



# The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter



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## Pasadena 2012

The eighth annual joint conference of the Shakespeare Oxford Society/Shakespeare Fellowship in Pasadena, October 18-21, 2012 will be remembered, and not only by those who attended. The sense of optimism and forward momentum was palpable. In the words of John Shahan, Chairman of the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition (SAC) and principal author of the *Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare*, whose talk was a kind of unofficial keynote speech, we finally have the traditionalists "right where we want them." More on this in a minute.

Like any healthy organization for change, what we might call the Oxfordian Fellowship contains its sub-groups and minor alliances, some represented by strong and charismatic personalities. Yet even among these, one detected a new willingness to close ranks and agree to disagree on certain questions pending further research.

We all know from past experience that unexpected evidence can turn up in support of what may at first appear to be the unlikeliest of hypotheses—after all, we were all Stratfordians once. What altered things was a willingness to uncompromisingly follow the evidence wherever it might lead. That spirit continues to define the movement Looney started: it is the whole difference between a science and a religion. On our side, the facts, no matter how inconvenient, are allowed to speak; on theirs, they are suppressed, tongue-tied by authority.

This intellectual tyranny demonstrates unequivocally that academic Stratfordianism is indeed a church in the most rigid and drearily predictable way. Its holy site is Stratford, complete with manger and soaring cathedral, its sacred text the First Folio, and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust its college of cardinals. Discipline is exercised via the imprimatur-like control of the big presses, lucrative appointments, and the occasional *auto da fe* of heretics. Stanley Wells of course is pope, while young Cardinal Bate attends in a well-appointed antechamber.

### Past and Future

The 2012 SF/SOS conference was notable too for the way it both reviewed the past and looked to the future. The ground work was laid on the first day by Alex McNeill, who artfully reconstituted the shoulders, as it were, upon which subsequent presenters stood. Roger Stritmatter introduced some remarkable new research on an annotated 1563 edition of Seneca, the annotating hand arguably being Oxford's, and Bonner Cutting devastatingly exposed the way authorship orthodoxy has warped related areas of art history.

Outgoing SF president Earl Showerman delivered an energetic presentation about Shakespeare's medical knowledge, and left one feeling that he, Earl, must have been one hell of an ER physician.



**Pasadena 2012: Katherine Chiljan, Virginia Hyde, Ramon Jiménez, Rich Joyrich.**

The conference was also honored by the brief attendance of the British actor, Michael York, who was recognized and awarded for his contributions to the authorship debate. Among other important items of business, John Hamill was elected next SOS president and Tom Reginier president of the Shakespeare Fellowship.

#### **Podcasts, Videos and Documentaries**

Arguably the most exciting developments, however, were represented by those members engaged in bringing Oxford's case to a younger, more media-savvy audience. Jennifer Newton introduced *The Shakespeare Underground*, an online series of interviews with non-Stratfordians.\* These quick, hard-hitting commentaries are available as podcasts on smartphones, Droids, iPhones and tablets. The idea is to reach a younger set of Shakespeare enthusiasts via the media they habitually use, and the way that they use them.

Cheryl Eagan-Donovan also won applause for her ongoing video project, *Nothing is Truer than Truth*. Her account of the resistance at Harvard University to the non-Stratfordian hypothe-

sis was a striking example of how the silencing takes place.

Equally impressive and exciting was the documentary, *Last Will. & Testament*, a conscious follow-up to *Anonymous*. Encouraged and supported by Roland Emmerich, the directors, twin sisters Laura Wilson Matthais and Lisa Wilson, have put together a potent series of interviews and illustrative footage (including scenes from *Anonymous*) encapsulating the present state of the debate. This movie is attracting considerable attention because of its visual quality and sheer intellectual integrity. *Last Will. & Testament* is destined not only to capture many awards—Lisa and Laura have already won Concordia's *Vero Nihil Verius* prize—but will help legitimize investigation into what has been called the greatest literary mystery of all time.

#### **The SAC Dinner**

Despite these high points—and there were many others—perhaps the most important gathering occurred off site at a Saturday night dinner organized by John Shahan and the SAC. Attended by friends and contributors to the SAC's withering response to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's "60 Minutes with Shakespeare," the evening's



**Man of Letters: Actor Michael York, lit up by a slide, thanks the 2012 conference. John Shahan watches.**

\* <http://www.theshakespeareunderground.com/>

festive tone turned serious in a continuation of the discussion begun by Shahan at his presentation to the conference earlier that day, and especially his claim that we have the Stratfordian camp on the defensive and scrambling for evidence. The focus quickly became a strategic evaluation of the way ahead, and especially the most effective counter to a proposed new book by the SBT, *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt*, scheduled for publication by Cambridge University Press next spring ([http://www.cambridge.org/us/knowledge/isbn/item7099141/?site\\_locale=en\\_US](http://www.cambridge.org/us/knowledge/isbn/item7099141/?site_locale=en_US)).

No hard decisions were taken, but the variety and imagination of the suggestions serve notice that Stanley Wells and his associates will be strenuously answered

Our view is that 2013 could well prove to be Oxfordianism's tipping point, if it has not in fact already been passed.

#### President's Message

This is a reminder that we are approaching the end of the year and that it is the time for members to renew. The Shakespeare Oxford Society depends on the dues of the membership to maintain the publication of the Newsletter and *The Oxfordian*, our annual scholarly journal. This way we keep the members informed of the latest developments in Oxfordian research.

The members are the ones who understand the importance of the work we are doing and the challenges that we face together. Every membership is a calendar year membership, so no matter when you paid your dues last year we ask you to renew at the beginning of 2013.

Thanks! This helps the SOS to prepare a realistic budget for the year.

—John Hamill

## The Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference

convenes at Concordia University April 11 - 13, 2013

FEATURING AWARDS TO, AND PRESENTATIONS BY,

**John Orloff**, *screenwriter*, **Ramon Jiménez**, *author*, **James Warren**, *editor*

Registration for the three-day conference, now in its 17<sup>th</sup> year, is \$225.

On-line registration is available on the SARC website

Or

checks can be made payable to  
The Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference  
and sent to

Dr Daniel Wright, Director  
The Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre  
Concordia University  
2811 NE Holman  
Portland, OR 97211-6099

The largest international assembly of scholars and academicians devoted to study of the Shakespeare Authorship Question on a university campus anywhere in the world.

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## Tassinari: 'Partisan and Unfair!'

Dear Editor:

A colleague sent me a pdf of your review of my book, *John Florio: The Man Who Was Shakespeare* (2010), *SON* Spring 2012. Of course, I never expected to be fairly and satisfactorily reviewed in a partisan medium, and in that sense your review was not disappointing! The weaknesses of your article are numerous but I will mention only the more serious omissions and misleading judgments.

In presenting Florio you say that he is "well-known" but omit adding "by reputation," as academics neglected him for almost 70 years after Frances Yates' biography in 1934. The vast majority of Shakespeare's readers completely ignore Florio's name and very existence!

This is an odd phenomenon within the Shakespearean field where everything surrounding the Bard is meticulously analyzed. And Florio, "the apostle of the Renaissance" in England, the translator of Montaigne and Boccaccio, the author of the first modern dictionary, a fantastic mine of Shakespearean words, and the Italian linguist who had the same patron as the Bard, would have been a natural and logical target for the army of Shakespearean investigators.

That Florio invented more than a thousand English words it is not Tassinari's opinion but the result of John Willinsky's research (*Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED*, 1994, p. 221). See my book, p. 125. In lexical creativity, John Florio comes third in the English Renaissance, with 1149 e.c., after Shakespeare and Cotgrave.

You put too much emphasis on the fact that Florio was of Italian origin. I suspect you are doing so for rhetorical and tactical reasons, as you eventually conclude that since Florio's direct knowledge of the country is missing, then Tassinari's argument...is very weak! On this point you are mistaken and/or false. It is very natural, logical and credible that in the fifteen or so years John Florio spent in continental Europe with his father, most of the time in Soglio, Switzerland, on the border of Italy, he had the opportunity to visit, at least the northern cities of his paternal country as Venice, Milan, Padua, Mantova, Florence. On his travels no one, except Frances Yates in 1934, has really done

serious research. That said, the Italian connection is indeed essential. The more important aspect is Florio's familiarity with Italian



Lamberto Tassinari

Medieval and contemporary literature. Naseeb Shaheen and Roger Prior convincingly demonstrate that the traces of Ariosto, Tasso, Berni, Boiardo are numerous and important in the plays. Other scholars have showed that Machiavelli, Giordano Bruno and many other Italian writers deeply influenced Shakespeare: the degree and the form of those influences (i.e., quoting from the original Italian when the English translation was available) can only point to Florio. There is also the "psychological Italianness" of Shakespeare, revealed by expressions of all kinds which betray his mother tongue.

The fact that my analysis of the subtle, profound knowledge of the Italian territory and customs is similar to Richard Paul Roe's, is not due to telepathy or chance, but to the fact that the California lawyer, alongside his own very precious and original findings, did use (unfortunately very often without quoting the origin) the same sources I relied on: J.O. Halliwell (1853), Karl Elze (1874), Gregor Sarrazin (1900), Edward Sullivan (1908-1918), Ernesto Grillo (1949), Georges Lambin (1963), and Noemi Magri (2004).

You say nothing of Florio being appointed by Burghley as tutor to Southampton, who became his patron and friend. Nothing of his father's Jewish origin. You don't mention that he became a Franciscan friar, then a Protestant preacher. That he was also a translator, a grammarian and linguist. Very close to Lady Jane

Gray, within the entourage of the Pembroke, Suffolk, and Dudley families; protected by Burghley in the 1550s: all links which reveal a very Shakespearian background. No mention of Florio's court life for 16 years as a personal secretary to Queen Anne; groom of the privy chamber, translator of James's *Basilikon Doron*; intimate companion to the noble and powerful (see my book, p. 115, for the web of his relations).

You completely overshadow my Chapter 13 "Aristocratic and Royalist" where Florio's Englishness is projected onto Shakespeare's history plays. The canon bears evident, huge signs of both Tudor and Stuart cultures, a characteristic reflected in Florio's life and works. By the way, the same cannot be said of de Vere.

Again, no mention of Florio's library: 340 Italian, French, and Spanish books which in his beautiful, Shakespearian last will, John bequeathed to his executor William Herbert, third earl of Pembroke—who "for certain reasons" renounced execution! To Florio's vast foreign, trilingual library we should add the English books left to his wife (300? 500?). Unfortunately, all these books are now lost!

No mention of his close relationship with Ben Jonson and Samuel Daniel who was also his brother-in-law. You omit the notion of exile in Shakespeare from Stratford...A notion familiar to Florio who experienced multiple exiles: as an Italian protestant from Italy and in 1554 from England and as the son of a Jew (Ch.11). You say nothing about *Shakespeare's Debt to Montaigne*, a fundamental 1925 little book demonstrating the lexical and philosophical link between Shakespeare and Montaigne/Florio (Ch.7 pp. 139-154).

Now, as your main criticism of my book concerns the insufficient stylistic comparison between Florio and Shakespeare, here is my reply.

My linguistic study is far from complete, this is true, it has just begun. But the book does offer significant stylistic comparisons, quoting also a few beautiful passages of Florio's prose which I consider perfectly Shakespearian.

Chapter 5 "The Dedications to Lord Southampton" containing my reading of the dedications by the two, WS and JF.

There are parallels and comparisons in Ch. 8 "Language, Style, And Euphuism," pp. 162-178.

Puns, wordplay and proverbs offer many

examples of meaningful coincidences and similarities with many parallels, Ch. 9, pp.185-197.

In the second English edition of my book, a larger section will be dedicated to language, because Shakespeare was a linguist, a genius of language. No one else can be compared linguistically to the author of Shakespeare's plays except Florio. Whoever eventually studies Florio's works and life will fatally arrive at the same conclusion I reached in 2008: that Florio, the infinite, bulimic, polyglot reader and "plagiarist," is the main if not the only responsible person for the invention of the author called William Shakespeare. I'm so convinced of this that I dare to conclude that the only chance non-Stratfordians have to contrast and disrupt the 2014 and 2016 Shakespearian celebrations resides in a collective "force de frappe" to engage in further research on John Florio. I'm firmly convinced that the Resolute John Florio is the only one who can challenge Stratford! The compliment you pay to my "formidable English skills" does not correspond to the truth...In fact I wrote my book in Italian and the formidable English skills belong to William McCuaig, my faithful translator whose name is printed in big characters on the title page!

I always had the impression you were open and even sympathetic towards John Florio and my book (as your decision to publish me in *The Oxfordian* and now in the Newsletter, shows) but it was as a wish without a will!

Lamberto Tassinari

## The Prince Tudor Question

**K**udos to the SOS newsletter for its examination of the Prince Tudor (PT) theories in conjunction with Southampton's plea to Queen Elizabeth for mercy. It is a timely topic, especially in conjunction with the two recent films that are bringing the Oxford's story to the public's attention, Roland Emmerich's fictional thriller *Anonymous*, and the documentary *Last Will. & Testament* by Lisa Wilson and Laura Wilson Matthias.

I enjoyed the two contrasting articles by Hank Whitemore and John Hamill. I believe

they could both be right, since Oxford could have been both bisexual and a loving father. But Hamill and Whittemore seem to put the sonnets into a Procrustean bed to fit their theories.

Whittemore's Prince Tudor theory (PT1) is basically sound, but suffers from the assumption that almost all the sonnets were addressed to Oxford's son. Thus some individual sonnet interpretations are questionable. Take, for example, Sonnet 87:

Thus have I had thee, as a dream might flatter  
In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

The sexual connotations of "had thee" clearly suggest a heterosexual love affair, and if Oxford ever felt like a king, it would be as Elizabeth's mate. This interpretation would strengthen Whittemore's PT1 case that Oxford and Elizabeth were lovers.

It is worth noting that Sonnet 87 closely resembles a poem by Oxford entitled "Farewell with a Mischief" first printed in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers* under Oxford's posy but plagiarized by George Gascoigne in a second edition. By seeing this poem as a farewell to Elizabeth when she broke off with Oxford, we get a clearer picture of the love affair and the



Helen Heightsman Gordon discusses the implications of *Anonymous* at the 2012 Pasadena Conference.

contempt he felt for her other choices. Even more questionable is Whittemore's fanciful idea that the Rival Poet is Oxford's pen-name. More convincing to me is the strong case made by David L. Roper that the rival poet is Walter Raleigh. Raleigh was a rival for Elizabeth's affections who made a meteoric rise to favor in 1582-1583. Elizabeth knighted him in 1585 and gave him a London home, Durham House. It is only when we see the rivals as vying for the Queen's favor that the real-life relationship makes sense.

I was amazed at John Hamill's cavalier dismissal of the "Prince Tudor 1" advocates because they have no "documented" evidence for it. Does all evidence have to appear in a written document? Doesn't Mr. Hamill know about the suppression and censorship in Elizabethan England? Has he read books by Dorothy Ogburn, Elisabeth Sears, and Katherine Chiljan? There is plenty of circumstantial evidence, plenty of clues for a literary detective to follow in solving the mysteries. For that matter, applying Hamill's logic to his own theory, there is no "documented" evidence that Oxford was homosexual—only some accusations by his enemies, in a long list of dubious charges. Because of the need for secrecy and censorship in Elizabethan England, challenges abound for the historical researcher—in sorting out truth from deception, filling in the gaps made by missing records, testing the veracity of rumors, and interpreting the symbols and encrypted messages. Much of the truth has been obliterated, evidence deliberately distorted, and speculation substituted for reasoned analysis.

Lacking documented proof, the best we can do is create a credible scenario, explaining as many of the mysteries as we can, until a preponderance of evidence leads to high probability. In the police state that was Elizabethan England, one who couldn't keep a secret might not keep his head. Censorship and spy networks, originally intended to protect Elizabeth and her political persona of "Virgin Queen," became tools for the acquisition of power. Laws were passed imposing severe penalties for "speaking ill of the queen," to suppress gossip about whether Elizabeth had a child or two. A playwright whose work offended powerful courtiers could be arrested and tortured, as was Thomas Kyd, or murdered, as was Christopher Marlowe. Oxford, however, had the protection of the Queen.

The most powerful censor in England was Elizabeth's long-time advisor, William Cecil, whom she appointed "Lord Burghley" just in time to make his 14-year-old daughter "Lady Anne" eligible to marry an earl.

As guardian of the 21-year-old Earl of Oxford, Burghley had the power to choose his ward's bride or impose a fine of £5,000. When the coerced bridegroom refused to live with his Countess, Anne Cecil, but found other women to love, Burghley was furious. He set out to destroy the reputation of his son-in-law. As the Queen's principal adviser, Burghley had dictatorial power over all printed matter and official records. He could destroy any documents or letters that put Oxford in a favorable light, while retaining those that slandered him with false and malicious accusations.

Thus for 400 years, researchers have been given a distorted picture of Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Historian Neville Williams, in *The Life and Times of Elizabeth I*, reports a rumor indicating the "wounded name" of de Vere:

Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was feckless, thoughtless and a "heel," keeping his countess short of money yet lavishly supporting indigent poets and actors. The Queen found him a most unsatisfactory favourite, yet there was something appealing in his eccentric, dissolute ways, and after anger and tears would come reconciliation. Her continued favour of this worthless aristocrat, against her better judgment, was to set in train the wildly improbable story that they were lovers, and the Earl of Southampton was their offspring! (111)

But what if the rumor had some truth to it? Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn, in their fine biography of Oxford, *This Star of England* (1952), conclude that it does. The first 17 sonnets, the Ogburns believe, were from father to son, urging him to marry and beget an heir. Betty Sears, in her book *Shakespeare and the Tudor Rose* (2002), cites evidence from other European countries that Elizabeth had more than one child. Hank Whittemore in *The Monument* (2005) emphasizes the royal blood of Southamp-

ton as Elizabeth's unacknowledged son. In *The Secret Love Story in Shakespeare's Sonnets*, I stress the lifelong love that Edward de Vere had for Elizabeth and the love-child she bore him that he could never acknowledge lest he harm his son, his queen, and his country. Yet Mark Anderson, in *Shakespeare by Another Name* (2005), does not even mention the previous biographers' theories. Censorship continues to this day. The attractive myth of a wool-dealer's son pulling himself up into greatness by the bootstraps of genius, continues to hold fascination for the general public and a stranglehold on English Literature departments. The ideal of a

Virgin Queen blinds many Brits and Americans to the several known lovers of Elizabeth. Academic journals regularly dismiss

without sincere comment any articles that deal with the question of Shakespearean authorship. A few teachers mention the alternative theories to their students (sometimes incurring the displeasure and wrath of their colleagues).

My own research over the past 20 years has led me to the following conclusions, which I respectfully submit for the consideration of SOS Newsletter readers:

- Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was the most likely author who used the pen name of "William Shakespeare."
- Edward de Vere wrote all the sonnets and the Dedication of the 1609 edition (the latter in the form of a riddle to escape the censors). The mysterious "Mr. W.H." is Henry Wriothesley.
- The *Sonnets* contain autobiographical elements matching closely Oxford's life events.
- The order of the *Sonnets* was scrambled so that the narrative would not be too obvious as the love story of Oxford and Queen Elizabeth that "never did run smooth."
- Their natural son, the Third Earl of Southampton, was the "Fair Youth" of the *Sonnets*.
- That there were several rival poets who vied

for the favor of Elizabeth, not for the “fair youth” (see Sonnet 78: “So oft have I invok’d thee as my muse/...as every alien pen hath got my use/ and under thee their poetry disperse.”)

- The chief rival poet was Walter Raleigh, Elizabeth’s “favorite” 1582-1585 (“Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,” Sonnet 86) while Oxford was banned from court “in disgrace of fortune and men’s eyes” (Sonnet 29).

- That many of the poems were written to women, including the brunette Ann Vavasour (Sonnet 127), Anne Cecil (when Oxford reconciled with her in 1581 (Sonnets 110 and 117), and Elizabeth (Sonnet 131 “In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds”).

- Oxford touchingly reveals in Sonnet 125 that he loves Elizabeth as a woman, unlike her fawning admirers: (“Let me be obsequious in thy heart, and take thou my oblation, poor but free/...mutual render, only me for thee”).

Thank you for permitting the expression of some alternate interpretations. The articles should help to stimulate thought and invite a re-examination of previously held assumptions.

*Helen Heightsman Gordon, M.A., Ed.D.*  
Author, *The Secret Love Story in Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (2008)

## Lady Susan de Vere

Dear Editor:

**A**re you aware that Oxford’s daughter Susan lived in Stratford in Wiltshire, about 90 miles south of Stratford-upon-Avon, and that at the bottom of her garden was the river Avon?

She was married to Montgomery, to whom the First Folio of Shakespeare’s plays was dedicated, together with his brother, Pembroke, who owned the house they lived in. This helps support the view that Oxford may have been involved in writing some of the plays.

*Ben Alexander*



Effigy of Lady Susan de Vere,  
Westminster Abbey

## ‘Dispark’d’ and ‘Disparkinge’

Dear Editor:

**V**ivian Salmon, in “Some Functions of Shakespearean Word-Formation,”\* states that Shakespeare shows a proclivity for using neologisms beginning with *un-* and with *dis-*. As an example of adding *dis-* to a verb that began as noun, she quotes *Richard II*, III.I.22-23 (1595): “you have fed upon my signories/*Dispark’d* my parks”—that is, turned his private parks into common land. The *OED* gives a much earlier instance of *disparked*, 1542, but *EEBO* cites only three uses prior to 1572. The first recorded use of *disparking* is not until 1602.

In September, 1572, Edward de Vere wrote to his father-in-law, Lord Burghley: “...as for my timber at Colne Parke; therein, I had no other meaninge save onlie to make, as it were, a yearlie rente, so as I may, withe ought [without] *disparkinge* the grounde.” That is, he employs—coins?—the gerund *disparking* some thirty years before its first recorded use by the admittedly

\* 1970, reprinted in Catherine M.S. Alexander (ed.), *Shakespeare and Language* (CUP, 2004) 79-100.



incomplete *EEBO* database.<sup>§</sup> As it happens, the same 1572 letter includes another still uncommon *dis-* word: “yowre Lordship at whose lekinge or *dislekinge* I was to be ruled.” The *OED* gives the first use of *disliking* as 1540, and only six authors are listed in *EEBO* as having employed it before 1572. The first appearance of the phrase “liking or disliking,” according to *EEBO*, was by William Painter in 1567.

Shakespeare employs the near homophone *disliken* (to render unlike, disguise) in *The Winter’s Tale*. This is the unique usage of *disliken* noted by both *EEBO* and the *OED*.

Oxford’s other uses of the *dis-* prefix in his letters include further uncommon words, such as *disburden* in 1576 and 1591. On October 31, 1572, he used *disburdened* in another letter to his father-in-law. *EEBO* gives only ten instances of prior uses of the word, one of them in *Richard II*, II.i.231. In the same letter, Oxford uses the unusual word *bakfriendes* (false friends) of which the *OED* cites a first use in 1472; the first instance cited by *EEBO* is in 1587, supporting the assumption that it was uncommon.

Once again, a Stratfordian has inadvertently helped strengthen the case for de Vere as Shakespeare. It is fascinating to read the Stratfordian literature while on the lookout for such welcome support.

*Richard M. Waugaman*

## Seventeen Reasons to Believe Oxford was Elizabeth’s Son

Dear Editor:

There have been various and sundry allegations that there is no “proof” that Oxford was the son of Queen Elizabeth I. In reply, we might ask, first, “What is “proof?” It is not one solid thing but a sequence. We begin

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<sup>§</sup> William Plumer Fowler (ed.), *Shakespeare Revealed in Oxford’s Letters* (1986), 62, notes de Vere’s use of “the very rare” *disparking*, and Shakespeare’s use of *dispark’d*. Fowler notes the parallel between the related contextual references to *timber* in de Vere’s letter, and to *forest woods* in the same line in *Richard III* that contains *dispark’d*.

with facts. The person was white or black. She was there or in another town at the time of the robbery, etc. These can always be challenged by the opposing side. These facts, if relevant to the issue, would then be considered “evidence.” This again is an area for dispute. While the fingerprints on the weapon were from the suspect, the gun was owned by the suspect, so they might be proof of nothing other than ownership.

If the weight of multiple pieces of evidence based on asserted facts makes the case for something, we then might say, “There was proof that he murdered his wife.” Again, this would be something to dispute. One side may say that the facts as evidence do not prove the case, or bring in contradictory facts. The point is that there is a method of resolving such issues in legal cases. In history there is no final jury, so the world will continue to debate many historical events.

However, to say that there is “no proof” when there are a number of “facts” that can be said to be “evidence” and the total of this “evidence” can be weighed to determine the case in individual and collective judgment. Here is a series of facts.

**1. Romantic Affair:** Princess Elizabeth Tudor had a romantic affair with her stepfather, Thomas Seymour, husband of her stepmother Queen Katherine Parr (last wife of Henry VII). This is an acknowledged historical fact. This romance was the subject of the 1953 movie *Young Bess*, starring Jeanne Simmons.

**2. Found in the Arms of Seymour:** Princess Elizabeth Tudor was found in the arms of Thomas Seymour by Queen Katherine Parr. Historically documented.

**3. Exiled to an Abbey:** Princess Elizabeth Tudor was sent to an abbey at Cheshunt in May 1548. She remained there in seclusion until late September 1548.

**4. No Known Illness:** Historians state that she was there because of illness, but no doctor is recorded as having visited her until October of the year.

**5. Midwife Reports:** A midwife reports that she was taken to a household blindfolded and there she attended a young fair-haired woman, who gave birth by candlelight. The son was born July 21, 1548.

**6. John de Vere’s Marriage:** John de Vere’s, 16th Earl of Oxford had banns of marriage twice

announced. However, on August 1, 1548, he went to Belchamp and married a woman he had never met before, Margery Golding. She was the sister of Arthur Golding, who was employed by William Cecil. This marriage would post date July 21. That seems a reasonable date for the birth to allow for arrangements to be made after it had been ascertained that a healthy baby survived.

**7. William Cecil Appears:** Princess Elizabeth writes a note to William Cecil calling him her “dear friend.” William Cecil is a confidant of Queen Katherine Parr. Why would she write such a note, if he had not done her some type of personal favor for which she is grateful?

**8. Does Not Visit Queen Katherine:** Princess Elizabeth does not visit her step-mother, who gives birth on August 3, 1548. Queen Katherine subsequently died from complications on September 15, 1548. She did not visit her despite the fact that Princess Elizabeth was exceedingly close to Queen Katherine, referring to her as “mother.”

**9. Legal Deposition:** Kat Ashley and Thomas Parry gave depositions that Thomas Seymour did act toward Elizabeth with unseemly familiarity, including slapping her on the buttocks, entering her room, etc.

**10. Pregnancy Rumors:** Princess Elizabeth writes in a letter that there are rumors in the countryside that she is pregnant and in the Tower. In fact, she is neither. However, she does not say that she was never pregnant.

**11. Baptismal Cup:** The Privy Council authorized a baptismal cup as a gift to John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, April 7, 1550. This acknowledges the existence of the child. This is either false evidence planted by William Cecil or positive evidence that Oxford was born in 1550.

**12. Queen Visits Oxford:** When Elizabeth becomes Queen she visits Edward de Vere at Hedingham Castle, home of John de Vere. Later, she attends his graduation ceremonies at Cambridge and Oxford Universities. The only other graduation ceremony she attended was for the Earl of Southampton.

**13. John de Vere Is Murdered:** John de Vere signed a new will on July 28, 1562, and by the end of August 1562, he was dead. Edward de Vere becomes the seventh Earl of Oxford upon the death of his purported father. Edward moves to London and lives in the household of William

Cecil. The Queen and Cecil are now in control of Oxford. No marriage can be arranged by his purported father.

**14. “Lawfully Dropped”:** In 1571, Parliament passes an Act of Treason and heirs to throne from Elizabeth are redefined from “lawfully begotten” to “the naturall yssue of her Ma’j body.” There would be no need to have such an act passed unless Elizabeth had children. This is a circuitous route, yet accomplishes its objective. Now, Oxford is a legal heir.

**15. Oxford Marries Ann Cecil:** William Cecil is raised to Lord Burghley by the Queen. Oxford marries his daughter Anne on December 19, 1571 in Westminster Abbey. The Queen attends the marriage. Now William Cecil has a daughter who is in line to become Queen. Oxford says, as Bertram: “I will wed her but not bed her.” He does not sleep with wife. Oxford agrees to this marriage to become the legal heir to the throne.

**16. Shakespeare’s Autobiography:** The author known as “William Shakespeare” portrays himself autobiographically as a prince or a king, never as a grain merchant, or earl of the realm: Prince Hal, Prince Bertram, King Lear, Prospero and Hamlet.

**17. Hamlet Is Oxford’s Family:** *Hamlet* is autobiography: the Queen is the Queen, Claudius is Robert Dudley, Ophelia is Anne Cecil, Polonius is William Cecil and Hamlet is Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

There can obviously be disagreements over each of the facts presented here: whether each is evidence, or whether in combination they “prove” Oxford was the son of Queen Elizabeth.

However, it is too simplistic to say that there is no “proof,” as if facts do not exist that make a substantive case for Oxford as the son of the Queen. This is more or less being in a state of denial without making any refutation.

It as if the defense lawyer presents no counter argument to the prosecution, but rather simply says, “They have no proof,” and sits down. This is what the anti-PT II faction continues to do.

*Paul Streit*

*Author, Oxford: Son of Queen Elizabeth I*

## **Answering Hamill: Southampton Poem Confirms Relationship of Southampton to Oxford, *Sonnets***

*Peter Rush*

I applaud the coverage in your last issue of the newly discovered poem by Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, to Queen Elizabeth, begging forgiveness for his role in the Essex Rebellion of February 8, 1601. Hank Whittemore's claim of a connection between the poem and *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, and John Hamill's rebuttal, hopefully have initiated a discussion that the following article may advance.

Whittemore maintains that the relevance of Southampton's poem lies in the "verbal parallels" and other resonances between it and 40 of the sonnets that Whittemore contends were written during the first six weeks of the earl's incarceration in the Tower, February 8 to March 19, 1601. These were the weeks between the date of Southampton's arrest and the date on or around which he must have received a reprieve from his death sentence. The recurrence of the same key words in these sonnets (27-66) and in Southampton's poem is extraordinary, and strongly suggests that Southampton had the sonnets in his possession when he wrote his poem. And since the date of the poem had to be in this time frame, this convergence reinforces the case that these sonnets were likewise composed in this time frame, something not recognized by Stratfordians or Oxfordians alike, including Mr. Hamill.

Whittemore devoted the remainder of his article to showing how the *Sonnets* demonstrate that Southampton was the son of Oxford and Elizabeth (sometimes called the "Prince Tudor," or "PT" theory). He made no attempt to connect this aspect of his reading of the *Sonnets* to the

poem. Regrettably, a headline was supplied for Whittemore's article that he did not write ("Southampton Poem Proves Oxford, 'Prince Tudor' Hypotheses"), which made the claim, not supported by Whittemore or his article, that the Southampton poem supported the PT Theory, which it does not, and which Whittemore nowhere asserted.

Even more regrettably, Mr. Hamill chose to dispute the headline (which he assumed was Whittemore's), which is understandable, but then ignored the remainder of Whittemore's article, above all his identification of the strong similarity of the poem to some of the sonnets.

As the author of a forthcoming book on the *Sonnets* that elaborates and expands on Mr. Whittemore's breakthrough discoveries (*Hidden In Plain Sight*, 2012), I hope in this article to make clear the strong reasons for thinking

that Southampton had in his possession 30-40 of the sonnets written during the first five weeks of his incarceration, and that he relied on them to a significant extent when composing his poem.

### **The Homosexual Argument**

After correctly noting that nothing in Whittemore's article supports its misleading title, Hamill chooses to ignore everything else in Whittemore's article, devoting most of his piece to his own "bi-sexual" theory. At the end he attacks the "PT Hypothesis" without reference to Whittemore's actual evidence, relying instead on hackneyed arguments against earlier versions of the hypothesis.

**The Prince Tudor Debate**  
Following the discovery of a new poem by the third earl of Southampton (*Newsletter*, Spring 2012), we have opened our pages to all sides of the so-called 'Prince Tudor' debate. If you have an opinion, send it in the form of a letter, review or article to [drmichaelegan@yahoo.com](mailto:drmichaelegan@yahoo.com)

### **Ships in the Night**

Although Hamill's article passes Whittemore's like a ship in the night, I have decided to briefly summarize the case against his dusted-off "homosexual" hypothesis. I shall then show how Sonnets 27-66 record Southampton's tenure in the Tower from February 8-March 19, 1601, and conclude with a list of the key words common to these sonnets and the Southampton poem.

Hamill first of all appears to believe that the sonnets are transparently sexual in nature. He writes as though it were more or less beyond argument that since the object of the allegedly sexual language is a man, Shakespeare and he were carrying on a homo- or bi-sexual relationship. He asserts, as if it were above dispute, that the sonnets exhibit an "overall sexual nature," and then chides the vast majority of scholars for "largely omit(ting)...the author's bisexuality," as if the latter were a proven fact. By assuming what he needs to prove, Hamill avoids the difficult task of actually proving that either alleged "fact" is truly so.

With what can only be labeled extreme arrogance, Hamill later asserts that the author of the *Sonnets* dwells on the emotional and sexual love of a young man and a libidinous woman, expressed through numerous creative puns, and with such dexterity that much of the sexual imagery can be overlooked by casual readers.

Not only overlooked by "casual readers," but strongly disputed by the vast majority of scholars. To flatly state that he knows without question what the sonnets are about, without caveat, smacks of hubris in light of the nearly 200 years of debate among literally hundreds of scholars who have tried, with greater humility, to make sense of these frankly rather weird poems.

After thus affirming what he should have proved, Hamill quotes Sonnet 52, asserting that it is filled with "particularly intense" erotic punning. Hamill rhetorically asks: "Is there any question that sexual desire is expressed here?" Readers should read this poem for themselves—there is not one unambiguous sexual "pun."

Worse, when those puns are explicitly identified by proponents of this theory, such as Pequigney (author of *Such Is My Love*, on whom Hamill heavily relies), the "narrative" makes no sense. That is, plugging in the supposed sexual meanings of the supposed punning words makes

an incoherent string of poetic lines. Plus, some of the alleged sexual puns refer to female anatomy, and the blithe assertion by Pequigney that one can substitute male for female sexual organs is unconvincing. In short, this sonnet is far from self-evidently about homosexual sex, but Hamill sees no need to prove his point.

### **Sweet and Sexy**

Hamill then cites Sonnet 99 as "also sweetly and exceptionally erotic." I likewise fail to see this sonnet as he does. I believe the basis for seeing both poems as "sexual" is the presumption that the word "sweet" demands a sexual interpretation, which is highly debatable. In fact, Whittemore convincingly demonstrates that this word has an entirely different meaning.

One sonnet Hamill fails to mention, but which is cited by Pequigney as his first strong indication of Shakespeare's supposed sexual lust for the young man, is Sonnet 20. After describing the young man in somewhat androgynous terms, as better in some womanly traits than women, and as beloved by both men and women, the sonnet says that "for a woman wert thou first created," until Nature changed her mind, and added "something" which was "to my purpose nothing" (presumably a penis). Pequigney (and likely Hamill) construe this as confirmation of the poet's homosexual interest in the young man.

But I am unable to fathom the logic of this deduction. To me, it strongly counters the homosexual hypothesis, since why would changing this person into a man be upsetting to a potential homosexual lover?

There isn't space to discuss the other ways Hamill and Pequigney support their view, but all of their instances are equally arguable, and very far from the consistent and "obvious" meanings Hamill alleges. He just starts from the presumption that Oxford and Southampton were bisexual, and this alleged fact then justifies his assuming that his sexual reading is correct. For Whittemore (and for that matter most conventional scholars), those words admit of non-sexual meanings that provide more coherent understandings of the specified sonnets. Hamill's logic appears to be entirely circular.

There are some broader issues that Hamill ignores. First, the sonnets repeatedly claim that they will make the friend/lover famous for gen-

erations to come, a “monument” to his “beauty,” whose memory will last until the end of time. It is hard to imagine that Shakespeare would have written these lines unless he intended them for publication. But if so, that contradicts the likelihood that they chronicle an illicit homosexual relationship.

Hamill thinks he has solved this by proposing that this explains why Oxford needed the pseudonym *Shakespeare*. He fails, however, to address the obvious fact that no pseudonym could have protected the real author from being known by the authorities—Elizabethan England was a well-run police state, arguably the first truly totalitarian state in history—and it was the authorities, not the *hoi polloi*, who would have come after Oxford for the crime of sodomy. Most proponents of the homosexual hypothesis at least maintain that these sonnets were intended to remain private, precisely to avoid attention.

An even bigger problem with Hamill’s thesis is that while he can claim to have found double-edged words that can be construed as having additional, sexual meanings, even he (and Pequigney) can only find them in a small minority of the sonnets. To prove his hypothesis, he would need to explain what all the other sonnets are about, and how they fit into his construction.

Honest scholars and commentators freely acknowledge that there is a great deal about the *Sonnets* that remains mysterious, that many lines and quatrains, and sometimes entire poems, still defy confident understanding. What is lacking for all of us is a coherent overview of the entire corpus that gives each sonnet its actual context. The homosexual hypothesis, of course, attempts to provide this, but in fact fails to account for the majority of the sonnets.

### Whittemore’s Thesis

Whittemore decided to tackle the challenge of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* by seeing whether they might not be based on a previously unconsidered premise. Of course he assumed that Shakespeare was Oxford. He also immediately concluded that Sonnets 1-126 had to be to and about Southampton, based first on the devotional dedications to

his popular, narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucreèce* (1594), and second, on the clear meaning of Sonnet 107.

Sonnet 107 is crucial, recognized by almost everyone as referring to the peaceful accession of James I after the death of Elizabeth on March 24, 1603. Its depiction of a “peace” that “proclaims Olives of endless age” after “sad augurs” predicting uncertainty were belied by reality, following the “eclipse” of the “mortal moon” (the death of Elizabeth), demands this dating.

Equally certain is that the references in the remainder of the sonnet to “my love” who now “looks fresh,” following the “lease of my true love...supposed as forfeit to a confined doom,” refers to Southampton, who had been spared execution for his part in the 1601 Essex Rebellion, but who remained in the Tower. As one of his first acts as king, even before he left Scotland, James ordered Southampton’s freedom. April 10, 1603, the date of his release, is almost certainly the date of Sonnet 107. This much is also accepted by most scholars, including many

***Anyone reading the sonnets cannot fail to notice a total change in mood, a sharp caesura, between Sonnets 26, with no hint of any kind of trouble, and 27, where Southampton is suddenly “like a jewel (hung in ghastly night).”***

Stratfordians. Whittemore’s breakthrough resulted from the following conjecture: if

Sonnet 107 records Southampton’s release, surely the immediately preceding sonnets must have been composed in the weeks and months while he was still in the Tower. Whittemore set out to find a sonnet memorializing February 8, 1601, when Southampton was arrested and first imprisoned.

Anyone reading the sonnets carefully cannot fail to notice a total change in mood, a sharp *caesura*, between Sonnets 26, with no hint of any kind of trouble, and 27, where Southampton is suddenly “like a jewel (hung in ghastly night),” and the poet is “looking on darkness” as black as the blind experience. The immediately succeeding sonnets continue this totally black mood.

Conventional analysts, including Hamill, say that Sonnet 27 and those following are about the poet’s extreme emotional reaction to some sudden separation from his beloved—an “obsessive” love, in Hamill’s words. I submit that this reading is tortured in the extreme, and only ap-

pears plausible by assuming one's conclusion and employing circular reasoning.

### Travail vs. Travel

This entire theory rests on reading the word "travail" as "travel," rather than "work" or "exertion." It had both meanings at that time, and Oxford may have "traveled" on horseback on the day of the failed rebellion, but "travail" makes much more sense in this context. Sonnet 27 is clearly recording something dreadful that has happened, and Oxford is exhausted from his own activities that day. This is confirmed by the frequency, in the succeeding 40 sonnets, of words expressing loss, crime, transgression or sorrow, including the following: *crime* (1) *stain* (3) *trespass* (1) *loss* (10) *offenses* (4) *grief* (9) *prison* (2) *buried* (3) and *sorrow* (3).

Sonnet 35's opening line, "No more be grieved at that which thou hast done," rings out loudly and clearly that Southampton has done something dreadful (but not necessarily to Oxford or their relationship).

The real story, the deeper mystery, is why this abrupt change of tone, and the introduction of so many words with such dark meanings have escaped the notice of every commentator for the past 180 years. In fact, among the 40 sonnets following number 27 are many which strongly imply that though Southampton might die, he will live eternally via the sonnets. Sonnet 55 is particularly striking in this regard, saying that "this powerful rhyme" will be the medium through which Southampton "shall shine more bright...than unswept stone." The sonnets will preserve "the living record of your memory," and "you (shall) pace forth; your praise shall still find room even in the eyes of all posterity" until the judgment day. These lines uniquely make sense if Southampton were still under sentence of execution—no conventional interpretations come close to the cogency of Whittemore's reading.

### The Great Southampton Mystery

Why the young earl was not executed remains a mystery—historians have never been able to explain it. Whittemore believes that the *Sonnets* hold the key. Sonnet 67, the 41st following the one recording Southampton's arrest, begins with the line "Ah, wherefore with infection should he live..." In fact, Sonnet 67 initiates a series where

the focus and mood change again, not as dramatically as between 26 and 27, but still very significantly. Space limitations forbid listing examples to prove this point, but I believe, with Whittemore, that 67 records the day Oxford learned that Southampton would not be executed, though not be pardoned either. He would thus continue in the Tower—that is, he would live, but with an "infection"—his still-standing treason conviction. The succeeding sonnets confirm this by focusing on different concerns than in the preceding forty.

In fact, the final executions occurred on March 18, 1601, 39 days after the rebellion. Sonnet 67 is the 41st sonnet that started with 27 on February 8. If Oxford had written the equivalent of a sonnet a day, the chronology would line up perfectly, dating Sonnet 67 to March 20, 1601.

Sonnet 87 appears to provide the answer to what actually happened on or just before March 20. Oxford writes that "so thy great gift, upon misprision growing, comes home again, on better judgment making." Read in the context of Southampton having been recently reprieved, this almost reads like an open book. "Misprision" was a legal term reserved, in that period, for instances where a monarch wanted a legal pretext to commute a death sentence.

### The Monument

It therefore virtually has to be the case that Southampton was granted the changed sentence of "misprision of treason." That this word occurs in the sequence shortly after the sonnet that appears to record his being spared execution helps confirm this reading. That its context is "that thy great gift...comes home again," which strongly suggests a reading of "so thy life, which now is preserved," strengthens the case. "Better judgment" might mean Oxford's view that the misprision charge was a "better judgment" than the death sentence. This additionally confirms that sonnets 27-106 were written during, and about, Southampton's incarceration.

If Sonnet 67 starts a second tier of 40 sonnets, it can be seen that a symmetry exists, arguing in favor of reading these sonnets as "prison sonnets." There were exactly 80 "prison sonnets," half (27-66) written while Southampton was under sentence of death, and half (67-106), after he was reprieved, though still in the Tower.

If Sonnet 125's opening line, "Were't ought to me, I bore the canopy," is taken to refer to Elizabeth's funeral on April 28, a further convergence is revealed: the 19 days of April 10-28, 1603 are exactly the same as the number of sonnets from 107-125, strongly suggesting that Oxford resumed writing one a day for this period. Sonnet 126 is a "send-off" sonnet to the previous 19, and with its inclusion, we have a set of 20, numbers 107-126.

The result is a symmetrical structure that cannot be coincidence: 26-40-40-20-26 (discounting the final two sonnets, 153 and 154, which are universally recognized as *sui generis* and unlike all the rest), which condenses into 26-100-26. That the even number of 100 is tacked into the middle of two sets of 26 each is all but conclusive evidence of intention, as the number 100 was almost *de rigueur* for sonnet (and poem) cycles at that time. This fact alone all but proves that Oxford intended the break between 26 and 27 to be just as significant as I have represented it to be, and surely for the same reason.

Further, in Sonnet 81, Oxford says that "Your monument shall be my gentle verse," repeated in 107, where he says "and thou in this [the sonnets] shalt find thy monument." A monument in that era was a funeral structure celebrating the life of the person buried there. Oxford clearly considered the *Sonnets* to be his monument to Southampton. Their symmetrical structure is required for it to so qualify.

### Southampton's Poem

We can now identify the importance of the new Southampton poem. It was undoubtedly written in the first weeks of his incarceration. Even if we didn't have confirmation from Sonnet 67 for the date on which he learned of his reprieve, logic dictates that it would have to have been just about the time of, or at most a few days after, the execution of the last two other conspirators on March 18.

We also have several extant documents, including a letter from Robert Cecil, the queen's top counselor, indicating that he was looking for a means to save Southampton's life, and four known letters from Southampton pleading for it. To this corpus, we now can add the poem, dated to the same period, February or March 1601.

There is one more piece of the story which must be briefly summarized—Oxford's attempt behind the scenes to save Southampton's life. In Sonnet 35 he states, "Thy adverse party is thy Advocate." As England's foremost earl, Oxford was the leading person on the jury which condemned Southampton (and all the conspirators) to death—a duty he could not have dodged. The line quoted above surely refers to this intense conflict of interest—he was Southampton's "adverse party" in voting to convict him, but his "Advocate" (upper case in the original) as his behind-the-scenes lawyer.

Southampton's poem includes a number of key words found also in the Sonnets: *blood, buried, cancel, crimes, dead, die, fault, grave, grief, groans, ill, liberty, loss, offenses, pardon, power, prison, sorrow, stain and tears.*

Whittemore first identified the 22 key words used by Southampton to describe his situation, and then found that 20 of them (listed above) recur sixty times in the first 35 sonnets. It is this recurrence that is the strongest indication that Southampton had them beside him. And if so, his poem becomes evidence that these sonnets were

written between February 8 and March 18, 1601.

Whittemore's major premise is thus confirmed—sonnets 27-106 were written to Southampton when he was in the Tower. His second and more controversial proposal, that Southampton was Oxford's and Elizabeth's illegitimate son, is something else again. He believes, and I again concur, that it can be established by evidence from the *Sonnets* themselves but not from Southampton's poem.



Lord Henry Wriothesley,  
ca. 1601

## Shakespeare, Oxford and *The Book of Common Prayer*

Richard M. Waugaman

In his *Shakespeare's Common Prayers: The Book of Common Prayer and the Elizabethan Age* (OUP, 2012), Daniel Swift explores a fascinating terrain in Shakespeare studies—what he convincingly calls the neglected topic of the literary influence on his works of the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP). He pushes back against scholars such as Stuart Gillespie who “dismisses the possibility that the prayer book could be a source” (61) for Shakespeare’s works. He is especially effective in conveying the successive controversies this book generated in England, from its first edition in 1549. He calls the BCP “the central religious text of this powerfully religious age” (3).

Swift uses these controversies to suggest that Shakespeare’s works engage with these debates. He is highly persuasive in making this central point. In the process, he gets in some zingers at his fellow Shakespeare scholars. He notes that many of them show no interest in connecting Shakespeare’s works with religious texts, adding:

Like sixteenth-century Puritans, twentieth-century literary critics assume separation between drama and liturgy, and are shocked when the border appears too porous (54).

Swift also decries a prevalent “single-track notion of [literary] influence,” positing instead that “Plays are not rivers: they can have more than a single source” (62).

Ostensibly a Stratfordian, Swift admits that “All the chronology of the plays are uncertain” (26), and he makes some David Ellis-like observations about the risks of biographical speculation in Shakespeare studies. He refers to Greenblatt’s “speculative biography *Will in the World*” (112), and calls Greenblatt’s account of Shakespeare’s marriage “entirely fictional” (113).

Swift then admits that

This has been going on for a very long time [in Shakespeare scholarship], this game of guessing, of speculation that sounds more like gossip; of

beginning to invent precisely where the evidence leaves off, and of taking the absence of evidence as proof. There is a style of confident bluster that marks this move (113).

An Oxfordian could hardly have said it any better. Swift also mentions the controversies over the authenticity of the 1604-05 Revels Accounts, quoting Duncan-Jones that they “seem almost too good to be true” (11). He then warns against “the proximity of fantasy in all archival work, and the peril of drawing too perfect a line between the imagined and the historical” (12). Swift even admits that “There are also those who suggest that the person who lived Shakespeare’s life was not the playwright” (281). But he then dashes the reader’s hope, that he is about to come out of the closet, by praising James Shapiro’s book on the authorship controversy.

### Influence on Shakespeare

Swift is helpful in reminding us of the frequent influence of the BCP’s evolving liturgy on Shakespeare. Our understanding of the theme of marriage in the plays is enriched by Swift’s observations of the role of the religiously necessary components of contemporary matrimony: the joining of hands, exchange of rings, verbal consent and, last but not least, sexual consummation. He also traces the controversies among Puritans, Protestants, and Catholics over the services of communion and burial of the dead, and how these clashes underlie word and action in the plays.

I find Swift less effective when he tries to locate what he considers to be specific instances of the literary influence of the BCP on Shakespeare’s works. Here he seems to suffer from tunnel vision, so set is he upon finding evidence for his conclusions. This is probably a necessary stage when an author is trying to advance a controversial thesis. Just as each neuron sends out collateral fibers to suppress the activity of adjacent neurons so its message can get through more clearly, Swift implies that the BCP is the primary literary influence on a given passage,



even when the wording in question also has a clear Bible or Psalms source.

**Macbeth**

Let me give an example—it is the first one Swift offers. This is from Macbeth’s soliloquy in II,i, 41-72, as he prepares to murder Duncan. The phrase Swift examines is

Thou sure and firm-set earth,  
Hear not my steps, which way they walk.

Having found nothing relevant in the work of previous scholars, Swift cites several scriptural sources for this phrase, especially Psalms 1, 128, and 143, which all contain verses including the words “walk” and “way.” Swift notes that Psalm 128 occurs in the marriage rite in the BCP (Coverdale translation). Swift tries hard to convince himself that Macbeth’s dark apostrophe would have evoked the marriage rite for early audiences.

**Two other verses of Psalm 17 ask God to hear the psalmist’s prayer, just as Macbeth asks the earth not to hear his steps, and Duncan not to hear the bell.**

**The Whole Book of Psalms**

I strongly share Swift’s wish to resurrect “a now-lost cultural knowledge” and “to trace the bounces of an echo” (56) of biblical allusions that would have been familiar to Shakespeare’s audience. Curiously, though, Swift’s enthusiasm for the BCP leads him to ignore an alternate translation of the psalms that he knew was popular in Shakespeare’s day. In fact, Swift even states that Sternhold and Hopkins’ *Whole Book of Psalms* (WBP) and the BCP were two of the three “most frequently reprinted books of Shakespeare’s age” (31).

Had Swift examined the *Whole Book of Psalms*, he would have found this in Psalm 17:5:

Then in thy paths that be most pure, stay me  
(O Lord) and preserve:  
That from the way wherein I walk, my steps may  
never swerve.

With the additional phrase “my steps,” we have already doubled the words in Macbeth’s comment that echo a psalm. Swift, as noted, found only the two words “walk” and “way” in his sources. Two other verses of Psalm 17 ask

God to hear the psalmist’s prayer, just as Macbeth asks the earth not to hear his steps, and Duncan not to hear the bell. Macbeth sees the dagger pointing toward his hand, whereas verse 14 of the psalm speaks of “these tyrants’ hands.” The psalm images a lion; Macbeth, a wolf. The psalm speaks of God’s eyes; Macbeth of his own eyes. The psalmist refers to what is in his mind; Macbeth refers to “a dagger of the mind.”

Further, the context of WBP 17 dovetails with Macbeth’s soliloquy. It offers just the sort of ironic reversal of the biblical source that Swift correctly discovers in much of Shakespeare. Psalm 17 is a prayer to God that underlines the psalmist’s righteousness—he has refrained from “the works of wicked men, and paths perverse and ill.” Verse 13 beseeches God to “Save thou my soul from the evil man, and

with thy sword him  
smite.” If Macbeth is  
echoing Psalm 17,  
audiences would  
have identified him  
with his dagger as

just the sort of evil man the psalmist fears. In my admittedly biased view, in his rush to force a connection with the BCP, Swift has missed a more salient psalm source for Macbeth’s words.

Another quibble with Swift’s reading of Macbeth’s soliloquy is that it misquotes (on Pope’s authority) the First Folio: “thou sowre [i.e. ‘sour,’ not ‘sure’] and firm-set earth.”

But by accepting Pope’s emendation here, Swift misses another possible Biblical allusion: Sir Richard Baker’s 1636 *Meditations and Disquisitions upon the Lord’s Prayer*, which uses the phrase “sowre earth,” in contrast with the more commonly used phrase “the sweet earth.” One of the eight times “sowre” is used in the Geneva Bible is in the sixth chapter of *Matthew*, the chapter with the second-highest number of hand-drawn annotations in de Vere’s copy. *Matthew* 6:16 reads: “Look not sowre as the hypocrites.”

So the listener is invited to ask if Macbeth is guilty of hypocrisy. Further, verse 16 follows immediately after the text of the Lord’s Prayer, further highlighting the unchristian irony of Macbeth’s pagan “prayer” to the earth to silence his footsteps as he prepares to murder Duncan.

Later, Swift links Lady Macbeth’s “Out, damned spot!” with the closing homily in the

BCP's service of matrimony, when the priest says, "Christ...not having spot or wrinkle..." (219). Fair enough. But the chief penitential verse, Psalm 51, seems even more relevant. The Coverdale translation appears in the BCP in its "A Commination against Sinners," but it is only the WBP translation that includes the phrase in verse 7, "And if thou wash away my spot, the snow in whiteness shall I pass."

Lady Macbeth twice uses the word *wash* when trying to clean her hands; Macbeth himself uses it once in the same context. Swift also quotes Macbeth's plea:

If thou couldst, doctor, cast  
The water of my land, find her disease,  
And purge it to a sound and pristine health.  
(238).

Again, "cast" and "purge" come from Psalm 51.

Immediately after the phrase Swift quotes is: "for fear/The very stones prate of my whereabout." This is one of only 15 times Shakespeare uses the word "prate."

The *Whole Book of Psalms* 69:13 reads:

Both high and low and all the throng, that sit  
within the gate,  
They have me ever in their tongue, of me  
they talk and prate."

"Whereabout" is used only one other time in Shakespeare and appears once also in the Geneva Bible, in 1 Samuel 21:2. As David is fleeing Saul, he says to Ahimelech the priest: "...The king... hath said to me, Let no man know whereabout I send thee..."

As in *Macbeth*, the context is a mortal conflict between a king and his successor.

Sure, only audience members who knew their Geneva Bible as well as de Vere would have caught that echo. Swift writes that "Perhaps the deepest fantasy of literary scholarship is to catch Shakespeare at the moment of invention" (26). De Vere's biblical echoes allow us to do just that—to watch his extraordinary associative process at work as he was writing.

Words were packed with literary associations for de Vere. Whether these were conscious or unconscious, they enormously enriched his extraordinary writing. Although he did not annotate 1 Samuel 21:2, he underlined two lines of

verse 4, and some of verses 12 and 13. The underlined portion of verse 13 includes the Hamlet-like revelation that David "changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad."

### A Thorn in His Side

Surely Swift knows the medieval and early modern English consonant "thorn" (phonetic "th"), so why does he repeatedly write (in the book's first printing, at least) "ye" when what was meant was "the" (e.g., pp. 18, 23, 156)? Did his publisher force him to pander to readers who do not know any better, including those who still believe in ye merrie olde Stratfordian authorship legend?

As long as I am being captious, I note that the book's year of publication is given incorrectly as 2013. No one has ever made the case for the influence on Shakespeare of the 1612 *King James Bible*, but Swift unaccountably tries to link it with a passage in *Hamlet* (29).

Swift has made a significant contribution to Shakespeare scholarship with his book, even though it is doubtful—compared for example with Holinshed—that the BCP was Shakespeare's "most powerful source" (237).

Swift imagines that his thesis would be proven if we ever found Shakespeare's "own annotated copy" of the BCP. True.

But let me allow Swift to have the final say—

Like so much in Shakespeare, we cannot wholly know [when *Macbeth* was first performed]. But we can be sure that this playwright knew perfectly the book that was the most controversial and adored of his lifetime. If we place Shakespeare and the *Book of Common Prayer* back in close relation, some sparks from the rub between these two may throw a light that will permit us to see both anew (246).

### In The Next Newsletter

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## Top Ten Reasons Why Oxford is Shakespeare

Matthew Cossolotto

**10** Many Shakespeare plays contain characters and details relating directly to Oxford's life and foreign travels, creating a strong circumstantial case for his authorship. Orson Welles said: "I think Oxford wrote Shakespeare. If you don't, there are some awfully funny coincidences to explain away."

**9** *Hamlet*, II.ii includes the stage direction, "Enter Hamlet reading on a book." This book is considered by scholars to be *Cardanus Comfort*, translated from Italian into English and published in 1573 at Oxford's behest. Polonius also is widely regarded as a parody of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, the Queen's counselor, Oxford's guardian and his father-in-law.

**8** "Shakespeare" displayed an intimate knowledge of a wide range of subjects, including the law, Italy, foreign languages, heraldry, music, navigation, court manners and intrigues, and warfare. Oxford's known educational background, foreign travels and life experiences match the knowledge base displayed in Shakespeare's writings. In fact, the Italian cities used as settings in Shakespeare's plays were the very cities that Oxford is known to have visited, while William of Stratford never left England.

**7** Oxford was praised during his lifetime as the best of the courtier playwrights for comedy, and was known to have used a pseudonym. While a small number of his acknowledged poems survive—probably written when he was very young—no such plays exist. Were these later published under the name "William Shakespeare"?

**6** Oxford was a leading patron of the arts, widely known to support a large circle of fellow writers, including Anthony Munday, John Lyly, and Robert Greene. They also worked for him

as secretaries and possible collaborators. Conventional scholars have long recognized these writers as having influenced the work of "Shakespeare."

**5** Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, translated into English in 1565 by Arthur Golding, had a profound influence on Shakespeare's writing. Golding was Oxford's maternal uncle, and some scholars believe Oxford translated some or all of *Metamorphoses* when he was still a teenager.

**4** The 1623 *First Folio* was financed by William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke, and his brother Philip Herbert, 1st Earl of Montgomery (later 4th Earl of Pembroke). Philip Herbert was married to Oxford's daughter, Susan Vere, and William Herbert was once engaged to another Oxford daughter, Bridget.

**3** Beginning in 1586, Oxford was granted a substantial annuity £1,000 by the notoriously parsimonious Queen Elizabeth for unspecified services. It's possible he used the money to support the production of patriotic history plays later known as Shakespeare's.

**2** The 1609 volume called *Shake-Speare's Sonnets* contains numerous autobiographical details that link directly to Oxford's life including the poet's advancing age, his preoccupation with the ravages of time and his own imminent death, his lameness, his shame, and his "outcast state." Another Oxford uncle, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, was the first to introduce what would later become known as the "Shakespeare" sonnet form.

**1** The publisher's 1609 *Sonnets* dedication refers to Shakespeare as "our ever-living poet"—a term that implies the poet was already dead. Oxford died in 1604, but William of Stratford lived on until 1616.

## The Essex Rebellion and *Richard II*: Why Wasn't Shakespeare Arrested?

Michael Egan

Among the more controversial elements of the movie *Anonymous*, even for Oxfordians, was the decision to represent the play performed before Essex's 1601 rebellion as *Richard III*, not *Richard II*. The change was made precisely because as soon as one begins to visualize it, that is, imagine Elizabethan power politics in reality, staging *Richard II* simply doesn't make any kind of sense, historically, politically or strategically.

The first unlikely thing is that the performance took place at all. If I were involved in so desperate a measure as an attempted coup, with all its obvious risks and dangers, I would certainly not fritter away the prior afternoon and evening by hiring a wherry to take me across the Thames, way out of town, so I could attend an entertainment of whatever tangential relationship to the enterprise. What if there was a last-minute hitch? I'd be going over all the details again and again, checking and rechecking the arrangements, making sure that key individuals understood their roles and were confident, prepared, and equipped to undertake them.

The second thing that makes no sense about this performance of *Richard II*, given that it portrays the deposition and murder of a king, is that requesting it so foolishly and needlessly tips the conspirators' hand. It announces their intentions, of course long suspected and investigated by the government, and even gives a full week's notice of the coup's likeliest date.

Whatever else, Essex was no fool and had he really known about the play (as the prosecutor, Sir Edward Coke, repeatedly alleged at his trial), would more than likely have stopped the whole thing in its tracks. Yet his full knowledge and approval were clearly established and even used in evidence against him.

It has of course been suggested that the purpose of this command performance by some of the highest nobles in the land was to prepare public opinion for the uprising, or at least screw the conspirators' courage to the sticking place,

These points again were noted at the trial, though without observing that the endeavor failed miserably in both objectives. Public attendance apparently was light, as The Lord Chamberlain's Men reportedly foresaw—the play was “so old and long out of use,” as they tried explaining to the conspirators. The following Sunday morning a bewildered London populace gave the uprising no support whatever. As for the conspirators' resolution, it too collapsed within a few hours. They were all quickly rounded up, attainted and sequestered in the Tower.

During Essex's trial, Augustine Phillips, one of the principal actors in Shakespeare's company, gave this account of the original transaction:

He [Phillips] saith that on Friday last was sen-  
night [a week ago] or Thursday, Sir Charles  
Percy, Sir Jocelyne Percy and the Lord Monta-  
gue with some three more, spake to some of the  
players in the presence of this examinee, to have  
the play of the deposing and killing of King  
Richard the Second to be played the Saturday  
next promising to get them xls. [forty shillings]  
more then their ordinary to play it. (Chambers,  
*William Shakespeare II*, p. 324.)

Phillips had more to say in testimony, including the players' warning that the requested drama was old and long out of use and thus unlikely to attract much of an audience. The two pounds extra that the conspirators paid showed how revealingly eager they were to see “the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard the Second.”

This noted, let's now turn to the next insubstantial element in the story, that the work solicited was Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Richard II*. The almost universal assumption among literary critics and historians alike, including Chambers, is that this was indeed the drama performed. They argue that the company involved was Shakespeare's and that he had of course

written a well-known and popular History under that name. *Richard II* was first staged in 1595-7 and then published in several editions between 1597 and 1601, clearly because there was a demand for it.

*Richard II* may not be our favorite Shakespeare play, but in the late 1590s it was one of his most popular and successful, not least because it is the exordium to the exciting *I* and *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, climaxing in Agincourt and the conquest of France.

But this is where the debate intensifies. Was the play so excessively paid for and performed in fact Shakespeare's? Actually, it was never so named. Sir Gilly Merrick, one of the conspirators afterwards hanged, testified only that the play "was of King Harry the iii<sup>th</sup>" and—the key point insisted upon by the prosecution—that it included "the kylling of Kyng Richard the second." (Chambers, *William Shakespeare II*, p. 324.)

Together with Phillips' testimony, this is generally taken to conclusively identify the drama as Shakespeare's *Richard II*. However, given the play's nature and stage history, this also seems quite unlikely.

The most obvious objection is that a four- or five-year-old dramatic history, one enjoying several recent printings because it was so popular, hardly merits description as old and long out of use. Successful dramas were never published while they enjoyed their runs on stage, so we can assume that *Richard II* was in repertory for at least two years, until 1597. Then it was repeatedly published under Shakespeare's name and more than likely often revived. Dismissing it in 1601 as stale, forgotten and unlikely to get much of an audience is a stretch, and a big one.

There's another, often overlooked objection, and that's Queen Elizabeth's famous remark to William Lambarde, that the *Richard II* play performed at the behest of Essex's followers "was played 40<sup>th</sup> times in open streets and houses."

First, there is no record of this, not even a hint. Second, it's unlikely to be true because of the drama's complex staging demands, which require quite a bit of physical ascending and descending—"Down, down I come, like glistering Phaeton," etc. Shakespeare clearly wrote his play with The Globe in mind and, as always, made full use of its architectural possibilities.

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Among examples are the voice of King Hamlet resonating creepily *hic et ubique* from the cellarage, the line of kings rising from the cauldron in *Macbeth* and, perhaps most famously, the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*.

It's not impossible, of course, that *Richard II* was staged privately, but Elizabeth's observation makes more sense if she was talking about a genuinely stale play, 10 or 20 years forgotten, one designed for the old days when crude stories were played in courtyards and manor houses; or a work prepared specifically for the provincial tour where there were no Globes or Theatres, only market squares and dining halls. Her remark also sounds second-hand, as though she were referencing someone else. It strikes me as the kind of information communicated by a trusted advisor, like Walsingham or Bacon, during the trial preparation: "Yes, your Majesty, this play was played forty times in houses and the open streets." Hands-on monarch though she was, Elizabeth surely had more to worry about, and recall in such detail, than the frequency with which stale and long-forgotten dramas had been played in the streets or in private.

But let's grant for a moment that Shakespeare's *Richard II* was indeed long-forgotten and out of use by February, 1601, that is, no longer in repertory. If we are to believe Augustine Phillips, the Lord Chamberlain's Men were nonetheless able to mount a production within a few days. This means they could locate the long-out-of-use play script (with all its parts intact, because of course each player had only his own lines with cues), re-cast some roles, have the actors freshly learn or re-remember all their lines, re-block the action, find time to rehearse at least once (don't forget they were still an active company) and successfully perform the entire thing to an almost empty wooden O. Yes, they were professionals, but anyone who has ever done any theater knows you don't just throw together a production as complex as *Richard II* overnight. Some of the actors will inevitably have been new to it, especially the pre-pubescent boys who played the queen and other female parts. Others will have moved on, and thus have had to be replaced, etc. Indeed, as soon as one begins to visualize it, the difficulties posed by a quick performance become insurmountable.

The second objection to the play's having been *Richard II* is that it *is* a tragedy. For most of the action the declining monarch is an extremely sympathetic figure, especially after his return from Ireland. As he says pathetically in some famous lines:

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings!  
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,  
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,  
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed—  
All murdered; for within the hollow crown  
That rounds the mortal temples of a king  
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,  
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,  
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,  
To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks,  
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,  
As if this flesh which walls about our life  
Were brass impregnable; and humored thus,  
Comes at the last and with a little pin  
Bores through his castle wall, and—farewell,  
king. (*Richard II*, III.ii.155-170.)

He also repeatedly articulates the classic Tudor version of monarchical authority, the Divine Right of Kings. Its memorable imagery would do little to support an assault upon that authority in the person of Queen Elizabeth:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord. (*Richard II*, III.ii.54-7.)

It's well known too that the now-famous deposition scene was banned during Elizabeth's reign, both from publication and performance. For these reasons it was unlikely to have been in the company's routine production of *The Tragedy of Richard II*. Some people have thus even suggested that the scene was actually written up and included just for this showing, which strikes me as most improbable from every point of view: timing, of course, but also because it was illegal and so clearly announces the conspiratorial intent. Since it's a big scene, arguably the play's biggest, including it at Essex's behest would have meant learning a whole new set of lines involving almost the entire cast, plus

blocking a major new scene, adding to the complexity of preparation and dangerously underlining the conspirators' increasingly manifest purpose.

But even assuming its special inclusion in the Essex performance, Richard is still depicted with the greatest sympathy, smashing the mirror and so forth, while Bullingbrook emerges almost immediately as a tyrant. The scene concludes with opposition to the new king already in embryonic formation, so analogies with that Henry IV would be just the thing Essex would want to avoid.

With this in mind, some modern commentators, most recently in the ShakespeareAtCU listserv and the movie *Anonymous*, have proposed that the play could have been, must have been, not *Richard II* but *Richard III*. Emmerich and Orloff even have Oxford penning the drama specifically for the occasion. Unfortunately there is zero evidence to support such a speculation with all its political and personal ramifications.

Queen Elizabeth herself recognized that the historical analogy was with the second Richard, not the third: "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" she famously remarked in the same exchange with William Lambarde referred to earlier. She felt vulnerable, deposable in Richard II's way. I think *Richard III* can be safely excluded.

It is of course true that *Richard II* depicts the killing of the king in its penultimate scene, but again in a manner of the utmost sympathy and horror. He is set upon by Sir Pierce of Exton and brutally murdered, climaxing thus:

*Richard*: That hand shall burn in never quenching fire  
That staggers thus my person. Exton, thy fierce hand  
Hath with the king's blood stain'd the king's own land.  
Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high,  
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die. [*Dies*] (*Richard II*, V.v.106-12.)

And Exton is immediately given a speech regretting the assassination.

Once again, this is hardly the kind of thing likely to encourage an attack on the crown or win the support of the queen's subjects for such a venture. On the contrary, the reverse was far

more probable, especially as the least of England's citizens knew what had followed Richard's deposition: the national disaster of the Wars of the Roses. In the play, even the triumphant Bullingbrook, now Henry IV, immediately condemns his predecessor's assassination. The image of the usurper spattered with royal blood also would not help. He tells Exton, in the drama's concluding words, which will have resonated ominously in the skulls of Essex's co-conspirators, assuming this was the play they saw:

They love not poison that do poison need,  
Nor do I thee: though I did wish him dead,  
I hate the murderer, love him murdered.  
The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labor,  
But neither my good word nor princely favor:  
With Cain go wander through shades of night,  
And never show thy head by day nor light.  
Lords, I protest, my soul is full of woe,  
That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow.  
(*Richard II*, V.v. 106-12.)

#### Other Candidates

The Essex play was thus most unlikely to have been Shakespeare's *Richard II*. It doesn't make sense from any perspective.

However, there are other candidates, in fact, quite a few. At least two and perhaps three other Richard II dramas were available when Shakespeare's tragical history was first staged in 1595. All possessed varying emphases, episodes and visions of the king. Among them was *Jack Straw* (1594), which however portrays the boy-monarch quite favorably and deals neither with his deposition nor murder.

There was also the unidentified *Richard II* Simon Forman recorded seeing at the Globe on 30 April, 1611, and *Pierce of Exton* by Chettle, Dekker, Drayton and Wilson, performed by the Admiral's Men at the *Rose* in 1598.\*

Other important literary treatments included Samuel Daniel's *The Civil Wars* and the influential political poems of John Gower, a major source for Shakespeare's canonical play, and indeed for his work generally. There is however no evidence, direct or indirect, to identify any of these as the historical drama in question.

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\* Forker, *Richard II*, p. 5n., and "Early Modern Plays Presented in London" (<http://www.columbia.edu/~tdk3/company.html>).

Evelyn May Albright, Blair Worden and others have suggested that John Hayward's *The First part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie the Fourth* (1599), presented in dramatized format, may have been the play. This prose history notoriously drew parallels between Elizabeth and Richard II, declared the king's deposition to have been lawful, and was provocatively dedicated to the Earl of Essex in language suggesting a kingly future for him: "*magnus...et presenti iudicio et futuri temporis expectatione*," i.e., "great thou art in hope, greater in expectation of a future time."

Sounds quite like Macbeth's witches, doesn't it? I've often wondered whether Shakespeare had Hayward's dedication in mind when he wrote his Scottish play, and if so how he ever heard of it, assuming he was the Stratford lad. As an Essex juror, Oxford of course would have had it called to his attention.

Hayward was tortured almost to death for his words, and then imprisoned. Nevertheless, there is no credible evidence to support the speculation that his *Life and Raigne of King Henrie the Fourth* was somehow Essex's play, nor is there any dramatic rendering extant. The suggestion has been put forward only because, as we've seen, the case against Shakespeare's *Richard II* appears so overwhelming.

### **1 Richard II**

Readers may be expecting me to make a case for *The Tragedy of Richard II, Part One*, the anonymous Elizabethan manuscript play in the British Library that I have identified as a forgotten work of Shakespeare's. The evidence for his authorship is set out in my 2006 book, together with a fresh edition of the text based on a digitized copy of the handwritten manuscript.

And *1 Richard II* does fit the bill in some interesting ways. It is a Shakespeare play and so was plausibly in his company's repertoire; it does deal with almost the whole of Richard II's reign, and even portrays his first brief deposition in December, 1387—because Richard II was deposed not once but twice. On that first and now almost forgotten occasion the young king was out of office for about three days around Christmas, and only restored to the throne when the triumphant nobles were unable to agree on a successor. One of the leading candidates to re-

place him was Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, who in *1 Richard II* is unhistorically made into the country's Lord Protector, but whose historical assassination by Richard provokes the uprising that is the drama's period.

So an attractive case for *1 Richard II* as the Essex play can be made, at least superficially. From time to time this possibility has been proposed by mainstream Shakespeare scholars, among them Matthew Black and Emma Smith.

There are also strong political reasons supporting the proposition. First, Thomas of Woodstock, the drama's heroic central figure, was in fact a distant ancestor of Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex in Elizabeth's reign. Indeed, among Woodstock's titles—he was one of King Edward III's seven sons—was that of Earl of Essex, though Devereux did not inherit his earldom via this line.

Another strong political argument is that *1 Richard II* sympathetically dramatizes what might be called a loyal rebellion led by disaffected nobility, their righteous anger directed more at the king's greedy and inept counselors than the monarch himself. This is of course precisely what Essex insisted in his own defense—that he had sought only to remove members of the queen's government, not Elizabeth herself. As we'll see, this plea and its counter, that he actually planned to both depose and murder the queen, just as Bullingbrook had deposed and assassinated Richard, takes us close to resolving the historical mystery we've posed: which *Richard II* was performed and why wasn't its playwright arrested (whether he was Shakespeare or not)?

Corollary to the foregoing is the likelihood, though it is no stronger than this, that *1 Richard II* concluded with the establishment of what in Elizabethan times would have been a highly revolutionary arrangement, constitutional monarchy. This political system declaws the ruler's absolute power by imposing severe legal restraints upon its exercise, and of course sets parliamentary authority over the Divine Right of Kings. England did eventually become a constitutional monarchy after the Bloodless Revolution of 1688, but advocating such limitations in 1592, when *1 Richard II* was probably written, makes it a truly prophetic drama, nearly a century ahead of its time, and thus fully worthy of the author I propose.



However, we can go no further than imagine the probable conclusion for this play because most of its final scene is in fact missing, excised precisely, as in the canonical history, because it dealt with the king's deposition. My reluctant conclusion, therefore, is that *Richard II, Part One* cannot have been the history performed the night before Essex's uprising. The trial testimony is quite unequivocal: the play in question portrayed not only Richard's deposition but his killing too.

So the drama staged 7 February 1601 was not the first part of Shakespeare's tragedy. And while *Part Two* technically fits, as we've seen, its actual content and the bearing of its message place it beyond credibility as a realistic candidate. All the other possibilities are equally disqualified for the reasons we've reviewed.

We are thus returned once again to the conundrum with which we started: which play, and by whom?

### It Never Happened

My answer, as readers may have anticipated, is none of the above. I don't believe there ever was a play, and the story of its solicitation and performance an evidentiary fraud introduced by the prosecution to establish so far as possible what it asserted were the Earl of Essex's true motives. Cecil and the government of course wanted Devereux's head, literally. The queen herself hesitated on this point, for reasons both personal and political, just as she had over the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. The charismatic Essex was a former lover, a capable general and high-ranking court official. We recall too that the earl's defense—since he could hardly deny the failed rebellion—was that he had sought only to remove the queen's dishonest counselors, not harm Her Majesty herself. Essex claimed his words and actions proved it. Soon after the Sunday sermon at St Paul's Cross he had led 300 armed followers through Ludgate and into the City, shouting, "Murder, murder, God Save the Queen!" and

"For the Queen, For the Queen!" His intention was to storm the Palace, arrest his political enemies and proclaim, "Long live the Queen and after her, long live King James of Scotland, only legitimate heir to the English throne!" (Chambrun, *Shakespeare: A Portrait Restored*, 1957, p. 229.)

In other words, his target was the Cecil faction, as he was theirs. To clinch the demand for his execution, Sir Edward Coke, Elizabeth's Attorney General and the chief prosecutor, had to establish that Essex also had a murderous intent directed at the queen's most sacred person. But how to establish this? The play about Richard II's killing and deposition went to the heart of the matter. Speaking directly to the accused, Coke said in his summation, after again citing the performance of the imaginary play:

I protest upon my soul and conscience I doe believe she [the queen] should not have long lived after she had been in your power. Note but the precedents of former ages, how long lived Richard the Second after he was surprised in the same manner? The pretence was alike for the removing of certain counsellors, but yet shortly after it cost him his life. (Chambers, II, p. 325).

Actually, as we know, and as Coke must also have known, there was no pretence at all involved in the deposition of Richard II, nor had he been surprised in the same

manner, nor was the issue Bullingbrook's removal of certain counselors. Interestingly enough, this is the story of his first deposition, as told in *1 Richard II*. The king's downfall begins in that play when he attacks the property and inheritance rights of the old nobility, powerfully dramatized again in the canonical *Richard II* when he seizes the Duchy of Lancaster literally over John of Gaunt's dead body.

These were real issues for Richard's nobles, and Shakespeare understands them. They are spelled out very clearly at the scene by Gaunt's shocked brother, the Duke of York. Whose rights are safe, he demands, if Bullingbrook's are not? Is not the king himself king by right of true succession?



Sir Edward Coke, 1552-1634

History starkly answers him. The first article of the final indictment against Richard was that he had transferred ownership of crown lands to “men unworthie,” what we might call the petty aristocracy. These “minions,” as the old nobility contemptuously described them, were the new breed of small land-owners like Bushy, Green and Scroope, whose rise is portrayed with such vigor in *1 Richard II*. In a central episode, the king distributes his kingdom among them in return for a monthly stipend of £7000. He even signs one of those new-fangled legal contracts affirming the deal—the rotten parchment bonds and inky blots that Gaunt laments on his death-bed. In the opinion of the old aristocracy the king had turned his kingdom into a “pelting farm,” a rented property, and himself into a “landlord,” a mere businessman.

Richard was additionally found guilty of creating a political and economic counterweight to the old nobility—precisely his purpose, of course. No one, least of all himself, had forgotten 1387.

So in his case it was class warfare, pure and simple, not a matter of court politics as in the Essex rebellion. Richard was a revolutionary, Essex an adventurer.

### Drama and Politics

The evidence concerning the Essex play thus turned out to be critical, which makes it even more remarkable that the testimony about its title, content, authorship and solicitation is so vague and imprecise, except on certain points.

We’ve already seen that the work itself was never directly identified, and are told only that it dealt with “Harry the iijj.” It was old and long out of use—studiedly vague. Nobody could say for sure who wrote it or what it contained other than the deposing and murder of a seated king. The conspirators were so eager to have it performed that they paid the substantial amount of 40 shillings above the usual fee. This of course emphasized their true murderous intent.

There are further aspects about this part of the story that just don’t add up or, to put it another way, add up to a rather different narrative.

First, Augustine Phillips testified that the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were approached by Sir Charles Percy, Sir Joselyne Percy and the Lord Monteagle (Montague) and some three others. Then Essex’s steward, Sir Gilly Merrick,

testified that at dinner the Saturday afternoon before the uprising, Sir Charles Percy suddenly proposed that they all journey together to

the Globe over the water where the L. Chamberlain’s Men vse to play and were there somewhat before the play began, Sr Charles telling that the play would be about Harry the iijjth...[Merrick] can not tell who procured that play to be played at that time except yt were Sr Charles Percy but as he thynketh yt was Sr Charles Percy. Thenne he was at the same play and Cam in somewhat after yt was begon, and the play was of Kyng Harry the iijjth, and of the kylling of Kyng Richard the second played by the L. Chamberlen’s players. (Chambers, *William Shakespeare II* p. 324).

Yet Sir Francis Bacon, one of the trial’s lead attorneys, gives a rather different account in his subsequently published history. He insists upon the main points: the play was about Richard’s deposition and murder and—the detail always included—how the conspirators over-rode the players’ hesitations by paying excessively for it.

But also according to him, it was Merrick who procured the performance: “Neither was it casual,” Bacon writes, “but a play bespoken by Merrick.” It was Merrick, he says, who silenced the players’ objections, and Merrick who promised them the extra forty shillings. Merrick was Essex’s steward and thus implicitly acting in his name, a point Bacon stresses:

So earnest he was to satisfie his eyes with the sight of that tragedie which he thought soone after his lord [i.e., Essex] should bring from the stage to the state, but that God turned it vpon their own heads (Chambers, *William Shakespeare II*, p. 326).

But this is flat against Phillips’ testimony and indeed Merrick’s own, who actually said that he could not tell “who procured that play to be played at that time except yt were Sr Charles Percy but as he thynketh yt was Sr Charles Percy.”

Bacon, one of great minds of his age and a participant in Essex’s trial, cannot be said to have spoken out of ignorance or stupidity. On the contrary, the whole thing reeks of a *post hoc* frame-up justifying Merrick’s execution. I suspect he was induced to testify against his fellow

conspirators with some sort of promise to go lightly on himself or others. When he was brought to trial in March, about a month after Essex, he repeatedly declined to admit his guilt. He was hanged at Tyburn anyway. In a short speech at the gallows, he rather curiously expressed the hope that by his death unspecified others might yet receive a pardon.

### Eloquent Silence

There's a final element in this contradictory mix that I think clarifies everything. The Cecil government, as we've seen, ruthlessly seized upon the rebellion to destroy its enemies at court and everywhere else. There's a direct analogy with the Kirov assassination in Stalin's Russia, which the Red Czar used to execute everyone and anyone he feared or disliked at the time. In Elizabeth's police state, which it was, anyone remotely associated with Essex was rounded up, interrogated, tortured and the necessary evidence extracted.

And yet—this is the strangest part, like the dog in the Sherlock Holmes story that failed to bark—neither Shakespeare nor any of the Lord Chamberlain's Men were so much as interviewed, Augustine Phillips aside. Neither was he nor any of them harmed, despite the fact that “at their [the conspirators] request,” as Phillips' testimony concluded, “this Examinee and his fellows were Content to play it [the requested drama] the Saturday and had their xls. more than their ordinary for it and so played it accordingly.”

This is worth pondering: the author of the very play performed, the one in which Richard II is deposed and murdered and taken for inspiration by the traitors, was not even brought in for questioning, and the company itself let off scot free! Compare this to the fate of Sir John Hayward, tortured almost to death and imprisoned.

Not only that—not only that—Shakespeare was as much a public Essex supporter as Hayward. Readers will remember his famous eulogy to the earl in *Henry V* (1599), comparing him to victorious Caesar greeted by Rome's plebians:

Were now the general of our gracious empress,  
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,  
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,  
How many would the peaceful city quit,  
To welcome him! (*Henry V*, V, Chorus, 31-35.)

We should not forget either Shakespeare's well-known association with the Earl of Southampton, to whom he had dedicated two famous poems, and who was deeply implicated in Essex's plot. Southampton's skin was saved only by Robert Cecil's personal intervention, though he was still sentenced to life in the Tower, where he remained until the accession of James I.

By comparison, Sir John Hayward was an innocent, and had even been found guiltless by Bacon himself. He was still imprisoned.

### The Payoff

There's a telling final detail: The Lord Chamberlain's Men, including Phillips and, one has to suppose, Shakespeare himself, played before Elizabeth at Whitehall on 24 February 1601, Shrove Tuesday, the very night before Essex was executed. That very night, and before the Queen herself—the moment could hardly speak more eloquently. Again we don't know the play performed, but don't you think it might have been *The Tragedy of Richard II*? What a delicious irony!

Either way, it just smells of a pay off, doesn't it? In fact, it stinks of one. The Lord Chamberlain's Men, in the person of Augustine Phillips, provided the clinching piece of evidence that sent my lord of Essex to the devil, and were rewarded by Cecil and Co. with a performance before Her Majesty herself, a tremendous honor. The payoff doubtless literally included a generous purse. Forty shillings would have seemed appropriate to all concerned.

My conclusion is that there was no Richard II play performed at the Globe on 7 February, 1601. And this is why Shakespeare and his fellows were never arrested. They had committed no offense. If they had, even in the tangential way the critics and historians so gullibly maintain, we can be sure they would all have been rounded up, tortured to the point of death and their company disbanded. Instead they were honored by the court and rewarded generously by the government; indeed, after James succeeded to the throne, they became The King's Men.

For 400 years the world has taken the prosecution's evidence at its dishonest face value. Like the jury, and indeed Elizabeth herself, we have all been gulled.



## Shakespeare Oxford Society

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