

‘I keepe my watche, and warde’: Richard Robinson’s *Rewarde of Wickednesse* (1574)*

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Abstract

In response to the recent call to re-evaluate what C.S. Lewis called the ‘Drab Age’, the article reassesses one sixteenth-century poem, *The Rewarde of Wickednesse* (1574), and its author, Richard Robinson. The poem is framed in such a way that the topos of service is central to an understanding of Robinson’s authorial identity, an identity determined by his proclaimed status within the household of the sixth Earl of Shrewsbury. The poet claims to be one ‘of a hundreth’ serving the family during the captivity of Mary, Queen of Scots. The article locates the *Rewarde of Wickednesse* within the relevant geographical, literary and socio-political contexts and reveals aspects of Robinson’s artistry that have remained hitherto unexplored.

Keywords: *de casibus*, Dream Vision, Mary Stuart, *Mirror for Magistrates*, Richard Robinson, Servant Writing

1. *Introduction*

The Rewarde of Wickednesse Discoursing the Sundrye Monstrous Abuses of Wicked and Ungodly Worldelinges is a little-known Elizabethan poem dedicated to Gilbert Talbot, son of the sixth Earl of Shrewsbury. It was written by Richard Robinson, a ‘Servaunt’ in the household of George Talbot and his wife, Elizabeth Cavendish (‘Bess of Hardwick’) and published in 1574, during

* I would like to thank David Griffith and Gillian Wright of the University of Birmingham for their valuable suggestions and abiding support during the process of writing this article. I would also like to thank Alan Bryson of the University of Sheffield and Felicity Maxwell of the University of Glasgow for their assistance. My thanks also go to the anonymous referees for the *Journal of Early Modern Studies* for their comments on an earlier version of this article.



the time Mary Stuart was imprisoned in Sheffield Castle.¹ It is evident that Robinson's work is part of a polemical, anti-papal agenda. As Allyna Ward points out, the *Rewarde* utilizes a *de casibus* framework in order to 'condemn bad moral behaviour but in the context of the dialectical opposition between Catholicism and Protestantism, an opposition that was not clearly demarcated during this period' (2009, 4). The condemnatory tone of the volume is established in the title-page:

Discoursing the sundrye monstrous abuses of wicked and ungodlye worldelinges: in such sort set downe and written as the same have beene dyversely practised in the persones of Popes, Harlots, Proude Princes, Tyrauntes, Romish Byshoppes, and others. With a lively description of their severall falles and finall destruction. (A1r)

The formal model for the *Rewarde* – and Robinson's most explicit source of inspiration – is *A Mirror for Magistrates*. The poem also contains a large number of narrative borrowings from the *Mirror*'s literary forerunner, John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*. Like several editions of the *Mirror*, the *Rewarde* begins with a dream vision Prologue. In a busy alehouse on a cold December night, the poet falls asleep amongst a company of drunken revellers. He is visited in a dream by Morpheus, the god of sleep, who takes him on a voyage through Hell. On their journey, they are elected by Pluto to record the complaints of twelve illustrious sinners: Helen of Troy, Pope Alexander VI, Tarquin, Medea, Tantalus, Vetronius Turinus, Heliogabalus, the Two Judges of Susanna, Pope Joan, Midas and Queen Rosamond.² The dreamer witnesses each complainant being subjected to dreadful punishments for their sins. Nine of the complaints conclude with the legalistic-sounding device of 'The Bookes Verdict'. Robinson's voyage is drawn to a dramatic finish by a grisly pageant led by Pluto, Proserpine and 'bloodie Boner the Butcher' (P1v).³ This is familiar poetic territory; the poem exhibits clear traces of the classical convention of *katabasis*, the heroic descent to the underworld adopted in Dante's *Divina Commedia* and in medieval visions of the otherworld, such as *St Patrick's Purgatory* and *The Vision of Tundale*. Though bordering precariously on unorthodoxy, the *Rewarde* disposes of

¹ Six copies of the 1574 edition survive; the copy consulted and here referred to is held by the British Library (STC 1840: 07). An edition of the poem was published for the Modern Humanities Research Association in Ward 2009. For criticism of the *Rewarde* see Pincombe 2009; Heavey 2012; see also Schmitz 1990, 61, 168, 223.

² Vetronius Turinus was counsellor to the third-century Roman emperor, Alexander Severus. Severus was succeeded by his cousin, Heliogabalus, in 222 A.D. Rosamond is not the 'fair Rosamund' of the English complaint tradition, but rather the murderous wife of the sixth-century King of Lombardy, Alboin. King Alboin's tale is told in Book VIII of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*. On the *de casibus* tradition see Budra 2000; Mortimer 2005.

³ The line 'For when he was living he might not abide me' (P3r) suggests that Robinson may have earlier come into contact with Edmund Bonner. See Pincombe 2008.

the conventional visit to Purgatory (for this is Hades), whilst conserving the upward trajectory (Kruger 1992) and scribal ethos of the visionary tradition. The dreamer is taken by Morpheus to the Muses' paradise: 'To Noble Helicon: The place of Infinite Joye', a 'princely place' of 'grace' and 'pleasure' (P4v), but like many dreamers before him, he must 'return to his body [,] tell what he has seen and thereafter lead ... a reformed life' (Easting 1997, 3). Indeed, the Muses instruct the poet to record his experience as a matter of great urgency. They then bequeath to him the poem's title and the promise of eternal fame: 'And good yong man (quoth they) take paines these few newes to pen, / So shalt thou earne greate thankes of us, and of all Englishe men' (Q3r). The Muses vanish and the dreamer is forced to return to the alehouse where he had fallen asleep. He wakes from his dream and, displeased at his companions' drunken behaviour, describes his decision to spend 'the time in studye' and his determination that the *Rewarde* reach the printer's hands with 'haste' (Q3v).

This article is divided into two sections, the first of which concerns Richard Robinson and the *Rewarde's* paratexts. In my discussion I will show that by attending to the poem's dedicatory materials we may begin to flesh out a biography for this neglected author. I will also consider the critical reception of Robinson in the light of several related issues: the figure of the servant-poet, the flexible *topoi* associated with service, and the kinds of privilege and duty that the act of 'writing' might aspire to fulfil. With these matters in mind, I will then address the *Rewarde's* complaints. The second part of the article is devoted to a critical reassessment of some of Robinson's wicked men and women, together with their sources and analogues. Not only does Robinson address a widespread contemporary concern with sin and morality: the complaints of Helen of Troy, Medea, Rosamond, Tantalus and Midas also reveal a hidden political dimension. Robinson's engagement with these narratives speaks to a range of socio-political anxieties and concerns that are deeply pertinent to his position as servant in the Shrewsbury household.

2. *Richard Robinson: 'Servant in the household to the right honourable Earle of Shrovesbury'*

The critical response to Robinson has been severe. He has been considered a 'cheerful and vulgar figure' and an 'amateurish' author of 'botched verses and forced rhymes', though the *Rewarde* has been deemed 'more readable than most contemporary moral poetry' (Sheidley 1984, 65). But more recent critical attention to Robinson and the *Rewarde* reflects a new interest in the mid-Tudor period, together with greater appreciation of the material and political circumstances governing the stylistic decisions of erstwhile 'drab' writers. The proponents of 'Drab Age' verse were – for a long time – treated as though they had remained quite insulated from the turbulent events taking place in the period during which they lived and wrote. As Cathy Shrank and Mike Pincombe note, recent critics

have begun to appreciate the historical importance of mid-Tudor verse, although ‘few have yet championed its literariness’ (2010, 167). Without a doubt, Robinson’s stylistic inconsistencies and flagrant misogyny render his work difficult for modern audiences. In several sections of the poem, Robinson chose to adopt the much maligned line of the fourteeners. But for his Prologue, and more than half of the complaints, he opted for the rhyme royal stanza, a prosody associated with the dream vision, *de casibus* complaint and a courtly readership. Yet if Robinson’s poetry fails to adhere to a standard principle of organization (Ward 2009, 11), his eclectic approach suggests that he may have had a wide and varied audience in mind. The *Rewarde*, its title-page states, is ‘Veye profitable for all sorts of estates to read and look upon’ (A1r), while the poem itself draws on a range of exemplary figures from both chronicle history and the classics.

One of the main sources for the *Rewarde* is John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* (c. 1431-1438), a composition in the tradition of Boccaccio’s *De casibus illustrium virorum* which paved the way for the mid-Tudor collaborative work *A Mirror for Magistrates*, first published in 1559 and in five further, enlarged editions printed between 1563 and 1610. A number of other works published independently of the *Mirror* similarly sought to ‘spur Englishmen and women to forswear vice by employing the powerfully persuasive form of exemplary tragic narrative’ (Lucas 2009, 233).⁴ The impact of the *Mirror* on the *Rewarde* is apparent in the Prologue’s resonances with Thomas Sackville’s wintry ‘Induction’ to the ‘Complaint of the Duke of Buckingham’ contained in the 1563 edition. Like Sackville, Robinson strategically casts his work as an ‘innocent aesthetic endeavour’ (Lucas 2009, 3) through his use of the dream vision Prologue. Robinson’s contemporary, John Higgins, also revisited the dream vision in his 1574 edition of the *Mirror*. As Robinson explains in his epistle to the reader, the dream is intended to proclaim the poem’s artifice: ‘faining that in my sleepe MORPHEUS tooke me to PLUTOS Kingdome in a Dreame: The which device, I mistrust not, but thou shalt thincke well of’ (A3r). Robinson here knowingly blurs the boundary between truth and fiction, positioning his work inside a distinct and authoritative literary tradition. To his immediate audience, the resonance with another, and rather more recent text – the *Metrical Visions* by George Cavendish (c. 1558) – would have been unmistakable.

A frequently over-looked work, *Metrical Visions* marks a momentous development in the English *de casibus* tradition.⁵ Gentleman-usher to Cardinal

⁴ Comparable texts include: George Whetstone’s *The Rocke of Regard* (1576), Thomas Proctor’s *A Gorgious Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578) and Anthony Munday’s *Mirror of Mutabilitie* (1574). The title of Robinson’s later collection, *A Golden Mirrour* (1589), testifies further to the widespread tendency to link ‘exhortations to virtue to the widely-revered poems of *A Mirror for Magistrates*’ (Lucas 2009, 233).

⁵ The *Metrical Visions* exist in three manuscripts, the holograph of which is appended to Cavendish’s ‘Life of Wolsey’. As noted by Pincombe, a crucial event in the ‘Life of

Wolsey, George Cavendish was the elder brother of Bess of Hardwick's third husband, Sir William Cavendish. In his *Visions*, the poet is elected by the ghosts of the Henrician court and impelled by conscience to record their complaints. Like Robinson, Cavendish deploys a medium that queries the issue of narrative agency: the dream. He considers his poetic 'enterprice' in quasi-prophetic terms: 'that all estates myght se / What is to trust to ffortunes mutabylite' (Cavendish 1980, 27; Pincombe 2009). Unlike Boccaccio and Lydgate, however, Cavendish (as Wolsey's servant) can lay claim to a genuine relationship with each of his complainants. The Cavendishes were closely linked to Robinson's patrons, not only by the marriage of Bess and George Talbot in 1567, but also by the marriages which took place between their children in a double ceremony the following year, when Henry Cavendish was wedded to Grace Talbot and Mary Cavendish to Shrewsbury's eldest son, Gilbert.

Richard Robinson must not be confused with his better-known namesake, Richard Robinson of London (*fl.* 1576-1599; see Voght 1924). Indeed, the name 'Richard Robinson' is extremely common in this period, and this may explain the absence of a biography for our poet. The author of the *Rewarde* is, however, identified on the title-page as a 'Servant in the household to the right honourable Earle of Shrovesbury' (A1r). George Talbot and his wife were considered to be 'paragons of the service nobility' (Collinson 1987, 14) and renowned for their loyalty to the crown. The Talbots were considered right for the job of housing Mary, Queen of Scots and her sizeable entourage, for they also possessed the largest noble household of the period. Mary was moved between the estates of Tutbury Castle, Wingfield Manor, Chatsworth House and Sheffield Castle and Manor, estates which covered large parts of the north of England and were deemed sufficiently distant from both London and the Scottish border. It must have been during Mary's second period of imprisonment at Sheffield Castle between November 1573 and September 1574 that the *Rewarde's* preliminaries were composed, for Robinson makes a point of telling the reader that he wrote the poem 'speciallye in suche times as my turne came to serve in watch of the Scottish Queene' (A2v). This is confirmed in the epistle dedicatory to the Reader, which is signed 'From my Chamber in Sheffield Castle / The xix of Maie, 1574':

And I, being one of the simplest of a hundreth in my Lordes house, yet notwithstanding, as the order there is, I keepe my watche, and warde, as time appointeth it to mee: at the which times, gentle reader, I collected this together ... (A3r)

Scholars have variously shown that the *topos* of service was adopted by Elizabethan writers to communicate a range of related social anxieties and

Wolsey' is Cavendish's deferred revelation of a deathbed prophecy to which only Wolsey's closest servants were privy (2009, 375).

motivations (Whigham 1984; Wall 1993; Burnett 1997; Rivlin 2012). Notions of 'service' in literature were extremely flexible, incorporating 'chivalry, Petrarchanism [*sic*] and relationships with one's political betters and with one's God' (Steggle 2004, 58). The work of scholars such as Patricia Phillippy (1998) and Laurie Ellinghausen (2008) demonstrate further that authors choosing to adopt the postures of servants might also be suggesting that service constituted for them a real 'occupational identity' rooted in a 'widespread, socially important ... type of relationship, that of a personal retainer to his employers' (Ellinghausen 2008, 1). With a high proportion of the nation entering the service profession, and in a multitude of forms, Robinson's epistle assumes a special urgency. As Mark Thornton Burnett observes, household structures were undergoing significant changes. Undermining the steward's traditional role as 'guardian of the household's morality', the 'upstart' officer posed a direct threat to the age-old feudal economy and the exclusive, privileged nature of service (157, 184). The poet's proclaimed constraints of time and space and his perspicacious allusions to the 'order' of household hierarchy speak of a concern that was arguably in the minds of many. But in writing 'From my Chamber in Sheffield Castle' (A3r), Robinson lays claim to a certain material privilege. Indeed, the *Reward* is also referred to as his 'second worke' (A3r), and Robinson describes himself as bound by 'good will' to 'present some other noveltie, more fitter to feede' the 'fantasie' of his patron (A3r). This promise was to be fulfilled in *A Golden Mirrour* (1589), again dedicated to Gilbert Talbot. Though this text was published anonymously, the name 'RICHARD ROBINSON OF ALTON' emerges in a concluding acrostic verse. This suggested to Thomas Corser that Robinson had grown up in Alton (1851, ix), but it is conceivable that in the Earl's declining years he had been pensioned off to Shrewsbury's Staffordshire seat at Alton.⁶

Further evidence perhaps pertaining to the author of the *Reward* can be found among the papers of Shrewsbury's second wife, Bess of Hardwick. A single document relating to the Hardwick estate invites us to consider that there may have been a connection between Robinson and Bess' eldest son. The document mentions the sum of £600 owed to William Cavendish by a Thomas Barley of Stoke. Among the witnesses were 'Tho[mas] Knyveton' (brother to John Kniveton, another of Shrewsbury's servants), 'Robarte Bagshawe' (a common name, but sources suggest that he was a yeoman from one of the Shrewsbury estates) and 'Richard Robinson'.⁷ Though the individual mentioned here cannot with certainty be identified as our poet, it is not unreasonable to suppose that this was he. The name 'Robinson' occurs elsewhere within the family archives,

⁶ I am grateful to Alan Bryson for making this suggestion. See Lodge 1791; Hunter 1819.

⁷ Nottinghamshire Archives, Portland of Welbeck (1st Deposit): Deeds and Estate Papers, 157 DD/P/51/6 (17 January 1573).

most commonly in association with other service-based capacities, such as that of messenger and family tutor.⁸ Perhaps the most compelling piece of evidence linking the name 'Robinson' to the Shrewsbury household occurs in the correspondence of Bess of Hardwick herself. In a letter dated 24 March 1576, she appeals to the recipient, Lord Thomas Paget, as follows:

your Lordship and other the Quenes Justices shall have the hearing and determening of an offence to the lawe, for the deathe of a man by the great misfortune of one Robinson my servant. I am in his behalfe, standing at theis assyses in Stafford upon tryall of lyfe most earnestly to crave your Lordship's favour towards him, according to the true evidence already brought before the Coroner by men indifferent: and the same I trust is to be geven againe at the foresaid tyme before your Lordships. Truly my Lord I would gladly do the pore man good in this case: and therfore trust your Lordship will the rather at my request stand his good Lorde.⁹

Whilst the full identity and fate of this servant are as yet unknown, the letter testifies clearly to Bess' compassionate yet commanding nature, and to her feelings of personal accountability where her staff were concerned. Regrettably, the name 'Richard Robinson' does not appear amongst the family's extensive lists of household employees. But this in itself provokes a set of searching questions. Is the name 'Richard Robinson' a pseudonym? Is the *Rewarde's* Prologue nothing more than an elaborate fiction of surveillance? If so, what ends are served by the poet's claim to keep 'watche, and warde' over Mary?

In trying to answer these questions we need to keep in mind the campaign of 'semi-publicity' aimed at appeasing Mary's supporters by keeping up an appearance of protective benevolence toward the Scottish Queen (Phillips 1964, 55). This led to several desperate appeals on the Earl's part for financial assistance with accommodating his royal guest in a suitable manner. Shrewsbury was required also to provide for Mary's sizeable entourage and to fund a number of expensive trips to the spa at Buxton. As one scholar suggests, despite the fact that he was the second wealthiest man in England, 'what mattered ... was that like others he *felt* poor' (Kershaw 1992, 269 original emphasis). Adding to Shrewsbury's predicament were several

⁸ For example, Leader's account of Mary's captivity implies that George Robinson was selected from among Shrewsbury's entourage to serve as the Bishop of Ross' messenger (1880, 126n; 208). The family was also served in a much broader sense of the term by Dr John Robinson, who was the family tutor for several years and was later recommended by the Earl to the Deanery of Lincoln.

⁹ Bess of Hardwick Papers (hereafter BHP) 103 (29 March 1576). Access to these materials has only recently become possible thanks to the AHRC-Funded Project, *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: The Complete Correspondence*, c. 1550-1608, <<http://www.bessofhardwick.org>>, accessed 2 January 2015. On the letters between Bess and her servants see Daybell 2004; Maxwell 2012.

incidents involving disloyalty on the part of servants which caused numbers of watchmen (initially set at forty) to oscillate frequently over a period of sixteen years. In the spring of 1573, a Privy Councillor had questioned Shrewsbury's son about security at Sheffield Castle. Gilbert is said to have replied as follows:

there good numbers of men, continually armed, watched hir day and nyght, and both under hir windowes, over her chamber, and of every syde of hir; so that, unles she could transforme hirself to a flee or a mouse it was impossible that she should scape. (Lambeth Palace Library, Talbot Papers, MS. 3197, 79 [letter of 11 May 1573])

The watch were fully-armed and required to stand in pairs 'at the stair foot of the said Scots Queen's lodging'. Eight additional soldiers were stationed within and without the castle walls (Leader 1880, 236-239). Many of these men, mostly drawn from the Sheffield yeomanry, ranked poorly in comparison with the more senior figures of the steward or gentleman-usher. Traditionally, yeoman servants were placed in noble households as either foot-men, stable-hands or grooms (Burnett 1997, 155). Evidence suggests that the more senior servants in the Shrewsbury household were permitted to transmit the commands of their master and mistress to the less elevated members of the serving body and to administer punishments (Maxwell 2012, 10-11). Shrewsbury's 'officers' were also allowed to pass through the castle quarters on the Earl's 'speciall busynesse' (Clifford 1809, 125). Although it is not clear in what exact capacity Robinson was employed, specific details contained within the poem point to his covering role similar to that of the yeoman servant or armed guard. 'Yet notwithstanding, as the order there is', Robinson not only keeps his 'watche, and warde', he also writes. For the antiquarian Joseph Hunter, the 'extent and variety' of the sources the *Rewarde* draws on presented an anomaly 'that can hardly be expected from one of the ordinary servants of the earl' (1819, 59). Quite what 'ordinary' means here remains a matter for further discussion.

One possible reason for the neglect of Robinson may be the fact that servant-writing has only very recently been granted significant critical attention. The *Rewarde* poses a major challenge to the notion that servants 'did not generally write or commit themselves to print' (Burnett 1997, 12). Recent work also recognises the value of texts not by convention considered literary – letters, diaries, household books – even the walls of houses in helping us understanding the roles played by servants within both the literary and domestic spheres.¹⁰ As one scholar recently stated, the servant is a 'prominently visible object' in this period, though usually 'invisible as

¹⁰ See Fleming 2001; Hackel 2005; Dowd 2009. Heidi Brayman Hackel also cites the example of Lady Anne Clifford, delightfully employing her servants to decorate her chamber with excerpts from her favourite books (2005, 38).

subject' (Erickson 2009, 24). Scholars generally accept that servants within the noble household descended from middle- or lower-gentry families and were granted positions that promoted family connections. Marriage between members of the nobility and servants certainly did take place, though such alliances met with varying degrees of approval. The example of John Kniveton, a servant-turned-kinsman to Shrewsbury through his brother's marriage to Bess' half-sister, Jane Leche, suggests that a servant's formal responsibilities and status could be improved by virtue of this bond (Daybell 2004, 130n). Bess' steward, Thomas Pusey, was also appointed Sheriff of Nottingham, a position which then 'enabled him to arrange advantageous marriages for his daughters' (Burnett 1997, 175). As Burnett states, 'it was not always easy to recognise where male domestic service ended and other forms of social attachment began' (89). Indeed, the office of servant could both enable and be initiated by a literary career. Thomas Howell (*fl.* 1560-1581) dedicated his first publication to Shrewsbury's daughter-in-law, Lady Anne Talbot and his *Newe Sonets and Pretie Pamphlets* (1570) 'To his approved Maister Henry Lassels Gentelman' (A2r), who was also employed in Shrewsbury's service. Howell later sought patronage from Lady Anne's step-daughter, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke. The poet Barnabe Googe (*fl.* 1560-1588) was also kinsman, ward and servant to William Cecil and a source of direct inspiration for Robinson's work.

Servants who not only wrote, but then went on to publish, also pose a significant challenge to preconceived notions of authorial subjectivity and agency. Writers such as Isabella Whitney (*fl.* 1567-1573) and the lesser-known James Yates (*fl.* 1582) turned the very experience of domestic service to imaginative and profitable use. Steggle's research on the latter author shows how publication was actively encouraged by the household in which Yates lived and worked. The traditionally courtly genre of the dream vision is also used by Yates to promote ideal models of service and courtesy, but geared ultimately toward the higher master, God (Steggle 2004, 58). Servants were expected to emulate their masters, but emulation was predicated on the master's own reputation for loyalty. To take an earlier example of the connection between authorship and service, we may turn to John Russell's *Boke of Nurture* (c. 1460), a fifteenth-century compendium of household instruction. Here Russell cites his posthumous allegiance to Lydgate's patron, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, as enabling him to impart his knowledge to a new generation of aspiring servants:

an usshere y Am / ye may beholde / to a prynce of highe degre,
 þat enioyethe to enforme & teche / alle þo thatt wille thrive & thee
 Of suche thynges as here-aftur shalle be shewed by my diligence
 To them þat nought Can / with-owt gret experience.
 (British Library Harleian MS. 4011, 171r)

Burnett's characterisation of servants as consumers – not producers – of literature can be assimilated to a pervasive (mis)representation of servants. By the latter part of the sixteenth century, the 'serving man's vaine reading' of ballads, and the maidservant seduced by cheap, popular fiction had become stereotypes with advocates of literary reform (Hackel 2005, 153). The avowed concern was that reading the 'wrong sort' of books might lead to absconding, idleness or sexual depravity, though these complaints may also have been clever marketing ploys designed to advance sales amongst a newly-literate portion of society. On the other hand, conduct books such as William Fulwood's *The Enimie of Idlennesse* (1568) attempted to promote the activity of writing 'at vacant tymes when leisure permitteth' as an exercise in manners: 'thou shalt both purchase frendship, increase in knowledge and also drive away drowsy dumps and fond fansies from thy heavy head' (A6v-A7r). Fulwood is praised by Robinson at the end of his *Rewarde* (Q3r), and the epistle dedicatory re-works Fulwood's words, describing his treatise as a 'Drousie Dreeming peece of work' (A2v). Robinson again echoes *The Enimie of Idlennesse* when he implores the reader to forgive the ingenuous aims of his own poem: 'take in good part this simple travaile of mine' written 'to eschewe Idlennes', 'the daughter of destruction' (A3r). The dream becomes an effective literary device by means of which he is able to at once articulate his poetic talent, and also use writing as a tool for implementing some of the moral imperatives of his profession.

Returning to the example of Shrewsbury's household, writing also emerges as a vital medium for communication during Mary's captivity. During this time the Earl remained almost entirely absent from London and the court, returning on one occasion for the trial and execution of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, in 1572. Members of the wider household nexus – comprising family, kin and servants – would therefore act as agents transmitting news between the country and the court. John Kniveton emerges as a key representative of the family during this period (Daybell 2004, 123). Thomas Baldwin was another such intermediary based in London and required by Shrewsbury to settle the debts incurred as a result of Mary's over-exuberant diet (Talbot Papers 3198, 26 [24 June 1580], cf. 47, 53, 61). Gilbert Talbot was kept away from Sheffield at Queen Elizabeth's request, but considered 'wrytyng' from the court a duty he owed his stepmother (BHP 080, 28 June 1574). Indeed, 'What newes out of the northe?' is a question frequently posed in this period, and one which suggests an avid 'appetite for political discussion' (Fox 1997, 600). The *Rewarde's* title-page makes it evident that the producers of this book wished to exploit the seductive nature of 'strange' stories:

A dreame most pitiful and to be dreaded:
 Of things that be strange,
 Who loveth to read:
 In this Booke let him raunge,
 His fancy to feed. (A1r)

In 'The Booke to the Aucthour' Robinson refers to the heavy demands put upon a news-intelligencer: 'And must I needs be packing hence, about such newes to beare'; 'But speede, as speede maye, abroade I will attempte in haste' (A4r). The depiction of the Muses in 'To Noble Helicon' also captures something of the interrogative mood of the nation: 'Why hast thou bene so long (quod they) what newes has thou brought with thee?' (P4v). It is by abiding by the terms of his journalistic contract that Robinson can hope to win eternal fame. At the close of the poem, the dreamer encounters a laurel tree laden with golden pens, then walks through a gallery containing life-like portraits of the classical authors and the medieval triumvirate of Chaucer, Skelton and Lydgate. These authors then make way for a contemporary equivalent, '*Wager, Heywood, and Barnabe Googe, all these together sate. / With divers other English men, whose names I will omit*' (Q2r). In a direct evocation of Jasper Heywood's Preface to *Thyestes* (1560), Robinson's Muses then look to the Inns of Court for inspiration:

Your Honours have in Th'innes of Court, a sort of Gentlemen,
That fine would fit your whole intentes, with stately stile to Pen.
Let Studley, Hake, or Fulwood take, that William hath to name
This peece of worke in hande, that bee more fitter for the same. (Q3r)

The lines from Heywood's Preface read as follows: 'In Lyncolnes Inne and Temples twayne, Grayes Inne and othe mo, / Thou shalt them fynde whose paynfull pen thy verse shall florishe so' (1560, *7v).

The analogy is indicative of Robinson's affinity, if not in reality then certainly in spirit, with the fellowship of writers operating in and around the Inns of Court (Shrank 2007; Shannon 2009; Winston 2011). It is perhaps no coincidence that these passages from 'To Noble Helicon' also allude to the translators of Seneca. During the 1560s, translation and adaptation of neoclassical drama became an intensely popular mode for political expression at the universities and the Inns of Court. Recent research by scholars such as Laurie Shannon and Jessica Winston show how these works also point to the 'social function' of tragedy: translation and the adaptation of Senecan drama 'helped authors to connect with other participants in this literary and social community, and to address issues that were important to them in contemporary social affairs' (Winston 2009, 482).¹¹ The first text attributable to Robinson, a lost play entitled *The Ruefull Tragedie of Hemidos and Thelay*, can be dated at the perimeter of this epochal decade, for it is listed in the Stationer's Register as of 1570 (Corser 1851, vi-viii; Wiggins and Richardson 2012, 52). This title suggests that Robinson may have engaged with the contemporary fashion for

¹¹ See also Winston 2005; Woodbridge 2010.

tragic narrative and neoclassical adaptation. Other links from the Inns of Court emerge in the form of Robinson's possible connection with William Cavendish, who was resident at Gray's Inn during the 1570s, and in a poem entitled *A Poore Knight his Pallace of Private Pleasure* (A Student in Cambridge 1579). This work, evidently written in imitation of George Pettie's *A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure* (1576), contains proof of the *Rewarde's* wider circulation. Published by an elusive 'J.C. Gent' of 'Grayes Inn', it contains two separate episodes in which Robinson is praised directly for his depiction of Pope Joan and Helen of Troy:

Revenge craves, the Gods have it permitted,
 Wherfore (quoth shee) let her be led away:
 But whither it was, I cannot truly say,
 Yet Morpheus sayd, that Robinson should tell,
 As well her paine, as where this Lady dwell. (Poore Knight, F1r)

These putative connections with the Inns of Court are given substance by Richard Smith's dedicatory verse to the *Rewarde*. Smith also published George Gascoigne's *The Steele Glas* and *The Complaynte of Phylomene* (1576), which, like the lost tragedy of *Hemidos and Thelay*, were printed by Henry Bynneman. Smith himself draws the connection between the *Rewarde*, the writings of Gascoigne and the wider Inns of Court community through his invocation of the Muses (Shannon 2009). Curiously, they are the Muses of 'Thespyas' (A4v). The poem contains several references to earlier works (possibly Robinson's lost play, as well as 'pleasaunt Poemes, and Sonettes'). Smith's depiction of Robinson as a 'Jewell for an Earle' and his celebration of his removal to Parnassus, where he 'Contrites the time both daye and night, in service of the same', are deeply suggestive.

Though the occasion may appear to be of little magnitude, Robinson fashions its publication into a collaborative and intensely patriotic endeavour. In the Epistle dedicatory, he asks that the reader attribute the volume's 'cause' to 'the busie lives, that all my Lorde my Maisters men do leade in the service of our Sovereigne Lady, the Queenes Maiestie' (A3r). He then projects the obligations of his office onto his readers, calling on them to protect the text 'from the spoile of Sclander, and the bloody butcher Envie, by the same, garde and keepe' (A2v); he thus endows the act of service with both patriotic and patronal virtues. These topical concerns are given their sharpest edge within 'The Author to the Reader', where the image of the 'Mirrou' evokes the ideally symbiotic relationship between the master and the servant:

Sith the protection of the Scottishe Queene was committed to my saide Lorde in charge, whose true and duetifull service therein, to his Prince both night and daie: as well by the travaile of his Honours owne Person, as also all them that serve him: I doubt not but FAME hath tolde it to all the Princes in EUROPE and noble subjectes: as it were to bee a Mirrou to the rest, that shall serve in credite of their Prince. (A3r)

Indeed, in seeking to promote Shrewsbury's own 'true and duetifull service', the passage might be read as a response to doubts about the Earl's fealty to the English crown.

These would have been timely assertions. The several preoccupations keeping Shrewsbury away from London had allowed a 'bruit' to spread of his – and his household's – sympathy for the Scottish Queen. In the expectation that Shrewsbury would be relieved of his office and Mary released, in December 1573 two chaplains from the Earl's estate made their way to court armed with libels alleging carelessness and disloyalty. The Earl openly decried their 'foule and evyll reports' as attempts to not only 'deface' his 'dutiful heart and loyalty' but also to bring about 'the rooting up' of his house and the 'utter overthrow and destruction' of his 'lineal posterity'.¹² As rumours of Shrewsbury's sympathy for the Scottish Queen intensified, so too did his reputation for tyranny. As Stephen Kershaw observes, the 'apparently impregnable position' of the Earl was directly threatened by his failure to uphold custom, a failure brought about by his at once inventive and ruthless efforts to clamber back some of the revenue lost during his time as Mary's keeper (1992, 276). This eventually led to marches on London by the 'clamoruse people' of the town of Glossop in 1579. The Earl's response to such 'weked speches' is detailed in a letter of April 1574:

How can it be imagenyd I shuld be desposed to favor this Queen for hur cleme to succede the Quenes Majestie? My delynge towards hur hath shoid the contrare: I know hur to be a strangar, a Papyste, and my enemy. (Talbot Papers, MS. 3206, 691 [16 April 1574]; Rawson 1910, 114-118)

The discovery of spies operating from within Shrewsbury's household – including the servant Thomas Morgan (later a conspirator in the Babington Plot) and Henry (or 'Hersey') Lassells, 'in lynnes with the Queene ... by the meanes of his brother being in servyce there' – continued to provoke fears on the part of Lord Burghley and Elizabeth that the household had fallen sway to the 'cuning Practises of the *Scotts* Quene, and her Friends'. There was, indeed, evidence to support their concern.¹³ By upholding the appearance

¹² Talbot Papers, MS. 3197, 47 (30 January 1574), cf. 77; 3198, 290; 3206, 673, 679, 691; Strype 1824 [1709], 371-374; Rawson 1910, 114-118.

¹³ Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 172, 65 [201, 272] (29 December 1573). See also BHP 225 (13 October 1571); State Papers (Scotland), SP 53/8, 43 (28 February 1572); SP 53/10, 1 (16 January 1575), 53/10, 3 (21 January 1575), 53/10, 37 (30 April 1575); Leader 1880, 126n; 208. Under interrogation, Morgan implicated four other men including an attorney, a schoolmaster and a porter, who were believed to 'haunt one Gree's house in Stanyng Lane, in London'. Earlier in 1571, the messenger George Robinson was imprisoned in a house in Sheffield after secretly delivering letters to Mary. On another occasion he was interrogated along with two others for smuggling letters in cipher concealed within his shoes. In 1579, Anthony Babington, a key conspirator in the plan to assassinate Elizabeth, had served as a page in the Earl's household (Williams 2004).

of custodial benevolence, the Shrewsburys had fatefully undermined an otherwise untainted reputation for loyalty. Elizabeth's anxiety was only fuelled by the discovery of a clandestine marriage between Bess' daughter and the Earl of Lennox in the summer of 1574.

The first part of this article has shown that the imperatives of 'service' might be interpreted in terms of an authorial, occupational and noble identity; the second will consider the extent to which the *Rewardé's* infernal complaints speak to these concerns. Focussing particularly on the lamentations of Helen, Medea and Rosamond, I suggest that these figures are presented in such a way as to declare the Earl's proper execution of his duty as Mary's keeper – his 'delynge towards hur'.

3. *'For she was never lyke Penelopie': Defaming Mary Stuart*

To publish a poem that directly defamed Mary Stuart was a risky undertaking. 'Maister Randolphe's Phantasey: a breffe calgulation of the procedinges in Scotland from the first of Julie to the Last of Decembre' (c. 1566), ostensibly the work of Thomas Randolph, the English Ambassador to Scotland, was disseminated amongst Mary's Protestant opponents in and around Edinburgh (Phillips 1964, 34-37). Upon her discovery of 'Le Songe', Mary called for the immediate exile of the Ambassador, whom she mistakenly believed to be the poem's author. Like the *Rewardé*, the poem is heavily indebted to Sackville's 'Induction'. The first part of the 'Phantasey' describes the Scottish nobles who had advised Mary against her marriage to Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley. The second part describes a dream in which Mary confesses that she ignored the advice of her councillors and that the 'wanton delight of effemynate force' now rules her court (Cranstoun 1891, 17). She commands Randolph to record her complaint:

... because thy expert yeres
Dailie attendent may truelie reveale
a whole dyscourse how I did prevale. (Cranstoun 1891, 14)

Yet the sole extant manuscript copy of the poem contains the signature of a servant of Randolph's, a Yorkshireman named Thomas Jenye.¹⁴ Elizabeth promised Mary that, 'even if but a dream and not written, she will not think [the perpetrator] worthy of living in her realm', but no evidence of the case having gone further survives (State Papers, Scotland, SP 52/12, 69 [13 June

¹⁴ State Papers (Scotland), SP 52/11, 241 (31 December 1565). Jenye was later involved with the Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland in the Northern Uprising. He escaped to the continent and worked for the Spanish secret service, for which he received a generous pension (Cranstoun 1891, xvii-xxiv; Lucas 2009, 232-233).

1566]). The curious case of 'Maister Randolphe's Phantasey' suggests that the poem was in fact commissioned by Protestant authorities and was therefore a work of state-sponsored propaganda.

On 10 February 1567, Darnley's half-naked body was found in the grounds of Kirk O'Field. The body exhibited no signs of injury from the explosion that had allegedly blown Darnley from the building where he slept. The several rumours surrounding this mysterious discovery led to a slew of propagandist libels, broadsides and placards – often posted under cover of darkness.¹⁵ Initially criticizing Mary for her failure to punish the culprits, the campaign went on to accuse Mary of adultery and of complicity with her new husband, James Hepburn – the 'Bludie' Earl of Bothwell – in murder. One placard depicting Mary as a mermaid was accompanied by the Latin motto, *Mala Undique Clades* ('Destruction awaits the wicked on every side'). The association between Mary and unchaste, 'wickit wemen', such as Clytemnestra, Jezebel and Medea, had been generated by a cluster of ballads by Robert Sempill. Designed to incite revenge for Darnley's murder, the ballads frequently utilized the typically 'medieval' conventions of dream vision, dialogue and complaint. In 'Ane Tragedie, in forme of ane Diallog betwix Honour, Gude Fame, and the Author heirof in ane Trance' (Buchanan 1571), for example, the Earl of Moray appears to the dreamer 'Nakid and bair, schot throw pudding and panche, / Above the Navill, and out above the hanche' (A2r). 'The testament and tragedie of umquhile King Henrie Stewart of gude memorie' (1567) also assimilates the language of the law into its title and narrative structure, thereby drawing on the rhetorically persuasive example set by the literature of complaint. Through their self-deprecatory appeal to Boccaccio ('Bochas'), the ballads derive much inspiration from Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and the authors of *A Mirror for Magistrates*:

War Johne Bochas on lyve as he is deid.
 Worthy workes wald wryte in hir contempt,
 Alsweill of tresoun as of womanheid.
 Thairto his pen wald ever mair be bent
 Hir for till shame, and bludie Bothwell shent. (Cranstoun 1891, 37)

As J.D. Staines has suggested, by positioning recent events within a providential structure and by claiming Mary as the 'origin' of contemporary misfortune, the balladeers sought to defend her deposition, 'fomenting the violent passions of civil war' (2009, 53-54, 25). Their productions were used as

¹⁵ The ballads are reproduced in Cranstoun 1891 and in McElroy's forthcoming edition. See also Bawcutt 1998; McElroy 2007; Staines 2009; Shrank 2010a; Shrank 2010b; Smith 2012; Barrett-Graves 2013; McElroy 2013.

evidence for the political climate in Scotland and sent, by way of ambassadors such as Randolph, to Mary's detractors at the English court.

Although Elizabeth had placed injunctions on the printing of works that directly defamed her cousin, George Buchanan's *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes* (1571) evaded censure by masquerading as a Scottish translation of a French text entitled *De Maria Scotorum*. *Ane Detectioun* included a first printing of the notorious 'casket sonnets' and of Mary's letters to Bothwell ('quhair sche maketh hir self Medea' (G2r, Cecil Papers 1222, 376 [7 December 1568])). By omitting any indication of its English origins, *Ane Detectioun* represented a clever tactic of 'semi-publicity' (Phillips 1964, 55). The essence of this campaign had earlier been captured in the performance of *A newe enterlude of vice conteyninge, the historye of Horestes* (1567) by John Pyckering of Lincoln's Inn. In contrast to the Sempill ballads, revenge is here transformed into the 'restoration of social harmony after, and through punishment' (Staines 2009, 66; Shrank 2010b, 538). As Rosalind Smith further observes, the post-Darnley trail of anti-Marian propaganda was followed by an outpouring of analogous texts on the subject of husband-murder. Plays such as *Arden of Faversham* (1592) illustrate the popularity on the English stage of true crime stories offering 'often surprising ... approaches to feminine guilt and criminal agency' (2012, 498). This brief overview of the anti-Marian propaganda campaign and its essentially tragic tenor may put us in a better position to understand the representation of 'wicked' women within the *Rewarde*.

As the first of Robinson's complainants, Helen of Troy is a principal character not only in a catalogue of wicked women, but also in the didactic scheme of the entire *Rewarde*: an example to all 'that live in godlie fere' (D1r). Her punishment revives a standard Dantean formula, that of 'Howe fornicatours in hell rewarded bee' (C4r), but also voices a popular desire to respond to Helen's paradoxical status as both chaste victim of rape and seductive adulteress (Schmitz 1990, 60-75; Heavey 2012). Though the analogy is not unambiguous, early modern interest in Helen was inspired in part by what Katherine Heavey describes as a 'desire to praise not just anonymous women who are unlike Helen, but in particular the epitome of chastity, Elizabeth herself' (2012, 473). In casting off 'Golden Rayes, and ritche attyre' and assuming 'the mourners weedes', Helen insists that one can mimic and exploit the image of chastity: 'seeme to lament: / Hide your painted faces, that sette mens heartes on fire' (C1r, my emphasis). Queen Rosamond, a character drawn from Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, analogously claims that 'it is harde for to knowe / When a woman speakes fayre, if shee meanes it or no' (O4r). The issue of feminine speech is given further treatment in the complaint of Pope Joan. Here, the dreamer slides from blame into pity for the speaker: 'Bicause shee was a woman, and had so litle grace' (P4r). But it is Robinson's sense of sympathy for Helen that confirms the ability of this particular speaker to affect her audience: 'Alas uneth my hande can holde the

pen, / my sight deuoured is with greeuous teares' (C2r). Robinson's emotive response to Helen's complaint might explain away any scribal inaccuracies, but it also questions the validity of her complaint and its subsequent bearing on the textual record. In an allusion to Ovid's *Heroides*, Robinson locates the most damning evidence against Helen within her letters to 'good Paris': 'I layde him letters, in secrete holes and noukes, / for to attempte the venture for my sake' (C3r). But the final proof is in the publishing:

And then when Fame hath sounded up hir trumps,
 and publisht all your deedes and filthy life:
 Then shall confusion put you to your Jumpes,
 your Husbandes shall disdaine to call you wife. (C3v)

Helen's complaint culminates in a cacophony of exploding cannon-fire, dissonant voices 'hurling up and downe' and the solitary cry of 'vengeaunce (on them that were defilde / with spilling guiltlesse blood)' (C4v). 'The Bookes verdite upon Hellen' also contains a direct warning to the reader, using her example to offer admonitions of a more immediate and seemingly more personal nature: 'Sith Helens faultes are knowne, and yours in secret hyd / Take heede least you be overthrowne' (D1r).

When Robinson began composing his *Rewarde*, John Higgins' *First parte of the Mirour for Magistrates* (covering the period from Brutus, the founder of Britain, to Julius Caesar) emerged from the press. This second version of the *Mirror* also turned to classical exemplars which were so 'sufficiently distant from English politics' as to make it difficult to forge direct parallels with the present day (Budra 2000, 32).¹⁶ Whereas by placing political concerns safely within a classical context, the *Mirror's* authors could evade the censors, audiences of *de casibus* tragedy were encouraged to discern similarities between the classical past and contemporary events. For Scott Lucas, the readers of the *Mirror* were invited to pursue a path of retribution and even punishment for the *Mirror's* modern-day counterparts (2009, 15). With regard to Robinson's Helen of Troy, it is the female reader who is encouraged to derive a lesson from her example:

Although it doth abashe eache daintye Dame,
 to reade of mee, or yet to heare mee read:
 I am the marke for you to shun like shame. (C1v)

¹⁶ I do not, however, believe that when the *Mirror* sets aside questions of power in favour of those relating to 'beauty and chastity' (Budra 2000, 67; that this is as apolitical as Budra suggests).

In these lines, Helen presents herself as a profoundly literary figure and a self-proclaimed victim of the textual record. The 'verдите' also contains a Chaucerian-style list of virtuous women which includes Alceste, Cleopatra, Criseyde, Griselda and Penelope. Although Cleopatra may strike the reader as a rather enigmatic choice for inclusion in this list, she serves here, as in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, to illustrate a direct concern with fame. The fact that Cleopatra is also the missing link in the *Noble Women of the Ancient World* series, a set of hangings commissioned by Bess of Hardwick during the 1570s, reinforces this assessment. It is instructive to contemplate the widely-held conviction that Mary participated in the design and construction of these hangings (Ellis 1996; Frye 2010). According to Susan Frye, the hangings represent a coded instrument of feminine power and dynastic ambition, promoting the paired ideals of domestic and political action as opposed to 'passivity and silence' (1999, 166-167). Conversely, Robinson's Helen of Troy is presented as the origin of ill fame for women; hers is the 'face' that 'did staine the rest' (D1r).

Robinson's account of Helen's fall and punishment shares some remarkable incidents with records of contemporary events. In February 1572, the Earl reported the actions of 'one Morgan my servant' and several other men, 'punished and put forth of my house' for delivering ciphered letters to and from Mary. Afraid of being caught, Morgan had hidden these letters underneath a stone in the grounds of Sheffield Castle.¹⁷

This episode also bears subtle traces of Robinson's acquaintance with anti-Marian propaganda. Although Helen of Troy was not cited explicitly in the attempt to defame Mary Stuart, Cathy Shrank locates the 'evident proofs' against Mary within the libellers' treatment of the handwritten record (2010a). *Ane Detectioun* contains the defamatory exhortation by Privy Councillor Thomas Wilson to 'call to minde that part of hir letters to Bothwell quhairin sche maketh hir selfe Medea' (Buchanan 1571, G2r). The casket sonnets were described as 'divers fonde ballades of her owne hand' and were said to have been enclosed, together with the said letters to Bothwell, inside 'one small gilt cofer nat fully ane foote lang, beyng garnishit in sondry places with the Romaine letter F under ane kyngis crowne' (O2r). *Ane Detectioun* also relates how Mary had

attemptit a disguisit maner of mournyng. But the myrth of her heart far passing the fayned sorrow, she shut the dores in ded but ... within fower dayes she threw away hir wayling weede, and gane to behald baith sunne and open skye agayne. (E2v-E3r)

Mary was further condemned for eloping under 'a marvelous fine inventioun god wote, that Bothwell should ravishe and take away the Quene by force'

¹⁷ (Scotland, 2), 151-152, SP 53/8, 40-43, 137-138 (28 February 1572).

(F2v). It was not, however, the figure of Helen of Troy, but rather that of Medea that was to become the most pervasive and damning of all literary representations of Mary (Shrank 2010b).

Although Robinson's Medea obstinately insists that Helen's 'wicked life and mine God knowes / are not to be comparde', Medea is presented as another 'good example for Women' (F1v). But while the complaints of Helen of Troy and Queen Rosamond deceptively implore women to do away with cosmetics and flamboyant clothing, 'The rewarde of Medea for hir wicked actes' goes further and critiques the trappings of witchcraft, 'Magike, and vile Conjuracion' and by implication, of Catholicism: 'You witches all take heede ... / Leave of your invocation, your crossings and your charmes' (G3r). There are several possible sources for Robinson's depiction of Medea, though the episode differs from the classical strand of the story and is re-worked along distinctly Lydgateian lines by substituting the instrument of murder – conventionally a poisoned cloak and chain – with a gilded 'cofer': 'invented with divers Jewels ... Subtillye contrived of a straunge fashion' (G1r).¹⁸ Medea's sons deliver the coffer to Creusa, the woman for whom she had been abandoned by Jason and, upon its undoing,

there flewe foorth fire, that burnde both man and child ...
 Consumde to dust this Ladye fresh and gaye,
 burnde all the pallas five yardes within the grounde. (G1r-v)

Robinson also turns to Lydgate for the *Rewarde's* final complaint, 'The rewarde that Rosamond had in hell, for murdering of hir husbande Albonius and living vitiouslie in hir husbandes dayes':

I polluted filthilye my Husbandes bedde,
 With one of his servauntes, whome after I made
 Most Traiterously to smite of his head,
 As hee laye a sleepe with his owne sworde or blade.
 And so tooke his Treasure, and to the Seas wee fled,
 There leaving my Husband wounded to dead. (O4r)

Robinson, however, departs from Lydgate in conflating the two figures of the king's murderer and Rosamond's lover into one and the same, the servant 'Melcheus'. In contrast to the *Fall of Princes*, the *Rewarde* presents the king as unarmed and sleeping at the time of the attack, in which his own 'sword or blade' is used.¹⁹ Rosamond's 'vile duplicitye' swells into pride as she then

¹⁸ See Lydgate's account of King Oetes in the *Fall of Princes* (Book I, 2171-2401). On Robinson's use of continental sources see Ward 2009, 58n.

¹⁹ By contrast, Lydgate's King Alboin puts up a fight against Perdeus with 'A speris hede to a tronchoun bounde' (Book VIII, 3312).

re-directs her affections toward the exarch of Ravenna. Having no longer any use for her servant, she offers him a cup tainted with poison, but he realises that he has been betrayed and forces Rosamond to herself drink from the cup, thus bringing about both their deaths. Although Melcheus' complicity in murder is the cause of his demise, he functions essentially as foil for both Rosamond's acts of revenge and for her ultimate fate. In this connection it is interesting to consider how similar moments of domestic disorder on the stage stirred early modern audiences to not merely 'expand investigations of the war between the sexes' but to also 'consider the place of servants' (Wall 2002, 200). Burnett has shown that a contemporary desire for preferment by those seeking to 'overcome the handicap' of their estate fuelled myths of the 'false steward', a paradigm of social ambition in early modern drama (1997, 184). Yet it is through depicting the falls of Tantalus and Midas that Robinson's interest in the sins of pride and evil governance extend to and conceal prerogatives pertinent to his status within the Shrewsbury household.

From the outset, the complaint of Midas, entitled 'Mydas, Which Tirannouslye, swallowed not onely his Countrey for Lucre sake, but his householde Servauntes also' (O1r), reminds the reader of Robinson's proclaimed status as a 'Servaunt in the household to the right honourable Earle of Shrovesbury'. The title also displays echoes of the epistle's conceit of the 'busie bee', 'commonly slain for the lucre' of her honey (A2-3r). In his complaint, Midas admits to having banished from his service 'the bloode of gentle race, / Which alwayes counsaylde me to minde, mine honor and my grace' and chose to lend his ear to 'Dunghil Doltes' (O2r). The downfall of Tantalus is similarly attributed to the wilful consumption of 'whispering tales' by the 'simplest sort' (H1v); the 'causers of my smart' he claims, 'counseld mee to play, the Tyrantes parte' (H1v). Thus, whilst the ghost of Tantalus in Heywood's *Thyestes* is the ancestral parent to a whole generation of cannibalistic tyrants, Robinson's re-working of the tradition emphasizes the dangers of ambition ('a privie poison', 'The nourishe of envie', G3v). Ambition spreads not only through the bloodline, but also among those serving one's own estate, in whom it surfaces in the form of 'Wicked counsel':

My servauntes through theyr counsell were principall,
 That thus I was corrupt, I crye therefore alas,
 They fed mee with fables, to bring theyr purpose to passe.
 And in my name the poore they spoyled quite,
 To mee unknowen, when I receiv'de no mite. (H1v)

Both Tantalus and Midas are presented here in the guise of sixteenth-century landlords. Though possessing 'mines, with vineyardes large, with corne and cattell store / Yea Lordships, lands, parckes houghe & wide' ('Midas', O2r), they 'famishte the countrey with fines and double rent' ('Tantalus', H1v),

thus bearing indirect witness to the contemporary trauma of enclosure (Ellis 2000). Through the 'bookes verdite upon Tantalus' the author implores those 'whome, the Lord appointes to rule' (H4v) to derive a moral lesson from this example. But it is against gossip, personified in the self-serving antagonist 'Piers' (or 'Peter') 'Pickthanke', that the full force of the *Rewarde's* attack is directed. This parodic take on Langland's *Vision of Piers Plowman*, the spokesperson of medieval estates satire, taps into a related anxiety over the roots of protest:

Lende not your eares in any wise, to Peter Pickthankes schole.
His flattering fetche doth robbe you al, of famous honour due,
Whose painting pensels evermore, reprocheful colours hewe.
And causeth curses of the poore, whose plaints the Lord doeth heare,
Redressing streight their care & grief, throughout the earth echewhere.
... Then are these muckscrapers at these daies, that swallow up the poore,
Which have to much, yet not content, but proule for more & more ... (H4r)²⁰

The prospect of rebellion is implied in the alehouse setting of the *Rewarde's* Prologue, 'When men delight to keepe the fire side, / And winter tales incline their eares to heare' (B1v). But it is only by limiting the spread of gossip, public opinion and complaint that the 'mighty' *can* truly prosper. In one final admonition, the 'Booke' contends: 'But wordes are wind, what will you more? No vertue is regarded: / Be as be maie, the daie will come, your workes will bee rewarded' (H4r). In signalling the reputational danger posed by rumour to those in power, the complaints of Tantalus and Midas thus posit the bogus, self-serving interests that lead to social and moral foment, and hence raise serious questions over the purpose, means and standing of the service profession itself.

The danger posed by rumour is counteracted in the closing episode of the poem. 'To Noble Helicon' is an allegory of patronage which champions the written record. Here Robinson has the Muses re-inscribe his earlier celebration of patronal virtues, assimilating the laureate ambitions of the poet and the sponsor's noble obligations into a single bond of 'grace' shared by both servant and master:

²⁰ The passage quoted confirms Robinson's acquaintance with *A Mirror for Magistrates* (See 'Death of the Poet Collingbourne', 1563). Whilst referring to the character as 'Piers' elsewhere in the *Rewarde* the reference to 'Peter Pickthanke' is a rather unfortunate example of Robinson's attempt to fill the line of the fourteener. The character appears at other moments in the *Rewarde* (and once in *Golden Mirrour*) accompanied by 'Tom Teltale' (H2v; H4v). These characters suggest further parallels between the *Rewarde* and the Scottish libel tradition, in particular the figures 'Maddie' and 'Tom Telltruth' (McElroy 2007). By extension, the passage evokes memories of the 1569 rallying cry, 'God Speed the Plough'. On the links between social satire and protest in the North see Lowers 1953; Kesselring 2004; Wilson-Lee 2012. See also Jansen 1989; McRae 2002.

So shalt thou earne greate thankes of us, and of all Englishe men.
 And for our ayde bee sure of it, gainste Zoilus and his whelpes,
 For to defend thy Booke and thee, wee promise heare our helpes.
 Loe heare you see, howe wee acquite our servauntes at the last. (Q3r)

Fifteen years later, in *A Golden Mirrour*, Robinson was to touch again on this concern.²¹ ‘The Authours name in Verdict’ repents, ‘Of wicked wilfull wretched workes’ and appeals to a higher master for deliverance: ‘Revenge not Lord, my wofull works, when I in sinne did wade’ (P3v). As this poem reveals, Robinson must in the meantime have achieved a degree of social advancement. While the printer’s preface simply identifies the poet as a ‘Gentleman of the north Countrey’ (A2r), his full identity is exposed in a final acrostic to be ‘RICHARD ROBINSON OF ALTON’.

A similar naming strategy is employed in the *Rewardes* finale. Here Morpheus at last reveals the true identity of the poet, but with a playful emphasis on his humble origins: ‘He is (quoth Morpheus) towards you al, and sproong of Robins blood, / Whose painefull pen hath aye beene prest, for to advance this place’ (Q1v). In *A Golden Mirrour* Robinson again explores the inextricable link between etymology and identity. Fourteen of these poems are penned on the etymologies of ‘divers worthy personages inhabiting the gentle natured countrey and Countie of Chester’ (A3r). One of the *Golden Mirrour*’s subjects – Lord Ferdinando Stanley – was a renowned patron of the arts. In writing of him, Robinson draws on the family motto (‘sans changer’) and Stanley’s sobriquet (‘Lord Strange’) in speaking of his noble comportment toward the poor:

... because his noble giftes
 Doe put equals to their shiftes
 Let poore me judge, that want refuge,
 That find their Landlords change,
 He takes th’olde rent, and is content:
 Which may be called Strange. (C4v)

Immediately preceding this verse we find an untitled encomium to ‘Talbot’, a twenty-stanza poem which concentrates specifically on the rich symbolic currency of the family’s heraldic emblem, the hunting dog. Like the *Rewardes*

²¹ *A Golden Mirrour* is also dedicated to Gilbert Talbot, ‘sonne and heire to the right honorable the Earl of Shrewsbury, Knight’ (A2r). It is interesting that the publisher of *A Golden Mirrour* claimed to have received the work in 1587, but deemed it necessary to examine ‘the end and purpose of the writer’ (A2r) before committing it to press. By making this claim the publisher re-configures the volume, in which the first poem appears to prophecy Drake’s success against the Spanish Armada, as a work of propaganda.

Prologue, the 'Talbot' poem is a dream vision, one in which the poet plays witness to a hunt of 'wicked weesels' from 'Britanian grounds'. It concludes with a direct counsel:

The heads and quarters of these Carrens vile
I did beholde, where kites and Crowes did eate,
A marke for many that do themselves exile
From Dueties doctrine, and deale by deepe deceit. (C3v)

Once again, Robinson uses a cautionary tale to illustrate the punishments that await the wicked. The poem echoes the homiletic warning that rebels will be 'rewarded with shameful deaths, their heads and carcasses set upon poles, or hanged in chains, eaten with kites and crows, judged unworthy the honor of burial' (Cooper 2003, 34). Like the Devonshire tapestries of the fifteenth century, the poem represents an attempt – as Collinson would have it – to resuscitate memories of the Talbots' reputation for 'unconditional loyalty under three other Tudors' (1987, 5). As Edward Wilson-Lee has argued, the fashion for heraldic beast allegory, traditionally an elite form used to signal inclusion at court, had been taken up by balladeers during the time of the Northern Uprising (2012, 237). By celebrating the victory of the Talbot dog, the poem restores this tradition to its noble origins and commemorates the part Shrewsbury played in the 1572 trial and execution of the Duke of Norfolk. Arguably, this was a measure of great necessity. On losing custody of Mary to Rafe Sadler in 1584, Shrewsbury was obliged to make a 'humiliating statement' at court (Archer 2013, 190n). Although this cleared him of the earlier charge of disloyalty, allegations were revived in 1586 after the discovery of a plot to assassinate Elizabeth. The key conspirators were Anthony Babington, once a page in the Shrewsbury household, and Thomas Morgan, the man discharged from Sheffield for conspiring with the Queen. The ballad-like refrain of Robinson's encomium ('... here Talbot take it, for thou art ever trew') goes right to the heart of Shrewsbury's perennial pledges of allegiance to Elizabeth over almost twenty troubled years in her service.

4. *Conclusion*

In seeking to 'abandon Idlenes' through writing, Robinson puts his professional obligations at the service of a set of ethically and politically-motivated purposes. The crucial fact of being Shrewsbury's household servant garners a rhetorical potency which permits him to exploit the privileges of his position as 'watche and ward', messenger and scribe. Whilst Robinson's engagement with the dream vision and *de casibus* complaint may not immediately strike the reader as having resulted in outstanding poetry, these modes of writing relate to contemporary efforts by writers from the Inns of Court and its surrounds to revitalize and reform interest in the possibilities of 'medieval' genres. Like so many dreamers before him,

Robinson emerges from the *Reward* as a liminal figure prominently situated between Hell and Helicon, delivering news along the proverbial highways of 'Crosselesie lane, and little Wittame home' (Q3v) and striving for admittance into the Muses' hall of fame. His true identity and function, however, remain unknown. Was he, perhaps like Jenye, an instrument of propaganda? Undeniably, the *Reward's* polemical tone and content are in accord with accepted notions of Protestant reform. But in considering Robinson's rhetorical capability, his geographical and social mobility and his interaction with a broad array of textual modes and traditions, it is possible to see that his *Reward* might also have spoken to the socio-political preoccupations of his time. Ultimately, it is through his depictions of the rise and fall of the mighty that Robinson reminds his reader of the dynamic and decisive role played by the servant, the several hazards of his particular occupation, and the rewards that may lie in wait.

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