

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT



IN AN ABLE AND INFORMATIVE ESSAY on Thomas Nashe's *Strange News*, Charles Wisner Barrell states that

Nash and Harvey . . . in the course of their controversy give us more unconventional and graphic information about the real Shakespeare . . . than can be gathered from any other contemporary publications. [And] . . . we can be very sure that if there had been any person such as the conjectured genius of Stratford-on-Avon writing this same type of "peling comedies" that Harvey attacks . . . [he] would . . . have come in for a thorough dissection. [Lord Oxford is the subject of many] entertaining descriptive references. . . . [And thus is explained] the motive back of the imperative order issued to the Stationers' Company on June 2, 1599, by Bancroft, Bishop of London, and Whitgift, Bishop of Canterbury:

"That all Nash's books and Doctor Harvey's books be taken wheresoever they may be found and that none of their books be ever printed hereafter."

The Earl of Oxford, Mr. Barrell declares, had been written of too familiarly, for one in his high position as Lord Great Chamberlain of England, by these literary vulgarians,

hence the tardy official effort to expunge the evidence, just as certain other testimony, such as the *records of the Lord Chamberlain's Office*, the *records of the Master of Revels*, and various tell-tale items which would fully corroborate his connection with the Shakespearean theatre were even more effectually eliminated.¹

We shall glance here at two significant productions of Thomas Nashe's, belonging to the years 1592 and '93. In the matter of the second, the *Epistle Dedicatorie of Strange News*, we are indebted for a number of points to Mr. Barrell's particularized interpretation.

To the most copious *Carminist of our time*, and famous *persecutor of Priscian*, his *verie friend* Master *Apis Lapis*: Tho. Nashe wisheth new strings to his *old lawnie purse*, and all honourable increase of acquaintance in the Cellar.

This is to say, to the most prolific, sanguine, contemporary writer, who imposes his own will upon Priscian, the Grammarian. His "verie friend" is his Verie friend. As for "Master Apis Lapis": this is not Bee-stone—i.e., Beeston, a minor actor in Lord Strange's Company, as it would be if written "apis lapis," and as students unacquainted with Oxford have suggested. Capitalized, it means Ox-stone; or, as Phillips says, "the jewel of Apis"² (the sacred Ox.) According to Barrell,

Apis here means the sacred bull of Egypt, frequently mentioned by Greek and Roman writers. . . . As a stoned or castrated bull becomes an ox, "Master Apis Lapis" in Nash's ribald pun becomes "Master Sacred Ox."

Lord Oxford is familiarly called "Oxe" in the counter-charges filed against him by Charles Arundel in 1580-81, [as well as] in certain published allegories of the period [and in his own plays too.]

Thomas Nashe wishes his "old tawnie purse" (Oxford's colors, the Vere livery, Reading tawny) might be refurbished—that is, replenished—and would like more of his company in that bohemian resort of epicures, the cellar of the Steelyard. The epistle continues:

Gentle Master William, that learned writer *Rhenish Wine and Sugar* . . . in zealous regard of that *high countenance* you show unto Scholars, I am bold, instead of new Wine, to carouse to you in a cup of News: Which if your Worship (according to your wonted *Chaucerism*) shall accept in good part, I'll be your daily Orator to pray that *pure sanguine complexion of yours* may never be furnished with pot-lucke, that you *may last to your last gasp*, and live to see the confusion of both your enemies, *Small Beer and Grammar rules*.

¹ *New Missions in Sh. Research: Quarterly of the Shakespeare Fellowship*, Am. B., Oct. 1944, Vol. V, No. 4.

² *Ed. B. in Sh.*, p. 62.

That Oxford was called "Gentle Master William" we have said before, and also that he himself was, partially, "Sir John Sack and Sugar," Falstaff. The "high countenance" he shows to scholars means his noble patronage of writers, which is recognized even by Sir Sidney Lee, who speaks of the prodigality of the Earl's patronage. Oxford was well-versed in Chaucer, having owned Chaucer's works when a youth at Cecil House. The "pure sanguine complexion" is apparent in his portraits and is spoken of in the description of Troilus in *Troilus and Cressida*. (1.2.107.) He evidently drank enough wine to keep rosy, and perhaps also phenomenally fluent. He is like Falstaff and Prince Hal in his fondness for sack and his contempt for "small beer," and he must, indeed, have hated grammar-rules, since his colleague makes such a point of it, and since we know he violated them—persecuted Priscian—when he chose.

Underneath the friendly banter, Nashe nevertheless shows deference, a solicitude not to offend.

It is not unknown to report, what a famous pottle-pot Patron you have been to old Poets in your days, & how many pounds you have spent (and as it were, thrown into the fire) upon the dirt of wisdom, called Alchemy: Yea, you have been such an *infinite Maecenas* to learned men . . . [who] have tasted the cool streams of your liberalitie . . . I would speak in commendation of your hospitalite, etc.

This is all well known to those acquainted with Lord Oxford's career. But it is interesting that Greene had written, nine years before, in dedicating his *Card of Fancy* to the Earl:

Wheresoever *Maecenas* lodgeth thither no doubt will scholars flock. And your Honour being a worthy favourer and fosterer of learning hath forced many through your excellent virtue to offer the first fruits of their study at the shrine of your Lordship's courtesy.

Nashe proceeds:

Yea, you are such an *infinite Maecenas* to learned men, that there is not that morsel of meat they can carve you, but you will eat it for their sakes, and accept very thankfully.

This is a tribute to the Earl's unflinching courtesy and consideration.

Think not, though under correction of your boon companionship, I am disposed to be a little pleasant, I condemn you of any immoderation either in eating or drinking, for *I know your government and carriage to be every way Canonical*. Verily, verily, all poor scholars acknowledge you as their patron, providiore, and supporter, for there cannot be a threadbare Cloak sooner peep forth, but you shall press it to be an outbrother of your bounty; three decayed Students you kept attending upon you a long time.

Nashe's comment upon Oxford's self-control is interesting, while what he says about his generosity shows how much the Earl was doing to

foster Elizabethan literature and further explains Burghley's rancor. Actually, it is a picture of the English Timon, a true *Maecenas*.

Shall I presume to dilate upon the gravitie of your *round cap*, and your *dudgeon dagger*? It is thought they will make you called upon shortly to be *Alderman of the Steelyard*. . . . I heard say when this last term was removed to *Hertford*, you fell into a great studie and care by yourself, to what place the Steelyard should be removed. . . .

A Tavern in London, only upon the motion, mourned all in black, and forbore to girt her temples with ivy, because the grandame of good fellowship was like to depart from amongst them. And I wonder very much that you *sampsond not yourself into a consumption* with the profound cogitation of it.

The plain "round cap" was worn only by men in high positions. In a letter to his father, Sir Robert Cecil had remarked that Sir Christopher Hatton had put off his feathered hat (Malvolio's "advanced plumes"?) for a "round cap." In his Gheeraeds portrait, the Earl of Oxford wears such a cap.³

As for the "dudgeon dagger": Nashe gives us a hint here by means of a pun that Oxford had adopted his pseudonym in either humiliation or resentment for his enforced anonymity. The "dagger" is the "speare" which he now shook in "dudgeon." In the *Macbeth* glossary, dudgeon is defined as "hilt of a dagger of wood of the same name." Macbeth says of the imaginary dagger he sees before him: "And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood." We strongly suspect that Lord Oxford had adopted his pseudonym, "Shakespeare," unhappily, since, from the manifold identity-clues which are woven through the body of the plays like connective tissue, we are given positive proof that he ardently wished his authorship to be recognized.

In regard to Oxford's being made Alderman of the Steelyard, Barrell says:

The agreement between the Hanseatic merchants and the citizens of London gave the Steelyard corporation the right to elect a freeman as their Alderman in the City Council. . . . Moreover, the Ency. Brit. states that among Anglo-Saxons, *earls* received the title of *aldermen*.

The records of the Privy Council state that because of the plague, the Michielmas law-term of 1592 was transferred from Westminster to Hertford, where the Queen also held Court. As a ranking nobleman . . . it was incumbent upon Lord Oxford to attend.

But, like Prince Hal, the Earl chafed at the exigencies of court-life and had come to prefer the conviviality of the tavern. The "Tavern in London," referred to, is undoubtedly the Boar's Head in Eastcheap. This is indicated by more evidence than we can record here; but one document connecting Oxford with this particular tavern

³ Barrell: *op. cit.*

exists in the shape of a formal request made to the Lord Mayor by the Earl's friends in the Privy Council, in 1602, that his and Lord Worcester's players might continue to hold performances at "the house called the Boar's Head . . . the place they have especially used and do like best of." (Chap. Seventy-one.)

"That you sampsond yourself not into a consumption" seems to allude to the deep, snoring breaths of one who had been imbibing freely of wine—or perhaps it was sack. Having spoken of Oxford's "wonted Chaucerism," Nashe is here making use of a word from *The Pardoner's Tale*, which is palpably *onomatopoeia* for a toper's heavy breathing:

And through thy dronké nose semeth the soun,
As though thou seydst ay, "Sampson, Sampson!"

It will be recalled that the Earl had drawn upon this tale for a description of Sidney in *Twelfth Night*; whereas the above quotation may have suggested a passage in *The Taming of the Shrew* (IV.1.138-9), where Petruchio pretends to go to sleep:

Petruchio. . . . Sit down, Kate, and welcome.
Soud, soud, soud, soud, soud.

Although Nashe's long-winded epistle is pointed and interesting throughout, we shall skip to the last two paragraphs:

Thou art a good fellow, I know, and had rather spend jests than money. Let it be the task of thy best terms, to *safeconduct* this book through the enemy's country.

Proceed to cherish thy surpassing carminical art of memory with full cups (as thou dost): let Chaucer be new-scoured against the day of battle and Terence come but in now and then. . . . We have cat's meat and dog's meat enough for these mongrels. However I write merrily, I love and admire thy pleasant witty humour, which no care or cross can make unconvertible. . . . Still be constant to thy content, love poetry, hate pedantism . . .

Thine intirely,
THO. NASHE

While formerly he has spent money lavishly, "and as it were, thrown [it] into the fire," Oxford now prefers—from necessity—to "spend jests." Nashe forbears to ask for financial help—"I conjure thee," he says in an earlier paragraph, "to draw out thy purse and give me nothing for the dedication of my Pamphlet."—He knows his friend is hard-pressed at the moment. But he bespeaks the Earl's influence. This was undoubtedly forthcoming, for the pamphlet was published. But the epistle evidently gave offense, for, after the first edition, it was printed in type so small as to be almost illegible.

In the matter of cherishing his "surpassing . . . art of memory with full cups," Nashe alludes to "cups full-flowing from the Muses' well,"

in the Latin couplet heading *Venus and Adonis*, and also to "full cups" of wine or sack in the tavern, while advising him to continue employing his copious memory not only upon Ovid but perhaps also upon actual happenings.

"Let Chaucer be new-scoured against the day of battle" is, in our opinion, an exhortation to take up his old play, *Troilus and Cressida*—which was based on a story by Chaucer—and polish it anew as a weapon: in other words, shine up your armor against your detractors. This was precisely what Oxford afterwards did: he added to the Greek part, portraying Jonson as Ajax, "the beef-witted lord," and in combination with Chapman, to some extent, as Thersites, one of the "mongrels" Nashe speaks of. Both these writers, animated by envy, poisoned by jealousy, had by that time been writing scurrilously against the anonymous dramatist. The final version of *Troilus* was a blasting *riposte*.

Oxford has elsewhere, though much later, been compared with Terence, who, by the way, is said to have been not an actual person but a name behind which two poets maintained an incognito. Thus one wonders if the Earl allowed Southampton, another Shakespeare, to have a hand occasionally in his work. Could he not possibly have written the "Will" sonnets, which seem quite uncharacteristic of Oxford? This would not only explain Nashe's injunction to curb such collaboration but would shed considerable light upon Jonson's portrayal of Southampton as Ovid, who, against Ovid *senior's* stern disapproval, wrote poetry when he should have been studying law. The fact that, in Jonson's play, one of young Ovid's compositions embodies the couplet which introduces *Venus and Adonis* may indicate that Southampton had something to do with the writing of that long, Ovidian, singularly uneven poem.⁴ He may possibly be the "sec-spure" himself wrote. The "Phaeton" of the title and the pun in line 10 present the recognizable symbolism:

Phaeton to his Friend Florio

Sweet friend, whose name agrees with thy increase,
How fit a rival art thou of the Spring!
For when each branch hath left his flourishing,
And green-locked Summer's shady pleasures cease,
She makes the Winter's storms repose in peace
And spends her franchise on each living thing:
The daisies sprout, the little birds do sing;
Herbs, gums, and plants do vaunt of their release.
So that when all our English wits lie dead
(Except the Laurel that is ever green),
Thou with thy fruits our barrenness o'erspread
And set thy flowery pleasure to be seen.
Such fruits, such flow'ets of morality,
Were never before brought out of Italy.

and Shakerley" to whom Harvey alludes in his verses on the miracles of Ninety Threc.

As for the "cat's meat and dog's meat," this refers to the literary concoctions they will fling at their "mongrel" opponents, the poets and playwrights, giving them tit for tat. It is an allusion which embraces the mysterious "dog" of Launce—or Spear—in *The Two Gentlemen* and Puntarolo's cat and dog in *Every Man Out*, both of which seem to be fantastic Elizabethan images for poets and playwrights or their work.

This letter gives a vivid picture of Shakespeare, the lusty but self-contained and magnanimous, thoroughly believable, human being, as he appeared to a shrewd, highly articulate fellow-writer in the year 1592-93. Nashe was called young Juvenal by both Greene and Henslowe. Racy and too impulsive for his own good, he was nevertheless a man of discernment and wit.

It will be noted that, at the close of the epistle, the playwright addresses his friend, after having earlier mentioned an old "Comment upon Red noses," to "hate pedantism." Now, during the previous year, Nashe had written a kind of masque called *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. It is one of those curious, artificial, highly allusive products peculiar to Elizabethan writers, and much of it is obscure to a modern reader, though some points are unmistakably clear. One of these is the identification of Will Summer with the convivial aspect of the Earl of Oxford. The following passage might indeed have been spoken by Falstaff himself. (Compare *1 H.IV: 1.2.1 et seq.*)

Will Summer. Fye, fye, of honesty, fye. *Solstitium* is an asse perdy; this play is a galley-maufray: fetch me some drink, some body. What cheere, what cheere, my hearts? are you not thirsty with listening to this dry sport? What have we to do with scales and hower-glasses, except we were Bakers and Clock-keepers? I cannot tell how other men are addicted, but it is against my profession to use any scales but such as play with a boule, or keep any howers but dinner or supper. It is a *pedanticall* thing to respect *times and seasons*: if a man be drinking with good fellows late, he must come home, for feare the gates be shut; when I am in my warm bed, I must rise for prayers, because the bell rings. I like no such foolish customes. Actors, bring now a black lack, and a rundlet of Rhenish wine, disputing of the antiquity of *red noses*. . . . Go forward in grace and virtue to proceed, but let us have no more of these grave matters.

In this obvious caricature of the Earl's tavern-manner, the emphasis laid upon his hatred of being "pedanticall" in the matter of "times and seasons"—i.e., day and night—is for the benefit of that arch-pedant, Chapman, and his friend Roydon, their group later to be joined by Jonson. Though perhaps written much earlier, not until several years after this did Chapman's *Hymn to Night—Hymnus in Noctem*—appear in print, with venomous veiled allusions to "self-

love's paramours, Caledonian boars"—this directed at Oxford-and-Southampton-Adonis of *Venus and Adonis*—to "manless natures"—a jibe at the Earl's, and no doubt Southampton's, effeminate strain and courtier manners—and bringing in spiteful darts at the plays. One of these is the following:

Kneel then with me, *fall worm-like on the ground*,
And from the infectious dung-hill of *this round*,
From men's brass wits and *golden foolery*,
Weep, *weep* your souls into *felicity*.

This is a palpable satire on passages from the "golden foolery" of *Richard II.*

Richard. Needs must I like it well: I *weep* for joy
To stand upon my kingdom once again. (III.2.4-5.)
Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;

For God's sake, let us sit upon the *ground*
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:

All murder'd: for within the hollow crown
That *rounds* the mortal temples of a King
Keeps Death his court . . . (III.2.145; 155-62.)

Richard says, "Let's talk of graves." Nashe has Will Summer say, above, "but let us have no more of these grave matters." If Chapman's poem had been written some time before publication, as was often the case in that day, Nashe is showing that he knew what the other meant: he was squaring up to him as he had previously squared up to the pompous Gabriel Harvey, taking up the cudgels for Oxford, poet of the Day, against the School of Night.

All this, of course, adds point to Roydon's attack in *Willobie His Arisa*. The animus increased until the *poetomachia* was in full swing; but the Earl seems again to have "continued like his magnificent self" until he finally turned upon his presumptuous baiters in a new version of *Troilus and Cressida*, reducing them to a pulp with their own much-vaunted classical weapons.

But to revert to Nashe: *Vertumnus*, or Spring seems again to be Oxford—in another aspect, for he was, like Proteus Ambiguus, a man of many forms. *Summer* greets *Vertumnus*.

. . . Knowst thou the reason why I sent for thee?
For. No, faith, nor care not whether I do or no. If you will dance a *Gal-liard*, so it is; if not, *Falangiado*, *Falangiado*, to *wear the black and yellow*; *Falangiado*, *Falangiado*, my mates are gone, I'll follow.

This mélange recalls the young de Vere's *The Forsaken Man*—"For black and tawny will I wear"—written after being circumvented by Gascoigne and Hutton, the famed dancer of the "galliard," and even

matches the refrain of that poem, "Ah a lalantida," with "Falangtado, Falangtado," etc.

Ver. [continuing] This world is transitory, it was made of nothing, and it must to nothing: wherefore, if we will doe the will of our high Creatour (whose will it is that we passe to nothing) wee must help consume it to nothing. . . . Tell me, I pray, wherefore was gold laid under our feet in the waynes of the earth, but that wee should contemne it, and treade upon it, and so consequently trade thrift under our feete. . . . I will prove an *unthrift*, if any, comes nearest a happe men. . . .

Here we obviously have Oxford's discourse paraphrased again, this time embodying Hamlet's reflections in the churchyard (V.1), Timon's disgust at the gold he finds in the earth (IV.3), and his own special use of "unthrift," found in *Timon of Athens* (IV.3.311); *The Merchant of Venice* (I.3.174; V.1.16); *Richard II* (II.3.122); and *Sonnets* 9.9 and 13.13.

The Fair Youth (so one takes him to be) comes in as *Solstitium*, when summoned.

Summer. Vertumnus, will *Sol* [i.e., the Sun or Son] come before us?
Ver. Sol, sol, ut, re, me, fa, sol,
Come to church while the bell toll.
Enter Sol verie richly attir'd with a noyse of Musicians before him.

There follows a dialogue between *Summer* and *Sol*, in which *Summer* takes *Sol* to task for his arrogance. He feels that *Sol* owes him a debt for his "gift of high grace."

Sol. My Lord, what needs these termes betwixt us two?
Upbraiding ill becomes *your bounteous mind*:
I do you honour for advancing me.
Why, 'tis a credit to your excellence,
To have so great a subject as I am:
This is your glorie and magnificence,
Not without stooping of your mightnesse,
Or taking any whit from your high state,
You can make one as mightie as yourself.
Autumnus. O arrogance exceeding all belief.
Summer my Lord, this saucie upstart lacke,
That now doth rule the chariot of the Sunne

.
Is a most base insinuating slave.

Finally *Summer* says to *Sol*, mildly enough:

Thou knowst too much to know to keepe the meane:
He that sees all things *oft sees not himself*.

Which seems exceedingly appropriate, all of it, to Oxford and the Fair Youth—the Son—in the early 1590's, when he was being courted and spoiled in and out of season and no doubt became insufferably

vain—although Nashe was quite bold in his censure and could not, at this time, have learned that Southampton was a prince, taking him merely for a bastard son who imposed upon his father's love.

There is a great deal more of this in Nashe's play; and it ties in with Greene's appellation of "upstart crow" for an arrogant young actor who, because he thought he could do everything—write, as well as act plays and improve on the playwrights' lines—was "an absolute Johannes Factorum" and, in his own esteem, "the only Shake-scene in a countree." It was evidently because Oxford had resented the liberties Nashe had taken in *Summer's Last Will* and had rebuked him sternly that Greene had introduced the symbolism about the "shal-low water" and the "worme," adding, "blame not Schollers who are vexed with sharp and bitter lines, if they reprove thy too much liberty of reproofe."

In discussing Sonnet 78, we spoke of Oxford's phrase about the Fair Youth's having "added feathers to the learned's wing"; and now we see in what weary scorn this must have been written. For Chapman had been referring to the arrogance of the young man—this same young man whom Greene had called an "upstart crow, beautified with our feathers"—who refused to act in the public theatres. (No wonder Oxford said so emphatically that "beautified is a vile phrase.") Chapman's lines, from *A Coronet for his Mistress Philosophy*, now become clear:

Muses that *Fame's loose feathers beauty*,
And such as scorn to tread the theatre,
As ignorant: the seed of memory
Have most inspired, and shown their glories there
To noblest wits and men of highest doom,
That for the kingly laurel bent affair
The theatres of Athens and of Rome,
Have been the crowns, and not the base impair.
Far then, be this foul cloudy-brow'd contempt
From *like-plumed birds*: and let your sacred rhymes
From honour's court their servile feet exempt,
That live by soothing moods, and serving times.
And let my love adorn with modest eyes,
Muses that sing Love's sensual emperies.

Marlowe's death occurred in the same year that Nashe's *Strange News* appeared. He had been, certainly since 1587, the year before the Armada, engaged in secret service work for the government.⁵ He had been matriculated at Corpus Christi, Cambridge, in March 1581, and had been employed in espionage work while nominally attending the University. There was a disposition on the part of the Cambridge authorities to withhold his degree, in 1587, because of his suspicious

⁵ There is a Privy Council record of this.

behavior, but, at the order of the Privy Council, it was granted. He was still engaged in espionage work in 1593, and was in Deptford about to embark for the Continent upon a secret mission, when he was killed, probably by an agent in the employ of France or Spain.⁶

In the course of time Chapman's animus against Oxford seems to have been partially overcome. We are indebted to him for the excellent description of the Earl, by name, in *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, of 1607. (Chap. Eight.) And even in 1599 he portrayed him amiably as Lemot in *A Humorous Day's Mirth*: a courtier, wit, and gallant, a familiar of the King, up to many mischievous pranks, and irresistible to the ladies. Several Oxford *cachets* appear in the following brief passages:

Lemot. My name signifies word.

Martia. Well hit, Monsieur *verbum*.

Lemot. What are you good at latine, Lady?

Martia. No sir, but I know what *verbum* is.

Lemot. Why, 'tis a green bunn, *ver* is green, and you know what bunn is, I am sure of that.

And again:

Lemot. Excuse me to the King and tell him I will meet him there: so this is but the beginning of sport . . . but this wench Martia hath *happy stars* reigned at the disposition of her beauty, for the King himself doth mightily dote on her.

At another time Lemot says:

I pray my lord look what a pretty falling band he hath, 'tis pretty *fantastical*, as I have seen made.

And he fashions, extempore, a "posie" in which "Echo" answers with the last syllable of each question, as in de Vere's famous poem. We have spoken of Jonson's use of the same device in *Cynthia's Revels* for a dialogue between Amorphus and Echo at the Fountain of Self-love. But this too belonged to the turn of the century.

It is extremely doubtful that some of these men had any personal acquaintance with the Earl until several years after they had begun to satirize him, even if they ever did, though Jonson had certainly observed him at a distance with a sharp, critical, and jaundiced eye. But they had learned who he was: they knew "Shakespeare" was a pseudonym.

⁶ Gilbert Slater: *Seven Shakespeares*, p. 141 ff.