



EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER NO. 54

Published by De Vere Press
1340 Flemish Street
Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 3R7 Canada

Was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, the "E.K." of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*? [Part 6 of 7]

In the five previous issues in this series, evidence was adduced to show that Oxford shared a literary friendship with Edmund Spenser and a social connection with him through the Spencers of Althorpe; as well, Oxford's relationships with Gabriel Harvey and Philip Sidney were examined to illustrate their consistency with E.K.'s relations with these two individuals. A further question to be examined in connection with the hypothesis that E.K. is Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, is whether Oxford and E.K. exhibited similar intellectual interests.

From the historical evidence which has survived, it is apparent that Oxford's principal intellectual interests included literature, languages, history, poetry, drama, law and music. Oxford was widely read, proficient in classical as well as modern languages, and avidly interested in history (Ward 23-4, 30-1, 84-5). He is said to have been one of the best comic playwrights of his time (Allan 78), the best of the courtier poets (Ogburn 687-8; Ward 199), and a proficient musician and composer (Ward 203-4). He seems also to have been interested in book publication; in 1573, he published Thomas Bedingfield's translation of *Cardanus' Comfort* (Ward 86-90).

According to the evidence of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, E.K. had similar interests. E.K. was extraordinarily well read, particularly in the areas of literature and history. He was fluent in Latin, Greek, French, Italian and, possibly, Hebrew. Occasional

references suggest that he knew something of law and music ("so oftentimes a dischorde in Musick maketh a comely concordance") (Oram 15, 116, 177-8). And, like Oxford, E.K. was a publisher: in the October eclogue in the *Calendar*, he announced his intention of publishing Spenser's (now lost) work, *The English Poet*:

his booke called the English Poete, which booke being lately come to my hands, I mynde also by Gods grace upon further advisement to publish (Oram 170).

A full-scale assessment of E.K.'s learning, as revealed in the pages of the *Calendar*, is the province of classical scholars. However, his knowledge of mythology, rhetoric, language, history and literature are canvassed in some detail below in order to suggest the way in which his interests in these areas paralleled Oxford's.

The starting point for an assessment of E.K.'s learning is the multitude of references he makes to classical and modern works and authors in *The Shepherd's Calendar*. These references -- found in his dedicatory epistle and general argument, and in the arguments and glosses to the individual eclogues -- attest to E.K.'s familiarity with the works and authors in the list which follows. In glancing over this astonishing list, it is necessary to keep in mind that it undoubtedly represents only a fraction of what E.K. had actually read by April, 1579:

The Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Matthew)

Homer (9th century B.C.) *Iliad*

Hesiod (8th century B.C.)

Stesichorus (c.640-c.555 B.C.)
 Alceus (c.620-580 B.C.)
 Theognis of Megara (6th century B.C.)
 Aesop (6th century B.C.) *Fables*
 Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.)
 Euripedes (c.480-406 B.C.) *Hecuba*
 Xenophon (c.430-355 B.C.) *Symposium 8*
 Plato (c.427-348 B.C.) *Alcibiades, Phaedo, Laws*
 Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)
 Theocritus (fl. c. 270 B.C.) *Idylls, Epigrams*
 Terence (c.185-159 B.C.) *Phormio*
 Moschus (c.150 B.C.) *Idylls*
 Cicero (104-43 B.C.) *De Oratore, De Divinatione, De Natura Deorum, Tusculan Disputations, Post Reditum in Senatu, Pro Archia Poeta*
 Bion (c.100 B.C.) *Idylls*
 Publius Syrus (1st century B.C.)
 Sallust (86-35 B.C.)
 Virgil (70-19 B.C.) *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid*
 Horace (65-8 B.C.) *Odes, Epistles, Ars Poetica*
 Livy (59 B.C. - A.D. 17)
 Propertius (c.50-16 B.C.)
 Ovid (43 B.C.-18 A.D.) *Amores, Metamorphoses, Heroides*
 Diodorus Siculus (c.40 B.C.) *Library of History*
 Seneca (c.4 B.C.-65 AD.) *Thyestes*
 Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.) *Natural History*
 Statius (c.40-96 A.D.) 'Epithalamium Stellae et Violentillae' in *Silvae*
 Plutarch (c.46-120 A.D.) (*Moralia?*)
 Tacitus (c. 55-117 A.D.)
 Lucian (c.115-200 A.D.) (*Deorum Dialogi*)
 Maximus Tyrius (2nd century A.D.) (*Dissertations?*)
 Aulus Gellius (2nd century A.D.) *Noctes Atticae*
 Eusebius (265-340 A.D.) *De Preparatio Evangelica*
 Ausonius (c.310-c.395 A.D.) *Epigrams: Nomina Musarum*
 Macrobius (fl. 400 A.D.) *Saturnalia*
 Musaeus (4th or 5th century A.D.) *De Herone et Leandro*
 Eustathius (12th century)
 Theodontius
 Andalò di Negro (fl.1300)
 Petrarch (1304-1374) *Rime Sparse*
 Boccaccio (1313-1375) *Genealogia Deorum*
 John Gower (c.1330-1408)
Plowman's Tale
 Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343-1400) *Troilus & Criseyde, The House of Fame, Canterbury Tales* with specific mention of *The Tale of Sir Thopas*
 John Lydgate (c.1370-1449)
 Alain Chartier (c.1385-c.1435) *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy*
 Laurentius Valla (c.1407-1457)
 Baptista Spagnuoli (Mantuan) (1448-1511) *Eclogues*
 Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494) *Epigrammata*
 Jacopo Sannazzaro (1458-1530)
 John Skelton (c.1460-1529) *Collyn Clout*
 Erasmus (c.1467-1536), *Adagia, Mimi Publiani*
 Pietro Aretino (1492-1556)
 Clément Marot (1496-1544) *Eclogue de Mme. Loyse de Savoye, Eclogue au Roy sous les noms de Pan et Robin*
 Joachim Périon (c.1499-1559) *In Petrum Aretinum Oratio*
 William Lambarde (1536-1601) *Perambulation of Kent*
 Gabriel Harvey (1550-1631) *Smithus: Vel Musarum Lachrymae, Gratulationes Valdinenses, Ode Natalitia*, and three lost works: *Tyrannomastix, Rameidos, Anticosmopolitia*
 Madonna Coelia (fl.1562) *Lettre Amoroze*

Harrison, Robert (fl.1572) *Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking By Night*, trans. from Ludwig Lavater's *De Larvis*
 George Gascoigne (1542-1577) *Complainte of Philumene*
 Edmund Spenser (1554?-1599) four lost works: *The English Poet*, a sonnet ('The silver swanne doth sing before her dying day'), *Dreams, Pageants*
 Raphael Holinshed (d.1580) *Chronicles* (Oram 13-8, 23-5, 32-5, 49-52, 62-5, 78-84, 99-105, 114-7, 129-133, 145-7, 161-4, 176-183, 196-8, 209-12).

The foregoing list of the works and authors referred to by E.K. in *The Shepheardes Calender* gives an indication of the enormous range and variety of his reading, and provides evidence of the subjects in which he is most keenly interested.

One of the subjects in which E.K. is interested is classical mythology. His enthusiasm for mythology is reflected in his lively retelling in the glosses of stories connected with the following mythological persons and places:

Flora, Maia, Lethe, Cupid, Achilles, the Muses, Helicon, Syrinx, Phoebe, Calliope, the Graces, nymphs, Cloris, Cynthia, Niobe, Pan, Atlas, Apollo, Titan, Endymion, Argus, Io, Venus, Narcissus, Orpheus, the Maenads, Pallas Athene, Melpomene, Philomel, the Fates, the Furies, the Elysian Fields, Hebe, Circe (Oram 63-4, 79, 81-4, 99-100, 102, 117, 131, 133, 147, 165, 178, 182-3, 196-8, 211).

The fact that E.K. feels it necessary to explain classical mythology to Spenser's audience indicates that the Elizabethans were not as conversant with mythology as is commonly supposed, and suggests that E.K.'s interest in this subject is a somewhat personal and specialized one.

Another subject which strongly interests E.K. is rhetorical technique. Considering the prominence given to the study of rhetoric in the university training of the day, E.K.'s thorough knowledge of its use in composition and oratory can be taken for granted. What is unusual is his marked interest in the use of rhetorical figures in poetry. In the glosses to *The Shepheardes Calender*, E.K. draws attention to examples of Spenser's use of eighteen rhetorical figures.

epanorthosis, paranomasia, allegory, icon or hypotyposis, metaphor, periphrasis, exordium, parousia, syncope, fictio, pathos, parenthesis,

hyperbaton, epiphonema, synecdoche, sarcasmus, cacozelon, exclamatio (Oram 34, 50-1, 65, 79, 83, 100, 103, 105, 131, 177, 179, 181-2, 196, 198, 209, 211).

It is important to E.K. that Spenser's skilful handling of these figures not be overlooked by the casual reader; as he says in the dedicatory epistle, he has prepared the glosses to the twelve eclogues because "many excellent and proper devises . . . would passe in the speedy course of reading, either as unknown, or as not marked" (Oram 19). Accordingly, E.K. draws attention in the glosses to a multitude of examples of Spenser's use of figures ("a prety Epanorthosis in these two verses, and withall a Paronomasia, or playing with the word", "a lively Icon, or representation", "a patheticall parenthesis, to encrease a carefull Hyperbaton") (Oram 34, 198, 103). These and many similar comments emphasize E.K.'s interest in poetic technique, and suggest that he himself was a practising poet.

E.K. is also very interested in language. As would be expected of a Cambridge or Oxford graduate in the sixteenth century, E.K. is proficient in classical languages. What is exceptional, however, is his thorough familiarity with classical poetry, demonstrated by the ease with which he illustrates the glosses with appropriate Greek or Latin verses. In the July eclogue, for example, Spenser speaks of melampode and terebinth:

Here growes Melampode every where
And Terebinth good for Gotes.

In his gloss to these lines, E.K. explains that melampode and terebinth "be hearbes good to cure diseased Gotes", and quotes a line from Theocritus which mentions terebinth (Oram 124, 131). Often, E.K. seems to quote these Greek and Latin verses from memory, further reinforcing the impression of his familiarity with the original texts. In the same vein, E.K. points out in the dedicatory epistle that Spenser's imitation of classical eclogues is so allusive that "few, but they be well-scented, can trace him out". In other words, lacking the assistance provided by E.K.'s glosses, few Elizabethan readers could be expected to notice Spenser's imitation of his classical models. This statement makes it clear

that E.K.'s (and Spenser's) knowledge of Greek and Latin poetry went considerably beyond what was taught in the university, and that their interest in classical poetry was a specialized one. A further inference which can be gleaned from the frequency with which E.K. quotes from certain Latin and Greek texts is the suggestion that Homer, Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid and Horace were among his favourite poets.

E.K. is also fluent in at least two modern languages, French and Italian. This is evidenced by his quotations from Petrarch, his translation of Spenser's French and Italian emblems, his references to Madonna Coelia's *Lettre Amoroze* and Marot's eclogues, and his definition of the word overture ("the word is borrowed of the French") (Oram 81, 182, 35, 52, 117, 147, 199, 34, 18, 33, 130). E.K. is also interested in linguistics. His familiarity with Middle English -- another personal and specialized interest -- is indicated by his glosses on the many "olde wordes" in the eclogues. His interest in linguistics is further illustrated by his derivation of the word "Kent" from "the Saxons tongue", and his glosses on Spenser's use of Northern dialect ("gate", "wae" and "heame" (Oram 115, 103, 162, 197).

E.K. is also greatly interested in history, a subject which seems not to have occupied a significant position in the university curriculum of his day. For the most part, his historical references are digressions from the topic at hand, a fact which reinforces the impression that the study of history was, for E.K., a compelling personal interest. References in the glosses to historical topics range over a wide spectrum: the destruction of Thebes by Alexander, the Danish conquest of Britain, King Ethelbert, King Edgar's destruction of the wolves, the conflict between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, the contention between the houses of Lancaster and York, the fall of Lord Hastings (an event, incidentally, which was of personal significance to Oxford because his lineal ancestor, Elizabeth Hastings, was a sister of Lord Hastings), Talbot's exploits against the French, and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (Oram 103-4, 115-6, 130, 150, 163, 180-1).

Among all E.K.'s interests, however, the one which

stands out from the rest is his passion for literature. This interest is reflected in the general character and quality of E.K.'s references to literature, which invariably display extensive knowledge and a keen critical judgment. The comprehensive scope of his knowledge of literature is illustrated in the paragraphs below by means of examples drawn from four different types of literary references found in E.K.'s glosses.

(1) In one type of literary reference, E.K. defines Middle English words in terms of their use across the broad spectrum of Middle English literature, indicating his familiarity with the works of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate in their entirety. The word "gride", for example, is "an olde word much used of Lidgate, but not found (that I know of) in Chaucer" (Oram 48). Similarly, "chevisaunce" is "sometime of Chaucer used for gaine; sometime of other for spoyle"; "glitterand" is "a participle used sometime in Chaucer, but altogether in J. Goore"; and the phrase "dead at mischief" is "much usurped of Lidgate, and sometime of Chaucer" (Oram 101, 133, 162).

(2) In another type of literary reference, E.K. shows his familiarity with a wide range of classical and modern models imitated by Spenser. In these references, E.K. compares particular lines in Spenser's eclogues to similar passages in the works of Virgil, Chaucer, Theocritus, Theognis, Hesiod, Horace, Mantuan and Ovid. One passage in Spenser, for example, "imitateth Virgils verse", another is "Chaucers verse almost whole", a third "seemeth somewhat to resemble that same of Theocritus", a fourth "is a piece of Theognis verse", while a fifth "seemeth to imitate the lyke in Hesiodus" (Oram 33, 49, 62, 105, 79). Similarly, Spenser is said to be "imitating Horace", or using a passage "translated out of Mantuane", or "Ovids verse translated" (Oram 162, 164). E.K. also compares Spenser's use of certain pastoral conventions with their use by earlier poets: pledges ("so also do Theocritus and Virgile feigne pledges of their strife"), astrology ("skill in starres . . . as Theocritus and the rest use"), and the name Phyllis ("the name is usual in Theocritus, Virgile and Mantuane") (Oram 146, 210, 49).

(3) In a third type of reference, E.K. shares his critical judgments with the reader. For example, he condemns excessive alliteration ("I think this playing with the letter to be rather a fault then a figure"), disparages Marot ("if he be worthy of the name of a poet"), and praises both George Gascoigne ("the very chefe of our late rymers") and Chaucer ("whose prayse for pleasaunt tales cannot dye, so long as the memorie of hys name shal live, and the name of Poetrie shal endure") (Oram 182, 33, 197, 50).

(4) Perhaps the most surprising of E.K.'s literary references, however, are those which make it clear that he is both an editor and a publisher. In addition to his work on the critical apparatus of *The Shepheardes Calender*, E.K. has written a commentary on Spenser's *Dreams*, and intends to publish Spenser's *The English Poet* (Oram 198-9, 170). Both the *Dreams* and Spenser's treatise on poetics are now lost, and the existence of these works is known only as a result of E.K.'s involvement with them. In addition, E.K. states in a gloss to the January eclogue that he has the manuscript of Sir Thomas Smith's "booke of goverment" in his possession (Oram 33), and it is perhaps not unreasonable to suspect that he had something to do with its posthumous publication in 1581 as *De Republica Anglorum*.

The examples given in the preceding paragraphs suggest that E.K.'s intellectual background was truly extraordinary. Nevertheless, in the pages of *The Shepheardes Calender*, he wears his learning lightly. He is a natural teacher, and his engaging and multifaceted persona animates and enlivens *The Calender* for modern readers as it surely did for his contemporaries. It is highly unlikely that such a brilliant individual could have passed through the Elizabethan age leaving no trace apart from the cryptic initials "E.K." In consequence, the reader of the *Calender* is driven to the conclusion that "E.K." is a pseudonym adopted by someone otherwise known to history under his real name. The hypothesis of this series of seven articles is that E.K. is Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

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