

GREENES, GROATS-WORTH OF WITTE

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Evidence of William Shakespeare's arrival in London was discovered in a pamphlet published in late 1592 by Henry Chettle. The title was *Greenes, Groats-Worth of Witte, bought with a million of Repentance*. Robert Greene had been a university man who achieved fame by having made a living from writing plays, although what little money there was to be made from this occupation is evident from the fact that he died a pauper. Greene also obtained notoriety for his dissolute life, hence his apparent 'repentance' at its end. What marks this pamphlet for special attention is its reference to a man named Shake-scene: an apparent pun on the name Shake-speare. In an open address to three writers of similar standing, Greene warns them against actors, and in particular one who also has pretensions at being a writer of blank verse.

Base minded men all three of you, if by my miserie you be not warnd: for unto none of you (like mee) sought those burres to cleave: those Puppets (I meane) that spake from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours. Is it not strange, that I, to whom they all have beene beholding: is it not like that you, to whome they all have beene beholding, shall (were yee in that case as I am now) bee both at once of them forsaken? Yes trust them not: for there is an up-start Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute Johannes fac totum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey. O that I might intreat your rare wits to be imploied in more profitable courses: & let those Apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions (Greene).

On the face of it, the discovery of this pamphlet confirms exactly what biographers have inferred all along, when trying to account for the first twenty-five years of Shakspeare's otherwise uneventful life. He is an actor; he turned to writing blank verse, and his name is parodied as Shake-scene. What is more, he is known to Robert Greene, a well known writer, who now insists upon warning his three former companions, with whom he had only recently dined, to beware of this man.

Three questions immediately spring to mind. Firstly, since Greene was addressing three friends with whom he was well acquainted: he, having only a few weeks before dined with him, why is he only now referring to this man? Surely, if the subject was that important, as may be inferred since Greene raises the matter on his deathbed: would it not have been just as important as a topic of conversation over dinner one month earlier? Secondly, what is the nature of the warning that Greene is issuing? A new writer with talent and fresh ideas who appears on the scene is not a cause for issuing a warning. Thirdly, why has Greene paraphrased a line from Shakespeare's play, *3 Henry VI*. 1.iv; viz. "O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide:" and then acted as though the author of the play in which this occurs is unknown to his companions?

In response to the second question, Greene is warning his friends of the man's *pretensions*. He is a 'Jack-of-all-trades', an actor, and in his own *conceit* ("*play of mind*" *2 Hen. 4*, 2.iv.231: see Alexander 682), a writer of blank verse. But where is the threat in this? Writers must make a first appearance at some point in time; never once before, or since, has a person been warned against before having published a single word. Moreover, to issue a deathbed warning addressed to three of the most prominent writers at that time warning them against some nobody, who happens to have begun writing blank verse and is full of his own importance makes no sense.

The third question asked, also merits no sensible answer. One of Greene's companions at the table had been Tom Nashe, as will be established further down. Nashe had recently seen a performance of *Henry the Sixth*. This play is referred to in Henslowe's diary on fifteen separate occasions in the year leading to the *Groats-Worth of Witte*; viz. "harye the vj the 3 of marche 1591 . . . harye the vj the 7 marche 1591 . . . harye the vj the 11 marche 1591 . . . harye the 16 marche 1591 . . . harye the vj the 28 marche 1591 . . . harye the vj the 5 of ap'ell 1591 . . . harye the vj the 13 ap'ell 1591 . . . harye the vj the 21 ap'ell 1591 . . . harye the vj the 4 of maye 159[1]2 (Henslowe now begins altering new entries from 1591 to 1592. This was because he had been using the legalistic form of the Julian calendar in which New Year's Day is 26 March; hence, all years marked 1591 are really 1592, according to the present Gregorian calendar.) harye the vj the 7 maye 1592 . . . harye the 6 the 14 maye 1592 . . . harye the vj the 1[0]9 maye 1592 (date was changed) harye the vj the [17]25 maye 1592 . . . harye the vj the 12 June 1592 . . . harye the vj the 19 June 1592. Nashe even refers to the popularity of this play in his '*Defence of Plays*'

. . . remarking how, despite the claims of some 'petitioners of the Council' that plays 'corrupt the youth of the City', there was a great deal both good and patriotic about the revivification of the history of a hundred or so years ago (Wilson, 121).

Greene died on 3 September 1592. Nashe's pamphlet went to print in the same month with the following review of "harey the vj":

How it would have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several time) who, in the tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding (ibid).

Shakespeare was therefore already well known to Nashe, for it can hardly be imagined that having so eloquently written about this play, which had already been performed on fifteen occasions that year, he took no interest in the identity of its author. It therefore makes not one jot of sense for Greene to have warned Nashe about an established playwright whose work was both known and admired by Nashe, and for Greene to then warn Nashe as though he were wholly ignorant of this author's existence. Both Greene and Nashe were leading figures in London's literary circle; they knew the theatre, and of course they knew who wrote the plays that were performed, especially if they were as popular as "harey the vj". Because of this rather obvious fact, Greene's open letter to his three dining companions no longer appears as genuine, or as fortuitous to Shakspeare's biographers, as it once may have appeared.

Greene's pamphlet was "Imprinted for William Wright" and described as "Written before his death and published at his dying request." In fact Greene died alone in the care of two Christian souls, a cobbler and his wife living close to Dow-gate, who mercifully gave him shelter in their house shortly before his end. Upon hearing of his death, Henry Chettle, who had recently set up as a publisher, took control of Greene's effects, amongst which were his recent notes for an article he was apparently planning to publish. It was these that Chettle took away with him as a basis for a publication he would call: *Greenes, Groats-Worth of Witte*. As Chettle later confessed:

If written as sometimes Greenes hand was none of the best, licensd it must be, ere it could bee printed which could never be if it might not be read. To be breife I writ it over, and as neare as I could, followed the copy, onely in the letter I put something out, but in the whole booke not a word in, (Alexander, 404).

So there we have it, the letter was reconstructed by Chettle from scribbled and sometimes undecipherable notes made by Greene. As such, it is fair comment that Chettle did not understand the background to these notes, and that he reproduced their content in a manner that made sense to him, but which Greene may never have intended when he wrote them. Let this be kept in mind, as the identities of Greene's three fellow diners are revealed, for it was to them that the letter was addressed.

To those Gentlemen his Quondam acquaintance, that spend their wits in making plaies, R. G. wisheth a better exercise, and wisdom to prevent his extremities.

If wofull experience may move you (Gentlemen) to beware, or unheard of wretchednes intreate you to take heed: I doubt not but you wil looke backe with sorrow on your time past, and indeavour with repentance to spend that which is to come. Wonder not, (for with thee wil I first begin) thou famous gracer of Tragedians, that Greene, who hath said with thee (like the foole in his heart) There is no God, shoulde now give glorie unto his greatnes: (Greene).

Gracer has been reliably identified as Marlowe; the Privy Council had intervened on his behalf to ensure that he received special grace while at Cambridge in order to receive his degree; the 'Grace Book' held at Cambridge refers (Carroll, 2004, p.284 fn.34). Marlowe was also known for his violent temper, and his subsequent confrontation with Chettle, whom he appears to have recognized as both editor and part-author of *Greenes, Groats-Worth of Witte*, led the publisher to afterwards declare: "With neither of them that take offense was I acquainted, and with one of them I care not if I neuer be" (Alexander, 404).

Marlowe had reason to take offence. Greene's pamphlet contained a number of remarks against his character relating to his atheism, which, he thought, made him too easily recognizable. He may also have been persuaded that Greene, who had shared many of his vices and disbeliefs, would never have penned these insults.

The second member of Greene's trio is also easily identified:

With thee I joyne yong Juvenall, that byting Satyryst, that lastly with mee together writ a Comedie. Sweet boy, might I advise thee, be advisd, and get not many enemies by bitter wordes: inveigh against vaine men, for thou canst do it, no man better, no man so well: thou hast a libertie to reprove all, and name none; for one being spoken to, all are offended; none being blamed no man is injured (Greene).

Thomas Nashe was known as "tender Juvenal" because, like the Roman satirist, Nashe's writing conveyed irony, sarcasm, moral indignation and personal invective. Chettle refers to this as a magnet for attracting enemies; he also refers to his subject's youth: Nashe was 24 years of age in September 1592. Lastly, Chettle refers to a Comedy they wrote together, thus recalling their past acquaintance. With two members now identified, we approach the third.

And thou no lesse deserving than the other two, in some things rarer, in nothing inferiour; driven (as my selfe) to extreme shifts, a litle have I to say to thee: and were it not an idolatrous oth, I would sweare by sweet S. George, thou art unworthy better hap, sith thou dependest on so meane a stay (ibid).

The identity of the third diner has proved difficult for orthodox scholars, and the much favoured opinion is that it refers to George Peele, another dramatist. Presumably the reference to Saint George has provided the stimulus for this, but the identification remains too weak for certainty. Fortunately, Nashe has rescued the situation by dispensing his own set of clues.

On 12 January 1593, just three months after Greene's death, Nashe published *Strange News*: a pamphlet that included an attack on Gabriel Harvey for the remarks he had made against the deceased Greene. In mid-flow, Nashe identified himself as one of those who had dined with Greene that summer evening. He also mentioned the third person whom scholars believe was George Peele. But Nashe refers to him by an unfamiliar name:

I and one of my fellows, Will. Monox (hast thou never heard of him and his great dagger?) were in company with him a month before he died, at that fatal banquet of Rhenish wine and pickled herring (if thou wilt needs have it so (Nashe).

Nashe has therefore confirmed that he was, indeed, the third member of this quartet, and since "tender Juvenal" was his nickname (Ackroyd, 198), and "gracer" has been identified as Marlowe, we are left with "Will Monox" as "sweet St George".

Will Monox is unknown by name, either as a writer or a member of Elizabethan society. But he was a person Nashe knew that Harvey would recognise, although not by this name. In July 1578, Harvey made a speech addressed to Queen Elizabeth, in which he remarked of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford and Lord Great Chamberlain of England: "In the prime of his gallantest youth he bestowed Angels upon me in Christ's College in Cambridge" (Ogburn, 542). But in later years Harvey became disenchanted with his former benefactor, and wrote a poem, *Speculum Tuscanismi*, which described Oxford in disparaging terms. Nashe seized upon this fact when reminiscing to Harvey about Greene: "A good-fellow he was, and would have drunk with thee for more angels than the Lord thou libelledst on gave thee in Christ's College." Nashe has reminded Harvey of the kindness shown to him by Oxford during his student days (angels were gold coins with the figure of St Michael on one side).

There is an apparent reason for Nashe reminding Harvey of Oxford's generosity; it was because he wanted Harvey to know that it was Oxford who dined with Greene a month before he died. But because Oxford was a nobleman, and could not be publicly identified as having dined with a reprobate like Greene, the information had to be conveyed by suggestive phrases that Harvey would understand; hence, first there was the reference to 'angels', and 'the Lord thou libelled', then secondly, 'his great dagger'. This was Nashe being satirical. Oxford's role as Lord Great Chamberlain required that he carry the great Sword of State (his great dagger) before the Queen during special ceremonial processions. But, where does Will Monox fit into this picture? The presence of 'ox' in the name now becomes especially suggestive, for it hints that an anagram may be present; this type of word puzzle being very popular at that time, particularly where secrets of a sensitive nature were concerned.

Treated as an anagram, WILL MONOX becomes M WILL OXON. Oxon will be familiar to every Latin scholar as the conventional abbreviation for "Oxonia latinized name of Ox(en)ford" (OED); hence, M Will Oxon is an abbreviation for Master William Oxenford. But why should Nashe refer to Lord Oxford as Master William? And why had Oxford called these three men together for a banquet? The likely answer is given further down. The immediate task is to reconfirm Oxford's identity from the letter appearing in *Greenes, Groats-Worth of Witte*, since this must refer to Oxford as "sweet St George".

In the first place the name represents a simple piece of harmless flattery, and in line with the grievance made by Oxford's father-in-law, Lord Burghley. In a letter written to Walsingham in 1587, the Lord Treasurer had complained of "[Oxford's] lewd friends who still rule him by flatteries" (Ogburn, 633). Greene, Marlowe, and Nashe would most certainly come under the definition of *lewd friends* in Burghley's estimation. However, the patriotic connotation attached to St George counted for more than just flattery, because it avoided giving offence to a person of Oxford's standing, as some other epithet might have done. For although Oxford occasionally consorted with men like Greene, Marlowe and Nashe, talented writers though they were, it is certain that he insisted upon his own position in society being respected, especially in the class-structured age of Queen Elizabeth's England.

In the summer of 1592, the anonymous play "harry vj" was being performed. This play, in parts I and III, is well known for the many times it rings out with patriotic cries of Saint George, as does *Richard III*: plays that together with *2 Henry VI* were part of the same tetralogy.

Henry VI Part I

[The English scale the walls and cry 'Saint George!']

(Act 2: sc. i)

God and **Saint George**, Talbot and England's right,
 Prosper our colours in this dangerous fight. (Act 4: sc. ii)
Saint George and victory! Fight, soldiers, fight. (Act 4: sc. vi)
 The thrice victorious Lord of Falconbridge,
 Knight of the noble order of **Saint George**, (Act 4: sc. vii)

Henry VI Part III

Then strike up drums. God and **Saint George** for us. (Act 2: sc. i)
 Unsheathe your sword good father; cry '**Saint George**!' (Act 2: sc. ii)
 For Warwick and his friends, God and **Saint George**. (Act 4: sc. ii)
 Lords to the field, **Saint George** and victory! (Act 5: sc. I)

Richard III

God and **Saint George**! Richmond and victory! (Act 5: sc. iii)
 This and **Saint George** to boot! What think'st thou, Norfolk? (Act 5: sc. iii)
 Our ancient word of courage, fair **Saint George**,
 Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons! (Act 5: sc. iii).

Saint George also manages to appear in *The Taming of the Shrew*, said to have been written in 1591, at about the same time as *Henry VI*:

"Now by **Saint George** I am too young for you." (Act 2: sc. i).

The frequency with which an oath to **Saint George** is uttered in these plays, must surely link it to the other oath to St George, as mentioned in the Groats-Worth letter. In which case, the missing member of the quorum; that is, according to both Nashe and the letter, is Will Monox, the author of these oaths. As though to draw attention to this subtlety, the letter has also paraphrased a line taken from *3 Henry VI, I: iv*: "*O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide.*"

Equally interesting is the adjective *sweet*, which the Groats-Worth letter employs to describe St George. It is of particular interest because not only does this word appear 72 times in Shakespeare's Sonnets – many of these poems showing evidence of having been written in 1592 and earlier – but the same adjective occurs almost 1000 times in the works of Shakespeare. However, it is the use of *sweet* in *3 Henry VI* that could be considered most suggestive.

Let it be understood that St George was intended to refer to Oxford, as Juvenal was intended for Nashe and gracer for Marlowe. Then it must likewise be true that "*sweet St George*" is equivalent to 'sweet Oxford'. Returning to the source of the oaths mentioning St George, which are found in *3 Henry VI*: we discover the very same words.

King Henry: **Sweet Oxford**, and my loving Montague, (Act 4: sc. viii)

Queen Margaret: Thanks, gentle Somerset; **sweet Oxford**, thanks. (Act 5: sc. iv)

It is entirely plausible that Greene had been seeking for a means by which to hint at Oxford's identity as the author of *hary the vj*, without actually revealing it, and Chettle had found this, and quite innocently repeated it in the Groats-Worth letter.

In any event, the mist should now begin to fade, as it becomes ever clearer why Nashe referred to Oxford, via an anagram, as Master William. It was because he had recently learnt that Oxford was about to publish work under the authorship of Master William Shakespeare. When the anagram of Will Monox is solved, it becomes a rather clever hybrid of Oxford's title and the name of the person who had agreed to become his allonym, William Shaksper. In other words, Master William Oxford unites the poet with his allonym under a single name.

This explains why nothing had ever been heard of William Shakespeare before 1592. He never existed. William Shakspeare certainly existed, but his reduced circumstances, the subsequent poverty of his father, the sudden termination of his education while still a child, his years spent in the drab occupation of a boring apprenticeship: these were commonplace at that time, and it led to his departure for London, and his participation in what was destined to become one of the greatest literary conundrums of all time – Who wrote Shakespeare?

When William first arrived in London from Stratford-upon-Avon during his mid-twenties, his greatest priority was to find employment. The account of how he went about this was obtained by Betterton, for inclusion in Rowe's short biography of Shakespeare. Betterton's informant was Sir William Davenant (1606–1668), England's poet laureate in 1638, and son of John Davenant, an innkeeper and former Mayor of Oxford. It was at Davenant's Crown tavern that Shakspeare is said to have stayed when commuting between London and Stratford-upon-Avon. And it was during one of these stopovers that he related to the elder Davenant how he began life in London. The account he gave sounds appropriate enough for a countryman newly arrived in the capital city. It is quite without airs and graces, and more believable because of that, especially since Shakspeare's rural upbringing would have prepared him for the job he described.

[His] first expedient was to wait at the door of the playhouse and hold the horses of those that had no servants, that they might be ready again after the performance. In this office he became so conspicuous for his care and readiness, that in a short time every man, as he alighted, called for Will. Shakespeare, and scarcely any other waiter was trusted with a horse, while Will. Shakespeare could be had. This was his first dawn of better fortune. Shakespeare finding more horses put into his hand than he could hold, hired boys to wait under his inspection, who when Will. Shakespeare was summoned, were immediately to present themselves, 'I am Shakespeare's boy, sir! In time Shakespeare found higher employment; but as long as the practice of riding to the playhouse continued, the waiters that held the horses retained the application of Shakespeare's boys (Rowe).

The part of London where Shakspeare operated as horse attendant is most likely to have been Shoreditch. Both the Curtain, built in 1577, and the Theatre, raised one year earlier were in that vicinity, and the possibility of serving those arriving on horseback at either playhouse was an obvious incentive. In addition, there was a popular watering hole for horses nearby. The added security of having someone like Shakspeare to guard against horse thieves would have ensured the demand for his services remained high.

The lack of any alternative account relating to Shakspeare's arrival in London places his biographers at an obvious disadvantage. Davenant's narrative account is rejected because it fails to fit in with the premise that governs what is acceptable and what must be discounted. The reader should therefore be aware that it is possible to prove anything when evidence is only accepted if it suits the premise it supports. Shakespeare's biographers are most adept at making this distinction, and will readily insist that Will Monox was George Peele. But ask them how the names are connected, and they will change the subject; lest, instead, it change the colour of their faces.

We must now return to the Groats-Worth letter and discover how well its remaining content fits in with Oxford having been one of the three diners to whom Greene refers. At first glance, one is thrown back to the naïf view taken by orthodoxy. Shakespeare is rebuked for his resemblance to Aesop's crow: the bird that adorned itself with the fine feathers of other birds, so that it might appear like them. The allusion to Shakspeare donning the literary garments of Oxford is a more apt translation. By drawing attention to this parallel in his notes, Greene would have been thinking of a play he had written, called *Never Too Late*, in which Cicero employs the same allusion to Aesop's crow. "*Why Roscius are thou proud with Esops Crow, being pranced with the glorie of others feathers?*" (Alexander, 401).

Roscius was Rome's most celebrated actor during the time of Julius Caesar, and his name has since entered the English language to describe similarly gifted players (OED refers).

Shakespeare also made mention of this actor in *3 Henry VI*: "*What scene of death hath Roscius now to act?*" (Act V: sc. vi): a play from where Greene had already paraphrased: "*Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*". It is truly remarkable how the Groats-Worth letter is laden with references to this play. It is understandable, therefore, with so recent a reference to Roscius in Greene's mind that the connection he made between Shakspeare and Aesop's crow would have been close to his thoughts.

It is also much easier to see how Chettle had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Greene had made notes after dining with Oxford, to the effect that by masquerading as a poet and a playwright, Shakspeare — or Shakespeare as he was now to be recognized — was really like Aesop's crow: pretending to be someone he was not. Oxford would write the work, Shakspeare would adorn himself with the airs and graces of the poet and playwright, as though he was the author; that is, "*in his own conceit*", which means in his own imaginative play.

As though to confirm this interpretation, Chettle unconsciously allows Greene's letter to state the truth, by noting how this upstart, "*supposes he is well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you*" (Alexander, 400). This

indicates that Chettle had managed to decipher Greene's notes with some success, but with no understanding of the underlying story they referred to. He not unnaturally took Greene's words at face value and edited them, believing that what he wrote down was a true account of the matter as seen by Greene before he died. Regrettably, this has had a similar effect upon scholars ever since: each one following the other into the same blind alley. Indeed, the alley has now become so crowded that the truth has been smothered in the crush.

With the Groats-Worth letter consistent in every detail, to the effect that Oxford was "*sweet St George*" and therefore the author of *3 Henry VI*, it is possible to arrive at a reasonable explanation as to why three of London's finest writers were summoned to meet the Earl of Oxford in the summer of 1592.

By calling them together, and treating them to a meal, Oxford had the perfect opportunity of personally explaining to them that an unknown poet and playwright was soon to emerge on the literary scene. Under ordinary circumstances this would give rise to curiosity concerning his educational background and previous work. By telling Nashe, Greene and Marlowe in advance that the so-called poet and playwright was really his allonym, a man known as William Shakspeare, but whose surname he had changed to Shakespeare, he was preempting their enquiries and the possible ridicule, which was bound to follow, once they learned the truth for themselves, that Shakespeare was merely a figurehead: a literary nonentity.

Oxford easily recognized they would be amongst the first to discover this deception, and very likely commit it to a satirical pamphlet. In fact, this happened anyway, when the anonymously written *Willobie His Avis* appeared in 1594. But in 1592, Oxford still had time on his side. It is also possible that he appealed to the three men dining with him to support his plan, since it would enable his work to be made public for as long as the ruse could be maintained. In those days, an appeal by a senior member of the nobility was as good as a command. Apart from which, Oxford had favours to call in for the collegiate atmosphere he had maintained for writers, when he owned Fishers Folly. He was therefore set fair to begin the first part of his plan: the publication of a narrative poem entitled *Venus and Adonis* by Master William Shakespeare. It would have been this that worked on Nashe's mind, and resolved itself as an anagram for Master William Oxford. But, even before a single word had been published, the plan began to unwind. Greene unexpectedly died and Chettle published the deceased man's notes, denigrating Shakespeare as an upstart crow, beautified by the feathers of others. For Oxford's carefully laid plans, this revelation, while being wholly accurate, dealt such a serious blow to the arrangements that were underway, it must have threatened the entire enterprise.

Marlowe responded to Chettle's publication in a manner that left the publisher with the wish never to meet with this man again. Marlowe was renowned for his belligerent temper; he was also an atheist, like Greene had been, and Chettle's publication had rebuked him for his disbelief through the mouth of Greene. Marlowe clearly did not believe the words came from Greene.

Nashe also did not believe the words came from Greene. Some people even thought that he was the author. To refute these allegations, he publicly declared the entire work to be: "*that scald trivial lying pamphlet called Greenes groats-worth of wit*" (Ogburn, 655).

Oxford was faced with a different dilemma. Chettle's letter had totally derailed his plan to launch Shakespeare's career as a fine, upright young poet under the patronage of the youthful Earl of Southampton, the subject of his many sonnets. What could be done to remedy the situation? The solution he chose was to seek an apology from Chettle. The publisher was to be left in no doubt regarding the probity of 'Shakespeare's' character, and the esteem in which gentlemen of the highest rank valued his writing. The strategy worked. On 8 December 1592, an entry appeared in the Stationers' Register, advertising a pamphlet to be published under the title *Kind-Harts Dreame*. This was to be the medium through which Chettle conceded:

With neither of them that take offence was I acquainted, and with one of them I care not if I never be. The other, whome at that time I did not so much spare, as since I wish I had. . . because my selfe have seen his demeanor no less civill than he exelent in the qualities he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightnes of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that aprooves his Art (Alexander, 400).

Who were the two that Chettle refers to, who took offence? Distinguished Regius Professor of English Language and Literature at Glasgow University, Peter Alexander, provided the customary answer.

It is clear from Chettle's own reply that he is referring to Marlowe and Shakespeare. . . .Chettle, however, feels he owes no apology to Marlowe. . . To Shakespeare Chettle offers a full and frank apology (ibid).

Certainly, there is little cause to doubt Marlowe's belligerent attitude, which must have frightened Chettle, for he admits that he does not care to meet again with one of the two he mentioned. But, logically, how can the other person be Shakespeare; unless, that is, Shakespeare and Oxford were the same person?

Remember! Greene was supposedly warning his three fellow diners to beware of the "*upstart crow. . . the onely Shake-scene in a countrey*". If Shakespeare were one of the two diners — to whom Chettle's apology is directed for

the offence it caused — then how can Greene have possibly been addressing Shakespeare? For it would then mean that Greene was warning Shakespeare to beware of himself.

To avoid this conclusion, one must accept that Shakspeare read the pamphlet, and hurried over to see Chettle to politely point out Greene's error. But why should Shakspeare consider Greene's opinion to be anything other than it was? If that was Greene's opinion of him, then he was entitled to express it as such. The correct response for Shakspeare to make was to publish a rebuttal, perhaps listing those earlier plays that biographers boast about. Compare Marlowe's reaction to Chettle, or Nashe's. Shakspeare, however, remained silent save for a personal plea: relying, instead, upon the reports of "*divers of worship*" to back a request that Chettle refute Greene's words with a published apology. This mysterious ghost squad, which Shakspeare managed to conjure up at a moment's notice, promptly vanished afterwards, as quickly as it had arrived, and was never heard of again.

If Shakespeare was Shakspeare, then the reaction he made to the letter, including canvassing for support amongst "*divers of worship*" does not ring true. How could this unknown, unpublished member of a lower class be able to persuade those of a higher class to write references for him concerning an obscure phrase in a pamphlet, and which did not even identify him by his full name? Who amongst those reading the Groatsworth letter would have recognised the object of Greene's reference to '*Shake-scene*'? Even to get an audience for his complaint is doubtful: and were that achieved, a word of sympathy is the most he could have expected before being shown the door. But if Shakespeare was Oxford, his reaction to 'Greene's' criticism was essential, to ensure William Shakespeare's forthcoming arrival on the literary scene remained unblemished. And, of course, Oxford's title would ensure he obtained references from the class of person that Chettle refers to. It is plain common sense.

There is another anomaly associated with Greene's death and the man who wrote Shakespeare's plays. It is clear from the circumstances of his death that Greene had little or no money with which to provide for himself, and it was entirely due to the charity of a shoemaker and his wife that his end came with a modicum of comfort.

Harvey referred to having called at the shoemaker's house in Dow-gate after Greene died, to be told that on his deathbed, Greene had called for "*a penny-pot of Malmsey*", and had then scribbled a final note to his abandoned wife, Doll, begging her to repay the kindness of his two comforters. Harvey, it is assumed, copied the note.

Doll, I charge thee by the love of our youth, and by my soul's rest, that thou wilt see this man paid: for if he and his wife had not succoured me, I had died in the streets.

Robert Greene.
(Bate, 14)

Oxford, for it could hardly have been 'Shake-scene', the man Greene allegedly raged against in 'his' *Groatsworth of Wit*, committed the dead man's final hours to the pages of *Henry V*. And by doing so, immortalised his former companion's final moments through the mouth of *Sir John Falstaff*.

Boy: Mine host Pistol, you must come to my master;
and your hostess—he is very sick, and would to
bed. (Act 2: sc. i)

The *hostess* recalls *Falstaff's* death, but is interrupted by *Nym*.

Nym: They say he cried out of sack.
Hostess: Ay, that 'a did. (Act 2: sc. iii)

The *hostess* is referred to by *Pistol* as *Doll* in the quartos, also in the First Folio, but some editors have since changed this to *Nell*.

Pistol: Fortune play the housewife with me now?
News have I that my Doll is dead I'th'spital
Of malady of France, (Act 5: sc. i)

Professor Jonathan Bate, an uncompromising advocate of Shakspeare's authorship, recognized the connection between Greene's and Falstaff's deathbed scenes, although not without discernible unease.

Sir John Falstaff—who dies in Hostess Quickly's tavern, calling out for sack, and remembering a woman called Doll in an uncanny replication of Greene's death in Hostess Isam's house calling out for malmsey and writing to a wife called Doll (Bate, 19).

For Bate, this dramatisation of Falstaff's death retains an *uncanny* similarity to Greene's demise. Had Bate, and those of a like mind, not become so mesmerised by the attractive tales that govern Shakespearean study,

there would not be the slightest problem in recognizing Oxford's final bow to Robert Greene, with whom he had dined, just a few weeks before the man's death.

Bate was far less uncertain when referring to the death of the other diner at Oxford's table. For Marlowe's death is also referred to by Shakespeare in a passing remark made by Touchstone to the unlettered Audrey in *As You Like It* (Act 3: sc. iii).

When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child, understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room. Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical.

Bate saw little difficulty in Shakespeare having written this passage upon recalling that Marlowe had been the one *struck dead in a little room* whilst quarrelling with his two companions over a *great reckoning*; although whether this 'reckoning' was for food or some other matter is left to conjecture (Bate, 123).

One can therefore see how easily the premise that Shakespeare controls what is acceptable and what must be omitted. Greene had insulted Shakespeare; therefore Shakespeare cannot be allowed to honour Greene, especially not with *Falstaff's* death scene. On the other hand, traditionalists believe that Marlowe's work instructed Shakespeare; therefore it is perfectly acceptable that Marlowe's death should be acknowledged with a suitable poetic line. But, compare this with the strong evidence that Oxford was Shakespeare, and that he was immortalising the deaths of two great writers, whose work he respected and with whom he had been acquainted. It is at once apparent that of the two interpretations, it is this latter one that explains the author's intention.

Greenes, Groats-Worth of Witte is always cited as prime evidence that in 1592, Shakespeare was already known in London as an actor and a writer of blank verse, and that Robert Greene, known throughout London as a playwright, had taken offence at his arrival, warning other writers to beware of him. Yet, contrarily, Shakespeare's name does not appear on any list of actors in 1592 or, for that matter, on any list in the preceding years. And at no time in the years that followed is he ever remembered for his acting ability. Nor does the name Shakespeare appear on any published work prior to 1593. Moreover, Shakespeare was not the upstart implied by Greene's letter. In short, Greene's notes can be seen as quite meaningless to anyone without special knowledge of what was about to happen in the year ahead. But when Chettle found them, he believed they were Greene's comments upon what had happened in the past, and he published them as such.

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