

# Detobel's Collected Essays

## PART III – CHAPTER I - A TO BE OR NOT TO BE MELICERTUS

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Among the pamphlets that swamped the London book market in the wake of Queen Elizabeth's death and James I's accession in the Spring of 1603, one has retained the attention of the literary world more than any other. This is *England's Mourning Garm ent*. No author's name is mentioned on the title-page; under the epistle to the reader only a motto is found. It is the same motto which appears thrice in *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*, namely: *Fœlicem fuisse infaustum* (to be happy one must have been unhappy) . But the author does sign the *erratum* note at the end:

### To the Reader

I love as little as any man to come into print: but seeing affection hath made me commit this fault, I pray you pardon it; and amend in reading the Printer's errors; where, being ill acquainted with Poetry, he hath passed Herores for Heroes; what ever else seems harsh, imagine I can write English, and make the fault not mine.

Farewell.      *Hen: Chettle.*

In a poem, purposely modeled on Spenser's poem *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, in which Spenser, returning from Ireland, greets his fellow-poets under pastoral names, the cunning imitator Chettle complains of the failure of several prominent contemporary poets to write an elegy on the deceased queen. Among these poets Shakespeare is unequivocally identified by an allusion to *The Rape of Lucrece*. The pastoral name by which Chettle addresses him is Melicert(us). However, Chettle uses the same pastoral name Melicert another time. One would naturally assume that within the same work the first and second

Melicert must be the same. But the first Melicert is mentioned as having been more or less actively involved in preparations to the expedition in the Low Countries in the year 1585 or 1586, which is incompatible with the traditional time-frame of Shakespeare's flourishing. Chettle would not have used the same pastoral name for two different living persons at the same time. Either the Melicert of 1585/86 is Shakespeare himself or he had died by 1603, leaving the name vacant, so that it could be assigned to Shakespeare. To be or not to be Melicertus, that is the question. Not to be in 1603, is the orthodox condition *sine qua non* with regard to the first Melicertus; to be places Shakespeare alongside with two statesmen in 1585.

Chettle himself adopts Spenser's pastoral name Colin, but Spenser had died four years before. He also uses the pastoral name Melibœus for two different identifiable persons, but one of them had died in 1603. The first Melicert seems to have been a prominent literary figure associated with Euphuism. It would make him a fair candidate for Shakespeare, and in 1603 he doubtless is Shakespeare. In either case we are facing an interesting problem. Either William Shakespeare frequented the court in the 1580s and thus was probably not 21-22-year old Will of Stratford. Or Shakespeare had a poetical precursor whose identity should be worth knowing. The third possibility is that Shakespeare's precursor was Shakespeare himself.

The name Melicert(us) is rife with associations. In Greek mythology he is the son of Leucothea, the White Goddess. Melicertus was also the name given to the Greek poet Simonides, whom Plato considered the foremost Greek poet of the time and Cicero called "suavis poeta,"<sup>1</sup> (sweet poet). Melicertus was a very suitable pastoral name for William Shakespeare, the foremost English poet of the time and, as many maintain, of all time. If the earlier Melicertus is not also Shakespeare, it seems likely that those who gave him this name thought him to be the foremost poet of the 1580s. It would therefore have been a suitable name for Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, whom Puttenham in *The Arte of English*

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<sup>1</sup> *De natura deorum*, I. 22. The way Cicero comments on Simonides is not without reminiscences of how Ben Jonson values Shakespeare in the First Folio. "Sed Simonides arbitror – non enim poeta solum suavis, verum

*Poesie* praised as the first among the court poets and of whom William Webbe in his *Discourse of English Poetry* (1585) wrote that “he may challenge to himself the title of the most excellent [poet at Court] among the rest.”<sup>2</sup>

Edward de Vere being still alive in March 1603, would thus be Shakespeare himself. As it is suggested by the context that the first Melicertus was a courtier, other courtiers known to have written poetry might also qualify as Melicertus in 1585/86: Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Edward Dyer, Fulke Greville, or Robert Sidney. But for the pastoral name Melicert to apply both to one of them and to Shakespeare as non-identical persons, the bearer of that name in 1585/86 had to be dead by 1603. All of the four mentioned alternative candidates were still alive in 1603, so one of them would be Shakespeare. The name would evidently admirably fit Sir Philip Sidney. He had died in 1586, so the pastoral name Melicertus would then have been vacant in 1603. However, Sidney must be ruled out, being named 'Philisides' in the same context. Sir Christopher Hatton and the earl of Essex, both known to have written some poetry, were dead in 1603, yet other elements considerably impair their claim. Once again, the implacable question with which Chettle's double use of the name Melicertus confronts orthodox theory is: who is the poet dubbed Melicertus in 1585/6 that had died in 1603?

The historical period in which Chettle speaks of Melicertus is the period preceding the war with Spain, not later than 1586, Sir Philip Sidney being spoken of as alive. Again, Oxford would pretty closely fit the picture, having been involved in the preparations to the war with Spain in 1585. The thorny question of Shakespeare's pastoral name was briefly debated in 1873/4 in *Notes & Queries* and in C.M. Ingleby's *Shakespeare-Allusions Books*. Oxford's name does not show up.

### ***The poem, pastoral names, works***

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etiam ceteroqui doctus sapiensque traditur – quia multa venirent in mentem acuta atque subtilia..” “Simonides is not only a sweet poet but, besides, a learned and wise man having many acute and subtle observations.”

<sup>2</sup> Smith, Gregory, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, p. 243.

However, the stanza in which Shakespeare is addressed in 1603 contains some details which are suggestive of a court poet. It reads:

Nor doth the silver tongued *Melicert*,  
Drop from his honeyed muse one sable tear  
To mourn her death that graced his desert,  
And to his laies opened her Royal ear.

Shepherd, remember our *Elizabeth*,  
And sing her Rape, done by that *Tarquin*, Death.

Would Chettle have been speaking “loose language” again? We have an allusion to Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*. It is further said that the queen “graced” Shakespeare’s “desert” and “opened her royal ear” to his poetry. The meaning of these phrases may be stretched to include other than court poets, but one would first think of a court poet, or a “companion for a king,” as John Davies of Hereford wrote in his epigram to “Our English Terence, M. Will Shake-speare,” a court poet whom the Queen had shown some favor.

The name Melicert already existed as a pastoral name in Robert Greene's romance *Menaphon*. In Chettle's poem most of the other poets addressed are easily identifiable, either by their sobriquet or by the work alluded to or by both. Daniel, typically, is not given a pastoral name but there is a clear allusion to his *Civil Wars*: “He that so well could sing the fatal strife/ Between the royal Roses White and Red.” Typically, because in Spenser's *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, Daniel is not given a pastoral name either. “Then rouze thy feathers quickly *Daniel*, /And to what course thou please thy selfe advance:/But most me seems, thy accent will excell, /In Tragic plaints and passionate mischance.” (ll. 424-427) Daniel seems to have stood aloof from the pastoral fashion.

Chapman is identifiable by a work, the continuation of Marlowe's translation of Musæus' *Hero and Leander*, and a name: "Neither doth *Coryn* full of worth and wit,/That finished dead *Musæus* gracious song," dead *Musæus* being Marlowe. Ben Jonson is given the name of his Roman idol: "Nor does our English *Horace*, whose steele pen/ Can draw Characters which will never die". He had been satirized as Horace in Thomas Dekker's and John Marston's play *Satiromastix* two years before. Hence, the latter two are also recognizable without difficulty as Antihorace and Melibœus respectively."Quick *Antihorace*, though I place thee here, /Together with young *Mælibee* thy friend." But Jonson and Marston seem to have been reconciled by 1603.

Drayton, too, is identified through a work of his: "No less doe thou (sweete singer *Coridon*);/ The Theme exceedeth *Edwards Isabell*,/Forget her not in *Poly-Albion*;" "Edward's Isabel" is a reference to Drayton's long poem on Edward II's favourite Piers Gaveston. *Poly-Olbion* was not published until 1611/12 but as early as 1598 it was known to be in the making. Chettle takes the pastoral names or sobriquets either from existing works (eg, Horace for Jonson) or in relation to such works (eg, Antihorace for Dekker). In any case he chose the names from a literary context, and the only literary context in which the pastoral name Melicertus occurs is Greene's romance *Menaphon*.

The problem with Shakespeare, at least for orthodox scholars, is that no occurrence of Shakespeare's pastoral name Melicert is known other than in Greene's novel *Menaphon*. This novel was published in 1589 with an epistle to the students of both universities by Thomas Nashe in which he speaks of "whole hamlets" or "tragical speeches," and Greene's description of Melicert indeed suits Shakespeare fairly well, but the date is again wholly incompatible with orthodox theory. Greene's description suits Shakespeare fairly well, but the date is again wholly incompatible with orthodox theory. Greene represents Melicert as the best poet of his time at a moment that the Stratford Shakespeare would have just come to London or would have still been living in Stratford.

### ***Shakespeare and his supposed forerunner***

*England's Mourning Garment* is a pastoral retrospective on the reign of the deceased queen. Elizabeth Tudor overcame factional strife and restored peace, Chettle argues. When it comes to the war with Spain, Colin/Chettle remarks that Elizabeth has been held responsible for that war: “And albeit I know some (too humorously affected to the Roman government) make question in this place, whether her highness first brake not the truce with the *King of Spain*: to that I could answere ... that her highness suffered many wrongs before she left off the league.” To which his fellow-shepherd Thenot replies: “O, saith *Thenot*, in some of those wrongs resolve us, and think it no unfitting thing, for thou that hast heard the songs of that warlike Poet *Philesides*, good *Melæbee*, and smooth tongued *Melicert*, tell us what thou hast observed in their saws, seene in thy own experience, and heard of undoubted truths touching those accidents: for that they add, I doubt not, to the glory of our *Eliza*.”

The three participants in the debate on the identity of Melicertus in 1873/4 were C. Elliot Browne, Brinsley Nicholson and C.M. Ingleby.

#### ***C. Elliot Browne***<sup>3</sup>

“I know of no other mention of Shakspeare under this name, but it would seem probable from the manner of this one that he had been previously, in some way or other, identified with Melicert. The other allusions of Chettle are generally appropriate, and for most of them there is other contemporary authority...Where did Chettle get the name Melicert? It is scarcely likely that he intended to allude to the son of Ino, who was no shepherd, but it is probable, I think, that he referred to the *Melicertus* of Greene's *Menaphon*, one of the principal characters in the most popular fiction of Shakspeare's old antagonist...”

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<sup>3</sup> On Shakspeare's Pastoral Name in *Notes and Queries* 4<sup>th</sup> S. XII, Dec. 27, 1873, p. 509-10.

Elliot Browne then remarks that the way Greene depicted Melicertus in his novel would well fit Shakespeare: “The character was evidently a favourite with Greene, who has put into his mouth the best poetry in the book. There are certainly some points of resemblance between Melicertus and the traditional idea of Shakspeare. Melicertus is a great maker of sonnets, and after his poetical excellence, the leading quality ascribed to him is the possession of a very ready and smooth wit, which enables him to shine in the euphuistic chaffing-matches with which the work is interlarded.” Elliot Browne uses exactly the same adjective for Greene's Melicertus as Chettle: “smooth wit” the one, “smooth-tongued” the other. And on the latter Melicertus he writes: “... there is another mention of Melicert and his works which has given rise to much speculation... Mr. Halliwell was the first, I believe, to point out this notice, and he considers that Shakspeare must have written some poem or ballad upon Spanish subjects, probably the Armada invasion; and Mr. R. Simpson believes that he has discovered a joint work of Shakspeare and Marston (Melibee), assisted by Rich or Gascoigne (Philisides), in a play entitled *A Larum for London*... I cannot bring myself to think that any one not labouring under the encumbrance of a theory upon the subject will ever find any trace of Shakspeare in this wretched production...” Perhaps out of politeness, Browne leaves Simpson's trio Shakespeare-Marston-Gascoigne uncommented upon. Gascoigne died in 1577, Marston was born c. 1575!

Having identified, somewhat pusillanimously, Philisides as Philip Sidney and Melibœus as Walsingham, he goes on: “Assuming, then that Philisides was Sidney, I venture to submit the probability that Melibee and Melicert were dead Statesmen, not living poets; that, in fact, the allusions in the political portion of the work are entirely independent of those in the poetical part, and refer, perhaps to Walsingham and Burleigh, who, with Sidney, were associated together in the popular mind as the three great leaders of the anti-Spanish policy.” Why Elliot Browne does not give any thought to the possibility of Melicertus being the Earl of Leicester, along with Walsingham the strongest partisan of intervention in the Low

Countries, commander-in-chief of the English forces, whose nephew and sometime heir apparent Sidney was, is not altogether clear. He goes on: "There can be no question of associating Melicert and Melibee with Shakespeare and Marston as Chettle refers to a period when Shakspeare and Marston were little more than children," a statement true for Marston, who would have been ten years old, but not for Shakspeare, born in 1564.

This solution is, of course, not wholly satisfactory. The author perceives it himself: "I anticipate the objection that the second part of my proposition may be said to weaken the first; that in seeking to dis sever the two allusions to Melicert I am depriving the supposed allusion to Greene's hero of any significance. But this must depend in great measure upon the question whether Chettle originated the allusion, or only applied it, and in any case it must be remembered that if my guess is right, the political Melibœus and Melicert had been dead for some years before their poetical namesakes were brought upon the stage."

But there can be little doubt that Chettle appropriated the name from Greene's *Menaphon*, as he borrows other pastoral names or sobriquets from literary contexts. Burghley's candidature thus grows very pale; he would fit because he died in 1598, but it is difficult to believe that the name given to the poet Simonides would have been associated with him. The same objection holds of course for the Earl of Leicester. Other difficulties subsist. Some of them were addressed by the two other authors.

### ***Brinsley Nicholson***<sup>4</sup>

Brinsley Nicholson insists that there is no reason to be in the least hesitant with the identification of Sidney in Philisides. He quotes several other instances where Sidney was referred to as Philisides, omitting the argument that the name, composed of the Greek "phileo" and the Latin "sidus," is just another form of Astrophel, Star-Lover, the name he took in his sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*. Nicholson points out that a pastoral name

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<sup>4</sup> On Shakspeare's Pastoral Name in *Notes and Queries* 5<sup>th</sup> S. I, Feb. 7, 1874, p.109-11.

cannot be treated as a nickname or pseudonym: “But there is a sixth and more cogent argument. It is a great mistake to suppose, that because one poet speaks of a friend, statesman, or other poet under a pastoral name, that such name became a sort of baptismal Arcadian name recognized and adopted by all. Even Spenser, though he had the authority of arch-poet, did not impose names used by all. Sidney he spoke of under Sidney's own assumed name, Astrophel, but Drayton calls him Elfin, Bryskett, Spenser's friend, Philisides, and A.W. Willie, probably from the Wiltshire stream that gave its name to Wilton, while Spenser's Willie, I believe, after fresh investigation, to be certainly, and in accordance with Malone's own belief, John Lyly. Here, however, there can be no doubt as to Philisides, for it has no meaning in Greek, English, or any other tongue, unless it be a Grecized form of Phil[ip] Sid[ney].” He delivers further evidence for identifying Melibœus as Walsingham, as not only Thomas Watson used that name in his elegy on him but, more specifically, Spenser remembered him as “good Melibee” in *The Ruins of Time*. Hence, the two uses are well discriminated, not only because Walsingham was dead and Marston not, but also by the different epithets “good” and “young.”

In the case of Melicert, however, the epithets “smooth-tongued” and “silver-tongued” are rather akin, as “smooth,” “fined,” “refined,” “sweet,” “honey-tongued” and “silver-tongued” were in current use for eloquence and poetical language. One can almost hear Brinsley Nicholson's sigh of relief at Elliot Browne's suggestion about the transferability of pastoral names: “Lastly, as to Melicert. I confess that the conjunction of Sidney, Walsingham, and Shakspeare was a strange one, I was inclined to think that Chettle could not have given the same name to two people in one book. But since reading MR. ELLIOT BROWNE'S note, and reconsidering the matter, I believe that the smooth-tongued Melicert of the Philisides and Melibee trio must have been a statesman or person of eminence, and the significant name Honeycomb or ‘he of the honeycomb’, agrees well with Ascham's notice of Burleigh in his

Introduction to his *Scholemaster* and with the description given for instance in Chalmer's *Biography*." But C.M. Ingleby demurred.

### ***C.M. Ingleby***<sup>5</sup>

He mostly quotes abundantly from the two previous authors but takes issue with the identification of Melicert as Burghley (Burleigh): "Clearly, if it be a condition of identification, that all three shepherds shall be poets, or at least well-known versifiers (and this is *prima facie* the inference from Chettle's use of the word *songs*), Mr C.E. Browne's conjecture, that the "smooth-tongued Melicert" is Burghley, is put out of court. Apart from this condition, we do not understand Dr Nicholson to give Burghley the decided preference over every competitor; for manifestly Lord Buckhurst would equally well fit the place, besides satisfying the condition of being a song-writer; and for choice, perhaps we should give the preference to the latter, as the associate of Sidney and Walsingham in Chettle's prose. Meanwhile the phrase "smooth-tongued Melicert" is perhaps too vague to furnish ground for more than a plausible guess... The chief point of interest in Dr Nicholson's paper, is the doctrine, now first propounded, that literary nick-names not infrequently lapsed on the death of their owner, and were revived in certain of their survivors... Thus Walsingham and Buckhurst being dead, it is the most natural thing in the world for Chettle to bestow them on Marston and Shakspeare."

### ***Conclusion***

Ingleby's condition that this Melicertus should be associated with "songs" is unnecessary. On the same grounds he rejects Burghley as candidate we would have to reject Walsingham. Walsingham has no literary record although his connection with the literary world, with Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Watson, and others, is well known. This is

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<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare-Allusion Books* , London 1874,pp.xiv-xxi.

confirmed in Watson's elegy on him but only in the Latin version. The line “Nec pectus varia suffultum Palladis Arte” (that death could not be prevented from taking him away, though his mind was nourished by the arts of Pallas), is missing in the English version.<sup>6</sup> Such a connection with the literary world sufficed for one to be spoken of as a “shepherd.” In Watson’s elegy, others are addressed as shepherd, Hatton, for example, also Burghley and the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard of Effingham. They are given the pastoral names of Damœtas, Damon and Aegon respectively. All four names occur in Virgil’s *Eclogues*.

It may be useful to look for what they represent there and how they could be related to a specific quality of the English bearers. Virgil’s eclogues are composed as dialogues between two shepherds, the first eclogue between Tityrus and Melibœus, the third between Damœtas and Menalcas, the eighth between Damon and Alphesibœus; Aegon is mentioned in the third eclogue. We cannot detect any reason for the four statesmen to be so called beyond the vague, general notion that as statesmen they cared for the people like shepherds for their flock. But if Chettle meant one of them he would more likely have taken the names from Thomas Watson’s elegy and not used the name Melicertus.

With his replacement of Burghley by Buckhurst Ingleby solved nothing. Based on Ingleby's own criterion Burghley, being dead in 1603, is a better candidate than Buckhurst, who, then still being alive, is thus no candidate at all. Buckhurst died five years later, in April 1608, a detail Ingleby seems to have thought not worth verifying. It looks as if he were content to have declared someone dead, true or not, so as to enable Shakespeare to take over the name. It seems difficult to detect an appropriate dead candidate, though the criterion that the Melicertus be dead does not logically follow from his being mentioned along with the dead Sidney and Walsingham. He might well have lived on. Nothing in Chettle's text suggests that he was dead. On the contrary, the use of semantically proximate adjectives in both references implies that the first and second Melicert would be identical, and would thus be

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<sup>6</sup> D.W. Thomson Vessey, Thomas Watson’s Melibœus in *The Bard*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1977, p. 163

consistent with the Melicertus in Greene's romance. On the other hand, Ingleby's claim has some justification. The quasi-synonymous epithets 'smooth-tongued' and 'silver-tongued' seem to point to significant literary achievement. As Ingleby wrote, 'the plot thickens'.<sup>7</sup>

Greene's *Menaphon* presents us with a Melicertus who accords with our traditional view of Shakespeare, sharing with him the same pastoral name. Chettle's *England's Mourning Garment* (a title borrowed from *Greene's Mourning Garment* evidencing Chettle's familiarity with Greene), takes over this name for a literary person who was somehow involved in the anti-Spanish policy of which Walsingham (Melibœus) and Sidney (Philisides) were exponents.

### **Greene's Menaphon<sup>8</sup>**

In Greek mythology Melicertus is a demi-god associated with the myth of Dionysus, hence with lyric poetry, theatre and music, and arts in general. Etymologically, too, the name evokes the idea of music and sweetness, smoothness, refinement and grace. The Greek words “meli” (honey) and “melos” (melody) have the same root. Brinsley Nicholson gives the meaning of “honeycomb”. Another interpretation is “honey-cutter,” a demon who gathers honey from trees and rock cavities.<sup>9</sup> The latter interpretation chimes in with the use of the word honey for poetry in Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (III.i) where it is said of Elpino<sup>10</sup>: “E stillar melle dalle dure scorze” (“and drawing honey from the rough bark”). Regardless of which interpretation one prefers, the very name Melicertus is strongly linked with “poetry” and “sweetness,” not only etymologically but also historically. As mentioned, the name (in Greek

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<sup>7</sup> Ingleby, op. cit., p. xv.

<sup>8</sup> All citations from Greene's tale are from *The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene, M.A.*, edited by Alexander B. Grosart, Vol. 6, London 1881-6.

<sup>8</sup> The name Elpino, 'the pine-tree,' carries an association with honey.

<sup>99</sup> *Pauly's Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Vol. 15.I. edited by Wilhelm Kroll. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlerscher Verlag. 1931, pp. 514-521.

<sup>10</sup> *The name Elpino, 'the pine-tree' carries an association with honey.* It is the pastoral name Tasso gives to Giovanbattista Pigna, secretary of state at the court of the Este in Ferrara, a man, it would seem, with little of literary value on record. It is interesting that the name 'Elphin' was also given to Philip Sidney, possibly in reference to Tasso's *Aminta*.

as Melikertes) was given to the Greek poet Simonides in the *Suida*,<sup>11</sup> a well-known Byzantine encyclopedia and familiar source for mythology in Shakespeare's time<sup>12</sup>.

The plot thickens. Oxford's candidature is supported by another passage in which Samela links Melicertus with Euphuism. Samela is the pastoral name Sephestia assumes in the shepherds' Arcadia. "Samela" is a transformation of "Semele" which is identical with "Selene," the Greek moon-goddess and mother of Dionysus.<sup>13</sup> "Sephestia" is a derivation from "sophia," (wisdom). Sephestia is the daughter of Democles, King of Arcadia, and the wife of Maximus or Maximus, as Greene also spells the name, the real name of Melicertus. The slight difference in spelling is heavy with significance.

Greene's novel is a romance. A romance does not lack psychological depth but it cares little for psychological and empirical consistence. The narrative is not committed to realism. As in Greene's *Pandosto* and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, the drama is set in motion by a king's jealousy. The king's decision to banish his daughter Sephestia and her husband is left unexplained, it comes down like a blow of Fortune: "But *Sephestia* thou art daughter to a King, exiled by him from the hope of a crown, banished from the pleasures of the Court to the painful fortunes of the country, parted for love from him thou canst not but love, from *Maximus, Sephestia*, who for thee hath suffered so many disfavours..."<sup>14</sup> They have been set

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<sup>11</sup> Suidas Anth. Pal. IX 571.184 II.1.45, quoted from *Pauly's Real-Encyclopädie*.

<sup>12</sup> The name was long mistaken for the author of the work.; it is now generally accepted that we have not to do with an author's name but with a word signifying 'bulwark', in the sense of 'bulwark against ignorance', denoting the encyclopedia itself. Anatole Fraunce, in *Countesse of Pembrokes Ivychurch*, leave G, has: 'Suida's faith, that in truth, they (mermaids) certaine blinde and dangerous rocks...'. Similarly Richard Linche in *The fountain of ancient fiction*, London 1599, P: ' *Suida* and *Fancrinus* report of one Lamia, who was a most lovely and beaoutous woman...'

<sup>13</sup> Other names for the moon-goddess Elizabethans were using are Cynthia and Luna. The following self-description of Melicertus is perhaps not without some biographical interest: '*Melicertus* no niggarde in discoverie of his fortunes, began thus. I tell thee, *Doron*, before I kept sheepe in *Arcadie*, I was a Shepheard else where, so famous for my flockes, as *Menaphon* for his foldes; beloved of the Nymphes, as hee likte of the Countrey Damzells; coveting in my loves to use *Cupids* wings, to soare high in my desires, though my selfe were borne to base fortunes. .. I fixte mine eyes on a Nymph whose parentage was great, but her beautie fare more excellent: her birth was by manie degrees greater than mine, and my woorth by manie discents lesse than hers: yet knowing *Venus* loved *Adonis*, and *Luna* *Endymion*; that *Cupide* had boltes feathered with the plumes of a Crowe, as well as the pennes of an Eagle, I attempted and courted her: I found her lookes lightening disdaine, and her forehead to conteine favours for others, and frownes for me...' (p. 67)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

out in a boat, are parted at sea, one thinks the other dead and at first does not recognize the other, so providing for a recurrent theme in romance, that of *anagnorisis* or re-identification.

Both have found refuge in the Arcadia of the shepherds/poets. Before even having heard Melicertus' first song praising her, Samela wonders: " May this *Melicertus* be a shepherd: or can a country cottage afford such perfection? Doth this coast bring forth such excellence? ... but his face is not enchased with any rustic proportion, his brows contain the characters of nobility, and his looks in shepherd's weeds are Lordly, his voice pleasing, his wit full of gentry: weigh all these equally, and consider, *Samela*, is it not thy *Maximus*?"<sup>15</sup> He is, of course, her Lord Maximus, and nothing in this description is incompatible with the Melicertus whom Chettle mentions in one breath with Sir Philip Sidney/Philisides and Sir Francis Walsingham/good Melibœus. After Melicertus has finished his first song, he meets Samela in the fields and extols her god-like qualities, to which Samela delivers an answer which makes Melicertus wonder. "*Samela* made this reply, because she heard him so superfine, as if *Ephœbus* had learned him to refine his mother tongue, wherefore thought he had done it of an inkhorne desire to be eloquent; and *Melicertus* thinking that *Samela* had learned with *Lucilla* in *Athens* to anatomize wit, and speak none but *Similes*, imagined she smoothed her talke to be thought like *Sapho*, *Phao's* Paramour."<sup>16</sup> The passage contains several references to John Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Euphues is an Athenian youth, Ephœbus an Athenian teacher, Lucilla is the heroine of Lyly's tale, and *Sapho and Phao* is one of Lyly's plays. But Lyly was not an aristocrat and is nearly as odd in conjunction with Walsingham, Sidney and the anti-Spanish campaign as Shakspeare of Stratford. Oxford, on the contrary, played a role in the period leading up to the English expedition in the Low Countries and was at first nominated General of the Horse, a major command which for some reason he did not eventually assume.

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<sup>15</sup> Greene, *Life and Complete Works of*, Vol. 6, p. 79.

Greene uses the name Arcadia in **two different senses**, in-court as the name of a **state**, out-of-court as the **world of the shepherds**, or the **literary world**. So we may understand that Melicertus/Maximus has been exiled from the court into the literary world. In the Arcadia of the shepherds, he is accounted the foremost poet, even Melicertus. Why, then, does Samela/Sephestia call him Maximus and not Maximius, as Greene consistently names him once he is back at court? “Maximus” is an epithet meaning “the greatest”. When Samela speaks of him as Maximus, she does not refer so much to his social rank but to his refined language. Therefore, “Maximus” should be understood as “the most excellent poet at court,” who according to Puttenham and William Webbe, was Edward de Vere . Indeed, once Melicertus/Maximus has returned to the court of Arcadia, Greene makes it clear that his true name is not Maximus but Maximius. Roman gentilitial or family names were formed by adding the ending *-ius* to the root. One of the great Roman leaders in the Second Punic War was Fabius Maximus. He was thought the greatest and therefore called Maximus, “the greatest”. The gentilitial name Fabius is derived from “Fab-us” (bean) by adding the ending *-ius* to the root. Maximius is the gentilitial or family name derived from the adjective “maximus”. Hence, the letter “i” changes the name from an epithet to a name of an aristocratic family. Greene seems to have used it to allude to the most prestigious or one of the most prestigious aristocratic houses in England. The threefold name Melicertus/Maximus/Maximius, then again would match Edward de Vere. He would have been considered as the best poet in the whole English literary world, Melicertus; he would also have been considered the best court poet (Maximus); and he was a descendant of one of the oldest English aristocratic houses (Maximius).

The dualism between court and country informs Greene's novel on the level of narration, and at the same time on the level of allegory. The allegorical thread sometimes

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 82.

supersedes the narrative. On the narrative level Sephestia and Maximus have been banished from court and are taking refuge in the simple world of the shepherds. On the allegorical level the world of the shepherds is the world of poetry: Maximus is a courtier and poet who has incurred disfavour and is living as a poet amidst common poets of whom Menaphon is the chief. Sephestia, wisdom, takes the name of the moon-goddess, the muse of both Melicertus and Menaphon. In a series of poetical contests, which seem mere interludes within the narrative, but on the allegorical level appear as the main theme of the novel, Melicertus and Menaphon are striving for Samela's favour, that is, for the laurel of the Muse, the prevalence in the world of poetry.

Greene was preeminent within the literary world outside the court, and this position could be allegorically grafted on Menaphon's position as chief of the shepherds. Melicertus had been a shepherd; a poet elsewhere, at court. If some features of Greene were incorporated by Menaphon, then Melicertus could have been lent some features of his rival, Shakespeare or his precursor. In wending our way back from allegory to reality we may be able to gather some information, however scarce, on the relationship between Menaphon/Greene and Melicertus, represented as the greatest poet of the time.

In the last part we receive at least a glimpse of a possible motive for the banishment of Sephestia (Samela) and Maximus (Melicertus). As in the case of Pandosto and Faunia it is incestuous love, actualized when Sephestia appears to her father Democles as a shepherdess. Democles decides to abduct Samela from the shepherds' Arcadia to the Arcadian court. Thereupon the shepherds, bereft of their muse, prepare for war against the king. The contest between Menaphon and Melicertus about the commandership of the army of the shepherds, which can again, be read as an allegory for what might have been a real source of tension in the circle of the euphuists: "What needs that question, quoth *Menaphon*, am not I the King's shepherd, and chief of all the bordering swains of *Arcadie*?" "I grant, quoth Melicertus, but am not I a Gentleman, though tired in a shepherdes skincoat; superior to thee in birth, though

equal now in profession.”<sup>17</sup> A gentleman, attired in a shepherd's skincoat, is an image for a “concealed poet” about whom we will soon learn more.

Thus Edward de Vere seems by far the most likely candidate for Melicertus. As he was still alive in 1603, he would be Shakespeare. It is incumbent upon orthodox theory to find another candidate, who, by the end of March 1603, had died.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.