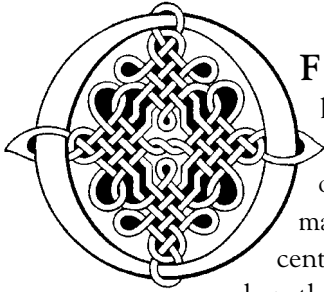


# EDMOND IRONSIDE, THE ENGLISH KING

## *Edward de Vere's Anglo-Saxon History Play*

Ramon L. Jiménez

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Of the hundreds of plays surviving from the Elizabethan stage, the anonymous history play *Edmond Ironside* is among the most mysterious. Not only is it anonymous, there is no clear record of its performance. There is no mention of it in any contemporary document, and there is no date on the single extant manuscript. The play was not even noticed by scholars until the nineteenth century, and was not printed until 1927. The manuscript first surfaced in 1865 when the British Museum purchased from a private library fifteen play manuscripts bound into a single volume labeled “Egerton 1994.” This volume’s whereabouts before then are unknown, but it appears to have been put together about the middle of the seventeenth century (see “Evidence for Date” below).

The first page of the forty-three-page manuscript contains a title, *Edmond Ironside*, with a subtitle, “The English King,” beneath it. At the top of the next page is written “A trew Cronicle History called” and below it a crossed-out line reading “Warr hath made all freinds [sic].” Because there are no other references to the play anywhere, it is not certain which phrase is its title, and which its subtitle. By common consent, modern editors call the play *Edmond Ironside*, although some correct the spelling to agree with the historical King Edmund it portrays.

Of the four or five academic scholars who have discussed the play at length, only two have dared to suggest an author. In 1954 a young American, Ephraim Everitt, presented considerable evidence that *Edmond Ironside* was an early product of Shakespeare’s pen (172). In his 1985 edition of *Edmond Ironside*, Eric Sams made what is probably the most substantial case ever presented for an addition to the Shakespeare canon. The few critics who took notice of Everitt dismissed his evidence as implausible, unconvincing, and “retrogressive” (Sisson 457, Ribner 241, Reese 312). M. M. Reese accused him of “releasing hares that have already been safely run to ground” (312). More attention was paid to the better-known Sams, but his brilliant and comprehensive brief for Shakespeare’s authorship was denied and dismissed, and then simply ignored.

In my opinion, Everitt and Sams were correct in associating the structure, style, imagery, and vocabulary of *Edmond Ironside* with that of Shakespeare’s earliest plays, and assigning it to the same playwright. But they were mistaken in identifying the handwriting in the *Ironside* manuscript as that of William Shakespeare of Stratford, and in attempting to connect the play to him. I also believe that their dating of the play to 1588 is much too late. In the pages that follow, I will support the claim that *Edmond Ironside* was written by the author of the Shakespeare canon, Edward de Vere, and that it was his second history play, written soon after he returned to London in September, 1570 after several months at the battlefield in Scotland under the Earl of Sussex.

### Synopsis of the play

*Edmond Ironside* comprises 1955 lines of dialogue, about ninety percent of which are end-stopped verse. About ten percent of the verse is rhymed, generally in couplets at the end of speeches. There are no act or scene markings, but the text divides naturally into eighteen scenes that editors have arranged in five acts. Of the thirty-five characters in the play, about twenty-five have speaking parts, and three are women. With doubling of roles, it could be performed by far fewer, although the final scene appears to require twenty players (Martin 374).

The play is set in late Anglo-Saxon England, just fifty years before the conquest, at one of the critical moments in English history. About two hundred years earlier, Vikings had begun invading England and settling in the eastern part of the country. By 1013 the Danish King, Sven Forkbeard, controlled enough towns and territory to declare himself the first Danish King of England. The Saxon King Ethelred II, later called “the Unready,”<sup>1</sup> who had reigned thirty-five years, fled to Normandy with his family. In the following year Sven Forkbeard suddenly died, and Ethelred returned to reclaim the throne of England, only to die himself in the spring of 1016.

The play opens at this moment—when Canute Svenson, the teen-age son of Forkbeard, invades England to claim his father’s throne. He is opposed by the oldest surviving son of Ethelred, the twenty-six-year-old Edmond, who is surnamed “Ironside” because of his great strength and courage in battle. It is their war for the crown of England that comprises the action of the play.

Punctuating this straightforward contest between Canute and Edmond are the machinations of the play’s self-proclaimed villain, Edricus, Duke of Mercia, who is based on the historical Eadric Streona, Ealdorman of Mercia under Ethelred. He is recorded in many chronicles as a notorious murderer and traitor who betrayed both Ethelred and the historical Edmund several times. Prior to the opening of the play, Edricus had been an ally of Edmond Ironside, but then deserted him and joined forces with the invading Canute.

In the opening scene, set in a council chamber in Southampton, Canute belligerently asserts that he is King of England now, and charges that Edmond is a usurper. He demands that those nobles present join him in opposing the upstart prince. In addition to Edricus, two other English nobles, Turkillus and Leofricke, have deserted to Canute, but he does not trust them, and has seized their sons as hostages.

In the next scene Edricus delivers a fifty-line soliloquy in the manner of Richard III, Iago, or Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, in which he recounts what a villain he is:

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He that heard my story from the end  
how many treasons I have practicéd  
how many vild things I have brought to pass  
and what great wonders have been compasséd  
by this deep-reaching pate would think I wis [surely]  
I had been bound apprentice to deceit  
and from my birthday studied villainy.<sup>2</sup> (300-306)

He reveals his hatred of Edmond and how he will work for his defeat. His reason is that it was Edmond's father Ethelred who raised him from the status of a ploughman's son to a dukedom, and the sight of Edmond reminds him of his base birth:

Therefore I hate him and desire his death  
and will procure his end in what I can  
but for Canutus, he doth honour me  
because he knows not whence I did descend,  
Therefore of the two I love Canutus best  
yet I can play an Ambodexter's part  
and swear I love, yet hate him with my heart. (325-331)

A leading scholar of the Elizabethan drama, Frederick Boas, observed that the dramatist portrayed Edricus as a "Machiavellian intriguer" who has the "stamp of Renaissance Italy rather than of Anglo-Saxon England" (116).

It is not until the third scene that Edmond Ironside appears, and his first words express his concern for the well-being of his soldiers. He inquires of his general if they have enough to eat, and if their captains have been keeping back their pay. He then devotes a dozen lines to excoriating officers who would starve their men and let them go barefoot and naked. At the end of the scene, Turkillus and Leofricke, the two English nobles who have previously deserted Edmond, return to him and pledge their loyalty. Edmond welcomes them and says, "I more esteem the life of one true subject / Than the destruction of a thousand foes" (369-70). He deplores the internal disunion among the English that aids their foreign foes. Edmond's character is thus established as generous, compassionate, and patriotic. He also demonstrates that he is well-educated

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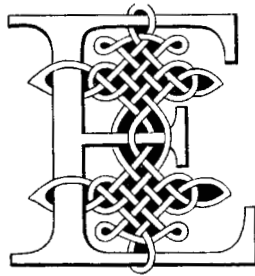


by making the first of the many classical allusions in the play: “Go in, brave lords, your sight doth me more joy/ Than Agamemnon when he conquered Troy” (381-82).

Act II opens with two entirely unhistorical scenes. In the first, Canute briefly woos Egina, the fictional daughter of the fictional Earl of Southampton. In a scene even shorter than the nearly-identical one in the last act of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, Canute meets Egina, offers her a cup of wine, and proposes—all in the space of thirty lines. In her conversation with Canute, Egina likens his adversary, Edmond, to Cadmus, the legendary hero in Book III of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but then agrees to his proposal. Her response to his brusque wooing is similar to Katherine’s in *Henry V*—“What my dread sovereign and my father wills / I dare not, nay I will not, contradict.”<sup>3</sup>

In the second scene, Edricus’s old peasant parents appear with his half-brother Stich, a cobbler who is the clown of the play. In great embarrassment and anger, Edricus curses and abuses his parents, and then hires Stich as his chamberlain. He immediately orders him to “beat these two beggars hence” and to see that they are “whipped out of the town.” Neither of these scenes advances the story and both are irrelevant, except that the latter underlines Edricus’s sense of shame about his low birth, adding another facet

to his wickedness. Following this, Canute learns of the return to Ironside of the two English noblemen, Turkillus and Leofricke. In retaliation, he orders two sons, whom he still holds as hostage, be cut off. This act of the historical Canute was first recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and repeated in nearly all the later chronicles, but it occurred several years before the events in the play. The dramatist also specifies the weapon—an axe, unmentioned in the chronicles. Stich is the executioner, and the “Ha. Ha. Ha.” reaction of Edricus, followed by Canute’s question, “Why laughest thou, Edricus?” are identical to similar laughs and questions after similar gruesome acts in *Henry VI, Part I* (2.2.42-3), and *Titus Andronicus* (3.1.65). The brutal mutilation scene extends to more than 160 lines. As Boas says, “No detail of physical horror is spared; the atmosphere is as foul and asphyxiating as in the notorious scenes in *Titus Andronicus*” (126).



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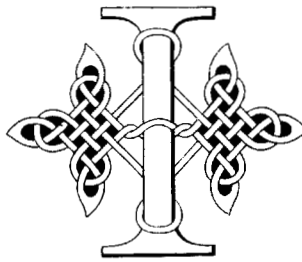
Act III opens with another irrelevant scene that is unique in Elizabethan drama. It is a vicious and abusive quarrel between the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, who are presented in their historical positions on opposite sides of the war. The Archbishop of Canterbury, who favors Canute, asserts his authority over York, calls him an “irreligious prelate,” and demands that he yield to him. The Archbishop of York replies by calling Canterbury a traitor, a rebel, a betrayer of his King, a profane priest, a Pharisee, and a parasite. After three exchanges of this type, York flees the stage and Canterbury follows, threatening to club him. Neither is heard from again. A similar exchange occurs in the third scene of Act I of *Henry VI, Part I* between Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and Lord Protector of the King, and his rival, Henry Beaufort, the Bishop of Winchester. The language and the level of invective are remarkably similar, and there are identical threats of violence.

In the scenes that follow, Edmond and Canute alternately exhort their soldiers to fight in a series of battles that are presented on stage in pantomime and then explained and described by a

Chorus "attired in black." In one scene Edricus carries a head on a spear point to illustrate the incident from the chronicles that in the middle of one battle Edricus pretended that he had killed Edmond, and exhibited a head to induce Edmond's army to give up.

This series of battles goes badly for the Danes, and Edricus proposes that he send a letter to Edmond begging his forgiveness and asking to return to his former place in his army. He will then be able to inform Canute of Edmond's plans and intentions. Canute agrees. After a comic scene with Stich, Edricus composes the letter and then decides to deliver it himself disguised as Stich. They exchange clothes, and in the last scene of Act III, Stich, dressed as Edricus, the Duke of Mercia, lords it over his fellow laborers, now his social inferiors.

When Edricus appears in Edmond's camp in the guise of Stich at the beginning of Act IV, Edmond reads the letter aloud, immediately recognizes Edricus, and unmask him. But Edricus, the smooth-talking villain, easily convinces Edmond that he is sincere, and the King forgives him, restoring his command. Inserted here is a lengthy scene in which Emma, Edmond's stepmother and widow of Ethelred, tenderly dispatches her two sons, Alfred and Edward, to her brother Duke Richard in Normandy for safe-keeping. This historical incident is described in numerous chronicles, and Edward, Edmond's half-brother, known to history as "the Confessor," later returned to England and ruled from 1042 to 1066. In the next two scenes, the kings and their armies fight two battles. In the first, Edmond is victorious, but in the second Canute is the victor, helped by yet another desertion to him by Edricus. Act V opens in Edmond's camp where he is cursing the treachery of Edricus as his generals console him. But then Edricus changes sides for the fourth time and stumbles onto the stage displaying a fake injury. Edmond and his generals angrily accuse him of desertion and treason. But Edricus, in what one critic describes as a "Falstaffian distortion of battlefield conduct," cleverly explains that it was his courageous advance against the enemy that has been mistaken for a desertion (Champion 62). Again, Edmond believes Edricus and forgives him.



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When the two armies confront each other for the final time and are about to fight, Edricus confides to the audience that he is concerned that Canute and the Danes will lose. He ponders what villainy he can practice to bring about the outcome he wishes, and then decides on a plan. He steps between the two kings, and proposes that instead of a general battle, they settle the war by single combat between them, thus sparing great bloodshed and slaughter. Although their two queens beg them not to, Edmond and Canute agree to this. They begin to fight and the stage direction reads, "Edmond drives Canute about." In an aside, Edricus worries that his tactic might backfire, and then reveals another evil side of himself in a rhyming couplet: "for I desire to drink King Edmond's blood / because he ever sought to do me good" (1989-90). When Edmond begins to overpower Canute, the latter offers to yield, extending his hand. Edmond eagerly accepts it and proposes that they divide the kingdom, telling Canute to take which half he wants. As Edricus mutters, "Blood, death and vengeance light on both of you," Edmond and Canute exit hand in hand.

There was such a partition of England between these two historical kings, but it collapsed in

November of the same year—1016—when Edmond died, probably murdered by someone in his household. Canute took control of the entire country, which he ruled until his death in 1035. In 1031 Canute visited Scotland where he obtained the allegiance of three kings, one of them named Macbeth. When Canute died, his oldest son Harold succeeded him, and his second son Hardicanute succeeded his brother in 1040.

The play's last scene, in which three of the characters—Turkillus, Leofricke, and Edricus—plot revenge, hints at the coming demise of the partition and suggests that there will be a second play. And there is evidence for such a sequel, probably called *Hardicanute*. In his *Diary*, the theatrical entrepreneur Philip Henslowe recorded a performance of "hardicute" by the Admiral's Men in October, 1597 (60). In another document, now unfortunately lost, Henslowe listed an inventory taken in 1598 of his company's "goods," including playbooks. Among the twenty-nine playbooks named appears the title *Hardicanewtes*, but no text of it has survived (316-320).

### Opinions of *Edmond Ironside*

Although the manuscript evidence indicates that *Edmond Ironside* was still being performed decades after Shakespeare's death, the synopsis above perhaps makes clear that it is a crude and clumsy play. It is poorly organized and its plot line is meandering and haphazard. There are irrelevant speeches and scenes throughout, and the motivations of several characters are muddy. Needless to say, modern critics have not been kind to it.

Irving Ribner called it "confused and uncertain" and "without organization or direction" (242-3). E.A.J. Honigmann cited "the monotonous ding-dong of plot and counterplot, the shallow thinking of all the characters" (25). Kenneth Muir pronounced it "abominably bad," and Bernard Spivack suggested that the author "deserves his oblivion, for he is neither good enough for fame nor bad enough for notoriety" (340).<sup>4</sup> Another commentator wrote that the playwright "lacks dramatic skill" and is "addicted to proverbs" (Boswell xi). Another cited the play's "lack of structural unity" and "longwindedness" (Dodds 166). *Ironside's* Jacobean reviser thought it wordy also. Even though it is a short play that would have required hardly two hours to perform, sixty-seven passages containing 196 lines were marked in the manuscript for deletion.

The first production of the play in perhaps 350 years—in an obscure London theater in April, 1986—was not a success. One reviewer remarked on its Shakespearean overtones, but reported that at the matinée she attended the cast outnumbered the audience (Pearce 87).

On the other hand, several critics have noted that what *Ironside* lacks in dramatic structure, motivation, and conciseness, it redeems with vivid imagery, dramatic irony, and spectacle. Its language is colorful, copious, and inventive. The play's first modern editor called it the "most important extant dramatization of Anglo-Saxon history" (Boswell xii). In Edricus, who delivers nearly a third of his 561 lines in seven soliloquies and four asides, the playwright has created the first believable English villain. As Boas says, the author "shows a true psychological instinct, a realization that personality moulds events" (140).

### Evidence of Shakespeare's authorship: general characteristics

What is most striking about *Edmond Ironside* is the presence of several distinctive characteristics that its author shares with the author of the Shakespeare canon—familiarity with the Law, with the Bible, with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and with country life.

An intimate and accurate knowledge of the Law and legal concepts has long been recognized as a hallmark of Shakespeare's works, especially the history plays. Legal terms and phrases abound throughout the plays and poems, and the same is true of *Edmond Ironside*, where they occur twenty-three times. Moreover, a conflict over the legal right to succession is the mainspring for the action of the play and, as Sams writes, Canute "argues his case less like a Viking chieftain conquering a country than a Tudor provincial lawyer arguing an estate" (217).

Shakespeare's habitual use of the Bible is well-known. In all the plays there is hardly a scene that does not contain some Biblical quotation, paraphrase, allusion, or parallel. Similarly, the entire text of *Edmond Ironside* is permeated with Scriptural thought and allusion. There are at least nineteen direct references to Biblical passages or images made by half-a-dozen characters. And the references are to Shakespeare's favorite books: Genesis, Psalms, Corinthians, Revelations, and above all the Gospels, especially Matthew.

The influence of Ovid on Shakespeare's imagery and vocabulary has been noted by every commentator from Francis Meres in 1598 to Jonathan Bate in 1993. Of the hundreds of allusions to classical mythology in the plays, ninety percent are to scenes, stories, and characters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Dobson 334). Allusions to Book I alone of *Metamorphoses* appear in nine plays (Sams 209). In *Edmond Ironside*, the Saxons and Danes are unusually well-versed in the classics. In their conversations with each other they refer to twenty-four different classical names or ideas, from Agamemnon and Juno to Parnassus and Troy. Twenty-one of these can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a percentage of Ovidian allusions comparable to that throughout the canon. Not only are the number and source of classical allusions in *Edmond Ironside* the same as in the canon, the fully developed imagery is often strikingly similar. One example is found in passages that describe grief-stricken women. In Act IV of *Ironside*, Emma recounts her anguish as she tearfully dispatches her two small sons to Normandy for safekeeping:

to dam my eyes were but to drown my heart  
like Hecuba the woeful queen of Troy  
who having no avoidance of her grief  
ran mad for sorrow 'cause she could not weep (1477-80)

In *Titus Andronicus*, as the ravished and mutilated Lavinia runs after him, the young Lucius struggles to understand her grief:

I have heard my grandsire say full oft  
extremity of griefs would make men mad

and I have read that Hecuba of Troy  
ran mad for sorrow. (4.1.18-21)

Similar allusions to the grief of Hecuba occur earlier in *Titus Andronicus* (1.1.139-41) and in *Hamlet* (2.2.513), *Cymbeline* (4.2.313), and *Lucrece* (1366ff).

Another example is Canute's comparison of the destruction he will wreak upon "new Troy" (London) with that suffered by ancient Troy, which he describes as "consumed to ashes and to coals/ with flaming fire . . ." Similar references to Troy-on-fire are scattered throughout Shakespeare's works: five in *Lucrece* (1468, 1474-6, 1491, 1523-4, 1561); three in *Titus Andronicus* (3.1.70, 3.2.28, 5.3.84); two in *Henry VI, Part 2* (1.4.17, 3.2.118); and one each in *Henry IV, Part 2* (1.1.73), *Julius Caesar* (1.2.113), and *Hamlet* (2.2.466). More than twenty such classical allusions in *Edmond Ironside* are also found in the Shakespeare canon.

As E.K. Chambers observed, Shakespeare is well-known for his "numerous similes and metaphors from natural history and counter-  
testifying to direct observation" (Shakespeare prominent in the early plays, and also Chambers added that he did not find dramatists of the time: Marlowe, Kyd, Drayton. But in *Edmond Ironside*, we the farm, the garden, the forest, and the birds, insects, flowers, and trees all find their medieval kings. But, just as in Shakespeare's plays and poems, there are almost no images or metaphors of town or village life.



try life, some of them literary, but others  
spear 1.287). These are especially  
in *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*.  
this same characteristic in the other  
Peele, Greene, Lodge, Nashe, and  
are flooded with images from the zoo,  
field. A multitude of animals, reptiles,  
way into this drama about a war between

Another characteristic that the author of *Ironside* shares with Shakespeare is the use of words and phrases about actors, acting, the stage, and the theater. E.K. Chambers commented on this proclivity (*Gleanings* 47-8) as have others, and Alfred Hart pointed out that Shakespeare was the earliest playwright to consistently make allusions of this type (*Homilies* 97). Readers of *Edmond Ironside* will recognize a Shakespearean motif in the exchange of clothes and identities by Stich and Edricus at the end of Act III. Throughout the play there are at least another dozen allusions to plays, players, acting, oratory, the stage, etc.

An acute interest in language and rhetoric is another trait that is found throughout Shakespeare's works. Jane Donawerth made a count of the words Shakespeare used relating to the nature of language and its effects on human motives—words such as speak, speech, language, name, voice, tongue, mouth, throat, ear, breath, pen, paper, ink, and parchment. The frequent use of these words is characteristically Shakespearean, and every play is replete with them. Donawerth found that in the early plays the frequency is one in every twenty-four lines, and for the entire canon, one in twenty-six (141, 161). The frequency of these words in *Edmond Ironside* is higher still—one in every twenty-four lines (Sams 334).



### Linguistic and Syntactical Similarities

Numerous scholars have scrutinized all or parts of Shakespeare's plays and poems to determine his linguistic and syntactical peculiarities. Sams, Everitt, and Eliot Slater have examined the text of *Edmond Ironside* in the light of the same peculiarities, and their findings support the conclusion that Shakespeare was its author.

Compound words are a marker of Shakespeare's language. Alfred Hart has counted their use in Shakespeare's early plays, and found one in every twenty-one lines, far higher than their frequency in any play by Marlowe, Greene, or Peele (*Homilies* 232-3). The frequency of compound words in *Edmond Ironside* is one in every twenty lines (Everitt 162).

The abundant use of prefixes is another characteristic of Shakespeare's language. Hart's count of seventeen—ad, be, con, de, dis, en, ex, for, in, out, over, per, pre, pro, re, sub, un—in five early plays (the three parts of *Henry VI*, *King John* and *Richard II*) revealed one such prefix in every 5.4 lines, a far higher frequency than the one prefix he found in every 6.4 lines in three plays by Marlowe (*Homilies* 227).

Every 4.1 lines in *Edmond Ironside* use of a single prefix—un—which he value, and found the prefix used an histories and the "great tragedies" same prefix 43 times in *Ironside*, spere play except *Comedy of Errors*



Everitt found one of the listed prefixes in (161). Hart refined his analysis to the deemed to have particular evidential average of forty times in each of the (*Homilies* 229). Everitt found the although it is shorter than any Shake- (161). The comparable average for three of Marlowe's plays is 19 (Everitt 161). Hendiadys—where two words expressing the same idea are joined by a conjunction—is another rhetorical device that Shakespeare used abundantly in his early writings. Albert Feuillerat found 86 examples, such as "reek and smoke," "shake and shudder," "dread and fear," and "repose and rest," in *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* (61-2). They are relatively rare in Marlowe, but appear in profusion throughout *Edmond Ironside*—6 in the first scene alone.

Noun-verb discords are extremely common in Shakespeare (Abbott 235); there are more than a dozen in *Edmond Ironside*. Another example is the excessive alliteration found in both *Titus Andronicus* and in *Ironside*—one occurrence in every 18 lines in *Titus*, one in 20 in *Ironside*, each higher than in any subsequent Shakespeare play.

But the linguistic similarities between Shakespeare and the anonymous author that are the most striking, and the most easily documented, are verbal diversity and inventiveness. Perhaps the most well-known and well-established characteristic of Shakespeare's language is the sheer number of different words he used. Among Elizabethan playwrights, he used more different words per line of poetry than any other (Hart *Homilies* 221-2). But the number of different words used in *Edmond Ironside*—2500—is higher than in any Shakespeare play, adjusted for its length, except *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*, and higher than in any Marlowe play (Sams 346-7).

A consideration of verbal inventiveness is even more startling. Shakespeare is credited in the Oxford English Dictionary with the introduction to the language of slightly over 2000 new words or usages (Schafer 83). Unfortunately, the compilers of the OED did not examine the manuscript

or the 1927 edition of *Edmond Ironside*. If they had, they would have found 300 words or usages, more than twelve percent of the total, that had not been seen in English by 1590, the date most often assigned to *Edmond Ironside* by orthodox scholars (Sams 17). Of those 300, Sams found that 260 had been erroneously described by the OED as first used by Shakespeare in plays written, according to orthodox dating, after 1590 (17). The following ten are from the first act alone:

- untutored: *Henry VI, Part 3* (1593); Dedication to *Lucrece* (1594)
- I pray: *Henry VI, Part 1* (1591)
- actions: in the sense of engagements with an enemy, *Much Ado About Nothing* (1599)
- spirit: in the sense of “ardor,” *Henry IV, Part I* (1596)
- soothes: in the sense of “blandishes,” *King John* (1595)
- insinuating: *Henry VI, Part 1* (1591)
- base born: *Henry VI, Part 2* (1593)
- plot: in the sense of a conspiracy: *Richard III* (1594)
- newsmonger: *Henry IV, Part 1* (1596)
- pate (brain): *The Tempest* (1610)

Fully 84 of these new words in *Edmond Ironside* appeared next in one of three of Shakespeare’s earliest plays, *Titus Andronicus*, or one of the first two parts of *Henry VI*. The ratio of new words and usages to the total in *Ironside*, one in nine, is the approximate ratio of new to total words in the entire Shakespeare canon (Hart “Vocabularies” 243). Another 30 words from *Ironside*, such as “extrIBUTE,” “arreared,” “nothing-fearing,” “cornegraph,” and “rentrunn” have yet to be included in the OED.

### Other Similarities

Besides the compositional similarities listed above, there is ample additional evidence of Shakespeare’s authorship of *Edmond Ironside*. Dozens of images, themes, and symbols found in both the anonymous play and in his accepted works, especially in the early plays, attest to the thought patterns of a single mind: people likened to plants, insects, birds and beasts of all kinds; blood that is shed or drunk; severed heads; soldiers who stand watch, who desert, who are betrayed, or deprived of necessities; evil and traitorous flatterers; emotional women; stubborn Jews; kings who are betrayed and rant about Judas; vows of revenge; children parting from their mothers; portents in the skies; plots that hammer in the head; passions that boil, rage, or ignite; feigned laughter; dark sighs; salt tears; Troy ablaze, etc. There are over seventy such motifs in *Ironside* that are repeated in *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III*, *Richard II*, and *Richard III* (Sams 7-9). Other similarities between *Titus* and *Ironside* reveal the shortcomings of the beginning playwright, such as tautologies, thin diction, and simplistic metaphors (Sams 27-32).

Admittedly, some of the similarities detailed above have not yet been subjected to “negative

checks” to corroborate their absence in the works of Shakespeare’s contemporaries. But Chambers, Hart, and Feuillerat have tested many of them, and found them absent from the plays of the dramatists most likely to have written *Ironside*: Marlowe, Kyd, Greene, or Peele. In a 1995 article on the authorship of *Henry VI, Part I*, Gary Taylor ruled out Thomas Nashe as *Ironside*’s author primarily because his distinctive and frequent use of the word “here” in his stage directions in *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* is absent from stage directions in *Ironside* (179). In fact, as mentioned above, other than Everitt and Sams, no academic critic has made a serious attempt to attribute *Ironside* to any known dramatist.

From the evidence detailed above, it should be apparent that if Shakespeare didn’t write *Edmond Ironside* then he was indebted to its author as he was to no other. If he didn’t write *Edmond Ironside*, he plundered it of hundreds of words and phrases new to the language, dozens of metaphors, images, and incidents and half-a-dozen scenes of rustic comedy, clumsy courtship, and ringing patriotism that he continued to use throughout his writing career. But such borrowing by him from other writers’ plays would be entirely untypical. Rather, it was Shakespeare’s custom, when repeating a phrase or a passage from one of his own earlier works, to improve and refine it. As Kenneth Muir wrote, “Hundreds of examples could be given of similar recurrences in plays whose authenticity no one disputes” (47).

As expected, Shakespearean orthodoxy has rejected the mountain of evidence connecting *Ironside* with the canon. Irving Ribner wrote that it “must be dismissed as stylistically impossible and in every way unconvincing” (241). Leading critics who have considered the question: John Kerrigan, Stanley Wells, Richard Proudfoot, E.A.J. Honigmann, John Wilders, and others, explain *Ironside*’s myriad parallels with Shakespeare’s plays as “influence” (one way or another), or simple plagiarism (Sams ix; Wells 138). Honigmann, for instance, writes, “Anyone who believes that an early date (before 1590) has not been clearly proved will prefer to see *Ironside* as the work of an author steeped in Shakespeare—like Tourneur, Webster, and many others” (24).

It is apparent that orthodox scholars cannot bring themselves to acknowledge an immature and inexperienced Shakespeare in the early plays, and many of them postulate other hands. Where they find tautology, overwriting, wordiness, and excessive alliteration, as in *Titus Andronicus* and the *Henry VI* trilogy, they attribute it to other playwrights. But as Kristian Smidt wrote, “it is intrinsically improbable that he made no attempts before he tackled *Henry VI*, or whatever play of the canon may be assumed to be the first in time” (159). *Edmond Ironside* and the earlier *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* are the rightful examples of these attempts.

## Sources

For the story of *Edmond Ironside*, the playwright was obviously indebted to several of the many English chronicle histories written since the early eleventh century, some in English, but most in Latin. The primary source cited by all editors is Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, which was published in 1577, and again in 1587. Other sources cited are *A Chronicle at Large*, published by Richard Grafton in 1569, and the anonymous *Flores Historiarum*,

published by Archbishop Matthew Parker in 1570 from a medieval manuscript (Martin 17-18, 21). However, accounts of the battles and negotiations between the historical Edmund Ironside and Canute can be found in at least sixteen different chronicles composed before 1570, beginning with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Six of these were in print by that date, and the rest were available in manuscript in various private libraries. Virtually all the historical incidents, images, and characters in the play can be found in Grafton's chronicle or in earlier historical narratives. Several such historical details in the play are absent from both of Holinshed's editions.

Another source appears to be William Lambarde's *Archaionomia* [*Ancient Laws*], a collection of Anglo-Saxon customs and laws that he translated and published in 1568. Sams found three names or phrases in *Edmond Ironside* that were apparently drawn from this book (139, 212, 218). The discovery of the name "Wm Shakspere" inscribed on the upper border of the title page of one of the copies of *Archaionomia* owned by the Folger Shakespeare Library caused some excitement in the early 1940s. Since then, however, the signature has been accepted as authentic by only a few scholars, and the discussion about it seems to have reached an impasse (Berman 99). Nevertheless, the Folger volume may be a genuine *Ironside* artifact. As Sams writes, "a phrase about mutilation is underlined and the passage is marked with a marginal bracket" (212).

In his edition of *Edmond Ironside*, Randall Martin has made the most extensive analysis of the play's sources. He suggests that, in addition to the chronicle material, the author borrowed words, phrases, ideas, and themes from a number of other plays and poems from the Elizabethan age, and earlier. These include a play by John Heywood, *The Pardoner and the frere* (1533), as the source for the quarrel between the Archbishops of Canterbury and York (25), and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) as the source for several unusual words and phrases (363-4). He points to William Warner's verse-chronicle *Albion's England* (1586) as the source of "smaller details of character and situation" (18). Martin also mentions a neo-Senecan tragedy, *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, written in 1587 by Thomas Hughes and seven others (one of whom was Francis Bacon), and printed the next year (26). He cites two short passages in *Ironside* as "corresponding" with two in *Arthur*, and adds that several contemporary issues treated in *Ironside* have parallels in *Arthur*. These four citations by Martin are all questionable as to their relationship to *Ironside*, and the last three, whether they be called "influences," "borrowings," or "correspondences," are subject to the test of precedence. It is far from clear that the author of *Ironside* was the debtor.

In the same category are the striking number of scenes, actions, phrases, and images, etc. in *Edmond Ironside* that all commentators note as identical or similar to those in the early plays of Shakespeare. Many of these are documented above. Martin dates *Ironside* to 1593, and asserts that its author borrowed words and phrases from all three parts of the *Henry VI* trilogy, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, and *Venus and Adonis* (363-75). Everitt and Sams, finding these and many more similarities in the canon, and who believe that Shakespeare wrote *Ironside*, conclude that he mined his own earlier play.

### Contrary evidence

The most obvious evidence that Shakespeare did not write *Edmond Ironside* are the facts that his name is absent from the manuscript, and the play is absent from all four Folios of his works published between 1623 and 1685. Although this is substantial evidence, or lack of it, a conclusion is not easy to draw. For the last decade or so of Elizabeth's reign, most of the plays performed are now lost, and most of those printed appeared without an author's name. Plays now accepted as written by Lyly, Peele, Greene, Kyd, Marlowe, Heywood, Drayton, and dozens of others were first printed anonymously. Eight or nine of Shakespeare's plays, as well as his *Sonnets*, first appeared anonymously. As Alfred Hart wrote, "It is correct to state that anonymity was the rule rather than the exception" (Stolne 6). Thus, the record on which to ascertain authorship is, at best, fragmentary. For the 1570s and 1580s, the record is even poorer. Moreover, at least three plays now accepted as Shakespeare's by most modern editors: *Pericles*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Edward III*, were absent from the first two Folios, and the latter two were absent from all four.<sup>5</sup> Six of the seven plays added to the second edition of the Third Folio, such plays as *The Puritan Widow*, and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, have never been accepted as Shakespeare's. Thus, the Folios are unreliable documents for determining Shakespeare's authorship.

Randall Martin has made the most extensive rebuttal to Sams's and Everitt's claim that Shakespeare wrote *Ironside* (363-75). He opens his remarks with the statement: "The major stumbling-block to identifying an author for *Ironside* is its unknown date" (363), and it is from this perspective that he addresses the question. Although he acknowledges many similarities between *Ironside* and Shakespeare's early plays, he concludes, on the assumption that *Ironside* was written later, that they were the result of borrowing and copying by the anonymous author. Martin rejects the many similarities that Sams and Everitt found in Shakespeare's later plays on the grounds that they "do not seem to be genuine" (369). But he offers neither an alternative author, nor any other credible evidence to disprove Shakespeare's authorship.

In 1987 Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor published *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, a work designed in part to "explain and justify" the editorial decisions made the previous year in their edition of the collected works: *The Oxford Shakespeare*. In their introduction, they described the "word function" test they used to distinguish authentic Shakespearean texts from bogus ones (80-89). Roughly speaking, the test consists of counting the incidence of a dozen common words, such as "but," "for," "not," "that," "with," etc. in a narrowly-defined Shakespeare canon, and then calculating "what proportion of the total vocabulary of a work those ten words normally constitute, and how frequently they occur relative to each other" (81). They then compared the results with those of similar counts of the same words in works by other authors. In all, they obtained "word function" test results from thirty-one canonical plays, and from more than fifty other literary works, or parts of works, including plays or poems by Daniel, Dekker, Fletcher, Middleton, Nashe, and Marlowe, as well as "bad quartos" of Shakespeare plays. The resulting collection of hundreds of numerical values displayed in seven Tables gives rise to a variety of confusing findings too numerous, and perhaps too tedious, to discuss—except for those relating to *Edmond Ironside*.

In one comparison of three anonymous plays that have been “seriously proposed as candidates for inclusion in Shakespeare’s early dramatic canon,” *Arden of Feversham*, *Edward III*, and *Edmond Ironside*, Wells and Taylor found that *Ironside* “is least likely to have been Shakespeare’s” because its usage of three of the function words (“no,” “that,” and “to”) deviates strongly from that of the Shakespearean norm (88). They added that “No single complete text in the Shakespeare canon, whether good or bad, whether of single or dual or disputed authorship, is in its overall totals as anomalous as *Ironside*.” However, they also found that the deviations from the Shakespearean norm in *Arden of Feversham* and *Edward III*, both absent from *The Oxford Shakespeare*, were no greater than those in many plays accepted as Shakespeare’s. They found an even greater conformity between function word-use in canonical plays and that in Marlowe’s *Edward II*. They explained these results as illustrating “a limitation of most forms of internal evidence” (88), and added that it is easier to show a positive authorial relationship than a negative one. It is the latter, a showing that they lack Shakespeare’s known idiosyncrasies, that requires exclusion from the canon of parts of *Timon of Athens* and *Pericles*, and all of *Edmond Ironside*. Their authors, say Wells and Taylor, “moved in a different rut from Shakespeare’s” (89).

Aside from these contradictory findings, there are other reasons for doubting the authors’ conclusion about *Ironside*. For one thing, *Edward III*, a play they rejected for the same reasons they did *Ironside*, has since been accepted as Shakespeare’s by several scholars (Smith 171, Slater 135), and included in the *The Riverside Shakespeare* (2nd ed. 1997).<sup>6</sup> Also, *Titus Andronicus* and the *Henry VI* trilogy, four of the plays that most resemble *Edmond Ironside* (because of their proximate composition dates), were excluded from Wells and Taylor’s control group, so to speak, of core Shakespearean plays. These five, and one other, *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, were probably the playwright’s earliest dramatic products and, as such, are likely to exhibit habits of word use different from those in the later works. It is only fair to say that as early as 1990 Wells and Taylor expressed regret that they had excluded *Edward III* from *The Oxford Shakespeare*.<sup>7</sup>

In a brief discussion of *Edmond Ironside* elsewhere in their book, Wells and Taylor acknowledged that the question of Shakespeare’s authorship “merits further investigation” and that “the Shakespeare attribution is only plausible if the play can be dated earlier than any play included in the 1623 Folio” (138). There is strong evidence for such a date.

### Evidence for date

Marginal annotations referring to performance dates of 1635 and 1643 on two manuscripts in “Egerton 1994” suggest that the fifteen plays were assembled and the volume bound after the outbreak of the Civil War (Boas 98). The names of four actors have been entered in the margins of the manuscript of *Edmond Ironside*: Edward May, George Stutfield, Henry Gradwell, and H. Gibson, the first three of whom can be associated with Prince Charles’s Men, a London company active in the 1630s. There is evidence of Gibson’s appearance in plays in the 1620s (Martin 378-9). This suggests that *Ironside* was performed in the 1620s and/or the 1630s, but gives no clue to its composition date. As mentioned above, a play performed by the Admiral’s Men on October 19, 1597 may

have been called *Hardicanute*. Another entry on the same page in Henslowe's Diary records a performance of "knewtus" on November 3rd of the same year (60). Thus, it is almost certain that these were two different plays, and more than likely that they were *Edmond Ironside* and its sequel.

All internal evidence suggests a much earlier composition date, and those critics who have made a guess date *Edmond Ironside* to various years between 1588 and 1603, with most preferring c.1590. On the other hand, E.K. Chambers thought the play so late that he excluded any mention of it from his four-volume *The Elizabethan Stage*.

Several editors have pointed out that the vicious quarrel between the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, in which the latter calls the former a henchman of the invading Danes, among other offensive things, could not have been performed as written after November 1589. It was in that month that the actual Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, was one of those appointed by the Privy Council to view and examine all plays to prevent improprieties against the Church and State from appearing on the stage. It is improbable that he and the other censors would have allowed this scene to be played, and thus hard to believe that a playwright would have written it after that date.

All commentators on *Edmond Ironside* cite the second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* as its major historical source. However, this is obviously done to comport with a dating of the play to 1588 or later. As mentioned above, no chronicle printed after 1570 was necessary for any historical detail in *Edmond Ironside*.

The play's style and dramatic devices are better indications of its date. The end-stopped and monotonous versification, the archaic vocabulary, the use of dumb-show, the "revenge" motif, the use of such neo-classical features as the Chorus and the Messenger, the moralizing about Fortune, and the good and evil counselors of princes, are all characteristic of the semi-Senecan school of drama, of which *Gorboduc* (1561) is the first example.

The simplistically villainous Edricus is obviously a personification of a moral abstraction, a character-type that first appeared in English drama in the mystery plays of the Middle Ages or earlier, with examples still appearing well into the sixteenth century. One such is to be found in John Pickering's *Horestes* (1567), where the character *Vice* opens the play with a soliloquy about his villainy. Edricus delivers a similar speech in Act I Scene 2 of *Edmond Ironside*, and another dating clue can be found in his final rhyming couplet:

yet I can play an Ambodexter's part  
and swear I love, yet hate him with my heart. (330-31)

This is an unambiguous reference to Ambidexter, the double-dealing character depicting a *Vice*, who appeared in Thomas Preston's *Cambises*, a play performed in 1560/61, and in *Clyomon and Clamydes*, an anonymous play written about 1570. In fact, nearly all the plays in which a *Vice* character appeared in the cast were written before 1570, and the last, *Susanna* by T. Garter, was written in 1578 (Mares 12).

Despite the flood of new words and usages in *Edmond Ironside*, the play, paradoxically, contains numerous archaic and obsolete words and colloquialisms, as well as many archaic spellings.

Examples of the first are “fact” for “deed” and “clown” for “countryman.” Colloquialisms include “bouncer,” “dad,” and “troyting” for “loitering.” Archaic spellings are “accompt” for “account,” “saffest” for “safest,” and “sighthes” for “sighs.” Most of these anomalies can also be found in the Shakespeare canon.

*Ironsides* is less well-plotted and less skilful than even the poorest of Shakespeare’s accepted history plays—the *Henry VI* trilogy, the earliest of which has been dated by Wells and Taylor to 1591 (111). How much earlier it should be dated remains an open question. Based on the evidence of style and dramatic devices, a date close to 1570 is the most probable, especially in the light of the biography of its author.

### Connections to Edward de Vere

For those who are convinced by the overwhelming evidence that Edward de Vere wrote the plays of Shakespeare, his authorship of *Ironsides* follows from the argument presented above.<sup>8</sup>

Another approach would be a direct comparison of the play’s linguistic markers to those in the handful of de Vere’s accepted writings that survive. Even a cursory perusal of his letters and poems reveals many of the linguistic markers found in *Edmond Ironsides*: hendiadys, alliteration, noun-verb discords, unusual words, archaic words, legal terms, etc. But the present lack of a good linguistic analysis and description of the de Vere canon makes it difficult to draw the necessary comparison. And even if such linguistic data were available, the small size of the canon, and the fact that most of it consists of personal and business letters, would tend to make suspect any conclusion about the similarity of its language to that of *Ironsides*.

The available evidence beyond this is circumstantial. One important fact is that Oxford was in an ideal position to use the most obvious historical sources for the play. As a young child he lived with, and was tutored by, Sir Thomas Smith, one of England’s greatest scholars, and the owner of an extensive library (Hughes 24). In 1562, at age twelve, de Vere went to live in the home of William Cecil, later Lord Burghley, and it is likely that he remained there, except for brief absences, until his marriage in 1571. Cecil is known as one of the premier book and manuscript collectors of the Elizabethan age, and scholars have described and documented his extensive library (Jolly 6).

The main source of the historical material in *Ironsides* was Richard Grafton’s *A Chronicle at Large*, which the author dedicated to Cecil in 1569. Cecil also owned the “E” or “Peterborough” manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*—one of the seven surviving copies—the earliest record of the Canute and Ironsides story (Wright 219-20). At least seven other manuscripts or books containing the story of Edmond Ironsides can be traced to Burghley’s library. Two of them were early twelfth-century Latin manuscripts: William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (*Deeds of the Kings of England*), and Matthew Paris’s *Chronica Majora* (*Greater History*) (McKisack 41, 51). A third was a fifteenth-century copy of Roger of Howden’s *Chronica* (McKisack 52).

Another chronicle in Cecil’s library that contained the Ironsides story was the anonymous *Flores Historiarum* [*Flowers of History*] that his friend Archbishop Matthew Parker edited and published in 1567 as by “Matthew of Westminster” (McKisack 40, 51). This fourteenth-century Latin



work has been cited as a specific source for Edmond's compassionate and magnanimous nature, and for the idea that it was Edricus who proposed the single combat between Edmond and Canute in Act V (Martin 11, 17-18).

The chronicle known as the *Brut* is another well-known history of early England that contains the Ironside story. It survives in several versions in hundreds of manuscripts in three different languages. One particular English-language manuscript that ends with the events of 1419 bears the signature of William Cecil on its first page (Matheson 94).<sup>9</sup> William Caxton printed a version of the *Brut* in 1480, and two years later printed Ranulf Higden's *Polycronicon*, a Latin adaptation of it, another volume known to be in Cecil's library (McKisack 51, 53).

Another possible link to Oxford is the previously-mentioned *Archaionomia*, William Lambarde's 1568 collection of Anglo-Saxon customs and laws that appears to be an *Ironside* source. The manuscripts of the laws that Lambarde used were transcribed for him by his teacher Laurence Nowell, another antiquary, who was a pioneer in Anglo-Saxon studies (Grant, 17, 20, 25-6). He also lived in William Cecil's home, and was Edward de Vere's tutor in the early 1560s (Grant 11).<sup>10</sup> Nowell is known to have transcribed many other old manuscripts, including a twelfth-century Latin history of England attributed to John of Worcester, also containing the Ironside story (Grant 17).

Another intriguing connection between Oxford and *Ironside* and Shakespeare is the abundant language and imagery of the soldier and the battlefield that permeate the anonymous play. Sams has identified thirty-nine words, images, and concepts in *Ironside* that relate to soldiers and weapons, all of which recur in the early Shakespeare plays (258-73). We know that Edward de Vere returned to London in the latter part of 1570 after his first experience of military service in the Scottish campaign (Ward 49). It is highly likely that the common battlefield scenes of hunger, deprivation, injury, and death would have made a deep impression on a sensitive and observant twenty-year-old. It may be these experiences that are reflected in the play, and especially in Edmond Ironside's first two speeches, which express his concern that his troops be well-fed and well-equipped. There is no sufficient dramatic need for twenty lines of these sentiments at this time, and three different critics have noted that the playwright seems to be speaking out of some personal experience (Boas 123, Sams 26, Jorgensen 127).

## Conclusion

Based on this body of evidence, I conclude that *Edmond Ironside* was Edward de Vere's second history play, probably written soon after he returned to London from Scotland in 1570. Before going there, he had written *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, and his next effort would be *Titus Andronicus* or one of the *Henry VI* plays. Eric Sams acknowledged the precedence of *The Famous Victories*, but he called *Ironside* "the very first chronicle history and hence in its own right a work of seminal significance in the history of English and world drama" (26). And so it is.

There is one other striking similarity of language between *Edmond Ironside* and a Shakespeare play that merits mention. We are all familiar with the dying John of Gaunt's speech about England in the second act of *Richard II*, one of the most moving expressions of patriotism in the English

language. Its jewel-like phrases recite a wistful love of country that is unparalleled in any other drama of any other period: “this sceptered isle,” “demi-paradise,” “this fortress,” “this little world,” “this precious stone set in the silver sea,” “this realm, this England.”

In the anonymous *Edmond Ironside*, five different characters speak the following phrases in different parts of play: “this noble isle,” “my pleasure’s paradise,” “the fortress of my crown,” “this little world,” “this little isle,” “this solitary isle,” “this realm of England.”

To the cumulative evidence set forth by rational argument must be added the evidence of the ear, and the ear tells us this is Shakespeare. This is Edward de Vere. \_\_\_\_\_ 🍷

Notes

1 “The modern English adjective ‘unready’ is an adaptation of the Old English ‘unraed,’ meaning ‘no-counsel.’ The name Ethelred is formed from the Old English words ‘aethel’ and ‘raed,’ meaning ‘noble counsel.’ The King’s nickname originated in a play upon words: ‘noble counsel, no counsel.’ It indicated that he lacked judgement, listened to bad advice and in consequence ruled unjustly. There is evidence to suggest that these were indeed Ethelred’s failings” (Fletcher 187).

2 Line citations for *Edmond Ironside* are from the Sams edition.

3 In *Edward III*, another anonymous play recently admitted to the Shakespeare canon, the Countess of Salisbury uses the same phrase “dread sovereign” in her response to Edward’s effort to seduce her in Act II Scene 1, line 572.

4 Quoted in “Footnotes,” an unsigned column in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 35.9 (Oct. 27, 1982).

5 To this list could be added *Troilus and Cressida*, which was absent from one printing of the First Folio (Blayney 21-2).

6 Ephraim Everitt devoted an entire chapter to documenting the extensive parallels between *Edmond Ironside* and *Edward III* (73-8).

7 Reported in 1990 in “Papers on the Oxford University Press Shakespeare—Pros and Cons,” an unsigned article in *The Shakespeare Newsletter*. In the 1997 reprint of *The Textual Companion* “with corrections,” the omission was not corrected.

8 So far as I can determine, Edith Duffey was the first to claim the play for de Vere in a 1992 article in *The Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter*.

9 The *Brut* has been identified as the sole source of two of the names of the French dead at Agincourt (1415) in the First Quarto of *Henry V* (Simison 514-15).

10 Grant misidentifies the seventeenth Earl of Oxford as “Richard.”

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