

This leaves two mysteries still to solve - the identity of Humphrey King, NOT Florio but somebody close to him who felt that he, too, had been insulted in the 'Groatsworth' epistle. Then there is also that rude Latin nickname Hugh Sanford devised from 'Resolute I. F.' and Florio's assertion that Nashe had made use of it while adding something to another mans book. My belief is that Florio was the complaining gentleman who suspected Nashe had added the 'Epistle to the gentlemen playmakers' to the end of Robert Greene's 'Groatsworth of Wit', in the same way that he had prefaced Greene's 'Menaphon' to the 'gentlemen students' and that the rude name in question was "Absolute Iohannes Factotum".

While Shakespeare scholars will probably never agree about who actually wrote that letter, it's easy to see why Florio of all people would have suspected Nashe. Greene's publisher Chettle is still believed by some to have penned the piece, others maintain as Chettle himself said "I protest it was all Greene's, not mine or Maister Nashe's". There is an arch exchange between Chettle, in his apologetic 'Kind Heart's Dream' and Nashe's subsequent 'Terrors of the Night' which parodies Chettle's device of being visited by ghosts with messages.

Nashe denied any involvement in the Groatsworth incident, and yet Chettle's ghost of Robert Greene does appear to point an accusing finger in Nashe's direction and invites us to look for something Nashe must have written, chronologically between the death of Greene and Chettle's publicaton which according to this ghost 'fed his own envy' rather than attacking Greene's enemies, the Harveys. Nashe published nothing under his own name during that period, so what is Chettle referring to?

The Groatsworth of Wit is very familiar ground however I would like to point out that there are certain similarities between the style and opinions expressed in 'Groats-worth' and contemporary books and pamphlets of Nashe's which should be acknowledged; this, for instance, is a snatch of Nashe's 'The Pride of the Learned' in his 'Pierce Penniless' - "Hence atheists triumph and reioice, and talk as profanely of the bible as of 'Bevis of Hampton', (a popular novel). I hear say there be mathematicians abroad that will prove men before Adam; (i.e. by pre-biblical accounts of mankind) and they are harboured in high places, who will maintain it to the death that there are no devils." Marlowe was widely reported to have said there was no such thing as the devil, indeed it was one of the eight charges laid against him and Groatsworth appears to address him in urging him against atheism.

If Nashe did write this epistle, his next paragraph must be based on what he imagined, or hoped, Greene might have said about himself, "young Juvenal, that biting satirist, that lastly together with me writ a comedy. Sweet boy, might I advise thee, be advised, and get not many enemies by bitter words: inveigh against vain men, for thou canst do it, no man better, no man so well: thou hast a liberty to reprove all and name none" - an apparently approving reference to Nashe's habit of pluralizing his attacks, as if he believed this gave him some sort of license to say whatever he pleased, even when the individual he targeted was easily identifiable. Was Greene really so naive on this point?

Compare the lines with Nashe's own estimation of his worth as a satirist in 'Lenten Stuff' when he says "I will make you laugh your hearts out. Take me at my word, for I am the man that will do it." Next comes the paragraph in 'Groats-worth' that has been quoted thousands of times in nearly every book about William Shakespeare. There can be no doubt that this refers to an

actor who at least postures as a playwright. The paragraph begins with a generality, "those puppets (I mean) that speak from our mouths, those Antics garnished in our colours" who are beholden to writers like Greene for their living. Far from helping Greene in the distress of his poverty and ill health, we are told that he had been forsaken by them. Players, it seems, cannot be trusted: "for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Iohannes fac totum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country. Oh that I might entreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let those Apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions" and the paragraph concludes "it is a pity men of such rare wits, should be subject to the pleasure of such rude grooms."

There are two or three things here that are distinctly reminiscent of Nashe's earlier works. The derogatory term "buckram Gentlemen" is used to describe actors in 'Groats-worth', a reference to buckram effigies used in pageants like giant puppets; Nashe uses the identical image in 'Pierce Penniless' referring to clerical scholars, apparently another episode in the quarrel with the Harvey brothers this time, "my soul abhors these buckram giants, that having an outward face of honour set upon them by flatterers and parasites, have their inward thoughts stuffed with straw and feathers, if they were narrowly sifted." Compare also the line "supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you" with Nashe's attack on the 'idiot art master' at St. John's who "thinks to outbrave better pens with the swelling bombast of a bragging blank verse." Then there is the "upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers" which calls up one of Nashe's favourite devices, a fable from Aesop and indeed he'd used this image in his 'Menaphon' diatribe attacking someone who: "vaunts Ovid's and Plutarchs plumes as their own". It comes from Aesop's story of the Jay and the Peacock, with its inherent moral "it is not only fine feathers that make fine birds" and it runs like this:

"A Jay venturing into a yard where Peacocks used to walk found there a number of feathers which had fallen from the Peacocks when they were moulting. He tied them all to his tail and strutted down towards the Peacocks. When he came near them they soon discovered the cheat and striding up to him, pecked at him and plucked away his borrowed plumes. So the Jay could do no better than go back to the other Jays, who had watched his behaviour from a distance; but they were equally annoyed with him, and told him: it is not only fine feathers that make fine birds."

There may also be a glancing reference to Aesop's tale of 'The Crow and the Raven' enfolded in the phrase 'upstart Crow'. In this legend the crow is envious of the raven's reputation as a bird of omen, so he hides in a tree and cries out like a raven, but when some travellers take a closer look they realise he's only a crow and pass on.. Aesop says:

"it is also like this with men: those who compete with rivals stronger than themselves will not only be unequal to them, but they will also become a laughing stock." 'Groatsworth' seems to suggest this player in posturing as a writer, but is out of his depth. He "supposes" he can "bombast out a blank verse", the word supposes could mean not only 'believes' but also 'purports' or 'pretends'. What is the nature of the "tiger's heart" wrapped in this player's hide? The phrase "Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide" is often regarded as a quotation from

Henry IV, which is an attractive notion. Using this 'wool in sheep's clothing' device to indicate some kind of duality in the nature of the player might well have appealed to one fond of quoting Aesop. Given their on-going quarrel and this Nashe-like language in the Groatsworth letter, I can readily see why Florio might have been one of Chettle's complaining gentlemen who believed he had detected a living hand behind the letter.

Despite the denials it seems to me Florio never let go of the idea that Nashe had written that epistle and was still vexed about it years after the event. If I understand him correctly, he complained that Hugh Sanford had coined the name 'absolute Iohannes Factotum' in criticising Florio for tackling the editing of Sidney's 'Arcadia'. It translates as 'John Over-all' or as we would say today 'Jack of all trades'. If the name had been bandied about among the University wits in the aftermath of this episode, when it appeared in the 'Groatsworth' it would have identified Florio to these readers, after all, it would rather destroy the purpose of the exercise to use a nick-name to refer to somebody if nobody recognised it. Looking again at the original sentence, we're told the player: "supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being AN absolute Iohannes fac totum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country." The sense of the remark now seems to be 'he's just as conceited and out of his league as his friend John Florio' - the man Nashe had called one of those "shifting companions that run through every art and thrive by none".

This brings us at last to what may be the most interesting discovery of all in this quarrel - the pamphlet 'An Half-penny worth of Wit in a Penny-worth of Paper, or The Hermits Tale' printed for Thomas Thorpe by the Assignment of Edward Blount under the obvious pseudonym Humphrey King. The author apologises to his patron, the Countess of Sussex, for addressing her under a 'covert barron' - a French legal term referring to a change of name, and the text of the poem reveals that indeed 'Lusty Humphrey' is a character from a poem by John Skelton. It seems to have been quite the fashion to borrow alter-egos from Skelton - Philip Sidney did it when he styled himself Philip Sparrow, as did Edmund Spenser when he adopted the Skelton name Colin Cloute, so we can see this author is following a known pattern. He tells us in his dedication that he has been accused of usury and dishonesty and his purpose is to deny the charges, adding "My book I entitle a halfpenny worth of wit in a pennyworth of paper whereby it draws somewhat near to the matter and the purpose" and goes on to tell us that while he freely admits he is no scholar, he justifies his right to, as he puts it, "shoulder in amongst them" because while they set their pens to showing off their wits and attacking one another in pamphlets, he deploys his wit to make his readers think about the issues of the day.

This is how he puts it: "I see my inferiors in the gifts of learning, wisdom and understanding torment the print daily with lighter trifles and jigglorums than my russet Hermit is, which hath made me the bolder to shoulder in amongst them. They clap a pair of French spurs on the heels of vice to rowell ope the wombe of that resty jade iniquity and let all the loathsome guts and garbidge of his paunch issue out to putrifie and infect the fresh air of Pauls Churchyard - I curb sin with a double snaffle of reprehension and turn and wind him with my smart wand of correction to what virtuous manage I please."

The dedications run to an interesting six pages, followed by various commendatory or witty verses to the author. The third of these sonnets contains the lines Nashe referred to in Lenten

stuff and appears to be the work of Florio. There is an ironic oath of friendship in the verse which runs 'By the red herring, thy true patronage, and famous Nashe so dear unto us both'. Then we come to the main body of the text, a lengthy poem, *The Hermit's Tale* -and for a while this stopped me in my tracks because it is so unlike anything of Shakespeare or his contemporaries in its simplistic style and even, almost plainsong rhythm. "Walking by a forest side, an ancient hermit I espied, white was his head, old was his face, pale were his looks, obscure his place, and in his hand I might behold, a book all torn and very old..." - thus it begins and continues in this sing-song style. It was some time before I hit on what it actually is and represents. The meter contains an even number of vowel beats to each line - rising at times from as few as three beats all the way up to nine and back again. It's a style mediaeval literary students would recognise at once as 'Skeltonic' - the style of John Skelton. Furthermore a study of his biography, brief though it is, reveals that the hermit of the poem is almost certainly a representation of Skelton himself, looking back on a life spent partly as a courtier and finally as a man of God, renouncing the vainglory of the Court and the ambition-led false piety of the Church.

What we have here is a piece of overt plagiarism designed as the sincerest form of flattery - a personal tribute to the inspirational force of Skelton.

As a pay-off to those university wits and critics - there is an interesting penultimate verse to the Hermit's tale... "You poets all, and some that write of Aesop's fables, conceiting plots to please the world, notes from your book of tables, methinks that Ajax should you call to make waste paper of you all that spend your time to please the time, with fictions, tales and idle rhyme, leaving the mark that should be hit, to praise God's glory and your wit. Oxford and Cambridge were erected for Virtue not for vice protected."

The reference to Ajax by the way implies their pamphlets are best fit to be ripped up and used in the latrine. Sir John Harrington's discourse on water closets comes to mind. The poem closes: "As for this homely tale, and he that made the same, hath neither learning, wealth nor wit and scarce can write his name."

In conclusion we have a man here writing under a pseudonym a poem designed to perfectly answer the 'Groatsworth' accusations of plagiarism and being an 'upstart' with humour, wisdom and purpose. He denies dishonesty and usury, he defends his right to 'shoulder in amongst' the university scholars as a writer, although he admits he is no scholar himself, and for some reason decides to publish a piece which could quite simply have been entitled 'The Hermit's Tale' under the banner 'An halfpenny worth of wit in a pennyworth of paper' because he says, it addresses the matter and the purpose of his publication. It is then put out by Thomas Thorpe and Edward Blount; bear in mind also the context in which it turns up: the row between Nashe and Florio which apparently touches on Nashe's envy of Shakespeare. I think this warrants a closer study altogether for it is surely exciting to think it might be the world of William Shakespeare, heavily disguised in Skeltonic verse. I have only been able to find a copy of the third edition of 1613 can be seen in a library, proving at least that it went to three reprints. The only clue as to the publication date, obviously prior to Nashe's *Lenten Stuff*, comes in a reference in the dedication to the reader to 'Geronimo's' - which was a fencing school and popular social centre for young men in London in the late 1580's and early 1590's before it was displaced in around 1594 by Saviolo's school.

It's also worth comparing Nashe's sketch of Humphrey King with Ben Jonson's brief description of his comic character, Sogliardo. It is widely believed this was a satirical portrait of Shakespeare, but let us remember that Florio came from the town of Soglio and it was common for Italians to be named after their place of origin (remember Nolano, the nick-name for Bruno). At any rate, Nashe tells us: he is 'Honest Humphrey, as all his friends and acquaintances esteem him, King of Tobacconists, a singular Mecaenas to the pipe and the tabor' - while Sogliardo, Jonson tells us in his list of characters at the start of 'Every Man Out of His Humour' "comes up every term to learn to take tobacco and see new motions. He is in his Kingdom when he can get himself into company where he may be well laughed at." I think that might be a reference to Florio attending the Parnassus plays at St. John's. Incidentally Court correspondence mentions Florio's fondness for tobacco when a visiting emissary complained that in order to get an audience with Queen Anne, he had to charm Florio with a new pipe to win favour.

Kingly references really come together in John Davies Epigram from 'The Scourge of Folly':

"To our English Terence, Mr. Will Shake-speare,
Some say, good Will, (which I, in sport, to sing)
Had'st thou not played some Kingly parts in sport,
Thou had'st been a companion for a king;
and been a King among the meaner sort.
Some others rail, but rail as they think fit,
Thou hast no railing but a reigning Wit,
and Honesty thou sow'st, which they do reap,
So to increase their stock which they do keep."

I am left wondering if all these Kingly references might perhaps refer to Humphrey King – is this how Shakespeare 'played some kingly parts in sport'?
It is certainly a tantalising conundrum.