

THE AUTHOR BEHIND THE ALLONYM ‘RICHARD LICHFIELD’

By Robert Prechter

In 1596, Thomas Nashe issued a pamphlet titled *Have with you to Saffron-Walden or, Gabriell Harveys Hunt is up*. It was Nashe’s last salvo in a pamphlet war with Gabriel Harvey dating from 1592. Nashe’s pamphlet begins with a mock dedication to ‘Don Ricardo Barbarossa de Caesario ... for Trinitie College,’ indicating Richard Lichfield, a barber serving Harvey’s old college at Cambridge. Similarly grandiose mock dedications attend B.R. (Barnabe Rich)’s *Greenes Newes* (1593), Philip Foulface’s *Bacchus Bountie* (1593) and William Kemp’s *Kemps nine daies wonder* (1600).

In his text, Nashe jokingly credits Lichfield for translating *Pierce Penilesse* into ‘the *Macaronicall* tongue’ (intentionally ill-Latinized Italian¹) and ‘maimedly’ into French. Some scholars have bemoaned the seeming loss of these translations, though they are surely fictional.

In 1597 came a reply to Nashe titled *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe*.² The tract was issued in the name of ‘Don Ricardo de Medico campo, Barber Chirurgion to Trinitie Colledge in Cambridge.’ ‘Medico campo’ is a droll rendition of ‘leech field,’³ the opening phrase thereby indicating Mr. Richard of Lichfield, the dedicatee of Nashe’s *Have with you*. Because barbers are unlikely authors, a natural assumption would be that Gabriel Harvey penned the piece in the barber’s name, answering Nashe mock for mock. But scholars have observed that aspects of humor and style indicate that someone other than Harvey wrote *The Trimming*, and they’re right. The writing styles are quite different. So far, so good.

I was astonished, however, to discover that from Thomas Nashe’s numerous biographers to the editors of Wikipedia, scholars today have defaulted to the opinion that Mr. Lichfield of Trinity College is the author of the book with his name on it. I cannot fathom why scholars believe that a *barber*, of all people, someone who cuts hair, pulls teeth and bleeds people, was able to pen a *learned*,

THE
TRIMMING
of Thomas Nashe Gentleman,
by the high-titled patron Don
Ricardo de Medico campo, Barber
Chirurgion to Trinitie Col-
ledge in Cambridge.

Faber qua fieri comedes isse gollat.



LONDON,
Printed for Philip Scarles
1597.

erudite, satirical tract worthy of a top student at the university. Nicholl admitted, ‘Barber-surgeons were college servants, rather than academics,’⁴ yet he evaded explaining how a full-time beard-trimmer could have come up with the Latin-infused text of *The Trimming*, which also features sprightly verbal inventions such as *glossomachicall, polypragmaticall, parasituprocriticall* and *pantophrainoudendeconticall*. Such a person would have to have been highly educated, yet Lichfield left no record of an education. Nor did he write anything else in his life despite living another 33 years.⁵ Lichfield’s will, which was proved in 1630, ‘seems to be the only documentary record of Lichfield,’⁶ suitably fitting the unremarkable life of a barber. Despite these red flags, ‘modern scholars do not doubt he wrote this work.’⁷

I think we can do better than that. The person we seek is someone who was well educated, was associated with Cambridge, had a mindset naturally opposed to Nashe’s loose language and raucous subject matter, wrote satire, and was active in literature in or near 1597. A hint of the true author comes from the observation that ‘Lichfield’s pamphlet ... makes a glancing reference to the rising Cambridge satirist, Joseph Hall.’⁸ Hall ‘spent seven years as a brilliant undergraduate [and] became a fellow of Emmanuel College, the dominant stronghold of Puritanism at Cambridge ...’⁹ after which he served as Bishop of Exeter and then of Norwich. Hall’s abilities and sensibilities are compatible with the text of *The Trimming*.

Hall is also on record as the author of satires, and their chronology fits perfectly. Hall’s first book, the satirical *Toothlesse Satyr*, came out in March of 1597, and his second book, *Byting Satyres*, came out in March 1598. *The Trimming* came out halfway between those two titles, in October 1597. All three books are similar in having been issued without Hall’s name attached. It was not until 1599 that Hall was outed as the author of the two anonymous tracts, which were then issued together in his *Virgidemiarum*. Unlike Richard Lichfield, who is credited with no other books, Hall continued to issue works until 1611.

In his acknowledged satires of 1597–8, Hall spends numerous stanzas scolding someone he calls ‘Labeo,’ offering plenty of clues that his target is the Earl of Oxford as Shakespeare,¹⁰ although he also takes shots that ‘may be partly aimed at Nashe.’¹¹ Most transparently, Hall speaks of ‘the Divell, and Saint Valentine,’ implying Nashe’s works, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell* (1592) and *The*

Choise of Valentines (1593). He grouses that Labeo need ‘Gird but the Cynicks Helmet on his head’ – a reference to the Nashe persona – to issue ‘the blacke Cloude of his thicke vomiture.’ In similar language, the Lichfield pamphlet grouses that Nashe displays ‘blacke choller’ and issues ‘ill-faverd vomittes of railinges.’

Hall shared Gabriel Harvey’s views on verbal propriety. As displayed in his two anonymous tracts, he agreed with Harvey’s negative view of Nashe’s texts as well as his mixed view of Shakespeare/Oxford’s output: ‘His dual opinion of de Vere’s writing is evident, as he recognizes his intelligence and ability in the history plays and the comedies but scourges his misuse of it in *Venus and Adonis*.’¹²

In short, Hall had the education, the Puritan prudishness, the glibness, the animosity, the compatibility with Harvey, the satirical bent, the verbal tendencies and the timing that make him the ideal candidate for having posed as Richard Lichfield for *The Trimming*. He slipped out the tract between two similar complaints, likewise aimed, at least partially, at Thomas Nashe, all three of which omitted the name of the true author.

I am aware of two outside-the-box attempts to tag the author as someone other than Gabriel Harvey or Richard Lichfield. One scholar proposed that the effort, though not ‘the most brilliant of pamphlets,’¹³ is by William Shakespeare. Another tagged ‘the Earl of Oxford as the author.’¹⁴ But it cannot be by Will Shaksper, who was illiterate, nor by the Earl of Oxford, who was, according to most Oxfordian interpreters of Nashe’s *Strange Newes* (1593), Nashe’s patron.¹⁵

Thomas Nashe’s final pamphlet, *Nashes Lenten Stuffe*, was published in January 1599. Its title responds to a line in *The Trimming*, whose introduction states, ‘this which I have here provided was bred in Lent ...’ In other words, *The Trimming* was Lichfield’s Lenten stuff, and now we are presented with Nashe’s. Nashe’s subtitle, *With a new Play never played before ...*’ is another response to *The Trimming*, which had linked Nashe to a Show, also never played,¹⁶ titled *Terminus & non terminus*. A third response derives from Lichfield’s challenge in referring to ‘Tho: Nashe ... borne I know not where,’ to which *Lenten Stuffe* provides an answer. Despite these links, Nashe’s subject matter is mostly apart from responding to Lichfield’s charges.

In the summer of 1599, shortly after *Lenten Stuffe* was published, authorities took the dramatic action of directing all combatants in the pamphlet war to cease

publishing. John Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury, ordered ‘that all Nashes bookes and Doctor Harveyes bookes,’¹⁷ along with satires by Joseph Hall, John Marston, Edward Guilpin, Thomas Middleton, T. Cutwode, Robert Tofte and John Davies & Christopher Marlowe,¹⁸ were to be burned and banned. It is likely that the authorities knew that Mr. Lichfield the Cambridge barber did not pen *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe*, or they would have included his name in their otherwise thorough roster of bans.

References and Endnotes

- 1 The FreeDictionary.com/macaronic.
- 2 Available at <https://archive.org/details/worksofgabrielha03harvrich> and <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A02777.0001.001?view=toc>
- 3 McCarthy, Penny, *Pseudonymous Shakespeare*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Burlington, Vermont, 2006, p.158.
- 4 Nicholl, Charles, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1984, p.233.
- 5 Nicholl, p.234.
- 6 Nicholl, p.318.
- 7 Editor’s text prefacing a copy of Grosart’s edition of *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe, Gentleman* by Richard Lichfield, first published in 1597, internet, <http://www.members.tripod.com/sicttasd/trimcopy.html>
- 8 Wikipedia, ‘Richard Lichfield’.
- 9 Morris, Carolyn, ‘An Arrogant Joseph Hall ... and an Angry Edward de Vere,’ *Brief Chronicles*, Vol. VII, 2016, p.74.
- 10 Morris, pp.33–82.
- 11 Nicholl, p.60.
- 12 Morris, p.43.
- 13 McCarthy, pp.158–161.
- 14 Appleton, Elizabeth, *An Anatomy of the Marprelate Controversy 1588–1596*, Edwin Mellen Press, 2000; as paraphrased in Stritmatter, Roger, Book Review, *Shakespeare Matters*, Vol.1, No.3, Spring 2002, p.27.
- 15 Nor can Oxford be the author according to my hypothesis of his relationship with Nashe, as proposed in the Thomas Nashe chapter of *Oxford’s Voices*.
- 16 In my opinion, for reasons offered in the Thomas Nashe chapter of *Oxford’s Voices*.
- 17 As quoted in Hibbard, G.R., *Thomas Nashe*, Harvard University Press, 1962, p.232.
- 18 Wikipedia, ‘Bishops’ Ban of 1599’.