

Upstart Crow vs. University Wit: Shakespeare “Beautified”

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Abstract Since Greene and Shakespeare crossed paths on several occasions, this paper will argue that Greene’s influence does matter if we are interested in Shakespeare’s “anxiety of influence.” Several clues in his plays suggest that Shakespeare felt the need to reassert his authorial self as a response to Greene’s attack on the originality of his work. For instance, he gave up collaborative writing for several years and made a sarcastic allusion to the death of his rival in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In *Hamlet*, Polonius’s allusion to the “vile phrase” should be read as an ironic reminder of Greene’s quip. It is not until he wrote *The Winter’s Tale*, a dramatization of Greene’s *Pandosto*, that Shakespeare was able to come to terms with his “anxiety of influence.” With *Autolycus*, he paid a last vibrant and humorous tribute to Greene’s popular ballads and romances.

Key words Shakespeare; University Wits; Greene; anxiety of influence

Shakespeare’s play texts can be regarded as multi-dimensional spaces in which a variety of styles both blend and clash. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a good example, since in the last act, Theseus, the Duke of Athens who is about to marry Hippolyta, has to select an entertainment for his wedding ceremony. Among various possibilities, he is proposed “[t]he thrice three Muses, mourning for the death / Of learning, late deceas’d in beggary” (5.1.59),¹ where a reference to Spenser’s “Teares of the Muses” (1591) is generally pointed out by editors and critics. However, the miserable death of Robert Greene, University Wit and “Prince of beggars” (Harvey 11) deceased in dire poverty, was probably also in Shakespeare’s mind when he wrote those lines. Indeed, in 1592, Greene’s dissolute life and tragic end was the talk of the town, and his miserable last years became almost as famous as his admired learning.²

Actually, Shakespeare’s allusion to Greene is more than an ironical tribute paid to a former rival. It points to the complex relationship between those two contemporaries, whose literary links remained ambiguous long after Greene’s death.

Since Greene and Shakespeare crossed paths on several occasions, I will argue that Greene’s influence is not easily dispelled when one is interested in the question of Shakespeare’s “anxiety of influence.”

Greene Before *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit*

A pamphleteer and playwright, Robert Greene was one of the first professional writers in early modern England. Born in Norwich³ and proudly defining himself as *academiae utriusquemagister in artibus* (i.e. master of arts at Cambridge and Oxford),⁴ penning stories for money rather than status, the prolific writer deliberately stood for the new world of commercial print, and never stopped claiming recognition “in the act of denying it to others” (Melnikoff and Gieskes 19).⁵ By contrast, Shakespeare was an all-round man of the theatre, and if he pragmatically paid attention to the print culture which had recently emerged, he continued to value performance and social prestige above professional writing skills. His strategy succeeded, and after 1598, publishers quickly understood that his name actually helped them sell great numbers of playbooks (Kastan 32-34). As a polygraph, Greene always wanted to earn money, but as a profligate author, he utterly failed, even though he tried to make amends for his own folly in his late-career “repentance pamphlets.” The last pages he wrote coincided with his bright young rival’s rising to fame. Ironically, if posthumous celebrity preserved Greene from oblivion, it is mainly because he — or someone who masqueraded as such — was the author of *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit*, a pamphlet written in 1592 and in which “Shakescene” / Shakespeare was harshly criticised. Now, if he was the one who dashed it off, he had apparently been preparing his onslaught for quite a few months, while Shakespeare was making his *débuts* on the London stage. We may thus wonder how Greene’s resentment grew in the late 1580s and consider the reasons that led to the eventual publication of *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit*.

For this, we need to go back to 1588. In a French sonnet dedicated to Greene and included in *Perimedes the Blacksmith*, published that year, a John Eliot⁶ advised his friend to ignore the rage of crows and “endure their malignant fury.”⁷ This seems to echo the close ties which were then established between envy, slander, gossip and rumour and reveal that, in the small world of London’s professional writers, Greene already had serious misgivings about the sonnet’s “dogs, crows and kittens” which stood for the writer’s rival pamphleteers and playwrights.

In *Menaphon*, the target is more clearly defined. Greene now launched his attacks against a “country-Author” who “can serve to make a pretie speech” but whose style is “stufft with prettie Similes and far-fetched metaphors” (Greene 1589: 61). The phrase “country-Author” could well be aimed at Shakespeare, the Stratford man,

whose early plays were already quite successful on the London stage.⁸

The year after that, Greene published *The Royal Exchange. Contayning Sundry Aphorismes of Phylosophie* (1590), a rather faithful translation of Orazio Rinaldi's *Dottrina Delle Virtu* (1585)⁹ but in which he inserted his own aphorisms. One of them is particularly striking: "Foure sorts of men must not be shamefast: 1. Players. 2. Cosoners (cheats). 3. Flatterers. 4. And beggars." The Elizabethan author gave no names, but his disenchantment with players, Shakespeare included, had become quite obvious at that time (Speroni 1972: 141). In *Francesco's Fortunes* (1590) published the same year, he mocked the renowned Roman actor Roscius¹⁰: "Why Roscius, art thou proud with Esops Crow, being pranct with the glorie of others feathers?" (quoted in Melnikoff 44). Interestingly enough, in Richard Hunt's copy¹¹ of the 1590 edition of William Camden's *Britannia*, we find the following marginal annotation: "*et Gulielmo Shakespear Roscio planè nostro*" ("and to William Shakespeare, manifestly our Roscius"). Clearly, Richard Hunt associated Stratford's fame with a now well-known actor, namely William Shakespeare, and he was probably not the only one to do so.¹²

Roscius the usurper soon gave way to Batillus the plagiarist, for in the epistle to his *Farewell to Folly* (1591), Greene poked fun at the "scabd jades" who "write or publish anie thing [...] distild out of ballets or borrowed of Theologicall poets, which for their calling and gravitie, being loth to have anie prophane pamphlets passe under their hand, get some other Batillus to set his name to their verses."¹³ Through allusions such as these, Greene may have shown his contempt for the young Shakespeare, if indeed the latter was already active in the London theatrical world of the late 1580s. Generally speaking, Greene regarded himself as a poet, and as such, he could overtly despise those who were not, according to his own criteria. No wonder thus if in *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (1592), he still argued for the superiority of the "poet" (*i.e.* himself) over the "plaier" (*i.e.* Shakespeare).

One last decisive element may have triggered his anger and led him to put the blame on the Stratford man. According to Hanspeter Born,

[I]n April/May 1592 Greene (with or without the help of Nashe) wrote *A Knack to Know a Knave*, a play that was intended to cash in on the success of his cony-catching pamphlets. [...] When Strange's Men received Greene's script they were dissatisfied with [his] subplot [...]. Shakespeare, whether on his own initiative or asked by his fellows, 'mended' the play. (Born 152)

Indeed, if *A Knack to Know a Knave*, performed on 10 June 1592 at the Rose, remains an anonymous comedy, it is nonetheless heavily influenced by Greene's prose fiction,

and it also presents all the characteristics of collaborative authorship, as a number of interpolated passages are strongly reminiscent of Shakespeare's style. Therefore, if Born is right, Greene must have deeply resented Shakespeare's rewritings, which may explain why his attack proved so virulent against the young playwright.

The Crucial Charges of Greene's Groatworth of Wit

Greene's Groatworth of Wit is a composite text belonging to the minor genre of the deathbed pamphlet, and recounting the story of Gorinus, a usurer, and of his two sons, Roberto and Luciano. The book was printed by Henry Chettle and entered in the Stationer's Register on September 22, 1592. The problem with this book is that Greene, who had fallen very ill during the summer, died on 3 September,¹⁴ and as a consequence, rumours of forgery arose immediately after the publication of the pamphlet.¹⁵ Actually, even though its authorship remains uncertain,¹⁶ Greene probably had something to do with the text,¹⁷ but what matters at this point, whether or not Greene was its author, is that such a notorious piece of writing fashioned the image of an embittered author who was envious of the success of his younger contemporaries.¹⁸

Yes, trust them not: for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank-verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a country. Oh, that I might entreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let those apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions! (Chettle and Greene 84)

The passage echoes the image of a crow decked with stolen colours which Horace used to satirize plagiarizing poets.¹⁹ On the face of it, the author of the pamphlet thus blames Shakespeare for his proud self-confidence and his plagiarizing habits as he hints at Margaret's attack on Gloucester in *2 Henry VI* (1591)²⁰ while simultaneously parodying a line from *3 Henry VI* (1591).²¹

The pamphlet ends on Aesop's fable of the grasshopper and the ant, "the first version in print in English verse, the first to mix prose and verse, and the longest and most elaborate treatment of the fable up to this time."²² "Greene" identified himself with the grasshopper, and Shakespeare with the ant, i.e. the "waspish little worme" who stubbornly refuses to support his "foodlesse, helplesse, and strenghtlesse" friend (Chettle and Greene 88). As a consequence, the end of the fable emphasizes the parallel between the grasshopper's miserable end and Greene's existence:

With this the Grasshopper yielding to the wethers extremities, died comfortless without remedy. Like him my selfe: like me, shall all that trust to friends or times inconstancie. (Chettle and Greene 89)

Now, if there is no proof that Greene, who enjoyed posing as a victim, ever asked Shakespeare to help him solve his financial difficulties, there is conclusive evidence that the former probably had good reasons to be jealous of Shakespeare's fresh success. Greene's plays were indeed far from successful: a play such as *Orlando Furioso*, performed by Lord Strange's Men at the Rose in February 1591-92, appears only once in the earliest performances listed by Henslowe in his diary (Maguin 224).

So, rather than plagiarism, "Greene"'s main criticism of was probably about something else, since imitation was the basic practice of the time.²³ In all likelihood, his grievances were first and foremost levelled against an actor who thought he could write verse good enough to be performed alongside those of Marlowe, Nashe, Peele ... and Greene.

We know that the first edition *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* was limited to a maximum of 500 copies (Miller 155). A reprint was issued by Richard Olive in 1596, and more than twenty years later, a new version was published by Henry Bell in 1617 before several reprints in 1621, 1629, and 1638. This testifies to the success of the book, and it partly explains why Shakespeare, who must have anticipated on this, took such offense at the pamphlet attributed to Greene. The fact that in *Kind-Heart's Dream* (1592-93), Chettle felt the need to rehabilitate the playwright by insisting on his "uprightness of dealing which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art" (quoted in Dutton 85) also reveals that Shakespeare had felt the injustice done to him and had voiced his feelings. As a result, oblique answers to Greene's slurs will later be found in his plays and poems. There are indeed a number of clues suggesting that not only the playwright did react, but also that he used this opportunity to redefine his auctorial self in the light of Greene's attack.

Shakespeare's First Reactions: In Search of Respectability

Very early on Shakespeare sought to promote himself as a respectable figure, even though or because he was not one of the so-called "University Wits." On October 20, 1596, by permission of the Garter King of Arms, "John Shakespeare, Gentlemen, and [...] his children, issue & posterity" were entitled to display a gold coat of arms which proved to be a visual pun on the family name "Shake-speare," hence described by Samuel Schoenbaum as an example of "classic simplicity" at a time when "heraldry tended toward fussiness and over-elaboration" (229). Its motto was a rather defensive phrase, "Non sanz droict" ("Not without right").

Crests were highly significant parts of a coat of arms, for they generally symbolized the name or the mood of the family’s arms. Now, in the case of the Shakespeare family, it has a spear in the middle, with a falcon shaking its wings on top. The falcon probably comes from the arms of Shakespeare’s patron, the Earl of Southampton.²⁴ However, one should also note with Katherine Duncan-Jones that “[u]nlike the crow, a bird with extremely disagreeable connotations, freely killed by farmers, the falcon was explicitly associated with chivalry and with aristocratic recreation” (106). This does not mean that Shakespeare chose a falcon just as a response to the “upstart crow” attack. But he may have had this in mind when, as a confident and impertinent young man, he decided to adopt an “arrogant falcon [...] which, with its silver tip, looks as much like a pen as a weapon” (Holland 29).

The playwright was thus concerned with his public prestige. As his brand name gradually increased its drawing power, Shakespeare was keen to outstage his jealous contemporaries. In this regard, one particular anecdote is significant (Nelson 74). Around 1599, the then government servant and future Master of the Revels George Buc went to Cuthbert Burby’s shop, near the Royal Exchange, in order to buy dramatic works such as *Alphonsus King of Aragon, Edward I, Sir Clymon and Clamydes*, and *A pleasant conceyted Comedie of George-a-Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield*. He asked for Shakespeare’s advice about the last play, a historical romance whose authorship he was unable to guess. Buc recorded that, according to Shakespeare, the author of *George-a-Greene* was a minister who had played the pinner. However, Buc also recorded below this that “Ed. Iuby saith that this play was made by Ro. Gree[ne].” Edward Juby, one of Greene’s contemporaries, was a leading actor at the Rose by 1594, and at the Fortune after 1600. As an experienced player, he did remember who had written *George-a-Greene*. Therefore, if Sir George Buc’s annotations reflect what he was told, one can wonder why Shakespeare did not mention Greene at all. Did his memory fail him? Such an explanation is not convincing. Of course, he may have omitted Greene because his rival was not the author of the play, contrary to what Juby had asserted. Yet, *George-a-Greene* shares striking stylistic similarities with Greene’s works and it is now traditionally attributed to him.²⁵ In that case, Shakespeare’s refusal to name his rival must be understood as a form of silent fury at Greene’s assault against him in his death-bed pamphlet.

Shakespeare’s “Coded” Reaction to Greene’s Barbs: Clues in Early Works

At a time when playwrights usually collaborated, Shakespeare appears to have been a relative exception, for he seems to have completely given up collaborative writing between 1592 and 1603. *1 Henry VI* was performed on 8 August 1592 and the play was an immediate success. Critics like Gary Taylor think that Shakespeare actually

wrote *I Henry VI* in collaboration with Thomas Nashe and a second author who may have been Peele, Marlowe, or Greene. The diatribe attributed to Greene was then issued in September 1592.²⁶ Thus, to Shakespeare's dismay, barely one month after the first performance of *I Henry VI*, an envious playwright was publicly warning authors against writing with him. If, as suggested by the pamphlet, the young playwright had indeed claimed excessive credit for the popularity of a collaborative play, things would change very quickly, and it was not until *Sir Thomas More* (possibly revised in 1603-1604), followed by *Timon of Athens* (c. 1607), or *Pericles* (c. 1606-1608), that Shakespeare wrote again in collaboration.²⁷

Everything tends to show, therefore, that Greene's barbs destabilized the budding author. His doubts are conveyed in *The Comedy of Errors*, whose first recorded performance took place at Gray's Inn on December 28th, 1594.²⁸ After the closing down of the theatres from June 1592 to May 1594, this early comedy was one of the first opportunities which Shakespeare had to answer Greene's charge (Godman 58). Now, if we examine the "lockout scene" (3.1) in detail, we notice that it almost immediately follows a passage where Shakespeare alludes to his own self by referring to his baldness.²⁹ Maureen Godman argues that, in the "lockout scene," Antipholus of Ephesus stands for the playwright, who tries to prove that he can "bombast out a blank verse" as the best of his fellow writers. In her view, "[t]he banter between Antipholus and Dromio [...] has as its dominant image the 'crow', Shakespeare's invention and a likely reference to Greene's attack" (59). As Antipholus of Ephesus, who stands outside the door of his own house, says that he wants a "crow" (3.1.81), his servant asks: "A crow without feather? Master, mean you so?" The servant then tells Dromio of Syracuse, who has remained inside the Phoenix:

For a fish without a fin, there's a fowl without a feather.
If a crow help us in, sirrah, we'll pluck a crow together. (3.1.81-83)

Antipholus soon reformulates his order: "Go, get thee gone. Fetch me an iron crow" (3.1.85). Obviously, in calling for an "iron crow" onstage, Shakespeare/Antipholus could "visually and verbally declare that he isn't an upstart crow, but pretty handy in handling an iron one if provoked; with that iron he'll 'pluck a crow' [...] with his adversary" (Godman 60). When Antipholus finally declares that "this jest shall cost [him] some expense" (3.1.124), it seems that, having just denounced the unfairness of Greene's attack through the character of Antipholus, Shakespeare now insists on the fact that the whole scene must be seen as a private joke at the expense of his former rival.

Another enigma related to Greene may be found in another early play, namely 2

Henry VI (c. 1591). In the 1594 Quarto, Suffolk likens the Lieutenant to “Abradas,” while in the 1623 version, Suffolk likens the same Lieutenant to “Bargulus.” The line found in the Quarto is actually taken either from Greene’s *Penelope’s Web* (1587) or from *Menaphon* (1589), for “Abradas” does not appear elsewhere in Elizabethan literature.³⁰ In the Folio, Abradas is replaced by another exotic character, “Bargulus the strong Illyrian pirate” (4.1.108), lifted from Cicero’s *De Officiis* (II.xi), a book frequently used in Elizabethan schools, and which mentions a bandit actually named Bardulis.³¹ Abradas and Bargulus being hardly interchangeable (Puljean Juric 233-36), there is at least one plausible hypothesis: if Shakespeare did feel offended by Greene’s attack, then he could have decided to remove his initial borrowing from Greene. Does this mean that his “struggle with poetic influence” was not yet “fully resolved” (Bloom xlv) ? This is precisely my point in this essay, and this is also the case in *Venus and Adonis* (published on April 18, 1593), a poem in which Shakespeare, according to M.C. Bradbrook, made “a claim to social dignity of his author,” thereby trying to erase the low-class image which Robert Greene had branded him with (70).³² Indeed, what better counter-attack against his accuser than the writing of an erotic mythological poem primarily intended for the classically educated gentlemen of the Universities and Inns of Court? As a University Wit, Greene had been incapable of it. On top of that, with *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare also targeted part of Greene’s favourite readership, i.e. women.³³ Moreover, he probably knew that in two poems attached to *Perimedes the Blacksmith* (1588), Greene had already presented an Adonis eager to accept Venus’ attentions. In the first, Adonis was considered as a “wanton” boy, while in the second, a counsellor warned a young man against Adonis’ behaviour: “A lecher’s fault was not excused by youth.” Shakespeare must have enjoyed taking precisely the opposite view. Far from desiring to be beautified with Greene’s feathers, he rather chose to beautify Greene’s feathers by taking up the same poetic topics in order to develop them in unexpected directions. From then on, rather than seek to eliminate the traces of his deceased rival, the playwright tried his best to appropriate the haunting figure of England’s first professional writer.

As a consequence, the genial comic figure of Falstaff (appearing in *1Henry IV*, *2Henry IV*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*), was partly inspired by Greene’s own physique and exuberant personality. Shakespeare certainly did not aim at drawing a straightforward portrait of his dead rival but, as pointed out by Stephen Greenblatt, “the deeper we plunge into the tavern world of Falstaff — gross, drunken, irresponsible, self-dramatizing, and astonishingly witty Falstaff — the closer we come to the world of Greene: his wife, Doll; his mistress, Em; her thuggish brother, Cutting Ball; and the whole crew” (216).³⁴ In other words, a certain kind of intimacy was growing out of the literary war between the writer and the playwright.

Puns on Greene in Later Works

Almost ten years after the publication of *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*, "Shakespeare continued to ruminate on Greene's insult," a fact which hardly surprises critics such as Joseph Loewenstein, if only because "in a single very efficient sentence, Greene had managed to impugn his profession as an actor, his ambition, his loyalty, his sincerity, and his taste [...]" (86). It should thus come as no surprise that in *Hamlet*, the playwright made Polonius parody Greene in the scene where he reads aloud Hamlet's letter to his daughter: "*To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia* — That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase, 'beautified' is a vile phrase. But you shall hear thus — *in her excellent white bosom, these, etc.*" (2.2.108-11).³⁵ Polonius's comic commentary can be regarded as still another proof, if need be, that Greene's irreverent phrase had the lasting power to hurt Shakespeare, who aimed at exorcising his rival's sting by ridiculing the very words used in *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*.

The possible pun on "beautified" just mentioned above is paralleled, on a much larger scale, by more obvious puns on the name of Greene. The latter had himself frequently used this device. At the end of Greene's two-part romance, *Greene's Never too Late; or, a Powder of Experience* (1590), for instance, the repentant Palmer, a pilgrim who is also one of the narrators of Greene's story (and, as such, standing for Greene himself), puns on the word "greene" just before departing from the novel. He is heard alluding to his "greener years," when his "greedie thoughts / gan yield their homage to ambitious will." If, with the benefit of hindsight, such lines devoted to "ambitious will" take on an ironical flavour, the only thing to be deduced here is that Greene took an obvious pleasure in punning on his own name. This is confirmed by Palmer's last words in *Greene's Never too Late*: "Gray is the green, the flowers their beauties hides: / When as I see that I to death was borne" (quoted in Skura 209). Such wordplays on "green" abound in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* — also rich in puns on the poet's own name, Will, in the so-called "Will" Sonnets — and it is certainly wrong to deduce that each time Shakespeare mentions this particular term, he nods to his rival. This idea, however, offers some interesting clues to interpret the 110-112 sequence.³⁶ Sonnet 112 indeed includes a reference to the insult that "Greene" paid to Shakespeare in 1592. Here, the poet subject to public disgrace seems to ask why he should care about Greene's insult as long as poetry brings him solace:

Your love and pity doth the impression fill,
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow;
For what care I who calls me well or ill,
So you o'er-green my bad, my good allow? (1-4)

The eye-catching “o’er-green,” coined by the poet, is one of these “verbal trompe-l’œil” (Schoenfeldt 62) in Shakespeare’s verse to be read as a pun on the name of Shakespeare’s rival, all the more so as it sounds close to “Robert (o’er) Greene.” As to the complaint about the “vulgar scandal,” it possibly alludes to the publication of *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit*.³⁷

Name games on the word “green” are certainly not restricted to the *Sonnets*. If the notion that jealousy is “green-eyed” is probably older than Shakespeare, the playwright is our earliest authority in print, and it is in *The Merchant of Venice* that fair Portia refers to “green-eyed jealousy” (3.2.110). This expression was all the more surprising, at the time, as yellow was the colour Shakespeare usually associated with jealousy. A few years later, in *Othello*, Shakespeare had Iago coin the more intense phrase “green-ey’d monster”:

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-ey’d monster, which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss,
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger:
But O, what damnèd minutes tells he o’er
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!
(3.3.165-170)

Not unsurprisingly, Shakespeare still used the word “green” in association with the theme of jealousy in *The Winter’s Tale*, a play derived from Greene’s *Pandosto*. In act 3 scene 2, Paulina tells Leontes:

[...] Thy tyranny,
Together working with thy jealousies —
Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle
For girls of nine — O think what they have done,
And then run mad indeed, stark mad [...]
(3.2.178-181)

In this context, “green” primarily relates to immaturity,³⁸ and the main meaning of Paulina’s reprimand is easy to grasp. On second thoughts however, since Shakespeare openly borrowed from Greene, one can wonder if, when the playwright wrote such a line, he did not have his old rival in mind, all the more so as “green” is used here concomitantly with another derogatory adjective, “idle” (i.e. “silly”).³⁹ By turning

Greene's jealousy into remedial language games which provided a safety valve for his own anger, Shakespeare converted his rival into a *pharmakon*, thus making the poison a remedy of sorts.

Conclusion: What Use Was Greene to Shakespeare?

Robert Greene's influence on Shakespeare certainly reaches a peak in *The Winter's Tale*, sometimes (wrongly) regarded as the playwright's belated revenge upon his dead rival who had been haunting him for twenty years. In this late tragicomedy, Shakespeare not only remembered Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* — Perdita bears a striking resemblance to Margaret of Fressingfield, a rustic lass wooed by Prince Edward — but also Greene's Mamillia. If the title of Greene's earliest prose fiction is echoed in the name of the unfortunate young prince Mamillius, the so-called "repentance tracts" published after Greene's death are alluded to in the unexpected repentance of King Leontes. The playwright also drew extensively from *The Second Part of Conny-Catching* (1592) in the sheep-shearing scenes and in the character of Autolycus, as well as from Pandosto. *The Triumph of Time* (1588), a sad tale of jealousy.⁴⁰ From the latter, he lifted several plot elements to reorganize them completely and give the tale a happy ending, thereby adapting Greene's "rhetoric of wonder" from the page to the stage (Kinney 203).

Many commentators have paid a particular attention to Autolycus, the dishonest peddler and ballad-maker created by Shakespeare, and they have tentatively portrayed him as Greene's alter ego. I would rather argue that Shakespeare may have represented Greene through the riddles of Hermione's statue as she is coming back to life. Like Pygmalion, the playwright transforms a petrified creature into "verie flesh" (Golding's *Metamorphoses*, X.274). Sixteen years separate Hermione's "death" from her resurrection in *The Winter's Tale*. Incidentally, sixteen years also represents the time gap between the 1595 edition of *Pandosto* (i.e the one possibly used by Shakespeare) and the first performance of *The Winter's Tale*. My point, therefore, is that this romance play should not simply be read as a retort to *Greene's Groatworth of Wit*, but as a form of literary epitaph allowing the Elizabethan pamphleteer to be revived on stage. To put it differently, *The Winter's Tale* may be regarded as Shakespeare's indirect acknowledgment that he needed rivals in order to create his own works, at a time when poets, writers and playwrights all resorted to what we may nowadays be branded as "plagiarism."

So, in the course of his dramatic career, Shakespeare's attitude towards his predecessor changed. Over the years, the influence of his dead rival proved more stimulating than paralyzing and, by the 1610s, his initial defensiveness turned into an open-mindedness which allowed him to pay tribute to a writer whose slurs he had

long sought to avenge. In other words, the playwright’s relation to Greene gradually became what could be called a posthumous intellectual collaboration. Alongside with Marlowe’s, Greene’s influence, at last, turned out to be a positive one.

Of course, as Greene embodied the new professional writing, Shakespeare, who was strongly interested in the business practices of his time, pursued what could now be defined as a cautious publication policy. However, after the “upstart crow” attack and with his integrity at stake, the playwright gave up collaborative writing for several years, worked at a much slower pace than his prolific Elizabethan counterpart, and gradually came to criticize and poke fun at Greene’s bohemian style — hard-drinking, angry, and much too overtly satirical to be able to challenge established norms in an efficient way. Besides, as opposed to his elder, Shakespeare seems to have deliberately avoided extensive autobiographical allusions in his own plays and poems, and when he sought publicity, he turned to others instead of relying on his own pen. In 1590 for instance, Greene had proudly claimed himself a “second Ovid” in *Greenes Mourning Garments* (1590: sig. A4, 9:121). Also hugely influenced by the Latin poet, Shakespeare never needed to claim anything regarding the author of the *Metamorphoses*. Indeed, eight years after Greene’s boasting self-conscious comment, Francis Mere published his *Palladis Tamia: Wit’s Treasury* (1598), in which he famously wrote that “the witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare.”⁴¹

From then on, the playwright cultivated his reputation not only by imitating, but by rewriting Ovid, thereby further differentiating himself from his proud rival. Above all, while Greene had always used texts written by others to forge his own improbable stories characterized by what Arthur Kinney has called an “affective and powerful poetics” (181) but then not going much further, Shakespeare perfectly digested well-known literary and historical material in order to produce innovative responses which solicited sense, sensibility and fancy altogether. He managed to do all that, I will conclude, because he had taken the time to think on Greene’s unfortunate example and thus learnt a great deal from his strengths and weaknesses. As a consequence, Shakespeare even managed to beautify his best enemy.

Notes

1. Unless specified otherwise, all references regarding William Shakespeare will be taken from *The Complete Works*. Eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
2. See the second letter written by Gabriel Harvey in *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets*: “[...] but who in London hath not heard of his dissolute, and licentious liuing; his fonde disguisunge of a Master of Arte with ruffianly haire, vnseemely apparel, and more vnseemelye Company: his vaine glorious and Thrasonically braunge: his piperly Extemporizing, and Tarletonizing, his

apishe counterfeiting of euery ridiculous, and absurd toy: his fine coosening of Iuglers, and finer iugling with cooseners: hys villainous cogging, and foisting; his monstrous swearing, and horrible forswearing; his impious profaning of sacred Textes: his other scandalous, and blasphemous rauinge; his riotous, and outrageous surfeiting: his continuall shifting of lodgings: his plausible mustering, and banquetring of roysterly acquaintance at his first comminge; his beggarly departing in euery hostisses debt [...]" (9-10).

3. If we are to believe what he writes in his title pages.

4. See Kinney 86.

5. Greene's complete works can be found in *The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene* in 15 vols, edited by Alexander B. Grosart (see bibliography).

6. A native of Warwickshire, like Shakespeare (Pruvost 272), Eliot was about to publish his famous *Ortho-epia Gallica* (1593) in which Shakespeare probably learnt part of his French. At the time of the sonnet, Eliot was only beginning his literary career, but he already paid tribute to Greene, obviously hoping that the book would sell and that his verse would awake the interest of his readers.

7. "Courage, donc je-dis, mon amy GREENE, courage, / Mesprise des chiens, corbeaux & chathuans la rage : / Et (glorieux) endure leur malignante furie, / Zoyle arriere, arriere Momus chien enragé, / Furieux mastin hurlant au croissant argenté, / A GREENE jamais nuyre sauroit ta calomnie" (quoted from the Internet site <<http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Greene/Perimedes.pdf>> [Accessed 23 October 2013]). Eliot's lines can be translated as follows: "Courage then, I say, my friend GREENE, courage, / Scorn the rage of dogs, crows and kittens, / And, glorious, endure their malignant fury. / Black Zoilus, black Momus, furious dog, / Furious mastiff howling at the silvery crescent, / Your calumny never knew how to harm GREENE."

8. It should therefore come as no surprise that, in his preface to Greene's *Menaphon* ("To the Gentlemen Students of both Universities"), Thomas Nashe complains about the ambitions of uneducated dramatists, the better to praise the scholarly elaboration of Greene's novels: "Indeed, it may be the engrafted overflow of some kilcow conceit, that overcloieth their imagination with a more than drunken resolution, beeing not extemporall in the invention of anie other meanes to vent their manhood, commits the digestion of their cholerick incumbrances, to the spacious volubilitie of a drumming decasillabon" (Nashe 1589: f). Here, Nashe probably alludes to Thomas Kyd as, in the same preface, he refers to Kyd's authorship of a lost version of *Hamlet*.

9. Rinaldi was a Venetian ambassador in London. See Speroni 1968: 97-175.

10. Possibly Edward Alleyn or William Shakespeare. In his *De Oratore* (55 BC), Cicero had pronounced Roscius "the only actor amongst men fitted for the stage, and the only man amongst actors who ought not to be seen there" (I.V.18). In one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, Roscius is mentioned by King Henry VI *a propos* Richard of Gloucester (3 *Henry VI*, 5.6.10): "What scene of death hath Roscius now to act?"

11. The son of a cleric, Richard Hunt was the vicar of Bishop's Inchington, near Stratford-Upon-Avon.

12. Hunt also linked Stratford’s fame with John of Stratford, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Hugh Clopton, a London magistrate. Both were quoted by Camden. For further details on the annotation linking Shakespeare to Roscius, see Nelson and Altrocchi 460-69. Hunt was born in 1596 and died in February 1661, which means that he could hardly remember Shakespeare acting on a London stage. He may simply have heard of Shakespeare’s theatrical fame. However, Hunt may also have read pamphlets connecting Shakespeare to Roscius.

13. Cf. Greene’s former allusion to Batillus in the dedication of *The Myrroure of Modestie* (1584).

14. Incidentally, the author of *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit* was inspired by a series of pamphlets printed immediately after the death of Richard Tarlton, which had been named as one of the Queen’s Men in 1583. Tarlton died exactly four years before Greene. *Tarltons Farewell* was issued in September 1588, *Tarltons Recantations* and *Tarltons Repentance or his Farewell to his Frendes in his Sicknesse a Little Before his Deathe* in 1589, and *Tarlton’s News Out of Purgatory* in 1590 (Chettle and Greene 14).

15. Both Henry Chettle and Thomas Nashe felt obliged to deny that they had a hand in its writing. Thomas Nashe repudiated Greene’s tract as a “scald trivial lying pamphlet” in the epistle to the second edition of *Pierce Penniless* (1592) (quoted in Schoone-Jongen 21).

16. Chettle, a non-university-educated dramatist who had been apprenticed to a printer at the age of thirteen, may have felt excited by the perspective of criticizing his fellow playwright under the designation of a University Wit. As to the bitterness of his attack, it can be explained by the fact that he had turned from publishing and editing to writing plays some time between 1592 and 1597, and that he was then in financial difficulty (Sanders 394). As noted by Emma Smith in her entry devoted to Henry Chettle in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, “[i]t is not known when Chettle began to write for the stage, but Francis Meres lists him as ‘one of the best for comedy amongst us’ in his *Palladis Tamia* of 1598. Between 1598 and 1603, the diary connects him with some forty-nine plays. Thirty-six of these seem to have been in collaboration.”

17. The pamphlet is loaded with reminiscences of Greene’s writing (but reminiscences can always be regarded as part of a conscious imitation process). In Greene’s *James the Fourth* for instance, as Ateukin the flatterer realizes that his plans to gratify the King have just failed, he exclaims: “What, was I born to be the scorn of kin? / To gather feathers like to a hopper crow / And lose them in the height of all my pomp? / Accursèd man, now is my credit lost!” (5.2.9-12). Ateukin being the very embodiment of the hypocrite, he can surely be described as an actor excessively trusted by the King. Such allusions to the feathers and the crow could constitute a draft version of Greene’s later accusations in *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit*.

18. Shakespeare, at the time, was already well advanced in his ambitious project of the first tetralogy (Erne 27).

19. More precisely, one can trace Greene’s source to Horace’s third *Epistle*, where the poet warns his friend Celsus “not to pilfer from other writers any longer, lest those he has robbed should return one day to claim their feathers, when like the crow (*cornicula*) stripped of its stolen splendour (*furtivus*

nudata coloribus), he would become a laughing-stock.”

20. “His feathers are but borrowed, / For he’s disposed as the hateful raven” (3.1.75-76).

21. “O Tiger’s heart wrapped in a woman’s hide” (1.4.137). This may suggest that Shakespeare was also a usurer and thus that he “could have followed his father in the money-lending business” (Honigmann 1988: 42). Now, if one is to believe Lodge’s and Greene’s *A Looking-Glass for London and England*, a usurer was then regarded as a man utterly devoid of conscience. As Alcon (one of the usurer’s victims) puts it: “[...] he hath as much conscience about the forfeit of an obligation, as my blind mare, God bless her, hath over a manger of oats” (1.3).

22. See D. Allen Carroll’s Appendix H in Chettle and Greene 147.

23. Moreover, in *Shakespeare and the Poets’ War*, James P. Bednarz insists on the fact that “[d]uring the Elizabethan period, poet-scholars [...] often complained of being exploited by [...] poet-players.” “Playwrights,” Bednarz writes, “voiced outrage at the economic injustice of a theatrical system that rewarded famous players far more than prominent poets” (230).

24. Southampton’s coat of arms was characterized by four silver falcons.

25. Greene probably wrote *George-a-Greene* in the late 1580s or early 1590s. It has been suggested that Shakespeare had no good reason to lie and did his best to answer Buc’s query, for he must have been aware that this learned gentleman was the next in line for Edmund Tilney’s position as Master of the Revels (Shapiro 13). Buc was indeed appointed to the Mastership of Revels by King James in 1603, which means that Shakespeare’s later plays all passed through his hands. Yet, it seems hardly believable that a minister should have been allowed to exhibit himself as an actor on public stages.

26. Yet, Michael Hattaway does not believe that “stylistic analysis is sufficient to prove or disprove authorship” in the case of *1 Henry VI*. See Hattaway’s Introduction to *1 Henry VI* for the New Cambridge Shakespeare, 42-43.

27. According to Taylor, “Greene’s attack [...] probably had the effect of making collaboration an exception in the Shakespeare canon” (Taylor 186).

28. I assume, here, that *The Comedy of Errors* was composed after 1592. Yet, whether the comedy was written after the publication of *Greene’s Groatworth of Wit* remains unclear. T. S. Dorsch, editor of the *New Cambridge Comedy of Errors*, thinks for instance that the play was probably composed between April 1591 and June 1592. But Shakespeare was then likely to revise his play, and insert his response to Greene’s insult whenever he wanted to.

29. The playwright wittingly praises the “bald followers” of hairless Time (2.2.108-109).

30. In *Penelope’s Web*, Greene writes: “I remember, Ismena, that Epicurus measured every man’s diet by his own principles, and Abradas, the great Macedonian pirate, thought everyone had a letter of mart that bare sails in the ocean [...]”. The same idea is hammered home in *Menaphon*: “I remember, sir, that Epicurus measured every man’s diet by his own principles; Abradas, the great Macedonian pirate, thought everyone had a letter of mart that bare sails in the ocean [...]”.

31. In the 1999 Arden edition, a note explains that “Bargulus” was the spelling Shakespeare probably found either in Nicholas Grimald’s or Robert Whytington’s translation of the *Offices*.

32. As M.C. Bradbrook put it, Shakespeare managed “to make a second reputation for himself,” because “[t]o appear in print was to make a dignified bid for Fame.” He would thus at once have “achieved recognition and respectful notice, even among those who despised, or affected to despise, the work of the common stages” (62).

33. Women readers seem to have particularly enjoyed Shakespeare’s poem “more than any other Shakespearean work before the 1640s” (Roberts 262). In 1611 for instance, Sir John Davies of Hereford still lamented in *The Scourge of Folly* that Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* was read by “the coyest Dames” for their “Closset-games.”

34. See Giorgio Melchiori’s comment in his Cambridge edition of *The Second Part of King Henry IV*: “By this logic, Falstaff is fashioned from the ‘wasted life’ of a character like Robert Greene. To spurn the fat knight is to accept the necessity and benefits of prudent speculation and graft; yet it is also to acknowledge the influence of minds that shone brilliantly but briefly” (Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*. Ed. Melchiori, 2007: 62).

35. However, Hamlet’s use of “beautified” is not necessarily connected to Greene only, because Shakespeare himself uses the word “beautified” in plays such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *King Edward III. Second*, because this very word, having been recently favoured by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Arcadia* (1590), had become fashionable.

36. In *Soul of the Age*, Jonathan Bate partly dates the *Sonnets* from the years associated with Southampton’s patronage by reading the sequence 110-112 (related to the trade of acting) as a riposte to Greene’s attack (19).

37. In a 1994 article written for the *TLS*, Barbara Everett paid attention to sonnet 112, which she clearly interpreted as an underlying allusion to Robert Greene’s attack: “A generous man’s complex feeling for a dying enemy who is both rival and fellow poet may have fused with all that the difficult sonnet is saying about sympathy and empathy, about wounded and wounding lovers, about the ‘profound Abisme’ at the centre of love” (13). Incidentally, Shakespeare may also have expressed his literary humiliation in sonnet 29, where the poet, wishing he had more friends, complains that he is “in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes” (l. 1).

38. See the fable of the ant and the grasshopper in Chettle and Greene 89: “My wretched end may warn Greene springing youth / To use delights, as toys that will deceive, / And scorne the world before the world them leave.”

39. The same sort of joking tone may be detected in *The Tempest*, where an enthusiastic Gonzalo exclaims: “How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!” (2.1.55). However, the landscape is not verdant for everyone, and Sebastian’s riposte is particularly sarcastic: “With an eye of green in’t.” Listening to Sebastian’s words, the audience certainly overheard an echo of Shakespeare’s “green-eyed jealousy” and “green-eyed monster.” Jealousy is, after all, a feeling shared by many of Shakespeare’s villains. Now, would it be possible that Shakespeare felt particularly inspired when he used the word “green” because he could not help thinking of his old rival who, (literally) green with envy, had criticized his skills?

40. The editio princeps of *Pandosto. The Triumph of Time*, unfortunately lost, probably dates back to 1585. A listing for “Triumphe of Time” as “an unrecorded first edition of Pandosto” has been identified in a 1585 stationers’ shop inventory (Rodger 264). However, a unique copy of the 1588 edition is the earliest extant one. *Pandosto* was then reissued in 1592, 1595, 1607, and was to run through several reprints in the course of the 17th century. Besides, it may be worth noticing here that in *Pandosto*’s dedicatory epistle, Robert Greene wrote that “[t]hey which fear the biting of vipers do carie in their hands the Plumes of a Phoenix.” With the benefit of hindsight, an expression such as “the Plumes of a Phoenix” takes on an ironical twist. How could the writer have anticipated the fact that a play entitled *The Winter’s Tale* would indeed be a Phoenix reborn from its ashes?

41. The full text is accessible online <<http://www.elizabethanauthors.com/palladis.htm>> (Date accessed: 27 October 2013).

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