

## Critical Introduction

### Personal contexts

It is ironic that the only existing portrait of Robert Greene shows not the man, but his ghost, hard at work at a writing desk strewn with the tools of his trade, his pointed beard jutting pugnaciously out of the confines of the winding-sheet doubling as a cloak (see Fig. 1). The image belongs on the title-page of John Dickenson's *Greene in Conceipt, New raised from his Grave to write the Tragique Historie of faire Valeria of London* (1598), but the figure of Robert Greene had been haunting the pages of Elizabethan print for almost a decade before this particular visitation. His presence may be sensed behind the narrator of Greene's own cony-catching pamphlets, the cryptically named 'R.G'. In *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit* (1592), which Henry Chettle allegedly assembled out of Greene's personal papers after his death, he drops the fictional mask suddenly to reveal himself with a flourish: 'Heere (Gentlemen) breake I off *Robertos* speech; whose life in most parts agreeing with mine, found one selfe punishment as I have doone. Heereafter suppose me the said *Roberto*, and I will go on with that hee promised'.<sup>1</sup> For a significantly long period in the fast-moving and notoriously capricious world of Elizabethan print, he continues to haunt the writings and the imaginations of his contemporaries – Thomas Nashe, Gabriel Harvey, William Shakespeare, Barnabe Riche, Samuel Rowlands, Thomas Middleton, Chettle and Dickenson, to name but a few.

What we know about Greene is conjured up from a combination of sparse historical records and these ghostly literary 'sightings'. We know, for instance, that he was born in Norfolk, since Greene's own signature records his regional background twice in his literary career. One Robert Greene, son of Robert Greene, was baptised on 11 July 1558 at St George's in Tombland, Norwich. Parish records turn up two likely fathers, one of whom is a local saddler and the other, a cordwainer turned innkeeper by the same name.<sup>2</sup> The saddler's workshop in Puritan Norwich would be an apt background for a writer whose narratives so often depict humble characters struggling against seemingly insurmountable forces that range from the social to the supernatural – vengeful landlords, tyrannical rulers, natural disasters, planetary influences and destiny. The cordwainer who had lived in Yorkshire from about 1571 to 1577, on the other hand, would better explain Greene's frequent dedications to south Yorkshire gentry in his early romances.

In either case, young Robert Greene's education at the local grammar school probably prepared him for his first major move from his hometown to the intellectual hotbed of Cambridge. The free grammar school at Norwich in the 1570s had close connections with the university. The headmaster, Stephen Lymbert, was a Cambridge man himself, and a number of Cambridge scholarships for Norwich students had been recently established by Archbishop Matthew Parker, who had held posts both as the master of Corpus Christi and as the Vice-Chancellor of the University under Henry VIII. Like his contemporary Christopher Marlowe, another scholar-turned-writer of humble background, Greene may have initially opted for Corpus. There are records of a Robert Greene who matriculated from Corpus in 1573 as a 'sizar' (a poor student who earned his keep by performing menial duties in college), and does not seem to have taken a degree. However, University records also show that on 26 November 1575, another Robert Greene entered St John's College, Cambridge, again as a 'sizar' and received his B.A. as a member of the same college in 1580.<sup>3</sup> Although it is uncertain whether both of these records refer to the future writer of pamphlets in London, changing colleges was not unusual in Cambridge. The

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (13 vols, London, 1881–86; repr. New York, 1964), vol. 12, p. 137. All later references, unless otherwise indicated, will be made from this edition and cited in parenthesis within the text.

<sup>2</sup> Greene signs himself 'R. Greene, Nordouicensis' in the dedicatory epistle to *A Maiden's Dream* (1591), and 'R. Greene, Norfolciensis' in his prefatory epistle to Thomas Lodge's *Euphues Shadowe* (1592). For the two accounts of Greene's parentage, see *The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene*, ed. J. Collins (2 vols, Oxford, 1905), vol. 1, p. 12; and Brenda Richardson, 'Robert Greene's Yorkshire Connexions', *Year's Work in English Studies* 10 (1980): 165–7.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed investigations of Greene's university record can be found in Kenneth Mildenerger, 'Robert Greene at Cambridge', *Modern Language Notes*, 64 (1951): 546–9; and Johnstone Parr, 'Robert Greene and His Classmates in Cambridge', *PMLA*, 77 (1962): 536–43.

unrivalled reputation of St John's, coupled with Greene's possible Yorkshire connections and the college's longstanding ties with the south Yorkshire gentry may explain his migration.

Sixteenth century Cambridge was one of England's foremost seats of learning, and the training ground of the country's religious, political and intellectual leaders. The university counted figures such as Thomas Cranmer, William Cecil, and Francis Walsingham among its alumni, while among its colleges, St. John's itself had a list of scholars that reads like a who's who of Tudor humanism, including Roger Ascham, Sir John Cheke, and Dr John Dee.<sup>4</sup> The typical Cambridge curriculum shows the influence of this significant inheritance. As an undergraduate, Greene's education in his first year here would have included the study of rhetoric in the wider humanist sense, progressing to logic and dialectic, and then to philosophy, both moral and 'natural', in the final year.<sup>5</sup> By the time he changed his affiliation as a student yet again and was awarded the M.A. degree from 'Clare Hall' (present Clare College) in 1583, Greene would have had to fulfil the usual requirements of further reading. Like a later student, John Everard, who entered Clare Hall in 1598 and reported studying metaphysics and astronomy for three years until he received his M.A., Greene would have studied philosophy, again, as well as the 'mathematical arts' including arithmetic, geometry, cosmography and astronomy.<sup>6</sup> Intensive study of the Bible and compulsory chapel attendance would have filled up the remaining gaps in the academic routine throughout this tenure. Greene's writings reveal the clear and unmistakable mark of this education. It is evident in his random but prodigious store of classical allusions, in his seemingly casual, nevertheless always accomplished, use of rhetorical figures, as well as in the religious fervency of his repentance pamphlets. It is an especially formative presence, as we shall see, behind his easy appropriation of astrological concepts in the *Planetomachia*.

There was, however, another turbulent side to Cambridge life, one that developed out of a potent combination of intellectual ferment and the material grievances of the students, and left an equally clear mark on Greene's texts. Tudor culture had always recommended education as a guaranteed means to social advancement. Even Thomas Nashe, the mercurial doubting Thomas of Elizabethan print, claimed in his *Anatomie of Absurditie* that '[i]t is learning and knowledge which are the onely ornaments of a man, [...] which maketh the children of the needy poore to become noble Peeres, and men of obscure parentage to be equall with Princes in possessions'.<sup>7</sup> Yet the truth was that by the last decades of the century, both Oxford and Cambridge had started to feel the after-effects of a heady mid-century educational explosion. When Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1533, the two universities had responded to a perceived need for trained officials in religious and lay administrative posts by significantly increasing their production of graduates. Soon they were producing at least a hundred extra eligible candidates each year for the steadily dwindling number of vacancies. The predictable result was a growing number of young scholars, increasingly frustrated with a system that had plucked them out of their familiar social backgrounds and yet eminently failed to sustain them.<sup>8</sup>

As one of the earliest generation of scholars who chose to seek out an alternative mode of living through the public arena of print, the steady stream of texts that Greene produced between his graduation in 1580 and his death in 1592 display a telling oscillation between flashy, defiant confidence and recurrent attacks of anxiety, disillusionment and guilt. He takes obvious pleasure, for instance, in advertising his educational and intellectual credentials on his works. His first published work, *Mamillia* (1583), identifies its author as 'Robert Greene Graduate in Cambridge', while the epistle to the second part of the romance was signed by Greene 'from my Studie in Clarehall the vii of Julie' (II.3, II.143). In various other pamphlets Greene is presented as 'Robert Greene Maister of Art,

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Nashe would later describe it as 'an University within it selfe, shining so farre above all other houses, Halles and hospitals whatsoever, that no Colledge in the Towne was able to compare with the tithe of her Students'. *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R.B. McKerrow, rev. F.P. Wilson (5 vols, Oxford, 1958), vol. 3, p. 317.

<sup>5</sup> By the sixteenth century, the topics and texts specified for study under the medieval divisions of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) had changed significantly. For further information about the studies undertaken by Cambridge undergraduates in this period, see Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1996); Victor Morgan, *A History of the University of Cambridge* (4 vols, Cambridge, 2004), vol. 2. The teaching of astronomy and astrology in sixteenth century Cambridge is discussed extensively by Mordechai Feingold in *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship: Science, Universities and Society in England, 1560–1640* (Cambridge, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> The *Responsa Scholarum* submitted by John Everard to the English School in Rome preceding his admission contains a detailed report on his studies at Cambridge. See Feingold, pp. 92–3.

<sup>7</sup> Nashe, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Mark H. Curtis, 'The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England', *Past & Present*, 23 (1962): 25–43.

in Cambridge' and 'Robertus Greene, in Artibus Magister', or even 'Vtriusq. Academiae in Artibus Magister' after he is granted a courtesy M.A. from Oxford in July 1588 (II.139, XII.3, IX.117). Within the narratives, readers are presented with a steady stream of bright young men and scholars, including that great hero of civic humanism, Cicero himself (*Ciceronis Amor*, 1589). Yet the ultimate triumph is always rendered somehow questionable by Greene's own rhetorical and narrative manipulations – his endless justifications of his chosen mode and style, and the frequent recapitulations of his protagonists. It is, for instance, only at a moment of placeless, desperate destitution that Greene's eponymous hero in *Francesco's Fortunes* (1590) 'calde to minde that he was a scholler, and that although in these daies Arte wanted honor, and learning lackt his due, yet good letters were not brought to so lowe an ebbe but that there might some profite arise by them to procure his maintenance' (VIII.128). Francesco is a precursor to the visitations of the 'R.G.'s and the 'Roberto's to come in later years. He decides that there is 'no dishonor to make gaine of his wit, or to get profite by his pen', and becomes a playwright in the city of Troynovant. Predictably, he grows so 'exquisite in that facultie' that his purse is 'well lined with Crownes' and 'his apparell in greater braverie then it was', but equally predictable is his final, sudden attack of guilt (VIII.129). Greene's narrative ultimately returns him to the wife and the simple scholarly life from which he had been seduced by the metropolis, which bears striking similarity to Elizabethan London.

For desperate English scholars, another alternative to Francesco's solution was to profess an interest in Catholic causes, which could secure the means of travel to Europe and maintenance in the Catholic seminaries abroad. Although no records of actual continental travel by Greene survive, *The Repentance of Robert Greene* describes how he struck up damning friendships with 'notable Braggarts, boon companions, and ordinary spendthrifts that practized sundry superficial studies', and he travelled into the hotbeds of Catholic conspiracies in Italy and Spain, 'in which places I sawe and practizede such villainie as is abhominable to declare' (XII.172). In any case, like his protagonists, Greene must have ultimately 'resolved rather to live by his wit, than any way to be pinched with want' (VIII.64). Between 1583 and 1586, he seems to have married and deserted 'a Gentlemans daughter of good account' (XII.177) and moved to London, embarking on a career that would turn him into the archetypal scholar-manqué, as well as the acknowledged leader in the world of Elizabethan popular print.

Contemporary descriptions of Greene in London conjure up a gifted, flamboyant, unpredictable and unconventional figure, and it is this literary image of the notorious 'Robin Greene' that offers to fill in the subsequent lacunae in our knowledge of Greene's life. 'Peruse his famous bookes', writes Gabriel Harvey in a wonderfully breathless rush of invectives:

... and in steede of *Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci* (that forsooth was his professed Poesie) Loe a wilde head, ful of mad braine and a thousande crotchets: A scholler, a Discourser, a Courtier, a ruffian, a Gamester, a Louer, a Souldier, a travailer, a Merchaunt, a Broker, an Artificer, a Botcher, a Pettifogger, a Player, a Coosener, a Rayler, a beggar, an Omnigatherum, a Gay nothing, a stoarehouse of bald and baggage stufe, unwoorth the answering, or reading; a trivial, and triobolar Autor for knaves, & fooles: an Image of Idleness, an Epitome of fantasticalitie, a Mirrour of Vanitie.<sup>9</sup>

Harvey, himself an ambitious Cambridge scholar, is disgusted by Greene's 'fonde disguisinge of a Maister of Arte with ruffianly haire, unseemely apparell, and more unseemelye Company.'<sup>10</sup> Even Greene's own publisher claims that he was 'wise, learned and polliticke, had not his lascivious life withdrawen him from those studies which had been far more profitable to him' (XII.156). Understandably, on the other hand, his friends and acquaintances emphasize the glamour of a life lived in the fast lane. Their Greene is a hard-drinking, quick-witted and equally quick-tempered man's man. He dressed 'after the habite of a schollerlike Gentleman', records Henry Chettle, 'onely his haire was somewhat long.'<sup>11</sup> Thomas Nashe, who knew him well, tells readers how Greene 'cherisht' a red beard 'whereat a man might hang a Jewell, it was so sharpe and pendant', and wrote only 'to have a spel in his purse to conjure up a good cuppe of wine with at all times.' He 'might have writ another *Galataeo* of manners' (the reference is to Giovanni Della Casa's 1558 treatise on courtesy and deportment, *Il Galateo*), but was eminently capable of making opponents like Gabriel Harvey literally eat their words.

<sup>9</sup> Gabriel Harvey, *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets, especially touching Robert Greene and other Parties by him Abused* (1592), ed. G.B. Harrison (Edinburgh, 1966), p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Chettle, *Kind-Hartes Dreame 1592, and William Kemp, Nine Daies Wonder 1600*, ed. G.B. Harrison (London, 1923), p. 13.

Greene 'would have made thee an example of ignominy to all ages that are to come, and driven thee to eate thy owne booke butterd', Nashe warns Harvey, 'as I sawe him make an Apparriter once in a Tavern eate his Citation, waxe and all, very handsomly serv'd twixt two dishes.'<sup>12</sup> In the two years preceding these recollections and condemnations – the last two years of his life – Greene himself had done as much to promote and exploit this authorial image with its *frisson* of disreputability and danger as any of his contemporaries. At his point of entry into the literary world in the 1580s, however, the younger Greene had had a different persona to emulate.

'*Euphues* I readd when I was a little ape in Cambridge, and I then thought it was *Ipse ille*', wrote Nashe, and in many ways, the fashionable Italian setting and rhetorical displays in Greene's first publication suggest that young Greene would have shared his view.<sup>13</sup> Although the earliest extant edition of *Mamillia, A Mirrour or looking glasse for the Ladies of Englande* is dated 1583, the romance actually had been entered in the Stationers' Register on 3 October 1580, which makes Greene's initial venture into the market of print concomitant with his graduation from St John's and the publication of the second volume of John Lyly's *Euphues*. *Mamillia* shows the same mixture of fascination and anxiety about youthful 'wit' and desire that shapes Lyly's two volumes, *Euphues: the Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and *Euphues and his England* (1580). As a first work, however, it also introduces readers to an authorial stance that they would learn to expect in Greene's texts. Using Lyly's own literary style, *Mamillia* presents a love-triangle between two constant women and one fickle man, which is a near-parodic inversion of the Euphues-Philautus-Lucilla triangle that occupied the narrative centre in *Euphues*. This implicit defence of women is a significant first sign of Greene's sensitivity to the movement of literary trends, and of his future reputation as the 'Homer of Women', as Nashe termed him, not altogether in admiration.<sup>14</sup> But by putting the wit of his Euphuistic hero, Pharicles, on trial for its ethical lapses, Greene also neatly undermines the authorial 'wit' of his predecessor. Lyly's criticism of women in the first *Euphues* volume had evoked a strong response from its readers, and in *Euphues and his England*, he had been forced to make amends for his earlier misogyny. *Mamillia* posits its young writer not only as a successor, but also a challenger to Lyly's pre-eminent position as a producer of urbane fictions.

The success of Greene's initial venture is confirmed by the quick succession of three more Euphuistic romances, all printed in 1584: *Gwydonius*, *The Card of Fancie*, *Arbasto*, *the Anatomie of Fortune*, and *Morando, the Tritameron of Love*. Slightly distinct from this group is *The Myrroure of Modestie*, a retelling of the Apocryphal story of Susanna and the elders. Together these four texts mark out the range of Greene's primary concerns in the early years of his literary career – his interest in the figure of the culpable yet attractive youthful sophisticate on the one hand, and his investment in women and in the unpredictable nature of relationships between men and women, on the other. *Morando*, in addition, serves to indicate the future direction of Greene's writing, combining a humanist debate in the style of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* with the narrative promise of its title. However, while the titular 'Tritameron' may gesture significantly at the continental framework tales such as Boccaccio's *Decameron* and the *Heptameron* of Marguerite de Navarre, *Morando* itself focuses almost exclusively on the device of the formal debate. In the space of three nights, its group of courtly gentlemen and ladies discuss whether 'Love doth much, but money doth all', whether 'it be good to love or no' and whether 'women are more subject unto love then men' with very little actual action other than the tripartite exchange (III.61, 84, 99). Greene's readers would have to wait some time before he would present them with texts that exploit the full narrative potential of the framework tale.

The two years following the heady success of these first romances marks a relatively quiet period in Greene's career. If we take Greene's purported autobiography in *The Repentance of Robert Greene* (1592) at its word, this period of literary inactivity seems to have coincided with his marriage and fatherhood. His deathbed plea for forgiveness from his 'deare Wife, whose company and sight I have refrained these sixe yeares' (XII.178) in the *Repentance* certainly marks 1586 as the year of Greene's desertion. Whatever the reason, Elizabethan readers seeking his fashionable 'amorous discourses' in 1585–86 would find only an odd trio of new books by Greene in the shops. *Planetomachia* is the first of these. It is followed by *An Oration or Funerall Sermon*, a strange production that offers an annotated translation of a sermon delivered at the funeral of Pope Gregory XIII, apparently appropriated into the anti-Catholic arsenal as 'a prooffe or caveat for the godly to beware of their poysoned potions.' The second part of *Morando, the Tritameron of Love* comes last, entered in the Stationers' Register on 8

<sup>12</sup> Nashe, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 287, 330, 271.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

August 1586. A renewed spate of publications would begin in the following year: *Penelopes Web* (1587), *Euphues his Censure* (1587), *Perimedes the Blacksmith* (1588). By the time *Alcida* is entered in the Stationers' Register on 9 December 1588, the success of his texts had already begun to transform Robert Greene into an identifiable literary brand name. 'Even Guicciardines silver historie, and Ariostos golden Cantoes grow out of request', Gabriel Harvey would later claim, 'the *Countesse of Pembrookes* Arcadia is not greene inough for queasie stomackes, but they must have *Greenes* Arcadia, and I beleeve most eagerlie longed for *Greenes* Faerie Queene. O straunge fancies: o monstrous newfanglednesse'.<sup>15</sup> Titles such as *Alcida Greenes Metamorphosis*, *Greenes Orpharion* (1590), *Greenes Never Too Late* (first extant edition, 1590), *Greenes Mourning Garment* (1590) and *Greenes Farewell to Folly* (1591) prove his fears right. Even previously published texts would be renamed in the wake of this popularity. *Menaphon* (1589), previously subtitled 'Camillas Alarum to slumbering Euphues', is called *Greenes Arcadia* in posthumous editions, while the fourth edition of *Gwydonius* in 1608 is renamed *Greenes Card of Fancie*.

Greene's phenomenal success depended on a crucial combination: his unerring sense of the developing literary trends and tastes, his ability to identify and assimilate the needs, fashions and fantasies of a rapidly growing readership, and his speed in adapting to the demands of this notoriously changeable market. Thomas Nashe later comments that 'in a night & a day would he have yarkt up a Pamphlet as well as in seaven yeare, and glad was that Printer that might bee so blest to pay him deare for the very dregs of his wit.'<sup>16</sup> Title pages and the Stationers' Register bear out his claims. Among the list of printers and publishers of Greene's works are names that shaped the Elizabethan print market, such as John Wolfe and William Ponsonbie. Almost all of Greene's texts of this first decade went through multiple editions before the end of the century, and at least one, *Pandosto, The Triumph of Time* (1588), was assured of future fame when Shakespeare drew on it extensively for his *Winter's Tale*.

*Pandosto* itself falls among a group of texts produced by Greene between 1588–89, which perfectly illustrate his chameleonic versatility. Within this very brief period, the experimentation with the framework tale and the Italian novella in *Perimedes* and *Alcida* make way for *Pandosto* and *Menaphon*, which tap into the contemporary interest in the Hellenistic and continental romances and pastorals. Both Heliodorus's *Aetheopica* and Angel Day's recent translation of *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus (1587) leave their mark on Greene's narratives, just as they would on Sir Philip Sidney's roughly contemporaneous *Arcadia*, with which *Menaphon* is often compared. In Greene's hands, these later romances combine the trademark sweep of time and space of the Greek romances, as well as their characteristic intricacies of plot, style and their emphasis on Fortune, with the cultural dichotomies and anxieties inherent in the contemporary pastoral romances. However, even as this process of assimilation and adaptation continues, *The Spanish Masquerado* (1589) explores a very different vein, celebrating the recent defeat of the Spanish Armada through a series of twelve emblems, each accompanied by a Latin motto and an English gloss. This text, published apparently 'least I might be thought to tie my selfe wholly to amorous conceites' (V.241), is nevertheless followed by *Ciceronis Amor* (1589) – a startling romance that is humanist at its very core, claiming to 'pen downe the loves of Cicero, which *Plutarch*, and *Cornelius Nepos*, forgot in their writings' (VII.100).

Among the romances, *Pandosto* and *Ciceronis Amor* were decidedly Greene's biggest commercial successes, with reprints, adaptations and literary references continuing well into the seventeenth century, but new signs of change were set to appear in Greene's writing. In 1589, Thomas Nashe's debut in print with a preface to Greene's *Menaphon* had indulged in a degree of self-advertisement, promising readers that his forthcoming '*Anatomie of Absurdities* may acquaint you ere long with my skill in surgery, wherein the diseases of Art [are] more merrily discovered' (VI.27). When the *Anatomy* was published the next year, Greene would have found himself implicated in Nashe's text as one of those writers of 'amorous discourses' who are charged with imitating 'afresh the fantastick dreames of those exiled *Abbie-lubbers*.'<sup>17</sup> Nashe's insinuation of corrupting Catholic influence was especially damaging at a time when the scare of the Spanish Armada had brought home the possibility of a Catholic invasion like never before, and it has been suggested as a primary factor in bringing about Greene's sudden 'adieu to all amorous Pamphlets' (VIII.109) in the 1590s. The alteration, however, is more in Greene's explicit presentation of his authorial intentions than in the form or content of the texts. Although *Greenes Mourning Garment* claims 'unfained repentance' and promises a complete

<sup>15</sup> Harvey, *Four Letters*, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Nashe, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 287.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

transition from ‘wanton workes to effectual labours’ (IX.120), for instance, its story of Rabbi Bilessi and his rebellious son, Philador, is merely an explicit retelling of the prodigal motif Greene had frequently used in his earlier narratives. The dependence on the format of debate and continental framework tales in *Greenes Orpharion* (1590) and *Greenes Farewell to Folly* (1591) has similarly raised conjectures that Greene may have been reusing previously written material. It is only in the latent realism and seemingly autobiographical references in *Greenes Neuer Too Late* and its sequel, *Francesco’s Fortunes* (1590), that a certain change of focus becomes apparent. Francesco’s Troynovaunt, with its crowds, playhouses, actors and devious, money-grabbing women, is only a step away from the bustling Elizabethan London that would occupy the center stage in Greene’s final publications.

Between the winter of 1591 and his death in the autumn of 1592, Greene produced six pamphlets about the devious London criminals, the wily ‘cony-catchers’, and their victims, the duped ‘conies’ or rabbits. There had been other books about rogues and vagabonds before, but Greene’s collections of cony-catching tales became the most spectacular publishing success of all. Each had a second edition within months after its initial appearance. The first pamphlet, *A Notable Discovery of Coosenage*, went into a remarkable four editions within a space of twelve months. Greene’s previously recurrent defences of his style and content, as well as his exercises in humanist imitation and scholarship in texts such as *Planetomachia* and *Ciceronis Amor* may have attempted to reaffirm his status as a scholar despite his involvement in print. The cony-catching pamphlets, however, make his involvement in the culpable London print market an intrinsic part of both his intellectual authority and his authorial voice. The narrator, ‘R.G.’, the daring investigator of the Elizabethan underworld, metamorphoses the fall of ‘Robin Greene’ into a version of civic humanism through his patriotic self-sacrifice: ‘The odde mad-caps I have beene mate too, not as a companion, but as a spie to have an insight into their knaveries, that seeing their traines I might eschew their snares [...and] forewarne in others to my countries commodity’ (X.5). In the final texts of the series, narrator ‘R.G.’ becomes a hero in his own right, whose actions and publications are followed with equal eagerness both by the public and the cony-catchers themselves. ‘I heard some [cony-catchers] named the other day as I was drinking at the Swanne [...but] it were a shame for me to speake against any good wenches or boon Companions [...] I feare me R.G. will name them to soone in his black booke’, says Nan the prostitute in Greene’s fourth cony-catching pamphlet, *A Disputation between a Hee Cony-catcher and a Shee Cony-catcher* (X.225). ‘I began to enquire what this R.G. should bee. At last I learned that hee was a scholler, and a Maister of Artes, and a Conny-catcher in his kinde, though not at cards, and one that favoured good fellows, so they were not palpable offenders in such desperate lawes’, reports ‘Cuthbert Cunny-catcher’ in the anonymous *Defence of Cony-catching* (XI.47), often attributed to Greene himself.

Despite the substantial change of focus in these years, Greene would continue to return to the literary forms he had explored in earlier texts. Thus the *Disputation* and the immensely popular *Quip For an Upstart Courtier* (1592) both go back to the humanist debate, while *Philomela, the Lady Fitzwaters Nightingale* (1592), which Greene says he ‘had written long since’ (XI.109) is strongly reminiscent of his earlier romances in defence of feminine patience and chastity. By the end of his career, Greene, like his Francesco, Roberto, and Philadors, had also established himself as one of the major playwrights of the period, although exact dates are uncertain, and none were printed until after his death. The plays range from the Marlovian *Comicall Historie of Alphonsus, King of Aragon* and the pastoral *Historie of Orlando Furioso*, to civic commentary and scriptural allusion in *A Looking Glasse for London and England*, and the creation of a new form of romantic comedy in *The Honorable Historie of Friar Bacon and Friar Bongay* and *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth*.

Greene died on 3 September 1592, apparently after an illness brought on by a fatal ‘surfett’ of ‘pickle herringe and rennish wine’. An extraordinary flurry of pamphlets both from friends and enemies followed. As one of the first to enter the fray, Gabriel Harvey reported Greene’s death ‘in a shoemakers house near Dow-gate’ with a certain degree of self-righteous satisfaction. Penniless, ‘attended by lice’ and mourned only by his landlady, Mistress Isam, and his ‘sorry ragged’ mistress, the sister of ‘Cutting’ Ball, the cutpurse, Greene left behind a legacy of ‘impudent pamphletting’, an illegitimate son named ‘Fortunatus’, and a £10 debt to the shoemaker which he begged his estranged wife to repay.<sup>18</sup> His dispute with Harvey had been fundamentally about their conflicting perceptions about the identity of the scholar-writer in a rapidly changing era, and it is a dispute that Harvey would long continue with Nashe. In the mean time, however, at least three posthumous books were published in Greene’s name. Of these, *Greenes Vision* is a framework tale, probably composed in 1590, while

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<sup>18</sup> Harvey, *Four Letters*, pp. 13, 20–21.

*The Repentance of Robert Greene Master of Arts* combines a purportedly autobiographical account of Greene's life with a first-hand report of his sickness and death. The third, *Greenes Groatsworth of Witte*, was probably largely written by its 'editor', Henry Chettle, but is best known for its bitter reference to 'an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that [...] is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrie' – the first contemporary reference to Shakespeare (XII.144). Texts such as *Four Letters* and *Groatsworth of Witte* are harbingers of an unprecedented literary phenomenon, for it soon becomes apparent that Greene's authorial self-construction itself had become the master-plot of new literary ventures. The ghost 'wrapt up in a sheete [...] with a penne under his eare, and holding a scrowle of written paper in his hande', as the narrator of *Greenes Newes both from Heaven and Hell* (1593) describes him, repeatedly demanded and justified the living writer's entry into the world of commercial print.<sup>19</sup>

To a large extent, later scholarship has taken Greene's contemporary critics at their word, treating his texts as regrettable and yet inevitable signs of the increasing commercialisation of literature in the late sixteenth century. Yet it is difficult to relate this rather pathetic marginal player in the large and colourful field of Elizabethan literature, to the texts and the figure through which the anxieties of an entire social group and generation seems to have been voiced at a particularly critical phase in the development of English society. Through his narrative manoeuvres and experimentations, Greene opened up entirely new ways in which Elizabethan fiction and drama could conceivably enter into a conversation with reality. Perhaps more importantly, his career inescapably confronted the ideals of civic humanism with the economic imperatives of the intellectual and writer in the 1590s. From his very first romance to the last posthumous pamphlets, Greene's writing explored the ways in which the erratic and insecure career of the professional author could be recast as an ultimately triumphant quest for authority in the public sphere. The possibilities opened up by this new role and voice are his undeniable contributions to Elizabethan literature.

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<sup>19</sup> B[arnabe] R[iche], *Greenes Newes both from Heaven and Hell* (1593), sig. A2<sup>r</sup>. Other literary visitations of Greene's ghost range from Henry Chettle's *Kind-Harts Dreame: containing five apparitions with their invectives against abuses reigning* (1592) and John Dickenson's *Greene in Concept, New raised from his Grave to write the Tragique Historie of faire Valeria of London* (1598), to *Greenes Ghost Haunting Cony-catchers* by S[amuel R[owlands]], printed in 1602, ten years after Greene's death.