

## SPENSER'S "PERFECT PATTERN OF A POET" AND THE 17<sup>TH</sup> EARL OF OXFORD

Printed in 1579 at the height of public antagonism to Queen Elizabeth's imminent betrothal to the Duc D'Alençon,<sup>1</sup> the *Shepheard's Calendar* belongs to a prestigious list of Renaissance works published without an author's name. For reasons exemplified in Spenser's case, Early Modern cryptonymic publication was more common than has been generally acknowledged. Indeed, according to Taylor and Mosher's *Bibliographical History of Anonyma and Pseudonyma*, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the "golden age of pseudonyms", during which "almost every writer used a pseudonym at some time during his career".<sup>2</sup> In retrospect, the attribution of *The Calendar* may seem obvious, but in 1579 Spenser was nobody of literary consequence<sup>3</sup> and it would be another twelve years before his name appeared in print on the *Fairie Queene*.

Spenser had, moreover, specific and unusually well-understood motives for concealing his identity as the author of the *Shepheard's Calendar*. Since Virgil, pastoral had been employed as an allegory of manners, and it was expected to contain veiled social criticism and comment on matters of policy that could not be voiced directly without fear of political reprisal. Spenser's work self-consciously assumes the mantle of this tradition and sets out to become the English pastoral of Elizabeth's reign. To S. K. Heninger it is "a highly contentious, even polemical work",<sup>4</sup> and Paul McLane confirms that

"in order to understand [Spenser's] purposes it is important to fit the content of his eclogues into the conditions of his own time. Spenser was expressing himself, his hopes and fears, in terms of England of 1579".<sup>5</sup>

Central to the polemic was the issue of the French marriage, which had come to stand as the symbol of a complex network of questions involving the status of the English reformation, the development of mercantile capitalism, and the role of the Elizabethan settlement and the Church of England in Tudor social life. In 1579, with public antagonism to Elizabeth's impending betrothal to D'Alençon at a fever pitch, Spenser joined a chorus of voices seeking to dissuade the queen from her unpopular alliance with the French Catholic monarchy. The quiet voice of pastoral was once more brought to bear on contemporary politics.

Obviously such a project could not be undertaken without reference to contemporary events and persons; according to Paul McLane, in what remains the most extensive study of the contemporary allegorical dimensions of Spenser's pastoral, the characters of the *Calendar* are invariably drawn from real-life prototypes, among them Gabriel Harvey (Hobbinol), Bishop Grindal (Algrind), Bishop Aylmer (Shepherd Morrel) and many others (Figure 1).

On the other hand, the *Calendar* is no ordinary political tract, but a literary *tour de force* that deploys a dazzling variety of metrical forms, an immense, sophisticated, and dialectically varied vocabulary, and a figurative complexity without precedent in Elizabethan literature, to produce literary effects that soften or complicate the text's politics. Affecting an antique flavour, Spenser imitates the practice of Jacopo Sanazzaro's *Arcadia* (Naples, 1504) and other continental pastorals, including an extensive, and sometimes intentionally misleading, series of glosses appended to each eclogue under the *nom de plume* "E. K". According to William Oram these "often serve to confuse,

---

*Facsimile Reproduction, Edited and With an Introduction* (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints 1979), x.

5. Paul McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar: A Study in Elizabethan Allegory* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1968), 7-8.

1. D'Alençon (155-1584), the youngest son of Henry II of France and Catherine de' Medici, was made Duke of Anjou in 1576, coincident with his brother Henry III receiving the crown of France. It is, however, customary for purposes of clarity to refer to him as D'Alençon, even after that date.

2. Taylor & Mosher, *Bibliographical History of Anonyma and Pseudonyma* (Chicago: The University Press, 1951), 85.

3. At the time Spenser's only published work was an anonymous translation of lyric poetry by French authors, including Petrarch and Du Bellay, contained in the English edition of an originally Dutch emblem book illustrated by Jan Van Der Noot. It was published by Henry Bynneman in 1569 under the English title, *Theatre for Worldlings*.

4. S. K. Heninger, *The Shepherdes Calender* (1579): A

Colin	Thenot	Cuddie	Piers	Palinode	Thomalin	Hobbinol	Morrell	Willy	Diggon Davie	Perigot
Spenser himself	Bishop Cox of Ely	Edward Dyer	Bishop Piers of Christ church	Anthony Munday	Bishop Thomas Cooper of Lincoln	Gabriel Harvey	Bishop John Aylmer of London.	William Camden.	Bishop Richard Davies of St. Asaph (Wales)	Sir Phillip Sidney

Figure 1: Paul McLane's Identifications of the characters in *Shepherde's Calendar*.

mislead, or misinform",<sup>6</sup> and Thomas Cain agrees that they "force the reader to adapt and maintain a vigilantly defensive querying posture towards the text";<sup>7</sup> while clarifying some points of ambiguity, they introduce new ones by adding a superstructure of often ironic commentary on the primary text, and may even be "reverse glosses designed to obfuscate an ordinary word with its Latin equivalent".<sup>8</sup>

In such centres of Renaissance learning as Florence or Paris, scholars were busy recovering, transcribing, translating, and publishing classical works which required an extensive *apparatus criticus* to be made accessible to a contemporary readership, and E. K.'s glosses were designed to imitate the practices of these renaissance scholars of "new learning". Superficially, then, the device served to endow Spenser's poetry with a coveted classical aura. But its esoteric purpose is to add another layer of complexity to an already complex and provocative text, to invoke an "apparatus of secrecy" and an ambience that "reserves more than it ever displays, [and]...always has something important hidden away"<sup>9</sup> and forces the reader to adopt the quizzical posture described by Cain. By dividing the attribution of the authorship for the text and the glosses, moreover, Spenser is able to distribute and dilute the moral and legal responsibility for his book's controversial political implications. One author was at least technically anonymous, the other — if in fact he was *another*<sup>10</sup> — became

6. William Oram, Einar Bjorvand, Ronald Bond, Thomas H. Cain, Alexander Dunlop and Richard Schell, eds., *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 6.

7. Thomas H. Cain, "Introduction to *The Shepherde's Calendar*", Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 9.

8. Cain, "Introduction to *The Shepherde's Calendar*", 6.

9. Richard Rambuss, "The Secretary's Study: The Secret Designs of the *Shepherde's Calendar*", *ELH* 59.2 (Summer, 1992), 313-35.

10. E. K. has variously been identified with Spenser's acquaintance Edward Kirke (1553-1613), whose primary fitness for the identification seems to be his initials, to Gabriel Harvey, whose style "is more ponderous and a good deal less effective than any of E. K.'s arguments or notes" (Johnson 26), to Spenser himself under an alternative sobriquet, or the Earl of Oxford, a theory plausi-

known only by a pair of initials which for four hundred years seems to have resisted satisfactory identification.

The tactic produced a double frustration for potentially invidious (or merely curious) critics. By allowing Spenser to create a layer of implication that could not be localized in either text or gloss, but was the combined effect of reading both together, he could readily evade responsibility for unauthorized interpretations. Since the two parts of the work were apparently composed by different writers, one of whom (E. K.) professed only a limited and imperfect knowledge of the intentions of the primary author, neither could be held fully accountable. The guilt for potentially seditious interpretation would be displaced onto the reader's own overactive imagination. As Lynn Staley Johnson comments on the strategy,

E. K.'s remarks in the "Generall Argument" that several of the eclogues [...] contain hidden meaning, some relating to matters of state, would not have surprised a reader of 1579 or 1580 accustomed to pastoral conventions and aware of the issues and events of his own time that might demand veiled writing.<sup>11</sup>

Among the issues and events of the time that required Spenser's "veiled writing" relating to "matters of state", at least one has to this day defied definitive solution. The mystery concerns the historical inspiration for the figure Cuddie, who plays a prominent role in the February, August, and October eclogues. Understanding Cuddie is not only consequential for grasping the purposes and design of Spenser's book, but is — on Spenser's own testimony — central to an informed knowledge of the history of the development of Elizabethan poetics in general. Indeed, E. K.'s argument to the October eclogue notoriously refers to Cuddie as "the perfect paterne of a Poet",<sup>12</sup> and

bly advanced by Nina Green in a series of short articles: "Was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, the 'E. K.' of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*?" *The Edward de Vere Newsletter*, 49-55 (March 1993-September 1993).

11. Lynn Staley Johnson, *The Shepherdes Calender: An Introduction* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1990), 24-25.

12. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 95.

he is so closely identified with the early literary history of the Elizabethan settlement that E. K. is compelled to address the implication that the character could represent Spenser, and concludes with a "doubt whether by Cuddie be specified the authour selfe, or some other"<sup>13</sup> To this con-fabulation Oram et al. sensibly reply that Cuddie and Colin — the latter universally acknowledged as Spenser's sobriquet in the poem — "can hardly both be authorial personae"<sup>14</sup>

Although it is tempting to suppose that a character of such vaunted credentials would have inspired close and sustained study and generated a historical counterpart commensurate with his literary footprint in Spenser's text, a survey of Spenser criticism reveals that this idealistic expectation remains unsatisfied. The annals of Spenser studies are littered with exotic and implausible theories about Cuddie, none of which provide a satisfying solution to the problem of his historical basis. As Paul McLane summarizes the tradition,

Scholars have not been able to agree on the identity of Cuddie. Herford thinks Cuddie of the February eclogue is not the same character as Cuddie of the August and October eclogues, but the rest ignore this problem and concentrate on the Cuddie of October. R. W. Church and Higginson suggest that October's Cuddie may be Edward Kirke; Fleay hesitantly suggests Fulke Greville. The others disagree on the extent to which Cuddie stands for Colin Clout or Spenser. Warton and Collier thought that Colin and Cuddie were different persons. On the other hand, Craik, Lowell, Grosart, and Jusserand identify them. Herford and Renwick believe that they are distinct persons, but that Cuddie in certain ways represents Spenser's position and attitude.<sup>15</sup>

From this litany of contradictory and inconclusive suppositions, neither the Variorum editors<sup>16</sup> nor the more recent, authoritative *Spenser Encyclopedia*<sup>17</sup> can offer substantive relief, and such scholars as James Jackson Higginson or Paul McLane, who have specialized in the poem's topical dimension, have fared little better, even when compelled by the terms of their inquiry to probe more deeply.

13. All references to SC are to the 1989 edition of Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 177.

14. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 177.

15. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender*..., 262-63.

16. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Frederick Morgan Padelford, et al., eds., *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943).

17. A. C. Hamilton, gen. ed., *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

Higginson argues for identifying Cuddie with Edward Kirke, often suggested (without much plausibility) as the author of the E. K. glosses. But why Spenser (or E. K.) should regard Kirke, however close a friend or sophisticated a scholar, as the "perfect pattern of a poet" is a mystery he cannot reconcile with the evidence, since "our meager knowledge of Edward Kirke does not include the information that he ever wrote poetry, only that, as the friend of Spenser and the composer of the gloss, he entertained enthusiasm for that art"<sup>18</sup>

Paul McLane, on the other hand, does an impressive job of investing the argument that Edward Dyer was "the only poet of the time who in 1579 could be called 'the perfect pattern of a poet'"<sup>19</sup> with an aura of plausibility. Pointing to Dyer's apparent financial difficulties in 1579, McLane argues that both the October argument and Cuddie's speeches in that eclogue describe Dyer's reduced circumstances and that "Spenser was closely associated with Dyer in 1579 [and] through him and Sidney and Leicester hoped to win preferment at court"<sup>20</sup> But while these circumstances support the general plausibility of the Dyer case, on closer study they fail to persuade, for several reasons.

Dyer, for one, was hardly the only aristocrat of the 1570s who had reason to complain of financial anxiety. To make the case for Cuddie as Dyer and to justify E. K.'s epithet McLane is thus forced to compensate by inflating Dyer's reputation as a lyric poet.<sup>21</sup> But with the possible exception of "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is", Dyer's poems furnish scant basis for the idea that E. K. — an astute and informed literary historian who marshals an astonishing range of sources and literary concepts — could sensibly nominate him as "the perfect pattern of a poet". McLane must also ignore the evidence of the October eclogue, in which Spenser urges Cuddie to sing the praises of

18. James Jackson Higginson, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender In Relation to Contemporary Affairs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), 181.

19. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender*..., 272.

20. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender*..., 271.

21. The one witness who might seem to support the attribution is Gabriel Harvey, who termed Dyer "in a manner our only English Poett". Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dyer's reputation has chiefly depended on a single poem — "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is", attributed in manuscript to Oxford, and the subject of an attribution study by Stephen May ("The Authorship of 'My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is'", *Review of English Studies*, New Series, XXVI, 104 [1975], 385-94), which supports the probability of Oxford's authorship. One can only agree with May's bibliographical reasoning and note, moreover, that the style and content of the lyric both correspond to Oxford's other extant poems, while deviating markedly from that seen in Dyer's oeuvre.

the Earl of Leicester. This exhortation makes little sense directed to Dyer, who was already a decided adherent of the Leicester faction. Finally, and most significantly, Cuddie in his closing October speech refers explicitly to his unfulfilled ambitions as a writer of tragic drama, a genre for which there is no credible hint of Dyer's involvement and which not even the most enthusiastic of his biographers have ever accused him of pursuing.

Given this history of critical *aporiae*, perhaps the most sophisticated strategy for dealing with Cuddie has been to ignore him. W. L. Renwick, among the most astute of Spenser's early editors, classes Cuddie with Willy and Perigot as characters who, "while evidently members of [Spenser's] Cambridge group of friends [...] say and do nothing to make their identification vitally important".<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, scholars can avoid the Cuddie problem by taking refuge in the truism that even a pastoral is an imaginative construct. Why should Spenser's characters be based on particular individuals and not just contemporary types? Isn't it conceivable that Spenser combined characters such as Hobbinol – known to be based on Gabriel Harvey – with others, such as Cuddie, who were pure inventions of his poetic fancy?

This line of reasoning is not only theoretically unsatisfying and inconsistent with the pattern of Spenser's work; it is contradicted by compelling external evidence, which makes clear that Cuddie is no exception to the general principle that all the major characters in the *Calendar* are drawn on real life counterparts, and that his identity was a topic of some conversation. Gossiping about the *Calendar* in his *Three Proper, Wittie, Familiar Letters Lately Passed Between Two University Men* (1580), Gabriel Harvey – Spenser's "Hobbinol" – not only anticipates the logic of Oram et al., but makes clear his personal acquaintance with Spenser's character: "Master Collin Cloute [i.e. Spenser] is not every body, and albeit his old companions, Master Cuddie and Master Hobbinol be as little beholding to their Mistresse Poetrie, as ever you wist..."<sup>23</sup> Harvey takes noticeable pride in flaunting his knowledge of Cuddie's identity, introducing a quotation of Cuddie's lines from the October eclogue with a coy nod and a wink to the reader: "For, I pray now, what saith M. Cuddie, *alias you know who*, in the tenth Æglogue of the foresaid famous new Calendar?"<sup>24</sup> Based on such testimo-

22. W. L. Renwick, *Edmund Spenser: An Essay in Renaissance Poetry* (London: Arnold & Co., 1925), 166.

23. Alexander Grosart, *The Works of Gabriel Harvey, D.C.L. In Three Volumes* (New York: AMS Reprint of 1884 edition, 1966), vol. 1, 93.

24. Grosart, *The Works of Gabriel Harvey...*, vol. 1, 92; emphasis supplied.

ny Higginson concludes that Cuddie represents "some University friend of the poet's intimate enough to be classed with Gabriel Harvey".<sup>25</sup>

To external testimony, let us add etymology and social history. As Lynn Staley Johnson has observed, the *Shepherd's Calendar* protests against the emerging mercantile values of late Tudor England and the erosion of traditional modes of life by romanticizing a fading literary *Gemeinschaft* inherited from the Middle Ages. In view of Spenser's sociological project, it is intriguing to notice that the name Cuddie is apparently derived from the Irish, *cuid odche*, literally meaning an "evening portion", or a "supper night's entertainment due to the lord from his tenant", or by extension "a rent or present in lieu of [the entertainment], a douceur, a bribe".<sup>26</sup> Although E. K. never touches directly on this etymology, Spenser makes Cuddie the judge of the rhyming contest between Willy and Perigot, and E. K. calls him the "arbiter of their cause, and Patron of his own".<sup>27</sup> It seems that Cuddie awards prizes to the rhymers not only in his capacity as the "perfect pattern of a poet", but also, filling the role of the lord inscribed in the etymology of his name, in recompense for the entertainment of their rhymes.

From these considerations it is apparent that Cuddie functions as a critical figure in Spenser's romanticized narrative of the transition from the feudal to the mercantile; his very name embodies an idealized world in which Master and tenant lived in harmony, and the Lord of the Manor exchanged the protection of his sword for the material fealty and imaginative productions of his dependents. In Spenser's nostalgic invocation, the dependents honoured their Lord in song; he in turn conferred material gifts as reward for their entertainments, completing the cycle of exchange by returning a portion of appropriated surplus in the form of tangible remuneration for literary and dramatic excellence.

There is only one Elizabethan individual who corresponds in every essential to all aspects of Cuddie's *persona* as well as fitting into the network of relationships established for him by Spenser in his *Calendar* and Harvey (Hobbinol) in his published letters: Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), a man "to the manor born", whose patrilineal ancestors had been lords of great estates for seventeen unbroken generations, was one whose role in the poetic culture of the 1570s, although obscured, was without precedent or equal.

Myriad details of circumstance and character

25. Higginson, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar*, 79.

26. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1238.

27. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 147.

confirm this identification. Partly through the impoverishment of his estates by the Court of Wards and partly in consequence of his own prodigal habits, Oxford was by 1579, like Dyer, in conspicuous economic distress. Like Shakespeare's Jaques, he had during his 1575-76 tour of France, Northern Italy, and the Mediterranean, quite literally sold his own lands to see the lands of other men.<sup>28</sup> After his return, he conspicuously ignored Iago's advice to "put money in your purse", and during the 1580s his prodigal pursuits led to the almost total exhaustion of his remaining estates within a decade. In the fifteen years between his marriage to Anne Cecil in 1571 and the granting of his 1000-pound royal annuity in 1586,<sup>29</sup> he divested himself of forty-nine estates and, in May 1591, having failed to raise cash by commuting his annuity into a lump sum payment of 5000 pounds, he finally alienated his ancestral Essex estate, Castle Hedingham, to his three daughters and their grandfather, Lord Burghley.

Commenting on Oxford's quixotic attempt to commute his annuity, his biographer B. M. Ward observes that Oxford's financial imprudence "seems most extraordinary" and proposes that Burghley, "who knew by bitter experience his son-in-law's complete ignorance of the value of money",<sup>30</sup> must have shrugged his shoulders in dismay. Indeed, to an upwardly mobile bourgeois like Burghley, Oxford's financial habits must have seemed not only a disgrace but also a scandal every bit as disturbing as Oxford's penchant for such "lewd friends" as Anthony Munday,<sup>31</sup> John Lyly,<sup>32</sup> Robert Green,<sup>33</sup> or Thomas Nashe.<sup>34</sup> On the other

hand, there is sufficient evidence for Oxford's spontaneous generosity to exonerate him from the frequent accusation of being a self-absorbed waster of his own estates who sold land to purchase fancy hats. Indeed, Oxford seems to have been one of the most generous literary patrons of the 1570s and 1580s,<sup>35</sup> and there is good reason to believe that his largesse, in patronizing both the printed word and the theatre, was a significant factor in the bleeding of his land wealth during those decades. Like Timon, he gave until his purse ran out.

Clearly, then, Oxford would have reason like Cuddie to complain of financial distress. But why does Spenser honour him as the judge of the August rhyming contest? Could this "monstrous adversary", as one recent book<sup>36</sup> has characterized him, reasonably be considered, by any stretch of the imagination, to embody the "perfect pattern of a poet"? Surprisingly, both Elizabethan and Jacobean authorities designated Oxford as the most accomplished lyric and comedic writer of the early part of Elizabeth's reign. In his *Discourse of English Poetry* (1586) William Webbe declares that "in the rare devices of poetry [...] the right honorable Earl of Oxford may challenge himself to the title of most excellent among the rest"; *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) likewise lists Elizabethan poets who "have written excellently well as it would appeare if their doings could be found out and made publicke with the rest, of which number is first that noble Gentleman Edward Earle of Oxford",<sup>37</sup> subsequently singling out Oxford, as Francis Meres (1598) also does, for his talent as a comic dramatist;<sup>38</sup> to Spenser in the 1595 dedication of *The Fairie Queene*, he was a patron noted for "the loue, which thou doest beare/To th'Heliconian ymps, and they to thee".<sup>39</sup> Strangely, he is still given highest honours among the Elizabethan poets by Henry Peacham in *The Complete Gentleman* (1622). Sir Sidney Lee, summarizing this tradition in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, concludes that "a sufficient number of his poems is extant to corroborate Webbe's comment that he was the best of the courtier poets in

28. William Plumer Fowler, *Shakespeare Revealed in Oxford's Letters* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Peter Randall, 1986), 203, 210.

29. B. M. Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, 1550-1604: From Contemporary Documents* (London: John Murray, 1928), 257, 355-58.

30. Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl...*, 306.

31. Charlton Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare: The Myth and the Reality* (New York: Dodd. Mead & Co., 1984), 672-74, 675-77. Munday dedicated his *Mirror of Mutability* (1579), as well as *Palmerin d'Oliva*, parts I (1588), and II (1616), to Oxford. His *Palmerin* translation was, similarly, dedicated to the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl, Henry, in 1619.

32. Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare...*, 626-29; Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl...*, 174, 186. Oxford was the dedicatee of Lyly's second (1580) novel, *Euphues And His England* (Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl...*, 158).

33. Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare...*, 675. Greene dedicated his *Card of Fancie* (1584) to Oxford and seems to have been a regular associate of the Vere literary enclave during the 1580s.

34. Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl...*, 190-94.

35. Stephen May, "The Poems of Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford and of Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex", *Studies in Philology* 77 (Winter 1980), 5-87.

36. Alan Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford* (Liverpool: The University Press, 2003).

37. Edward Arber, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1869), 75.

38. Arber, *The Arte of English Poesie*, 77.

39. J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt, ed., *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, Edited with Critical Notes* (Oxford: At the University Press, 1912), 410.

the early years of Elizabeth's reign".<sup>40</sup>

Whether, as some have claimed, such praises were mere flattery of a powerful aristocrat, or were sincere and informed assessments of Oxford's contemporary literary stature, is perhaps irrelevant in evaluating the fit between his reputation and Spenser's character. The point is that these sources concur in describing him, as E. K. describes Cuddie, as *the* lyric and dramatic talent of the 1570s and 1580s. He was, in other words, a patron respected not just for his largesse but for his practical sophistication in the arts of literature, history, and music. The thirty-seven dedications to him — including works of literature, history, philosophy, theology, medicine, and music<sup>41</sup> — often praise his discernment and understanding in terms that recall Cuddie's role as an aesthetic arbiter in the October eclogue.<sup>42</sup>

Could Oxford (1550-1604), Spenser (1552-1599) and Harvey (1550-1630) really have been so closely associated that Harvey some years later would recall their friendship in this manner? Both direct and circumstantial evidence provide an affirmative answer. They were not only close in age, but all three were graduates of Cambridge: Oxford graduated BA at the precocious age of 14 in 1564, Harvey two years later in 1566 from Christ's College, taking his MA in 1573, and Spenser matriculated from Pembroke College in 1569, receiving his BA in 1573 and his MA in 1576. Unequivocal evidence connects Oxford and Harvey at Cambridge; in his *Four Letters* (1592), Harvey fondly recalls his friendship with the Earl, who "in the prime of his gallantest youth [...] bestowed Angels upon me in Christes Colledge in Cambridge, and otherwise voutsafed me many gracious favours at the affectionate commendation of my Cosen, M. Thomas Smith, the sonne of Sir Thomas".<sup>43</sup> Sir Thomas Smith, with whom Harvey maintained a lasting relationship over many years,<sup>44</sup> had been Oxford's first tutor,<sup>45</sup> and

by Harvey's own testimony Smith's son seems to have introduced Harvey to Oxford, probably during the 1560s around the time of their joint attendance at Cambridge.<sup>46</sup>

In every conceivable category, then, Oxford fits Spenser and E. K.'s description of Cuddie better than Dyer does. Turning to a more detailed examination of the three eclogues in which Cuddie appears, moreover, it becomes clear that Oxford is the only Elizabethan figure consistent with Spenser's portrait. First paired in February with the elderly Thenot as the young upstart "herdsman's boy" (E. K.'s argument) who is instructed by Thenot's parable of the oak and the ivy, Cuddie originally appears as the figure of prodigal and unbridled sensuality who requires the restraint of aged wisdom. McLane says that the term "herdsman" denotes "a powerful member of the nobility" — as distinct from the term "shepherd", which signifies a pastoral authority like Thenot.<sup>47</sup> He infers that Dyer, who cultivated a relationship with Leicester, would accordingly be a "boy" of Leicester's. But by the same logic it seems equally plausible to think of Cuddie himself — as Oxford certainly was — as a young scion of the nobility. The designation "boy" would be particularly apt, for after the untimely death of his father in 1562, Oxford had become a ward of the crown; the administration of his lands was divided between Burghley, Leicester and the Queen, and he was reduced to the status of a juvenile retainer on his own lands; he would not purchase his liberty from the court of wards until 1590, when he was forty years of age.

Cuddie's August arbitrage of the rhyming contest between Perigot and Willy anticipates E. K.'s description in the synopsis of the October eclogue of Cuddie as the "perfect pattern of a poet". Although a participant in the rhyming games, Cuddie is also the aesthetic arbiter of the exchange. In this eclogue McLane's topical identifications are at their weakest; having mismatched Cuddie with Dyer, he is forced to make further awkward choices in identifying the two rhyming

40. Sir Sidney Lee, "Edward de Vere", *Dictionary of National Biography*, 228.

41. May, "The Poems...", 9.

42. For the dedications collected in one volume, see Katherine V. Chiljan, *Book Dedications to the Earl of Oxford*, 1994.

43. Grosart, *The Works of Gabriel Harvey...*, vol. 1, 184. Although Harvey's reference seems to be the only direct evidence associating Oxford specifically with Christ's College, Christ's is traditionally considered the most aristocratic of the Cambridge Colleges and therefore it seems likely that Oxford pursued his studies there, as Harvey's anecdote might suggest.

44. Following Smith's death in 1577, Harvey wrote elegiac verses, *Sir Thomas Smith, vel Musarum Lachrymae*.

45. Stephanie Hopkins Hughes, *Shakespeare's Tutors: The*

*Education of Edward De Vere*, revised from a Bachelor of Art's Thesis submitted to the Humanities Department of the College of Arts and Sciences, Concordia University, Portland, April 2000.

46. Another link between the two men was the Cambridge teacher William Lewin (d. 1598), a former tutor of Anne Cecil who became a major influence on Harvey during his time at Christ's College. In 1575 Lewin, now a student of civil law, accompanied Oxford on the first stage of his continental tour. Contemporary account describes Lewin as "a Raphael [...] both discreet and of good years, and one that my Lord [Oxford] doth respect" (Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare...*, 540).

47. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender...*, 266.

Oxford	Cuddie (August)
were I a King, I might command content	Gynne, when lyst, ye jolly shepherds twaine, Sike a judge, as Cuddie, were for a king. <sup>1</sup>

Figure 2: Oxford and Cuddie Lyrics Compared.

NOTE

Quotation 1, left, is from May, 37; quotation 2, right, is from Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 140.

contestants, and concludes that Willy and Perigot stand, respectively, for William Camden and Sir Phillip Sidney. While Sidney is certainly a likely candidate for one of the two, when McLane identifies Willy with Camden by "looking over a list of Spenser's and Sidney's friends in 1579"<sup>48</sup> one may be permitted a healthy scepticism. No matter how friendly Spenser may have been with Camden, why would he portray the cultural historian, antiquarian scholar, and future Clarenceux Herald, as engaged in a rhyming contest with Sir Phillip Sidney?<sup>49</sup>

Oxford, on the other hand, was a conspicuous participant in the genre of the Elizabethan rhyming contest; according to the well-known tradition,<sup>50</sup> he wrote the following lyric:

Were I a king I might command content,  
Were I obscure unknown should be my cares,  
And were I dead no thoughts should me torment,  
Nor words, nor wrongs, nor love, nor hate, nor  
[fears.  
A doubtful choice of three things one to crave,  
A kingdom or a cottage or a grave.

To which Sir Phillip Sidney purportedly replied:

Wert thou a king, yet not command content,  
Since empire none thy mind could yet suffice,  
Wert thou obscure, still cares would thee torment;  
But wert thou dead all care and sorrow dies:

48. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender...*, 345.

49. McLane's own analysis undermines his identification of Perigot as Sidney and Willy as Camden, instead confirming the view proposed here that Willy is based on Sidney. In March Spenser pairs Willy with Thomalin, a character that McLane argues is based on Thomas Cooper. Cooper was Sidney's tutor at Christchurch and Sidney lived in his household. To this may be added that in *The Teares of the Muses*, published in 1591, Spenser mourns a figure named Willy: "Our pleasant Willy, ah is dead of late" (277). Following the principle of Occam's razor we can now see that the name in 1591 signifies the same identity as it did a decade earlier, since Sidney of course died in 1587 in time to be elegized in *Tears of the Muses*.

50. Alexander Grosart, "Poems of Edward (de Vere) Earl of Oxford", in *Miscellanies of the Fuller Worthies' Library in Four Volumes* (New York: AMS Reprint, 1970, of private printing 1872-1876), vol. 4, 427.

An easy choice of three things one to crave,  
No kingdom, nor a cottage, but a grave.<sup>51</sup>

As this is a rare instance of an Elizabethan rhyming contest about which many critical particulars are preserved, it would seem that Spenser's contemporaries associated both Oxford and Sidney with the genre. It is largely on the basis of this that J. T. Looney in 1920 sought to identify Oxford with Spenser's Willy<sup>52</sup> surmising a direct correspondence between Spenser's eclogue and the "were I a king" exchange. However inviting Looney's theory might be, the evidence of the eclogue suggests that his emphasis is misplaced. Following his usual methods of mystification, Spenser deliberately confounds the identification of Cuddie by making him the judge of a rhyming contest in which he could superficially be supposed a participant. Actually it is Cuddie, not Willy, who distinctly echoes Oxford's lyric (Figure 2).

The dialectical "sike" — such — complicates comparison, but a paraphrase of Cuddie's line confirms the direct relationship between the two texts: "begin when you like, for such a judge as Cuddie, is a judge for a king". As a ranking Earl of the realm, apparently involved with producing and patronizing royal entertainments during the 1570s (as he certainly was during the 1580s),<sup>53</sup> Oxford was a literary "judge for a king" in more than one sense of the phrase. As Cuddie he can judge Willy and Perigot with equanimity because his own dramas are royal fare; in the economy of literature invoked in the August eclogue, he is both the Lord who receives the gift of entertainment and, as retainer of the monarch, the one who gives — not just a judge, but also a poet, for a king.

With Oxford as Cuddie, moreover, a plausible alternative to McLane's precarious August schema immediately falls into place: Perigot and Willy

51. Robert Brazil & Barbara Flues, "Poems and Lyrics of Edward de Vere", *Elizabethan Authors*, <<http://www.elizabethanauthors.colm/oxfordpoems.htm>>. Accessed June 26, 2007.

52. J. T. Looney, "Shakespeare" Identified in *Edward de Vere, The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, 3rd edition reprint of 1920 original by Ruth Loyd Miller (New York: Kennikat Publishers, 1975), 342-44.

53. B. M. Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford...*, 264-82.

Earl of Oxford	Cuddie (October)
<p>My mind to me a kingdom is, Such perfect joy therein I find That it excels all other bliss That world affords or grows by kind.... I see how plenty suffers oft How hasty climbers soon do fall.... Content I live, this is my stay....<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>But ah my courage cooles ere it be warm, For thy, content us in thys humble shade: Where no such troublous tydes han us assayed, Here we our slender pipes may safely charm.<sup>2</sup></p>

**Figure 3: Comparison of the lyric, “My Mind To Me a Kingdom Is”, with Cuddie on the October theme of contentment.**

NOTE

Quotation 1 is from May, “The Authorship...”; quotation 2 is from Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 176)

Oxford’s 1572 <i>Cardanus Comforte</i> lyric	Cuddie (October)
<p>he that takes the pain to pen the book, Reaps not the gifts of goodly golden muse For he that beats the bush the bird not gets, But who sits still and holdeth fast the nets.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>my poore Muse hath spent her spared store, Yet little good hath got, and much lesse gayne They han the pleasure, I a sclender prise. I beate the bush, the byrds to them doe flye.<sup>2</sup></p>

**Figure 4: Parallel Passages between Oxford’s “Laboring Man” (1572) and Cuddie’s October lyric.**

NOTES

- As Ruth Loyd Miller notes in *A Hundredth Sundry Flowres: From the Original Edition of 1573* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1975), 352-55, these verses of Oxford’s seem to have become very influential during the 1570s.
- Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 171.

SC	Colin	Thenot	Piers	Palinode	Thomalin	Hobbinol	Morrell	Diggon Davie	Cuddie	Willy	Perigot
McLane	Spenser himself	Bishop Cox of Ely	Bishop Piers of Christ church	Anthony Munday	Bishop Thomas Cooper of Lincoln	Gabriel Harvey	Bishop John Aylmer of London.	Bishop Richard Davies of St. Asaph (Wales).	Edward Dyer	William Camden	Sir Phillip Sidney
Stritmatter	Spenser himself	Bishop Cox of Ely	Bishop Piers of Christ church	Anthony Munday	Bishop Thomas Cooper of Lincoln	Gabriel Harvey	Bishop Aylmer of London	Bishop Davies	Earl of Oxford	Sir Phillip Sidney.	Edward Dyer

**Figure 5: Proposed Emendations to McLane’s Allegorical Schema.**



are inspired, respectively, by two of Spenser's intimates, the "Castor and Pollux" and "two Diamonds of hir maiesties court",<sup>54</sup> Spenser's close friends Edward Dyer (1543-1607) and Sir Phillip Sidney. Evidence for a special affinity between these two during the late 1570s, of the sort that would naturally lead Spenser to depict them as friendly contestants, is overwhelming.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, comparative examination of style puts the theory of Spenser's reliance on de Vere as the model for Cuddie beyond reasonable dispute. McLane's application of this evidence is highly selective and oriented solely towards building the case for Dyer: "the final four lines of Cuddie on content", he remarks, "seem to echo Dyer's most famous Lyric, 'My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is'" (Figure 3).<sup>56</sup>

Ironically, McLane's argument ends up supporting the case for Oxford; as he acknowledges, the

54. The phrases are Harvey's. By 1579-80 Harvey invariably pairs the two names: "As for the two worthy Gentlemen, Master Sidney and Master Dyer" (*Two Letters*, 1580, Grosart, *The Works*, vol. 1, 7); "I will imparte yours to Maister Sidney and Maister Dyer" (*Two Letters*, 9); "whether it were Gabriell or some other that put so good a notion into the heads of those two excellent Gentlemen M. Sidney, and M. Dyer, the two Diamondes of hir Maiesties Courte..." (*Three Letters*, 1580, vol. 1, 75); "this good English Poet wanted but a good patterne before his eyes, as it might be some delicate, and choyce elegant Poesie of good M. Sidney's, or M. Dyers (ouer very Castor, & Pollux for such and many greater matters)" (*Three Letters*, 86).

55. A longtime friend of the Sidneys, Dyer had served as the close friend and confidante of Lady Sidney while Sir Henry was detained in Wales on the Queen's business during the early 1570s: see Ralph M Sargent, *The Life and Lyrics of Sir Edward Dyer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 38. By 1575, Dyer and Phillip were both frequenting Leicester house, if not actually residing there together (Sargent, *The Life and Lyrics...*, 39); when Sidney died in 1587, "the nation may have sacrificed its paragon", but "Edward Dyer had lost the one great friend of his life" (Sargent, *The Life and Lyrics...*, 89), whom he memorialized in one of his best poems. As Sargent summarizes their literary association,

One can scarcely tell how strong were the literary ties between Dyer and Sidney from the start. Sidney, returning from Courts where verse came naturally to men's lips, found in Dyer an accomplished poet. Sidney had already attempted a few verses of his own. But henceforth, under the scrutiny and encouragement of the older poet, he would really blossom forth [...] Beyond these considerations [...] the two discovered a strong liking for each other simply as men. (39)

Surely, two men who form such an obvious pair of closely associated and mutually practicing poets form the perfect analogue for Spenser's October rhymers.

56. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender...*, 277.

poem "doesn't agree in its philosophy with most of Dyer's other poems, or with his life".<sup>57</sup> It has subsequently been attributed, decisively, to Oxford.<sup>58</sup> Close comparative reading reveals that the parallels with Oxford's King lyric and "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is" are not isolated examples; Spenser repeatedly has Cuddie mimic Oxford's lyric poetry (Figure 4).

In vocabulary, theme, form and image, passages from the August and October eclogues reveal many detailed parallels with Oxford's acknowledged poetry. In August, Cuddie imitates Oxford's well-known echo poem, "Sitting Alone upon My Thought", extant in several contemporary manuscript copies.<sup>59</sup> In both poems the male lover's lament is echoed by the natural landscape; Oxford's "ancient hoary wood [where] echo answered her to every word" reappears in Cuddie's "forest wide [which] is fitter to resound /The hollow Echo of my carefull cryes..." The same Cuddie lyric and also contains suggestive<sup>60</sup> ele-

57. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender...*, 277.

58. May, "The Authorship...". This highly influential and accomplished poem has, according to May, been "almost continuously in print since 1588" (385), when it appeared without attribution in William Byrd's *Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs*. May shows that the Dyer attribution is wrong, for several reasons: 1) the only early modern attribution to Dyer, the Rawlinson manuscript, was compiled c. 1585, and the manuscript's testimony "does not warrant [...] un-questioning confidence" since it reproduces an exemplar of the poem "with no less than seven errors in forty-eight lines", which "scarcely argues for immediate descent from the author's original" (May, "The Authorship...", 388); 2) the attribution to Dyer begins only in 1850; 3) the poem is attributed to "Earlle of Oxenforde" in MS. Rawl. Poet. 85 (f. 16V), to "L. Ver" in Harvard f MS. 1015 (f. 14V), dateable to June 1581.

59. May, "The Poems...", 79-81. Although May seems to doubt whether Oxford is the author of this lyric (listing it as "possibly" by him), the combination of external and internal evidence supporting the attribution seems difficult to ignore: all manuscript copies connect it to the scandalous love affair (c. 1579-81) between Oxford and Anne Vavasour and the point of view "is partial...to the Earl", flattering "him with references to his beauty and birth" (May, "The Poems of Edward de Vere...", 80), as well as indulging in repeated onomastic puns on the name "Vere". There is no substantive evidence for attributing it to Vavasour or anyone else.

60. For example, *tears*, a frequent motif in Oxford's lyrics: "the trickling teares that fales along my cheeks" (Oxford; May, "The Poems...", 31); "Let streames of teares supply the place of sleep" (Cuddie, August); "drown me you tricklyng tears" (Oxford; May, "The Poems of Edward de Vere...", 27); "whose streames my trickling teares did ofte augment" (Cuddie, August); "a floud of tears, he semde to shedd" (Oxford; May, "The Poems...", 28); "my sithyng seas shall flowe with streams of tears" (Oxford; May, "The Poems...", 30).

ments drawn from several of Oxford's other poems. In October Cuddie borrows both theme and language from Oxford's 1572 prefatory poem to *Cardanus Comforte*, "The laboring Man", as the two excerpts in Figure Four serve to illustrate. Given the circumstances already enumerated, this evidence "from sign" is conspicuous enough to support the conclusion that Spenser is consciously imitating Oxford's poetry in the verses spoken by Cuddie. Based on the foregoing considerations, therefore, the present article proposes to modify McLane's schema of identifications (Figure 5).

In this revised schema, Oxford replaces Edward Dyer in the "Cuddie" position, Dyer shifts to the Perigot position, and William Camden is eliminated in favour of Sidney, who shifts over from Perigot to assume the Willy position. The net effect of these emendations is to replace the unlikely William Camden (Willy) with the Earl of Oxford (Cuddie) in Spenser's allegorical construct. Although seemingly a minor shift in emphasis, this reconstruction of the topical landscape of Spenser's poem could have a profound impact not only on our understanding of Spenser's purposes and the significance of his work, but of Elizabethan literary history on a larger scale. A consideration of the implications might start by noticing that when we conceive Cuddie as representing the "type" of Oxford in all three eclogues, Spenser's *Calendar* achieves a dynamic unity previously absent in our conception, revealing all three months in which Cuddie appears as parts of the same design and the same cycle of transformative logic. Each month in fact belongs to one of the three categories assigned by E. K.<sup>61</sup> to the entire year: Plaintive (February), Recreational (August), and Moral (October).

As a figure known to impersonate the elderly bishop of Ely, Richard Cox (d. 1581),<sup>62</sup> Cuddie's February interlocutor, Thenot, is the ideal character to instruct Cuddie/Oxford with the "plaintive" fable of a mighty oak overtaken by a creeping briar. As a former associate of John Dudley, the Earl of Northumberland, Cox possesses the authority of experience to lecture Cuddie on the dangers of upstart vines. During the reign of Edward VI, Cox's sustaining oak, the towering Northumberland, had fallen for plotting to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne.<sup>63</sup> Northumberland's chief nemesis<sup>64</sup>

and "creeping briar" had been his former protégé William Cecil. And two decades later Cecil was creeping to power through the branches of another mighty oak: the ancient lineage of the Oxfords. Indeed, several of Cecil's most significant political advancements during the 1560s and 1570s seem directly tied to his appropriation of the traditional authority and power of the Veres: in 1562 he was made Master of the Court of Wards, coincident with the death of John de Vere and Earl Edward's wardship; in 1571 he was advanced to the nobility to enable the marriage of his daughter Anne with his flamboyant literary ward.

February rooted the creative impulse in epic and Ovidian allegory, but the "recreative" August celebrates lyric. The "neaherds boye" Cuddie not only presides over the summer rhyming of Perigot and Willye, but "reciteth also himself a proper song" and "doleful verse/Of Rosalend". E. K. designates Colin as the lyric's author, and Perigot confirms the attribution. But the song's proximate origin in Oxford's echo lyric illustrates the circulatory energy which defines the "recreative" eclogue: Colin's lyric, inspired by one authored by Cuddie's alter ego, the "perfecte pattern of a poet" Oxford, is now recited by Spenser's personification of the originator.

By October the youthful upstart of February and the sunny rhymer of August have arrived on the verge of a new autumn; the complex transformation Thenot's February *fabella* has induced in Cuddie illustrates the moral and psychological profundity of Spenser's literary synthesis and the continuity of his narrative technique. The *fabella* turns on the juxtaposition of two modes of temporal reckoning, the life-cycle of the individual and the historical time of nations and social classes. In life-cycle time, the brash young herdsman of February is the upstart vine,<sup>65</sup> contending with all the vigour of youth against the stately wisdom of his elder. From the historical point of view, however, these roles are reversible. The young herdsman is heir to an imposing tradition of aristocratic privilege that dwarfs the social climbing of his nouveau riche guardian. But this traditional privilege is threatened, ironically, by the same upstart briar — now elevated to the peerage as Lord Burghley — who had, a generation before,

*Britannica, Eleventh Edition* (New York: The Encyclopedia Britannica Company, 1910), vol. 4, 816.

61. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 22-23.

62. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender*..., 337-39.

63. During the counter-reformation reign of Mary Tudor (1553-58), Cox subsequently became a Marian exile and did not return to England until after Elizabeth resumed the throne, being elected to the Bishopric of Norwich in 1559.

64. "Burghley, William Cecil". *The Encyclopedia*

65. Indeed, McLane argues *in extenso* (*Spenser's Shepherd's Calender*..., 62-73) that the briar is supposed to represent Oxford and the oak Leicester. But such an attempt to decode the fable into a fixed representation of individuals is wholly contrary to the spirit of Spenser's intention in the fable, which is to construct an allegory of the dynamic rise and fall of great houses and their dependents.

brought Cox/Thenot's aristocratic oak, The Earl of Northumberland, crashing down to earth. This ironic juxtaposition of identities supplies a brilliant example of Spenser's art at its most delicate, balancing conflicting interpretation with an applicable moral for everyone. It also illustrates, incidentally, why Burghley conceived a lifelong antipathy towards the author of the *Fairie Queene* — whose art was not reducible to a utilitarian formula serviceable to the abstractions of state power.

With this indeterminacy in mind, Thenot's narrative constitutes a moral challenge to Cuddie to set aside the childish ways of the briar and assume his ancestral prerogatives as a man of substance and authority. This might explain why, having heard Thenot's narrative, Cuddie feels himself undergoing an Ovidian transformation, his breeches "grafted to the ground", his "galage growne fast to my heel".<sup>66</sup> The upstart briar is beginning to "take root" as a seedling, foreshadowing his eventual reappearance in October as a mature poet, having fully absorbed the wisdom of his elders in the February and August eclogues, and ready to set aside his "dapper ditties" (comic diversions) to produce tragedies on the "stately stage". In this scenario, the oak and the briar have effectively exchanged places in Spenser's poem, and the young Cuddie/Oxford is now coming into his own as a representative of his ancient lineage, overshadowing his elder but nouveau riche father-in-law.

The October eclogue, in which Cuddie plays such a prominent role, has often been identified as central to the schema of Spenser's pastoral. Numerous critics have praised the exalted tone of the eclogue and regarded it as a presage and omen of the excellence of Elizabethan literary culture of the ensuing decades. "To the student of Spenser's art", argues De Selincourt,

the most deeply interesting of the Eclogues is October [...] whether the characters are meant to portray actual persons has been disputed; but it is clear enough that they prefigure two conflicting elements in the poet's own nature; the practical — eager for fame, and inclined to value poetry at its market price, as a means to further his worldly ambitions — and the ideal, expressed in a passion for art which, as he has learned from his master Plato, "was a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to be gotten by labour and learning, but adorned with both".<sup>67</sup>

For Jones, October unites "both the critical and romantic vein of the two series of eclogues", earning "an important structural place in the organization of the *Shepheard's Calendar*; it is, as it were, the

keystone of the arch".<sup>68</sup> October is not only "the keystone" of Spenser's *Calendar*; it also contains the most potent arguments for identifying Cuddie with Oxford and the most provocative evidence for the latter's underground reputation as a literary figure who by 1579 already cast a large if covert shadow over the literary scene of England.

Piers, who argues for Spenser's own neo-Platonic view of poetry for its own sake, is based on Dr. John Piers, Bishop of Salisbury (1523-1594), a professor at Christ Church during the years that Oxford earned his degree. Just as Cuddie was in February subjected to the moral wisdom of Thenot, he is in October still the recipient of persuasion from a wiser, older Piers, who responds to his complaints of the impoverished state of poetry by urging that "glory" is "greater then [...] gayne" and exhorts him to "abandon then the base and viler clown" of comic theatre to "sing of bloody Mars, of wars, of guists" (172). Although Piers' remonstrance to Cuddie to sing in a martial idiom has been identified as "an obvious satire directed against Burghley's policy of peace and non-intervention",<sup>69</sup> the more direct and explicit object of Spenser's satire is Gabriel Harvey's 1578 encomium to de Vere, one of several long poems partially delivered in praise of several courtiers on the occasion of the Queen's visit to Audley End in Essex in July 1578, and published later that year by Henry Bynneman as *Gratulationes Valdinensis*.

That Spenser's October text draws its moral orientation as well as significant elements of its imagery from Harvey's 1578 encomium is confirmed by E. K.'s notes to the September eclogue, immediately preceding Spenser's imitation, which allude by name to the published version of Harvey's speech, recalling "Mayster Gabriel Harvey[s] [...] late Gratulationum Valdinensium which boke in the progrese at Audley in Essex, he dedicated in writ-

68. Greenlaw, ed., *The Works of Edmund Spenser...*, vol. 7, 370. The centrality of the October eclogue to Spenser's work has been recognized by nearly every critic. Craik detects divine music in the passage: "The Tenth Eclogue [...] is the loftiest strain of the twelve [...]. Both the elevation and glow of sentiment here, and the musical flow and sweep of the verse, are worthy of the *Fairy Queen*, of which this song may be considered as the prelude and prognostication" (Greenlaw, ed., *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, 366; emphasis added). Herford thinks that "this noble and pregnant piece is the very core of the *Shepheard's Calendar*" (Greenlaw, ed., *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, 367). And Richard F. Hardin ("The Resolved Debate of Spenser's 'October'", *Modern Philology*, 73, 3 [Feb., 1976], 257-63) notes that "among the eclogues [...] 'October' has always held a special place because of its presumed representation of 'the perfecte pattern of a poet' in the shepherd Cuddie" (257).

69. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherd's Calender...*, 185.

66. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 48.

67. Greenlaw, ed., *The Works of Edmund Spenser...*, vol. 7, 369; emphasis added.

ing to her Majesty",<sup>70</sup> as well as by tangible literary connections between the two works. If Burleigh was the leader of the "peace" party, Harvey's jingoistic appeal to de Vere to "throw away [his] pen"<sup>71</sup> and replace it with a spear (*tela*)<sup>72</sup> represents the other extreme of Elizabethan political rhetoric, one reflected Spenser's *Calendar* when Piers exhorts Cuddie to "sing of Mars".<sup>73</sup> Indeed, it is substantially on the basis of parallels between the martial rhetoric of Harvey's encomium and the October eclogue that Eva Turner Clarke in 1933 identified Cuddie with Oxford:<sup>74</sup>

When Spenser, through Pierce, says to Cuddie, "Abandon then the base and viler clowne", together with the two succeeding lines, we have the interpretation of Harvey's request to Oxford to give up the "writings that serve no useful purpose". The word "clowne" clearly suggests stage plays, and the adjectives associated with it indicate the lowly place held by the stage and drama in Elizabethan society. As Spenser begs Cuddie to "sing of Mars, of wars, of giusts", so Harvey assures Oxford, "now is the time for thee to sharpen the spear and handle great engines of war". The similarity of thought between Spenser's poem and Harvey's Latin address to the Earl of Oxford, contemporaneous as they were, is so striking that it is obvious both were addressed to the same person.<sup>75</sup>

The October eclogue features an involved discussion of the didactic influence of art; Cuddie laments the poverty of poetry and poets, to which Piers replies with a theory of art as a form of moral instruction which provides its own reward: "O what an honour is it to restraine / The lust of lawless youth with good advice".<sup>76</sup> The political implication of Piers' advice, moreover, is explicit:

70. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 164.

71. Gabriel Harvey, *G. Harveii gratulationum Valdensium libri quatuor* (London, 1578), STC 12902.

...calamum, memorande, pusillum,

Exanguesque libros, usuque carentia scripta,

Abjice: nunc gladiis opus est (h1).

The "pusillum" – itty bitty – is a delightful touch of Harveyian irony.

72. Harvey, *G. Harveii gratulationum*..., h1.

73. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 172.

74. It is a telling commentary on the insular nature of the mainstream of Elizabethan literary studies that Clark's theory is not even mentioned by McLane.

75. Eva Turner Clark, *The Satirical Comedy, Love's Labours Lost* (New York: William Farquhar Payson, 1933), 134. Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl*... (183) had previously speculated that Cuddie might be Oxford, as well as definitely departing from Looney's suggestion that "Willy" could be identified with Oxford.

76. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 171.

Advauce the worthy whome [Elisa] loveth best,  
That first the white bear to the stake did bring.<sup>77</sup>

This appeal to Cuddie to sing the praises of the tamer of the white bear – a clear reference to the heraldic devices of the Dudley Earls of Leicester – shows how far Spenser's own text contradicts the theory identifying Cuddie with Edward Dier, a well-known acolyte of the Leicester faction who would have required no encouragement to sing the public praises of his powerful patron. On the contrary, Spenser is using pastoral as a normative force, not merely to criticize, but also to heal and advise. He is here concerned with the same set of complicated relationships among the upper aristocracy that had plagued the Elizabethan settlement for over two decades: Having covertly alluded to the 1558 downfall of John Dudley, Earl of Northumberland, in his February *fabella*, he here invokes art as a force for national reconciliation, urging a rapprochement of contending internal factions whose disputes still imperilled English domestic and foreign policy during the precarious middle years of Elizabeth's reign. He is concerned in the October eclogue, above all, with the political as well as aesthetic agenda of domesticating the two "mightie ones of great estate / drawne into armes, and proove of mortall fight",<sup>78</sup> Oxford, the orphaned heir of encumbered estates, and Leicester, the powerful son of the fallen intriguer Northumberland. It is difficult to imagine a stronger proof of the present thesis identifying Cuddie with Oxford; in 1579 his ongoing feud with the powerful "white bear" Robert Dudley, to whom the Court of Wards had farmed the management of his estates while he was still a minor, was perhaps the greatest, potentially most destructive schism within the English aristocracy.<sup>79</sup> As a poet

77. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 173.

78. "Muiopotmos: or The Fate of the Butterfly", as reprinted by Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 413. Conventionally, this might be taken to denote Leicester and his traditional enemy, the Earl of Sussex, who served as an important elder ally and father figure to the young Earl during the 1560s and 1570s. However, at the time of the *Shephearde's Calendar*, Oxford was engaged in a very well documented public altercation with Leicester (see Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary*..., 200-03), accusing him of stockpiling weapons and supplies at Kenilworth in preparation for rebellion as well as being complicit in the death of Walter Devereux. Doubtless this is the same conflict later referenced by Thomas Nashe when he accuses Gabriel Harvey of attempting to prosecute his personal ambition when "two great Pieres" were "at a iarre, and their quarrel continued into bloodshed": Ronald B. McKerrow, *The Works of Thomas Nashe, Edited from the Original Texts*, vol. 3 (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1905), 78.

79. See note 82.

of strong moral conviction with affinity for both factions, Spenser did not hesitate to employ the rhetoric of literature to compose the dispute.

By the conclusion of the October eclogue Cuddie, who had taken root in the soil of Thenot's fable in February, now imagines himself assuming the posture of a literary oak, raising tragedies of the "stately stage", decorated by garlands of "wild ivie twine"<sup>80</sup>:

Thou kenst not Percie howe the ryme should  
[rage.  
O if my temples were distaind with wine,  
And girt in girlonds of wild ivie twine,  
How I could reare the Muse on stately stage,  
And teach her tread aloft in bus-kin fine,  
With queint Bellona in her equipage.<sup>81</sup>

Cuddie's transformation from a lustful youth, disdainful of his elders, to a mature tragic dramatist, from skipping ivy to stately oak, is complete. In February he was a student, absorbing the moral fables of his elders; by August he was ready to judge a rhyming contest and be the arbiter of piping lyrics; but in October he has cast aside the "dapper ditties" that "feed youth's fancy / and the flocking fry"<sup>82</sup> to undertake the labour of tragedy. He has not just *absorbed* Thenot's fable, he has, like a character in Ovid, *become* it, embodying the figure of the oak and vowing to sing his new-found wisdom in the sonorous undertones of tragic drama.

As is well known, the October eclogue introduces Spenser's commitment to neo-Platonism, which would come into full flower only sixteen years later in *The Faerie Queene*. "Already in the October eclogue", writes Fletcher, "[Spenser] has defined poetic 'inspiration' after the lines of the Italian and French Platonic theorists".<sup>83</sup> Concur Herford: "here, alone in the Calender, is Spenser's high Platonic creed of love, as expressed in the contemporary *Hymnes* and the later *Colin Clouts*".<sup>84</sup> Variorum editors Greenlaw, Osgood, Padelford and Heffner concur: "Platonism appears first in Spenser's work in October, where its influence is apparent in discussion of two topics: poetic theory and love".<sup>85</sup>

80. The detail of the wild ivy, recalling the briar of February, confirms the esoteric continuity of Spenser's narrative.

81. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 75-76.

82. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition*..., 171.

83. Greenlaw, ed., *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, vol. 7, 368; emphasis added.

84. Greenlaw, ed., *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, vol. 7, 367-68; emphasis added.

85. Greenlaw, ed., *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, vol. 7,

371; emphasis added. The Earl of Oxford's contemporaries seem to have definitely connected him with the doctrines of neo-Platonism, which are conspicuously evidenced in his letters — e.g., "The work is so cunning, as of a shadow they can make a substance, and of a likelihood a truth" (Fowler, *Shakespeare Revealed*..., 284) — as well as in the few prose writings published under his own name, in the emphatic neo-Platonism of his Bible markings (Roger Stritmatter, *The Marginalia of Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible: Providential Discovery, Literary Reasoning, and Historical Consequence*, University of Massachusetts PhD dissertation, February 2001, 94-99), and in published works associated with him.

Tom Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1600), reprinted by McKerrow (*The Works of Thomas Nashe*..., vol. 3, 231-95), not only confirms Oxford's association with the neo-Platonic doctrine in the minds of his contemporaries and incidentally reveals the extent to which orthodox literary criticism has chosen to ignore a rich and revealing tradition of literary representations of Oxford that go far to attest to his reputation as the "perfect pattern of a poet". In Nashe's play, a bankrupt, neo-Platonic "Ver" (spring) laments his own prodigality but exonerates himself as a patron of spring theatricals: "*quae habui, perdididi*; what I had, I have spent on good fellows; in these sports you have seen, which are proper to the Spring, and others of like sort (as giving wenches greene gownes, making garlands for fencers) have I bestowde all my flowry treasure and flowre of my youth" (226-31). His *consolatio* is neo-Platonic: "This world is transitory; it was made of nothing and it must [return] to nothing; wherefore, if wee will doe the will of our high Creatour (whose will it is, that nothing passe to nothing) we must helpe to consume it to nothing. Gold is more vile then men [...]. It is madness to dote upon mucke" (256-60, 315). Instead of doting on muck, Ver has devoted himself to "those sports you have seen, which are proper to the Spring" — that is, his theatrical productions.

Appended to a 1592 "translation" of the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Axiochus* was "a sweet speech or oration, spoken at the tryumphe at Whitehall before her Majestie, by the Page of the right noble Earl of Oxenford". Although ostensibly by "Edw. Spenser", the work is now attributed to Anthony Munday, who in the early 1580s was Oxford's devoted servant and secretary (the original case for Munday's authorship appears in "The Sweet Speech and Spenser's (?) *Axiochus*", Marshall W. S. Swan *ELH*, 11, 3 [Sep., 1944], 161-81). The pessimistic *Axiochus*, perhaps a figure for Oxford, confesses that "neither do those things greatly moove my minde, which only have a colour and shadowed show of truth, being set out with flaunting pride, and glory of words, but yet truth have they none" (34; italics added). The tournament took place on January 22, 1581, but remains surprisingly obscure (see Charles Wisner Barrell, "Queen Elizabeth's Master Showman Shakes a Spear in Her Defense", *Shakespeare Fellowship Quarterly*, 8, 1 (1947), 4-14).

The "annexed" oration (STC 19974.6) is not reprinted in the Variorum Spenser, nor available on the Michigan microfilms series 1-1797. Nor is the related STC 13868.5, which consists of the challenge issued by Philip Howard, the Earl of Arundel, under the *nom de plume* Callophusis,

Piers – not Cuddie – is the primary October spokesman for Spenser’s neo-Platonic idealism. Once more Cuddie plays the role of the sometimes reluctant recipient of an elder’s wisdom; singing the lament of the muses he complains of the unprofitable nature of poetry, while Piers consoles him with the doctrines of neo-Platonism. But the emblem – *illo agitante, calescimur* – given for Cuddie at the eclogue’s conclusion seems to signify his conversion to the neo-Platonic doctrine, and when he reappears in *Colin Cloute’s Come Home Again* (1595);<sup>86</sup> Cuddie’s materialism has been displaced by the neo-Platonic ideal of poetry as divine inspiration: “some celestiall rage / of love (quoth Cuddie) is breath’d into thy brest / That powreth forth these oracles so sage, / of that high

powre, wherewith thou art possess’;<sup>87</sup> he goes on to praise Colin for the “deep insight” by which he “wot’st the mystery”<sup>88</sup> of Cupid’s might.

It is impossible to fully appreciate Spenser’s unity of purpose in *The Shepheard’s Calender* – to compose the internal conflict in the English state over the proposed D’Alençon marriage and celebrate the birth of a new English poetics that would preserve the traditional values of “merry England” – without restoring Oxford to his critical role as Spenser’s spokesman for poetry and, ultimately, Renaissance neo-Platonism; only with this identification in place do the architectonic tensions of the poem become fully visible.

As a leading poet, prominent supporter (at least in public) of the D’Alençon match, and *bête noire* of Leicester and Hatton, Oxford played a critical role, alluded to in Spenser’s poem, in the events of the late 1570s; he is omitted from history and from Spenser’s poem at the cost of a diminished appreciation for the real conflicts which shaped English policy of the period and of the normative and aesthetic features of Spenser’s poem. Restored to his proper place in *The Shepheard’s Calendar*, Oxford can be seen as a central figure in Spenser’s allegorical history of the development of early Elizabethan literary culture – the “perfect pattern of a poet” who, in 1579, is just beginning to envision his project to

...reare the muse on stately stage,  
And teache her tread aloft in buskin fine,  
With queint Bellona in her equipage.<sup>89</sup>

Roger STRITMATTER

available on microfilm. Howard’s challenge, issued on Twelfth Night (Jan. 6), was entered for publication on January 16 as “the challenge of the Justes”. However, the speech of Oxford’s page was not published for another eleven years, and remains until this day an extremely scarce publication. At the time of Barrell’s article, only one copy was known to exist, that owned by Carl H. Pforzheimer and reprinted for the first time by Barrell. More recently, the subject has been considered further by Daniel Wright, “Oxford as ‘The Knight of the Tree of the Sunne’, Shaking the Spear at Court”, *Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter*, 34, 2 (Summer 1998); reprinted at <<http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/?p=57>>.

86. McLane, correctly recognizing the close connection between the Cuddie of 1579 and that of 1595, suggests that the later character “probably represents the same person as the Cuddie of the Calendar” (*Spenser’s Shepherd’s Calender...*, 277). Spenser must have known his Shakespeare well, for Colin to Cuddie echoes Hamlet’s speech to Horatio (“there are more things, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy”): “Much more there is unkennd, then thou doest kon/And much more that does from mens knowledge lurke” (294-95).

87. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 823-26.

88. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 833.

89. Oram, ed., *The Yale Edition...*, 176.

January	Colin		
February	Thenot		Cuddie
March	Willy	Thomalin	
April	Thenot	Hobbinol	
May	Piers	Palinode	
June	Colin	Hobbinol	
July	Thomalin	Morrell	
August	Willy	Perigot	Cuddie
September	Diggon Davie	Hobbinol	
October	Piers		Cuddie
November	Colin	Thenot	
December	Colin		

Appendix: Table of Speakers in *Shepheard’s Calendar*.