

# DID OXFORD MAKE HIS PUBLISHING DEBUT IN 1560 AS “T.H.”?

Robert Prechter



They restless lie, ne yet they feel unrest.  
I grant that I envy the bliss they livéd in;  
Oh that I might have found the like, I wish it for no sin,  
But that I might as well with pen their joys depaint,  
As heretofore I have displayed their secret hidden plaint.  
Of shivering care and dread I have felt many a fit,  
But Fortune such delight as theirs did never grant me yet.  
By proof no certain truth can I unhappy write,  
But what I guess by likelihood, that dare I to indite.

*Romeus and Juliet* (lines 902-11)



ANY Oxfordians believe that young Edward de Vere wrote *Romeus and Juliet*, which was published under the name of Arthur Brooke in 1562, when Edward was twelve years old. We see it as a juvenile work of the author who would later write *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. But *Romeus and Juliet* is itself an ambitious work, a narrative poem of 3020 lines, so it seems sensible that there should be precursors even to this poem, early exercises that show a youth capable of such a project. The question is, were any such precursors published? I believe the answer is yes.

*The fable of Ovid treting out of Latin into Englysh Mytre, with a moral ther unto* (inside called *Ovids Fable of Narcissus*) was published in 1560 under the initials T.H., which stand quite well for the name of the publisher, Thomas Hackett. Hackett's and Oxford's worlds would occasionally overlap in later years. In 1584, Hackett published John Soowthern's *Pandora*, which he dedicated "To the right honourable the Earle of Oxenford. &c." It consists of poems, some by "Soo(w)thern" to Oxford and some purportedly by Oxford's wife, Anne Cecil. In 1584 and 1585, respectively, Hackett published *A Watch-woord to Englande* and *Fedele and Fortunio*, both by Oxford's secretary, Anthony Munday. In 1585 and 1587, respectively, he published *Pomponius Mela* and *Julius Solinus* by Oxford's uncle, Arthur Golding.

Some scholars have attached *Ovids Fable of Narcissus* to the canon of Thomas Howell, who was "probably a native of Dunster in Somerset" (DNB), but this assignment has to be an error. Howell's three works came out in 1568 and 1581, years after *Ovids Fable*. In none of these did he find it necessary to hide behind initials. *Newe Sonets and pretie Pamphlets* (1568) and *The Arbor of Amitie* (1568) proudly announce: "Written by Thomas Howell" and "set forth by Thomas Howell," while the dedication attending *H. His Devises* (1581) is clearly signed, "Tho. Howell." In the second 1568 book, "John Keeper student" says in his preface, "the fruites [of] Howelles hart and hardie hande . . . are young and tender yet." It is unlikely that a writer who

in 1560 was young, as T.H. describes himself (see below), would still be “young and tender” after eight years. More telling is that, despite the passage of significant time, the style of writing in these later compositions is far simpler and less accomplished than that of *Ovids Fable*. A young poet’s style should not change noticeably for the worse as he matures over a period of eight years. With perhaps two or three exceptions, Howell’s poems comprise rhymed couplets in trimeter, quadrameter or hexameter, producing a sing-song style that grates in short order. In contrast, Shakespeare wrote mostly in pentameter, while Arthur Golding used septameter in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, both forms that naturally vary the rhythm. T.H.’s meter, using thirteen iambs per couplet, is closer to these than to Howell’s. Aside from finding perhaps two dozen effective poems in Howell’s canon, I agree with the DNB’s assessment: “He was an uncouth writer, and his poems have little merit or interest” (DNB).

But if Thomas Howell was not the author of *Ovids Fable*, who was?

As Oxfordian Hank Whittmore has conjectured, *Ovids Fable* shows clear signs of being one of Oxford’s early works, perhaps the first to appear in print (13). The poem is constructed in rhyming couplets comprising a line of hexameter followed by one of septameter, the same format used for *Romeus and Juliet*. The subject matter of the translation is the story of Echo and Narcissus as told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare’s primary source. As one would expect from such an early effort, it’s brief, just five pages (192 lines) long, with language that’s often juvenile. For a short while I wondered how I might convince doubters that this is the product of a mere ten-year-old boy. But the author himself tells us plainly that he is young: “For neither I presume, by youthfull yeares,/ To clayme the skyl that elder folkes, doe wante. . . .” A marginal note labels one section as “A good warning to yonge people,” suggesting a schoolboy’s lesson. In fact, *Ovids Fable* appears to be the very kind of student effort that was the favored method of instruction in Oxford’s time: a short translation followed by a dissertation in verse, in this case one intended to demonstrate the moral value of Ovid’s story.

The author reveals a strong motivation to learn: “I have declared, what I can conseve/ Full glade to learne, what wiser folke parceave . . . .” We know from his time with Sir Thomas Smith (Hughes) that young Oxford was “full glad to learn.” Evidence of his education appears at least through age seventeen. He spent his childhood and teen years living with and studying with the best minds of the English Renaissance, including the great scholar of the Greek Classics and Roman Law, Sir Thomas Smith, the cartographer and scholar of Anglo-Saxon, Laurence Nowell, and the Latinist Bartholomew Clarke. As a teenager he enjoyed access to the great store of books and manuscripts in Lord Burghley’s library. During his years at Cecil House he received

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Masters degrees from both Cambridge and Oxford Universities and, at seventeen, was enrolled at Gray's Inn, the leading college of English Common Law.

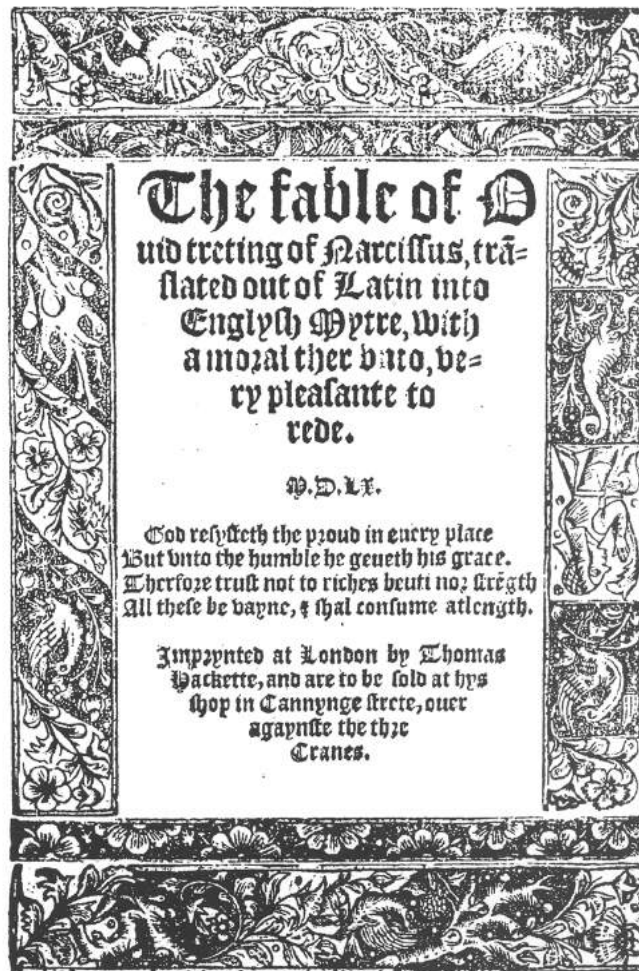
Along the way, he surpassed the ability of his learned tutor, Laurence Nowell, to impart any more knowledge to him; as Nowell wrote in June 1563 to William Cecil, "My work for the Earl of Oxford cannot be much longer required" (Nelson 39). In later years he would be lauded as a man of great learning by writers and scholars who looked to him for patronage. What little we know of the author, then, fits young Edward well.

### Oxford and Shakespeare

Oxford seems to have gotten more than stories from Ovid; he got much of his language and imagery from him as well. For example, the translation's description of "The wood and wattrye nimphes [who] bewayles hys lot as is ther wonte, wyth cuttynge of theyr heare" (lines 187-8) appears two years later when Arthur Brooke describes Juliet's despair over Romeo's banishment: "How doth she tear her heare!" (l. 1077). The translation also describes Echo, whose fate is "The later ende to geve of every sence or clause" (l. 23). In "The moralization," T.H. explains Echo's cleverness in her gambit: "The ende of everye sence she repetis/ Where by for what he spake he maye deserne" (414). The same poetic trick later appears in "Anne Vavasor's Echo," attributed to Oxford: "O heavens, who was ye first that bredd in me this feavere? Vere;" etc. (Grosart 411).

"The moralization," in T.H.'s own words, displays at least three aspects of *euphuism*, a style that would later be attributed to John Lyly, Oxford's secretary:

- 1) The extended simile: "Even lyke a fadinge flower, this flyting geste/ I maye recimbell, which is freshe to daye/ And yet or night is wethered clene awaye." (T.H. 348)
- 2) Alliteration: "Unbrydelyd will oh whether wylte thou trayne/ This wandring witte...";



Title page from *The fable of Ovid* by T.H., published by Thomas Hackett in 1560.

“Now witte that wantes all that wisdom willes”; “The pleasaunte pipes of pallase”; and “For his dysdayne dyd drowne him in a well.” (429-30, 554, 660, 861)

3) The comparison: “Mysuse of good thus them shall over throwe/ Even as Minarnais pipis that Marcias founde/ Misused him harmed with swetenes of the sound.” (656-8)

T.H.’s early work contains lines and stylistic elements that will appear later in Oxford’s poetry and the Shakespeare canon. The translation speaks of “bewtye bente wyth proude dysdayne (14), foreshadowing a theme heard also heard in Shakespeare’s Dark Lady sonnets. The phrase “proud disdain” shows up in *As You Like It* (3.4.51): “the red glow of scorn and proud disdain,” and Shakespeare juxtaposes the two words again in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (2.4.160-1). Narcissus’s “necke lyke yvery whyte [and] face wyth skynne as whyte as snowe, well coleryd wyth bloud,” “his naked breste/ With a carnacion hue” (95-6, 160-1), and his “red and whyte” (171) presage both Oxford and Shakespeare’s obsession with white skin and his red/white metaphors relating to facial color. Words such as *amasyd*, *mone* and *thrall* we find in the *Sonnets*.

The phrase “treckeling teares” appears in Shakespeare’s *King Henry IV, Part 1* (2.4.374) when Falstaff says, “Weep not, sweet queen; for trickling tears are vain.” The phrase *trickling tears* also appears in several of Oxford’s early poems (see Grosart 394, 403). We hear strains of Shakespeare in T.H.’s original poem as well. He observes, “youth and bewghte, come and soone be paste” (851), a major theme of the *Sonnets*, as in #60: “Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,/ And delves the parallels in beauty’s brow.” T.H. refers to a writer’s concept or conception as his *Invention*, as Shakespeare does in *Sonnets* 38, 59, 76, 103 and 105. T.H.’s metaphor, “to descant on this same” (809), employs a musical term that Shakespeare uses in the same way when Richard III says: “I . . . descant on mine own deformity” (1.1.27).

The author knows the histories of “the stronge assyryan kynge” (239) and “the Sicicthian Quene” (274) and speaks of “the Ladys” (474) and “the greatest lorde in lande” (473), revealing the interest in royalty and nobility that permeates Shakespeare’s works. As Shakespeare refers often to *Fortune*, T.H. in his short volume refers to *Fortune* three times, as in: “When fortune lyst to turne her happye whele” (252). The reference to “The wretched end of Cleopatres lyfe” (262) indicates the same interest that Shakespeare reveals in his transcendant play.

T.H. also suffuses “The moralization” with words of humility and apology: “The prayse hereof I utterly refuse”; “Right well I knowe, my wyttes be all to skante”; “the simpill sence/ That I have gatherid by my simple witte”; and “my simple travayle” (5, 12, 715-16, 890). A similar theme attends the prefaces to Shakespeare’s narrative poems. The brief dedication to *Venus and Adonis* contains eight apologetic phrases. The author knows “not how I shall offend,” expects “the world will censure me” for “so weak a burden,” “so barren a land,” “so bad a harvest,” and “my invention . . . deformed,” promising “some graver labour” in place of his “unpolished lines.”

Some of the phrases in T.H.’s translation presage Shakespeare’s wise wordplay, such as “those same eyes that, erreure blindes, to erreour dothe him move” (106). In “The moralization,” T.H. dispenses some pearls of wisdom not unlike some of the Bard’s:

Affection so a waye doth reasone chase. (420)  
For who dooth covet him selfe of wiser skole

Then dedes him showe, doth prove him selfe a fole. (1573-74)

...he trusteth the lyinge well of prayse

Whereby his wit and all he hath decayes. (587-88)

Wherefore, this vice, that everye vartue marres

That private weale, converts to prevate woo [woe] . . . (708-09)

...bewties blomis, full sone are blowne awaye

The stronge by syckenes, feles a feble stitche

From wele to woe, thus by promyse pytche [pitched] (269-71)

Our tyme is toste . . . [tossed] (272)

Nowe yf a tiraunte saye it shall be so

None other thinge but so they have to speake

Although it tourne a thousande unto woee. . . . (302-04)

T.H. frequently foreshadows Oxford. He disparages rich men's "heapis of golde" (199) and warns, "who potteth ther truste in golde/ Or slypper welthe ar sene in care to dwell/ And lose at laste, the good they like so well" (222-4), a sentiment similar to that expressed thirteen years later in Oxford's preface to Thomas Bedingfield's *Cardanus Comfort*: "what doth availe a masse of goulde to be continuallye imprisoned in your bags, and never to be employed to your use" (7). Shakespeare expresses the same sentiment through Iago: "Who steals my purse steals trash" (*Othello* 3.3.179).

The entire pamphlet ends with a ringing announcement of this ambitious young poet's mission: "and when more yeares shall sende/ More wyt and yoke more knowledge shall a wake/ Suche labours lyke I mene not to forsake" (892-4), which, we suggest, sounds like a promise from a boy whose vision would lead him to become the soul of English literature.

### Comparing T.H. to Golding

Shakespeare draws extensively on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and since "We know that Shakespeare knew the book in both the original Latin and Arthur Golding's translation," (Bate qtd. in Nims xlii), the inescapable implication is that Shakespeare must have done his own translation. For this and other reasons, many Oxfordians attribute Golding's translation to Oxford. T.H.'s "moralization" reveals knowledge, not just of the tale of Echo and Narcissus, but also of many more of Ovid's stories of metamorphosis, such as those involving Juno, Lyriope, Daphnis, Phaeton, Lycaon, etc. Is the lad who did this translation the same one who took on the entirety of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, published five and seven years later under his uncle's name?

The thirteen-iamb-per-couplet of *Ovids Fable* are but one iamb from the traditional "fourteeners" of Golding's translation, and other aspects of the two poems are similar. Both authors feel compelled to make apologies for translating a pagan poet by means of long dissertations (in

verse) asserting that Ovid's tales provide lessons congruent with Christian morals. The point of such packaging is to justify the telling of Ovid's story—of self-love with homosexual overtones—to those of more Puritanical mind. Oxford's uncle, Arthur Golding, whose name is on the complete volume of Ovids *Metamorphoses* (1567), was a devout Puritan, and his book, too, contains a preface to the same purpose. Some of their more specific sentiments are also similar. For example, T.H. reassures his readers, "I meane to shewe, accordyng to my wytte/ That Ovyd by this tale no follye mente" (15); while Golding writes, "I trust my travail in this cace/ May purchase favor . . . Ovids present woorke [gives] counselles wise and sage" (l. 181-82). While T.H. explains, "Thus Ovid bydes hys readers for to knowe/ The thynges above as well as those belowe" (l. 34); Golding repeats, "Now when thou readest of God or man, in stone, in beast, or tree,/ It is a myrror for thyself thyne owne estate too see" (l. 81).

There are wisps of identity in the phrasing that appear in both translations. One must expect a huge difference in writing ability, and probably style as well, between a boy nine or ten years of age—even if he's a budding genius—and the same lad of fourteen or fifteen. For this reason we should not expect to find many lines in T.H.'s five pages to be identical to those in the corresponding portion of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, celebrated by scholars for its free-wheeling, non-literal rendering (for example, Nims xxxiii-xxxv). We might, however, suspect that a few constructions would have remained with a teenager who had already worked with the same material. Of course, one would also expect different authors to use many of the same terms simply because the Latin words suggest them. I submit, however, that the following lines from T.H. and Golding are so much alike that they support the case for a single author. (The numbers after each pair of initials refer to the lines in the sources.)

- T.H. For that when she dyd seke . . . (25)  
 A.G. For when that with the feate . . . (450)
- T.H. Howe ofte oh wolde she fayne, with plesaunte words him glad . . . (39)  
 A.G. O Lord how often woulde she faine (if nature would have let) . . . (467)
- T.H. In lystynge for to heare, some sounde hys mouth escape  
 Where to her wordes she myghte applye, & him an answeare shape.  
 By chaunce Narcissus . . . (43-45)
- A.G. . . . with attentive eare she harkens for some sounde,  
 Where to she might replie hir wordes, from which she is not bounde.  
 By chaunce the stripling . . . (471-73)
- T.H. . . . amasyd, doth loke on everye side  
 And caulying loude come here he sayth . . . (47-48)
- A.G. Amazde he . . . looketh round about,  
 And Come . . . aloud he calleth out. (475-476)

- T.H.       Whyflyst thou me quod he . . . (50)
- A.G.       Why fliste, he cryeth . . . (478)
- T.H.       Wythin the woodes in hollow caves . . . (62)
- A.G.       . . . alone in dennes and hollow Caves, (491)
- T.H.       . . . so hath she nought, but voyce & bones to spare,  
Whereof is nothing lefte, but voyce for all her bones  
They saye...were tourned into stones, (66-68)
- A.G.       And nought is left but voyce and bones: the voyce yet still remaynes:  
Hir bones they say were turnde to stones. (496-497)
- T.H.       and sought to graunte this juste request . . . (76)
- A.G.       Assented to his just request . . . (508)
- T.H.       Which neither shepardes happe to fynde, nor gotes that upward gad  
Uppon the rocky hyls . . . (78-79)
- A.G.       Which neyther sheepheirds, nor the Goates that fed upon the hill, (510)
- T.H.       Narcissus theare through heate, and wery hunters game  
glad to take rest dyd lye hym downe . . . (85-86)
- A.G.       The stripling wearie with the heate and hunting . . .  
Did lay him downe . . . (515-17)
- T.H.       For seyng as he dranke, the image of hys grace  
...with shadowe of his face (89-90)
- A.G.       For as he dranke, he chaunst to spie the Image of his face, (519)
- T.H.       as image made of marble . . . (92)
- A.G.       . . . an ymage made of Marble . . . (523)
- T.H.       The necke, that he desyred so mucche to imbrace,  
and yet himselfe he could not catche . . . (103-04)
- A.G.       To have embraste the necke he sawe and could not catch . . . (539)
- T.H.       and hath no substaunce of it selfe, but comes and bydes with thee  
If thou canst go awaye, with thee it wyll departe  
yet nether care for meate or slepe . . . (110-12)

- A.G.      The thing is nothing of it selfe: with thee it doth abide,  
              With thee it would departe if thou withdrew thy selfe aside.  
              No care of meate . . . (547-49)
- T.H.      that ever anye pyned so . . . (120)
- A.G.      That hath so pinde . . . (559)
- T.H.      . . . but that I lyke and see (121)
- A.G.      Howbeit that I like and see. . . (560)
- T.H.      For looke how ofte . . . so oft . . . (127-28)
- A.G.      . . . For looke how oft . . . . So oft . . . (565-66)
- T.H.      With frendly cheare . . . . Thou smylest when I laughe . . . (136-37)
- A.G.      hope of friendship by thy cheere . . . . And if I smile thou smilest too . . .  
              (575-77)
- T.H.      thou speakest words . . . (140)
- A.G.      Thou speakest words . . . (581)
- T.H.      What shall I doe . . . (143)
- A.G.      What shall I doe? (586)
- T.H.      Oh wolde to God I might, departe my body fro  
              in hym loves this that wyshe is strang . . .  
              But nowe my strength . . . (145-47)
- A.G.      I would to God I for a while might from my bodie part.  
              This wish is straunge . . .  
              My sorrowe takes away my strength. (588-91)
- T.H.      He whom I love right fayne, I wold might lyve alenger houre (150)
- A.G.      I would this youngling whome I love might lenger life obtaine: (594)
- T.H.      Nowe whether doste thou go, abyde he cryed faste  
              forsake not hym so cruelly . . . my wretched rage (155-58)
- A.G.      Oh whither dost thou flie?/ Abide I pray thee . . .  
              Forsake me not so cruelly . . . my wretched rage . . . (600-04)



- T.H. . . . she cryed alas alas, (176)  
A.G. Alas, she cride, Alas . . . (623)
- T.H. alas thou ladde to much in vayne . . .  
    Whych selfe same wordes agayne, this Ecco straight dyd yell (180-81)
- A.G. Alas sweete boy beloved in vaine . . .  
    With sighing sound the selfsame wordes the Echo did reply. (627-28)

These passages appear to tie the well-known Arthur Golding to the now less elusive “T.H.”

### **A Contribution from “The prenter”**

There is one item in T.H.’s publication that young Edward did not write. The very first poem, “The prenter to the Booke,” is hack-work, as you can see from the first of its two stanzas:

Go Lyttell Booke do thy Indevoure  
to all estates, that vyce doeth refuse,  
In the mayne be learned how to percever  
synne to abhore vertue to use.  
The wyse the aucthour wyll excuse  
by cause he invayeth, agaynst synne and pryde,  
Who causeth many a one, perilously to slyde.

It could well be the printer’s poem, as the title attests. If so, it is surely the only composition in the pamphlet by anyone whose initials are actually T.H. \_\_\_\_\_

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