George Gascoigne's Proliferative Poetics

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The collective voice of early Elizabethan literature has been characterised as 'that of the schoolmaster exhorting […] wayward youths' (Panofsky 1975: 7). While the centrality of the Inns of Court, as both a professional community and a vibrant literary epicentre, spanned the long century from 1550-1660, the moralising legacy of the humanist schoolroom is particularly prominent in texts produced at the Inns in the 1560s. This decade saw the first vernacular plays in blank verse written and performed. Despite being staged during a festive season associated with institutionally sanctioned performances of misrule, the first Inns drama, Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc* (*c*. 1561-2), is a didactic tragedy. In performance and then print, George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta* (*c*. 1566-7) is framed by paratexts, dumbshows, and choral odes that heavy-handedly direct moral interpretations of its action. Even *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (*c*. 1587-8), the *terminus ad quem* of this kind of performance, begins with five law students making a case for the value of their creative writing to the Muses and the Queen. The value of imaginative English literature was still being established (Helgerson 1976).

No writer experimented more prolifically with the delights and dangers of English literature in this period than George Gascoigne. Born *c*. 1534, he studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, before being admitted to Gray's Inn in 1555. Gascoigne returned to Gray's a decade later, having appeared in Elizabeth I's coronation, conducted a failed farming experiment in Bedfordshire, married a widow (who may still have been married to someone else), and spent time in Parliament, the army, and debtors' prison.[1] On his return, he collaborated in the authorship of *Jocasta*.[2] A veritable compendium of the Theban saga, *Jocasta* retells the story of Euripides' *Phoenissae*. It was translated from Ludovico Dolce's Italian *Gioasta* (Venice, 1549) by Gascoigne

[1] See G. W. Pigman III, 'Gascoigne, George (1534/5-2577), *ODNB*, Oxford University Press (27 May 2010) https://doi-org.ezproxy.prd.bodliean.ox.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/10421.

[2] Marie Axton (1977: 54) assumes that *Jocasta* and *Supposes* formed part of the Christmas revels of 1566; G. W. Pigman (2000: xxvii) proposes the 'Christmas to Lent revels, 1565-6 or 1566-7'; Katherine Duncan-Jones (1991: 48) suggests the 'New-Year-to- Shrovetide festivities in 1565-6, or those of 1566-7'; Austen (2008: 48) notes that there were also revels at All Hallows, Candlemas, and Accession Day.

and Kinwelmersh (Christopher Yelverton contributed the Epilogue, Kinwelmersh translated Acts One and Four, and Gascoigne did the rest). Its argument, written by Gascoigne, encourages *Jocasta*'s audience to identify a 'type' of tyranny in Creon and a 'myrror' of misery in Oedipus. Dumbshows at the beginning of each act animate didactic emblems, and the play's final speech reinforces man's powerlessness in the face of Fortune, encouraging the viewer to: 'Example here, loe take'.[3] These framing devices not only reinforce the moral of the play, but they complicate it by positioning *Jocasta* within Gascoigne's real and imagined literary communities.

Gascoigne repeatedly wrote in the voice of the reformed-prodigal-turned-moralist.[4] His success in this guise has, as Gillian Austen notes, eclipsed his reputation as a courtly poet. However, his moralising should be seen as a part of the complexity of this courtliness, which 'is often a mixture of seriousness and playfulness' (2008: 2, 4).[5] When Gascoigne assures you that something is dutiful rather than profligate, you cannot not necessarily take his word for it – the Court of High Commission did not when they recalled *The poesies of George Gascoigne Esquire* (1575), despite its claim to have been purged of 'sundrie wanton speeches and lascivious phrases' (Winston 2016: 226; Hughes 1997: 1). Accordingly, a sceptical critical turn has scrutinised the importance of accidents, seriocomic performances of failure, narrativizations of authorial intent, and Gascoigne's position within an early modern poetics of 'discomposition' (Pfeiffer 2022: 249-298; Braden 2022: 38-81; Hetherington 2016: 29-59).

Jocasta, meanwhile, has been examined for its complex intertextual genealogy, in particular the use made, not just of Dolce's *Giocasta*, but of multiple Latin translations and of Euripides' original Greek (Dewar-Watson 2010: 22-32; Pyré 2020: 44-58). The expansion of female roles in *Jocasta* has also been a subject

[3] In manuscript (BL MS Add. 34063), and print (1573), commonplace marks also alert the reader to *sententiae* ripe for extraction and reflection, see Suthren 2020: 59-84.
[4] On Gascoigne as prodigal, see Helgerson 1976: 44-57.
[5] Before his return to Gray's Inn, he had spent a few 'extravagant' years on the periphery of the court which are the subject of the eroticised narrative of his 'seven Sonets in sequence'; on the games Gascoigne plays with his reader, hiding in plain sight, see Skura 2008: 168-196.

of study, as has the way in which it was read in Elizabethan England as a model tragedy (Norland 2009: 83-9). For Tanya Pollard, *Jocasta* provides an example of a broader mother-daughter dyad that models a shift in authority from classical literary sources to their modern descendants (2017: 43-88); for Tania Demetriou, Gabriel Harvey's annotations reveal *Jocasta*'s value for early modern readers as a kind of composite tragic collection (2021: 757-87). While the topicality of the play and its engagement with Elizabethan politics have been fruitfully discussed by both Lorna Hutson and Jessica Winston, this chapter considers the play's position within Gascoigne's wider oeuvre (Hutson 2023: 245-278; Winston 2016: 193-212). *Jocasta*, a play whose characters are all too deeply entangled with one another, has remained isolated in this respect. By focusing on proliferation – in Gascoigne's use of polyptoton, his sonnets, and their occasional contexts – I argue that didactic writing at Gray's Inn provided opportunities not only for earnest reformation and reflection, but for play.

Roots and Resemblances

Euripides' *Phoenissae* is a tragedy preoccupied with growth. It appropriates Aeschylus' depiction of an Oedipus 'who sowed the sacrosanct soil / of his mother, where he had been nurtured, / and suffered a bloodstained progeny' ('ὅστε ματρὸς ἁγνὰν / σπείρας ἄρουραν ἵν᾽ ἔτραφη / ῥίζαν αἱματόεσσαν / ἔτλα') (Aeschylus 2014: 11.753-6). Aeschylus' Apollonian oracle uses the verb '*σπείρω*' ('to sow') when warning Laius: 'do not keep sowing the child-begetting furrow' ('μὴ σπεῖρε τέκνων ἄλοκα') (Euripides 1994: 1.18). In *Phoenissae*, Antigone is a 'shoot' ('θάλος'), a noun that 'transforms itself into the cognate verb when discord ('ἔρις') is said to "sprout" ('θάλλει')' (1994: 1.88, 11.811-812; see also Pyré 2020: 52). Moreover, the repetition of the adjective 'δεινός' ('terrible' *and* 'wonderous'), yokes this vegetative imagery to the procreative quality of suffering and art. This effect is further reinforced by the conflation of crime and generation in the double meaning of 'αἷμα' ('the blood spilled' and 'the blood transmitted') (1.61, 1.179, 1.374, 1.1051). Euripides' Theban tragedy is one of excessive productivity.

The fertile suffering of the house of Laius, so potent in Euripides' play, was recreated, to varying degrees, by three early modern Latin translators: 'Dorotheus Camillus', the pseudonym of Rudolphus Collinus (or Ambühl); Philip Melanchthon; and Stiblinus (Kaspar Stiblin), respectively.[6] As Yves Pyré observes, only Collinus sees the 'advent of discord as a bitterly ironical efflorescence ("contentio floret")' and it is from Collinus that Dolce worked when translating *Giocasta*. Jessica Apolloni notes in Chapter 9 of this volume, on *Gismond of Salerne* (written by members of Inner Temple and performed for Queen Elizabeth in the same year that *Jocasta* was staged), how Innsmen in this period were heavily engaged with Italian literature and culture. The same year that Dolce's Italian text served as Gascoigne's primary model for *Jocasta*, he translated Ludovico Ariosto's *I Suppositi* (1509) into the comedy *Supposes*. In *Giocasta*, Dolce further expands the negative fertility imagery he found in his source:

Ma, si come da verde & fresca pianta
noui rampolli un sopra l'altro nasce;
Cosi a l'interno mio graue tormento
Vn se n'aggiunge, & forse ancho Maggiore (1549: 15).

[But, yes, as from a green and fresh plant
nine offspring one above the other is born;
So inside my grave torment
One is added, and perhaps even greater.]

Gascoigne's translates Dolce's formulation:

And as the growing greene and pleasant plante,
Dothe beare freshe braunches one above an other,
Even so amidde the huge heape of my woes,
Dothe growe one grudge more greevous than the rest (1573: 95).

[6] As John W. Cunliffe established (1912: xxxvi-xxxvii), Dolce did not translate directly from Euripides but used Collinus (1541). By the time Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh staged their play, however, both Melanchthon (1558) and Stiblinus (1562) had been printed by Joannes Oporinus' press in Basel: the latter a bilingual Greek and Latin edition. On the Latin translations, see Pyré 2020, and on the use made of Seneca, see Dewar-Watson 2010.

Dolce's 'perhaps' ('forse') is abandoned for the conviction of the alliteration and polyptoton, the repetition of words revived from the same root, of growth. Here, Gascoigne embraces the challenge of translating Dolce into English, a language without the aural affordances of a highly inflected language like Italian ('a' in the first line given above, 'o' in the third) which come close to constituting something like internal rhyme. He does this by creating a rhetorical pattern that encodes the action of the plot at the level of the sentence. Rather than clustering sounds at the end of words and lines he emphasises shared etymological roots.

Jocasta's eponymous queen is elided throughout the play with the native soil of Thebes, over which Pollynices and Eteocles fight, and from which Oedipus and Antygone are ultimately banished. This preoccupation with the 'natyve soil' that elides queen and city permeates all five acts of the play, but no examples of polyptoton occur in the two acts translated by Kinwelmersh, it is a distinct feature of Gascoigne's sections. In his acts, it is striking how often the same word is repeated in a different case, inflection, or voice within a line or across a single speech. Pollynices regrets that '[he] must departe, and parting must' (108). Once he is dead, Antigone recalls that 'Whyle [he] yet livedst, I had a lively hope […] But now, hastie death hath done to dye,/ This dying hope of mine' (153). Eteocles assures his brother that the man who would shed his own blood to spill Pollynices', 'By thee he standes, and thou standst him before' (107). Creon reveals to Meneceus 'That this devine of thee devined hath' (124). This rhetorical pattern sits uncomfortably between repetition and progression, echoing the confused consanguinity of the characters. In *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham would describe how this device 'do pleasantly encounter, and (as it were) mock one another by their much resemblance' (1589: 170). It is that *much resemblance* that makes Gascoigne's polyptoton the perfect figure for the of the House of Laius.[7]

[7] In 'Certayne notes of instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English' Gascoigne stresses the centrality of *inuentio*, and the importance of using figures that 'lead you not from your first invention' (1575: 581).

Gascoigne's polyptoton not only proliferates its source word, it also repeatedly calls it into question. The opening speech of Act two ends with the question: 'Where resteth now the restless queene of Thebes?' (93) and it is answered with further negation. The Chorus hope that Pollynices will 'Some quiet bring to this vnquiet realme' (93). Jocasta's rest is complicated by her restlessness just as Pollynices' army un-quiets his homeland. These antitheses multiply across the play: there is no rest from restless grief and no quiet ends to unquiet lives (119). Nobility and worth become the 'Vnoble' and 'vnwoorthie' (146) actions that fuel the tragic plot. Reiteration does not reinforce meaning, just as Thebes' two princes do not make the city twice as strong, they almost destroy it.

The same principle is at work in *The poesies of George Gascoigne Esquire* (1575) in which *Jocasta* was printed for the second time, having first appeared in *A Hundreth sundrie flowres bound up in one small Poesie* (1573).[8] Because the first book was 'doubtfully construed, and (therefore) scandalous', Gascoigne abandoned the fiction of an anonymous anthology, restructured the material, and added three dedicatory epistles.[9] Each of the epistles address a different audience and makes a different claim for the book's content and significance (Pfeiffer 2022). The first and longest of these letters is addressed to 'To the reuerende Diuines', in which Gascoigne mounts a forensic defence of the accused book by playing the trial lawyer and pre-emptively refuting the objections of 'grave and graye headed Iudges' (1575: 1, 3). The second is addressed to 'al yong Gentlemen, and generally […] the youth of England' – it is tempting to suspect he had his fellow Innsmen in mind – which, in exploring how questionable parts of *A Hundreth sundrie flowres* have been misread, admonishes his readers to exercise greater caution in reading (and so advertises the book's lewd qualities) (15). The third appeals to 'the Readers generally' and promotes the variety of the work included (27). There is, he suggests, something for everyone. Yet in providing multiple epistles, the nature

[8] A manuscript of *Jocasta* dated 1568 survives in BL MS Add. 34063.

[9] In the tripartite horticultural structure of *The poesies*, *Jocasta* is positioned as useful, even curative, one of the 'good hearbes' rather than 'fresh flowres' or 'holsome weedes' Gascoigne (1575: 33).

of the volume's contents becomes more not less obscure: is it serious, scandalous, or all of the above?

Posies and Poses

Gascoigne, who had written one of the earliest English sonnet sequences and perhaps the second corona of English sonnets, uses them to further complicate the tone of *Jocasta*. While Petrarch's recuperation of frustrated desire as poetic glory in the sonnet was already well established by this time, the 'huge and hungry crocodile' of sexual desire, associated with the sonnet form from Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (printed 1591) onward, was still to come (Kuin 1998: 89). But it was Gascoigne who authored the first prescriptive definition of the sonnet in one of the additions he made to *The poesies*. In 'Certayne notes of instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English', he specifies that sonnets 'serue aswell in matters of loue as of discourse' (1575: 587). 'Discourse' encompassed both 'reasoning' and 'conversation' at the time, revealing a dual tradition in which sonnets were used both for love and 'a less emotive and introspective purpose' (Shrank 2008: 35). Her examination of mid-Tudor sonnet collections – including Richard Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes* (1557), Barnabe Googe's *Eglogs Epytaphers, and Sonettes* (1563), George Turbeville's *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* (1567), Thomas Howell's *Newe Sonets and Pretie Pamphlets* (1567-8), and Gascoigne's 'The deuises of sundrie Gentlemen' in *A Hundreth sundrie flowres* (1573) – reveals recurrent attempts to demystify love. In these sonnets (broadly defined) both the rejection of the female subject by the male speaker and then the poem's circulation amongst men fortifies male sociability. Their didactic quality, proffering ponderous advice, emerges, at least in part, as a pose; the moralist, like the prodigal young man, is only one persona among the many adopted by the speakers. These sonneteers are not just earnest lecturers, they are prolific and 'gregarious' impersonators (Shrank 2008: 40).

Jocasta begins and ends with a sonnet. Where Dolce's *Giocasta* starts with a fifty-five-line prologue, 'A Sodisfattion De Gli Spettatori recitato da un fanciullo' ['To the Satisfaction of the Spectators recited by a child'], Gascoigne's begins with '*The argument of the Tragedie*': a sonnet in rhyming couplets. What starts

like a classical invocation, ‘To scourge the cryme of wicked Laius,/ And wrecke the foule Incest of Oedipus,/ The angry Gods styrred up theyr sonnes’, moves to a *de casibus* conclusion, ‘Creon is King, the type of Tyranny,/ And Oedipus, myrrour of misery’ (1575: 71), familiar from Italian and then English texts, such as John Lydgate’s *The Fall of Princes* (*c*. 1431-1438) and the recently published *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559, 1563).[10] This vernacularisation is reinforced by the distinctly English sound of the verse, its rhyming couplets, alliteration, and the predominance of monosyllables (Gascoigne explains in ‘Certayne notes of Instruction’ that ‘the more monasyllables that you use, the truer Englishman you shall séeme, and the lesse you shall smell of the Inkehorne’) (1575: 581).[11] While it is possible that he performed his own prologue in 1566, or that a written copy was circulated with the arguments of the dumbshows in advance of the play, it may also have been a later addition for publication.[12] However the sonnet-argument was disseminated, Gascoigne also transformed Dolce’s final eleven-line choral ode into an English sonnet. In it, the abstract ‘Cosi ingegno & uirtu cede a fortuna’ (‘So ingenuity & virtue yields to fortune’) of the Italian is reimagined as an active and embodied ‘dame Fortune’ (162), hoisting men up on her wheel with typically English phrasal verbs that proclaim she has not only been ‘*translated and digested into Acte*’ (71) but into English (Dolce 1549: 53). The sonnet form of *Jocasta*’s argument and its conclusion make Gascoigne’s contribution to the commonweal explicit, while also gesturing to the contrived and socially performative nature of the moral lesson being delivered.

The sonnet argument of *Jocasta* ends with the Latin tag: ‘*Fortunatus infœlix*’ (‘fortunate then unhappy’ or ‘the lucky unfortunate’) (1575: 71). A fitting tag for the fate of the eponymous heroine, this motto also concludes several other

[10] The main repository of *de casibus* narratives in English, *A myrrour for magistrates* (1563), carries in most of its editions the motto ‘*Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum*’ (‘happy are they made cautious by the plight of others’).

[11] He may be echoing ‘A Letter of syr I. Cheekes’ in Thomas Hoby’s translation of *The courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio diuided into foure books* (London, 1561). Despite being a competent Latinist and a liberal coiner of words derived from both Old English and Latin, Gascoigne anticipates later poets by recognising English’s potential as a literary language. One of the examples cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is ‘gardening’.

[12] See Austen 2008: 55. Dieter Mehl 1965: 11; ‘*The argument of the Tragedie*’ would not be ‘best allowe[d]’ to be termed as a sonnet by Gascoigne’s definition in ‘Certayne instruction’, which limits the form to the English sonnet (1575: 585).

texts in both *A Hundreth sundrie flowres* and *The poesies*. These include a series of poems which, we are told, were composed upon a particular 'occasion' by their author:

> Hee had (in myddest of his youth) determined to abandone all vaine delightes and to returne unto Greyes Inne, there to undertake againe the studdie of the common Lawes. And being required by five sundry Gentlemen to write in verse somewhat worthye to bee remembred, before he entered into their fellowshipped, hee compiled these five sundrie sortes of metre upon five sundrye theames, whiche they delivered unto him [.] (1573: xxix; 1575: 356-369)

This is one of the few instances in *A Hundreth sundrie flowres* when the names of real men are used: John Vaughn, Alexander Neville, Richard Courtop, Francis Kinwelmersh, and his brother Anthony, were all Gascoigne's contemporaries at Gray's Inn. Each provided a prompt to which Gascoigne responded. Anthony Kinwelmersh's suggested '*Satis suffit*' ('enough is enough', 1573: 357), which may have been an allusion to Gascoigne's extensive financial and legal difficulties.[13] The 'sudden surfeit of contradictory proverb lore' in Gascoigne's response, characteristic of the answer poem genre, disrupts 'the gravity of the moral stance' set up in the serious exemplarity of his rhyme royal opening (Austen 2008: 40). The exercise is a jocular one and its morality a flexible posture (Hart: 1956: 19-20). In response to his Erasmian prompt from Francis Kinwelmersh, '*Audaces fortuna iuvat*' – translated by Gabriel Harvey as 'Fortune advaunceth hazaders' but more commonly taken as 'fortune favours the bold' (1575: 356) – *Jocasta*'s co-author received an English sonnet in which Gascoigne not only plays with the relative audacity of the classical figures Caesar, Menelaus, and Aeneas, but also with his own.[14] Written within a year of 'Gascoynes five notable devises', *Jocasta* is the product of further collaboration by this irreverent coterie.

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[13] See Pigman, 'Gascoigne, George (1534/5-2577), *ODNB*.

[14] Malone 792, B7. The proverb can be traced to Erasmus via Taverner, '*Audaces fortuna juvat.* Fortune helpeth men of good courage. He that feareth yt his matters shall not have good successe: shall never bringe his matters to passe', in *Proverbes or Adagies. Gathered out of Erasmus* (1539, 1552, B2). It originates with Seneca; see A. Otto, *Die Sprichwoȓter und sprichwoȓtlichen Redensarten* (Leipzig: 1890), *ad fortuna*, 9.

Gascoigne makes these responses more than the sum of their parts by dramatising their occasion and so turning the challenge he was issued, to write ‘something worthy to be remembered’ (1575: 357), into the foundation of his conceit. He devised these poems, we are told, while:

> ryding by the way, writing none of them until he came at the ende of his journey, the which was no longer than one day in ryding, one daye in tarying with his friend, and the thirde in returning to Greyes Inne: and therefore called Gascoignes memories (Austen 2008: 1).

He did not just write but memorised 259 lines of verse. A similar centrality (and the same motto) appears in the occasional framing of another series of poems included in both *A Hundreth sundrie flowres* and *The poesies*, ‘The devises of sundrie Gentlemen’ (1575: 294-308). Likely circulated around Gray’s Inn in manuscript years earlier, these poems are interspersed with details of the occasions of their composition:

> whiles he sat at the dore of his lodging, devising these verses above rehersed, the same Gentlewoman passed by againe, and cast a long looke towards him, whereby his left his former invention and wrotes thus[.] (306)

The occasion transforms the amorous verses into a coherent narrative and the poems themselves become performative as a result. The poetic sequence looks increasingly like a dramatic script.

Occasion itself is always both rooted and boundless in Gascoigne’s work. The ‘sundrie’ speakers of these verses are identified not only by their mottos but their initials. Each is linked in some way to Gascoigne and the other alter egos he used throughout his career. As well as sharing a motto with *Jocasta*, ‘F. I.’ is linked by the printer’s convention (that made I and J interchangeable) with the eponymous protagonist of *The Adventures of Master F.J.* As Austen has argued, Gascoigne peoples *A Hundreth sundrie flowres* with ‘plausible figures from the

nascent world of literary publishing'. In this light we can identify H.W. as the publisher, G.T. an aspiring editor and narrator, and F.J. and his friends as the group of writers whose work is published with (or without) their consent in this fictional coterie (Austen 2013). The occasion of 'Certayne notes of instruction', meanwhile, makes Gascoigne's poetic manual part of an epistolary response to a fictive Italian friend, Signor Eduardo Donati, who is desperate to be instructed in the mysterious ways of rhyme. These connections recall the structures of Italianate experimental prose fiction, such as the story-telling games of Boccaccio's locked-down houseparty and Chaucer's Canterbury-bound pilgrims. While distinctions between the occasional contexts and fictional content are similarly confused, if not completely collapsed by Gascoigne, he always keeps multiple occasions in play.

More is More

The importance of Fortune in *Jocasta* can be traced back to the various notions of fate that permeate the *Phoenissae*. Euripides creates lexical patterns around fate, chance, and providence (τύχη) as well as fortune, both good (εὐτύχής) and bad (δυστυχής). His Latin translators carry this over in words such as 'calamitas', 'fortuna', and 'infoelicitas', as well as the corresponding adjectives 'felix', 'infelix', 'fortunatus', and 'miser'. But it is Dolce who significantly expands the role of fortune in light of the trends of the period in which he wrote. *Giocasta* traces the influence not only of Petrarch's *Il Canzoniere* (*c*. 1327-1374) and *I Trionfi* (*c*. 1351-1374) but also of Boccaccio, who introduced Jocasta in his *De Claris Mulieribus* (*c*. 1361-1362) as 'the queen of Thebes that was made famous more by her mishap/misfortune than by her reign and merits' ('Jocasta Thebarum regina fuit magis infortunio suo clara quam meritis, aut regno'), and who was the first woman to appear in his *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (*c*. 1355-1374). Dolce's prologue opens with reference to the affliction of 'Fortuna', and it is the final word of his play (1549: 3, 53).

As well as absorbing the significance of fortune introduced by Dolce, *Jocasta* expands upon it, exaggerating the pose. This is apparent in the most spectacular addition made by Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh to their sources: the dumbshows. The Egyptian King Sesostris, representing ambition, is wheeled

onstage in a chariot drawn by four kings for the first dumbshow (1573: 73). In the final dumbshow, the chariot returns in a visual polyptoton. This time it is driven by Fortune who is pulled by four ‘noble personages’ while leading two kings by a string in her right hand and two slaves by a string in her left (144). She then proceeds, by redistributing their crowns and rags, to invert their statuses. The parallel implies a close connection between the two shows: ambition represents the ascending movement of Fortune’s wheel. As well as inspiring Christopher Marlowe’s iconic ‘pampered jades of Asia’ in *Tamburlaine, Part II* (1588), these dumbshows have a clear connection with the action of the play, in which Antigone drives (presumably the same chariot) on stage, bearing the bodies of her dead mother and brothers (152). Pyré notes that the emblem of Sesostris as Fortune’s ambitious fool – first proposed by Menander Protector (1851: IV.210), made popular by John Tzetzes’ *Chiliades* (*Book of Histories*) (1826: 3.8, 83-4), and taken up by Henry Peacham (1612: 76) – provides an emblematic frame that emphasizes the wheel of Fortune as the source of tragedy (Pyré 2020: 46). But there is also an Inns-specific context at play in these elaborate pageants. In *Jocasta* the weighty political and moralistic form of the dumbshows in *Gorboduc* (performed at Inner Temple in 1561-2) are echoed and their sober lessons reimagined. The split flames of *Jocasta*’s second dumbshow and Curtius’ leap into the ‘great Gulfe’ (1575: 116) in its third are both special effects as bold as the play’s two stately chariot sequences. An Inns audience would surely have had to smile as these played out in Sesostris’s wake. Fortune, after all, favours the bold.

The fourth dumbshow goes even further, magnifying *Gorboduc*’s opening sequence in which six wild men tried and failed to break a faggot of small sticks, until they had divvied them up. In *Jocasta*, this lesson is performed as fight scene:

> Trumpets, drummes and fifes sounded, and a greate peale of ordinaunce was shot of: in the which ther entred vpon the stage .vj. knights armed at al points […] either parte beeing accompanied with .vij. other armed men: and after they had marched twice or thrice about the Stage, the one partie menacing the other by their furious lookes and gestures, the .vj.

> knights caused their other attendants to stand by, and drawing their Swords, fell to cruell and couragious combate, continuing therein, till two on the one side were slayne. The thirde perceiuing, that he only remayned to withstand the force of .iij. enimies, did politiquely rūne aside: wherewith immediatly one of the .iij. followed after him, and when he had drawen his enimie thus from his companie, hee turned againe and slewe him. Then the seconde also ranne after him, whom he slewe in like mān̄er, and consequently the thirde, and then triumphantly marched aboute the Stage wyth hys sword in his hand. (129-130)

As in *Gorboduc*, those who hold together cannot be overcome, but 'being once disseuered by any meanes, are easily ouerthrowen' (130). Unlike *Gorboduc*, however, *Jocasta* features eight central characters – Jocasta, Antygone, Pollynices, Eteocles, Creon, Meneceus, Tyresias, and Oedipus – and it also requires seventeen interlocutors. Moreover, the proliferation of participants in the dumbshows make it difficult to stage with fewer than forty-six people, even if the extras double their roles (Austen 2008: 37). The original production, then, must have involved a significant proportion of the total membership of Gray's Inn, which Austen estimates comprised 220 men at most in the period (53). The size of show is surely part of the fun; enough is *not* enough. Christopher Yelverton's epilogue is wise to this performance context. Winston has noted how the 'we' of its moral interpretation of the action performed, 'See, ruin grows when most we reach to rise' (1575: 163), might target the personal and professional ambition of the play's Innsmen performers and audience (2016: 193-212). But this self-awareness is not confined to a cheeky wink at the play's end, it is a structural principal.

A similar approach is apparent in the next classical tragedy performed by the gentlemen of Gray's Inn, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (discussed by Winston in Chapter 1 of this volume). As well as sharing a collaborator with *Jocasta*, *Misfortunes* recalls it by portraying Arthur as a British Oedipus, describing Curtius' leap in its third dumbshow, and by revisiting Creon's conflict – a father who must choose between the welfare of a beloved child and that of his country

– in Arthur's new found fondness for Mordred.[15] *Misfortunes* also follows *Jocasta*'s approach to the moralising dumbshows of *Gorboduc*, restaging *Gorboduc*'s fourth as its first one. As well as three furies emerging 'from under the stage' in the same way, wearing the same costumes, and carrying the same snake, firebrand, and whip, three additional emblematic props (a 'snake athwart a cup', a 'Cupid', and a 'Pegasus') are added, as are three nuns to mirror the three furies (Hughes 1587: A1r). Both *Jocasta* and *The Misfortunes of Arthur* play with the notion of excess while warning against it. By making, remaking, and even unmaking meaning in this polyptotonic way, Inns drama cultivated the opaque and unpredictable energy that would go on to flourish in the commercial theatre.

By playing with didactic drama, Elizabethan Innsmen helped to establish the legitimacy of creative compositions in the vernacular. In the 1580s and 1590s, as purpose-built playhouses came to dominate English drama, the Inns would increasingly be associated with other forms of literary innovation, notably verse satire. Just as Sidney's crocodile of frustration would break the 'well-banked river' (Kuin 1998: 89) of the sonneteering tradition outlined in 'Certayne notes of Instruction', so, the young men who followed Gascoigne into the Inns of Court would develop his aggregative approach and unleash something of even greater linguistic virtuosity and viciousness. Gascoigne had charted a new kind of career as an author of imaginative English literature. It proved to be fertile ground.

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BL Add. MS 34063

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[15] Inns of Court circles had shown interest in this type of conflict before *Jocasta*, when the recusant common lawyer Edmund Plowden had used the dilemma to exemplify his theory of the king's two bodies, albeit by referencing Agamemnon and his sacrifice of Iphigenia.

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