

Reading Names in an Elizabethan Allusion: Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and Thomas Nashe

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My 1974 edition of Everard Guilpin's 1598 collection of satires and epigrams, *Skialetheia*, fails to recognize how heavily one passage relies for many of its effects on the names of the two individuals ridiculed and thus, in consequence, how readily the two are identifiable. I now see that the initials of Southampton and Nashe are given prominence in one line and that the text plays throughout, in a variety of ways, on the name *Henry Wriothesley*, Third Earl of *Southampton*, thought by most scholars to be the Fair Young Man of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. This allusion to these two has gone unnoticed (other than in my edition) and its method of playing on names thus gone unappreciated. My identification of the two satirized by Guilpin, which was tentative in my edition, can now be confident. Specialists in the English Literary Renaissance need to be alert to the way names were embedded within texts.

The comment on an Everard Guilpin passage in my 1974 edition (208-11) of his *Skialetheia or A Shadowe of Truth, in Certaine Epigrams and Satires* of 1598, is, I now realize, seriously inadequate. I failed sufficiently to recognize that Guilpin relies heavily and unremittingly on the names of those attacked as sources of inspiration in line after line, with the result that my conclusions, back then, were too tentative. Now, belatedly, I can be much more decisive and also, based on what I now know and see, can illustrate how peculiar and various, from our point of view, were Elizabethan codes for names.

Skialetheia was printed anonymously, no doubt because it contained many passages similar to the one now before us, passages that, read properly, indirectly attack important individuals. (Lord Essex, the "Felix" of a long passage, at the height of his power in 1598, is one of

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several attacked.) Guilpin would have feared repercussions. His anxieties, if we are correct to assume such, would be justified as *Skialetheia* was one of a number of books called in and burned in 1599 because it was judged to be socially inflammatory. (Guilpin himself, however, was not mentioned by name in the edict.) Using a kind of code based on names enabled Guilpin to make clear enough to whom he referred for those that could understand such matters, and to do so in a brash and exhilarating way, wittily taking his chances, and at the same time protecting himself because no references were direct. Much of the literature of that period, not only that of abuse such as this, where the matter is complex and involves some risk, but also that of praise or love, takes inspiration from the names of individuals at issue. Invention often began with names. Those of us who specialize in the English Literary Renaissance should from the start learn how to detect names in crucial places in texts, to be alert to the variety of their presentations (of spellings, anagrams, quibbles and puns, rebuses based on names, and so on), and to believe that forms (distortions usually) of real names are apt to be present and identifiable. It should not require of others a quarter-century's study, as it has of me, to begin to recognize the codes for and realize the importance of this feature of Renaissance style.

The passage for consideration occurs at Satire V. 103-20, when the Satirist, describing a series of grotesqueries and depravities in a London street scene, settles his attention on one particular couple. Our task is to find clues to the real-life identities of the "lord and foole" of the first line:

But who's in yonder coach? my lord and foole,
One that for ape tricks can put *Gue* to schoole:
Heroick spirits, true nobilitie 105
Which can make choyce of such societie.
He more perfections hath than y'would suppose,
He hath a wit of waxe, fresh as a rose,
He playes as well on the treble Violin,
He soothes his Lord vp in his grosest sin, 110
At any rimes sprung from his Lordships head,
Such as *Elderton* would not haue fathered:
He cries, *oh rare my Lord*, he can discourse
The story of *Don Pacolet* and his horse,

(To make my Lord laugh) sweares and iest, 115
 And with a *Simile non plus* the best,
 (Vnlesse like *Pace* his wit be ouer-awde)
 But his best part is he's a perfect Bawde,
 Rare vertues; farewel they.... (Guilpin 1974, 85)

The Fool (Parasite-Flatterer) described here writes, among other talents put into service, and does so to excite his Lord's sexual urges. I suggested in my edition, without confidence, that the Lord is probably Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, considered by most to be the Fair Young Man of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (the one to whom Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* [1593] and *The Rape of Lucrece* [1594]), and that the Fool or protegee is either Shakespeare or Thomas Nashe, probably Nashe. Evidence pointing to Southampton-Nashe that I then considered "insubstantial" I can now augment. Guilpin appears to have in mind the most conspicuous example of pornography of the 1590s to survive, Nashe's poem *Choice of Valentines*, perhaps composed in 1592, called "Nash his Dildo" in two of six manuscripts (it was not printed). It is a graphic account of a visit to a brothel (Nashe 1958, 1966, 3: 397-416). One manuscript is indeed dedicated to "the lord S" (3: 403); another, however, the recently located Folger copy, is dedicated to "the Lorde Strainge." (For discussions of the manuscripts and references, see, on the Folger in particular, Evans and Niland [1993] and, on the manuscripts in general, Molton [1997].)

I missed completely that the initials of the Lord and Fool are announced early on, in line 105: "*Heroick spirits, true nobilitie*" (= Henry Southampton, Thomas Nashe), a trick I was not prepared for. The phrases "*Heroick spirits*" and "*true nobilitie*" are both heavily ironic, being contaminated and diminished by the "lord and foole" of the previous line; that is, the "lord" by the "foole," and by the satiric context in general. Neither phrase applies specifically and exclusively to the individual whose initials it carries; both apply, ironically, at once to both individuals attacked. (*Spirits*, being ghosts, can hardly be *heroic*, so that we have what appears to be oxymoronic.) *Heroic*, I also failed to realize, would have been taken in that period as an anagram of Latin *Henricus*, certainly when the full name was anagrammatized, as was in fact done by William Camden, in his *Remains Concerning Britain*, which was near completion in 1597:

Henricus Wriothesleius,
HEROICUS, LAETUS, VI VIRENS.

'Noble, happy, growing in power.' (1984, 150, 490)

If there's a play on *Heroic*, then we may also expect one on *spirits*. I did not see then, and would not have dreamed of such a possibility, that *spirits* supplies the clue to the family name. It suggests, I now see, *wraiths*, that is, apparitions or spectres of dead persons, and thus *Wraithes-ley*, Southampton's name, now usually spelled *Wriothesley*. Until well into the sixteenth century the family name had been simply the monosyllabic *Wrythe* (at times *Writh* or *Writhe*) (Green 1993, 25-27). The *O.E.D.* (1.b), where *wraith* is described as originally (and chiefly) Scots, supplies a useful quotation from James VI in 1597: "These kindes of spirites, when they appeare in the shaddow of a person...to die, to his friendes...are called Wraithes in our language." How the name *Wriothesley* was pronounced, and thus what sort of imaginative plays could have been made on it, has been a topic discussed at length by scholars in our own time and was apparently of some interest then. Martin Green, for instance, lists 17 different spellings of *Wriothesley*, reflecting, we may presume, almost as many pronunciations (1993, 306-307n.). Indeed, Southampton's family name has generated more comment than any other name in the period except Shakespeare's. That name, as Muriel St. Clare Byrne has observed, "presents a genuine spelling pronunciation problem" (1981, 1: 121). Guilpin goes on to exploit, beginning here with *wraiths*, its potential for a variety of plays as ground for his wit and ridicule.¹

In the next line (106) the word *choyce*, surely, points directly at *Choice of Valentines* ("make choyce of" = "select"). And "The story of *Don Pacolet* and his horse" (line 114) carries a similar allusion—with an added bawdy glance at women's *plackets* 'slits in skirts'. Pacolet's magical horse, capable of conveying him instantly to any desired place, appears in the romance *Valentyne and Orson*, popular in the sixteenth century.

At least three additional swipes are taken at Southampton by name. First, "fresh as a rose" (line 108), meaning something musty, the simile being stale by the mid-1590s. As Green shows in massive detail in *Wriothesley's Roses: In Shakespeare's Sonnets, Poems and Plays* (1993),

Southampton was then identified with the emblem of the rose, which was associated with the Wriothesley family on the basis of the Southampton connection; the arms of the town of Southampton contained three roses, both red and white. And, Green goes on, doubtless encouraged by the suggestion of roses in their own name, the Wriothesleys simply appropriated the emblem and decorated their home with the Southampton heraldic roses. It is partly the *Rose-ly/Wriothes-ley* pun which enables Green (1993, 18, 33) firmly to connect Southampton and roses and thereby to find, correctly I think, so much of Southampton in Shakespeare's works, especially in the sonnets and poems. In Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, *Rose* is always capitalized, is sometimes italicized, and occurs (in singular and plural combined) 13 times.

Second, "soothes his Lord vp in his grosest sin" (line 110) plays directly and outrageously on *Lord Southampton*: "*soothes his Lord up*"—as against "*soothes his Lord down*" or "*soothe him down*," which would be the obvious verbal play on *South-amp-ton*. "Soothes him *up*" meant encourages or humors him, in his sexually proclivities, we are to infer. In a *Parnassus* play written about 1599, Ingenioso, taken by many to stand for Nashe, uses the phrase to describe the way he serves his lord, named Gullio: "Well madame Pecunia, onc[e] more for thy sake will I waite on this truncke, and with soothinge him vpp in time will leaue him a greater foole than I founde him" (Anon. 1949, 213).

Third, "(To make my Lord laugh)" (line 115) plays on the Latin root *ris-* (having to do with laughter) in the pronunciation "*Ris-ly*." A. L. Rowse is one of a number of scholars who feel that the name "is pronounced Wrisley, and may be rhymed with grisly" (1965, 4; see also Green 1993, 18). The fact that this verse is short two syllables, quite unusual for Guilpin's text, may mean that something suggesting the name, or Nashe's, was dropped, perhaps censured. Direct allusions to other names in the piece, though suggestive, do not apparently draw on their intendants' real names as such, e.g., *Gue*, a blind performing ape; *Elderton*, a dipsomaniac maker of ballads; *Pace*, a churchman who lost his wits. (*Gue* may have stood, in addition to the ape whose name it was, for Nashe's old antagonist Gabriel Harvey since it combines the beginning and end of his name: *Gabriel Harvey*—*v* and *u* being interchangeable to makers of anagrams.) Doubtless there is more in the passage than I now see, which is much more than I once saw.

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Several implications follow from the foregoing, especially those concerning literary history. First, Guilpin hints strongly at *Choice of Valentines*—note the word *choyce* in line 106 and the allusion to *Valentyne and Orson*. In view to the dedication to Lord Strange in the Folger manuscript, one is forced to one of three surmises: that “lord S.” was in fact Southampton, not Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange (who died in 1594), despite the Folger manuscript’s dedication, some copier of the manuscript having guessed wrong; that Guilpin was either wrong himself, and others would have been also, or else knowingly gave the wrong impression, Southampton being very much alive in 1598 and Guilpin, as is obvious in other places in *Skialetheia*, being extremely hostile to Southampton and his party; or that Guilpin alludes to *Choice* because it was well known in order to direct attention or suggest the presence of still other pornography by Nashe, compositions not surviving and perhaps not so well known, written at the time for Southampton, not for Strange.

Second, during the 1590s quite a number of printed comments accuse Nashe, if rarely by name, of prurient writing (of prostituting his muse), comments literary historians have dutifully and typically noticed, e.g., Gabriel Harvey (1966, 2: 91); Nashe himself, in rather vague admissions of guilt (1958, 1966, 3: 30-31, 129); *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (in Harvey [1966, 3: 63]); Joseph Hall (1949, 19-20); John Marston (1961, 171-72); the *Parnassus Plays* (near the end and at the turn of the sixteenth century [Anon. 1949, 71-79]); and John Davies of Herford (published in 1611, though written earlier; quoted by McKerrow in Nashe [1966, 5: 153]). But no one, to my knowledge, includes Guilpin in this group. In neither of Martin Green’s two books (1974; 1993), the second of which is a particularly valuable addition to our knowledge of Southampton, and both of which make the case for a unique relationship between Nashe and Southampton, is there any mention of Guilpin’s passage. Finally, for all the comment on Southampton’s family name *Wriothesley*, with the perfervid search for puns, quibbles, and anagrams, no one has observed before, to my knowledge, the possibility of a play on *wraiths-spirits*. This alone should send many Shakespeareans back to their texts.

Note

1. One suspects similar plays on *Henricus Wriothlesleius* (or some version thereof) in a sentence of Nashe's dedication to him in *The Unfortunate Traveler* of 1594 (my emphases): "Incomprehensible is the height of your *spirit* both in *heroical resolution* and in matters of conceit" (1966, 2: 201). The *W* here is wanting in the anagram (because it was not pronounced) or else is manifest as a *v* become *u*, though a *u* was available in *Henricus*. Anagrams may substitute *v* or *u* for *W*, according to Camden (1984, 142). The *a* of *al* is drawn from the surname's last syllable phonetically in Latin or in English. Anagrams were rarely exact or expected to be so: *heroical resolution* is an Elizabethan anagram for Southampton's given name and surname. Nashe may be having fun with the convention of anagrams. His dedication "so far exceeds all norms of Elizabethan hyperbole" that Martin Green considers it a "mocking parody" of the one Shakespeare addressed to Southampton for *Venus and Adonis* (1993, 98).

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