

Biographers have long believed that Robert Greene underwent a religious conversion and “repented” for having written pamphlets on courtly love, none of which required an apology. Edward de Vere had been a fan of Ovid since his teen years. A passage in one of Robert Greene’s books demonstrates how far that dedication extended and reveals what Oxford was up to when he steered his Voice through two stark shifts in tone. The following text is excerpted from the **Robert Greene** chapter.

#### ^What Motivated Robert Greene to Shift from Romances to Love-Warnings to Confessionals?

*Groats-worth* and *The Repentance* are puzzling books. We can conclude *that* the Earl of Oxford wrote them. Can we figure out *why*?

Robert Greene spent his first decade writing sixteen intricately decorated love stories. Then over three years he wrote five tales showing how love can lead to ruin. In 1592, he became yet another person, a sackcloth-wearing penitent blubbering out confessions of abject depravity, wailing about his folly in having written wanton, lascivious love stories and repenting not only his previous works but also his entire life. These are two dramatic changes of heart. Why in the world did Oxford do it?

As noted earlier, my first thought was that I was dealing with a canon of mixed authorship. I thought, perhaps the militant Protestant Barnabe Rich or the devoutly Catholic Thomas Lodge was writing the repentances and the confessionals. Despite trying hard, however, I could not isolate differences between Oxford’s writing and that of a hypothetical interloper. I could find no discernible boundaries of contributions, as we find within single works such as *Dialogue* and *Farewell* by **Barnabe Rich**, *Doctor Faustus* by **Christopher Marlowe**, *Arden of Feversham* by **Anonymous**, *Albions England* by **William Warner** and five of **Ben Jonson**’s plays. Nor are there clear boundaries between different works, as we have shown in Voices’ dual canons, as listed in the **Arthur Brooke** chapter. So, dual or multiple authorship failed to explain Greene’s shifts in tone.

Alternatively, I thought, perhaps Oxford in the early 1590s had undergone a temporary religious phase and suffered agonizing remorse over his prior books. Maybe with all the pressures and failures of his life he slid into a pit of self-hatred, fell on his knees and embraced the thought that he was a sinner damned to hell lest he repent. My first thought was, “Repent *what*?” Greene’s romances, as critics have uniformly noted, are lovely stories containing not a jot of depravity. Despite Greene’s insistence of sincerity in his repentance and the widely acknowledged earnestness of his writing about it, I kept returning to the conviction — declared emphatically by Gabriel Harvey in 1592 — that the Earl of Oxford did not feel any repentance whatsoever or go through any religious conversion. The reason for certainty on this issue derives from another advantage I have over orthodoxy, namely the knowledge that Oxford was also behind a hundred other pen names. Just look at them: **Shakespeare** is in no way a religious writer, as discussions throughout this book attest. Neither are the major Voices **William Warner**, **Samuel Daniel** and **Richard Barnfield**, all of whom produced books during and/or after the Robert Greene era. All these writers are classical, pagan, secular and amorous. If Oxford in the early 1590s were truly undergoing an attack of passionate, Calvinist religiosity and self-loathing, *it would show up consistently among his other contemporaneous or ensuing Voices*. But it doesn’t.

Hughes asked of Greene, “why in the world does he lie about himself in such an absurdly degrading manner?”\* She concluded of Oxford, “The shift in tone in 1590 reflects his troubles of that period.”\* Oxford would have repented writing Greene’s stories, she conjectured, because “a man of Oxford’s stature may have suffered from knowing that in his world such frivolities were considered mere ‘toys,’ a pastime for youths,

not something that a mature man of his learning and social status ought still to be doing in his thirties and forties.”\* I could not embrace this explanation, though, because there is no suggestion of such a view anywhere in **Shakespeare**’s works or in any aspect of Oxford’s life. If Oxford shared Greene’s drive to renounce prose fiction, he would have stopped writing it. But he didn’t, as we know from evidence in the **Thomas Nashe**, **Robert Parry** and **William Burton** chapters. He kept writing love stories in the form of plays, too.

So, what in the world could reveal Greene’s motive?

Thankfully, yet another error from an orthodox scholar proved fortuitous. In chasing down (on January 19, 2014) a false attribution of *Faire Em* to Robert Wilson, I was led back to the preface of Greene’s *Farewell to Follie* and from there to that of his *Mourning Garment*. Upon a careful re-reading of it — for another purpose entirely — the scales fell from my eyes on Greene’s motive for repentance. Let’s take a scenic route to the answer.

Of all the influences in the Voices’ works, one stands out above all: that of Publius Ovidius Naso (43 B.C.-18 A.D.). Ovid is **T.H. (Thomas Hackett)**’s muse for Oxford’s first narrative poem, *Ovids fable of Narcissus*, published in 1560, when he was only ten years old. His childhood fascination culminated with **Arthur Golding**’s *Ovids Metamorphoses*, published in part in 1565 when he was fifteen, and in full in 1567 when he was seventeen. Most Voices draw from Ovid, and scholars are unanimous that he is **Thomas Nashe**’s and **Shakespeare**’s primary inspiration. Robert Greene is equally enamored of Ovid. He cites him numerous times and credits him for the title and theme of *Alcida: Greenes Metamorphosis*. Carroll confirmed, “*Greene thought of himself, as did others, as an Ovid.*”\*

Who was Ovid? Here are the key points of his life:

Ovid... was a Roman poet best known for the *Metamorphoses*, a 15-book continuous mythological narrative written in the meter of epic, and for collections of love poetry in elegiac couplets, especially the *Amores* (“Love Affairs”) and *Ars Amatoria* (“Art of Love”).

...His father wished him to study rhetoric toward the practice of law. According to Seneca the Elder, Ovid tended to the emotional, not the argumentative pole of rhetoric. After the death of his brother at 20 years of age, Ovid renounced law and began travelling to Athens, Asia Minor, and Sicily. He held minor public posts, as one of the *tresviri capitales* and as one of the *decemviri litibus iudicandis*, but resigned to pursue poetry probably around 29–25 BC, a decision of which his father apparently disapproved.

...The first 25 years of Ovid’s literary career were spent primarily writing poetry in elegiac meter with erotic themes. ...The first five-book collection of the *Amores*, a series of erotic poems addressed to a lover, Corinna, is thought to have been published in 16–15 BC; the surviving version, redacted to three books according to an epigram prefixed to the first book, is thought to have been published c. 8–3 BC. Between the publications of the two editions of the *Amores* can be dated the premiere of his tragedy *Medea*, which was admired in antiquity but is no longer extant. [Then came] the *Ars Amatoria*, the *Art of Love*, a parody of didactic poetry and a three-book manual about seduction and intrigue, which has been dated to AD 2. Ovid may identify this work in his exile poetry as the *carmen*, or song, which was one cause of his banishment. The *Ars Amatoria* was followed by the *Remedia Amoris*... (*Love’s Remedy* or *The Cure for Love*)...in the same year. ...The aim of the poem is to teach (mainly) young men how they can avoid idealizing the women they love and to procure assistance to them if love brings them despair and misfortune.

...By AD 8, he had completed his most ambitious work, the *Metamorphoses*, a hexameter epic poem in 15 books which encyclopedically catalogues transformations in Greek and Roman mythology from the emergence of the cosmos to the deification of Julius Caesar.

...The Julian Marriage Laws of 18 BC, which promoted monogamous marriage to increase the population's birth rate, were fresh in the Roman mind. Ovid's writing in the *Ars Amatoria* concerned the serious crime of adultery, and he may have been banished for these works which appeared subversive to the emperor's moral legislation. However, in view of the long time that had elapsed between the publication of this work (1 BC) and the exile (AD 8), some authors suggest that Augustus used the poem as a mere justification for something more personal.

...In exile, Ovid wrote two poetry collections titled *Tristia* [Sorrows] and *Epistulae ex Ponto* [Letters from the Black Sea] illustrating his sadness and desolation. ...In the final poem [of Book 1 of *Tristia*,] Ovid apologizes for the quality and tone of his book, a sentiment echoed throughout the collection. ...The final poem [of Book 3] is again an apology for his work.

...He enjoyed enormous popularity, but in one of the mysteries of literary history he was sent by Augustus into exile in a remote province on the Black Sea, where he remained until his death.\*

Some aspects of Ovid's life are curiously parallel to Oxford's:

- "Ovid renounced law and began travelling to Athens, Asia Minor, and Sicily." Oxford attended law school, declined to become a lawyer and traveled to France, Italy and probably several other countries.
- "Ovid held minor public posts," which he "resigned to pursue poetry." Oxford could have held political posts but chose to write poetry and plays instead.
- Ovid's most ambitious work was "the *Metamorphoses*, a hexameter epic poem in 15 books which encyclopedically catalogues transformations in Greek and Roman mythology from the emergence of the cosmos to the deification of Julius Caesar." Oxford not only translated *Metamorphoses* but copied his idol in delving into his own most ambitious work, **William Warner's** *Albions England*, an epic poem in twelve books (augmented to sixteen books by the actual Samuel Daniel; see **William Warner** chapter) that catalogues the mythology and history of England from the arrival of Brutus from Troy to the reign of Queen Elizabeth.
- The puritanical direction of Roman law was contrary to Ovid's sensibilities. The piously religious ethos of Elizabethan England was contrary to Oxford's sensibilities.
- Both men lived in dictatorships, led by an emperor and a queen, respectively.
- Ovid (in the year 8) was banished from Rome, and Oxford (in 1581) was banished from court.

The key information for our purposes is a set of three consecutive literary modes in which Ovid wrote. He first issued poetic instructions on succeeding at love in *Amores* (*Love Affairs*) and *Ars Amatoria* (*Art of Love*). He shifted gears to warn about the pitfalls of love in *Remedia Amoris* (*Love's Remedy* or *The Cure for Love*). After being banned from Rome, he wrote two poetry collections titled *Tristia* (*Sorrows*) and *Epistulae ex Ponto* (*Letters from the Black Sea*), parts of which describe his miseries and beg forgiveness for his former works. This sequence reveals shifts in Ovid's views, from being a champion of amorous activity to a denouncer of it, and from being a bold issuer of love poetry to an agonized apologizer for it.

Does that sound familiar?

Robert Greene in the dedication of *Mourning Garment* (1590) explains his intent to carry out *the same transformation*. He writes to his dedicatee,

Ovid, after hee was banished for his wanton papers written, *de Arte Amandi*, and of his amorous Elegies betweene him and Corinna [*Amores*], being amongst the barbarous Getes, and though a Pagan, yet

toucht with a repenting passion of the follies of his youth, hee sent his *Remedium Amoris*, and part of his *Tristibus* to Caesar...that hee which severely punished such lascivious livers, would be as glad to heare of their repentant labours. Thus (Right Honorable) you heare *the reason of my bold attempt*, how I hope your Lordship will be glad with Augustus Caesar, to read *the reformation of a second Ovid*.

And there we have it. He says, “*the reason of my bold attempt [is to effect] the reformation of a second Ovid*.”

Oxford, then, will steer his beloved Robert Greene down the same course Ovid traversed. As described in the Opening Argument of this book, Oxford is not only a man of poetry and the theatre, but he is also a *theatrical man*. His Voice will play a *role*, that of Oxford’s most beloved *role model*.

Because Oxford is behind both the names Robert Greene and **Shakespeare**, we should not be surprised to learn that “**Shakespeare** knew of Ovid’s punishment under Caesar Augustus.”\* More than that, he knew the very literature to which Greene refers: According to Colin Burrow “...**Shakespeare** actually ‘knew’...quite a lot of Ovid,” including “the *Metamorphoses*, and some of the *Fasti*, perhaps some *Tristia*, the *Heroides*, and the *Ars Amatoria*.”\*

The final sentence in the quotation above from Greene echoes a very similar passage from **Phillip Stubbes**’ address to his dedicatee in *The Second part of the Anatomie of Abuses* (1583). It reads, “And thus craving pardon at your good Lordships hand, for this my bold attempt...” The **Nameless** author of *An Homelie against disobedience* (1570) also speaks of a “bolde attempt.” Each time Oxford uses that phrase, he launches an ambitious undertaking requiring the adoption of a new writing persona.

Within *Mourning Garment*, Greene continues his explanation in the ensuing address “To the Gentleman Schollers of both Universities.” He describes the deathbed conversion of Aristotle from atheist to fervent believer, foreshadowing the deathbed conversion of Robert Greene in *Groats-worth* and *The Repentance*. He takes a moment to point out, “Had Ovid been a Dunce, he had never delivered such amorous precepts.” In other words, Ovid’s brilliance also made him passionate — personality traits long recognized in both **Shakespeare** and the Earl of Oxford. But later in life, Ovid underwent a mental metamorphosis, and Greene announces that he will do the same:

What Ovid was in Rome, I referre to his Elegies: what he was amongst the Getes, I gather from his *Tristibus*: how he persevered in his repentant sorrowes [his *Sorrowes*], the discourse of his death doth manifest. The Romanes that heard his loves *beleaved his penance*. Then Gentlemen let me finde like favour, if I that wholly gave my selfe to the discoursing of amours, bee now applied to better labours.

...please it you (Gentlemen) to put on my *Mourning Garment*, and see the effects that grow from such wanton affects, you wil leave Ovids Art [his *Art of Love*], & fall to his remedy [*Love’s Remedy*]....

So, just as Ovid began by writing amorous *Elegies* and *Art of Love*, shifted gears with *Love’s Remedy* and ended with “his repentant *Sorrowes*,” Greene will follow his lead. Having begun with love pamphlets, he will shift gears to warnings against lust and from there to sorrowful confessionals. Oxford had already had some practice in such a pose when he wrote “A Remedy against Love” in **William Averell**’s *A Speciall Remedie* in 1579.

One of Greene’s most telling statements about Ovid is “The Romanes...*beleaved his penance*.” Oxford set out to achieve the same effect, and it worked. Nearly every reader since — as evidenced by the four centuries of quotations cited above — has believed Greene’s transformations to be partly or wholly genuine, about which scholars have repeatedly expressed “no doubt.”

Greene's warnings against lust cover four and two-thirds books: *Never Too Late* (1590), *Francescos Fortunes* (1590), *Mourning Garment* (1590), *Farewell to Follie* (1591) and the first two-thirds of *Groatsworth of Witte* (1592). Greene's confessional phase begins with the final third of *Greens Groatsworth of Witte*, carries through *The Repentance of Robert Greene* and ends with the frame of *Greenes Vision*, published "posthumously" in 1593. Despite all that was going on in his life — including money woes and the escalating pamphlet war with Gabriel Harvey (see **Thomas Nashe** chapter) — Oxford held firm to his purpose, leading his literary creation, Robert Greene, to the end of his life in a state of profound *tristesse*, following the course of Ovid.

Now we finally know why Robert Greene underwent his dramatic changes of heart. Over 400 years ago, *he plainly told us the reason*. Somehow, scholars have failed to spot that shiny gold doubloon that lay by the side of the road for over 400 years.

We have also discovered why Oxford introduced a new Voice, **Thomas Nashe**, for the preface to Greene's *Menaphon* of 1589. That is when he got the idea of having Greene follow Ovid's course, requiring his literary demise. He needed a new Voice to take over from Greene when the transformation was complete. A few months later, he announced his intended path. Immediately after Greene took his exit, **Nashe's** role expanded to fill the void.

Greene's imitation of a poetic hero is not an isolated incident among Oxford's Voices. At least three other Voices, in four instances, explain that they are writing in the style of a renowned writer from ancient Rome or Renaissance Italy. In 1593, **Thomas Nashe** excuses his pornographic poem, *Valentines*, by explaining the source of his inspiration: "Yett Ovids wanton Muse did not offend./ He is the fountaine whence my streames doe flowe." In the very next year (1594), **Richard Barnfield** issues *The Affectionate Shepheard*, a homoerotic adventure to which some readers took offense. Yet in the ensuing *Cynthia*, he explains that his exercise was "nothing else, but an imitation of Virgill, in the second Eglogue of *Alexis*." **Richard Linche** writes about his inspiration for the first translated poem within *The Fountaine of Ancient Fiction* (1599): "[It] is not much unlike that reported by *Claudianus*, which wee will endeavour (though not in his right colours) thus to compose." That same year, in *Lenten Stuffe*, **Thomas Nashe** finally explains the motive for his entire body of satirical writing: "of all stiles I most affect & strive to imitate Aretines."

Greene himself had done the same thing twice. In *Ciceronis Amor* (1589) he announces his endeavor to imitate Cicero. In *Euphues His Censure to Philautus* (1587), he explains, "In these counsels Euphues, following in the footsteps of Tullies orator, Platoes comon wealth, and Baldessars courtier, aymeth at the exquisite portraiture of a perfect martialist."

The difference in the current instance is that Oxford designed not just the literature but also the latter days of the life of his Voice to parallel the trajectory of his primary poetic hero, Publius Ovid Naso. It was quite a feat.

Supporting the fictional basis of Robert Greene's end-of-life declarations is that their very style derives from English literary tradition. Carroll explained,

[T]he mood and substance of the last quarter of *Groatsworth*, which are *quite conventional*, conform to that *large body of popular literature of death and confession* much of which, as M.A. Shaaber has described it, is of doubtful authority. It presents, especially, the recantations of Catholics or of criminals, and *consists chiefly of lamentation, repentance, and exhortation* to the reader *to avoid evil courses*. Two special features typical of this literature, according to Shaaber, are that it is *written in the first person* (like the last quarter of *Groatsworth*) and *purports to be the speaker's own words written just before his death*.\*

In retrospect, we can see that as far back as 1579, **William Averell** laid the groundwork for a transformation from evildoer to penitent in “A Prayer of a repentant Sinner, bewailing his sins, and craving for mercy,” within *A Speciall Remedie*. **Thomas Lodge** was the first Voice to apply the model to fiction. His anti-hero in *History of Robert, second Duke of Normandy* anticipated Greene’s treatment by a year. Greene himself did the same thing in *The Black Bookes Messenger...the Life and Death of Ned Browne* in early 1592. Greene follows the same template in *Groats-worth*, except that his tale is in the first person, not the third, and his exhortation to avoid evil courses is directed toward himself and his fellow playwrights rather than to the reader. He completes his personal makeover in *The Repentance* and the preface to *Greenes Vision*. Finally, in 1596, he reprises the model for *The Blacke Dogge of Newgate* by **Luke Hutton**.

In *The Royal Exchange*, Greene states, “Ovid was banished from Rome, and lived amongst the barbarous Geeates.” In *Mourning Garment*, he says, “Ovid...was banished for his wanton papers written, *de Arte Amandi*.” In *Farewell to Follie*, Greene speaks of, “poets...who with Ovid seeke to nourish vice in Rome by setting downe *Artem amandi*...and therefore deserve by Augustus to be banished from so civill a countrie as Italie, amongst the barbarous Getes to live in exile.” Throughout this time, Ovid and his fate were on Oxford’s mind.

Other Voices reveal the same preoccupation, both earlier and afterward. **John Lyly** in *Euphues England* (1580) refers to “Art...the precepts of Ovid.” **Phillip Stubbes**, in *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) had revealed knowledge of Ovid’s fate: “Augustus, banished Ovid, for making Bookes of love.” **Henry Crosse**, who copies much of the language from *Groats-worth* in *Vertues Common-wealth* (1603), reiterates it: “Ovid for his wanton *Ars amandi*, was exiled by Augustus.” In *Narcissus* (1591), **John Clapham** quotes from the same book by Ovid, in Latin.

Like *Groats-worth*, *The Repentance* is “again a work pieced together with various kinds of material.”\* Now that we know Oxford made up Greene’s transformation, we can turn to seeking out his sources of inspiration.

Greene states that his conversion began upon “sodainly taking the booke of Resolution in my hand.” “The book he refers to was a religious work very popular at the time, entitled *A book of Christian Exercise appertaining to the Resolution, that is, showing how we should resolve ourselves to become Christians, by R.P.* It was written by Father Parsons This truly appalling work...”\* was designed to scare people into becoming Christians.

Oxford mined at least two other literary sources for the language of Greene’s testimony. The Puritan Thomas Stocker, who had spent some childhood years in Oxford’s father’s house, dedicated *Divers Sermons of Master John Calvin* to Oxford on May 6, 1581. This book is likely a primary source of Greene’s turgid rhetoric. Scholars have also discovered that *The Repentance of Robert Greene* “follows...Robert Parson’s *A Booke of Christian Exercise* [1582], a popular work of the time that includes terrifying images of damnation... and the progress of the soul.”\* Oxford would have added both books to his library in 1581-1582. He pulled them off the shelf a decade later to serve his purpose.

The same sources inform **William Averell**’s *wonderfull & straunge newes*, published the following year, as well as **Thomas Lodge**’s *The Divil conjured, Prosopopoeia* and *Wits Miserie*, **Thomas Nashe**’s *Pierce Penilesse* and *Christes Teares*, Greene and Lodge’s *Looking Glasse* (1592), **Jo. La. (John Lane)**’s *Tom Tel-Troths Message* (1600), **Henry Crosse**’s *Vertues Common-wealth* (1603), and the “strange event” pamphlets of **John Phillips**, **Thomas Churchyard Gentleman** and **Thomas Day**. Mining all these books would surely turn up passages paralleling those in *Groats-worth* and *The Repentance*.

To any alert person, Greene breaks the spell of his agonized sermon in *The Repentance* when he abruptly inserts an advertisement for his cony-catching pamphlets:

These vanities and other trifling Pamphlets I penned of Love, and vaine fantasies, was my chiefest stay of living.... *But I thanke God that hee put it in my head, to lay open the most horrible coosenages of the common Conny-catchers, Cooseners, and Crosse-biters*, which I have indifferently handled in those my severall discourses already imprinted. And my trust is that those discourses will doe great good, and bee very beneficiall to the Commonwealth of England.

If Oxford's friends weren't laughing at that one, they weren't paying attention.

I suspect Greene is telling the truth when he reports, "my copesmates...fell upon me in jeasting manner, calling me Puritane and Presizian, and wished I might have a Pulpit, with such other scoffing termes...." I also envision his friends roaring their approval as he read his book aloud for their amusement.

\*Hughes, p.15

\*Hughes, p.37

\*Hughes, p.31

\*Carroll, D. Allen, Ed., *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit, Bought with a Million of Repentance (1592)*, Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, Binghamton, New York, 1994, p.77fn

\*Wiki, "Ovid" and "Remedia Amoris"

\*Delahoyde, Michael, "Subliminal Chaucer in Shakespeare's History Plays," *The Oxfordian*, Vol.17, 2015, p.160

\*Showerman, Earl, "Book Reviews—*Shakespeare & Classical Antiquity* by Colin Burrow," *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Vol.51, No.4, Fall 2015, p.10

\*Carroll, D. Allen, Ed., *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit, Bought with a Million of Repentance (1592)*, Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, Binghamton, New York, 1994, p.14

\*Crupi, Charles W., *Robert Greene*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1986, p.32

\*Collins, p.46

\*Crupi, Charles W., *Robert Greene*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1986, p.33