

The Author of *The Wisdom of Dr. Doddypoll*

by *Charles Graves*

At the May 2015 de Vere Society Annual General Meeting in Oxford, the late **Michael le Gassick** considered whether the anonymous play, *The Wisdom of Dr. Doddypoll*, published in 1600, was from the hand of Edward de Vere. I would like to add my own argument in support of this claim.

Outline of the play

The play concerns a Flemish doctor called Dr. Doddypoll, who is courting Cornelia, the daughter of a jeweller. At the same time, a so-called ‘painter,’ a disguised earl called Lassenbergh (calling himself Cornelius) is courting the jeweller’s other daughter, Lucilla. The jeweller is awaiting the arrival of some noble visitors, among whom are Kathryn, Duchess of Brunswick, betrothed to Alphonse, the Duke of Saxony, and Albedure, the son of Duke Alphonse, who is in love with Hyanth, daughter of Lord Casimir. Meanwhile, Lord Casimir, a widower, is in search of a second wife and has his eye upon Cornelia. Casimir is a friend of the jeweller and admires his business.

The action of the play is initiated when the jeweller who, wishing Cornelia to marry one of the visiting nobles, asks Dr. Doddypoll for drugs that will make Albedure fall in love with her. It is then arranged for Albedure to drink Dr. Doddypoll’s potion by pouring it into his wine. However, Albedure does not fall in love but instead goes crazy and runs away into the woods, looking only for relief from the potent drug, which gives the sensation of burning. At one point, Albedure jumps into the water to free himself from the potion’s effects, and is saved from drowning by the jeweller’s servant, who is passing by. Albedure winds up swapping clothes with him, hoping to return to society anonymously. He also mistakenly takes a peasant boy for his beloved Hyanth, and aggressively handles him. At the same time, his father, Duke Alphonse, nervous about his upcoming marriage to Kathryn, is informed of this matter. During the play, the Duke pretends to be in love with Hyanth, soliciting her to be his mistress. This offends his son, though later it is revealed that the Duke’s presumed passion for her was feigned and that he was merely ‘testing’ his son’s love for her.

In the meantime, the jeweller, learning that Lassenbergh – who has been courting his daughter Lucilla – is not really a ‘painter’ but an earl, insists that the earl marry her. While the wedding does take place, Lassenbergh, being now ‘found out’ feels a slight to

his honour and becomes melancholic, abandoning his bride. The earl runs into the woods, chased by Lucilla, who is bewildered by his actions. In the woods, various fairies and an Enchanter meet Lassenbergh, Albedure and Lucilla. The fairies mistakenly give a precious bejewelled cup to the jeweller's servant when setting out a banquet, and the Enchanter reprimands the fairies for this. He also kidnaps the earl and his bride and even tries to woo Lucilla; but her love for her husband is unshakeable.

By play's end, the Duchess Kathryn convinces Duke Alphonse that their marriage should go ahead as planned. The cup that the servant was given by the fairies is presented to the Duke and Duchess for their approaching marriage. She also convinces Earl Lassenbergh that he should stay with Lucilla. At the same time, Casimir tells the jeweller that he wishes to marry his daughter Cornelia. Thus, Cornelia ends not with the proposed Albedure, but with Hyanth's father, Lord Casimir. Still, the jeweller's dream of his daughter marrying a nobleman is realised. The four marriages, Lassenbergh-Lucilla, Albedure-Hyanth, Casimir-Cornelia and Duchess Kathryn-Duke to Alphonse are consecrated at the end of the play. Dr. Doddypoll, who wanted to marry Lucilla is tricked into believing that he had been out-witted in his plans by a character known as 'the merchant,' and the play ends with the doctor blustering about how he had been fooled by him.

The Authorship Question

Clues that the play was by the same author as *Midsummer Night's Dream* (MSND) arise with the evident similarity of the Lassenbergh-Lucilla plot, which mirrors the episode of the young couples in the woods. Equally, an enchanter and fairies also had been at work to confuse the complicated situation of the various couples. In relation to Oxford's own life, the jeweller's daughters marrying into the nobility parallels that of William Cecil, Lord Burghley's family, with the marriage of his daughter Anne to the Earl of Oxford and daughter Elizabeth to William, son of Lord Wentworth. Problems arise for Oxford, however, when during his trip to Italy in 1572-3, he hears rumours that Anne had had an affair and that the child Elizabeth is not his own. Thereafter, he becomes estranged from her, and this episode may have influenced the Earl Lassenbergh scenario where Lassenbergh abandons his bride after being 'found out.'

At that same time, *Doddypoll* resembles two other plays, *Rosalynd*, which was published in 1590 by T. Lodge, and *As You Like It*, probably written after 1590 or concurrently with *Rosalynd*. In both plays, four couples are married at play's end and all wrongs righted. Nevertheless, the marriages are not thwarted by politics but by emotional factors. Lassenbergh struggles with shame at being discovered; Albedure



struggles with his lunacy, imposed by a trick involving Doddypoll, Florian and Cornelia; Duke Alphonse struggles with his hesitation to marry. Dr. Doddypoll's potion somehow ties all these marriage plots together, so that the doctor deserves a place in the title, as it is his 'wisdom' that reconciles all plot points.

The movement towards the marriage of Lassenbergh is only one 'marriage plot,' and since it opens the play and contains strong parallels to *MSND*, it seems to take on a dominant role. But Albedure's experiences do not obscure the fact that his father, Alphonse, and a leading character in another 'marriage affair,' is really intent upon having Hyanth as his mistress. Of course, this is proven not to be the case when Duke Alphonse claims that he is simply 'testing' his son's maturity. But Albedure makes some powerful negative statements about his father, calling him the traitor Nessus. These may reflect the problems Oxford had, if he is represented by *Albedure*, with his father-in-law, William Cecil.

Equally, there are some rather bizarre features accompanying the adventures of Albedure in this play. When he is running out towards the woods, Doctor Doddipoll meets him and he is called by Albedure 'Clio' and 'girl' (line 891), and Albedure says: "Thou must write Acrostignes first my girl," apparently referring to the sexual passion caused by the Doctor's potion. Clio is one of the Greek classical Muses, who is the "Muse of history, with a roll of paper and a chest of books."¹ In reference to the origin of Hyanth, who is loved by Albedure in the play, the author Robert Graves notes the following in *The Greek Myths*:

The youth Hyacinthus, a Spartan prince, with whom not only the poet Thamyris fell in love – the first man who ever wooed one of his own sex, but Apollo himself, the first god to do so;²

... but the West Wind had also taken a fancy to Hyacinthus, and became insanely jealous of Apollo... Hyacinthus seems to be name for a Cretan spring-flower hero ... elsewhere he is called Antheus;

... One of the daughters of Hyacinthus was called Antheis.³

Here we see the origin of Hyanth and associated characteristics. The mad Albedure, representing Edward de Vere, confuses her with a bearded peasant. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, by choice of the name Hyanth, the author was referring to Hyacinthus, a man wooed by Apollo. There was probably a reason for the author associating Albedure's beloved with a man loved by other men in Greek tradition. Moreover, when Albedure sees the peasant, he tries to tear out of him (male) the

heavenly signs of Hyanth (female). According to Robert Graves, the Erroyns are “personified pangs of conscience.”⁴ Albedure in his madness is confusing the peasant’s breast with Hyanth, his female fiancé. We have only to remember the multitude of sonnets addressed to a young man, whom we believe was Henry Wrothesley the 3rd Earl of Southampton, to highlight the ambiguity the Earl may have felt towards one of his own sex.

There is also a reference to the Greek classical traitor Nessus, whom Albedure identifies with his father Duke Alphonse because the Duke was trying to take Albedure’s love, Hyanth, away from him. This Nessus was a centaur and the god’s ferryman who took away Deianera from Heracles and tried to violate her.⁵ Heracles shot Nessus. Here is a reference to the ferry on Walcheren Island, and the origin of the de Vere name, as Vere is taken from the town of Veer in modern Zeeland, westernmost province of the Netherlands; veere means ferry in Flemish.

Aside from similarities to Oxford’s personal life, the main characters Alphonse, Kathryn and Albedure replicate three of Oxford’s most distant known ancestors: Alphonse de Vere, a Norman, who married Kathryn of West Flanders, gaining the title of Vere, and their son, Alberic, who was a companion of William the Conqueror in 1066. Thus, the parallel names and positions in society lend weight to le Gassick’s suggestion that *Doddypoll* was from the pen of the descendant of these historical persons. The cup of the Enchanter held by Flores and later given to Duchess Kathryn may resemble the ‘Holy Grail’ of medieval lore, perhaps referring to the fact that Kathryn of Flanders, wife of the historical Alphonse de Vere, was given Walcheren Island by the Holy Roman Emperor. Also, calling the Duke of Brunswick Constantine (i.e. Emperor Constantine of the Romans) again reinforces the idea of Middle Ages holy kingship.

Conclusion

What might the author be trying to say in this play? First, that Oxford reconciled himself to the fact that everyone wanted him to marry Anne Cecil (‘Lucilla’) and that he ultimately consented. He was, after all, the father of three living daughters by her. But there was another, more obscure, side to Oxford that was represented by Albedure, a name parallel to his family name. When he drinks the potion he is satisfying society’s preference, i.e. heterosexual love, presumably with Cornelia, Flores’s daughter. But Albedure’s true love is Hyanth, a name associated with Hyacinthus, an object of homosexual love in Greek classical literature. Was Oxford confused about his feelings for Henry, Earl of Southampton and did *Doddypoll*’s potion bring out this side of his ambiguous sexuality?



Moreover the two males – Earl Lassenbergh and Albedure – both have some direct connection with the events in the life of Edward de Vere. Thus it appears that both of these characters are autobiographical. This was also the case, in our opinion, with Jaques and Touchstone in *As You Like It*, both representing sides of Edward de Vere’s personality in relation to society. It may be that the author of *Doddypoll* included himself in his writings as a ‘double’ character representing the two aspects of his own personality. *Doddypoll* may then be a play of Edward de Vere about himself and his own experiences during the 1570s.

Additional Comments:

(A) Introduction of Flemish characters in play

Michael le Gassick had informed the de Vere Society at the Oxford meeting in May 2015 that in early July 1574, Edward de Vere hired a ship, with Lord Edward Seymour, and sailed to Flanders. There is speculation as to his motives, perhaps collecting the £15,000 Lord Burghley had promised him? By the end of July, having been recalled by Thomas Bedingfield, he was back in England.

Concerning the sub-plot about Earl Lassenburgh, I believe this may have some relation to the fact that Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, the Flemish portraitist, painted Edward de Vere’s portrait, though the date is unknown. Hauns (Hans) in the play, who sleeps in a servant’s bed with the painter ‘Cornelius’ (Earl Lassenburgh) calls himself a ‘Dutch gentleman.’ This differs from a Flemish one. Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger painted Edward de Vere, and this portrait may be symbolized in the play by Cornelia’s picture of Albedure in a little jewel.

The main character is called ‘Lassenbergh’. Lessines is a town in East Flanders, south of Geraardsbergh. The Gheeraerts family name seems to have provided material for the fictional name ‘Lassenberg.’ Thus, it appears that there were at least three factors which may have influenced Edward de Vere to pen a play with a Flemish setting: his trip to Flanders in 1574; his West Flanders ancestors; sitting for the Flemish painter Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger.

(B) Dr. Doddypoll : from Oxford English Dictionary:

Dodder is a parasitic climbing plant with leafless stems that are attached to the host plant by means of suckers. This is certainly the situation of *Dr. Doddypoll* vis à vis the main characters in the play. In the end it is he who remains unmarried (‘leafless’). Equally, ‘poll’ is a person’s head or scalp and ‘dotty’ means slightly mad or eccentric.

References

- 1) *Smaller Classical Dictionary*, ed. E. H. Blakeney 1910.
- 2) Robert Graves notes the following in his *The Greek Myths* Folio edition (op. cit., p.288)
- 3) Robert Graves notes the following in his *The Greek Myths* Folio edition, p.82
- 4) Robert Graves *The Greek Myths*, Folio edition, p. 504 on Nessus
- 5) Robert Graves *The Greek Myths*, Folio edition, pp. 396-7

