



# EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER NO. 66

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

## Does the Langham *Letter* display a negative attitude toward the Earl of Leicester?

On the surface, certain passages in the Langham *Letter* appear to be an encomium to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, the Queen's host at Kenilworth in the summer of 1575. On another level, however, the *Letter* is deeply critical of Leicester. It will be the purpose of the present article to explore the manner in which the *Letter's* anonymous author outwardly praises Leicester while subtly drawing attention to a darker side of the Earl's character.

Most of the author's remarks concerning the Earl are confined to a lengthy section near the end of the *Letter*, the first paragraph of which reads as follows:

But noow syr too cum to eend. For receyving of her highnes, and entertainment of all thooother estatez: Synz of delicatz that ony wey moought serve or delight: az of wyne, spyce, deinty viands, plate, muzik, ornaments of hoous, rich arras and sylk (too say nothing of the meaner things) the mass by provizion waz heaped so hoouge, which the boounty in spending did after bewray. The conceyt so deep in casting the plat at fyrst. Such a wizdom and cunning in acquiring things so rich, so rare, and in such aboundauns: by so immens and profuse a charg of expens. Which by so honorabl servis and exquisit order, curteizy of officerz and humanitee of all, wear after so boountifully bestoed and spent: what may this express, what may this set out untoo us, but only a magnifyk minde, a singular wizdom, a prinsly purs, and an heroicall hart? If it wear my theam Master Martyn, too speake of hiz Lordships great honor and magnificens, though it be not in me too say sufficiently, az bad a penclark az I am, yet could I say a great deel more (Kuin 74-5).

The remarks in this passage are decidedly ambiguous. The Earl has amassed great riches, which have

been expended during the Kenilworth entertainment by officers whose honour and courtesy are beyond question; however, the Earl has evidenced "cunning" in acquiring "things so rich, so rare, and in such aboundauns", and has displayed "deep conceyt" in casting the "plat" or plan for the entertainment. The words "cunning" and "deep conceyt" are double-edged, and can as easily be interpreted negatively as positively.

Moreover, the author neatly sidesteps the issue of whether "so immens and profuse a charg of expens" is proof of a "magnifyk minde". He casts the proposition in the form of a rhetorical question, leaving open the distinct possibility that all this acquisition and expenditure on the Earl's part may express something quite different from a "magnifyk minde, a singular wizdom, a prinsly purs, and an heroicall hart". A hint as to what this acquisition and expenditure might express is given in the use of the word "prinsly"; in acquiring and spending so largely, it may be that the Earl aims at rising above his already exalted station, perhaps as high as the crown. Moreover, since Leicester's ability to spend so hugely results from the valuable perquisites and licences bestowed on him by the Queen, it is, in a sense, the prince's own "purs" which he is so bountifully spending.

The author closes the paragraph with a lightly veiled threat. If it were his theme to speak of the Earl's "great honor and magnificens", he could say "a great deel more", but even at that, he would not be able to do justice to the case ("it be not in me too say sufficiently"). The natural tendency is for the reader to

interpret this remark to mean that the author could never speak enough in praise of the Earl's good qualities; however, it is equally possible to infer that, were he given free rein to say as much as he liked, the author feels that he could still not do justice to the Earl's faults.

In the paragraph which follows, the author enlarges on the theme of Leicester's "magnificens and greatnes" in a decidedly peculiar fashion:

But beeing heer noow in magnificens and matters of greatnes: it fallz well too mynde. The greatnes of hiz honorz Tent, that for her Majestyez dyning waz pight at long Ichington, the day her highnes cam to Kyllingwoorth Castl. A Tabernacl indeed for number and shyft of large and goodly roomz, for fayr and eazy officez, both inward and ooutward all so likesum in order and eyesight: that justly for dignitee may be comparabl with a beautifull Pallais, and for greatnes and quantitee with a proper Tooun, or rather a Cittadell. But too be short, least I keep yoo too long from the Ryall exhaunge noow, and too cauz yoo conceyve mooch matter in feawest wordz: The Iron bedsteed of Og the king of Basan (ye wot) waz foor yards and a half long, and too yards wyde, whearby ye consider a Gyaunt of a great proportion waz he. This Tent had seaven cart lode of pynz perteyning too it: noow for the greatness, gess az ye can (Kuin 75).

The comparison between the "greatnes" of the Earl and the "greatnes of hiz honorz Tent" appears to be a carefully calibrated insult. The words "magnificens and matters of greatnes" prepare the reader for a discussion of Leicester's moral, spiritual and intellectual greatness; instead, the author abruptly descends to the level of physical greatness and, in effect, compares him to a tent. Moreover, this tent is likened to a citadel, "a fortress commanding a city, which it serves both to protect and to keep in subjection", a subtle reference to the Earl as an oppressor, perhaps of his tenants, perhaps even of his royal mistress. To add further insult to injury, the person to whom the *Letter* is addressed, Humfrey Martin, is envisaged by the author as being so quickly bored with the description of the great tent (and by extension, with the description of the greatness of the Earl) that he is in danger of wandering off to attend to business at the Royal Exchange. To prevent this, the author quickly concludes his description by comparing the tent to the giant bedstead of Og, King of Basan -- another large structure, but a smaller struc-

ture than a tent. Thus, the "greatnes" of the Earl is further diminished.

In addition, although the author inserts a marginal gloss pointing to Deuteronomy 3 as the source of the reference to Og, King of Basan, there is another reference to Basan which might well have occurred to the mind of an Elizabethan reader familiar with the Bible. This reference is found in Psalm 22:12: "Fat bulls of Basan close me in on every side". Psalm 22 contains other verses with unpleasant overtones, particularly verse 6: "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people". All this might, of course, be accidental. However, immediately after the word "Basan" in the text appear the words "ye wot", which seem to point to the word "Basan" as having some special significance, and to raise the question of whether the author of the *Letter* intended his readers to think of Psalm 22 as well as Deuteronomy 3:11.

In the next paragraph, the author turns his attention to "great" objects which are still more unflattering for purposes of comparison to the Earl than the tent:

And great az it waz (too marshall our matters of greatnes togyther) not forgetting a Weather at Grafton, brought too the Coort, that for body and wooll waz exceeding great, the meazure I tooke not. Let me sheaw yoo with what great marveyll a great chyld of Leyceter shyre, at this long Ichington, by the Parents waz prezented: great (I say) of limz and proportion, of a foor foot and foor inches hy: and els lanuginous az a Lad of eyghteen yeerz, beeing in deed avoowd too be but six yeer oold: nothing more bewraying hiz age then hiz wit: that waz, az for thooz yeerz, simpl and childish (Kuin 75-6).

In this passage, Leicester's "greatnes" is subtly likened to the greatness of a sheep. At this point, there remains little more which the author can do in the way of further denigrating the Earl's greatness by comparing it to physical objects of diminishing size, and indeed he suggests that he has lost interest in the subject; he does not even bother to take the "meazure" of the "body and wooll". However, there is still the Earl's intellectual greatness to be dealt with, and this is subtly compared to that of the "great Chyld of Leyceter shyre" (the name of the child's county of origin is surely not accidental), whose wit

is "simpl and childish".

The author of the *Letter* has now fulfilled the implied promise of the first paragraph: he has said "a great deel more" about the Earl, although perhaps he still feels that it has not been in him to "say sufficiently". He now switches to a different method of attack:

Az for unto hiz Lordship, having with such greatnes of honorabl modesty and benignitee so passed foorth as: *Laudem sine invidia et amicos pararit*. By greatnes of well dooing, woon with all sorts too be in such reverens, az: *De quo mentiri fama veretur*. In synceritee of freendship so great, az no man more devoutly woorships, *Illud amicitiae sanctum et venerabile nomen*. So great in liberalitee, az hath no wey too heap up the mass of hiz treasure, but only by liberall giving and boounteous bestowing hiz treasure, following (az it seemez) the law of Martiall that sayth:

*Extra fortunam est, quicquid donatur amicis:  
Quas dederis, solas semper habebis opes.*

Oout of all hazerd doost thou set that too thy freends thou gyvest:  
A surer treasure canst thou not have ever while thoo lyvest (Kuin 76).

On the surface, this paragraph is an encomium to the Earl's good qualities: his "honorabl modesty", "greatnes of well dooing", "synceritee of freendship", and "liberalitee". Latin quotations from Terence, Bias, Ovid and Martial have been drawn upon by the author of the *Letter* to illustrate these qualities, and marginal glosses direct the reader to the authors (although not, significantly, to the specific works in which the quotations are to be found). The sources of these Latin quotations have been identified by modern scholars, however, and it is instructive to examine the quotations in their larger context.

The first quotation is from Terence's *Andria*. The original Latin reads, *Ita facillume/ Sine invidia laudem invenias et amicos pares* ("That's the best way to steer clear of jealousy, win a reputation and make friends") (Crowell 9; Radice 42). The *Letter* paraphrases the line in question (*Laudem sine invidia et amicos pararit*), which Kuin translates as "He has achieved fame without envy, as well as friends" (110). This comment on Leicester's "honorabl mod-

esty" can, of course, be taken in a positive sense, but it can equally well be taken in a negative one, i.e., "the sort of fame and friends he has achieved are not to be envied". Moreover, the context within which the line is found in the first scene of the *Andria* is not a favourable one. The father, Simo, is speaking of his son, Pamphilus:

Let me tell you the sort of life he lived: he was patient and tolerant with all his friends, fell in with the wishes of any of them and joined in all their pursuits, never contradicting nor putting himself first. That's the best way to steer clear of jealousy, win a reputation and make friends (Radice 42).

Simo's servant, Sosia, readily agrees:

A well-planned life! Agree with everything nowadays, if you want friends; truthfulness only makes you unpopular (Radice 42).

The immediate context from which the quotation is drawn is therefore scarcely flattering to the Earl. The wider context is still more unflattering. As the conversation progresses, Simo reveals his suspicions that Pamphilus, whose marriage he is in the process of arranging, is carrying on a secret affair with a girl who has borne him a son. In the play, everything eventually works out for the best, and Pamphilus is permitted to marry the girl with whom he has been having the affair. In real life, Leicester was involved in a very similar scenario. On the surface, he was still actively pursuing his ambition to marry the Queen. In secret, however, he had been carrying on an affair with Douglas Sheffield, who had borne him a son on August 7, 1574 (Kuin 1; Peck 86-7, 269-70). It may be purely accidental that the line in question, praising the Earl for his "honorabl modesty" is drawn from a play with this theme; however, the reader cannot help but wonder at the coincidence.

The second quotation, *de quo mentiri fama veretur*, is identified in the marginal gloss with Bias of Priene, one of the Seven Sages of antiquity. The phrase is taken from the *Septem Sapientum Sententiae*, often printed with Ausonius (Butrica). The entire passage reads:

1. Bias Prieneus.

Quaenam summa boni? mens semper conscia recti.  
 Pernicies bomi quae maxima? solus homo alter.  
 Quis dives? qui nil cupiet. Quis pauper? avarus.  
 Quae dos matronis pulcherrima? vita pudica.  
 Quae casta est? de qua mentiri fama veretur.  
 Quod prudentis opus? cum possis, nolle nocere.  
 Quid stulti proprium? non posse et velle nocere.

The author of the *Letter* has changed *qua* to *quo*, altering the gender from feminine to masculine so as to make the phrase applicable to Leicester. Kuin translates the *Letter's* version as "Of him rumour fears to lie" (110).

In the original, the phrase is part of a rhetorical question about women's chastity (*Quae casta est? de qua mentiri fama veretur*), and might be freely translated as "Where is the woman so chaste that rumour fears to lie about her chastity?", the implication being that no such woman exists. The author of the *Letter* has, of course, omitted the reference to chastity; however, considering its source, it seems likely that the phrase is to be read at least in part as a comment on Leicester's licentiousness, which was documented in print in 1584 in *Leicester's Commonwealth*.

The phrase *de quo mentiri fama veretur* is also a specific comment on Leicester's "greatness of well-doing". The author of the *Letter* says that "By greatness of well dooing, [Leicester has] woon with all sorts too be in such reverens, az: *De quo mentiri fama veretur*". However, the word "fear" produces deliberate ambiguity. On the one hand, the phrase can be read as extremely complimentary to the Earl: rumour might be said to fear to lie about the deeds ("well-doing") of someone whose character was of such an unstained and unblemished nature that nothing said to his detriment would be given credence, despite rumour's best efforts. On the other hand, the word "fear" can be read as negative in the extreme: rumour might be said to fear to lie about the deeds of someone whose power was sufficiently great to quell all dissent, even rumour itself.

The third quotation (*Illud amicitiae sanctum et venerabile nomen*), taken from Ovid's *Tristia*, comments on Leicester's "synceritee of freendship". The line is innocuous enough; David Slavitt, in a modern translation of the *Tristia* renders it as "There was

no fixity surer than that friendship" (20). However, the context in which the line is found makes a mockery of its use in praise of the Earl. Ovid is in exile, and is writing of a particular friend who turned away from him in his hour of need; he describes the pain and confusion he felt at the betrayal:

Backward shall rivers flow from the sea to their upland sources  
 while the wheeling sun careens from west to east;  
 water itself shall burn and flame sweat waterdrops,  
 the laws of nature reversed or - worse - revoked.  
 When whim is the only rule, nothing is sure or likely  
 or unlikely - so that all our wisdom  
 is undone and we all are infants again, groping  
 in a huge, incomprehensibly dangerous world.  
 I'd sooner expect that than what has in fact happened -  
 which feels as bad and leaves me just as bewildered:  
 A friend on whom I had counted, to whom I had looked to help  
 has turned away. There was no fixity  
 surer than that friendship - and none mattered so much.  
 O perfidious! Did you just forget me?  
 Or was it fear to approach, lest I might prove contagious?  
 Or was it distaste? Disaster *is* distressing.  
 But for your own sake, to think of yourself as kind,  
 decent, loyal, and so on, could you not  
 feign conventional sorrow, mouth the commonplaces,  
 copy out the copy-book phrases and send them  
 with smug relief as much as regret? I don't understand . . .  
 What can one man know of another's heart  
 unless he look into his own, considering how he'd feel  
 were the circumstances reversed. To see your face  
 once more, and to say "Farewell" for the last time . . .  
 How could I fail to do that much - or little -  
 if you were the one leaving? Other people showed up,  
 acquaintances, people I hardly knew, strangers.  
 And in some of their faces I saw the glistening eyes of grief  
 as they watched me board, leaving behind the life  
 you knew so well, the life we'd shared. Nothing! The wind  
 blew it away like chaff. But even the wind  
 from the right quarter can sting tears from the coldest eye.  
 The landscape here ought to be yours, the bleak  
 prairie, the rocky crags, the hills with their veins of flint,  
 this ill-omened terrain so far from Rome.  
 We took for granted the narrow streets whose paving stones,  
 worn smooth by civilized feet, seem jewels  
 from where I'm standing now. I can remember nights  
 of long carouse and walking home at dawn  
 (it must have rained in the small hours and then cleared)  
 when the stones gleamed in the moment's light. And you,  
 reading this will suppose that I've turned sentimental  
 and a little foolish. But do not condescend  
 as the living often do when they think of the baleful dead.  
 It isn't our mute reproach that's hard to bear  
 but sentiment, forgiveness, and love - which can be weapons  
 or instruments of torture. Knowing this,  
 how can I not forgive you, affirm our old friendship,  
 and recall with pleasure how it once gleamed? (20-1)

The allusion in the *Letter* to these lines in the *Tristia*

serves to illustrate the point: Leicester's "synceritee of freendship" is not to be relied upon.

The final quotation is from Martial's epigram 42:

*Extra fortunam est, quicquid donatur amicis:  
Quas dederis, solas semper habebis opes.*

Oout of all hazerd doost thou set that too thy freends  
thou gyvest:  
A surer treazure canst thou not have ever while thou  
lyvest (Kuin 76).

This time, the author of the *Letter* provides his own translation of the lines, and the sentiment sounds pleasant enough: Leicester guarantees the safety of his possessions by generously bestowing them on his friends. Again, however, when the lines are examined in the context of the entire epigram, they assume a different, and in this case rather ominous, significance:

A cunning thief will break your money-box and carry off your coin, cruel fire will lay low your ancestral home; your debtor will repudiate interest alike and principal, your sterile crop will not return you the seed you have sown; a false mistress will despoil your treasurer, the wave will overwhelm your ships stored with merchandise. Beyond Fortune's power is any gift made to your friends; only wealth bestowed will you possess always (Ker 327).

Thus, the epigram's message is that disasters of every kind befall the man who, like Leicester, attempts to amass earthly possessions.

In making use of these double-edged quotations, the author of the *Letter* was playing a dangerous game. However, his wide reading among Latin authors allowed him the freedom to choose little-known lines, and he appears to have been confident that the larger context from which the quotations were drawn, with the accompanying adverse implications, would not be recognized by the majority of his contemporaries, despite the identification of the authors in the marginal glosses.

In the paragraph which follows, the author begins a new theme, that of the Earl's "honor, fame, and renooum", in the course of which he gives a curious impression of his own personal reasons for revering

the Earl:

What may theez greatneses bode, but only az great honor, fame, and renooum for theez parts heerawey, az ever waz untoo thoz too nobl Greatz: the Macedonian Alexander in Emathia or Grees, or too Romane Charlez in Germany, or Italy? which, wear it in me ony wey too set oout, no man of all men by God (Master Martin) had ever more cauz: and that heerby consider yoo, It pleazed hiz honor too beare me goodwill at first, and so to continu. To have given me apparail even from hiz bak, to get me allowauns in the stabl, too advauns me unto thiz woorshipfull office so near the most honorabl Coouncell, too help me in my licenz of Beanz (thou indeed I doo not so moch uze it, for I thank God I need not) too permit my good Father to serve the stabl (Kuin 76).

The author of the *Letter* begins by asking rhetorically what the "greatneses" which he has just described might bode, and supplies a possible answer: the Earl will achieve the same degree of "honor, fame, and renooum" in the area around Kenilworth ("theez parts hereawey") as Alexander the Great enjoyed in Emathia and Greece, and Charlemagne in Germany and Italy.

This appears to be high praise indeed. However, Alexander's great achievement was the conquest of Asia from the Hellespont to India; it thus appears distinctly odd that the author of the *Letter* focuses, not on Alexander's justly earned fame in Asia, but on his fame in Emathia and Greece.

Emathia, according to Kuin, is "the part of Macedonia between the Axius and the Haliacmon" (110), in other words, the area immediately surrounding Alexander's birthplace of Pella. It is faint praise indeed to say that a man who conquered much of the known world of his time was renowned in his own birthplace. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that Alexander enjoyed "honor, fame, and renooum" in Greece. The Greek city states had been conquered by Alexander's father, Philip of Macedon; after Philip's death, when it seemed possible that they would try to regain their independence, Alexander made an example of Thebes. After conquering the city, he had most of the inhabitants (to the number of twenty thousand) sold into slavery. At Alexander's death, the Greeks were as anxious as ever to throw off Macedonian rule, and the Greek troops

which Alexander had settled in Asia, as well as the mainland Greek cities, took the opportunity to revolt (Scott-Kilvert 263-4, 427).

The same analysis applies to the author of the *Letter's* comment with respect to Charlemagne. Early in his reign, Charlemagne, at the request of Pope Hadrian, waged war on the Lombards and, according to Einhard:

did not cease, after declaring war, until he had exhausted King Desiderius by a long siege, and forced him to surrender at discretion; driven his son Adalgis, the last hope of the Lombards, not only from his kingdom, but from all Italy; restored to the Romans all that they had lost; subdued Hruodgaus, Duke of Friuli, who was plotting revolution; reduced all Italy to his power, and set his son Pepin as king over it (Painter 28-9).

Similarly, but in this case after a prolonged struggle, Charlemagne subdued Germany. Einhard says of the war with the Saxons:

No war ever undertaken by the Frank nation was carried on with such persistence and bitterness, or cost so much labor . . . war was begun against them, and was waged for thirty-three successive years with great fury; more, however, to the disadvantage of the Saxons than of the Franks. It could doubtless have been brought to an end sooner, had it not been for the faithlessness of the Saxons . . . But the King did not suffer his high purpose and steadfastness - firm alike in good and evil fortune - to be wearied by any fickleness on their part, or to be turned from the task that he had undertaken; on the contrary, he never allowed their faithless behavior to go unpunished, but either took the field against them in person, or sent his counts with an army to wreak vengeance and exact righteous satisfaction. At last, after conquering and subduing all who had offered resistance, he took ten thousand of those that lived on the banks of the Elbe, and settled them, with their wives and children, in many different bodies here and there in Gaul and Germany (Painter 30-2).

What the author of the *Letter* thus appears to be saying is that Leicester may perhaps enjoy "honor, fame, and renooum" in the limited local area around his castle of Kenilworth, but that elsewhere he is viewed as an oppressor, as Alexander was in Greece, and Charlemagne in Italy and Germany. This view of Leicester as an oppressor was echoed nine years later in Leicester's Commonwealth:

he [Leicester] that taketh in whole forests, commons,

woods, and pastures to himself, compelling the tenants to pay him new rent and what he cesseth; he that vexeth and oppreseth whomsoever he list, taketh from any what he list, and maketh his own claim, suit, and end as he list . . . (Peck 109).

After dealing in this manner with Leicester's "honor, fame and renooum", the author itemize the reasons which personally oblige him to be grateful to the Earl:

It pleased hiz honor too beare me goodwil at first, and so to continu. To have given me apparail eeven from hiz bak, to get me allowauns in the stabl, too advauns me unto thiz woorshipfull office so neer the most honorabl Coouncell, too help me in my licenz of Beanz (thou indeed I doo not so moch uze it, for I thank God I need not) too permit my good Father to serve the stabl.

Whearby I go noow in my sylks, that els might ruffl in my cut canvas: I ryde noow a hors bak, that els many timez might mannage it a foot, am knoen too theyr honorz and taken foorth with the best, that els might be bidden to stand bak my self: My good Father a good releef, that he farez mooch the better by: and none of theez for my dezert, eyther at fyrst or syns, God he knows. What say ye my good freend Humfrey, shoold I not for ever honor, extoll him all the weyz I can? Yes by yoor leave whyle God lends me pouor to utter my minde. And (having az good cauz of hiz honor, az *Virgill* had of *Augustus Cezar*) will I poet it a littl with *Virgill*, and say,

*Namque erit ille mihi Deus, illius aram  
Saepe tener nostris ab ovilibus imbuet agnus.*

For he shallbe a God to me, tyll death my lyfe consumez:  
His auterz will I sacrifice with incens and perfumez  
(Kuin 76-7).

The more the reader ponders these curious statements, however, the more difficult it is to take them at face value. Leicester was the Queen's Master of Horse, and there appear to be a number of rather obvious clues in this passage which suggest that the creature which has received all these "favours" from the Earl is not the author of the *Letter*, but a horse, perhaps even a horse named "Robert" or "Robin" after the Earl. These clues include the references to "allowance in the stable", to a "licenz of Beanz" (horses were fed horse-beans in Elizabethan times), to the fact that his "Father" ("sire"?) is permitted to "serve the stabl", to riding "a hors bak", to "mannage" (a term of horsemanship), to being "taken foorth",

to the fact that his "Father" ("sire"?) has a "good releef, that he farez mooch the better by", etc. If this is so, the rhetorical question which follows applies to the horse: should not this horse "extoll" the Earl "all the weyz" it can? But to what extent can a horse "extoll" anyone? The author suggests that it can do so "whyle God lends [it] poun to utter [its] minde". The entire paragraph suggests a broad jest, the point of which escapes the modern reader because some vital contemporary clue which would have explained it is now lost.

At this juncture the anonymous author, shifting back to his own persona, says that he has "az good cause" to sacrifice the Earl's altars "with incens and perfumez" as Virgil had of Augustus Caesar, implying that Augustus was a generous patron who gave Virgil "good cause" to sacrifice to his altars in gratitude. From the little that is known of Virgil's life, however, it would appear that Augustus was not Virgil's patron in the financial sense (Clarke xxiii-xxv; Lee 18-9). In consequence, if the author of the *Letter* has as good cause to thank the Earl for pecuniary benefits as Virgil had to thank Augustus Caesar, then indeed he has no cause to do so. Moreover, even the two shepherds in Virgil's Eclogue I, from which the lines quoted in the *Letter* are taken, have little real cause to thank Augustus: one of them has lost his land in the turmoil following Augustus's assumption of power after the assassination of Caesar, and the other has poor land in which "bare rock and bog/ With muddy rushes covers all the pasturage" (Lee 19-21, 33). The emphasis on lands in Eclogue I might well cause a modern reader of the *Letter* to be reminded of an apposite passage in *Leicester's Commonwealth*, in which the Gentlemen describes Leicester's practices with respect to lands under his control:

he [Leicester] that may chop and change what lands he listeth with her Majesty, despoil them of all their woods and other commodities, and rack them afterward to the uttermost penny, and then return the same so tender-stretched and bare shorn into her Majesty's hands again by fresh exchange, rent for rent, for other lands never enhanced before . . . (Peck 108-9).

The next paragraph in the *Letter* can be taken at face value in one respect: the Earl is an unusual pattern

("singular Patron") with respect to setting the standard by which the Queen is to be entertained:

A singular Patron of humanitee may he be well untoo us tooward all degreez: of honor, toward hy Estates: and chiefly, whearby we may learn in what dignitee, woorship and reverens her highnes iz to be esteemed, honored, and recyved. That waz never indeed more condignly doon then heer: so az neither by the bylderz at fyrst, nor by the Edict of pacification after, waz ever Kenelwoorth more nobled then by thiz, hiz lordships receiving her highnes heer noow (Kuin 77).

At the same time, this paragraph contains a subtle allusion to treason. The Edict of Pacification of 1266 A.D. brought to an end the seige of Kenilworth Castle, and provided a method by which certain barons who had taken part in the civil war against Henry III could be restored to their lands and titles. The *Letter's* mention of the Edict in this passage thus gives rise to a thought-provoking speculation. The leader of the barons in the civil war against King Henry III was Simon de Montfort, a previous holder of the title of Earl of Leicester, and a previous owner of Kenilworth. The reader cannot but wonder whether the subtle connection drawn in this passage between a previous Earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort, and the current Earl, both owners of Kenilworth Castle, is meant to convey a hint that the latter is no more to be trusted by his sovereign than was the former. Certainly, there were rumours abroad that, under cover of preparations for the Kenilworth entertainment, the Earl had fortified the Castle. In discussing the Earl's treasonable designs, the characters in *Leicester's Commonwealth*, published nine years later, had this to say with respect to the Earl's fortification of Kenilworth:

*Gentleman*: Whereunto if you add now his own forces and furniture which he hath in Killingworth Castle and other places, as also the forces of Huntingdon in particular, with their friends, followers, allies, and compartners, you shall find that they are not behind in their preparations.

*Scholar*: . . . And as for the castle last mentioned by you, there are men of good intelligence and of no small judgment who report that in the same he hath well to furnish ten thousand good soldiers of all things necessary both for horse and man, besides all other munition, armor, and artillery (whereof great store was brought thither under pretense of triumph when her Majesty was there and never as yet carried back again,

and besides the great abundance of ready coin there laid up (as is said), sufficient for any great exploit to be done within the realm (Peck 105-6, 206).

At this point in the *Letter*, with an ingenuous exclamation of surprise ("But Jesu Jesu whither am I drawn noow. But talk I of my lord onz, een thus it farez with me: I forget all, my freends, and my self too."), the author betakes himself off to other concerns.

Before concluding this article, however, it is necessary to discuss two additional passages which appear to be written in the same tenor as those which have been discussed in the preceding pages. The first of these is a paragraph which occurs earlier in the *Letter*. The author is about to describe the renovations which the Earl has made to Kenilworth, first, the new wing added to the Castle itself, generally referred to as "Leicester's buildings", and, secondly, the beautiful garden recently created on the north side. The anonymous author introduces his topic with the following paragraph:

Az for the amplitude of hiz Lordships mynde: all be it that I poor fooll can in conceit no more attein untoo, then judge of a gem whearof I have no skill: ye, though daily worn and resplendaunt in mine ye: Yet sum of the vertuze and propertiez thearof, in quantitee or qualitee so apparaunt az cannot be hidden but seen of all men, moought I be the boolder too reoport her untoo yoo: but az for the valu, yoor jewellers by their carets let them cast and they can (Kuin 69).

The author's remarks with respect to "the amplitude of hiz Lordships mynde" are scarcely complimentary. Though "daily worn and resplendaunt" to the eye, the amplitude of the Earl's mind cannot be judged of, since certain qualities are "hidden" (deliberately so, to judge from the author's phrasing). Even those qualities which are not "hidden" (i.e., Leicester's initiative in beautifying Kenilworth) are still of doubtful value ("but az for the value, yoor jewellers by their carets let them cast and they can").

A clue to the author's meaning here can be found in a passage in *Leicester's Commonwealth*, published nine years later in 1584. The Lawyer has just finished remarking that Leicester's "treasure must needs in one respect be greater than that of her Majesty,

for that he layeth up whatsoever he getteth and his expenses he casteth upon the purse of his Princess" [i.e., the Queen]. The Gentleman replies that Leicester has so many ways of "gaining" that his expenditures are of little import. Moreover, the Earl's riches are really the Queen's property:

For that (said the gentleman), whether he do or no it importeth little to the matter, seeing both that which he spendeth and that he hoardeth is truly and properly his Princess' treasure, and seeing he hath so many and divers ways of gaining, what should he make accompt of his own private expenses? If he lay out one for a thousand, what can that make him the poorer . . . (Peck 108).

The Gentleman then goes on to provide a list of the many methods, both legitimate and illegitimate, by which Leicester is able to add to his income, a list which runs to a full page in the text of the *Commonwealth*. Many of these methods involve the Earl's enrichment at the expense of the Crown; when viewed in this light, Leicester's expenditures on Kenilworth could well have been categorized by the author of the *Letter* as of doubtful "valu".

One final passage in the *Letter* which requires consideration in the context of the author's attitude towards the Earl of Leicester is found at the end of the description of the country sports put on for the Queen's entertainment at Kenilworth. The author describes the mock combat staged by the local young men after they had run their courses at the quintain:

Many such gay gamez wear thear among theez ryderz: who by and by after, upon a greater coorage leafthear quintining, and ran one at anoother. Thear to see the stearn coountenauns, the grym looks, the cooragious attempts, the desperat adventurez, the daungerous coorsez, the feers encoounterz, whearby the buff at the man, and the coounterbuff at the hors, that both sumtime cam topling too the ground. By my trooth Master Martyn twaz a lyvely pastyme. I beleve it woold have mooved sum man too a right meery mood, though had it be toold him hiz wyfe lay a dying (Kuin 52).

The reader cannot help being utterly taken aback by the callous remark which concludes this paragraph. However, it is noticeable that the author particularizes the remark to a single individual: it is not men in general, but only "sum man" in particular who



would be moved to "a right meery mood" in these circumstances, even though "hiz wyfe lay a dying". It is also noticeable that the occasion which would move this man to a "right meery mood" is one involving country sports. In addition, the remark is prefaced by a very specific reference to "topling too the ground". The reader's thoughts are thus drawn to the Earl of Leicester's first wife, Amy Robsart, who met her death by "topling" from a flight of stairs when her servants had been sent away to a country market or fair in a neighbouring town. *Leicester's Commonwealth* gives the following account of the circumstances of her death:

For first his Lordship [i.e. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester] hath a special fortune, that when he desireth any woman's favor, then what person soever standeth in his way hath the luck to die quickly for the finishing of his desire. As for example, when his Lordship was in full hope to marry her Majesty and his own wife stood in his light, as he supposed, he did but send her aside to the house of his servant Forster of Cumnor by Oxford, where shortly after she had the chance to fall from a pair of stairs and so to break her neck, but yet without hurting of her hood that stood upon her head. But Sir Richard Varney, who by commandment remained with her that day alone, with one man only, and had sent away perforce all her servants from her to a market two miles off, he (I say) with his man can tell how she died, which man, being taken afterward for a felony in the march of Wales and offering to publish the manner of the said murder, was made away privily in the prison. And Sir Richard himself, dying about the same time in London, cried piteously and blasphemed God, and said to a gentleman of worship of mine acquaintance not long before his death that all the devils in hell did tear him in pieces. The wife also of Bald Buttler, kinsman to my Lord, gave out the whole fact a little before her death. But to return unto my purpose, this was my Lord's good fortune, to have his wife die at that time when it was like to turn most to his profit (Peck 82).

Whether or not Leicester was in fact responsible for his wife's death, there is no doubt that rumour blamed him for it. And, if this hint in the *Letter* has been correctly interpreted, there would seem to be little doubt that in the minds of some, at least, of Elizabeth's courtiers, the news of his wife's death had made Leicester "meery" rather than sad.

In summary, then, it would appear that, in the view of the author of the *Letter*, the character of the Earl of Leicester was seriously flawed. Opinions of this

sort could not, of course, be expressed openly. However, under cover of showering the Earl with praise, the author of the *Letter* manages, by means of subtle word-play and allusion, to convey his true assessment of the character of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

This subtle characterization of Leicester is entirely consistent with the hypothesis that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was the true author of the Langham *Letter*. After the death of his father in 1562, Oxford's lands were granted to Leicester by the Queen during Oxford's minority (*Wards*), and Oxford's later financial difficulties appear to stem directly from the fact that his lands, and the income therefrom, were in Leicester's hands for nine years.

Oxford also had other reasons for negative feelings about Leicester. Only three years before the 1575 Kenilworth entertainment, Oxford's first cousin, Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, had been executed for treason, perhaps through Leicester's machinations (see issues # 14-17 of the *Edward De Vere Newsletter*). In addition, about three years after the publication of the Langham *Letter*, Oxford is said to have drawn up a list of charges against Leicester which seem to be a blueprint for the accusations in the anonymous tract, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, published in 1584 (see Appendix A). The *Letter's* veiled animosity towards Leicester thus seems to point directly towards identification of Oxford as its author.

## Works Cited

- Butrica, James Lawrence Peter. Department of Classics, Memorial University, Newfoundland. E-mail message of May 11, 1998.
- Clarke, Howard, ed. *Vergil's Aeneid and fourth ("Messianic") eclogue in the Dryden translation*. Pennsylvania State University, 1989.
- Crowell, E.P., ed. *The Andria and Adelphoe of Terence*. Philadelphia: Eldridge and Brother, 1874.
- Ker, Walter C., trans. *Martial: Epigrams*. Vol. 1. London: William Heinemann, 1930.
- Kuin, R.J. P. *Robert Langham: A letter*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983.
- Lee, Guy. *Virgil: The eclogues*. London: Penguin Books, 1984.
- Painter, Sidney, ed. *The life of Charlemagne by Einhard*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960.
- Peck, D.C., ed. *Leicester's commonwealth*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio

- University Press, 1985.  
Public Records Office, Wards 8/13. (*Wards*)  
Radice, Betty, trans. *Terence: The comedies*. London: Penguin Books, 1976.  
Scott-Kilvert, Ian, ed. *The age of Alexander: Nine Greek lives by Plutarch*. London: Penguin Books, 1973.  
Slavitt, David R. *Ovid's poetry of exile*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

**Appendix A: Charges allegedly made by Oxford against Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester circa 1578-80, as reported by Lord Henry Howard and/or Charles Arundel in PRO SP12/151[/50], f. 110.**

Articles whereof Oxford would have accused Leicester.

First, that Ned York had told [Oxford] in what sort Kenilworth was fortified, with brass, pieces, munition, powder, etc., proportionably as strong as the Tower, against a day, under colour of making the Queen sport with fireworks, shooting, etc.

2. That resty meal and meat, with oil, cheese and butter, etc., were often cast out of the castle, which were orderly provided against a day for [Leicester's] own assurance, as the said Ned York, upon Sir Thomas Leighton's words, assured him.

3. That Robin Christmas gave [Oxford] a note of gifts [to Leicester] to the value of a treble subsidy, beside £17000 of yearly receipt by land and office, etc..

4. That Leicester should tell [Oxford], when [Oxford] had his suit in hand, that the Queen was of the hardest disposition, and did good to nobody but at their importune suit, and that no man in England had gotten anything but by [Leicester's] labour.

5. That [Leicester] boasted of his greatness in alliance, wealth, credit with the Queen, etc., affirming further that he was able to make the proudest subject to sweat that would oppose himself against him, and that he made the Duke of Norfolk to stoop, notwithstanding all his bragging.

6. That Julio should complain to the said Oxford of Leicester's coldness in friendship towards him, though he saved both his life and his honour when, with weeping tears, [Leicester] made his moan unto him at my Lord of Essex's coming over.

7. That [Leicester] told the said Oxford at Reading, four days before the Queen knew of my Lord of Essex's death, that he could not live past such a certain time prefixed.

8. That in respect of future times [Leicester] had made a pack safe enough for himself, and would turn up their heels that made account to deal with him, with much more which I have forgotten.