

## “Edwardus is My Propre Name”: Lily’s Latin Grammar and the Identity of Shakespeare

Nina Green



William Lily’s *Latin Grammar* was memorized by every Elizabethan schoolboy.<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare’s awareness of that fact is evident in the second scene of Act IV of *Titus Andronicus*. Titus sends a bundle of weapons to Demetrius and Chiron with a scroll on which are written two lines from the *Grammar*:

**Dem.** What’s here? a scroll, and written round about.

Let’s see.

[Reads.] *Integer vitae, scelerisque purus,*

*Non eget Mauri jaculis, nec arcu.*

**Chi.** O, ‘tis a verse in Horace, I know it well,  
I read it in the grammar long ago.

**Aaron.** Ay, just – a verse in Horace, right, you have it.<sup>1</sup>

The reference to the *Grammar* here is perhaps the most egregious anachronism in Shakespeare. What could be more absurd than characters in a Roman play recollecting their childhood study of Lily’s *Latin Grammar*? But surely Shakespeare did not just slip up here. Such an anachronism must have been deliberately inserted to attract the audience’s attention to something. At least in part, Chiron and Aaron’s words make it clear that that “something” is the manner in which allusions in a play can trigger the recollection of memorized passages in the *Grammar*.

The first lesson in the *Grammar* is on nouns or names. And on the first page of this lesson is found a name – Edward – in Lily’s phrase *Edwardus is my proper name*.

It is a remarkable coincidence that scenes in two of Shakespeare's plays draw specific attention to this page in the *Grammar* containing the name Edward.

The first allusion is found in the first scene of Act II of *1 Henry IV*. Gadshill banters with the chamberlain at an inn in Rochester:

**Gads.** We steal as in a castle, cocksure; we have the receipt of fern-seed, we walk invisible.

**Cham.** Nay, by my faith, I think you are more beholding to the night than to fern-seed for your walking invisible.

**Gads.** Give me thy hand. Thou shalt have a share in our purchase, as I am a true man.

**Cham.** Nay, rather let me have it as you are a false thief.

**Gads.** Go to, homo is a common name to all men. Bid the ostler bring my gelding out of the stable. Farewell, you muddy knave.

The words *Homo is a common name to all men* would have been instantly recognizable (Figure One) to any educated Elizabethan as part of the sentence in the *Grammar* which distinguishes between proper and common nouns:

A noun substantive either is proper to the thing that it betokeneth, as *Edwardus is my proper name*, or else is common to more, as *Homo is a common name to all men*.

**SOAN INTRODVCTION  
OF THE EYGH T PAR-  
tes of speache.**

**I**N SPEACHE be these eyght partes folowinge,

{	Noune,	} declined.	{	Aduerbe,	} undeclined.
	Prionoune,			Coniunction.	
	Uerbe,			Preposition.	
	Participle,			Interiection.	

**Of the Noune.**



**NOVNE** IS THE NAME OF A thing that may be sene, felte, heard or vnderstand. As the name of my hand in Latine is Manus. The name of an house, is Domus. The name of goodnes, is Bonitas, Of Nounes som be Substantiues, and som be Adiectiues.

**A** Noune Substantiue is that standeth by hym selfe, and requyeth not an other woorde to be toyued with him: as Homo, a Man. and it is declined with one article: as Hic Magister, a Master. or els with twa at the moste: as Hic & hac parens, a Father or Mother.

**A** noune Adiectiue is that can not stande by hym selfe, but requyeth to be toyued with an other woorde: as Bonus, good; Pulcher, faire. And it is declined either with thye terminati- ons: as Bonus, bona, boum: or els with thye articles: as Hic hac & hoc Felix, Happy. Hic & hac leuis & hoc leue, Lyght.

**A** Noune Substantiue either is propre to the things that it betokeneth as Eduardus is my propre name. or els is common to mo: as Homo, is a common name to all men.

**Numbres of Nounes.**

In Nounes be thyo numbres: the singular and the plural. The

Figure One: Lily's discussion of nouns.<sup>2</sup>

Gadshill's words would thus have immediately reminded any educated member of an Elizabethan audience of the other part of the sentence -- *Edwardus is my proper name* (Figure Two).

**¶ A Noun Substantive either is propre to the thinge that it betokeneth as Eduardus is my propre name. or els is common to mo: as Homo, is a common name to all men.**

**Figure Two: "Edwardus is my propre name."**

Gadshill's cryptic reference to walking invisible also assumes significance; as the true author of the Shakespeare plays, Oxford does "walk invisible." Similarly, the references to "stealing" and to "a true man" are significant in relation to Oxford's surname, Vere, and his motto *Vero Nihil Verius* (*Nothing truer than Vere*). There is a hint in these lines that the authorship of the plays has been stolen from a "true man," named Edward, who "walks invisible."

Were there only a single instance in which attention is directed to this line in Lily's *Latin Grammar*, it could be argued that the reference in *Henry IV, Part 1* is a mere coincidence. But the allusion to the words *Edwardus is my proper name* in *Henry IV, Part 1* does not stand alone. In the first scene of Act IV of *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*, the audience's attention is again directed at great length to the same page.

Anders has explicated in detail the relationship between this scene in *Merry Wives* and the first page of the lesson on nouns in the *Grammar*:

Shakespeare's acquaintance with Lily's *Grammar*, commonly known as the *Accidence*, is satisfactorily proved by the catechetical scene in *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*. Sir Hugh Evans asks the boy, William, "some questions in his accidence." The answer to Evans' query, "How many numbers is in nouns?" will be found on the first page of the grammar proper:

*In nouns be two numbers, the singular and the plural. The singular number speaketh of one, as lapis, a stone. The plural number speaketh of more than one, as lapides, stones.*

Compare *Merry Wives*, ll. 32:

**Evans.** What is *lapis*, William?

**Will.** A stone.

**Evans.** And what is "a stone," William?

**Will.** A pebble.

**Evans.** No, it is *lapis*. I pray you, remember in your prain.

Again, [consider] ll. 26-30:

**Evans.** What is “fair,” William?

**Will.** *Pulcher*.

**Quickly.** Polecats! There are fairer things than polecats, sure.

These jests refer to the same page, where *bonus*, good; *pulcher*, fair, are given as instances of adjectives.

On p. 2 of Lily’s *Grammar* we read:

Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus declined:

*Singulariter*

<i>Nominativo</i>	<i>hic, haec, hoc</i>
<i>Genitivo</i>	<i>huius</i>
<i>Dativo</i>	<i>huic</i>
<i>Accusativo</i>	<i>hunc, hanc, hoc</i>
<i>Vocativo</i>	<i>caret</i>
<i>Ablativohoc, hac, hoc</i>	

*Pluraliter*

<i>Nominativo</i>	<i>hi, hae, haec</i>
<i>Genitivo</i>	<i>horum, harum, horum</i>
<i>Dativo</i>	<i>his</i>
<i>Accusativo</i>	<i>hos, has, hoec</i>
<i>Vocativo</i>	<i>caret</i>
<i>Ablativohis</i>	

Compare with this *The Merry Wives*, ll. 39ff.:

**Evans.** What is he, William, that does lend articles?

**Will.** Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus declined, *singulariter, nominativo, hic, haec, hoc*.

**Evans.** *Nominativo, hig, hag, hog*; pray you, mark; *genitivo, hujus*.  
Well, what is your accusative case?

**Will.** *Accusativo, hinc*.

**Evans.** I pray you, have your remembrance, child. *Accusativo, hung, hang, hog*.

**Quickly.** “Hang-hog” is Latin for bacon, I warrant you.

**Evans.** Leave your prabbles, ‘oman. What is the focative case, William?

**Will.** O, — *vocativo, O*.

**Evans.** Remember, William: focative is *caret*.

**Quickly.** And that's a good root.

**Evans.** 'Oman, forbear.

**Mrs. Page.** Peace!

**Evans.** What is your genitive case plural, William?

**Will.** Genitive case?

**Evans.** Ay.

**Will.** *Genitivo, horum, harum, horum.*

**Quickly.** Vengeance of Jenny's case! fie on her! never name her, child, If she be a whore.

**Evans.** For shame, 'oman, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Anders demonstrates that Shakespeare took great pains in *Merry Wives* to direct attention to a specific page in the *Grammar* which all educated members of his audience knew by heart. Why did he bother to do this? The answer would seem to be that there is more to the scene than meets the eye.

Considering its lack of relationship to the rest of the play, the scene in *Merry Wives* seems pointless and irrelevant. That is not the case if it is being used to draw attention to a key paragraph on the first page on nouns in the *Grammar*, that is, the paragraph between *pulcher* and *lapis*, the two words which Parson Evans asks William to define, a paragraph in which is found the phrase *Edwardus is my proper name*. In that context, the contrast between the names Edward [de Vere] and William [Shaksper of Stratford] is surely significant, particularly when young William is depicted in *Merry Wives* as struggling to learn the most basic rudiments of Latin.

Was Edward de Vere the real Shakespeare? These three allusions to the *Grammar* in three different Shakespeare plays raise the issue in a way which cannot easily be dismissed, particularly in light of all the internal evidence in the Shakespeare plays which establishes that their author was someone with an entirely different education and life experience from William Shaksper of Stratford. These unusual allusions to the *Grammar*, and to the line *Edwardus is my proper name*, require that serious consideration be given to the proposition that the author of Shakespeare's plays was, indeed, someone named Edward, and that the references to the *Grammar* were inserted into the plays for the express purpose of using a page in Lily's Latin *Grammar* memorized by all educated Elizabethans as a device by which he could reveal his authorship of the Shakespeare plays.

❧ **Works Cited** ❧

Anders, Henry R.D. *Shakespeare's books: A dissertation on Shakespeare's reading and the immediate sources of his works*. New York: AMS Press, 1965.

*A shorte introduction of grammar by William Lily*, with an introduction by Vincent J. Flynn. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1945.

❧ **Endnotes** ❧

<sup>1</sup> Shakespearean quotations for *Titus Andronicus* and *1 Henry IV* are from the *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> *A shorte introduction of grammar generally to be vused compiled and sette forth for the bringyng vp of all those that intende to attaine the knowledge of the Latine tongue*. Excusum Londini: Apud Reginaldum Wolfium, 1558. STC (2nd ed.): 15613.3. Modern reprint: *A shorte introduction of grammar by William Lily*, with an introduction by Vincent J. Flynn. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Henry R.D. Anders, *Shakespeare's books: A dissertation on Shakespeare's reading and the immediate sources of his works*. (New York: AMS Press, 1965).