

BOOK REVIEW

Fortunatus im Unglück: Die Aventiuren des Master F. I. *Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford*. Translated by *Chris Hirte*. Afterword by *Kurt Kreiler*. Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 2006. Pp. 259.

Like most “Stratfordians,” I did not think that Oxfordians “deserved the compliment of rational opposition,” as Jane Austen would say, and never would have reviewed this book had I not encountered a footnote in the fascinating, tortured correspondence between Sigmund Freud (a notorious Oxfordian in later life) and his fiancée Martha Bernays.¹ If scholars of their caliber, three of the world’s most eminent historians of psychoanalysis, can take Oxfordianism seriously, Shakespeareans need to speak up and not simply trust that Hollywood will sink the Oxfordian cause by reducing it to the absurd. Arguing against opponents who hold a view rooted in class prejudice and requiring belief in near-omnipotent conspiratorial power while discounting the power of an author’s imagination is a thankless and usually vain task, but one hopes that outsiders to the field of Renaissance English literature will be open-minded enough to recognize evidence when confronted with it. I will leave the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays and poems to Shakespeareans. But since it is not as notorious that Oxford warmed up for Shakespeare by writing George Gascoigne’s *Adventures of Master F. J.* and several poems included in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573), I feel compelled, as the most recent editor of that book, to dispute Kurt Kreiler’s assertions about the authorship of *Master F. J.* and other poems that he attributes to Oxford.²

1. Sigmund Freud and Martha Bernays, *Die Brautbriefe*, vol. 1, *Sei mein, wie ich mir’s denke: Juni 1882–Juli 1883*, ed. Gerhard Fichtner, Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, and Albrecht Hirschmüller (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2011), 456. Gerhard Fichtner died on January 4, 2012. His contributions to Freud scholarship are immense, and he will be greatly missed.

2. Kurt Kreiler repeats his assertions about Oxford’s authorship, sometimes less cautiously, in *Der Mann, der Shakespeare erfand: Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel,

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Although there is no good reason to believe that Oxford invented Shakespeare, one might well wonder whether Gascoigne did write the parts of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* not explicitly attributed to him. Gascoigne delights in mystification; at one point in the second edition, *The Posies of George Gascoigne Esquire* (1575), a marginal note mischievously informs the reader, “These thinges are mistical and not to bee understoode but by Thauthour him selfe.”³ Gascoigne presents *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* as a largely anonymous anthology—no author’s name appears on the title page, and prefatory letters tell a story of surreptitious publication—while hinting at his authorship in his quest for patronage. Furthermore, contingencies of the printing house during the production of the first edition in 1573 compounded the confusion of Gascoigne’s charade of now you see me, now you don’t. The main issue at hand is easily stated. Does one accept Gascoigne’s claims in the title and prefatory letters to *The Posies of George Gascoigne Esquire* that he wrote the works included in both editions? Or does one believe that Oxford wrote *Master F. J.* and “The Devises of sundrie Gentlemen” not explicitly attributed to Gascoigne but did not publish them under his own name because “His *Adventures* were, according to contemporary ideas, a highly offensive, lascivious, treacherous work” (209)—treacherous in revealing the prevailing promiscuity in courtly circles? The evidence is overwhelming that Gascoigne wrote everything in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* except for the duly acknowledged translation by Francis Kinwelmarsh of a couple of acts of *Jocasta*.

It should be unnecessary to make such an argument because, as have I pointed out before, the notion that *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* is an anthology edited and partially composed by Oxford was exploded by W. W. Greg in his review of B. M. Ward’s edition, which launched this fantasy, and by C. T. Prouty.⁴ Neglecting the scholarly principle that one ought to acknowledge if not argue against opposing positions, Kreiler never mentions Greg or refers to Prouty’s arguments. In fact, he does not argue against (or even cite) anyone who makes the case for Gascoigne’s authorship and does not

2009). He also assigns the verse prologue to *The complaynt of Phylomene* (1576) to Oxford (181), but since he offers no evidence for this attribution (or for assigning to Oxford N. R.’s commendatory poem in the volume that contains it), I see no reason to say more than the idea has, to my knowledge, never occurred to anyone and to state flatly that there is no such evidence.

3. George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. G. W. Pigman III (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 341. I suspect that Gascoigne himself wrote this note, but it is impossible to say with certainty. All quotations of Gascoigne’s works are from this edition (hereafter “my edition”) with page numbers indicated parenthetically.

4. See my edition, xlv; W. W. Greg, review of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres from the Original Edition*, ed. B. M. Ward (London: Etchells & Macdonald, 1926), *Library* 7 (1926): 269–82; Greg’s reply to Ward’s letter, *Library* 8 (1927): 123–30; *George Gascoigne’s “A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres,”* ed. C. T. Prouty (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1942), 19–28.

refer to any work on Gascoigne since 1966 other than my edition.⁵ Nor does Kreiler make clear the extent of his indebtedness to Ward or his disagreements with him.⁶

Kreiler does credit Ward with discovering the acrostic “Edward De Vere” in “The absent lover (in ciphers) disciphering his name, doth crave some spedie relief.” Although Kreiler, who regards this acrostic as beyond chance, concludes that historical and artistic insight determines the question of authorship, not a method of deciphering (199), it is hard to imagine that anyone would ever have connected Oxford with *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* if not for the cipher. Be that as it may, the cryptographers William Friedman and Elizebeth Friedman demonstrated, in a book not mentioned by Kreiler, that applying Ward’s rules does show that the acrostic could be owing to chance: they discover “Lewis Carroll.”⁷ Furthermore, the first line of the poem, “*L’escü d’amour*, the shield of perfect love,” deciphers (i.e., reveals) the name “Scudamore,” a contraction of the Italian for “shield of love.”⁸ This interpretation is much more economical and less fanciful, especially if one accepts Gascoigne’s declaration in 1575 (370) that he had written poems for other men: the dear dame addressed in the poem would have had no trouble recognizing the name of her lover.

So what does Kreiler’s historical and artistic insight amount to? Crudely put, the best works were written by Oxford, the pedestrian ones by Gascoigne. Matters of taste are, of course, subjective and beyond argument, but I myself find most of the stylistic features that Kreiler admires garden-variety Petrarchanism and believe that Gascoigne’s virtues lie elsewhere. One can argue, however, that Kreiler does not persuasively account for the hints in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* that the poems that he wishes to assign to Oxford were in fact written by Gascoigne, as he claimed in 1575.⁹

Before turning to these indications of Gascoigne’s authorship, I ought to say a word about the only poem that, although not written by the Earl of Oxford, might allude to him, “A loving Lady being wounded in the spring time, and now galded eftsones with the remembrance of the spring, doth therefore thus bewayle” (237–38). I will not repeat the reasons for supposing that “The lustie *Ver*” bewailed by the lady might refer to Edward de

5. In her excellent *George Gascoigne* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2008), Gillian Austen reviews Gascoigne’s possible contact with Oxford and concludes “there is no evidence that they were closely acquainted” (152).

6. Kreiler is less inventive than Ward, who believed that Oxford found some poems that Christopher Hatton had indiscreetly written about a love affair, wrote the prose of *Master F. J.* to connect these poems, and published the lot to discredit his rival with Queen Elizabeth.

7. William F. Friedman and Elizebeth S. Friedman, *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined: An Analysis of Cryptographic Systems* (Cambridge University Press, 1957), 132–34.

8. See my edition, 262.

9. I mention these hints in my edition, 596.

Vere.¹⁰ Kreiler believes that Oxford is not only the author of this poem but also the speaker, who overhears the lady's lament, and her "merry heartbreaker." But identifying the speaker with the heartbreaker does violence to the last stanza, in which the speaker addresses ladies who know about whom he sings and asks them to "cause this noble spring, / To send his sunne" to the wounded lady. The speaker and "this noble spring" are not the same person. Kreiler's misreading does not invalidate Oxford's authorship. But that would involve imagining that Oxford had the bad taste, or heartlessness, to write a poem in which he overhears a lady lamenting his dumping her and then urges ladies who know this "merry heartbreaker" to exhort him to restore her to his favor. If the poem actually does refer to one of Oxford's affairs, it is much simpler (and kinder to Oxford) to think that Gascoigne wrote it. Again and again we will see that it is more straightforward to attribute poems to Gascoigne than to Oxford. Complicated ad hoc explanation is a hallmark of Oxfordianism.

How does Gascoigne alert the careful reader that he is the author of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*? In the first edition, "The Devises of sundrie Gentlemen" form part of the collection presented by G. T. and precede the section attributed to Gascoigne, the only author mentioned by name in the book (other than Kinwelmersh for translating part of *Jocasta*, which does not form part of G. T.'s collection). G. T. prefaces the first of these poems, all of which are entitled "Gascoigne's . . .," by remarking, "I will now deliver unto you so many more of Master Gascoignes Poems as have come to my hands" (263). Kreiler introduces his translation of this passage and its continuation by calling them "strange words" (171), but they are more than that. The clear implication of "so many more" is that Gascoigne wrote at least some of the poems that we have just read, but Kreiler has nothing to say about this.

He does have something to say about two of Gascoigne's other hints that he is the author of the entire volume (181). He claims that Oxford appropriates his poetic shadow, Gascoigne, by naming the lover of "His Riddle" (231) "G. G.," although it is a self-portrait, and by playing with the letters "A.O.G.N.C.S." and writing as if he were "Gascon" in "Eyther a needlesse or a bootelesse comparison betwene two letters" (253–54). If one were to take this seriously, one would want to know how to tell that in one poem Oxford adopts Gascoigne's initials to write about himself but in another inserts an anagram of his name to write about Gascoigne's marital misadventures (he married a woman already married to Edward Boyes, the "B" of the poem). Why isn't Oxford writing about some experience of Gascoigne's in "His Riddle" and the sequence of which it forms a part? Kreiler

10. For these reasons, see my edition, 611; the poem may not refer to real people. Incidentally, "ver" means "spring" in English, not just in Latin, as Kreiler implies (204).

provides no explanation. It is simpler to believe that George Gascoigne is using his initials and an anagram of his name while writing about himself than that the Earl of Oxford first attributes a flirtation of his own to G. G. and then impersonates G. G. courting his wife.

Kreiler, who accepts that Gascoigne did write the poems assigned to him in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, does not mention a more important hint that Gascoigne wrote one of "The Devises." In line 24 of "Gascoignes Recantation," Gascoigne says, "That once I soong, I *Bathe in Blisse*, amide my wearie *Bale*" (274). But "A straunge passion of another Author," the first line of which reads, "Amid my Bale I bath in blisse" (243), does not appear in the Gascoigne section of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*. Did Gascoigne insert lines in his own poem obligingly to lay claim to a poem written by Oxford to help his noble friend conceal his authorship? Or did Gascoigne include another indication that, as he said in 1575, he was the sole author of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*? Presumably Kreiler would have to say that Gascoigne was covering Oxford's tracks because he praises and compares one stanza of this poem with another that he attributes to Oxford from *The Paradyse of Daynty Deuyseyes* (192).

There is another poem, surely by Gascoigne, that Kreiler praises as Oxford's (173): the argument (it is not a prologue, as Kreiler says) to the translation of *Jocasta* (59). In *Der Mann, der Shakespeare erfand* [The man who invented Shakespeare], Kreiler makes explicit what he had only implied originally: Oxford wrote this poem for publication in 1573.¹¹ But that was not the case, since the argument is in the manuscript of *Jocasta*, almost certainly written in 1568, a year or so after the performance of the play at Gray's Inn.¹² This is not simply a matter of getting the date wrong, for neither the stigma of print nor anxiety about impropriety would prevent someone from signing his name in manuscript to an argument to a play ostensibly by Euripides. Futhermore, as W. W. Greg, the author of *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration* (1939–59), remarked, an argument is "not a very likely addition for an outsider to supply."¹³ To assign the argument to Oxford would require imagining some complicated scenario; to assign it to Gascoigne, whom Kreiler accepts as a translator of the play, is straightforward.¹⁴ So once again Kreiler cannot distinguish a poem by Gascoigne from one by Oxford.

Nor does Kreiler distinguish Gascoigne's versification from Oxford's. One of the aspects of Oxford's style that Kreiler singles out for praise is his

11. Kreiler, *Der Mann, der Shakespeare erfand*, 47.

12. For a discussion of this manuscript, see my edition, xlvi–l.

13. Greg, review of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, 277.

14. It is not impossible that Kinwelmersh, the other translator, wrote the argument, although I doubt it, but supposing so would introduce yet another author with the stylistic excellencies of the Earl of Oxford.

astonishing use of poulter's measure (172). Kreiler does not mention that this verse form is the most used in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, with fifteen examples in the poems that he assigns to Oxford and fifteen in the ones allowed to Gascoigne.¹⁵ He does not contrast the use of poulter's measure by Oxford and Gascoigne—one would be hard put to find significant differences—and does not mention that in *Certayne notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English* (1575), Gascoigne himself coined the phrase and called "Poulter's measure" "the commonest sort of verse which we use now adayes" (461).¹⁶

Kreiler begins his discussion of *Master F. J.* with an extravagant claim for its originality: in the sixteenth century, there is a new voice, one that understands love as a form of the battle between the sexes and arranges the lovers as masterly combatants in a game (147). But love as a battle between the sexes is not a new idea in the sixteenth century; Gascoigne has skillfully developed the old theme of the "militia amoris."¹⁷ It is not simply point-scoring pedantry to call attention to Kreiler's exaggeration, for, once again, he does not distinguish Gascoigne from Oxford. It is true that the warfare of love is most prominent in *Master F. J.*—and not merely figurative when F. J. rapes Elinor—but there is an extended use of the topos in lines 71–84 of a poem that Kreiler assigns to Gascoigne, "Dan Bartholmews Dolorous discourses" (339). When one is dealing with something as commonplace as the "militia amoris" to establish authorship, it does not suffice to quote from a poem signed "E. O." in *The Paradyse of Daynty Devyses* and then to comment that the poem resembles poems from "The Devises" because, among other things, they present "the woman as dearest enemy" and describe "the erotic relationship in the vocabulary of the warrior" (192). One needs at least to show that there is something specifically Oxfordian about these passages, something that they do not share with uses of these commonplaces by Gascoigne and his contemporaries. Renaissance poetry is a tissue of commonplaces, some developed more brilliantly than others. Calling attention to resemblances does not establish authorship.

15. For a list, see my edition, 746.

16. Kreiler does not dispute Gascoigne's authorship of this little treatise, for he implies, without coming out and saying so, that Oxford is the unknown Edouardo Donati, at whose request Gascoigne says he wrote it (454). The evidence? Oxford signed his Latin preface to Castiglione "Edouardus Verus," and "'Donati' sounds like the words 'donatio' and 'donator,' by which the giver or grantor is probably meant" (252). One cannot deny that Edward was Oxford's first name.

17. The "military service of love" was a particularly common theme in the Roman elegists. For example, Ovid's famous and influential *Amores* 1.9 begins, "Every lover is a soldier," and draws out the comparison of the two at great length. Petrarch's *Canzoniere* 140 (translated by Wyatt as "The long love that in my thought I harbour") is another famous extended example of love as warfare. See the note on 563–64 in my edition for more examples and references to the scholarly literature.

A heavy burden of proof lies upon anyone who seeks to overturn a long-standing, near-unanimous scholarly opinion, in this case, that Gascoigne was the author of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*. Kreiler clearly is not up to the burden. He ignores the scholarly literature on Gascoigne. He endorses Ward's fanciful acrostic. He cannot account for Gascoigne's hints in the 1573 edition that he was author of the entire collection. His artistic and historical analysis is at best impressionistic. He does not distinguish Gascoigne's poems from the ones that he attributes to Oxford. His contention that Oxford invented Shakespeare is equally groundless, but others will have to take up that dreary task of refutation, even if they do not believe that Oxfordianism deserves the compliment of rational opposition.

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