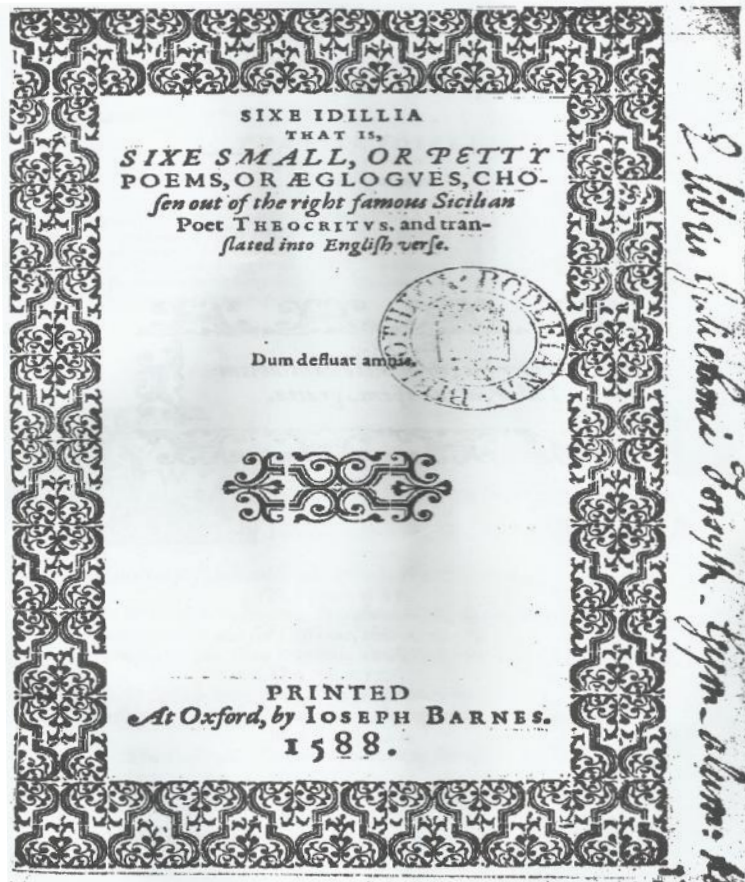


The Mystery of Willy

Oxford, Spenser, and Theocritus' Sixe Idillia

by Richard Malim

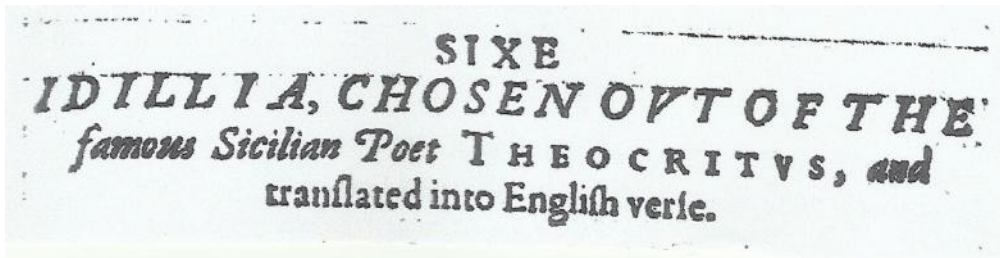
In 1588 there appeared a little printed book whose title page reads “*Sixe Idillia that is, Sixe Small, or Petty Poems, or Aeglogues, Chosen out of the right famous Sicilian Poet Theocritus, and translated into English Verse / Dum defluat amnis* [tr: as long as the river may flow down to the sea] / Printed at Oxford by Joseph Barnes 1588.”



Title Page, Sixe Idillia

Theocritus (fl. 270 BCE) was an immensely influential pastoral poet writing in Ionic Greek. The translator selects six of the poems or *Idillia* namely nos. **8, 11, 16, 18, 21** and **31**. The sole surviving copy is in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and, while the date of publication is clear, the date of the actual translation and the translator's identity are not revealed. The typesetting and printing generally do not seem to have received any critical comment but they appear to be of very high quality. There is something of a mystery as to why the book was printed in Oxford but it may possibly account for the sole surviving copy being in the Bodleian.

On the face of it, one cannot find much to assist in establishing who the translator might be. There are however pieces of intrinsic evidence in favour of Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, in the actual printing. On the title page the word verse is printed with the usual long 's' used well into the nineteenth century: on the second page (below) this letter is mangled in the original so the word looks more like verie (to sound perhaps more like Vere) than verSe. There is also a small space and an unnecessary capital O for 'Oxen' ["Oxford"] in *Idillia* 16. There are, in addition, six uses of the word verie discussed below which seem hardly born out from the original Greek.



Second Page, Sixe Idillia

In the first half of the sixteenth century and for long after that, the educated classes were imbued with a contemporary version of humanism. These humanists

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were responsible for recovering, editing, and explaining a great many ancient texts in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. But they also introduced a respect bordering on fanaticism for certain critical principles – for example, that ‘great poetry’ had to be written in hexameters and that drama had to obey the four unities allegedly laid down by Aristotle – formulated and developed by such critics as the Italian Castelvetro (d.1571). In this way the humanists of the time hoped to preserve Latin as the living Esperanto of Europe by putting the Latin clock back to the age of Cicero.

They succeeded in killing off post-classical Latin but froze Ciceronian Latin in a time warp, and with it Castelvetro’s distorted reflection of Aristotle’s observations on Greek tragedy onto which were foisted the arbitrary rules of the unities (Lewis 19-30). This attitude attracted a great deal of criticism especially as it finally ended the Elizabethan Classical period of ‘romantic’ humanist writers, of whom Shakespeare is the foremost exemplar. Eventually, the Elizabethan Classical manner of writing was ended for good, by the early nineteenth century romantics.

With that simplification, perhaps an oversimplification, in mind, we can do no better than set out C.S. Lewis’s critique of *Sixe Idillia*.

The unknown author. . . is a sensitive and original metrist who deliberately uses the alexandrine without a medial break. For example, he writes “with lovely Netehearde Daphnis on the hills, they say” and rids the fourteener of its even more tyrannous ‘cesure,’ for example: “Upon a rocke, and looking on the Sea, he sung these rimes; O Galatea faire, why dost thou shun thy lover true?” Both modifications really create new metres, whose possibilities have not yet even yet [as of 1953, the date of Lewis’ book] been fully exploited.

[Idillia] 31, in three metrical feet per line is intended to be like [John Skelton’s] *Philip Sparrow*. Elsewhere this version sounds far more like Greek poetry than anything that was to be written in English before the nineteenth century:

O Jupiter, and thou Minerva fierce in fight,
And thou Proserpina, who with thy mother, hast renoune
By Lysimelia streames, in Ephyra that worthy towne,
Out of our Iland drive our enimies, our bitter fate

(*Sixe Idillia*, 16. 82 et seq.)

All that I have said about humanism in this book in my previous paragraph would have to be retracted if there had been many such humanists.

(Lewis 520 – 521)

To an extent, Lewis’ view of the poetical abilities of the translator of *Sixe Idillia*, if they could be pinned on Oxford, are backed by S.W. May.¹ While May labels the sixteen poems he accepts as Oxford’s as “the output of a competent, fairly experimental

poet working in the established modes of mid-century lyric verse,” his actual analysis is rather different.

He does use eleven different metrical forms in these sixteen poems, including one English sonnet, the graceful trimeters [lines of three feet] of no. 14, and the unexpected tetrameters at the end of each stanza of no. 9. Structurally the poems are unified and brought to well-defined conclusions . . . More complex is the weaving of a double refrain into the conventional fabric of no. 6, while the surprising and unconventional endings of nos. 7 and 9 show Oxford playing upon the received tradition in imaginative ways. [His work is] varied in conception and manner well beyond the relentless plodding of [his contemporaries] Breton, Turberville and Churchyard.

(May 13-14)

This sounds closer to the view of Theocritus’ translator than May might admit and we must remember that the translation of the *Sixte Idillia* appeared after those juvenile poems accepted by May and represents the product of a mature poet.

Now it is possible that *Sixte Idillia* was a shot in the war between the strict humanists, having Gabriel Harvey, Dyer, Sidney, and Greville as their leaders and supported at least at first by Spenser – and their opponents, whom one might call the romantics, whose standard-bearer was Oxford himself and who was ultimately backed by the poets and playwrights who began to appear over the following decades. An earlier shot in the war was the plea by Harvey addressed (or written to be addressed – there is some doubt as to whether it was actually delivered) to the Queen during her progress in 1578 at Cambridge University. Here are some extracts translated from Harvey’s Latin containing great praise, but at the same time an attack on Oxford’s preference for metres suiting English rather than, say, the metre of Latin heroic couplets, joined with a request to stop writing in a manner unappealing to Harvey:

Thy splendid fame demands even more than in the case of others the services of a poet demanding lofty eloquence. Thy merit doth not creep along the ground.

O great-hearted one, strong in thy mind and thy fiery will, thou wilt conquer thyself, thou wilt conquer others . . . Mars will obey thee.

For a long time past [i.e., pre-1578] Phoebus Apollo has cultivated thy mind in the arts. English poetical measures have been sung by thee long enough. Let that courtly Epistle [i.e. to the reader of *The Courtier* by Castiglione] more polished even than the writings of Castiglione himself – witness how greatly thou dost excel in letters. I have seen many Latin verses of thine, yea even more English verses are extant; thou hast drunk deep draughts not only of the Muses of France and Italy, thou hast learned the manners of many men,

and the arts of foreign countries. It was not for nothing that Sturmius [the leading German scholar in 1575 in Strasbourg] was visited by thee; neither in France, Italy, nor Germany are any such cultivated and polished men.

Now Harvey comes to his point. England is in grave danger:

O thou hero worthy of renown, throw away the insignificant pen, throw away bloodless books, and writings that serve no useful purpose; now the sword must be brought into play.

The message is also to “get out of our strict literary humanist way especially as you could have more military important roles.”

In thy breast is noble blood, courage animates thy brow, Mars lives in thy tongue, Minerva strengthens thy right hand, Bellona reigns in thy body, within thee burns the fires of Mars. Thine eyes flash fire, *thy countenance shakes spears*; who would not swear that Achilles is come to life again . . .”²

(Harvey, cited by Ward, 156-158)

The original Latin used in the last sentence is ‘vultus tela vibrat’; the accuracy of the translation can be disputed, but the nuance of the phrase cannot. The use of the word ‘vultus’ for ‘countenance’ is interesting. The Elizabethans’ addiction to puns leads me to suspect that there is a pun by Harvey on the Latin word ‘vultis’ / ‘you will’ i.e. ‘You, Will,’ and so we have buried in the Latin, ‘Will, Shakes, Spear(s)’, one of the first references to the use by Oxford of the pseudonym.

Because I show *Sixte Idillia* was written much earlier than its printed publication date 1588, I see it as a counter-blast (if not directly so) to Harvey’s view. The translator confirms that he can write Greek verse into English metres without needing Latin, as the title page puts it, “Chosen out of the right famous Sicilian Poet Theocritus, and translated into English verse.” Later, Oxford makes a criticism of Watson’s *Hekatompathia* (1582) which I consider below.

While Harvey was the chief literary enemy, the clique led by the first Earl of Leicester – Robert Dudley – was probably the chief target. (Dudley had robbed Oxford blind while he was under age and was still plundering his estates.) Leicester’s nephew Sir Philip Sidney had literary talent and pretensions, which laid him open to mockery for general ineffectualness in such plays as *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as Slender, in *Twelfth Night* as Aguecheek – (did Sidney suffer from teenage acne?) – and in *As You Like It* as the courtier Le Beau. All these must have appeared before Sidney died a national hero in 1586. *Hamlet* was written too late. The Sidney character had to be written out and his best speech given to Polonius:

The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral,

pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ, and the liberty, they are the only men.

(*Hamlet*, 2.2.397-404)

The literati of the Court circle would readily recognize this as a send up of Sidney's prolix literary criticism, with its attempts at classification of 'Poesy.'

These be subdivided into sundry more special denominations, the most suitable be the Heroic, Lyric, Tragic, Comic, Satiric, Iambic, Elegiac, Pastoral, and certain others.

(*Defence of Poesy*, "Proposition" p. 27)

Now in his parts, kinds, or species (as you list to term them), it is to be noted that some poesies have coupled together two or three kinds, as the tragical and comical, whereupon is risen the tragicomical. Some in the like manner have mingled prose and verse, as Sannazzaro and Boethius. Some have mingled matters heroical and pastoral."

(*Defence of Poesy*, "Examination" p. 43)

The orthodox Stratfordian critic comes from a position of total denial that the writer of Shakespeare had any knowledge of Greek, or of Greek literature, save through translations. Oxford, the true writer, was sufficiently competent in Greek to attend the Greek Orthodox Services in Venice (in 1575-76) at the Church assigned to the Greek Orthodox Community at San Giorgio dei Greci, where he might follow the fiendishly difficult pronunciation (to an Englishman) of the Greek in use. Because the learning is so lightly worn, the clues can be difficult. In *Titus Andronicus* we have:

The self-same gods that armed the Queen of Troy
With opportunity of sharp revenge
Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent.

(*Titus*, 1, 2, 136-8)

This refers to the revenge of Hecuba in blinding Polymestor for killing her youngest son. The story is in Ovid, but the words 'in his tent' are not in the Latin of Ovid: they are in the Greek of Euripides' *Hecuba*. In Sophocles' *Ajax* we have:

The Greeks upon advice did bury Ajax
That slew himself; and wise Laertes' son [i.e. Ulysses]
Did graciously plead for his funeral.

(*Ajax*, 1.1.376-378)

In *Ajax*, Ulysses was the chivalrous foe; in *Metamorphoses*, Ulysses was the villain.

In *3 Henry VI*, we find a simile for Warwick's scouts:

That as Ulysses and stout Diomedes
 With sleight and manhood stole to Rhesus' tents
 And brought from thence the fatal Thracian steeds . . .

3 *Henry 6*, (4, 2, 19-21)

The story comes from Homer's *Iliad* and also Euripides' *Rhesus*. To collect elements of the story from Latin, Shakespeare would have had to consult widely – unlikely when there is at least one comprehensive source in Greek.

Erasmus' Latin translation of Lucian's *Misanthrope* is cited in John Jowett's edition of *Timon* (2004) as a source for *Timon of Athens*, but the play is devoid of any Latin feel. Likewise the words *academe*, *dialogue*, *Promethean*, *metamorphise*, *Olympian*, *pander*, *ode*, and *mimic* are imported direct from the Greek. Greek names or words are used to name the characters: Laertes, Dromio (from Greek root for *run*), Desdemona (*unlucky woman*), and Ophelia (*benefit*).

The efforts of numerous critics to deny the knowledge of Greek required by the writer – and available to Oxford – are tortuous in the extreme. A writer not fluent in Greek might hit upon a few connections by accident, or by borrowing from other writers, but not the volume of sources required for the works of Shakespeare. Andrew Werth³ can point to an endless list of connections, from which I take:

- *The Greek Anthology* is a source for Sonnets 153 and 154.
- Homer is a source for *Troilus and Cressida*; *Midsummer Night's Dream*; *As You Like It*; *The Comedy of Errors*.
- Aeschylus is a source for *Macbeth*. Note the typically Greek way Duncan's murder is announced.
- Sophocles: *Hamlet*; *Othello*; *Macbeth*.

We may add that the reporting of the naval battle in *Edward III* sounds like a typical Greek report by a messenger.

One of the arguments for Oxford's competence in Greek is his capture of the nuance and irony in Greek tragedy. “[The] conception [of character in *Hamlet*] is Greek, and Shakespeare got nearer to the spirit of Greek tragedy than did Jonson and the schoolmasters” (Thomson 250). Since Jacques Amyot translated Plutarch's Greek into French – perhaps the version purchased by Oxford in 1568 referred to above – and Thomas North translated Amyot's version into English, critics have convinced themselves that the writer “got nearer to the spirit of Greek tragedy” through the two idiosyncratic prisms through which Plutarch's *Lives* had to pass to appear in English.

Two other critics, who do not entertain for one moment that the author could be other than William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, state that his patent intima-

cy with the classics is “a miracle we cannot explain” (Martindale 12, also Nuttall 57). To this state of confusion I hope to add the *Sixse Idillia* of Theocritus.

Idillion 8

The first of the idillia selected by the translator is number 8 *Bucoliastae* (“the singers of a neatherd’s [i.e., a cowherd’s] song”). The form of this part bears a superficial resemblance to the eighth Eclogue titled “August” of *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), an early work of Edmund Spenser, the author of *The Faerie Queen* (1590). In Spenser’s circle of writers and admirers – who included Sidney, Dyer, Greville, and Harvey – was E.K. These initials would seem to cover the critic and poet Gabriel Harvey, who sought to be Spenser’s mentor and to have him adhere more closely to those strict humanist ideas mentioned above – fortunately without too much success.

Harvey was the dedicatee of *The Shepheardes Calender* and probably wrote the critical apparatus, the ‘Epistle’, the ‘Generall Argument’, the headnotes with the specific ‘Arguments’, and the ‘Glosses’ and ‘Emblems’ with which the printed work is decorated using the initials E.K. On the other hand, some Oxfordians feel these denote a cover for Oxford himself, and indeed there is circumstantial evidence putting Oxford in the right place to be E.K. (Hyde). However, an examination of these writings shows them to be antipathetic to Oxford’s own literary views as we know them. In the ‘Epistle’ E.K. praises Spenser’s attempts to reintroduce obsolete words. The obsolete words are the cause whereby

... our Mother tong, which truly of it self is both ful enough for prose and stately [my emphasis] for verse, hath long time ben counted most bare and barrein of both. Which default, which some endevoired to salve and recure, they patched up the holes with peces and rags of other languages, borrowing here of the French, there of the Italian, every where of the Latins; not weighing how if those tongues accorde with themselves, but much worse with ours; so they have made our English tongue a gallimaufrey, or a hodge-podge of al other speches.

The Shepheardes Calender “Epistle”

This is a view utterly in accord with Harvey’s and diametrically opposed to Oxford’s.

In the Epistle there is a reference to “the Noble and worthy Gentleman, the right worship full Ma[ster] Phi[lip] Sidney, a special favourer and maintainer of all kind of learning.” This is hardly a description which would come from Oxford, as he refers to Sidney in September 1579, five months after the date of the Epistle, as a “puppy” in the course of their tennis court quarrel. Harvey and Sidney were the literary god-fathers of the strict humanist literary group: their relationship can be seen from their exchanges in Eclogue 10 of the *Shepheardes Calender* discussed towards the end of this

essay. In the absence of any other like-minded godfather type, Harvey looks to be E.K., especially when the writer of the “Epistle” calls him

. . . mine own good maister Harvey, to whom I have in respect of your worthinesse generally, and otherwise upon some particular and special considerations [not specified – intended to reassure the reader that Harvey and E.K. were not the same person], vowed this my labour, and the maidenhead of this our common frends Poetrie

The August Eclogue (No. 8) is a counter-blast to the ‘romantic’ writing of Oxford and his supporters, because it shows Oxford/Willy not just as a poor loser but as hardly a competitor in the competition between himself and Perigot. The case for Spenser dubbing Oxford as ‘Willy’ is not yet generally accepted and is more fully explored in the Broader Conclusions section, with which this essay concludes.

Spenser’s commentator in his Argument introducing the August Eclogue begins:

In this Aeclogue is set forth a delectable controversie made in imitation of that in Theocritus . . . They choose for umpere of their strife, Cuddie, a neatherd’s boye; who having ended their cause, reciteth also himselfe a proper song, wherof Colin, he sayth, was Author.

Colin is Colin Clout, Spenser himself. Cuddie the judge is probably Sidney, the leader of the salon of humanist-inclined literati. Perigot the winner and the loser is Willy/Oxford.

There seems no logical reason (let alone evidence) to suppose that Spenser intended to use the sobriquet ‘Willy’ to refer to different people in 1579 and 1591. The change of tone arises because with the writing of *The Faerie Queene* (and its eventual first publication in 1590) Spenser shook off the influence of Harvey, and Sidney’s death in 1586 removed his influence as well. For large parts of the 1580s Spenser was in Ireland, by location, physically removed somewhat from direct ‘humanist’ influence.

The resemblance between Idillion 8 and Eclogue 8 is superficial, but comparative study provides interesting evidence. At no stage in the Eclogue is Willy given a fair chance and in fact is shown as a (justifiably) poor loser:

Herdgrome [Cuddie,the judge], I fear me, thou have a squint eye
Areede [explain] uprightly who has the victorie.

And perhaps sarcastically:

Never dempt [judged] more right of beautye, I weene
The shepheard of Ida that judged beauties Queene.

In Idillion 8 by contrast, the loser Menelcas, is not like Willy, merely a supplier of counterpoint to Perigot in the Eclogue, but he is given a very fair chance in his contest with the winner Daphnis. Theocritus' judge is an unnamed goatherd, who unlike Cuddie in Spenser's Eclogue 8 who declaims lines he says are Colin's, asks Daphnis to teach him, and Menelcas finishes his part in the poem:

Menelcas greevd, the thing his mind did much dismaie
And sad as a Bride he was, upon the marriage day.

A sad loser but with no cause to be a bad one too. The following Shakespearean words are noted:

“Pawne”

A stake: a security for a bet. (common use). As a noun, *pawn(e)* comes up in *TGV*, *WT*, *KJ*, *R2*, *Wives*, *Lear*, *2H4*. As a verb *pawne* is even more common.

“Smart”

A keen pain. Used metaphorically in *Rape of Lucrece*, line 1238. Used as a noun in *H8*, *Troilus*, and *Cym*. Similar adjectival and verb connotations connoting pain are also found.

While in Eclogue 8 the judge breaks into song, in Idillion 8 he has nothing more to give out after his judgment.

Idillion 9

Cyclops (Idillion 9), the second chosen by the translator, has little to assist my argument. The Cyclops bewails his unrequited love and blames his one-eyed appearance and other facial defects but as the translator's headnote argument says, “there is no medicine [in the poem “medsun”] so souveraigne against love, as is Poetry.” *Souveraigne* is a word meaning ‘supremely medicinal and efficacious’ used metaphorically by Shakespeare twice in *Venus and Adonis* (lines 28 and 916) and in *Sonnet 153* (line 8). *Souveraigne* is also used four times in the plays: in *Tempest* (5.1.145), *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1.2.216), *1 Henry IV* (1.3.57), and in *Coriolanus* (2.1.127). Spenser's January Eclogue is also about unrequited love but is scarcely comparable. Interesting words include:

- “Middest” for *midst*, appears in the Argument at the head of the poem. An archaic use, but found in *2 Henry VI* at (4.7.212)
- “Crowtoe”: appears in Idillion 18. The wild hyacinth or buttercup – not found in the rest of Shakespeare.
- “Strouting bags”: in Idillion 18. Swollen cows' udders – likewise not found.

- “Rattells” used to describe the tops of poppies, but not found used except for rattles (n.) elsewhere

Perhaps the Cyclops’ lines on the pain of his unrequited love in the poem:

For which, this remedie he found, that sitting often times
Upon a rocke and looking on the Sea, he sung these rimes.

struck a chord with Oxford when he wrote an untitled poem (c.1581) which begins:

Sittinge alone upon my thought in melancholye moode,
In sighte of sea, and at my backe an aunceyent horye woode.⁴

Idillion 16

For Idillion 16, *Charites* (possibly, the Graces) or *Hiero* (tyrant of Syracuse 270-215 BCE), the translator provides an Argument which begins:

The stile of this Poeme is *more loftie than anie of the rest*, & Theocritus wrote it to *Hiero King of Siracuse* in Sicily. Wherein he *reproveth the nigardise* of Princes and great men, *towards* the learned, and namelie *Poets*, in whose power it is, to make men famous to *al posterity* . . .

With it we can compare Spenser’s Eclogue for October in *The Shepheardes Calender* which contains an interesting borrowing of thought from Oxford, where Cuddie laments that his poems have been feeding “youths fancie”, but:

They han the pleasure, I a sclender prize;
I beate the bush, the byrds to them doe flye.

Which follows Oxford’s “labouring man” poem published in 1572 seven years earlier:

But hee that beates the bushe the byrde not gets
But who sittes still, and holdeth fast the nets.

The Argument in the headnote to this Eclogue’s first paragraph begins:

This Aeglogue is made in imitation of Theocritus in his 16th idillion, wherein he *reproved the Tyranne Hiero of Siracuse for his nigardise towards Poetes, in whome is the power to make men immortal* for theyr good dedes, or shameful for their naughtie lyfe. . . . *The style hereof*, as also that in Theocritus, *is more loftye then the rest*, and applied to the heights of Poetical witte.

And later in the commentator’s Glosse, which follows each Eclogue:

He [Spenser] sheweth the cause why Poetes were wont to be had in such honor of noble men, that is, by them their worthiness and valor shold through their famous Poesies be commended to *al posterities* . . .

Puttenham, the reputed author of *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589) borrows the same phrasing:

Such personages . . . were Bacchus, Ceres, Hercules, Theseus, and many other, who thereby came to be accounted gods and half-gods and goddesses (heroes) and had their commendations given by hymn accordingly, or by such other poems as their memory was made thereby *made famous to the posterity* forever after . . .” (I, ch. 16)

The remarks in the Glosse seem to bear only a slight relationship to Spenser’s actual poem in contrast to the Idillion translator’s Argument which is an exact *précis* of the Idillion which follows the translator’s headnote Argument. It follows that a translator living with the work which as a poet he labours to turn into poetry will write an Argument directly rather than consult and copy excerpts from the Glosse irrelevant to a poem of a less competent poet (then).⁵ This means that the printer’s date for the printing of the *Sixe Idillia* bears no relation to the actual date the composition was made. If it be correct, this means the *Sixe Idillia* might well have been translated earlier than 1579. We may also consider these rare words in this Idillion:

- “nigardise” : found both in the Argument to this (16th) Idillion and the Spencer Eclogue Glosse (above), but not elsewhere in Shakespeare. “Nigard” however is found in Sonnet 4.
- “chafe” n.: meaning *fret* or *passion* - once used by Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1.3.85)
- “grutch” v. int.: synonym of *grudge*: used only as a present participle in Shakespeare, but in *1 Henry 6* we have: “perish they that grudge one thought against your majesty” (3.1.180)
- “Keep restance”: *reside* – found in contemporary works but not in Shakespeare.

Idillion 18

Perhaps Idillion 18, *Hellens Epithalamion*, named for her wedding to Menelaus – one of history’s less successful nuptials – does not take the matter further, save that some might agree that the following might have autobiographical resonance or some ring of social experience and appeal to the translator accordingly:

[Twelve noble Spartan virgins sing:]
 Fair Bridegrome, do you sleep? Hath slumber al your lims possesst?
 What, are you drousie? Or hath wine your bodie so opprest
 That you are gone to bed? For if you needs would take your rest,
 You should have taen a season meete. Mean time, till it be daie
 Suffer the bride with us, and with her mother deere to plaie....
 For Menelaus, shee at evening, and at morning tide
 From daie to daie, and yeare to yeare shall be thy loving Bride.
 O happie Bridegrome, sure some honest man did sneze to thee
 When thou to Sparta came, to meete with such a one as shee.”
 (lines 9-17)

Shakespeare does not use the word ‘sneze’ in any of its forms or connotations: Sneezing was at the time in Sicily an omen of good luck (Lang 43n). ‘Dight upon their haire in Crowetoe garlands’ means “arranged upon...,” but was already archaic and is not found in the canon.

Idillion 21

Idillion 21, *Netehearde*, is another slight poem, but perhaps the sentiment appealed to the translator, which he summarized in the Argument:

A Neteheard is brought in chafing, that Eunîca a maid of the cittie disdained to kisse him. Wherby it is thought that Theocritus seemeth to checke them, that thinketh this kinde of writing no Poetry, to be too base & rustical. And therefore this Poeme is termed Netehearde.

Perhaps he is using this idea as a shot in his fight with the Sidney-Greville-Harvey humanist group.

- “chafing”: a use from the verb, i.e. complaining
- “I have no will / After the countrie guise to smouch, of Cittie lips I skill” – “I don’t desire to sully but to avail myself of city lips.” ‘Smooch’ and ‘skill’ as a verb in this sense both archaic and not found in the canon
- “slouch”: n. meaning an ungainly person – not found
- “...shee spatterd on her bosome twice or thrice” possibly “she stained her bosom by sputtering saliva in contempt”- neither ‘spattered’ or ‘sputtered’ are found in the canon
- “her mouth she wride” – from ‘wry’ – used in *Cymbeline* (5.1.5) just once.

Idillion 31

Idillion 31, *Adonis*, is the last one chosen for translation. Its headline argument begins: “The conceit of this Idillion is verie delicat” (delicate). Note the use of this *Verie* marker word and its only use in an Argument as opposed the body of the verse.

Here ‘delicat(e)’ – a quite common word – has the nuance ‘ingenious’ as in “a delicate stratagem” (*King Lear* 4.5.180). The poem purports to be a continuation of the Venus and Adonis story, which no doubt appealed to the author of *Venus and Adonis*, whereby Venus sends out a party to capture the boar. The boar pleads for mercy and Venus has pity: “ruth” – used in *Sonnet* 132, *Richard II* (3.4. 107), *Troilus and Cressida* (5.3. 50), and in *Coriolanus* (1.1. 195). This is the boar’s plea at the end of the idillion:

Venus, to thee I swear,
 By thee and husband thine,
 And by these bands of mine,
 And by these hunters all,
 Thy husband faire and tall,
 I minded not to kill,
 But as an image still,
 I beheld him for love.
 His thigh, that naked was,
 Thinking to kiss alas,
 And that hath hurt me thus...

He blames the “needless” (*unnecessary* – a common Shakespeare word) teeth in his snout for the slaying, and is pardoned. *Image* is an uncommon use for a common word in Shakespeare, here meaning as a conception – in imagination. It is found so used in *The Tempest*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure For Measure*, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Twelfth Night* (three times), in *Troilus and Cressida*, and in *Macbeth*.

In addition to the curious use of *verie* instead of *verse* with the long *S* – discussed in my third paragraph at the beginning of this essay – there are six other uses of *verie*, one of which is the headline argument to Idillion 31 (above). The other five are in the text below. **A** is the *Sixe Idillia* version, **B** is Lang’s prose translation. These five uses do not appear in the original Greek.

Idillion 8 [The gift of a she-goat]

- A** “Which to the *verie* brim, the paile doth ever fill”
B “that ever fills the milking pail above the brim”

Idillion 9

(i) [a medicine to combat love-sickness]

A “yes *verie* hard to finde”**B** “but hard to procure”

(ii) [Cyclops’ one-eyed ugliness]

A “But well I knowe, fair Nimphe, the *verie* cause why you thus flie.”**B** “I know, thou gracious maiden, why it is that thou dost shun me.”**Idillion 16**

(i)

A “To all posteritie, the *verie* horses are renoun’d.”**B** “honour too was won by the swift steeds”

(ii)

A “So that of warr, the *verie* name maie not be heard againe.”**B** “may none anymore so much as name the cry of onset [blare of the trumpet, the command to charge].”

My schoolboy Greek enables me to confirm that there are no superlatives nor any other original word which needs to be translated as “*verie*” in the original Greek.

There is another possible parallel. Spenser dedicated *The Shepheardes Calender* to Harvey, and I have suggested that Harvey is E.K. the commentator who produces the introductory Arguments and the postscript Glosses (see section on the first translated idillion, above).

In 1582 Thomas Watson (1557-92) produced his *Hekatompathia* – ‘The Passionate Century of Love’: verses dedicated in the following fulsome terms to Oxford, who is the probable author of the annotations to it – in the same way that Harvey was, or may have been, the author of the critical apparatus surrounding *The Shepheardes Calender*.

To the Right Honorable my very good Lord Edward de Vere, Earle of Oxenford, Viscount Bulbecke, Lord of Escales, and Badlesmere, and Lord High Chamberlaine of England, all happinesse.

Alexander the Great, passing on a time the workeshop of Apelles, curiouslie surveyed some of his doings: whose long stay in viewing them, brought all the people into so good a liking of the painters workemanship, that immediatelie after, they bought up all his pictures, what price soever he set them at.

And the like good happe (Right Honorable) befel unto mee latelie, concerning these my Loves Passions, which then chaunced to Apelles, for his Portraites. For since the world hath understood (I know not how) that your Honor had willinglie vouchsafed the acceptance of this worke, and at convenient leisures favourable perused it, being as yet in written hand, many have oftentimes and earnestly called upon mee, to put it to the presse, that for their mony they might but see, what your Lordship had some liking had already perused. And therewithal some of them said (either to yield your Honor his due prayse, for soundness of judgment; or to please me, of whom long since they had conceived well) that Alexander would like of no lines, but such as were drawn by the cunning hand, and the curious pensill of Apelles

In the introductory body to *Hekatompathia* Watson included a Latin poem addressed to his book of poems which contains the lines (in translation):

. . . Also if you cross Sidney's desk, or Dyer's, two fields that lie open for the Muses, say that . . . you have been shown to Vere, a man who deserves great things for his virtue and true nobility. Both of these gentlemen will then remove the frown from their brows, read you kindly, both will ignore your blemishes. Then as a servant you will accompany Vere to the golden roofed house of Apollo.

The phrase "remove the frown from their brows" means to cease to be obstructive.

One copy survives with annotations which are "most interesting part of the book" (Lewis 383) because the annotator rolls off quotations from Homer, Xenophon, Horace, Martial, Pliny, Virgil, Ovid, Tibullus, Theocritus, Petrarch, and Ronsard, along with obscure Italian poets Fiorenzuola, Strozza and Parabosco, without apparently breaking into a sweat. By this method of commentary, the annotator follows E.K. (or Harvey?) in *The Shepheardes Calender*, and Oxford is the only likely candidate as the annotator of *Hekatompathia*.

Thomas Watson's poem LIII (53) has this headnote:

Argument: The first two parts of this sonnet, are in imitation of certain Greek verse of Theocritus (Id. 19); which verses as they are translated by many good poets later dayes, so most aptlie and plainly by C. Vreinus Velius in his Epigrammes [the Latin of Velius is then quoted at length]

As Mark Anderson (183) puts it: "if the author of Watson's glosses is not de Vere, an additional Elizabethan literary genius still awaits the light of discovery."

So, in addition to the fulsome dedication to Oxford and the Latin additional poem, Oxford is the dedicatee who also can be identified as the supplier of the explanation

and critical apparatus contained in the headnote annotations to Watson's poems, and also as the translator and commentator of the *Sixe Idillia*.

Broader Conclusions

Oxfordians contend that Edward de Vere (1550-1604) used the pseudonym Willy (Will or William) *Shakespeare* (or *Shake-speare*) as a cover for his literary and other artistic endeavours at various stages of his career. The characters Black *Will* and George *Shakebag* in *Arden of Faversham* (1592) – which may be a re-write of the court comedy *Murderous Michael* (1577) – may be other examples. The Latin pun in Harvey's address to the Queen at Cambridge in 1578, discussed above, could be another. Likewise *Will Monox* – “my Oxford” – referred to by Nashe in his *Strange News* (1592), along with Spenser's references to *Willy*, seem to refer to de Vere. The contention is strengthened by the evidence suggesting that Spenser always used Willy as his name for the Earl of Oxford. I suggest the name was originally chosen as courtly bar-room humour perhaps in recognition of his success with the ladies of the Court.

While establishing Oxford as the translator of the *Sixe Idillia* is a worthwhile goal for scholars, it opens up, with additional armour, the contention that Oxford appears as Willy in both Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* and in *Tears of the Muses* (1591). So far I have tried to establish Oxford as Willy in *Shepheardes Calender* (1579) and the translator and commentator of *Sixe Idillia*, and to argue *Sixe Idillia* is the later work. The contrary suggestions are that Spenser, having used Willy as the cover name for a leading poet in 1579, would naturally wish to reuse that name as a cover for some other poet in *Tears of the Muses* in 1591, or that he would take Willy, used as the cover for a different poet in 1579, and stick the name on Oxford in 1591.

Tears of the Muses contains no reference to Sidney who was killed five years earlier, and is clearly intended as a critique of the state of the arts in 1591 as Spenser found them on his return to London. Other attempts at identifying Willy with other poetic luminaries in either or both works seem less persuasive, logical, or even complete.

A look at the names Spenser did use should clarify the position further:

Colin Clout: There can be little doubt that Spenser meant to identify himself with this name. He appears in Eclogues 1, 6, 11 and 12, and is mentioned in Eclogue 4, where a poem to the Queen is ascribed to him, and in Eclogue 8, which Cuddie concludes by performing Colin's song. Willy declares:

Fayth of my soule, thou [Cuddie] shalt ycrouned be
 In Colins stede, if thou this song arede [declare]
 For never thing on earth so pleaseth me
 As him to hear or matter of his deede.

I think Willy is probably being shown to know there was no possibility of Cuddie replacing Colin with a 'better' song. Spenser makes Oxford declare that Cuddie's recital of it would please him (Oxford) most. In effect Oxford is still in third place behind the other two, to the satisfaction of the Sidney-Harvey literary faction.

Willy: He can only be Oxford. The most obvious indication is that Spenser would be unlikely to use the same name for two different poets, first in 1579 for *The Shepheardes Calender* and then in 1591 when he has his *Complaints* published containing *Tears of the Muses*, regretting the current state of the arts and indicating that Willy is absenting himself – first to the lamentation of Thalia the muse of comedy:

But me have banished, with all the rest
That whilome wont to wait upon my traine,
Fine Counterfesaunce, and unhurtfull Sport,
Delight and Laughter, deckt in seemly sort.

All these, and all that els the Comick Stage
With seasoned wit and goodly pleasance graced,
By which mans life in his likest image
Was limned forth, are wholly now defaced;
And those sweet wits, which wont the like to frame
Are now despizd, and made a laughing game.

And he, the man whom Nature self hath made
To mock her self, and Truth to imitate,
With kindly counter under mimic shade,
Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late
With whom all joy and jolly merriment
Is also deaded, and in dolor drent.

In stead thereof scoffing Scurrilitie
And scornful Follie with contempt is crept,
Rolling in rymes of shameless ribaudrie
Without record or due decorum kept;
Each idle wit presumes to make,
And doth the Learneds taske on him to take

But that same gentle Spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet Nectar flow
Scorning the boldness of such baseborn men
Doth rather choose to sit in idle [i.e., non-productive] Cell
Than so himself to mockery to sell.

Secondly we may add from Terpsichore's Lament: "Blind Error, scornfull Follie, and base spight" now rule:

Nor anie one doth care to call us in,
Or once vouchsafeth us to entertaine,
Unless some one perhaps of gentle kin,
For pitties sake compassion our paine,
And yield us some reliefe in this distresse . . .

Thalia's verses confirm that Oxford is out of circulation – "gentle Willy" (noble Shakespeare) is silent, "scorning . . . baseborn men."

"Willy" is identified by both Dryden and Rowe as Shakespeare. C.S. Lewis (p. 308) identified Willy 'more plausibly' with Richard Wills, Willes, or Willy the learned author of *De Re Poetica* 1573, who died around 1579.

As the next but one stanza reveals, "Willy" is very much alive in his "idle cell." At the time of Oxford's non-productivity from 1588 onwards, he was suffering extreme depression which is clear from the surrounding evidence (Malim 164-172). Some have sought to show that the first and third verses depict Sidney as Willy and Oxford as the anonymous *gentle Spirit* disjunctively but the use of the connecting phrases "In stead thereof" and "But that same gentle Spirit" would appear to confirm their unity of reference to Oxford. One may contrast his social status ("gentle", i.e. noble vouched for by Terpsichore) with "such baseborn men."

Cuddie: I believe this is Sidney. In addition to the passage in Eclogue 8 mentioned above, in Eclogue 10 of *The Shepheardes Calender*, Cuddie is examined by Piers, who might again be Harvey. He complains he is not receiving the credit for his verses in terms that mirror a phrase or two from Oxford's poem beginning: "The labouring man . . ." Piers' comment is:

Oh what an honor is it, to restraine
The lust of lawless youth with good advice
Or prick them forth with pleasaunce of thy vaine
Whereto you list [want] their trained willes entice.

In other words, Harvey – if it be he – wants Sidney to lead them in ways of poetry ("trained") acceptable to Harvey – i.e., the writing of English poetry in strict Latin hexameters or heroic couplets, or at least "with pleasaunce of thy vaine" [i.e., with appreciation of your genius].

Harvey endeavours to persuade him of this in Eclogue 10:

Abandon, then, the base and viler clowne;
Lyft up thyselfe out of the lowly dust,

And sing of bloody Mars, or wars and giusts . . .

But Cuddie points out that Virgil (“Tityrus”) did just that (“Arma virumque cano”), and it did not do him much good. And Sidney was right – he had no major preferments until his knighthood in 1581, notwithstanding his much-praised part in an embassy in 1577 to the crowned heads of Europe. Notably when Harvey addressed Oxford at Audley End in 1578 he wanted Oxford to give up writing altogether (“throw away the insignificant pen...”), but here, in contrast, Piers/Harvey wants Cuddie/Sidney to “sing of bloody Mars” etc.

Towards the end of Eclogue 10, Cuddie as Sidney – a man with no record of appreciation for alcohol – gives out an even more relevant passage:

Thou kenst not, Percie, how the ryme should rage?
 Oh, if my temples were distained with wine, [emphasis added]
 And girt in girlonds of wild Yvie twine,
 How could I rear the Muse on stately stage,
 And teach her tread aloft in buskin fine,
 With queint [quenched, i.e. satisfied] Bellona [war goddess] in her equipage,
 But, ah! My corage cooles ere it be warme. [i.e., I’ll be taking no action]

Spenser is showing Sidney agreeing that he is not the man to reform the stage as Harvey would like: that is, into the Aristoteleian fake straightjacket of the four unities. In effect, he admits the stage under Oxford’s lead and his track record as a history and romantic comedy writer as early as 1579 would not be readily reformable, and contents himself with an attack which can only be aimed at Oxford and his dramatic skills.

Two minor points should be noted which might appear, at first sight, to embarrass my thesis:

1. A 1587 *Elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sidney* by “Anomatos” refers to Sidney as ‘Willy.’ In contrast, Spenser, who was resident in distant Ireland since 1580 when he came to write epitaphs for Sidney, called him Astrophel, or Phillisides, names under which the deceased hero might readily be recognised.
2. We need to note the poem entitled *Elegy made long since upon the death of Sir Philip Sidney* by ‘A.W.’ contained in Volume I of the brothers Davison’s *Poetical Rhapsody* (1601).⁶ This work was dedicated to the Earl of Pembroke, Sidney’s brother-in-law, and this may have been an afterthought, because in editions one and four the deceased is referred to as ‘Willy’ and in editions two and three as ‘Sidney’, which may be regarded as suspicious. However, from internal evidence I suspect the deceased Willy being celebrated is Spenser himself who had died more recently in 1598, because not only is Willy dead but Spenser’s creations Colin Clout and Cuddie are dead or silenced as well, as readily appears from these extracts:

Sing no more the songs of Colin Clout
Lament the source of all annoy
Willy is dead. [i.e., "Sidney is dead" /eds. two and three]

Ah Colin I lament thy case
For thee remains no hope of grace."

. . .
Come now, ye shepherds daughters . . .
Your Willy's life was Cuddie's joy
Your Willy's death has killed the boy.

Our Willy dead, Our Colin killed with care;
Who shall not loath live, and long to die
And will not grief our little Cuddie spare.

The references to Cuddie clearly indicate that the references in *The Shepherds Calender* may not have been in A. W.'s mind. A. W. wrote (also in *Poetical Rhapsody*) *Eclogue entitled Cuddie* and in it he referred to Cuddie as "A little herdgroom."

I am satisfied that I have made out the case that the attribution of 'Willy' has to be to Oxford by Spenser in 1579 and 1591, and that the other references to 'Willy' are not germane.

Notes

1. May pp. 13-14. May also wrote, “While we cannot know to what extent his [Oxford’s] example spurred on those who followed, his precedent did at least confer genuine respectability upon the later efforts of such poets as Sidney, Greville and Raleigh.” The passages I quote from the Arguments and Glosses to *The Shepherdes Calender* above give some evidence that his example was not only precedent in time, but also precisely such a spur.
2. Ward’s own translation.
3. Werth also supplies many of the quotations. A note from his paper in *The Oxfordian* 5 adds “*The Greek Anthology* has a long and fairly complex history. . . .The *Anthology* was popular in Europe from the beginning of the sixteenth century and was published in partial Latin editions in Venice, Florence, Paris, London, Frankfurt, and other major cities. For a detailed study of the history and literature of this fascinating work, see Alan Cameron’s *The Greek Anthology: From Meleager to Planudes*.” (p. 27).
4. I suggest that this reference nails down any further doubt about the poem’s authorship; May (p. 38) sets out the full text but says it is “possibly by Oxford.”
5. Lewis’s basic case is that if Spenser had not written *The Faerie Queene* he would not have received much acclaim as a poet.
6. Quotations from Davison from Brydges 1814 and Bell 1890. I have been referred to Eric Miller’s essay on his website (<http://ericmillerworks.com>) in which he seeks to show with considerable success that AW was in fact Oxford at least in regard to the authorship of a number of the poems in *Poetical Rhapsody*. It is a moot question as to whether this identification can be extended to this poem as well. If it is not Oxford’s, then my interpretation stands, but if it is by Oxford, a still more interesting (but still logical) scenario can be imagined – the poem is Oxford’s memorial to Spenser and bewails the departure of his creations, Colin Clout, Willy and Cuddie. From Oxford’s point of view, there are two secondary advantages; first, he can distance himself from ‘Willy’ if he wants to and secondly, he has a subtle dig at Sidney’s reputation by portraying Sidney as a little boy, or a “little herdgroom”. Perhaps that is why the poem had in the second edition to be stuck on to Sidney after all.

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