



# Shakespeare Matters

"The Voice of the Shakespeare Fellowship"

Vol.3: no.2

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments..."

Winter 2004

## Do Oxford's letters spell Shakespeare?

By K.C. Ligon

*Famously, [Admiral] Nelson put the telescope to his blind eye and declared that he could not see the signal.<sup>1</sup>*

In his introduction to *Monstrous Adversary*, Prof. Alan H. Nelson says that "it has become a matter of urgency to measure the real Oxford against the myth created by partisan apologists." Yet he allows that the "biographer who is not persuaded that Oxford wrote the works of Shakespeare must nevertheless pay tribute to those who are, for it is often his amateur admirers who have discovered new evidence about the man and his milieu." Thus Nelson honors the discoveries while belittling Oxfordian interpretation, labeling it "amateur" and the work of partisan "admirers." He defines his contrasting, professional approach:

My main purpose is to introduce documents from Oxford's life, many of them written in Oxford's own hand. Since documents alone do not make a biography, however, I have felt duty-bound to point out their significance for an accurate estimation of Oxford's character.

It is noteworthy that the documents which form the core of Nelson's book are the sensational Howard and Arundel libels. The men who made those scandalous accusations about Oxford were speaking for their very lives. Nelson's choice to present their testimony as if it were factual, before giving any intimation of its bias, demonstrates what he means by pointing out the "significance" of the documents. That he feels "duty-bound" to construct his  
*(Continued on page 15)*

## Conference in Carmel

*Fellowship's 2nd annual gathering features plays, papers and a good time for everyone*



*Derran Charlton (l) and William Causey were among those addressing the conference this year. Charlton has been an indefatigable researcher in the UK for years, frequently turning up interesting documents from household archives (he is interviewed by Mark Anderson in this issue—see page 28). Causey has recently organized debates in Washington, DC about the authorship, including the landmark all-day event at the Smithsonian Institution last April.*

The Fellowship's second annual conference this past October was the third time in the last nine years that Oxfordians have met in the colorful, world-famous arts community of Carmel (Calif.), home of Oxfordian Stephen Moorer's Carmel Shakespeare Festival. This year conference goers were treated to productions of *Henry VI, Parts I & II*, and *Taming of the Shrew*. There was also a tour (organized by John Varady) of Carmel's favorite-son poet Robinson Jeffers' home.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the panel discussion

*(Continued on page 8)*

## "The play's the thing..."

*At the authorship debate in NYC same old question takes center stage: "What is evidence?"*

One of the major events at the Shakespeare Oxford Society conference in New York last October was a debate on Thursday evening (Oct. 23), featuring Oxfordians Hank Whittemore and Robert Brazil vs. Stratfordians Irv Matus and Alan Nelson. *Harpers* magazine editor Lewis Lapham served as moderator.

The focus of the debate was a comparison of each side's candidate to demonstrate which man was most likely the author of the Shakespeare Canon. However, it became apparent that such a format still leads to the key problem in the whole

debate, namely—what is evidence? Nelson commented toward the end of the debate that he understood the format to be limited to "documentary evidence" as the criteria upon which each side would build its case, and by this of course he meant that therefore "literature" (i.e., the plays and poems) would not be in evidence. This led to the inevitable pattern that repeated itself throughout the evening: The Stratfordian side citing over and over the First Folio and the Stratford monument as the key evidence that "fingered" their man as the true

*(Continued on page 12)*

## Letters:

To the Editor:

As a voracious reader and collector of all thoughts Oxfordian, I think that the following statement in Roger Stritmatter's essay on Nelson (*Shakespeare Matters*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Fall 2003) should be questioned:

Charlton Ogburn's 1984 work, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* . . . is the most important work on the authorship question since J. T. Looney. . .

We must remember that Ogburn, Jr., credits Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn, Sr., with designating Edward de Vere as the author of *Romeus and Juliet* by "Arthur Brooke." It was Dorothy who believed in the Prince Tudor concept which her son rejected. She also deconstructed Ben Jonson and many a follower and pseudonymous stand-in for de Vere.

In 1952, the senior Ogburns published *This Star of England* (Coward-McCann, 1296 pages) to major reviews in *Newsweek*, *The New York Times* and elsewhere. Rare copies fetch \$75 and more today. Their exhaustive work was a passionate appeal to common sense and fair play. It inspired many, including Dr. Paul Altrocchi, Ramon Jiménez and their own son. Charlton, Jr., owes his masterpiece to theirs. In all fairness, let reason agree: Both generations of Ogburns will be studied eventually as equal among the last century's greats and there is room at the top for all three, plus.

How can a list ignore Clark's *Hidden Allusions*, Fowler's *Revealed* or Ward's biography, not to mention Whalen's and Sobran's smashing end to the millennium?

James Sherwood  
Plandome, New York  
12 December 2003

*Roger Stritmatter responds:*

You ask, "How can a list ignore Clark's *Hidden Allusions*, Fowler's *Revealed* or Ward's biography, not to mention Whalen's and Sobran's smashing end to the millennium?"

My essay was not intended to include a "list"—and it does not include one. Had I embarked on a list, where should I have stopped? On the contrary, for the reasons

stated in the essay, I singled out The Mysterious William Shakespeare as "the most important" of many Oxfordian works since Looney. I stand by that characterization for the reasons stated in my essay.

This conclusion in no way disparages the useful and interesting works you mention, and many more with which I am more than passingly familiar and about which I have written in some detail in other contexts; it merely asserts that none of them have the historic importance of Mr. Ogburn's book.

To the Editor:

When taken together, Chuck Berney's points in *Shakespeare Matters* ("Sir Walter Scott as Paleo-Oxfordian," Fall 2003) provide a strong argument that Sir Walter Scott knew of Shakespeare's identity as Oxford. In this connection readers may be interested in remarks by the revered Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, whose translation we used to introduce Part VII of *Shakespeare's Fingerprints*:

Shakespeare, Goethe, and Walter Scott do not display servile obsession with kings and heroes. They do not appear, as do French heroes, as slaves imitating dignity and the nobility. They are natural in everyday life with no affectation in their speech; there is nothing

theatrical even in solemn situations, because solemn occasions are usual for them. It is clear that Walter Scott belongs to the intimate circle of English monarchs.

One easily deduces that Shakespeare moved with royalty, which of course he did, as the Earl of Oxford. One also infers that Pushkin (as also Anna Akhmatova at a later point) was an anti-Stratfordian. Perhaps he was also a paleo-Oxfordian, in Berney's sense.

Michael Brame & Galina Popova  
University of Washington  
7 December 2003

The following letter to the editor appeared in the January/February 2004 issue of the *Atlantic*. Andrew Werth is a graduate of Concordia University, home of the Edward de Vere Studies Conference, at which he has spoken for seven years:

In an otherwise brilliant article "That Blessed Plot, That Enigmatic Isle" (October 2003 *Atlantic*), Christopher Hitchens calls those who believe that the seventeenth earl of Oxford wrote the works of Shakespeare "lonely crackpots." He thus bestows that description on Felicia Londré, the Curators' Professor of Theatre at the

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The purpose of the Shakespeare Fellowship is to promote public awareness and acceptance of the authorship of the Shakespeare Canon by Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), and further to encourage a high level of scholarly research and publication into all aspects of Shakespeare studies, and also into the history and culture of the Elizabethan era.

The Society was founded and incorporated in 2001 in the State of Massachusetts and is chartered under the membership corporation laws of that state. It is a recognized 501(c)(3) non-profit (Fed ID 04-3578550).

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The Shakespeare Fellowship

University of Missouri, Kansas City, and a recent president of the American Theatre and Drama Society; Sir Derek Jacobi, Britain's leading thespian; many university Ph.Ds; and a host of lay people who have weighed the evidence and found the case for the Stratford man, Will Shaksper, breathtakingly bankrupt. In fact, Oxford is becoming the leading authorial candidate, for good reason.

One can only hope that Hitchens is being facetious when he writes that Oxfordians "rest their case" on Oxford's intimate knowledge of Italy—an intimacy that is reflected in the plays. In fact, there is a mountain of persuasive evidence in favor of Oxford, including the fact that Hamlet (which scholars have long insisted is Shakespeare's most autobiographical play—whoever the Bard was) is essentially Oxford's biography. In contrast, there is virtually no evidence whatever that the man from Stratford had anything to do with the writing of plays. Everything we know of the man suggests that he was illiterate.

As for being "lonely," the Oxfordian theory gains scores of new adherents every year, both within the academy and without. The largest Oxfordian conference, at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, grows each year and features intelligent presentations by researchers from UC Berkeley, the University of Washington, and other institutions.

I hope that Hitchens will abandon an opinion that, his comments suggest, is uninformed, and will join the debate in Portland this year.

Andrew Werth  
Everett, Washington

Christopher Hitchens's reply to Werth's letter (printed in the same issue):

*I happily accept Andrew Werth's reassurance that the Oxfordians are now joyously proliferating. I have met and conversed with both Tom Bethell and Joseph Sobran, Oxfordians extraordinaire, and though I think they might not mind being termed "mavericks" or "eccentrics" (or even "right-wing Catholic oddballs"), I have no excuse for having used the opprobrious and also lazy term "lonely crackpots."*

### Correction

In our last issue the note under the article "Illicit reversal" by Brame and Popova said it was excerpted from their book *Shakespeare's Fingerprints*. It in fact contained many new textual examples relating to Weever, Grange and Gosson.

## From the Editor

### An authorship lesson from *Peter Pan*

Among the usual flood of holiday movies over Christmas was a new version of an old, familiar tale: *Peter Pan*. Our readers may wonder how in the world a children's fairy tale merits a mention in a newsletter about Shakespeare.

Well, it's because we're actually a newsletter on the authorship of Shakespeare, a theme which for many of us involves not just who is the author, but also what does "authorship" mean? How and why does an author create a work? Is it critical to a reader's understanding to know the author? Finally, does knowing the work inform us about the author, and does knowing the author inform us about the work?

It is these questions that came to mind after viewing this intriguing new version of the familiar old tale, because what makes it an interesting film is that the filmmakers went back to J. M. Barrie's original text, which turns out to be a far cry from the more "Disney-fied" recent versions. And in reading about how this original text came to be written, we learn a familiar story: Only J. M.

### "plentiful lack" ... "irreducible particularity"

The day after the Fellowship conference in Carmel some of us (Bill and Charles Boyle, Hank Whittemore, and Sandy Hochberg) relaxed in Monterey, visiting Cannery Row shops, having lunch, and, of course, checking out book stores. In this instance we found a little book entitled *Shakespeare of Stratford, A Handbook for Students*, by Tucker Brooke (1926). On the book's final page we find:

So in Shakespeare's actual life he ignored the dreams of El Dorado and imperial England, and he ignored the facts of tobacco and the colonization of Virginia and the Fight of the Revenge, while scrutinizing day by day the thinking minds of the men and women about him. And thereby he gained a wisdom so deep that it concealed his plentiful lack of knowledge—a humanity so immense that we seldom note how completely he had failed to be Elizabethan (p. 160).

"A plentiful lack of knowledge..." In all the years we've been involved in the authorship debate, and therefore looking with new eyes at all the orthodox scholarship—past and present—that attempts to explain the inexplicable circumstance of how the Stratford man wrote Shakespeare, this has to the all-time winning non-explanation.

Barrie could have written this particular story at this particular time.

It turns out that his own experiences in growing up involved several intense, emotional experiences: An older brother who died young (age 13), and Barrie's efforts to "become" that older brother to please his mother; his own burden of stopping to grow in his early teens (leaving him both a very short man, and infertile); and finally his close friendship with five boys in a neighbor's family, boys he (childless) came to adopt when their parents both died. And yes, they became in fiction the "lost boys," and the eldest (Peter) was, yes, Peter Pan.

Now all we're saying here is how interesting it is to see something familiar from a new perspective, and then find out that the "newness" is simply a case of returning to the original text, a text that turns out to have been intimately connected to its author, but had over time been lost as the story morphed into—to quote *Peter Pan* director P.J. Hogan—*Leave It To Beaver* in Neverland.

And the irony here is how often the best counter-argument to such theorizing—i.e., an author's real life matched to his work—continues to crop up all around us. In our brief note on *Peter Pan* (above) we observed how only a particular author could really come to write a particular work. In thinking back on the authorship debate in NYC last October (story, p. 1) one of the evening's more memorable lines came when Matus said he didn't read *Hamlet* to read a code book—and by code book, he meant the Oxfordian take on *Hamlet* as being uniquely particular to the author's life.

And now, just as we go to press, suddenly that word "particular" crops up again, this time with the news (see page five) that one of the gurus of post modern academic theory (Terry Eagleton) has just published a new book (*After Theory*) in which he rejects postmodern literary theory, which he describes as "a movement of thought which rejects .... the possibility of objective truth." Or, as Georgetown Literature Prof. Dennis Todd puts it: [today there is] "a renewed appreciation of the irreducible particularity of an art work, an author, an historical moment, a particularity that theory may illuminate but never fully explain."

Amen.

*In the News**Beard of Avon* opens in New York

New York City's drama critics, a notoriously demanding crew, wrote rave reviews for Amy Freed's comedy *The Beard of Avon*, a farcical takeoff on the debate over who wrote the works of Shakespeare.

Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, and Will Shakspeare of Stratford-on-Avon are the leading characters in this farce with serious undertones. But the usual cast of characters—Bacon, Marlowe, even Queen Elizabeth—also manage to have a hand in writing the famous plays. It's the "group theory" of authorship with a vengeance, and de Vere is no hero. But then nobody is.

Before the play opened, *The New York Times* led the coverage with a long interview with Amy Freed by Bill Niederkorn in the Sunday edition of November 16. (Niederkorn attends Oxfordian conferences and presents papers.) Freed told him how her first impulse in writing the play was to focus on de Vere:

It was the murdering, pederastic, bad-boy, motorcycle queen, Oxford, who was going to have written the plays. Somewhere in my head it was going to be the real kind of terrible, reckless, sexy guy. And the question for me was: Would the world accept the loss of the Christlike innocent

sweet boy from Stratford? That was a very early take, and then the innocent rustic guy really started fighting back.

And in the end he, too, manages to have a hand in writing the plays.

Freed started out as an actress and has been writing plays for more than a decade. In 1999, one of her plays was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. She teaches acting at Stanford University.

Two days after Niederkorn's article, her play opened at the New York Theater Workshop, and Bruce Weber of the *Times* praised it in a full-length review that called it a "clever, thoughtful and entertaining farce."

The *New York Daily News* reviewer found it "unusually entertaining [with] an extraordinary cast."

In its theater listings, *The New Yorker* magazine's critic suggested that the comedy was more than a farce:

Amy Freed's new comedy proposes an unusual solution to the controversy over Shakespearean authorship: that the Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere, collaborated on plays with the unschooled but talented Will Shakspeare and relied on him more and

more as time went on. Tim Blake's Shakspeare evolves during the play from a sweetly yearning farmer to a writer sure of his craft, but it's Mark Harelik's convincing portrayal of de Vere that elevates the play beyond farce.

No surprise that de Vere steals the show. The reviewers noted that the cast seemed to be having a great time performing the play, a tribute, no doubt, to Freed's thorough understanding of the authorship controversy. As the luncheon speaker at the Shakespeare Oxford Society conference in New York City three weeks before her Off-Broadway premiere, she spoke about how she first heard about Oxford as the true author and how her play developed over time and "out-of-town try-outs." (A review of the performance run in Toronto appeared in the winter 2003 issue of this newsletter.)

Even as a farce and even though Oxfordians might wish for a more positive role for de Vere as the dramatist, Freed's play surely raised awareness of the authorship issue and its validity for thoughtful theatergoers and readers of the New York media.

—RFW

*Edward's Presents* gets rave reviews in London

A new play featuring Edward de Vere as the genius behind *A Midsummer Night's Dream* et alia has opened at the Union Theatre in Southwark, London. *Edward's Presents*, a five-act drama by Sally Llewellyn, although just opened, is winning high accolades from London reviewers and introducing many theatergoers to the idea of Oxford's authorship of the Shakespearean canon:

"Intriguing ... entertaining, original and compelling theatrical drama. The author's jumping off point is the suggestion that William Shaksper (sic) was not the author of the folios but in fact they were written by ... Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford. This suggestion is not as far-fetched as it seems ..... Beyond this departure point, the play is rife with the tension of love triangles... original, daring and provocative

in its plotting."

—Chelsea Theatre.

"A theatrically dynamic piece that is well driven by its core characters ... I did really enjoy *Edward's Presents*. It is written with a refreshing amount of explosive theatricality and it tackles big themes in an extremely ambitious way."

—Live Theatre.

"An accomplished and entertaining piece with an involved story and rounded characterisation... the language is so fluent and progressive in terms of the narrative."

—Paines Plough.

"Very well written ... the material [is] accessible to both the lay person and the aficionado."

—Roxanna Silbert, Traverse Theatre.

## A Hamlet-like Falstaff

"Kevin Kline's performance as Falstaff in Lincoln Center's production of *Henry IV* (the two parts shortened and fused) is a work of stunning theatrical mastery," reports Fellowship drama reviewer K.C. Ligon. "From the first moment of his leonine awakening after yet another night of imbibing sherris sack, to the last heartbreaking chimes at midnight, Kline reveals a Falstaff with more than a little touch of Hamlet in him. Every inflection, every gesture surprises—and the voice rings true and clear."

In the words of John Simon, writing in *New York Magazine* (Dec. 1, 2003):

Instead of a merry, monumental lumberer, we get a graceful, wistful tergiversator, worth in itself the price of admission. This has to be seen ..... gentlefolk in New York now abed/ Shall think themselves accursed they were not [there].

## Miami Law Review article questions traditional Stratford story

We're pleased to announce another auspicious development in the Shakespeare question. The *University of Miami Law Review*, in its January 2003 issue (Volume 57:3), has published an important article on the authorship question by University of Miami Law School faculty member Thomas Regnier. The article, which is titled "Could Shakespeare Think Like a Lawyer? How Inheritance Law Issues in *Hamlet* may Shed Light on the Authorship Question," surveys the history of scholarship on Shakespeare's knowledge of the law and then summarizes the recent work of another lawyer, J. Antony Burton, whose study of the theme of inheritance law in *Hamlet* was published in the orthodox *Shakespeare Newsletter* (Fall 2000, Winter 2000/2001).

Regnier, who has just joined the Shakespeare Fellowship, argues that Burton's work has significant implications for the authorship question: "Burton's analysis

moves us further from the Stratford theory and closer to those theories that suggest that someone with advanced legal training wrote Shakespeare's works" (426), suggests Regnier.

"The writer of Shakespeare's works had to have a highly sophisticated, deeply ingrained understanding of the law. He could think law and speak law .... In the long-standing authorship controversy, no camp has at this point achieved definitive proof of its theory of authorship .... we must [therefore] study the works for evidence about the person who wrote them ... Burton's article is a fine example of the direction in which we must proceed" (427-28).

Burton's work has been known to Oxfordians since shortly after his initial publication; he lectured to the founding meeting of the Shakespeare Fellowship in Northampton, Mass., in October 2001.

## Sci-Fi novel touts Oxford

A new science fiction novel, *1632* by Eric Flint (2002, Baen Publishing, distributed by Simon and Schuster), includes the following conversation:

Judith Roth finally managed to speak. "I can't believe you. You actually—" She almost gasped the next words. "You actually saw Shakespeare? In person?"

Balthazar raised his head, frowning. "Shakespeare? Will Shakespeare? Well, of course. Couldn't miss the man at the Globe. He was all over the place before he moved back to Stratford-on-Avon. Never missed a chance to count the gate. Twice, usually."

Half-stunned, Morris walked over to a bookcase against the wall. He pulled down a thick tome and brought it over to Balthazar. "We are talking about the same Shakespeare, aren't we? The greatest figure in English literature?"

Still frowning, Balthazar took the book and opened its cover. When he saw the frontispiece, and then the table of contents, he almost choked. "Shakespeare didn't write these plays!" he exclaimed. Shaking his head: "Well, some of them, I suppose. In some small part. The ones that read as if written by committee. The little farces like *Love's Labour's Lost*. But the great plays? *Hamlet*? *Othello*? *King Lear*?"

Seeing the look on his companions' faces, he burst into laughter. "My good people! Everyone knows that the plays were really written by—" He took a deep breath, preparing for recitation: "My Lord Edward, Earl of Oxford...."

## Postmodernism: theory in chaos

The *Christian Science Monitor* for January 27th, 2004 carried an article that will undoubtedly be of interest to all involved in the authorship debate. Under the headline "Theory in chaos," *Monitor* contributor David Kirby reports on a new book (*After Theory*) by Terry Eagleton of Manchester University in the UK, a book in which one of the leaders of what is called postmodern literary theory now says that such theories (which he defines as a contemporary movement of thought which rejects... the possibility of objective knowledge) were relevant in their heyday, but no more.

Such theorizing centers around ideas such as Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, etc. where literature could be examined only as it related to these larger theories or cultural movements...even in cases where the literature was written before these movements even began.

Eagleton is quoted in the article as saying, "cultural theory as we have it promises to grapple with some fundamental problems, but on the whole fails to deliver..." Theory, he says, "has been shame-faced about morality and metaphysics,

embarrassed about love, biology, religion and revolution, largely silent about evil..."

In a comment about where theory went wrong, Roger Lathbury (professor of American Literature at George Mason University) said, "theory became the object of study more than the works it purportedly was designed to explicate."

For those engaged in the Shakespeare authorship debate this is of some interest, since a cornerstone of the debate is the relationship—and the relevance—of the author to his work. The change that is now afoot is probably best summed up by Georgetown University Professor of British Literature Dennis Todd, who is quoted as saying, "[that there is today] a renewed appreciation of the irreducible particularity of an art work, an author, an historical moment, a particularity that theory may illuminate but never fully explain."

This pretty much sums up what students of the authorship debate see as the problem of modern Shakespeare studies...they seem to reside in every century, culture and movement in recent history—except the Elizabethan.

### Oxford Day Banquet scheduled for April 30th

The 17th Annual Oxford Day Banquet is scheduled for Friday, April 30th, 2004. It will again be held in the MIT Faculty Club, and as in the past two years there will be a full schedule of activities the following day (Saturday, May 1st). For details, contact Alex McNeil via email: [mcneil301@comcast.com](mailto:mcneil301@comcast.com)

# Mark Rylance featured guest in Michigan

## *Shakespeare Globe Theatre artistic director meets with Oxfordians*

By Thomas Hunter

Oberon, a Michigan-based Oxfordian group, has been honored to host mystery novelist Sarah Smith and Shakespearean actor and director Mark Rylance, artistic director of London's Globe Theatre, in joint meetings with the Shakespeare Oxford Union, a newly created student group at the University of Michigan sponsored by Oberon.

During her visit in October, Sarah Smith spoke to fans and audiences at bookstores and to university and high school students in the Detroit-Ann Arbor area about how the authorship question provided the central mystery for her recently released novel *Chasing Shakespeares*. Smith's charming and engaging style stirred interest in authorship among the groups she addressed.

Rylance chatted with a standing room crowd at the Michigan Union in Ann Arbor about the importance of authorship in presenting Shakespeare's plays. His frank discussion about the importance of knowing the true author held his audience transfixed well beyond the scheduled time of the meeting which Mr. Rylance generously extended. The London Globe Theatre company was in Ann Arbor as part of its U.S. tour of *Twelfth Night*, presented in the round by an all-male cast as it would have been played to an Elizabethan audience.

It was a most memorable evening of Shakespeare, especially Rylance's Olivia, and a convincing demonstration of biting and side-splitting humor that the true author must have intended rather than the light romance which it is so often interpreted to be. Barbara Burris distributed an Oxfordian reading of the play to audiences of two performances, who received it favorably.

Both the new student organization and Mr. Rylance's visit can be credited to the vision, passion and persistence of Burris, a founding member of Oberon, in reach-

ing out to the community to spread the word about authorship. Both Rylance and Smith demonstrated that the interest is there in the community if we but use our resources to make the fascinating issues of authorship known. Both were most supportive of Oberon's endeavor.

The responses to Rylance's visit

members of Oberon as we are well past the student years of our lives, however constantly learning. We both have a long-standing love of Shakespeare and were amazed to realize that he may indeed have been the Earl of Oxford. Actually that makes him such a much more interesting fellow. Keep us informed of your doings.



Photo courtesy Chicago Tribune

London's Shakespeare Globe Theatre production of *Twelfth Night* toured the United States last fall, featuring an all-male cast. Second from the left is Globe Artistic director Mark Rylance as Olivia. Also pictured are: Michael Brown (l) as Viola, Rhys Meredith (r) as Sebastian, and Liam Brennan (second from right) as Orsino.

(printed below) demonstrate a welcome public receptiveness to the inquiry into the true author. Such awareness of and involvement in authorship are the special focus of Oberon's mission, which is to provide opportunities for free and open discussion and research into the authorship issue, especially with regard to Edward de Vere, and also to provide students, teachers, and all in the southeastern Michigan area who love Shakespeare and great literature with resources for a greater understanding and appreciation of the true author and consequently of his works.

One attendee of Rylance's "chat" wrote:

Thanks for providing that superb afternoon with Mark Rylance. I am a flat out fan of that British actor/manager. My husband and I are very interested in becoming

Another response followed:

I never took the authorship discussion seriously until I heard Mark Rylance's talk, not because I was certain that the man from Stratford wrote the plays but because I didn't think it mattered. What's in a name? I figured. Although I still feel the play's the thing and find my way to literature through close readings, I can see the value of knowing something about a work's author. And I have to take seriously anything told me by someone who can create such magic in the theater—I share your enthusiasm for that production.

And also this comment:

I enjoyed [Mr. Rylance's] discussion on authorship. As for the authorship question, I knew very little about it before I came to the talk, so it was fascinating to hear him talk about it and to see the video.

Such reactions to Mark Rylance's personal and moving reflections about the importance of authorship in producing Shakespeare demonstrate the lively interest in this issue that exists. The public is telling us that Shakespeare does matter.

Anyone interested in learning more about Oberon and about the University of Michigan student organization, The Shakespeare Oxford Union—or about Oberon's handsome Oxfordian bookmarks—can drop a note to us at [everoxford@hotmail.com](mailto:everoxford@hotmail.com) or P.O. Box 1353, Royal Oak, MI 48068.

# Wells and Wood at Smithsonian

## *Stratfordian scholar Stanley Wells and documentary filmmaker Michael Wood face off on the historical context of Shakespeare*

During the last week of October 2003 the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC hosted a pair of talks by two well-known, but adversarial, figures in the ever-changing landscape of Shakespeare and Shakespeare authorship studies.

Michael Wood spoke on Wednesday evening, October 29th, promoting his book and documentary film *In Search of Shakespeare* (the book has been published under the title *Shakespeare* in the US). In a late addition to the Smithsonian schedule, Stanley Wells (author of numerous Shakespeare books, including the just-published *Shakespeare for All Time*) gave a lecture on Monday evening, October 27th—a lecture during which he took the opportunity to lay into both anti-Stratfordians and his fellow Stratfordian Wood.

Wells's point of contention with Wood is how Wood's new biography of the Stratford man, in emphasizing the Catholicism of the Shaksper family and the anti-Catholic politics of the Elizabethan police state, has raised questions about Shakespeare's true religious sympathies and his role as a

writer in the highly charged political-religious atmosphere of Elizabethan England. Our last issue of *Shakespeare Matters* (Fall 2003) addressed some of these issues.

Two Washington area Oxfordian researcher/authors—Ron Hess and Peter Dickson—attended these talks, and via email distribution lists let the Oxfordian community know what happened.

Hess attended the Wells lecture on Monday evening, and reports that Wells was quite entertaining and humorous, especially when launching into his favorite targets, such as A. L. Rowse, or any and all anti-Stratfordians. When asked about the other claimants, he first talked of Bacon, then Marlowe, and only at the end of Oxford (mentioning that Alan Nelson's new book would "knock the props out from under such a ludicrous candidate").

As expected, Wells did address the Catholic issues raised by Wood, but only to dismiss them. He questions whether John Shaksper really practiced the faith, and clearly says William was not Catholic. Wells's current book spends little time on

how the author actually lived and wrote in his era (i.e. historical context), and much time on his universal impact over the ages—a universality that, in Wells's view, renders his purported Catholicism a moot point.

Dickson attended Wood's Wednesday talk, and reports that he was impressive on stage, full of enthusiasm and humor. He covered the same ground as his book and documentary, emphasizing that having a correct historical context for Shakespeare does matter. He said, reports Dickson, that the Bard we have today is a product of the British Literary Establishment, which [persistently keeps ... his biography] "separate from the history of the time..."

Wood also remarked during the Q&A session, in response to a question about Wells and the Catholic issue, "I really do not understand their reluctance to engage on this issue." With the Wood documentary now being broadcast in the US over four weeks this February (PBS, Feb. 4, 11, 18, 25), we will all be hearing more about the new Catholic Shakespeare for years to come. Engagement is optional.

## Tyrant toppled

### *Regime change at Shakespeare Fellowship*

On 10 October 2003, agents of Regime Change pulled a bearded, dishevelled man from his "spider hole," a small dank room furnished only with an iron cot and a refrigerator stocked with gin and pistachio nuts.

"I am Chuck Berney, president of the Shakespeare Fellowship, and I am willing to negotiate," croaked the man.

"Not any more, buster," replied the agents, "President McNeil sends his regards."

After protracted negotiations, an exhausted Board agreed to Berney's demands that he be named President Emeritus for Life, Lord High Treasurer, and Groom of the Back Stairs.

## *From the President*

2004—yes, this year marks the 400th anniversary of the death of Edward de Vere. And we have to wonder, four centuries later, whether we Oxfordians have made any real progress in convincing the world of the true identity of the man who was Shakespeare.

On one hand, the academic high ground has at present been staked out anew by staunch Stratfordians: Alan Nelson, who sets out to prove in *Monstrous Adversary* that de Vere couldn't possibly have been the Bard, and Daphne Pearson, who plans to publish a book based on her Ph.D. thesis examining Oxford's finances (curiously, her thesis is not publicly available, an option apparently permitted, if seldom employed, in British academic circles).

On the other hand, as I look over the

articles in this issue as we go to press, I see that the notion of Oxfordian authorship is popping up in several places outside of academia—in hit plays, in scholarly law review articles, and even in science fiction novels. That indicates that men and women with open minds, especially in the creative area, are taking the authorship issue seriously and are beginning to conclude for themselves that, if the case for the Stratford man is a weak one, then the only logical candidate is the 17th Earl of Oxford.

In short, I'd like to think that the toothpaste is out of the tube, and the Stratfordians can't put it back. The question is not whether Edward de Vere will be generally acknowledged as the true Shakespeare, but when.

Alex McNeil

*Fellowship conference (cont'd from page 1)*  
 sion "Just Call it Fiction," featuring five Oxfordians who have written fictional accounts of the authorship story—two directly about Oxford (James Sherwood's *Shakespeare's Ghost* and Paul Altrocchi's *Most Greatly Lived*), two children's books (Lynne Kositsky's *A Question of Will* and Norma Howe's *Blue Avenger Breaks the Code*), and one novel about contemporary Oxfordians (Sarah Smith's *Chasing Shakespeares*). Hank Whittemore, author of more than 10 fiction and nonfiction books, moderated.

Whittemore asked such questions as which audience the authors were trying to reach with their works (and did they reach them?), how much research went into writing fictional accounts of this issue, what new insights or discoveries they had made during their work, and—most important of all—did any of their "hard-nosed" Oxfordian scholar colleagues think that fictionalizing a working theory had any merit.

James Sherwood commented that his work (*Shakespeare's Ghost*) was written "from the bottom of my heart" as a work about a poet making poetry and what goes into the poetic process. His book has sold fairly well and is stocked, for example, at the Folger Shakespeare Library (which has placed several reorders!).

Sarah Smith noted that her *Chasing Shakespeares* was meant more to illustrate the excitement of the chase, presenting vignettes of contemporary scholars grappling with the issue. It does not attempt to prove the case one way or the other, but rather to give it a wider audience. And that it certainly has, with numerous favorable reviews around the country and several printings.

The intended audience for both Lynne Kositsky's and Norma Howe's books was, of course, young adults, written in the spirit of "catch 'em young before the authorities get hold of them." The emphasis in such stories is to keep things moving along rather than bucketloads of minute detail or lengthy arguments. In both books solving a mystery is the basic template the authors work from, which is fitting for the larger mystery that all authorship types tackle every day.

Finally, Paul Altrocchi provided some details about his work in writing *Most*



The authors who participated in the Fiction Panel are (from left): Paul Altrocchi, Norma Howe, Sarah Smith, Lynne Kositsky and James Sherwood.



Reading excerpts from Charles Boyle's screenplay on actor Leslie Howard's interest in Oxford as Shakespeare are (from left): Christopher Paul, Marguerite Gyatt and Hank Whittemore.

*Greatly Lived*. He noted that he had read more than 300 books and articles to provide a rich and accurate historical background to his story (for example, six books on falconry, five books on medieval tournaments, etc.). He also spoke about the need for revisions. His final published version of *Lived* was his 28th draft; he cited John Gardner, who once said a writer should revise his work "at least a hundred times."

Altrocchi's parting words on fiction writers engaging the authorship issue was that "all Oxfordians—whether research scholars, fiction writers, editors, assemblers of conferences, speakers on the authorship question, or just enthusiastic de Vereans who spread the word person to person—should all be mutually respectful as we all work together to hasten the inevitable Paradigm Shift."

Another event with a focus similar to the Fiction Panel was Charles Boyle's presentation of his screenplay about actor

Leslie Howard and his journey into promoting Oxford as Shakespeare in the 1940s. In Howard's 1941 propaganda film *Pimpernel Smith* the lead character (Prof. Horatio Smith) several times mentions Oxford as Shakespeare, and one time holds up Looney's *Shakespeare Identified*. The screenplay was brought to life with readings of several scenes, performed by Christopher Paul, Marguerite Gyatt and Hank Whittemore.

A book in progress was also the subject of Mark Anderson's presentation, "Much Ado about Prospero: Edward de Vere's Italian travels." Anderson read from his forthcoming book, *Shakespeare's Autobiography: the Literary Life of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford*. The selections read by Anderson centered on de Vere's travels in Italy in the summer of 1575, tracing his probable routes of travel and making comparisons with plays such as *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

### Plays, sonnets, and history

A broad range of papers was presented over the three-day conference, reflecting the excellence and wide variety of research being done by contemporary Oxfordians. Perhaps the most detailed, and potentially most exciting, work presented came from Christopher Paul of Atlanta, Georgia. A professional actor who has performed Shakespeare, Paul has in recent years spent hundreds of hours at the Emory University library researching the Elizabethan era.

Paul gave a two-hour talk on Sunday that went into great detail about the reaction to Oxford's death in 1604—in short, there was next to none. Most Oxfordians are aware that some of the circumstances of his death, especially the well-known absence of a will or any public honors or eulogies, are strange, and would seem to support the notion that something is amiss. Paul provided a wealth of detail, drawn from numerous documents and letters dated from summer 1604 into the 1607/08 period that indicate that some people who would be expected to know of the earl's death were unaware of it, and that there were several significant anomalies in how his estate passed to the young 18th earl.

The presentation was too detailed to get into here, but Paul expects to publish in *The Oxfordian* next fall, and to continue to research this era, with special attention paid to the provocative theory that Oxford may not have died in 1604, but may have instead gone into exile. Such theories have been around for years, but not until Paul's detailed researches have they been given any substance or credence.

Another interesting and potentially significant talk on Sunday was given by Marty Hyatt, someone familiar to those whose involvement in the authorship issue has been on the Net. Hyatt founded the UseNet discussion group humanities.lit.authors.shakespeare (HLAS) in 1995—and in so doing made the key decision to have its charter specifically permit authorship discussion, a decision that staved off numer-



ous attempts from 1995-1997 to outlaw authorship discussion on HLAS. He also co-founded (with *SM* editor Bill Boyle) the first Oxfordian ListServ (Evermore) in 1994, a group which eventually became the Phaeton discussion group moderated by Nina Green.

Hyatt was making his first presentation at an Oxfordian conference of research he has been conducting for the past five years on the Sonnets. Briefly, he is involved in an analysis of the entire Sonnet sequence based on theories published by Alastair Fowler in his 1970 book of essays, *Triumphal Forms*. These posit that the Sonnets were laid out in authorial order in the structure of a pyramid—with significant numerological and calendrical/chronological data embedded within the structure. Hyatt also presented evidence that the Sonnet sequence echoes themes and formats of the Psalms as published [in contemporary versions of the bible].\* Hyatt has no immediate plans to publish, but we can advise interested readers to search out Fowler's *Triumphal Forms* for a basic primer on what this is all about.

There were several papers about the plays being presented that weekend (*Taming of the Shrew*, *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*). Barbara Burris ("Norfolk, Leicester, *Henry VI* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*"), and her husband Ron Halstead ("Stomping at the Savoy: On *2 Henry VI*") both gave papers that were focused on placing the *Henry VI* plays (along with *Merry Wives*) in historical context—the context being, of course, Oxford's life and concerns, with the

(Continued on page 10)

*Pictured in descending order are: Charles Boyle presiding over performed excerpts from his screenplay about British actor/director Leslie Howard (who promoted Oxford as Shakespeare in his 1941 film Pimpernel Smith); Sarah Smith speaking about her just-published authorship novel Chasing Shakespeares; Ron Halstead speaking on 2 Henry VI, one of the plays performed over the weekend; and Marty Hyatt speaking on his five years of research on the structure of the 1609 quarto of Shakespeares Sonnets.*

\*text modified for online edition, Feb. 2004.

*Fellowship conference (cont'd from page 9)*  
roots of the context reaching back to the 1560s and 1570s.

Burris presented evidence that *2 Henry VI* is one of a series of plays and writings by Oxford from 1570 to early 1572 advocating for his friend, the Duke of Norfolk, who was falsely accused of treason. This "Norfolk cluster" includes *2 Henry VI* (1570), *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (1570), a revised *Damon and Pithias* (printed 1571), *Sir John Oldcastle* (1571-72), and *Treatise of Treasons* (printed Jan. 1572). She noted the historical changes to *Henry VI-2* to fit the plots by Cecil and Leicester against Norfolk and the correspondence of characters to this plot, including Leicester as Suffolk, Cecil as Cardinal Beaufort, Margaret as Elizabeth, Humphrey as Norfolk and Eleanor as the Queen of Scots.

Just prior to the performance of *Henry VI, Part Two*, Halstead gave a talk on the Jack Cade rebellion scenes in that play. He pointed out festival elements, especially the Lord of Misrule, and linked them to Oxford's experiences. He also pointed out Oxford's sympathy for the laboring man in the poem published with *Cardanus' Comfort* and the portrayal of the rebels in the early Cade scenes.

Roger Stritmatter spoke about the Induction scene in *Taming of the Shrew*. He presented it as literally being a microcosm of the authorship debate itself, with Christopher Sly thrust into a role over his head as Lord of the household. "What does this scene have to do with the play?" Stritmatter asked. Well, not much—unless it was meant to be a contemporaneous authorship comment. It is also interesting, Stritmatter noted, that the scene is frequently cut in production—most likely because no one knows what it's about.

Another play that was a paper topic was *Hamlet*, with Hank Whittemore giving an intriguing view of how its calamitous final act may—along with everything else going on in Shakespeare's autobiographical masterpiece—provide allusions to the calamitous Essex Rebellion. Whittemore emphasized to his audience that this theory was,



*Dr. Galina Popova and Dr. Michael Brame gave two presentations on their linguistic research into Shakespeare, Oxford and other Elizabethan poets. Both are professors at the University of Washington, and co-authors of Shakespeare's Fingerprints, a study which concludes that Oxford not only wrote Shakespeare, but may have authored a number of other works of the Elizabethan era, published anonymously or under other names.*



Photo: Ted Story

*Fellowship Board members—and conference organizers—Lynne Kositsky and Roger Stritmatter pictured during the tour of the Robinson Jeffers home memorial in Carmel.*

admittedly, far out. But as he moved from point to point, emphasizing key words such as "plots," "mutineers," "commissions," "axes falling," "treason," "confessions," "judgments," "purposes mistook," and "pardons," one could easily wonder for a moment exactly how much early 17th century historical context and authorial comments on that context may have entered into the final version.

*King John* was the focal point of *SM* editor Bill Boyle's talk on "Shakespeare's Histories as Mirrors of Elizabethan Policies." The title of this talk was taken from Lily B. Campbell's 1947 *Shakespeare's Histories, Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*. Boyle told his audience that books such as Campbell's were a goldmine for Oxford-

ians, providing rich, insightful commentary on the political context of Elizabethan theatre—commentary that in the end is a problem for Stratfordians, but on the money for Oxfordians. *King John* is a perfect example of this paradox, since—as Campbell emphasizes—the early, anonymous 1580s version (*Troublesome Reigne of King John*) is essentially indistinguishable from Shakespeare's 1590s version, but Stratford's Shaksper cannot have written *Troublesome Reigne*. Yet it is the "anonymous" author of *Troublesome Reigne* who introduces the ahistorical character of the Bastard Faulconbridge, who is the centerpiece, chorus and narrator of the play. While *King John* is one of the examples Campbell gives in explaining how an Elizabethan history play is not out to present "true" history, but rather to comment on the current world and its political concerns, she has no real explanation for why the Bastard character is so prominent in the play.

Boyle noted that, once he viewed the 1980s BBC version of this play, and saw the Bastard brought to life, there was no doubt in his mind that he was looking at an authorial character on the order of Hamlet, Lear, Touchstone, Feste, Bertram, etc. And if the Bastard was "invented" in the 1580s, then only the true Shakespeare could have invented him.

### The authorship debate

Other papers presented took on the debate itself, always a fun topic. *SM* Editor Bill Boyle led off the conference with a "State of the Debate" talk on Thursday. Boyle spoke about the near simultaneous publication of Alan Nelson's *Monstrous Adversary* and Michael Wood's *In Search of Shakespeare* (both the book and the TV documentary) as a watershed moment in the debate. The gist of his talk ("Drive, they said") appeared in our last issue (Fall 2003) as part of the newsletter's coverage of both these books.

Mark Alexander gave an informative—and often hilarious—presentation on "Stratfordian Evasions." Alexander, a

grizzled veteran of authorship debating on the internet, used PowerPoint to drive home the point that much Stratfordian scholarship and debating tactics is really—as we know—skillful evasion of key arguments and data, and an over reliance on straw men and ad hominem attacks.

Dr. Richard Desper took on the issue of evidence with his talk, “The Epistemology of the Shakespeare Authorship Question.” By the word “epistemology,” Desper refers to the methodology of knowledge, or briefly, how do we know what we know. Examining the body of evidence, he declared the Oxfordian position already proven by the Method of Induction, and there is no need for a “smoking gun” to prop it up. Examples of conclusions reached by induction, Desper said, include latent fingerprint identification, the structure of our solar system, and the double-helix structure of DNA. He then went on to list 10 facts already established by evidence in the authorship question, all pointing to Oxford as the true writer of Shakespeare. So, Desper declared, the question has been proven, and no “smoking gun” evidence is needed. It would be nice, he said, but it’s not necessary.

University of Washington linguistic professors Michael Brame and Galina Popova gave two talks over the weekend, giving some background on how they came to write their trilogy of books (still in progress) on Oxford as Shakespeare, and presenting further examples of how their analysis not only proves that Oxford was Shakespeare, but also how he may well have written under other pseudonyms in the 1580s and 90s as part of a major effort to elevate the English language and its literature.

The Brame-Popova contribution to the debate is significant since it further buttresses the view that Shakespeare was far from an accidental genius, but rather was well-trained and multilingual. He was also a man on a mission—that mission being the elevation of the English language. And that’s one thing (the emergence of the modern English language) that all students of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Age can agree on—Shakespeare’s key role in refining old Anglo-Saxon English into modern English. It’s merely the “really” who, how and why that trips us up.

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Other intriguing historical research was offered by *SM* regular contributor Dr. Paul Altrocchi, who looked at the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Napoleon, the Third Earl of Southampton, and the Fifth Earl of Derby: “Poison Power: Natural Death, or Murder Most Foul?” Altrocchi’s medical background was key in his forensic analysis of the history of the period and the multiple stories told about these deaths and the various theories about how they could have been murder by poison.

Altrocchi’s conclusion was that Napoleon and Derby were murdered by poison, but that the theories about the Third Earl of Southampton having also been poisoned were most likely wrong. He said the traditional reason given (lethargy) was most likely an after-effect of the fever he had just recovered from, and the real cause could have been a heart attack related to the overall strain of his illness and his son’s death. He emphasized that murder by poison was a one-way trip—there is no illness, then recovery, then illness again, as was the case with the Third Earl.

Derran Charlton shared some of this

recent researches and stories, which included his acquisition of Dorothy Ogburn’s annotated copy of the *Sonnets*, and a catalogue of items at the Shakespeare Birthday Trust, which included the “WS” ring featured prominently on Wood’s *In Search of Shakespeare*. It turns out the ring was found in a farmer’s field in Stratford in 1810, but nonetheless was immediately considered to have been the poet’s, lost 200 years earlier. Interestingly, at the time (1810) the farmer had in his employ one “William Shakespeare.” Go figure.

John Varady spoke about Carmel’s own Robinson Jeffers and led a tour of the Jeffers memorial in Carmel, and Washington D.C. lawyer William Causey (a recent convert to the authorship debate who has organized two highly successful authorship debates at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington over the past two years) spoke at the Saturday Banquet on “A Lawyer Looks at the Authorship Question.”

Other presenters included: John Shahan on “Speaking of Metamorphosis: How does change take place?”, a paper designed to lay  
(Continued on page 32)

## Fellowship’s 2004 Conference set for Baltimore next October

The Shakespeare Fellowship’s Third Annual Conference will be held in Baltimore, Maryland, over Columbus Day weekend (October 7th to 10th, 2004).

The conference headquarters hotel will be the Best Western Hotel, 5625 O’Donnell Street in downtown Baltimore (800-633-9511). The conference room rate (single or double) will be \$95 per night. The conference registration fee was not yet set as we went to press.

Dr. Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky, organizers of last year’s conference in Carmel (CA) are again organizing this year’s event. Stritmatter now lives in Baltimore, where he moved last fall to begin a position as instructor at Coppin State College.

Early plans call for cooperation with several local groups, including the Baltimore Shakespeare Festival, whose production of *Julius Caesar* will be part of the

conference package. Also, creators (and performers) Graham Jones and Jepke Goudsmit of the Kinetic Energy Theatre Co. will be on hand (all the way from Sydney, Australia) to present part of their Oxfordian show “Shakespeare, Who Was He? A demasquerade.”

Conference speakers who are confirmed so far include: Dan Wright, Richard Desper, K.C. Ligon, Terry Ross, Roger Stritmatter, Ken Kaplan, Hank Whittemore, Ren Draya, Charles Boyle, William Boyle, Stephanie Hughes, William Niederkorn, Ron Hess, Michael Dunn, Tim Holcomb, Marty Hyatt, Andrew Hannas and Prof. Kevin Simpson (Concordia University). Simpson’s paper from the 2001 De Vere Studies Conference (““Madness in great ones must not unwatched go”: Edward de Vere and the Creativity-Madness Debate in Psychology”) will be published in the August 2004 issue of *The Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*.

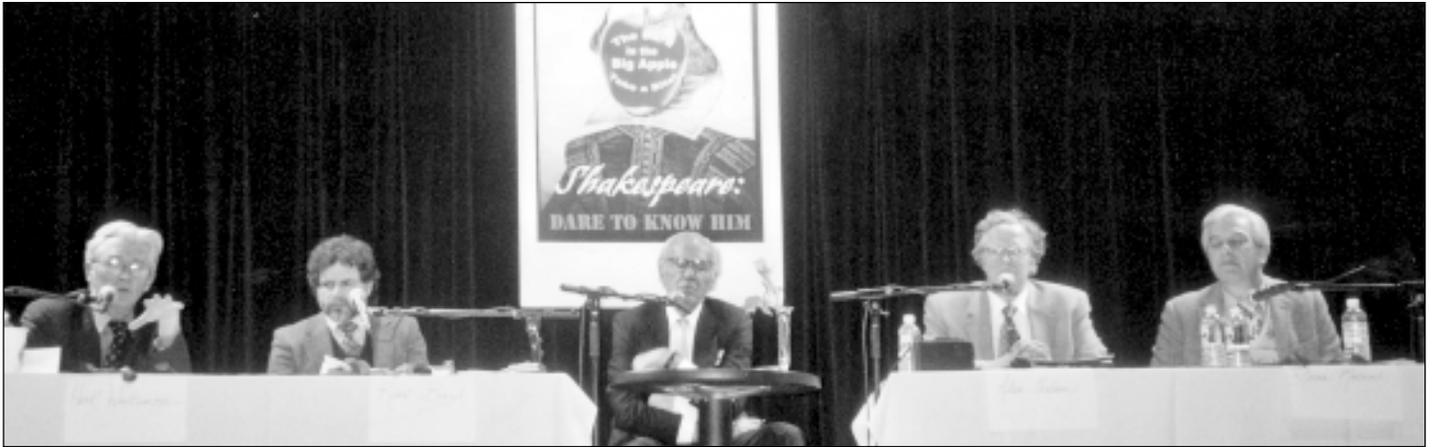


Photo: Karyn Sherwood

Participating in the debate are (from left): Hank Whittemore, Robert Brazil, moderator Lewis Lapham, Alan Nelson and Irv Matus.

*Play's the thing (cont'd from page 1)*

author, while the Oxfordians had to argue from the circumstantial evidence (both literary and documentary) that “seemed” to indicate that Oxford was the best fit to be the true author.

Nonetheless, the exchanges between the two sides proved to be quite illuminating by the evening’s end. The final exchange between Hank Whittemore and Irv Matus illustrated in microcosm the dilemmas inherent in debating the authorship. When Matus remarked that all the Oxfordians have is a story that they make up as they go along, Whittemore came right back with, “Yes, we do have a story. In fact, we are on a great adventure, while you are on a sinking ship.” Matus got in the last word of the evening, and said that “I don’t read *Hamlet* to read a code book ... I read *Hamlet* to read the great literature that it is.”

This exchange seemed to crystallize the key problem in the whole authorship debate: Are the works of Shakespeare the key evidence, and—if so—how do we read these works and how do we incorporate them into the debate over who wrote them?

The debate had begun with a question for both sides: “What is the evidence that your man wrote the works?” The Stratfordians came back with the usual answer that of course their man wrote the works, and the Folio and the monument are the key pieces of evidence. They also cited records showing that their man was connected to the theatre, emphasizing throughout the evening that only a “man of the theatre” could be Shakespeare, and therefore their man was Shakespeare (and of course discounting the well-known connections of Oxford to play-writing and having his own company of players).

Whittemore countered these points by

asking, “What evidence do you have that in the lifetime of Shaksper that any contemporary record exists as to his being a writer?” (They conceded there was none.) And “What evidence do you have that there is any foreground of early works, apprenticeship, youthful efforts, leading to the full blown poems and plays attributed to Shakespeare?” They conceded also that there were none. Nelson did remark that many manuscripts were lost in that era. They then complained about these questions and returned to both the Folio and the monument. Eventually Lapham broke in and said, “Gentlemen, let me get this clear ... you haven’t answered this question.”

Brazil demonstrated a large problem with the orthodox story of Shakespeare and the theater. As many as half the plays have no direct association with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men or the King’s Men—the acting groups that are claimed to be the only troupes for which Shakespeare wrote. On a related point, Brazil also noted that documentary evidence connected Robert Armin, the clown of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men around 1600, with Oxford’s entourage in Hackney. Brazil also challenged Nelson on his claim that the Stratford man never dealt in grains, citing the existing records that he was fined twice for hoarding grain during a famine.

When the Oxfordians’ turn came, Brazil showed how the Oxford-financed-and-published *Cardanus Comferte* and *The Courtier* contained numerous exact phrases and ideas that are reflected in such plays as *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Brazil made the interesting point that the most credited screenwriter of all time is Shakespeare (based on his search in the Internet Movie Database), but Hollywood has never attempted to film the life of William Shake-

speare of Stratford because they know there is no story there that could ever play on the screen.

Whittemore built on this point by noting that, “Alan Nelson has given us a biography of the Earl of Oxford that purports to tell us that he couldn’t have written the Shakespeare plays ... he has, in fact, succeeded in giving us the life that was lived throughout the plays themselves.” For instance, selling lands like *Timon*, presenting plays like *Hamlet*, dueling in the streets like *Romeo*, dabbling in sorcery and magic like *Prospero*, etc.

“I want to make it clear that the evidence in either case is circumstantial.” And he continued that “part of our evidence comes from Oxford’s known literary work (all youthful) and letters that in many instances contain the very words, phrases and themes found in the later Shakespeare work.” For example, there is Oxford’s sonnet “Love thy choice” (which begins with “Who taught thee first”) compared with sonnet 150 (9)’s “Who taught thee how...”. He also quoted another line from “Choice” (“In constant truth to bide so firm and sure...”) in comparison with sonnet 152 (10)’s “Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy.”

He further noted the line from Oxford’s May 7, 1603 letter that “truth is truth, though never so old,” comparing it with his motto (“Vero nihil verius”) and with Sonnet 82 (12): “Thou, truly fair, wert truly sympathized / In true plain words...” All these instances amount to evidence of a foreground for their candidate (unlike Shaksper), with in some cases 30-40 years dividing Oxford’s usage from Shakespeare’s.

Whittemore continued that Oxfordian circumstantial evidence could be viewed as a series of dots, which when connected, reveal the face of Oxford. Dots such as: his connection with Shakespeare’s sources

(Golding, Surrey, Lyly, Munday, Watson, etc.), the fact that he himself was a noted poet and playwright of the era, had a company of players, was a musician, had traveled to Italy, etc. Further, Oxford could be connected to virtually every reference in the autobiographical sonnets—botany, music, astronomy, horsemanship, painting, medicine, law and politics. Finally, for circumstantial evidence we have a living, breathing human being.

In response to all these points about Oxford's life and work the Stratfordian debaters, when not touting the First Folio and the monument, presented the familiar arguments about the Stratford grammar school (he could have learned everything there), and also the evidence pointing to the Stratford man as an actor. On this latter point Nelson mentioned the recent article in *Shakespeare Matters* about the "Roscius" annotation discovered by Paul Altrocchi,

citing it as just one more piece of evidence that the Stratford man was indeed an actor. Several times during the evening Nelson and Matus emphasized that their man was a "man of the theatre," which, in their estimation, therefore made him the author.

Of course, as both Brazil and Whittemore responded, so what if he was an actor? —it still doesn't establish him as a writer, let alone the author of the Shakespeare Canon. And, of course, Oxford was himself deeply involved in theatre as patron of a company of his own and an acknowledged playwright, but without any surviving works under his own name. Nelson, in his book and during the debate, cited the fact of Oxford's having his own company as evidence that he wouldn't have been writing for any other company, namely the Chamberlain's Men (aka Shakespeare's company).

As so often happens with debate events

such as this, it was hard to determine winners and losers; individual responses are usually dictated by the sympathies one had before the debate began. If anything, this encounter did prove that concentrating on the works as key evidence is paramount. For Stratfordians, always emphasizing the Folio and the monument is nothing more than claiming ownership without providing a credible argument for how and why their man actually did write the works.

Since Oxfordians don't have a comparable "ownership claim" to the works by Oxford, it is the works themselves that must be cited. That was the Oxfordians' strongest point throughout the evening, culminating in the final exchange between Whittemore and Matus over how to read *Hamlet*. And it is this point that Oxfordians should remember to emphasize in any encounter with Stratfordians—the plays and poems are the thing. —W.Boyle

## Shakespeare Oxford Society meeting in NYC

The Shakespeare Oxford Society held its 27th Annual Conference in New York City over the last weekend in October, with the primary venue being the National Arts Club in Gramercy Park.

The conference began with a debate on Thursday evening—it is reported on in this issue, beginning on page one. For Shakespeare Fellowship members who attended the conference in Carmel earlier in the month, some of the faces and papers in New York were the same.

In addition to his participation in the debate, *Shakespeare Matters* columnist Hank Whittemore also spoke Sunday on Ben Jonson and William Shaksper, reprising a talk he first gave in Portland last April. Mark Anderson again read from his work in progress on Edward de Vere's literary biography (though from a different chapter from the one he read in Carmel). Dan Wright was on the agenda twice, speaking first on the possible scandal about the Rev. Wilmot as the first to find there was no record of Shakespeare the writer in Stratford (see his article in *Shakespeare Matters*, Summer 2003), and also discussing the anomalous treatment by Shakespeare of the historical earls of Oxford (e.g., leaving the 9th earl out of *Richard II*, and attributing false heroics to the 13th earl in the *Henry VI* series).

As he had in Carmel, Christopher Paul presented his research on the possible evidence that Oxford did not die in 1604 but

may have gone into retirement (similar to that of the dukes in *Measure for Measure* and *As You Like It?*). As Paul is the first to point out, such a scenario is far from established by his documentation, but clearly it is well worth further study and discussion. Finally, Fellowship trustee Sarah Smith spoke about her authorship novel, *Chasing Shakespeares*.

Among the other papers in New York, Robert Brazil was impressive as he focused on the role of Gabriel Cawood in the publication of Oxford/Shakespeare's works, plus the works of a number of the writers that some believe were members of his writing team and/or his stand-ins. Brazil was a busy man all weekend, as he also participated in the Thursday debate, and performed his own adaptations of some of de Vere's poems to music (with two fellow musicians).

Ramon Jiménez's presented his excellent piece on the early play *Edmond Ironside*, which he had read at the De Vere conference last April. The reading was embellished by readings from the play itself by professional actors James Newcombe and Tom Kelly. Newcombe also participated in the Sunday panel on producing, directing and acting Shakespeare on stage.

Others giving papers over the weekend were Richard Whalen ("Shakespeare's Audience"), Bill Farina ("Edward de Vere as Man of the Theatre"), Ron Hess (on his book *The Dark Side of Shakespeare*), John

Shahan ("Smoking Guns & Defining moments: How Revolutionary Change Occurs"), *The New York Times* writer William Neiderkorn (on a century of *Times* coverage of authorship issues) and Peter Dickson on how emphasizing the Catholic roots of the Stratford man has caused a rift in the ranks of Stratfordian scholars (see page seven).

Prof. Alan Nelson, answering questions about his new book, raised a few eyebrows when he concluded by saying, "Oxford is not going away. He is a great character. This is a terrific story. You really have a winner."

Playwright and Pulitzer Prize finalist Amy Freed spoke engagingly at the Saturday luncheon of her experiences in writing and seeing her authorship play *The Beard of Avon* produced around the country (it opened in New York in December—see our review on page four). Columbia University Chair of the Graduate Theatre Program Kristin Linklater also spoke, voicing her strong Oxfordian convictions (the final chapter in her 1992 *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice* is devoted to Oxford as Shakespeare).

On Sunday the conference concluded with a panel discussion about the effects of exploring the authorship question on understanding the text, characters and story. The panel, moderated by Linklater, included: Broadway producer Edgar Lansbury, American University Professor of Theatre Caleen Jennings, and actor James Newcombe of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

## The Eighth Annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference

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*Spell Shakespeare (cont'd from page 1)*  
 “accurate estimation of Oxford’s character” from such obviously tainted evidence reveals his extraordinary bias against his subject:

If I judge Oxford harshly from the outset, it is because I neither can nor wish to suppress what I have learned along the way.

Here Nelson suggests that his perspective is based upon the truth of the documents, which, insofar as they relate to the libels, is in serious question. Be that as it may, readers will find on Nelson’s page of Editorial Procedures a statement of the critical difference (given in greater detail in the Introduction) between his methodology and that of Oxford’s previous biographer, Bernard M. Ward, author of *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*:

The documents that lie at the heart of this biography are freshly transcribed from original sources. To preserve the flavour of the originals I retain original spellings...

Whether or not Nelson could have composed the first sentence without realizing its irony, he has nonetheless given us his equation: documents in modern spelling (Ward’s) may lie, while those in original spellings (Nelson’s) tell the truth. After touching on particulars of orthography, he continues:

I silently expand abbreviations; incorporate scribal corrections, additions, and interlineations; suppress cancellations; restore missing text; and insert letters, words and comments, as needed for clarity, within square brackets.

Nelson thus admits to a fair amount of textual manipulation, at least as much as he assigns to Ward, but adds this disclaimer:

More pedantically accurate transcriptions of many of the same documents are posted at my website.

This statement is important as there is other information available at Nelson’s website<sup>2</sup> not found in the book, and it is there that his real reason for retaining the original spellings becomes clear: Nelson’s theory is that the Earl of Oxford’s spelling reveals that he couldn’t have been Shakespeare.

Indeed, Nelson’s aim in writing this book seems to have been twofold: One, to establish that Oxford was a scoundrel un-

worthy of being the bard, and two, regardless of the reader’s assessment of the earl as a human being, to prove that Oxford can be dismissed as author of the canon on linguistic grounds alone. Although the few pages devoted to linguistic considerations appear slight when compared to the several hundred focused upon Oxford’s character, the chapter which deals with the earl’s extant letters constitutes Nelson’s best attempt to disqualify Oxford as Shakespeare on the basis of his “idiosyncratic” spelling (including that of words Nelson says Oxford “misheard”) and supposed regional dialect. Nelson is also critical of the earl’s grammar (he doesn’t seem aware that Oxford’s constructions are reflective of Shakespeare’s), lack of punctuation (he doesn’t acknowledge the lightness of punctuation in Shakespeare), and use of legal Latin, though he denigrates Oxford’s classical Latin as well, citing what he describes as Oxford’s failure to resort to Latin roots in spelling. That Oxford would have been experimenting with competing forms in an age of tremendous variation in spelling is a thought which barely rates a murmur of recognition from Nelson, who uses phrases like “distinctly odd, even for the time” to describe examples which depart from “more normative forms.” Here Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable<sup>3</sup> provide an informative context:

The variability of English spelling was an important part of the instability that people felt characterized the English language in the sixteenth century, especially as compared to a language like Latin. To many it seemed that English spelling was chaotic.

Baugh and Cable emphasize, however, that consistencies of spelling “often went with a scholarly temperament,” citing Sir John Cheke’s and Richard Stanyhurst’s individual systems (both at odds with many of their contemporaries), adding that “most writers show a fair degree of consistency within their own practice.”

Here, however, they make a critical distinction:

It was somewhat different with the hastier writing of the more popular playwrights and pamphleteers. It is not always clear how much of their spelling is to be credited to them and how much to the printer. Most printers probably took advantage of the variability of English spelling to ‘justify’ a line, with as little scruple about optional letters as about extra spaces.

At his website, Nelson argues that one would expect that “some of the author’s signature spellings would find their way into the final corpus, even with the personal and ‘house-style’ alterations inserted by professional scribes and compositors,” his implication being that none of Oxford’s spellings found their way into the printed texts of the Shakespearean canon. It is worth noting that the Riverside Shakespeare<sup>4</sup> includes in its basically modernized text a few variant spellings judged to be possibly reflective of contemporary pronunciations, including: ‘sixt’ (sixth), ‘Callice’ (Calais), and ‘embassadors’ (ambassadors), all of which are found in Oxford’s letters. Of course in this era the likelihood of any author’s “signature” spellings surviving in printed form would be based upon how close to or distant from the norm, as perceived by the individual compositor, each was.

### Oxford’s spelling

Nelson states that Oxford’s spelling generally “falls about midway between the untrained and phonetic practices of the poet Thomas Churchyard or the landlady Julian Penn<sup>5</sup> (1592), and the more nearly uniform and ‘modern’ practices of William Cecil, Oxford’s daughters Bridget and Susan, and his second wife, Elizabeth Trentham.” Many chapters later, he gives an example of Churchyard’s spelling but modernizes Mrs. Penn’s<sup>6</sup> with the excuse that its orthography is so unclear that he must “translate” it. Moreover, his coupling of “untrained” and “phonetic” implies that phonetics were or are the province of the “untrained.” The level of this observation is bizarrely shortsighted, because Oxford’s tutor Sir Thomas Smith was the author of *De Recta et emendata linguae Anglicae scriptione Dialogus* (a Dialogue Concerning the Correct and Emended Writing of the English Language, 1568), and because the young earl was also acquainted with John Hart, another outstanding phonetic spelling reformer, thought by E.J. Dobson<sup>7</sup> to be “our chief authority for the pronunciation of his time.” Nelson’s implication that Churchyard and Penn were somehow reflective of stylistic influences while ignoring Smith and Hart in this context renders a cynical meaning to his avowal to point out “the significance” of the documents.

The first endnote to the chapter “Oxford’s Letters” cites Nelson’s website,  
 (Continued on page 16)

*Spell Shakespeare (cont'd from page 15)*  
reinforcing the idea that he is his own authority. Here the extant letters and memoranda may be read in their entirety, along with alphabetized word lists which make it possible for the reader to observe, in utter disbelief, that Nelson actually constructs his theory of “misheard words” from Oxford’s occasional spellings, despite the fact that Oxford frequently spelled most of these words consistent with more normative contemporary forms. His citation of the *I* in ‘realme’ is a particularly egregious example. The website shows that Oxford spelled this word as ‘realme’ no less than 26 times compared with only two instances of the variant ‘reame.’

Furthermore, the *Oxford English Dictionary* states that *I* did not become standard in the word until 1600. Nelson also cites Oxford’s mention of ‘Edward Hubbard/Hubbert’ as ‘Hulbert’ in a letter to Burghley, without clarifying that in Oxford’s letter to the man himself he addressed him as ‘Hubbert.’ Nelson declares that this instance of an extraneous *I*, together with Oxford’s having added an *I* to the name of the estate ‘Wivenhoe’ (Wiuenghole) and his having dropped the *I* twice in ‘realme,’ is a “propensity” which “marks Oxford as particularly defective in his habits of pronunciation.”

Oxford’s letters, however, include vocabulary that demands skillful articulation, and it will be observed that some of these words include complex combinations of *m*, *n* and *l*, for instance: ‘calumniated,’ ‘gentlemen,’ ‘Walmsle,’ and ‘Mydelltone’s.’ Nelson cites Oxford’s single spelling of ‘stannary’ as ‘stammarye,’ as evidence of the earl’s mishearing of *nas m*, ignoring the possibility that the earl might have taken note of the local dialectal form. Indeed, according to the *Riverside Shakespeare*,<sup>8</sup> the bard spelled ‘renowm’ as a variant of ‘renown,’ which the editor believes may have reflected a “distinctive” contemporary pronunciation.

Moreover, the similarity of the orthography of doubled *m* and *n* respectively makes one wonder if ‘stammary’ is actually a penmanship issue. Nevertheless, seizing upon the slight incidence of an excrescent *l* and if true, an errant *m* for *n*, both clearly unusual when compared to Oxford’s otherwise conventional applications of these sounds, Nelson advances his slender claims. It will be seen that his argument that Oxford was not a “fully competent practitioner of his native English” is based upon similarly constituted comparisons.

### Spelling and hearing

Also, while Nelson’s website states that certain items are dialectal, in the book he calls the same items misheard, while some misheard words on the website have been categorized differently in the book. ‘Necescessarye’ (which Oxford spelled seven times according to the standard ‘necessarie’) Nelson concedes was likely due to a moment of “inattention.” He has also changed his mind about ‘importu-

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***“Indeed, Oxford’s  
orthography suggests  
a cosmopolitan  
personality actively  
responding to the  
changing linguistic  
environment.”***

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nate’ for ‘importune.’ Still on the misheard word list at the website, in the book Nelson calls it “odd” even though it is cited by the *O.E.D.* as a variant used in Oxford’s lifetime (1598), and well beyond. Nelson argues that since Oxford used it three times in his letters and Shakespeare never did, Oxford can’t have been Shakespeare. The poem “When I was Fair and Young” (thought by Looney and Dr. Grosart to be Oxford’s)<sup>9</sup> ends with the phrase “importune me no more,” so possibly Oxford used both variations, depending on the nature of the writing.

Nelson points to Oxford’s use of ‘satisfise’ for ‘satisfy’ and ‘subieste’ for ‘suggest,’ stating that Shakespeare only used ‘satisfice’ once and never used ‘subieste,’ omitting Oxford’s usage of ‘satisfie,’ and the fact that ‘subieste’ might have been changed by a compositor to the competing form. ‘Interest,’ according to the *O.E.D.*, was an alteration of the earlier form, ‘interest.’ Oxford uses ‘interested’ once, Shakespeare uses ‘interest’d’ once, yet Nelson cites the word as further evidence that “clearly Oxford’s language is not the language of Shakespeare.”

Nelson cites ‘agers’ (possibly Oxford’s coinage from ‘ag-ere,’ to act, do) for ‘agents,’

despite Oxford’s six usages of the contemporary variant ‘agentes,’ two of ‘agent,’ one of ‘agents,’ and one of ‘agentship.’ Additionally, as Nina Green<sup>10</sup> notes, the *O.E.D.*’s first citation for ‘agentship’ (tentatively, 1616) is 19 years after Oxford’s use of it. Green’s research demonstrates that Oxford used a number of words years before their earliest citations in the *O.E.D.* (three of which are attributed to Shakespeare), also assessing “the significance of the correlation between Oxford’s lexical vocabulary and Shakespeare’s” (Oxford’s letters may be read at her Oxford Authorship website—[www3.telus.net/oxford](http://www3.telus.net/oxford)—in modern spelling). Green states that “one should not lose sight of the fact that Oxford’s prose vocabulary, for the most part, is derived from business correspondence which deals with topics not even remotely connected with the subjects of Shakespeare’s plays and poems. Yet astonishingly, Oxford deals with these financial and legal matters in the vocabulary of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.”

Nelson’s eye doesn’t see that, however. He cites as misheard ‘lyggates’ for ‘lingots’ (ingots), despite two examples of ‘lyngates,’ which can certainly be taken as a variation, but clearly not as evidence of inability to hear sounds of the word. Oxford’s ‘my thinkes’ for ‘methinks’ was a variant used by John Fletcher in *Mad Lover* (1619),<sup>11</sup> who by Nelson’s reasoning must also have possessed an inferior ear. Oxford spells ‘use’ and its derivatives according to the standard at the time (as ‘vse’) no less than 47 times, yet on the basis of a single instance of ‘yowse,’ a spelling very clearly based upon sound, Nelson foolishly argues that Oxford couldn’t hear the word properly. Similarly, Nelson cites a single instance of ‘churge’ for ‘church,’ failing to take into consideration that this spelling might acknowledge a final voiced consonant in place of the corresponding voiceless one, and omitting that Oxford spelled it more regularly as ‘churche.’ The notion that Oxford may have sometimes favored correlation of sound over etymology generates only contempt from Nelson, who notes that Oxford had no “settled” way of spelling ‘half-penny,’ nor of ‘buy,’ however the *O.E.D.* cites many contemporary variations of both. Nelson’s assertion that Oxford spoke a provincial dialect truly falters: If Oxford were that parochial he wouldn’t display such flamboyant variation.

Indeed, Oxford’s orthography suggests a cosmopolitan personality actively re-

sponding to the changing linguistic environment. Early training with Sir Thomas Smith notwithstanding, his extensive foreign travels also argue against his having rigidly maintained the speech patterns he heard as a child. Nelson's attempt to characterize Oxford's speech as rural East Anglian is perfectly in step with his subjective and misleading assessment of Oxford's spelling. His logic operates entirely within the confines of his biased view, and outside the complex weave of influences competing for recognition as standards in the cosmopolitan capital, standards to which Oxford had been exposed long before he arrived in London at the age of 12. The young earl then spent the remainder of his formative years listening to the vocal patterns of Lord Burghley, the Queen and other well-established Londoners. It is noteworthy that while Elizabeth<sup>12</sup> adopted the popular East Midlands derived *-ar* pronunciation in words like 'person,' which she wrote as 'parson,' Oxford participated only partially in the innovation, often spelling 'merchants' as 'marchantes' but 'servants' and 'service' with *-er*, the form which became standard for all three words later on. This is one of many instances of his fluidity as a writer and, one could reasonably infer, as a speaker.

In his play *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, George Chapman provides a contemporary portrait of Oxford distinctly at odds with Nelson's postliminary appraisal:

He was beside of spirit passing great,  
Valiant and learn'd, and liberal as the  
sun,  
Spoke and writ sweetly, or of learned  
subjects,  
Or of the discipline of public weals;  
And 'twas the Earl of Oxford.

Indeed, where is the contemporary evidence to support Nelson's fantastic claim that Oxford's dialect would have been regarded as "provincial," comparable to Walter Raleigh's famously broad Devonshire?

How can one credit Nelson's claim that Oxford's Latin was "defective" based upon a few examples of English legal Latin? An expert in that vernacular might be able to ascertain if Oxford chose phonetic renderings in these words and phrases as well, given that the "language" involved was neither Latin nor English. As for Oxford's classical Latin, Nelson ignores the testimony of the scholar Sturmius (whom the

earl met during his travels in 1575), when in a subsequent letter to Burghley, he says:

As I write this I think of the Earl of Oxford, for I believe his lady speaks Latin also.<sup>13</sup>

Nelson also disregards Gabriel Harvey's praise of Oxford's Latin verses and Courtly Epistle in the introduction to Bartholomew Clerke's translation of Castiglione's *The Courtier*.<sup>14</sup> Harvey, speaking in Latin be-

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***"How can one  
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fore the Queen and Court at Audley End in 1578, lauded Oxford's writings above those of Castiglione himself, observing that in Oxford's travels he had "learned the manners of many men and the arts of foreign countries."<sup>15</sup>

Harvey's testimony and Oxford's Latin Epistle itself are an embarrassment to Nelson: Thus quietly, in an endnote which relates to another matter, he conjectures that Clerke himself "may have" written the epistle. That Clerke would undertake this assignment by presumptuously adopting such an affectionate, self-deprecating tone toward himself on behalf of England's premier earl is unimaginable.

Nevertheless, continuing his attack on Oxford's skills as a Latinist, Nelson states that "only a person ignorant of or indifferent to Latin could spell 'impudent' as 'impodent' or (worse) 'impotent.'" Nelson thus reveals his own ignorance of, or indifference to, the fact that 'impotent' (and the variant 'impodent' found in *Hamlet* Q1<sup>16</sup>) had more than one meaning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Besides being defined as "powerless," the *O.E.D.* says that 'impotent' ('impotently') also meant "without self-restraint, ungovernable, unrestrainedly," citing Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* (1596),

"O sacred hunger of ambitious mindes, And impotent desire of men to raine." It is therefore hardly certain that Oxford meant 'impudent' where he spelled 'impodent' (again, possibly like 'churge,' with a voiced consonant in place of its voiceless counterpart), describing certain servants to Burghley, expressing in a subsequent letter that he scorned "to be offered that injury to think I am so weak of government as to be ruled by servants, or not able to govern myself." He later wrote to the Lord Treasurer that if he hadn't "alredie sufficient knowledge of Carmaden's honestie" that he would have "the more wondered at thys impotent part of his to avoue before her Majestie so manifest & intolerable vntruthes." Here of course Oxford actually spells the word 'impotent.' Might this be another normative spelling of Oxford's, contrasting with a phonetic one that is possibly indicative of "dialect"? Nelson hasn't considered this possibility, and in making his evaluation of Oxford's dialect he doesn't cite any dialectician or linguistic authority for evidentiary support.

### Sound and spelling

To be sure, there is a distinction between accent and dialect (and between sound and spelling) especially with respect to the development of modern English in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Spelling conventions were progressing ahead of pronunciation changes (largely due to the raising of Middle English vowels, known as the Great Vowel Shift), despite the efforts of spelling reformers to resolve spelling with the evolving standard. As C.L. Wrenn<sup>17</sup> says:

Especially between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries English vowels, which had very roughly the sounds of Classical Latin, came to assume their present sounds, some of which are peculiar to our language. This relatively rapid change in the vowel sounds happened to coincide with the increasing and inevitable tendency of the printers, with the popularizing of books in Queen Elizabeth's time, to look for accepted conventions of spelling.

The relationship between sound and spelling had been more straightforward in the previous era. As Baugh and Cable<sup>18</sup> put it:

One of the striking characteristics of Middle English is its great variety in the different parts of England. This variety was not confined to the spoken forms of the  
*(Continued on page 18)*

*Spell Shakespeare (cont'd from page 17)*

language, as it is to a great extent today, but appears equally in the written literature. In the absence of any recognized literary standard before the close of the period, writers naturally wrote in the dialect of that part of the country to which they belonged... In a rough way, however, it is customary to distinguish between four principal dialects of Middle English: Northern, East Midland, West Midland and Southern... London began as a Southern and ended as a Midland dialect. By the fifteenth century there had come to prevail in the East Midlands a fairly uniform dialect, and the language of London agrees in all important respects to it.

So, in looking for clues to Oxford's pronunciation in his spelling, it must be understood that the Great Vowel Shift was still in progress. As an example, Middle English long *-e* (spelled with an 'i') had been pronounced in words of the lexical set **price** (like today's 'caprice'), but was now shifting toward the (**ai**) diphthong we pronounce in today's **price** words. Linguist J.C. Wells<sup>19</sup> says one transitional pronunciation during this period was the (**ei**) diphthong we now pronounce in the lexical set **face**. Interestingly, in an East Midlands text called *The Bestiary*, c. 1250<sup>20</sup> one finds the spelling of 'eiland' for 'island.'

In 1570 in *A Methode or comfortable beginning for all vnlearned*, John Hart's phonetic rendering of 'thy' in The Lord's Prayer is (**thei**).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in outlining his proposed system of spelling according to sound in *An Orthographie*, Hart spelled many words of the **price** set with (**ei**), including 'like' ('leik'), which he says is the pronunciation of the "common man, and many learned," though he makes it clear that he favors the older, more conservative pronunciation in other words of the same set, such as 'title' and 'right.' Thus Hart records one aspect of the Great Vowel Shift as it occurred in the "best and most perfitte" speech of "every reasonable English man." Oxford, who spelled 'like' as 'leke,' habitually chose (only for this word and its compounds) a spelling that seems to have been reflective of this shift.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, neither choice was adopted as the standard spelling, and the pronunciation later stabilized as (**ai**).

However, Oxford did not spell over a hundred other words in the **price** set with an 'e,' such as 'pike' or 'find,' choosing an 'i' or 'y' spelling elsewhere. Thus, this occasional spelling of Oxford's, despite its frequency in commonly used words, cannot be given much weight as an indication of his overall pronunciation of words of

the lexical set **price**, except by Nelson, who cites it as evidence of Oxford's "peculiar" dialect, calling it an "e-for-i substitution," without saying which sounds he means. Use of the term "substitution" is itself injudicious, as the standard sounds weren't fully established. In any case, given Hart's division of the **price** set, it would appear that Oxford pronounced most of those words with the older, conservative vowel. It is also noteworthy that in the preface Oxford wrote to *Cardanus Comforte*<sup>23</sup> the

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***"The fact is that  
Oxford's spelling  
reveals educated  
awareness of  
past and present  
forms of  
the language..."***

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word 'like' appears, not as he habitually wrote it ('leke'), but apparently according to the compositor's preference.

At his website Nelson also cites Oxford's *-wh* spelling in 'hood' (once in 'leklywhodes' and once in 'falswhood') as evidence that he "spoke a dialect recognized by contemporaries as provincial, and even as rustic" (in the book he omits 'rustic' and rescinds his claim that this 'dialect' was recognized by anyone except himself), calling this a "wh-for-h substitution," again without defining the context of the evolving pronunciation. The *O.E.D.*, however, observes that:

Early in the fifteenth century appear spellings with *-wh* of words with initial **-h** followed by an **-o** sound."<sup>24</sup>

They add that "some of these spellings were especially frequent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century." Thus *whood* for 'hood' is used by Hall the Chronicler, Nashe, Harvey, John Davies of Hereford and Sylvester.

Hall spelled 'hood' as 'whode,' as Oxford did in 'leklywhodes,' the single *-o* reflecting the OE root 'hod.' Oxford, however, also used the single *-h* in both words, spelling them as 'leklihode' and 'falshodd'

(once each), which is a clear sign of his awareness of the evolving standard. That Nelson would once again present only one set of examples is an appalling reminder of his shallow interest in "letting the documentary evidence speak for itself."

Nelson also alleges that Oxford's addition of *-t* to 'through,' 'though' and 'enough,' is proof of mishearing and/or defective delivery but these were variants which appeared in literature, at least in one instance, long after Oxford's lifetime. The *O.E.D.* cites the variant 'enought' in *The Man in the Moone* by W.M. (1609), also in Edward Cooke's *A Voyage to the South Seas and Round the World, Perform'd in the Years 1708, 1709, 1710, and 1711 by the Ships Duke and Duchess of Bristol*. Evidently this quirk of Oxford's accent/dialect/mishearing was visited upon Capt. Cooke over a century later. The 'through,' variant was once used as a combination of 'through' and 'out' which led to the modern 'throughout,' again, according to the *O.E.D.*, which cites Chapman's use of it in 1599. Virtually every one of Oxford's variant spellings is either an earlier form or one of the competing variants of the time. Despite Nelson's suggestion otherwise, 'showld,' 'cowld,' and 'wowl'd' are found in *O.E.D.* citations for the 16<sup>th</sup> century. 'Lave' is old form of 'law,' 'thought' for 'though' is an old Scottish form, and out of 46 variants listed by the *O.E.D.* for 'suit,' Oxford used only seven. 'Ought' and 'owte' are earlier forms of 'out,' and Oxford used both, as well as 'out' itself. Nelson cites 'altho(e)' for 'although,' according to his usual pattern, ignoring Oxford's more frequent use of 'althoughe' and 'althowge,' and although Nelson has documented Oxford's deep interest in alchemy, he must have missed in 'thoth' this possibly sly reference to the Egyptian god Thoth, later named Hermes Trismegistus by Neoplatonists and devotees of mysticism and alchemy.<sup>25</sup>

### **Are spelling variations errors?**

The fact is that Oxford's spelling reveals educated awareness of past and present forms of the language, and suggests the same willfulness evidenced in other aspects of his life and personality: He seems to bend the words to serve his own interests, spelling the way that pleases him at any given moment, favoring many antique forms, but at other times taking a flyer on new variations, some of his own creation. However, since Nelson views all

of Oxford's notionate behavior as reprehensible, his disdain for Oxford's distinctive spellings is similar to his contempt for Oxford's extravagance in shoes: All "variations" are "errors." Yet Dennis Freeborn observes that in this era, "The concept of a 'spelling mistake' had not yet been established."<sup>26</sup>

This brings us to Oxford's 'oft' for 'ought,' about which Nelson makes another contumelious pronouncement:

The OED head-note reveals that Oxford's substitution of the labial fricative 'f' for the guttural 'ough' is a positive linguistic error, not just a rural dialect.

First, I can find no such statement in the *O.E.D.* In addition, the style of the sound is more accurately called labio-dental, since its articulation involves both lips and teeth. Second, Nelson provides two *O.E.D.* citations for 'oft' (defined as an obsolete or dialectal form of 'aught' and 'ought'), *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1575) and *Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576), as well as citing Robert Greene's *Orpharion* (c.1590), so the preposterous implication of his construction is that the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines Oxford's use of 'oft' as a "positive linguistic error." Furthermore, the guttural (x) sound, spelled -gh, was gradually disappearing in Standard English, though there is still a question as to whether this process was complete in Oxford's time. When it did disappear, of course, wherever it didn't become silent, it was replaced by -f.

However, the poet's rhyme in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), "When as thine eye hath chose the dame," suggests that the labio-dental fricative -f sound was being pronounced then in a variant of 'naught' with -ft:

Have you not heard it said full oft  
A woman's nay doth stand for nought.

Kokeritz<sup>27</sup> says: "This [variant] may have been current in London at the time, for Hodges' couples 'aught' and 'oft' are pronounced alike, while Chapman rhymes 'wrought': 'aloft,' soft."

More to the point perhaps, Shakespeare uses 'oft' for 'aught' in Sonnet 14:

Or say with princes that it shall go well,  
By oft predict that I in heaven find...

Thus, Oxford's so-called "error" is also Shakespeare's.

Clearly, Professor Nelson is no Profes-

sor Higgins. His citation of "wh-for-h" as a rustic dialect marker applies just as readily to Nashe, Harvey, Hall the Chronicler, John Davies of Hereford and Sylvester as it does to Oxford, as they all spelled 'hood' as 'whood,' and even so, Oxford spelled the word with the single -h with an equal frequency. Moreover, according to Charles Barber,<sup>28</sup> though the pronunciation of (hw) before rounded vowels (as in 'who') was gradually changing to (h), it was still heard in developing Standard English "well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century." Nelson's citation of e-for-i in 'like' is also meaningless out of proper context and specious on two counts: 1) Oxford spells every other word in the lexical set **price** with an *i* or a *y* according to more accepted conventions of his time, well over a hundred words, including those with identical consonant closures, i.e., 'pike.' 2) Neither pronunciation nor spelling had completely stabilized in Oxford's lifetime as the Great Vowel Shift was still in process.

### Conclusion

Nelson has misidentified variant forms as errors, and foolishly proposed that on the basis of occasional spellings that Oxford misheard those words even though he habitually wrote them in more normative contemporary forms. His evaluation of Oxford's dialect therefore proceeds from a suspect methodology. It is certainly not the assessment of a dispassionate professional, more like the cynical calculation of a hostile amateur.

Thus, Nelson's pronouncements about Oxford's language resonate in the same hollow tone as his judgments about Oxford's character. His selectivity in observation of the evidence, together with serious inconsistencies of form and substance (as well as omissions of critical contextual information) all lead the reader to conclude that Nelson is either engaged in deliberate obfuscation to prove a thesis for which there exists no decisive evidence, or that he is so blinded by his bias against Oxford that he truly does not know what he is doing.

Indeed, instead of convincing the reader that "clearly Oxford's language isn't the language of Shakespeare," Nelson has unwittingly provided further evidence that it is.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> <http://mapperleyplains.co.uk/oprus/see.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson>.

<sup>3</sup> *A History of the English Language*, fifth ed.

(London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 208-9.

<sup>4</sup> Blakemore Evans, G. *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson, Alan H. *Monstrous Adversary*, 328 "Julian (or Julia) Penn."

<sup>6</sup> Nelson, op.cit., 328-9.

<sup>7</sup> *English Pronunciation 1500-1700*, second ed. 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), V. 1, 88. See Nina Green's *Edward de Vere Newsletters*, Oxford Authorship Site, "The Langham Letter/Orthography."

<sup>8</sup> Blakemore Evans, op.cit., 39.

<sup>9</sup> Brazil, Robert at <http://elizabethanauthors.com> "The Poems and Lyrics of Edward de Vere."

<sup>10</sup> *Edward de Vere Newsletters*, Oxford Authorship Site, "Oxford's Vocabulary," 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, CD-ROM version 3.00, copyright Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Kokeritz, Helge, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Nelson, Alan H. op. cit., 176.

<sup>14</sup> Brazil, Robert op.cit "Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford," Letter to Bartholomew Clerke.

<sup>15</sup> Brazil, Robert op.cit. Gabriel Harvey: Address at Audley End.

<sup>16</sup> iB3 recto Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: The First Quarto 1603 (The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. 1963, Fourth Issue), Act I, sc. 2, "Nephew to olde Norway, who impudent/And bed-rid, scarcely hears of his/Nephews purpose..." The word 'impudent' has been read by some editors as 'impudent', though this hardly reflects the sense of the line, and it appears as 'impotent' in Q2 and Folio.

<sup>17</sup> *The English Language* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1978), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Baugh and Cable, op.cit., 188-90.

<sup>19</sup> *Accents of English 1* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 184.

<sup>20</sup> Baugh and Cable, op.cit., 411.

<sup>21</sup> [http://english.su.se/nlj/k3/web/lect6/gvs\\_evid.htm](http://english.su.se/nlj/k3/web/lect6/gvs_evid.htm).

<sup>22</sup> Freeborn, Dennis *From Old English to Standard English* (Macmillan Press LTD) 291-2, 306.

<sup>23</sup> Brazil, Robert op. cit. Letter to Thomas Bedingfield.

<sup>24</sup> *O.E.D.*, 'wh.'

<sup>25</sup> *O.E.D.*, 'Hermes.'

<sup>26</sup> Freeborn, op.cit., 323.

<sup>27</sup> Kokeritz, op.cit., 307.

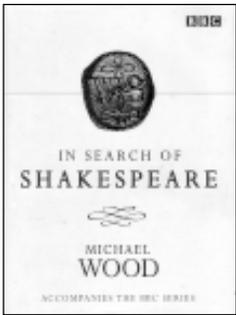
<sup>28</sup> *Early Modern English* (Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 127.

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# Book Reviews

***In Search of Shakespeare, By Michael Wood (London, BBC Worldwide Ltd., 2003)***

By K.C. Ligon



Has Michael Wood found Shakespeare? Wood would doubtless argue that he has, certainly that he has come closer than any previous historian or biographer to constructing a viable

personal history of the bard's life. In his film *In Search of Shakespeare* and its accompanying book (retitled for US publication as *Shakespeare*), Wood has taken an in-depth look at the Stratford man's family history together with copious and perceptive references to the cultural history of the time, appearing to find a centerpiece for his personal history in the bard's proposed secret life as a Catholic in this turbulent era of religious conflict in Elizabethan England. Armed with this intriguing dimension to the Stratford man's personality—that he created those sublime works “not for an age but for all time” in the midst of performing a lifelong dodge around Protestant authority and the very real danger of persecution, torture, even death—Wood weaves all the major myths and conjectures about the Stratford man from the past 400 years into a tapestry with his own fanciful musings, pausing only very occasionally to admit that his fiction might not be fact.

“If I'm right,” he says in the film, “this is what happened,” announcing his conjecture that the Stratford man came to Wilton House to write the first 17 sonnets on a commission from Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, in order to encourage her son, William Herbert, to marry. Swept along by Wood's fervor (and in the book, by many beautiful photographs and reproductions) we soon lose all sense of this being a conjecture. We start to believe that Wood's scenario must have happened, that somehow Wood has proved it. Of course in the book the tone of this and

other conjectures is more low-key, and it is the contrast between the different approaches to book and film that allows Wood to seem both scholarly and theatrical, creating a delivery system for his mix of fact and fantasy that is simultaneously skewed to a serious audience and directed towards one that seeks only to be entertained.

## Narrative, documents, entertainment

The audience looking for entertainment in the film may find it—Wood does his best to bring the era to life with stirring music and reenactments—while the serious-minded student seeking fresh revelations about the bard in the book may be disappointed, since it is more obvious here that Wood's fantasy Shakespeare is a creation of myths willfully set against a backdrop of well-documented aspects of contemporary history. In his determination to flesh out vividly the great spaces between the paltry collection of known facts of the Stratford man's life in order to connect them to the brilliant Shakespearean canon, Wood loads his narrative with more verifiable documentation of the time, tripping off into what “might have been” at regularly timed intervals, building a sand castle on a bricks and mortar foundation.

Indeed, in tone and presentation, the film *In Search of Shakespeare* often seems like a mock-documentary in the tradition of *The Rutles* or Peter Jackson's *Forgotten Silver* (a “documentary” about a pioneer New Zealand filmmaker who never was), since it presents fiction as fact with a similarly zealous enthusiasm. This image is reinforced by Wood's personality that at times is charming and amiable as he recounts historical events, but which takes on a daffy, overheated near-hysteria as he steps into the realm of conjecture. Alert readers with some knowledge of the period will detect these “gear shifts” in the book as well; however, the naïve reader could easily mistake Wood's scenarios for proven historical fact, and the gullible viewer might think his quavering voice expresses genuine emotion.

Wood, it must be remembered, is something of a showman. Having begun as an actor, he brings a theatrical energy to everything he does. It is clear that he identi-

fies strongly with the self-made up-from-nothing-to-greatness Shakespeare, and in the bard he has found a role he would dearly love to play, that to some extent he thinks he is playing. By virtue of his own life experience, Wood offers the audience a visceral version of the paradigm: A kid from the provinces with a non-standard accent who journeys to London and makes something of himself. Wood, whose primary education was Manchester Grammar School, and the Stratford lad, who “must have” attended Stratford Grammar School, would both have had to downplay their Midlands accents to succeed in the big city. Wood's speech now also reflects a flavor of the Popular London accent heard in the speech of the actors and other craftsmen and women he interviews, hinting at the dialect transformation that the Stratford lad would have to have performed in order to be understood in London, much less soar to Shakespearean heights of literary fame and greatness.

## How to succeed in show business

Wood thus turns the Shakespeare story into a how-to-succeed-in-show-business saga (coupled with an against-all-odds, life-and-death struggle to escape religious persecution), using phrases such as “getting bums on seats was still a prime motivation,” saying Shakespeare was “like a top scriptwriter today, a professional through and through,” and that after “ten years in showbiz he had made some money and had financial security.” Everything the Stratford man does (or can be conjectured as doing) leads as the night the day to the young genius taking London by storm. The lack of hard evidence doesn't dissuade Wood. No mention of Will the playwright in Henslowe's receipts? No matter. Wood tallies up the grosses for a performance of *Henry VI* with his own trembling pencil before our eyes, then announces in a stage whisper reeking with portent—the film is full of these mini-soliloquies—that with this “take,” Shakespeare had “arrived.”

Thus Wood himself arrives, following in Shakespeare's footsteps, striding about London and the English countryside with the look of an overanimated child, swathed in a black neo-Elizabethan leather jacket, his gelled-up auburn hair nearly standing

on end, a large bag importantly slung over one shoulder (as if it contained the lost manuscripts), speaking to “the people” and white-gloved, poring over yellowed parchments as hand-held cameras devotedly capture every frame of his breathless journey. Wood the actor is doing his “homework” to become Will the playwright, sharing his “behind the scenes” process with reader and viewer. Accompanied by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company who perform scenes from the plays, Wood looks on with giddy pride as if he had dashed off those scenes the night before.

As he writes in the book, and speaks directly into the camera in a cozy, self-congratulatory tone, he wants us to picture Shakespeare as a “young blade, bold in his craft,” urging us to “put away” the image of the establishment icon, “a balding middle aged man in a ruff.” Of course, Wood doesn’t want to play that fellow. Furthermore, it is an important part of Wood’s “search” for Shakespeare to “find” the bard in himself, for by stepping into the role he can play him as the charming, poetic, sensitive, witty, well-read, well-traveled, savvy historian/show business entrepreneur Michael Wood either is or would like to be, and not as the lackluster, shadowy figure the Stratford man has always seemed to be, especially in the 80-odd years since the charismatic Earl of Oxford was first ad-

vanced as the real Shakespeare.

Indeed, this comparison is the subtext for Wood’s entire enterprise. It will be abundantly clear to anyone who has studied the life and writing of the Earl of Oxford that, while Wood was searching for Shakespeare in the life of the Stratford man, he was also performing a search of all evidence that points to Oxford as Shakespeare, the earl having emerged as the chief challenger to the traditional view that the Stratford man wrote the canon.

**The anxiety of Oxfordian influence**

Thus Wood’s “answer” to the Oxfordian case is the real centerpiece of *In Search of Shakespeare*. However, Wood is answering a question many readers and members of the audience haven’t asked. The fact that he is responding to the Oxfordian case will be noticed only by some: Oxfordians, Stratfordians (who may or may not agree with his conclusions), and the curious whose interest has been piqued by recognizing the great divide between the known facts of the life of the Stratford man and the life that is reflected in the works of Shakespeare. Wood has covered his tracks cleverly, though, and would certainly deny that anything about Oxford was in his thoughts. His truncation of source material wherever it collides with his premise, his ma-

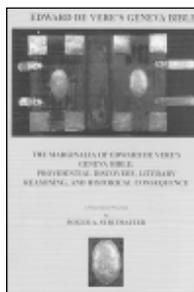
nipulation of time and text—especially the Sonnets—his countless “diverting speculations” outside of “verifiable historical fact,” and his failure to even mention Oxford in passing, offering only a self-conscious description of Oxford’s daughter as “a woman named Bridget de Vere,” all point to his covert agenda: To mock up unknown aspects of the Stratford man’s life with key elements of the life of Edward de Vere—education and poetic sensibility—while refurbishing the known aspects of the Stratford man’s life with Wood’s dynamic personal attributes, Wood having cast himself in the role of Shakespeare’s successor in the entertainment industry.

Michael Wood’s biography in the book states that he has “over eighty documentaries to his name.” A survey of the Internet Movie Database reveals four that he hosted, two of which he co-wrote. One presumes that he went un-credited, or the Imdb is seriously behind in crediting him for the other 76+ films he has worked on. This is certainly possible if he worked on those films as a production assistant. In any event, that Wood claims to have these films “to his name” invites a comparison to the idea that the Stratford man has those 37 plays and 154 sonnets “to his name.” If Wood were trying for an in-joke, he couldn’t have constructed a better one.

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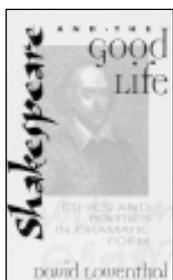
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*Book Review/Commentary**Monstrous Adversary: Part II**Oxford biography fraught with errors and exaggerations*

By Richard F. Whalen



Oxfordian scholars are finding significant errors and misinterpretations in Alan Nelson's *Monstrous Adversary*. Initial reviews on-line and in print had already found grave flaws,

and now more are turning up. The recent findings are casting more doubt on the book's value, especially its offhand conclusion that Oxford did not write the works of Shakespeare.

"Offhand" conclusion because Shakespeare's true identity is only incidental to the main purpose of the 527-page book. That purpose is to provide transcripts of documents from Oxford's life and some judgments in passing on what they say about his character and life style. Although Oxfordians would not quarrel with many of his judgments, they would certainly position them differently. They would also deny that his lifestyle precludes him from having been a writer of genius. (See the review of Nelson's book, *Monstrous Adversary*, in the fall issue of this newsletter.)

Nelson, who recently retired as professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley, knows more about Oxford's life from archival documents than most Oxfordians. He has transcribed scores of documents by Oxford and about his life. And he shares his work with Oxfordian scholars, even though he clings to the Stratfordian creed.

What Nelson considers a blemish on Oxford's character and lifestyle leads off the Introduction to the book. In his fifth sentence, Nelson charges that "Oxford neglected to serve others for the simple reason that his first aim in life was to serve himself." (Which sounds like the typical behavior of many geniuses.) In a flawed

attempt to support his allegation, he cites an elliptic sentence from a letter: "I have no help but of mine own, and mine is made to serve me, and myself not mine."

But Nelson undercuts his argument in

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---

the same paragraph, where he recognizes that Oxford was referring to his real estate, not his chosen lifestyle. Oxford's elliptic sentence has been wrenched out of context. As Nina Green points out, Oxford was only saying that his property exists to serve him and not the other way around, a reasonable attitude toward real estate.

On the Internet discussion group Phatton, Green also notes that Nelson erroneously cites Bernard M. Ward's 1928 biography of Oxford to support an allegation of necromancy against him. But Ward referred only to astrology, not necromancy, which has a more sinister connotation; and everyone in Queen Elizabeth's court, including herself, believed to some extent in

astrology. Others did allege necromancy, but not Ward.

**Stunning misinterpretation**

A quite stunning misinterpretation of a published poem by Nathaniel Baxter addressed to Oxford's daughter Susan also mars the book. According to Nelson, Baxter, a commoner, improbably tells the teenage Susan in the poem that her father "devoted his time in Venice to sexual adventure, at the cost of a besmirched reputation and a sexually transmitted disease." The key passage reads: "Hopping Helena with her warbling sting infested the Albanian [of Albion] dignitary [Oxford]." Hopping Helena is supposed to refer to a prostitute and "warbling sting" to venereal disease.

Dr. Frank Davis, however, showed several years ago that the interpretation is medically wrong and that the passage simply refers to a dancing girl, Helena, playing a warbling sting on a lute. A warbling sting describes a lute vibrato common at the time. Davis glosses the lines as follows: "Oxford never avoided what pastimes brought,/Including Italian sports, enchanting songs;/ Dancing girls playing the warbling sting (on the lute),/These things captivated him,/Just as they corrupted all Italy." Nelson knew of Davis's corrective but does not recognize it in the text or even in the endnotes. (See issues of the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* of summer 2001 and spring 1995.)

Most astonishing for Oxfordians and probably for Elizabethan scholars is the judgment that Oxford was not competent in English. As Nina Green has commented: "the utter absurdity of this claim is obvious to anyone who reads Oxford's letters, with their complex but clear prose style and highly sophisticated vocabulary." (See also the article by K.C. Ligon in this issue.)

Green has demonstrated "that Oxford's lexical vocabulary coincides with

Shakespeare's to a remarkable degree and is in every way the equal of Shakespeare's in both its richness and its innovative use of language." On Phaeton recently, she reiterated the results of her 1993 study of Oxford's letters and youthful poems:

When I broke Oxford's vocabulary down into lexical words, the results showed that 93 percent of the vocabulary of Oxford's letters and 97.5 percent of the vocabulary of Oxford's youthful poems are identical with Shakespeare's [vocabulary]....Oxford's vocabulary, both in terms of his word choices and their level of sophistication, is entirely consistent with the hypothesis that Oxford wrote the works of Shakespeare. The study does not prove that Oxford did write the works of Shakespeare, but it proves he can't be ruled out as the author of the Shakespeare canon.

That is what Nelson tries to do. In Green's study, she also cites examples of Oxford's innovations in the English language. He used dozens of words many years before the first usage as given in the Oxford English Dictionary, including several that are found in Shakespeare. Green's study can be found on her website, [www3.telus.net/oxford](http://www3.telus.net/oxford).

### Praise for Oxford exaggerated?

Toward the end of his book, Nelson charges that contemporary praise for Oxford was exaggerated. "Oxford's poems and plays were praised in print during his lifetime," he writes, "Gabriel Harvey praised both Oxford's Latin and his English compositions." He also cites praise by William Webbe, George Puttenham, and Francis Meres. But then he states that these contemporaries "clearly exaggerated Oxford's talent in deference to his rank." The only supporting testimony for "clearly exaggerated" is, of all people, William F. Buckley Jr. during his *Firing Line* TV debate between Charlton Ogburn and Professor Maurice Charney.

Nelson also alleges that Oxford was not a Latin scholar. But in three other places in the book he cites contemporaries who said Oxford was competent in Latin, even excellent. Besides Gabriel Harvey's praise of him excelling in letters, including Latin, an Italian page testified that Oxford spoke Latin and Italian well, and the German scholar Sturmius wrote to Lord Burghley

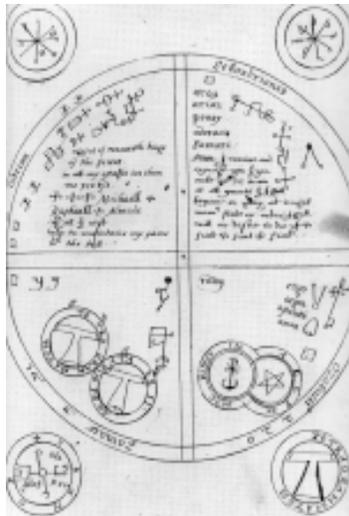


Fig. 1

There are only a handful of graphic images used in Nelson's book, some of them generic "life in Elizabethan times" material, and none of them of Oxford's letters or handwriting. Several are present, however, to illustrate some of Nelson's favorite Oxford themes—e.g., Oxford "the atheist," "the superstitious," "the murderous monster." Fig. 1 shows a page from the Book of Magic, mentioned by Nelson (p. 223) to illustrate what may have been involved in the reputed "Book of Prophecies," a connection that in turn leads Nelson to one of the Howard-Arundel charges that Oxford "wallowed" in superstition. Fig. 2 shows "The Street" in Whitehall, the scene of a March 17, 1580, skirmish between Walter Raleigh and Edward Wingfield (p. 232), which Nelson (based again on Arundel's testimony) traces back to a scheme by Oxford to murder Raleigh. Nelson notes that the narrow street was the "perfect spot for an ambush."



Fig. 2

that "as I write, I think of the earl of Oxford; and his lady, too, understands Latin, I think." Nelson notes only that this proves Oxford's wife's competence in Latin. Nina Green supplies the corrective that it also proves Oxford's competence. Thus, Nelson gives testimony by three contemporaries in support of Oxford's Latin skills, but they have no effect on his negative assessment, which may yet prove faulty in its details. Oxfordian scholars continue to analyze the book.

To his credit, Nelson has posted errata notes on his website ([socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson](http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson)) that go beyond correcting the usual typos, misspellings, and other minor errors that afflict most books. He calls one section of errata "Errors or problems of fact/interpretation." For example, he says re page 254: "I now think that the 'important gentleman' who fell away and was set at liberty was perhaps not Oxford but Francis Southwell."

Regarding his interpretation on page 432 of a letter by Oxford's son, Nelson says:

As pointed out by Christopher Paul [an Oxfordian of Atlanta], I committed an egregious error in failing to recognize that 'wytherings' is in fact the surname of Anthony Wytherings, who had an office related to the Forest. Hence my interpre-

tation of the letter as humourous and childish rather than serious and evidence of ongoing competition over the Forest is incorrect. I also owe thanks to Christopher Paul for noting that much more documentation concerning the fate of the Forest in the years beginning 1604 survives than I had indicated or been prepared to deal with. [Nelson had read "wytherings" as meaning "white herrings."]

According to Green, Nelson also cites Oxford's annual income from his inherited properties at twice the actual value, thus exaggerating his profligacy and economic downfall. Oxford died in debt.

Quite admirable is Alan Nelson's willingness to listen to Oxfordian scholars and debate aspects of the authorship issue with them at every opportunity. Despite the "Monstrous Adversary" title for his book, he himself has usually been a friendly adversary. Oxfordians can only hope that some day he will grasp the cumulative power of the evidence for Oxford as Shakespeare and see how woefully inadequate is the evidence for the Stratford man. All the research that went into his book will remain valid. All he would have to do is change a few interpretations and, of course, his overall conclusion.

*A year in the life*

By Hank Whittemore

## 1604 (Part I): "Our revels now are ended"

Now opens the first full calendar year of the reign of James VI of Scotland as King James I of England, following his accession upon the death of Queen Elizabeth last March. Londoners are just beginning to recover from the ensuing months of horror and suffering caused by plague that claimed 30,000 lives. In the eyes of most Englishmen, meanwhile, Scottish "foreigners" are also infecting the country. These uncouth creatures have flooded the Court with lack of manners and grace and with all-too-obvious greed for handouts. Even Robert Cecil, who engineered the succession of James, feels ill at ease in the new Jacobean world. "I am pushed from the shore of comfort," he writes to Elizabeth's godson John Harrington, confiding his wish to go back in time to the Queen's reign so he might wait "in her presence-chamber with ease at my food and rest in my bed."

Cecil will become Viscount Cranborne this year and 1st Earl of Salisbury in the next, but his hunchbacked shoulders already carry the burden of state business. Last year he reported to James the aims of the Bye and Main plotters (to kidnap the King and compel him to do their bidding), resulting in the November treason trial and conviction of Sir Walter Raleigh, who now resides in the Tower. The Gunpowder Plot next year will further consolidate Cecil's control over the Government under James, whose youthful experiences have made him pathologically afraid of plots. Meanwhile England has avoided civil war around the succession and, too, negotiations with a weakened but still arrogant Spain are underway to finally end the long and bitter war.

Upon his accession James himself assumed patronage of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, now His Majesty's servants the King's Men; and the company formed by the merging of Oxford's and Worcester's players became Queen Anne's Men, while 11-year-old Prince Henry became the new patron of the Lord Admiral's Men. During the seven months of plague since May 1603, however, all public theaters have been closed.<sup>1</sup> In December the disease was still ravaging the city, so James moved the Court to

Hampton Palace and the King's Men followed at his command, performing three plays there after Christmas.

**January 1: Royal Entertainment**

On New Year's Day the King's Men perform another play for the royal assemblage at Hampton Palace.<sup>2</sup>

**January 14: Hampton Conference**

When James made his journey south to London and the English throne, Puritans presented him with a petition (signed by more than a thousand leaders of reform-minded Christians) to get rid of leftover Catholic rites and ceremonies. Unable to ignore it, the King called for churchmen and theologians to gather at Hampton Palace "for the hearing, and for the determining, things pretended to be amiss in the church." In the wording of this royal summons, James made known his negative attitude toward the Puritan complaints, based on his fear that weakening the Bishops would weaken himself as monarch.<sup>3</sup> The conference, aimed at settling religious differences between the Puritans and the Bishops of the Church, formally opens.

**January 17: King James Bible**

The Puritans are departing from the Hampton Conference even angrier than they were four days ago. A motion is passed, however, that "a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek... without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all churches of England in time of divine service." James dislikes the popular Geneva Bible (published in England in 1560) because its marginal notes appear to challenge his divine primacy. In any case, the result of this motion will be the King James Version of 1611.

**January 30: Oxford Letter**

The latest-dated letter from the hand of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford among those to be recovered over the next 400 years is written this day to King James in regard to the conditions prevailing at Waltham Forest and Havering Park. The new monarch granted Oxford custody of both the Forest and the Park on July 18, 1603, a week before the earl served as Lord Great Chamberlain during the coronation at Westminster. In August James renewed Oxford's annual grant of 1,000 pounds,

using the same language as in the original warrant issued by Queen Elizabeth in 1586.

Edward de Vere expresses his gratitude: "Seeing that it hath pleased your Majesty of your most gracious inclination to Justice & right to restore me to be keeper of your game as well in your Forest of Waltham, as also in Havering Park, I can do no less in duty and love to your Majesty but employ myself in the execution thereof."

Now he informs the King that both areas have been "abused" by deer killing and timber cutting, adding: "I was bold to send unto your Majesty a man skillful, learned and experienced in forest causes, who being a dweller and eyewitness thereof might inform you of the truth."

Oxford is sending James the results of a royal inquiry so that "now, having lawfully proved unto your Majesty that Sir John Gray hath killed and destroyed your Deer in Havering Park without any warrant for the same, his patent is void in law, and therefore I most humbly beseech your Majesty to make him an example for all others that shall in like sort abuse their places and to restore me to the possession thereof, in both which your Majesty shall do but Justice and right to the one and the other... Your Majesty's most humble Subject and Servant E Oxenforde."

Professor Nelson depicts Oxford as "venomous" against John Gray, interim Keeper of the Game, but by this letter the earl appears to be concerned strictly about preventing future abuses of the environment.<sup>4</sup>

**February 2: Play at Court**

The King's Men perform again for the Court at Hampton Palace.

**February: Priests Deported**

James issues a royal proclamation ordering all Roman priests to make their way to the nearest port of embarkation. Then they should "abjure the realm."<sup>5</sup>

**February 18: Play at Court**

The King's Men perform at Hampton Palace for the Court. In London, the plague is at last beginning to subside, and James announces he will make his royal entrance into London on the fifteenth of March.

**March 12: Royal Lions**

James arrives from the country with Queen Anne and Prince Henry, now a hand-

some boy of 12, and they take up residence in the Tower for the next three days. While touring the fortress, the King marvels at the lion pit by the gates; so Edward Alleyn, Master of the Bear Garden, is ordered to lower three of his large, powerful, short-hair dogs into the pit to fight for their lives. Members of the royal party watch the lions kill two of the mastiffs before the third, badly hurt, is saved. Prince Henry commands Alleyn to keep this brave dog at the Garden "and make much of him, since he that fought with the King of beasts should never after fight with any inferior creature."<sup>6</sup>

### March 15: Red Cloth

The account of Sir George Home, Master of the Great Wardrobe, includes an entry related to material for costumes to be worn by nine members of the King's Men during the Coronation Procession today in London: "Red cloth, four and a half yards each: William Shakespeare, Augustine Phillips, Lawrence Fletcher, John Hemmings, Richard Burbidge, William Slye, Robert Armin, Henry Cundell, Richard Cowley."<sup>7</sup>

These men are listed as members (or grooms) of the Chamber. With 4 ½ yards of scarlet-red cloth apiece, they have 40 ½ yards for their livery or, for all practical purposes, exactly the same amount ("forty yards of crimson velvet") that Edward de Vere requested in his petition of July 7, 1603, to the Privy Council. As a premier nobleman, Oxford ordinarily would have his own servants walk with him in the grand procession, but he now maintains no such retinue.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that "Shakespeare" now heads the list of names (the same as those listed on the Royal Patent for the King's Men issued in May 1603) would seem to suggest he is the leading member of the company.<sup>9</sup> This remarkable Government record, implying that "Shakespeare" deserves more prominence than any of the players, will pass unseen by contemporary citizens of England; but the name on this list will loom large, centuries later, in orthodox biographies of the poet-dramatist as an actor. Was the red cloth issued to "Shakespeare" given to William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon? Or was it issued to the Earl of Oxford, the actual leader of the company, under the Shakespeare name?

Although Edward de Vere participated in the private Coronation procession last July, whether he is involved on this solemn but joyous public occasion is unrecorded. By the same token, nowhere in all the

elaborate accounts of the festivities of this day are any players (with or without their red cloth) ever mentioned.<sup>10</sup> The names of both Oxford and "Shakespeare" are missing from the historical records of this important event.

### Royal Procession

James makes his triumphal entry into London amid the great crowds on hand for the pageants and shows. The streets have been railed and graveled; marshaled along one side of the procession route, from St.

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*"Was the red cloth*

*issued to 'Shake-*

*speare' given to*

*William Shakspeare*

*of Stratford-upon-Avon?*

*Or ... to the Earl*

*of Oxford?"*

---

Mark's Lane to Fleet Street, members of the city guilds stand waiting in their liveries, while the opposite side is jammed with common citizens and sightseers from all over England. Glass windows have been taken down, the better for spectators to see, and the conduits that supply the city's drinking water will run all day instead with claret wine.

Just after 11 a.m. the King sets forth from the Tower behind an enormous procession of the entire Court, judiciary, civil service and aristocracy, all walking in place according to precedence. His Majesty rides on a white jennet under a canopy held high by eight Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber; followed by Queen Anne in her chariot trailed by Ladies of the Court (second among her retinue, behind the Lady Arabella, is Elizabeth Trentham, Countess of Oxford)<sup>11</sup> and Maids of Honor. Spectacle, music and orations greet King and Queen all along the route, starting with 300 children of Christ's Hospital saluting with song from a platform.

Waiting for the royal couple on the way to Westminster and Whitehall Palace are eight Triumphal Arches, each more sumptuous and fantastic than the previous one.<sup>12</sup>

### Coronation Entertainment<sup>13</sup>

Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton composed "devices" for the royal family on this occasion, notes Duncan-Jones, who adds: "We may wonder why Shakespeare, the King's Men's leading playwright, did not compose anything for this great day." She also wonders why the Stratford man was "never asked" to write any "royal and aristocratic" masques or shows for the Court of James, either now or later. "Part of the answer," she offers, making a suggestion that could literally take one's breath away, "may be that Shakespeare was known to lack the ready access to classical literature and mythology that the genre required."<sup>14</sup>

Jonson and Dekker collaborated on the speeches given this day for The King's Coronation Entertainment. The scene at Fenchurch represents the City of London; at Temple Bar it's the Temple of Janus, where the symbolic figures Genius and Martialis engage in a dialogue in praise of the King and Queen. In the Strand at Westminster the scene is the Pleiades, with Electra lauding the significance of the day and the virtues of the King while proclaiming herself a comet of good omen for his reign. Later this year Edward Blount will publish *The Coronation Entertainment* together in quarto with two other Jonson works: *A Panegyre*, delivered upon the King's entrance to Parliament on March 19, 1603; and *Entertainment at Althorp*, performed for Queen Anne and Prince Henry on June 25, 1603, during their journey from Edinburgh to London.

Quite plainly Ben Jonson has become the chief writer of speeches and dialogues and masques for Jacobean royalty – a new career, thanks to his close association with Robert Cecil, who seems to have much to do with Jonson's rise to prominence.

### March 19: Parliament

King James meets his first Parliament, which will sit until early July. Nearly all the peers of England including "Veare Earle of Oxford" are summoned. Nelson writes that "Oxford neither attended, nor named a proxy; he remained, however, a member of the dormant committee to hear petitions from Gascony."<sup>15</sup>

### March: Southampton

Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, who is attending Parlia-

*(Continued on page 26)*

*Year in the life (cont'd from page 25)*

ment, is commended for a performance in the royal tilting yard.<sup>16</sup> James liberated Southampton in early April 1603 from the Tower of London, where the earl had spent more than two years of a life sentence for his role in the failed Essex Rebellion of 1601. Upon his release, Southampton quickly gained the high favor of the King, who granted him various honors over the next few months. These included a royal pardon, the captaincy of the Isle of Wight, installation as a Knight of the Garter; privileged access to the Privy Chamber, restoration of his earldom and the lucrative Farm of the Sweet Wines, which had provided Essex with most of his wealth.

#### **March: Malt on Credit**

William Shakspeare sells 20 bushels of malt on credit to his Stratford neighbor Philip Rogers, a financially troubled apothecary on High Street licensed to sell ale as well as drugs and tobacco.

#### **April: Southampton Daughter**

Elizabeth Vernon, Countess of Southampton, has given birth to another daughter (their first child, Penelope, was born in late 1598); and Queen Anne has agreed to be godmother. This month the baby girl is baptized Anne Wriothesley, in honor of Her Majesty, at a ceremony in the Chapel Royal.<sup>17</sup>

#### **April 9: Playhouses Reopen**

The Privy Council orders the lifting of the ban against public playing, so the King's Men now resume their regular performances at the Globe, though no records exist to indicate what plays they present.<sup>18</sup> [It appears that one of the many forgeries perpetrated in the nineteenth century has been a list of company actors (including "Shakespeare") appended to the Council's letter of this date. The Stratford man's biographers no longer use this item, simply ignoring what was once part of the traditional story.]

#### **April: Garter Vote**

Oxford's brother-in-law Thomas Cecil casts the earl's first and only vote since the 1580s for entrance into the Knights of the Garter.<sup>19</sup>

#### **May 1: Royal Entertainment**

Sir William Cornwallis the elder presents Ben Jonson's *Entertainment at Highgate*, written for King James and Queen Anne, at his house at Highgate.<sup>20</sup>

#### **May: Peace Talks**

Spanish commissioners arrive to discuss a treaty ending the war.

#### **May 22: Coronation Fees**

A warrant is issued to "pay 200 pounds

to the Earl of Oxford, for fees at the Coronation" for which he served as Lord Great Chamberlain on July 25, 1603.<sup>21</sup>

#### **May: Garter Robes**

Warrants are issued for the delivery of scarlet robes to the earls of Southampton and Pembroke as Knights of the Garter.<sup>22</sup>

#### **June 18: Forest of Essex**

Oxford grants custody of the Forest of Essex to his son-in-law Francis Lord Norris, husband of Bridget Vere, and his cousin Sir Francis Vere, who has just returned to

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*"Southampton was*

*quickly found*

*innocent of*

*whatever charges*

*had been*

*brought*

*against him..."*

---

England after 20 years of continuous military service in the Low Countries.<sup>23</sup>

#### **June 24: Oxford's Death**

Fifty-four-year-old Edward de Vere is reported to have died on this date at his Hackney home, of unknown causes.<sup>24</sup>

#### **June 24: Southampton's Arrest**

Late this evening Henry Wriothesley is arrested and held prisoner by the Government of King James. Southampton's papers are seized and scrutinized while he is interrogated.

"According to the French ambassador," Akrigg writes, "King James had gone into a complete panic and could not sleep that night even though he had a guard of his Scots posted around his quarters. Presumably to protect his heir, he sent orders to Prince Henry that he must not stir out of his chamber."

#### **June 25: Southampton's Release**

This morning, while the Privy Council is examining Southampton and those arrested along with him, wild rumors sweep

through the Court. Some men say a plot was discovered against the King and the Prince.

"Southampton was quickly found innocent of whatever charges had been brought against him," Akrigg continues. "According to both the Venetian and French ambassadors, he was released on June 25, the day after his arrest. Probably we shall never know the nature of the charges brought against Southampton... Probably King James, embarrassed by what had occurred, ordered that all the papers be destroyed. Certainly a determined effort seems to have been made to hush up the whole affair...."

"If the charges are unknown to us, so is Southampton's accuser. King James, though clearing Southampton, refused to divulge to him the identity of the informer. When Southampton, meaning to challenge his accuser to a duel, demanded to be told his identity, the King gave him only 'fair words'... That Southampton was completely exonerated and restored to favor there can be no doubt."<sup>25</sup>

#### **June 25: Shaksper Loan**

Also on this day William Shakspeare loans two shillings to apothecary Philip Rogers, who still owes payment for the malt he purchased from him on credit.<sup>26</sup> William has presumably gone back to Stratford to make this transaction in person; in London he is evidently living in the home of Christopher Mountjoy, a French Huguenot manufacturer of ladies' ornamental headgear, in the ward of Cripplegate within the northwest corner of the city's walls.<sup>27</sup>

#### **July 6: Oxford Burial**

Oxford's body is recorded as buried at St. Augustine's Church of Hackney, but he receives no funeral of record and leaves no known will.<sup>28</sup> His grave will be marked by no stone or name. His 11-year-old son Henry de Vere, reported by Nelson as already selected by King James "as a boy-companion for his son and heir Prince Henry," will become the 18th Earl of Oxford.

Before the death of Oxford's widow in 1612, she will request "to be buried in the Church of Hackney, within the County of Middlesex, as near unto the body of my late dear and noble Lord and husband as may be." She hopes this "to be done as privately and with as little pomp and ceremony as possible may be," except that "there be in the said Church erected for us a tomb fitting our degree, and of such charge as shall seem good to mine executors."<sup>29</sup>

A manuscript-book by Perceval

Golding, youngest son of Oxford's uncle, Arthur Golding, will report in a later year of the reign:

Edward de Vere, only son of John, born the 12<sup>th</sup> day of April 1550, Earl of Oxenford, High Chamberlain, Lord Bolbec, Sandforth, and Badlesmere, Steward of the Forest of Essex, and of the Privy Council to the King's Majesty that now is. Of whom I will only speak what all men's voices confirm: he was a man in mind and body absolutely accomplished with honorable endowments: he died at his house in Hackney in the month of June Anno 1604 and lieth buried at Westminster.<sup>30</sup>

A fire at Whitehall Palace in 1613 burned all records of the Privy Council from 1602 up to then,<sup>31</sup> so whether Oxford was an official member during the latter part of the Queen's reign has been unclear. To this point, however, at least two Privy Council letters from April 1603 have been found with Oxford's signature on them. These suggest that Oxford was part of a so-called Great Council conducting state business (under Secretary Robert Cecil's direction) during the transitional period between the Queen's death and May 2, 1603, when King James made his own appointments to the Council.<sup>32</sup>

The remark about Oxford being buried in the Abbey is unconfirmed. If correct, it would mean his body was removed from its Hackney location at some point after his widow's death in 1612 and brought to Westminster. The transfer would have been contemplated (if not carried out) by the time the First Folio was issued in 1623, when Ben Jonson wrote:

My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee  
by  
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lye  
A little further, to make thee a roome...

The possibility exists that Oxford's cousin Sir Horatio Vere and his son Henry de Vere, 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, were instrumental in having his body removed from Hackney and re-interred at Westminster in the tomb of Francis Vere, who died in 1609. Henry de Vere would eventually die at age 32 in 1625 from wounds received while fighting in the Low Countries under Horatio Vere, who would die in 1635. Both men would be buried in the Francis Vere tomb, which acted as a "family vault," in the Chapel of St. John the Evangelist at the southeast corner of the north transept of the Abbey.<sup>33</sup>

In chronological terms, our story would seem to be over; but we'll continue the year 1604 in the next issue, while exploring these and other questions:

- What was the link, if any, between Ben Jonson and William of Stratford?
- What was the association of Ben Jonson and Edward de Vere?
- Was Oxford the guiding force behind the Chamberlain's-King's Men?
- What was William of Stratford's role, if any, with the company?
- Was Oxford involved in work begun in 1604 on the King James Bible?
- Did Oxford really die this year? Is there some reason to believe he lived any longer?
- Is it just a "coincidence" that Southampton was arrested on the evening of the same day of Oxford's reported death? Or was there a connection between the two events?

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Adams, J. Q., *A Life of William Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 361.

<sup>2</sup> Adams, *Ibid.*, 361; the plays are not identified in any records.

<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis added); Christian History Institute at [www.gospelcom.net](http://www.gospelcom.net); a good recent account is from Nicolson, Adam, *God's Secretaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Nelson, Alan H., *Monstrous Adversary* (Liverpool: Liverpool Press, 2003), 424; I have taken the liberty to modernize the spellings.

<sup>5</sup> Bowen, Catherine Drinker, *The Lion and the Throne* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1956), 237.

<sup>6</sup> Bowen, *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, Ruth Loyd, *Oxfordian Vistas* (Jennings, LA: Minos Publishing Company, 1975, vol. 2 of the series), p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> The royal warrant establishing the King's Men on May 7, 1603 listed Fletcher first and Shakespeare second, followed in order by Burbage and the others.

<sup>10</sup> Adams, op. cit., footnote, p. 362 ("In a document in the Records Office," J. Q. Adams writes, "there are specially noted as present in the procession 'Messengers of the Chamber,' and other such officials.")

<sup>11</sup> Nelson, op. cit., 424.

<sup>12</sup> Akrigg, G. P. V., *Jacobean Pageant* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 31.

<sup>13</sup> Brock, D. Heywood, *A Ben Jonson Companion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 147.

<sup>14</sup> Duncan-Jones, Katherine, *Ungentle Shakespeare* (London: Thomson Learning/Berkshire House, 2001), pp. 176-177 (Emphases added).

<sup>15</sup> Nelson, op. cit., 424.

<sup>16</sup> Rowse, A. L., *Shakespeare's Southampton* (London: MacMillan, 1965), 180.

<sup>17</sup> Akrigg, G. P. V., *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 140; Rowse, *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>18</sup> Adams, op. cit., 362.

<sup>19</sup> Nelson, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Brock, op. cit., 85.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, op. cit., 112.

<sup>22</sup> Rowse, op. cit., 180.

<sup>23</sup> Ward, B. M., *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* (London: John Murray, 1928), 347; Nelson, op. cit., 425.

<sup>24</sup> Ward cites the burial record of the Parish Register in the Newcombe MSS preserved by the Hackney Public Library.

<sup>25</sup> Akrigg, *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton*, op. cit., 140-142.

<sup>26</sup> Schoenbaum, Samuel, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Schoenbaum, op. cit., 260.

<sup>28</sup> Ward, op. cit., cites the Church of St. Augustine's; Nelson, op. cit., cites the name of the rebuilt church, St. John-at-Hackney; he indicates Oxford was buried in the churchyard, which was apparently within the original building.

<sup>29</sup> Ward, op. cit., 347.

<sup>30</sup> Carrington, Phyllis, *Shakespeare Fellowship Newsletter*, American Branch, June 1943; stating the source is a manuscript found by Percy Allen at the Herald's College; the Ogburns suggest that Golding copied this paragraph from a contemporary notice circa 1604 (cited by B. M. Ward) and that Golding must have added the information about Oxford being buried at Westminster; Ogburn, Dorothy and Charlton, *This Star of England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972, reprinted from 1952), 1198.

<sup>31</sup> Ward, op. cit., 344.

<sup>32</sup> The two Privy Council letters signed by Oxford are dated April 3 and 8, 1603. The second letter was reported by the *Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter* of March 31, 1970 and reprinted (courtesy of the Folger Library) in the June 30, 1970, issue. More recently, Christopher Paul discovered the existence of the first letter at the British Library.

<sup>33</sup> Carrington, op. cit.

***Paradigm Shift***

By Mark K. Anderson

# An Interview with Derran Charlton

Oxfordians living in North America have a very wide ocean separating them from virtually all of the original documents that tell the story of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. One person who has arguably done more than any other to narrow the gaping gulf between English archives and American readers and researchers is Derran Charlton.

Attend any Oxfordian conference or event, and probably every one of the leading scholars you listen to have all, at one point or another, corresponded with and learned new things from Mr. Charlton. This kindly, thoughtful, auburn-haired and fire-bellied British Oxfordian has devoted countless hours since the late 1980s (the precise date he cannot recall) plumbing archives and private libraries that many of us have still not even heard of.

According to a recent letter—he's also one of the most responsive and generous correspondents in the Oxfordian movement today—Charlton has to date researched at the Bodleian, British, Maidstone, Chetham, Rylance, Skipton, Cornwall, Bury St. Edmunds, Chelmsford, Colchester, Nottingham, Stratford-upon-Avon, Taunton, Chesterfield, Ashbourne, Norwich, Lavenham, York, Leeds, Holkham and Wentworth Woodhouse Libraries in addition to dozens of American public and university libraries and collections. "But," he adds, "I prefer to research private unexamined collections/archives not open to general inspection—such as the Bedingfield, Yorke and Walsingham ... collections."

As he told *Shakespeare Matters*, his odyssey began at the Wentworth Woodhouse archives, an opulent south Yorkshire mansion that his family had worked at for over four centuries. A retired coal miner and entrepreneur, Charlton spent years combing the extensive Wentworth Woodhouse libraries for documents relating to the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford and the many Elizabethan and Jacobean figures he came into contact with. In the process, Charlton has found such gems as

the 1696 will of William, Earl of Wentworth that lists a portrait of the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford. When estate curators reviewed the heirloom portraits from the will in 1782, all were accounted for except one. The Earl of Oxford's portrait was missing, and in its place was a new portrait listed as "Shakespeare." The "Shakespeare" portrait had the same dimensions as the missing Earl of Oxford painting. (Not a few Oxfordians have wondered whether this finding illuminates the early history of the "Ashbourne Portrait" of Shakespeare—a checkered history discussed at length in Barbara Burris's articles for *Shakespeare Matters*.)

Other discoveries—published in the pages of Oxfordian newsletters such as *The De Vere Society Newsletter*, *The Elizabethan Review*, *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* and *The Spear-Shaker Review*—have included:

- The last recorded letter of Edward de Vere, to King James I, in 1604, from the Chelmsford archives.
- A copy of King James's pardon of Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, from the Essex County archives.
- A variation of the *Twelfth Night* poem "Farewell dear love since I needs be gone..." from a 1578 collection of personal papers of George Puttenham.
- A copy of a 1574 letter by Edward Hubbert, receiver to Edward de Vere, from the Cornwall archives.
- A reference to "A Tower Conference between the Earl of Oxford and Sir W.P. [William Pickering?]," from the Wentworth Woodhouse archives.

Charlton's numerous finds—too many of which remain unpublished and unchronicled—remind Oxfordians that most of the proverbial iceberg lies beneath the water's surface, waiting to be fathomed and studied. Few have dived deeper and returned with more precious nuggets than the tireless Yorkshire researcher from Wentworth Woodhouse country.

The following interview was con-

ducted in Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif. on 12 Oct. 2003, during the Second Annual Shakespeare Fellowship Conference.

**SHAKESPEARE MATTERS: What first attracted you to the authorship question, and what inspired you to do your own research on the subject?**

DERRAN CHARLTON: I had researched my own family history. I knew that my grandfather and his father and his father had been employed at Wentworth Woodhouse.

**Briefly, so that everyone is up to speed, what and where is Wentworth Woodhouse?**

Wentworth Woodhouse is the largest private house in England. The front is 702 feet across. It has 365 rooms, one room for every day of the year. It's owned by the Wentworth family. Edward de Vere was scheduled to be married to one of the Wentworth daughters. He was very, very young at the time. ... Edward de Vere's daughter Elizabeth married William Stanley [Earl of Derby], and they had a son called James. He had a daughter who married into the Wentworth family and brought all the Derby collection and library and portraits.

**So you started out researching your own family?**

Within two and a half hours, I was into a direct line back to 1667. We've always been employed on the estate—for at least 450 years, probably longer. [My family] was employed as scribes in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period. And then some of them became sculptors. Even now, I only live within five and a half miles from where my ancestors lived more than 500 years ago. We're not very peripatetic. We sort of stay around.

So [in the genealogical research], I started seeing references to Edward de Vere, to Lady Prudence Trentham, references to the Vavasours, references to the Knyvett family.

Within a fortnight, I was in a bookshop in Leeds. Charlton Ogburn's book had just

been published in paperback. So I went in, and it caught my interest. I was first interested in the name: I thought if it's written by a man named Charlton, it can't be a bad book, right? I started turning the pages, and it was evident he'd been researching this subject for years and years. But he said he'd never really come across anything definite. So I wrote to him. He was in a hospital at the time. He got back to me and said he was "electrified"—which I thought was a good, amusing American expression. [laughs]

**What was your background before coming to the Shakespeare authorship question?**

I was taught Shakespeare, and I firmly believed he was the man from Stratford. Having contacted Charlton Ogburn, I then lost a great belief and craved the truth. I'd come across Edward de Vere in the archives, but I didn't realize he was the man who could have been Shakespeare.

[Ogburn] told me that you'll have to continue the research where he'd be leaving off. He knew he was dying. He put me in touch with David Lloyd Krieger — also very encouraging and very enthusiastic. This was '88 or '89, could be in the early '90s.

**And what did you do for work — you're now retired, is that correct?**

I'm now retired, yes. I was born in a coal-mining village. I started working at the local pit, and I worked my way out of it. I eventually became self-employed — selling records and then jukeboxes, pool tables and video machines. Along the way, Margaret Thatcher closed the coal mines during a miners' strike. There was no wages for 14 months. So I sold the business off.

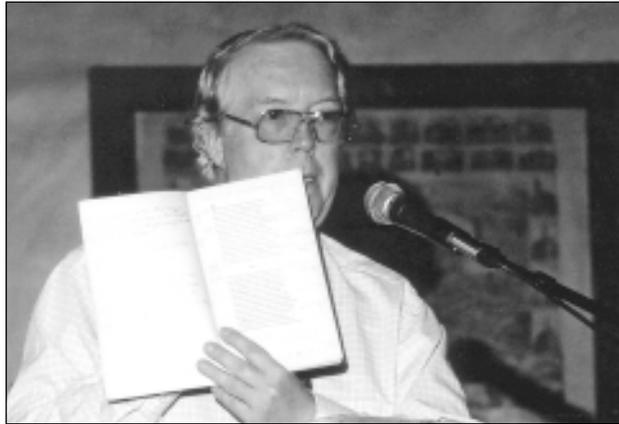
In the meantime, I was put in touch with Charles Burford, and he put me in touch with the Millers [Ruth Loyd and Minos D. Miller]. I also met John Price, and he in turn introduced me to Verily Anderson.

**What was your first big discovery?**

The first big thing I found is a copy of *Leicester's Commonwealth* at Wentworth Woodhouse. It's written in beautiful secretarial hand, very legible. It's in two different handwritings. There are about 13 lines crossed out, and what's been written

has been reworded. I actually found this document hidden inside a will. ...

[Ed. note: According to D.C. Peck's edition of *Leicester's Commonwealth* (Ohio Univ. Press, 1985 pp. 225-6), there are 58



*Derran Charlton addressing the Shakespeare Fellowship conference in Carmel last fall. He's holding up an annotated copy of Shakespeares Sonnets once owned by Dorothy Ogburn.*

known manuscript copies, in various states of completion and accuracy, of this infamous libel that first appeared in print in 1584. Peck does not list the Wentworth Woodhouse copy.]

I also found instructions from Elizabeth, signed by her full council, instructing the Earl of Derby to go to Navarre to bestow the king with a Knighthood of Garter. That was the official thing he was supposed to do. The unwritten thing was they knew the Armada was going to come up, so they wanted Henri [Navarre] to be the go-between. Any English senior prisoners who were captured would be held to ransom, and the ransom negotiations would be done by the King of Navarre. Likewise any spies who were captured would be negotiated by Henri. This is dated sometime around 1585.

**This came how long after your discovery of *Leicester's Commonwealth*?**

Probably three weeks. I knew I was onto something. I also found a good manuscript by a man named Sir John Ogle, who was the right-hand man to Horatio and Francis Vere in the Lowlands. It's never been published. It's a first-hand account of what was going on. Saying things like, "This man was out riding through the sand dunes. Suddenly shots appeared over the top and we were being attacked. This morning we lost Sir Hiram or whoever it is, and we

killed about 16 Spaniards."

I found a manuscript on the Earl of Essex and the battle of Cadiz. I've been into the York archives — these go back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. I hope to check if these have any reference to the York who worked with Edward de Vere, Rowland York.

**At what point did you start going to these other archives and private libraries — expanding your scope beyond Wentworth Woodhouse?**

I spent about almost seven years going to the Wentworth Woodhouse. I used to go every day. I thought, well, there must be somewhere else I could pass my time on. I thought, why not the Bodleian? I went to the archivist and said, "I'm going to the Bodleian to do some research there. Will you write me a reference?" In 10 minutes, he'd written out the letter. I think he was just happy to get rid of me.

I was interested in the collection of [the 18<sup>th</sup> century Shakespearean scholar] Edmund Malone — he had 608 books at the Bodleian. ... Ultimately, I went through all the 608 books. ...

I've also been in touch with the [now former] Lord Lieutenant of Essex, who's one of Verily Anderson's cousins — Sir John Ruggles-Brise. She called him up and asked if it's OK if Derran goes through what he's got? So I went down, and the first thing I saw was a portrait of Sir Thomas Smith painted by Holbein. That's the only portrait of Sir Thomas Smith.

So we come to the library, and he opens the door. I went in and sat in there. The wall behind me was floor to ceiling 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century first editions. The next wall, 17<sup>th</sup> century, 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century. All books that were bought by his ancestors. There are lots of interesting books in there.

**Any American libraries that you've explored?**

I went to the Baconian library, and had a great day there. It's only about 20 minutes drive away from the Huntington. ... I remember going to the Harvard [Houghton] Library and finding the most brilliant references: In the Countess of Pembroke's will she left some of her books to Edward

*(Continued on page 32)*

*Confidential Video Bard*

# Taming of the Shrew revisited

## and other Carmel performances

By Chuck Berney

Apparently I am considered an easy mark by mail-order video dealers, since every week the postman brings me several catalogs, usually hawking something like the complete *œuvre* of Doris Day and Rock Hudson. However, late last summer I got a catalog offering a video of a 1976 stage performance of *Taming of the Shrew* by San Francisco's American Conservatory Theatre, directed by William Ball. Since I had just reviewed two versions of *Shrew* for *Shakespeare Matters* (Summer 2003) I was intrigued. Yielding to temptation (my usual response), I ordered the video. It turned out to be a jewel.

The production is explicitly based on the Italian *commedia dell'arte* style—the company enters dressed in white clown suits and wearing black masks with projecting beak-like noses. They take places on each side of the stage, and acting as a chorus, accompany the action with music, percussion, and group responses (they sigh when Bianca appears, cheer whenever “Padua” is mentioned). The acting of the principals is bawdy, broad and mannered. Marc Singer is a good-natured Petruchio with a strapping physique. Kate is played by Fredi Olster, a classic beauty in the Raquel Welch tradition. Rick Hamilton sustains a sly Tranio, and Raye Birk, with bulging eyes, a goatish beard and a running gag involving noxious breath, is hilarious as Gremio, the senex figure. Slapstick abounds—the wooing scene (“Good morrow, Kate”) is staged as a TV wrestling smackdown. It would be easy to dismiss this production as vulgar, silly nonsense. The first time I watched it I laughed a lot, but didn't see the artistry. On later viewings I came to appreciate the rich and detailed reactions that each of the

actors had to the others' speeches. In spite of the exaggeration, recognizable human beings were interacting emotionally in



*Pictured at top, Kevin Black (Petruchio) and Emily Jordan (Kate) wrestle out their differences in the Pacific Rep production of Taming of the Shrew. Pictured below are two archetype characters from “Commedia dell’arte”—an Italian theatrical tradition that is bawdy, broad and mannered. Oxford undoubtedly saw such theatre during his Italian travels, and Shrew is a good example of how he then worked with it back home.*

clearly specified ways. This production was so clear and so funny that it convinced me that Oxford came back from his Italian tour determined to try his hand at *commedia dell'arte*.

*Shrew*, presented by Stephen Moorer's

Pacific Repertory Theatre in Carmel during the Fellowship conference in October, was directed by Mark Shilstone-Laurent, who may have been familiar with the video discussed above, since his production was in much the same style. One of its great strengths was the masterful Petruchio of Kevin Black—he had the audience in the palm of his hand from the moment he swaggered onto the stage. Emily Jordan as Kate was small but fierce. Her tendency to go over the top was fine in *Shrew*, but sometimes distracting in *Henry VI*, in which she played Queen Margaret. *Shrew* was staged outdoors in the magical Forest Theatre. During the performance a luminous full moon gradually rose behind the trees, reaching maximum visibility just in time for Petruchio's line “Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!” This got a big laugh, as did many other lines and bits of business. One of the rewards of being in the audience was watching just how involved the many teenagers were—whooping when the lovers kissed, and responding with genuine amusement to a play more than 400 years old.

In a previous column (Spring 2002) I discussed the distinct mental models with which a viewer responds to a filmed production or an actual stage performance of a given play, suggesting that the viewer subconsciously thinks of the film as a documentary, for which the judgmental criterion is *believability*, while a staged performance is judged by other criteria—skill of the performers, rhythm, interweaving of ideas and actions, etc. It may be useful to summarize this distinction by imagining a continuum—call it the documentary/*commedia* continuum—on which a given production may be placed. (I am using “documentary” as a shorthand

term for the style of presenting a fictional narrative which depends on the suspension of disbelief to achieve its effect.) As the nomenclature implies, film is the medium par excellence for documentary presentations, while a stage and live performers (actual or implied) are necessary for the *commedia* effect. But the position of a given performance on the continuum depends on the material as well as the medium. The stage plays of Ibsen or Arthur Miller, for example, would be clustered around the documentary end, while films such as the Warner Bros. cartoons or the Marx Brothers movies are the modern versions of *commedia*. For *Shrew*, the BBC video starring John Cleese (reviewed Summer 2003) is about as close as you can get to the documentary end of the scale, while the ACT version discussed here defines the *commedia* end. The remarkable thing is that both are so successful.

During the conference, Roger Stritmatter gave a paper on the Induction Scene that opens the Folio text of *Shrew*, in which a vagrant, Christopher Sly, is made to think he is lord of the castle; the play proper is then presented as entertainment for him. Roger pointed out that the Induction Scene is a miniature version of the authorship scam, in which an illiterate yokel is represented as the "lord" of the greatest plays ever written. It is noteworthy that in none of the productions of *Shrew* discussed here or earlier is the Induction

Scene used. A little thought suggests why. If you use the Induction Scene, you inexorably place the rest of the play on the *commedia* end of the continuum—these are actors, seeking to entertain, rather than representations of real people. In the film versions (Zeffirelli, BBC), the director does not want to do that—he wants you to believe what the actors are doing. How then do we explain the absence of the Induction Scene in the two stage versions we have discussed? The answer is that in these productions, *the* Induction Scene is replaced by *an* induction scene. The ACT version starts with the masked, costumed actors taking the stage in a stylized manner, dancing wildly, and then taking a group bow, establishing the presentational nature of what is to follow. The PRT performance began with a solo juggling act (appropriately, performed by a Christopher) which, again, prepared the audience to expect *commedia*-type performances. *Quod erat demonstrandum*.

**1,2 Henry VI.**

Much of the matter of these plays concerns the illicit love affair between the Duke of Suffolk and Queen Margaret (the wife of Henry VI), and the political antagonism between Suffolk and Cardinal Beaufort. In a paper given before the performances, Barbara Burris enhanced our appreciation of the plays by pointing out the

parallels between Suffolk, Margaret and Beaufort, and the historical figures Leicester, Elizabeth and Burghley.

Stephen Moorer has mastered the art of presenting Shakespeare's history plays in exciting, compelling ways. He stages them in the intimate Circle Theatre, where the audience is close enough to grasp every nuance of gesture and expression, and uses the many entrances to weave scenes together in a cinematic rush. And not least, he has assembled a company of superb actors. Fresh from his star turn as Petruchio, Kevin Black proved a stalwart member of the ensemble in the principal role of Suffolk. David Mendelsohn, heroic as the Black Prince in the 2001 production of *Edward III*, assumed a completely different persona as the devout, indecisive Henry. Travis Brazil did yeoman duty in four ensemble roles, capping them with a fifth as a demonically energetic Jack Cade, ironically brought low by a mild-mannered gardener with a large pair of shears. The gardener was played as a lovable eccentric by our old friend, Kevin Black.

Speaking of old friends, the cast included two veterans of the 1976 ACT *Shrew*: Rick (Tranio) Hamilton, here playing a Duke of York determined to reach the throne, and Fredi (Kate) Olster, now Dame Eleanor Codham, whose interest in sorcery proves so unfortunate. The wheel has come full circle.

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*Paradigm Shift* (continued from page 29)  
de Vere's daughter—one of them [I can't recall which]. I also got out their copy of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. That was published in three volumes. And between each volume, you've got blank end pages. I realized that somebody had written on them. Annotated. At the time, I couldn't quite make the writing out. I got the ultraviolet machine and still couldn't quite make it out. It's always been on the list to make it back.

[Derran flips through his notes to share more recent discoveries.]

Here it is. At the Bodleian Library, look for a manuscript with the shelf mark MS Top Essex c.16. That's "The Vere Family, Earls of Oxford," written by a man called J.W. Pycroft. That was in 1846-'47 [sic]. It's got all the charts of all the Earls of Oxford, where they were.

Mr. Pycroft was a legal man. He was

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trying to find [someone named] "John Veare," and he was claiming that John Veare was a direct relation to Edward de Vere, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford. This man Pycroft spent two years researching Edward de Vere, looking for John Veare. He went all over. He was convinced that John Veare was the rightful Earl of Oxford.

Again, nothing's been written about it. This manuscript has never been published.

**As far as you know, then, Pycroft had investigated the life of Edward de Vere but had not come to any conclusions vis à vis Shakespeare, correct?**

Yes. He was writing down all the citations for the various records of things relating to the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford. It's an incredible manuscript. It's written out in Pycroft's own hand—all about the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Earls of Oxford, that whole period.

That's an example of the kinds of things I've been finding. I've been trying to get it out.

[Note: *Shakespeare Matters* has contacted the Bodleian to request a facsimile of MS. Top. Essex c.16. We were notified at press time that the manuscript is in too poor a condition to be scanned or photocopied. Any readers who will soon be traveling in the vicinity of the Bodleian are hereby encouraged to take an afternoon at the library examining this document and write an article for *Shakespeare Matters* describing your findings!]

*Fellowship conference* (cont'd from page 11)  
the groundwork for challenging Stratfordian fence-sitters to make a decision on the authorship question, and Robert Nield, "Shakespeare Unmasked," a cipher solution to the authorship debate that identifies Will Hastings (WH) as Shakespeare

**Board elections**

In addition to the full schedule of papers and plays, the Annual General Meeting of the Shakespeare Fellowship was held on Friday morning, at which a new Board of Trustees was elected. The slate of trustees nominated by the Nominating Committee was formally approved: Earl Showerman of Ashland, Oregon, has joined the Board of Trustees, succeeding Dr. Paul Altrocchi, and current trustees Steve Aucella and Roger Stritmatter were named to second terms. The nomination of Alex McNeil as President was approved.

Also, the membership approved the Board's recommended amendment of the by-laws to authorize, from to time, the naming of Honorary Trustees. As announced previously, Sir Derek Jacobi and Michael York have been named as the Fellowship's first two Honorary Trustees.

At the new Board's first meeting, in addition to the election of McNeil as President, other officers elected were: Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky as first and second vice presidents, Ted Story as secretary, and Chuck Berney as treasurer.

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