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***The Taming of a Shrew* and “Her Old Comedy”: Two Versions of “Shrew” for Pembroke’s Players?**

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The Taming of a Shrew is one of 5 plays published in 1594-5 that were “sundry times acted by the Right honourable Earl of Pembroke his servants” (Fig. 1). Three other plays performed by Henry Herbert’s servants were revised and included in the First Folio as *Henry VI, parts 2 and 3*, and *Titus Andronicus*. Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II* (registered July 6, 1593, a month after Marlowe’s death) was the only play that showed an author’s name on the title page.

Authorship of *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594) remains a controversial question, due to major differences between this unsigned Quarto and the First Folio version entitled *The Taming of the Shrew*¹. Herbert’s wife was the celebrated poet, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke². The First Folio was dedicated to the patrons, William and Philip Herbert, that is, the two sons of Mary Sidney and Henry Herbert. Was the Countess involved in writing or editing any of these plays?

Marlowe’s involvement has been discussed often because several lines from *Doctor Faustus* and *Tamburlaine* are quoted or paraphrased in *A Shrew*³. Taylor and Loughnane⁴ recently proposed that Marlowe wrote scenes for all 3 history plays on Henry VI (written c.1590-4) based on many studies of style and word use. Thomas Nashe was identified as first author of Act 1 of *Henry VI, part 1*: “There is also general agreement that Nashe wrote all or the great majority of Act 1”⁵. Each of the 3 plays on Henry VI required unusually large casts of at least 20 actors, using many props, such as armor, weapons and flags available from Pembroke’s armory.

--Insert Fig. 1 about here--

How did Marlowe and Nashe come to write for Pembroke’s players? Nashe (1591) and Marlowe (1592) each wrote prefaces that praised “Mary Countess of Pembroke”, seeking her patronage and poetic experience (see below). This suggests that Marlowe, Nashe and the Countess of Pembroke worked together on Henry VI plays somehow in 1590-4, and so may have participated in writing *A Shrew*⁶. The role of the Countess in choosing who wrote plays for

¹ See reviews by Gale, 2009; Eriksen, 2015; Pruitt, 2017.

² Waller, 1979; Hannay, 1990; *Tudor Times*, 2017.

³ Hickson, 1850a,b.

⁴ Taylor and Loughnane, 2017, pp. 490-517.

⁵ Neville, 2017, p. 2387.

⁶ Hickson, 1850a,b; Eriksen, 2005; 2015; Williams, 2012.

Pembroke's servants, and in revising and deciding what was included in plays and poems published in 1594-5, is considered here. Her possible influence on what was included in First Folio plays other than *The Shrew* and *Henry VI, parts 1-3* is not considered.

New evidence reviewed here suggests that the Countess of Pembroke wrote a 1593 sonnet entitled "Her Old Comedy" claiming authorship of an early version of "Shrew", as an Italian satire about "Gnasharduccio...the kill-cow ass", that is, Thomas Nashe. Although *A Shrew* (1594) includes quotations from Marlowe's plays, references to Nashe are not apparent. This evidence is consistent with Mary Sidney Herbert's support for Marlowe and her opposition to Nashe after 1591, revealed in his angry pamphlets of 1592 and 1593, and in her replies.

A Shrew vs. The Shrew. Many commentators have speculated on the possible history of the 2 published *Shrew* plays. Several have proposed that *A Shrew* and/or *The Shrew* was written as a revision of another earlier version of the play (often called the "Ur-Shrew") that was not written by William Shakespeare⁷. No text of *Shrew* before 1594 is available, however. Hickson and Eriksen⁸ both argued that Marlowe was author of *A Shrew*, based on quotations and plot structure. Taylor and Loughnane concluded, however, that William Shakespeare was final editor of early plays performed by Pembroke's servants, and thus a likely author of *A Shrew*.

A Shrew is shorter than *The Shrew* (1525 vs. 2487 lines⁹), but has fuller development of the framing story of Christopher Sly, at the start, middle, and end of the play. The story of a self-important drunk, who is found in the street and then fooled into believing that he is Lord of the House and of its Lady, is so amusing that these scenes from *A Shrew* are often added to performances of *The Taming of the Shrew*. *A Shrew* is set in Athens, not in Padua, with less development of the Athens settings in *A Shrew* than Italian settings and names in *The Shrew*.

The names of most characters are changed in *The Shrew*. Two character names that are kept are "Sly", the drunkard of the framing narrative, and "Kate", the leading lady, but not "Petruchio", the suitor. William Sly was a comic actor for Pembroke's players in 1592-3¹⁰. Katherine was the given name of the Herberts' first daughter, who died in 1584. Kate is a less submissive woman in *A Shrew* than in *The Shrew*. For example, after consenting to marry "Ferando", the suitor in *A Shrew*, she promises to become his "match":

"But yet I will consent and marry him,
For I methinks have lived too long a maid,
And match him too, or else his manhood's good."

⁷ Hickson, 1850; Houk, 1942; Duthie, 1943; Galey, 2009; Pruitt, 2017.

⁸ Hickson, 1850; Eriksen, 2005; 2015.

⁹ Lines counted in *A Shrew* (1594) vs. *The Shrew* (Pruitt, 2017).

¹⁰ George, 1981; Knutson, 2001a,b.

Word Use in Plays and Poems of Shakespeare and Contemporaries. Rare words used in First Folio plays have been compared in several studies, with many of the same rare words found in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI, part 1*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*¹¹. When plays of other authors were included, rare-word associations between *Henry VI, parts 1, 2, 3*, and *Titus Andronicus* were confirmed, with further associations to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, parts 1 and 2*, with Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, and with Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (written c.1592, published 1600)¹². Rare words in *The Shrew* were most like those of Nashe's only sole-authored play *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. Rare words in several First Folio plays were also found in Mary Sidney Herbert's translations of *Psalms 95-150* and of Garnier's *The Tragedie of Antonie* (1592).

Word-frequency studies featured in *The New Oxford Shakespeare* found that six First Folio plays (*Henry VI, parts 1, 2, 3*, *Richard II, III*, and *King John*) used word frequencies similar to those in 5 plays of Marlowe (*Tamburlaine, parts 1 and 2*, *Massacre at Paris*, *Edward II* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, a play with Nashe's name also on the title page)¹³. *The Shrew*, however, used word frequencies more like those in comedies of Middleton¹⁴.

Major poems of William Shakespeare (*Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*) were linked most closely by word frequency with poems of Philip Sidney (*Astrophel and Stella*), and Mary Sidney Herbert (*Psalms 44-63*), their niece Mary Sidney Wroth (*Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*), and their circle of poets, especially with Samuel Daniel's *Delia*¹⁵.

Together, these results suggest that plays performed by Pembroke's servants and published in 1594-5 may have been influenced by previous writings of Marlowe, Nashe, Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert.

Poets and Playwrights Who Worked with the Countess of Pembroke. While serving as a "maid of honor" for Queen Elizabeth, Mary Sidney Herbert (1561-1621) studied literature with her older brother after he returned from Venice and Padua in 1573. Together they led a "school for poets" at Pembroke's estate at Wilton House that continued after Sir Philip's death in 1586. In 1590 she completed her English translations of French authors Garnier and deMornay, then revised Sir Philip's major works into an elaborate folio, entitled *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*¹⁶ (1593; 1598).

¹¹ Slater, 1988; Jackson, 2014.

¹² Warren, 2003.

¹³ Arefin et al., 2014, Cluster 4.

¹⁴ Arefin et al., 2014, Cluster 2.

¹⁵ Arefin et al., 2014, Cluster 1.

¹⁶ Waller, 1979; Hannay, 1990; Hannay et al., 2005.

Twenty-four different authors praised the poetic achievements of Mary and Philip Sidney in 37 dedications written over three decades¹⁷. Among many poets supported at Pembroke's estate at Wilton House in 1590-95 were Samuel Daniel and Hugh Sanford, tutors to their young children. Sanford ("H.S.") wrote a dedication to Mary Sidney Herbert for the *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, stating that she was, in effect, co-author of this version of Philip's longest work.

Samuel Daniel travelled to Venice in 1590-1 before returning to Wilton House¹⁸ to write *Delia* (1592) and *Cleopatra* (1594). Daniel's dedication to Mary Sidney for *Cleopatra* states "I must so work posterity may find, /How much I did contend to honour thee." His dedication sonnet to *Delia* credits the Countess further:

"Wonder of these, glory of other times,
O thou whom Envy even is forced to admire:
Great Patroness of these my humble Rhymes,
Which thou from out thy greatness dost inspire:
Since only thou hast deigned to raise them higher,
Vouchsafe now to accept them as thine own,
Begotten by thy hand, and my desire,
Wherein my Zeal, and thy great might is shown.
And seeing this unto the world is known,
O leave not, still to grace thy work in me:
Let not the quickening seed be over-thrown,
Of that which may be borne to honour thee.
Whereof, the travail I may challenge mine,
But yet the glory, Madam, must be thine."

Her personal secretary, John Davies of Hereford, wrote epigrams in *To Worthy Persons* (1611) "To the right noble, judicious and ingenious sister of the never-too-much renowned Sir Philip Sidney: Mary, Countess of Pembroke". In *The Muse's Sacrifice* (1612) Davies praised the Countess' poetry and her self-sacrificing leadership. Davies promised to keep her authorship secrets: "(Oh do not tell) that still your favor seeks."¹⁹ These patronage relationships help explain how the Countess worked with Nashe and Marlowe in 1590-4.

Thomas Nashe's Preface to Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert²⁰. Nashe's preface to the unauthorized publication of *Astrophel and Stella* was registered Sept. 18, 1591, and printed by Thomas Newman. This text was imperfect and incomplete as compared with the later version in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1598). Nashe may have passed this text on to Newman without the Countess approval, when he worked for the Pembrokes in 1591.

¹⁷ *Tudor Times*, 2017.

¹⁸ Schleuter, 2012.

¹⁹ Davies, *To Worthy Persons*, 1611; *The Muse's Sacrifice*, 1612.

²⁰ Nashe, preface to *Astrophel and Stella*, 1591.

Nashe opens with admiration for Sir Philip Sidney, followed by self-praise. Nashe begs to be “excused though I open the gate to his glory and invite idle ears to the admiration of his melancholy... Long hath *Astrophel* (England’s Sun) withheld the beams of his spirit from the common view of our dark sense, and night hath hovered over the gardens of the nine Sisters,...But now that cloud of sorrow is dissolved which fiery Love exhaled from his dewy hair, and affection hath unburdened the laboring streams of her womb in the low cistern of his Grave.” Nashe aims, again inappropriately, “to procure his [Philip’s] violent enlargement”.

The Countess’ school for poets is then likened to “the Temple of *Pallas*...the springs of *Castalia*”. “Fair sister of *Phæbus*, and eloquent secretary to the Muses, most rare Countess of *Pembroke*, thou art not to be omitted, whom Arts do adore as a second *Minerva*, and our Poets extol as the Patroness of their invention; for in thee the *Lesbian Sappho* with her lyric Harp is disgraced, and the Laurel Garland which thy Brother so bravely advanced on his Lance is still kept green in the Temple of *Pallas*. Thou only sacrificest thy soul to contemplation, thou only entertainest empty handed *Homer*, & keepst the springs of *Castalia* from being dried up. Learning, wisdom, beauty, and all other ornaments of Nobility whatsoever seek to approve themselves in thy sight and get a further seal of felicity from the smiles of thy favour...I fear I shall be counted a mercenary flatterer for mixing my thoughts with such figurative admiration... Yours in all desire to please, THO: NASHE.”

Publication of Sir Philip’s unpolished manuscript with Nashe’s insensitive comments infuriated the Countess, who closely guarded her brother’s legacy²¹. Nashe’s preface was deleted from re-prints published after Sept. 1591 at the order of Her Majesty’s Principal Secretary, William Cecil²². This suggests that Nashe was not supported by the Countess after 1591.

Christopher Marlowe’s Preface to “Mary Countess of Pembroke”²³. After Marlowe identifies Lady Mary as Samuel Daniel’s “Delia”, Marlowe places her above others, as an immortal poet of virtue. His commitment to recognize “thy glorious name...on the foremost page of every poem” may have helped Marlowe earn her support.

**“TO THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS NOBLE LADY ADORNED WITH ALL
GIFTS BOTH OF MIND AND BODY, MARY COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE.**

Delia born of a laurel-crowned race, true sister of Sidney the bard of Apollo, fostering parent of letters, to whose immaculate embrace virtue, outraged by the assault of barbarism and ignorance, flyeth for refuge, as once Philomela from the Thracian tyrant; Muse of the Poets of our time, and of all most happily burgeoning wits; descendant of the gods, who impartest now to my rude pen breathings of a lofty rage, whereby my poor self hath, methinks, power to surpass

²¹ Hannay, 1990; Mentz, 2000.

²² Faulkes, 2007.

²³ Preface by “C.M.” to Watson’s *Amintae gaudia*, registered Nov. 10, 1592, from Eccles, 1934.

what my unripe talent is wont to bring forth: Deign to be patron to this posthumous Amyntas, as to thine adoptive son: the rather that his dying father had most humbly bequeathed to thee his keeping.

And though thy glorious name is spread abroad not only among us but even among foreign nations, too far ever to be destroyed by the rusty antiquity of Time, or added to by the praise of mortals (for how can anything be greater than what is infinite?), yet, crowned as thou art by the songs of many as by a starry diadem Ariadne, scorn not this pure priest of Phoebus bestowing another star upon thy crown: but with that sincerity of mind which Jove the father of men and of gods hath linked as hereditary to thy noble family, receive and watch over him. So shall I, whose slender wealth is but the seashore myrtle of Venus, and Daphne's evergreen laurel, on the foremost page of every poem invoke thee as Mistress of the Muses to my aid: to sum up all, thy virtue, which shall overcome virtue herself, shall likewise overcome even eternity.

Most desirous to do thee honor, C.M.”

Consequences. Marlowe’s appeal (“Deign to be patron...as to thine adoptive son”) led to support for his work on the Pembroke’s plays from early 1592 until his death on May 30, 1593. The title page of *Edward II* (1594) states in large letters “Written by Chri. Marlow, Gent.” just below Pembroke’s name (Fig. 1). Marlowe scenes for *Henry VI, part 2* were published anonymously in 1594 in *The Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of Lancaster and York*. His scenes for *Henry VI, part 3* were published in 1595 as *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York. A Shrew* (1594) included quotations and paraphrases from 3 of Marlowe’s best-known plays.

By contrast, Nashe’s opening scenes for *Henry VI, part 1*, were not published until 1623, 2 years after the Countess died. After Nashe was fired in 1591, Lord Strange’s Men performed this *Henry VI* as a new play on Mar. 3, 1592²⁴. The First Folio text shows evidence of Nashe’s 1591 writing in Act I, followed in later scenes by writing of Marlowe and 2-3 other authors²⁵.

*Pierce Penniless, His Supplication to the Devil by Thomas Nashe*²⁶. Nashe soon published a series of pamphlets expressing his disappointment, beginning with *Pierce Penniless* (registered Aug. 8, 1592). In the opening paragraph (p. 5), “Pierce” [Nashe, that is] curses his penniless fate: “But all in vain...my vulgar muse was despised & neglected, my pains not regarded or slightly rewarded, and I myself (in prime of my best wit) laid open to poverty. Whereupon (in a malcontent humour) accursed my fortune, railed upon my patrons, bit my pen, rent my papers, and raged on all points like a madman...Divines and dying men may talk of hell. /But in my heart her several torments dwell.”

²⁴ *Henslowe’s Diary*, 1961.

²⁵ See Taylor and Loughnane, pp. 513-7.

²⁶ Modern spelling edition by Nina Green, 2001, of Nashe’s Jan., 1593, 2nd edition.

Nashe proceeds to consign his patrons and Mary Sidney's circle of poets to various Circles of Hell, like Dante, while berating foreign, and especially Italian, influences. He is careful not to name his female tormentor other than "Dame Niggardesse" (p. 9). Readers of 1592-4 may have suspected the names of his patrons, that is, the Pembrokes whose servants had performed Henry VI plays "sundry times" by 1594. Nashe's subsequent career was supported, without reliable patronage, primarily by the meager income from his controversial pamphlets²⁷.

Soon after, Mary Sidney Herbert wrote a short satirical poem for Queen Elizabeth (likely for her visit to Pembroke's estate at Ramsbury Manor, Aug. 26-8, 1592) entitled "A Dialogue between Two Shepherds, Thenot and Piers". Nashe's character, "Piers", attacks Thenot's praises of "Astrea" by concluding each stanza with an insult, such as "Thou are so oft a liar"²⁸.

In the next month, Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*²⁹, a comedy about Will Sommers, jester for Henry VIII, was performed for the Archbishop of Canterbury at Croyden Palace. The old fool "Will Summers" humorously begs for forgiveness and for money from the court, on behalf of the playwright Nashe.

Strange News by Thomas Nashe (registered Jan. 12, 1593)³⁰. Gabriel Harvey's critique of Nashe's insulting behavior, entitled *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets* (registered Dec. 4, 1592), was quickly followed by Nashe's *Strange News*, which begins: "Gentlemen, . . . I would do works of supererogation in answering the Doctor [Gabriel Harvey]." Nashe pleads innocence, because he did not use the names of his patrons, "they that are ungroundedly offended". To shift the blame, Nashe calls "G.H. . . the kill-cow champion of the three brethren", that is, leader of the 3 Harvey brothers, Gabriel, John and Richard. He ends his introduction (pp. 6-8) "Saint Fame for me . . . Thomas Nashe".

In the body of the pamphlet, Nashe attacks Harvey with a line-by-line refutation of his words, concluding (pp. 54-5): "Lord, if it be thy will, let him be an ass still. Gentlemen, I have no more to say to the Doctor, dispose of the victory as you will." Nashe finally begs again for a patron.

Pierce's Supererogation, or A New Praise of the Old Ass by Gabriel Harvey (1593)³¹. Harvey used this controversy to defend the Countess against their nemesis Nashe, but also to involve her in the on-going "War of the Poets". Harvey's defense is supplemented on pp. 5-6, by 3 sonnets that Harvey introduces as written by "the excellent gentlewoman . . . my patroness . . . an enchanting woman with her white quill". The Countess famously wrote with a white swan's quill, as shown clearly on her official portrait in 1618 (Fig. 2). Above her head is the Sidney

²⁷ Mentz, 2000.

²⁸ Nichols, 1893, *The Progresses, Processions of Queen Elizabeth*.

²⁹ *Strange News*, 1600. Modern spelling edition by Nina Green, November, 2002.

³⁰ Published by John Danter and registered Jan. 12, 1593.

³¹ *Pierce's Supererogation*, 1593. Modern spelling edition by Nina Green, 2001.

family badge, a downward-pointing spear-head, or “Pheon”, crowned with a laurel wreath, coronet, swan’s quills and scrolls³².

--Insert Figure 2 about here--

Like Nashe and Davies, Harvey does not use the Countess of Pembroke’s name: “I dare not particularize her description without her license or permission” (p. 91). Harvey’s “gentlewoman...patroness” is described more fully on pp. 90-3 as an expert in classics, an author of 3 books, and the target of Nashe’s malice:

--“She hath, in my knowledge, read the noblest histories of the most singular women of all ages, in the Bible, in Homer, in Virgil (her three sovereign books)” (p. 91). The 3 books that Harvey refers to may be her unpublished translations of Psalms 44-150, *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (1593) and her French translations, including Garnier’s *The Tragedie of Antonie* (1592) on the death of Cleopatra.

--“She is...the gentlest, and wittiest, and bravest, and invinciblest gentlewoman that I know...And what if she can also publish more works in a month than Nashe hath published in his whole life...Her pen is a very Pegasus indeed, and runneth like a winged horse, governed with the hand of exquisite skill” (p. 91).

--“Whatsoever she writeth must needs remain an immortal work, and will leave...an eternal memory of the silliest vermin that she would vouchsafe to grace with her beautiful and alleective style, as ingenious and elegant.”

--Nashe is referred to as “the ass”, “St. Fame”, and “*Strange News*”: “*The noddy Nashe, whom every serving-swash /With pot-jests dash, and every whip-dog lash*” (p. 92).

--“The stay of publication resteth only at my insistence [which Harvey dated as Apr. 27, 1593]... were that fair body of the sweetest Venus in print [registered Apr. 18, 1593], as it is redoubtably armed with the complete harness of the bravest Minerva” (p. 91).

This line implies that both Harvey and the Countess knew the date of registration of *Venus and Adonis* by “William Shakespeare”. Several poets, including Nashe and Harvey, compared Mary Sidney Herbert with the Goddess of Wisdom, Minerva or Pallas Athena. Indeed, the Countess is shown as Pallas Athena with armor and spear on the title page of *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (1593). On the French edition for Marie de Medici (1625), Mary Sidney is shown on the frontispiece with the Sidney Pheon placed above her head, and called “PALLAS” in the poem below (Fig. 3). Does this imply that Harvey believed that the Countess held “the harness of” “Venus in print”? Her involvement in *Venus and Adonis* is discussed further below.

--Insert Figure 3 about here--

³² Williams, 2012.

To summarize, Harvey's patroness in 1593, who wrote her 3 books with a white quill, endured the wrath of Nashe, and was many times identified with Pallas Athena and Minerva, can only have been Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. This conclusion was previously suggested by McCarthy, and supported with abundant evidence by Steggle³³.

Harvey re-affirmed this conclusion by a short poem, dated Sept. 1593, asserting that his "Gentlewoman... Championess" used a "Phoenix quill" to defend Harvey against Nashe. Mary Sidney was later identified as "Philip's Phoenix" in the title of Hannay's biography (1990).

"To the Lovers of Admirable Works

Pleased it hath a Gentlewoman rare, [Mary Sidney]
With Phoenix quill in diamant hand of Art,
To muzzle the redoubtable Bull-bear, [Nashe]
And play the galliard Championess' part.
Though miracles surcease, yet Wonder see
The mightiest miracle of 'ninety-three".³⁴ [1593]

Her Three Sonnets (dated July 16, 1593). On pp. 5-6 of *Pierce's Supererogation*, Harvey's "patroness" blames Nashe for the controversy and ill will, repeatedly using Nashe's words from *Strange News*. These 3 sonnets thereby turn Nashe's own words against him.

The first 2 sonnets present her internal dialogue on whether to defend herself publicly or to stay silent. "Her Old Comedy" (Sonnet 3) is then identified as "Shrew prose" about "a glorious and braving knight" named "Sir Bombarduccio", that is, "Gnasharduccio the sole bruit of Fame". Her final message ("L'Envoy") is that "the kill-cow ass" is Thomas Nashe, who defamed the Countess ("poor lass"), and not Gabriel Harvey, who defended her.

If "Her Old Comedy" refers to the missing "Ur-Shrew", these sonnets describe her previous satire about Nashe, the pamphleteer who carelessly praised her in his 1591 preface to the unauthorized *Astrophel and Stella*, then blamed her in *Pierce Penniless* (1592) and *Strange News* (1593).

"Sonnet 1: Her own prologue, or demur. [Comments added here are mine]
O muses, may a woman poor and blind,
A lion-dragon or a bull-bear bind?
Is't possible for puling wench to tame
The furibundal champion of Fame? [Can a woman tame Nashe?]
He brandisheth the whirlwind in his mouth,

³³ McCarthy, 2000; Steggle, 2004.

³⁴ Harvey, 1593. *A New Letter of Notable Contents*.

And thunderbolteth so confounding shot;
Where such a bombard-goblin, north or south,
With dread pen-powder, and the conquerous pot?
Silly it is, that I can sing or say,
And shall I venture such a blustering fray?
Hazard not, panting quill, thy aspen self;
He'll murder thy conceit, and brain thy brain.

Spare me, O super-domineering elf,

[He'll murder me with his pen.]

And most railipotent forever reign.

Si tibi vis ipsi parcere, parce Mihi.

[“If you wish to spare yourself, spare me.”]

Sonnet 2: Her counter-sonnet, or correction of her own preamble.

Scorn, frump, the meacock verse that dares not sing,

[“meacock” is a word used only once in the First Folio, *The Shrew*, Scene 6, line 301]

Drooping, so like a flagging flower in rain;

Where doth the Urany or Fury ring

That shall enfreight my stomach with disdain?

Shall friend put up such braggardous affronts?

Are milksop muses such white-livered tronts?

Shall boy the gibbet be of writers all,

And none hang up the gibbet on the wall?

If dreary hobbling rime heart-broken be,

And quake for dread of Danter's scarecrow press,

[Why fear publisher John Danter?]

Shrew prose thy pluck-crow implements address,

And pay the hangman pen his double fee.

[Her “Shrew prose” will pay Nashe back.]

Be spite a sprite, a termagant, a bug,

Truth fears no ruth, and can the great devil tug.

[Truth will tame the devil.]

Ultrix accincta flagello.

[From *Virgil's Aeneid*: “Girt with the lash”.]

Sonnet 3: Her Old Comedy, newly entitled.

My prose is resolute as Bevis' sword;

[My “Shrew prose” is strong.]

March, rampant beast in formidable hide,

Supererogation squire on cock-horse ride;

[Nashe in the title of Harvey's book]

Zeal shapes an answer to the bloodiest word.

If nothing can the booted soldier tame,

Nor rime, nor prose, nor honesty, nor shame,

But Swash will still his trumpery advance,

I'll lead the gag-toothed fop a new-found dance.

Dear hours were ever cheap to piddling me;

I knew a glorious and braving knight,

That would be deemed a truculental wight,

Of him I scrawled a doughty comedy, [Shrew is her comedy about Nashe.]
 Sir Bombarduccio was his cruel name, [Perhaps the Ur-Shrew knight's name?]
 But Gnasharduccio the sole bruit of Fame. [Nashe's St. Fame, subtitle of Harvey's book.]
L'Envoy [The Final Message]
 See, how he brays and fumes at me, poor lass, [Nashe, the ass immortalized by her comedy.]
 That must immortalize the kill-cow ass."

According to my reading of these sonnets, "Her Old Comedy" was Mary Sidney Herbert's prose version of *Shrew*, written before 1593. Conflicts between Nashe and the Countess³⁵ in 1591-3 support the Countess's motivation to write an Italian comedy about Nashe for performances by Pembroke's players. According to the first 2 sonnets, she reluctantly added these 3 sonnets to Harvey's 1593 book, publicly mocking her enemy Nashe after he had insulted her again in *Strange News*. The personality of Nashe is presented in both characters, that is, the drunken "Sly" who dreams of being a Lord in *A Shrew*, and the bragging suitor "Gnasharduccio", who pretends to be a knight in the play within the play.

Her satire about Nashe was altered for publication of *A Shrew* in 1594, however. The revised comedy was re-set in Athens, then used poetic words from 3 of Marlowe's most famous plays. Most prominently, the opening speech of the Lord on page 1 that begins "Now that the gloomy shadow of the night..." is a mood-setting quotation from Doctor Faustus' speech just before the entrance of Mephistophilis (first performed in 1592)³⁶.

Nashe's words, however, are not immortalized in *A Shrew*, apparently to protect the reputations of the Pembrokes from associations with the troublesome pamphleteer. The decision of Pembroke's players to sell their costumes (reported in *Henslowe's Diary* Sept., 1593) may have resulted from their desire to withdraw from public conflicts with Nashe, rather than merely financial concerns³⁷.

The rare words in *The Shrew* are most like those of Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* among several plays tested by Warren³⁸. The sonnet "Her Old Comedy" repeatedly mocks Nashe's words in 1592-3. This suggests that the earlier comedy of Mary Sidney Herbert may also have used many of Nashe's rare words, and that these words were restored in *The Shrew* (1623). This evidence supports previous speculation that an early "Ur-Shrew" influenced both *A Shrew* and *The Shrew*, but in different ways³⁹.

³⁵ Mentz, 2000.

³⁶ Hickson, 1850a.

³⁷ See Knutson, 2001a,b.

³⁸ Warren, 2003.

³⁹ Houk, 1942; Eriksen, 2005; 2015.

Pembroke's Men: Performances and Performers. It is not recorded when or where *A Shrew* was acted by Pembroke's servants before publication in 1594⁴⁰. As their only published comedy, it occupied an important place in their repertory, especially for Queen Elizabeth who liked comedies. Her visit to Pembroke's country house, Ramsbury Manor, Aug. 26-8, 1592 was followed by 2 performances by Pembroke's players at court on Dec. 26, 1592 and Jan. 6, 1593⁴¹. These would have been ideal occasions for performing Mary Sidney Herbert's "Old Comedy".

The Italian Ur-Shrew was thus likely written between 1591, when Nashe worked for the Countess, but before the court performances at New Year's 1593. The Countess' satire about "Gnasharduccio" would be especially welcome after Nashe's *Pierce Penniless* was published in Aug., 1592. *A Shrew* was then written after her 3 sonnets (dated July 16, 1593) were published, with new names and a new setting, deleting references to Nashe, while recognizing Marlowe's plays. Although *A Shrew* was strongly influenced by Marlowe's plays⁴², these revisions cannot have been written by Marlowe who died May 30, 1593. This further suggests that Mary Sidney Herbert wrote *A Shrew* for Pembroke's players as another tribute to Marlowe after his death, and as a more-polite revision of her insulting comedy about Nashe.

Based on internal comparisons, Houk⁴³ proposed that the Ur-Shrew, was designed as an object lesson to Sly, the drunkard at the Lord's door, on how to deal better with women. Sly is placed on stage throughout *A Shrew* to observe the conflict and courtship between Kate and Ferando in the internal play. Houk's idea seems even more plausible given the ridicule heaped on Nashe in the 3 sonnets about "Her Old Comedy", which resembles the ridicule of Sly in *A Shrew*. Lessons on how to behave in courtship, and in marriage, would amuse the court, especially if the author was understood to be Lady Mary Sidney Herbert.

Actors' lists for Pembroke's players 1592-3 have been compared to those for Lord Strange's Men for the same years⁴⁴. Richard Burbage and William Sly were listed as actors for both groups, while Richard Burbage, William Sly and Henry Condell were listed for the Lord Chamberlain's Men and for Pembroke's Men. William Shakespeare, however, was not listed with any acting company until March, 1595 for the Lord Chamberlain's Men⁴⁵. The plays for Pembroke's Men, were written between c.1589 and 1593 ("Shakespeare's lost years") and then revised for publication in 1593-5⁴⁶. This raises questions about any involvement of the actor Shakespeare as an author of plays for the Pembrokes in those years.

⁴⁰ *Records of Early English Drama* (MacLean, ed.), 2018.

⁴¹ Nichols, 1893, *The Progresses, Processions of Queen Elizabeth*.

⁴² Houk, 1942; Eriksen, 2015.

⁴³ Houk, 1942, p. 1036.

⁴⁴ George, 1981; Knutson, 2001a,b.

⁴⁵ Schoenbaum, 1975, p. 136.

⁴⁶ Taylor & Loughnane, 2017.

Whom would the Pembrokes trust for final revisions of publications with the Earl's name on the title page? Mary Sidney Herbert had recently revised Sir Philip Sidney's work in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1593) and had proven unwilling to trust others to publish or edit Sir Philip's stories or poems⁴⁷. Marlowe and Nashe's prefaces to Mary, Countess of Pembroke, and their scenes for Pembroke's plays, suggest that the Countess was the lead writer, not only of "Her Old Comedy", but also of final revisions to *A Shrew* and *Henry VI* plays in 1594-5. She had the power to attract or to fire writers, to write plays herself or with authors of her choice, and then to edit plays for performances by Pembroke's servants, and for their publications in 1593-5. These conclusions raise many larger questions about how the career of the poet named "William Shakespeare" began in 1593.

***Venus and Adonis* (1593): Contributions of Christopher Marlowe and Mary Sidney Herbert.** *Venus and Adonis* is based on a story from Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As compared with Ovid's story, Shakespeare's version emphasizes the female viewpoint of Venus, and her inconsolable suffering at the death of the handsome Adonis. Buxton⁴⁸ proposed that poets of 1593 would recognize this as an elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sidney in 1586, especially since the handsome Sidney died of a wound in the thigh similar to the thigh wound to Adonis. Several poets of the Sidney Circle wrote tributes to Sir Philip⁴⁹ between 1590-3, such as those in *The Phoenix Nest* (1593) "set forth by R.S." that is, Mary Sidney's younger brother, Robert Sidney⁵⁰.

The title page of *Venus* quotes 2 lines from Ovid's *Amores*, Book I, XV, "*Vilia miretur vulgus, mihi flavus Apollo, /Pocula Castalia plena ministers acqua*". Marlowe⁵¹ translated these lines: "Let base-conceited wits admire vile things, /Fair Phoebus lead me to the Muses springs." These words urge poets to follow Apollo to Castalia's springs, where poets sought inspiration in Greece. In the complete poem XV, Ovid discourages poets from seeking fame for itself, but advises them to earn the laurel wreath through virtue.

The author of *Venus and Adonis*, thereby, urges poets to follow Sir Philip Sidney ("Phoebus Apollo") to Mary Sidney Herbert's school for poets ("the Muses springs") in my view. This quotation supports Marlowe's dedication to the Countess in 1592 that ends: "thy virtue, which shall overcome virtue herself, shall likewise overcome even eternity." I have previously argued that the poet of *Venus* was from the Sidney school for poets, most likely Mary Sidney Herbert herself⁵².

⁴⁷ Hannay, 1990; Mentz, 2000.

⁴⁸ Buxton, 1986.

⁴⁹ Hannay, 1990; Williams, 2012.

⁵⁰ *The Phoenix Nest*, 1593, "set forth by R.S. of the Inner Temple"; Hughes, 2003.

⁵¹ Davies and Marlowe, *Epigrammes and Elegies*, c. 1592-3.

⁵² Yeomans & Yeomans, manuscript circulated since 2018, available on request.

Many Poems of “Shakespeare” Have a Female Protagonist. *Lucrece* (1594) describes the suffering of a noble woman who is raped by the Roman general Tarquin. *A Lover’s Complaint* (1609) tells the suffering of a “gentle maid” who falls desperately in love with a handsome poet-horseman remarkably like Sir Philip Sidney. *The Phoenix and the Turtle* (1601) allegorically celebrates the love of a female bird and a male turtle dove, immortalized together through immolation. The final quatrain, ending “Co-supremes and stars of love”, associates the star-lover Sir Philip Sidney (“Astro-phil”), with his accomplished sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, in my view.

Mary Sidney Herbert’s role in patronizing or writing poems influenced by Marlowe and Nashe, and signed “William Shakespeare”, is worth considering⁵³. I have previously speculated that the Countess chose this pen-name in the Dedication to *Venus and Adonis*, as “the first heir of my invention”, using the given name of her “first heir”, William, and the Sidney family badge as her pen, a shaking spear. This pen-name was used 6 months after performance of Nashe’s play *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*, that featured jester “Will Summer”. Three months later the Countess ridiculed Nashe in the sonnet “Her Old Comedy”. Was “Will Shakespeare” a comic pen-name influenced by “Will Summers”? Was *Venus* also written by Mary Sidney Herbert with influences from Marlowe?

The Dedication of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, “To the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets Mr. W.H.” from “our ever-living poet”, similarly associates William Herbert, Mary Sidney Herbert’s first son, with the poet⁵⁴. Indeed, the first 11 sonnets begin with a family’s ambitions for a “tender heir” and a mother’s ambitions for beauty and reproduction. The final message of the poet in Sonnet 126 ends “Her *Audit...*/And her *Quietus* is to render thee”. Is the female voice of the poet in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* also Mary Sidney Herbert’s⁵⁵? If so, the astonishing career of “William Shakespeare” as an expert poet and playwright in the early 1590s can be understood best through the influences of Sir Philip Sidney, and of Christopher Marlowe and the University Wits, on the Countess of Pembroke.

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⁵³ Williams, 2012.

⁵⁴ See reviews by Duncan-Jones, 2010; Williams, 2012; Yeomans, manuscript.

⁵⁵ Yeomans, “The Design of Shakespeare’s Sonnets”; Yeomans & Yeomans, *Shakespeare’s Puzzles*.

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Figures:

Fig. 1. Title pages for *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594), left, and *Edward II* (1594), right.

Fig. 2. Portrait of Mary Sidney, Dowager Countess of Pembroke, by Simon van de Passe, dated 1618 on the scrolls. National Portrait Gallery.

Fig. 3. Left: Frontispiece portrait of Mary Sidney Herbert, for publication of *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1625) in the French translation by Jean Baudoin for Marie de Medici. Engraving of Jean de Courbes. Right: Title page from *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1598).

Pleasant Conceited

Historie, called The taming
of a Shrew.

As it was sundry times acted by the
Right honorable the Earle of
Pembrook his seruants.



Printed at London by Peter Shortand
are to be sold by Cuthbert Burbie, at his
shop at the Royall Exchange.
1594.

The troublefome

raigne and lamentable death of
Edward the second, King of
England: with the tragicall
fall of proud Mortimer:

As it was fundrie times publicly acted
in the honourable citie of London, by the
right honourable the Earle of Pem-
brooke his seruants.

Written by Chri. Marlow Gent.



Imprinted at London for William Iones,
dwelling neere Holbourne conduit, at the
figue of the Gunne. 1594.



1552
Right Honorable and most Vertuous
Lady MARY SIDNEY, wife to the late
deceased Henry Herbert Earle
of Pembroke &c.
As to be sold by William
Peele

Simon Passera sculptor L.

