

# On the Authorship of *Willobie* *His Avis*

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**I**n September 1594, someone calling himself Hadrian Dorrell and claiming to write “From my chamber in Oxford” edited a volume of verse titled *Willobie His Avis* (also labeled *Willobies Avis* or just *Avis*), which he attributed to “M. Henry Willobie.” Dorrell claims that his “very good frend” Willobie had left the country in “her Majesties service” and “chose me amongst the rest of his friends” to give “the key of his study, and the use of all his bookes till his returne.” Dorrell says that he discovered the manuscript among Willobie’s papers and decided to name it and “publish it without his consent.”<sup>1</sup>

Intriguing facts attend this book, not the least of which is that state authorities saw fit to order it removed from circulation. Henry Willobie, moreover, never wrote anything aside from this impressively intricate project. These and other mysterious circumstances have long intrigued and befuddled critics.

## A Tangle of Mysteries

Scholars agree that the three names of writers whose material prefaces the first edition of *Avis* are probably pseudonymous. Researchers cannot find a body to go with the editor’s moniker, so “The name of Hadrian Dorrell was apparently assumed. No Oxford student bearing that appellation is known to the university registers.”<sup>2</sup> “Abell Emet” and “Contraria Contrariis,” whose names appear beneath commendatory poems, are too fantastic to be other than pseudonyms.

On the other hand, most scholars have assumed that the name Henry Willobie indicates a real person by that name. In his preface to *Avisa*, Dorrell says that his close friend Willobie was until recently his chamber-fellow at Oxford University. Seemingly supporting this claim is a marginal note by “W.C.,” published the following year in *Polimanteia*, naming “Willobie” as one of the poets emerging from Oxford University. But the marginal note suggests an afterthought, so it seems likely that W.C. picked up this association simply from having read the preface to *Avisa* rather than from any personal knowledge of the author. Scholars propose as a candidate one “Henry Willoughbie,” who “matriculated as a commoner from St. John’s College, Oxford, on 10 Dec. 1591 at the age of sixteen.”<sup>3</sup> But if this young man is Willobie, he would have written his one and only publication at the age of 18 or 19. Given the maturity of *Avisa*’s verse and the intimate court knowledge its narrative suggests (see discussion below), this scenario borders on the impossible. Some biographers have concluded that Henry Willobie is the same as a Henry Willoughby whose father was a country gentleman from Wiltshire. The 1605 edition of *Avisa* contains a poem signed “Thomas Willobie,” and “a nineteen-year-old Henry Willoughby at West Noyle in Wiltshire had a younger brother Thomas.”<sup>4</sup> But, again, tagging a teenager as the author does not fit the sophistication of *Avisa*.

Contradictions regarding authorship and subject matter attend the prefatory material in the first two editions of *Avisa*. In preface to the 1594 edition, Dorrell tells readers that Willobie is a “yong man.” But in contrasting the story’s time to “This wicked age, this sinfull tyme,”<sup>5</sup> Abell Emet implies that the poem is of another era. In the 1596 edition, Dorrell supports Emet’s earlier implication by stating, “This Poeticall fiction was penned by the Author at least for thirty and five years sithence.”<sup>6</sup> This new assertion contradicts his original claim that the author was his “very good frend and chamber fellow [at Oxford] M. Henry Willobie, a yong man.”<sup>7</sup> It also dates the genesis of the poem to circa 1561. If we were to accept this chronology, it would preclude suggested authorship candidates from the 1590s named Willoughby. Scholars have mostly ignored Dorrell and Emet on this dating point. Dorrell also spends a good deal of space in his 1594 epistle “To the gentle & courteous Reader” speculating—ultimately in vain—upon whose real-life stories the poems narrate. But in 1596 he insists that the poem is a “Poeticall fiction,” contradicting his earlier contemplative analysis. As a result of these altered claims, scholars have summarily dismissed everything Dorrell says: “Dorrell’s general tone suggests that his two accounts of the origin and intention of the book are fictitious.”<sup>8</sup> But this is not quite correct. His tone is earnest in both accounts; it is his statements which indicate the presence of falsehood.

Contradicting both Dorrell’s authorship claims and scholars’ conjectures are Peter Colse’s comments in *Penelopes Complaint*, published two years after *Avisa*, in 1596. In the dedication to “Ladie Edith” Colse says, “an unknowne Author, hath of late published a pamphlet called *Avisa*...” and in his address “To the Readers” he reiterates that *Avisa* is “by an unknowne Author.”<sup>9</sup> Since Dorrell had discussed and prominently displayed Henry Willobie’s name, Colse’s comment unequivocally implies knowledge that it is fictitious.

As for *Avisa's* identity, Colse hammers on the idea of *Avisa's* lack of desert, calling "vaigneglorious *Avisa*...the meanest [among] praiseworthy matrons."<sup>10</sup> Along these lines, one "S.D.," writing in Latin in the preface to Colse's book, includes a curious line that scholars have interpreted to mean that *Avisa* was "the wife of an innkeeper, the daughter of an innkeeper."<sup>11</sup> These comments led researchers to pore over the scant records of various inns and taverns of the Elizabethan era to try to locate a hint of *Avisa* among the hostesses and innkeepers' daughters of Wessex, because Henry Willoughby, one of the teenagers who supposedly wrote the book, was from Wiltshire, within Wessex.

Two scholars rescued orthodoxy from pursuing such dead ends. The story of *Avisa* contains enough specific allusions to indicate who "*Avisa*" was. In 1968, Akrigg in *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton*<sup>12</sup> postulated that the lady in question is Queen Elizabeth and that the suitors in the book were hers in real life. He noted, for example, that *Avisa's* motto, "Always the same," is an English translation of the Queen's motto, *Semper Eadem*. In 1970, de Luna's *The Queen Declined* fleshed out the argument. As de Luna pointed out, S.D.'s Latin reference in Colse's book can also be interpreted to say that *Avisa* was "the wife of a shopkeeper [England], the daughter of a harlot [Anne Boleyn]."<sup>13</sup> Supporting the case that Abell Emet is a pseudonym, she interpreted the name to mean "Abell reincarnated," Thomas Abell having published a book in 1532 "tacitly defending the chastity of a Queen."<sup>14</sup>

Dorrell's own apparent curiosity regarding the subject matter of *Avisa* in the 1594 epistle is fully convincing. One is hard pressed to explain why Dorrell would muse so elaborately and realistically about the possible truth behind *Avisa* if he were trying to obfuscate its meaning. Unlike either someone trying to advertise Elizabeth's heroic chastity or someone trying to hide her identity, he says, for example:

when I do more deeply consider of it, & more narrowly weigh every particular part, I am driven to thinke that there is some thing of trueth hidden under this shadow...there is some thing under these fained names and shoves that hath bene done truely.... me thinkes it a matter almost impossible that any man could invent all this without some ground or foundation to build on.<sup>15</sup>

He carefully lists reasons for this surmise and discusses what he thinks of each suitor in turn. He muses about the real-life identification of *Avisa* and her suitors. He comments, as a virginal reader would upon encountering the epithet "Henrico Willobego," "It seemes that in this last example the author names himselfe and so describeth his owne love, [yet] I know not...."<sup>16</sup> On the subject of the poem Dorrell initially seems truly in the dark.

Peter Colse's comments in the preface to *Penelopes Complaint* are obviously what spurred Dorrell to rush to press his new edition, dated June 30 of the same year, to issue a reply to "P.C." His treatise, "The Apologie, shewing the true meaning of *Avisa*," is notably anxious in tone, so he must have learned by then that *Avisa* was a political hot potato. A careful reading of his 1596 preface shows that he reacted emotionally to every detail of Colse's commentary.

In the 1594 edition he had said, “Concerning the name of Avisá, I thinke it to be a fained name, like unto Ovids Corinna.”<sup>17</sup> In “The Apologie” within the 1596 edition, he reiterates no fewer than seven times that Avisá is a “fained” (or “fayned”) name. Of course, that the name is feigned is irrelevant to whether it stands for a real person. But in the 1596 “Apologie” he vigorously opposes that idea as well: “For I dare pawne my life, that there is no perticular woman in the world, that was eyther partie or privie to anye one sentence or word in that booke.”<sup>18</sup> As this claim directly counters his seemingly honest deliberations about Avisá’s identity in the 1594 edition, we may surmise that Dorrell in the meantime had discovered the true meaning of *Avisá* and was writing this “Apologie” in consternation over having published a book that prompted Colse’s negative reaction and S.D.’s perhaps clever, if disrespectful, allusion to Avisá’s true identity. In response to Colse’s statement that the author is unknown, Dorrell continues to insist that the author’s “true name,” Henry Willobie, was on “everie Page” of the manuscript—a possibility even if Willobie were a pseudonym of the true author. Rather conveniently, he also announces that “the Author [has] now of late gone to God.”<sup>19</sup>

The hubbub of Colse and Dorrell’s exchange over a book about Elizabeth and her suitors provides sufficient reason to explain the book’s fate: “[T]he authorities disliked the book strongly, and there was doubtless good reason why, in June 1599”<sup>20</sup> the Stationers’ Register recorded that “Willobies Advíso [was] to be Called in.”<sup>21</sup> Official upset may also explain why there are no extant copies of the 1596 edition, whose content we must surmise from the 1596 date attending “The Apologie” in the extant 1605 edition.

This final, “Augmented” edition from 1605 contains a lengthy poem signed “Thomas Willobie Frater Henrici Willobie nuper defuncti,”<sup>22</sup> i.e., “Thomas Willobie, brother of Henry Willobie, lately deceased.” This tag handily supports Dorrell’s claim that the author had died between 1594 and 1596. Yet the style and content of Thomas’ verse give no reason to doubt that whoever is behind the name Dorrell also wrote Thomas’ poem. Its very title—The victorie of English Chastitie, under the fained name of Avisá—continues Dorrell’s mission of assuring readers that hers is a “fained name,” and the body of the poem repeats the phrase twice more. Dorrell had spent more than eight pages in 1596 answering Peter Colse’s comments, and this poem continues that orientation by turning the tables on Colse’s celebration of Odysseus’ wife Penelope over Avisá by celebrating Avisá over Penelope. In the poem Juno says, “Avisá, both by Sire and spouse,/ Was linckt to men of meanest trade,”<sup>23</sup> supporting S.D.’s line about Avisá’s relations but in a fictional context, seemingly another attempt at misdirection. Needless to say, there is no record of the death of Henry Willobie or Willoughby, or of the fine education of his poetic brother. Obviously, the man behind Dorrell added yet a fifth name to his list of pseudonymous writers by inventing a phony literary brother for his phony author.

Despite this seeming Gordian knot of statements and claims, I hope to show three things: (1) that most of Dorrell’s testimony is trustworthy; (2) that we can identify which parts are not; and (3) that there is a good reason, in light of the proper context, for the falsehoods that appear.

### The List of Suitors Identifies the Time of Composition

Willobie's poem tells the stories of five of Avisá's suitors. De Luna identified the first suitor as Thomas Seymour, who pursued the teenaged Lady Elizabeth Tudor in the 1540s. The second she identified as King Philip II of Spain, who communicated his desire for marriage soon after the death in 1558 of his first wife, Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary Tudor. The proposal was made "sometime before 1565,"<sup>24</sup> when Elizabeth made reference to it. The third is Francois de Valois, Duc d'Alençon, whose "courtship"<sup>25</sup> of Elizabeth began "As early as 1570"<sup>26</sup> but petered out "in 1576,"<sup>27</sup> though he pressed a second marriage suit from 1578 to 1582. The fourth she postulated as a combination of knight and courtier Sir Christopher Hatton, who pursued the Queen from 1564 to 1575, and to a lesser degree Archduke Charles Hapsburg of Germany, who pressed a suit for marriage between 1559 and 1568. It is important to note that the author would have been able to describe at least the first four of the five courtships described in *Avisa* by 1576.

Interest from an Oxfordian perspective escalates with the narrative of the fifth suitor. His initials are H.W., his code name is "Henrico Willobego," a Spanish version of the name Henry Willobie, and he is described as "Italo-Hispalensis."<sup>28</sup> At the start of this portion of the book, we discover that H.W. has a friend, the first and only such instance in the book. And look who it is:

[He] bewrayeth the secresy of his disease unto his familiar frend W.S. who not long before had tried the curtesy of the like passion, and was now nearly recovered of the like infection; [and to] see whether an other could play his part better then himselfe [in] this loving Comedy, he determined to see whether it would sort to a happier end for this new actor, then it did for the old player. But at length this Comedy was like to have growen to a Tragedy....<sup>29</sup>

The initials W.S. and the theatrical references in Willobie's narrative have prompted many scholars to interpret this person to be William Shakespeare. William Jaggard, in his *Shakespeare Biography*, "called the portrait of W.S. in Willobie's poem 'the most convincing vision of [Shakespeare's] personality known throughout all literature,' and many others have expressed their concurrence, more or less qualified."<sup>30</sup> Never mind that W.S. is depicted, with no apparent motivation, as a faux friend and a callous advisor who urges H.W. into folly for his own sport, hardly a flattering portrait of William Shakespeare. Never mind that W.S. "had tryed the curtesy of the like passion"<sup>31</sup> and that H.W. speaks of "my faythfull frend,/ That like assaultes hath often tryde,"<sup>32</sup> thereby naming W.S. as one of Avisá's—and therefore, by the theory at hand, one of Queen Elizabeth's—former suitors, a position in which young William Shaksper of Stratford, born in 1564, could not possibly have been. Orthodox scholars have not resolved these issues.

The identification of W.S. as William Shakespeare and the publication of *Avisa*

in 1594, after Shakespeare's print debut the preceding year, have muddied the waters as to the identification of the fifth suitor. Stratfordians' default that Shakespeare is William Shaksper has forced them to try to match the fifth suitor to a real-life person active in the 1590s, when the name William Shakespeare first appeared in print and when their candidate for authorship would have been of an age to appear as H.W.'s acquaintance in the book. De Luna tried to make a case that the fifth suitor is a composite figure comprising Elizabeth's earlier lover, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and her then-current young favorite, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. But the poem concludes with Avisá ending the one-sided courtship. The courtship with Leicester was hardly one-sided, so Leicester is out. And Essex's relationship with Elizabeth—according to de Luna's own notes—was "still in process"<sup>33</sup> in 1594, when *Avisa* was published, thereby jettisoning Essex. Some writers have proposed that H.W. is Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. Ogburn asked, "But can it be believed that Southampton had conceived a burning desire for a woman forty years his senior?"<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the idea of a 20-year-old Southampton wooing the 60-year-old Queen in 1593-94 is ludicrous. These inquiries meet a dead end, and there are no other qualifying suitors of the time.

Hess came to the rescue with a crucial insight. Based on "the only clear clue about 'Mr. H.W.' that WHA gives,"<sup>35</sup> i.e., his description as being "Italo-Hispensis," an Italianate Spaniard, Hess proposed that H.W. is Don Juan of Austria. He observed:

from about 1574 to as late as Feb. 1578 there were secret efforts by emissaries from both sides to negotiate marriage between Queen Elizabeth and Don Juan. [There is] evidence that Oxford's travels to Italy in 1575-76 were an elaborate mission to contact, probe, engage, and ultimately betray Don Juan of Austria, the heroic half-brother of Philip II of Spain."<sup>36</sup>

Don Juan, despite being born in Bavaria, was of Spanish descent and upbringing and associated with the Earl of Oxford in Italy, thus justifying Willobie's moniker.

Identifying W.S. as Oxford fits the poem's circumstances. The book depicts W.S. as a former suitor to Avisá, and Ogburn<sup>37</sup> gave evidence of a courtship between Oxford and Elizabeth during the years 1572 to 1574. In February 1575, Oxford traveled to the continent with Elizabeth's blessing and stayed away for 14 months. If, as Hess conjectures, Oxford had undertaken a state mission to insinuate himself as an advisor to Don Juan of Austria and encourage him to take the ill-fated course of pursuing Elizabeth, he would have acted in a misdirecting manner much like that of W.S. toward H.W. in *Avisa*. Nelson's biography of Oxford provides evidence connecting the earl to Don Juan three times in the 1570s.<sup>38</sup> So Oxford's activities in the 1570s are compatible with *Avisa*'s W.S. character.

Although not immediately apparent, Willobie's omission of W.S.'s story from the accounts of Elizabeth's loves of the 1570s also fits Oxford's identification as W.S. The author knows that W.S. had tried "like assaults,"<sup>39</sup> yet he declines to narrate his courtship of Avisá. We may discern a possible reason for this omission from the fact

that the story of Robert Dudley, who courted the Queen during the years covered in *Avisa*, also fails to appear in the poem. The author, then, omits narratives involving still-living English noblemen, a decision likely borne of prudence.

Thus, on all counts, only in the Oxfordian context does the identification of W.S. as Shakespeare make any sense. Compatibly, there are wisps of evidence consistent with Oxford's identification as W.S. as early as 1577. Oxfordians make a case that Gabriel Harvey's Latin address to Oxford at the University of Cambridge the following year includes a phrase that can be interpreted as "your will shakes spears," implying that Oxford by then was already associated with the Shakespeare moniker. So, Oxford may have been known among literati as W.S. by this time.

According to Ron Hess, identifying the fifth suitor as Don Juan of Austria "locks in Oxford as 'Mr. W.S.,' the man who went to Italy in 1575-76 to 'advise' DJ on how to woo 'England's Avisa,' [which] all but certainly identifies Oxford as Shakespeare."<sup>40</sup> No doubt this identification is useful to those seeking to tie Oxford to William Shakespeare's initials, and it helps cement the identification of H.W. as Don Juan and W.S. as Oxford. But what matters to our authorship quest is that identifying W.S. as Oxford supports the otherwise indicated time period for H.W.'s story and thus the general termination time of all the other stories in *Avisa*. Oxford's real-life courtship of Elizabeth was over by 1574. And her real-life courtship by Don Juan, who stands behind the fifth and final section of Willobie's poem, ended no earlier than 1576 and no later than 1578. This dating fits the progressive timeline of all the other courtships and confirms that the real-life machinations constituting the author's subject matter came to an end in 1577, plus or minus a year. Therefore, Emet in 1594 and Dorrell in 1596 were accurate in assigning the poem an earlier composition date.

### **Did Oxford Write *Avisa*?**

At least one Oxfordian<sup>41</sup> postulates that Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, authored *Avisa*. If so, it is hardly likely that Oxford would have begun writing it in 1561 when he was only twelve years old, so to make a case for Oxford's authorship we would have to jettison Dorrell's dating claim from 1596.

Some aspects of writing style in *Avisa* seem consistent with Oxford's authorship. There are plenty of classical references, instances of alliteration and words and phrases typical of Oxford's writing. In relating the fourth and fifth courtships, the poet uses several "authentic legal metaphors,"<sup>42</sup> as does Shakespeare, and of course Oxford had a legal education. One of the marginal notes refers to a spa in Italy with details suggesting personal experience: "In Italy is a certaine water that falleth into the River Anion, of colour white, and at first seemes to bee wonderfull colde, but being a while in it, it heateth the body more extreamey."<sup>43</sup> Oxford, of course, had traveled to Italy. The last three words of Willobie's line, "Though now by brothers bought and solde," meaning betrayed, as Judas betrayed Jesus, is "an expression used five times by Shakespeare."<sup>44</sup> *Avisa* scolds her second suitor, "Is't filthy love your worship meanes?/ Assure your selfe your labor's lost,"<sup>45</sup> giving us the title of one

of Shakespeare's early plays. The fourth suitor says, "And if I seeke your spoile, or shame,/ Then raze me out, and blot my name."<sup>46</sup> The Bard uses the word "blot" four times in the Sonnets, and this feared fate is the same one that Shakespeare laments in his Sonnets, e.g., "My name be buried where my body is" (72).

The book ends with a poem titled "The Praise of a Contented Mind," which has nothing to do with the story. Oxford wrote a poem, published in 1573 under his own name, titled "In Praise of a Contented Mind." The two poems are in the same meter: an unusual eight iambic beats per line. Might Oxford have written a second version of his earlier verse and tacked it onto the end of *Avisa*?

And look! The final three words in the entire book, placed after this very poem as a signature in extra-large italic type, are "Ever or Never."<sup>47</sup> Might this be one of Edward de Vere's self-references?

These tempting items seem initially to favor a case for Oxford's authorship. But it is also apparent that most of them involve serious contraindications. The cumulative weight of certain stylistic aspects attending *Avisa* and a related fact undermines the case for Oxford's involvement. Here is a short list:

- 1) The rhymed tetrameter is a different meter from anything by Shakespeare or Oxford.
- 2) One of H.W.'s poetic letters to *Avisa* is rendered in hexameters, another meter that Oxford and Shakespeare avoided.
- 3) Many references and phrases in the poem, such as "Old Asues grandame," "Our Moab Cozbies," "Queene Joane of Naples," "devoide of crime" and "Gorgeous shewes of Golden glose," not found in either the Bard's writing or Oxford's acknowledged corpus.
- 4) A number of terms and spellings in the poetry of the fifth section not found in either the bard's writing or Oxford's acknowledged corpus — for example *fainty*, *frize*, *wourth*, *wanny*, *boren*, *shoe* (for show), *vernant*, *fewtures*, *lave*, *for's't*, *savadge*, *groes*, *mule*, *ful-fed*, *lust*, *lustlesse*, *sworen*, *sance*, *raines* (for reins), *mell*, *chamfered*, *cryme*, *wel-fare* and *farder*.
- 5) Willobie uses "very" as an adverb, as in "A heavy burden...seemes very light" and "great sorrowes very neere."<sup>48</sup> This word is filler, and Shakespeare used it rarely. In all of Shakespeare's sonnets, he used the word but once in this manner, in Sonnet 90: "the very worst of fortune's might."
- 6) Contrary to Oxford and Shakespeare's persistent secularism, the author of *Avisa* makes many religious references. "The facility with which *Avisa* cites Biblical authority is indeed surprising"<sup>49</sup>; "*Avisa* had so free a flow of Scriptural illustration, all ready in hand in rhymed stanzas, with which to overwhelm her adversaries...."<sup>50</sup> Oxford knew the Bible, but he did not use religious conventions in his compositions, and Shakespeare's heroic characters are not prone to relying primarily on the Bible for communicating the truth of their positions in debate.
- 7) It is atypical of Oxford and Shakespeare to pile on such pulpit phrases

as “God prosper this,” “Of wicked lust,” “praise from God above,” “where filthy life/ Hath stained the soile,” “Serve God,” “filthy pleasure,” “sinfull flesh,” “which God doth hate,” “Gods revenging ire,” “Let love of God such lust remove,” “When God shall take your husbands life” and “Noblemen gentlemen, and Captaynes by idlenesse fall to all kind of vices,” and lines such as “What filthy folly, raging lust,/ What beastly blindnes fancy breeds?/ As though the Lord had not accurst,/ With vengeance due, the sinfull deeds?”

- 8) The subject matter of Willobie’s “The Praise of a Contented Mind” is entirely different from that of Oxford’s “In Praise of a Contented Mind.” Willobie’s version is full of religious references, and it praises a mind that is content with the idea that God put things in a certain order. Oxford does not make a single religious statement in his poem.
- 9) The author of *Avisa* draws “remarkable natural parallels” between his story and seventeen lines from “the Tale...of Patient Griselda...told by Chaucer’s Clerk of Oxenford, which poem...was not far from Willobie’s thoughts as he worked on *Avisa*.”<sup>51</sup> The poet even uses numerous Chaucerian forms, including the spelling of certain proper names, the “syllabic e” and “passages which are Chaucerian both in form and substance...suggest[ing] that Willobie had recently been reading...the Canterbury Tales.”<sup>52</sup> Chaucer was the source of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, so we know that Oxford knew his Chaucer, but Shakespeare never evokes Chaucer as strongly in stylistic matters as does the author of *Avisa*.
- 10) The relatively plain style of the poetry in *Avisa* differs from the euphuism that Oxford was using under the name T.H. as early as 1560<sup>53</sup> and throughout the writing of Shakespeare. Peter Colse in the preface to *Penelopes Complaint* recognized that *Avisa* was written in “so plaine a stile.” Simple lines such as these, from the poem’s fifth section, certainly bear out his charge: “I often said, yet there is one,/ But where, or what I could not tell,/ Whose sight my sence would overcome,/ I feard it still, I knew it well”<sup>54</sup>; likewise in the case of “If you will speake, pray speake it playne,/ Lest els perhaps you lose your payne.”<sup>55</sup> The dearth of poetic artifice in *Avisa* flags it as being the product of a pen other than Oxford’s.
- 11) There is no passion in the poem. As de Luna says “*Avisa* is essentially not a romantic but a ‘realistic’ poem....”<sup>56</sup> If Oxford is consistent about anything, it is his passion and romanticism. Shakespeare did not write dispassionate narrative poems about lovers.
- 12) Within the context that W.S. is Shakespeare and Shakespeare is Oxford, it makes no sense to posit that the negative portrayal of W.S. in *Avisa* is a self-appraisal by Oxford.

These observations contradict the idea that Oxford is behind *Avisa*. One scholar opined that Dorrell’s statement, “It seemes that in this last example the author names himselfe and so describeth his owne love, [yet] I know not...”<sup>57</sup> refers to W.S.,

making W.S. the author. But Dorrell's phrase "this last example" clearly refers to Henrico Willobego, not to W.S. So we cannot assign authorship to W.S. and therefore to Oxford on this ground.

As Stratfordians' misidentification of W.S. as William Shaksper leads to a dead end, some Oxfordians' misidentifications of Avisa and of H.W. have led to some bizarre theories. At least two writers<sup>58,59</sup> have postulated that Avisa is Elizabeth Trentham, Oxford's second wife, and that Oxford as "W.S." encouraged H.W., the young Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton—who, according to one of these theorists, was homosexual—to have sex with her, producing Henry de Vere, who is therefore a bastard and not Oxford's son, as their offspring. Our solution will require no such far-fetched scenarios.

### **Unraveling the Authorship Mystery**

The seeming contradictions in the evidence attending the authorship and editorship of *Avisa* have confounded Stratfordians and Oxfordians alike. Yet all the mysteries and inconsistencies listed above are facts not to ignore or dismiss, but to explain: Who is the author of *Avisa*, who is Hadrian Dorrell, and what is the story behind the publication?

A list of questions will help direct us toward who wrote the famous poem relating the chaste Avisas' adventures in love. Who

- 1) was a poet and storyteller?
- 2) was alive in 1576, the earliest year for the narrative's end, but dead, as Dorrell claims, in 1596?
- 3) was old enough to have been writing in 1561, the year Dorrell claims the book was started?
- 4) was (ideally) of an age to have known, at the time of the events, about Elizabeth's relationships with Thomas Seymour, King Philip of Spain, duc d'Alençon, Archduke Hapsburg (and/or Christopher Hatton), and Don Juan of Austria?
- 5) was close enough to the court to be privy to this information?
- 6) was a self-appointed champion of Elizabeth?
- 7) is on record as having written poetry praising Elizabeth's chastity?
- 8) was educated in the law?
- 9) included legal metaphors in his writing?
- 10) praised and emulated Chaucer?
- 11) indicated some knowledge of Italy?
- 12) used marginal notes in his publications?
- 13) wrote verse in iambic tetrameter?
- 14) set in italics poetic missives appearing within his stories?
- 15) was publicly accused of being "a common rhymer and a deviser of slanderous pasquils against divers persones of great calling?"<sup>60</sup>
- 16) is on record having written an apparently fictional story that some scholars believe is based on a real-life love relationship...

- 17) in which the heroine coolly rejects her would-be lover, just as *Avisa* does all five of hers...
- 18) using language very like that in the prose of the fifth section of *Avisa*?
- 19) used initials in referring to characters in that fiction?
- 20) specifically used the initials H.W. to represent a contemporary person?
- 21) had a known reason to refrain from publishing *Avisa*?
- 22) had a known reason not to have published *Avisa*?
- 23) wrote so much like Oxford that people have confused the two men's work...
- 24) but wrote in a plainer style, with religious references and without euphuism and passion?
- 25) wrote material that the editor, posing as Hadrian Dorrell, would have read?
- 26) signed poems "Ever or Never." and signed his clandestine fiction "Ever or never?"

The answer is: George Gascoigne.

George Gascoigne was born in 1535. According to testimony penned in "A Remembraunce of the wel employed life and godly end of George Gaskoigne, Esquire," by his friend and bedside comforter, George Whetstone, Gascoigne died on October 5, 1577, after an illness lasting three months. He was 26 years old in 1561, the year that Dorrell claims the author began working on *Avisa*. He was therefore old enough to be a reasonably accomplished poet at the time when Dorrell says the author began writing what would have been the first section or two of *Avisa*, depicting the Queen's relationship with Thomas Seymour and that of the concurrently ardent King Philip II of Spain.

In concert with the case that *Avisa*'s author composed his narrative poem over a period of time is Gascoigne's own explanation in a dedication written for another narrative poem, *The complaint of Phylomene*. He says he wrote it in two periods, the first some "twelve or thirtene yeares past,"<sup>61</sup> meaning in 1562 or 1563, and the second in "this present moneth of April 1575,"<sup>62</sup> when he finished it. Combining Dorrell's testimony and de Luna's and Hess' dates for the subject matter, we can see that *Avisa* was written over almost precisely the same period. Dorrell's dating claim may be false, but the identification of Gascoigne as the author powerfully supports the case that it is accurate.

No fact appears to upset the case that *Avisa* was completed before October 1577, when Gascoigne died, or even before July 1577, when he fell ill. It does not matter that d'Alençon undertook a second marriage suit in 1578; Gascoigne need only to have covered the first one, which failed in 1576. As for the final section of *Avisa*, Hess speculated that Don Juan's courtship of Elizabeth ended sometime between 1576 and February 1578. It was, however, almost certainly over by the earlier part of that span. Oxford disengaged himself from Don Juan in 1576, and Don Juan spent the latter part of that year and all of 1577 immersed in political struggles on the continent. At the dawn of 1577, when he requested naval transport of his

army from Luxembourg, “The States General, urged by a suspicious Queen Elizabeth who knew Don John’s ambitions [to] invade England and liberate the Queen of Scots...demurred and insisted they depart overland.”<sup>63</sup> The cat was surely out of the bag by then regarding Elizabeth’s lack of interest in a marriage alliance. Don Juan’s death in October 1578 had nothing to do with pining away for a lover, either; he died of typhus in a battle camp. Therefore, Don Juan’s pursuit of Elizabeth almost surely ended well in time for Gascoigne to have penned the entire fifth section of *Avisa*.

At least two comments from scholars suggest that the poem postdates 1577, but neither bears scrutiny. De Luna saw Willobie’s condemnation of the second suitor “downe to fierie lake”<sup>64</sup> as a reference to “the fate of th[e] Armada...in 1588”<sup>65</sup> under Sir Francis Drake’s fire ships. But it is clearly a conventional reference to Hades. From the final prose text in the fifth section, Hess concluded, “Mr. H.W. was clearly dead by the end of the series of cantos,”<sup>66</sup> meaning that Don Juan by then had died, an event that did not occur until October 1, 1578. But the text in question in fact indicates that H.W. was still alive. It reads: “H.W. was now *again*e stricken so dead, that *hee hath not yet any farder assaid, nor I think ever will, and where he be alive or dead I know not, and therefore I leave him*”<sup>67</sup> (italics added). On five counts relating to these italicized words, we may rest assured that Willobie is not reporting on the death of H.W. One cannot be stricken dead twice; much less are there degrees of death. So, the narrator’s comment that H.W. was stricken so dead again refers to his relapsing into his previously described state of miserable prostration at failing to attain *Avisa*. A dead man cannot attempt anything, either, yet Willobie confers upon H.W. the continued ability to further assay, lasting through his life for ever. Finally, the narrator states that he doesn’t know if H.W. is alive or dead, thus establishing that the preceding clauses do not say that he died. To conclude, nothing requires a composition date after 1577.

De Luna noted that Willobie omits mention of Sir Walter Raleigh, a consort of the queen’s in 1581-82, from the list of the queen’s known suitors. The reason, she speculated, is chiefly that “the poem seems to have emanated from Raleigh’s own faction,”<sup>68</sup> but her reasoning was prompted by the assumption that the author was alive in 1582. A better reason for Raleigh’s absence from the poem is that by the time he was on the scene the author was dead.

Gascoigne obtained a legal education from Gray’s Inn. His books refer to several of his friends from Gray’s Inn. As noted above, Willobie presents legal metaphors, for example, “Ah woe is me, the case so stands,/ that sencelesse papers plead my wo...”<sup>69</sup> and “For farther triall of my faith...And though I be by Jury cast...And though I be condemned at last.”<sup>70</sup> Likewise, the entirety of “At Beautyes barre” from Gascoigne’s *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres* (1573) is an extended legal metaphor: “At Beautyes barre as I dyd stande,/ When false suspect accused mee,” etc.<sup>71</sup>

Gascoigne praises and refers to Chaucer throughout his many works. Indeed, “He acknowledged Chaucer as his master....”<sup>72</sup> In the prefacing material to the F.J. story within Gascoigne’s *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres* (see further discussion below), the unnamed contributor G.T. (who I believe is Gascoigne himself<sup>73</sup>) lauds Chaucer.

Although Gascoigne’s foreign adventures seem to have been confined to the Low

Countries, his “The Tale of Mistress Frances” in the second version of his F.J. story, published in 1575, is set in Venice, and he reveals therein a tidbit of knowledge of Italy when he mentions a coin “in Italie called a Caroline.”<sup>74</sup> This comment is akin to the lone reference to the spa in Italy in one of the marginal notes in *Avisa*.<sup>75</sup>

Aspects of *Avisa*’s literary construction fit Gascoigne’s authorship. Marginal notes attend Gascoigne’s long poems “Dan Bartholomew of Bath” and “Dulce bellum inexpertis,” his plays *Supposes* and *Jocasta*, and some of his briefer poems such as “At Beautyes barre.” Gascoigne uses tetrameter for several poems, including “Gascoignes good morrow,” “The deadly dropes,” “The fable of Philomela” within *The Complaint of Philomene* and “In praise of Phillip Sparrow,” which appears within his F.J. story. In the latter story, poetic missives from lover to lady are set off in italics, as are those in *Avisa*.

In 1572, Gascoigne’s creditors succeeded in having him denied a seat in Parliament based on several charges, most notably his being “a common rhymer and a deviser of slanderous pasquils against divers persones of great calling.”<sup>76</sup> *Avisa* is precisely in this mold: It is rendered in rhyme; it is about persons of great calling, i.e., royalty and courtiers; and it may be construed as slandering Mr. W.S. if not others among *Avisa*’s suitors as well as even the Queen herself.

Gascoigne was probably close enough to the court to have knowledge of Elizabeth’s relationships, having “first went to court as a replacement for his father as almoner at Elizabeth I’s coronation.”<sup>77</sup> He contributed substantially to the festivities honoring the Queen at Kenilworth in 1575, including, at Leicester’s command, the farewell address, in which, “clad like unto Sylvanus [he] spake ex tempore...”<sup>78</sup> He met personally with the Queen on New Year’s Day 1575. Gascoigne’s *The Tale of Hemetes the Heremyte Pnounced before the Q. Majesty att Woodstocke* (1575) is addressed to Queen Elizabeth and contains a woodcut of his kneeling before her and presenting to her his book. Gascoigne thus clearly saw himself as, or at least aspired to be, a literary champion of Elizabeth, fitting the role of the author who wrote the ringing defense of *Avisa*’s—and Elizabeth’s—chastity. Gascoigne also dedicated *The Grief of Joye* (1576) “To the highe and mightie pryncesse, Elizabeth,” and he “subsequently received a royal commission in 1576 to work as her agent or spy in France and the Low Countries.”<sup>79</sup> To some degree, then, he succeeded in his desired role as the Queen’s defender.

Gascoigne, most tellingly, is also on record as having written, in 1575, two years before *Avisa* was concluded, a lengthy, ringing tribute, in verse, to Queen Elizabeth’s chastity. *The Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Castle*, published on March 26, 1576, records entertainments for the Queen from the summer of 1575. It includes Gascoigne’s masque in which the goddess Diana seeks out a maid chaster than she and finds none other than Zabeta, a character that all scholars recognize as Elizabeth. Clearly we have found an authorial candidate who demonstrates an interest in precisely the subject that *Avisa* covers. (If we put the two heroines’ names together, moreover, we essentially have the Queen’s full name: *Avisa* = *Elisa*, and *Zabeta* = *zabeth*.)

One might suggest that Gascoigne refrained in 1577 from publishing his

extensive narrative poem about the Queen's adventures in love because he would have feared authorities' negative reaction to it. After all, the publication of *Flowres* in 1573 apparently aroused the ire of certain "divines," which required an "Apologie" from Gascoigne in the 1575 edition (see further discussion below). This explanation, however, is insufficient; after all, whatever happened with respect to the 1573 book did not stop Gascoigne from writing, or at least continuing, *Avisa*. A better, and in this case irrefutable, reason that Gascoigne did not take this narrative poem to press is that he died just as he would have completed the fifth section. One must also understand that just because *Avisa* comes down to us in apparently finished form does not mean that it was in fact finished. Ultimately, the reason why Gascoigne would not have rushed the poem to the printer's becomes obvious once we think about it: The story of Elizabeth and her suitors was—as history proves—a work in progress, one that the author, in concert with Dorrell's testimony, would have updated over the years as new would-be husbands entered the scene. Surely Gascoigne viewed *Avisa* as a lifelong project that was as yet incomplete. He may or may not have intended to publish it, but he surely intended to keep writing it. Dorrell's 1596 assertion that after the author's death the poem "lay in wast papers in his studie, as many other prettie things did, of his devising"<sup>80</sup> is likely accurate.

The observation that *Avisa* has some Shakespearean qualities fits Gascoigne's authorship, because the similarity of Gascoigne's and Oxford's poetic styles is already a matter of record. Their writing styles are so similar that it has become traditional in some circles to assert that Oxford wrote all or at least a portion of *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres*, or even brought it to press. But a close inspection of that book and Gascoigne's other works<sup>81</sup> confirms that, despite a few Shakespearean parallels, Gascoigne consistently wrote simple verse lacking in Oxford's artifice, euphuism and passion, the poetic qualities we find in *Avisa*.

Twice Willobie uses the phrase "trickling teares,"<sup>82</sup> one of Oxford's common expressions. From my reading, this phrase is absent from almost all other Elizabethan poets' bags of tricks. An exception I have found is Gascoigne, who uses the phrase four times: in "Dan Bartholomew:" "Yet shed mine eyes no trickling teares";<sup>83</sup> in *Jocasta* (V, ii): "The trickling teares raynde downe his paled chekes";<sup>84</sup> in *The Droomme of Doomes Day*: "he will sigh and grone, and shed trickling teares";<sup>85</sup> and in the autobiographical "Gascoignes voyage into Hollande," which includes this line: "Well, on our knees with trickling teares of joye,/ We gave God thanks."<sup>86</sup>

Gascoigne's writings also embrace religion naturally and at times forcefully. His works from late in life—*The Glasse of Governement* (1575), *The Steele Glas* (1576), *The Droomme of Doomes Day* (1576) and *The Grief of Joye* (1576)—all treat moral and religious themes, fitting the strong Biblical tone of *Avisa*.

The first edition of Gascoigne's *Flowres* contains seven poems signed "Ever or Never," capitalized, italicized and concluded with a period in exactly the form appearing after the poem at the end of Willobie's book. An eighth poem in *Flowres* is signed identically but with a lower-case *n* beginning never. In the second edition, titled *The Posies of George Gascoigne*, the same phrase, with a lower-case *n*, appears along with an added ninth poem and at the end of Gascoigne's F.J. story, which (as

discussed below) closely resembles the fifth section of *Avisa*.

Gascoigne was a prolific writer. From 1573 to 1577, he issued hundreds of pages of poetry, stories, plays and essays. A number of them he had written in earlier years, for example his plays, which date from 1566. An author this active could have produced *Avisa* as well as his other works.

### **Connections between *Avisa* and Gascoigne’s “The Adventures [of] Master F.J.” and Other Writings**

Gascoigne’s famous prose story, “The Adventures Passed by Master F.J.,” published initially in *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres*, details a doomed love affair. The main character is identified only by the initials F.J., thereby being compatible with *Avisa*’s D.B., D.H., W.S. and H.W. Many of Gascoigne’s contemporaries—at least twenty by his own count, as related in the preface to his second edition—suspected that his F.J. story, under the cover of purported fiction, depicts the adventures of real people. If their charges are accurate, then Gascoigne’s F.J. story clandestinely celebrates the sexual incorruptibility of a real-life lady in a veiled drama of her personal life, which is exactly what the author of *Avisa* does. If the charges are inaccurate, then Gascoigne still authored a fictional story with the same underlying theme as *Avisa*.

In the second edition of *Flowres*, titled *The Posies of George Gascoigne*, Gascoigne corrected the first edition’s multiple authorship claim and emphatically denied that its prose and verse story was about real people. The editing and publishing events attending *Avisa* essentially repeat this sequence, showing that the subject matter had a similar effect upon readers, which is consistent with both books having issued from the same pen.

Gascoigne’s F.J. story comes after an “Epistle from H.W. to the Reader” and “The letter of G.T. to his very friend H.W. concerning this work.” The author’s choice of H.W. as the initials of a supposed fellow writer is compatible with the name that Dorrell says he found associated with the *Avisa* poem: Henry Willobie.

The fifth section of *Avisa* is laid out much as Gascoigne designed “The Adventures of Master F.J.” The main difference is that F.J. is rendered mostly in prose, with verses interspersed, whereas the fifth section of *Avisa* is mostly in verse, with prose interspersed. In each narrative, initials indicate the wooer(s), whereas a name—Elinor in F.J. and *Avisa* in *Avisa*—attends the beloved. In both works, lovers send poetic notes, printed in italics. In the end, after much entreaty and interplay, Elinor leaves her suitor unrequited, as *Avisa* does all of hers.

Willobie’s use of vocabulary in the brief prose portions within the fifth section of *Avisa* conforms to Gascoigne’s in both the preface to and the body of F.J. Take, for example, Henry Willobie’s famous words in the introduction to the fifth section of *Avisa*: “H.W....*bewrayeth* the secrecy of his disease unto *his familiar friend* W.S. who not long before had tryed the curtesy of the like passion....”<sup>87</sup> In but a few pages of F.J., Gascoigne employs all four of these highlighted terms. The first sentence in the preface to F.J., titled “H.W. to the Reader,” speaks of “*my familiar friend* Master G.T.”

and a few lines later we read of “my *familiar friendes*.”<sup>88</sup> Early in the story, Gascoigne speaks of “M. Elinor of hir *curtesie*”<sup>89</sup> and says, “without cause of affection the *passion* is easie to be cured” and “the stile this letter of hers *bewrayeth* that it was not penned by a womans capacitie.”<sup>90</sup>

The poetic missives from the male wooer to his beloved in the two narratives of H.W. and F.J. likewise begin with similar introductions. Willobie in the second prose passage in *Avisa* writes that H.W. “in a melancolike passion wrote *these verses following*”;<sup>91</sup> Gascoigne in F.J. writes, “he...there in this passion compiled *these verses following*.”<sup>92</sup> Willobie in the third prose passage in *Avisa* writes that H.W. “fell...into such *extremity of passionate affections*”;<sup>93</sup> Gascoigne in F.J. has F.J. write, “Such is then the *extremitie of my passions*.”<sup>94</sup> This passage about H.W. ends, “he takes his pen & *wrate, as followeth*”;<sup>95</sup> Gascoigne in F.J. says that he “*did write unto hir as followeth*.”<sup>96</sup> The letters that F.J. writes in F.J. also have much the same construction and poetic terminology as those that H.W. writes in *Avisa*.

In *Avisa*, H.W. sends a note to *Avisa* beginning, “Like wounded Deare, whose tender sydes are bath’d in blood...”<sup>97</sup> This metaphor appears in “Now have I found the waie” from Gascoigne’s *Flowres*: “For as the stricken Deare, that...feeles himselfe to bleede.”<sup>98</sup> Gascoigne’s narrative poem “Dan Bartholomew” includes another metaphor involving “The stricken Deare.”<sup>99</sup> In all three cases, moreover, Deare is rendered identically in spelling and capitalization.

De Luna noted many ampersands in his fifth section of *Avisa*, concluding that Dorrell had meddled with it. Dorrell does use many ampersands in his prefatory material, but Gascoigne in F.J. also uses them; a single page (beginning “This sonet was highly commended...”) has five; others have none. Some of his poems feature them as well; “Beautie shut up thy shop” has five of them, while others have none. Gascoigne went back and forth in using this shortcut, a pattern consistent with that found in *Avisa*. While it is possible that Dorrell or the printer transcribed Gascoigne’s manuscript for the fifth section and substituted ampersands where Gascoigne had spelled out “and,” he more likely switched to using more ampersands when he shifted style, perhaps after having left the book unattended for a while, in presenting the new story of H.W. I am unable to confirm, from ampersands or any other stylistic matters, various scholars’ suspicions that *Avisa* was “revamped circa 1585-86” or “revived and modified in 1593-94.”<sup>100</sup> Instead, in my view, all of the text fits Gascoigne’s authorship.

The poetic language in both books is essentially the same as well. For example, phrases such as “flowing teares” and “scalding sighes” in F.J. echo those such as “trickling teares” and “silent sighes” in *Avisa*. Willobie’s escalating references to H.W.’s death from pining, as in “Then farewell life, my glasse is runne,” “I die in feeld,” “my death shall be your gaine” and “by disdaine she sought mine end,” echo many of Gascoigne’s like expressions, such as “With desperate death thou sleast the lovers heart” and “I pin’d for deadly paine,” which are from poems in F.J.; “most like the panges of death,/ That present grieffe now grypeth me,” which is from the “Spreta tamen vivunt” series in *Flowres*; and “greedely I seeke the greedy grave...But death is deafe” from his “Dan Bartholomew of Bath.” Just as Willobie offers several

aphorisms, such as “Excessive griefes good counsellis want,”<sup>101</sup> so does Gascoigne in F.J., as in the line, “no smoke ariseth, where no cole is kindled.”<sup>102</sup> Willobie’s favorite metaphor of love is battle, as in “If now I yeeld without assault”<sup>103</sup>; and so is Gascoigne’s in F.J., as in “The firste blowe thus profered and defended....”<sup>104</sup> The stylistic details within Willobie’s *Avisa* fit those of Gascoigne’s F.J.

A footnote in de Luna’s book compares two passages, one from Canto I of *Avisa*: “Full twentie yeares she lived a maide,/ And never was by man betrayde”<sup>105</sup>; and the other from 1.1 in a masque from Gascoigne’s *Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Castle*, in which “Diana, Goddess of Chastity,” confirms of Zabeta, “Full twentie yeeres I marked still hyr mynde,/ Ne could I see that any sparke of lust....”<sup>106</sup> These are identical points, made with identical beginning words about the same person: Queen Elizabeth, who in each case is called by a nickname compatible with part of her name. Soon thereafter, Zabeta is described as “a peerless maide,”<sup>107</sup> even “a better maide” and “a worthier maide”<sup>108</sup> than Diana, fitting Willobie’s use of the same word in the same context. De Luna derives no authorship conclusion from this parallelism. But under the scenario that Gascoigne wrote about Elizabeth in *Avisa* as well as in *Princely Pleasures*, we should not be surprised to find parallel language in the two compositions.

“The Adventures Passed by Master F.J.,” then, appears to be the first of Gascoigne’s three treatments of the same theme: the chastity of a heroine. The second is his masque of Diana and Zabeta for the Kenilworth entertainments, and the third is *Avisa*. They were completed in 1573, 1575 and 1577, respectively.

Willobie often uses *y* in place of *i*, for example in *quyet*, *shryned*, *advyse*, *aryse*, *wysest*, *dyvers*, *sometymes*, *pynning*, *cryme*, etc. Gascoigne’s poems are likewise packed with such words. Over the course of two pages in his “Weedes” section of *Posies*, we find *lustye*, *dyd*, *foyle*, *hyr*, *lyst*, *rejoice*, *byrdes*, *lye*, *fayre*, *myne* and *soberlye*. In a single page from *Flowers* are *wyll*, *trye*, *styll*, *kyll*, *lyving*, *lyke* and *daye*. In a short paragraph from the “Epistle” to *Posies*, we find *desyre*, *wyll*, *wythoute* and *publikelye*. So, this spelling tendency is common to both texts.

I have little doubt that an exhaustive study of Gascoigne’s canon would turn up virtually every phrase, term and idea attending *Avisa*. But with the non-stylistic circumstantial evidence so strongly favoring his authorship, these examples should suffice to make the connection on stylistic grounds.

### **Did Anyone Else Contribute to *Avisa*?**

Originally under the influence of what I now consider to be an Oxfordian myth that Oxford contributed to Gascoigne’s *Flowres* and brought it to print, I initially wondered if Oxford might have stepped in to finish and publish Willobie’s book as well. But my investigation into this question demonstrates, at least to my full satisfaction, that Oxford had nothing to do with *Flowres* or anything else that Gascoigne wrote.<sup>109</sup>

As noted earlier, some stylistic considerations, such as the rash of ampersands, have led scholars to suggest that the editor, Dorrell, “meddled” with the fifth section

of *Avisa*. De Luna also noted format changes in the form of a different heading, failure to start on a new page and the omission of “the breathing space, large type, and ornamental border normally heralding the appearance of a new suitor.”<sup>110</sup> The introduction of a third party in the story is also new, as are the prose interjections “written from a point of view completely exterior to the rest of the work.”<sup>111</sup> The fifth suitor’s name, Henrico Willobego, is nearly identical to the supposed author’s, another difference from the other sections, even though, as de Luna and others confirmed, “the author and the fifth suitor are clearly meant as separate persons.”<sup>112</sup> H.W. writes many poetic letters to *Avisa*, and is the only suitor to do so. H.W.’s story takes up three times the space of any of the others. These myriad differences prompted de Luna to state, “Various aspects of this fifth suit, in short, suggest that parts of it may well be an interpolation by some writer other than Willobie himself.... The likeliest suspect is ‘Hadrian Dorrell’, the self-admitted filcher of Willobie’s poem.”<sup>113</sup>

But Gascoigne’s clustered use of ampersands, Dorrell’s convincing indications in 1594 that he was independent of the material and had no idea who *Avisa* was, and the myriad verbal parallels between Gascoigne’s structure and writing in F.J. and those in the fifth section of *Avisa*, as far as I am concerned, sew up the case for Gascoigne’s authorship of the entire book. This conclusion that Gascoigne is the sole author of *Avisa* is consistent with Dorrell’s flat statement in his 1594 preface: “I have not added nor detracted any thing from the worke it selfe, but have let it passe without altering any thing.”<sup>114</sup>

### **Authorship of the Concluding Material**

Dorrell explains, “in the end I have added to fill up some voyd paper certaine fragmentes and ditties...which I found wrapped altogether with this, and therefore knew not whether it did any way belong unto this or not.”<sup>115</sup> These fragments and ditties comprise “The Authors conclusion” and two song poems: “The resolution of a chaste and constant wife” and “The Praise of a Contented Mind.” All three poems are Gascoigne’s. The first poem proceeds in exactly the same manner as the preceding material. The second poem contains religious language, and its phrase “web of wylie kind,”<sup>116</sup> echoes Canto 51’s “you spring of savadge kynd”<sup>117</sup> and 74’s “of dame Chrysiedes kind.”<sup>118</sup> In *Flowres*, Gascoigne twice uses like phrases: “kit[e]s of Cressides kind”<sup>119</sup> and “tricks of Cressides kynde.”<sup>120</sup> The religious aspect of the third poem, “The Praise of a Contented Mind,” we have already discussed. Its terms *frozen*, *sildome*, *floating* and *sliu’d* seem peculiar to Gascoigne’s vocabulary. Its signature, *Ever or never*, appears under eight of Gascoigne’s other poems, as printed in his *Flowres* and again in *Posies*.

To conclude, Henry Willobie is a pseudonym of George Gascoigne, the true author of *Avisa*. Who, then, is the book’s editor and publisher, the man hiding behind the names Hadrian Dorrell, Abell Emet, “Contraria Contrariis,” and Thomas Willobie?

### Authorship of the Prefatory and Subsequent Material

Dorrell's preliminary address "To the gentle & courteous Reader" of 1594 is written in a direct, unadorned style. It contains references to the Emperour Theodosius and Pelagius of Laodicea, along with prudish comments about "Heathen Poets" and Ariosto's "lewd" tales. It praises "godly preachers" and uses heated Calvinist language such as "sinnefull gaine of a filthy carkasse" and "cry to the Lord for vengeance against us." Dorrell's "Apologie" in the 1596 edition continues the same type of language, so we may be confident that the same writer is at work.

Abell Emet's poem in hexameters continues in the same vein, speaking of "This wicked age, this sinfull tyme." The Biblical reference to Susan in the poem by "Contraria Contrariis" is consistent with the other prefatory materials. Its tetrameter is like the verse in *Avisa* itself.

The poem signed by Thomas Willobie in the 1605 edition, which came out after Oxford died, features phrases such as "filthy lust" and "lewde Desires," linking it to the prefacing material from the earlier editions. To conclude, the consistency in style and theme throughout the introductory material strongly suggests that one man wrote it all.

It is impossible that George Gascoigne wrote any of this prefatory material, because Dorrell refers to Philip Sidney as "Astrophell" (from his *Astrophel and Stella*) and to Edmund Spenser's "Fayry Queene"; and *Contraria Contrariis* refers to "Shakespeare" and his *Lucrece*. All three of these referenced books postdate Gascoigne's death.

Nevertheless, one clue to authorship is the striking similarity between the prefatory material in Gascoigne's F.J. story and that attending *Avisa*. The pretense that Dorrell gives for *Avisa*'s publication is very like that attending the prose story of F.J. in *Flowres*. In *Flowres* persons identified only by initials claim to have brought the shadowy story of a formally conducted love suit to print without the knowledge or permission of the author (Gascoigne), who in real life was out of the country. In *Avisa*, a person identified only by a pseudonym claims to have obtained the author's shadowy story of five formally conducted love suits and "to publish it without his consent"<sup>121</sup> while he was out of the country. In *Flowres*, H.W. claims, "I...have presumed of my selfe to christen it by the name of *A hundredth sundrie Flowers*."<sup>122</sup> In *Avisa*, Dorrell claims, "I have christened it by the name of *Willoby his Avisa*."<sup>123</sup> In *Flowres*, the closing of H.W.'s epistle reads, "From my lodging nere the Strande the xx. of January, 1572,"<sup>124</sup> and that of G.T.'s letter reads, "from my Chamber this tenth of August, 1572."<sup>125</sup> Similarly, the closing of Dorrell's preface to *Avisa* reads, "From my chamber in Oxford this first of October."<sup>126</sup>

Similarities extend to Gascoigne's second edition. His preface to *Posies* is plainly written and peppered with religious references. Dorrell's preface to *Avisa* is likewise straightforward and contains religious references. The dedications in *Posies* are to groups: "To the reverend Divines," "To al yong Gentlemen" and "To the Readers generally." The dedications in *Avisa* are similarly addressed "To all the constant Ladies & Gentlewomen of England that feare God" and "To the gentle & courteous

Reader.” None of the commendatory poems in either preface is signed by the name of a person; those in *Posies* appear above initials and an abbreviation, and those in the preface of *Avisa* appear above pseudonyms.

G.T.’s letter in *Flowres* has another point of interest relating to Dorrell’s preface to *Avisa*. Speaking of the unnamed author, G.T. says,

And to be playne (with you my friend) he hath written (which as farre as I can learne) did never yet come to the reading or persuinge of any man but himselfe: two notable workes. The one called, the Sundry lots of love. The other of his owne invencion entituled, The clyming of an Eagles neast. These thinges (and especially the latter) doth seeme by the name to be a work worthy the reading. And the rather I judge so because his fantasie is so occupied in the same, as that contrary to his wonted use, he hath hitherto withhelde it from light of any his familiers, untill it be finished, you may gesse him by his Nature.<sup>127</sup>

G.T., then, expresses knowledge of two unpublished works by the unnamed author, who we later learn is George Gascoigne. These works are presumed lost, but I would propose that “Sundry lots of love” is an early working title for the book that eventually came out as *Avisa*, which deals with “sundry lots of love” (two of which “lots” were concluded and two more started by 1573). The statement, “he hath hitherto withhelde it from light of any his familiers, untill it be finished,” moreover, fits precisely the scenario I have painted with respect to Gascoigne’s probable treatment of *Avisa* as an unfinished, ongoing project on the courtship of England’s Virgin Queen.

What ties this passage to Dorrell is that the preface to *Avisa* contains a similar commentary in mentioning an unpublished work by Willobie, who we now see is Gascoigne. He says that *Avisa*

lay in wast papers in his studie, as many other prettie things did, of his devising, and so might have continued still (as his Susanna yet doth) had not I, contrary to his knowledge, with paine collected it; and (in consideration of the good ende, to which it was directed, published it.<sup>128</sup>

Any story of Susanna, by the way, would have the same theme as *Avisa*: a woman’s rejection of suitors, suggesting why it came to Dorrell’s mind when discussing *Avisa*. (I am unaware of any verse about Susanna—such as Robert Roche’s 1599 poem—that could qualify as Gascoigne’s.)

Given all these parallels, we may conclude that whoever packaged *Avisa* and wrote Dorrell’s preface was intimately familiar with Gascoigne’s *Flowres* and *Posies* and used them as a model. This is useful information.

Whoever we identify as Hadrian Dorrell, the editor of *Avisa*, must fit everything we know about him. Whoever wrote the prefacing material

- 1) was alive in 1605, when the final edits to *Avisa* appeared in the fourth edition;
- 2) was a poet capable of writing the verses by Abell Emet, Contraria Contrariis and Thomas Willobie;
- 3) attended Oxford University;
- 4) was religiously inclined;
- 5) had access to George Gascoigne's papers and might have been the person whom Gascoigne "chose," as Dorrell puts it, to possess those papers;
- 6) used ampersands, as Dorrell did in his 1594 preface and his 1596 apology;
- 7) knew Gascoigne's *Flowres* well enough to imitate aspects of its preface;
- 8) was (ideally) old enough to have brought *Flowres* to press in 1573;
- 9) wrote prose and poetry that sounds like Dorrell's;
- 10) can (ideally) be linked to the name Henry Willobie.

To my knowledge, the only man who fits this description is Nicholas Breton, who was born in 1545 and did not die until 1626. A prolific writer, he composed in a "variety of different literary genres, including pastoral and religious verse, prose tales, imaginary letters, essays, and satires. He was born in London, England. He was a stepson of the English poet George Gascoigne and studied at the University of Oxford."<sup>129</sup> One could hardly ask for a better summary of a plausible editor for *Avisa*.

Although Breton does not appear on the college rolls, "a casual notice in the Diary of the Rev. Richard Madox (Sloane MS.5008) under 14<sup>th</sup> March 1582 [pertains to] 'Mr. Brytten, once of Oriell Colledge, which made wyts wyl.'"<sup>130</sup> His identification as the author of *Wits Will* confirms this "Mr. Brytten" to be Nicholas Breton, and the only Oriell College in England is at Oxford University. So Breton did attend Oxford and therefore would have been right at home as Dorrell writing from, or pretending to write from, a chamber in Oxford. Supporting the connection is Breton's address "To the Gentlemen students and Scholers of Oxforde" in his poetry book, *The Pilgrimage to Paradise* (1592).

Breton shared his stepfather's poetic inclinations, his extensive writing, and his religious fervor as well, suggesting that their sentiments were closely allied. For all these reasons, as well as the two men's kinship by marriage, Gascoigne could well have chosen Breton as the protector of his papers during his absence abroad in the early 1570s, and Breton would have been the most likely heir of Gascoigne's papers upon his death in 1577, through a will, or because they were already in his possession or because he was simply the most interested party.

Breton was a passionate admirer of virgins, whom he enthusiastically extolled in *The Good and the Badde* (1616), so he would have approved of *Avisa*. He was also a devoted admirer of Elizabeth, whom he eulogized in his manuscript, "Character of Queen Elizabeth" (undated, but written after her death in 1603). If Dorrell's goal in bringing *Avisa* to press, as de Luna proposes, was to come to the defense of the Queen's chastity at a time when her "reputation could use a little defending,"<sup>131</sup>

Breton qualifies on both counts. On the other hand, if we take Dorrell's original preface as genuine, as I believe we should, it is clear that he was unaware of the grenade he was handling and therefore was not out to defend the Queen at all but merely to publish a celebration of the chaste *Avisa*. His later denial that *Avisa* was anyone of import seems to have been an act taken to protect the Queen and his own skin.

Breton, moreover, is well known as a careful student of Gascoigne's work. Grosart elaborates:

It is interesting, because of the biographic fact...that Breton's mother in her widowhood married George Gascoigne, to find that his step-son paid him the most flattering of all homage, of walking in his footsteps. There are various evidences that the poems of Gascoigne were familiar to Breton. Thus, in the Floorish upon Fancy, the "Dolorous Discourse..." echoes Gascoigne's "Passion of a Lover" [in which] Lines 7-8 are taken in substance from it.... So too the opening of "A Gentleman talking on a time," etc., is nearly verbatim from Gascoigne, "When first I thee beheld in colours black and white." It is thus clear that in his earliest book, the Floorish upon Fancy, the influence of Gascoigne was deeper than that of any other in his after-books....<sup>132</sup>

This is precisely the description we would hope to find when searching for an author who could imitate, at times nearly verbatim, aspects of Gascoigne's *Flowres* and *Posies*.

Breton's use of religious and moral language fits Dorrell's as well. In the preface to *Avisa*, Dorrell talks of "wicked and dissolute behavior"<sup>133</sup>; in *An olde Mans Lesson* (1605), Breton speaks of "drunkennes, wantonnesse, or wickednes."<sup>134</sup> Dorrell fears for those who "are become wilfully desperate in the performance of all kind of impiety"<sup>135</sup>; Breton in *Maries Exercise* (1597) says of such men, "wilful were such a blinde-nesse [as] would seeke paradise in hell,"<sup>136</sup> and in *Wits Private Wealth* (1607) he adds, "he that delighteth in sinne is the Devill incarnat."<sup>137</sup> Dorrell speaks of "the holy scriptures," "godly preachers" and "the glory & praise"; in *Maries Exercise* Breton speaks of "the Holy Scriptures," "Thy comfortable preaching" and, within a few words of each other, "praise" and "glory." Dorrell speaks of "the ripenesse of our sinne"<sup>138</sup>; Breton in *I Would, And would not* (1614) speaks of "the foule delight of sinne"<sup>139</sup> and in *Maries Exercise* of "the evill part of sinne."<sup>140</sup> Dorrell lists "the foure moral vertues": Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance and Justice<sup>141</sup>; Breton in *Divine Considerations* (1608) offers a similar list: humilitie, charitie, chastitie, patience, labour, love and pity; in *An olde Mans Lesson* he calls Patience the "greatest...vertue" and lists six moral vices: Pride, Sloth, Glotony, Lecherie, Envie and Vanities; and in *Characters upon Essaies Morall, and Divine* (1615) he covers an even more extensive inventory of such terms. Dorrell fears for those "that tremble not at the remembrance of Gods judgements";<sup>142</sup> Breton in *Maries Exercise* says, "the aungells tremble at Thy presence,"<sup>143</sup> and in *Wits Private Wealth* he condemns "he that is fearelesse of

GOD.”<sup>144</sup> Dorrell talks of “a filthy carkasse” and “such filthy freedome”<sup>145</sup>; Breton in *Divine Considerations* speaks of “a filthy hole,” “substances so filthy” and “the filth of sinne.”<sup>146</sup> In his 1596 “Apologie,” Dorrell says, “I pray God some other have not eternized their follies, more waies then one”<sup>147</sup>; Breton in *Divine Considerations* says, “Oh what a swarme of follyes hath this ignorance begotten in this worlde?”<sup>148</sup> Breton in *A Murmurer* (1607) and “An Invective against Treason” (1614) offers pages of heated pulpit-language not unlike that in Dorrell’s paragraph ending “...all kind of impiety.”<sup>149</sup> Thus, Breton’s religious and moralistic terminology is consistent with Dorrell’s.

For the record, Breton is not as liberally minded as his stepfather. Gascoigne’s foreword in *Flowres* titled “The Printer to the Reader” says admiringly, “He that wold laugh at a prety conceit closely conveyed, let him peruse the comedie translated out of Ariosto,”<sup>150</sup> indicating *Supposes* and perhaps also “The devises of sundrie Gentlemen,” which is billed as “A translation of Ariosto allegorized,” both of which are in *Flowres*. Dorrell’s preface to *Avisa*, on the other hand, summarily dismisses Ariosto’s tales as “lewd.” This difference in attitude maintains throughout the two men’s known material as well as that from *Avisa* which I assign here to Gascoigne and to Breton.

I find similarities in Dorrell’s and Breton’s non-religious language as well. Dorrell closes his address, “From my chamber in Oxford this first of October.”<sup>151</sup> Breton in *A Floorish upon Fancie* (1577) closes his address, “From his Chamber in Holbourne, this xx. of February.”<sup>152</sup> Dorrell repeats that *Avisa* is a “fained name.” Breton in *A Dialogue Full of Pithe and Pleasure* (1603) speaks of “fained love.”<sup>153</sup> Dorrell defends women’s constancy against others’ charges: “This false opinion bred those foule-mouthed speches of Frier Mantuan, that upbraides all women with fleeting unconstancy,”<sup>154</sup> and he offers three (unnamed) contrary examples from antiquity. Breton in “The Praise of Vertuous Ladies and Gentlewomen” (1599) does the same thing: “Some will say women are unconstant; but I say not all: for Penelope, and Cleopatra, Lucretia, with divers more too long to rehearse, shall stand for examples of such constancie....”<sup>155</sup> Recall that Contraria Contrariis likewise mentions Lucrece. Reflecting Dorrell’s inquiry into whether there is “some thing of trueth hidden under this shadow,” Breton in *An olde Mans Lesson* advises, “their best vertue, is in finding out a falsehood or maintaining a truth.”<sup>156</sup>

Both of Dorrell’s addresses use ampersands, and Breton likewise uses them liberally. In “The Forte of Fancie,” for example, he employs three of them within nine lines. Breton’s writing even provides us with parallels to Dorrell’s phony story of having come across *Avisa* among the papers of his young friend at Oxford who left him the keys to his study upon departing England to serve the Queen. The same type of framing device accompanies the preface to *An olde Mans Lesson* (1605) and especially his explanation for *A Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters* (original date unknown), in which Breton gives transparently implausible explanations for his coming across the materials that he is publishing. In the first instance, he claims, “I have met of late with a discourse written by I know not whom.”<sup>157</sup> In the second instance, speaking of a passing postman, he says,

...it was his hap with lack of heed, to let fall a Packet of idle Papers, the superscription whereof being only to him that finds it, being my fortune to light on it, seeing no greater style in the direction, fell to opening of the inclosure, in which I found divers Letters written, to whom, or from whom I could not learne.<sup>158</sup>

Thus, we have found in our candidate a penchant for exactly the type of red herring that Dorrell initially tossed out regarding where he found the packet of papers that he published as *Avisa*. In that case, though, given our authorship analysis, he really did obtain someone else's papers, just not in the way he describes.

Identifying Dorrell as Breton provides yet another reason to suspect that Gascoigne's original composition remains intact: Breton's voluminous canon contains no marginal notes. While Breton could have gone to the trouble of continuing Gascoigne's practice of appending marginal notes if he wrote the fifth section of *Avisa*, it is more likely that Gascoigne wrote all of it.

It is also important to our conception of events that Breton's works contain nothing like Dorrell's lengthy introduction to *Avisa*. In other words, he pens no intricate ruse that would serve to overturn the idea that his musings of 1594 about the book and its meaning are entirely genuine.

Stylistic links to Breton extend to *Avisa's* pseudonymous poet-contributors. Breton's first publication,<sup>159</sup> *A Smale handfull of fragrant Flowers*, attributed to N.B. (1575), contains a prefacing poem, "The Author to his Lady," which speaks of "Lucrece chaste," "Collatinus wyfe" and "Susan," just as "Contraria Contrariis" prefacing poem in *Avisa* mentions "poore Lucrece," "Collatine...wife" and "Susan." Although most of N.B.'s references are Biblical, he mentions Diana, whom Abell Emet also mentions in his prefacing poem to *Avisa*.

Yet further, Breton is well known to have hidden frequently behind pseudonyms and to have employed others in framing prefacing addresses, exactly as I postulate he does in *Avisa*. The address "To the Reader" in *Pasquils Mad-cappe* is signed only "Pasquill," yet the publication is universally recognized as Breton's. In his follow-up, *Pasquils Fooles-Cap* (1600), the purported author is Pasquill, a contributor is Morphorio, and N.B.'s dedication is "To my very good friend, Master Edward Conquest," thereby employing three obvious pseudonyms, much as we find with *Avisa's* Hadrian Dorrell, Abell Emet and Contraria Contrariis. N.B.'s ensuing dedication in *Pasquils Passe, and passeth not* (1600) "To my very loving and undeserved good friend M. Griffin Pen"<sup>160</sup> employs yet another probable pseudonym. Breton's *The Passionate Shepheard* (1604) is signed "Bonerto," another pseudonym, and his address "To the Reader" in *I Would and would not* is signed B.N., reversing Breton's initials and obfuscating his authorship. So, Breton's practices in this regard mirror those of the editor of *Avisa*.

I found these similarities between *Avisa's* prefacing material and Breton's writing with only a cursory review of Breton's dozens of lengthy works. (Searchable electronic copies of Breton's prose, which would have streamlined this exercise, are

as yet unavailable.) A dedicated investigation likely would turn up many more such parallels. Although a thorough study of late Elizabethan prose might show that someone else is a better candidate than Breton for the elusive Dorrell, I can think of no other obvious place to look.

Gascoigne was probably the person, as Dorrell implies, who invented the name Henry Willobie to pose as the author of *Avisa*, perhaps thereby explaining why that name fits the initials H.W. that attend Gascoigne's F.J. story in *Flowres*. But a wisp of external fact may link Breton to Dorrell's claimed friend Henry Willobie and his brother Thomas. Recall that scholars unearthed a pair of brothers—Henry and Thomas Willoughby—in the county of Wiltshire. Breton's ancestors had ties to Wiltshire. In the 1400s, one branch of his family "removed to Monchton-Farley in Wiltshire..."<sup>161</sup> and "The 'Visitation of Wilts, 1565' (College of Arms, G.8.fo.50)" refers to "Henry Breton of Moncton Farley in coun. Wiltes..."<sup>162</sup> This Henry Breton, who married and had four children, was brother to Nicholas's father, William. With an aunt, uncle and cousins in Wiltshire, Breton surely would have visited there and could have met young Henry and Thomas Willoughby. He might have met them in or before 1594, in which case he could have chosen Henry's name as cover for his publishing project. (Perhaps this Henry Willoughby did leave the country in "her Majesties service," as Dorrell says.) Or, if Gascoigne created the pseudonym (the more likely scenario), Breton might have had the good fortune to have met the brothers before 1605, in time for Thomas' name to serve his course of authorial misdirection. Whether Gascoigne or Breton introduced the name, at least both of our proposed candidates could have done so given their independent links to it.

Thus, two known facts relating to Nicholas Breton—his attendance at Oxford University and a link via relatives in Wiltshire to Henry and Thomas Willobie—fit Dorrell's only hints of self-identification. So, until a better candidate comes along, Nicholas Breton seems to be the best choice for the man behind the names Hadrian Dorrell, Abell Emet, Contraria Contrariis and Thomas Willobie.

### **Breton Was Gascoigne's Agent for *Flowres***

*A Hundreth sundrie Flowres* came to press while Gascoigne was serving in the army in Holland. Upon his return, he apologized for certain aspects of the collection when issuing the slightly revised version in 1575 titled *The Posies of George Gascoigne*.

Gascoigne states three times in the material prefacing *Posies* that he arranged ahead of time for *Flowres* to be printed while he was away on military assignment. Gascoigne does not name his agent, but in the prefacing material of *Flowres* G.T. is the deliverer and H.W. the receiver. Gascoigne himself is the best candidate for G.T., and Nicholas Breton became so entangled in his stepfather's literature that he seems a highly probable candidate for H.W., the man who took *Flowres* to press. Since Breton would have read (or perhaps even wrote) H.W.'s letter claiming to have coined the title, it is fitting the he coined a like title—*A Smale handfull of fragrant Flowers*—for his own first work two years later.

### Scenario for the Gascoigne Publishing Projects

To summarize: Nicholas Breton, at his stepfather's request, brought the collection of George Gascoigne's work—*A Hundreth sundrie Flowres*—to print in 1573, while Gascoigne was on the continent. As part of that effort, he might have written the material by H.W. and G.T. prefacing the F.J. story, but it is more likely that Gascoigne wrote it, calling himself (the compiler) "G.T." and Breton (the receiver) "H.W." Gascoigne had begun work on *Avisa* around 1561, but he left that work out of *Flowres* because, as G.T.'s letter says, the author did not wish his poem on "Sundry lots of love" released until it was finished. Gascoigne wrote the fifth section of *Avisa* in 1576-77 but had no designs to publish the book yet, given the still open-ended nature of the subject matter. He attached the name Henry Willobie to the work, possibly reflecting the initials H.W. attending the receiver's persona in the preface of *Flowres*; or, if Breton came up with the name, it might be an allonym derived from an acquaintance—"a yong man"—from Wiltshire named Henry Willoughby. Conforming to Dorrell's description, Gascoigne wrapped up *Avisa* with three other poems, leaving this collection behind in manuscript form upon his death in 1577. Breton obtained his stepfather's papers, and in early 1594 turned his attention to publishing *Sundry lots of love*.

Either because he adopted the name or out of courtesy to Gascoigne's notations and therefore his apparent wishes, Breton either imposed or maintained the name Henry Willobie as the purported author and "christened it by the name of *Willoby his Avisa*." He wrote prefacing material under the names Hadrian Dorrell, Abell Emet and "Contraria Contrariis," and published the volume shortly after completing his contributions in September 1594. In 1596, Peter Colse disparaged *Avisa* in his preface "To the Readers" in *Penelopes Complaint*, a poem "answering" *Avisa*. He penned a Latin poem by S.D. providing a false clue—though perhaps with a double meaning for the entertainment of insiders—to throw readers off the trail of *Avisa*'s true identity. Colse made it clear that he knew that "Henry Willobie" was a pseudonym by remarking that the author was in fact "unknown." By 1596, either before or upon reading Colse's treatise, Breton had become acutely aware of why Gascoigne had cloaked the identities of the heroine and her suitors, as well as, perhaps, of why he posted the fictitious name Willobie as author. Breton rushed out a response to Colse in a new edition of *Avisa*. In his haste, he contradicted his original authorship attribution to "yong man" Willobie by adding over three decades to his age, thereby approaching the truth. He also pronounced the author deceased, which was accurate, although he was forced to lie that the author was "lately" deceased because of his original phony attribution of the book to a living friend at Oxford. Nine years later, after Elizabeth was dead, Breton extended his defensive maneuvers with a poem in the 1605 edition over another assumed name, Thomas Willobie, billed as Henry's brother. Thomas was either the fictional or the real-life brother of Henry Willoughby of Wiltshire, an acquaintance of Breton's, whether he had known him all along or fortuitously met him in the interim. Table 1 summarizes these attributions.

**Table 1**Gascoigne wrote:

The entirety of *Avisa*

“The Authors conclusion”

“The resolution of a chaste and constant wife”

“The praise of a contented mind”

Nicholas Breton wrote:

The preface “To the gentle & courteous Reader” by Hadrian Dorrell and the commendatory poems by Abell Emet and Contraria Contrariis in the 1594 edition

“The Apologie” by Hadrian Dorrell in the 1596 edition

“The victorie of English Chastitie” by Thomas Willobie in the 1605 edition

The scenario outlined here allows both of Dorrell’s addresses to have much truth to them. In the first version of his story, he says that author had left England and “at his departure, chose me amongst the rest of his frendes, unto whome he reposed so much trust, that he delivered me the key of his study, and the use of all his bookes till his returne.”<sup>163</sup> Gascoigne traveled to Holland in 1572 and returned in 1574, so it is likely that he left his papers at that time with Breton, who in the meantime brought *Flowres* to press. In the second version of his story, he says that the poem had been around for a long time, that the author was deceased and that he discovered *Avisa* and its three accompanying poems among the author’s papers. It would be entirely reasonable for Breton to have resumed his perusal of Gascoigne’s papers after Gascoigne’s death and to have found these earlier-written works among them, just as he says. It may be true as well that the name Henry Willobie, as a pseudonym of Gascoigne, was on “everie Page,” perhaps reflecting the initials H.W. that appear in Gascoigne’s book, *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres*.

We may also account for some of Dorrell’s falsehoods, which the sensitive situation required. Given the difference in text and tone between his two addresses, Breton must have found out in the meantime about *Avisa*’s meaning, so he chose the safest course by swearing in 1596, “thus much I dare precisely advouch, that the Author intended in this discourse, neyther the description nor prayse of any particular woman, Nor the naming or ciphering of any particular man.”<sup>164</sup> In 1594, he did not swear any such thing because, as he clearly indicated at the time, he did not know whether or not it was true. In 1596, he lied because the truth was dangerous. In 1605, he wrote a poem under the name Thomas Willobie to extend the pretense.

The story of *Avisa* and her wooers so well shrouds the real-life actions of Elizabeth and her suitors that the true subject of the poem went undetected by

outsiders for nearly 400 years. H.W.'s words to Avisá serve well as a solemn promise from Gascoigne to Elizabeth:

Your name by me shall not be crackt,  
But let this tongue from out my jawes,  
Be rent, and bones to peeces rackt,  
If I your secrets doe disclose.<sup>165</sup>

Gascoigne was true to his word. Even though we know that *Avisa* is about Elizabeth, we can glean no secrets about her from its pages.

### Endnotes

Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Willobie His Avisa* are to the 1594 edition.

- <sup>1</sup> Henry Willobie, *Avisa or The true Picture of a modest Maid...*, Hadrian Dorrell's "To the Reader," (London: John Windet, 1594).
- <sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Heale, s.v., "Willoughby (Willobie), Henry (1574/5–1597x1605)." *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 21. Stephen, Sir Leslie and Sir Sidney Lee, eds. (London: Oxford University Press, 1921-1922), 506-07.
- <sup>3</sup> Heale, "Willoughby," *DNB* 21, 506.
- <sup>4</sup> B.N. de Luna, *The Queen Declined, an Interpretation of Avisa*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 28-fn.
- <sup>5</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, "Abell Emet in commendation of Willobies *Avisa*."
- <sup>6</sup> Henry Willobie, *Avisa or The true Picture of a modest Maid...*, "The Apologie," (London: John Windet, 1605).
- <sup>7</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, "To the Reader."
- <sup>8</sup> Heale, "Willoughby," *DNB* 21, 506.
- <sup>9</sup> Peter Colse, *Penelopes complaint: or, A mirrour for wanton minions*. Taken out of Homers Odissea, and written in English verse (London: Printed by [Valentine Simmes for] H. Jackson, 1596).
- <sup>10</sup> Colse, 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Colse, 5.
- <sup>12</sup> G.P.V. Akrigg, *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 216-17.
- <sup>13</sup> de Luna, 8.
- <sup>14</sup> de Luna, 101.
- <sup>15</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, "To the Reader."
- <sup>16</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, "To the Reader,"
- <sup>17</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, "To the Reader."
- <sup>18</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, "The Apologie," (1605).
- <sup>19</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, "The Apologie," (1605).
- <sup>20</sup> G.B. Harrison, *Shakespeare at Work*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958, 188). Quoted in B. N. de Luna, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 14.
- <sup>21</sup> de Luna, *The Queen Declined*, 2-fn.
- <sup>22</sup> Heale, "Willoughby," *DNB* 21, 506.

- <sup>23</sup> Henry Willobie, *Avisa or the true picture of a modest maide, and of a chast and constant wife Wherento is added an apologie, shewing the true meaning of Avisas: with the victorie of English chastitie, neuer before published*, (London: Iohn Windet, 1605), 66: 51-52.
- <sup>24</sup> de Luna, 56.
- <sup>25</sup> Sir John E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Pelican Reprint of 1952 edition, 1962), 241. Quoted in B. N. de Luna (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 62.
- <sup>26</sup> de Luna, 62.
- <sup>27</sup> Neale, 241.
- <sup>28</sup> de Luna, 46.
- <sup>29</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 41.
- <sup>30</sup> de Luna, 107.
- <sup>31</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 41.
- <sup>32</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 42.
- <sup>33</sup> de Luna, 95.
- <sup>34</sup> Charlton Ogburn, Jr., *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* (McLean, VA: EPM Publications, 1984), 739.
- <sup>35</sup> Ron Hess, E-mail message to 'list,' July 13, 2007.
- <sup>36</sup> Ron Hess, "Tempest's Red Herrings: Does 'Bermoothes' = Bermuda or 'Caliban' = Cannibal?" In *The Dark Side of Shakespeare trilogy*, Sections 3.B, 4.A.6, B.5.6, and C.3, (Internet, Willyshakes.com), <http://willyshakes.com/hesstext.htm>, (accessed March 9, 2009).
- <sup>37</sup> Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, 511-13.
- <sup>38</sup> Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford* (Liverpool: University Press, 2003), 120, 171, 205.
- <sup>39</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 42.
- <sup>40</sup> Ron Hess, E-mail message to 'list,' April 5, 2005.
- <sup>41</sup> Ron Hess, "Another Rare Dreame: Is This An 'Authentic' Oxford Poem?" *The Oxfordian VIII* (2005), 61.
- <sup>42</sup> Hess, "Dreame," 76.
- <sup>43</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 34.
- <sup>44</sup> de Luna, 41-fn.
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- <sup>46</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 40.
- <sup>47</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 65.
- <sup>48</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 43-44.
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- <sup>51</sup> de Luna, 27.
- <sup>52</sup> de Luna, 96-97.
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- <sup>65</sup> de Luna, 57.
- <sup>66</sup> Ron Hess, *The Dark Side of Shakespeare*, Appendix N, Draft (unpublished).
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- <sup>68</sup> de Luna, 111.
- <sup>69</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 61.
- <sup>70</sup> Willobie *Avisa*, 36.
- <sup>71</sup> George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres Bounde Up in One Small Poesie Gathered Partely (by Translation) in the Fyne Outlandish Gardins of Euripides, Ouid, Petrarke, Ariosto, and Others: And Partly by Inuention, out of Our Owne Fruitefull Orchardes in Englande: Yelding Sundrie Sweete Savours of Tragical, Comical, and Morall Discourses* (London: Imprinted [by Henrie Bynneman [and Henry Middleton]] for Richarde Smith, 1573), 345.
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<sup>87</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 41.  
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<sup>93</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, 57.  
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<sup>98</sup> Gascoigne, *Flowres*, 317.  
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<sup>121</sup> Willobie, *Avisa*, "To the Reader."

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