# Christopher Hatton, Edward Dyer and the "First Adonis"

Patrick Buckridge

Sir Christopher Hatton--Captain of the Queen's Guard, Vice-Chamberlain, Knight of the Garter, Privy Councillor, and Lord Chancellor of England--was, together with Burghley, Leicester and Walsingham, one of the four most influential statesmen of Elizabeth's reign. Leicester aside, he was also the Queen's most loyal and long-term personal favorite, and probably her lover. The relative lack of interest in him by historians and biographers is therefore a little surprising. Until 1944 there was no modern full-length biography of him, and there has been none since. The reason for this inattention, as suggested by that sole biographer, Eric St. John Brooks, is that Hatton has traditionally been thought of as a lightweight and a dandy. The first of these epithets, at least, is open to dispute: Brooks makes a strong case for recognizing the weight and scope of his public performance, first as Vice-Chamberlain in controlling the Parliament on the Queen's behalf, and in exposing and prosecuting Catholic plots and Puritan sedition alike; and later, as Lord Chancellor, in preparing the nation and Parliament for the coming of the Armada.[1]

Hatton, then, was no political lightweight; but he probably was a bit of a dandy. The legend--and there is no reason to doubt its essential truth--is that Christopher Hatton danced his way into the Queen's heart in January of 1562.

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The occasion was a mask presented at Court by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple, of whom the 21-year old Hatton was one, and Elizabeth was so taken with his handsome face and graceful figure that she made him one of her own Gentlemen Pensioners and a close favourite. The sneering but essentially accurate observation by his enemy Sir Thomas Perrot that Hatton 'came to Court by the galliard' was first reported by Perrot's son-in-law Robert Naunton in his *Fragmenta Regalia* in the early seventeenth century, and passed down to nineteeth-century historians like Froude and Lord Campbell in whose hands he became the effeminate clothes-horse, of whom Lytton Strachey would say, wittily but untruthfully, 'Hatton danced, and that is all we know of him'.[2]

He died in 1591 at the age of 51, apparently of acute cystitis, and his death was the occasion for an unusually large number of eulogies over the next few years, including one by Robert Greene called "A Maiden's Dream upon the Death of my late Lord Chancellor." Most of these stressed his gentle and courteous manners, his amiability, integrity and compassion. Some look back to his former beauty of face and figure, and to his youthful prowess in the hunt and the tiltyard, in both of which he excelled as much as he did on the dance floor. His heraldic animal, or 'cognizant', was the hin--Drake named his flagship (the 'Golden Hind') in honour of it--and it surmounted the sumptuous monument erected for him in the old St Paul's, which was by Sir William Dugdale.

Hatton's literary and dramatic interests both before and after he came to Court were not insignificant. While at the Inner Temple he took part in plays and masks, including, almost certainly, a part in *Gorboduc*, the play that preceded the great mask of January 1562 where he caught the Queen's eye. He even did a bit of writing himself. The tragedy of *Tancred and Gismund*, acted before the Queen in 1566 or 1567, and not published until 1591, was the joint effort of five authors, one for each Act, and the fourth Act is signed Christopher Hatton.

Further literary endeavours, if there were any, are less certain. He may have contributed a group of about twenty poems and translations to that peculiar anonymous anthology of 1573, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*. These poems are linked to Hatton by a particular Latin motto, or 'posy', *Si fortunatus infoelix* ('If fortunate, unhappy'); which is clearly stated by Gabriel Harvey, in his marginalia, to be 'lately the posie of Sir Christopher Hatton'.[3] His actual authorship of these poems must, in my view, remain a distinct possibility, despite Prouty's insistence that the whole volume be attributed to George Gascoigne--as was done by the publisher three years later in a revised edition--and despite the efforts of B.M.Ward and others to assign all or most of the volume to Edward De Vere.[4]

The Hatton posy, 'Fortunatus infoelix', is also the key to the dancing chancellor's one reputed appearance in the Shakespeare canon. When Malvolio, in *Twelfth Night*, reads the forged letter, ostensibly from Olivia, the signature

is given as 'The Fortunate Unhappy' (a direct translation of the Hatton posy), and this has been taken by Oxfordians, understandably enough, as an indication that Malvolio was modelled on Hatton. The primary evidence of the posy is supposedly reinforced by:

- Sir Toby's epithet 'sheep-biter' applied to Malvolio earlier in the same scene (II v 5). 'Sheep' and 'mutton' (or 'mouton') were Elizabeth's favourite nicknames for Hatton.

- the known enmity between Oxford and Hatton, as evidenced in Hatton's letter to the Queen, of which more later;

- the image of Hatton (in some circles) as a fop and a dandy;

- his image as a social upstart among aristocratic courtiers, as illustrated by Naunton's description of his career as that of 'a mere vegetable of the Court that sprang up at night and sank again at his noon';[5]

- the supposed presumptuousness and suspected impropriety of his relationship with the Queen, as evidenced by Mary Stuart's letter to Elizabeth (intercepted by Burghley); and by his own highly charged letters to her in the early 1570s.

- the external evidence of Francis Peck in the eighteenth century: that he had seen a manuscript of 'a pleasant conceit of Vere, Earl of Oxford, discontented at the rising of a mean gentleman in the English court, *circa* 1580.'[6]

This is an imposing list of reasons, but it is easy to overlook the lack of a single clincher among them. Peck's lost manuscript, if it was indeed a Court interlude of some kind, may well have had nothing to do with *Twelfth Night*. Indeed, if Peck's 'mean gentleman' had resembled Malvolio one might have expected Peck, writing in the eighteenth century, to mention the resembalnce. Secondly, the hoaxing letter in *Twelfth Night* is not written by Malvolio, but to him: the posy should thus logically be associated not with the receiver of the letter but with its real or ostensible writer - that is, with Maria or Olivia, neither of whom makes much of a Hatton figure.

Similarly, the 'sheep-biter' epithet does not equate at all easily with 'sheep' (even 'sheep-who-bites', *pace* Ogburn ).[7] A 'sheep-biter', according to the OED, is primarily 'a dog that bites or worries sheep', with several secondary meanings, one of which, 'a malicious or censorious fellow' fits Malvolio well enough.[8] If the 'sheep' element in the epithet does, or did at some stage in the play's evolution, contain a cryptic allusion to Hatton, it would

more logically have been a reference to somebody who was an enemy, or at least a nuisance, to Hatton (as the dog is to the sheep) than to Hatton himself.

If, for the sake of argument, the name of Edward De Vere were proposed in place of Christopher Hatton as the original for Malvolio, it would at least highlight the reversibility of several of the Oxfordian arguments about Malvolio: the known enmity between the two men, their suspected sexual intentions towards the Queen, and the image of the affected fop. All of these can support an Oxford allusion as strongly as a Hatton one. Gabriel Harvey's "Mirror of Tuscanism" provides a well-known description of Oxford's affected foppery on his return from Italy in 1575, and this description provides at least as plausible an external referent for Malvolio's sartorial aberration as anything in Hatton's reputation.

> His cringing side neck, eyes glancing, fisnamie smirking,
> With forefinger kiss, and brave embrace to the footward.
> Large-bellied Kodpeasd doublet, unkodpeasd half hose,
> Straight to the dock like a shirt, and close to the britch like a diveling.
> A little Apish flat, couched fast to the pate like an oyster,
> French Camarick ruffs, deep with a whiteness starched to the purpose.
> . . . . .
> Delicate in speech, quaint in array, conceited in all points,
> In Courtly guiles, a passing singular odd man,
> For Gallants a brave Mirror, a Primrose of Honour.[9]

There are, of course, many ways in which Malvolio is patently not Oxford: Malvolio is a servant and a stickler for moral proprieties, and Oxford was neither. But no more was Hatton. And if the meaning of Malvolio's name--'I wish [thee] ill' --were to be applied to a real individual at Elizabeth's court there were undoubtedly many there who would have thought (rightly or wrongly) that it fitted the haughty Oxford better than the courteous Hatton.

But whatever person or persons may have been glanced at, and recognised, in some version of *Twelfth Night* performed at Court in the late 1570s, it is a safe bet that these allusions and the topics that gave them their point most obviously at that time the topic of the French marriage - would have been long-forgotten by the Middle Temple audience on the occasion of the first recorded performance of Twelfth Night, in 1602. For that performance, different topical themes and different personal allusions would very likely have been in play.

The process by which such changes come about has been called 'serial composition', which refers to the writing, over a period of time, of a series of versions of a play for a succession of different audiences and occasions. Such versions may be done by the same or different hands, but each is complete in itself and needs to be accorded its own textual integrity. Leah S. Marcus, Steven Urkowitz and other orthodox scholars have applied the principle to some of the

Shakespearean 'bad quartos' with interesting results: indeed, the unintentionally heterodox implications of their work have yet to be exploited.[10] In the present context, given the chronology of publication, it is clear that if Hatton, who died in 1591, is to be found anywhere in the Shakespeare canon, it can only be as a residual allusion from an earlier version of one or other of the Shakespeare texts we now have. If not in Twelfth Night, where else might he be found?

One intriguing possibility, I want to argue, is in *Venus and Adonis*. Serial composition, after all, could occur with poems as well as plays, and it could and did occur with manuscript as well as printed publications.[11] The notion that Shakespeare's first long poem might be a product of serial composition has been around in semi-orthodox circles since 1930 when it was argued at length by H.T.S. Forrest, a scholarly civil servant in the British Raj, in a book called *The Original 'Venus and Adonis'*.[12]

Forrest had written a book some years earlier on the Sonnets, arguing that they were written by five different authors - Shakespeare and four others - on themes supplied by Southampton in a long-running sonnet competition. His views on *Venus and Adonis* were decidedly less radical. His argument was simply that Shakespeare wrote and circulated, in MS, a complete version of *Venus and Adonis* that was less than two-thirds of its published length (127 stanzas as against 199), and that the 72 additional stanzas were interpolated by a different hand - probably Southampton's, he hints; but he does not pursue the identity of the interpolator, nor does he speculate about historical parallels or allusions. He is interested only in establishing serial composition by two hands, and he purports to do this by identifying stanzas containing a device he calls 'duplication'. By this he means multiple uses of the same conceit, where one instance of it, for example, can be shown to be illogically or incongruously placed in the poem. Forrest takes these to be the inferior contributions of at least one reviser other than Shakespeare whom he regards as the original author.

A fair number of Forrest's particular judgments of incongruity and inferiority can be dismissed as narrow and ahistorical - as an unfashionable intolerance of tonal ambiguity, in some cases; in others as ignorance of the importance of standard devices of repetition (like anaphora) in Renaissance rhetoric and poetry. But even allowing for this, there is still a substantial remainder of cited instances from the poem where it is difficult to disagree that the duplications do seem more like elaborated imitations of conceits that were already there, than original articulations of a basic idea. Forrest's most persuasive examples are those that draw attention to the placement of a more complex or ironic form of a particular conceit ahead of its simpler form in the narrative sequence. This version of duplication in particular - and Forrest finds several instances of it - does suggest a piecemeal 'padding out' of a completed poem.[13]

There is, however, no equivalent cogency in Forrest's insistence that the revisions were carried out by a different hand. Alden Brooks asserts that 'the verses [Forrest] designates as interpolations, though harmful to sequence and unity, are in themselves of the same excellence as the rest'.[14] I am less certain of this than Brooks, I must admit, but in any case a difference in literary quality--even if it were clearly demonstrable--is not proof of dual authorship: the greatest authors can and do have lapses. Nor, for that matter, need we share Forrest's confidence that the poem as we have it can be 'unrevised' merely by subtracting the interpolated stanzas. Other, much more subtle modifications may have been involved, especially if the reviser and the original author were the same person.

Brooks's view, a variant of Forrest's, is that *Venus and Adonis* was revised at least once, and by the original author (who he believes was Edward Dyer) rather than by a second hand. An assumption of the serial composition model, whether it involves one, two or more authors, is that the successive revisions are carried out for mainly external reasons, having to do with changing economic motives and opportunities on the part of those involved, or changing sets of contemporary, extra-textual referents. In the case of *Venus and Adonis* both factors may have come into play; and although the economic factors can only be effectively considered in relation to a particular assumed author, some progress is possible on the extra-textual referents while suspending judgment, for the moment, as to specific candidates.

Orthodox commentators are generally reluctant to endorse contemporary allusions in Shakespeare's poems or plays, but acknowledging a link between Adonis and the young Earl of Southampton is something of an exception. The poem's explicit Dedication to Southampton, and the marked similarities between many of the descriptions of Adonis in the poem and existing portraits and descriptions of Henry Wriothesley make this one of the least resistible, least contentious equations in Elizabethan literature.

A few have taken the logical next step: if Adonis alludes to Southampton, then Venus must surely allude to Elizabeth Vere,[15] Oxford's eldest daughter, to whom Southampton was engaged from about 1590--with increasing reluctance, it would appear, from his determination to extract himself from the engagement despite an enormous financial penalty.[16] The Ovidian story of an attractive and physically active young man who is vigorously pursued by a somewhat predatory woman, whose amorous interest in him he does not reciprocate and whom he finally rejects, obviously lent itself to a satirical rendering of Southampton's dilemma at the time of its resolution, or soon afterwards, in 1592/3.

The match between the two situations is not perfect; such analogies seldom are. In the poem Venus is a Queen, beautiful, and somewhat older than the young man, and Elizabeth Vere was apparently none of these things. Further-

more, in the undisputed source for the basic narrative, the tale of Venus and Adonis in Book Ten of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Adonis, though beautiful, is first and foremost a great hunter, who, as Bullough puts it, 'shows no great bashfulness'--in fact none at all--in response to Venus' determined wooing. The theme of Adonis's resistance to love comes from the tale of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in Book Four. Here, in the vain but vigorous wooing of the boy-traveller Hermaphroditus by the wood-nymph Salmacis, we find all the most memorable details of the one-sided encounters in Shakespeare's poem: his blushes, the begging and refusal of a kiss, her imprisoning embraces, his continued reluctance. A small but important contribution is also made by the story of Echo and Narcissus in Book Three, namely the self-love with which Venus charges Adonis.[17]

I rehearse these agreed facts about the Ovidian sources of *Venus and Adonis* in order, firstly, to note that a spread of three distinct sources for one mythological poem is unusual, and secondly, to briefly entertain the possibility that if *Venus and Adonis* was indeed serially composed, the seriality of the process may be reflected in a successive rather than simultaneous appropriation of the three Ovidian sources (or at least of the last two together). That is, the stories of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, and of Echo and Narcissus, may have been blended in to produce a new version of an old poem that was being revised to reflect a new historical situation.

What 'meta-textual' encouragements might there be for seeing the poem in this way, as the end-product of one or more revisions. There is one encouragement ready to hand in the much-masticated Dedication of which I merely observe that the poet's famous vow that if the poem is disapproved he will 'never after ear so barren a land' is explicitly a metaphor of repeated cultivation --cultivation even to exhaustion and sterility--of the one plot of earth. (Later I shall have something to say about 'the first heir of my Invention'.) The other encouragement, admittedly dependent on the assumption that the author of the poem and the author of the *Sonnets* were one and the same, is all those sonnet conceits--goring his own thoughts, selling cheap what is most dear, dressing old words new, spending again what is already spent--that hint at the revision of old work as a central part of this particular poet's everyday experience.

If the 'Southampton version' of the poem is the last of a series, the nature and address of the preceding version or versions is of some interest. Oxfordians, who tend to accept a principle of single-author serial composition, are awkwardly placed on this. Some, following Ogburn, seem content to see the poem as an updating of a much earlier poem by Oxford in which he figured as Adonis to the Queen's Venus. But who is now (in 1593) Venus to Southampton's Adonis? Ogburn is reluctant to say, perhaps because there are really only two possibilities, neither of them credible.

Venus is either the Queen, exactly forty years older than Southampton, and approaching sixty years of age in the early 1590s. Her relationship with the young Essex notwithstanding, this is hardly a believable identification within this version. The other possibility is that Venus stands for Elizabeth Vere, if only by inescapable inference from the identification of Adonis with Southampton. But this is virtually impossible if the author is Oxford, since it would mean he had not only written but seen published a poem that would most naturally be read at the time of publication as exposing and ridiculing his own daughter's unreciprocated lust for a well-known young aristocrat. Whatever one thinks of Oxford--and reading his letters it is hard to feel unqualified admiration for him--he was surely not that much of a monster!

What this has to mean, surely, is that Edward De Vere did not write--could not have written--the 1593 'Southampton version' of *Venus and Adonis*. The standard Oxfordian hypothesis for an earlier version reflecting the Queen's supposed seduction of Oxford in the 1570s should probably then also fall by the wayside, since it would entail a highly improbable 'takeover' by a reviser hostile to the dignity of Oxford's own family.

Leaving aside the authorship question as such for a moment longer, what alternative historical analogies are there that might provide referents and occasions for the poem in its (putative) earlier versions? Or to put the question more directly, who was the earlier 'real-life' Adonis if it was not Oxford? One likely candidate, clearly visible once the disparaging Oxfordian spectacles are off, is Sir Philip Sidney. There are several Adonis allusions in *Astrophel*, the small volume of elegies Spenser compiled after Sidney's death, and there is a long reproach to Death here in the verses Spenser attributes to the Countess of Pembroke which parallels Venus's reproach to Death in *Venus and Adonis* (931ff.).[18]

Richard Lester, in the latest issue of *The Elizabethan Review*, proposes a different kind of link with Sir Philip Sidney. Writing from Oxfordian premises, he argues that *Venus and Adonis*, though composed much earlier, was published when it was as a kind of 'answer' to Sidney's *Arcadia*, first published in 1590, and written a decade earlier.[19] It is perhaps difficult to see how a 1200 line jeu d'esprit like *Venus and Adonis* could be seen as effectively 'capping' the half-million words of the published *Arcadia*, but Lester points to some interesting similarities between the two Dedications: similarities he interprets as ironic on Oxford's part, but which might be more naturally explained as a gesture of common purpose between Sidney and the close friend and fellow-poet with whom, in the early 1580s, he shared an ambition to refine and enrich the language of English poetry. Both works, in their very different ways, can be seen as contributions to such a project.

The friend and fellow-poet was Edward Dyer, and if a case could be made for seeing Dyer as the author (and reviser) responsible for the published *Venus*

*and Adonis*, it might then be possible to see Sidney, on the basis of the allusions and analogies just mentioned, as the Adonis of a postulated earlier version of the poem. Can such a case be made for Dyer as author? It would surprise most people to know that he has a more straightforwardly documentary claim to *Venus and Adonis* than any candidate other than William Shakspere (who has the title page and the Dedication). This claim rests on Gabriel Harvey's cryptically framed quotation of the poem's two-line epigraph from Ovid's *Amores* --lines not known to be used elsewhere in Elizabethan literature--in a marginal annotation to his copy of Speght's *Chaucer* (acquired in 1598). Harvey annotation reads:

> *Vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo*
> *Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua*
> quoth Sir Edward Dyer, between jest and earnest.[20]

Not conclusive evidence, certainly, but perhaps sufficient, to justify adopting Dyer's authorship of *Venus and Adonis* as at least a working hypothesis.

Alden Brooks, the champion of the Dyer claim, speculated that Sidney was the original Shakespearean Adonis in the limited sense that Venus's lament for the slain youth had its origin in Dyer's elegy for Sidney. The lament became, on this theory, one of the building blocks of the full poem published in 1593. Brooks hypothesised further, however, that the narrative core of the poem originated in a very different kind of work, a satire on the Queen's incorrigible wooing of young courtiers (a regal habit of which the young Edward Dyer may himself have had personal experience).

Brooks's reasons for suspecting that Elizabeth's dealings with Dyer might at some stage - perhaps on just one awkward occasion - have resembled those of an amorous Venus with a reluctant Adonis are at least as cogent as those for suspecting any such dealings between Elizabeth and Oxford. The same much-quoted source that provides evidence of the Queen's attraction to Oxford - Gilbert Talbot's gossipy letter to his father, the Earl of Shrewsbury, in May 1573 - also gives us a rather fuller account of what was clearly, at least at this point in time, a longer and more complex personal relationship, that of the Queen with Dyer. Talbot's story begins with Elizabeth's concern for Hatton, who had been seriously ill with a kidney complaint:

> The Queen goeth almost every day to see how he doth. Now there is devices, chiefly of Leicester, as I suppose, and not without Burghley's knowledge, how to make Mr. Edward Dyer as great as ever was Hatton; for now in this time of Hatton's sickness the time is convenient. It is brought thus to pass: Dyer lately was sick with a consumption, in great danger; and as your Lordship knoweth, he hath been in displeasure these

> two years. It was made the Queen believe that his sickness came because of the continuance of her displeasure towards him, that unless she forgave him he was not like to recover. And hereupon her Majesty hath forgiven him, and sent unto him a very comfortable message; now he is recovered again and this is the beginning of this device. These things I learn from such young fellows as myself.[21]

It is difficult to know which of the half-dozen actors we learn most about from this remarkable vignette; but our focus for the moment is on Dyer, and what this letter tells us is that two years after incurring the Queen's 'displeasure' he was still remembered by her with enough affection to be restored to her favour on the basis of a transparently flattering lie. Just what he did to displease Elizabeth is unknown, but it is a fact that exactly three years earlier, in May 1570, she suddenly gave Dyer, who was then a young courtier employed as Leicester's secretary, the stewardship of Woodstock, her favourite rural retreat, where she could enjoy his company and attendance in some semblance of privacy. To suggest that something slightly injurious to the Queen's vanity, but not entirely unforgivable, may have occurred between them at Woodstock in the following year, is of course mere speculation, but not as rank or as free-floating as some.

It is worth noting at this point that Hatton's biographer, Eric Brooks, and at least one other scholar, Kenneth Thorpe Rowe, have argued that an 86-line poem called 'Amarillis', attributed to Edward Dyer, and praised by Gabriel Harvey, in which two friends are smitten with love for the same woman, is based on precisely the relationships and strategems described in the Talbot letter.[22] On this reading of the poem, Amarillis is the Queen, and Coridon and Charamell, her two suitors, are Dyer and Hatton respectively. There can be no doubt that the poem does treat of real events and people, since the poet says so in the penultimate couplet:

> Well I wott what here is ment, and though a talle it seme,
> Shadows have ther bodies by, and so of this esteme.[23]

Dyer's biographer, Ralph Sargent, believed that the romantic triangle consisted of Dyer, Philip Sidney, and Mary Sidney, but aginst this Rowe makes a detailed and powerful case for Hatton and Elizabeth as Charamell and Amarillis. Alden Brooks follows Sargent, but confuses the issue by asserting that Dyer's 'Amarillis' is lost, and that the extant poem of that name is a 'scurrilous caricature' of it by another poet altogether, probably John Lyly.[24] There appears to be no basis for this claim other than Brooks's reluctance to accept that Dyer would have dealt, even in pastoral mode, with the reputedly incestuous passion of Philip and Mary--something which, as Rowe argues, the poem does not do.

One problem with seeing Dyer's own experience with the Queen as the referent for an early version of *Venus and Adonis* , as Alden Brooks seems disposed to do, is the enormous risk--and for that matter the impropriety and discourtesy--involved in committing such revelations even to manuscript. As it happens, Dyer was not averse to taking some public risks with Elizabeth's temper,[25] and even--as we'll see in a moment--some private liberties with her reputation; but not to that degree. A socially and ethically plausible conjecture about this 'ur-*Venus and Adonis*' needs to incorporate culturally credible propositions about what the situation was to which the poem was alluding, and about why and for whose benefit the allusion was being made.

Such propositions--culturally credible ones--do seem to me to arise from the situation at Elizabeth's Court in 1572/3, broadly the time-frame to which the Talbot letter refers. In October of 1572 Edward Dyer wrote an extraordinary letter to Christopher Hatton in which he enlarged, tactfully, acutely and candidly, upon an earlier response he had made, in person, to Hatton's request for advice on the matter of how best to counter the Queen's evident attraction to the Earl of Oxford. The letter is too long to quote in full. Suffice it to say that it shows considerable hostility towards Oxford on Hatton's behalf, but advises Hatton, sympathetically but firmly, against any attempt to 'have it out' with the Queen.

> That the Queen will mislike such a course this is my reason. She will imagine that you goe about to imprison her Fancye, & to wrapp her grace within your disposicion.[26]

Hatton's best course of action, Dyer assures him, is 'to use your suit towards her Majesty in words, behaviour and deed to acknowledge your duty; declaring the reverence which in your heart you bear, and never seeming deeply to condemn her frailties, but rather joyfully to commend such things as should be in her as if they were in her indeed; hating my Lord of [Oxford][27] in the Queen's understanding for affection's sake and blaming him openly for seeking the Queen's favour.'

Elizabeth's 'frailties' have already been frankly if euphemistically specified in the second paragraph:

> First of all, you must consider with whom you have to deale, & what wee be towards her, who though she does descend uery much in her Sex as a woman, yet wee may not forgett her Place, & the nature of it as our Sovraigne.

And this even though, as he goes on to say--with perhaps the most cryptic of allusions to his own experience with her--'a man of secrett cause knowne to

himselfe might in common reason challenge it'.

Elizabeth's aggressive and indiscreet sexuality in this fourth decade of her life had been noted by others with much less tact and goodwill than Dyer displays in his letter. Archbishop Parker was scandalised by reports of her behaviour with Leicester and Hatton;[28] and Mary Stuart's intercepted letter to Elizabeth, though written in 1584, was retailing gossip from the Countess of Shrewsbury, her jailer, that may well have been a dozen years old. Mary's admittedly second-hand version of the Queen's behaviour is interesting in its emphasis on her amorous assertiveness with Hatton, and his embarrassed retreat from her public advances:

> Quant au dict Haton, que vous le couriez a force, faisant si publiquement paroÓtre l'amour que lui portiez, qui [sic: que?] lui mesmes estoit contreint de s'en retirer...'[29]

The forty-year old Elizabeth that comes into view in descriptions like these is certainly a believable Venus, and this is hardly a new or surprising identification. But the Adonis to her Venus, in this case, is neither Oxford, nor Sidney, nor Edward Dyer, but the 32-year old Christopher Hatton.

Hatton as the 'ur-Adonis' of the Shakespearean poem? Standing in the way of it are three things: the centuries of mild contempt to which historians have subjected him; several decades of Oxfordian hostility arising from the undoubted enmity between Oxford and Hatton; and the sexually ambivalent image of a reluctant, self-regarding Adonis, influenced in this respect more by Ovid's Hermaphroditus and Narcissus than his Adonis, who is beautiful like them, but also robust, manly and at worst a bit offhand with the lady reminiscent, again using Dyer's words, of the 'rugged dealing' the Queen had put up with from Hatton 'untill she had what she fancyed'.[30]

One problem that might be solved by seeing Hatton as the first Adonis is the emblematic role of the boar in the poem. Oxfordians have noted, as well they might, that the boar is the De Vere family crest. But since the boar in Venus and Adonis is the villain of the piece, not the hero, it is surely difficult to interpret this fact otherwise than as an argument against Oxford's authorship, and against identifying Adonis with Oxford in an early version of the poem. If on the other hand Adonis stood for Christopher Hatton, then the boar's deadly hostility to Adonis can be read as a straightforward figure for Oxford's known (and reciprocated) hostility to Hatton. Indeed, one of Hatton's letters to the Queen from this period strongly supports such a reading. Written during the same period of ill health to which the Talbot letter refers,[31] the letter expresses Hatton's gratitude for a favour the Queen has sent him--a 'branch of the sweetest bush':

> It is a gracious favour, most dear and welcome unto me. Reserve it to the Sheep, he hath no tooth to bite; where the Boar's tusk [or 'tush'] may both rase and tear.[32]

The sexual innuendos of bush, tooth and tusk are intriguing, but even without them, there can be no doubt that, in the letter, the sheep is Hatton and the boar is Oxford. The latter equation clearly supports the same identification of Oxford with the boar in the poem, and may even suggest why the author chose as his narrative vehicle an Ovidian tale with a dangerous boar in it.

What we do not find, at least in the published poem, is a sheep. But the Sheep was the Queen's private nickname for Hatton, not a heraldic device. Presumably it was a playful alternative to 'mutton', which may have arisen, in turn, from its phonetic similarity to Hatton. And there is, as it happens, another near-homonym for 'Hatton' in the poem, namely 'Adon', the metrically shortened form of 'Adonis', which is used twice (ll. 769, 1070).[33] One would not want to stake an argument on the resemblance of Hatton to Adon, but it might have been one more reason for the author to choose the story he chose in order to write about his friend's dilemma at Court.

But for whose eyes, and for what reason? If Edward Dyer did write an early version of *Venus and Adonis*, with the Queen and Hatton as the eponymous lovers and the Earl of Oxford as the ruthless boar set upon destroying their idyll, he can only have done it as a witty warning to Hatton himself, a warning in the same vein as his letter, but in a different mode. The substance of the warning, in both cases, was; 'Don't pit yourself directly against Oxford. The Queen is infatuated with him and you'll lose'. The poem, however, carries the warning not in the form of positive strategic advice (as the letter does) but as a cautionary tale: Adonis, against strong pleas to the contrary, hunted the boar and was killed by it, to the unending grief of Venus. If Hatton indulges in the same sort of bravado he is likely to end up in the same condition, metaphorically at least, as Adonis did; and the Queen, like Venus, will be unhappy forever.

Is it possible, finally, that there is a reason why it occurred to the author of the 'Southampton version' published in April 1593 to revive and refurbish a poem he had first written for Christopher Hatton twenty years before - perhaps genuinely then 'the first heire of [his] Invention'? In November 1591 Hatton died, and within the next two months as many as five eulogies were published.[34] Perhaps this gave Dyer a chance to offer his own cryptic memorial to an old friend, while at the same time freeing him to publish it in print (and to make some money), knowing that the one person who understood its original meaning--perhaps the only person who had read the earliest version-- could not be embarrassed by it.

NOTES

1. Eric St. John Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton, Queen Elizabeth's Favourite* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), pp.13-22.

2. Quoted. E.S.Brooks, p.13.

3. George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers*, ed. Charles T. Prouty, Vol. 17, University of Missouri Studies No. 2 (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1942), p. 25.

4. That Oxford was the author of some of the poems, Prouty's arguments notwithstanding, seems to me equally probable. Ward spends much effort and ingenuity 'deciphering' the posy 'Meritum petere, grave' as an acrostic of 'Edward De Vere', and Ogburn, Jr. follows him down this dubious path. But the posy 'Ever or never', which is signed to eight of the poems, requires no great ingenuity to connect it to Oxford, though it is notable that these are the poems which are most unequivocally assigned to Gascoigne in the headnotes. Oddly enough, this posy is only to the prose narrative, 'The Adventures of Mr. F. J.', in the revised edition of the anthology, the one entitled *George Gascoigne's Posies*. I have no explanation for this fact, but it does seem, on the face of it, to damage Prouty's and Ward's positions about equally.

5. Sir Robert Naunton, *Fragmenta Regalia*, quoted by E.S.Brooks, p.15.

6. Quoted by Charlton Ogburn Jr., *The Mysterious William Shakespeare: the Myth and the Reality* (McLean, Va.: EPM Publications, 1992), p.386.

7. Ogburn, p.634.

8. See *Twelfth Night*, ed by J.M.Lothian and T.W.Craik. Arden Edition of the *Works of William Shakespeare*. (London: Methuen, 1975), p.62, n.5.

9. Quoted by Ogburn, p.630.

10. Leah S. Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.350, note 8.

11. On 'serial composition' in manuscripts that circulated privately for many years, see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1993).

12. Henry Telford Stonor Forrest, *The Original 'Venus and Adonis'* (London:

The Bodley Head, 1930).

13. A fairly convincing example is Forrest's treatment (pp.22-23) of stanzas 9, 32 and 161, of which he argues 9 and 161 are 'interpolations'.

14. Alden Brooks, *Will Shakspere and the Dyer's Hand* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), pp.108-9.

15. A. Brooks, p.109.

16. Henry Garnett, in a letter dated November 1594 (p.24), says that Southampton had to pay £5,000 'for refusing the Lady Vere'. Cited by A.W. Titherley, *Shakespeare's Identity* (Winchester: Warren & Son, Ltd., Wykeham Press, 1952), 314.

17. Geoffrey Bullough, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), Vol. I, pp.162-163.

18. The Death-chiding passage occurs in 'The Dolefull Lay of Clorinda' (so designated by Spenser), beginning at about line 31: 'What cruell hand of cursed foe unknown/Hath cropt the stalke which bore so faire a flowre?' There is also an explicit Sidney/Adonis analogy in the anonymous 'Mourning Muse of Thestylis' (ll. 128ff.), and in Spenser's own contribution, 'Astrophel', Sidney is described, Adonis-like, as a fierce hunter gored to death by a boar (ll. 115ff.).

19. Richard Lester, 'Why was *Venus and Adonis* published?' *The Elizabethan Review* vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 67-72.

20. Cited by Alden Brooks, *Dyer's Hand*, p.632.

21. Qtd. By Alden Brooks, pp.444-45.

22. E.S. Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, p.94; Kenneth Thorpe Rowe, 'The Love of Sir Philip Sidney for the Countess of Pembroke', *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters* Vol. 25, Part IV (1939), 579-595.

23. Ralph Sargent, *The Life and Lyrics of Sir Edward Dyer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 195.

24. Sargent, pp.67-70; A. Brooks, *Dyer's Hand*, pp.456-7.

25. Sargent (p.131) and A. Brooks (pp.666-667) both allude to Dyer's acerbic

and pointed response to the Queen's playful question to him, 'Sir Edward, what does a man think of when he thinks of Nothing?': 'A woman's promise'. (Elizabeth had promised him financial relief, but had been dissuaded by Burghley).

26. This and subsequent extracts from the letter to Hatton are taken from Sargent's original-spelling transcription (pp.24-26) rather than the modern-spelling versions of Nicolas and Alden Brooks. Nicolas and Brooks, however, both print the entire letter whereas Sargent unaccountably omits about ten lines.

27. The word in the MS (an early 17th century transcription) is either 'Crm' or 'Ctm'. Dyer's (orthodox) biographer Sargent (158, following B.M.Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford,* 1928, p.74) reads it as a scribal misreading for 'Oxon' ( as does Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, 503-4). Other possible readings include 'Ctm' for 'Chm', short for '[Lord Great] Chamberlain', hence Oxford; and 'Crm' for 'Orm', hence perhaps the Duke of Ormonde, a lesser favourite (E.S.Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, p.88) but the known circumstances do, as Sargent says, make the Oxford identification 'reasonably certain'.

28. Letter to Burghley, September 1572, cited by Sir Harris Nicolas, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton* (London: Richard Bentley, 1847), p.14.

29. Nicolas, *Memoirs*, p.15. 'As for the said Hatton, [I have heard] that you would run at him so hard, making the love you bore him so public, that he himself felt constrained to draw back.' (My trans.)

30. Sargent, p.25.

31. The letter is without date or place of origin, but Nicolas (28) and E.S.Brooks (98-100) both conclude on the internal evidence that it was written either in July-August 1573 from Spa, or earlier in the year, before Hatton left England for the sake of his health.

32. Nicolas, *Memoirs*, p.28.

33. The form is also used in Thomas Edwards' *Narcissus*, in an explicit reference to the Shakespearean poem. See Roger Nyle Parisious, 'Occultist Influence on the authorship Controversy', *The Elizabethan Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring 1998), p.32.

34. E.S.Brooks, pp.354-358.