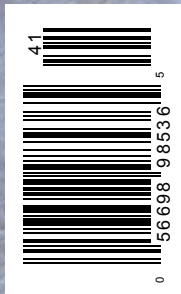


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On the night of 19 January 1543, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, shouldered his stone bow and went out to lay siege to the sins of London. A stone bow is built like a crossbow but, as the name suggests, it is fitted with a pouch to launch stones instead of bolts, and best suited for birds and other small game. Surrey went after the city's windows instead.

*Thy windows had done me no spight,
But proud people that dread no fall,
Clothed with falsehood and unright
Bred in the closures of thy wall.*¹

It is a little difficult to catch the young earl's tone here. (Surely, my lord, the windows' guilt was never in question?) But he goes on to sing the "hidden burden" of outrage hot in his "reckless breast," and he casts himself—in the poem he wrote afterward about his crusade, usually called "A Satire against the Citizens of London"—as "A figure of the Lord's behest, / Whose scourge for sin the scriptures show." He catalogues the sins those sluggard Londoners were practicing behind their windows, from pride to envy to wrath to sloth to greed to lechery to gluttony, and the hail of stones against glass foretells the plague and famine that will befall the city in the end-time. Such missiles will bring London down, beating "stone from stone" until none is left standing upon any other.

Surrey wrote his poem inside the stone walls of Fleet Prison, where he had time, some months later, to reflect on his vigilante escapade. His stature as scion of one of Tudor England's great families had not protected him from arrest. Neither had the translations of the *Aeneid* and of Petrarch that would secure his place in literary history. (He is often identified by literary historians as the inventor of blank verse.) Nor was his "Satire" the only record of that night, however much he might have wished it to be. Officers of Henry VIII's Privy Council began taking testimony almost immediately, and the trail led them to one Millicent Arundel, who kept an inn in St. Lawrence Jewry, near St. Paul's, where Surrey was apparently well known. On 28 March, Mistress

Arundel offered the following account, as rendered by none other than Sir Thomas Wriothesley, the king's chief counselor, fixer, and occasional torturer.

*About Candlemas last my lord of Surrey, Thos. Clere, young Wiat, Shelley my lord of Surrey's servant, and young Pickering, with their servants, went out of her house at 9 p.m., with four stone bows, and tarried forth till after midnight. Next day was great clamour of the breaking of glass windows, both of houses and churches, and shooting of men in the streets, and the voice was that those hurts were done by my Lord and his company; so she commanded her household to say nothing of the going out, and when her neighbours asked her she denied it. She heard Surrey, "the night after, when Mr. Blage rebuked him for it, say that he had liever [i.e., rather] than all the good in the world it were undone, for he was sure it should come before the King and his Council; but we shall have a madding time in our youth, and therefore I am very sorry for it." That night or the night before they used the same, rowing on the Thamys, and Thomas Clere told her how they shot at the queenes at the Bank.*²

Here is a different picture of Surrey's crusade. After an evening drinking in Arundel's company (and, as the record elsewhere has it, compounding his sins by eating meat during Lent), the earl and four of his boon companions took their carousing to the streets, shooting stones at citizens and at the expensive glass windows of churches and great homes. Later that night, or maybe it was the night

Opposite: A portrait of the proud earl, the most painted man at court after Henry VIII himself, attributed to the court painter William Scrots. Here Surrey is depicted leaning on a broken pillar under the arms of Thomas of Brotherton, son of Edward I, and Thomas of Woodcock, son of Edward III. His use of heraldry to locate himself in the royal lineage, perhaps maneuvering to be Protector to the king's heir, was the principal charge against him when he was brought to trial for treason and executed in 1547. The date of the portrait is uncertain: perhaps made from life, at his commission; perhaps a memorial to his ambitions, when both he and the king who had him killed were dead.



before, they had been out on the river, harassing the prostitutes walking by the Bankside stews. As a witness, Arundel has something of Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly about her, the apple-cheeked, mock-scolding enabler of the lads at the tavern. Is it Surrey's contrition or her doting apology we hear when she says, with more sympathy than logic, "we shall have a madding time in our youth, and therefore I am very sorry for it." Still: she was under oath, and Wriothesley was not a man to lie to, and neither the Council nor the City of London was inclined to drop the case.

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These competing accounts, the heroic-prophetic poem and the legal record, could be pressed to tell a number of larger stories: stories about the proud earl, notoriously tender of his dignity (he had been imprisoned only the year before for dueling); about the fate of the aristocracy's ancient liberties under the Tudor monarchs, whose project of centralizing national authority gradually brought the great families, like Surrey's, to heel; about the iconoclastic social energies of the early English Reformation, which made for a good deal of broken glass. They also offer a concise résumé of the age-old business of throwing stones. *Item*: hooliganism, a charge that has always dogged stone throwers, idle boys making chaos with the readiest missiles. Apprentices in the city of London were frequently disciplined for such assaults on the property of their masters and betters. (Bright glass calls out to be broken, does it not?—especially in the madding time of our youth.) *Item*: protest. Those apprentices had their grievances. They had rioted in 1517, turning on the city's foreigners with the energy of an oppressed class, or would-be oppressors, or both. Perhaps a man as lucky in birth as Surrey might still take up the stone of dissent. *Item*: iconoclasm, stone throwing on highest principle, the stone as an anti-idol jealous to return the graven image to the primitive condition of the missile that brings it down. The Protestant Surrey, waking sinners. *Item*: stoning, a still more fervently righteous act, of which we get a glimpse in the Bankside antics (when the revelers took shots from the river at women Surrey's poem calls "shameless whores"). Some modern codes still prescribe the size of the

stone, the distance of the throwers, how a man executed in this fashion is to be buried to the waist and a woman to the shoulders.

In short, stone throwing—or stone shooting, Surrey's aristocratic variant—gathers worlds of signification around the obdurately incommunicative projectiles that make it possible just because they come to hand. None of those potentials is neglected in the long afterlife of that January night. Surrey's first modern editor, the clergyman G. F. Nott, took the earl at his word as an incandescent iconoclast. The telltale stones were proof of his devotion to the Reformation cause, and Nott goes so far, in the biography that prefaces his edition, as to make up a speech before the Privy Counsel, of which no record survives, based on the poem. "Was I to suffer these unhappy men to perish without warning?" his righteous Reformer asks. Nott goes on to comment on his own invention: "Wild and extravagant as this attempt at reformation may be justly deemed, thus much is certain; it was the result of sincerity on the part of Surrey: it grew out of that romantic turn of thought and enthusiastic mode of contemplating common objects."³ Such common objects as stones, perhaps.

Thirty-eight years later, however, in 1854, Robert Bell was unconvinced. He takes the occasion of a note in his own edition to ridicule Nott for believing that "in flinging stones at the windows of the citizens Surrey was trying to awake them from Catholicism. It must, undoubtedly, be admitted that his mode of contemplating common objects was remarkably peculiar, if it induced him to hit upon this method of reforming the Londoners."⁴ Frederick Padelford takes an indulgent tone in an edition published in 1928: "It may have been during his confinement that this irrepressible young nobleman composed this waggish satire."⁵ Ten years on, his biographer Edwin Casady goes further, declaring Surrey to be a true Catholic, and his poem a parody of Protestant zeal (of their self-seriousness, and perhaps of mischief-making dressed up as righteous violence). His Surrey is unrepentant, and has little to repent. With no more warrant than Nott he describes how the "young gallants" were first set upon by a band of citizens and apprentices. After driving them back with their stone bows, it was only natural for Surrey and his friends to go after the surrounding

windows: "To roistering young Englishmen the sound of shattering glass is ... apparently, a necessary adjunct to a 'jolly party.'"⁶

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Surrey as iconoclast. Surrey as refomationist, and counter-refomationist. Surrey as roistering young Englishman. And at the center, those stones. Was it just a game, an evening's pastime? But a stone is not a ball: we may throw it, but not to catch. Was the riot an act of reform? Not of a constructive kind. A stone is not a tool, even when it is temporarily pressed into such service. Not a tool? True, the slow weather of erosion may shape it for flight, but it remains stubbornly natural. That makes a stone good for certain revenges, against the bright daylight reasonableness of glass, or against someone accused of unnatural acts. From the moment it is taken in hand, or slipped into the leather palm of a stone bow, it has the energy of wanting to return where it belongs, and to put everyone and everything else there, too. When it falls, it restores the proper order of things, its law the law of gravity. If you suspect otherwise, look inside: you will only make another stone, and if you keep inquiring, sand.

When Surrey left Fleet Prison is not clear. He was commanding the king's troops in October 1543, but by 1546 he was back in prison again, in the Tower of London, allegedly for incorporating the royal coat of arms into his own, using them to blazon the great house he was building at Mount Surrey, outside Norwich. (A great house, with great windows of its own; and a symbolic claim, Henry feared, on his throne.) In the Tower, he made psalm translations where some scholars have detected a final allegiance to the Reformation cause. But even on the scaffold, he made no speech to settle the

matter of his creed, or none that survives. He was executed on 19 January 1547, one of the last casualties of the paranoia of Henry's late reign, four years to the day after his night on the town. Among critics of the ambiguous apologetic he left behind him, opinion has swung back toward Nott: H. A. Mason argues influentially for Protestant commitment; his biographer William Sessions guardedly allows a "genuine prophecy."⁷ But the episode remains volatile. The paradoxical cause of that volatility is the common object of the stone. Cause? No, not cause. But the stone was an indispensable accomplice. Any other instrument—an arrow, a club, or a blade for closer work—would have been more legible. More legible? No, less legible, or at least less variously legible, less protean than the stolid stone. The stolid stone which, when it takes flight, becomes as manifold in its potentials as the philosopher's stone of the alchemists. Surrey chose his weapon well, if weapon it was, to baffle us and perhaps even to baffle himself about the meaning of his act. That act was one of righteousness or hilarity, reform or mayhem, punishment or misogynistic violence. The stone is the blind black eye through which we cannot see the difference.

1 Henry Howard, *Poems*, ed. Emrys Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 30–31.

2 James Gairdner and R. H. Brodie, eds., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, vol. 18, part 1 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1901), p. 202.

3 G. F. Nott, ed., *The Works of Henry Howard Earl of Surrey and of Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), p. liii, p. liv. It should be said, Nott

was not friendly to all youth. His place in history rests most securely on his edition, but he is also remembered for calling Percy Shelley a scoundrel: see E. W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 209.

4 Robert Bell, ed., *Poetical Works of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey* (London: J. W. Parker and Son, 1854), p. 97.

5 Frederick Morgan Padelford, ed., *The Poems of Henry Howard*,

Earl of Surrey (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1928), p. 221.

6 Edwin Casady, *Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1938), p. 98. In defense of his position, Casady points out that the windows Surrey broke included those of Sir Richard Gresham, who had made his fortune selling lead from the roofs and the windows of the ruined monasteries.

7 H. A. Mason, *Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor*

Period (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 240–248; William Sessions, *Henry Howard, The Poet Earl of Surrey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 237. Andrew W. Taylor surveys the reception in "Glass Houses: Surrey, Petrarch, and the Religious Poetics of the 'London' Invective," *Review of English Studies*, new series, vol. 57, no. 231 (September 2006), pp. 436–438.