

THE AUTHORSHIP OF 'IN THE WRACKLES OF WALSINGHAM',  
RAWLINSON MS 219 BODLEIAN LIBRARY OXFORD

by H. A. Bond

Once again the vexed question of authorship has been brought into prominence by the publication of a recent book on Walsingham<sup>1</sup> in which the statement is repeated that these much-quoted lines are the work of Philip Howard Earl of Arundel and Surrey, son of the 4th Duke of Norfolk.

Perhaps in this quincentenary year (1983) of the Howard Norfolk Dukedom it may be thought opportune to comment on this issue by a short notice in our Society's transactions.

As long ago as 1955 I discussed by letter with Margaret Crum, Assistant in the department of the Keeper of Western MSS. at the Bodleian, who informed me that the volume in which the Walsingham lines occur is a collection of religious poetry by at least two authors, Philip Howard and Peter Heskines, named by the copier and possibly more.

The spine of the volume is lettered 'E of Arundell MS.' but is an 18th century marking of little significance though the greater part of the MS contains 'a contempt of this world made by Philipe Earl of Arundel after his attaynder'. The lines in question are however separated in the binding from 'Walsingham' by Peter Heskines' poem and other unascrbed poems. The letter ended "I should not find it easy to think that the same poet wrote 'O wretched man' and 'Walsingham'."

I next took the matter up with the late Father Christopher Devlin, S. J. the author of what may be considered the definitive biography of Robert Southwell, Jesuit Poet and Martyr who was a prisoner in the Tower of London at the same time as Philip and was earlier Chaplain to Philip's wife Ann. Father Devlin wrote "I would agree with Rose Macaulay that the 'Walsingham Lament' could not be the work of B. Robert or B. Philip Howard or any of our Elizabethan poets. It seems to spring from an older pre-renaissance tradition of the older Ballad tradition which lingered on in the English countryside (and later still in Scotland) during the 16th century and then died out as poetry became inseparable from a classical education. Much as I admire Blessed Robert's poems I do not think he had it in him to emulate the rough inspiration and long practised skill of these old ballads. He and his contemporaries were too tied to the new regular verse forms."

I next cast around in my mind as to who amongst earlier writers conformed to the norms laid down in Father Devlin's letter and I remembered that Gregory Martin as tutor to the 4th Duke's children had spent a Cambridge summer vacation with his charge Philip at the Duke's house at Kenninghall.

It will be remembered that Gregory Martin was responsible almost unaided for the putting into English of the Douai version of the New Testament.

It is interesting to compare the following lines from 'The Lament' with lines written by Gregory Martin recorded in Louise Imogen Guiney's *Recusant Poets*<sup>2</sup>

I quote firstly from 'The Walsingham Lament' —

Bitter was it oh to see the seele sheepe  
Murdered by the ravening wolves, while the sheephards  
did sleep.  
Bitter was it oh to vewe the sacred vyne,  
While the gardiners plaid all close, rooted up by the swine.

Secondly from the same anthology I quote from 'Questions' by Gregory Martin —

Where were the Feeders of the sheepe,  
What were they all so sound asleep,  
That none of them could open mouth,  
once to defend the knowne truth?

The employment of so similar an imagery in both poems suggests overwhelming the hand of the same author and taken together with his known historical background must be a strong and convincing pointer to Gregory Martin as the author of both.

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Fisher, *Walsingham — a place of Pilgrimage*, p. 158

<sup>2</sup>Published 1938.