



# EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER No. 55

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 7 of 7]

A modern spelling version of E.K.'s dedicatory epistle in *The Shepherd's Calendar* is reprinted below. It is followed by Oxford's dedicatory epistle to Thomas Bedingfield's translation of *Cardanus' Comfort*, published in 1573. The reproduction of the two texts allows the reader to compare E.K.'s prose style in 1579 with the prose style of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, in 1573.

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To the most excellent and learned both  
Orator and Poet, Master Gabriel Harvey, his  
very special and singular good friend E.K. commen-  
deth the good liking of this his labour,  
and the patronage of the  
new Poet.

'Uncouth, unknissed', said the old famous poet Chaucer whom, for his excellency and wonderful skill in making, his scholar Lydgate (a worthy scholar of so excellent a master) called the lodestar of our language, and whom our Colin Clout in his æglogue calleth Tityrus, the god of shepherds, comparing him to the worthiness of the Roman Tityrus, Virgil. Which proverb, mine own good friend Master Harvey, as in that good old poet it served well Pandar's purpose for the bolstering of his bawdy brokage, so very well taketh place in this our new poet who, for that he is uncouth (as said Chaucer), is unknissed, and, unknown to most men, is regarded but of few. But I doubt not, so soon as his name shall come into the knowledge of men and his worthiness be sounded in the trump of fame, but that he shall be, not only knissed, but also beloved of all, embraced of the most, and wondered at of the best. No less, I think, deserveth his wittiness in devising, his pithiness in uttering, his complaints of love so lovely, his discourses of pleasure so

pleasantly, his pastoral rudeness, his moral wiseness, his due observing of decorum everywhere - in personages, in seasons, in matter, in speech - and, generally, in all seemingly simplicity of handling his matter and framing his words. The which, of many things which in him be strange, I know will seem the strangest, the words themselves being so ancient, the knitting of them so short and intricate, and the whole period and compass of speech so delightsome for the roundness and so grave for the strangeness. And first of the words to speak, I grant they be something hard, and of most men unused, yet both English, and also used of the most excellent authors and most famous poets. In whom, whenas this our poet hath been much travailed and thoroughly read, how could it be (as that worthy orator said) but that walking in the sun, although for some other cause he walked, yet needs he might be sunburnt, and having the sound of those ancient poets still ringing in his ears, he might needs in singing hit out some of their tunes. But whether he useth them by such casualty and custom, or whether of set purpose and choice, as thinking them fittest for such rustical rudeness of shepherds, either for that their rough sound would make his rhymes more ragged and rustical, or else because such old and obsolete words are most used of country folk, sure I think (and think I think not amiss) that they bring great grace and, as one would say, authority to the verse. For albeit amongst many other faults it specially be objected of Valla against Livy, and of other against Salust, that with overmuch study they affect antiquity, as coveting thereby credence and honour of elder years, yet I am of opinion (and eke the best learned are of the like) that those ancient solemn words are a great ornament both in the one and in the other, the one labouring to set forth in his work an eternal image of antiquity, and the other carefully discoursing matters of gravity and importance. For, if my memory fail not, Tully, in that book wherein he endeavoureth to set forth the pattern of a perfect orator, saith that oftentimes an ancient word maketh the style seem grave and, as it were, reverend, no otherwise than we honour and reverence gray hairs for a certain religious regard which we have of old age, yet neither everywhere must old words be stuffed in nor the common dialect and manner of speaking so corrupted thereby that, as in old buildings, it seem disorderly and ruinous. But all as in most exquisite pictures they use to blaze and portray not only the dainty lineaments of

beauty, but also round about it to shadow the rude thickets and craggy cliffs that, by the baseness of such parts, more excellency may accrue to the principal; for oftentimes we find ourselves, I know not how, singularly delighted with the shew of such natural rudeness, and take great pleasure in that disorderly order. Even so do those rough and harsh terms enlumine and make more clearly to appear the brightness of brave and glorious words. So oftentimes a discord in music maketh a comely concordance; so great delight took the worthy poet Alceus to behold a blemish in the joint of a well-shaped body. But if any will rashly blame such his purpose in choice of old and unwonted words, him may I more justly blame and condemn, or of witless headiness in judging, or of heedless hardiness in condemning, for, not marking the compass of his bent, he will judge of the length of his cast. For, in my opinion, it is one special praise of many which are due to this poet that he hath laboured to restore, as to their rightful heritage, such good and natural English words as have been long time out of use and almost clear disherited. Which is the only cause that our mother tongue, which truly of itself is both full enough for prose and stately enough for verse, hath long time been counted most bare and barren of both, which default, whenas some endeavoured to salve and recure, they patched up the holes with pieces and rags of other languages, borrowing here of the French, there of the Italian, everywhere of the Latin, not weighing how ill those tongues accord with themselves, but much worse with ours. So now they have made our English tongue a gallimaufry or hodgepodge of all other speeches. Other some, not so well seen in the English tongue as perhaps in other languages, if them happen to hear an old word, albeit very natural and significant, cry out straightway that we speak no English, but gibberish, or rather such as in old time Evander's mother spake; whose first shame is that they are not ashamed, in their own mother tongue, strangers to be counted, and aliens. The second shame, no less than the first, that whatso they understand not, they straightway deem to be senseless, and not at all to be understood, much like to the mole in Aesop's fable that, being blind herself, would in no wise be persuaded that any beast could see. The last, more shameful than both, that of their own country and natural speech, which together with their nurse's milk they sucked, they have so base regard and bastard judgment that they will not only themselves not labour to garnish and beautify it, but also repine that of other it should be embellished - like to the dog in the manger, that himself can eat no hay, and yet barketh at the hungry bullock that so fain would feed; whose currish kind, though cannot be kept from barking, yet I con them thank that they refrain from biting.

Now for the knitting of sentences, which they call the joints and members thereof, and for all the compass of the speech, it is round without roughness and learned without hardness, such indeed as may be perceived of the least, understood of the most, but judged only of the learned. For what in most English writers useth to be loose, and as it were ungirt, in this author is well grounded, finely framed, and strongly trussed up together. In regard whereof, I scorn and spew out the

rakehelly rout of our ragged rhymers (for so themselves use to hunt the letter) which without learning boast, without judgment jangle, without reason rage and foam, as if some instinct of poetical spirit had newly ravished them above the meanness of common capacity. And being in the midst of all their bravery, suddenly either for want of matter or of rhyme, or having forgotten their former conceit, they seem to be so pained and travailed in their remembrance as it were a woman in childbirth or as that same Pythia, when the trance came upon her:

*Os rabidum fera corda domans etc.*

Natheless, let them, a' God's name, feed on their own folly, so they seek not to darken the beams of others' glory. As for Colin, under whose person the author's self is shadowed, how far he is from such vaunted titles and glorious shows, both himself sheweth, where he saith:

'Of Muses, Hobbin, I conne no skill,' and,  
'Enough is me to paint out my unrest,' etc.

And also appeareth by the baseness of the name wherein, it seemeth, he chose rather to unfold great matter of argument covertly, than, professing it, not suffice thereto accordingly, which moved him rather in æglogues than otherwise to write, doubting perhaps his ability (which he little needed) or minding to furnish our tongue with this kind (wherein it faulteth), or following the example of the best and most ancient poets which devised this kind of writing, being both so base for the matter and homely for the manner, as the first to try their abilities and, as young birds that be newly crept out of the nest, by little first to prove their tender wings before they make a greater flight. So flew Theocritus, as you may perceive he was already full-fledged. So flew Virgil, as not yet well feeling his wings. So flew Mantuan, as being not full summed. So Petrarch. So Boccaccio. So Marot, Sannazzaro, and also divers other excellent both Italian and French poets, whose footing this author everywhere followeth, yet so as few, but they be well-scented, can trace him out. So finally flyeth this our new poet, as a bird whose principals be scarce grown out, but yet as that in time shall be able to keep wing with the best.

Now as touching the general drift and purpose of his æglogues, I mind not to say much, himself labouring to conceal it. Only this appeareth, that his unstayed youth had long wandered in the common labyrinth of Love, in which time to mitigate and allay the heat of his passion, or else to warn (as he saith) the young shepherds, his equals and companions of his unfortunate folly, he compiled the twelve æglogues which, for that they be proportioned to the state of the twelve months, he termeth the SHEPHEARDS CALENDAR, applying an old name to a new work. Hereunto have I added a certain gloss or scholion for the exposition of old words and harder phrases, which manner of glosing and commenting, well I wot, will seem strange and rare in our tongue, yet forsomuch as I knew many excellent and proper devices both in words and matter would pass in the speedy course of reading, either as unknown

or as not marked, and that in this kind (as in other) we might be equal to the learned of other nations, I thought good to take the pains upon me, the rather for that by means of some familiar acquaintance I was made privy to his counsel and secret meaning in them, as also in sundry other works of his, which albeit I know he nothing so much hateth as to promulgate, yet thus much have I adventured upon his friendship, himself being for long time far estranged, hoping that this will the rather occasion him to put forth divers other excellent works of his which sleep in silence, as his *Dreams*, his *Legends*, his *Court of Cupid*, and sundry others, whose commendations to set out were very vain, the things, though worthy of many, yet being known to few. These my present pains, if to any they be pleasurable or profitable, be you judge, mine own good Master Harvey, to whom I have both in respect of your worthiness generally, and otherwise upon some particular and special considerations, vowed this my labour and the maidenhead of this our common friend's poetry, himself having already in the beginning dedicated it to the noble and worthy gentleman, the right worshipful Master Philip Sidney, a special favourer and maintainer of all kind of learning. Whose cause I pray you, Sir, if envy shall stir up any wrongful accusation, defend with your mighty rhetoric and other your rare gifts of learning, as you can, and shield with your goodwill, as you ought, against the malice and outrage of so many enemies as I know will be set on fire with the sparks of his kindled glory. And thus recommending the author unto you, as unto his most special good friend, and myself unto you both, as one making singular account of two so very good and so choice friends, I bid you both most heartily farewell, and commit you and your most commendable studies to the tuition of the greatest.

Your own assuredly to be commanded E.K.

Post scr.

Now I trust, Master Harvey, that upon sight of your special friend's and fellow poet's doings, or else for envy of so many unworthy quidams which catch at the garland which to you alone is due, you will be persuaded to pluck out of the hateful darkness those so many excellent English poems of yours which lie hid, and bring them forth to eternal light. Trust me, you do both them great wrong, in depriving them of the desired sun, and also yourself, in smothering your deserved praises, and all men generally, in withholding from them so divine pleasures which they might conceive of your gallant English verses as they have already done of your Latin poems which, in my opinion, both for invention and elocution are very delicate and superexcellent. And thus again, I take my leave of my good Master Harvey from my lodging at London this 10th of April, 1579 (Oram 13-21).

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*To my loving friend, Thomas Bedingfield, one of her Majesty's Gentlemen Pensioners.*

After I had perused your letters, good Master Bedingfield, find-

ing in them your request far differing from the desert of your labour, I could not choose but greatly doubt whether it were better for me to yield you your desire or execute mine own intention towards the publishing of your book. For I do confess the affections that I have always borne towards you could move me not a little. But when I had thoroughly considered in my mind of sundry and divers arguments whether it were best to obey mine affections or the merits of your studies, at the length I determined it better to deny your unlawful request than to grant or condescend to the concealment of so worthy a work. Whereby as you have been profited in the translating, so many may reap knowledge by the reading of the same, that shall comfort the afflicted, confirm the doubtful, encourage the coward and lift up the base-minded man to achieve to any true sum or grade of vertue, whereto ought only the noble thoughts of men to be inclined. And because next to the sacred letters of Divinity, nothing doth persuade the same more than philosophy, of which your book is plentifully stored, I thought myself to commit an unpardonable error to have murdered the same in the waste bottoms of my chests, and better I thought it were to displease one than to displease many, further considering so little a trifle cannot procure so great a breach of our amity as may not with a little persuasion be repaired again. And herein I am forced like a good and politic captain, oftentimes to spoil and burn the corn of his own country lest his enemies thereof do take advantage. For rather than so many of your countrymen should be deluded through my sinister means of your industry in studies (whereof you are bound in conscience to yield them an account), I am content to make spoil and havoc of your request, and that that might have wrought greatly in me in this former respect, utterly to be of no effect or operation. And when you examine yourself, what doth avail a mass of gold to be continually imprisoned in your bags, and never to be employed to your use? I do not doubt even so you think of your studies and delightful Muses. What do they avail, if you do not participate them to other? Wherefore we have this Latin proverb, *Scire tuum nihil est, nisi te scire hoc sciat alter*. What doth avail the tree unless it yield fruit unto another? What doth avail the vine unless another delighteth in the grape? What doth avail the rose unless another took pleasure in the smell? Why should this tree be accounted better than that tree, but for the goodness of his fruit? Why should this vine be better than that vine, unless it brought forth a better grape than the other? Why should this rose be better esteemed than that rose, unless in pleasantness of smell it far surpassed the other rose? And so is it in all other things as well as in man. Why should this man be more esteemed than that man but for his virtue, through which every man desireth to be accounted of. Then you amongst men I do not doubt but will aspire to follow that virtuous path, to illustrate yourself with the ornaments of virtue. And, in mine opinion, as it beautifieth a fair woman to be decked with pearls and precious stones, so much more it ornifieth a gentleman to be furnished in mind with glittering virtues. Wherefore considering the small harm I do to you, the great good I do to others, I prefer mine own intention to discover your volume before your request to secret the same. Wherein I may seem to you to

play the part of the cunning and expert mediciner or physician who, although his patient in the extremity of his burning fever is desirous of cold liquor or drink to qualify his sore thirst - or rather kill his languishing body - yet for the danger he doth evidently know by his science to ensue, denieth him the same. So you, being sick of too much doubt in your own proceedings, through which infirmity you are desirous to bury and enseel your works in the grave of oblivion, yet I, knowing the discommodities that shall redound to yourself thereby (and, which is more, unto your countrymen), as one that is willing to salve so great an inconvenience, am nothing dainty to deny your request. Again we see, if our friends be dead, we cannot show or declare our affection more than by erecting them of tombs. Whereby, when they be dead indeed, yet make we them live, as it were, again through their monument. But with me, behold, it happeneth far better, for in your lifetime I shall erect you such a monument that, as I say, [in] your lifetime you shall see how noble a shadow of your virtuous life shall hereafter remain when you are dead and gone. And in your lifetime, again I say, I shall give you that monument and remembrance of your life whereby I may declare my goodwill (though with your ill will as yet) that I do bear you in your life. Thus earnestly desiring you in this one request of mine (as I would yield to you in a great many) not to repugn at the setting forth of your own proper studies, I bid you farewell.

From my new country Muses at Wivenhoe, wishing you, as you have begun, to proceed in these virtuous actions. For when all things shall else forsake us, virtue yet will ever abide with us, and when our bodies fall into the bowels of the earth, yet that shall mount with our minds into the highest heavens.

By your loving and assured friend. E. Oxenford (Miller 133).

### Works Cited

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