Thomas Master and the Mensa Lubrica: a Seventeenth-Century Gaming Poem

In the late 1650s the Oxford press was in intellectual decline, some complained. One modest effort to smarten up the Oxford image was a small 1658 miscellany of Oxonian pieces, headed by a Latin address penned by Thomas Barlow, Bodl

from Autograph manuscripts of several Oxford historical titbits were sought out, presumably by Barlow himself, and handed over to the Oxford printers, the Lichfield dynasty, now under the leadership of Leonard Lichfield II, who following the death of his father was appointed with his mother printers to the university on 17 September 1658.¹

The short works gathered together by Barlow were mixed in genre and language but of highly respectable authorship. First came the statesman, scholar, and mathematician Sir

argued that military matters and the study of philosophy might both thrive together in the

by the celebrated Abraham Cowley,

appeared in the various editions of his bestselling (and today almost unread) poems, and it is chiefly through this English poem that the name of Thomas Master has been spared total expulsion from the literary firmament.

It is to *Mensa Lubrica* to which I shall devote this note. The Latin text consists of 63 hexameters; the English presents a slightly longer text of 84 lines in rhymed couplets. The Latin text is certainly by Master: it had first been published as a single sheet, perhaps in 1651, but only one copy is recorded as surviving in institutional hands, among the second Keeper of the Ashmolean, now in the Bodleian Library.⁴ It was republished again as a single sheet in late 1690

edition, very much wor

supplied a detailed

And as their *Painted Chariots* did divide This and that Faction; Each one his owne side Admiring and applauding; Thus there are

But He, whose *Virt* , and scornes Forlornes; He who dares , and no way dreads The Gaping Grave Brink of Ruine, and doth even Falling stand. He, He the *Triple Crown* doth win and wear; And if his Pope-ship all Assaults can bear, And Sithis Hollow Chaire, so that no Eye Bewailes his Downfall; Then unto the Skie His Praise resounds: His Party Pæans sing, claps Him with her Whitest Wing. And Thus One, Translator Chooses to shew his ruder Cobling Hand Rather then *Disobedience*: so that here Nothing but *plain dull Duty* doth appear. Whie the more Lookes like the de. A Poet that could Gamesters Humours hit, Might on each passage Play, and shovel Wit.

When it had been but Idleness to doe Well.

And here is

Mensa Lubrica Montgom: Illustrissimo Domino Domino Edwa[r]do *Baroni* de Cherbury

Roboreus longo se porrigit æquor Campus,

Emenso stadio præceps ruet, Alveus illum