

Was William Scott a Plagiarist?:

A Review of Scott's Unpublished Manuscript, *The Model of Poesy* (1599)

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ave you ever wished that some 16th century manuscript would turn up, and settle the authorship question once and for all? Well, we will have to keep wishing for that one. But, in the meantime, a very interesting 16th century manuscript *has* turned up. It was published for the first time in 2013, and it has some provocative implications for the authorship of the canon.

The work in question is *The Model of Poesy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), written by William Scott (c.1571-c.1617) in 1599, but never before published. Gavin R. Alexander of Cambridge University, whose extensive editorial work on *The Model* was deservedly praised by Russ McDonald in his *Times Literary Supplement* review (March 21, 2014), believes that Scott originally intended to publish his short book. Scott wrote a dedicatory epistle, which is uncommon for a manuscript that is not intended for publication. Alexander calls *The Model's* references to Shakespeare in order to illustrate rhetorical principles “unprecedented” (lxi).

The work consistently commends Sidney's *Defense of Poetry*, and Scott calls it “in many ways a commentary” (lxiii) on Sidney's prior work, which was itself written around 1579, and published in 1595, nine years after Sidney's death. Although Scott freely criticizes other authorities, he never once criticizes Sidney, although he does expand his own work beyond the limits of Sidney's.

After Alexander presented his research on *The Model* at a Renaissance Society of America meeting on March 24, 2012, he told me during the discussion period that *The Arte of English Poesie* is alluded to frequently by Scott. Because of my interest in *The Arte*, I have been waiting for the publication of Alexander's book with lively anticipation. It is rewarding to Oxfordians in several ways, especially to those of us who think de Vere was the author of the anonymous *Arte of English Poesie*, which Scott calls “another of Scott's favorite sources” (85). Tantalizingly, Scott criticizes the excessive creation of new words. He speaks of “some [words] new

coined," borrowing the use of "coin" meaning to create a new word, first used in *The Arte*. As usual, Scott fails to acknowledge his source here.

Stanley Wells, who has done so much to discredit his own scholarly reputation by clinging to the orthodox premise of authorship and refusing to even read contrary scholarship, in this case deserves our thanks for rediscovering Scott's manuscript, which he announced in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 2003. Early accounts of this rediscovery highlighted Scott's role as Shakespeare's first serious literary critic.

In his excellent editorial apparatus, Alexander sidesteps some peculiar oddities of *The Model*. It's not just that Puttenham is never mentioned in it. After all, the assumption that Puttenham wrote *The Arte* is a later one, although based on rather dubious evidence. What Alexander does not acknowledge is that *The Model* borrows extensively from *The Arte*, without ever once acknowledging that 1589 book. Any student or scholar who did this today would be condemned for blatant plagiarism. You may ask if Scott mentions the authors of other works that he cites. Yes. He names "Sir Philip Sidney" (in just those words) on nearly every page (I counted thirty-five instances); "Master [Edmund] Spenser" six times (as well as simply "Spenser" three additional times); Scaliger as often as Sidney; "[Du] Bartas" twelve times; as well as two mentions of [Samuel] Daniel; and one of "Sir Thomas More," "Sir Thomas Wyatt," "my Lord of Surrey," and "mine uncle George Wyatt."

So failing to name an important source was atypical for Scott. What about "Shakespeare"? Once again, Scott is intriguingly silent, though he mentions "that well-conceited tragedy *Richard the Second*" and "*Lucrece' Rape*," from which he twice quotes. Alexander squarely faces this failure, but then evades the obvious question as to its meaning: "Scott does not name Shakespeare as the play's [i.e., *Richard II's*] author at any point, but we cannot infer from this that he used the anonymous 1597 quarto [of the play]: he also fails to name Shakespeare as the author of *Lucrece*, and Shakespeare's authorship of that work was clear..." (133). In contrast with Alexander's admirable effort to place the date of *The Model's* composition in the summer of 1599, his powers of logical inference seem to abandon him when it comes to Scott's failure to name Shakespeare, or to refer to *The Arte* by name. Instead, he commends Scott's "scholarliness" (liii), and emphasizes that "he is far more assiduous than many of his contemporaries are in citing his sources" (liii).

Marcy North's crucial work on early modern anonymous authorship seems unknown to most Shakespeareans. Those who have read her know that she does not accept the common attribution of *The Arte* to George Puttenham. Instead, she advises us to admit we do not know who wrote it. Further, North points out that 16th- and early 17th-century commonplace books fail to mention Shakespeare as the author when they copy his sonnets, even when they name the other poets whose poems they copy. So here is an important precedent for Scott's failure to name Shakespeare as author of *Richard II* or of *The Rape of Lucrece*. This failure comes as no surprise to Oxfordians. We recognize that it was only with the 1623 publication of *The First Folio* that there was a concerted effort to invent "William Shakespeare" as author of the canon. At the time Scott wrote, in 1599, those in the know respected

de Vere's wish for authorial anonymity. Yet Scott's failure to use the name "William Shakespeare" from the dedicatory epistle of *The Rape of Lucrece* hints that, for some reason, he does not wish to promote the use of that pseudonym. His strong support of Sidney probably prejudiced him against Sidney's one-time enemy, Edward de Vere.

Scott may have had further reasons for his silence about the author's name, as well as his reticence in naming *The Arte*. He dedicated *The Model*, as well as an accompanying translation of a poem by Du Bartas, to his patron, Sir Henry Lee (1533-1611). Lee was the nephew of Sir Thomas Wyatt (who is mentioned once in *The Model*), and also related to William Cecil, to the Earl of Essex, and to Queen Elizabeth. Still more significantly, Lee's mistress was Anne Vavasour, father of Edward de Vere's illegitimate son Edward Vere. In fact, Lee's affair with Vavasour may have begun when he was her jailer when she was imprisoned in the Tower after her son's birth. Lee lived with her in the 1590s, after his wife died. In fact, it was said that Lee entertained Queen Elizabeth so lavishly at his estate in 1592 in an effort to placate her resentment at his relationship with Vavasour.

Since Lee was Scott's patron, he may have felt it would be imprudent to risk Lee's displeasure by writing too favorably about Edward de Vere or his literary works. It is also likely that naming de Vere as author of the Shakespeare works was taboo (the still surviving theatrical taboo against saying "Macbeth" aloud may be a displaced remnant of that name taboo).

It is curious that, despite Alexander's impressive scholarship, he fails to consider the implications of Scott's failure to name *The Arte* as a primary source of his book; as well as his failure to name Shakespeare as author of two of the works he discusses. A further curiosity is that Russ McDonald, in his *TLS* review mentioned above, similarly ignores these omissions, inconvenient as they are to the traditional authorship theory of both *The Arte* and the Shakespeare canon. Post-Stratfordians are well acquainted with the various scotomata of the Stratfordians. But here we have the opportunity to observe such a blind spot *in statu nascendi*.

Scott may have made some veiled criticisms of de Vere's literary works. There is no contradiction in Scott praising phrases from two works by de Vere, while objecting to others. In fact, Scott condemns one phrase from *Lucrece*¹ as "very idle, stuffed verse," while saying the poem as a whole is "very well-penned" (53). Did Scott have the extremely popular but racy *Venus and Adonis* in mind when he wrote, "And so they that under these flowers of poetry hide snaky wantonness and villainy bring poison in a golden goblet and are to be entertained as soul-murderers" (32)?

Surprisingly, Scott believes there is no place for ambiguity in good poetry. He could not be more different from de Vere in this respect. Stephen Greenblatt identifies "strategic opacity" as Shakespeare's characteristic pattern of deleting obvious motivations from his plots, so as to increase the complexity of his characters and their psychology. Stephen Booth has similarly identified the multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings of many of the words in the Sonnets. Scott, though, praises "*perspicuity*, when our words are, as it were, clear and transparent... having no ambiguous or obscure phrase...The contrary to this may be seen in him that thus lays down ambiguously a good conceit:

That when the searching eye of heaven is hid
Behind the globe, that lights the lower world.”
(54)

Those two lines are from *Richard II* (3.2.37-38), which Scott also praises as “well-penned” (45).

Scott mentions Petrarch, whose Italian sonnet structure was transformed into the English sonnet by de Vere’s uncle, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, who is mentioned on page 29. After praising Petrarch and unnamed English poets, Scott goes on to deprecate other unnamed English poets:

There is nothing in him [i.e., Petrarch] but may stand with honesty and virtue. We have some English admirers of their sundry stars with great felicity of wit that follow him; *but it were to be wished some conceits had never been born or never seen the light to have eclipsed the virtue and worth of them whom they have unworthily succeeded* [emphasis added].

Besides, we have other plaintiffs [i.e., poets who write “complaints”] as we have other calamities and losses, whether of goods, honour, friends, health, or whatsoever worldly fading joy we hold dear...Besides, it is an ease to the person affected to unload the burden of his affections and pour out his passion in complaint:

For sorrow ebbs, being blown with *wind* of words
[from *The Rape of Lucrece*, line 1330, emphasis added].
(27)

I wonder if Scott has some of de Vere’s poetry in mind, in addition to *Lucrece*. Had Scott seen *A Lover’s Complaint* in manuscript? Its line 7 includes the phrase, “sorrow’s wind,” echoing the line Scott quoted from *Lucrece*. Some of de Vere’s sonnets were circulating in manuscript by 1599, and they may have conceivably been one target of Scott’s criticism. Referring to emblems and *impresa*, Scott writes, “But this too large a field for me to *ear* in” (81; emphasis added). Using “to ear” meaning “to plough” in a figurative sense, referring to literature, was somewhat unusual in the 1590s; but de Vere’s dedication of his 1593 *Venus and Adonis* to the Earl of Southampton includes the phrase, “I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, and never after *ear* so barren a land...”

Another hint that Scott knew and may have been deliberately alluding to de Vere’s poetry is his use of the derogatory phrase “carpet poets”: “So as here those carpet poets that make their argument love and courting dalliance to stir sensual and low-pitched affections are clean dismissed from the rank of the heroical [poets]—yea some may be utterly unbilled from the service of poetry as weak or treacherous” (70). The phrase “carpet poets” is unusual—it does not occur in *Early*

English Books Online. But it recalls the similarly demeaning phrase “carpet knights” that occurs in the final stanza of de Vere’s poem “A Young Gentleman Willing to Travell.”² If Scott intended “carpet poets” to echo “carpet knights” (as Alexander believes he did) he seems to be alluding to de Vere’s failures at court, including his banishment in the early 1580s for his “dalliance” with Anne Vavasour.

It also occurs in Book 12 of the “Golding” translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which may have been partly or entirely de Vere’s work. There, as well as in two earlier Golding translations, it takes the form “coward[ly] carpet knight.”

Scott also criticizes poetry that is set to music as inferior—“they lose little grace if they want [lack] music—whereas these [i.e., poems set to music] are for the most part low matter, principally the number [meter] fitted to melody..” (25). De Vere signed some of the poems and anonymously wrote other poems in the wildly popular *Paradise of Daintie Devises*, which was a collection of the sort of song lyrics that Scott is deprecating.

Again, Scott does not name any examples, but he betrays his Puritan origins when he castigates the kind of “songs or carols” that “suffers now a strange *metamorphosis* in our last, loosest age into crowed ditties lewd and scurrilous, having no ingenious conceit and most of them most abominably lascivious, such as the heathens would not endure; and shame is it that they be suffered to disgrace our art and undermine our honesty” (27; emphasis added). Given that Sidney Lee said of de Vere’s father-in-law Lord Burghley that he found de Vere’s “perverse humour a source of grave embarrassment,” and given the bawdiness of his literary works, it is possible that he is at least one of Scott’s unnamed targets here. Further, Scott rails against the use of comedy to make disguised attacks against important people:

[I]t is against the law of comedy and received custom (howsoever now countermanded) to represent the errors and follies of high states and personages, lest the sacred majesty of the places and dignities become contemptible for those personal faults, so neither must the errors of these high and holy mysteries be profaned and vilified by vulgar reproaches, because, the case going so near as the conscience of a man, these slips and errors are to be pitied and tenderly tendered, not scorned and reproached.
(79)

One thinks of *The Arte* calling de Vere the best author of comedy, and of his skewering his former guardian, and his father-in-law Lord Burghley as Corambis in an earlier version of *Hamlet* (Polonius in later versions). In the 19th century, Corambis/Polonius as Burghley could be freely acknowledged by Shakespeare commentators, before de Vere was first proposed as “Shakespeare” in 1920. Many of Burghley’s “personal faults,” “errors and follies” are “profaned and vilified” in this play. Scott’s phrase, “the case going so *near* as the *conscience* of a man,” brings to mind Hamlet’s explanation to Horatio of why he feels no guilt about the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, “They are not *near* my *conscience*” (5.2.58; emphasis added).

The 1599 *The Model of Poesy* is valuable evidence that supports the post-Stratfordian conclusion that 'William Shakespeare' was a pseudonym. Further, it is consistent with the hypothesis that Edward de Vere wrote *The Arte of English Poesie*. It will reward further study.

Endnotes

- ¹ "The endless date of never-ending woe," which Scott uses to exemplify what Scaliger identified as the error of having "idle attributes only to fill up your metre" (53).
- ² See Richard M. Waugaman, "A Wanderlust Poem, Newly Attributed to Edward de Vere." *Shakespeare Matters* 7(1):1, 21-23, 2007. "Carpet knight" also occurs in Book 12 of the "Golding" translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which may have been partly or entirely de Vere's work. There, as well as in two earlier Golding translations, it takes the form "coward[ly] carpet knight."