



# EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER NO. 18

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## Does the early work of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, reveal that he wrote songs as well as verses?

A number of poems ascribed to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, appear in various early anthologies and manuscripts. Steven May has concluded that at least sixteen of these poems were, in fact, written by Oxford (13).

Eight of these poems attributable to Oxford are found in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*. Steven May considers the attributions in this particular anthology to be "entirely reliable" because the printing of the second edition was supervised by William Hunnis (d.1597), Master of the Children of the Queen's Chapel (68).

One of the poems signed "E.O." in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* is clearly a song, as indicated by the presence of a refrain. The lyrics read as follows:

A Croune of Bays shall that man weare,  
That triumphs over me:  
For blacke and Tawnie will I weare,  
Whiche mournyng colours be.

The more I folowed on, the more she fled awaie,  
As *Daphne* did full long agone, *Apollo's* wishfull praie.  
The more my plaints resounde, the lesse she pities me,  
The more I saught the lesse I founde, that myne she ment to be.

*Melpomeney*, alas with dolefull tunes helpe than,  
And syng *bis* wo worthe on me, forsaken man;  
Then *Daphne's* baies shal that man weare, that triumphs over me,  
For Blacke and Taunie will I weare, which mournyng colours be.

Droune me you tricklyng teares, you wailefull wights of woe,  
Come help these hands to rent my heares, my ruffall happs to

showe:

On whom the scorchyng flames of love, doeth feede you se,  
Ah, a lalantida my deare dame, hath thus tormented me.

Wherefore you Muses nine, with dolefull tunes helpe than,  
And syng *Bis* wo worthe on me forsaken man;  
Then *Daphne's* Baies shall that man weare, that triumphs over me,  
For Blacke and Taunie will I weare, which mourning colours be.

An Ancre's life to leade, with nailes to scratche my grave,  
Where earthly Wormes on me shall fede, is all the joyes I crave;  
And hide my self from shame, sith that myne eyes doe see,  
Ah, a alantida my deare dame, hath thus tormented me.

And all that present be, with dolefull tunes helpe than:  
And syng *Bis* woe worthe on me, forsaken man. *Finis. E.O.* (May 26-7)

Steven May notes that:

The first stanza of this poem is the second half of its variable refrain. The full refrain occurs as stanzas three and five, and the poem ends with the first half of the refrain (70).

He concludes that "Oxford may have written the poem for music, or the poem and music both" (70).

The rhythm of the verses also suggests that they are to be sung rather than read, as does the use of "a alantida" in stanzas 4 and 6. (The syllables "a alantida" appear to replace the name of the "deare dame" of whom the poet complains.) Further evidence that the verses are meant to be sung is found in the use of the word "*bis*", which directs that the words "wo worthe on me, forsaken man" are to be repeated in three separate stanzas. Finally, the last two lines of the song appear to invite audience participation, calling on "all that present be" to join in "with dolefull tunes" and sing the words "woe worthe

on me, forsaken man".

The printer of *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, Henry Disle, claimed that Richard Edwards (1523?-66), Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, was the original compiler of the collection, having made it "for his private use". Disle also claimed that the lyrics were "aptly made to be set to any song in five parts or sung to instrument" (Rollins 212, 970). *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* went through at least ten editions between 1576 and 1606 (Rollins 212), and Winnifred Maynard has concluded that "the *Paradise* owed much of its popularity to the fact that it offered a collection of lyrics for the new five part consort song" (May 70).

There is thus a sound basis for the hypothesis that the remaining "poems" by Oxford found in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* are also the lyrics of songs. Nor is this conclusion incompatible with what is known of Oxford's interest in music. The Earl of Oxford was the patron of John Farmer and perhaps of the composer William Byrd (Miller 490-3), and his own musical accomplishments were praised by professional musicians. John Soowthern, for example, commended Oxford as "one expert in . . . music" (May 70), and John Farmer, in his *Divers and Sundry Ways of Two Parts in One*, a treatise on counterpoint published in 1591, gave as his reason for dedicating the book to Oxford that:

I was rather emboldened for your Lordship's great affection to this noble science (music) hoping for the one you might pardon the other, and desirous to make known your inclination this way (Miller 491).

Farmer also dedicated to Oxford his *The First Set of English Madrigals* in 1599, saying in the dedicatory essay:

I have presumed to tender these Madrigales onlie as a remembrance of my service and witness of your Lordships liberall hand, by which I have so long lived, and from your Honorable minde that so much have loved all liberall Sciences: in this I shall be most encouraged, if your Lordship vouch safe the protection of my first fruites, for that both for your greatness you best can, and for your judgement in Musicke best may: for without flatterie be it spoken, those that know your Lordship know that, that using this science as a recreation, your Lordship have overgone most of them

that make it a profession. Right Honourable Lord, I hope it shall not be distastfull to number you heere amongst the favourers of Musicke, and the practisers, no more than kings and Emperours that have been desirous to be in the roll of Astronomers, that being but a starre faire, the other an Angels Quire . . . (Miller 491-2).

The first edition of *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* was published in 1576; thus, all the songs in the collection attributable to Edward de Vere were written, at the latest, by the time he was twenty-six years of age. However, if Disle's statement that the entire collection was compiled by Richard Edwards can be credited, the lyrics in question were actually written before Oxford was sixteen years of age, since Edwards died in 1566. Given this promising start, and the fact that the Earl's interest and skill in music could still attract John Farmer's notice as late as 1599, it seems reasonable to expect that Oxford wrote other music during his lifetime, and that his songs and instrumental pieces are to be found among the extant music of the Elizabethan period.

### Works Cited

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- Miller, Ruth Loyd, ed. *Shakespeare identified*. 3rd. ed. Vol. 2. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1975.
- Rollins, Hyder E. and Herschel Baker. *The Renaissance in England*. Lexington: Heath, 1954.

### Appendix A:

First lines of eight poems (or more properly, songs) attributed to Edward de Vere in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*:

1. Even as the waxe doeth melt, or dewe consume awaie.
2. A Croune of Bayes shall that man weare.
3. Framd in the front of forlorne hope, past all recoverie.
4. I am not as I seme to bee.
5. If care or skill could conquere vaine desire.
6. My meanyng is to worke what wonders love hath wrought.
7. The Lyvely Larke stretcht forth her wynges.
8. The tricklyng teares that fales along my cheeks.