

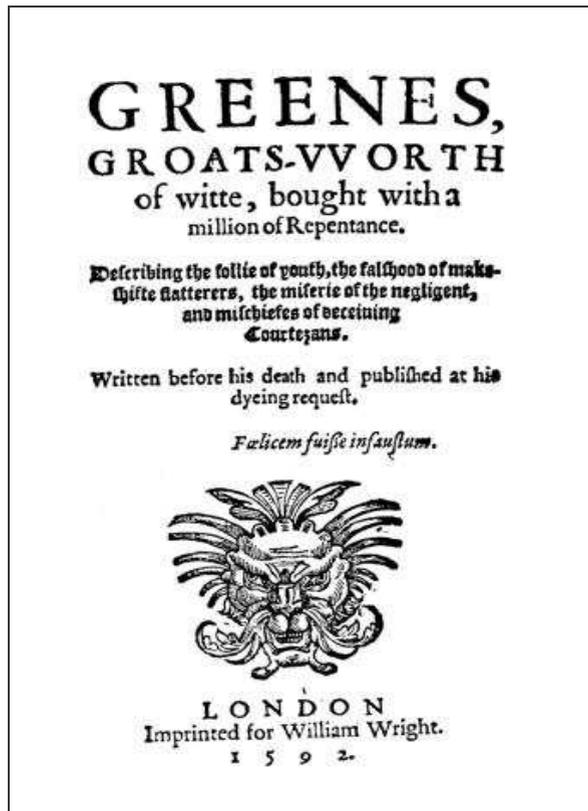
## Greene's *Groats-worth of Witte*: Shakespere's Biography?

Frank Davis

Few tracts from Shakespeare's time have generated more study, comment and controversy than *Greenes Groats-worth of Witte, Bought with a Million of Repentance, Describing the follie of youth, the falshoode of makeshift*

*flatterers, the miserie of the negligent, and mischiefes of deceiuing Courtezans.* This curious but important work, posthumously published by Henry Chettle in 1592, is generally hailed by Stratfordians as proof that Shakespeare (meaning Shakspere of Stratford) was a recognized, highly regarded actor and writer in the London theater world by the early 1590s.

The importance of *Groats-worth* to the authorship question thus cannot be denied. Several documents record Shakspere's legal and business activities, yet almost none refer to his literary career. Could *Groatsworth* be that text?



### Robert Greene

Greene's own biography is uncertain and challenged by some Oxfordians, as we'll see. According to traditional sources (Kunitz 235-6; Ward 551-4; Collins 1-43; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Arata Ide 432-436), he was born in Norwich around 1560. His parentage is uncertain but he managed to matriculate at St John's College, Cambridge as a sizar<sup>1</sup> in 1575, taking his B.A. in 1579, and his M.A. from Clare Hall in 1583. In 1588 he received a Master of Arts at Oxford University. It is reported that he traveled extensively between 1578-1583, visiting

France, Germany, Poland and Denmark, Italy and Spain.

Greene married 1585/6 and settled briefly in Norfolk but soon deserted his wife and child, moving to London. He began his career writing mostly love-pamphlets and plays in 1580, although the majority of his work was published in the last five years of his life. Most of his plays are lost. The major known works attributed to him include *Alphonsus*; *The Looking Glasse*; *Orlando Furioso*; *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*; *Pandosto*; and *James IV*.

### Greene's Famous Lines and Chettle's Apology

*Greene*: Base minded men all three of you if by my miserie you be not warnd: for vnto none of you (like mee) sought those burres to cleaue: 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 be-holding, shall (were yee in that case that I am now) bee both at once of them forsaken? Yes trust them not: for there is an vpstart 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 *Iohannes factotum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a country.

*Chettle*: About three moneths since died M. Robert Greene, leauing many papers in sundry Booke sellers hands, among others his Groats-worth of wit, in which a letter written to diuers play-makers, is offensiuely by one or two of them taken, and because on the dead they cannot be auenged, they wilfully forge in their conceites a liuing Author: and after tossing it two and fro, no remedy, but it must light on me. How I haue all the time of my conuersing in printing hindred the bitter inueying against schollers, it hath been very well knowne, and how in that I dealt I can sufficiently prooue. With neither of them that take offence was I acquainted, and with one of them I care not if I neuer be: the other, whome at that time I did not so much spare, as since I wish I had, for that as I haue moderated the heate of liuing writers, and might haue vsde my owne discretion (especially in such a case) the Author beeing dead, that I did not, I am as sory, as if the originall fault had beene my fault, because my selfe haue seene his demeanor no lesse ciuill than he exelent in the qualitie he professes: Besides, diuers of worship haue reported, his vprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writting, that aprooues his Art.

According to Greene, himself, he lived a life of debauchery leading to his poverty and early death on September 3, 1592. Greene's own recognition of his errant

ways led to his repentance that gives us this most important document, published posthumously by Henry Chettle

Most students of Shakespeare are aware of *Groatsworth* and well acquainted with its 'upstart crow,' 'Shake-scene' and 'tyger's hart' references. Many don't go much beyond, however, though this context comprises less than 0.5% of the whole of *Groatsworth*.

As we have noted, Stratfordians point out that the 'upstart crow' passage is the first reference to Shakespeare in London, indicating that he was by then already an established playwright as well as actor. They consider the letter's warning to be proof that he was successful and that Greene was jealous and bitter. This seems plausible, though as the Stratfordian scholar William Allan Neilson observes,

Greene was much given to the mingling of autobiography with his fiction, and this has resulted in a much larger body of possibly true biographical details than we possess concerning most of his contemporaries. (869)

In addition to this, it is remarkable to see how often orthodoxy has ignored the first and third parts of *Groatsworth*, or has failed to give the entire pamphlet a clear interpretation. It is also interesting to observe the difficulties caused by trying to reconcile Greene's second part with Chettle's 'Apology' in his 'To the Gentlemen Readers' published three months later as a preface to *Kind-Hart's Dreame*.

### **A Three-Part Statement**

The complete tract of *Groatsworth* is divided into three parts, each summarized below. The first is the story of 'Roberto,' an autobiographical parody of Greene himself. Second is his celebrated letter warning of the 'upstart crow,' and the third is a parable derived from Aesop's fable of the grasshopper and the ant. This too is a thinly disguised autobiographical exercise. At the end of *Groatsworth* Chettle attaches Greene's final apologetic letter to his estranged wife.

**Part 1** Roberto is an academic scholar (Robert Greene even uses his own Latinized name) whose father Gorinius and brother Lucanio are money lenders (usurers). At his death, Gorinius bequeaths Lucanio all his wealth, leaving Roberto only 'a groat' to 'buy a groats-worth of wit.'

The two brothers set out to find wives and came upon Lamilia, a courtesan with whom Lucanio falls in love. As the three of them are talking, Lamilia tells a 'fable' of a fox, a badger and the disgracing of a ewe. Roberto follows with his own story of a Squire's daughter and farmer's son who were in love and scheduled to be married. The bridegroom was deceived by a jealous rival using the 'bed-trick,' resulting in the rival winning his bride and the bridegroom having to marry another woman.

After the tales, Roberto, Lucanio and Lamilia gamble with dice and Lamilia wins all Lucanio's money. While Lucanio goes for more 'crowns,' Roberto tries to get Lamilia to give him part of her winnings. When Lucanio returns, Lamilia tells him of Roberto's deceit and Lucanio 'dis-owns' his brother.

Roberto departs. Later, lying on the ground next to a hedge lamenting his bad luck and 'sorrow,' he is overheard by 'a gentleman' who offers to help: 'I suppose you are a scholler, and pittie it is men of learning should live in lacke.' When Roberto asks, 'What is your profession?' the gentleman answers, 'Truly, sir, I am a player.' Roberto is somewhat taken aback: 'I tooke you rather for a Gentleman of great living.'

Certainly he is a man of substance now, the gentleman replies, but it was not always so, especially when he was 'faine to carry my playing Fardle a footebacke.' Now his 'very share in playing apparel will not be sold for two hundred pounds.'

Roberto is surprised that the gentleman has prospered 'in that vayne practice,' and that 'it seems to mee your voice is nothing gratious.' The gentleman's answer is important for our analysis:

I mislike your judgement: why, I am as famous for Delphrigus and The King of Fairies, as ever was any of my time. The Twelve labors of Hercules have I terribly thundered on the Stage, and plaid three Scenes Of the Devill in the Highway to heaven. Have ye so? (saide Roberto) then I pray you pardon me. Nay more (quoth the Player) I can serve to make a pretie speech, for I was a cuntry Author, passing at a Morall, twas I that pende the Morall of mans witte, the Dialogue of Dives, and for seven years space was absolute Interpreter to the puppets. But now my Almanacke is out of date: *The people make no estimation / Of Morals teaching education*. Was not this prettie for a plaine rime extempore? If ye will ye shall have More. Nay, its enough, said Roberto, but how meane you to use mee? Why, sir, in making Playes, said the other, for which you shall be well paid, if you will take the paines .<sup>2</sup>

Roberto goes with the Player who provides lodging for him 'in a house of retayle.' There he falls into one vice after another.

Meanwhile, all Lucanio's wealth has been consumed by Lamilia. When Roberto hears of this misfortune, he seeks his brother out and provides some meager assistance. This is perceived as demeaning by Lucanio, but by now Roberto is 'famozed for an Arch-plaimaking-poet.' His wealth fluctuates 'like the sea' and he confesses that he is 'contrarie to the world,' and that if paid in advance, would 'breake my promise.' Roberto learns the craft of thieves and 'high Lawyers.'

His wife, a 'Gentlewoman,' tries to 'recall him' but to no avail. Roberto's debauchery continues until he finds himself, 'lying in poverty' with 'but one groat.' He cries: 'O now it is too late, too late to buy witte with thee: and therefore

will I see if I can sell to carelesse youth what I negligently forgot to buy.' The author adds, clearly reinforcing the autobiographical nature of the tale:

Heereafter suppose me the saide Roberto...Greene will send you now his groatsworth of wit, that never showed a mites-worth in his life: & though no man now bee by to doe me good: yet ere I die I will by my repentaunce indeavour to doo all men good. (Greene 17)

The author continues with a poem describing his plight and regrets. He then proceeds to list ten rules for gentlemen to 'be regarded in your lives' (Greene 18-19).

**Part 2** This section contains Greene's famous letter '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 warning.

Greene calls the first writer 'thou famous gracer of Tragedians' who said, with Greene, 'There is

no God.' He chastises the author for not recognizing that his 'excellent wit' is a gift of God, ad-

***The second writer is 'yong juvenall, that byting Satyryst, that lastlie with mee together writ a Comedie.' Greene also calls him a 'Sweet boy,' warning him not to get too 'many enemies from bitter words.'***

monishing him further for his 'Machivilian policy' (19-20). This author is widely accepted to be Christopher Marlowe. In view of Greene's description, there should be little doubt.

The second writer is 'yong juvenall, that byting Satyryst, that lastlie with mee together writ a Comedie.' Greene also calls him a 'Sweet boy,' warning him not to get too 'many enemies from bitter words' (20). The consensus is that this is Thomas Nashe, although there is no record of his having collaborated with Greene on a comedy. Thomas Lodge has also been suggested for the 'yong juvenall,' but it turns out he was absent from England, having sailed on August 26, 1591, and could not have returned much before June, 1593 (Simpson vol.2 382). Furthermore, Lodge was two years older than Greene and so is unlikely to be addressed as a 'yong juvenall.' Nashe on the other hand was Greene's junior by seven years.

To the third and final writer, Greene writes:

And thou no lesse deserving than the other two, in some things rarer, in nothing inferior; driven (as my selfe) to extreme shifts, a little have I to say to thee: and were it not an idolatrous oth, I would swear by sweet *S. George*, thou art unworthy better hap, sith thou dependest on so meane a stay (Greene 20).



An allegorical rendering of Robert Greene in his funeral shroud, from John Dickenson's *Greene in Concept* (1598).

Here there has been less uncertainty of identification. George Peele seems the likeliest candidate.

Greene's famous warning about the upstart crow follows. It's clear from his references to 'puppets...that speak from our mouths' and 'Anticks' garnished 'in our colours' that he is referring to actors. This becomes important when we analyze the rest of his statement.

Greene's advice is that the writers use their 'rare wits' in 'more profitable courses, & let those *Apes* imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions' (21). Again, his use of 'apes' reinforces the reference to actors. Greene makes a plea for them to seek 'better Maisters' and not be 'subject to the pleasure of such rude groomes,' because their best 'husbands' [agents] will never 'prove a Usurer' [lend them money] and that the 'kindest of them all' would never find them 'a kind nurse' [to attend them in sickness] (21).

The next paragraph has received little attention. Greene says he could 'insert [address] two more' [writers] that both have 'writ against these buckram Gentlemen' but he will 'leave them to the mercie of these painted monsters' (21). Again, 'buckram' and 'painted monsters' reference actors.

In the final paragraph of the letter Greene says, 'But now returne I to you three,' advising them not to make the same mistakes as himself, adding that he is 'now at the last snuffe' and that 'there is no substance left for life to feede on.'

He ends with this salutation:

*Desirous that you should live,  
though himselfe be dying,  
Robert Greene (21).*

**Part 3** Greene's farewell follows: 'farewell in like sort, with this conceited Fable of that olde Comedian *Aesope*.' This is Greene's rendition of the story of the ant and the grasshopper. The grasshopper calls the ant a 'greedie miser' and the ant replies, 'The thriftie husband spares what unthrift spends.' The two separate, and while the grasshopper pursues his pleasures, the ant labors. When winter comes the ant is prepared but the grasshopper starves. He goes to the ant for help, but 'Pack hense, thou idle lazie worme' is the retort.

'Foodlesse, helplesse, and strengthles,' writes Greene, the grasshopper digs himself a pit in the sand and engraves his epitaph which describes his (and Greene's) life:

*For all worlds trust, is ruine without ruth [compassion]  
Then blest are they that like the toyling Ant,  
Provide in time gainst winters wofull want.*

The grasshopper dies ‘comfortles without remedy. Like him my selfe: like me, shall al that trust to friends or times inconstancie. Now faint of my last infirmity, beseeching them that shal burie my bodie, to publish this last farewell written with my wretched hand’ (23).

*Groatsworth* concludes with a letter which Chettle found ‘with/ This booke after his [Greene’s] death.’ It’s a *mea culpa* addressed to the writer’s abandoned wife and child. Greene again describes his sorry state, complaining that he suffers hunger for his gluttony, thirst for his drunkenness, and ulcerous sores [syphilis?] from his adultery. He commits his soul to his ‘Saviour,’ and signs off, ‘Thy repentant husband for his dis / Loyaltie, Robert Greene.’

Before analyzing *Groatsworth*, we should consider two other important documents. First, Nashe’s quick show of displeasure and denunciation when in September, 1592, he wrote in an epistle prefixed to *Pierce Pennilesse*:

Other news I am advised of, that a scald, trivial, lying pamphlet, called Greene’s *Groatsworth of Wit*, is given out to be my doing. God never have care of my soul, but utterly renounce me, if the least word or syllable in it proceeded from my pen, or if I were in any way privy to the writing or the printing of it (Looney/Miller vol.ii 342-3).

The second important document is Chettle’s apologetic response in his *Kind-Harts Dream* printed some three months after *Groatsworth*. In his introduction, ‘To the Gentlemen Readers,’ Chettle claims that *Groatsworth* was the work of Greene and not himself. He denies responsibility, but does offer this all-important apology that has led to erroneous interpretations by many Stratfordians:

About three moneths since died M. Robert Greene, leaving many papers in sundry Booke sellers hands, among others his *Groats-worth of wit*, in which a letter written to divers play-makers, is offensively by one or two of them taken, and because on the dead they cannot be avenged, they willfully forge in their conceites a living Author: and tossing it two and fro, no remedy, but it must light on me (*Ibid.*, 343).

Chettle’s statement makes it clear that Greene’s letter in *Groatsworth* was a warning written to ‘divers play-makers,’ specifically to the *three* metaphorically identified writers. The warning was specifically *about* another individual, the ‘upstart crow’ or ‘Shake-scene.’

Chettle goes on to address the ‘one or two’ offended playwrights:

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, for that as I have moderated the heate of living writers, and might have used my owne discretion (especially in such a case) the Author being

dead, that I did not, I am as sorry, as if the originall fault had been my fault, because my selfe have seene his demeanor no lesse civill than he, exelent in the qualitie he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported, his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writting, that ap-rooves his Art. For the first, whose learning I reverence, and at the perusing of Greenes Booke, stroke our what then in conscience I thought he in some displeasure writ: or had it beene true, yet to publish it, was intolerable: him I would wish to use me no worse than I deserve (*Ibid.*, 343).

The first sentence quoted above indicates that there were two offended play-makers, one, believed to be Marlowe, he doesn't know (or care to know), the other, believed to be Nashe, he is sorry he didn't (using his own discretion) spare [remove him] from Greene's work. Chettle goes on to praise this second play-maker who had complained with his statements of 'uprightness of dealing,' 'honesty' and 'grace in writing.'

### Stratfordian Positions

It is curious how Stratfordians have interpreted Chettle's apology and praise to be for the 'upstart crow,' i.e., the very person Greene was warning against! But this is exactly what occurred over the years, beginning with Malone, and carried on by Chambers. Chambers believes the apology had to be to Shakespeare as the second writer (Marlowe being the first) because Peele and Nashe had no reason to be offended by what Greene had said (Chambers vol. 1, 58-9). This ignores Nashe's prompt and dramatic denial of having anything to do with the 'scald trivial lying pamphlet.' Nashe obviously 'took offense.' The myth of Chettle's apology being directed to Shakespeare has been propagated more by biographers—e.g. Schoenbaum 150-6, Greenblatt 212-15, Ackroyd 176-8, and Honan 158-162—than other Shakespearean scholars. In 1886 F.G. Fleay declared, 'Shakespeare was not one of those who took offense; they are expressly stated to have been two of the three authors addressed by Greene' (111).

In his 1994 edition of *Groatsworth*, D. Allen Carroll presents a thorough evaluation, concluding with John Payne Collier and Warren Austin's computer-based work that *Groatsworth* was largely a forgery by Henry Chettle (Chettle 6,7,24-27,105-6). Carroll comments: 'Greene *may* have had something to do with the writing of *Groatsworth*, Chettle *certainly* did. If the book is indeed Chettle's, or largely his, as few have believed and as the evidence seems to suggest, then it ranks as one of the most successful hoaxes in our culture' (ix). Carroll later adds:

Though in the main a forgery, in my judgment, the book may contain some matter by Greene and/or someone else and thus be, in a minor way, a collaboration (30).

Carroll's discussion of the 'Player-Patron' in Part One reports 'that the portrait is a composite, suggesting a pattern of the highly successful actor,' but concludes that 'Shakespeare was too young, as was Richard Burbage and Edward Allyn' (115-6).

But why too young? Carroll doesn't explain, though he says that the ant in the third section of *Groatsworth* is accepted by Honigmann as likely to represent Shakespeare (147). Carroll says the equation of the ant with Shakespeare can only be a 'good possibility,' but he does not comment on Shakespeare being too young for this representation of the ant. Carroll notes that Dover Wilson believed Chettle's apology in *Kind-Hearts Dream* was directed toward Shakespeare, but he ends cautiously with:

In any case, it has been argued, Chettle's apology, as put, does not require an inference that he was confronted directly for the defense by Shakespeare or anyone (138).

A more recent important orthodox review of this 'apology to Shakespeare' issue is found in a 1998 article by Professor Lukas Erne of the University of Geneva, who dispels the notion of Chettle's apology being written to Shakespeare. Erne concludes:

The cumulative effect of the evidence against Shakespeare [being the recipient of the Chettle apology] is such that it partakes of *mythology*, rather than biography, to keep drawing inferences about Shakespeare's early years in London from Chettle's apology (440). [Emphasis mine]

It is unfortunate that Stratfordian biographers still ignore or are unaware of Erne's 1998 work, basing their writings on what is prevalent in previous or even recent biographies.

### **Oxfordian Positions**

Oxfordians also differ in their interpretations of *Groatsworth*. Ogburn goes to great lengths to discount both it and Greene's authorship, citing Nashe's statement that *Groatsworth* was 'a scald, trivial, lying pamphlet' and Austin's 1969 computer analysis 'proving' that *Groatsworth* is a forgery (55-67). However, a number of credible refutations to Austin's work can be found, including the more recent work of Westley (363-378).<sup>3</sup> Ogburn accepted Austin's conclusion that *Groatsworth* was written by Chettle alone. Ogburn also makes an interesting report on Professors G.B. Evans and Harry Levin, who rebutted his article on *Groatsworth* in the *Harvard Magazine*. 'Mr. Ogburn seems baffled by the earliest allusion to him [Shakespeare] in Robert Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, which is

clearly a protest against a mere actor who has presumed to become a dramatist' (63). Ogburn's final words on this subject are worth noting:

As to Henry Chettle, it occurs to me that the Stratfordians have unwittingly been right all along and that in warning the three unnamed playwrights against an actor who was in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country, a know-it-all with a tiger's heart, the forger of *Groatsworth* was putting the playwright we know as Shakespeare on guard, with his fellows, against the unnamed actor we also know as Shakespeare. If Chettle did not know it to begin with that the two were the same, he must soon have discovered it. How else are we to explain that later he found reason to express his regret and in doing so is apologetic not to the actor Shake-scene—who as a nobleman in disguise could not vent his ire without giving himself away—but to the playwright who Chettle said took offense, though nothing had been said against him and whom Chettle now finds to be of uprightness of dealing and of honesty, with a grace in writing that attests his art (67)?

Ogburn's belief is that the apology is to Shakespeare (i.e. Oxford), the true author. However, this theory requires unprovable assumptions about Chettle's state of mind. Ogburn seems to want to eliminate any possibility of Shakspeare being an actor; he took this hard-line position because he held Shakspeare was illiterate, so he could not be a writer, while being an actor would also suggest literacy.

On the other hand, 'partial literacy' would likely suffice for being an actor—although certainly not for any writer of significance. There are quite a few documents that do support the contention of Shakspeare being an actor (Davis). Also, if we are to believe that all three parts of *Groatsworth* are biographical, we have to consider that 'Shake-scene' may indeed have attempted some writing. Note that the 'gentleman' who assisted Roberto claimed to have written some 'moral' plays ('...twas I that pende The Morall of mans witte...'). This comic parody no doubt accounts, in part at least, for why Stratfordians do not wish to correlate him with Shakespeare as they do in 'part two' with 'Shake-scene' and the warning letter.

Ruth Lloyd Miller also accepts that Chettle was the forger of *Groatsworth*; she sees the story of 'Roberto' as a satire on the Cecils, Burghley and his two sons, Thomas and Robert (Looney/Miller 350-55). If true, this would be a monumental political risk. It is unlikely that either Greene, Chettle, Shakspeare or even Oxford would be willing to take such a chance.

Oxfordian Richard Whalen cautiously reports the usual Stratfordian positions as given above, and notes the substantial questions raised by Oxfordians and a few Stratfordians. Although not elaborating on of his own belief, Whalen does say: 'Nothing says Shake-scene came from Stratford. Far from being a fairly clear identification, it [*Groatsworth*] is deliberately evasive and obscure' (44).

Sobran also says that *Groatsworth* is ‘probably’ a forgery, presenting no definitive conclusions except that in regard to Chettle’s apology, ‘Shakespeare might be either the playwright [one offended] or the crow [subject of the insult], but not both. In all probability, he was neither’ (36). He approvingly cites Jay Hoster’s *Tiger’s Heart*, which ‘argues that the real “upstart” was the actor-manager Edward Alleyn, the greatest star of the Elizabethan stage (at least before Burbage), whom the real Greene had earlier attacked for underpaying playwrights’ (34). This was first noticed in 1952 by Kunitz and Haycraft:

But an examination of the famous passage—the ‘upstart crow beautified with our feathers’ who is ‘in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country—makes it probable that the person alluded to is some unnamed actor, and not any of Greene’s fellow-dramatists (236).

Hoster’s position is also shared by Hughes (4). Both boost their arguments by reporting that Alleyn was a large man: one story says he broke boards on a stage with his heavy stomping (and hence ‘Shake-scene’). They also theorize that Alleyn may have played a part in *3 Henry VI*, from which the ‘tiger’s heart’ parody is derived. Although there is no evidence of the latter, the Alleyn proposal is not entirely implausible. With less support, Will Kemp (Frazer) and even Ben Jonson (Green) have also been proposed as candidates for ‘Shake-scene.’

On the other hand, Oxfordian Dick Lester, an experienced systems analyst and independent researcher, reached another conclusion when he presented his paper at the Second Edward de Vere Studies Conference in 1998. The ‘upstart crow,’ he proposed, was indeed likely to be William Shakspeare of Stratford. Lester also refuted Austin’s computer analysis that *Groatsworth* was a forgery by Chettle, concluding that *Groatsworth* was written at the very least by a combination of Greene and Chettle. Lester excludes Alleyn, one reason among several being that there is no evidence he ever wrote or pretended to be a writer (6).

A. D. Wraight disagrees, however, claiming that Alleyn was a indeed writer (35), a position discredited previously by J. Payne Collier.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Mark Anderson, in his 2005 best-seller *Shakespeare By Another Name*, agrees with Lester that ‘Shake-scene’ refers to Shakspeare (256-8).

Also in 2005 Jonathan Dixon wrote an informative paper on this subject in *Shakespeare Matters* (12). He analyzes the Elizabethan recognition of the relationship of Aesop’s ‘crow’ and Batillus, the Roman ‘pretender.’ Dixon carefully and convincingly develops this line of thought, maintaining that *Groatsworth* supports the anti-Stratfordian position of Shakspeare being a front man and a ‘money-lending entrepreneur.’ The theory that Shakspeare was a ‘pretender’ was reinforced by Dixon in the Spring, 2000 *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* (7), where he argues that ‘supposes’ was used in Elizabethan times to mean ‘pretends.’

***Vertues Common-wealth***

Also important to our discussion of *Groatsworth* is Diana Price's review of Henry Crosse's 1603 *Vertues Common-wealth* (or *High-way to honour*) in a section she titles 'An Elizabethan Interpretation of *Groatsworth*.' Price (54-6) records from Crosse:

[T]hese copper-laced gentlemen [who] grow rich, purchase lands by adulterous plays, and not [a] few of them usurers and extortioners which they exhaust out of the purses of their haunTERS so they are puffed up in such pride as self-love as they envy their equals and scorn their inferiors (Crosse, 117). it were further to be wished, that those admired wits of this age, Tragedians, and Comedians, that garnish Theaters with their inventions, would spend their wits in more profitable studies, and leave off to maintain those Antics, and Puppets, that speak out of their mouths: for it is a pity such noble gifts, should be so basely employed, as to prostitute their ingenious labors to enrich such buckram gentlemen (Crosse, 122).

He that can but bombast out a blank verse, and make both the ends jump together in a rhyme, is forthwith a poet laureate, challenging the garland of bays, and in one slavering discourse or other, hang out the badge of his folly. Oh how weak and shallow much of their poetry is, for having no sooner laid the subject and ground of their matter, and in the Exordium moved attention, but over a verse or two run upon rocks and shelves, carrying their readers into a maze, now up, then down, one verse shorter than another by a foot, like an unskillful Pilot, never comes night the intended harbor: in so much that oftentimes they stick so fast in mud, they lose their wits ere they can get out, either like Chirillus, writing verse not worth the reading, or Battillus, arrogating to themselves, the well deserving labors of other ingenious spirits. Far from the decorum of Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, etc., or our honorable modern Poets, who are no whit to be touched with this, but reverent esteemed, and liberally rewarded (Crosse, 109).<sup>5</sup>

Price notes that 'Henry Crosse' has never been identified, so the possibility of a pseudonym exists (54). What is evident is that *Vertues* is referring to *Groatsworth* by both the *intent* (e.g. warning; advising 'more profitable studies') and *wordage* (e.g. puppets, usurers, buckram, bombast out a blank verse, etc). Note also Crosse's use of 'Batillus' in view of Dixon's article relating this to Aesop's crow.

It should be pointed out, however, that *Vertues* addresses 'gentlemen' and maintains a plural view of the offenders. This suggests that the 'Batillus practice' may have been more widespread than the warning against just one 'upstart crow.' The concept of widespread Batillus practice is supported by Henslowe's *Diary* where several of his actors, including Alleyn, were paid for 'boockes' [plays]. This

seems, as Collier stated, to be for work done revising old plays for new presentations.<sup>6</sup>

'Shake-scene' as representing Shakspeare is supported by *Groatsworths'* reference to 'tyger's heart,'<sup>7</sup> likely parodying the anonymous *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* (1595) that subsequently became Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 3*. Sobran is not alone in maintaining that the 'tyger's hart' reference would not have been recognized as significant to Shakespeare in 1592 because *True Tragedy* was not published until 1595 and even then anonymously (34). Shakespeare was not identified with this play until *Henry VI, Part 3* in the First Folio of 1623. However, *True Tragedy* was already being performed by 1592, indicated by Philip Henslowe's notation about the playing of *Henry VI* and *Harry of Cornwall* (? *Famous Victories*), and likely had been staged even earlier. Significantly, Greene did not write his letter to the 'public' even though some might have understood his references. Instead he directed it to fellow writers who could be expected to recognize the relationship

Nina Green and Stephanie Hopkins Hughes both suggest that between 1580-1592 Oxford wrote under the pen-name, Robert Greene. Their theory is based on the fact that there were several 'Robert Greenes' in England at the time, and no evidence has been found to definitely connect them with the authorship of the works attributed to Robert Greene.<sup>8</sup> Nina Green affirms that 'considerable stylistic and other evidence in Greene's works strongly suggests that Greene was, in fact, one of Oxford's pen-names' (Green). Hughes even goes on to say in her *Hypothesis in a Nutshell*:

Robert Greene's rich biography could not be substantiated by the most diligent research because it was 100% fiction.

Robert Greene wrote like an aristocrat and not like a proletarian because he was an aristocrat (and not a proletarian).

Robert Greene sounds like early Shakespeare because he was early Shakespeare.

Robert Greene wasn't mentioned as a playwright until after his death because his true identity could not be revealed, and because plays, unlike pamphlets, did not require an author's name; that is not until such time as they had to be published, which in some cases did not occur for many years.

The peculiar charge which he hurled in *Groatsworth* at the actors and their manager of ingratitude rather than for some violation of business practice makes sense when seen as the viewpoint of one who saw his involvement in the newly created commercial theater as one of good fellowship based either on the common understandings of social intercourse, or the traditional service due a lord by his retainers; transactions which Alleyn and his fellow actors saw in the cold light of commercial necessity and perhaps also with an exhilarating (and reckless) awareness of a new-found freedom of enterprise (26-7).

Some of Hughes' hypotheses seem to be in opposition to statements made by Nashe, Harvey, Meres and Chettle regarding Greene's life and death.<sup>9</sup> One also wonders whether the 'love pamphlets' for which Greene was so famous would necessarily be classified as 'aristocratic.' In fact, Richardson remarked that Greene 'wrote a number of racy low-life pamphlets' (178). But, in fairness, detailed analysis of Hughes' efforts should await their final publication.

### Conclusions

Is it possible that *Groatsworth* is a literary biography of William Shakspeare of Stratford? The first hurdle is obvious. It has to be decided whether the 'upstart crow' is intended to characterize Shakspeare, Alleyn, or someone else. The idea of an actor (other than Shakspeare) has been around for quite some time, but it is difficult to ignore the 'tyger's hart' reference in conjunction with 'Shake-scene.' If the 'crow' was an actor other than Shakspeare, then we have no authorship issue involved with *Groatsworth*. But it would still have significant ramifications for the Stratfordians in light of their continued claim that *Groatsworth* demonstrates Shakspeare's importance as an actor and writer in 1592.

However, if it is assumed that the 'upstart crow' *is* Shakspeare of Stratford, then the implications are profound for Stratfordians and anti-Stratfordians. It is important to note that the references to the three playmakers in the part-two warning were metaphors for purposes of specific identification, so it is logical that 'Shake-scene' and 'tyger's heart' are also metaphorical identifiers. One can argue that these two identifiers *could* represent another actor that shook the stage and acted in *3 Henry VI*, but their association with Shakspeare has to be considered a more direct metaphorical possibility.

Additionally, there would seem to be little doubt that Greene intended the 'gentleman' in the first part, and probably the ant in the third part, to be characterizations of the 'upstart crow.' Otherwise, why would these three apparent autobiographical stories be grouped together? The first and third parts echo the sentiment ascribed to the 'crow,' the 'Iohannes factotum.' The problem here for orthodoxy is that the portrait painted by Greene is that of a miserly, plagiarizing pretender.

What is implicitly stated in Chettle's apology is a real problem for Stratfordians because of their continued claim that it is directed to Shakespeare, the author-actor. But it has been conclusively recognized by a number of orthodox scholars, some mentioned here, that this is not the case. The biographers of Shakespeare who have stated, and continue to state otherwise, should be challenged at every instance by citing Erne's important work, for example. The continuation of biographers to use Chettle's apology to boost the reputation of Shakespeare is simply foolish deception.

But Dixon, Lester, Anderson and Price just may be right: *Groatsworth* is about Shakspeare, and it marks him as a plagiarist, usurer, entrepreneur and likely front man play-broker.<sup>10</sup> As it turns out, however, it really doesn't make any difference whether *Groatsworth* was written by Greene, Chettle or more likely a combination of the two—or anyone else for that matter, even Oxford. The work stands by itself and the meaning is of no less importance regardless of authorship. Here, for a rare instance, Oxfordians can agree with Stratfordians: The 'upstart crow' and 'Shake-scene' references do signify Shakspeare; therefore *Groatsworth* may be the only literary biography we have of William Shakspeare of Stratford upon Avon, written during his lifetime.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A student who receives some form of assistance such as meals, lower fees or lodging during his or her period of study, in some cases in return for doing a defined job.

<sup>2</sup> D. Allen Carroll has given a thorough examination of the different plays that the 'gentleman stranger' speaks about: the 'morrall' dramas he has 'pende' and others he was involved with. Carroll speculates about several of the plays mentioned in *Groatsworth*, identifying the *Twelve labors of Hercules* with the greatest certainty (noted also by Collier in *Henslowe's Diary*). Carroll wished to identify these different works, 'not to reflect the experience of any specific individual but rather dramatic activity in general of the seventies and early eighties.' He covers all the bases when he states: 'The Player-Patron thus seems to be fictional...But it just may be that the portrait contains traces of someone specific, or several individuals, whom we cannot now identify.' Carroll adds:

The case for Shakespeare, which involves the idea of him as a factotum or business manager for his company, has been offered a number of times, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and little success: by an anonymous author in *The New Monthly Magazine* (in 1840), by Richard Simpson, Alden Brooks, M.C. Bradbrook, and A.L.Rowse. But Shakespeare cannot have had anything like the long association with acting suggested in the profile (3,4).

We are asked to believe that without significant preliminary development, Shakspeare ascended London's acting-playwriting scene, meteoric-fashion, producing the mature and fashionable *Venus and Adonis* the next year, and *Lucrece* the year afterwards along with *The Comedy of Errors*, 1-3 *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Richard III*.

<sup>3</sup> A statement by Peter Moore, reported by Malim, that Greene's *Groatsworth* is a forgery by Chettle was founded in part on the misinformation given in Greene's letter to his wife and child. Moore states that Greene's child was, in fact, 'Fortunatus', an illegitimate child by his mistress, not his wife. This is based on Gabriel Harvey's comment in his 1592 *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets*

...his keeping of the foresaid Ball's sister, a sorry ragged quean, of whom he had his base son Infortunatus Greene, his forsaking of his own wife, too honest for such a husband...

Plus John Payne Collier's 1846 discovery of a burial record in Shoreditch of one 'Fortunatus Greene', August 12, 1593 as reported by Crupi (9, 149).

This scenario is also thoroughly discussed in Carroll's 1994 book (Chettle, 10-11). Even assuming this is all true, it certainly does not rule out Greene having had another previous son by his lawful wife. As a matter of fact, some biographies of Greene say he deserted his wife and newborn child when he went to London, although this is not documented. What this 'Fortunatus discovery' does, however, is give further support to Harvey's comments on Greene's life and death.

<sup>4</sup> 'We have evidence in the theatrical Diary kept by Alleyn's father-in-law, Philip Henslowe, preserved among the Alleyn's papers, of a copious playwriting activity among the actors of the Lord Admiral's Men, who seem to have been a crew of scribbling actors, foremost of whom was Edward Alleyn himself.' Wraight goes on to say: 'Since the play *Tambercam* is certainly by Alleyn, and is so acknowledged by the *Dictionary of National Biography*, there is no reason to doubt that the [plays] he sold were all his own works' (35). Henslowe (227) records: (Henslowe, xxvi).

Pd unto my sonne, E. Alleyn, at the apoyntment of the company, for his boocke of Tambercam, the 2 of octobr 1602, the some of .....XXXXs

But Collier thought that Alleyn was paid for revising older plays to make them more useful, not for writing new plays:

The sum generally paid for putting an old play on the stage, on its revival, with such changes as seemed necessary, was 2 £ [40 s], and this sum Edward Alleyn obtained for Tambercam (of which he was not the author, as some have supposed) ... (xxvi)

<sup>5</sup> Some further explanation of *Vertues Common-wealth* is needed. Although Henry Crosse has not been identified, what can be certain is that he had Puritanical ideals. The original quarto consisted of 155 pages. The first 49 were about 'Vertue', the remaining 106 dealt with 'Vice' where every occupation or activity from lawyers to wearing make-up is chastised. Poets were treated more leniently but players and playwrights harshly so. Twelve pages (111-123) were devoted to plays and players, from whence these previous quotations were taken. Whereas Crosse obviously took phrases and intent of meaning from *Groatsworth*, his goal was to chastise actors and playwrights and warn the public about the evils of players, not just to warn playwrights against actor-playwrights. He related all the 'vices' to the harm they cause the 'Common-wealth'. To understand the author's intentions requires studying the *entire* book, not just looking at a few selected sentences.

<sup>6</sup> Collier thought that Alleyn was only paid for *revising* older plays to make them more useful, not for writing new plays as noted in end note 4 above.

<sup>7</sup> I have heard it said by some Oxfordians that 'tiger' was a name given to child actors during Elizabethan times; but I have not seen the documentation and the closest definition the *OED* gives is:

A smartly-liveried boy acting as groom or footman; formerly often provided with standing-room on a small platform behind the carriage, and a strap to hold on by; less strictly, an outdoor boy-servant. And the earliest date listed is 1817.

<sup>8</sup> Much effort has been put into investigating the life and parentage of Greene, especially by the work of Brenda Richardson (160-180). Tracing back records in Norwich (where in *Groatsworth* Greene infers he was born) Richardson found two Robert Greenes, suitable for the period of time required. One was a saddler who did have two sons, and the other an innkeeper who only mentions one son in his will- perhaps agreeing with *Groatsworth* in the disinheritance of our writer. Carroll, however, reports that the life of Greene, as interpreted from *Groatsworth*, more consistently conforms to the life of Thomas Lodge (Chettle, 9).

<sup>9</sup> Nashe refers to Greene in his angry rebuttal of his authorship of *Groatsworth* (reported above) as well as in his 1593 *Four Letters Confuted*. Harvey's pertinent comments are also listed above in end note 2 from his *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets*. Meres also reported on Greene's death in his *Palladis Tamia* of 1598 where he stated Greene died of a surfeit of pickled herring and rheinish wine, repeating what Harvey had said in his *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets*. Also, it should be mentioned that Greene's book, *Planetomachia*, was dedicated to Leicester and there is a record of Leicester's payment to Greene for 'a book.'

<sup>10</sup> The history of the issue of 'plagiarism' associated with *Groatsworth* is most interesting and has been thoroughly reviewed by the eminent Oxfordian, Gwynneth Bowen (1-8). She notes that the 'tyger's hart' allusion to *True Tragedy* was first noted by Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1766 and that other borrowing took place on a 'colossal' scale; but it was thought at that time the two 'Contention' plays (*The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster* and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of Yorke*) were both written by Shakespeare (as noted earlier by Dr. Samuel Johnson) and were just poor copies of the *Henry VI* trilogy. In 1790, Edmund Malone disagreed saying that 2 and 3 *Henry VI* were not 'originals' by Shakespeare but were his revisions of the two anonymous Contention plays. He apparently was the first to claim that Greene was accusing Shakespeare of plagiarism with the 'upstart crow' passage. Malone's theory apparently lasted 140 years until, as pointed out by Bowen, a 1929 book by Peter Alexander (*Shakespeare's Henry VI and Richard III*) changed opinions, reverting back to essentially what Johnson had said, the exception being that the 'upstart crow' was the result of Greene's jealousy and 'beautified with our feathers' referred to all the players. One can't help but wonder if the publication of Looney's work in 1920 might have influenced this change of orthodox opinion.

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## Peter R. Moore

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