

1591 – A WATERSHED YEAR FOR OXFORD AND THE ENGLISH THEATRE

By Alexander Waugh

Abstract:

This article provides evidence that Thomas Churchyard, Thomas Nashe and Christopher Marlowe were among the playwrights lodged in Oxford's scriptorium at St Peter's Hill in 1591 and explains how an ignominious rent scandal – the cause of a quarrel between Churchyard and Oxford – inspired the creation of Falstaff and changed the way all theatre was managed thereafter.

Odd things were happening to English playwrights at the beginning of the 1590s. On 26 August 1591 Thomas Lodge, one of London's most successful dramatists and a euphuist acolyte of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, abandoned his quill to embark on a two-year sea voyage to South America with an expeditionary force under the command of Sir Thomas 'The Navigator' Cavendish. As Lodge's ship was crossing the equator Christopher Marlowe, the famous tragedian, was arrested in the Netherlands on a charge of counterfeiting money. Neither Lodge, who died in 1625, nor Marlowe can be shown with any degree of certainty to have written a single new play after the summer of 1591. On his return to England, Lodge trained to be a doctor, and in the short time that was left to Marlowe before his violent death in May 1593 he wrote an atheist tract (never published, now lost), a dedication to Lady Pembroke and an unfinished epyllion, *Hero and Leander*.

John Lyly, perhaps the most admired comic playwright of the English court during the 1580s and Oxford's long-time servant, also appears to have stopped writing for the stage after 1591. In the fifteen years before his death in 1606 his fortunes fell very low. Promises of employment by the queen were not honoured. In petitions to her and to her minister Robert Cecil, Lyly lamented his condition as 'the most miserable example of misfortune' comparing himself to an oyster, soon to be swallowed up, that can 'only live on dead hopes'.¹

Robert Greene, whose prolific output of pamphlets, plays, romances and other publications establishes him as the single most successful author of the 1580s, died in wretchedness and poverty in September 1592. So desperate was he

for cash at the beginning of that year that, having sold the rights to his play *Orlando Furioso* for twenty nobles to the Queen's Men, and taking advantage of their absence from London, he crookedly resold the same play for the same amount to Edward Alleyn for performances by the Lord Admiral's and Lord Strange's Men.² Alleyn was a thundering stage-shaking show-off of an actor and a sharp practising businessman who had risen to dominant heights in the English theatre world from the humble origins of a publican's son from the Pye Inn outside Bishopsgate. By usuary, shrewd property investment, theatrical wheeler-dealing and a professional association with Philip Henslowe (his theatre-owning father-in-law), Alleyn had established himself by the end of 1592 as the chief employer of impoverished playwrights and actors in London.

Having acquired the performing rights in *Orlando Furioso* from the author, Alleyn proceeded to meddle with Greene's text, adding 531 tasteless and bombastic lines of his own to the title role which he then declaimed in his booming voice from the stage of the Rose theatre in February 1592.³ Greene was so affronted by Alleyn's literary vandalism that he hit back in a screed published immediately after his death under the title *Greenes Groatsworth of Witte*. Though unnamed in the pamphlet, the object of Greene's scorn could hardly have passed unnoticed by contemporary readers. Surely it was Alleyn (not William Shaksper of Stratford) whom Greene mercilessly caricatured as an 'Upstart Crow' (recalling the corvid sign at the Pye Inn), as a dishonest usurer, as a tight fisted employer of playwrights and an 'Ape' (a mimic actor), who fancied himself as the 'only Shake-scene in a countrey' and (even more absurdly) as a '*Iohannes factotum*' able 'to bombast out a blanke verse' as well as such experienced university wits as Greene's close friends, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe and George Peele'.⁴

These three playwrights found themselves, like Greene, to be utterly destitute in 1592. George Peele, a gentleman scholar, was so poor as to be 'driven to extreme shifts' for a living. Marlowe, who earlier that year was behind bars for counterfeiting, was back in England in the Spring of 1592, but forsaken by the noble lord who had employed him to write for his players in the previous year. By the end of 1592 he was, according to Greene, living with Nashe and Peele a life of 'woeful experience' and 'unheard of wretchedness'. Nashe remembered himself in that year as 'in most forsaken extremities'.⁵ Despite their desperate

circumstances Greene warned all three against writing plays for Alleyn and other ‘rude groomes’ like Philip Henslowe.

Lodge, Greene, Marlowe, Lyly, Peele and Nashe were not the only dramatists who appear to have lost all sense of direction after 1591. Matthew Roydon, Thomas Achelley and Thomas Watson cannot be shown to have written any new plays after 1591. Even Thomas Kyd appears to have stopped writing for the stage after that year, with only a single translation of a ‘closet drama’ (a play not intended for public performance but for private reading) registered to his name between 1591 and his death at the end of 1594.⁶ The dramatic career of poet, playwright and soldier, Thomas Churchyard, once a servant of the Earl of Oxford, reveals precisely the same symptoms. Why is it that he wrote no plays from 1591 until his death in 1604? The documented events of Churchyard’s life in the early months of 1591 help, I believe, to answer this and to explain the apparent collapse of many, if not all, of the above-named playwrights’ careers in this time.

The details of Churchyard’s case are as follows. In June 1590, following the death of Oxford’s ‘very loving friend’ Thomas Randolph (a distinguished diplomat) half of his vast and ancient house on St Peter’s Hill, lying between St Paul’s Cathedral and the Thames, was let to one Julianna Penne of Cheapside, a business woman, widow and mother of Lord Burghley’s patronage secretary Michael Hickes.⁷ In December of that year Mrs Penne sub-let her part of the building to Thomas Churchyard for use by the Earl of Oxford and his men at an annual rent of £100. According to Churchyard, Oxford had promised to pay the rent and all the living expenses of those who lodged there with him. As Mrs Penne later wrote to Oxford, ‘You know my Lord you had anything in my house whatsoever you or your men would demand, if it were in my house; if it had been a thousand times more I would have been glad to pleasure your Lordship withall’.⁸

The veracity of Churchyard’s claim of Oxford’s guarantee cannot be established. It is known that Oxford, throughout his adult life, had difficulty meeting financial obligations and it is also known that Churchyard was a braggart who could not always be trusted. He boasted, for instance, that he was the author of a fine poem in his far distant youth called ‘Shores Wife’ (of better quality than anything he had written before or since) and was accused by his peers of

dishonestly passing another poet's work as his own. As a young man he was a servant to Oxford's poetical uncle, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey.

Whether Churchyard lied, exaggerated or was telling the truth about Oxford's guarantee to pay the rent and other bills on St Peter's Hill, Oxford had a track record of failure to honour his debts and in 1591 his finances were at a perilously low ebb. By his own admission he had spent a fortune in Elizabeth's court – no doubt on court entertainments,⁹ but it was not for this reason that he then found himself on the brink of bankruptcy at this time. Since 1586 he had been receiving a mysterious £1,000 annuity from the Crown but since his coming-of-age he had been forced to sell off inherited estates at an alarming rate to repay enormous debts enforced upon him by covenants upon his livery and wardship. In 1583, he lost £3,000 investing in Frobisher's maritime explorations and in the same year forfeited £11,446 to the Court of Wards for failure to pay an original debt of £3,306.¹⁰ By November 1590 action by Sir William Waldegrave seeking indemnity for a £6,000 debt threatened a creditors' run on his remaining assets and, to make matters worse, at the beginning of 1592 he discovered that two of his trustees, Thomas Hampton and Israel Amyce, had defrauded him of certain of his lands and rents. These events combined to put Oxford in grave danger of default to the Crown. He was facing financial ruin and public disgrace.

In his role as patron of writers, scholars and musicians it was customary for Oxford to reward his muses with income derived from specific revenues from his estates. He granted, for instance, the lease on Battles Hall in Essex to the composer William Byrd and an annuity of £20 to the lutenist Robert Hales out of 'the issues and profits' of his 'lands tenements and hereditaments' in Essex.¹¹ The poet Henry Lok, who had worked for Oxford for twenty years and alluded to him as a Phoebus-like patron 'whose favour shone sometimes so gratuitously upon me' as to 'account it as impossible that the beauty thereof should be eclipsed', informed Lord Burghley in November 1590 that all of Oxford's gentlemen servants had 'tasted of his liberality by gift or procurement of land, lease, or permanent gift of his own estates by his procurement, or in cloths, money [etc.]'.¹² As a consequence of such generosity, Lok warned that Oxford had fallen prey to 'those over many greedy horse leaches which sucked too ravenously on his sweet liberality'¹³ – precisely the same misfortune that beset Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*.

One month after Lok's warning to Burghley, Churchyard (assuming Oxford to be his guarantor) signed a contract putting himself in hock to Mrs Penne for £50 if by March 25 he failed to pay her the first quarter's rent of £25. Oxford must have informed Mrs Penne that he would not stand as guarantor to such an arrangement for on 6 January, Churchyard, protesting his honesty, delivered a letter in the presence of three witnesses, vowing to serve Mrs Penne in any capacity until such a time as her bills were settled:

Good Mrs Penne, I have lovingly and truly dealt with you for the Earl of Oxford, a noble man of such worth as I will employ all I have to honour his worthiness; so touching what bargain I made and order taken from his own mouth for taking some rooms in your house by quarter at the rate of a hundred pounds a year, with such necessaries as I can name, I stand to that bargain, knowing my good lord so noble and of such great consideration that he will perform what I promised in the highest degree of his bounty and because I (always sickly and ready to part from this vain life) would, neither quick nor dead, wish to see you a loser by any of my drifts bargains or doings, I do hereby, absolutely for the love and honour I owe to my lord, bind myself and all I have in the world to you, for the satisfying of you for the first quarters rent of the rooms my lord did take, and further for the coals, billets, fagots, beer, wine and any other things spent by his honourable means, I bind myself to answer; yet confessing that napery and linen were not in the bargain I made with you for my lord, which indeed I know my lord's nobleness will consider. So Mrs Penne to show myself honest in all my actions, I yield my body goods and liberty freely unto you whilst you do live to use by law and right until my good lord do satisfy you in all reasonable points and demands herein. In witness of this my true meaning I put my hand and seal to this my own writing. The sixth of January ensuing the entry and coming of my lord of Oxford to your house.¹⁴

It was probably on or shortly before 25 March that Churchyard, owing Mrs Penne £50, fled into the nearby church of St Paul's claiming 'sanctuary'. Sanctuary (seeking refuge on church ground) allowed the claimant to be tried under Canon law in the ecclesiastical Courts where punishments were less severe than those meted out by the civil courts. If found guilty of dishonesty in his transactions with Mrs Penne, Churchyard could have been sentenced to death by the civil courts but under the jurisdiction of the Archdeacon's court his worst fate would have been banishment from the realm. Seemingly resigned to exile Churchyard wrote to Mrs Penne from the sanctuary of St Pauls:

I never deserved your displeasure and have made Her Majesty understand of my bond touching the earl and for fear of arrest I lie in sanctuary, for albeit you may favour me yet I know I am in your danger and am honest and true in all my actions, I find in court causes to forsake it and the realm too, yet would, ere I go, see you and all my friends well pleased.¹⁵

That Churchyard was not sent into exile suggests the matter was somehow resolved, that Mrs Penne got her money, and that Churchyard was either found ‘not guilty’ or pardoned. His petition to the queen (supreme head of the Church of England) suggests a plea for royal pardon. That his case came before the Archdeacon’s court is suggested by Nashe who, in his dedication to Oxford (*Strange Newes*, 1592) wrote:

I would speake in commendation of your hospitalitie likewise, but that it is chronicled in the Archdeacons Court, and the fruites it brought forth (as I gesse) are of age to speake for themselves. Why should virtue be smothered by blinde circumstances?¹⁶

Nashe’s public reference to Oxford’s ‘hospitality’ as ‘chronicled in the Archdeacon’s Court’ was impertinent and his words had to be quickly replaced in a reprinted edition. Those ‘fruits’ that Oxford’s hospitality ‘brought forth’ which Nashe considered ‘of age to speake for themselves’ must mean the literary works that flowed from Oxford’s scriptorium, a scholarly and literary institution which, for a long while, had been populated by ‘more rare quallified men and selected good Schollers than in any Noblemans house that I know in England’.¹⁷ The Latin word *‘vere’* means ‘truly’ or ‘verily’ as Nashe wrote in his anonymised dedication to Oxford: ‘Verily, verily, all poor scholars acknowledge you as their patron, providitore and supporter, for there cannot be a threadbare cloak sooner peepe forth, but you strait presse it to be an outbroker of your bounty.’¹⁸ History does not reveal the names of all the literary men who were lodged at St Peter’s Hill in 1591, but Churchyard was certainly not alone. Thomas Nashe was among them.

It is a matter of some regret that Ronald B. McKerrow, the finest Nashe scholar of the twentieth century, failed to identify references in the writings of Nashe and Harvey to Thomas Churchyard and a ‘mistress Penia’ as allusions to Churchyard’s embroilment in the Julianna Penne rent scandal at St Peter’s Hill. As Nashe himself wrote ‘one Cuppe of nipitaty puls on another’ and had McKerrow made this connection he would have recognised the anonymised

dedictee of Nashe's *Strange Newes* as Oxford and would have understood why Nashe called him 'Apis Lapis' ('idle bee').¹⁹ The connection would also have made him aware of the reasons why Nashe, in his previous pamphlet (*Pierce Penniless*, 1592), had inveighed against patrons, calling them 'drones' complaining of one particular patron: 'I am quite undone by promise-breach ... one drone should not have driven so many Bees from their honey-combs'. Shakespeare wrote of 'drones that rob the bee of her honey' (*Pericles*, II.i) as drones were commonly supposed to be 'idle bees' that do nothing but consume the honey made by industrious workers. The association of patrons with drones is of long standing. In a diatribe against patrons Roger Gostwick commended the quip of St Gregory: 'Scholars take the paines and idle drones eate up the gaines'.²⁰ It was to this drone-like habit that Nashe alluded in his *Strange Newes* dedication to Oxford when he wrote: 'Yea, you are such a Maecenas [i.e. patron] to learned men that there is not that morsel of meate they can carve you, but you will eate for their sakes and accept very thankfully'. Thus references to Shakespeare as 'honey-tongued' or sitting in 'idle-cell' may be allusions him as patron, not solely as persuasive or mellifluous poet.

In his *Four Letters* (finished in September 1592) Gabriel Harvey exposed the fact that Nashe, like Churchyard, had been imprisoned over the St Peter's Hill rent scandal. 'I would think the Counter [i.e. gaol], M. *Churchyard*, his hostesse *Penia* and such other sensible Lessons, might sufficiently have taught him that *Pennillesse* is not lawless: and that a Poets and Painters Licence, is a poor security, to privilege debt, or defamation'.²¹ Nashe retorted that 'a gentleman is never thoroughly entered into credit till he hath been there [i.e. prison] and that any poet who has not been incarcerated for debt should doubt the authenticity of his own wit'.²² He was not, however, so blasé at the time. In his 'most forsaken extremities', furious at Oxford's breach of promise which had 'laid [him] open to poverty' while 'in the prime of his best wit', Nashe 'abruptly set down' verses, that were later printed in *Pierce Penillesse*. The last four lines imply that he, like Churchyard, also faced exile:

In some far Land will I my griefes rehearse,
Mongst them that will be mov'd when I shall groane.
England (adieu) the Soyle that brought me foorth,
Adieu unkinde where skill is nothing worth.²³

Nashe's fallout with Oxford found its bitterest expression in the first part of *Pierce Penillesse* (1592) in which he alluded to his noble patron under such diabolical

titles as ‘the high and mighty Prince of Darknesse’, ‘Duke of Tartary’, ‘Marquesse of Cocytus’, etc.²⁴ This devil (Oxford) is represented as one who has maintained the scholar Piers Penillesse (Nashe) without any pay ‘this halfe year’ in a ‘dauncing schoole’ within a house that is ‘vast, large strong built and well furnished, all save the kitchen for that was no bigger than the cook’s room in a ship with a little court chimney’ and as Nashe belligerently pointed out ‘no man here in London can have a dauncing schoole without rent, and his wit and knaverie cannot be maintained with nothing’.²⁵ In the dedication of his subsequent pamphlet addressed to Oxford as the ‘idle drone’ (‘Apis Lapis’). Nashe attempted a teasing, humorous rapprochement, but Gabriel Harvey, who had already accused him of dishonouring his patron in *Pierce Penillesse*, further censured the ‘brabbling’ Nashe for showing ‘no reverence to his patrons, no respect to his superiours: no regard to any but in contemptuous, or censorious sort’ in *Strange Newes*.²⁶ Harvey insinuated that Nashe ‘shamefully and odiously misuseth every friend, or acquaintance as he hath served some of his favorablest patrons, (whom for certain respects I am not to name), M. Apis Lapis, Greene, Marlow, Chettle and whom not?’²⁷

Like Nashe, Churchyard also distanced himself from Oxford after the St Peter’s Hill fiasco of 1591, reneging on a vow (twice publicly made) to dedicate an anthology of collected writings to his former patron. When finally printed in 1593 his book (*Churchyard’s Challenge*) was pointedly dedicated to a prominent member of the ecclesiastical court instead and contained within it a strange complaint that he was not able to include ‘workes gotten from me of some such noble freends as I am loath to offend’ which include ‘an infinite number of songs and sonnets given where they cannot be recovered, nor purchase any favour when they are craved.’²⁸ Could Churchyard have contributed such verses to court plays that were held by the remnants of Oxford’s scriptorium?

Oxford had his revenge. In *Henry IV* Shakespeare modelled his paunchy, boastful, untruthful, sack-drinking, court-haunting, yarn-spinning, poetical and cowardly old soldier, Sir John Falstaff, on the real life paunchy, boastful, untruthful, sack-drinking, court-haunting, yarn-spinning, poetical and cowardly old soldier, Thomas Churchyard, while the attempt by Eastcheap tavern hostess Mistress Quickly to have Falstaff arrested for breaking his promise to pay the rent and living expenses

due to her tavern, surely mirrors the threat of Eastcheap hostess, Julianna Penne to have Thomas Churchyard arrested for breaking his promise to pay her the rent and living expenses at her establishment on St Peter's Hill.²⁹ Churchyard wrote to 'Good Mrs Pen' that he had 'truly and loving dealt' with her in a letter offering his servitude in words echoing a marriage vow that promised 'to yield my body, goods and liberty freely unto you whilst you do live to use by law and right.' Could this very letter have provided Shakespeare with the joke of Falstaff's reneged 'book-oath' to marry Mistress Quickly?

Churchyard's note to Mrs Penne bewailing the prospect of banishment and declaring 'I am honest and true in all my actions' certainly brings to mind Falstaff's comical pleading at Mistress Quickly's tavern:

... for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff and therefore more valiant, being as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish plump Jack and banish all the world. (*1 Henry IV*, II. iv)

That these lines are *acted* by Falstaff in a 'play extempore' in which he and Hal alternate in the roles of Henry IV and the Prince of Wales, adds further weight to the theory that the incident in Shakespeare's play was modelled on real-life events at Oxford's scriptorium, in which Oxford and his band of literary wits dramatized scenes from English chronicle histories, in line with the state sponsored 'policy of plays' that Nashe had revealed to be a secret of government in his pamphlet *Pierce Penilesse*.³⁰ The purpose of this State policy was to boost national morale by ensuring that courtiers, lawyers, captains, scholars and other influencers, who were otherwise wasting their afternoons at the theatres, would be infused with patriotism and elevated in spirit and mind by exposure to high-brow drama. As Nashe reveals 'Poets are necessary to the State' as they 'make the vulgar sort aspire to a richer puritie of speech ... encourage the vertuous by their praise to be more vertuous, the soldier to be more couragous, the vicious to fear eternal infamie etc.' (McKerrow I, p. 193). Who better to command these policies than the scholarly, poetical, play-writing Earl of Oxford whom Elizabeth had lauded abroad 'not in the usual way but from my heart, on account of his outstanding mind and vertue'?³¹

In two illustrated lectures I have laid out evidence in support of the theory that Oxford, with royal and Privy Council support, patronised a scriptorium of

scholarly poets and playwrights throughout the 1580s.³² This institution, or ‘College’ as Nashe referred to it, was located wherever Oxford took his lodgings; first at the Savoy Hospital on the Strand, briefly at his enormous residence outside Bishopsgate called Fisher’s Folly (next to which Marlowe and Watson were arrested for murder) and finally at Mrs Penne’s house in St Peter’s Hill. As Robert Greene once noted Oxford was a Maecenas [patron] to poor scholars for ‘wheresoever he lodgeth thither no doubt will scholars flock’.³³ It is not known who among the playwrights apart from Churchyard and Nashe were resident at this last address when the rent scandal closed it down. It would be tempting to identify Peele, Nashe and Marlowe (the three scholars whom Greene warned against working for Alleyn in 1592) as the ‘three decayed Students’ whom Nashe had claimed that Oxford ‘kept attending upon him a long time’ in his 1592 dedication to *Strange News*.³⁴ While Peele was certainly ‘driven’ to extreme shifts, a stronger case can be made for including Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd among those ‘many bees driven from their honeycombs’ by that singular drone.

Letters dating from June 1593 sent by Kyd to Lord Keeper Sir John Puckering attest to the fact that Marlowe wrote plays in the same room with Kyd for an unnamed lord and that this arrangement ended in 1591.³⁵ Modern scholars propose Lords Pembroke or Strange as their patron, but Kyd specifically states that Marlowe’s lord ‘could never endure [Marlowe’s] name or sight when he had heard of his conditions, nor would indeed the form of divine prayers used daily in his Lordships house have quartered with such reprobates’.³⁶ This statement strongly suggests that this nobleman would not have countenanced any association of Marlowe’s name with his own after 1591, thus eliminating both Pembroke and Strange, whose names are squarely identified with Marlowe’s from 1592.³⁷ Indeed Pembroke and Strange can be eliminated for other reasons. Neither was noted for his piety (as was Oxford); neither is known to have employed playwrights let alone multiple playwrights at the same time (as Oxford was); neither appears to have presented any plays at Court (unlike Oxford’s Men) from the foundation of the Queen’s Men in March 1583 until 1592. Indeed, Pembroke had no players until 1592, yet Kyd states that he and Marlowe were writing for their noble patron’s players sometime after 1587 and before 1592, when Oxford had several theatrical troupes under his patronage.

E. K. Chambers (1923) noted that Oxford in the 1580s was simultaneously patron to John Lyly, William Hunnis and Henry Evans. However, he missed the significance of this fact.³⁸ Patronage of these three men gave Oxford effective control over Paul's Boys, the Queen's Majesties Men, the Children of the Chapel, as well as several of his own acting troupes, making him the singular most powerful person in English theatre in the 1580s. Meeting the demands of these theatre companies required many playwrights. Lok was not the only poet to allude to Oxford as a Phoebus-Apollo, Sun-god patron of literary muses. Marlowe's friends Nashe and Chapman described him respectively as 'our Patron, our Phoebus' and as 'liberal as the Sun' while a host of contemporary poets wrote of the same connection – Edmund Spenser, Thomas Watson, Angel Day, John Lyly, Francis Davison, John Soowthern, Francis Meres, Gabriel Harvey, George Coryate, Thomas Heywood and John Bodenham among them.³⁹ In his *Bel-vedere* (1600) Bodenham named Marlowe, Nashe, Kyd, Watson, Achelow, Greene and Peele among poets who 'have lived together' under Phoebus' radiant purview, providing critical clues that identify *Bel-vedere's* Apollo as 'truly de Vere'. In his *Knights Coniuring* Thomas Dekker identified the same poets as 'the children of Phoebus at the chapel of Apollo ... worthy to eat at the table of the Sun'.⁴⁰

To Oxfordians the famous Droeshout engraving of Shakespeare depicts a theatrical mask through which Phoebus' dazzling light shines forth while sun rays blaze from his collar cryptically spelling de Vere (*'deux vier'*). A passage from Jonson's famous tribute in the same book is interpreted by Oxfordian scholars as an allusion to Oxford's literary patronage since it names Marlowe, Kyd and Lyly as *'disproportioned Muses'* whom Shakespeare ('like Phoebus') *'outshines'*. Stratfordian commentators have never given a satisfactory explanation for Thomas Heywood's comment that he believed his own work to be 'unworthy' of Shakespeare's 'patronage'.⁴¹

Evidence suggests that it was as a direct consequence of the St Peter's Hill crash of 1591 that the control of the playwrights shifted from Oxford to the common players such as the Burbages, Henslowe and Alleyn – the subject of Greene's complaint in *Groatsworth of Witte* (1592). Links to the court were not completely broken by Oxford's withdrawal. In 1592 theatre owner, dyer and pawn broker Philip Henslowe was made a 'Groom of the Chamber', a court position that

reported to the Lord Chamberlain. In the same year he bought shares in the Queen's Men, transforming what was once the principal performing troupe of Elizabeth's court into a provincial (but no doubt profitable) touring company, while he and his son-in-law (the 'upstart crow' Ned Alleyn) raided the archive of plays that belonged to the Queen's Men in the 1580s, taking works by Greene, Marlowe, Kyd, Lodge, Shakespeare and others, debasing their texts and from 1592 presenting them at the Rose, the Swan, the Newington Butts theatre and such venues in which they held shares. With the collapse of Oxford's patronage, the Lord Admiral, the Lord Chamberlain, Lords Pembroke, Sussex and Strange lent their names to troupes of players who became the principal performing companies at Court and at the London theatres. Playwrights Greene, Nashe and the anonymous authors of the Parnassus comedies were among several to express their resentment at the deleterious influence of the new breed of hard-nosed semi-literate player businessmen that had taken over their affairs on account of which several among Oxford's 'gentlemen scholars' gave up playwriting altogether. According to Oxfordian theory, the years between 1591 and Oxford's death in 1604 were profitably spent correcting, revising, augmenting and imbuing with his own unique genius such works as had been incubated during his superintendence of the government's 'policy of plays'. This theory is supported by notices on title pages of Shakespearean quartos and in prefatory remarks to the First Folio,⁴² suggesting that it is to this late, solitary period of Oxford's intellectual life that the genius of Shakespeare is most surely owed.

End notes

1. John Lyly, Petition to Queen Elizabeth (1595) and letter to Robert Cecil (22 Dec 1597) given in *John Lyly Works* (ed. R. Warwick Bond), Oxford: Cambridge, vol.1 (1902), pp. 64–65 and 68–69.
2. From *The Defence of Connycatching* (SR. 21 Apr 1592), p. 12: 'Ask the Queen's players if you sold them not *Orlando Furioso* for twenty nobles, and when they were in the country, sold the same play to the Lord Admiral's men for as much more? Was not this plain cony-catching, Master R.G.?'
3. Alleyn's additions to the part of the title role in Greene's *Orlando Furioso* are preserved at Dulwich College (Dulwich MSS 1, Article 138, folio 8r).
4. This 'upstart crow', once universally supposed to be a reference to William Shakespeare, is identified as the braggart, actor, usurer and stage promoter Edward Alleyn by scholars Jay Hoster (1993), A. D. Wraight (1993), Stephanie Hopkins Hughes (1997), Daryl Pinksen (2009), Peter Farey (2009), Robert Detobel (2010),

- Katherine Chiljan (2011), Peter Bull (2020) and Ros Barber (2021), with whom the present author concurs. Greene describes the actor whose ‘*Tygres hart [is] wrapt in a Players hyde*’ alluding to a line (‘Oh Tygres Heart wrapt in a Womans hide’) which Alleyn delivered in the title role of *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of Yorke* (I.iv.138). The line was also incorporated into Shakespeare’s *3 Henry VI* (I.iv.151) which Alleyn probably acted with Lord Strange’s Men in March 1592.
5. In *Terrors of the Night* (John Danter, 1594) Thomas Nashe describes how he was rescued from ‘most forsaken extremities’ by patron George Carey in 1592 (sig. F3).
 6. Kyd’s translation of Robert Garnier’s French tragedy *Cornélie* may have been made as late as 1593. It was entered for publication on 26 Jan. 1594 by Nicholas Ling and John Busby: ‘A booke called Cornelia, Thomas Kydde beinge the Author’ (Arber, II, p. 644).
 7. Thomas Randolph’s first wife was the sister of Marlowe’s patron, Thomas Walsingham. For Oxford’s friendly affection for Randolph see Bernard Ward, *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, London: John Murray (1928), p. 238
 8. BL MS Lansdowne 68 (114), ff. 255–56, rendered in modern English by Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary* (2003), p. 326–7.
 9. Oxford to Robert Cecil (2 Feb 1601), AMS Hatfield MSS (Cal. XI.27); rpt: Katherine Chiljan (ed), *Letters and Poems of Edward Earl of Oxford*, California (1998), p. 64.
 10. Nina Green ‘An Earl in Bondage’ in *Report My Cause Aright*, Shakespeare Oxford Society 50th Anniversary Anthology (Summer 2004), 124–133.
 11. See Katherine Chiljan, The Earl of Oxford’s Annuity to Robert Hales, *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Fall 2005), 1 and 5–7.
 12. Henry Lok to Lord Burghley (6 Nov. 1590); see Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary* (2003), p. 329.
 13. Ibid.
 14. BL MS Lansdowne 68, f. 352, transcribed in Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary* (2003), p. 328.
 15. BL MS Lansdowne 68, f. 357, transcribed in Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary* (2003), p. 329.
 16. Thomas Nashe, dedication to *Strange Newes* (1592), A2 in McKerrow, *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, Oxford (1966), vol. 1, p. 256.
 17. Ibid.
 18. Thomas Nashe, *Strange Newes* (1592), dedication to ‘*Apis Lapis*’ [Oxford]. In the original Nashe wrote ‘Yea, you have been such an infinite Maecenas to learned men’; in the revised version ‘you are such an infinite Maecenas’ from which it may be inferred that Oxford was offended by the suggestion that his patronage of scholars had ceased altogether on account of his financial troubles.
 19. *Apis*: a bee; *lapis*: ‘a negligent person that bestyareth hym not in dooyng a thing’ as per Thomas Cooper’s *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae* (1587).

20. Roger Gostwick, *The Anatomie of Ananias*, University of Cambridge (1616), p. 110.
21. Gabriel Harvey, 'The Third Letter' from *Four Letters*, London: John Wolfe (1592), see A. Grosart, *Works of Gabriel Harvey*, vol. 1, p. 199.
22. Thomas Nashe *Strange Newes of Four Letters Confuted*, (McKerrow, vol. 1, p. 310).
23. Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse* (1592), A1.
24. In *Pierce Penilesse* the eponymous character, a poet and scholar, driven with others from his patron's dancing school, sets out to deliver a supplication to the elusive Devil searching for him first at Westminster Hall (to which Oxford as Lord High Chamberlain held the keys), in the lawyers' district where Oxford was (according to Nashe) to be found 'amongst men of Judgment in both laws every day' and to the money lenders' exchange (Oxford was always in debt). ON his journey Piers seeks sanctuary ('dines with Duke Humphrey') at St Pauls where he finds an 'old soldier' (Thomas Churchyard) still sleeping.
25. Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse* (1592), A4, (McKerrow, vol. 1, p. 165).
26. Gabriel Harvey, *Pierces Supererogation*.
27. Ibid. *Works of Gabriel Harvey*, (ed Grosart) vol. 2, p. 322.
28. Thomas Churchyard, *Churchyards Challenge*
29. See Gilbert Wesley Purdy, *Edward de Vere's Retainer Thomas Churchyard – The Man Who Was Falstaff*, Kindle Edition (2017).
30. Thomas Nashe, section titled 'the defense of playes' from *Pierce Penilesse* (1592). Writing of the moral and educational benefits of good plays Nashe states 'To this effect, the pollicie of playes is very necessary, however some shallow-braind censures (not the deepest serchers into the secrets of government) mightly oppugne them' (*Pierce Penilesse*, 1592) in McKerrow, *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, vol. 1, pp. 211–213
31. Queen Elizabeth, letter of introduction to crowned heads of state (24 Jan 1575), contemporary copy in Cambridge University Library, CUL MS Dd.3.20, ff. 98v–99.
32. 'Alexander Waugh: Edward de Vere & Marlowe, Lyly, Kyd', 'BAND OF BROTHERS' Zoom Webinar, 12 Dec, 2020
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMiqs7xi5uw> and 'Was Christopher Marlowe Shakespeare's servant?' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWyGdkLYwoI>.
33. Robert Greene, *Gnydonius or The Card of Fancy*, dedication to the Earl of Oxford, London: William Ponsobny (1584).
34. Thomas Nashe dedication to 'Apis Lapis' (Oxford) in *Strange Newes* (1592). The 'three students' replace the first edition text 'and you kept three maides together in your house a long time; a charitable deed & worthie to be registered in red letters'. Oxfordians have interpreted the 'three maides' to mean Oxford's daughters, but how could it be considered 'charitable' to house one's own daughters? The passage concludes remarks about Oxford's charity to scholars, thus the 'three maides' of the

- first edition and the ‘three students’ of subsequent printings almost certainly refer to the same three people who were scholars.
35. Kyd’s two letters to Sir John Puckering (MS Harleian 6849, fols. 218–19 and 6848, fol. 154) are transcribed in Arthur Freeman, *Thomas Kyd, Facts and Problems*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1967), App. A, pp. 181–183.
 36. Ibid.
 37. Marlowe dropped the name of Lord Strange as referee when he was arrested in January 1592.
 38. E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, Oxford: Clarendon (1923), vol. 2, p. 497.
 39. Citations to all these allusions to Oxford as patron Phoebus-Apollo are given in Waugh & Strittmatter, *New Shakespeare Allusion Book* (forthcoming).
 40. See ‘Was Christopher Marlowe Shakespeare’s Servant?’ Alexander Waugh YouTube channel (2021); John Bodenham, *Bel-vedere, or the Garden of the Muses*, London: Hugh Astley (1600), prefatory pages and Thomas Dekker, *A Knights Coniuring*, London: William Barley (1607) final two pages.
 41. Thomas Heywood, *Apologie for Actors*, London: Nicholas Okes (1607), final page.
 42. See for instance the 1598 quarto of *Loves Labors Lost* described as ‘Newly corrected and augmented by W. Shakespere’ and the 1599 quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* described as ‘Newly corrected, augmented and amended’. Such notices ceased after Oxford’s death in 1604. F1 states that the plays though often printed in corrupted form had somehow survived in MS form ‘absolute in their numbers as he conceived them’ (A3).

