that is itself a translation from the Greek:

And for this thing is broughte into the English tonge  
We pray you all not to be discontent  
For the laten boke which hath be usyd so long  
Was translate owt of greke this is evident.  
And sith our English tong is now sufficient  
The matter to expresse we think it best always  
Before English men in English it to play.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> “*Terentius plus sibi laudis statuit, maioremque gloriam posuit in vertendis Graecorum antiquis fabulis, quam inveniendis suis novis, si idem Terentius rem nihilo minus ingeniosam arbitratus est ex bonis graecis bona latina facere, quam si ipse de suo nova excogita[vi]sset, quae scriberet, et posteris legenda tradideret*” (Udall, *Floures* [4r]).

<sup>428</sup> ESTC (2nd ed.) 23894.

<sup>429</sup> *Terens in Englysh*, quoted in John Palsgrave, *The Comedy of Acolastus*, ed. P. L. Carver (London: EETS, 1937) lxxxii.

The anonymous translator of 1520 clearly values Terence as source for a good play in English rather than as a model of classical Latin. His first object is to place such a play before English men.

Udall, although he is composing a schoolbook for Latin composition, likewise dignifies the practice of translation as a form of authorship, offering as models his own idiomatic renderings of Terence's lines. He sometimes includes variant translations, interspersed with *scholia*, glosses on points of grammar, syntax, and usage. Occasionally he inserts comparable phrases or proverbs from sources other than Terence, including Cicero, Donatus, and Erasmus. Taken on their own, Udall's translations of Terence's lines show a lively feeling for dialogue in English. Consider, for example, his inventions on a single highly idiomatic phrase from the *Andria* in the first section of the *Floures*:

*Bona verba qu[a]ieso.* Speke fayre I praye you, or proverbially, you woll nat do as you saye. For those wordes be alwayes of the wryters used and spoken ironice,<sup>430</sup> that is to saye in mockage and derision: As if one shulde say, I wolle cause the braynes to flee out of thy heed, and the other shulde in mockage, scorne, and derisyon answeare and saye thus: you wolle not I trow: or thus, you wolle not doo as you saye I trow, he moughte saye hit elegauntly and proprely in latyne, *Bona verba quaeso*, yet gyve [m]e fayre launage I beseche you hartely. (3v)

In the *Andria*, "*Bona verba quaeso*" is the importunate reply of a devious slave to his master's threat to torture him if he continues in his trickery. John Sargeant renders the

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<sup>430</sup> The *OED* records the use of "ironiously" in Leonard Cox's *The Arte or Crafte of Rhetoryke* (cited variously as 1524 and 1530, though the first edition noted in the ESTC, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., is 1532), but no use of "ironic" before 1630 (Jonson, *New Inn*) or "ironically" before 1576 (Abraham Fleming, *A Panoplie of Epistles*). Udall's adverbial "ironice" may be a direct borrowing of a late Latin word. See Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879) 1000.



phrase, “Hush, sir! Don’t say ‘tricked,’” and Betty Raddice translates it as simply, “Hush, hush, sir.”<sup>431</sup> The slave’s master interprets the wheedling as mockery: “Will you laugh at me? You don’t fool me” [*Inrides? Nil me fallis*]. To reveal the “mockage” implicit in the harmless-sounding words, Udall reframes this exchange of slave and master as a little contest of puerile bravado. The first speaker’s threat to spill the other’s brains (as if they had given offense) can be met, says the schoolmaster, either with plain defiance, or more “elegantly and properly,” with a cool, brainy request for “good words.” The overlay of this scene of schoolyard banter on Terence’s master-slave exchange makes a point that is central to reading Udall: “good words” may not be enough to reverse the crude material realities of the social order, but they afford a certain sense of intellectual superiority, elegant and proper, which a reader or a theater audience can be brought to acknowledge.

In using Terence thus to assert mind over matter, Udall may have been influenced by the so-called Christian Terence movement then current on the continent.<sup>432</sup> Following the commentaries of Donatus, the fourth century grammarian, schoolmasters had long valued Terence as a source of rhetorical *copia*, as a master of efficient form and *oeconomia* of detail, as an observer of manners and decorum appropriate to various character types (and social ranks), and as a source of moral *exempla*, both positive and negative. Philip Melanchthon’s first publication was an edition of Terence (1516), followed soon after by works on grammar and rhetoric, including the *Institutiones Rhetoricae* (1521). In 1527, seven years before the *Floures*, Melanchthon published a moralized edition of Terence, and argued there that comedy was valuable for teaching

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<sup>431</sup> Terence, *Andria* I.205, trans. John Sargeant, *Terence*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994) 22-23; Terence, *The Comedies*, trans. Betty Raddice (London: Penguin, 1976) 47.

<sup>432</sup> On the Christian Terence movement, see F. P. Wilson 96ff.

both rhetoric and prudence.<sup>433</sup> The schoolmaster Leonard Cox adapted Melanchthon's *Institutiones* to produce the first extensive rhetoric in English, *The Arte or Crafte of Rhetoryke*, printed in 1532.<sup>434</sup> Other humanist schoolmasters in northern Europe used Terence's dramatic structure to produce neo-Latin schoolboy dramas on morally improving themes, like the *Acolastus* of Fullonius (Willem de Volder), first printed in 1529 and translated by William Palsgrave in 1540, when Udall was headmaster at Eton. Udall was therefore heir to a rich supply of works in which Terence was treated both as a model for teaching classical rhetoric and for making new drama that valorized the power of wit.

Udall's *Floures* was printed by the royal printer Thomas Berthelet in 1534, and went into several editions through 1572.<sup>435</sup> The book's printing history suggests that schoolmasters and students must have found it attractive or useful, whether as a source-book for elementary composition, or as a commentary to be used alongside the reading of Terence. In either case, the *Floures for Latyne Spekyng* made Udall's mark on grammar schooling, not just as a pious restoration of "pure" Terence, but also as an appropriation of Terence for the production of new writing and translation. Taken with Udall's dramatic writing, the *Floures* represents a stage in English humanism when reverent devotion to the ancient masters was yoked to a bumptious new confidence in English letters. This tendency runs parallel to similar audacious moves in religious and social

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<sup>433</sup> Norland 80.

<sup>434</sup> ESTC (2nd ed.) 5947. For the complete text, see Leonard Cox, *The Arte or Crafte of Rhetoryke*, ed. Frederic Ives Carpenter (Chicago, 1899).

<sup>435</sup> ESTC (2nd ed.) numbers editions of the *Floures* from 1533/4 (23899), 1538 (23900), 1544 (23900.5), 1560 (23901), and 1572 (23901.7).

reform, notably the official publication of the Bible and liturgy in English, whereby ancient words and forms were appropriated to new formulations of or commentaries on power.

This new confidence in the vernacular led Udall to treat Terence as a field ripe for creative raiding. Rebecca Bushnell, following the horticultural metaphor of Udall's title, has described the structure of Udall's book as a collection of flowers plucked from a garden. Bushnell notes that Erasmus, Elyot, and Vives, among others, use a harvesting metaphor to describe the humanist practice of reading widely and selecting edifying bits, as opposed to treating books whole, as artistic unities. Udall's *Floures* is a classical text reduced from a whole by being plundered for its useful parts, but Udall's choice of structure pays respect to the dramatic form of the original, as he "offered selected phrases (with translations) of the plays, ordered not by topics, as in a commonplace book, but by line number, scene and act, as if they composed a complete text. The general effect—of a complete interlinear translation nibbled randomly by mice—reveals Udall's sense of the whole pulling against his habit of using the parts."<sup>436</sup> The double action that Bushnell notes, exploiting the classics piecemeal while maintaining the sense of a dramatic whole, animated important shifts toward a school curriculum shaped by drama, and an English drama literature informed by, but not slavishly bound to, classical letters.

The sequencing of Udall's selections by act and scene, in the order they appear in Terence's plays, gives the *Floures* practical value as a running commentary for reading or translating a complete Terence. Udall's book is not, however, designed as a pony or crib

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<sup>436</sup> Rebecca Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996) 134-35.

notes, as he omits many of Terence's more difficult or obscure passages, and expurgates others that would be improper for schoolboy consumption. Nonetheless, Udall's culling produces not a topical phrasebook like Anwykyll's, but a schoolbook that is also a dramatic text. He preserves in their dramatic context (though in nibbled versions) examples of distinctly dramatic forms like stichomythia, apostrophe, and comic monologue which, when recited in the schoolroom, must often have had the effect of play-acting rather than story-telling or oratory. A lazy—or normal—student might have skipped the Latin and read only Udall's interlinear translation, which constitutes a lively, if elliptical, version of Terence.

The text of Udall's *Floures* thus had several potential uses: as a model for Latin dialogue and composition, as a model of translation from Latin into the vernacular, as instructive commentary on fine points of Terence's language, and as a model of selective editing (and expurgation). In selecting phrases, Udall apparently followed Donatus's commentary as printed in a recent French edition of Terence.<sup>437</sup> The phrases seem more often to be selected for their dramatic force and expression of character than for their grammatical or philological interest. Consider the uncut Latin text of a speech from Terence's *Eunuchus*, the second of the three plays excerpted in the *Floures*.<sup>438</sup> I show Udall's selections for the *Floures* in ***bold italics*** among the language he omitted. Gnatho, the parasite, boasts of his methods of "bird-catching":

*Hoc novum est aucupium: ego adeo hanc primus inveni viam.*

*Est genus hominum, qui esse primos se omnium rerum volunt,*

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<sup>437</sup> Juhász-Ormsby 204.

<sup>438</sup> The *Floures* begin with the *Andria* and end with the *Heautontimorum*.

*Nec sunt: hos consector. Hisce ego non paro me ut redeant[sic];*

*Sed his ultro arrideo, et eorum ingenia admiror simul.*

**Quicquid dicunt laudo: id rursus si negant, laudo id quoque.**

*Negat quis? nego: ait? aio. Postremo imperavi egomet mihi*

*Omnia assentari. Is quaestus nunc est multo uberrimus.*"<sup>439</sup>

Udall's nibbling in this passage of the *Floures* looks somewhat arbitrary. He omits language that would seem to be useful for teaching points of grammar (the deponent *consector*, the passive infinitive *assentari*, the defective verb *ait*) or such figures as the rhetorical question (*quis nego?*). He follows, however, a clear pattern of selecting forceful expostulations of the kind adaptable to schoolboy banter or composition, often with an emphasis on mental ability: "*Di immortales! homini homo quid praestat.* Good lorde in heven howe moche is some one man better than an other! *Stulto intelligens quid interest!* What difference is between a foole and a wise man!" (47v). Likewise, he selects barbed examples of direct address and ironic wit: "*Simul consilium cum re amisti?* Haste thou loste thy goodes or substaunce and thy wytte to? Or, dyddest thou lese thy wytte also whan thou lost thy goodes? *Omnia habeo, neque quicquam habeo.* I have all thynges, and yet I have nothyng" (48r). Along with such pointed observations on the uneven distribution of brains and wealth, Udall preserves Terence's unsparing observations on character types: "*Est genus hominum, qui esse primos se omnium rerum*

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<sup>439</sup> *Terence I*, II.ii.247-253. Sargeaunt translates: "**Mine is a new way of bird-catching, yes and I'm the original inventor of it. There is a class of men who set up for being the head in everything and aren't. It's them I track: I don't aim at making them laugh at me; no, no, I smile on them and stand agape at their intellects. Whatever they say I praise; if again they say the opposite, I praise that too.** If one says no, I say no; if one says yes, I say yes. In fact I have given orders to myself to agree with them in everything. **That's the trade that pays far the best nowadays.**"

*volunt*. There is one sorte of men, whiche wolde have preeminence above all others, or, whiche desire to be hygheste of all, and to be mooste hadde in honoure” (48v). Erasmus justified the study of comedy specifically because such lessons in human typology provided models, negative and positive, of decorum.<sup>440</sup>

Udall saw such archetypal comic potential in this speech by the parasite Gnatho. He later adapted this same monologue freely to introduce his own parasite, Matthew Merrygreek, in the comedy *Roister Doister*. Both speeches convey the mercurial calculations of the flatterer, who has nothing, but wants for nothing, because he wields the power of pleasing words over less intelligent men of property. On the face of it, such verse, and indeed the work of Terence in general, with his parade of courtesans and young wastrels, makes a peculiar choice for an ethical model for young boys. Udall’s nibbling and commentary make of it, however, an engaging vehicle for points of grammar and usage and decorum, propelled by a narrative and dramatic momentum clearly more dynamic than even the most sensational *vulgaria* of Horman.

Udall’s interlinear translation and commentary work with Terence’s dramatic text to convey fine points not only of grammar, but also of social and cultural distinctions:

*Conveni hodie quondam mei loci atque ordinis*. I spake with one today of my degree & ordre or state, or honour. Donatus expoundith it thus, *Mei loci .i. ingenuum*, free borne, *ordinis.i. pauperem* Poore. *Illud natalium hoc fortunae est*.

The one that is to wytte [in this speech], *loci*, hath respect and relation to the degree of byrthe, *ordinis*, dothe referre the haviour in goodes and the state of Fortune. (47v)

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<sup>440</sup> See Erasmus, *De Ratione Studii* 687.

Udall thus clarifies distinctions of rank in Latin and in English, and also dwells on the distinction between wit and property as contrasting routes to social standing. In this same vein, he offers alternative translations for Gnatho's taunt of a fellow ne'er-do-well who has squandered his patrimony:

*Simul consilium cum re amisisti?* Haste thou loste thy goodes or substaunce and thy witte to? or, dyddest thou lese thy wytte also whan thou lost thy goodes? (48r)

Udall likewise lingers over his gloss on *aucupium*, using philology to analyze the parasite's boasting of his talent for catching gulls:

*Hoc novum est aucupium.* This is a new crafte to gette a lyvinge, or to gette money, a metaphore taken of foulynge, or takynge of foule. For *Auceps* properly is a fouler, and *Aucupium* is foulynge, and by a metaphore it is used for all maner of wayes to gette any thing by wyles, traines, or craft, and it is derived of the verbe *aucupor*, [*aucup*]aris, to go foulynge and to take byrdes, and by translation *aucupari laudem*, is to go about to gette preise and commendacion, *aucupari quaestum*, to go about to gette money. (48v)

Such are the sweet flowers Udall gathers for his dear flock, the impudent witticisms of a parasite, arranged with scholarly glosses among similar speeches by the clever slaves, deceiving sons, and harried fathers who people Terence's plays. Even so, this is Terence scrubbed for the schoolroom. Udall's selections are remarkably chaste, if by that we mean free from explicit erotic content, though Udall's pupils may have had simultaneous access to unexpurgated texts of Terence's plays. Even with the sex omitted, the *Floures* convey much of Terence's worldly sophistication along with his graceful Latin, propelled by the form of dramatic dialogue.

Udall's use of Terence as a model of colloquial Latin must have had effects beyond classicizing the Latin in student composition. Udall's English glosses and inventions on Terence's language set up a model of improvisatory translation of the classics for contemporary purposes. Perhaps most important, Udall gives full play to Terence's preoccupation with *consilium* and *aucupium*. Thus boys learned that wit and wiles can confer the satisfactions of intellectual mastery, even in the absence of social or material dominion.

In June of 1534, a year after Anne Boleyn's coronation and only three months after the publication of the *Floures*, Udall was appointed headmaster at Eton. Perhaps the job was his reward for crown service, or perhaps Udall was a ready-made Protestant scholar when one was needed to fill a prominent post in the hey-day of Boleyn's power and Thomas Cromwell's reforms. During his years at Eton Udall probably supervised the performance of plays at the school, and they may have been his vehicle into court. Cromwell's account books for 1537 and 1538 show a payment "To Woodall the scolemaster of Eton—The seconde of ffebruary given to hym by my Lordes commaundement for pleing byfore hym vii."<sup>441</sup> Possibly Udall was paid for appearing before Cromwell with his boys performing a piece of his own composition.<sup>442</sup> Whether or not Udall exploited his boys as court performers, he used and misused Eton boys in ways that excited comment even in this relatively authoritarian age. Though Erasmus and Elyot

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<sup>441</sup> *Exchequer Accounts*, quoted in Edgerton 34.

<sup>442</sup> The *Eton Register*, xxxii, notes a hiatus from 1537-1538, in the middle of Udall's term of office, at a time corresponding to Cromwell's account-book entry. This suggests to Edgerton that Udall may have taken leave from Eton to serve at court as an interluder. See Edgerton 34.



had only lately counseled kindly schoolmastering,<sup>443</sup> Udall left a name as a brutal flogger, at least in the recollection of one Etonian. Nearly forty years later, a former student, Thomas Tusser contributed the following recollection of his own time at Udall's Eton, in a book that went into twenty editions:

From Paul's I went, to Eton sent,  
To learn straightways the Latin phrase;  
Where fifty-three stripes given to me at once I had  
For fault but small, or none at all.  
See, Udall, see, the mercy of thee, to me, poor lad.<sup>444</sup>

Tusser's complaint may have been a conventional schoolboy trope, though the phrase "fifty-three stripes" has a convincing specificity.

Violence may have been only a part of a larger pattern of deviance by the Eton schoolmaster. From the legal record we know that Udall incurred heavy debts in these years.<sup>445</sup> From Udall's own description we know he fell into vices of "lewdness and folly."<sup>446</sup> On March 14, 1541, Udall, then in his seventh year as headmaster of Eton, stood before the Privy Council to answer "certain interrogatoryes" about the robbery of

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<sup>443</sup> See William Harrison Woodward, *Desiderius Erasmus Concerning the Aim and Method of Education* (New York: Teachers College, 1964) 205ff.; Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named The Governour*, ed. John M. Major (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1969) 83; and Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster (1570)*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1967) 37.

<sup>444</sup> Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundreth Points of Good Husbandry*, cited in Edgerton 32.

<sup>445</sup> Edgerton (36) cites secondary digests of civil cases. This information needs further checking against the court documents.

<sup>446</sup> Nicholas Udall, manuscript letter to an unnamed patron, Cotton Ms. Titus B VIII: 386r -88v. For a transcription see Edgerton 42ff. I have checked the transcription against a photocopy of the manuscript.

college silver by two Eton scholars, Thomas Cheney and John Horde. Under questioning “toching the sayd fact & other felonious trespasses whereof he was suspected,” the schoolmaster “did confess that he did comitt buggery w[ith] the sayd Cheney sundry tymes heretofore, & of late the vjth day of this p[resent] monethe in this p[resent] yere at London; whereupon he was committed to the M[ar]shalsey.”<sup>447</sup> Sodomy was punishable by death under the law,<sup>448</sup> but Udall escaped with his life, though deprived of his post at Eton and briefly imprisoned. Perhaps the lenity of his punishment can be set down to the nature of the sodomy law, which may have been aimed at persecuting Catholic monastics, not Protestant crown servants like Udall.<sup>449</sup> Perhaps the nature of the crime itself mitigated the penalty, as there was no charge of rape or violence. Buggery, some have argued, was widely tolerated as part of school culture, part of a strangely coded homosocial mystery and even a marker of status.<sup>450</sup> Moreover, the boy Cheney was

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<sup>447</sup> Sir Harris Nicolas (editor). *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England. Vol. VII. 32 Henry VIII. MDXL. to 33 Henry VIII. MCXLII* (London: The Commissioners on the Public Records of the Kingdom, 1837) 152-53.

<sup>448</sup> See Smith 43ff. on the Henrician buggery laws, which apparently lumped the practice with heresy and sorcery, and entered civil rather than canon law as part of Henry's assault on the clergy. Smith shows also that the sodomy laws were seldom enforced in the Elizabethan years, though it is relevant to Udall's case that the few prosecutions involved the use of force on young children (48-49).

<sup>449</sup> See Smith 44: “Sodomy had been considered a specifically clerical vice since it first began to be mentioned in the ecclesiastical law in the thirteenth century. Making sodomy, along with sorcery and heresy, a felony under the civil law would give Henry's agents the legal power they needed to make answerless accusations during the impending visitation of the monasteries.”

<sup>450</sup> See, for example, Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996) 49: “the love of men for men in this culture appears less threatening than the love of men for women: it had fewer consequences, it was easier to de-sexualize, it figured and reinforced the patronage system. But beneath these practical considerations was a deep layer of anxiety.” See also Bruce Smith, whose observations on homosexuality and the law are particularly

probably connected by marriage to Thomas Wriothesley, a member of the Privy Council who heard the case.<sup>451</sup> Perhaps the offense was hushed to save a great family from a minor embarrassment. In any of these scenarios, the schoolmaster's role seems less than magisterial, even relative to his larcenous young victim.

Elizabeth Pittenger has observed the slippery “revealing and revealing” Udall deploys in writing about homoerotic desire in a penitent letter of petition written to an unnamed master during or just after Udall's imprisonment, and likewise in his most famous work, the comedy *Roister Doister*. The remainder of this chapter follows Pittenger's suggestion that scholarship should move beyond “indicting Udall,” whether for sex crimes or for the misogynous homosocial bonding Pittenger reveals in these texts.<sup>452</sup> I argue that Udall's sexual transgression represents a more important social transgression, arising from the ambiguity of the schoolmaster's place in Tudor society. I take Udall's confessed buggery as an emblem of the insistent penetration of the gentry by humanist education, especially by the rhetoric that was central to the New Learning. In this context, I examine the penitent letter and then the comedy as complementary acts of schoolmasterly aggression, laying claim to an intellectual authority that the masters of social and material authority do not have.

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important for my reading of Udall's trial : "The one salient fact about homosexuality in early modern England, as in early modern Europe generally, is the disparity that separates the extreme punishments prescribed by law and the apparent tolerance, even positive valuation, of homoerotic desire in the visual arts, in literature, and, I shall argue, in the political power structure" (13). Smith devotes his third chapter to homosexuality in educational settings, figured as pastoral retreats, sometimes involving “some form of homosexual initiation into manhood” (115).

<sup>451</sup> Edgerton 38-39.

<sup>452</sup> Pittenger 184-85.

The schoolmaster's ambiguous social position (which I discussed in Chapter One) might well have given rise to such aggression. Charged with teaching the sons of the ambitious the language needed to play their intended roles, the rhetoric master was bound to serve the social hierarchy without having a secure role of his own in it. He was an insider-outsider, stuck in a liminal space. His knowledge and eloquence were commodities in the social mobility market, but their subversive potential rendered him suspect.<sup>453</sup> Making a virtue of necessity, Udall uses this outsider status to claim a high vantage point, like the place of Man himself in Pico della Mirandola's creation myth.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Wayne Rebhorn develops an example from Richard Rainolde's *Foundacion of Rhetorike* to demonstrate rhetoric's power for both social mobility and subversion. Rainolde holds up Cicero and Demosthenes as examples of orators who, though "borne of meane and poore parentes," rose by rhetoric to great honor, and to oppose tyranny. Rebhorn's explanation of Rainolde's double position might well be applied to Udall: "Like all the other writers on rhetoric in the period, he has a deep investment in the supposed legitimacy of such advancement...as an appropriate reward for oratorical ability, wisdom, and political skill. But in a world where rulers still derived their legitimacy from their *blood*, from the supposedly fixed positions they inherited from their ancestors, rather than from their handling of the word, it is easy to see why such a vision of advancement might be construed as subversion." See Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men's Minds* 114.

<sup>454</sup> I refer to this passage: *Nec certam sedem, nec propriam faciem, nec munus ullum peculiare tibi dedimus, o Adam, ut quam sedem, quam faciem, quae munera tute optaveris, ea, pro voto, pro tua sententia, habeas et possideas. Definita caeteris natura intra praescriptas a nobis leges cohercetur. Tu, nullis angustiis cohercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te posui, tibi illam prefinies. Medium te mundi posui, ut circumspiceres inde comodius quicquid est in mundo.* [No fixed place, no special shape, nor any gift peculiar to you alone have we given you, O Adam, so that you may have and hold whatever place, or shape, or defense you may hope for, according to your own wish and judgment. For other beings nature has been limited and prescribed, compelled by our laws. You, compelled by no restraints, according to your own judgment, into whose hands I have placed it, shall define that [nature] for yourself. I have placed you in the middle of the world, that you may from there look around the more easily at whatever there is in the world]. See *Pici Mirandulensis Oratio de Hominis Dignitate*, 5.18-21, *Department of Modern and Classical Languages Website*, George Mason University, 9 October 2004 <<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/fld/CLASSICS/mirandola.oratio.html>>.

From this position the schoolmaster observes the absurdities and inequities of the status quo, and plays some rhetorical tricks on the men he calls master.

Although the Tudor grammar school propagated a humanist rhetoric increasingly regarded as a cultural commodity, it was also seen as a forcible intrusion on older traditions of education, and even as meretricious flummery. The ambition and suspicion attached to Latin grammar inform a little scene in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, written forty years after Udall died, but helpful in understanding the enduring ambiguity of the schoolmaster's social position. Mistress Ford complains to the parson schoolmaster, "Sir Hugh, my husband says my son profits nothing in the world at his book," and she challenges Sir Hugh to "ask him some questions in his accidence." After hearing a little of young William's Latin, the mother's suspicions outrun her husband's: "You do ill to teach the child such words...to hick and to hack, which they'll do fast enough of themselves, and to call 'horum.' Fie upon you" (*MWW* 4.1. 13-15, 59-61).

William's recitation reminds us that the Tudor schoolmaster was seen as forcing unwanted attentions or improper notions on his pupils in several ways. In our best woodcut of a Tudor schoolroom, the schoolboy's bare bottom and the birches of the master loom larger than the books.<sup>455</sup> The master used his rod unsparingly to inculcate high-minded eloquence, but for inspiration he offered pagan texts of suspect morality. Though young William was still learning his accidence, boys like him learned their grammar in order to translate and imitate classical literature, including selected passages

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<sup>455</sup> See Rosemary O'Day, "An Educated Society," *The Oxford Illustrated History of Tudor and Stuart Britain*, ed. John Morrill (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 120.

from the masters of erotic poetry along with their sober Tully.<sup>456</sup> The notebooks of a Winchester schoolboy, William Badger, show that in the early 1560s he translated Terence, Plautus, Martial, Ovid, Tibullus, and Juvenal, in addition to the sterner stuff of Cicero and Vergil.<sup>457</sup> Though the passages chosen for classroom use were carefully scrubbed, the authors themselves were widely understood to be “wanton and dishonest,” even “wicked and ungodly”; thus Thomas Becon, in 1560, condemned Martial, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, Lucian, Ovid, among others. “From the reading of these and such-like filthy writers, [it] is convenient that the youth do abstain.”<sup>458</sup> The persistence of these poets in the curriculum points to a certain bold sophistication on the part of the schoolmasters, for whom the advantages in using such examples of fine Latin style clearly outweighed the moral risks. So classical authors provided, paradoxically, the going models of both literary purity and of heathen depravity, meet food for both ambition and suspicion. No wonder, then, if the ambiguity of the humanist schoolmaster’s social position was sometimes identified with an ambiguous sexual

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<sup>456</sup> See the recommended reading in *De Ratione Studii* 669. Sir Thomas Elyot does not mention Terence or other playwrights in *The Boke of the Governour* (1531), and Roger Ascham expressed deep reservations about their morals and meters in *The Scholemaster* (1571), though commending the purity of their Latin (see Ascham, ed. Ryan 142-44). Nevertheless, the Winchester College timetables of 1530 include Terence in the fourth form, and the Eton timetables of the same year include Terence in the third and fourth forms (see Leach 448-51).

<sup>457</sup> For a thorough digest and commentary on Badger’s notebooks, see T. W. Baldwin, “The Winchester System Under Queen Elizabeth,” in *William Shakspeare’s Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, vol. 1 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944) 321-37.

<sup>458</sup> Thomas Becon, “Catechism,” quoted in Baldwin, *Small Latine*, vol.1, 109.

profile.<sup>459</sup> This was certainly the case with Nicholas Udall, a preeminent grammarian, a notorious beater, and a confessed bugger.

Such ambition and suspicion form part of the background to Udall's criminal transgression. While young William Ford was imagined as the son of a Windsor burgher, Udall's student and victim Thomas Cheney was the second son of a knight. A survey of the *Eton College Register* shows that his social standing was unusual among Eton scholars in Udall's eight years as headmaster. The great majority of schoolboys were not the sons of gentlemen.<sup>460</sup> The records identify about 115 boys at the college in Udall's years, 1534-1542. Of these, only 40 are identified by their parentage: twelve "son of," nine "perhaps son of," eight "probably son of," and two "doubtless son of," as well as one "said to be nephew of." Of this minority, very few appear as gentlemen "of name." Indeed a father's name in the register is no guarantee of gentle rank. Though a handful of the parents named are identified with estates (e.g., Richard Grosvenor of Eaton Hall, or

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<sup>459</sup> On the suspicion of "institutionalized homosexuality" in Tudor schools and colleges see Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995) 51-54. See also Rebhorn's exploration of the way in which Ariosto "juxtaposes the sexually ambiguous humanist rhetorician and schoolmaster to the ideal orator and poet who is the mythical civilizer of humanity" (*Emperor*, 193). Rebhorn also discusses the mythological figure of the Hermaphrodite as an emblematic figure that links the social and moral "double nature" of rhetoric to sexual ambiguity: "In fact, the Hermaphrodite was a fantasy figure who extended the double nature in both positive and negative directions. On the one hand, it represented the fond dream rhetoricians had that some day even the least of them might rise up to become ideal, complete human beings, worthy to rule as emperors of men's minds. On the other, it constituted their nightmare, the fearful vision in which they stood condemned for their ambitions, stigmatized and punishable as guilty sodomites, forever condemned to an inferior position as irredeemable Outsider or Other" (195).

<sup>460</sup> The social mix at Udall's Eton bears out Lawson's generalization about grammar schools of the period: "Any school might contain at the top of its social scale the sons of one or two baronets, knights or gentlemen of the county, and at the bottom the sons of small shopkeepers and craftsmen, the neediest of them—orphans perhaps—taught free as poor scholars" (116).

Richard Hurleton of Hurlton), others are named as the sons of citizens including a “merchant taylor” of London and a brewer of Eton. Nicholas Tubman, moreover, is “probably the s. of Nicholas T. the College porter and barber 1513-33 and his wife the College laundress” (337). Further research may reveal more sons of the gentry among the unidentified names, though one would expect that the incentives and probabilities for turning them up earlier were higher than for the sons of plebeians. Notwithstanding all the archival problems of a reconstruction like the *Eton College Register*, it appears that Eton in the middle of the sixteenth century was still, as it was in Henry Medwall’s day a half-century before, a school for poor scholars and boys of the middling sort, not yet dominated by so-called commensals, the fee-paying sons of the gentry.

Udall’s Oxford M.A. and his Eton post may have entitled him to call himself a gentleman, but only in fantasy could he consider himself equal in rank to his student Cheney. Udall’s crime was therefore a transgression not only of the laws of sexual morality, but of the boundaries of rank. While the phrase “did comitt buggery with the sayd Cheney” does not tell us precisely who topped whom, we can confidently say that any sexual acts Udall performed with Thomas Cheney were socially inter-penetrating. The schoolmaster made a catamite of Sir Robert Cheney’s second son, while the boy won the upper hand over his master at the moment Udall subjected himself to being indicted for a capital crime. The mutual subjection of the boy and his schoolmaster is a powerful reminder of the discipline that school in Tudor England had only recently come to represent to men like Thomas Wriothesley or boys like Thomas Cheney. Their grandfathers would probably have scorned Nicholas Udall and his classical learning as dirty clerkly grubbing.



Yet for Udall's students, even the sons of the gentry, the path to worldly success led through the grammar school. Some thirty years after Colet refounded St. Paul's this was still a relatively new phenomenon, and it had raw edges for everyone concerned. If in seeing Udall go to jail his accusers felt some satisfaction, their outrage may have had less to do with child abuse than with trespassing and poaching.

### **A Penitent Letter: Mastering the Master**

Soon after his imprisonment, Udall wrote a letter to an unknown patron, addressed only as "Right Worshipfull and My Singular Good Master."<sup>461</sup> We have a copy in Udall's own hand, though we do not know the identity of this master, nor indeed whether the letter was ever delivered. Udall's stated object in the letter is to get money and a job worthy of his talents, a "helping hand to the bestowing of me to such condition where I may by sober living be recovered to some state of an honest man." His patron has evidently failed in an attempted "restitution to the room of schoolmaster in Eton," which, Udall abjectly claims, "I was never desirous to obtain but only for an honest purpose to discharge my debts." So Udall distances himself from any longing, personal or professional, to resume teaching. To be thus "desirous" might under the circumstances seem indelicate, and though he later offers to change from "negligence of teaching to assiduity," his profession seems to be merely work for pay and not a vocation. Rather, Udall associates the restoration of his honesty (a word which also denotes sexual continence, though more often in women than in men) with the discharge of his debts.

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<sup>461</sup> In quoting from the letter I use the modernized spelling from Edgerton's transcription (42ff.).

Udall's rhetorical strategy in the letter is first to abase himself as a penitent schoolmaster, then from that posture to ambush his master with a virtuoso display of learning, and so to gain the upper ground through a peculiarly humanist ethical appeal: You may look up to me, he seems to say, as I am a master of classical letters. Udall pours forth a relentless stream of Latin and Greek phrases and quotations, beginning in the second paragraph. One must wonder if his "Singular Good Master" could understand all of them. The assumption that his master can read and appreciate Latin creates a double bind: if the master is a capable classicist, he will be reminded of his obligations as a member of the confraternity of the learned, and so be moved to help Udall; if the master is not able to read the Latin and Greek passages, he may be flattered and shamed at once, and in his eagerness to seem to understand be moved to help Udall. This is, of course, precisely the dynamic of learned allusion in the popular theater, where the uncomprehending may cynically be manipulated to clap the louder to cover their own ignorance.

Udall moves from pleading and fawning in the first paragraph, where he sets out his request, to preaching, teaching, and even consoling, thus patronizing his patron: "Let not despair so deeply enter into your most gentle heart to think me past amendment..." The reference to his "gentle heart" neatly reminds the patron of the demands of both Christian charity and the gentleman's sense of *noblesse oblige*. Udall then deploys a series of three Latin quotations that move the burden of redemption from the servant-sinner onto the forgiving master, and the guilt from the individual sinner to the whole of fallen humanity:

...call to mind that Plinius says: *tum demum praecipuam esse clementiae laudem, cum irae causa iustissima est* [the greatest praise is due to mercy when the reason for anger is most just]. He needs no mercy nor forgiveness who has not offended. *Et quis tandem mortalium sapit horis omnibus? Imo (quod ait poeta)*

*Si quoties peccant homines su fulmina mittat*

*Juppiter, ex quo tempore inermis erit.*

[And finally who among the mortals is always wise? In the end (as the poet says)

If for every human sin Jupiter sends forth his

Thunderbolts, he'll soon be without any weapons.]

What servant has not continual need of the clemency of his master? For my part, as I cannot excuse myself but that I have deserved your displeasure and indignation, so I trust my offenses *humana quidem esse et emendari* [as they are human, they can be corrected].

The analogy to Jupiter exalts the master as a god of might, with huge power to punish wrong, but it also casts him as an anthropomorphic deity of limited powers, not to mention one with an embarrassing record of concupiscence of his own. This is a rhetorical gambit worthy of a humanist schoolmaster, sealed by the equation of the human and the forgivable in the other two Latin passages.

In seeking absolution, Udall replaces his sexual misconduct (to which he refers only obliquely as the “excesses and abuses that have been reported to reign in me,” and “vices of which I have been noted or to your mastership accused”) with vaguely acknowledged profligacy and debt. He implicitly makes his master’s money and not his

own continence the ultimate key to his redemption. He maneuvers onto the ethical high ground by expressing faith in his master's wish to be a redeemer rather than an avenger:

the more hatred of vices that is rooted in your most honest and heroic heart, the more propense the same is to show mercy and forgiveness to all such as with whole heart and purpose of amendment without dissimulation return to the wholesome path of honesty from which youth or frailty they have chanced for a time to swerve.

Though he was thirty-seven years old, Udall recasts his transgression as youthful prodigality, "lewdness and folly," but natural to the state of man and even valuable as an occasion for grace.

The abjection soon slides into a little exercise on the forms of the accusative in four out of the five declensions: "For the love of Christ, consider in what extremity and distress I am constitute. Consider that, forgoing your favour, I shall therewith lose *amicos, fortunas, spesque omnes, existimationem denique ac vitam* [friends, fortunes, all hopes, reputation, and finally life], nor live six days out of prison; all of which things...only your goodness may save and redress." The onus shifts even more clearly to the master as Udall continues, bemoaning his master's recent reproof: "no torments, no death, no other kind of misfortune could have pierced my heart or made in it so deep a wound as has this your displeasure, which wound, if it might please your goodness with the salve of your merciful compassion to bring for this one time *ad cicatricem* [to the wound] you should not need in all your life again to fear *ne quando mea culpa vitioque recrudesceret* [lest my fault and my crime break forth again]."

The sentiments expressed in Latin cloak Udall's confessions, recasting his crimes either as opportunities for mercy or as eruptions of the universal condition of sinful man. In developing the *felix culpa* theme—that sin occasions grace, that "to recover a man from present extinction is finally a thing of the greatest and loftiest mind"—Udall casts himself in the role of the prodigal son, his master in the role of “an indulgent and tender parent *qui delinquentibus liberis non ante extrema supplicia admovet, quam remedia consumpserit* [who would not apply extreme punishments to his delinquent children before he had used up other remedies].” The typologizing stratagem gives them both a safe distance from the facts of sodomy and theft, and frames Udall's plea for money as a cry for spiritual redemption. Udall deftly assumes the power of assigning the roles in their relation. This sleight-of-hand at the heart of the letter allows Udall to slip neatly into the role of Prometheus:

Be good, master, to me this once. If ever I shall be found again to offend in any such kind of transgressions as at this time has provoked and accended your indignation against me, I shall not only be my own judge to be accounted forever most unworthy the favour and goodwill, either of your mastership or of any other honest friend, but also to be most extremely punished to the example of all others. οὐ γὰρ ἀγνοήσεις αὐθις ἔνθα δὲ χάχασός ἐστιν, οὐδὲ ἀπορήσεις δεσμῶν ἢν τι τεχνάσων ἀλίσχωμαι, *ut ait Lucianicus ille Prometheus*. [For you will not forget again where the Caucasus is, nor will you want for chains if I am caught scheming anything, as that Prometheus of Lucian says.] (42)

The image of the recidivist going willingly to his punishment may demonstrate Foucault's point that a schoolmaster inculcates in pupils a self-imposed discipline, more

insidious than violent, and therefore deeper.<sup>462</sup> Yet there are cracks in this repentance.

Note that Udall says, “If ever I shall be *found* again to offend”: The whole letter expresses regret at being caught, but never confesses an particular crime outright.

Throughout the letter, Udall invokes public opinion of his own actions—and by implication the public view of his master's responses—thus creating an audience for the drama of redemption he figures in this letter.

Moreover, the Prometheus of Lucian that Udall adduces turns out to be a trickster, singularly unrepentant for having created mankind and given him the stolen fire, bargaining with Zeus for his freedom. Lucian's line appears in the following exchange:

*Zeus:* You're trying to trick me, Prometheus.

*Prometheus:* What good will that do me? You'll still know where  
Caucasus is, and still have plenty of chains left, if I'm caught up to any  
tricks.

In the upshot of Lucian's comic dialogue, Zeus frees Prometheus from his chains in exchange for a prophetic tip-off about a dangerous erotic liaison.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Though Foucault's analysis of the systematic control of power and knowledge concentrates on eighteenth century disciplinary institutions, he acknowledges that the subtle micro-processes of control “were at work in secondary education at a very early date, later in primary schools.” See his “Docile Bodies” in *Discipline and Punish*, quoted in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 182. The Tudor schoolroom, with its high master's chair commanding a view of every student ranged across tiered “forms,” is an obvious forerunner of the panopticon.

<sup>463</sup> Lucian, *Dialogues of the Gods* 5 (1), in *Lucian*, vol. 7, trans. M. D. Macleod (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1961) 258-59. Lucian dealt with an unrepentant Prometheus in a second comic dialogue, “Prometheus,” in *Lucian*, vol. 2, trans. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 242ff., and in another short piece, “To One Who Said, ‘You're a Prometheus in Words,’” in *Lucian*, vol. 6, trans. K. Kilburn (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 418ff.

The moral that this scholarly letter implicitly teaches is that crime doesn't always pay at first, but some well-crafted words, spiked with privileged knowledge, can work wonders in appealing to the powers that be. Udall ends the letter with a business-like reassurance that, with help, his debts can be retired in two or three years. He signs the letter with a formula that has an ironic ring: "Your most bounden orator and servant, Nicholas Udall." Which kind of *orator* was this Nicholas Udall: the humble suppliant, the hired advocate, or the public man of eloquence? Though he plays the orator who speaks in his client's stead, taking control of his master thus by putting words in his mouth, Udall uses his Protean rhetoric to blur distinctions between the user and the used. And who was "bounden" to whom? Udall, like Merrygreek in *Roister Doister*, harps on the formulaic address "your mastership," a reminder of the bond—or bondage—of mutual service, the exquisite irony of patronage in every age. Udall depended, like the parasite in Roman comedy, on a man who may in some ways have been his intellectual inferior, and such a man often depended on servants, even embarrassing ones, to help him speak his mind. Invoking Prometheus, even Lucian's comic version, Udall turns to the darker side of the clever slave, but also makes a claim for the rhetorician as a tormented bringer of the celestial fire.<sup>464</sup>

We do not know how Udall's master responded to his plea, and whether he thought it worth his money to purchase the prayers of this dubious beadsman. The

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<sup>464</sup> See Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (1939; New York: Harper, 1962) 50-1, for a discussion of the Prometheus myth as a development in the early history of man beyond technological expertise (represented by the Vulcan myth) to "a craving for mental autonomy which, encroaching on the rights of the gods, spells deification rather than humanization. It presupposes sacrifice and entails punishment" (50).

remainder of Udall's life was, we know, clouded with debt, crowded with fugitive service to one master or another, though never far from the heights of power.

Udall's swift rehabilitation from convicted bugger to translator, court dramatist, and headmaster suggests that the schoolmaster-dramatist enjoyed a kind of sacerdotal immunity founded in his mastery of rhetorical performance, whether manifested in his literary services or in his a considerable personal charm. Much of the remaining fifteen years of Udall's life were spent on works of scholarship, sometimes with royal patronage, including translations of Erasmus, Peter Martyr, and Vesalius. He was often troubled with debt and litigation, though his appointments to a number of church benefices, some rather substantial, suggest a steady, if inglorious, recovery.

In 1549 Udall was made tutor to Edward Courtenay, an important royal prisoner in the Tower, a grandson of Edward IV and sometime Yorkist claimant to the throne. The perfect ambiguity of Udall's position inheres in this curious act: was it a generosity to young Courtenay to be given so accomplished a tutor, or was it a piercing insult, leaving him apt to be forever tarred as a sodomite's boy? A similar question may be put about Udall's final appointments as maker of interludes at Mary's court and as headmaster at St. Peter's College, Westminster: were these signal honors, or consolations that amounted to ignominious time-serving? Udall was stripped of his church offices by the Catholic restoration in 1553, the same year Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* annointed him in print as a master of ambiguity for the mis-pointed letter in *Roister Doister* (see below). Mary could not tolerate so Protestant a priest, though she could trust him to provide court



amusements. It may have been for her amusement that he produced the comedy for which we know him best.

### ***Roister Doister: The Man's Part***

The Promethean transgressions of Udall's penitent letter invite comparison to the comic reversals he stages in *Roister Doister*. Both letter and play are distinctly didactic. They are crusted with classical learning and rhetorical invention, and replete with explicit acts of instruction, discipline, and correction. On the face of it, Prometheus bound to his rock has little in common with the clever slave in Roman comedy, but Udall draws on both figures to dramatize the position of the man who lives by his wits and words, played out in ambiguities of speech, social rank, and sexuality. In the letter, Udall slyly casts himself as a Promethean figure, man-maker and light-bringer, abject but not penitent, cleverer by far than his Olympian master. In the play, the mischievous Merrygreek, like the scheming slave or parasite in Roman comedy, exults in the role of an eloquent prodigal, by turns abject and magisterial, locked in a dialogic tension with a master who has only the power of wealth and a spurious claim on gentility. The strategy of the *servus callidus* works both in the letter and in the play to displace the worldly master's wealth with the rhetoric master's wit.

A marked difference separates the letter from the play, however. The letter's penitent petitioner deploys all the refinements of language as evidence of the value of an eloquent retainer to a worthy master. Here wit and learning ornament and justify the sacred bond of service, though not without irony. The comedy, by contrast, unmasks both rhetoric and service as fundamentally amoral systems, highly unstable conventions for

manipulating power relations. The emancipatory powers of wit and learning are plainly shown to be bound by, and often opposed to, the stubborn limits of rank and wealth, as the master of rhetoric is bound by his service.

Udall organizes his unsettling observations around a wooing plot. The title character, Rafe Roister Doister, a self-described gentleman and soldier, seeks the hand of a rich widow, Christian Custance. She is promised to the merchant Gavin Goodluck. The braggart soldier imagines that he offers the widow a social promotion, while she sees him for the fool he is. Their respective servants provide necessary mishaps for the plot, causing the merchant to suspect the widow of infidelity. The servants also provide a running commentary on the indignities of servitude. The central relationship in the play is that between the Roister Doister and the clever parasite Matthew Merrygreek, a social inferior of superior intelligence. For Udall's audience, a "greek" was a wily fellow or a cheat, and a "gay greek" was a roisterer, so Merrygreek's name labels him as both potential predator and a fit companion for Roister Doister.<sup>465</sup> Merrygreek's job is to teach the dullard soldier how to speak and act in order to win the widow and her fortune.

As a master of rhetoric, the trickster Merrygreek operates with remarkable power over speech, rank, and even sexual roles in the play, now regulating them, now scrambling them perversely for his own mirthful "pastance." Merrygreek flatters his master shamelessly, corrects his master's rhetoric and deportment, preaches a mock funeral over him, raises him from the dead, beats him, flirts with him, helps the widow defeat him in mock battle. In the end Merrygreek effects a reconciliation in which the widow is safely married to the merchant and Roister Doister is left unattached except to

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<sup>465</sup> See "Greek," *OED*.

Merrygreek himself. In effect, the parasite stages a series of little dramas in which he recasts himself and those around him in roles that he switches relentlessly. He exhibits the power of rhetoric to sow confusion, though it be a confusion that has the power to illuminate absurdities in the prevailing social order.

As we have seen, Udall's education and social experience taught him the language of mastery, and also brought him up against a master's intransigent power. Where in similar circumstances Caliban learns how to curse, Udall's Merrygreek teaches us how to caper, commenting ironically all the while. If in his mirth he lays bare the limitations of the humanist notion of undetermined man, he also posits a high authority for learned wit. The festive reversals of the play—servants over masters, women over men, boy actors in adult roles, amoral behavior over conventional ethics—present the audience with two liberating claims: first, intelligence, and especially self-awareness, trumps other forms of power; second, play—dramatic, festive, satiric play—has the power to free the oppressed within, if not from, their bonds. Though these emancipations may be largely interior, limited to the ontological and aesthetic domains, they define themselves as rising above the merely social and material. A humanist education may not, then, be depended upon to get a man a “great room in the city,” but it can get him a superior understanding, and from that an olympian laughter ringing around and above the grubby toilings of humankind.

And that, in my reading of this play, is the point: in the social universe of Udall's comedy, the essential promises of civic humanism break down, so that there are no stable connections between learned eloquence, gentle status, and ennobling service to the commonwealth. In Udall's didactic play there is no model gentleman, no exemplar of

virtuous rhetoric. Service in Roister Doister's London is either self-seeking, inept, or merely dim. Such gentility as there is hangs in tatters on the silly chivalric pretensions of Roister Doister or the big-talking schemes of Merrygreek. Between these gentlemen *manqués* and the plodding merchant virtues of Gavin Goodluck, there is little to choose in the way of patterns for ambitious self-fashioning. Goodluck carries the day in the plot, emerging as the nominal master of this burgher universe, but his triumph is Fortinbrassian: although the bluff, decent speeches of the merchant re-establish an acceptable social order to end the play, they pale on the stage and in memory next to the glorious confusions of Merrygreek, or the grandiose self-delusions of Roister Doister. Udall announces in the prologue that he will use the conventional moral and social reversals of festive comedy to purge the pretenses of "the vayneglorious... / Whose humour the roysting sort continually doth feed" (23-24).<sup>466</sup> But he includes in the company of those fed by Roister Doister's humor not merely the decadent gentry and their parasites, but also the smug citizens, newly ascendant.

The sly effect of the comedy is thus to set up a new authority over this shifting social scene: the transparent power of the comic wit to observe and infiltrate ordinary life, to represent and to criticize it, and to give pleasure or to stir up trouble in doing so. Though the comic chaos is safely contained in the end by the solid virtues of the widow and the sober merchant, Merrygreek dominates the action throughout. He asserts mastery over his own master, and he demonstrates his powers to destabilize the proprieties of stolid burgher life. Like the rebellious Prometheus, this rhetorician is seen as uniquely

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<sup>466</sup> Nicholas Udall, *Roister Doister*, in *Four Tudor Comedies*, ed. William Tydeman (London: Penguin, 1984).

free, even when bound, a maker of men and master of the power of forethought, even when restrained by other, less subtle powers. Though he is a descendant of the Vice of moralities and the clever slaves and parasites of Roman comedy, Merrygreek is a new kind of comic hero in English drama, the first of a breed of fabulous, all-too-human liars whose fictions are more impressive and memorable than mere facts.<sup>467</sup>

Although it destabilizes fundamental assumptions of humanist teaching, *Roister Doister* is very probably a school play. The cast includes six roles—four women and two boys—that probably required boy actors. These roles have long been taken as a sign, as Wilson says, "that the play was written for children, but it is an assumption, though a most likely one."<sup>468</sup> Even so, *Roister Doister* would seem to be strange matter for school

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<sup>467</sup> For example, Wilson states that "Gnatho [of Terence's *Eunuchus*] contributed to the character of Matthew Merrygreek, but the very active delight with which this character entangles Roister Doister in absurd situations reminds us as much of the mischievous Vice of the morality plays as of the classical parasite. (Nowhere, by the way, is Merrygreek called a 'parasite.' The word was still new in English and perhaps as a social type the parasite is more Roman than English)"; see Wilson 108. See also Bevington, *Mankind to Marlowe* 32; Wolfgang Riehle, *Shakespeare, Plautus, and the Humanist Tradition* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990) 20; Altman 149; and Norland 272.

<sup>468</sup> Wilson 108. See also Bevington, *Mankind to Marlowe* 32-33. While we can date the penitent letter fairly precisely in 1541 by reference to Udall's dismissal from Eton, the date of *Roister Doister* is not established. Udall's student and friend Thomas Wilson provides a *terminus ad quem* by quoting the comedy's ambiguously pointed letter in the 1553 edition of *The Rule of Reason*. As the letter did not appear in the 1551 and 1552 editions of Wilson's book, it is reasonable to suppose the play appeared in 1552 or 1553. Edgerton (61-62) argues that the play was produced when Udall was a canon at Windsor, beginning in 1551, when he may have produced the play for the court of the ailing Edward VI. The reference to the queen in the last few lines may merely be a printer's emendation after Mary's accession in 1553. Bevington sets the play in the first year of Mary's reign, using both the evidence of Wilson's *Rule of Reason* and internal clues that the play reflects the queen's preference for diverting entertainment over the dogma of Edwardian drama (121). Bevington finds evidence for the Marian date in Udall's emphasis on "Christian Custance's story of feminine courage, charity, and firm maternalism" (121), and the tone of the "mock-heroic rite" of Roister Doister's funeral, which Bevington reads as "light and friendly," satirizing not the service itself but "the

drama, as it glamorizes deception and social subversion. True enough, the prologue claims to aim at innocent mirth and the unmasking of the “vayneglorious,” and the language and action are remarkably chaste. But the play offers little that could be understood to improve the morals of schoolboys, and nothing to improve their Latin. Instead it seems to aim to amuse an audience who would enjoy Merrygreek’s use and abuse of the preposterously ungentle gentleman. Such an audience might well be found at court, or in a grammar school populated by the sons of citizens. In either setting the blustering pretensions of a seedy landowner seeking to marry a rich widow would have made a welcome figure of fun.

Yet the play has a deeper link to schooling, as it embraces the humanist principle that the performance of eloquence trumps unearned privilege. Just as the Tudor schoolroom subjugated social rank to rhetorical performance, so in the comedy the characters of superior rank, the gentleman and the rich citizens, are subjected to the rhetorical gambits of Merrygreek. Though Merrygreek delivers on the prologue’s promise of mirth without scurrility (2, 4), his character depends primarily on the popular appeal of the clever scamp, a type granted the immunity needed to wreak havoc on the social order. Merrygreek’s ploys to master his masters provide therefore an archetypal framework for thinking about Udall’s life and work as a whole, and particularly for considering his notorious crime and his penitent letter as symbolic representations of the invasion of the privileged preserves of the gentry by humanist schoolmasters and the

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comic discrepancy between Roister Doister’s ineffectual melancholy and the seriousness of “*Requiem aeternam*” (124).

forces of change they served. Finally, Udall's Merrygreek reveals (and revels in) a Protean quality inherent in the practice of rhetoric, a polymorphism that gives the rhetorician a superhuman exemption from moral and social conventions, and by extension an almost heroic freedom, even when he is bound in ignominious servitude. In the hypertrophied self-fashioning of Matthew Merrygreek, Udall creates the satiric equivalent of Pico's Man with his undetermined nature.

Merrygreek opens the play by introducing himself to the audience as a "Grasshopper" (31), an improvident merry-maker who "can take no thought" (38) beyond cadging his next meal. This turns out to be only the first of several overlapping *personae*. He soon boasts that he practices artfully on the gullibility of a copious catalogue of wastrels, among whom Roister Doister appears as his "chiefe banker/ Both for meate and money" (55).<sup>469</sup> Merrygreek credits language as the source of his power over his master: "I can with a worde make him fayne or loth, / I can with as much make him pleased or wroth" (85-86). We first encounter Roister Doister in Merrygreek's words, where he identifies his gull with the worn traditions of the courtly gentleman, "facing and craking / Of his great actes in fighting" (63-4), and quick to fall desperately in love, ready to die unless the lady *du jour* "on hym take some compassion" (72). Thus Merrygreek asserts his control over Roister Doister even before the gentleman appears, complaining like a courtly lover, "Come death when thou wilt I am weary of my life" (95), and "Of love I make my mone" (149). The languishing lover readily acknowledges

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<sup>469</sup> This line is the earliest use recorded in the *OED* for "banker" in the sense of "an intermediary between borrowers and lenders," situating Merrygreek in the earliest days of a money economy in England, and constituting his identity as a parasite who is a sharp man of business, not merely a gourmand.

his dependence on the parasite for “counsel”<sup>470</sup> in courting the lady: “I die except thou helpe... / ... most bounde to thee I am” (114, 121). Merrygreek takes the job, though he pretends a reluctance to neglect his other “greate affaires” (111). Having thus implied that he is a much sought-after counselor, Merrygreek quickly turns to schoolmastering, questioning his pupil and scolding him for forgetting the lady’s name (167-68). Further questioning about “the bellows that blewe this sodeine fire” reveals that the woman “is worthe a thousande pounde and more” (175-76). Banker and parasite are bound to one another by the profit motive, but Merrygreek, as the rhetoric master, provides all the management, his master all the capital.

Merrygreek manages his master through instruction that frequently relies on dramatization. His teaching methods alternate between flattery and abuse, often administered in the form of little dramatic scenes. Merrygreek also plays the role of master of the revels throughout, at several points calling in his master’s servants to play supporting roles in wooing scenes. Early in the play he leaves his master to “call your Musitians, for in this your case / It would sette you forth, and all your wowing grace” (271-72). Later he prompts the same servants to play for their addled master, saying, “Who so hath suche bees as your maister in head, / Had neede to have his spirites with Musike to be fed” (511-12). In the play’s final scene of reconciliation, Merrygreek offers to “fet your quier that we may have a song” (1997), whereupon servants and masters join in singing the play’s closing benedictions. Thus Merrygreek exercises throughout a

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<sup>470</sup> Altman, 150 n.5, notes, “The words ‘counsel’ and ‘counselor’ occur frequently enough to suggest Udall’s familiarity with Melanchthon’s definition of comedy as “*humanorum consiliorum et eventuum imago quaedam*” [a portrayal of human schemes (*consilia*) and their outcomes] 139.



directorial authority over Roister Doister, the other servants, and the citizens, involving them all in a pageant for which he calls the tune.

Merrygreek can act parts as nimbly as he directs others in them. Early in the play, he stages for his master a flattering little scene in which he feeds his master's courtly delusions by impersonating a series of women who, he says, have accosted him on the street to ask about his wonderful master:

Who is this (sayth one) sir Launcelot du lake?

Who is this, greate Guy of Warwike, sayth another?

No (say I) it is the thirteenth Hercules' brother.

Who is this? noble Hector of Troy, sayth the thirde?

No, but of the same nest (Say I) it is a birde. (212-16)

Merrygreek sustains these imagined dialogues of mistaken identities at some length to include the Nine Worthies and other heroes in the mock-epic catalogue. From literary figures he turns the focus of the little drama suddenly to social rank, again playing two roles and the narrator:

Sir I pray you, what lorde or great gentleman is this?

Maister Rafe Royster Doyster dame say I, ywis.

O Lorde (Sayth She than) what a goodly man it is,

Woulde Christ I had such a husbande as he is. (226-29)

Merrygreek inflames his master's vanity by impersonating two people at once: a woman who sees Roister Doister as he would like to be seen, and a loyal servant who is also a literary authority and social arbiter. In the latter role he presumes even to control access to his master's person: when the woman voices a desire to see the paragon's face,

Merrygreek replies, “It is inough for you (say I) to see his backe. / His face is for ladies of high and noble parages. / With whome he hardly scapeth great marriages” (230-32). These flattering fictions mock the vanities of social striving in the marriage market, while they also flaunt the trickster’s power to define and control his acquiescent master.

When Merrygreek accepts the role of rhetoric coach, he undertakes teaching manhood along with speech. He adjures his master-pupil repeatedly to “play the man’s parte” (1179). Advising him on his approach to the widow, Merrygreek mixes masculinizing commands—“speake out like a ramme”—with emasculating insult—“Ye speake like a capon that had the cough” (122, 123). Merrygreek’s mixed messages extend to a ritual enactment of man-making when, after Roister Doister declares yet again that he will die for love, Merrygreek dramatizes his master’s death and resurrection. Calling in the servants and a parish clerk to act as mourners, the parasite speaks a mock requiem in Latin over his master, mixed with more sly insult: “*Requiem aeternam*. Now God reward your mastershyps. And I will crie halfepenie doale for your worshyps” (973-74). Then he resurrects him with a reviving slap (1005), one of several occasions on which he strikes his sluggish pupil. Having thus given his master a new life, Merrygreek steels him to act his part: “speake with Custance yourselfe” (1017), “with a lusty breast and countenance, / that she may know she hath to answer to a man” (1022-23). The lessons include detailed instruction on the bearing and behavior of a gentleman: “... up, man, with your head and chin! / Up with that snoute, man! ... / That is a lustie brute; handes under your side, man” (1029-31), and then offers tentative praise of his pupil’s efforts: “That is somewhat like, for a man of your degree!” (1034).

Merrygreek's frequent references to Roister Doister's social rank remind us that the servant is in fact the controlling source of the master's dubious entitlements. He calls him "Maister," "your maship," and "your worshyp" throughout, and represents him to others as a "gentleman," especially to women, including the imaginary admirer we noticed above. Not surprisingly, the titles impress no one except the widow's toothless old nurse, Madge Mumblecrust. After Roister Doister flatters and kisses her, she exclaims with pleasure at receiving the attentions "of such a gay gentleman" (380). Seeing them thus together, Merrygreek pretends to mistake Madge for the widow: "I perceiv nowe ye have chose of devotion, / And joy have ye ladie of your promotion" (433-34). Though the horrified Roister Doister replies, "Tushe foole, thou art deceived," and the bewildered old woman bursts into tears, Merrygreek perseveres in his perverse misprision: "What weepe on the weddyng day? Be merrie, woman! / Though I say it, ye have chose a good gentleman!" (439-40). With the little self-deprecating phrase, "Though I say it," Udall inserts an exultant bit of irony into his cruel comment on the aptness of the match. In so qualifying the spurious judgment of his master's gentility as admittedly biased, he plays the parts of a loyal but scrupulously fair retainer and a winking ironist at once. Merrygreek's delight in his own multi-vocal powers beams through the confusion he has produced.

The confusion clarifies the character of the master. The widow's giddy young maid, Tibbet Talkapace, is more skeptical than the nurse about the honor of a kiss from Roister Doister. When he assures her, "Ye might be proude to kisse me, if ye were wise," she replies, "What promotion were therin?" (391-92). Her suspicions are more than justified. Roister Doister's leering asides about the widow's serving girls suggest that he

imagines the pleasures of *droit de seigneur* open to the widow's chosen husband. Of Tibbet he exclaims, "The jolyest wench that ere I hearde, little mouse, / May I not rejoyce that she shall dwell in my house?" (299-300), and, when a second maid appears, he adds, "See what a sort she kepeth that must be my wife! / Shall not I when I have hir, leade a merrie life?" (313-14). For all her canny calculations, however, Tibbet is duped into receiving "a token and a ring" (739) from Roister Doister, thinking that they are from Goodluck and that she will gain his favor when he is her master. Her inept self-seeking traduces her mistress's interests, and compromises the widow's reputation. While the scenes between the widow's serving women and Roister Doister could be acted and enjoyed by schoolboys without a trace of "scurilitie," they would also convey to an adult audience more than a whiff of cynicism about the self-seeking nature of servants, and a dark glimpse of sexual predation as a defining characteristic of the gentleman master.

Leaving aside Merrygreek's claims, we have only slender clues to determine whether we should regard Roister Doister as a representative of the gentry, and not merely as a delusional social climber. He certainly regards himself as a gentleman, gallantly offering his service to his lady. After sending her a mis-pointed letter that turns every compliment to an insult, he pleads, "Let all this passe, sweetheart, and accept my service" (1103). The soldier also utters rather endearing affirmations of *noblesse oblige* to excuse his own reluctance to fight. Thus he asks, "What is a gentleman but his worde and his promise?" (1241), after promising Merrygreek not to make good on a threat to kill an inoffensive scrivener. Again, after being trounced in battle by the widow and her women warriors, he excuses himself from exacting vengeance: "Ah, dame, by the auncient law of armes, a man / Hath no honour to foile his handes on a woman" (1983-

84). Perhaps we should read him as a cowardly Quixote, whose claims to gentle birth, though slender, are real enough to identify him as a squire gone to seed.

The play offers further circumstantial evidence that Rafe Roister Doister represents the lower echelons of the gentry, perhaps a rung or two below a later scion of the same stock, Sir John Falstaff. The word “roister” denotes a “swaggering or blustering bully; a riotous fellow; a rude or noisy reveler,” which implies at the least some means and leisure.<sup>471</sup> A stage direction at the mock funeral, “*Evocat servos militis*” (after 974), affirms that Rafe is to be understood as a soldier, even perhaps as a knight. He has no visible means of support, the lack of which is a customary sign of a gentleman. He has a small retinue of servants, some of them musicians. By his own description he has “money plentie all things to discharge” (133), a claim Merrygreek that affirms specifically in an aside (134) and generally by his parasitical pursuits. Roister Doister’s passionate interest in the thousand pounds of the London widow may well be a forerunner of the city comedy motif of the slipping aristocrat seeking to augment his fortunes with merchant money.

Christian Custance herself refers to him as a gentleman, though always ironically, as when she receives his first insulting proposal. Merrygreek tells her that his master is “willyng you to take, / Bicause ye shall not destroy yourselfe for his sake,” and she replies, “Mary God yelde his mashyp what ever he be, / It is gentmanly spoken” (853-56). But such an observation could be a sardonic comment on the arrogance of gentlemen in general, and could apply to an impersonator as well as to a born gentleman. Perhaps our best evidence for Roister Doister’s gentle status comes in the final scene, when

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<sup>471</sup> “Roister,” *OED*.

Goodluck graciously receives his vanquished rival, shaking his hand and saying, “Oh the moste honest gentleman that ere I wist” (1992). The merchant has not shown himself capable of irony elsewhere in the play, though a generous, even condescending gesture to a nominal social superior is consonant with his bland and self-righteous character.

If we take Roister Doister as a member of the gentry and not merely a fantastical bounder, then Udall is doing more than exploiting a comic type for easy laughs. He is satirizing strange disjunctions in the social order, reminding us that “soldier” can be a name for coward, a moaning cavalier may have neither honor nor devotion to his lady, and a gentleman may be unacquainted with gentle manners. And though the clever Merrygreek’s machinations serve to reveal these hypocrisies near the top of the social order, his own service is shown to be self-serving, manipulative, and harmful both to his master and to innocent people like the widow. As his schemes are doomed to failure by his master’s character, he is merely using his master, and if they were to succeed, he would saddle a good woman with a fool. Indicted by the widow for his part in her discomfiture, Merrygreek justifies his misdeeds by claiming that he aimed always only at “sporte and pastime” (1618), pointing to the obviously impossible mismatch as evidence of his intention: “But well might ye judge I spake it all in mockage, / For why, is Roister Doister a fitte husbände for you?” (1610-11). Finally Merrygreek gets away with all his mischief, tacitly forgiven by his master for his failures and by the widow and merchant for jeopardizing their union. Indeed, he orchestrates the play’s final rapprochement, subtly shifting all blame onto others: he persuades the citizens to “pardon all past” (1941) with the promise of more “sport” (1947), and he convinces his master that the offended citizens were in fact “all in love with your mashyp” (1962) and eager to forgive. Even a

scrupulous audience may feel he has done no irreparable harm and provided considerable amusement, while revealing folly and deception throughout the ranks of society.

Nevertheless, the clever parasite's comic antics leave behind a residual uneasiness, certainly about the gentility of gentlemen and the fidelity of service, but also about the reliability of rhetoric, the credibility of language and learning. The arts of humanism are themselves not, then, dependably gentle. But Merrygreek's agile role-changing is not merely a pragmatic survival technique; it constitutes a special mercurial intelligence, honed by the rhetorical practice of *ethopoeia*. For the mercurial temperament, a good laugh comes first, and for a laugh Merrygreek is as ready to unmake as to make his foolish pupil. When sent to speak for his master, Merrygreek takes a perverse pleasure in betraying his master's cause. His mischievous mis-pointed reading of Roister Doister's love letter turns it into a string of insults and even threats that convey his master's true nature more accurately than the original. For example, the scrivener's original promises, "I will be gladde / When ye seeke your hearte's ease; I wyll be unkinde / At no time" (1311-13). Merrygreek's reading moves the beginning and conclusion, leaving: "When ye seeke your hearte's ease I will be unkinde, / At no tyme in me shall ye muche gentlenesse finde" (1149-50). When his master reproves him for botching the reading, Merrygreek replies with exquisite irony: "Alas, would ye wyshe in me the witte that ye have?" (1341). Thus both speech and writing are shown to be inherently unreliable, and service like Merrygreek's is shown to serve something other than the interests of the master. Such wits serve merriment, and an unsparing satirical vision that Udall places above the claims of loyalty or even of plain, guileless truth-telling.

This critical acumen arguably serves a high purpose in unmasking the pretensions of bullies and fools. But in Merrygreek such wit is just as likely to mask itself in unsettling pretenses that seem to revel in deception and even violence. Festive reversals inevitably have a nightmarish quality of disorientation, as their liberations necessarily involve the threats that come with destabilization. The play's prime examples of such disorientation come from Roister Doister's lessons in manhood. Merrygreek's instructions in wooing are laced with misogyny. The tutor incites behaviors that are indifferently self-subjecting and self-serving. He feeds his master's impulses to serve the lady and also to possess her, but also to indict her as the source of man's ruin. While the rhetoric coach supposedly makes a man of the gentleman in order to win the woman, he simultaneously seeks to turn his master against marriage, and indeed against women. First he scoffs at "this foolishe love" (250). Soon the note of misogyny surfaces in Merrygreek's abrasive wooing in his master's name. When the widow declines the honor of Roister Doister's love, Merrygreek accuses her of being coy, saying, "Oh jesus, will ye see / What dissemblyng creatures these same women be" (843-44). In his sermon at the mock funeral, he exhorts the audience, "And all men take heede by this one Gentleman, / How you sette your love upon an unkinde woman: / For these women be all suche madde pievish elves" (979-81). In coaching the lover, he implies that success in the suit will only lead to submission to a predatory female: "Your good mastershyps / Maistershyps, were hir owne Mistreshyps mistreshyps, / Ye were take up [as food] for haukes, ye were gone, ye were gone" (1047-49). In characterizing real manhood, he counsels abjuring women altogether: "Rather play the mans parte, and doe love refraine. / If she despise you een despise ye hir againe" (1179-80). These misogynistic statements, taken together



with Merrygreek's intentionally inept courting and teaching, suggest that the parasite is keeping his master for himself, placing their homosocial bond above the goal of winning the woman.

The disorientation deepens when Merrygreek veers suddenly into playing the role of an abject female, a *tour de force* of perverse rhetoric. In the queerest reversal in the play, he enraptures his master, protesting that if he were a woman he would desire the master's "goodly person" (1201). Here, as in the penitent letter, a servant masters his master (calms his ire, has his way) by an act of eloquent submission, though in the play it takes a distinctly seductive turn. When Roister Doister laments that the lady has refused him, Merrygreek coyly replies:

MM: I mourne for an other thing.

RD: What is it Merygreeke, wherfore thou dost grieffe take?

MM: That I am not a woman myselfe for your sake,

I would have you my selfe, and a strawe for yond Gill,

And mocke much of you though it were against my will. (1193-97)

The substitution here of "mocke" for "make" winks at the audience, even as the rascal seems to swoon, enrapt against his will. The little love scene ends on a breathless note, as Merrygreek's desire leaves him for once at a loss for words: "Yea! And I were the fairest lady in the shiere, / and knewe you as I know you, and see you nowe here- / Well, I say no more" (1207-9). So Udall uses rhetorical abjection, impersonation of the prostrate female, to stimulate fantasies of mastery in the infantile soldier, and so to subject him. The pitiful master exclaims, "Gramercies with all my hart!" (1209).

In this rhetorical game, scoring a point is a cue to change roles. Having thus seduced his master, Merrygreek withdraws the vision of slavish love and steps back into the role of the schoolmaster: “But since that cannot be, will ye play a wise part?” (1210). This wisdom involves first a feigned restraint, then violent retribution. He advises, “Refraine from Custance a while now” (1211), predicting that she will “come on her knees creeping” (1214). If not, he says, the lover “may avenged be” (1216). The promise of vengeance thrills Roister Doister, who swears a phallic oath of vengeance: “By Cock’s precious potsticke, and e’en so I shall! / I wyll utterly destroy hir, and house and all!” (1217-18). The cumulative effect of Merrygreek’s instruction is thus to uncover his master’s inclination for bullying and violence against the widow. When the time comes for the proposal of marriage, the coach withdraws all props and urges his master to speak as if sending him off to strike a blow: “I can say no more, to speed we are not like, / Except ye rappe out a ragge of your Rhetorike” (1467).<sup>472</sup> The soldier’s proposal amounts to a threat of rape: “Yes dame, I will have you whether ye will or no / I commaunde you to love me...” (1472-73). When she stoutly refuses, he cries, “Nay dame, I will fire thee out of thy house, / And destroy thee and all thine, and that by and by” (1489-90). Though an audience may feel the actual danger to the widow’s person and reputation to be negligible, the power of Merrygreek’s performances to stir up social trouble is palpable. The parasite can be credited with unmasking ridiculous qualities in

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<sup>472</sup> Frank Whigham observes that the word “rap” is sometimes used as a synonym for *fart*, as in Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) 3.23: “Flamock, having his belly full and his tail at commandment, gave out a rap nothing faintly.” If this usage were current in Udall’s time, the line would offer a particularly pungent example of Udall’s about rhetoric.

the *miles gloriosus*, but he delivers his playful vision of truth through a perverse comic rhetoric in which abjection and violence are recklessly entwined.

Udall relies on the widow's good sense and good humor to neutralize these troubling tendencies in Merrygreek. In the end she adopts his techniques of role-playing and mercurial wit, and restores their integrity in some measure. Custance alone comes close to being Merrygreek's equal in wit. In their first encounter, she greets him warmly, saying, "Welcome, friend Merygreeke!" (834). When he carries on an elaborate pretense that he has discovered her secret love for his master, the widow shows her own rhetorical abilities, parrying his figures with neat twists:

MM: Concerning mariage. Doth not love lade you?

CC: I feale no such cariage.

MM: Doe ye feele no pangues of dotage? Aunswere me right.

CC: I dote so, that I make but one sleepe all the night.

But what neede all these wordes? (839-43)

Indeed, even Roister Doister, that connoisseur of rhetoric, is moved to comment on the widow's rhetorical skill: "Hir talke is as fine as she had learned in schooles" (1094). She, on the other hand, objects to Roister Doister specifically because he is stupid, "a very dolt and loute" (879), with "as much braine as a burbolt" (892). Her definition of manhood depends on intelligence: "I will not be served with a foole in no wise; / When I choose an husbände I hope to take a man!" (1105-6). Moreover, there's a solid burgher propriety in her estimation of men, as she condemns both Roister Doister and Merrygreek as "idle loytrers bragging up and downe" (1495).

Even so, she aligns herself with Merrygreek as a person of intelligence and playful imagination. After the trickster's schemes have compromised her reputation and aroused the suspicions of Goodluck, Custance expresses amazement that Merrygreek "would joyne hymselfe with suche a wretched loute" as Rafe (1597). But she accepts the rascal's excuse as plausible when he claims he "spake it all in mockage" (1610). Moreover, she outdoes Merrygreek in the spirit of histrionic mockery, devising the culminating drama herself. Indeed, she does so in a way that shifts the responsibility subtly onto her two male accomplices, Merrygreek and a bumbling constable, as she suggests to them that they "bidde" her stage a battle against Roister Doister. The men prove biddable:

CC: If ye two bidde me, we will with him pitche a fielde,

I and my maides together.

MM: Let us see, be bolde!

CC: Ye shal see women's warre.

Tristram Trusty [the constable]: That fight wil I behold. (1630-32)

The widow clearly shares Merrygreek's view that histrionic ploys are both fun and useful, especially for people who find themselves at the social margins.

The widow occupies a socially vulnerable position like that of the impecunious scamp. She finds herself marginalized by her marital status as he is by his poverty. They occupy dependent positions, though they are clearly the intellectual superiors of the lot. As Cartwright points out, "Udall sympathizes remarkably with widows, who faced serious social difficulties in Tudor England—a sensitivity all the more striking if, as Linda Woodbridge argues, widows constituted Renaissance literature's most satirized

females.”<sup>473</sup> As schoolmasters found themselves much-satirized, too, it is not surprising that Udall identifies with the widow and gives her a sharpness of wit like Merrygreek’s. As Cartwright says, “Sympathy bends toward Dame Custance, as incident after incident confirms her discretion, good sense, and innocence in contrast with the willingness of males—even her betrothed, Gawain Goodluck—to leap to unwarranted and mean-spirited conclusions.”<sup>474</sup> When Goodluck declares to her, “I must needs mistrust ye be elsewhere entangled” (1857), he confirms that the report of his male servant carries more weight than the widow’s own word.<sup>475</sup> Indeed the leading males in the play array themselves against the widow at one time or another. Though the final reconciliation nominally makes all well, the widow’s isolation as a victim of men’s talk makes painfully clear not just the ponderous authority of male power, but the danger inherent in the loaded language of even such unreliable men as Merrygreek. If the widow is Udall’s only sympathetic stability-figure in this play, the circulation of male power in overcharged rhetoric is the primary threat to her well-being.

This would seem a curious stance for a Tudor schoolmaster and servant of the crown to take. Bevington develops the sharp male-female contrasts in the play to argue persuasively that Udall wrote *Roister Doister* for Mary’s court, a place like Custance’s household where good order reigned under a firm feminine leader, by contrast to the disorderly male-dominated courts of Edward VI and Henry VIII. Udall balances Gavin’s cold suspicions, Merrygreek’s hit-and-run amorality, and Rafe’s bluster against the

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<sup>473</sup> Cartwright 142.

<sup>474</sup> Cartwright 142.

<sup>475</sup> Cf. Othello’s readiness to believe the word of his ancient Iago against his wife.

widow's probity and stability. Bevington makes much of the contrast between the males in the play and Custance's "feminine courage, charity, and firm maternalism" (121).<sup>476</sup> In emphasizing Custance's equanimity, however, Bevington overlooks her moments of rage, dejection and fierce defiance. A schoolboy might well have played her for broad comic effects, at times even turning shrewish. She repels Rafe's stubborn suit with a pungent threat of violence: "Nay, as for charming me, come hither if thou dare; / I shall cloute thee tyll thou stinke, both thee and thy traine, / And coyle thee [with] mine owne handes, and sende thee home again" (1508-10). After Goodluck's servant finds her in Rafe's company, she complains that she is "yll accombred with a couple of dawes" and apparently breaks into tears, for the constable comforts her, "Nay, weepe not woman" (1567-68). At her lowest point she offers up a prayer that shows impressive knowledge of Bible stories, asking help of the God who came to the aid of the woman taken in adultery (the "advoutresse" 1891), "Susanna, wrongfully accused" (1893), and Hester (1895). Thus Udall fleshes out a complex female character, certainly the brave, sane person of Bevington's binary schema, but also a scrapper, and a pitiable victim of men's loose talk.

In the culminating sequence, the widow rises in defiance and masters Merrygreek's dramatic techniques, taking the lead as they join forces in her "women's warre." In suggesting that "Christian's victory over Roister Doister is not one of Amazonian "maistry"—for Christian is loyally subservient to Gawin's proper masculine authority,"<sup>477</sup> Bevington glosses over her genuine fierceness in battle. She attacks Roister Doister, proclaiming, "I myself will Mounsire Graunde Captaine undertake" (1787). He

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<sup>476</sup> Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* 124.

<sup>477</sup> Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* 123-24.

shrinks from her assault, calling up the comic stereotype of the widow by crying that she must have slain “hir other husbände” (1804). She rallies her troops—“Too it againe, my knightesses, downe with them all!” (1809)—and routs Roister Doister’s forces, threatening to take on yet another male role in doing so: “Away, loute and lubber, or I shall be thy priest!” (1814). Female subjection is thus triumphantly reversed, using the carnivalesque methods of Merrygreek himself. Indeed, her festive roles show more integrity and valor than those of the trickster, though they may have seemed even more grotesque and ethically unsettling to an audience in the 1550s.

Festive reversals conventionally end in a status quo purged, but restored rather than revolutionized. Merrygreek’s final devious ploy suggests again, however, that the rhetorician’s proper role in a harmonious world order is uniquely exempt from the constraints of conventional rank and place. He returns to flattering his vanquished master, constructing a pretense that the victorious citizens are in fact “in love with your mashyp” (1762), and afraid that “he will be avenged one day” (1965). Having thus effected a new harmony among the orders by reviving the flagging ego of the gentleman, he plays again the role of the schoolmaster, urging his silly pupil to step forward, overcoming fears that the widow will fight him: “I warrant you, be bolde! / Too them, and salute them” (1972-73). The comedy concludes with two couples symmetrically reunited, the parasite and his gentlemen balanced against the widow and her merchant. The parasite fails as a rhetoric coach and go-between, but he succeeds in his conspiracy with Custance to “laugh well” at his master’s expense (898), and in doing so he maintains his own mastery over his master. More, he succeeds in revealing the taunting truth that rank and wealth, though

they may prevail in material terms, are nonetheless subject to the critical power of rhetoric, a force so potent as to be unconfined by conventional limits of all kinds.

In the celebratory song that ends the play, Merrygreek sings a pious schoolmaster's petition to the queen, as a gesture toward rejoining the orthodox moral order:

God graunt hir, as she doth, the Gospell to protect,

Learning and vertue to advaunce, and vice to correct. (2007-8)

Yet Merrygreek stands always outside the social structures of the play, as in the liminal spaces of school or stage, winning a living by instructing, correcting, mocking. He performs at once the saturnalian reversals of festive drama and the systematic sale of eloquence. Both were represented in Tudor society by schoolmaster-interluders like Udall himself. This parasite's wit shows the marks of the humanist curriculum: it is improvisational, ironic, filled with rhetorical self-invention, directed at tests of performative merit. But no such performance, however brilliant, can guarantee either Merrygreek or Udall a great room, a position on the safe, inner side of the social *limen*.

So Merrygreek's dilemma is precisely that of the schoolmaster: paid to produce performances by actors who may not be up to their prominent parts, they will be blamed for failure or left behind by success. Waking to a world where the race is not, after all, to the swift, they laugh at the race, and claim victory in a higher contest. Against the optimistic humanist idea that people of all kinds are potentially educable, Udall asserts through Merrygreek that the rhetorician's function is not, finally, to make men, but to know them. Even if his students fail to make the mark, the teacher shows himself a master by holding a mirror up to nature. And unflattering as his reflections could be,



Udall has the true ironist's impulse to spare no one, least of all himself. Matthew Merrygreek, in the catalogue of wastrels upon whom he preys, lists one Nichol Neverthrive (51). In using his own name in the list of feckless sponsors of rhetorical trickery, was the rhetorician Nicholas Udall voicing an awareness of his own vanities and follies?

In 1555 Mary directed her Master of the Revels to furnish the demands of "our well beloved Nicholas Udall [who] hath at soondrie sessions convenient heretofore showed, and myndeth hereafter to showe his diligence in setting forth of Dialogues and Enterludes before us for our regal disporte and recreation."<sup>478</sup> A year later he was appointed as master of St. Peter's school, adjoining Westminster Abbey, "a struggling institution just getting started."<sup>479</sup> He served for one brief year before his unstoried death.

Nicholas Udall's writing is marked by an audacious display of rhetorical dazzle and classical learning, but also by a debunking skepticism about human nature and social pretensions. He plays both sides with regard to stolid burgher virtues: all the Udall texts suggest a strong ethic of the ascendancy of intelligence and eloquence over inherited privilege. But as they do, they also exalt the merits of Protean self-preservation and even mercurial high-jinks at the expense of propertied probity. The rebellion that Udall advanced was rhetorical and dramatic, a *sauve qui peut* outbreak of eloquence that left the powers that be standing, but confused and amused by this scamp, in spite of themselves. His assault was mounted in the schoolroom, where boys of every social rank

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<sup>478</sup> Edgerton 66.

<sup>479</sup> Edgerton 66.

were recruited by Terence to the ranks of the literary, to an ideology of critical superiority that could be embraced by the vulgar or the aristocratic. Udall's comedy and his letter to his master modeled conquest by confusion, deploying the classical strategy of the slave whose knowledge and language are stronger than his bondage.

Udall's story, however, offers a potent reminder that drama, like schooling, is always profoundly ambiguous in its social import: it is particularly hard to determine whether drama or schooling does more to liberate or to enforce. What was Udall himself at his most potent, but a servant slipping one over on the master? Yet his plays, and other school drama, exerted a force of their own sufficient to move the attract the patronage—and control—of the crown.<sup>480</sup> Indeed, when Elizabeth refounded St. Peter's College (Westminster school) in 1560, four years after Udall died there, the school charter included the following provision, “As to Comedies and Plays to be shown at Christmas”:

That the youth may spend Christmas-tide with better result, and better become accustomed to proper action and pronounciation, we decree that every year, within 12 days after Christmas day, or afterwards with the leave of the Dean, the Master and Usher together shall cause their pupils and the chorister to act, in private or public, a Latin comedy or tragedy in Hall, and the Choristers' Master an English one. And if they do not each do their part, the defaulter shall be fined 10 shillings.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> For catalogues of such performances, see the Appendices to Motter 245ff., and Appendix B in Shapiro 257ff.

<sup>481</sup> Leach, *Educational Charters* 518-19. This is Leach's translation from the original Latin, which appears on the facing page.

This article is perhaps our most important evidence of the ordained relation of Latin grammar to dramatic play, making explicit the otherwise absurd connection between good Latin and the performance of proper decorum. The Westminster statute also forcefully demonstrates two other points relevant to Udall's stories. First, they show that school curriculum and of festive drama had commodity status, so that their control was of interest to the crown. Second, the threat of a fine for noncompliance reminds us that the schoolmaster was a crown servant in this scheme, hired as an enforcer, and that he may not have looked on the production of plays as unalloyed pleasure. While on the face of it humanist ideals seem thus to be swept into the absolutist vortex, we can as easily argue that burgher values of self-improvement and bookish learning were ascendant even in the acts of the monarch. The proximal results of Udall and his kind in school and on stage were more modest, though also signaled by the royal ordinance: a boom in school plays, the heyday of the boy companies, a learned literary drama in English, a skeptical reaction against literary education.

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