The Use of State Power To Hide Edward de Vere's Authorship of the Works Attributed to "William Shake-speare"

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Those who controlled state power used it not only to destroy evidence of the Earl of Oxford's literary activities, but also to airbrush him from much of the historical record. It will be argued that the only explanation weighty enough to account for the use of state power for that extraordinary purpose was Oxford's bodily involvement in the succession issue in some way—as described in the so-called Prince Tudor or Tudor Heir theories — an involvement that could have affected Queen Elizabeth's reputation and provided a possible challenge to the legitimacy of King James's reign. Focusing on the authorship question from the point of view of the use of state power makes it possible to see the effort to hide Oxford's authorship of Shake-speare's works in the proper context, as one part of the larger effort to remove him from the historical record for non-literary reasons, and thus provides an explanation for how and why Oxford became Shake-speare that is in accordance with those provided by Hank Whittemore, Charles Beauclerk and others.

I: State Power Used to Hide Oxford's Authorship

"William Shake-speare" was a pen name. There was no actual person with that name involved with the theater in London at the time "Shake-speare's" plays were written, first performed or published. It is not surprising that the author used a pen name; as Archer Taylor and Frederic J. Mosher concluded in their study of literature in the Elizabethan era, "the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [were] the Golden Age of pseudonyms [and] almost every writer used a pseudonym at some time during his career."[1] Thus, a search for the real author must be undertaken if we are to know his or her real identity.

The two principal candidates for the authorship of Shake-speare's works are well-known today: the man baptized as Gulielmus Shakspere, from Stratford-on-Avon, who was also known as William Shakspere[2] throughout his lifetime, and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

It is easy to understand why Shakspere would have used a pseudonym, if he was the author. Writing was and is a dangerous occupation in authoritarian societies, and Elizabethan society was certainly authoritarian.

And it is easy to understand why Oxford, as a courtier, would have used a pseudonym. In his day, men of his social rank did not write poetry. As the author of *The Arte of English Poesie* noted, "in these days (although some learned princes may take delight in them [poetry]) yet universally it is not so. For as well poets as poesie are despised & the name become of honourable infamous, subject to scorn and derision, and rather a reproach than a praise to any that useth it."[3] And, as is well known, the social customs at the time prohibited courtiers from publishing their works or having them performed on the public stage.

Evidence of authorship

It is truly astounding that no direct evidence exists today in support of either of these men—or anyone else—as having been the author of the works attributed to William Shake-speare.

Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakspere and Oxford, was clearly a writer, having left a literary paper trail in connection with all twelve types of evidence shown below in Figure 1, which is modeled on the chart in Diana Price's book *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*. William Shakspere was clearly not a writer, having left behind no literary paper trail at all, casting doubt on whether he was even literate even though Shake-speare's works were attributed to him after his death. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume that no paper trail exists for Shakspere today because none existed during his lifetime; in other words, he was not the author of anything literary.[4]

Oxford, like Jonson, left behind a clear paper trail connecting him to a literary life. It connects to eight types of documents, a record equal to or better than all but four of the twenty-five writers listed in Price's chart. Significantly, however, none of these records ties Oxford directly to the works attributed to William Shake-speare.

Figure 1: Paper Trail of Three Writers	Jonson	de Vere	Shakspere
Evidence of Education	Yes	Yes	No
Record of handwritten correspondence	Yes	Yes	No
Record of correspondence on literary matters	Yes	No	No
Evidence of having been paid to write	Yes	Yes	No
Evidence of a direct relationship with a patron	Yes	Yes	No
Evidence of association with other writers	Yes	Yes	No
Extant original manuscript	Yes	No	No
Commendatory verses or epistles from other writers	Yes	Yes	No

Commendatory verses or epistles contributed	Yes	Yes	No
Misc. records referring to him as a writer	Yes	Yes	No
Evidence of books owned, written in or borrowed	Yes	Yes	No
Notice at death as a writer	Yes	No	No
TOTALS	12	8	0

Although no *direct* evidence exists today to prove that Oxford was Shake-speare, a large and growing amount of *indirect or circumstantial* evidence does support that conclusion. That evidence, accumulated by hundreds of Oxfordian and even Stratfordian scholars and researchers since John Thomas Looney first proposed Oxford as Shake-speare almost 100 years ago, includes more than 200 correspondences between marked passages in Oxford's Geneva Bible and passages in the plays, as documented by Roger Stritmatter,[5] and hundreds of examples of incidents in the plays that mirror events in Oxford's life.[6]

Missing Documents

If Oxford wrote Shake-speare's works, direct evidence of his authorship must have existed at one time. But that evidence is missing now. Documents that would substantiate Oxford's authorship, if they still existed, would include:

- Government records. For instance, minutes of Privy Council meetings are missing for more than two years (Aug. 27, 1593-Oct. 1, 1595). As Stephanie Hopkins Hughes points out, "this period of time included many developments related to the theater that surely would have been discussed by the Privy Council, given that several of Elizabeth's leading councilors [were] also patrons of London theater companies."[7] This period, she notes, "covers the months following Marlowe's assassination, through the registration with the Stationers of a dozen (anonymous) plays of the 1580s, the murder of Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange . . . the formation of the second Royal company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men from what was left of Stanley's company and the marriage of [Robert] Cecil's niece (Oxford's daughter) to Stanley's brother, now the 6th Earl of Derby."[8]

- Private papers of important government officials. The papers belonging to Sir Francis Walsingham, Principal Secretary to Queen Elizabeth, are missing. Walsingham was extensively involved in supporting the theater, and Hughes believes that his papers would have shown his patronage of Oxford's literary activities at Fisher's Folly and the creation of the first two successful commercial theaters in London.[9] The papers of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, among others, are also missing.

- Records of theatrical performances. Records from the Master of the Revels are missing, as are records of works performed at the first Blackfriars theater, a key venue for performances of Oxford's work in the 1580s. All of these documents would tell us much about the birth of the London stage and Oxford's role in creating it.
- Personal documents. Missing are any letters from or to Oxford mentioning any of his literary activities. Not one such letter exists even though, as Gary Goldstein observes, "33 books were dedicated to him, he employed writers such as John Lyly, Anthony Munday, and Thomas Churchyard, and was patron of two theater companies, one operating for more than 20 years."[10] Thousands of letters dealing with these activities must surely have existed.
- Oxford's own dramatic works, personal papers, books, and will. As John Thomas Looney noted, "Edward de Vere is the only dramatist in the long list compiled by Francis Meres (1598) of whose work no trace has been found."[11]

Missing . . . through accident or on purpose?

Such records that could be direct evidence of Oxford's authorship of the works of Shake-speare—are they missing because they have been lost through the ravages of time over the last 400 years . . . or is there a more sinister reason?

Stephanie Hopkins Hughes has persuasively argued that these records have not gone missing by accident, because they are too coincidentally relevant to the authorship question. As she explains, "when following the paper trails that lead to Oxford's activities from the 1580s on, to the University Wits, and to the creation of the London Stage and Press, it seems to happen with rather considerable regularity that the trail will vanish just at the point in time where one would expect to find information, then reappear once that point is past."[12]

Charlton Ogburn, Jr., similarly noted "the wholesale evidently selective disappearance, hardly to be explained as accidental, of records that might be expected to throw light on the object of the quest."[13] He added:

> The fact is that every contemporary document that might have related authorship of Shakespeare's plays and poems to an identifiable human being subsequently disappeared. Every last scrap of paper that would have told who Shakespeare was — whether the Stratford man or any other — simply vanished; . . . And I think we cannot simply attribute the blank record to accident. For a body of work as superior as Shakespeare's, it is simply not conceivable that every reference during the author's life, and evidently for some years thereafter, which linked the work to a flesh-and-blood author, including everything in the author's own words, written or

> quoted, should have passed into limbo by chance. Chance is not so purposeful. Elizabethan writers of far less stature than the author of Shakespeare's works have been found unmistakably associated with their products by concrete references that have not had to be unearthed through the exhaustive searches over years by legions of investigators.[14]

Thus, Ogburn concluded, "there can be but one explanation for the empty-handedness of generations of scholars after lifelong quests. Someone saw to it that those quests would be fruitless."[15]

Gary Goldstein also concluded that "if the author of the canon wished to remain anonymous, then he and his friends did an outstanding job of eliminating any contemporary records that could identify him."[16] Morse Johnson found that "Such an unthinkable, singular and total eclipse cannot be attributed to happenstance or indifference. The sole rational explanation is that his identity was intentionally and effectively concealed during the lifetime of whoever was the author."[17]

Hughes, Ogburn, Goldstein and Johnson are surely right. The scope and variety of the documents that are missing, the range of places where they should have been found, and the fact that other similar documents that do not relate to Oxford's authorship still exist, all lead to the conclusion that their absence is not the result of chance. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a concerted, sustained, systematic effort was undertaken to seek out and destroy those documents that would have supported Oxford's authorship of the works attributed to William Shake-speare.

Who Was Involved?

Oxford was no doubt involved in the effort to hide his authorship of his literary works. We know that he took steps earlier in his years as a courtier to hide authorship of his poems, publishing them anonymously or under pseudonyms such as the initials *E.O.* He also published two lengthy poems in 1593 and 1594 under the name William Shake-speare, and he approved of at least some of his plays being published under the same name beginning in 1598.

We also have Oxford's own words in the *Sonnets* testifying that he was aware that his name would not survive: "My name be buried where my body is" (Sonnet 72), and "Though I, once gone, to all the world must die" (Sonnet 81).

Although we don't know to what extent Oxford was involved in the effort to seek out and destroy documents that would tie him to his literary works and the creation of the public stage in London, we do know that others must have been involved because Oxford would not have had access to many of the documents, such as Privy Council records. What we see is a concerted, extensive effort carried out at least partly, if not largely, by people other than Oxford. So, who would have been involved in that effort?

Given the nature of the documents that are missing, the campaign to destroy them must have been orchestrated by those who controlled state power. Only they would have had access to the state documents that are missing, such as Privy Council records and the records of the Office of the Revels. Only they would have had the power to seize private papers of important officials and letters in private hands.

Because much of state power was in the hands of the two Cecils—William Cecil, Lord Burghley, chief advisor to Queen Elizabeth during most of her reign, and his son Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury—it is principally that team that I mean when I discuss the use of state power.

Father Francis Edwards provides the context:

> For at least 50 crucial years — until 1612, in fact, England was virtually ruled, and with remarkable consistency and effectiveness, by Sir William Cecil and Sir Robert, his son. As principal secretaries, they had all the power necessary to preserve or destroy for posterity the materials of future history that lay in public hands. As Masters of the Court of Wards, they had similar opportunities to deal, sooner or later, with the private records of a great many leading families. No one who has attempted research on important figures who collided or disagreed with the regime at any point can fail to notice the curious lop-sidedness of the records."[18]

Nature of State Power in Authoritarian Societies

Beyond controlling the paper record, the Cecils and others who controlled state power were ruthless in using it to ferret out risks to the government or the crown. As Alfred Hart explained, "Walsingham and the Cecils controlled an efficient secret service, and any person of local importance who criticized any action or proclamation of the Council ran the risk of being summoned to London.[19] And interrogated, which often involved torture.

The theater and the press were censored to restrain "the expression of discontent and criticism of the government and its actions."[20] As Janet Clare notes in *Art Made Tongued-Tied by Authority*, "Elizabethan drama was subject to two largely unrelated types of censorship: censorship by the Master of the Revels before the performance of a play and censorship by an ecclesiastical licenser prior to publication."[21] These two types of censorship were put under the sole direction of the Master of the Revels by the Star Chamber decree of 1586 mentioned below, thus "confirming the secularization of dramatic censorship under absolute state control."[22]

Penalties for violating censorship regulations were severe; playwrights, actors, printers and publishers were especially vulnerable to charges of possessing or writing seditious materials. Ben Jonson was arrested numerous times; Thomas Nashe's works were burned in 1599 and he was forbidden ever to publish again. It

is worth noting that Chapman, Jonson and Marston were all arrested after the first performance of their play *Eastward Ho!*—a play that does not appear to contain seditious material but does appear to pay homage of sorts to Oxford. We might also note that Ben Jonson's study was set ablaze and all his papers and books were destroyed in 1623, shortly after the First Folio of Shake-speare's works, which Jonson edited, was ready to go on sale—a very physical form of censorship.

John Stubbs had his right hand chopped off for publishing a tract, *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf*, which argued against the idea of the Queen marrying the French Duc of Alençon. We have some idea of just how traumatic that event was for Oxford because of his extraordinary use of the word "hand" 72 times in *Titus Andronicus*, a play in which the main character has a hand chopped off. We can, in fact, date that play to the months following Stubbs' punishment in 1579.

Those who controlled the state during the reigns of Elizabeth and James had power far beyond that which exists in a modern democracy, and they could be ruthless in using it in the pursuit of their interests. The threat of such severe penalties for crossing those with political power would itself have instilled a sense of self-censorship among those who knew of Oxford's authorship, limiting the number of handwritten or printed documents that would need to be sought out and destroyed in order to bury awareness of Oxford's authorship and his role in establishing the public theater in London.

Only Two Choices Exist

If we assume (a) that documents that once existed that tied Oxford directly to authorship of the works of Shakes-peare are now missing, (b) that they have not gone missing by accident, (c) that Oxford could not have destroyed all of them by himself, (d) that state power would have been needed to seek out and destroy them, and (e) that those who controlled state power were sufficiently ruthless to do so, we must choose between two options:

- Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was not the author of the works attributed to "William Shake-speare," or
- Oxford was the author and the effort to hide his authorship was so systematic, so extensive and so successful that it could have been carried out only through the use of state power at the highest levels.

There are no other options. Before choosing between them, it is worth pausing to recognize just how improbable it would have been for state power to have been used to seek out and destroy the large number of documents that resulted from Oxford's authorship of Shake-speare's works and his role in the creation of the public theater. Ogburn described that effort as "highly implausible" and noted that "its implausibility is what has chiefly blocked a more general acceptance of 'Shakespeare' as having been a pseudonym."[23]

At the same time, we can note, with Sherlock Holmes, "When you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

So, based on the overwhelming amount of circumstantial evidence that has been uncovered in the past century, we must conclude that the first option (that Oxford was not "Shake-speare") cannot be true, and that the second option must be true: Oxford was the author and state power was used to hide his authorship. The serious men who dominated Queen Elizabeth's government made a determined—and until the past century successful—effort to wipe Oxford's authorship of Shake-speare's works from the historical record.

II: Why State Power Was Used to Hide Oxford's Authorship

Many of Oxford's plays were first written to be performed as entertainment in the court and for private performances for courtiers outside the court. If the story had ended there, there would have been little need for the use of state power to hide his authorship. It is only when the plays left the court to be performed on the public stage and to be published (and thus read by the general public) that they became of concern to the government.

Those who controlled state power believed it was necessary to separate the plays from the court in the public mind, and the best way they found to do that was by cutting the connection between the plays and the author. This section considers three of the many reasons why. The first has to do with Oxford's use of the plays to generate public support for Queen Elizabeth's reign and the anticipated war with Spain, the second with the political nature of the plays, which made them of concern to the government, and the third with the portrayal in the plays of the ultra-sensitive issue of succession.

Conditions Early in Queen Elizabeth's Reign

It is helpful to review the conditions that existed early in Elizabeth's reign.

Elizabeth became Queen in November 1558, but her accession to the throne had not been a sure thing. Parliament had twice declared her a bastard ineligible for succession, and the religious situation was even more contentious. The separation of the Church of England from Rome, the suppression of the religious orders and the dissolution of the monasteries had occurred less than thirty years earlier.[24] England had recently been through years of religious strife under the reign of Bloody Mary, and Elizabeth found herself a Protestant queen of a country that was still majority Catholic.

Furthermore, she was under verbal assault from outside England from the start of her reign. "As early as 16 February 1559, Pope Paul IV published the Bull, Cum ex apostolates, advocating the deposition of all sovereigns who encouraged

heresy."[25] Ten years later, early in 1570, following her government's victory over the Northern Rebellion, Pope Pius V issued a Bull of Deposition against Elizabeth that excommunicated her and absolved her subjects from allegiance to her.

Reason 1: Public Performances of the Plays to Garner Support for Queen Elizabeth's Reign

From the beginning, Elizabeth needed to move quickly to increase public support for the legitimacy of her reign and the authority of the Church of England. She did this through both of the means to reach large audiences available to her—the pulpit and the public theater.

Her government ordered that certain homilies, or sermons, be read from every pulpit in England each Sunday to give a common message to the entire country. In the early years of Elizabeth's reign, her government reissued the series of homilies originally distributed in 1547 by King Edward's Council of Regency. But after the Ridolfi plot, which aimed at the invasion of England and the accession of the Duke of Norfolk, she ordered that a new set of twenty Homilies on Disobedience and Willful Rebellion be prepared. They were distributed throughout England in 1573.

These Homilies, as Alfred Hart noted in his analysis published in 1934, "put into the form of sermons a series of simple lessons on the fundamental principles of Tudor politics."[26] The most important of them, Homily X, was "'An exhortation concerning good order and obedience to Rulers and Magistrates,' . . . [and] it briefly expounds such politico-religious doctrines as the divine right of kings, non-resistance, passive obedience, and the wickedness of rebellion."[27]

It is just these themes from the Homilies that Shake-speare, far more than any other writer of his day, emphasized in his plays. As Hart observed:

> Shakespeare outdoes every other important dramatist of his time in the number and variety of the allusions made to the divine right of the reigning monarch, the duty of passive obedience enjoined on subjects by God, and the misery and chaos resulting from civil war and rebellion. References to such topics are scattered through at least twenty plays. . . . Though most frequent in the plays on English history, they are also to be found in comedies of his early and middle periods, and in the great tragedies.[28]

> What is peculiar to Shakespeare is that he treats the politico-theological doctrines of divine right, non-resistance, passive obedience and the sin of rebellion, as the accepted and immutable law of almost every land in every age. He has adroitly woven into the fabric of his plays so many and varied references, direct and indirect, to these doctrines, that we may extract from them an excellent digest of the main articles of the . . . political creed of the Tudors concerning the constitution of the body politic in general and the relation of ruler to subject in particular.[29]

In fact, Hart concluded, "The number and variety of the passages . . . in which [Shakespeare] makes definite allusions to [these] topics . . . give . . . very strong support to my contention that Shakespeare derived these ideas either directly or indirectly from the Homilies."[30] The similarities between the themes and wording of the homilies and Shakes-peare's plays are so similar that Mark Anderson speculates in his book *"Shakespeare" By Another Name* that one or more of them were actually written by a twenty-year-old de Vere. "The anonymous Homily Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion (1571)," he writes, "is a proto-Shake-spearean piece of prose—containing enough distinctive rhetoric and poetic flourishes to lead one to suspect the hand of a twenty-year old Bard. . . . Did de Vere record his theological reflections on rebellion for clergymen across the land to recite to their flocks?"[31]

But even if Oxford did not write any of the homilies, we see a body of work presented to the public in the theaters that mirrors their messages in support of the Queen and her government and the authority of the Church of England. We thus see Oxford seeking to influence public opinion through the theater long before he ever began to use the pseudonym William Shake-speare, and he would have been most effective in doing so if it was not known that the author of the plays was a member of the court. These plays, then, would have been of interest to the state for their content even if state power was not yet used to hide Oxford's authorship of them.

Need for National Unity During the Anglo-Spain War (1585-1604)

The early use of the public theater to influence public opinion was expanded in a more systematic way to create unity throughout the country as England entered the War with Spain in the mid-1580s. At the same time, Oxford himself moved from being an unofficial supporter of the government to becoming a direct supporter and perhaps even a member of it.

England's fear as the 1580s progressed was that if Spain succeeded in extinguishing the independence of the Protestant Dutch and Flemish communities, it would then turn its power toward a religious crusade against England. In summer 1585 Elizabeth recognized that she had no choice but to support the Low Countries, and sent English military forces there to help defend them. Thus began the Anglo-Spanish War that did not end until nineteen years later, when King James signed a peace treaty with Spain.

The war represented a direct threat to the continuation of Elizabeth's reign. In June 1587, following the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the Pope issued a Papal Bull calling on all English subjects to rise up and depose her. As historian Paul Johnson explains:

> There were few members of her government . . . who were under any illusion that her, and their, regime was likely to survive her murder. No imaginable successor would be able to command the confidence of the country; the result would be civil war, the intervention of one

> or more Catholic powers, a compromise at best, leading inevitably to the triumph of Rome. Then they would be hanged or burned alive. Nor was it just a question of their own lives. They had no doubt that the fall of England would mean the end of reformed religion.[32]

Elizabeth and her government were in for the fight of their lives, and it was a fight that put England on an exhaustive war footing for almost twenty years. As Colonel B. R. Ward discovered, expenditure on soldiers, sailors and war materials averaged 70% of revenue during the entire 1585-1604 period, and expenditures on the army and navy in the year of the Armada actually amounted to 101% of revenue.[33] This was a terrible burden to be borne by the English crown and people for such an extended period of time, and the government came close to bankruptcy during the closing years of Elizabeth's reign.

To garner public support for her regime during those difficult years, Queen Elizabeth took two steps in June 1586. First, on June 23 she established severe and rigid control over the printing presses by a Star Chamber Decree, a measure designed to stop the dissemination of opinion contrary to the war effort. Second, only three days later, on June 26, she sanctioned a grant of £1,000 a year to the Earl of Oxford. Oxford was to serve, as Ward explained, "as the head of a Secret Service Department of State. This could hardly have been anything but a War Propaganda Department."[34] Payments to him were retroactive back to March 1586, but it is likely that discussions on this issue were underway by the fall of 1585. If so, the creation of this new secret department was likely the reason why Oxford had been recalled suddenly from the Low Countries in October 1585, where he was serving as General of the Horse. In 1585 or 1586, then, Oxford moved from being an unofficial supporter of Queen Elizabeth's reign by writing plays emphasizing themes from the Homilies to working in an official capacity as a member, though secret member, of her government.

As a result of Oxford's new responsibilities, we see a change in themes of the plays that he and his team of writers wrote. Whereas in the earlier plays he had emphasized the ideas of the divine right of kings and the necessity of obedience and loyalty—themes supporting Elizabeth's reign—the plays now encouraged pride in the nation and support for the war with Spain. In *Henry V*, to cite one example, characters from every part of the British isles—the Welsh Fluellen, Irish Captain Macmorris, Scottish Captain Jamy and English Gower—cooperate with each other, thus demonstrating the idea of Britain as a union of people united in resisting the Spanish menace.

1586 was thus a critical year in Oxford's life. It might seem at first that other years were of greater importance—e.g., 1581, the year of his banishment from court, or 1593, the first use of the pseudonym "William Shake-speare." But a case can be made that 1586 was the true turning point for the future of Oxford and the memory of his name because it was that at time that he moved from hiding his authorship due to traditional reasons—that courtiers do not write or publish—to hiding it for reasons of state. It was at that time, with the launching of the state-

funded propaganda effort in the theater, that state power perhaps began to be used to hide Oxford's authorship of his plays. If so, it was perhaps at that time that his art began to become "tongued-tied by authority."

Reason 2: The Political Nature of Oxford's Plays

Although Oxford's plays were designed in part to strengthen support for the Elizabethan regime, there was a problem with them—at least for the state. The problem was that the plays were political through and through. They did not merely contain passing references to issues currently being addressed by the government, or occasionally ridicule prominent members of the court. Rather, most of these plays were built around issues of great concern to the state and ridiculed prominent personages in the court in almost every act and scene.

In many cases, they had been written originally for audiences of courtiers who would immediately understand the allegorical references to matters of state and know just who was being ridiculed. While it might be regarded with great humor within the court to see their queen falling in love with an ass—and everyone at court knew just who that ass was in real life—it simply wouldn't do to have the general public make the same connections. Censors had to find a way to reduce that likelihood.

Because the plays were so political throughout, ordinary censorship—cutting out a scene here or a speech there that authorities deemed offensive or inappropriate—would not work. After censors got through removing all the sensitive parts, there would not be much of a play left. There were the additional problems that the author was less likely to practice self-censorship, and that he and his theater company had more power than others to resist official censorship. Those who controlled state power had to find another way to sanitize the plays if they were to be performed on the public stage.

The way they found to cut the connection between the plays and the court was to break the connection between the plays and the author. By suppressing awareness that Oxford's works presented on the public stage had been written by a nobleman, an inner member of the court, those not in the know would be less likely to perceive that the plays mirrored developments and portrayed individuals from the court. The plays could then be presented as mere entertainment unconnected with real life.

Reason 3: Family Politics of the Cecils

It was not just the official censors who would have wanted Oxford's authorship of his plays hidden, but also senior officials who had been portrayed and ridiculed in the plays. It was bad enough that their pride was pricked in the closed performances in the court, but it must have been intolerable for them to imagine the common

people laughing at characters modeled on themselves. One of the most effective scenes in the movie *Anonymous* was one in which Will Shakspere, on stage, mocks a high official who has a feather in his hat by saying that his brain is lighter than his feather. We saw how that ended, with the official storming out of the theater and the play being closed down.

We can easily imagine something similar happening in real life. As Janet Clare notes, "censorship beyond the state system was thus provoked. . . . [T]he players had to accommodate not only the official censorship of the Master of the Revels, but arbitrary intervention from influential courtiers who were alert to real or perceived aspersions on their family name."[35]

On this point, Charlton Ogburn concluded that

> Oxford would pay dear for his satisfactions. If there was anything on which Elizabeth, Burghley and the other Cecils, Leicester and the other Dudleys, Christopher Hatton, the 3rd Earl of Southampton, and doubtless others who appeared in the plays and poems were agreed upon it was that the author must never, *never* be known for who he was, lest his characters be seen for who they were, if heaven and earth had to be moved to prevent it. And for all we know, the inheritors of their power well into the future would be aware of that necessity and be obedient to it.[36]

As we have seen, the most powerful of all the officials during Oxford's lifetime, the two Cecils, had ample power and opportunity to cleanse the historical record of anything they did not want in it. William Cecil would surely not have wanted the general public to realize that he was the real-life model for Polonius in *Hamlet*. Robert Cecil's motivations would have been, in Stephanie Hopkins Hughes' estimation, "darker and more personal," given "Oxford's portrayal of him as the twisted, evil Richard III. Unable to attack him openly," she writes, "I believe he [Cecil] set about first to curtail, then when that ended in a stalemate, to remove every trace of his [Oxford's] power, every connection to the writing establishment and to his authorship of the Shakespeare canon."[37]

Reason 4: The Succession

A third reason for the use of state power to hide Oxford's authorship has to do with the issue of succession. In the last decade of Queen Elizabeth's reign — since she turned sixty years old in 1593 — no issue was more important or more sensitive than that of who would succeed her.

However, this issue (like the earlier issue of her possible marriage) was one about which Elizabeth never tolerated interference by others. She believed that as the monarch—the only person in the kingdom who was responsible to God for the kingdom as a whole—such decisions in these matters belonged exclusively to her.

Elizabeth sought throughout her reign to restrict Parliament's role in them, beginning with its first meeting in 1566-67. When Parliament tried to pressure her

to resolve the marriage issue by linking it to the annual subsidy to the crown and refusing to consider other business until the succession issue had been resolved, Elizabeth responded angrily by vetoing all discussion of her marriage or succession by Parliament, and attacked what she called "the impudent assumption that parliamentarians were more concerned for the future of the kingdom and its people that she herself, divinely anointed to discharge this very duty." The impasse was resolved only when Elizabeth withdrew her ban on discussion of the issues and Parliament simultaneously decided not to discuss them.

Elizabeth also sought to ban or limit public discussion of her marriage or succession. As noted, John Stubbs had his right hand chopped off for daring to advise the queen on her marriage in his pamphlet *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf* in 1579. As William Camden noted, in response to Stubbs's pamphlet "Her Majestie burned with choler that there was a book published in print, inveighing sharply against the marriage," and it was she herself who decided on Stubbs's sentence and who pushed it through the court system in violation of usual procedures, much to the consternation of her advisers.

Into this breech rode the Earl of Oxford, seeking to advise the queen and others on this most sensitive issue of succession through his plays. Even though public discussion of succession was forbidden, Oxford's later plays (or at least those revised from the early 1590s onwards) seemed to focus almost obsessively on that issue, examining from every angle the question of who is a legitimate ruler and the mechanics of how power is transferred from one monarch to another.

Several Oxfordian researchers have shown that earlier plays which had emphasized such themes as obedience to the crown or support for the war with Spain were revised from 1593 onwards to focus much more on the issue of succession. Daniel Wright has shown the extent to which this was done as *The Troublesome Reign of King John* was revised to become *King John*, and Ramon Jiménez has shown similar changes as the *True Chronicle of King Leir* became *King Lear*.

Given the obsession in the plays with the issue of succession, it was imperative for reasons of state that Oxford's authorship be kept hidden so that the public would not recognize that the succession issues being dealt with in the plays actually related to the current monarch.

III: State Power Was Used to Airbrush Oxford from the Historical Record

We have examined how and why those who controlled state power—in particular, the Cecils—used it to hide Oxford's authorship of the works attributed to William Shake-speare and his role in the creation of the public theater in London. But the story doesn't end there. They also used state power for a second purpose: to eliminate Oxford himself from much of the historical record.

Airbrushed Out of History

Oxford was, in effect, airbrushed from history by Robert Cecil and others who controlled state power. "Airbrushed" is the term used to describe the removal from photographs of the political leadership in the Soviet Union and China of those who fell out of favor with the current leadership.

We have today far fewer documents related to Oxford than we would expect to have, given his position as Lord Great Chamberlain and as a member of the court. It is not just documents about his writing and acting, and his role in providing dramatic entertainment in the court and in creating the public stage that are missing. The paper trail of the non-literary aspects of his life has also largely vanished. Burghley's files are unaccountably incomplete when it comes to Oxford. They contain nothing related to Oxford's connection with the expeditionary force in the Low Countries, and the grant of £1,000 a year to him, an extraordinary large amount, is never mentioned.

Oxford was the only major Elizabethan figure not to have had a public funeral. As Hughes noted, "Whatever Oxford's relationship with Cecil might have been, protocol would have demanded that the premier earl in the kingdom have a public and honored funeral. There is not a single other major figure in the Elizabethan era that did not have a public funeral."[38]

Oxford's own files, papers, books, manuscripts and will are missing. With only a handful of exceptions, no letters exist either from or to Oxford, other than letters between him and the Cecils. His letters to Anne Cecil have not survived even though hers to him have. On this point Charlton Ogburn concluded "that every communication he ever made his wife in writing can hardly have vanished without someone's having exerted himself to that end. But if we were to be prevented from hearing Oxford's side, care was taken to preserve a record of Anne's."[39] And, "Once again one is reminded of the irretrievable loss we have suffered from the Cecils' tight control of the records of Elizabeth's reign, including, it is evident, the decision as to what correspondence of their illustrious in-law's would be allowed to survive."[40] Thus, Ogburn concluded, "in expunging all traces of his [Oxford's] connection with the stage . . . [the Cecils] seem almost to have effaced Oxford himself from the record."[41]

The effort to airbrush Oxford from history was so successful that he vanished almost completely for more than 300 years. Paul Johnson's book *Elizabeth: A Study in Power and Intellect*, published in 1974, provides an example of the minimal presence that Oxford has had in the historical record, as shown in Figure 2. That book's 500 pages contain only seven references to Oxford, fewer even than Henry Carey, 1st Lord of Hunsdon, and far fewer than Burghley, Walsingham and other prominent members of the court and government. All seven references to Oxford are derogatory. Johnson does not mention at all that Oxford was the Great Lord Chamberlain of England or that he was acclaimed as a poet and dramatist.

Burghley, Sir William Cecil, Baron	125	Bacon, Sir Francis	18
Walsingham, Sir Francis	75	Henry, Lord Hunsdon	16
Leicester, Robert Dudley, Earl of	71	Sidney, Sir Philip	14
Raleigh, Sir Walter	57	Smith, Sir Thomas	14
Cecil, Sir Robert, Earl of Salisbury	43	Shrewsbury, Gilbert Talbot, 6th Earl of	13
Hatton, Sir Christopher	43	Seymour, Lord Thomas	12
Essex, Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of	34	Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton	12
Drake, Sir Francis	28	Hunsdon, Henry Carey, 1st Lord of	11
Norfolk, Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of	24	**Oxford, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of**	**7**

***Figure 2: Number of References to Major Figures in Elizabethan England in Paul Johnson's* Elizabeth (1974)[42]**

It is thus not surprising that John Thomas Looney had never heard of Edward de Vere when, in the 1910s, he began his search for the real author of the works attributed to Shake-speare.

IV: Why State Power Was Used To Airbrush Oxford from the Historical Record

We now ask, not *how* it was possible to erase Oxford from the historical record, but *why*? What reason could have existed to warrant the use of state power to erase from the historical record a man described by his contemporaries as "the most brilliant of the young nobility of Elizabeth's court" and as "a fellow peerless in England," and by King James as "Great Oxford"? Surely there must be more behind the effort than merely hiding his authorship of the works of Shake-speare. The connection between the court and the plays had already been cut by the use of the pseudonym.

H. K. Kennedy-Skipton has given us a clue by suggesting that it was done for reasons unrelated to the authorship of the plays.

> If we accept the life of De Vere and his relation to the times as told in the plays, we may find they form a historical foreground, and will in fact be a criterion of the truth of the background. There can be no doubt that the plays and the life of Edward De Vere conceal facts

> of vital historical import, compared with which the mystery of the authorship is of minor consequence. How otherwise can one explain the erasure of the name of such an important person from the pages of our history?[43]

Others have commented on the importance of literature as a source for knowledge of historical events, but Kennedy-Skipton's statement, from 1932, is the earliest I have found that relates specifically to Shake-speare. We now must consider the possibility that Oxford might have been airbrushed out of the historical record for non-literary reasons.

The Succession Issue Revisited

Part II concluded with a discussion of Oxford's addressing the sensitive issue of the succession to Queen Elizabeth in his plays. I now return to that issue.

Since the 1930s, some Oxfordians have speculated that Oxford was not merely an observer of the succession process, but was directly involved in it either as a son of the queen, a lover of the queen and father of a child by her, or both. The Tudor Heir theories, also known as Prince Tudor Theories, or "P.T.," are the most controversial aspects of the authorship question. They posit not only that the Earl of Southampton and perhaps Oxford himself were sons of Queen Elizabeth, but also that Oxford's place in history was sacrificed to protect the "Virgin" Queen's reputation and to eliminate any potential challenges to King James' reign by direct descendants of Queen Elizabeth.

Some Oxfordians have concluded that the Tudor Heir theories have been proven to be false, persuaded perhaps by Diana Price's 1993 article, "Rough Winds Do Shake,"[44] or Christopher Paul's 2002 article "The Prince Tudor Dilemma."[45] I have examined these and other articles and found their arguments to be less than definitive. In addition, key points in them have been effectively addressed by Bill Boyle, Charles Beauclerk, Hank Whittemore, Daniel Wright and others in *A Poet's Rage*, published in 2013. A more comprehensive re-examination of these theories is needed; they should not be ruled out until that examination has been undertaken.

The Tudor Heir theories are of vital importance because no other theories are weighty enough to explain why those who controlled state power saw fit to use it to conduct the systematic, sustained and determined effort that was needed to eliminate not only the historical record of Oxford's role in the development of the public theater and his authorship of the literary works attributed to William Shake-speare, but also most records pertaining to his place in the court and government and his correspondence with anybody other than the Cecils.

Right Up To The Brink

It is interesting to note that Walt Whitman, that most perceptive of readers of Shake-speare's plays, felt in his bones that "It is impossible to grasp the whole

cluster of these plays . . . without thinking of them as . . . the result of an essentially controlling plan. What was that plan? Or, rather, what was veil'd behind it? – for to me there was certainly something so veil'd."[46] Whitman's friend William O'Conner also had the impression of the plays having "a lurking sense of being in aid of some ulterior design, probably well enough understood in that age, which perhaps time and criticism will reveal."[47]

B. R. Ward thought that the ulterior design lurking behind Shake-speare's historical plays was their role in influencing public opinion during the War with Spain. But something weightier was needed to explain the plays' obsession with the issue of succession.

We noted earlier Charlton Ogburn's conclusion that Elizabeth and her senior advisors felt that "the author must never, *never* be known for who he was . . . . if heaven and earth had to be moved to prevent it."[48] Surely if they felt strongly enough about protecting their family names to destroy evidence of Oxford's literary and theatrical activities, they would not have balked at the additional step of destroying the non-literary records of Oxford's life in order to achieve the far more important goals of protecting Queen Elizabeth's reputation and the legitimacy of King James's reign.

As noted earlier, Stephanie Hopkins Hughes concluded that Robert Cecil was determined to remove every trace of Oxford's connection with the theater.[49] From there it is only a step away for Cecil to eliminate Oxford himself from the historical record in order to protect his own position by hiding awareness of any potential challengers to James.

And, as noted above, Charlton Ogburn concluded that "in expunging all traces of his [Oxford's] connection with the stage . . . [the Cecils] seem almost to have effaced Oxford himself from the record."[50] I believe that Ogburn got it backwards. Effacing Oxford himself from the record was the primary goal, not an accidental result from an overzealous effort to expunge Oxford's connection with the stage.

Thus, many eminent Oxfordians go right to the brink in describing the extraordinary efforts taken to eliminate Oxford from the historical record. But because they were focused only on the narrower issue of the authorship question, they did not recognize that burying the record of Oxford's authorship of Shake-speare's works was only one part of the larger effort to eliminate Oxford himself from the historical record for other reasons.

And in fact, Charlton Ogburn later came to conclude that Southampton was the son of Queen Elizabeth and Oxford because, as he explained, "there is no other scenario of which I have heard that accommodates the facts in the case."[51] As he wrote in a letter to the editor of *The Elizabethan Review* in 1997, "the need for dissimulation of Oxford's authorship of Shakespeare's works was absolutely imperative." It was, he continued, "not simply a matter of preserving the reputations of the Queen and those around her, which would be recognized in the plays were these attributed to an insider at Court . . . What was at stake in the identity of the poet-dramatist was the succession to the throne of the United Kingdom. For all I know, this may be dynamite even today."[52]

Those who controlled state power in the early years of the 17th century believed that they faced no effort more deserving of the fullest use of their power than that of establishing and preserving James on the throne. This article has examined some aspects of the use of state power for that purpose, and reached conclusions about how Oxford became Shake-speare that are in accordance with the more comprehensive accounts provided by Hank Whittemore in *The Monument* and Charles Beauclerk in *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom*.

Summary and Conclusion

State power was used for two purposes:

1) To hide Oxford's authorship of the works attributed to "William Shake-speare" because . . .
   - the plays had been used for propaganda purposes, i.e., to generate public support for Elizabeth's reign, especially during the War with Spain;
   - the plays were political through and through, and to break the connection between them and the court it was necessary to break the connection between the plays and Oxford; and,
   - the plays addressed the ultrasensitive issue of succession.

2) To airbrush Oxford from the historical record because . . .
   - Oxford was bodily involved in the succession issue as described in the Prince Tudor/Tudor Heir theories and thus his existence threatened the purity of Queen Elizabeth's reputation and the legitimacy of King James' reign.

State power was clearly used for these two purposes, but to state them in this way does not adequately describe what happened.

It is more accurate to note that the purposes for which state power was used evolved over time. The discrete effort to hide Oxford's authorship of plays being performed on the public stage became only one part of the larger effort to airbrush him from the historical record. The effort to protect the family name of those portrayed in the plays ultimately became one part of the more determined effort to protect James' reign from challenges by direct descendants of Queen Elizabeth.

The evolution of the purposes for which state power was used took place over a period of about twenty years. It began in the mid-1580s, around the time that Oxford began receiving the annual annuity of £1,000, and was largely complete by the coronation of King James in 1603, as shown in Figure 3.

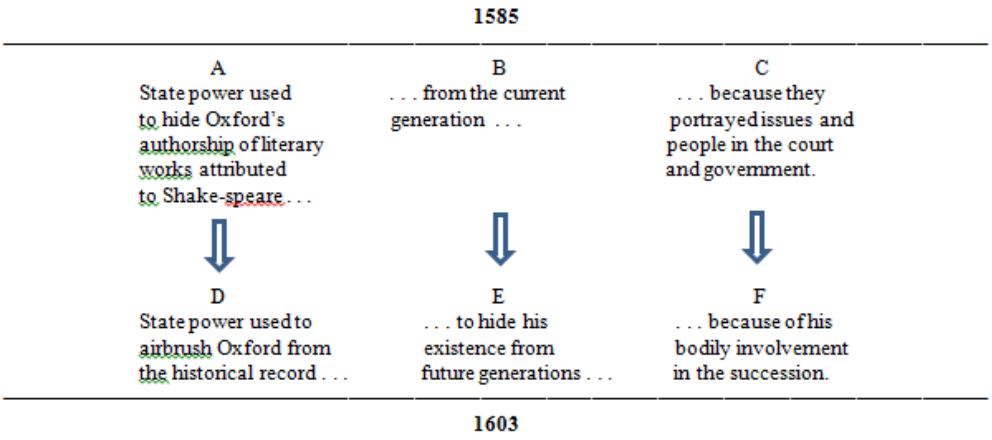

Figure 3: Evolution in the Use of State Power as it Relates to the Authorship of Oxford's Literary Works

One key moment in that evolution was the spring of 1593, when Oxford first published under the pseudonym William Shake-speare, when Shake-speare's first published work was dedicated to Southampton, and when Southampton held a particularly prominent place in the court. Another key moment occurred early in 1601 at the time of the Essex Rebellion, when Southampton was convicted of treason. I have not described those two points in time in this paper, nor have I noted the passages in Oxford's works that tie them to him and to Southampton's parentage, because those events and references have been thoroughly addressed elsewhere.[53]

It was perhaps only after James was securely on the throne—in the final year of Oxford's life and in the years immediately following his death—that Robert Cecil, with future generations in mind, sought to carry out the full-scale effort to airbrush Oxford from the historical record that had begun earlier.

Focusing on the authorship question from the point of view of the use of state power makes it possible to place the effort to hide Oxford's authorship of the works of Shake-speare in the proper context. The use of state power for political reasons, then, played *the* critical role in why today so many people believe that William Shakspere, rather than Oxford, was the author of the plays and poems they love so dearly.

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Endnotes

[1] Archer Taylor and Frederic J. Mosher, *The Bibliographical History of Anonyma and Pseudonyma*, 1952, p. 85, quoted in Mark Anderson, "*Shakespeare" By Another Name*, xxviii.
[2] Shakspere used a variety of spellings of his name, but none of them has the e in "Shake." All would have been pronounced with the short *a* sound. "Shack."
[3] Charlton Ogburn, Jr., *The Mysterious William Shakespeare,* 688.
[4] See the list of works cited for books that make a fuller case why the man from Stratford could not have been the author of "Shake-speare's" works, especially Anderson, Looney and Ogburn.
[5] Roger Stritmatter, *Edward De Vere's Geneva Bible: the marginalia of Edward De Vere's Geneva Bible: providential discovery, literary reasoning, and historical consequence.*
[6] See, for example, Eva Lee Turner Clark, *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays* (1930), Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn, *This Star of England* (1952), and other works cited.
[7] Stephanie Hopkins Hughes, "Missing From the Record." Accessed January 17, 2014.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Gary Goldstein, "Still in Denial," *The Oxfordian* 15, 99.
[11] J. Thomas Looney, *"Shakespeare" Identified.*
[12] Hughes, "Missing From the Record," www.politicworm.com, accessed January 17, 2014.
[13] Ogburn, Jr., *The Mysterious William Shakespeare.*
[14] Ibid. at 183.
[15] Ibid. at 183-184.
[16] Goldstein, 98-99.
[17] Morse Johnson, "The Oxfordian Position," *Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter,* 24:3 (Summer 1988), 9.
[18] Ogburn, Jr., at 201-202.
[19] Alfred Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homilies,* 14.
[20] Ibid. at 14-15.
[21] Janet Clare, *Art Made Tongue-Tied By Authority*, 16.
[22] Ibid. at 17.
[23] Ogburn, Jr., at 198.
[24] Hart,10-11.
[25] Paul Johnson, *Elizabeth: A Study in Intellect and Power,* 87.

[26] Hart, 29.
[27] Ibid. at 21.
[28] Ibid. at 27-28.
[29] Ibid. at 28.
[30] Ibid. at 67.
[31] Anderson, 43.
[32] Johnson, 241-242.
[33] Colonel B. R. Ward, "Queen Elizabeth's "Patrimony," *Shakespeare Pictorial*, June 1929, 20.
[34] Ward, "Elizabethan Exchequer Figures," *Shakespeare Pictorial,* March 1929, 16.
[35] Clare, 78.
[36] Ogburn, Jr., 657.
[37] Hughes, "The Cecils and History," www.politicworm.com, accessed January 17, 2014.
[38] Hughes, "Oxford's Funeral." Web. Accessed February 2014.
[39] Ogburn, Jr., 649.
[40] Ogburn, Jr., 735.
[41] Ogburn, Jr., 203-204.
[42] Johnson.
[43] H. K. Kennedy-Skipton, "The Tragic Story of Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Pictorial,* August 1932.
[44] Diana Price, "Rough Winds Do Shake: a fresh look at the Tudor Rose Theory," *Elizabethan Review*, Vol. 4/2, Autumn 1996, 4-23.
[45] Christopher Paul, "The Prince Tudor Dilemma: hip thesis, hypothesis, or old wives' tale?" *The Oxfordian* 5 (2002), 47-69.
[46] Ward, "What Lurks Behind Shakespeare's History Plays," *Shakespeare Pictorial*, September, 1929, 16.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ogburn, Jr., 657.
[49] Hughes, "The Cecils and History," www.politicworm.com, accessed January 17, 2014.
[50] Ogburn, Jr., 203-204.
[51] Ogburn, Jr., Letter to the Editor, *The Elizabethan Review* 5:1 (Spring 1997), 7-9.
[52] Ibid.
[53] See, for instance, Hank Whittemore's *The Monument* and Charles Beauclerk's *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom*.