The Demoniac-Exorcist: Richard Rothwell and the Dispossession of John Fox in Early-Seventeenth-Century England

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The Demoniac-Exorcist: Richard Rothwell and the Dispossession of John Fox in Early-Seventeenth-Century England

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The demonic possession of Nottingham man John Fox in the early seventeenth century and his dispossession at the hands of Puritan minister Richard Rothwell (c. 1563–1627) remains a fragmented case in the scholarship. Little information about this event survives in the historical record and any attempts to establish accurate dates, actors, or locations are fraught with difficulty. What the limited source material does illuminate is the enigmatic figure at the center of this case, Richard Rothwell, a figure who has thus far received little attention from scholars.

This article addresses two intersecting aspects of the Fox possession and exorcism. First, it examines the depiction of Rothwell's lifelong conflict with temptation as presented in the biographical account by his pupil, Stanley Gower; and, secondly, it unpacks and analyzes Rothwell's dispossession of John Fox. This integrated approach demonstrates that the full historical and theological implications of Fox's possession narrative are only apparent when considered within the larger scope of Rothwell's ministry. Bringing Rothwell's exceptional exploits to light and situating them within the broader historical context justifies his consideration alongside many of the other notable Puritan ministers of this period. Further, examining how Rothwell's biographers shape his narrative can clarify major theological contentions among Puritans, especially pertaining to the orthopraxy of spiritual warfare, whom exactly the Devil was able to persecute, and the fraught process of categorizing demonic assault.

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Richard Rothwell is portrayed by his contemporaries as a man of contradictions: at once a brilliant theologian and preacher that was heralded as a shining light in the Puritan movement, while also cast as a reformed sinner perpetually struggling with demonic temptation.[1] This struggle established Rothwell's exceptional credentials as a spiritual healer. His pupil, future Westminster Divine Stanley Gower (c. 1600–1660), covers Fox's dispossession in his brief biography of Rothwell as it appears in certain editions of Samuel Clarke's prolific *Lives* series, a biographical compilation of English clergymen.[2] In this notable anthology, Rothwell is placed alongside influential Puritans such as Richard Greenham, Arthur Hildersham, and John Dod as an exemplar of clerical excellence. His experiences, Peter Lake explains, furthers the *Lives*' central claim that the Church of England had denied itself the full benefits of these men's spiritual knowledge solely because of the episcopal persecution to which they had been subjected.[3]

Rothwell's piety made him the continual target of demonic assault, and Gower's depiction in this biography establishes parallels to virtuous figures

1. The term "Puritan" remains a contentious scholarly issue as it was originally used as a slur against individuals deemed to be overzealous in their religious convictions. These individuals largely rejected the label Puritan and called themselves the "Godly." In order to effectively frame the intra-confessional tensions of this historical context, the terms Puritan and Godly are used interchangeably in this article. Puritan and Godly are defined here as the "hotter sort of Protestants," drawing on Patrick Collinson's scholarship. Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Cape, 1967), 13, 27.

2. This account was first published in the appendix to the 1651 edition of Clarke's anthology series as: Stanley Gower, "The Life of Master Richard Rothwel, Who Died Anno Christi, 1627," in *A Generall Martyrologie Containing a Collection of all the greatest Persecutions which have befallen the Church of Christ from the Creation to our present Times*, ed. Samuel Clarke (London: Printed by *T. Ratcliffe* and *E. Mottershed*, for *John Rothwell* and *Thomas Underhill* in *Pauls* Church-yard, 1651), 452–61. This article uses the 1660 edition as its primary thematic focus is on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English clergymen: Stanley Gower, "The Life of Master Richard Rothwel, Who Died Anno Christi, 1627," in *The Lives of Two and Twenty English Divines Eminent in Their Generations for Learning, Piety, and Painfulnesse in the Work of the Ministry, and for Their Sufferings in the Cause of Christ: Whereunto Are Annexed the Lives of Gaspar Coligni, That Famous Admirall of France, Slain in the Parisian Massacre, and of Joane Queen of Navarr, Who Died a Little Before*, ed. Samuel Clarke (London: Printed by A. M. for Thomas Underhill and John Rothwell in Pauls Church-yard, 1660), 85–94.

3. Peter Lake, "Reading Clarke's *Lives* in Political and Polemical Context," in *Writing Lives: Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 297, 299.

such as St. Anthony. Gower writes, "Though he was a man subject to many temptations, the devil assaulting him very much, yet God was mightily with him, that out of his own experience he was able to comfort many."[4] Rothwell's perpetual conflict with, and eventual triumph over, temptation is didactic in nature, emerging as the central theme of the source material.[5]

Gower's account also outlines a demonic incursion for Rothwell himself (while being ambivalent about its exact nature) that stands as a unique situation in the English context.[6] Rothwell's demonic trials are laden with imagery of spiritual transformation, drawing on generic tropes from conversion narratives and even contemporary possession accounts, that evoke the label of *demoniac*. Subsequently, Rothwell's 1620 (approximate) dispossession of Fox is depicted as the culmination of his lifelong struggle with temptation and a fitting end to his career as a Godly minister. Rothwell is hence fashioned as an entirely different type of Puritan exorcist from the more well-known examples of John Darrell, George More, or John Swan and thereby merits closer analysis.

The proximity of the Fox dispossession to the John Darrell Exorcism Controversy, conducted in the same location of Darrell's most controversial possession case no less, is also significant. Rothwell's treatment of Fox unfolded in a period of sustained scrutiny against witchcraft and demonic possession cases, along with the suppression of clerical nonconformity. Following Darrell's conviction for fraud at the High Commission in 1599, leading figures in the Church of England—Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift; the Bishop of London, Richard Bancroft; and his chaplain, Samuel Harsnett—initiated a campaign against exorcism.[7] The Mary Glover dispossession of 1602, conducted by a coalition of Puritan ministers, was the first high-profile case in the wake of Darrell's conviction and was fiercely contested by the episcopacy in the courts.

Concerned about the threat of nonconformist elements using exorcism to proselytize, the episcopacy passed (through convocation) Canon 72 of the

4. Gower, "Life," 87.

5. See: Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

6. This is also a unique situation in the broader continental context. The closest historical comparison is the French Jesuit and exorcist Jean-Joseph Surin, known for his involvement in the 1634–37 Loudun possessions. In Loudun he offered his body to the demons plaguing the Ursuline convent and subsequently endured their assaults for the next twenty years.

7. See: Brendan C. Walsh, *The English Exorcist: John Darrell and the Shaping of Early Modern English Protestant Demonology* (New York, London: Routledge, 2021).

Church of England in 1604.[8] This canon decreed that all ministers now required a license to enact dispossession by prayer and fasting and, because of the cautious demonological attitudes to demonic possession and witchcraft held by the episcopacy, this legislation effectively ended clerical exorcism in England.[9] Canon 72 did not deny the continued manifestation of demonic possession, but established that dispossession was beyond the purview of the clergy. Subsequently, the opening years of the seventeenth century set a precedent for the legal and demonological status of demonic possession in England as many known cases resulted in exposure, charges of fraud, or the failure to secure a witch for conviction.[10] King James VI & I himself spearheaded the investigation of numerous fraudulent possession and witchcraft cases including: Anne Gunther (1606); John Smith, the "Leicester Boy Trial" (1616); William Perry, the "Boy of Bilson" (1620); and Helen and Elizabeth Fairfax (1621–3).

Published accounts of demonic possession and dispossession were also heavily suppressed and the little pamphlet literature that did circulate around

8. Church of England, *Constitvtions and Canons Ecclesiasticall, Treated vpon by the Bishop of London, President of the Conuocation for the Prouince of Canterbury, and the rest of the Bishops and Clergie of the said Prouince: And agreed vpon with the Kings Maiesties Licence in their Synode begun at London anno Dom. 1603. And in the year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord James, by the grace of God, King of England, France, and Ireland the first, and of Scotland the 37. And now published for the due observation of them, by His Majesty's authority, under the great seal of England* (London: Imprinted by R. Barker, Printer to the Kings Most Excellent Maiestie, 1604), sig. M4r-M4v.

9. The 1601–2 possession case of Thomas Harrison in Northwich (Cheshire) emerges as the only example of authorized prayer and fasting for dispossession in the post-Darrell period. The Bishop of Chester, Richard Vaughan, provided episcopal permission (in the form of a licence) for the use of prayer and fasting but also set strict guidelines that ensured that Harrison's spiritual treatment was carried out within the existing structures of ecclesiastical authority. Only ministers on a specified list were permitted to treat the boy, with all outside visitors forbidden to enter the house where Harrison dwelled. Furthermore, fasting was to be conducted privately and no prayer meeting was to take place at this time. The language of the licence indicates that the bishop was doubtful over the exact nature of Harrison's illness, prescribing prayer and fasting as a general means of treating spiritual affliction rather than for the explicit purpose of dispossession. Francis Young, *A History of Anglican Exorcism: Deliverance and Demonology in Church Ritual* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018), 39–40.

10. Similarly, the rate of witchcraft prosecutions after 1603 (at least in the counties of the Home Circuit) dropped significantly from the Elizabethan level. Stuart Clark, "King James' Daemonologie: Witchcraft and Kingship," in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1977), 161.

England in this period was largely produced by underground presses. Accordingly, there is a great deal of mystery surrounding the ecclesiastical response (or lack of) to Fox's dispossession, as no legal consequences befell Rothwell, Fox, or any other of the participants. This is all the more puzzling as Rothwell was a notorious nonconformist, and his dispossession of Fox offered an ideal opportunity for the ecclesiastical authorities to reprimand him. Furthermore, Nottingham was the town where Darrell controversially dispossessed William Sommers in 1597 and was subsequently arrested by the ecclesiastical authorities to face the High Commission.

Authorities were clearly not hesitant to prosecute such matters at this time. In 1620, William Perry's possession was questioned at length, resulting in a confession of counterfeiting. No substantial explanation for inaction with regards to the Fox case is forthcoming in the relevant source material. That aside, the possession of John Fox and the involvement of Puritan ministers in his dispossession is significant in that it represents active resistance against Canon 72 and the episcopacy's campaign against exorcists in early-seventeenth-century England.

Despite great interest in demonic possession cases in early modern England, the figures of Rothwell and Fox have received remarkably little scholarly attention.[11] This article is the first publication on the two figures in which their respective histories are sketched in full. Moreover, Rothwell's biography in Clarke's *Lives* series also provides valuable insight into the fraught nature of categorizing demonic affliction, along with the proximity and susceptibility of clergymen to such afflictions, in this period. Gower's depiction of Rothwell's conflict with temptation and his dispossession of Fox thus illustrates how Godly ministers fashioned and exhibited virtue when experiencing adverse circumstances. To this effect, Rothwell's inclusion in this defining anthology series of Godly biography indicates that dispossession by prayer and fasting had not been totally discredited by the episcopal authorities and remained as a fundamental spiritual practice in many English Protestant circles.[12] Dispossession is depicted in the *Lives* as a powerful tool of proselytization, with its efficacy a testament to the one "true" faith.

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11. Darren Oldridge is the only modern scholar to have drawn any substantive attention to this case, publishing excerpts from the source material in the appendix to his *The Devil in Tudor and Stuart England* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010), 207–11.

12. For cases of post-1604 dispossession see: Amy G. Tan, "Resisting the Devil: The Case of Edward Dynham (1626) and Options for English Protestant Dispossession," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 19, no. 2 (2017): 135–53.

By this same token, Rothwell's career bears many interesting parallels with John Darrell's ministry, and his successful dispossession of Fox takes place in the immediate decades after the latter's controversial indictment at the High Commission. These similarities were surely acknowledged by Gower and Clarke, as Rothwell's continual altercations with the ecclesiastical authorities directly mirror Darrell's experiences of censure and tie into the central themes of the *Lives* series. The 1651 edition of Clarke's *Lives* thereby sets out in the introduction that the legal tribulations experienced by the ministers it featured were persecutions of the exact expressions of spirit that should define the English national church, rather than divide it.[13] "Here thou hast a certain and infallible mark of the true church of Christ, viz. to be hated and persecuted by the devil and his instruments."[14] Rothwell serves as an excellent focus for exploring this tension, for there is no other English clergyman during this period so precariously balanced between the status of aspiring saint and demoniac.

FOX'S POSSESSION IN PRINT

Due to the limited extant textual evidence, discussion of John Fox's possession and dispossession has largely been confined to the margins of scholarship. No account was published during Rothwell's lifetime, with all information about this ordeal stemming from Stanley Gower's *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel, who died Anno Christi, 1627,* initially published in the 1651 edition of Samuel Clarke's *Lives* series.

The date of publication and the subject matter of this account provide some indication as to how Gower's authorial intent aligned with Clarke's. Published during the final period of the English Civil War, this edition of Clarke's *Lives* series set out to construct and justify a moderate, learned, and respectable version of the Puritan tradition. Many of the clergymen depicted in the series, however, were not "moderate" at all, and some, such as Rothwell, were "overt and defiant nonconformists; men who had never finessed or evaded the demands of either subscription or conformity for a quiet life or the chance to remain unmolested in their ministry."[15] The defining characteristic for inclusion in the *Lives* series was pastoral excellence and personal godliness, qualities that Rothwell as a minister and an exorcist embodied.

13. Lake, "Reading Clarke's *Lives* in Political and Polemical Context," 294.
14. Clarke, *A Generall Martyrologie*, "To the Christian reader" sig. ar.
15. Lake, "Reading Clarke's *Lives* in Political and Polemical Context," 295–96.

Rothwell's inclusion in the *Lives* series is also predicated on the resurgence of demonism in England at this time. Accusations of witchcraft, reports of strange phenomena, and (to a lesser degree) demonic possession cases soared during these turbulent years, resulting in an influx of sensationalist pamphlet literature. Gower's account of Fox's possession in *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* capitalizes on this resurgence of demonism and the proselytization potential inherent to such phenomena, while also serving Clarke's broader polemical objectives. This biographical entry was evidently composed long after the subject's death and relies heavily on the author's own recollections of Rothwell, the information that he was able to glean through discussions with his mentor's Puritan brethren, and the details that Rothwell himself divulged. It is one of the few biographies to be specifically written for Clarke's *Lives*, rather than taken from an earlier publication, as it bears this editorial comment: "*This Life was drawn up by my reverend Friend Master* Stanly Gower *of* Dorchester."[16] *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel*, due to its generic format, is by no means comprehensive. It runs at a brief ten pages, and Gower passes over or summarizes large periods of Rothwell's life. Gower is not an entirely unreliable narrator, but he is working with an incomplete data set that greatly problematizes his, and modern scholars', attempts to reconstruct Rothwell's life. More so, Gower's affection for Rothwell and his objective in presenting the clergyman as the model of pastoral excellence naturally compromise the historical veracity of this account and consequently require an extra degree of scrutiny from readers.

Rothwell's dispossession of Fox amounts to the most substantial section of *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel*, running to almost five pages. Gower prefaces that he was not present for the dispossession, and it is likely that he heard the full details of the story in 1627 when he visited Rothwell on his deathbed in Mansfield (Nottinghamshire). It "is a relation which I had from himself, and from divers others to whom the story was known, that are yet alive."[17] In this case, observations of the dispossession were most likely recorded and collated by the attending ministers (Rothwell included)—as indicated by the use of direct speech in the narrative—that Gower consulted at a later date.

Gower's *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* makes mention to a work of this nature, but any such manuscript was lost during the Civil War: "I had a Book written with his [Fox's] own hand, of the Temptations the *Devil*

16. Gower, "Life," 94.
17. Ibid., 91.

haunted him with afterwards, and the Answers divers godly and reverend Ministers gave to those temptations: but the Cavaliers got them, and all my Books and Writings."[18] A pamphlet attributed to Gower, titled *An Account of the Strange and Wonderful Manner in which John Fox, who Some Time Ago Lived Near Nottingham, was Sorely Afflicted with an Evil Spirit*, was supposedly published in Glasgow sometime during 1627 (shortly after Rothwell's death), yet any such work is no longer extant.[19] Authorship of this pamphlet has always remained contentious, but an early-nineteenth-century reprint in a Glasgow broadside (using an almost identical title) pulls directly from Gower's *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel*, suggesting that he is in fact the author of all versions. To this effect, the 1627 pamphlet may have been the basis for the latter section of *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* entry, as it is certainly a stylistic departure from the preceding narrative.[20] The textual legacy for Fox's possession and dispossession is evidently highly fragmented, and it is thereby Gower's *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel*, the only extant record of this event, that this article primarily draws from.

Complicating matters further is the difficulty in accurately dating Fox's exorcism. Gower's account does not provide an exact year nor an approximate time frame, likely owing to the extenuating circumstances in which he was first relayed this tale. The text lacks consistent dating with any such descriptions being frustratingly vague. Thus, dates can only be discerned through cross-referencing the few specifics supplied. Gower establishes that Fox was

18. Ibid., 94.

19. Stanley Gower, *An Account of the Strange and Wonderful Manner in which John Fox, who Some Time Ago Lived Near Nottingham, was Sorely Afflicted with an Evil Spirit* (Glasgow: s.n., 1627). Kirsten C. Uszkalo attributes authorship of this pamphlet to Gower in *Bewitched and Bedeviled: A Cognitive Approach to Embodiment in Early English Possession* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 203n113. However, no such extant title is listed in Harry Gidney Aldis's *A List of Books Printed in Scotland before 1700*, and this is further evidence that the Gower pamphlet is no longer extant. Harry Gidney Aldis, *A List of Books Printed in Scotland before 1700: Including Those Printed Furth of the Realm for Scottish Booksellers, with Brief Notes on the Printers and Stationers*, Publications of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Vol. VII (Edinburgh: Printed for the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 1970).

20. Anon., *An account of the strange and wonderful manner in which John Fox, who some time ago lived near Nottingham, was sorely afflicted with an Evil Spirit, that threw him into fits, deprived him of the power of speech, spoke within him, and endeavoured to baffle the efforts of the Ministers who attended him, whose names are here mentioned; also an account how he was at length relieved, after remaining three years dumb, and lived a virtuous and religious life* (Glasgow: T. Duncan, 1820).

severely afflicted by the Devil for many years and seen to by many Godly ministers during this period.[21] Two rough dates for the dispossession—1612 and 1620—have been posited in the scholarship, and, while the consensus seems to be for the former, this article argues that that the latter is actually the best approximation.[22]

Based on a close-reading of the account, circa 1612 is the earliest definite textual marker of Fox's demonic illness whereas circa 1620 is the probable date of Rothwell's dispossession.[23] The first date is based on a reference to two Nottinghamshire ministers whom were implied to have attended Fox concurrently. Gower writes that "many prayers were put up to God for him, and great resort, especially of godly Ministers, to him: amongst the rest Master *Bernard* of *Batcomb,* then of *Worksop*; and Master *Langley* of *Truswel*."[24] The presence of Richard Bernard, "then of *Worksop*," at Fox's bedside provides two possible periods: 1601–1605 and 1606/07–1613. Bernard was appointed as Worksop's vicar in 1601 and then removed on April 9, 1605, for refusing to submit to the church canons of 1604.[25] He eventually did conform in 1606/07 and was subsequently reappointed to Worksop. In 1613, he left his position there and became the vicar of Batcombe, Somerset. The other minister mentioned by Gower is Henry Langley "of *Truswel*," who was appointed West Rector there in 1610 until his death in 1636.

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21. Gower, "Life," 92.

22. Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* is one of the first major twentieth-century works to list the 1612 date. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 580 n 73. Darren Oldridge and Kathleen Sands also provide a 1612 date for the Fox dispossession. Kathleen R. Sands, *Demon Possession in Elizabethan England* (Westport, Colo.: Praeger, 2004), 200; Oldridge, *The Devil in Tudor and Stuart England*, 207. More recent works, such as Michael P. Winship's 2018 *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America*, set down 1620 as the most probable date. Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 2018), 64.

23. Francis Hutchinson lists 1627 for Fox's dispossession, yet this is likely based on the publication date of Gower's pamphlet. Francis Hutchinson, *An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft: With Observations Upon Matters of Fact; Tending to Clear the Texts of the Sacred Scriptures, and Confute the Vulgar Errors About That Point. And Also Two Sermons: One in Proof of the Christian Religion; the Other Concerning Good and Evil Angels. By Francis Hutchinson, D. D. Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty, and Minister of St. James's Parish in St. Edmund's-Bury* (London: Printed for R. Knaplock, at the *Bishop's Head*, and D. Midwinter, at the *Three Crowns* in St. *Paul's* Church-yard, 1718), 36.

24. Gower, "Life," 92.

25. Ronald Albert Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York, 1560–1642* (London: Longmans, 1960), 149, 296.

If Gower's designations are accurate, then that establishes a three-year window (1610–1613) wherein both Bernard and Langley were at their respective posts in Worksop and Batcombe. However, Gower's account does not specify how long a gap existed between their clerical mediation and Rothwell's eventual dispossession: "He [Fox] lay thus (if I mistake not) some years."[26] Rothwell lived in or around the market town of Barnard Castle in Teesdale (County Durham)—about one hundred thirty miles from Fox's residence in Nottingham—for the most part of the 1610s and only settled in Mansfield around 1620, so it is likely that he treated the demoniac at this date. Accordingly, Gower was under Rothwell's tutelage for much of the 1610s, yet establishes that he was not present for, or made privy to, any such dispossession event during this period.[27] This explains the lack of specific dating in the text.

Overall, *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* is not too concerned with this type of exact chronology. The examples contained within Rothwell's extraordinary life, highlighted in his dispossession of John Fox, are intended to be "read as codas to, indeed as culminations of, narratives that stretched through the entire history of the church, from the Old Testament or early church to the present."[28] Rothwell's dispossession is therefore constructed as an ordained act of spiritual warfare, with its efficacy offering further proof of the true faith in this period of fierce confessional conflict.

THE LIFE OF MASTER RICHARD ROTHWELL

Gower describes his mentor Rothwell as a brilliant minister and theologian whose very passions subjected him to the Devil's perpetual temptations. Consequently, *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* is markedly different from other Godly biographies in that its subject is a reformed sinner that undergoes a spiritual awakening as a young man. The "*Painfulnesse in the Work of the Ministry*" mentioned in the title of the 1660 *The Lives of Two and Twenty English Divines* is certainly emphasized in Rothwell's biography. *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* is not presented as a conversion narrative in the traditional sense, but is one in which a conflicted theologian is finally able to conquer his own inadequacies and fulfill his providential duty.

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26. Gower, "Life," 92.

27. It is possible that Rothwell dispossessed Fox in 1612 immediately prior to departing to Barnard Castle, yet the descriptive terms for the demoniac's long illness—"He lay thus (if I mistake not) some years"—and Gower's absence infers that the event unfolded at a much later date.

28. Lake, "Reading Clarke's *Lives* in Political and Polemical Context," 293.

Rothwell was born to a family of some wealth at Bolton (Lancashire) around 1563 and subsequently educated at Queens' College Cambridge where his insightful, albeit controversial, scriptural commentaries attracted considerable attention. Marion Gibson asserts that he must have been familiar with fellow student John Darrell who was of a similar age.[29] After graduating with a B.A. in 1581, Rothwell was ordained "Presbyter" by Archbishop Whitgift, one of the High Commissioners that prosecuted Darrell and a leader in the campaign against exorcism, who "forbade him medling with interpretation of *Moses Types, the Book of* Canticles, Daniel, *and the* Revelation."[30] Rothwell evidently faced censure from the religious authorities from the very beginning of his career, and this theme of prosecution came to characterize his ensuing ministry. Gower attributes this constant clash with authority to Rothwell's brilliance: "he had a prompt wit, a quick apprehension, a clear understanding, a sound judgement, a ready speech, and a strong memory." Furthermore, he "was tall, well set, of great strength of body and activity, of a stern countenance, of invincible courage, of approved valour, and of a very goodly and majestick presence."[31]

His considerable mental and physical endowments, however, led him astray as he fell into sinful ways after leaving university:

> But alas! all these natural dispositions, intellectual habits, personal deportments were but as so many weapons in the hands of a mad man: Judge how able by these to resist the truth; for he remained some years without any change of heart, or sensible work of grace upon his soul, but preached learnedly as they called it, and lived vainly; abhorring debauchery, and debauched companions, through the height of his spirit, but gave himself to hunting, bowling, shooting . . . sometimes he would swear *Faith and Troth,* and in his passion greater blasphemie.[32]

Rothwell thus spent the first period of his life in the metaphorical wilderness, indulging in his own vices, spending his wealth frivolously, and sharing disdainful company. His love of God was shrouded in darkness and remained so until, finally acknowledging his sinful ways, he experienced a spiritual awakening.

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29. Marion Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print: Darrell, Harsnett, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Exorcism Controversy* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 20.

30. Gower, "Life," 85.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 86.

Rothwell's time in the wilderness eventually came to an end when, one day "playing at *Bowles* amongest some Papists and vain Gentlemen" in Rochdale (Lancashire), he was reproached by vicar Richard Midgley.[33] After reflecting upon Midgley's words, and attending his sermon the next day, Rothwell underwent a spiritual transformation wherein he "proved the means of the Conversion of so many."[34] "He came after Sermon to Master Midgley, thanked him for his reproof, and besought his direction and prayers, for he was in a miserable condition of nature; and under the spirit of bondage he lay for a time, till afterwards, and by Master Midgleys hands also he received The Spirit of Adoption, wherewith he was so sealed, that he never lost his assurance to his dying day."[35] The *Spirit of Adoption* is referencing Romans 8:15 wherein the apostle Paul explains conversion from the sinful flesh to the Holy Spirit.[36]

Rothwell, now part of God's covenant, "counted Master Midgley ever afterward for his spiritual Father."[37] Gower continues to use this imagery as he then compares this relationship to that of St. Augustine and St. Ambrose, following the former's historic conversion to Christianity from Manichaeism in 387. The conversion that Rothwell—now in his early to mid-twenties—undergoes thereby equips him with a unique spiritual insight and prepares him for an ongoing battle with Satan.

> He now becomes another man, forsakes all his wonted courses and companions, preacheth in another manner then formerly, opens the depths of Satan, and deceitfulnesse of the heart, so as he was called the *Rough Hewer.* He had the power of God that went with his Ministry, when he preached the Law to make men tremble, yea sometimes to cry out in the Church: and when he preached the Gospel, he was another *Barnabas,* and had great skill in comforting afflicted consciences.[38]

Having been reborn into God's covenant, he "disposed his temporal estate amongst his friends . . . *and lived of the Gospel.*"[39] In 1599, he served as a soldier and chaplain to a regiment under the 2nd Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux

33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 86–87.
36. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (KJV).
37. Gower, "Life," 87.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 85.

in Ireland where his martial prowess was remarked upon by many.[40] After returning to England he took up a lectureship in Lancashire and then later ("to decline the storm of the Prelates") became domestic chaplain to Baron William Cavendish of Hardwick in Derbyshire.

Toward the end of Rothwell's employment in Cavendish's Derbyshire household, in the early 1610s, he met a young Gower and took him under his wing. It was at "that time," Gower exclaims, "I first knew him, and came (I blesse God) acquainted with him."[41] Gower's admiration for his mentor shines through here as he remarks "and so (I blesse God) he not only fitted me for the University, but was a means to bring me to the first saving knowledg of Christ; I remember, and shall do ever, the first Sermon and point which God blessed to my soul for that purpose."[42] This sentiment, along with the hope of allowing others to partake in this experience, is certainly a motivating force behind Gower's authorship of *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel*.

Rothwell's spiritual rebirth did not mean that he became a conformist. On the contrary, his spiritual convictions only crystalized further as he continued to study and advance his non-conformist position. "He was so fixed in his judgment, that he would never either marry . . . nor take any Benefice, (though divers great livings were proffered him)."[43] These convictions also brought him into constant dispute with his fellow ministers and, inevitably, the religious authorities.[44] "He had some contests with the Prelates, especially with Bishop *Neal* then of *Litchfield,* afterwards of *Durham*; in the which the Bishop, I dare say, was more afraid of him, then he was of the Bishop."[45]

Sometime during 1612, Rothwell took leave from Cavendish and relocated to County Durham, in the proximity of Barnard Castle, "by means of an honourable and Elect Lady, the Lady *Bowes,* afterwards the Lady *Darcy* in the North."[46] Isabel Bowes was a distinguished patron of Godly ministers,

40. Ibid., 87.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 88–89.

43. Ibid, 87.

44. Marchant notes that Rothwell sued James Cham of Sheffield at the High Commission on July 9, 1611, concerning an undisclosed matter that was settled out of court. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York*, 310.

45. Gower, "Life," 88. Richard Neile served as Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry from 1610–14.

46. Ibid. The text establishes that Rothwell went north a short time after Isabel's second husband, Sir William Bowes of Streatlam, died in late 1611.

including a young John Darrell whom she assisted during his first exorcism in 1586. Recognizing Rothwell's zeal, she provided him with a living and requested that he reform the spiritually destitute people of the north. Bowes also feared for Rothwell as folk here "were of a fierce disposition, and having never heard the Gospel, might deal unkindly with him." To this Rothwell replies "*Madam, If I thought I should never meet the devil there, I would never come there; he and I have been at odds in other places, and I hope we shall not agree there.*"[47] Provided with forty pounds an annum and accompanied by Gower, he made great strides in County Durham and won over many souls as the "*Apostle in the North*." Within four years he "had so many judicious and experimental Christians, that they came from *London, York, Richmond, New-Castle,* and many other places, to see the order of his Congregation."[48]

Rothwell would also encounter difficulties in the north, from both enemies old and new. Bishop Neale was appointed to the see of Durham in 1617 and promptly turned his attention to nonconformity in the county. "*Neal* (the said Prelate of *Durham*) bestirred himself, and outed many worthy men, and endeavored his removal."[49] This resulted in one fiery encounter between pursuivants and Rothwell in which the minister faced them down with a sword and issued a challenge to Neal: "*He bad them go to their Lord, and tell him, if he had any thing to say to him, he would meet him on Bernards Castle bridge.*"[50]

It is at this point in the biography, circa 1620, that Gower and Rothwell part ways. Here, Gower's education with Rothwell concludes and, looking back thirty years later, he summarizes that "I was about eight years his bed-fellow and eye witnesse of the great success he had in his Ministry there."[51] Rothwell leaves Barnard Castle to take up a ministership in Mansfield under the sponsorship of Isabel Darcy while Gower prepares for Dublin where he is eventually admitted to Trinity College on October 27, 1621.[52] The two men each embark on a new journey in which they will not see one another for almost a decade.

The next, and final, part of Gower's biography passes over a considerable period.[53] Gower does not elaborate on Rothwell's time in Mansfield, as

47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 89.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Jacqueline Eales, "Gower, Stanley (bap. 1600?, d. 1660), Church of England clergyman," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sept. 23, 2004, n.p.
53. Gower states that "after eight years continuance" at university he "came over into England upon some opportunities, and stayed about half a year" before visiting

communication between the two relied solely upon letters. All that can be inferred about this intervening Mansfield period is that Rothwell, at the very beginning of his residency here, traveled the short distance to Nottingham and delivered John Fox from the Devil.[54] Notably, Mansfield was the birthplace of Darrell and believed to be his home in the years following his High Commission. It is unknown if Darrell was still alive at this point—his last book was published in 1617—but if so, he and Rothwell were undoubtedly in contact.[55] Following Fox's dispossession, little is known of Rothwell's activities. He seemed to be in poor health in these latter years, a lingering ailment from a demonic assault suffered at Barnard Castle. Gower, after completing his university studies, visited Mansfield in early 1627 and encountered his mentor "sick unto the death."[56] He recovered somewhat at Gower's coming, and was able to travel around town and converse with parishioners before quickly relapsing.

With his death approaching, he and Gower made the most of what little time he had left. Rothwell maintained his spiritual convictions to the very end and even had Gower clear up any possible misunderstandings otherwise. This was in response to the "drunken Vicar of Mansfield, one Master Brittaine" who took advantage of Rothwell's "*miserable condition*" to extract declarations of conformity.[57] Rothwell died peacefully at his Mansfield residence around March 27, surrounded by Godly brothers and sisters. Having overcome the Devil's temptations throughout his life and, in turn, providing spiritual guidance to others in enduring such temptations, Rothwell passed with full assurance of his salvation. Gower reports his final words and gestures, praising his mentor for maintaining his spiritual convictions to the very end: "*Now* (saies he) *I am well*: *Happy is he that hath not bowed a knee to* Baal; he bad

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Rothwell in Mansfield in 1627. He was admitted to Trinity on October 27, 1621 and encountered Rothwell in 1627, so the actual length is somewhat shorter than the eight years stated. The eight years may be referring to how long the pair spent apart rather than how long Gower was at university. Gower, "Life," 89–90.

54. Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 64.

55. John Darrell, *A Treatise of the Church VVritten against Them of the Separation, Commonly Called Brownists. Wherein the True Doctrine of a Visible Church Is Taught, and the Church of England, Proued to Be a True Church. The Brownists False Doctrine of the Visible Church Is Conuinced; Their Shamefull Peruerting of the Holy Scriptures Discouered, Their Arguments to Proue the Church of England a False Church Answered* (London: Printed by William Iones, Dwelling in Red-Crosse Streete, 1617).

56. Gower, "Life," 90.

57. Ibid.

us sing *Psal.* 120. he sung a while, but in the singing of the Psalm he died, *Anno Domini* 1627. and in the year of his age 64."[58]

A STRANGE SICKNESS AT BARNARD CASTLE

After concluding the biographical sketch of his subject in *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel*, Gower turns to two episodes that were, according to him, "worthy [of] the inserting into his life, which have been omitted in the fore-going story."[59] The first, which Gower was present for, is set during Rothwell's County Durham period and functions as a prologue to his eventual dispossession of Fox. Rothwell experienced a type of demonic affliction over the course of a month while residing at Barnard Castle. The exact nature of this demonic affliction remains an aspect of Gower's account unexplored by modern scholars. In his 1971 *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Keith Thomas merely remarked that Rothwell "had to have the Devil ejected from himself" at some point during his life.[60] Recently, Darren Oldridge has termed this affliction "a possessionlike experience" while Amy Tan labels it as a "disease associated with demonic activity," yet neither of them has investigated the matter further.[61] Beyond these scant references, there has been no further elaboration or serious inquiry into this incident in the relevant scholarship.

At Barnard Castle Rothwell was suffering from a "strange sicknesse" that learned Physicians from "*London, York, New-Castle, Durham,* and other places" were unable to remedy.[62] Gower terms this ailment as a *Vertigo capitis* (vertigo of the head) whereby he experienced "fourty fits at least in an hour, and every one of them accompanied with mischievous temptations" that were relayed to and recorded by his young pupil.[63] The exact nature of this affliction is never explicitly described in the text, but its origin is diabolic. This condition was likely intended to be read as demonic *obsession*, an entirely external assault on the mind, soul, or body that usually preceded a possession if the individual was not strong enough to resist.

Demonic obsession, while having clear precedents in medieval demonology, was not defined in English theological discourse until the early

58. Ibid., 90–91.
59. Ibid., 91.
60. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 580 n73.
61. Oldridge, *The Devil in Tudor and Stuart England*, 207; Tan, "Resisting the Devil," 145.
62. Gower, "Life," 91.
63. Ibid.

seventeenth century. King James VI & I outlined in his 1597 *Daemonologie* that there are two types of possessing spirits: "whereof the one followes outwardlie, the other possesses inwardlie the persones that they trouble," and Calvinist theologians used this framework to develop the category of demonic obsession.[64] The Puritan theologians John Deacon and John Walker defined obsession in their 1601 *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Divels*, as either "an outward assaulting and vexing: or in an inward suggesting and tempting," resulting in such afflictions as "ungodly motions, affections, lustes . . . and carnall practices."[65] However, it remained an unstable theoretical category throughout this period as the boundaries between possession, obsession, and even natural disease frequently overlapped, particularly in the pamphlet literature. Obsession also had another interpretation that was more widespread in Catholic states. It was often associated with aspiring saints or figures of spiritual authority as their virtue made them the target of the Devil's malice. The episode of St. Anthony resisting demonic incursion in the eastern Desert of Egypt stands as the most well-known example of obsession.[66]

Both readings of this demonic affliction are thereby predicated on temptation. Temptation was a central aspect of Calvinist spirituality and was further emphasized in the seventeenth century as theologians began to focus more on the spiritual anguish induced by the Devil's temptations rather than the extraordinary physical phenomena made manifest in conditions such as

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64. James I, King of England, *Daemonologie, in Forme of a Dialogue, Diuided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Walde-graue printer to the Kings Majestie, An., 1597), 62.

65. Deacon and Walker's *Dialogicall Discourses* was a polemical tract denouncing Darrell's exorcism ministry and dismissing the metaphysical reality of post-apostolic demonic possession. The two ministers were attempting to reconceptualize demonic possession and put forward demonic obsession as the only possible form of demonic torment. While their definition of demonic obsession was widely accepted, their argument that it dismissed demonic possession was not. Demonic obsession thus developed into a separate category of demonic assault that existed alongside demonic possession in seventeenth-century England. John Deacon and John Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Divels Declaring Their Proper Essence, Natures, Dispositions, and Operations, Their Possessions and Dispossessions: With Other the Appendantes, Peculiarly Appertaining to Those Speciall Points, Verie Conducent, and Pertinent to the Timely Procuring of Some Christian Conformitie in Iudgement, for the Peaceable Compounding of the Late Sprong Controuersies Concerning All Such Intricate and Difficult Doubts* (London: George Bishop, 1601), 226–27.

66. Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession & Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 16–17, 63–64.

possession.[67] The struggle against demonic temptation is fundamental to Rothwell's narrative, and it is through this lens that his strange affliction and efficacy as a spiritual healer are framed.

Gower's resolution to not define the exact nature of Rothwell's affliction, despite clearly invoking demonic obsession, highlights the wafer-thin membrane separating the categories of saint and sinner in this period, along with the difficulties that Godly clergymen encountered in maintaining spiritual integrity during their ministries. The exceptional nature of this predicament necessitated careful expression and a sustained emphasis on Rothwell's unparalleled faith in order to fashion it as a divinely inspired affliction. Gower's circumspect description of Rothwell's sickness in *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* is hence a means of evading the label of demoniac and the stigma of personal sin that demonic possession carried. To this effect, demonic obsession is never explicitly put forward by Gower in the text, as this condition could also imply sinful behavior on the part of the sufferer.

The model of the aspiring saint plagued by demonic incursion was not widely established in English theological discourse, and its prevalence in Catholic territories was also somewhat problematic to a Protestant audience. Gower therefore leaves the nature of Rothwell's illness ambiguous, leading the reader to ascertain its symbolic meaning through his virtuous actions and demeanor. The conversion narrative of sinner to pious minister collapses if the subject falters in any way. Rothwell's disreputable past, eccentric behavior, resistance to authority, and zealotry were already questionable elements, and the specter of demonic assault could quite easily be interpreted as a providential punishment. Gower thus had to maintain the piety of his mentor while also carefully resisting descriptions that could imply sin or elicit the label of demoniac. Accordingly, the presentation of Rothwell's physical and spiritual battle with the Devil at Barnard Castle is Gower's attempt to model his mentor in the image of Christian saints, fashioning this experience as another conflict in his lifelong struggle against demonic temptation. Rothwell's affliction consequently manifests in response to his extraordinary faith, acting as a form of sanctification and an atonement for past sins. This is a battle that he is uniquely equipped for and an exceptional situation in which the renowned spiritual comforter is forced to conquer his own literal demons.

Even more significant is the use of, and focus on, prayer and fasting as a remedy for Rothwell's demonic illness. "*Rothwell*," Gower declares, "*was*

67. Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England*, 7–8.

confident that disease would not he removed but by Prayer and Fasting."[68] Although it is not overtly framed here as treatment for possession or obsession, its use closely resembles the type of Puritan dispossession—the "doctrine of possession and dispossession of demoniakes ovt of the word of God"—popularized by Darrell in the late sixteenth century.[69] Prayer and fasting were fundamental spiritual exercises in Calvinist spirituality, conceived of as remedy for myriad afflictions, but they had largely become associated with dispossession. Following the Darrell Exorcism Controversy and the introduction of Canon 72, the use of such spiritual exercises had come under scrutiny, and their appearance in this situation indicates that Gower intends to frame it as a dispossession. Further testifying to the application of prayer and fasting as dispossession in this case is the response that the practice elicits. Gower exclaims that the Devil fiercely resists their efforts and "told him [Rothwell] if he did fast and pray that day, he would torment and hinder him."[70]

In the face of this adversity, Rothwell and Gower carry out the treatment together with the younger man (still in his teens at this point) appointed to lead the exercises: "Master *Rothwel* would needs have me to perform the duty, which through Gods goodnesse I did."[71] The role of Gower in this process, despite him being the one to enact prayer and fasting, is largely underplayed. Gower does not elaborate on his own actions here, and the text focuses on Rothwell's struggle against demonic temptation. This is his personal battle, one of the many undertaken during his lifetime. Consequently, the initial stage of this dispossession proves especially harrowing for Rothwell.

> The morning of that day he had a fit continued four hours together upon him, and the devil set upon him all that while, with most dreadfull temptations, telling him he would make him the scorn of Religion, and every man should reproach it for his

68. Gower, "Life," 91.

69. See: John Darrell, "The Doctrin of the Possession and Dispossession of Deminoiakes Ovt of the Word of God. Partiuclarly Applied Vnto Somers, and the Rest of the Persons Controverted Together. With the use we are make of the same," in *A True Narration of the Strange and Greuous Vexation by the Devil, of 7. Persons in Lancashire, and VVilliam Sommers of Nottingham Wherein the Doctrine of Possession and Dispossession of Demoniakes out of the Word of God Is Particularly Applyed Vnto Sommers, and the Rest of the Persons Controuerted: Togeather with the Vse We Are to Make of These Workes of God* (England: s.n., 1600).

70. Gower, "Life," 91.

71. Ibid.

sake, that had before by his means looked towards it: That he should never preach more, but should blaspheme the name of God he had preached, with many like suggestions.[72]

The Devil's threats are naturally centered on Rothwell's preaching as he opposes everything just and holy, directing his efforts toward corrupting the most devout of God's subjects. Gower's Godly biography thereby communicates the pious nature of Rothwell, indicating that he is the target of demonic advances precisely because of this virtue.

The efforts of Gower and Rothwell soon come to fruition. Gower declares that "the devil was not permitted to hinder or interrupt him or us, and God heard our Prayers."[73] The Devil's bodily torments of Rothwell ended at this time, "so that he had never a fit after that" as "God gave him courage, comfort and Victory over them all."[74] There is no exact moment of deliverance wherein the Devil is cast out of, or repelled from, Rothwell's body. His release from physical agony simply denotes his release from the Devil's direct assaults, and the text forgoes any mention of a vacating spirit. His spiritual struggle with the Devil continued after this, but this too he soon overcame, taking to the pulpit a week later:

but after many wrestlings with Satan, who told him he would make him mad, and before all the people in the Pulpit make him a scorn if he did adventure to preach; Neverthelesse his Faith in Christ overcame his fear of Satan, and he preached with great assistance and comfort upon that text, *Psal*. 116.9. *I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.*[75]

In the end, Rothwell's perpetual spiritual struggle against demonic temptation did take its toll. "Neverthelesse that sicknesse did so weaken his brain, that ever after he was enclining to some infirmities."[76] He continued to preach and administer to his parish for a few years until, confronted by this sickness, advancing age, and persecution, he moved south to more hospitable environs in Mansfield. It was in this diminished disposition, during the final decade of his life, that Rothwell took on his most challenging task to date.

72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.

Gower's outline of Fox's possession and dispossession, while contained within a larger account of Godly biography, draws from popular demonic pamphlets. Rothwell's spiritual conflict with Satan features several generic tropes characteristic of Calvinist possession narratives—the descriptive language of Fox's possession, the conversion imagery, the dialogue with the Devil, and the focus on his temptations—that stand in contrast with the rest of *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel*.

In this case, there is no ambiguity about the nature of Fox's affliction nor Rothwell's role in delivering the man from the Devil. Fox is designated as the demoniac whereas Rothwell embodies the role of the Puritan exorcist. This section does make a few notable concessions to the English possession genre, however. For one, there is a notable absence of witchcraft as the inciting incident, which was a fundamental aspect of many English possession narratives. Secondly, there is no space given to diagnosing Fox's affliction as possession, a lengthy process usually involving figures of authority from the local community. Despite these curious omissions, the account largely adheres to the format of possession pamphlet (albeit in a truncated form) and centers on Fox's torments in order to highlight the role of the Devil within God's providential schema.

Importantly, this text subscribes to the efficacy of dispossession and places Rothwell in the spotlight, as his treatment of Fox is presented through a sustained dialogue with Satan. Fox serves as a dark mirror image to Rothwell, as the demoniac's battle with temptation is framed as representative of his own struggles. Possession was an emblematic condition by nature, revealing God's attributes or providential intentions, and Gower's account establishes a far deeper connection between demoniac and exorcist than is usually the case.[77] The Devil thereby challenges Rothwell about his own state of grace, as his sanctity and Godly resistance are paramount to Fox's deliverance from evil. So much so that Rothwell, now advanced in years and under a cloud of illness, receives more attention in the text then the demoniac does. Thus, Gower casts this event—positioned at the very end of his biography—as the culmination to Rothwell's ministry and his final conflict against the Devil.

The account opens by providing a brief biographical note on Fox and then describes the bodily torments that he experienced for many years.

77. Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 403.

There was one *John Fox* living about *Nottingham,* who had no more learning then enabled him to write and read: This man was possessed with a devil, who would violently throw him down, and take away the use of every member of his body, which was turned as black as pitch in those fits, and then spake with an audible voice in him, which seemed sometimes to be heard out of his belly, sometimes out of his throat, and sometimes out of his mouth, his lips not moving.[78]

Little is known of Fox. His age, occupation, and spiritual convictions are a complete mystery. He was not presented as a pious demoniac like Thomas Darling or Mary Glover, both of whom actively contributed to their own dispossession. His basic literacy indicates a humble background and further comments in the text hint that he had not lived a virtuous life. There is no definite inciting incident for the possession, and it is likely that Fox's sinful nature is the proximate cause for the Devil's attention. Interpretations of Fox's affliction were undoubtedly influenced by the infamous Nottingham demoniac William Sommers who, under duress, confessed to counterfeiting his possession only two decades prior. The prolonged length of Fox's illness also suggests that the diagnosis of possession was not immediate, only becoming apparent at a much later stage when the demonic symptoms manifested completely.

After briefly referencing the many clergymen that attended Fox, the narrative then jumps ahead a number of years to the dispossession *in situ*. Here, Rothwell is approaching the house on horseback as the Devil, sensing his imminent arrival, announces to the assembled party that "*I will make a fool of him before he goes*."[79] The Devil challenges the clergyman immediately upon arrival and their back-and-forth—presented in the form of a dialogue—comprises the bulk of the narrative. Contrary to Catholic exorcisms which focus on the abjuration and interrogation of demonic spirits by the exorcist, Rothwell is the one questioned at length. The Devil alleges that Fox is an unrepentant murderer and a reprobate to which Rothwell replies: "Thou art a lyer, and the father of lies; nor art thou so well acquainted with the mind of God concerning this man, which makes thee thus to torment him; therefore I believe thee not, I believe he shall be saved by Jesus Christ."[80] The Devil soon shifts his attention to Rothwell's state of grace and the lives he took while on campaign in Ireland: "*Thou art a murtherer thy self, and yet talkest thou thus?*." Rothwell refutes this point by establishing the legal and spiritual

78. Gower, "Life," 91–92.
79. Ibid., 92.
80. Ibid.

justification of his soldiering: "Thou liest again, I have fought the Lords Battels against his known enemies, the idolatrous and bloody Papists in *Ireland*. Rebels to the Queen my Sovereign, by whose authority I bore armes against them; otherwise I have killed no man."[81] Proving his spiritual convictions, Rothwell successfully challenges every one of these provocations and drives the Devil to desperation.

The Devil then demonstrates the efficacy of his machinations, momentarily silencing Rothwell by revealing that the minister came precariously close to death on the journey here and subsequently took a life in this process. "*Thou didst murther one this day, as thou camest hither, and there is one behind thee will justifie it*." To this

> *Rothwel* looked over his shoulder, and with that the devil set up a hideous laughter, that nothing could be heard for a great while, and then said: *Look you now, did not I tell you I would make* Rothwel *a fool? and yet it is true, thou didst murther one this day; for as thou camest over the Bridge* (which he named) *there I would have killed thee, and there thy horse trod upon a flie and killed it*."[82]

This proves to be no lie as Gower comments: "Master Rothwels horse you must know stumbled there, it seems the devil had power to cause it, but without hurt either to Master Rothwel or his horse."[83] Rothwell thanks God for again protecting him against the Devil's treachery. "Thou hast oft beguiled me, I hope God will in time give me wisdome to discern, and power to withstand all thy delusions; and he it is that hath delivered me out of thy hands, and will I doubt not also deliever this poor man."[84]

The Devil acknowledges that his machinations are having no effect and shifts tactics. He then "blasphemed fearfully, quoted many Scriptures out of the Old and New Testament, both in *Hebrew* and in *Greek,* cavilled and played the Critick, and backed his Allegations with Sayings out of the *Fathers* and *Poets* in their own language."[85] Hearing Fox speak so profoundly, all the while moving "neither tongue nor lip," shocks the onlookers, yet not Rothwell who "was mightily enabled by God to detect the devils sophistry."[86] The Devil, looking on, despairs at Rothwell's steadfastness: "*What stand I*

81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., 92–93.
83. Ibid., 93.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.

talking with thee? All men know thou art BOLD ROTHWEL, and fearest no body, nor carest for words, therefore I will talk to thee no more" to which Gower adds in an aside "that name he carried to his grave."[87]

This moment marks a turning point in the narrative as Satan's displeasure signals to the onlookers that God has blessed their efforts. "*Rothwel* (turning to the people) said, Good people, you see the goodnesse of our God, and his great power; though the devil made a fool of me now, through my weaknesse, God hath made the devil dumb now; do you see how he lyeth? therefore let us go to prayer; that God who hath made him dumb, will (I doubt not) drive him out of this poor man."[88] Having withstood the Devil's ploys and demonstrating his powerlessness before God to the assembled crowd, Rothwell initiates the dispossession.

Gower describes Rothwell's "dispossessing of the devil" as the greatest challenge that the minister has thus faced and only able to be overcome through earnest prayer and the grace of God. "I look to find thee as great an enemy in this duty now, as I have done heretofore, but I fear not thy threat, I know thou art limitted; God heareth the Prayers of the upright, hath promised to give his Spirit to supply infirmities, therefore in confidence of his promise, and powerfull assistance of his Spirit, and in the name and intercession of his Son Jesus Christ we will go to Prayer."[89]

In the same manner that the Devil attempted to interrupt Rothwell's prayers at Barnard Castle, he threatens to do the same here. The "Devil raged, blasphemed, and said, *And wilt thou go to prayer? If thou do, I will make such a noise, that thy prayer shall be distracted, and thou knowest God will not hear a distracted prayer."*[90] Satan does indeed carry out this threat, but, with God's blessing, Rothwell is able to weather all such distractions. He is seemingly even able to overcome the demoniac's enhanced strength in this instance as God momentarily provides him with a power far beyond his natural (and compromised) limits.

> The *Devil* for a quarter of an hour together, or more, made a horrid noise; nevertheless Master *Rothwels* voice was louder then the *Devils*. After a while the *Devil* roared at Master *Rothwels* face (this was the first motion of any part of the mans body)

87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid., 91, 93.
90. Ibid., 91.

Master *Rothwel* opened his eyes, met, and brought down the hand, which he held with great ease, two men being scarce able to hold the other hand.[91]

Puritan exorcists were adamant in denying that they held any unique spiritual powers to dispossess, and Rothwell is no exception. Rather, it is his deep understanding of Satan's machinations—developed through his own struggle with demonic temptation—that allows him to triumph in this conflict. It is this unique spiritual insight that establishes his credentials as a spiritual healer and compels him to confront the Devil wherever he appears.

Fox's deliverance adheres to the generic conventions found in possession pamphlets. Demoniacs at the moment of their release were described as *laying dead*, before rising triumphantly as a testament to God's power. Calvinist possession narratives did not usually feature grotesque imagery of demonic spirits, and, accordingly, no description of a vacating spirit is given here.[92] Rothwell's prayers prove successful and

at length the *Devil* lay silent in the man, and after that departed from him. The man fetcht divers deep sighs, insomuch as they thought he had been expiring, but his colour returned to him, and the use of all his members, senses, and understanding; and at the next petition, he said (to the glory of God, and amazement, but comfort of all the company,) *AMEN*: and so continued to repeat his *Amen* to every petition.[93]

This performative display of faith from Fox is seen as an undeniable sign of God's power, invoking His inevitable victory during Revelation.[94]

Yet, like Rothwell, Fox is left damaged by his prolonged struggle with the Devil. The brief elation he experiences soon slips away following Rothwell's departure as his innate depravity asserts itself again. "Master *Rothwel* left him, after which he was stricken dumb for three years together . . . Thus the poor man remained tempted, but no longer possessed."[95] Temptation was understood to be an ongoing condition in Calvinist spirituality, and Fox, like all Christians, remained in the Devil's grasp. As a result, it fell to his community to ensure his rehabilitation.

91. Ibid.
92. Levack, *The Devil Within*, 63.
93. Gower, "Life," 94.
94. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 413.
95. Gower, "Life," 94.

His community continued to pray for his recovery, throughout the towns and villages of Nottinghamshire, and eventually God saw fit to deliver him from this affliction.

> At length by Prayer also (which was instantly put up to God for him, every Sabbath and Lecture day, in many places,) the Lord opened his mouth, and restored his speech to him: one using this petition, Lord open thou his mouth that his lips may shew forth thy praise. He answered in the Congregation, Amen: and so continued to speak."[96]

The dispossession seemed to elude any inquiry from the authorities, and neither Rothwell nor Fox were ever reprimanded for their actions. No secret was made of what transpired on this day as Fox retained his status as a demoniac for some time. His resistance against the Devil's temptations was observed by Rothwell and other ministers, becoming the foundation of a manuscript that Gower would come into possession of following Rothwell's death. Fox's ongoing struggle with the Devil played out in the community for all to bear witness to, resolving three years later when God restored his speech. Nottingham, in the wake of Sommer's confession of simulating his possession, now had a true demoniac. *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* concludes that Fox "spake graciously to his dying day," indicating that the demoniac had undergone a spiritual conversion and remained free of any further demonic torments.

Fox's eventual triumph over temptation is a testament to the efficacy of Rothwell's dispossession and his role as a spiritual comforter. This battle with demonic temptation is fundamental to *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel*, with Rothwell's personal struggles and his later deliverance of Fox comprising a complete spiritual narrative that concludes with his salvation. Gower's account of Rothwell's life thus serves as a uniquely profound example of Godly biography, presenting an especially pious individual who overcomes his sinful past to become one of the great Puritan minsters and healers of the seventeenth century.

CONCLUSION

Richard Rothwell's rich legacy as the *Apostle in the North*, *Rough Hewer*, and *Bold Rothwell* grew in the succeeding period, inspiring a whole generation of Puritan ministers. This is certainly evident in the ministry of Stanley

96. Ibid.

Gower who, as years went on, began to greatly resemble his mentor. Gower continually faced disciplinary action for neglecting parts of the liturgy, not wearing the surplice, or using the sign of the cross at baptism. His ministry became characterized by arduous all-day sermon and prayer sessions, the same type of zeal that Rothwell demonstrated in his preaching.[97] Gower is hence consciously fashioning himself after the model of Godly piety that *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* puts forth, holding up Rothwell as the exemplar for other English ministers to follow. "Thus have I given you as true an account as I could of this famous Champion of Christ, who notwithstanding his Non-conformity, may be called with *Austin, Haereticorum Malleus, The Hammer of Hereticks,* and with *Ambrose, Orbis terrarum (Anglicarum) oculus*. The eye as bright as any other in the English Orbe."[98]

Rothwell's inclusion in Clarke's *Lives* series is emblematic of the type of Puritan orthodoxy being constructed during the mid-seventeenth century and, in defiance of episcopal policy, an endorsement of the continued use of dispossession by prayer and fasting. Dispossession in *The Life of Master Richard Rothwel* is cast as a powerful spiritual tool that can provide comfort to those suffering from demonic affliction. Rothwell was only one of two English exorcists featured in Clarke's *Lives* (the other being Robert Balsom), and his ministry encapsulates the Calvinist fixation on temptation, along with the means of overcoming this condition. His perpetual conflict with the Devil, manifest in the affliction he overcome at Barnard Castle and then culminating with his deliverance of Fox, shapes Rothwell as both a Protestant saint and martyr. Gower's account of his mentor reveals the powerful legacy that Richard Rothwell held among Puritans in the seventeenth century, and it is by this metric that he is deserving of continued scholarly attention.

97. Eales, "Gower, Stanley," n.p.
98. Gower, "Life," 91.