


Hundreth Sundrie Flowres Revisited: Was Oxford Really Involved?

Robert R. Prechter

Abstract

Some have advocated the idea that the Earl of Oxford participated in the composition and publication of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, published anonymously in 1573 and issued in somewhat different form in 1575 as *The Posies of George Gascoigne*. The case rests on thirteen claims: that aspects of the publication indicate a coverup of authorship and motive; that aspects of it indicate more than one author; that Gascoigne lied in taking full credit for the first edition; that a prose story within the publication contains scandalous material about then-living persons; that an acrostic in one of the poems has a solution in “Edward de Vere”; that a series of inferences about the motto attending that poem indicates Oxford’s involvement in the larger project; that Oxford and Gascoigne separately described their mutual experience of having been caught in the rain on a highway; that Christopher Hatton is connected to the volume through the motto *Si fortunatus infoelix*; that aspects of the prose story connect it to Hatton; that Oxford and Hatton were enemies; that Hatton secretly sabotaged Oxford’s interests and was sympathetic to his enemies; that Oxford lampooned Hatton as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and as Speed in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; and that stylistic evidence indicates Oxford’s authorship of the prose story and some of the poems in the book. All of these claims are challenged.



ver the decades, a number of Oxfordians have attributed *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* to the Earl of Oxford. In the process, they have deprived an author of his rightful title to a pioneering book of English fiction. The analysis presented here is intended to correct this misconception.

A Hundreth sundrie Flowres bounde up in one small Poesie, an anonymous collection of plays, verse and a story, was published in 1573. Two years later, it came out again in an annotated, expanded and slightly altered collection titled *The Posies of George Gascoigne Esquire, Corrected, perfected, and augmented by the Authour. 1575*. For several reasons the publications invite scrutiny. Among them are:

- 1) The title page of *Flowres* names no author, and the text indicates and implies multiple authors, but two years later, in *Posies*, George Gascoigne takes full credit for all of the material.
- 2) *Flowres* came to press while Gascoigne was in Holland.
- 3) *Flowres* contains a shadowy “Epistle” by “H.W.” and a “letter” to him from “G.T.” These initialed persons claim to have brought the prose story “A discourse of the adventures passed by Master F.J.” to print—via another unnamed person, “A.B.”—despite G.T.’s entreaties to keep it private.
- 4) The publication was entered twice into the Stationers Register, at different times, by different publishers.
- 5) The publication is missing thirty-six pages of text, skipping from page 164 to page 201.
- 6) In the 1573 edition, the printer in his opening address tells readers that F.J., the hero of the prose story, is one “whome the reader may name Freeman Jones,” an everyman type of pseudonym. His lady is named Mistress Elinor. The story is altered somewhat in the 1575 edition and re-named “The plesant Fable of Ferdinando Jeronmi [called Jeronimi in the text] and Leonora Valasco.” The initial vagueness suggests hanky-panky, and the name changes in the second edition to real-sounding but referentless characters seem designed to further misdirect the reader from any real-life models for Master F.J. and his lady.
- 7) In the second edition, the story purports to be a translation of “the fable as it is

written in Italian by Bartello,”¹ a writer who does not exist. If Gascoigne meant author Matteo Bandello, he gives no hint of the literary source, and—as far as I can discern—no scholar has proposed one, suggesting that the citation is a diversion.

- 8) The printer’s epistle is written in such a way as to indicate that the original plan for the book did not include the two plays printed before the F.J. story, suggesting that they were added later.
- 9) About a year after *Flowres* was published, Oxford left England without royal permission and spent July 1574 in Europe.
- 10) Copies of *Posies* were “confiscated for reasons that remain obscure. On 13 August 1576, ‘by appointment of the Q.M. Commissioners,’ Richard Smith, the bookseller, returned ‘half a hundred of Gascoignes poesies’ to the Stationers’ Hall....”² This action could indicate an official recall, perhaps implying that some of the poems and/or the F.J. story contained offensive or unauthorized material.

On this fertile background, a number of prominent scholars, beginning with B.M. Ward, have built a scenario of the Earl of Oxford’s involvement in *Flowres*, implicating him in substantial authorship of the volume, in its compilation, and in its publication. They propose that courtier Christopher Hatton is either — versions vary— the author or the subject of a certain group, or groups, of poems and the prose story. Oxford, supposedly motivated by his dislike of Hatton, set out to embarrass him. This behavior fits such character traits as impetuosity, which, it is argued, Oxford possessed. Latter-day theorists support their case by making connections to Oxford on stylistic grounds. I will refer to these charges and their variations as the *Flowres*-Oxford theory.

In three published studies, Ward “argues that the 1573 edition...was both compiled and published by Lord Oxford without Gascoigne’s knowledge or permission....”³ According to Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn Sr., “in 1573, under the title of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, Oxford had published an anthology of poems— his own, Christopher Hatton’s, *ostensibly* (though this seems to have been a fluke: they were rather by Oxford and *aimed* at Hatton), and some by Gascoigne—while Hatton and Gascoigne were absent on the Continent” [italics in the original]. They go further in referring to the collection as “Oxford’s *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*.”⁴

Charlton Ogburn Jr. reprised the case over the course of four pages, asserting that Oxford “foisted”⁵ the *F.J.* story on Gascoigne. V. Anderson believes that Oxford inserted “sixteen of his own poems”⁶ into “his” publication; M. Anderson reports, “de Vere has long been suspected of writing, or at least contributing to...*A Hundred Sundry Flowres*....”⁷ This venerable tradition not only lacks credible evidence but also ignores numerous insurmountable contradictions which obviate the conclusion that Oxford was involved in the project.

We must begin by acknowledging that the author of *Flowres* engaged in obfuscation. But in all cases it is less conspiratorial than it seems. The initials attending the letters prefacing the *F.J.* story are probably covers for the real writer, but no one demonstrates any nefarious effect. Switching the associated name from Freeman Jones to Ferdinando Jeronimi seems devious, but, as we will see, there is

no evidence to challenge the notion that it was done for the reason Gascoigne gives in his 1575 preface: to make it clear to overly suspicious readers that the story is in fact fictional. In the second edition, Gascoigne's introduction of "Bartello" as the source of the F.J. story seems to qualify as a serious red herring. But he mentions Bartello again in his extension of "Dan Bartholomew of Bath," a poem left unfinished in the 1573 edition, and in "The Fruite of Fetters"; both poems introduce his persona, the Green Knight. For the discerning mind, Gascoigne cleverly retracts the whole pretense:

In this roundabout fashion, quite characteristic of Gascoigne...he lets the reader know that Bartello and Bartholomew are the same as the green knight; and the green knight, as we know from *The fruite of Fetters*, in which Bartello is again given as authority, is Gascoigne himself.⁸

Thus, we are left, in the end, with no cover-up at all. In interpreting Gascoigne's preface to *Posies* as a mock repentance, F. Hughes chalks up these games to "Gascoigne the ironist."⁹ Such playful items constitute no real evidence of serious misdirection, nor of deliberate concealment. But whether one holds that the dissembling in both editions is lighthearted (as the balance of evidence indicates) or serious, it is, by itself, entirely irrelevant to the question of whether Oxford is responsible for any of it.

Dual Registration and Missing Pages

Ward thought it suspicious that the book was entered into the Stationers Register twice—once by publisher Henry Binneman within the period of November 17 to December 31, 1572, and once by publisher Richard Smith in the same period in 1573—and that the book is apparently missing 36 pages. He concluded that two distinct books were later bound together. The first portion he dismissed as self-evidently Gascoigne's, but the second he reserved for Oxford. Ward's assignment has two serious problems: (1) None of the surmised partial editions survives, nor is there any known contemporaneous reference to them; and (2) in the Stationers Register, "both publications are assigned to George Gascoigne."¹⁰

It is not incumbent upon us to explain why these minor anomalies attend the book, but a simple explanation does exist. Taking a lead from Ambrose,¹¹ we may surmise that the dual publishers—who are identified in the two parts of the 1573 edition of the book—account for the pagination break, as well as the dual register entries. The full year separating their registrations suggests that the first publisher's work was for some reason interrupted, and Gascoigne's agent—whoever he was—simply assigned the second half to the other publisher, and somewhere in the process the pages were misassigned. Gascoigne, who was in Holland on Her Majesty's service, was unavailable to correct the error.

Is Gascoigne Being Truthful When in *Posies* He Claims Full Authorship of *Flowres*?

Scholars agree that the additional material in the second edition belongs entirely to Gascoigne. Indeed, the detailed commentary in the three epistles prefacing *The Posies of George Gascoigne* is entirely consistent with Gascoigne's life. Gascoigne names a friend at Gray's Inn, speaks of his trip to Holland, mentions a few specific friends and addresses a number of poems to specifically named ladies. He also details the circumstances attending his masques' performances, clearly indicating firsthand knowledge.

In the prefacing material, written "To the reverend Divines," "To al yong Gentlemen" and "To the Readers generally," Gascoigne fails to disavow a jot of *Flowres*, apologizes convincingly for certain aspects of the youthful compositions in the first edition of his works—almost every word of which he maintains in the second—explains his feelings about the matter, and describes his earlier motivations and ensuing actions. Scholars disagree over whether Gascoigne's apology is heartfelt or mock-serious, but they have not questioned that he wrote it.

Advocates of the *Flowres*-Oxford theory charge that Gascoigne is lying, or that Oxford wrote the preface under Gascoigne's name, but there is no contemporaneous record of suspicion that Gascoigne was not the author. On the contrary, no fewer than eighteen prefatory verses by Gascoigne's friends and admirers in the second edition support his claim to authorship of the first edition. Most of them are signed with initials; it seems likely that "T.Ch." is Thomas Churchyard and "G.W." is George Whetstone, who later wrote Gascoigne's epitaph. Both men had ties to Oxford, and if all the other poems were alike enough to assign to one or two writers, we might wonder about subterfuge; but their styles are different enough that they seem to be written by multiple authors. It is unlikely that all of these poets would be fooled or would feel compelled to confirm Gascoigne's authorship of something he had not written. It seems far more likely that Gascoigne was simply calling upon his friends to dress up the volume of his lifetime literary effort, now finally issued in his name.

In the prefacing epistles to *Posies*, Gascoigne uses language that directly counters any suspicion that someone brought *Flowres* to press without his knowledge or permission. There is no basis upon which to question Gascoigne's honesty on this point, and, notably, *there is no indication that he was even answering a charge to the contrary*. He lists five reasons why his works accrue to his credit and concludes, "These considerations (right reverend) did first move me to consent that these Poemes shoulde passe in print."¹² He adds a comment about the time "when I fyrst [permitted] the publication" and wonders "whether I were worse occupied in first devising, or at last in publishing these toies & pamphlets." He explains his primary reason for having them published while he was in the Low Countries: "I thought good to notifie unto the worlde *before my returne*, that I coulde as well persuade with Penne, as pearce with launce or weapon."¹³ This statement is fully in accord with Gascoigne's later motto: *Tam Marti quam Mercurio*—"as much for Mars as for Mercury"—the noble ideal of arms and letters. (Mars is the god of war, and Mercury

is the messenger of the gods and therefore, as Ben Jonson put it, “the president of language.”¹⁴ He continues, “as these considerations did specially move me *at first to consent to the imprinting of these posies*, so nowe I have yet a further consideration which moveth mee most earnestly to sue for *this second edition or publishing of the same*.”¹⁵

Gascoigne explains the composition of the prose story *F.J.* as an exercise designed that “men might see my Methode and maner of writing.”¹⁶ If he had *not* written *F.J.* he would have disavowed it or—if he feared retribution from a powerful nobleman—at least would have dissembled the issue, not explained his intentions in having written it. Nor does Gascoigne excuse himself from the authorship of any of the poems, but only from any perceived malicious intent: “so might it seeme that I were woorthie of greate reprehension, if I shoulde bee the Aucthour of evill *willfully*, or a provoker of vyces *wittingly*.”¹⁷ He even expresses some pride that “the first Copie of my Posies hath beene verie much i[n]quired for by the yonger sort.”¹⁸

The form of Gascoigne’s preface in *Posies* is itself clear evidence that the project was entirely his. The seeming fidelity of Gascoigne’s reasons, admissions, apologies, excuses and expressions of pride supports his full authorship of *Flowres*.

A Scandalous Story?

One of the important assertions of those who doubt Gascoigne’s sole authorship of part or all of the two volumes is that the original *F.J.* story scandalized real people and therefore required a coverup. First we will see whether such a scenario, true or not, would support Oxford’s involvement, and then we will see if it is true.

Ironically, if the claim of scandalous material were true, it would point towards Gascoigne’s authorship, not Oxford’s. An aspect of Gascoigne’s biography precisely fits the charge that *F.J.* is about real people: In 1572 he was “elected to Parliament, [but] his creditors kept him from sitting”¹⁹ by charging him “not only with insolvency, but with manslaughter, atheism, and with being ‘*a common rhymor and a deviser of slanderous pasquils against divers persones of great calling*.’”²⁰ In other words, Gascoigne’s enemies had already tagged him, *prior to 1573*, with having written clandestinely about high-ranking people. Therefore, an exceptional reason is required to shift scandalous writing onto Oxford’s shoulders when (1) Gascoigne’s name is on record as being connected to such activity, and (2) Oxford’s is not. (This is true despite some Oxfordians’ attempts, which I find to be erroneous, to link him with such publications as *Willobie His Avis* or the anti-Leicester pamphlets or to writing satires of Hatton from Shakespeare’s plays, as discussed below.) The charge levelled against *F.J.*, then, fits Gascoigne better than Oxford.

Alternatively, if the claim of scandalous material is false, it also works against the Flowres-Oxford theory. We will now investigate whether either of the reasons supporting suspicions about *F.J.*’s supposedly scandalous nature is valid: that that the *F.J.* story was sanitized for the second edition and the original book was banned.

If either Gascoigne or Oxford had embarrassed certain people with the original

text, the deletions made for the second edition might tell us who they are. But we have yet to read an analysis indicating that Gascoigne's revisions, the meat of the supposed gossip, reveal the identity of anyone. If they do, it is certainly not Christopher Hatton. Ward, in the appendix to his book on *Flowres*, detailed every change between the two versions of the story and yet cited not a single excised phrase that relates directly to Hatton or anybody else.²¹ Studying the alterations will assure anyone that nothing of substance was deleted. Even the seemingly suspicious change of location from northern England to Italy, paralleling the "Bartello" claim, contributes nothing to the story and is not elaborated in any way. The supposedly offending poems contain no significant alterations, either. These voids indicate that no sensitive material was excised.

Many scholars have assumed that *Flowres* was banned, but the evidence is inconclusive if not contradictory. According to Pigman, "Since it is often stated as fact that 73 was censored, one must emphasize that *there is no record of this* and that the records of the Stationers Company from July 1571 to July 1576 are missing."²² The fact that Gascoigne reissued the poems and prose story intact implies that the 1573 edition had *not* been banned. The only basis for believing that the first edition was banned is that authorities recalled copies of the *second* edition in 1576. But even this belief is conjecture. The recorded event of 1576 is that a bookseller, on orders from the Queen's commissioners, "returned" 50 copies of *Posies* to the Stationers' Hall. The commissioners' motivation for obtaining this round number of returns from a single seller is unexplained; perhaps the merchant was indebted or a tax delinquent.

To conclude, we lack any solid reasons to doubt Gascoigne's statements in the preface to *Posies* that some readers—obviously none powerful enough to ban his first book—had come to the *false* conclusion that the story "was written to the scandalizing of some worthie personages"²³ and that among twenty such claimants he got twenty interpretations of "whom they woulde seeme therby to know." He swears "by the hope of my salvation" that no living person was the model for the story. A person may *suspect* that he is lying, but if Gascoigne did something other than he says, it is incumbent upon doubters to so demonstrate.

We have thus constructed two challenges to the conspiracy theory: (1) If Gascoigne is lying and *F.J.* is indeed scandalous, then Gascoigne, who was accused the year before by creditors of exactly such behavior, is an ideal candidate for authorship in the first place. (2) If Gascoigne is telling the truth (which better fits the evidence), then *F.J.* is not scandalous, and a portion of Flowres-Oxford theory becomes moot.

Multiple Authors?

Another reason for suspicion about the authenticity of Gascoigne's authorship of *Flowres* is that certain language in the 1573 edition indicates or implies that the poems are by multiple authors. G.T., in his letter prefacing the *F.J.* story, refers to "all the authors" whose works make up the book. It may be worth mentioning that much of the language implying additional authors is less than definitive. At the end of the

F.J. story, G.T. introduces the next section as containing “sundry verses written by sundry gentlemen...presented out of sundry gardens [of] the authors...” A perusal, however, shows that this portion of *Flowres* is a loosely connected narrative primarily about various men writing poems to various women and friends, who reply in turn; in other words it chronicles “The devises of sundry Gentlemen,” exactly as the title says, fitting a fictional frame just as well as one based in reality. When in the midst of this section the editor finally introduces Gascoigne’s name, he does not say that Gascoigne is merely the next poet; he says: “I will now deliver unto you *so many more* of Master Gascoignes Poems as have come into my hands, who hath never beene dayntie of his doings, and therefore I conceal not his name....”²⁴ This statement may be taken to mean that all the poems preceding it are Gascoigne’s, too.

Doubt as to the meaning of this comment suggests sloppiness in establishing a pretense of multiple authors, whereas no such imprecise statement accompanies Gascoigne’s explanations of 1575. Regardless, we will proceed under the universally accepted assumption that the editor’s intent—whether or not it was truthful or carried out competently—was to indicate multiple authors, and see where that premise takes us. Poems in this section, many of which are grouped accordingly, appear over eight different Latin mottos or “posies”: *Si fortunatus infoelix; Spreta tamen vivunt; Ferenda Natura; Meritum petere, grave; Ever or Never; Haud ictus sapio; Attamen ad solitum* and *Sic tuli*. All the poems appearing above the final four of these mottos are attributed in the text to Gascoigne. The first four are claimed for anonymous others: G.T. says that “Master F.J.” is responsible for the first series; the introduction attending the second series says, “Now to begin with another man”; the third is labeled “A strange passion of another Author”; and the fourth follows the entreaty to “hearken unto the works of another writer.”

Ward takes these notes at face value and says, “It is obvious from these notes that the several authors can be distinguished by the Latin ‘posy’ or motto which serves as a signature at the end of each one.”²⁵ Right away we have at least a minor problem: If each motto were meant to indicate a different writer, why are four of them openly charged to Gascoigne? Contrary to Ward, the differing mottos *per se* mean nothing; *only the editorial notes* suggest four other authors.

In deciding which edition of Gascoigne’s book contains the misdirection, it is crucial to point out that no Elizabethan poetry survives to link any of the four supposedly independent mottos to any other poet. Surely if the text indicating that different men wrote the poems were accurate, some researcher would have found at least one of these mottos in other poets’ works.²⁶ Until some evidence to the contrary surfaces, the exclusive appearance of these mottos in Gascoigne’s publications seems to confirm the authorship of the man who, we must remember, cheerfully claimed them two years later as his own.

Negative evidence against others theories of authorship is not, however, all we have. There is also positive evidence of Gascoigne’s authorship of poems within the first, third and fourth series, as well as a contradictory designation within the second series:

- The first series, signed *Si fortunatus infoelix*, directly follows G.T.'s presentation of "sundry verses written by sundry gentlemen." But its main character—discussed at length in the introduction to "I Cast myne eye" as "being stoong with hot affection," etc.—is named "G.G.," indicating George Gascoigne. (We will examine this series in more detail below.)
- The second series, signed *Spreta tamen vivunt*, includes a poem by "An absent Dame," thus contradicting the claim that the entire series is by "another man." It will not do simply to assert that the independent poet wrote this verse as well, because the whole case against a single author depends upon the attending notes' literal accuracy.
- The third series, signed *Ferenda Natura*, begins with the poem, "Amid my Bale I bath in blisse." Several pages later, within one of the series explicitly labeled as Gascoigne's, a poem titled "Gascoignes Recantation" reads, "once I soong, *I Bathe in Blisse*, amide my wearie *Bale*:/ And many a frantlike verse, then from my penne did passe" (italics original). As Pigman²⁷ observed, Gascoigne hereby claims outright the earlier poem as his own. Later, in "Dan Bartholomew," Gascoigne writes, "If ever man yet found the *bathe* of perfect *blisse*," again using the phrase. The words *Ferenda* and *Natura* also show up yet again—likewise in italics—as representing the object of the poet's affections in Gascoigne's *The Grief of Joye* (1576), in which he speaks of "*Ferenda* she who eke *Natura* hight," also connecting that motto directly to him, not "another Author."
- In the fourth series, signed *Meritum petere, grave*, the seventh poem plays on the alphabet and concludes, "Take dooble G. for thy most loving letter," showing that the poem, and by implication the whole series, is both by and about Gascoigne, not, as the prefacing statement would have it, "another writer." The same motto appears on the title page, thereby connecting the whole project to Gascoigne. (We examine this series further below as well.)

Therefore we may reject claims of authorial independence for every one of the four groups of poems. We can even assign three of them positively to Gascoigne; ironically, they happen to be precisely the ones that various Oxfordians have attributed to Oxford.

One of the four signatures that the book attaches to Gascoigne, *Haud ictus sapio*, appears again in his long narrative poem on "Dan Bartholomew," which soon sports another motto, *Fato non fortuna*; and the extension of that same poem in *Posies* introduces yet another motto: *Tam Marti quam Mercurio*, stretching the motto count to ten. The overlap and continuation of mottos in later works further demonstrate that the author is simply using a device.

In *Flowres*, moreover, G.T. first says that all the poets verbally explained their motivations to him, and then he claims he has no idea who wrote the poems. As Pigman said, "If he spoke with them, he ought to know who they are."²⁸ G.T. also claims that the collection was simply "presented" to him, whereas earlier "he takes credit for the labour of assembling it."²⁹ Thus, the multiple authors theme in *Flowres*

is self-contradictory, whereas the single author theme of *Posies* is not.

In summary, the book's original identification of Gascoigne as the author of four of the eight original series; the Gascoigne-specific content in three of the other series; the inconsistency of assignment in the single remaining series (not to mention its indistinguishability from the others on the basis of style); Gascoigne's continual use of mottos in subsequent material; the attachment of these mottos solely to Gascoigne; and the self-contradictory claims about the supposedly independent authors, together prove that Gascoigne is behind all of the poems supposedly written by "sundrie Gentlemen" and confirm Gascoigne's later claim to all the poetry in *Flowres*, which in turn is supported by the appearance of all but three of the poems ("When worthy Bradamant" and "When stedfast friendship" from the *Si fortunatus infoelix* series and "If any floure" from the *Haud ictus sapio* series) in what he calls his "second edition." In sum, in the 1575 edition, Gascoigne simply "drops the pretense of multiple authorship."³⁰

Consider finally that *Flowres-Oxford* theory requires that a *hidden, anonymous*, editor of *Flowres* in 1573 was being *truthful* about the existence of multiple authors, while the *clearly identified* Gascoigne in 1575 was *lying* about being the sole author. Consistent with normal sensibilities and Gascoigne's own admission, the internal evidence indicates that these conclusions are backwards.

Advocates of the *Flowres-Oxford* theory also seem undeterred by the fact that the entire *Flowres* enterprise is sloppy. Is such sloppiness found in any other literature attributable to Oxford? Oxfordians have done a heroic job of demonstrating that Shakespeare's references to law, medicine and astronomy reveal a deep and subtle understanding and that his references to geography and the peerage are flawless. But advocates of the *Flowres-Oxford* theory propose that he also issued a slapdash book full of careless inconsistencies.

The third prefacing epistle in *Posies*, moreover, explains why Gascoigne initially connected some of these poems to other men. He writes,

I thought good to advertise thee, that the most part of them were written for other men. And out of all doubt, if ever I wrote lyne for my selfe in causes of love, I have written tenne for other men in layes of lust.... For when I did compile any thing at the request of other men, if I had subscribed the same with mine owne usuall mot or devise, it might have bewrayed the same to have beene of my doing. And I was ever curious in that behalfe, as one that was lothe to bewray the follies of other men.

Thus, Gascoigne confirms the deduction of Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn Sr. that these poems "were all written by" one man, but they have the wrong man: He is not "Oxford himself,"³¹ but Gascoigne.

Gascoigne's eventual claim to full authorship of the poems and the *F.J.* story, which were initially credited to unnamed persons, is also compatible with the fact that Gascoigne consistently credited independent writers *by name* for their work. Some parts of the play *Jocasta* (performed at Gray's Inn in 1566), which is included

in *Flowres*, are clearly marked as by two separate co-authors. And two years later, in *The Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Castle* (1575), Gascoigne notes quite precisely the portions of the entertainment that were contributed by others, *whom he names*, just as he does in *Jocasta* and as he does *not* do for the poems and story in *Flowres* that are supposedly by others. In *Posies*, the vague claims for unidentified second-party authorship are deleted, undoubtedly (we may now safely say) because they were false.

Gascoigne's successors, moreover, continued to claim the entire book for him. A later collection, *The Whole Works of George Gascoigne* (1587), published a decade after the poet's death, attributes to him all the works that appear in *Posies*.

So Gascoigne seems innocent of participating in a literary cover-up. And, as we are about to see, so does Oxford.

The Oxford Non-Connection

When all is said and done, Ward's only evidence that Oxford is connected to *Flowres* is his assertion in the introduction to *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1926) that one of its poems, "L'Escu d'amour," contains an acrostic of "Edward De Vere." I am not the first to reach this conclusion. Bowers in 1937 wrote, "The cipher is, indeed, the very keystone of his theories, since it is the one tangible matter which can be produced of Oxford's connection with the volume."³² For this reason we need to investigate the claim carefully.

We should begin by noting that Ward's evidence would have no value even if Oxford's name were embedded in the poem. Rather than assert thereby that Oxford wrote it, one could just as well suggest that Gascoigne wrote this poem for Oxford, in accordance with his admitted practice.

Ward's case is so inadequate that no alternative explanations are required. Despite having supported some conclusions³³ about secretly embedded names, I myself fail to find any "acrostic" or other device in the aforementioned poem.

"L'Escu d'amour"—the Shield of Love—was the motto of the Scudamore family, Sir John Scudamore being twenty-nine years old at the time. There seems no reason to doubt that Gascoigne wrote this poem about or for Scudamore, not Oxford. A contradicting acrostic would have to be clearly rendered in order to challenge the idea that the poem relates to Scudamore.

To introduce his argument, Ward shows a poem by Anthony Munday from 1579 that contains an acrostic in which the first letter of each line denotes "EDWARD DE VERE." In 1606, Nathaniel Baxter addressed a poem to Susan Vere that contains the Vere family motto in the same type of acrostic. Failing to find Oxford's name in the poem in any conventional or natural way, Ward derives it using the following procedure:

- (1) Select the starting letters of each word.
- (2) Start on a prominent letter in the first line.
- (3) Scan the first line forward, the second line backward, and so

on to the end.

- (4) Select the letters that fit into a name.
- (5) End on a letter in the last line.
- (6) Begin again with the same letter that ended the first progression.
- (7) Scan the last line backward, the next-to-last line forward, and so on to the beginning.
- (8) Find the same progression of letters as you found in the downward direction.
- (9) End on the same letter with which you started.

The final step, as Bowers deduced, “is tailor-made for Edward de Vere,”³⁴ since it allows only names that start and end on the same letter, and the only qualifying letters in the first line that also appear in the last line are *E* and *L*. Despite jerry-rigging these rules, Ward takes yet further liberties:

- (1) He chooses *a* prominent letter in the first line rather than *the* most prominent letter, which is the starting capital *L*.
- (2) He allows lines to contain one or two solution letters, or no solution letters.
- (3) He treats the letter *U* in the word *Untied* as his required *V*, in line with Elizabethan printers’ common practice but contrary to the letter’s usage.
- (4) He finds the capital letters *E*, *D* and *U*, for Edward De Vere, placed in the downward direction, but capital letters are randomly placed in the upward direction, a combination counterindicative of an intentional cipher.
- (5) He finds a capital *D* for *de*, but the middle part of Oxford’s name was in fact almost always written in lower case.

Any poem of such substantial length—giving us a whopping 304 letters with which to work—would render, by similarly ad hoc guidelines, countless names. As Bowers rightly noted, “the curious rules remove any significance to such performance with a string of letters.”³⁵

Even so, Ward’s specific claim can be tested. In doing so, one is perfectly justified in finding other names to fit the cipher, since Ward did no less in finding a cipher to fit the name. Ambrose tackled the task and asserted, “one finds in the same poem—using the same ‘key’ suggested by Mr. Ward—the names of George Gascoigne, Elisabeth Gascoigne, Thomas Churchyard, and even the present writer’s own name [Genevieve Ambrose].”³⁶ Yet despite her assertion, Ambrose in fact failed to test Ward’s key, because her names do not show up in both directions, much less do they start and end, as Ward requires, on the same “prominent” letter. In Ambrose’s solutions, the capital letters do not occur in the right places, either.

Nevertheless, I found no trouble in using Ward’s *precise* instructions—not even with any adjustments that would have been acceptable under his approach—to come

up with a solution. I combined two of Ambrose's names in order to start and end on an *E* and added a middle name for good measure to come with the name "Elisabeth Cissy Ambrose." As with Ward's "Edward De Vere," this solution turns up in both the downward and upward directions when reading the lines alternatively forward and backward and then vice versa, respectively; it has the capital letters—E, C and A—in exactly the right places in the downward direction; and the entire name begins and ends not merely on the same lines but also on precisely the same letters with which Ward's progression begins and ends: the *E* in *L'Escu* and the *e* in *elles*. It doesn't even require substituting a *V* for a *U*.³⁷

This solution, moreover, contains twenty-one letters compared to a mere twelve in Edward De Vere. Statistically, each additional letter increases the improbability of a solution exponentially. Perhaps we should search Elizabethan archives for this possible object of Gascoigne's affection. Doubtless one could also find names that begin and end more sensibly with the opening *L* of the poem and the *L* of *lend* in the final line, but one of my goals was to show that Ward's specific starting and ending points do not render a unique solution. To state the matter clearly: There is no special anagram and no case whatsoever that Oxford's name is deliberately embedded in the poem.

Ward desperately needs his purported encoding, because he goes on to note that the poem falls within the *Meritum petere grave* series of poems, from there to noting that the same motto appears on the title page, and thence to the conclusion that Oxford compiled the entire book. This is a far-fetched inference, even if its starting point were true.

The content of this very series of poems contradicts Ward's case. As noted earlier, in one of these poems—"Of all the letters"—the writer begs his love to "Take dooble *G* for thy most loving letter," clearly indicating George Gascoigne. Ward himself notes that the letters cited in the poem's first stanza—A, O, G, N, C and S—are "an obvious anagram"³⁸ of "Gascon." Both of these sets of letters confirm that the first-person narrator is Gascoigne. Ward even goes on to argue that the subject of the poem is Elizabeth Breton, whom Gascoigne once wooed and eventually married, and that the "B" of the poem represents his rival at the time, Edward Boyes. Yet then, without cause and contrary to logic, he simply asserts, "I suggest further that Lord Oxford wrote it..."³⁹

Ward goes on to pinpoint the time of composition as being "at the same time that Gascoigne was writing the *Complaynt of Phylomene*, namely, September, 1562."⁴⁰ Although this dating is indefensibly precise (see further discussion below), the problem here is that Oxford at that time was only twelve. Ward admits, "It may, of course, be argued that Lord Oxford was too young at that time to have written it,"⁴¹ and counters that objection with proof of the pre-teen Oxford's command of English. But the point is not that Oxford *could* not have written it; the point is that a pre-teen boy *would* not have written a highly personal poem, in first person, for a twenty-eight-year-old man in love with a specific woman, much less when both lovers are commoners and he a nobleman, and when there is no evidence that the boy had any inkling that either person existed, and when there is evidence that the man involved

is himself an accomplished poet perfectly capable of writing his own poems. Ward extrapolates his idea into another scene: “we can well imagine that the thinly veiled and rather contemptuous reference to Elizabeth Gascoigne’s reputation must have been very annoying to her husband when he saw the poem in print in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*.”⁴² But wait a minute. Why would a young boy write “a thinly veiled and rather contemptuous reference” to some woman more than twice his age, whom as far as we know he never met? Does it not make more sense that Gascoigne was simply writing about his own future wife?

The opening line of another one of the *Meritum petere grave* poems—“I that my race of youthfull yeeres had roon”—fails to fit Oxford, who was twenty-two years old when *Flowres* was published, whereas it fits the thirty-eight-year-old Gascoigne. It also conforms perfectly well to Gascoigne’s musings about youth and middle age in the narrative poems he added to *Posies*.

The series’ very motto, which is Latin for “to seek a serious reward,” “points to Gascoigne; it expresses his major motive for publication as he freely admits in 75—a desire for preferment,”⁴³ which Oxford, a top member of the peerage and still wealthy in 1573, hardly required. Thus, from every angle, the appearance of the motto on the title page links the whole publication not to Oxford, as Ward would have it, but to Gascoigne.

Hess⁴⁴ listed not only the *Meritum petere, grave* series but also the three *Ferenda Natura* poems as Oxford’s. But, as shown above, Gascoigne links this latter motto directly to himself.

To complete the set, the Ogburns asserted that “all” of the poems signed *Si fortunatus infoelix* are by Oxford and “contain revelations of his intimacy with the Queen.”⁴⁵ But one of the poems in this series, “A Sonet written in prayse of the browne beautie,” lavishes praise on a lady’s “lovely nutbrowne face.” Such a description hardly pertains to Elizabeth’s pale visage, so we may reject the idea that the poems pertain to the Queen. This conclusion also counters the claim that the poems are about *Christopher Hatton’s* contemporaneous pursuit of the Queen in the early 1570s. In either case one may dismiss Oxford’s authorship, because if there is one thing upon which Shakespeare was firm, it is that pale white skin, not brown, is a mark of beauty; in the Sonnets, Shakespeare nearly tears himself apart for falling for the Dark Lady despite what he perceives as her off-putting complexion; the deepest insult toward a woman that he can devise in *Two Gentleman* (2.6) is that “Silvia—witness Heaven that made her fair—/ Shows Julia but a swarthy Ethiop”; and he has even the Moor of *Othello* (5.2) praise his wife’s “whiter skin...than snow,/ And smooth as monumental alabaster.” So the poems are not about the Queen, and Oxford did not write them. We may therefore reject this claim by the Ogburns on two counts.

What about the motto “*Ever or Never*”—capitalized and italicized as Oxford might do to suggest his name—which is found immediately below seven poems in *Flowres*? One would think, of all the series of poems in the book, that advocates of the Flowres-Oxford theory would have seized upon these poems as evidence of Oxford’s authorship. The reason no one has claimed these poems for Oxford is that

they are listed as Gascoigne's, introduced as Gascoigne's and titled as Gascoigne's, and their lines contain references to him and his friend Lord Zouch. In *Posies*, Gascoigne adds another poem, "To binde a bushe," also signed "Ever or never." Clearly, this is one of Gascoigne's personal mottos. Therefore, it is important that in the second edition of the book *the same tag follows the F.J. story*. In other words, Gascoigne in 1575 attached one of his personal mottos to *F.J.*, denoting it as his own work. Flowres-Oxford theorists might charge that Gascoigne used his own motto to attach *himself* to *Oxford's* story, but to admit such a claim, one would have to have some basis upon which to link the *F.J.* story to Oxford in the first place, and we have none. Moreover, the original *F.J.* story contains a poem signed "Tyll then and ever" (which in the 1575 edition is rendered "Till then and ever"), a signature that is consistent with Gascoigne's *Ever or Never* tag. The *Ever or Never* tag also appears at the end of the pseudonymous *Willobie His Avis*. But since that tag in *Flowres* is unequivocally Gascoigne's, one cannot use a theory of Oxford's authorship of *Willobie* to connect him to *Flowres*.

Observe in the end that Ward charges Oxford with hiding behind mottos in a book attributed to Gascoigne, but he disallows the simpler scenario that *Gascoigne* is hiding in such a manner in his own book. Which situation is more likely, given that Gascoigne is the only author connected to the volume?

The weakest of Ward's arguments, that "Lord Oxford under the nom de plume of 'G.T.' edited *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*,"⁴⁶ concerns two descriptions of one of Gascoigne's personal experiences. In the dedication to *The Complaynt of Philomene* dated April 16, 1575, Gascoigne explains how he came to begin the poem while "riding by the high way betwene Chelmsford and London" some "twelve or thirtene yeares past," indicating 1562-1563. He describes being caught in the rain while riding, an incident that the preface of "De Profundis," one of the poems in *Flowres*, had earlier described. This is further evidence that Gascoigne wrote *Flowres*. Yet Ward begins, "Anybody will surely agree that two such similar and graphic accounts...of so trivial an incident as a ride in the rain, could only have been written by...." One would think the sentence should conclude with "the person who experienced it." But instead Ward says, "actual eyewitnesses [who] rode into London together."⁴⁷

Citing the historical fact that Oxford traveled to London on September 3, 1562, and glossing over the fact that Gascoigne says only that he traveled from Chelmsford to London *sometime* in 1562 or 1563, Ward notes, "If Gascoigne was riding from Bury St. Edmonds or Lavenham [well north of Chelmsford], he must have passed Castle Headingham on the way."⁴⁸ This is all well and good, but then Ward postulates that Gascoigne actually traveled on September 3, 1562, hooked up with the new Lord Great Chamberlain of England—who was described as traveling with "seven score horse all in black,"⁴⁹ — and got caught in the rain with him! Never mind the coincidence required for Gascoigne and Oxford, *who were traveling in the same direction*, to have met each other even if they were traveling on the very same day; never mind that we have no idea on which day of which year Gascoigne made his trip; never mind the unlikelihood of Gascoigne sidling up to this twelve-year-old earl as he led his massive train of pomp; never mind the contradiction that Gascoigne's

own description of the event fails to mention Oxford and his glorious train, noting only that *he* was “overtaken with a sodaine dash of Raine.” We are, even more naïvely, expected to believe that Oxford took up his pen eleven years later and reminisced about the incident in *Flowres*, without mentioning his own (if he were impersonating Gascoigne) or his companion’s (if he were writing from his own point of view) participation, while attempting to hide behind anonymity, all as a sidebar to a mean-spirited publishing conspiracy designed to embarrass the Queen’s favorite courtier, Christopher Hatton, and that Gascoigne recalled the same event in print two years later without mentioning his famous companion! Listing Ward’s stunning leaps in conjecture is exhausting.

But we need not rely only on logic, reason, sense and statistical probability to dismiss Ward’s scenario. Gascoigne tells us, in the dedication to *Phylomene*, the same source to which Ward refers, that he—not Oxford or anyone else—wrote “Deprofundis,” thereby making it plain why he refers in both places to the memorable downpour:

I called to minde that twelve or thirtene yeares past, I had begonne an *Elegye* or sorrowefull song, called the Complainge of *Phylomene*, the which I began too devise riding by the high way betwene Chelmisford and London, and being overtaken with a sodaine dash of Raine, I changed my copy, and stroke over into the Deprofundis which is placed amongst my other Poesies, leving the complaint of Phylomene unfinished: and so it hath continued ever Since until this present moneth of April. 1575. when I begonne my *Steele Glasse*.

So, Gascoigne wrote part of both works during the rain shower, which is why he mentions the event in both prefaces. Oxford, however, is nowhere in sight.

Ward, in fairness, scores a point when he observes that Oxford, in his dedication to Thomas Bedingfield for *Cardanus Comfort*, published in the same year as *Flowres*, claims to have brought the work to press against the wishes of the author as expressed in his “letters.” This is exactly the same scenario that “H.W.” reports in his preface to *F.J.* If the rest of the context justified doing so, we could surely take this as an indication that Oxford might be using the same device twice. But absent further support we must take careful note of significant differences: Oxford’s tone is playful, not conspiratorial; he addresses his comments directly to his friend Bedingfield, not to “the Reader”; and he signs his name in big, bold letters: **E. Oxenford**, in no way hiding his presence. This evidence seems rather to show Oxford as a man who would *not* publish someone’s private work sneakily for mean reasons rather than as one who would. Moreover, doubters might wish to contrast Oxford’s magnanimous, learned, larger-than-life dedication to Bedingfield against H.W. with G.T.’s squirrely addresses—again, *published in the same year*—and see if they believe that the same man wrote them.

Finally, we might ask: Had Oxford done the deed of which he is accused, would there not be some indication that Gascoigne was upset with the earl? But there is no

evidence that Gascoigne was angry at Oxford at any time following the incident.

Ward declared about the supposedly scandalous *Flowres*, “The perpetrator of the outrage was Lord Oxford.”⁵⁰ The true outrage is that theorists of the Flowres-Oxford theory have perpetrated a misconception that has hurt Oxford’s reputation among his own advocates.

The Hatton Non-Connection

The source of much speculation about a supposed second-party contributor to *Flowres* is a snippet from Gabriel Harvey. In his 1578 Latin address to Christopher Hatton, he refers to “his symbol, *Foelix Infortunatus*”; and a hand-written marginal note next to a poem signed *Si fortunatus infoelix* in Harvey’s personal copy of *Posies* he calls it “lately the posy of Sir Christopher Hatton.”⁵¹ These items suggested to Ward and his successors that the poems in *Flowres* appearing over this signature are connected to Hatton. In Ward’s version of the scenario, Hatton wrote them; and in the Ogburns’ version, they were slyly imputed to him. M. Anderson supports the Ogburns’ view: Speaking of Hatton’s private letters to Elizabeth, he says that his “lachrymose musings would soon be spoofed.... Hatton was now the subject of an elaborate courtly prank.”⁵² These theorists extend their conjecture to say that the title of the *F.J.* story—typed *F.I.* in the Elizabethan style—indicates *fortunatus infoelix* and therefore Hatton as well.

The proper initial response is, “So what?” Gascoigne said that he wrote poetry for other men’s use. Where is the evidence that these poems are anything else? So, the first thing to observe is that even if suspicions were correct that Hatton is involved, there is no evidence to implicate Oxford as perpetrating any of the associated mischief. But we may reject the conspiracy theorists’ line of reasoning anyway, by at least nine facts:

- 1) The juxtaposition of *fortunate/unhappy* and *unfortunate/happy* was somewhat of a generic formulation in the Elizabethan era. Robert Parry, writing in *Moderatus* (1595), speaks of the hero as “sonne to the renowned (and sometimes *infortunate*) but now *happie* Florentine Perduratus.” The idea that this motto referred only to Hatton is therefore tenuous from the outset.
- 2) As noted above, in the series of poems signed *Si fortunatus infoelix*, the only identifier in the accompanying prose for one of the characters involved is “G.G.,” this “dooble G” indicating George Gascoigne. The ensuing poem, “His Riddle,” is composed by a character named G.G., yet it is still signed *Si fortunatus infoelix*. This is a strong and immediate connection of the motto to Gascoigne, not Hatton.
- 3) The similar phrase, *Fortunatus infoelix*, appears below the prefacing poem, “The argument of the Tragedie,” attending the early play *Jocasta*, which Gascoigne co-wrote. One might leap to the conjecture that Hatton wrote the “argument” for Gascoigne’s play; after all, he contributed the fourth act to *Tancred and Gismund* in 1568. But the evidence contradicts such a

conclusion. As noted above, sections of *Jocasta* are clearly marked as to its three authors. If Hatton were a fourth, surely he would have been named as well. The appearance of this signature here, then, links it *unequivocally* to Gascoigne but—by omission of Hatton’s name in a context where writers are named—pointedly *not* to Hatton. As Pigman says, “Affixing this posy may be Gascoigne’s way of indicating that he, not Kinwelmersh, wrote the argument.”⁵³

- 4) In *Posies*, where he takes full credit for both editions, Gascoigne maintains fifteen of the seventeen poems signed with the *Si fortunatus infoelix* motto. The two omitted poems from this series offer no evidence of literary deception, as the third omitted poem is from Gascoigne’s *Haud ictus sapio* series.
- 5) Gascoigne consistently uses various signature phrases for his poetic series. Nothing seems to distinguish the poems within the *Si fortunatus infoelix* series from any of the others, as one might expect if either Hatton or Oxford were responsible for this material separately from the rest.
- 6) Both editions of the book quite clearly separate the two sets of initials: the *F.J.* of the story and the *S.F.I.* of the motto. In the opening pages of *Flowres*, the address from “The Printer to the Reader” speaks of “F.I. whome the reader may name Freeman Iones,” clearly indicating the intention from the start that “F.I.” stood for *F.J.*, not *F.I.* The name Ferdinando Jeronimi in the second edition extends this designation. When speaking of the upcoming poems prior to beginning the *F.J.* story, G.T. does say that he has tried to “set in the first places those which Master F.I. [meaning *F.J.*] did compyle.” But following this thread leads to a conclusion in which someone with initials *F.J.* wrote poems signed with a motto whose opening letters are *S, F* and *I*. In other words, there is still no indication that *Si Fortunatus Infoelix*, even if it is *F.J.*’s motto, is intended to reflect his initials. Thus, we cannot use the initials *F.J.* of the story to support the theory that they indicate “Fortunatus Infoelix” and therefore Christopher Hatton.
- 7) Harvey initially *disassociates* Hatton from the *Si fortunatus infoelix* motto. In his 1578 address, he connects Hatton to only one motto; he says, “To the honorable and brave knight Christopher Hatton, counsellor to the Queen’s Majesty, concerning his symbol, *Foelix Infortunatus*,”⁵⁴ which is different from *Si fortunatus infoelix*. He does *mention* the reverse motto but says (as translated), “One man is happy, but unfortunate; another is fortunate but unhappy.”⁵⁵ As one can readily see, his construction specifically indicates that while the first motto is Hatton’s, the latter—the one that the *Flowres-Oxford* theory requires—designates another man, and therefore belongs to anyone but Hatton.
- 8) As mentioned above, despite the existence of massive archives from the Elizabethan era, there is no indication that Hatton—or even any anonymous poet who might turn out to be Hatton—wrote any poetry signed *Si fortunatus infoelix*.

All of this evidence outweighs Harvey's undated marginal note that the *Si fortunatus infoelix* motto is Hatton's and indicates almost surely that Harvey made a simple error. Given his clear language in 1578 that the first motto pertained to Hatton, we can certainly understand a careless mental reaction—upon seeing the second, similar motto in Gascoigne's book—prompting him to scribble the marginal note relating it to Hatton. To conclude, the evidence linking Hatton to 17 poems in *Flowres*—which after scrutiny comes down only to Gabriel Harvey's single notation—which *contradicts* his earlier statement—is moot. This conclusion is important because, as Ward admits, "The identification of Hatton as the poet of 'Fortunatus Infoelix' or 'Master F.I.' of the *Flowres* rests [entirely] on the contemporary evidence of Gabriel Harvey."⁵⁶ With that evidence so severely compromised, there is no case.

Ward expanded his argument in 1928 by attempting, through a series of inferences, to link Christopher Hatton to George Turberville, whom he accepts as the "G.T." of the preface to *F.J.* For worthy stylistic reasons, no scholar today agrees with his assertion, "the letter of G.T. in the *Flowres* is a genuine document, penned by a real man, George Turberville."⁵⁷ Even if it were true, Ward still fails to connect Hatton to the document.

Ward also tries to connect Hatton to the poems of *Flowres* on the basis that H.W. says he published the poems without permission so as "to have gained a bushell of good will, in exchange for one pynt of peevish choler."⁵⁸ Starting with the idea that the poems are Hatton's, he leaps to the conclusion that only a man of "high rank...could with impunity publish Hatton's private love letters"⁵⁹ or would so disregard the danger of an angry reaction of the Queen's favorite as to label it merely "peevish choler." Then he takes an even bigger leap to conclude that Oxford—by reason of his high rank—must have published them. But Ward's line of reasoning for Oxford's authorship depends upon an initial assumption of Hatton's involvement, without which there is simply another void. One might far better attribute H.W.'s casual attitude simply to the fact that the other poets—if such existed—were *not* high ranking courtiers. But the best explanation for H.W.'s brave stance, which is consistent with everything else about the volume, is that *there were no other authors* and therefore no one to peeve. Consistent with this interpretation, the historical record is devoid of any indication that anyone *was* peevied.

The F.J. story contains no connection to Hatton, either. Nevertheless, from the story's initial setting "in the north partes of this Realme," Ward attempts to link it to Hatton, because "Hatton was born and had been brought up at Holdenby,"⁶⁰ which is about 110 km. north of London. Ward fails to mention that from 1557 to 1559 George Gascoigne was a Member of Parliament representing Bedford, which is about 100 km. north of London, a fact that nullifies the import of his argument. But even this connection fails, because in F.J.'s opening address to Elinor he states that he is "altogether a straunger in these parties" (i.e. *parts*, which in the next edition reads *Country*). In other words, F.J. is not from "the north partes of this Realme" at all! Ward's argument is thereby canceled twice. No one, including Ward, has proposed any other substantive reason to link the story to Hatton.

The *F.J.* story, to the extent that it might be *about* Hatton, might just as well be about one of the other men for whom Gascoigne says he wrote poems, or about someone else entirely, or about himself, or about no living person at all. But such questions are mere curiosities subordinate to the case that the *F.J.* story—whether fact or fiction—contains no link to Christopher Hatton.

Advocates of the Flowres-Oxford theory agree that *Gascoigne* did not write about Hatton, but they require a Hatton connection in order to insinuate the Earl of Oxford into their theory of his clandestine publishing conspiracy to “discredit Sir Christopher Hatton before the Queen.”⁶¹ As we have seen, all evidence contradicts any such connection. Therefore, we could, without further discussion, simply ignore Oxford’s supposed motive: that he hated Christopher Hatton. But we can do better than that.

The Hatton-Oxford Non-Feud

Flowres-Oxford theorists link together their conjectures by accepting and at times extending Ward’s argument that Oxford and Hatton were enemies, thereby justifying Oxford’s supposed attack on him with the *Si fortunatus infoelix* poems, the *F.J.* story and the secret publication of *Flowres*. But the trail of inference leading to a charge of enmity between the two men lacks foundation.

Let us begin by noting that even if Oxford and Hatton did hate each other, such a fact would not constitute evidence that Oxford had anything to do with *Flowres*. It would just be another “So what?” Circumstance and evidence are two different things. But once again the conjecture is not proven.

Oxford had known Hatton since at least age twelve, when he sold him a reversion of property in Ashton.⁶² A decade later, in May 1571, the two men joined forces with Charles Howard and Henry Lee for a tournament at Westminster. Ward argues that Oxford and Hatton’s relationship went awry at this time. But documentary evidence relating to Oxford and Hatton’s association mostly contradicts this idea.

A year after *Flowres* came out, a letter from the Countess of Suffolk shows that Hatton was serving the interests of Oxford’s sister, Lady Mary Vere.⁶³ In 1578, Hatton served as a mediator in the matter of Oxford’s debt to Peter Legate.⁶⁴ During this period, Lord Burghley wrote two letters confirming Hatton’s friendship with Oxford. He wrote these letters one year and three years after the writing of the two texts by which Oxford allegedly intended to humiliate Hatton (*Flowres* in 1573 and *Twelfth Night* in 1580):

Burghley to Walsingham on August 3, 1574, speaking of Oxford:

I can not well end, nother will I end without also *prayeng yow to remembre Mr Hatton to continew my Lordes friend, as he hath manifestly bene, and as my Lord confesseth to me that he hopeth assuredly so to prowē [prove] him....*⁶⁵

Burghley to Hatton on March 12, 1583:

I perceived yesterday by my Lord of Leicester *that you had very friendly delivered speeches to Her Majesty tending to bring some good end to these troublesome matters betwixt my Lord of Oxford and Mr Thomas Knevet; for the which doings I heartily thank you, and beseech you to continue your former good meaning...*⁶⁶

This latter friendly intercession appears to have been initiated on Hatton's part. Subsequent portions of the letter show that Burghley trusted Hatton to be sympathetic to Oxford's predicament. Justifying Burghley's trust, Hatton responded as follows on March 19, 1583:

My Lord of Oxford's cause standeth but in slow course of proceeding to his satisfaction; but yet, *for my own part, I have some better hope than heretofore....* His Lordship wrote me a *very wise letter*, in this case of his, *the report whereof her Majesty took in reasonable good gracious part.*⁶⁷

This seems as straightforward a kindly reply, with respect to Oxford, as an officer of a contrarily disposed queen might ever be expected to compose. All these letters contradict the idea that Hatton "hated" Oxford.

Christopher Hatton died in 1591. Two years later, on October 25, 1593, Oxford in a letter reminded Burghley that Hatton had investigated his property suit to the Queen, "Wherupone *what he conceyved therby of my tytell, he was redie to have made his report unto her majestie.*"⁶⁸ In his letter of October 20, 1595, he elaborated,

...her Magesty takinge exception to my arbitror, had her owne Sir Christopher Hatton then Lord Chanceler, *appoynted as indifferent for us bothe*, as she dyd measure yt. *He havinge hard [heard] the matter and her Magesty councill with myne, was resolved, and herupon wished me to urge her Magestie to call for his report, which accordinglie I dyd and the lord chancelor present.*⁶⁹

So, the Queen considered Hatton an "indifferent" party, not an enemy of Oxford's. In a letter dated May 7, 1603, to Robert Cecil, Oxford clarifies that "Sir Chrystopher Hattone...was redie to make hys report *for me.*"⁷⁰ Hatton's decision, moreover, went directly contrary to the Queen's sentiments, as Oxford reports in his 1593 letter (and reiterates in his 1595 letter): "she flatly refused, therin to here my lord Chanceler" on his behalf. If Hatton hated Oxford, he never would have attempted such a thing.

Ward's entire case that Oxford hated Hatton, presented in papers from 1926 and 1928, rests on two brief comments in letters. He cites a cryptic line from a letter written October 9, 1571 from Edward Dyer to Hatton vaguely suggesting that he

adopt a policy at court of “hating my Lord of Ctm.” “In a foot-note Nicholas says quite unequivocally that ‘My Lord Ctm’ stands for Lord Oxford.”⁷¹ Whether Nicholas is right we can only guess. As to Dyer’s motive, Ward charges him with advising Hatton “to cultivate a deliberate and secret enmity against him [Oxford], *for no reason* apparently other than that Oxford stood high in Her Majesty’s favour.”⁷² He then presumes that Hatton took such advice, based on the evidence of an undated letter from Hatton to the Queen in which he writes, “the Boar’s tusk may both raze and tear.” Says Ward, “The unmistakable reference...obviously refers to Oxford, the de Vere crest being a Blue Boar.”⁷³ Then he postulates further that Oxford—almost instantly, for the chronology to hold up— must have come to hate Hatton in return, thereby justifying his publication of the *Si fortunatus infoelix* poems to embarrass him.

Hatton’s undated note to the Queen about the boar’s tusk, although cryptic, seems germane. It might even justify suspicion that in the early 1570s, “Hatton and de Vere were now rivals for...Her Majesty’s affections.”⁷⁴ But the question is whether they were bitter rivals or amiable ones. To decide, we must assess the tone of the comment. Is it a dire warning about Oxford’s dangerous nature, or is it a playful reference about a rival lover? We can’t be sure, but the context within which Hatton makes the comment suggests that he was attempting to elicit a smile from his beloved. He minces, “The branch of the sweetest bush I will wear and bear to my life’s end.... Reserve it to the sheep—he hath no tooth to bite; where the boar’s tusk may both raze and tear.”⁷⁵ In other words, Hatton says, “Don’t let the boar carry your love-token, because he might tear it. As a sheep, I can carry it unharmed.” His tone is more apt for pillow talk than a political warning.

Next consider Dyer’s earlier note from 1571 mentioning “my Lord of Ctm.” Anderson’s explanation that the notation might be “a scrivener’s misreading of ‘my lord Chamberlain’ or ‘my lord of Oxon’”⁷⁶ is conjecture. Maybe it means “my Lord of Cornwall” or someone else who was in fact lord of somewhere beginning with C. And if “my Lord of *Crm*,” as Ward first cited the letters, could stand for “my lord of *Oxon*,” surely it would stand better for “my Lord of *Ormonde*,” to whom Roger Townsend refers in a letter of 1582.⁷⁷ But let us allow that Dyer meant to write “Chm,” meaning “my Lord of Chamber.” Even this construction might indicate someone other than Oxford, who was Lord *Great* Chamberlain. Perhaps Dyer meant to indicate William Howard, then Lord Chamberlain, who held powerful sway over the Queen, or his thirty-five-year-old son, who “may have [taken over] some portion of the chamberlain’s duties”⁷⁸ in 1570-1572, when his father fell ill. He was, after all, nearly the same age as the Queen and therefore perhaps a potential rival for her affections. No one has investigated whether there might be another candidate for the subject of Dyer’s advice. Can we really feel confident with the idea that “my Lord of Ctm/Crm” obviously means de Vere and not someone else? Given the obscurity of the reference, even Nelson, despite scouring the archives for any and all indications of enmity toward Oxford, rightly did not stoop to mention it.

In order to create a narrative linking Oxford to Dyer’s cryptic words of 1571, Ward dates Hatton’s “boar’s tusk” letter to 1572; but Anderson, drawing from

Clark, dates it to 1580 in order to fit his case for the supposed shredding of Hatton as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. If Anderson's dating is right, then the time interval weakens Ward's case that Dyer meant Oxford by "Ctm"; and if Ward's dating is right, it weakens Anderson's case that Dyer's letter is linked to *Twelfth Night*. One may take either half of the case (or neither) but not both halves. Obviously the dating of Dyer's letter is highly speculative, as is the dating of *Twelfth Night* to 1580.

Even if this note does refer to Oxford, one must make an extraordinary leap to conclude that Hatton, prodded by a single line from a Machiavellian cohort, would choose to take the unlikely step of fashioning his life to breed hatred between himself and one of the country's highest-ranking noblemen and indeed one of his established acquaintances, as Ward says "*for no reason,*" Iago-like, aside from the assumption that they were both currying favor from the Queen. Is this story compatible with human nature? If an acquaintance sent you a note recommending that you hate a colleague at work, would you do it? But even this leap of faith is insufficient to get all the way to the case for Oxford's involvement with *Flowres*, which further requires that Oxford immediately reciprocated the hatred and then mounted an ill-conceived campaign to express it. If significant evidence supported such an unlikely chain of events, perhaps we would be led to entertain it; but as we have seen, it does not.

Moreover, as detailed above, Oxford's, Burghley's and Hatton's own surviving letters flatly contradict Ward's scenario. Yet his response is only to express wonder: "It is strange...to find Hatton apparently *ready and willing to use his influence with the Queen in furthering Lord Oxford's cause*. But there is little doubt that his assistance was more apparent than real and that he continued to follow Dyer's sinister advice given nine years before,"⁷⁹ said "advice" being about "my Lord of Ctm," about whom we know nothing, and said "following" of the advice being wholly hypothetical.

Ward, seconded by Clark, persists in referring to "Hatton's *apparent* befriending of Lord Oxford" and continues, "It is clear that neither Burghley nor Oxford had any idea that Hatton was *secretly* jealous of the Earl's high favour."⁸⁰ Stop for a moment and think: Could Hatton have kept such a secret, for twenty whole years, from the powerful Burghley, who was hyper-informed about court matters, especially as they might touch on his own son-in-law? Could Hatton have kept such a secret from Oxford, the target of his enmity? Would Walsingham (in 1574) or Leicester (in 1583), powerful men at court, ever have attempted to serve secretly as Hatton's tools against Burghley's interests, or would they have been foolish enough to do so unwittingly? One would have to rewrite the history of the English court to believe such things.

Anderson leaves room for Hatton's sincerity in referring to him in this role as one "whom de Vere *had once* so loved to hate."⁸¹ But where is the portion of the scenario that explains how, or why, or when, the two men resolved their supposed bitter feud and became friends again? Both versions of the theory—that Oxford and Hatton reconciled or that they did not—are absurd. In the first case, we would have to believe that Hatton forgave Oxford for satirizing and exposing him as F.J. and for the withering, devastating portrayal of him on the stage as Malvolio (see discussion below), all of which he amiably brushed aside in representing Oxford before the

Queen. In the second case, we would have to believe that Hatton, plying a secret enmity, had Burghley, Walsingham and Leicester, the craftiest politicians of their own or any other era (not to mention Oxford) all fooled. The third case—that Oxford and Hatton mostly got along—is boring but fits the evidence.

In the early 1580s, Oxford's enemies "Arundell and Howard were...living in the custody of"⁸² Christopher Hatton, and Arundel's letters to Hatton, containing wild accusations against Oxford, were signed in terms such as "your honour's fast and unfeigned friend." Proponents of Flowres-Oxford theory thereby imagine an alliance among these men and argue that Hatton therefore must have misled Burghley in his letter of kindness toward Oxford in 1583. Clark states, "[Although] Sir Christopher Hatton...replied sympathetically, he probably used all his influence against him [Oxford], not only because he remembered his own long-time enmity for the Earl, but *he was carrying on a secret correspondence with Charles Arundel....*"⁸³ This sentence contains three fantastical charges in a row, but we are concerned now only with the last one, for which, as with the others, no evidence aside from contrary evidence exists. The administration would not have been so naive as to place two suspected traitors in the custody of a sympathizer. Its very choice of Hatton contradicts the conspiracy theorists' case. Accordingly, in his letter of July 1581, Arundel refers to "*my monstrous adversarye Oxford,*"⁸⁴ not "our" adversary. Since Arundel had to communicate by letter, moreover, it is quite obvious that Hatton was not conferring with him in person. That Hatton did not destroy the letters indicates that he felt no qualms about their existence. If Hatton had responded in kind, Howard and Arundel, both of whom were eventually released from the Tower, would have had plenty of time to let others see any supportive letters to bolster their claims. If such letters existed, we would know about them today, yet no letters from Hatton are extant to indicate that he responded to Arundel, in "secret" or otherwise.

Nothing indicates that Hatton took any actions whatsoever on the traitors' behalf, much less that he aided them in their quest to destroy Oxford at court. If Hatton were Oxford's secret enemy, he might have taken advantage of such a situation, but there is no indication that he did, and Arundel's ultimate fate—fleeing to the continent—strongly suggests that he did not. Arundel's letter of December 1581, stating, "I builte my onelie trust on the frindshipp of yowr honor,"⁸⁵ may even suggest that Hatton was playing him. Hatton, moreover, may have had good reason to dissemble with Arundel, since in one of his letters "Arundel complains that Oxford had named him in public as the author of a satire against Hatton then circulating among the London wits."⁸⁶ Even Nelson admits, "the attribution may have been accurate—Arundel had a penchant for satire."⁸⁷ Here, then, we have evidence of Oxford outing one of *Hatton's* enemies, a man who had anonymously published an embarrassing tract about him, which is what Flowres-Oxford theorists say, with no evidence of matching value, that Oxford did to Hatton. Nothing in this record, then, supports Clark's assertion that "the favoured Oxford was in 1580 disliked by the jealous Hatton."⁸⁸ Rather, all this evidence fits the notion that Hatton was sympathetic to Oxford's cause, and that *Oxford was equally supportive of him*, far better than any case to the contrary.

Nelson did discover one important piece of evidence attesting to a rift between Oxford and Hatton. He notes, “On 14 October [1573] Edward Bacon wrote to his brother Nathaniel from Gray’s Inn (*Stiffkey*): ‘...My Lord of Oxford and Mr Hatton were at great wordes in the chamber of presence, which matter is said to be before the Counsell’.”⁸⁹ If there were good reasons to attribute *Flowres* to Oxford and connect the *Si fortunatus infoelix* poems and the F.J. story to Hatton, this quarrel, which took place in the same year that the book was published, might be evidence that Hatton was angered by the publication. It is a tad humorous that Nelson dates the “boar’s tusk” letter to 1573, a *third* surmise opposing the already disparate dates suggested by Ward and Anderson, perhaps for a similar motive of tying it to this report of a quarrel. But scholars should be content to observe that even if the quarrel were about *Flowres*, one could just as well attribute these men’s “great wordes” to Oxford’s shock at being accused of something he did not do. Indeed, this is the more likely explanation, because of Hatton’s benign, at times supportive, behavior towards Oxford thereafter. For my part, I would reject all such speculation and accept Nelson’s conclusion: “of the incident no more is known.”⁹⁰

Even the relentless Nelson, a biographer who set out to prove Oxford a “monstrous adversary,” discovered nothing further attesting to enmity between Oxford and Hatton, whom he discussed on forty-one pages of his narrative. Charges that Hatton was “one of de Vere’s long-standing rivals”⁹¹ have come only from advocates of the *Flowres*-Oxford theory.

Oxford, Hatton and Supposed Literary Caricatures

I believe we can also dismiss the Ogburns’ argument,⁹² echoed by many scholars, that Shakespeare satirizes Christopher Hatton as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, thereby supposedly showing that Oxford would have been disposed to parody him earlier in *F.J.* One thing seems certain: If Oxford had made Christopher Hatton the laughingstock of London, Hatton would have hated his guts forever; he would never have forgiven him, much less to the point of cheerfully defending his interests at court. So, on the simple basis that the two men got along well enough after 1580—which is the date for the play provided by some Oxfordians, including those who believe that Hatton loathed Oxford—one would have to throw out the idea that Oxford made sport of Christopher Hatton’s attempt to win over the Queen.

But, yet again, we can refute the very argument as it stands. That Malvolio is stuffy and called a Puritan is of no weight, since such traits could apply to countless Elizabethans; and the rest of the play’s circumstances—Olivia’s mourning, a cryptic note, yellow stockings, imprisonment, etc.—have no known ties to Hatton.

Indeed, the specific evidence supposedly implying that Malvolio is Hatton consists of only two items. First, Hatton, in his letters to the Queen, refers to himself as “Your Majesties Sheep,” and in the play, “Sir Toby...calls Malvolio ‘a rascally sheep-biter’.”⁹³ Thus, we are told, Malvolio must be Hatton. On the contrary, Sir Toby’s comment logically indicates that Christopher Hatton is the only person in Elizabethan England that Malvolio *cannot* represent, because he is a sheep *biter* and

therefore *not a sheep*.

If Malvolio has anything to do with the real-life court of Elizabeth, he can only be a *rival* of Hatton's, one who would bite the sheep. According to the Flowres-Oxford interpretation of Hatton's letter to the Queen, the only possible sheep biter in the whole picture—the one with a “tusk [to] raze and tear”—is Oxford. But according to Oxfordian theory, the only person in Elizabethan England who cannot be a model for the unsavory Malvolio is the author of the play, Shakespeare, who is Oxford. One would have to abandon Oxfordian theory to fit Hatton's letter logically to *Twelfth Night*.

For the Malvolio-as-Hatton idea to be credible in the first place, it would seem that the sheep-biter phrase would have to be especially, if not uniquely, applicable to Hatton. But B.R.—very credibly identified as Barnabe Rich by Cranfill and Bruce⁹⁴—in his preface to *Greenes Newes* in 1593 speaks of a “paltry Asse [who] in the end became a notable sheepe-byter, worrying and devouring whole flockes of poore sheepe.”⁹⁵ What makes this citation especially relevant is that Barnabe Rich fondly dedicated no fewer than four books to Christopher Hatton, to whom, as we learn from the title page of yet another of Rich's books, he was “servant.” So, we may be confident that the single person in Elizabethan England to whom “sheep biter” in this instance *cannot possibly refer* is Christopher Hatton.⁹⁶

The other supposed clue for identifying Malvolio with Hatton is that the anonymous letter left for him is signed, “The Fortunate Unhappy,” which is “an English reversal of the Latin pen name (*Felix Infortunatus*; ‘the happy unfortunate’) that Hatton used.”⁹⁷ But there are at least two problems with this conclusion: First, it is not Hatton's known pen name at all, because in all his extant correspondence *he never used it*; it is only a motto that Gabriel Harvey, and only he, associated with Hatton. But more conclusively the signature at the end of the letter refers to its female *writer*, not its receiver, thus indicating unequivocally, exactly as in the case of “sheep-biter,” that it means someone *other* than Malvolio, which by the theory in question must be someone other than Hatton. As far as I can discover, these are the only specific items that scholars use in the attempt to connect Hatton to Malvolio, and each of them does precisely the opposite.

One may readily confound, in precisely the same way, Clark's⁹⁸ assertion that Speed in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is “surely a caricature of Sir Christopher Hatton.”⁹⁹ Speaking to Speed, Launce observes that a woman's toothlessness is a good quality because “she hath no teeth to bite,” and we are to believe, since the line is reminiscent of the line that Hatton wrote about himself in his “boar tusk” letter, that Speed is Hatton. But Speed is neither the speaker, whom one might thereby claim is Hatton, nor the subject, whom one might thereby claim is Hatton. Rather, Speed is just standing there listening, as a *third party* to the spoken line. Clark's identification, had it been accurate, would show a playful treatment anyway, not a vicious one, so it would be useless in supporting a case for enmity between Oxford and Hatton. No one seems bothered by Clark's unstated but necessary assumption that Oxford somehow secured the Queen's private, amorous correspondence, which seems to me highly unlikely. But none of this matters. It's just a joke in a play.

Anderson goes on to connect Malvolio's imprisonment in the play to the treatment of Jesuit priest Edmund Campion, confounding the whole idea that Malvolio represents any one person by connecting him to *someone else entirely*. He says, "De Vere puts Hatton in Campion's shoes, expressing his discontent with a crooked system that could so heartlessly demolish a man in the name of religion."¹⁰⁰ Whatever the merits of this identification, in the Hatton context it makes no sense. If Oxford hated Hatton and was in the process of humiliating him, why would he use him for a model of suffering injustice and show him sympathy? The argument connecting Malvolio to Hatton becomes inconsistent.

On top of all this, we must note that all the conjectures involving *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Twelfth Night* and *Arundel* relate to 1579-1581, so even if they were valid, they would hardly serve to show that Oxford was motivated to write and publish *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres* back in 1573. Indeed, if Oxford had done so, then given Hatton's magnanimous non-retaliation, we are left with no reason for Oxford to continue baiting Hatton through his plays. Such speculations about these plays are also inconsistent with the fact that just three years later Hatton was representing Oxford before the Queen in the Knyvet matter. Assertions that "de Vere and Hatton were notorious rivals circa 1580, and *Twelfth Night* mocks Hatton relentlessly"¹⁰¹ are unfounded on both counts.

To conclude, the claim that Hatton and Oxford detested each other is a myth. Therefore, any purported motive on Oxford's part to issue *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres* simply evaporates.

Contrary Evidence from Writing Style

The last basis upon which the case for Oxford's authorship of *Flowres* rests is the stylistic aspects of some of the writing, which some latter-day theorists have tacked onto Ward's story. Once this argument is nullified, no part of the case will stand. For the sake of brevity, we will review only a few main points.

Compared to Oxford's poetry, Gascoigne's poetic style is plain. Whereas Oxford would compare ladies' features to damaske rose, lillie, christall, pearle, alabaster, etc., one of the *Si fortunatus infoelix* poems reads, "Thy face is fayre, thy skin is smoth and softe,/ Thy lippes are sweet, thine eyes are cleere and bright." From these lines alone one may excuse Oxford from the entire *Si fortunatus infoelix* series. The defense of such mundane expression, moreover, comes from Gascoigne himself, in the essay on poetic method published in the second edition, where he declares: "I would neither praise hir christal eye, nor hir cherrie lippe, &c. For these things are *trita & obvia*."¹⁰²

Gascoigne employs certain pet phrases throughout his work. Even his three titles — "A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres," "The Adventures passed by F.I." and "*Sundry adventures passed by Dan Bartholomew*" — use the same language. The word *hundreth*, which Gascoigne uses again in the poem "A Hundreth sonnes," fails to fit Shakespeare, who prefers the word *hundred(s)* throughout his works.

Ward himself originally pointed out that *Dan Bartholomew*, which everyone agrees is Gascoigne's,

...rather resembles *The Adventures of Master F.I.* Both have an “editor”— in this case “The Reporter”—who explains the circumstances in which the various poems were written.... It is written in the same seven-line stanzas as *The Grief of Joy* and *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*—both indisputably by Gascoigne.... On the face of it it looks as though “The Reporter” and “Dan Bartholomew” might be two different people. But the evidence of style points very decidedly to a single author, that author almost certainly being Gascoigne himself.¹⁰³

Moreover, in contrast to Shakespeare’s plots and writing, the *F.J.* story is exhausting. The tedious opening paragraph of Gascoigne’s *The Glasse of Government* (1575) is perfectly compatible with his authorship of *F.J.*:

Surely Phylocalus I thinke myselfe indebted unto you for this friendly discourse, and I do not onely agree with you in opinion, but I most earnestly desire, that wee may with one assente devise which way the same may be put in execution, for I delight in your loving neighborhood, and I take singular comfort in your grave advise. [etc.]

Perhaps the poem in *Flowres* most suggestive of Oxford’s composition is “This tenth of March,” in the *Spreta tamen vivunt* series, which in particular has attracted attention. One stanza portraying a grieving woman invites comparison to the opening of *A Lover’s Complaint*. Clark also sees Oxford in ensuing lines using the word *Ver* to indicate *spring*: “The lustie *Ver* which whilom might exchange/ My grief to joy, and then my joys increase,/ Springs now elsewhere.... What plant can spring that feels no force for *Ver*?”

Aside from the plainness of expression in this poem, there are specific contraindications of Oxford’s authorship. The first line of the poem mentions “Aries... This tenth of March.” The word *Aries* appears but once in all of Shakespeare, in *Titus Andronicus*, and it is *not* in an astrological context. In line five, the poet says, “I crost the Thames.” Although Shakespeare refers to the Thames in three plays, none of his poems are set locally. When the lady in the poem spies the narrator, he says, “Lord how she changed hew.” Oxford is not prone to using *Lord* as an exclamation. A few lines later, the poet says he memorized the lady’s lament, and thereafter “I set them downe in this waymenting verse.” Gascoigne’s professed literary hero, Chaucer, used the word *waymenting*, but it does not appear in any of Oxford’s poems or in Shakespeare. Variations on the poet’s phrase, “do them boote,” appear elsewhere in the Gascoigne canon (“do hir boote” appears in the preceding poem) but nowhere in Shakespeare, who prefers “bootless” or “it is no boot.” Oxford’s authorship even of this poem is therefore highly unlikely.

Parts of many poems that we *know* are Gascoigne’s sound very much like parts of Oxford’s. Consider the tantalizing lines, “My sweetest sour, my joy of all my grief,/ My friendly foe, mine oft reviving death...” which are akin to lines in Shakespeare’s

sonnets. They are from Gascoigne's *The Grief of Joye*, published in 1576. In other words, Gascoigne often sounded like Oxford. Therefore, the case for Oxford's authorship of any portion of Gascoigne's material based on stylistic similarities is not credible. Advocates of the Flowres-Oxford theory need a powerful stylistic case—one far stronger than anything they have offered—to assign any portion of *Flowres* to Oxford.

Finally, Gascoigne's critics avoided calling him a poet. William Webbe called him a "rhymmer,"¹⁰⁴ and Michael Drayton called him a "meterer,"¹⁰⁵ as distinct from a poet. Even Ogburn, who supported Oxford's involvement in the book, admitted, "No great poetry marks *Flowres*...."¹⁰⁶ Shakespeare's poetry, and even some of Oxford's early song lyrics, are on a higher plane.

Given that the language in the prefaces of *Flowres* matches Gascoigne's; that Gascoigne's stylistic quirks permeate the book, that much of Gascoigne's poetry sounds like Oxford's, that none of the poetry in *Flowres* is beyond Gascoigne's ability, and that most of it is beneath Oxford's talents, we are left with no stylistic reason to believe that Oxford had any role in penning any part of *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres*.

A Pause for Perspective

We might conclude with Fredson Bowers' restrained comment from 1937: "The years following the publication of B.M. Ward's arguments that George Gascoigne's *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573) was in fact an anthology, to which the chief contributor was Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, have gradually seen disproved every piece of evidence or conjecture that he has advanced...."¹⁰⁷

We can reflect calmly upon the unlikelihood of the Earl of Oxford collecting the old plays and poems of George Gascoigne and his friends or penning impossibly vague parodies, in verse and prose, of Christopher Hatton, buried within a massive, 413-page book. It seems equally improbable that he would issue the whole *mélange* anonymously, for the petty motive of embarrassing a fellow courtier, and without regard for how Gascoigne might respond, and then flee the country to avoid a fight at court, of which there is no indication. Extraordinary evidence would be required to counter this scenario, but there is none. As far as we know, in all the correspondence extant from Elizabethan England, there is not a single indication that Hatton was embarrassed by the book, not a single indication that Gascoigne was not its author, and not a single indication that Oxford had anything to do with it.

Literary scholars and historians should leave Gascoigne's legacy to Gascoigne. The 17th Earl of Oxford has enough enemies, and we should refrain from grafting fanciful stories onto his biography. If the works of Shakespeare serve as any guide, Oxford possessed as noble a mind as one could have. Percival Golding's description of Oxford as "a man in mind and body absolutely accomplished with honourable endowments."¹⁰⁸ matches what we see in Shakespeare, but fails to fit the circumstances required by the Oxford-Hatton-*Flowres* theory.




Endnotes


- ¹ John W. Cunliffe, Editor, *George Gascoigne The Complete Works*. In 2 Volumes. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1907, 1910), 384.
- ² G.W. Pigman, III, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. s.v. "Gascoigne, George (1534/5?-1577)." (Oxford: University Press, 2004). <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10421> (accessed March 9, 2009).
- ³ Eva Clark, *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays*. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974), 790.
- ⁴ Dorothy Ogburn and Charlton Ogburn. *This Star of England*, (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1952), Chapter 6. <http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/Star/ch06.html> (accessed March 9, 2009).
- ⁵ Charlton Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. (McLean, VA: EPM Publications, 1984), 515.
- ⁶ Verily Anderson, *The De Veres of Castle Hedingham*. (Colchester, UK: Terence Dalton, 1993), 198.
- ⁷ Mark Anderson, "*Shakespeare*" by Another Name: *The Life of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, the Man Who Was Shakespeare*. (New York: Gotham Books, 2005), 69.
- ⁸ A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller, Eds. *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, 3:10. s.v. "George Gascoigne. Bibliography." New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907-21; New York: Bartleby.com, 2000. <http://www.bartleby.com/213/1000.html>; and 3:10 s.v. "George Gascoigne 2. The Posies" <http://www.bartleby.com/213/1002.html> (accessed March 9, 2009).
- ⁹ Felicity A. Hughes, "Gascoigne's poses. (George Gascoigne)." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 1997. *HighBeam Research*. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-19321312.html> (accessed February 19, 2009).
- ¹⁰ Genevieve Ambrose, "Review, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*." *The Modern Language Review* Vol. 22, No. 2. (April 1927): 214.
- ¹¹ Ambrose, "Review, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*," 214.
- ¹² Cunliffe, *Gascoigne*, 5.
- ¹³ Cunliffe, *Gascoigne*, 6.
- ¹⁴ Ben Jonson, "De orationis dignitate." *Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter and Some Poems*. In *The Works of Ben Jonson*. Edited by Francis Cunningham (London: Chatto & Windus, 1910), 413.
- ¹⁵ Cunliffe, *Gascoigne*, 7.

- ¹⁶ Cunliffe, *Gascoigne*, 7.
- ¹⁷ Cunliffe, *Gascoigne*, 4.
- ¹⁸ Cunliffe, *Gascoigne*, 12.
- ¹⁹ Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, Eds. *British Authors Before 1800: A Biographical Dictionary*. (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1952), 210.
- ²⁰ Sir Leslie Stephen, et al, Eds. *The Dictionary of National Biography*. Vol 7, s.v. "Gascoigne, George" by Sidney Lee (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), 916.
- ²¹ For a detailed list of differences between these two publications, see Ward 1926, 187-89 and Pigman 2000 l-lvii.
- ²² G.W. Pigman, III, Ed. *Gascoigne, George. A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), liiii-fn.
- ²³ Cunliffe, *Gascoigne*, 7.
- ²⁴ George Gascoigne. *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres bounde up in one small Poesie*, p. 344. Durable URL: http://proxy.kennesaw.edu:2123/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.882003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99841417 (accessed March 9, 2009).
- ²⁵ B.M. Ward, Ed. *Gascoigne, George. A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres from the Original Edition* (London: Frederick Etchells and Hugh Macdonald, 1926), ix.
- ²⁶ Pigman, *Gascoigne*, 596-fn.
- ²⁷ The motto "Meritum petere grave" shows up once more, in the margin beside Sonnet XXX in J.C.'s *Alcilia*, published in 1595. The mysterious initials, the marginal notes, the Latin posies, a reference to Chaucer, and the extended legal metaphor in the poem "Loves accusation," echoing "At Beautyes barre" within *Flowres*, all tag the collection as Gascoigne's, published posthumously.
- ²⁸ Pigman, *Gascoigne*, 596-fn.
- ²⁹ Pigman, *Gascoigne*, 596-fn.
- ³⁰ Pigman, *Gascoigne*, 1.
- ³¹ Ogburn and Ogburn. *This Star of England*, Chapter 6, Internet.
- ³² Fredson Thayer Bowers, "Gascoigne and the Oxford Cipher," *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (March 1937): 183.
- ³³ Robert Prechter, "The Sonnets Dedication Puzzle," *Shakespeare Matters*, Vol.4, No.3 (Spring 2005):1; and Vol.4, No.4 (Summer 2005): 1.
- ³⁴ Bowers, "Gascoigne and the Oxford Cipher," 185.
- ³⁵ Bowers, "Gascoigne," 185.
- ³⁶ Ambrose, "Review, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*," 216.
- ³⁷ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxiii.
- ³⁸ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxiii.
- ³⁹ An illustration of this derivation is available at http://64.88.182.87/Flowres_anagram.pdf.
- ⁴⁰ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxiii.
- ⁴¹ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxiv.
- ⁴² Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxiv.
- ⁴³ Pigman, *Gascoigne*, lv.

- ⁴⁴ W. Ron Hess, "Another Rare Dreame: Is this an 'authentic' Oxford poem?" *The Oxfordian* 8 (2005): 61.
- ⁴⁵ Ogburn and Ogburn. *This Star of England*, Chapter 6, Internet.
- ⁴⁶ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxii.
- ⁴⁷ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxii.
- ⁴⁸ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxii.
- ⁴⁹ Henry Machyn, *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, London, as qtd in Golding, Louis Thorn, *An Elizabethan Puritan: Arthur Goldling, the Translator of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1937), 35.
- ⁵⁰ Ward, *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, 135.
- ⁵¹ G.C. Moore Smith, *Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia*, London: Shakespeare Head Press, 1918. Quoted in Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn, *This Star of England* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1952), 166.
- ⁵² Anderson, M. "Shakespeare" by Another Name, 69-70.
- ⁵³ Pigman, *Gascoigne*, xlvi.
- ⁵⁴ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xii.
- ⁵⁵ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xii.
- ⁵⁶ B.M. Ward, "Further Research on A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres." *The Review of English Studies* 4, no.13 (January 1928): 47.
- ⁵⁷ Ward, "Further Research," 48.
- ⁵⁸ Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, 202.
- ⁵⁹ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xv.
- ⁶⁰ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xiii.
- ⁶¹ Pigman, *Gascoigne*, xlv-fn
- ⁶² Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford* (Liverpool University Press: Liverpool English Texts & Studies, 2003), 14.
- ⁶³ Nelson, 172.
- ⁶⁴ Nelson, 185.
- ⁶⁵ Nelson, 114.
- ⁶⁶ Nelson, 284.
- ⁶⁷ Nelson, 286.
- ⁶⁸ Nelson, 343-344.
- ⁶⁹ Nelson, 351-352.
- ⁷⁰ Nelson, 420.
- ⁷¹ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxxiv.
- ⁷² B.M. Ward, *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, 1550-1604, from contemporary documents.* (London: J. Murray, 1928), 75.
- ⁷³ Ward, *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, 75.
- ⁷⁴ Anderson, M. "Shakespeare" by Another Name, 69.
- ⁷⁵ Nelson, 96.
- ⁷⁶ Anderson, M. "Shakespeare" by Another Name, 69.
- ⁷⁷ Nelson, 282.
- ⁷⁸ Jorge H. Castelli, Ed. s.v. "William Howard (1st B. Howard of Effingham)" [tudorplace.com](http://www.tudorplace.com); <http://www.tudorplace.com.ar/Bios/>

- [WilliamHoward\(1BEffingham\).htm](#) (accessed March 9, 2009).
- ⁷⁹ Ward, *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, 225.
- ⁸⁰ Ward, *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, 96.
- ⁸¹ Anderson, M. "Shakespeare," 245.
- ⁸² Anderson, M. "Shakespeare," 167.
- ⁸³ Clark, *Hidden Allusions*, 494.
- ⁸⁴ Nelson, 273.
- ⁸⁵ Nelson, 275.
- ⁸⁶ Nelson, 275.
- ⁸⁷ Nelson, 275.
- ⁸⁸ Clark, *Hidden Allusions*, 370.
- ⁸⁹ Nelson, 104.
- ⁹⁰ Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary*, 104.
- ⁹¹ Anderson, M. "Shakespeare," 167.
- ⁹² Ogburn and Ogburn, *This Star of England*, Chapter 22.
- ⁹³ Anderson, M. "Shakespeare," 154.
- ⁹⁴ Thomas M. Cranfill and Dorothy Hart Bruce, *Barnaby Rich—A Short Biography*, (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1953), 70-77.
- ⁹⁵ B.R., *Greenes Newes both from Heaven and Hell* (London, 1593) A3.
- ⁹⁶ Ward's conjectures about Hatton and Oxford led to other incorrect conclusions, such as that Barnabe Rich's description of the Frenchified fop in an address prefacing his *Farewell* is a sketch of Oxford. Unfortunately, Clark accepts and expands upon this idea. But these writers were apparently unaware that in *A Souldiers Wishe* from 1604 Rich wrote a heartfelt commentary requesting King James to honor a certain unnamed person who was able "with one hand to holde the Speare...and with the other to hold the pen." Barnabe Rich. "A Souldiers Wishe to Britons welfare," (London: T. Creed for Jeffrey Chorlton, 1604), 61. Durable URL: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&res_dat=xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99855017 (accessed July 6, 2010).
- ⁹⁷ Anderson, "Shakespeare," 154.
- ⁹⁸ Clark, *Hidden Allusions*, 306, 313.
- ⁹⁹ Clark, *Hidden Allusions*, 313.
- ¹⁰⁰ Anderson, M. "Shakespeare," 155.
- ¹⁰¹ Anderson, "Shakespeare," 154.
- ¹⁰² George Gascoigne. "Certayne Notes of Instruction in English Verse." (1575) In *English Reprints*. Edited by Edward Arber (London: King's College, 1869), 32. <http://www.archive.org/bookreader> (accessed July 6, 2010)
- ¹⁰³ Ward, *Gascoigne*, xxi.
- ¹⁰⁴ William Webbe. *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, (London: John Charlewood for Robert Walley, 1586[7]). Durable URL: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&res_dat=xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99846918 (accessed July 6, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Michael Drayton. "Of Poets and Poesie" in *Elegies Upon Sundry Occasions*, (London: Augustine Mathewes for William Lee, 1627). Durable URL: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&res_dat=xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99856790

(accessed July 6, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ Ogburn, *Mysterious*, 517.

¹⁰⁷ Bowers, "Gascoigne," 183.

¹⁰⁸ Ogburn, *Mysterious*, 765.