THE SHAKESPEARE OXFORD NEWSLETTER

Vol. 57, No. 1 | Published by the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship | Winter 2021

Falstaff – Unmasked

by Earnest Moncrieff

"I can smile, and murder whiles I smile" (*3 Henry VI* 3.2.1613)

"[O]ne may smile and smile and be a villain" (*Hamlet*,1603 Q, sc. 5.81)

Falstaff Reinvented: When fully understood, the uncut *Henry IV* play texts of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, show Falstaff to be a cowardly, lying parasite, a villain who wastes and discards English soldiers and endangers its monarchy. Famed lexicographer and literary critic Samuel Johnson in 1765 expressly labeled Falstaff as an agent of vice, corrupt, despicable, a thief, a glutton, supercilious, haughty, a boaster, who was always ready to cheat and prey upon the poor, to terrify the timorous and insult the defenseless.[1]

Yet many modern stagings of the *Henry IV* plays present Falstaff mostly, if not entirely, as a jolly rascal who charms audiences with jests, wordplay, benign fibs and clever improvisations. Legendary stage actors like David Garrick, Ralph Richardson and Orson Welles portrayed him as a vital, witty life force. Scholarly praise for Falstaff also issued from many orthodox academics over the centuries, from William Hazlitt to Harold Goddard and Jonathan Bate. Professor Harold Bloom adoringly elevated Falstaff and Hamlet atop all characters in the Shakespeare canon.[2]

Modern stage directors sometimes contrast Prince Hal (later Henry V) as a ruthless, maturing war criminal with a Falstaff who is a wise, prescient, paternal archetype. But Vere's complete play texts and carefully explicated content must be distorted in order to scrub Falstaff of his integral, pervasive evil (I will refer to Edward de Vere as "Vere" in this article).

Actor Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Falstaff in an undated photogravure

A Smiling Villain: In *1 Henry IV* the heir apparent Prince Hal brands Falstaff a "devil," "vice," an "old white-bearded Satan" (II.iv.1430-1446).[3] Those labels would resonate with Elizabethan audiences familiar with decades of Miracle and Morality play characters and themes.[4] Hal distills Falstaff's evil essence in this rhetorical masterpiece:

> Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it?
> Wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it?
> Wherein cunning, but in craft?
> *Wherein crafty, but in villany?*
> *Wherein villanous, but in all things*?
> *Wherein worthy, but in nothing?*

(2.4.1438-1442; emphases added, lineation emended)

Falstaff publicly masks his villainy behind smiles, wit and banter. Caught lying (e.g., about his Gadshill

Continued on p. 11

From the President:

Hello 2021!

2020 was a difficult year for all of us. But the SOF was able to keep functioning as best it could. We had some successes.

Membership growth was up thirteen percent in 2020, on top of a seven percent increase in 2019. We now have about 465 members. After several years of flat membership, growing by twenty percent in two years is good. New memberships for 2021 and donations are at about the same pace as last year. So we are on a good track.

The big challenge we faced in 2020 was, of course, how to function in the COVID-19 era. We were able to hold the Looney Centennial Event at the National Press Club in early March, just before the pandemic began to affect daily life here in the US. We conducted our first annual meeting thru Zoom on September 26 and followed that with an online Symposium via YouTube in early October. This year, we are still operating under COVID-19 restrictions. We plan to host a virtual Symposium this spring (see page 10), and at this time we expect that our annual meeting and Symposium in the fall will also be "virtual" events. Details will follow soon.

We are planning to improve our website, but it will take a few months. We need to improve our social media presence—Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc. We are working to make our Podcast, "Don't Quill the Messenger," even better and more approachable. On the second anniversary podcast, just released, our producer says that our podcasts were downloaded more than 20,000 times in 2020 and have been heard in some forty-six countries (see also page 8).

We are also starting to plan events to commemorate the First Folio's 400th anniversary in 2023. This is another big moment for us to celebrate and promote Oxford as the real author of the works of Shakespeare. We cannot let the Stratfordians again twist the event to accommodate their version of reality, and ensnare more people into their fantasy of an illiterate merchant from Stratford-upon-Avon becoming the most brilliant writer in the English language.

Internally, we have decided to develop written contracts with several individuals who receive compensation for the work they do for the SOF; although their work has been authorized by the Board of Trustees, most of them have labored under informal agreements. We have finalized contracts with Lucinda Foulke for her design work for *The Oxfordian* and other duties; Jennifer Newton for her work on the website, brochures and other duties; Gary Goldstein for serving as editor of *The Oxfordian*; and Steven Sabel for serving as Director of Podcasts and Community Outreach. We are finalizing a contract with Roger Stritmatter for his work on the SOF's Brief Chronicles book series.

I also want to thank all the members—too many to list—who work (without financial compensation) on our several committees. Three persons deserve special thanks. Patrick Sullivan processes your credit card payments and helps maintain our membership database. Alex McNeil has edited the *Newsletter* for the last seven years; he is a superb editor, and we cannot thank him enough for his time and dedication. And Alex's wife, Jill McNeil, who has been doing the layout for the *Newsletter*. We are very lucky to have so many dedicated persons who perform important work for this organization.

Thank you, members, once again for your support of the SOF and all of its activities. We proudly promote with research and evidence that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, was the true author and that he used the pseudonym of William Shakespeare to write the poems and plays. Please help us carry this message to the world by becoming a member and please add your donations. Any amount is appreciated. We need funding to continue our many activities. If you're a member and would like to see a copy of our budget for this year, please contact me at info@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org.

Finally, as our Secretary Dr. Earl Showerman strongly advises, please wear a mask whenever you're outside! Earl is back working at the hospital in Ashland, Oregon, and has seen the COVID-19 crisis firsthand. The sooner we can control this pandemic the sooner we can go back to normal business.

John Hamill, President

The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter

Published quarterly by the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, P.O. Box 66083, Auburndale, MA 02466-0083. www.ShakespeareOxfordFellowship.org.

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to investigating the Shakespeare authorship question and disseminating the evidence that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), is the true author of the poems and plays written under the pseudonym "William Shakespeare."

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship pursues its mission by supporting research, educational and scholarly initiatives, annual conferences, website and social media, and by publishing this Newsletter and an annual scholarly journal, *The Oxfordian*.

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship was formed in 2013 when the Shakespeare Oxford Society, founded in 1957, and the Shakespeare Fellowship, founded in 2001, united to form a single organization. Dues, grants and contributions are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

TRUSTEES

John Hamill, President; Research Grant Program Chair
Julie Sandys Bianchi, Vice President; Video Contest Chair
Richard Foulke, Treasurer; Finance/Investments Chair
Earl Showerman, Secretary; Conference Chair
Ben August, Trustee
Bonner Miller Cutting, Trustee
Catherine Hatinguais, Trustee
Theresa Lauricella, Trustee; Education Outreach Chair
Robert Meyers, Trustee; Communications Committee Chair

Articles, essays, commentary, book reviews, letters and news items of interest to the Shakespeare Oxfordian community are welcome. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship. As provided in the bylaws, "The conferences, publications, and other educational projects of the Fellowship will be open forums for all aspects of the Oxfordian theory of authorship."

Alex McNeil, Newsletter editor: (newsletter@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org)
Jill McNeil, Newsletter layout

Printed by Minuteman Press, West Newton, MA. © 2021 by the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship

Letters to the Editor

The Shakespearean Authorship Trust merits great praise for getting well-known mainstream Stratfordians to speak at its events, specifically at its November 2020 online conference: "'I all alone beweep my outcast state'—Insiders, Outsiders: Shakespeare and the Court" (see page 9). This is a stunning accomplishment. A high level of diplomacy is necessary if warring camps are to meet. Professor Bill Leahy is to be highly praised for the diplomatic finesse that facilitated this exchange, as well as the presenters and attendees, for their comments were also restrained, respectful, and diplomatic.

The fact that Professor Marjorie Garber would not allow her presentation to be recorded is an indication of the threat Stratfordian academics feel they have hanging over their heads in addressing the authorship question. My feeling is that Professor Garber probably has authorship questions. She cited Freud's espousal of Oxford as the author. Professor Jane Kingsley-Smith had a wonderful topic with the theme of "exile." She did the best she could to fit it (almost apologetically) into the life of Shakspere using the Stratfordian myth of "the poaching exile," but conceded that the theme might be relevant to the authorship question. This is stunning considering (one can assume) that she doesn't want to endanger her academic career. Elizabeth Winkler, a young journalist, went out on a limb with her *Atlantic* magazine article, "Was Shakespeare a Woman?" and was viciously attacked. Challenging accepted academic theory is highly problematic in any field, not just in Shakespeare studies. I think there are a lot of closet authorship skeptics in academia who are simply not willing to risk their academic careers by questioning the status quo. Older academics get nasty when lifelong theories they have advocated are questioned or, worse, threatened because it puts their life's work into question.

There is light on the horizon. There has been a sea change in Stratfordian academia, which now admits that Shakespeare wrote for the court. They always maintained that he wrote for the people. They are also now saying Shakespeare knew French—another major paradigm shift, which Diana Price has shown to be untenable because *Hamlet* (with its untranslated French source) was written before Will Shakspere roomed with a French Huguenot family in London. The other seismic change is the multiple authorship theory, because the more co-authors the Stratfordians assemble, the more difficult it becomes to explain how all of this transpired with no written record. It is really important to reference Delia Bacon, who first wrote about the multiple

authorship theory in 1857 and included Oxford. I believe the multiple authorship theory is the beginning of the end of the belief that Shakspere wrote the plays. It's the only way to explain the vast knowledge revealed in the plays if Shakspere is the author.

The Shakspere myth only slowly started to unravel after three centuries with the academic studies of Abel Lefranc and then J. Thomas Looney, who were friends. It continues to slowly unravel. Because it is such an embarrassment, it will probably simply fade away rather than implode (barring the dramatic discovery of a document revealing Shakespeare's identity). An implosion also remains a possibility, with ongoing Oxfordian studies by Alexander Waugh, Roger Stritmatter and Bryan H. Wildenthal, among others, of questions and hints about the authorship question in contemporary Elizabethan literature.

I think it is inevitable that first encounters between Stratfordians and authorship skeptics will be somewhat awkward. What's important is that they continue to occur, which can only happen if Stratfordians don't feel threatened. This requires the social finesse that the Shakespearean Authorship Trust so brilliantly exhibited —a guide to be followed.

Sincerely,
Elisabeth Waugaman
Potomac, Maryland

I applaud John Shahan's comments in the Fall 2020 *Newsletter*, responding to articles by David Roper and Janet Wingate in the Summer issue about names being embedded within the dedication to *Shake-speares Sonnets* (1609). Shahan pointed out two major errors pertaining to these and other decryption efforts. The first was using John Rollett's multiplicative factor of 100 when calculating the odds of the name "Henry Wriothesley" appearing in the dedication; the second was a failure to evaluate all likely ways the name could appear in calculating those odds. Shahan's comments covered other authors' attempts to decrypt the *Sonnets* dedication language as well. In Alexander Waugh's case, I can offer probability calculations for his major findings, and would welcome critical feedback.

I agree with Shahan that Rollett's 100x "guesstimate" is inappropriate for probability estimation, and unnecessary. Rollett effectively factored in this preference by limiting possible spelling permutations to 1 rather than 120 (5!, or 5 factored) for HENRY and the same for assuming correct spellings in the WR-IOTH-ESLEY split sequences. I don't know if the 100x factor was used in Rollett's 1999 *Oxfordian* article; it would be useful to see his notes and later results.

In his comments, Shahan critiqued Peter Sturrock's latest presentation on the topic in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* (Summer 2020, Volume 34), but didn't mention the earlier and sound probability analyses in Sturrock's book, *AKA Shakespeare: A Scientific Approach to the Authorship Question* (2013). In Appendix F of his book, Sturrock demonstrated how to calculate the most likely ways Wriothesley's name might be formed and evaluated in probability terms.

Apparently on advice from mathematician David Webb, Shahan indicated there were fifty-three different ways of breaking up the name WRIOTHESLEY using the criteria Shahan specified. In his Appendix F, Sturrock identified twenty-one triple-splits (i.e., the name split into three parts) and six two-splits for the Wriothesley name. He assumed a minimum of two letters in any triple-split portion, and a minimum of three letters in two-split portions. Although not explained, it's clear to me that a two-letter minimum is essential. Other splits are possible, but single-letter split portions appear mathematically ambiguous, if not intractable. These differences need to be resolved.

Prior assumptions were, of course, necessary to develop these probability estimates—for example, the allowable number of Dedication letter grids and types, statistical population size (144 or 146 letters), and relevant permutations. Finding out how likely correct spellings occur by chance is a highly pertinent question. Undoubtedly, Rollett chose exact vertical spellings because that is how they occur in his solution. If they were not in the correct spelling order and easily identified, would we even be having these present discussions?

There is clearly a need to systematize how various analytical decryption efforts are evaluated in terms of random chance. Ultimately, the single most important question is how should we then understand and interpret these probability results? It's not a simple matter. Hopefully, the SOF will continue to provide us criticisms and insights on very complex analyses.

Mike Gansecki
Longmont, Colorado

Among biographers, Shakespeare doubters like the SOF are a strong minority, growing in strength and number due to a fairly obvious fact: there are no full-fledged biographies of the supposed Bard. Most biographies are of the life-and-works or works-and-times sort, not really biographies. Documentary biographies, like Diana Price's *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*, make clear that authorship by the man from Stratford is extremely unlikely, if not impossible.

The tables turn, however, on a particular strand of doubting groups, which are the advocates of the Tudor Prince theory, when the subject is Queen Elizabeth I.

Hundreds of biographers and myriad histories, novels, films, and tales have addressed the Queen. Only one camp claims that she was the mother of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, also his lover, and the mother of his son who became the Earl of Southampton. Are all the admirers and scholars of Elizabeth, over a period of centuries, missing something? Not just "something," but fame and big bucks? How much academic advancement or money could be gotten for such a discovery? Imagine: the most sordid and notorious case in all of history!

The only thing lacking to make such a case would be proof—evidence that such nefarious acts occurred. That has never been provided, not by any biographer, historian, journalist, Catholic propagandist, PT theory backer or anyone else. Proof, that is factual evidence, does not come from poetry and plays but from documents, like those used to discredit the Shakespearean authorship theory.

Dr. Ernie Rehder, Emeritus professor of Modern Languages, Florida State University

---

In the Fall 2020 *Newsletter* did I read correctly that the membership is now up to 465? The dues are reasonable and the Fellowship is correct in its stance on the author of *Hamlet* and Sonnet 116. And correct on the author of the accepted "Shake-speare" catalog. Books on the subject of Oxford as Shakespeare and YouTube videos supporting the Oxfordian position seem to be very popular. And yet, thousands annually make their hajj to Stratford-on-Avon. We happy few.

Whose 500th birthday will occur first, Edward de Vere's or William of Stratford's? Clearly we have the first birthday advantage on our side, and we shouldn't let that go lightly. The SOF should have a long-term goal of getting worldwide coverage and support on April 12, 2050, a date that should live in infamy among the Stratfordian elite. I won't be there for it, but the SOF must build a growing base that will be there. Let William of Stratford's 500th birthday be known and celebrated as the day of the fake, the day of the straw man, the day of wool merchants and glovemakers, the 500th birthday of a player—anything but the commemoration of a writer's birthday.

Charlton Ogburn's book [*The Mysterious William Shakespeare*] relit the fire in me for this truth. As a thirteen-year-old I read the children's editions of biographies of many famous people, such as Hiram Ulysses Grant, who at age ten had a phrenologist predict that he would be president; or Thomas Edison, who lost hearing in one ear as a lad because of a dolt on a train. I wondered about Shakespeare's boyhood, so I went to my family Funk & Wagnalls encyclopedia. I couldn't believe what I read; there was nothing that made a lick of sense to my thirteen-year-old mind. He magically (and ridiculously and impossibly, I felt) appeared on the scene with no boyhood. Other encyclopedias were weak in that area, too. And so, I've been interested ever since in hearing the truth about the real man.

After Ogburn I have verily read more of that ilk. The new evidence that has arisen consistently points to Edward de Vere. Look at the thousand-pound annuity, or at Henry Wriothesley's letter to the Queen that came to light in 2011 (as interpreted by Hank Whittemore). Look at Richard Roe's book [*The Shakespeare Guide to Italy*], de Vere's annotated Bible as studied by Roger Stritmatter, or the analysis of de Vere's so-called Tin Letters by Bonner Miller Cutting.

Stratfordians stand on the "crutch of coincidence," maintaining that in such a large catalog with so many characters and words there are bound to be some coincidences of people and events. For example, that the Shaksperes of Stratford were glovemakers and Shakespeare mentions gloves more than fifty times—therefore William of Stratford is the author. But the de Vere connection to gloves can also be made. Returning from Venice, de Vere sent the Queen fine Italian gloves which, I've read, became the vogue in her court.

Stratfordians make alterations to their case like an increasingly complex orrery. They used to claim that Shakespeare's descriptions of Italy contained clear errors of geography, thereby proving that he'd never been there. But now that it's clear that the author knew Italy—where ten plays are set—like the back of his hand, they say that he obtained this intimate knowledge from hanging out with sailors in London pubs. (By the way, if you were in Venice and your family name was "Vere," wouldn't you have to visit Verona? One translation of "Verona" means "terrace," another suggests "javelin." But I digress.)

I encourage the SOF to task a panel of retired Scotland Yard detectives, or a national association of police investigators, to approach the case from a professional point of view and cut through the Stratfordian Gordian knot. And please give more than a couple of hours to reach a decision, unlike the panel of US Supreme Court justices in 1987.

We have the 500th birthday advantage. One hundred years have passed since J. Thomas Looney clearly identified the true author, but our society has 465 members and Stratford continues to dominate. How can we be sure that by 2050 our man will have the worldwide credit that he is due? Late is better than never, of course, but by that date we must hold the high ground and the Stratfordians can maintain the flat earth position. Then, in 2064, William of Stratford's 500th birthday will be observed as that of an extremely common person who, in passing, left his wife no less than his second best bed.

Ray Stoll
Fairfax, Virginia

What's the News?

Eagan-Donovan and Stritmatter Receive 2021 Research Grants

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship (SOF) has announced the award of two research grants for 2021. The purpose of the SOF Research Grant Program (RGP) is to support and promote new research about Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford: his biography, his literary life, and the evidence that he is the true author of the Shakespeare canon.

The 2021 recipients are Boston-based filmmaker, writer, and educator Cheryl Eagan-Donovan and Roger Stritmatter, Professor of Humanities at Coppin State University in Baltimore. Both have been honored previously as Oxfordians of the Year, Stritmatter in 2013 and Eagan-Donovan in 2019. The announcement was made by SOF President John Hamill, who chairs the RGP Committee.

Cheryl Eagan-Donovan
Eagan-Donovan was awarded $3,250 to fund her research on "The Lives of the Poets in Late 16th-Century London: Manuscript Circulation and the Workshop Method—Keys to Discovering Edward de Vere's Literary Circle." Her research will focus on the evidence that manuscripts were shared among the writers in Oxford's circle and other contemporary poets and playwrights, and that these writers critiqued one another's work in the workshop method, as indicated by annotations, correspondence, dedications, and prefaces.

Eagan-Donovan states: "I am very grateful to the SOF and honored to receive the award. Building on the work of Steven May, Roger Stritmatter, John Hamill, Alexander Waugh, and other scholars, I plan to visit the British Library, the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, and private libraries including Dulwich in the UK to look for manuscripts and correspondence between select members of Oxford's circle, including Marlowe, Nashe, and Peele. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, my preliminary research will be conducted using online collections."

Eagan-Donovan is a former Trustee of the SOF. Her debut documentary, *All Kindsa Girls* (2006), was screened at film festivals and art house theaters in London, Toronto, and throughout the US. Her acclaimed biographical film on the life of Edward de Vere (Oxford), *Nothing Is Truer Than Truth*, was completed in 2018 and widely released in 2019. It recently obtained a new global distribution deal under the title *Shakespeare: The Man Behind the Name* (see page 7). Eagan-Donovan has served on the boards of Women in Film & Video New England and the Next Door Theater. She has published and lectured on writing, film, and literature, including at Lesley University, Northeastern University, Lasell University, and Grub Street Center for Creative Writing. She spoke at the SOF Centennial Symposium in Washington, DC, in March 2020. At the SOF Online Symposium in October 2020, Eagan-Donovan spoke about her forthcoming book, *Shakespeare Auteur: Creating Authentic Characters for the Screen*.

Roger Stritmatter
Stritmatter was awarded $200 to study and clarify "The Role of Cryptography in Literary and Shakespeare Studies." He will pursue a detailed study of the Charlotte Armstrong solution to Ben Jonson's First Folio cryptogram. Stritmatter notes: "Much of the evidence in support of Oxfordian conclusions is framed in a 'code-

like' context that makes copious use of the large repertoire of 'secret writing' techniques known and practiced in the 16th and 17th centuries. As a movement, we need to continue to explore and debate these possibilities rather than suffer under the absurd legacy of Baconian pseudo-cryptology."

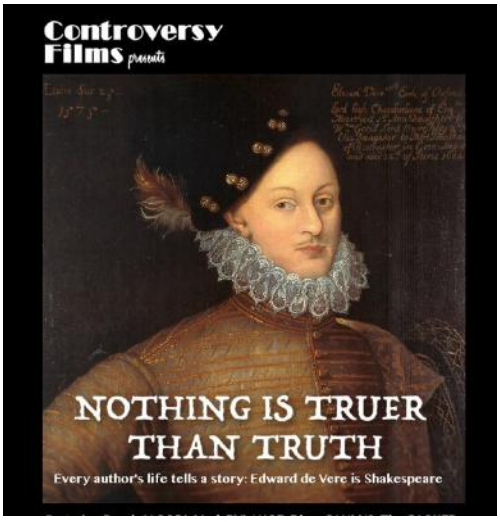
The "solution" that Stritmatter will study is that laid out by Charlotte Armstrong in her 1969 novel, *Seven Seats to the Moon*, in which she found the phrase "Ver had his wit, Ver writ his Booke" embedded in Ben Jonson's "To the Reader" encomium in the 1623 First Folio.

Stritmatter accomplished two historic firsts, as the first person to earn a PhD in a field centrally relevant to Shakespeare studies, and to obtain a tenured university position in such a field, while openly embracing the Oxfordian perspective. He has been a prolific Shakespearean scholar for decades, publishing numerous articles in leading peer-reviewed journals, including *Review of English Studies*, *Shakespeare Yearbook*, *Notes and Queries*, *Critical Survey*, and *Cahiers Élisabéthains*. He is co-author (with Lynne Kositsky) of the highly praised *On the Date, Sources, and Design of Shakespeare's The Tempest* (2013). He currently edits the Brief Chronicles series of scholarly books published by the SOF. His landmark 2001 PhD thesis, "The Marginalia of Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible," explored striking parallels between biblical references in the works of Shakespeare and hundreds of handmarked verses in Oxford's personal copy of the Geneva Bible.

The SOF wishes Eagan-Donovan and Stritmatter the best as they continue their research.

Eagan-Donovan's Oxfordian Film Gets New Global Distribution

Cheryl Eagan-Donovan's acclaimed documentary, *Nothing Is Truer Than Truth*, is set to reach new audiences worldwide—with a new title—as a result of a deal signed last fall with international film and TV distributor NENT Studios UK. Eagan-Donovan, a filmmaker, writer, educator, and former Trustee of the SOF, was honored in 2019 as Oxfordian of the Year. Her film explores evidence that the true author behind the pseudonym "William Shakespeare" was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, focusing largely on Oxford's travels in Europe during 1575–76. It is based on Mark Anderson's biography of Oxford, *"Shakespeare" By Another Name* (2005).



The film will be released by NENT UK under a new title—*Shakespeare: The Man Behind the Name*—drawn from a line spoken by Sir Derek Jacobi. A new 55-minute cut of the 85-minute original version has been prepared. It was presented in October 2020 at MIPCOM, the world's largest annual TV entertainment market. NENT UK, owned by Nordic Entertainment Group, produces and distributes content in genres ranging from documentary to game shows, lifestyle, and drama.

Eagan-Donovan's production company, Controversy Films, reports that the new distribution strategy will focus first on a UK broadcast, followed by outreach to continental Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. The film will be released on VOD and streaming platforms and will be screened at historic venues, museums, and libraries.

The documentary has earned rave reviews. It explores Oxford's formative time as a young adult in Venice, Verona, Padua, and other Italian cities, connecting the works of "Shakespeare" set in those very locations to Oxford's intimate experience of Italian art, theatre, and culture. It also explores the mystery of Oxford's (and Shakespeare's) sexuality. The film features interviews with many renowned Shakespearean scholars and artists, including Sir Derek Jacobi and Sir Mark Rylance (both Honorary Trustees of the SOF).

Nothing Is Truer Than Truth was shown in January 2018 at the San Diego Public Library (among other preview events) and had its major festival premiere in April 2018 at the Independent Film Festival Boston. The final original cut was shown at the SOF Annual Conference in Oakland, California, in October 2018. It was officially released in 2019, under its original title, for wide distribution by Gravitas Ventures and via streaming on Hulu and Amazon Prime. It remains available under that title on DVD and Blu-ray. Eagan-Donovan was a featured speaker at the SOF Centennial Symposium in Washington, DC, in March 2020. At the SOF Online Symposium in October 2020, she spoke about her forthcoming book, *Shakespeare Auteur: Creating Authentic Characters for the Screen*.

From the Director of Podcasts and Community Outreach:

Two years ago, I was asked by Jake Lloyd, founder of Dragon Wagon Radio and producer of the "Don't Quill The Messenger" podcast series sponsored by the SOF, to become the host of the series. As I write this, Jake and I are planning the second anniversary episode; by the time you read this, we will be well on our way to beginning our third year as a growing source of information for new audiences about the Shakespeare Authorship Question and the Oxfordian movement.

Over the past two years, we have received much feedback from listeners about the series from all over the world. In recent months, we've heard from all across the US and from Canada, the UK, Portugal, Sweden, Chile, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Jake reports that we now have listeners in forty-six countries.

In the past year, there have been more than 20,000 downloads of DQTM episodes. Between 800 and 1,000 listeners stream each episode every two weeks, making the podcast one of the most successful outreach programs sponsored by the SOF.

All of this was made possible by inspiration from SOF trustee Julie Sandys Bianchi, who convinced the Board of Trustees to fund the effort in the fall of 2018. Look what has become of her fabulous brainchild!

For the past two years, I have also served under contract as the director of public relations and marketing for SOF. During that time, we built up our media database, promoted our activities and programs, made great strides in our digital media presence, and realized successes such as record numbers at our last in-person conference in Hartford, front-page coverage in newspapers in local markets such as America's premier Shakespeare destination—Ashland, Oregon—and more than thirty different mentions in newspapers in local markets across the nation.

Due to the national pandemic and budget constraints affecting our organization, the Board of Trustees has decided to make an adjustment to our marketing strategy for the coming year. Instead of serving as your Director of PR and Marketing, I am now the Director of Podcasts and Community Outreach. It is indeed a new role that has yet to be fully defined, but I embrace the challenge with the same passion I have always maintained for our mission and our message.

I will continue to serve as director and host of "Don't Quill The Messenger," and the Board has asked me to present proposals in the near future regarding the development of our Speakers Bureau, social media outlets, membership development, and fundraising. This new role, I'm sure, is meant to represent a more clarified mission for me with regard to how donor money is being focused upon these efforts, and I look forward to serving our membership to the best of my ability in this role.

Jake Lloyd and I will be producing twenty-four episodes of the podcast this year, inviting both new and tried-and-true guests to the series to cover a wider variety of topics in all areas of focus and study—even those that may make some people uncomfortable. As Oxfordians, we are no strangers to making people uncomfortable with the questions we ask. If you are a listener of the series—a fellow Quiller—then you know our slogan: "Keep asking questions!"

I will propose to the Board that we seek to inform local markets that our speakers are available for online presentations to schools, civic organizations, libraries, service clubs, and any group of curious minds who want to tune in to a Zoom presentation or personal gathering (when the latter are once again a reality).

I also hope to challenge existing members to help us gather new members to our organization through proposed campaigns and membership drives. I will continue to encourage (as I am doing here and now) our members and donors to support our various community outreach programs, such as the podcast series, Speakers Bureau outreach, membership drives, and more.

As always, your input and feedback is both welcomed and encouraged. If you have an idea you wish to share about a podcast topic, a social media campaign, an outreach effort, or a membership incentive, I want to hear from you! You can reach me at publicity@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org.

If you would like to be a guest on an episode of DQTM, let me know. If you want to earmark a donation to benefit the podcast series or one of our other successful outreach programs, make sure to indicate that with your donation.

Together, we are making strides by leaps and bounds to advance the truth of Shakespeare authorship to greater numbers than "eVere" before. We are reaching new audiences with our message like we never have before in the past 100 years. I'd like to think that J. Thomas Looney would be proud! We can continue this momentum if we all band together to support each and every effort to promote further exploration into Shakespeare authorship on every level.

Together, we can. Together, we will. Together, we will pers-Evere!

eVere Yours,
Steven Sabel, Director of Podcasts and Community Outreach

SAT Holds Online Conference; Most Presentations Available on YouTube

The Shakespearean Authorship Trust (SAT) held an online conference on November 28-29, 2020 (see also the letter from Elisabeth Waugaman on page 3 of this issue). This year's theme was titled "*I all alone beweep my outcast state*— Insiders, Outsiders: Shakespeare and the Court." The conference was open to anyone who paid a small registration fee.

Conducted via Zoom, the event consisted of two two-hour sessions, each with four speakers. Professor Bill Leahy of Brunel University (London) served as host and moderator. Presenters at the November 28 session were: Professor Bernardine Evaristo of Brunel University ("on the nature of outsiderdom/exclusion and conversion to insiderdom"); Professor Jane Kingsley-Smith of Roehampton University ("Shakespeare and Exile"); Julia Cleave, independent scholar and SAT trustee ("*Excellent! I smell a device:* Insider Gossip in Three Shakespeare Plays"); and Alexander Waugh, author, critic and journalist ("Shakespeare the Outcast"). Presenters at the November 29 session were Professor Marjorie Garber of Harvard University ("The Imposter Syndrome"); Dr. Kevin Gilvary, independent scholar, author and SAT trustee ("The Protagonist (of the plays) as an Outsider"); Dr. Barry Clarke, independent scholar and author ("Bacon as Insider; Shakespeare as Outsider"); and Elizabeth Winkler, journalist and critic ("Shakespeare as (Woolf's) Woman: A Recurring Theme"). Also featured were short performances and recitals by actors Sir Derek Jacobi, Sir Mark Rylance, Richard Clifford and Annabel Leventon.

Of the eight presentations, at least six may be found on the SAT's YouTube channel. However, Professor Garber requested that her presentation not be recorded. She did not give a reason for this request. What did she talk about? Professor Roger Stritmatter gives this summary:

> Dr. Garber stated at the outset that she preferred not to speak about any authorship candidates or even about the merits of the authorship question as a topic. She seemed to have a poor understanding of her audience or the purpose of the conference. She recycled the tired argument that authorship doubters are the victims of a "family romance" fantasy, suffering from a mental illness that obliges them to replace the author as paternal authority with a higher, preferably more aristocratic authority —in essence, to deify Shakespeare. Although she thus made extensive use of her own interest in psychoanalytic theory, Garber did not acknowledge the seemingly relevant fact of Freud's persistent and clear expression of Oxfordian conviction, and therefore either apparently had no quarrel with it or preferred to cherry-pick Freud for the convenient bits. She devoted most of her time to discussing the psychoanalytic concept of "imposter syndrome," a disorder involving the belief that a person is undeserving of their achievements and the high esteem in which they are, in fact, generally held. Professor Garber then discussed the appearance of cases of "imposter syndrome" in the plays. How exactly this was meant to apply to the authorship question remained vague in Garber's analysis, leaving open the possibility that Garber is employing her experience as an English professor to diagnose post-Stratfordians with a second syndrome on top of the "family romance" label. There were few questions and no significant discussion. Most participants preferred not to engage what Garber said. Although the question was not addressed, it could be inferred from Professor Garber's line of reasoning that the author himself must have suffered from some early modern variant of the imposter syndrome, that he somehow felt himself be an imposter.

Founded in London in 1922 as the Shakespeare Fellowship (and later known as the Shakespearean Authorship Society), the Shakespearean Authorship Trust is a registered charity that seeks the "advancement of learning with particular reference to the social, political, and literary history of England in the 16th and 17th centuries and the authorship of the literary works that appeared under the name of William Shakespeare." The organization does not advocate for any particular authorship candidate.

Visual from SAT Online Conference, November 2020

More Awards for Robin Phillips's Film

Robin Phillips's new pro-Oxfordian film, *Behind the Name SHAKESPEARE: Power, Lust, Scorn & Scandal*, continues to win awards at film festivals around the world. In this one-woman feature, she appears as "Christina di Marlo."

As reported in the Fall 2020 issue of the *Newsletter*, Phillips completed the film in mid-2020 and began to enter it in film festivals all over the world. As we reported in the last issue, the film had won more than 30 awards by November.

Three months later that total has increased to more than 110 awards in the US, the UK, Venice, Florence, Madrid and Tokyo, among other places. Yvonne Cheal wrote a very positive review in *The De Vere Society Newsletter* ("succeeds in getting a great amount of detail, based on solid research, across to all audience levels. . . . This Robin is no upstart, and has plenty to crow about"). There was also a glowing review from the Venice Film Awards ("an extraordinary one-woman show/documentary").

Phillips became interested in the authorship question after seeing Roland Emmerich's feature film, *Anonymous*, in 2011. She created a one-woman stage show that was staged in the Washington DC area, and presented a filmed version of her show at the SOF Annual Conferences in 2017 and 2018; incorporating suggestions received from several Oxfordians, she spent the next two years working on a new version of it.

Phillips hopes to arrange for broader distribution of her film later this year (including home video sales).

Robin Phillips a/k/a "Christina diMarlo"

Second SOF Online Symposium Set for April 10, 2021

Several Oxfordian scholars will participate in another virtual Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Symposium to be held on Saturday, April 10, 2021. "The Shakespeare Attribution: Information, Misinformation, and Changing Opinions" is scheduled as a four-hour Zoom Webinar (noon to 4 PM EDT) that will be free to the public.

The theme of the spring Symposium is the problematic reception of the authorship challenge by the academy and the public. As Michael Dudley, Community Outreach Librarian at the University of Winnipeg expressed it, "The Shakespeare Authorship Question — the proposition that the plays and poems of Shakespeare have for centuries been attributed to the wrong person — is treated with unique disapprobation in the academy, such that it is almost universally excluded from curricula and scholarly inquiry."

Scheduled speakers include James Warren, 2020 Oxfordian of the Year, whose new book examines the effect that J. Thomas Looney's 1920 book, *"Shakespeare" Identified,* has had over the past hundred years. Michael Dudley will discuss the epistemological damage caused by the reaction of organizations in defense of orthodoxy. Coppin State University Professor Roger Stritmatter will present on the hidden meaning of Ben Jonson's "To the Reader" epigram accompanying the Droeshout engraving in the First Folio.

De Vere Society Honorary President Kevin Gilvary, who edited *Dating Shakespeare's Plays*, will discuss 21st century fictional biographies of William Shakespeare. Julia Cleave, a trustee of the Shakespearean Authorship Trust in the UK, will share revelations of how Shakespeare dared to present Queen Elizabeth in the guise of Titania, Portia, and Olivia, and made sport of a colorful cast of the Queen's suitors.

Symposium co-host Cheryl Eagan-Donovan will lead a discussion on the circulation of manuscripts as it

relates to Edward de Vere's literary circle. Attorney Dorothea Dickerman will deliver a talk, "The First Thing We Do Let's Convince All the Lawyers," highlighting a thoroughly researched trip to northern Italy intended to convince her husband (a Harvard Law School graduate) that William Shakspere could not be the author. A panel of authors of recent and forthcoming Oxfordian publications will also be featured.

Registration for the free SOF Spring Symposium will open in late February. The program schedule, syllabus, and announcements will be posted on the SOF website in the weeks leading up to the event. For further information on the program, contact SOF Conference Committee Chair Earl Showerman at earlees@charter.net.

Will there be an in-person SOF Annual Conference this year? Although we have reserved space at the Ashland (Oregon) Hills Hotel & Suites from September 30 to October 3, 2021, the uncertainty of pandemic restrictions and the absence of a commitment by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to mount productions this fall requires us to delay any such decision. A final determination is expected by May 1. If we do not hold an in-person event, we again expect to have a virtual membership meeting and another online educational symposium.

William Shakespeare Gets Vaccinated

It was widely reported in the media that the first man (and second person) in England outside of clinical trials to receive a vaccine against COVID-19 was named William Shakespeare. The 81-year-old, who lives in Warwickshire, received his first shot on December 8, 2020. "It could make a difference to our lives from now on, couldn't it," he remarked. "It will be a precaution."

The incident sparked a spate of jokes and quips, with references to *The Two Gentlemen of Corona*, *Vacbeth*, and *The Taming of the Flu*.

It was not reported whether anyone was seen standing in the shadows behind Mr. Shakespeare — perhaps an even older gentleman named Edward de Vere?

(Continued from p. 1)

cowardice and having killed Hotspur) Sir John swiftly lies again and again, improvising glib, facile excuses for his bad behavior.

Falstaff views the property and lives of others as targets of opportunity for his capture and use. Sir John constantly consumes (sack, food, lodging, loans, English army conscripts, etc.) but pays for nothing from his own pocket. The parasitic knight's hosts and victims include religious pilgrims, enabling women like Quickly and Tearsheet, his Eastcheap acolytes, England's commoners and royalty.

On the Shrewsbury battlefield Falstaff's callously views his unprepared soldiers as "food for [gun] powder" and bodies to "fill a [grave] pit" (4.2.2434-2436). Fatally dispatching his impressed "ragamuffins," Falstaff abandons them to be "peppered" (5.3.2919-2922).

Of Falstaff's 150 impressed men, 147 die. Sir John even refuses to help Prince Hal in his horseless, weaponless, life-threatened need: Falstaff denies the heir apparent a weapon, jokes, then flees, leaving the unarmed Hal to fend for himself (5.3.2935-2940).

In *1 Henry IV* Falstaff admits to extorting over 300 pounds (4.2.2380-2381) by first targeting higher-class yeomen for impressment, but later freeing them from service if they bribe him. In *2 Henry IV* Sir John corruptly fills his ranks with unsuitable, untrained, unprepared men. If his soldiers survive battle then they will become beggared burdens to English society. His slaughtered battlefield conscripts remain as "shadows" in Falstaff's "muster book" so that he can capture their pay despite their decease (3.2.1985-1986).

Prince Hal, the King and Hotspur are each driven by "honour." But Falstaff ridicules honor (5.1.2753-2767) in his famous catechism.[5] Hal later mourns the tragic aspects of Hotspur's and King Henry's deaths. But Falstaff exults because both deaths are gateways to his own advancement.

Falstaff brags about his predations. In *1 Henry IV* he boasts that stealing is his "vocation" (1.2.210-211). In *2 Henry IV* he leverages his expected court advancement into a 1000-pound loan from Master Shallow, a loan Sir John will never repay. The knight likens himself to Nature: big fish (pike) feed on little fish (3.2.2170-2174).

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Falstaff declares (1.3.363-370) that his prey is not romance, but property —here, the purses of the two husbands whose wives he pursues.[6]

Falstaff: Origins, Topical Allusions and Imagery

Matters concerning the dating and sequencing of, and revisions to, Edward de Vere's Falstaff character and the plays in which he appears have been researched extensively by Ramon Jiménez and Kevin Gilvary; this essay integrates their evidence and conclusions.[7] In his youthful work *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* Vere included a jocular knight that evoked Sir John Oldcastle[8] – a troublesome allusion that likely continued through Vere's initial expansions of *Famous Victories* into three longer *Henry* history plays (*Henry IV* parts 1 and 2, and *Henry V*). But when the two expanded and revised *Henry IV* plays were finally published in quarto (1599 and 1600), Vere had removed that topical Oldcastle allusion and replaced him with a putatively "fictional" knight named Falstaff. As explained below, formidable circumstantial evidence suggests that Vere's final Falstaff character vilified Sir Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Oxford's lifelong archenemy.

Sir John Smythe was an English soldier of fortune, diplomat, military analyst and war veteran.[9] His 1590 book, *Certain Discourses Military,* was quickly deemed subversive and banned. But Smythe preserved an annotated manuscript of his book that remained unpublished until 1964.[10] In *Certain Discourses* Smythe excoriated England's conduct in its failed Lowlands military campaign of the 1580s. To Smythe (6,13) those efforts were "disordered" and "confused." Smythe concluded that English armies must be better trained, disciplined, regularly paid, well armored, adequately armed and otherwise treated fairly and humanely by competent commanders.

In 1585 Queen Elizabeth appointed Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, as Lieutenant General to manage the English armies in the Lowlands. While claiming otherwise, Sir John Smythe's detailed critique attributed England's military failures to Dudley and his poor leadership. Smythe cited many problems: drunkenness, gluttony, carousing, pride, arrogance, graft, theft; poor leadership, preparation, discipline and training; cowardice, dishonor, dicing, carding, inadequate arms and armor, stealing from civilians; discarding sick or wounded soldiers; the beggaring and slaughter of English soldiers (12-35; 117). Do those behaviors sound familiar? Vere's two *Henry IV* plays meticulously relaunch these express failures and features of Robert Dudley's command, as Smythe set fourth in *Certain Discourses*, in the character of Sir John Falstaff.[11]

Smythe (42-43) also mourned the death of Sir Philip Sidney in the Lowlands. Comparing Smythe's Lowlands critique with the reported facts of Sir Philip's fatal battle wound, it follows that his demise resulted from three causes: Sidney's lack of military experience and training; his incomplete battlefield armor; and poor tactical oversight by General Robert Dudley, who, like his nephew Philip, lacked military experience.[12]

Imagery in *1 Henry IV* reinforces a Falstaff/Dudley-Elizabeth connection. Professor Leah Marcus[13] recognizes that Falstaff's erudite imagery (1.2.134-138) dates Falstaff's thefts to Queen Elizabeth's reign. Falstaff claims to be one of:

> *Diana*'s foresters ... men of *good government*, being governed ... by our noble and *chaste mistress* the *moon*, *under whose countenance we steal*. (emphases added)

Diana. Good government. Chastity. Moon. Theft. To what might Vere have alluded with this rich, topical imagery eruption that evoked Queen Elizabeth and ended in theft? Falstaff's Machiavellian capture of others' purses and property echoes the wardship raid of Oxford's estate by Robert Dudley.[14] Dudley's early harvests of young Edward's properties happened under William Cecil's corrupt oversight of Elizabeth's Court of Wards, in concert with the 16th Earl's will.[15] Mirroring Falstaff's allusive self-identification as the Queen's agent, Robert Dudley became the Queen's agent both in Vere's wardship and her Lowlands armies.

Smythe cites Lowlands military "vice" four times in two pages (27-28). This repeated Vice theme may have inspired Vere to style and brand Falstaff as the exemplar of Dudley's military disorder, misrule and personal Vice.

Smythe's concluding paragraph (120) now reads as a remarkable indictment of both Dudley and Falstaff, deriding those Englishmen of war who are guilty of

> [N]eglecting and [disregarding] all *true honor* and *discipline* military, [practicing] a most shameful and detestable art and discipline of *carousing* and *drunkenness*, turning all matters military to their own *profit and gain*, *neglecting to love* and to win the love of *their soldiers* under their governments and charges, making in a manner *no [account] of them nor of their lives*. In such sort as by their *evil* conduction, *starving and consuming* of great numbers and *many thousands of our most brave English people*, as also by their *infinite* and other *disorders*, they have made *a far greater war upon the crown and realm* of England and English nation than anyways upon the enemies of our country. [Emphases added]

Just as Smythe targeted Dudley with his scathing critique, Vere targeted Dudley with his Falstaff character. Lord Oxford forever resurrected in Falstaff what

Elizabeth's operatives had censored about Robert Dudley.

Conclusion

In his revised "fictional" knight Falstaff, Edward de Vere embedded a searing, masked rebuke of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. That topical allusion drew upon (1) more than two dozen detailed criticisms of Leicester in Sir John Smythe's banned 1590 tome on England's Lowlands military failures; and (2) Dudley's early plunder of Lord Oxford's estate that was enabled by Elizabeth's Court of Wards graft and abuse.

Oxford leaves abundant textual evidence that Falstaff is a dangerous, dissembling villain. Like Richard Duke of Gloucester (quoted above from *3 Henry VI*), Falstaff masks his murder and mayhem with smiles. Falstaff's evil essence is often obscured these days by staging choices and strategic text cuts by directors, dramaturgs and actors who reshape the knight into a jolly, prescient, Bacchanalian, amusing senior citizen.[16] Though such character scrubbing entertains audiences, it materially distorts the fully explicated, Vice-driven character that Lord Oxford masterfully crafted.[17]

Harold Bloom (*Invention*, 284) credits Falstaff with "more of Shakespeare's own genius than any other character save Hamlet." By accident, the professor is partially correct. When we unmask and correctly identify the author of the Shakespeare canon we uncover long censored Elizabethan truths and the dark, revenging genius of Edward de Vere.

[Earnest Moncrieff (a pseudonym) is a recovering economist who sought Truth after hearing Charles Beauclerk on his global tour a score and seven years ago. He has seen Vere's entire play canon many times over. In his third published Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship essay, Moncrieff remains partial to cucumber sandwiches and to Vere's many historical-comical-tragical-revenges that pierce the Dudley-Sidney-Herbert circle.]

Endnotes

1. *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, Vol. 4, 357. Each adjective and phrase is expressly that of Samuel Johnson, with quotation marks omitted.
2. Hazlitt (*Characters of Shakespear's Plays* [1817], Kindle version at 112-120) is ambivalent about Prince Hal, but lavishly praises Falstaff. Professor Jonathan Bate (*Genius of Shakespeare,* 1997 paperback) sees in Falstaff the "irrepressible forces of life itself – wit, companionship, thirst" (204-205) and language "richer in metaphor and invention than the verse of any of the plays' noble speakers" (209). Professor Harold Bloom in his S*hakespeare: Invention of the Human* (2008, chapter 17) sees Falstaff (284) as "the true and perfect image of life itself."
3. Act, scene and line numbers are from *opensourceshakespeare.com*.
4. Scholars who recognize the integral, destructive Vice and misrule features of Falstaff include E.E. Stolle, J.D. Wilson, E.M.W. Tillyard and Lily Campbell.
5. Falstaff's bitter, dismissive speech on "honour" attracted many 20th century professors and generations of their students thereafter. But Lord Oxford's canonic stance on English honor, order and duty echoed those of Hotspur and Hal —emphatically contrary to Falstaff's.
6. Over a century of performances, broadcasts and recordings of Giuseppe Verdi's 1893 comic opera *Falstaff* (an adaptation based mainly on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) have presented to millions of global auditors a benign, buffoon knight who lacks malevolence. Philip Johnson, in Kevin Gilvary's *Dating Shakespeare's Plays* (2011), concludes (65-74) that Vere could have written *Merry Wives* before his two *Henry IV* plays.
7. See Ramon Jiménez, *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship* (2019), chapter I. Vere's earliest expansions of his youthful prose *Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (c.1563) featured John Oldcastle as a braggart knight. Vere's transitional *Henry IV* texts for the Queen's Men did not survive on paper, perhaps because of the topical Oldcastle problem. Events possibly causing Vere to replace "Oldcastle" with Falstaff include (i) Robert Cecil's marrying an Oldcastle descendant in 1589 and (ii) Lord Brooke, another Oldcastle descendant, becoming Elizabeth's Lord Chamberlain in 1596. See also Gilvary (223-240).
8. Edward de Vere's original choice of Sir John Oldcastle is traceable to Edward's grandfather's patronage of John Bale, whose "adulatory" biography of Oldcastle was published in 1544 (Jiménez, 48). Bale also authored *Kynge Johan*, an early English history play reportedly staged in 1561 for Queen Elizabeth by Edward's father, the 16th Earl of Oxford, shortly before his death (Jiménez, 220).
9. Lord Oxford shared several attributes with Sir John Smythe. Both were volatile, eccentric and always in debt. Both clashed with Queen Elizabeth, William Cecil, Robert Dudley and Howard family members. In *"Shakespeare" by Another Name* Mark Anderson (2005) shows evidence (109-110) that Vere and Smythe crossed paths. See Gilvary (238) for Smythe's animus with Essex, another Vere enemy.

10. Sir John Smythe, *Certain Discourses Military*, ed. J.R. Hale, Cornell University Press (1964). Folger Shakespeare editor Hale cites Smythe's annotated 1590 manuscript as "the most original, practical, serious, cultivated work on military science yet written by an Englishman."
11. Smythe criticized Leicester's battlefield leadership team for "leaving their soldiers to slaughter, to save themselves rather with the force of their heels" and capturing "gain and profit by the dead pays of their soldiers slain" (20). Falstaff on the battlefield does all of this. Smythe (24) also criticized Dudley's transport and deposit of "great numbers" of "sick and starved" English soldiers to Kent and Essex, where less than one "fortieth" survived, approximating the two-percent survival rate that Vere gave to Falstaff's "peppered" soldiers at Shrewsbury.
12. Poor decisions compounded. Based on a "hasty plan" for a bad weather attack on an enemy supply convoy bound for the "notoriously well fortified" Zutphen, Philip Sidney and 200 other English nobles were "wrongly positioned" and directly faced 2,200 enemy musketeers. Due to vanity, fashion or carelessness Sidney failed to wear the thigh armor that could have mitigated his fatal wound. See Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Courtier Poet* (1991), at 292-295. Philip Sidney thus ironically was "food for [gun] powder" (*1 Henry IV* 4.2.2434-2436) under Robert Dudley's Lowlands leadership.
13. Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare* (1988), 94.
14. Nina Green, "Fall of the House of Oxford," *Brief Chronicles* I (2009), 41-95. See also Nina Green's *Leicester's Commonwealth* scholarship on pervasive rumors of Dudley's nefarious behaviors and English property seizures http://ww.oxford-shakespeare.com/oxfordsbiography/leicester.html
15. Bonner Miller Cutting, "Evermore in Subjection: Wardship in 16th Century England," *Necessary Mischief* (2018), 105-118.
16. The 1960 BBC television series *An Age of Kings* gives a rare rendition of Falstaff that fairly shows his villainy. Available on DVD, this black-and-white series (adapting eight War of the Roses plays) features several brilliant portrayals, including one by a young Sean Connery as a stuttering, heroic Hotspur and one by Judi Dench as Kate in *Henry V.*
17. In these *Henry IV* history plays Falstaff becomes a masterful mixed-genre character: variously he is vice personified, a villain causing and becoming *tragedy,* a *comedic* clown, and a savage *allusion* to Vere's political rival Robert Dudley. Earl Showerman, in *Brief Chronicles* VI (2015, at 107-136) cites how scholars match Falstaff's archetype with the Old Comedy template of Greek playwright Aristophanes, who often ridiculed political vice, corruption, lying, greed and gluttony (e.g., in *The Knights*). See also Bruce Johnston, "What Role Did the Herbert Family Play in the Shakespeare Cover-Up?" *The Oxfordian* 21 (2019, at 65-94), for other instances of Vere's literary rebukes to Sir Robert Dudley.

In Memoriam: Peter Kline (1936-2020)

Distinguished Oxfordian Peter Kline died on December 14, 2020. Born in Madison, Wisconsin, he grew up in Washington, DC. He earned a BA from Amherst College and an MA from Catholic University. While a high school student, he founded the Lyric Theater Company of Washington.

Kline began his teaching career at the Maret School in Washington, and later taught at the Thornton Friends School and Sidwell Friends School. He introduced his students to Shakespeare in the classroom and in school plays. One of his students at the Maret School was the son of David Lloyd Kreeger. The elder Kreeger became persuaded of the merits of the Oxfordian theory of authorship, which eventually led Kreeger to organize the famous moot court authorship that took place in 1987 before a panel of three US Supreme Court Justices at American University in 1987.

Kline wrote more than fifteen books, including *Diary of a Play Production* and *Why Students Can't Think*. He is survived by his wife, Syril Levin Kline (author of *Shakespeare's Changeling: A Controversial Literary Historical Novel* [2019]), three daughters from a previous marriage, two stepsons, a dozen grandchildren and several nieces and nephews.

In Memoriam: C. Richard "Dick" Desper (1937-2020)

Longtime Oxfordian Clyde Richard "Dick" Desper, 83, passed away peacefully on Thursday, December 17, 2020.

Dick Desper was born in Greenwood, Arkansas, on December 14, 1937, the youngest of seven children. Raised in Taylorville, Illinois, he excelled at math and science from an early age. He earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a PhD in chemistry from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. While working on his doctorate degree, he met fellow chemistry student Beatrice Smith. They soon married and had five children. He worked for many years as a civilian employee of the United States Army in the field of polymer science.

After his divorce from Beatrice Smith, Dick married Laura Taylor in 1988. Following his retirement from the Army, Dick and Laura joined a local real estate company, where they enjoyed working together as part of the sales team. He was a longtime member of the Acton (Massachusetts) Congregational Church, where he found purpose in many volunteering opportunities.

In 1989, after watching "The Shakespeare Mystery" on PBS's *Frontline*, Dick became interested in the Shakespeare Authorship Question. He wrote an Oxfordian-themed play, *Star-Crossed Lovers*, which was staged in the Boston area in April 1993. He wrote about his effort in the Fall 1993 issue of the *Newsletter*. Never having written a play before, he first consulted Lajos Egri's book, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. He decided to focus on events in Oxford's life between 1574 and 1582, and to portray his central character "as a flawed personality, with the best and the worst of all of us in him; one striving for growth, one driven towards growth by a major aspect of his personality, his o'erweening perfectionism, and one driven to create, to the point of obsession, by the overpowering God-given genius of his abilities. And one capable of great ineptitude in his personal relationships."

Bill Boyle recalled first meeting Dick Desper at a Boston area Oxfordian dinner in the early 1990s. "His articles on some of the more obscure aspects of the Oxfordian thesis remain important and insightful to this day," Boyle noted, citing "Allusions to Edmund Campion in *Twelfth Night*" (*Elizabethan Review* vol. 3 [1995]); "We must speak by the card of equivocation will undo us: Oxford, Campion, and the Howard-Arundel Accusations of 1580-81" (*The Oxfordian* IV [2001]); "Stars Or Suns: the portrayal of the earls of Oxford in Elizabethan drama" (*Shakespeare Matters* Summer 2006); "Virtue rewarded, the premise of *The Reign of King Edward III*" (*Newsletter* Summer 2001).

"One special memory," Boyle wrote, "was our car trip in 1999 to western Massachusetts for the Hampshire Shakespeare Company's production of *Thomas of Woodstock* (a play now considered by some to be a prequel to *Richard II*), performed outdoors with a real horse used in in a scene where, if I remember correctly, Woodstock winds up talking with the horse.

"During our drive back to Boston we both agreed that the play was an example of Shakespearean (i.e., Oxfordian) juvenilia, and that Nimble the clown felt so Shakespearean, most likely being a self-portrait of a youthful, playful Oxford. We marveled at how something so obscure for mainstream scholars could become so clear through the prism of the Oxfordian thesis. And how it took a stage production to bring it to life."

Dick Desper is survived by his second wife, Laura, five children, three stepchildren, four grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Research Grant Report

by Eddi Jolly

[In 2020 Emma "Eddi" Jolly received a research grant from the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship for research in Public Record Offices and libraries in England to search for evidence on or about Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, in particular trying to locate the so-called "Flemingii" manuscript connected with Oxford. Here is her preliminary report.]

While research this year has been substantially thwarted by the COVID coronavirus, two areas are complete enough for a report. The first is brief; it considers the name written in the margin of a copy of Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essais*, while the second enlarges upon our knowledge of Abraham Fleming, cleric, translator, editor, poet and writer.

1. Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essais*

The name "Willm Shakspere" is found written in a copy of Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essais*; the book is dated 1603 and was purchased by the British Museum for 100 pounds in 1838. There is no agreement on whether the name was written by William Shakspere of Stratford, but the general absence of reference to it as "evidence" by orthodox scholars would suggest that at best it is seen as flimsy proof of Shakspere having actually written it.

Figure 1[1] shows a facsimile of one of the three signatures on Shakspere's will and Figure 2 the writing in Florio's translation. We might note that the handwriting is secretary in style rather than italic; that the surname in Florio's translation is close to the spelling most frequently found in Shakspere's signatures; that the initial *W* is written with a marked flourish that is different from those of the six generally accepted signatures; that the flourish above the *m* of the forename is not the same as the line above on the signature on the will. The *h* is typical of the secretary hand in each. The *m* of *William* points up at the end in the will signature; it does not — it almost curls back under — in the Florio signature. The *k* is more clearly written in the name in Florio's translation. The latter is arguably more fluently written than any of the alleged Shakspere signatures.

While I think it is important to recognize that, although today we think it important to have matching signatures (or at least it was when we wrote checks), there is nothing to suggest that it was thought particularly important in the early seventeenth century.

Figure 1. One of three signatures on Shakspere's will, 1616.

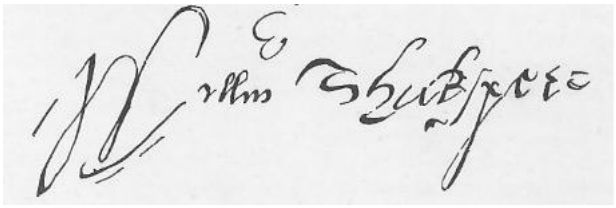


Figure 2. The "signature" found in Florio's translation of Montaigne's essays, 1603.

Think of Oxford's and Henslowe's different spellings of their own surnames. Nevertheless, it is easy to see why the name written in Florio's translation is *not* used as proof of Shakspere's ownership of the volume, even though Montaigne is suggested as a Shakespeare source by some commentators.

1. Abraham Fleming

Alan Nelson mentions Abraham (I use the first name, to distinguish between Abraham and his older brother Samuel) as one of Oxford's servants and/or protégés,[2] and as a "superstitious alarmist," part of a "credulous crew" headed by Oxford[3]. Nelson also informs us that Abraham dedicated his translation of Niels Hemmingsen's *The Epistle…* to Anne,[4] and Nelson alludes to Abraham's *A Bright Burning Beacon* (1580), describing the earthquake of 1580.[5]

But a little investigation shows us that Abraham was a cleric, translator, poet, writer, indexer and editor and worked with, or for, or was sponsored or praised by, for instance, William Cecil, Sir Thomas Smith, Roger Ascham, Alexander Nowell, Arthur Golding and Richard Mulcaster (headmaster of London's prestigious Merchant Taylor School). In other words, Abraham was quite a significant Elizabethan.

Early years

Samuel was born in 1548, and Abraham in 1552 (there is some uncertainty about this because he is recorded as aged about fifty-six when he died in 1607). He was probably born in Holborn; they were Londoners. They both knew Latin and Greek well; Samuel is known to have attended Eton, before going to Kings, Cambridge,

in 1565. Abraham also learned French, as his later works show. He went to Peterhouse, Cambridge, in November 1570, returning to London in about 1576-77; he would not graduate until 1581 or 1582, possibly for financial reasons; he had worked at Peterhouse Buttery while a student.[6] It is interesting to note that by 1576 his brother Samuel was tutor to Sir John Harrington, the Queen's godson.

Early books

In her unpublished PhD thesis Clare Painting Stubbs estimates that Abraham probably had seventy-three publications to his name.[7] An early book was *Of Englishe Dogges* (1576), a translation of Caius's *De Canibus Britannicus* (1570), dedicated to Abraham's college master Dr. Andrew Perne. Abraham translated Virgil's *Bucolics*, with his own *Bucoliks* in 1575; he also translated Cicero, more Virgil, and the Epistles of St. Paul. The inventory of Perne's library included further titles transcribed or translated by Abraham, including copies of Roger Ascham's letters, Isocrates, Pliny, Peter Martyr, John Calvin and Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester. The books were varied; Abraham was not without humour, as *A Paradoxe prouing by reason that baldnesse is better than bushie haire* (1579) demonstrates.[8] This may have been because he himself seems to have had a receding hairline in his twenties.[9] By the time he actually graduated (probably 5 April 1582) he was rather busy in London, since seventeen books written or augmented by him were published in the months prior to graduation.

Religion in the family

Samuel became the pluralist rector of Ely, Cottenham and Bottesford, and was chaplain to four successive earls of Rutland. Abraham was ordained in 1588, working in Deptford and then St. Pancras, Soper Lane; he was a licensed preacher. He delivered eight of his sermons at Paul's Cross, a pulpit apparently reserved for influential clergymen.[10] Their sister, Hester, also married a clergyman, one Thomas Davenport or Damport; at his death in 1618 she became housekeeper to Samuel. When Samuel died, Hester married his curate, John Knowles, a short marriage, for she died in 1622.[11]

Holinshed's *Chronicles*

One measure of Abraham's achievements is his involvement in Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

It was a little surprising to find on a visit to the British Library that one copy of Holinshed's *Chronicles* was not catalogued under "Holinshed," but rather under Abraham Fleming. A closer look reveals how Abraham is connected with this major source for Shakespeare's history plays.

It seems that Fleming was not involved in the first edition of the *Chronicles*, although he does appear within its pages. It is an entirely different matter when we come to the second edition, of 1587. Holinshed himself had died in 1580, but the propaganda value of a book presenting the best of Britain's achievements was recognized by the Privy Council, which sponsored its publication. By the time the second edition was finished it was not so much Holinshed's as Fleming's *Chronicles*. It was printed on larger pages; 200 woodcut illustrations had been removed, and the content nearly doubled (an extra 1.5 million words). Abraham contributed throughout. He worked closely with the Privy Council, especially when it came to excisions and major changes concerning, for example, Mary Queen of Scots, executed just after the first run of the second edition came out. Abraham checked references and created the indexes. He also took a complete copy from the first run and went through it marking it for corrections.

In his task he was working alongside other famous names, like John Stow and John Hooker. His own contributions can be seen with either his full name, or "Abr. Fl" or "A.F." next to them. Furthermore, his contemporaries also knew that Abraham was collecting manuscript sources to help him write sections of Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Newton handed Fleming a copy of the speech made by Queen Elizabeth in Cambridge in 1564. This had been "lieng among my [Newton's] papers these twentie yeares and more, I thought it good now to send it to you [Fleming], that if anie occasion be fitlie offered in the discourse of hir highnesse reigne, you maie (if you please) insert it."[12] This and other details of the sort show Abraham was collecting manuscripts, so the list Francis Peck had of manuscripts which had been in Abraham's possession at some point is easily explained.

A number of twentieth century investigations have confirmed Abraham Fleming's very significant role in the production of *Chronicles*.[13]

A literary career, and a church career

Abraham was approached as early as 1576 by writers who wanted him to augment their work, Barnabe Googe and George Whetstone among them. Indeed, the range of subjects and tasks Abraham took on were varied. Two of Martin Frobisher's books on his voyages had Abraham's verses in them. A Protestant, he wrote three godly devotional texts and several other religious books. He was involved in editing a dictionary in 1580 and brought out a special Latin English one for children: *A shorte*

dictionarie in Latine and English, verie profitable for yong beginners… newlie done by Abraham Fleming…. It had several editions: 1584, 1586, 1594, 1599. It was not his only book to be republished. He was also associated with Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* in 1584; Scot listed his sources, which included "Gnimelf Mahabra," Abraham Fleming spelled backwards (he also liked acrostics).

Despite fourteen years of success in the literary field, after his ordination at Peterborough in 1588 Abraham became chaplain to Lord Howard of Effingham and pursued his career in the church, which was where his heart lay.

In 1607, perhaps as early as June, Abraham went to visit his brother in Bottesford. He died there on 18 September. Oddly, he didn't leave a will. But over a century later Francis Peck had accumulated many manuscripts which were either in Abraham's hand or had come into his possession. Where they were in the intervening years, and what happened to some of the ones Peck listed but which were not published, is not known.

He was somewhat more than a "servant or protégé" and more than a "superstitious alarmist." His was a significant life.[14]

Endnotes

1. Taken from *The Henry Irving Shakespeare*, ed. Henry Irving and Frank Marshall, 8 vols. (London: Blackie & Son, Limited, 1898), vol 1, p. lxxx. A footnote on p. xxxvi also states that "The words 'Wllm Shakspeare hundred and twenty poundes' are written in on a paper found in the original binding of a copy of North's Plutarch, 1603, now in the Boston (USA) Public Library… see 'Bulletin of the Boston Public Library, vol. 8 no. 4."
2. Alan Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 223.
3. Ibid., 225.
4. Ibid., 239.
5. Ibid., 243.
6. https://repository.royalholloway.ac.uk/file/89fa6719-8bde-2470-3a26-e850544e284e/9/Painting_Stubbs_PhD_Dec_2011.pdf (accessed 1 September 2020). This is Clare Elizabeth Painting Stubbs's unpublished PhD dissertation; it is well worth reading for the level of detail given about Abraham. Most of the information in this report comes from it. Some page references are given, but the information is drawn widely from the thesis, esp. pp. 20-22.
7. Ibid., 19.
8. Ibid., 23-25.
9. Ibid., 27.
10. Ibid., 11.
11. Ibid., 27. One might also note that the three siblings seem to have been quite close.
12. Ibid., 99. In W.E. Miller, "Samuel Fleming, Elizabethan clergyman," *University of Pennsylvania Library Chronicle* Vol. XXV (1959), 93.
13. Ibid., 91ff.
14. Apart from Clare Painting Stubbs's thesis there are a number of articles about Abraham:
    - Sarah C. Dodson, "Abraham Fleming writer and editor,"*University of Texas Studies in English* vol. 34 (1955), 51-66.
    - William E. Miller, "Abraham Fleming: Editor of Shakespeare's Holinshed," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 1 (1959-60), 89-100.
    - Elizabeth Story Donno, "Abraham Fleming: a learned corrector in 1586-87," *Studies in Bibliography* vol. 42 (1989), 200-211.
    - Cyndia Susan Clegg, "Abraham Fleming," ODNB vol. 20 (2004), 31-33.
    - William E. Miller, "Abraham Fleming, Elizabethan Man of letters: a biographical and critical study" (unpublished: University of Pennsylvania, 1957).

Bardolatry and Oxford's Literary Reputation in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

by Peter W. Dickson

[Note: This is an expanded version of Peter Dickson's article, "Oxford's Literary Reputation in the 17th and 18th Centuries," originally published in the Fall 1998 issue of the *Newsletter.*]

The following essay provides additional documentation and analysis regarding the emergence of skepticism about the Stratfordian Tradition among some prominent British scholars in the early 1800s who had concluded that George Steevens and Edmund Malone had failed to offer a credible narrative of the alleged Bard from Stratford-upon-Avon. Furthermore, their searing critiques paved the path for others in the 1830s to advance more radical challenges to the Orthodoxy, such as English Catholics who insisted that the Bard had to have been a secret Roman Catholic, and one anonymous gentleman (perhaps to counter such audacious claims) who made an equally audacious and implausible assertion that "William Shakespeare" was a pen name for Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe was accused of being an atheist, which raises the question of whether his possible rejection of Christianity was factor in his death by assassination in May 1593.

Biographical information concerning the alleged Bard from Warwickshire available in print in the seventeenth century existed only in brief items by Thomas Fuller in 1662 and Gerard Langbein in 1691. John Aubrey had prepared a similar short account concerning Shakespeare in the late 1600s, but his notations did not appear in print until the publication of his book *Brief Lives* in 1813. Fuller and Langbein cited stories from persons who claimed to have known the alleged Bard and mixed them in with not a little speculation, such as Langbein concluding that, based on the dramas, the author had to have known French and Italian as well as Latin. Especially in view of Shakespeare's widespread fame, what was offered as biography was woefully inadequate even by the standards of the time. But that was all that was evidently available in print.[1]

Prior to 1700, in the public mind the name "Shakespeare" was almost exclusively associated with the works as found in the four editions of the massive folio containing his plays. In his critical edition of the Shakespeare works in 1709, Nicholas Rowe added more biographical detail or claims (many of them questionable), well beyond what had been asserted by Fuller and Langbein.

The subsequent veneration of Shakespeare — "Bardolatry" — was an eighteenth-century phenomenon. In *Shakespeare in Fact* (1994) the late Irvin Matus criticized those scholars who had dated the emergence of this cult as a consequence of David Garrick's sponsorship of the Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769. Matus cited the town's earlier and active interest in its famous son when a troupe of actors performed *Othello* on September 9, 1746, with the proceeds used to repair the bust of Shakespeare in Holy Trinity Church.[2] However, despite devoting an entire chapter in his book entitled "The Bard Before Bardolatry," Matus overlooked how this cult was promoted even earlier in London in connection with the Drury Lane Theater under the leadership of Colley Cibber (1671-1757) and his son, Theophilus, in the 1720s. This was even before Garrick became an actor in 1741 and co-manager of this same theater in 1747.[3]

The crucial fact is that the appearance of Rowe's edition of Shakespeare's works in 1709 was followed almost immediately by the reopening of the old Theater Royal (renamed The Drury Lane Theater) in 1710-11 under Colley Cibber's leadership. Cibber was an actor and dramatist in his own right; he was given the title of poet laureate in 1730, although prominent literary figures such as Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson and Alexander Pope ridiculed his selection as unwarranted. In any case, when Garrick joined the Drury Lane Theater in the 1740s, Bardolatry was well underway, at least in London. For their part, the people of Stratford town remained relatively passive, even after the Jubilee in 1769, and did not build and dedicate a local theater to their favorite son until 1870.

It is not mere coincidence that Theophilus Cibber (1703-1758), in addition to being an actor and playwright like his father, assumed a major role with regard to the promotion of Bardolatry. He published *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1753, which drew heavily on what Rowe had published more than forty years earlier.[4] Cibber did add some noteworthy information, such as that the profits from a performance of *Julius Caesar* at the Drury Lane Theater on April 28, 1738, were used to finance the Shakespeare monument in Westminster Abbey.

It is highly revealing that Cibber conspicuously made no mention of Edward de Vere, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, in sharp contrast (as we shall observe in more

detail below) to his prominence in the lists of well-known Elizabethan-era literary figures assembled by William Webbe (1586), George Puttenham (1589), Frances Meres (1598) and Henry Peacham (1622). Cibber listed and explored the lives of more than twenty-five Elizabethan poets, but did not include Oxford.

This exclusion seems to have been deliberate, although the similar absences of Dyer and Paget from the list may explain Cibber's selections, because their works, like those of Oxford, had been largely lost or were not published under their names. In any case, Oxford became a non-person, at least to those who were totally dependent on reading Cibber's book in 1753.

The Survival of Oxford's Literary Reputation

Although awareness of Oxford's life as a prominent literary figure never died out completely, there has been a perception that, after Francis Meres's inclusion of Oxford in his lists of famous poets and dramatists in *Palladis Tamia* (1598), such awareness largely disappeared until Alexander B. Grosart collected and published some of Oxford's poems in 1872.

This perception is inaccurate because one can reconstruct a trail of interconnected historical references to Oxford as a significant literary figure throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Arguably the most significant among these posthumous references to Oxford is the one made by Henry Peacham. In *The Complete Gentleman*, first published in 1622, Peacham included Oxford (but not Shakespeare) in the list of the greatest deceased literary figures who had flourished during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Three subsequent editions of *The Complete Gentleman* in 1627, 1634 and 1661 solidified its rank among the bestselling works in England of the seventeenth century.

Like George Puttenham's list in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), Peacham's list placed Oxford first. Peacham's omission of the name of "William Shakespeare" from his list is, to say the least, glaring; it suggests that he knew, or strongly suspected, that it was a pen name. It is virtually certain that the omission was deliberate because Peacham was still preparing his manuscript in the spring of 1622, by which time the collection of plays for the First Folio was already well underway in the shops of Edward Blount and William Aspley, which were only a few feet from the shop of Peacham's publisher (Thomas Constable) in Paul's Crossyard.[5] Constable did not register *The Complete Gentleman* for publication until July 3, 1622; by that time neither Constable nor Peacham could have been totally ignorant of the enormous effort behind the Folio project.

Moreover, Peacham's omission of "Shakespeare" cannot be dismissed as an innocent oversight in 1622, because all the subsequent editions of *The Complete Gentleman* continued to omit the increasingly famous name. Peacham lived until 1643. Despite having seen the publications of the First Folio in 1623 and the Second Folio in 1632, he failed to include the name "William Shakespeare" in his list for the later editions of *The Complete Gentleman* in 1627 and 1634 (both of which appeared during Peacham's lifetime). Peacham's persistent and defiant refusal to acknowledge "William Shakespeare" as a name for a real flesh and blood person behind famous literary works from the time of Queen Elizabeth makes no sense unless he was convinced it was a pseudonym — presumably used by one of the writers he did include in his list, which begins with the Earl of Oxford.

Between Peacham's original list in 1622 and Grosart's publication of some of Oxford's poems in 1872, six major commentators noted Oxford as a literary figure. Besides Peacham, the only one from the seventeenth century was Anthony Wood (1632-1690), who published the *Athenae Oxonienses* and *Fasti Oxonienses* in 1675. In these two compendia listing all the great writers educated at Oxford University, Wood reveals that his knowledge of Oxford as a famous court poet comes from his poems as they appeared in Richard Edwards's *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (published in 1576, 1578, and eight more times thereafter). Wood describes Oxford as "an excellent poet and Comedian as several matters of his composition, which were made public, did shew, which I presume are now lost or worn out."[6] Nonetheless, Wood closes with a list of the titles of several of Oxford's poems which appeared in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576).

Born in 1632, Wood was, in some fundamental sense, the preserver of a literary reputation for Oxford to replace that which had become obscure or hidden and about which Peacham took no steps to disclose in 1622. Wood's role may have been unintentional because there is no reason to believe, and certainly no way to know for certain, if Wood privately knew or suspected that Oxford might have made a contribution to the Shakespearean canon.

Wood's formative years coincided with the rise of Puritanism, the English Civil War and the Commonwealth. This period was essentially the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, during which time the aura of Shakespeare and the entire literary-theatrical

aura of Shakespeare and the entire literary-theatrical heritage of the Elizabethan era went into steep decline. There was no reversal of this situation until the republication of Shakespeare's plays in the Third Folio in 1663, which followed shortly after the last edition of Peacham's *The Complete Gentleman* in 1661. By that time Wood was already in his early thirties.

As I noted, during these same decades there was little published biographical information of any consequence available to the general public concerning the alleged Stratfordian Bard. At the time of the Stuart Restoration and for a few more decades, knowledge concerning "William Shakespeare" essentially was limited to what had been written and published under this name and found in surviving copies of old quartos printed before the English Civil War, or in the several editions of the Folio which were owned by persons or families fortunate enough to have been able to afford such expensive and massive volumes.

Thus, no matter who Shakespeare may have been, prior to the eighteenth century there was hardly any solid factual foundation for a meaningful biographical narrative from which readers could build up an image in their minds of the real person behind the name. (Unless perhaps they had bothered to visit Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon to see the wall memorial with its bust high above an anonymous tomb, inscribed with only a crude doggerel, that everyone incredulously was expected to accept as the final resting place of England's greatest literary genius.)

Meanwhile, as far as Oxford being a high-ranking and well-known Earl, two eighteenth-century genealogists repeated almost verbatim Wood's observations about his literary talent, and that he was the first to introduce embroidered gloves and perfumes from Italy that impressed Queen Elizabeth. These experts on the British Peerage were Arthur Collins (1682?-1760) and Samuel Egerton Brydges (1763-1837). Collins's remarks concerning Oxford can be found on page 265 of his *Historical Recollection of the Noble Families of Cavendish, Hollis, Vere, Harley and Ogle* (1752).[7]

A prominent publisher and expert on Elizabethan literature and poetry, Brydges, in his *Memoirs of the Peers of England during the Reign of King James the First* (1802), made four terse but emphatic references to "Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, the poet."[8]

In a prior work, *Reflections on the late augmentation of the English Peerage* (1798), Brydges offers a detailed biographical sketch of Oxford which echoes Wood's description, stating that Oxford was "a celebrated poet, distinguished for his wit, adroitness in his exercises, and valour and zeal for his country."[9] In that work Brydges revealed that, in addition to Wood, he had two other sources of information about Oxford. The closest in time to Brydges was the classic three-volume *The History of English Poetry* by Thomas Warton (1726-1790). In volume one (published in 1774), Warton makes passing references to the lists of famous poets, which included Oxford, that Meres had published in *Palladis Tamia* in 1598 and that Puttenham had published in *The Arte of English Poesie* in 1589.[10] William Webbe's reference to Oxford in *A Discourse of Poetrie* (1586) was not mentioned, but Warton cites the book in other places.

Far more important than Warton as a source was Brydges's reference to *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England, With Lists of their Works,* published in 1758 by Horace Walpole (1717-1797), the Fourth Earl of Oxford (second iteration). Son of the famous Prime Minister, Walpole was a highly regarded scholar who voiced only qualified praise of Shakespeare, which upset others who questioned his talent as a literary critic. Nonetheless, he was famous as the publisher who established the Strawberry Hill Press and as a major expert on English literature like Warton, with whom he had a great rivalry.

In a section devoted to Oxford in volume one of his work, Walpole cites *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* and initially repeats almost verbatim what was in Wood's prior work from 1675.[11] Along with Oxford's reputation as a poet, Walpole confirms that he was "reckoned as the Best writer of Comedy in his time," but adds that "the very names of all his plays are lost."

Nevertheless, a few pages later Walpole offers his own unique perspective on Oxford in a discussion of the most important figures in English literature prior to 1600. He reveals his thinking in a section on another writer, Thomas Sackville (Lord of Buckhurst and the Earl of Dorset), the same author whose name follows Oxford's in Peacham's list in 1622. Walpole's comments are extraordinary because he refers to Shakespeare as well as Oxford and Buckhurst:

> Tiptoft and Rivers set the example of bringing Light from other countries, and patronized the art of printing, Caxton. The Earls of Oxford and Dorset struck out new lights for Drama, without making the multitude laugh or weep at ridiculous representations of Scripture. To the former we owe Printing, to the two latter Taste —what do we not owe perhaps to the last of the four! Our historic plays are allowed to have been found on the heroic narratives in the *Mirrours for Magistrates*; to that plan, and to the boldness of Lord Buckhurst's new scenes perhaps

> we owe Shakespeare. Such debt to these four Lords, the probability of the last obligation, are sufficient to justify a Catalogue of Noble Authors.[12]

Walpole has clearly identified and highlighted two distinct pairs of aristocrats for their historical contribution to English drama and literature. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, John Tiptoft (a baron and First Earl of Worcester) and Rivers (Anthony Woodville, the Second Earl of Rivers) were two earls who introduced foreign literature and the art of printing into England in the second half of the fifteenth century.

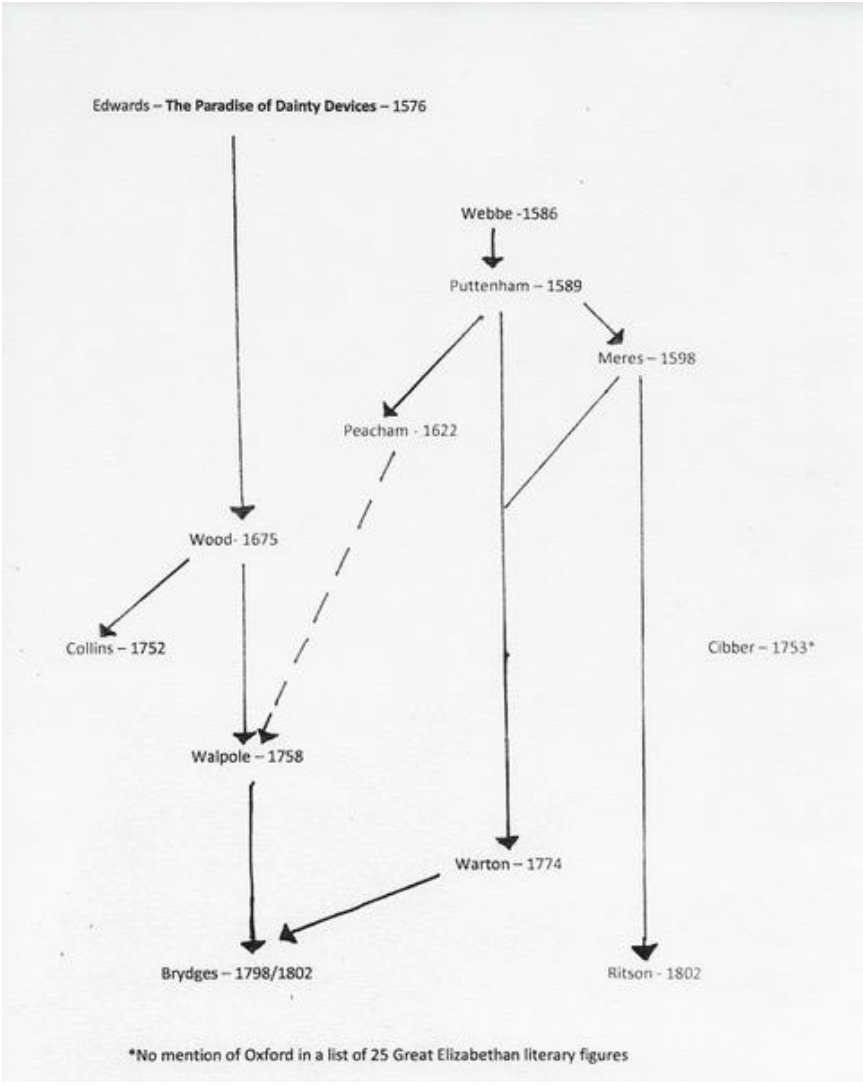
Walpole then links Oxford and Sackville (Buckhurst-Dorset) as essentially as the fathers of English drama and goes on to highlight the impact on Shakespeare of Sackville's multivolume work *Mirrour for Magistrates*, which first appeared in 1559. Walpole's selection of and emphasis on Sackville was no doubt influenced by the fact that the latter was famous as the co-author of the first English tragedy in blank verse, *Gorboduc* (written in 1561).

Because Walpole, like Warton a decade or so later, refers to Shakespeare as a distinct person in this passage, we must conclude that he did not think that Oxford and Shakespeare were the same man, even though the latter is never discussed with any specificity. The main reason for this omission of any detail about Shakespeare is that Walpole only wanted to write about authors of royal or noble blood.

Some Oxfordians might try to force an interpretation of the foregoing passage by arguing that, since Buckhurst-Dorset preceded Oxford by at least a full decade, Walpole is hinting that it is Oxford "as the real Shakespeare" who owed the great literary debt to Buckhurst. This interpretation is impossible to prove and there is other evidence that Walpole assumed that the Stratford man was the author Shakespeare.

The final literary reference concerning Oxford, long overlooked and highly detailed, can be found in *Bibliographica Poetica: A Catalogue of English Poets* (1802) by the literary critic Joseph Ritson (1752-1803). The passage is worth quoting in full:

> Vere Edward, earl of Oxford, the 14th (sic) of his surname and family, is the author of several poems printed in "The Paradise of Daintie Devices," 1576, etc. and in "Englands Helicon." One piece, by this nobleman, may be found in "The Phoenix nest," 1592, another is subjoin'd to "Astrophel & Stella," 1591, and another to "Brittons Bowre of Delights," 1597 (selected by mister Ellis). Some lines of his are, also, prefix'd to "Cardanuses Comforte," 1573. All or most of his compositions are distinguish'd by the signature E.O. He dye'd in 1604; and was bury'd at Hackney (not as Wood says, at Earls-Colne in Essex). Webbe and Puttenham applaud his attainments in poesy: Meres ranks him with the "best for comedy." Several specimens of Oxford's poetry occur in "Englands Parnassus," 1600. In the posthumous edition of Lord Oxford's works, Vol. I. two poems, by the Earl of Oxford, are given from an ancient MS. miscellany: but the possessor is not pointed out. One of these is reprinted by mister Ellis.[13]



[It is important to note that, in the second to last sentence of the above excerpt, "the posthumous edition

of Lord Oxford's works, Vol. I." refers to the "works" of a subsequent Earl of Oxford (probably Robert Harley [1661-1724], 1st Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer), not to Edward de Vere, in which two of de Vere's poems "are given from an ancient MS. Miscellany."]

Ritson also reveals that Oxford's first wife, Ann Cecil, also wrote a few poems, a fact which he extracted from the last edition of Walpole's work cited above.[14] Walpole obtained his information concerning Lady Oxford from an article written by the famous Shakespeare expert and editor George Steevens in the *European Magazine* (issue dated June 1788).

In retrospect, it is clear that Anthony Wood (1675) largely provided the detail for the general perception of Oxford that carried down to Brydges and Ritson at the end of the eighteenth century. The supposedly great comedies written by this Earl were lost to history, leaving us with a smattering of his poems. Meanwhile, as we observed earlier, published commentaries during the seventeenth century that identified the life of the William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon with the great literary works only appear in works after the Stuart Restoration in the terse commentaries offered by Thomas Fuller in 1662 and Gerard Langbein in 1691.

[Peter Dickson, a retired political analyst from the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence, has been engaged in the Shakespeare authorship dispute since 1998. That year he became famous for his revolutionary essay entitled "Shakespeare's First Folio: A Response to the Tyranny of Buckingham and the Spanish Marriage Crisis of 1621-1623," which the Folger Shakespeare Library rejected for discussion within its in-house Institute. Dickson has published extensively on the disruptive Catholic Bard movement that threatens the Shakespeare establishment. He is also the author of a two-volume work, *Bardgate,* which represents the first-ever attempt at a comprehensive resolution of the authorship dispute involving the complex intertwining of Oxford's literary legacy with that of the Stanley brothers (Ferdinando and William, the Earls of Derby), who had the legal claim to the English throne via Henry VIII's will and the Third Act of Succession.]

Endnotes

1. Fuller's terse account appears in *The History of the Worthies of England* published in 1662, one year after his death. Langbein offered more for the reader, and in the wake of the expansion of the canon with the Fourth Folio in 1685, he ascribed to the pen of Shakespeare's pen forty-six plays and cited his probable source material. But beyond that, Langbein largely recycled oral traditions about the Warwickshire Bard in his 1691 book, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets*.
2. Matus, Irvin, *Shakespeare in Fact* (1994), 201.
3. Curiously, Matus also made no mention of Fuller and Langbein's comments on the life of the alleged Bard in his chapter entitled "Shakespeare's Reputation in the Seventeenth Century." This title was an implicit admission that during the 1600s the Bard was known virtually entirely from the literary works and the reputation that arose from them, not from any meaningful information about the actual life of the author.
4. Theophilus Cibber's commentary on the life of Shakespeare appears on pages 123-143 in volume one of this work.
5. Dickson, Peter W., "Henry Peacham on Oxford and Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* (Fall 1998), 1, 8-13.
6. The passages in Wood can be found in *Atheniae Oxonienses*, column 152, and in *Fasti Oxonienses*, p. 99, column 1.
7. Collins was the only eighteenth-century work citing Oxford as a significant poet that was known to J. Thomas Looney, the originator of the Oxfordian theory in his book, *"Shakespeare" Identified*, published in 1920.
8. The references in this work can be found on pp. 2, 148, 494 and also in a footnote at the bottom of p. 163.
9. The biographical sketch can be found on pp. 50-51 of this work.
10. Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, 242-244.
11. The passage about Oxford in Walpole's work can be found on p. 144. It should be noted that Walpole may have cribbed the passage directly from Collins's work, which had been published only six years earlier in 1752.
12. Walpole,144.
13. Ritson, *Bibliographica Poetica*, 381-382.
14. Ibid.

© Peter W. Dickson, 1998, 2021

Royal Family Members (Almost) Erased from History—In the 20th Century?

by Alex McNeil

The British TV series *The Crown* has proven popular with audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. It is a historical drama based on the life of Queen Elizabeth II. Season 4, which spans the 1980s, was shown in 2020; two more seasons are planned.

Series creator Peter Morgan readily admits that the series is a dramatization—that it does contain historical inaccuracies and that most of the dialogue is made up. Nevertheless, many historical events are skillfully woven into the show, such as the intruder who broke into Buckingham Palace in 1982 and confronted the Queen in her private bedroom.

A lesser-known event was depicted in "The Hereditary Principle," an episode in Season 4. In the early 1980s Princess Margaret learns, from her therapist, of the existence of two of her first cousins—Nerissa and Katherine Bowes-Lyon—who had been institutionalized since 1941 for severe intellectual disabilities and were then living. In the episode, a furious Princess Margaret confronts the Queen and the Queen Mother with this news. The Queen is certain that Nerissa and Katherine had died; retiring to the library, they consult *Burke's Peerage*, the standard reference work on British aristocracy, which indeed listed both sisters as deceased. The Queen Mother, however, knew the truth, but had apparently kept it from her daughters.

The story is rooted in fact. It was first made public in 1987 by the British tabloid, *The Sun*. Additional details were reported in *Maclean's* magazine. Nerissa and Katherine were the daughters of the Queen Mother's sister, Fenella, and her husband, John Herbert Bowes-Lyon. They were placed in the Royal Earlswood mental hospital in 1941, when Nerissa was 22 and Katherine was 15; they remained institutionalized for the rest of their lives. They were listed as "deceased" by *Burke's Peerage* as early as 1963. *Debrett's Peerage*, another reference work, simply omitted their names starting in the 1950s. Nerissa died in 1986; Katherine died in 2014. The press reports noted that their mother, Fenella, visited them until she died in 1966, but that thereafter there were no records of visits from family members. Only a few hospital employees attended Nerissa's burial. The Queen Mother was reported to have known by 1982 of her nieces' hospital admittances. (Ironically, the Queen Mother was the patron for the Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults.)

When asked to comment on the press reports in 1987, a representative of the Bowes-Lyon family opined that Fenella "was a very vague person [who] often did not fill out forms completely that *Burke's Peerage* sent her." An editor for *Burke's* stated, "If this is what the Bowes-Lyon family told us, then we would have included it in the book. It is not normal to doubt the word of members of the royal family." An editor for *Debrett's* stated, "It would seem to me that their mother had more or less rejected them in her mind as being her daughters. She had five daughters, and these two unfortunately seemed to be born mentally disturbed and that in her own mind, she shut them out."

To be sure, until quite recently there was a great deal of misunderstanding—and even shame—about mental illness and intellectual disabilities. Wealthy families often did institutionalize members who were mentally ill or intellectually disabled, and did not speak about them in public; for practical purposes, they disappeared. Peter Morgan, *The Crown*'s creator, believes that, for the royal family, the pressure to remove Nerissa and Katherine from history was acute. As the Queen Mother explains in the episode, "The hereditary principle already hangs by such a precarious thread. Throw in mental illness, and it's over. The idea that one family alone has the automatic birthright to the crown is already so hard to justify. The gene pool of that family better have one hundred percent purity. There have been enough examples on the Windsor side alone to worry people. King George III, Prince John, your uncle. If you add the Bowes-Lyon illnesses to that, the danger is it becomes untenable."

The Great Seamark at Wivenhoe

by Michael Hyde

"Commanding an eminence on the river Colne's estuary as it flows into North Sea, Wivenhoe Hall was, according to one account, a large and sumptuous house 'having a noble gatehouse with towers of great height that served as a seamark'" (Mark Anderson, *"Shakespeare" by Another Name*, 60).

Mark Anderson's well-annotated biography of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, quotes several sources on Wivenhoe Hall, including Janet Cooper, who states in her *Victoria History of the County of Essex* that the manor house with its tower gateway "used as a sea mark in the sixteenth century" was "built just northwest of the church circa 1530." This would trace the seamark and the tower to 15th Earl John (d. 1540), but, as Anderson correctly concludes, the date is wrong. In the Summer 1987 *Newsletter* Barbara Westerfield writes of a personal visit to Wivenhoe and of finding a local tourist booklet titled "A Glimpse into Wivenhoe's Past." It dates the seamark and the gateway tower to the 12th Earl John in the 1440s: "By the middle of the 15th century, John de Vere, 12th Earl of Oxford, was Lord of the Manor at Wivenhoe." The tour booklet also states that Wivenhoe Hall was a large elegant house "with towers of great height that served as a sea mark."

Why does this matter for Edward de Vere and the Shakespeare authorship question? The simple answer is that the older the better, in terms of ancestry for Edward de Vere, who, as Westerfield observes, signed his letter to Bedfingfield in 1573 "from my country muses at Wivenhoe." Ancestry and ancestral places were literary inspirations to de Vere. Alas for Oxfordians, Westerfield records that Wivenhoe was sold in 1586, two years before the Armada attack, along with the manors of Battleswick and Great Bentley — an injury not just to de Vere's pocketbook, but to his pride, his Earldom, his sources of inspiration and the Muses. A more complete account of Wivenhoe Hall's antiquity, though not of the seamark, can be found in the public talk by Christopher Thompson, former Lord Mayor of Wivenhoe, listed below in the bibliography. In addition, we notice that Alan Nelson's biography of de Vere, *Monstrous Adversary*, dates the sale of Wivenhoe as 1584 to "Roger Townshend, a wealthy lawyer" (281).

Shakespeare's works contain three references to seamarks, each with tantalizing Oxfordian links and glosses. Each has a martial provenance, one by a landlubber soldier, two with maritime or nautical references: (1) Coriolanus instructs his young son Martius in stout military terms: "and stick I' th' wars/ Like a great sea-mark, standing every flaw/ And saving those that eye thee" (*Coriolanus* 5.3.73-75); (2) Othello forewarns of his suicide after murdering Desdemona, in language befitting his being captain of a ship at Lepanto: "Here is my journey's end, here is my butt/ And very seamark of my utmost sail" (*Othello* 5.2.264-265); (3) finally, Sonnet 116 has perhaps the most haunting evocation, saying that Love is constant and eternal in mariner's terminology: "Oh, no, it is an ever-fixed mark/ That looks on tempests and is never shaken;/ It is the star to every wand'ring bark,/ Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken" (5-8).

The words *every*, *very* and *ever* appear as adjectival modifiers in each passage: *every flaw* or blast of wind; *very seamark*; *ever-fixed mark*. Sonnet 116 says that the (sea) mark "is never shaken" in tempests. Many Oxfordians would gloss these modifiers as *e-very* or *E-Vere*, *very* or *Vere*, *ever* or *E-Ver*, and *never* or *not-ever* (*E-Ver*) "shaken." Coincidences or signifiers? Lastly, the "star" that guides the "wand'ring bark" reminds us of "Starry Vere" in Marvell's poem, and of the silver "molet" that magically appears on Aubrey's shield in the Rotheley poem (d. 1470s to 1485?) in its rendition of the ancestry of the Vere family dating to the Crusades, a work found in the flyleaf of the Ellesmere Chaucer, housed today at the Huntington Library (Hanna and Edwards, see below). These seem to be too many *very*/ *Vere* coincidences, a "very" pattern.

Wivenhoe Hall (from wivanhoehistory.org.uk)

Practical questions abound concerning the seamark at Wivenhoe. Surely it was visible at the entrance to the Colne River, either returning from London by the Thames, or from Europe into the Thames estuary? How far at sea was it visible to sailors? How many times did Edward de Vere himself use the mark in his various voyages? Did he and his young bride Anne Cecil travel back and forth from London by the rivers to Wivenhoe? As Anderson informs us, "By the end of October 1572, the earl and his Countess had taken refuge at his Essex estate of Wivenhoe. This estate, recently returned to de Vere's portfolio, had been in the family since at least the middle of the fifteenth century" (60).

Poetical and imaginative questions also abound. If sonnets 1-125 were indeed privately addressed to Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, would he have recognized the seamark reference? Were they written when Wriothesley was on one of his voyages to Spain in the 1590s with the Earl of Essex, while the poet awaited his return to the Thames and London? Perhaps the seamark is an image of departure and loss, not only of returning safely to port?

Each of these seamark passages is an authorial invention. In Plutarch's life of Coriolanus, there is no address to young Martius, only Volumnia's lengthy speech, which brings Coriolanus to tears and to surrender. He is a soldier whose battles are fought on dry land, but somehow he invents these words for his young son, literally urging that he stand tall, to "stick I' th' wars," thus "saving" his forces in battle. Othello is a sea captain and master mariner, but strangely treats his own pending suicide or "journey's end" as a seamark, as his "butt" and "utmost sail," the destined end of his voyaging through life. Sonnet 116 weaves a complex metaphor of voyaging by the stars, with an ever-fixed seamark on the ocean horizon — with the tower and beacon light of Love to guide the poet and his beloved. If there is truly a hidden image of the Vere star or silver mullet in these lines, we have new tantalizing evidence of Edward de Vere as the Shakespeare author.

In these three moments of extreme passion where a fixed seamark is invented by Shakespeare, we cannot help but notice that each poises on a moment of actual or potential loss. Coriolanus abandons his attack on Rome, and is exiled; Othello, in his last metaphoric voyage, loses his wife and his life; the poet of Sonnet 116 may lose his beloved unless the seamark, like a constant fixed star, brings back his beloved. As we know, Edward de Vere by 1584 had lost his Vere patrimony, his "country Muses," his "very seamark" of Wivenhoe Hall.

[Michael Hyde is a registered financial advisor, and has worked in financial markets for forty years. Before that he taught in the English departments at several Boston area colleges and universities. He has a BA from Harvard (*magna cum laude*), and an MA and PhD from Tufts University. His PhD thesis, "The Poet's Creative Word," was a full-length study of the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Under the tutelage of Walter Houghton he worked on the five-volume bibliographical project that became known as the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*; his work was principally focused on attribution of authorship in Victorian literary magazines, and involved identifying anonymous or pseudonymous authors using both external evidence and internal evidence based on known writings of each author. Mike became interested in the Shakespeare authorship question after reading Mark Anderson's book, *"Shakespeare" by Another Name*.]

Works Cited and Consulted:

Anderson, Mark. *"Shakespeare" By Another Name, The Life of Edward deVere, Earl of Oxford, the Man Who Was Shakespeare*. New York: Gotham Books (2005), 1st paperback ed. (2006).

De Grazia, Margreta. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Barnes & Noble Shakespeare. New York (2011).

Hanna, Ralph & A.S.G. Edwards. "Rotheley, the DeVere Circle and the Ellesmere Chaucer," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 58 no. 1 (1995), 11-35.

Hyatt, Marty. "A Mullet Is Born," reported in Sandys et al., "SOF Annual Conference Sets New Attendance Record," *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, vol. 55 no. 4 (Fall 2019), 1.

Nelson, Alan H. *Monstrous Adversary, the Life of Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford*. Liverpool University Press (2003).

Parker, R.B. (ed.). William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*. Oxford Univ. Press (1994, 2008).

Ross, James. *The Foremost Man of the Kingdom, John de Vere Thirteenth Earl of Oxford (1442-1513)*. Woodbrige, U.K.: The Boydell Press (2011, paperback ed. 2015).

Spencer, T.J.B. (ed.). *Shakespeare's Plutarch, The Lives of Julius Caesar… and Coriolanus in the translation of Sir Thomas North*. Hammondsworth, UK: Penguin Books (1964 paperback ed.).

Thompson, Christopher (former Lord Mayor of Wivenhoe). A public talk, "Wivenhoe, the De Veres and the Wars of the Roses," given 11 October 2013 in St. Mary's Church, Wivenhoe. Accessed at wivenhoehistory.org.uk.

Whalen, Richard F. (ed.). William Shakespeare, *Othello The Moor of Venice*. The Oxfordian Shakespeare Series, Horatio Editions-Llumina Press (2010).

Advertisement

Behind the Name SHAKESPEARE: Power, Lust, Scorn & Scandal

The New SAQ Gateway Film

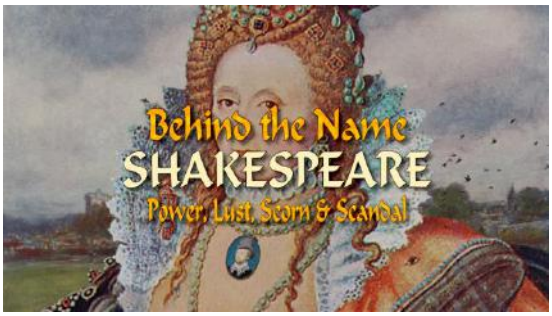
A Christina di Marlo Film

"Behind the Name SHAKESPEARE" has now earned 117 top BEST awards from 57 festivals around the world, with 157 festivals pending. Distribution won't happen until summer but in the meantime, this film festival review shows how the doors are beginning to open in the public's view of the SAQ -- which may be helpful to know in SOF scholars' battle for truth.
-- Robin Phillips (aka Christina di Marlo)

VENICE FILM AWARDS REVIEW 11/11/2020

"BEHIND THE NAME SHAKESPEARE" is an extraordinary one-woman show/documentary. The exceptional Robin Phillips guides us through the exciting investigation about who is really behind the most important plays in the whole world and therefore behind the name of William Shakespeare…(She) puts all her talent as an author, actress, and storyteller, playing sort of comedian detective (a brilliant choice that makes us remain glued to the screen for the whole duration of the film). . .

The documentary is full of information, anecdotes, details, and spins around two centuries, between literature, history, and art. Despite being so full of news and quotes, you can easily follow it from start to finish. Not only without ever getting bored but remaining with bated breath in search of yet another proof that helps to agree with an increasing number of groups of people who support this extraordinarily beautiful and thrilling theory.



It's difficult, after having seen it, not to want to join the chorus of voices of these artists, historians, writers, who claim that a glove maker's son could not have created what are among the greatest masterpieces of world theater literature. And that it's much more likely that it was the 17th Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere, lover (to be reductive) of Queen Elizabeth, and an erudite and brilliant man of letters.

I challenge the public not to fall in love with this story. . .with this delightful documentary film, which teaches and entertains, thus remaining faithful to the primary purpose of Elizabethan theater."

Watch and Share the Trailer at GroundbreakerFilms.com

Unfortunately, Mythmaking Continues

by John Hamill

I have read and reread the articles by William Boyle and Peter Rush in the Fall 2020 issue of the *Newsletter* ("Reasonable Doubts, Reasonable Theories" and "The PT Theory: Let the Real Debate Begin"), which were in response to my article, "Looney and Mythmaking," in the Summer 2020 issue.

I wrote that article, as I write this one, as a member of the SOF, not as its President. I had become concerned that the *Newsletter* was running too many pro-PT articles, without rebuttal or correction. It seemed that the SOF was becoming a pro-PT organization, which it is not.

In my earlier article I asked for proofs that go to the core and validity of the Prince Tudor (PT) theory — that Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, was actually the son of Queen Elizabeth and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. I raised three specific points: (1) that accepting the PT theory necessitates admitting that various documents concerning Southampton's parentage are either false or forged; (2) that Elizabeth secretly carried a child to term and gave birth to it in 1573-1574; and (3) that we would have to understand why this Protestant Queen would put her own child, the heir to the throne, to be raised in an openly treasonous Catholic home. No answer came.

I do not feel that those core questions were adequately addressed by Boyle or Rush. An argument that "it could have happened, and here's how" is not sufficient. Those who agree with the PT theory cannot simply argue that interpretations of poems or plays confirm their points of view. We need facts.

This theory goes directly against what J. Thomas Looney, the founder of our movement, presented in his carefully researched book over a hundred years ago, *"Shakespeare" Identified*. Looney became concerned that the PT theory would undermine and discredit his discovery and the work he had done.

We — the Looney Oxfordians and the PT Oxfordians — need a shared commitment to the truth. Are we living in two realities? Repeating something over and over does not make it true. We know that PT is a belief held by faith by some and no facts will dissuade them. As Boyle boldly stated: "The Prince Tudor issue has been part of the Oxfordian movement for most of the history of the movement: it is not going away." He makes it clear that PT followers will never concede, regardless of the evidence.

Both Boyle and Rush did raise other specific points with factual support, which I appreciate. I address two of them here:

1. Southampton's rise at court. Rush calls attention to the "numerous references in the writings and speeches of others in the years 1590-1594" that laud him highly, including one that referred to him as "*dynasta*, Latin for 'prince' . . . ." It is true that in 1593, Southampton, then age 20, was under consideration to be elected a Knight of the Garter. This is a very high honor for someone so young who was not a member of the royal family. However, that does not prove that he was under consideration because he was the bastard of the Queen. Southampton was reputed to be very charming and handsome, and the Queen certainly took notice. He was also the "cup bearer" for Essex, the Queen's current favorite, who had received his Garter in 1588 (also at age 20), and Essex probably suggested the same honor for his "favorite." Essex was not a member of the royal family, as far as we know. Even in her advanced years the Queen continued to surround herself with young handsome men and bestowed favors on them, at least while they remained in her good graces.

There was some amazement at his rapid rise, but that was about it. Yes, Southampton was described (by the Chaplain of Magdalen College of Oxford in 1592, in front of the Queen) as *Dynasta*, i.e., a "hereditary prince" or "a prince of a distinguished race." But that should not be interpreted as saying that he was the biological son of the Queen and heir to the throne, or as suggesting that it was so understood at the time. If it had been so understood, especially since it was considered high treason to discuss the issue of succession anywhere (let alone directly in front of the Queen), the Chaplain would have been arrested and executed, and Oxford University disgraced. The encomium would not have been allowed to be published. The question of succession to the throne was not a matter that was treated lightly by the authorities. The importance of this cannot be overestimated.

Such flowery language was a standard way of praising Southampton's status. He was an Earl, a *prince of the realm*, as all high-ranking nobles were referred at times. In the plays (e.g., *Henry V*) Shakespeare uses the terms "princes" and "royal fellowship" when referring to the nobility. All such princes would by duty be considered "noble offspring of the monarch." Obviously, that did not mean that they were of royal blood.

Using the term "prince" for a nobleman was not mere flowery language. It was also used specifically to define how Knights of the Garter were selected. As Peter

Moore explains in *The Lame Storyteller* (262-273), potential members were selected from three categories: princes, barons, and knights. "Princes" means royalty, dukes, marquesses, and earls, while "barons" and "knights" are self-explanatory. At the time of Southampton's consideration, he was one of about twenty-five Englishmen in that particular category of "prince."

Southampton's time in favor with the Queen was not long-lived. The last known record of them meeting was in 1595. She died in 1603. More revealing is that once Southampton was seen to fall out of Elizabeth's favor the flowery praises stopped. If he had been perceived to be the bastard of the Queen, rumors as to how the Queen treated him, and any potential claim to the throne he had, would have increased as she grew older. In the end, Southampton was not elected to be a Knight of the Garter under Queen Elizabeth, as he would have been had he been the heir to the throne. He was not elected until 1603, ten years later, by the homosexual King James, who also liked young handsome men around him, after he released him from the life sentence Queen Elizabeth had put him in for his role in the Essex rebellion. In sum, we have no evidence that Southampton was ever treated by her as if he were her son, and there were no rumors that that effect.

2. A published reference to a royal heir in 1606. Boyle cited a recent discovery by Robert Prechter (see *Newsletter*, Summer 2019) that a 1606 history book suggested that the Queen did have an heir ("Our Queene deceast conceald her Heire"), and correctly noted that it has received no attention. As I said in my previous article, "there were rumors at the time, mostly spread by Catholics, that the Queen had illegitimate children." Queen Elizabeth may have had a bastard child or children. That is still an open question. But there is no evidence, or even rumor, that Southampton was one, or that the father was Oxford. The existing documentation shows that Henry Wriothesley was the son of the 2nd Earl of Southampton and his wife, Mary Browne, and that he was born on October 6, 1573. There is no evidence of an "alternate" date and place of birth; that fact undermines PT completely.

Boyle also wrote that it was "disingenuous" for me to insist on documentary evidence to support the PT Theory when much of the case in support of Oxford as Shakespeare is based on so-called "literary evidence." It is true that our claims for Oxford's authorship are often challenged by Stratfordians on the ground that we "don't have any documentary evidence." However, there are no contemporary documents that claim that the man from Stratford was the author of Shakespeare's works, and we rely on a great deal of circumstantial evidence that is not contradicted by facts. I don't think I'm imposing a double standard.

This is the major difference between the Looney Oxfordian and PT Oxfordian theories. Advocates of the former theory don't have to argue that the contemporary documents were forged. We don't have the unnecessary burden of proving the Shakespeare attribution had anything to do with political succession.

The PT Theory is certainly interesting and in some ways appealing, but I repeat that it is not factual. As Oxfordians our goal must be to educate and not spread unsupported fantasies, no matter how attractive. It is no different from believing the ill-educated son of a country businessman from Stratford wrote the plays attributed to William Shakespeare.

I really do believe that Prince Tudor theory is one of the many reasons why Oxfordians are ignored by both academia and the media. I believe that it undermines our mission to develop coherent arguments proving that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was the real author of the Shakespeare canon. In his article, Boyle disagreed, writing that "It is the resistance to the core idea [that Oxford was Shakespeare] that has held us back, not the particulars of the case." On that point we must agree to disagree.

But J. Thomas Looney agreed with my view. In a 1933 letter to Joan Robinson, who had reviewed his landmark book, *"Shakespeare" Identified*, Looney expressed reservations about "extravagant and improbable" theories concerning Oxford and Queen Elizabeth that "are likely to bring the whole cause into ridicule." Robinson agreed, opining that apparently "nonsensical" theories help Stratfordians to "dismiss the whole business with a shrug."

All Oxfordians should be open to new ideas, even radical ones. We do not have all the answers (yet). But we must be committed to backing up those ideas with solid research and evidence. In that spirit, I ask Peter Rush and William Boyle to respond with some data and facts that would point to a birth date for Southampton (if he were a royal bastard) other than October 6, 1573. *This is the cornerstone of the PT theory*. This will open the way for us to be able to discuss the theory in a credible way.

Let's stay on the path Looney outlined for us. Let's stick with the facts.

[Three responses follow.]

1. Response from William Boyle

I am disappointed with John Hamill's response. He does not address some major points that were raised by Peter Rush and myself in our Fall 2020 articles, such as Justice John Paul Stevens's notable remark at the 1987 moot court on the need for Oxfordians to present a complete theory of the case, or former SOF President Tom Regnier's call for a "big tent" philosophy within the SOF, one big enough to accommodate controversial theories such as the Prince Tudor (PT) theory.

Does the PT theory impede acceptance of the Oxfordian theory?

In the Fall 2020 issue I said that I did not believe the PT theory was impeding the wider world's acceptance of the basic idea that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was the man behind the "Shake-speare" name. Hamill disagrees, and states that we will have to agree to disagree. He went on to cite a 1933 letter from J. Thomas Looney in which Looney expressed reservations about "extravagant and improbable" theories concerning Oxford and Queen Elizabeth that "are likely to bring the whole cause into ridicule."

There is irony here. "Improbable" is the same word that Justice Stevens used in 1987 in addressing the conundrum at the heart of the authorship debate, the need for a *complete* theory of the Oxfordian case that needs be presented, even if parts of it are "improbable." I wish that Hamill had considered that the point is not whether the PT theory may result in ridicule from some quarters, but rather whether the theory (improbable or not) is a necessary part of attempting to get at the *how* and *why* of the authorship mystery. I repeat that the authorship question itself—with or without PT—has been ridiculed for centuries.

What are facts?

Hamill writes that "PT followers will never concede, regardless of the evidence." Such a statement can be made only by someone who is certain that the case is closed on PT (but not on other theories), and that its proponents should simply shut up. Hamill later writes, "The PT theory is certainly interesting and in some ways appealing, but I repeat that it is not factual." I submit that it is a theory that knits together a number of facts in attempting to answer the larger question of how and why the author of the Shakespeare works came to be dispossessed.

Hamill creates two camps—"Looney Oxfordians" and "PT Oxfordians"—and says that Looney Oxfordians don't have to argue that the contemporary documents were forged; he offers no examples of any such documents, so I'm not sure what he means. He continues, "no contemporary documents . . . claim that the man from Stratford was the author of Shakespeare's works, and we rely on great deal of circumstantial evidence that is not contradicted by facts." That immediately brings to mind the First Folio. Its publication in 1623 is indeed a fact. But I think all of us we would agree that it is not what it appears to be. It is not a forgery, but it is a "fake" document in the sense that it deliberately sent readers off in the wrong direction if they were at all interested in learning about the true author. Its deceptions lie at the very center of the entire Shakespeare authorship problem.

Is a birth date factual proof of paternity?

Hamill does acknowledge that a recently discovered passage in a 1606 history book — which states that a royal heir existed, and that the Queen "conceald" him for reasons unknown — is a new fact in the debate, to be added to other instances of rumors of the Queen's having had children. But he dismisses it as just another rumor: "There is no evidence, or even rumor, that Southampton was one [of the Queen's bastards], or that the father was Oxford. The existing documentation shows that Henry Wriothesley was the son of the 2nd Earl of Southampton and his wife, Mary Browne, and that he was born on October 6, 1573."

Hamill insists that this birth date is a fact that must be dealt with "if we are to discuss the [PT] theory in a credible way." Such a birth date is established by a letter written by the 2nd Earl of Southampton on that date, stating that his wife had given birth to a "goodly boy." (He does not say "my son," just "goodly boy.")

This is significant, since another undeniable fact is that the 2nd Earl was imprisoned in the Tower of London from late 1571 to May 1573. Because a child born in October was likely conceived in January, a question arises about how the 2nd Earl could be the father; there are no records of conjugal visits at that time, and strong evidence that there were not any. This is a big deal. It has been debated for decades. It has led some Oxfordians to posit that Edward de Vere had an affair with Mary Browne, and that he was the father of the child born on October 6, 1573.

Facts must be interpreted

So, as happens so often in the authorship debate (as in life and history itself) one fact can collide with another. A "documented" birth date for Southampton is thrown

askew by another fact, which leads straight to the question, "Who was the 3rd Earl's biological father?" It also leaves the door open to the idea that the child that was born on that day may not have been the individual who grew up to be the 3rd Earl of Southampton. Nothing is easy in the authorship debate, especially the facts.

Hamill concludes, "Let's stay on the path Looney outlined for us. Let's stick with the facts." Fair enough. But let's also acknowledge that all of us are engaged in theorizing about events that happened 400 years ago, based on the available facts, but to date nothing has surfaced that tells us how the true author of the Shakespeare canon came to be separated from his life's work. Sifting through all the available facts and documents from that time, trying to determine what they mean, and then theorizing about how they all add up, is why we are all here.

2. Response from Hank Whittemore

John Hamill's sweeping attacks on the Prince Tudor theory for its alleged lack of factual documentation are, in my view, hypocritical. If they are not, we should expect to see factual documentation of the Oxford-Southampton-Dark Lady bisexual triangle in the 1590s; that is, evidence about when and where they engaged in their various encounters. We should also expect Hamill to explain how a bisexual triangle theory is in conformity with "the path outlined for us" in 1920 by J. Thomas Looney, whose own ingrained attitudes had their roots in the Victorian Age.

Hamill's arguments have no place in a Fellowship dedicated to exploring the many facets of an authorship theory that is almost entirely based (as Hamill admits) on circumstantial evidence alone. As it happens, the circumstantial and literary evidence for the PT theory is enormous. I'm willing to debate John on any points he has raised, without need to postulate any "forged" documents. Meanwhile, I send to all members my best wishes for a continuation of our healthy, vigorous exchange of ideas based on the facts as we know them.

[Hank Whittemore is a leading advocate of the Prince Tudor theory, which he presented at length in his 2005 book, *The Monument*.]

3. Response from Peter Rush

While Bill Boyle writes that he is "disappointed" with John Hamill's response, I'm actually grateful for Hamill's doubling down on arguments that I find inadequate to refute the Prince Tudor theory, a theory presented in detail by Hank Whittemore in *The Monument* and amplified in my book, *Hidden in Plain Sight*.

Boyle rebuts Hamill's assertion that multiple documents establish the birth of a son to the 2nd Earl of Southampton on October 6, 1573. Only one exists, which refers to the birth of a "boy," not a "son," on that date. This fact is notable for the absence of other documents that one would expect to find, such as naming of godparents or a notice of a baptism, suggesting either the early death of the infant, or his repudiation by the 2nd Earl as not of his blood. Hamill writes that "there is no evidence of an 'alternate' date and place of birth; that undermines PT completely." Many PT advocates do not dispute that a boy was born to Mary Browne on that date; we rather contend that the person who grew up as Henry Wriothesley was a *changeling* for the child born October 6.

Hamill chose to cherry-pick just one of several instances I cited that point to Southampton being seen as *primus inter pares* among the nobility, a prince and, by hint, royal. What about the other instances? Together they constitute a very strong case. To make his case, Hamill would need to point to any other nobleman who received anything remotely close to the accolades suggesting comparable status to that accorded Southampton during Elizabeth's reign.

As to the claim that the chaplain who called Southampton *Dynasta* would have been executed if Southampton were indeed Elizabeth's heir by blood, I would argue that the chaplain would never have dared to make such a reference *if he hadn't been told to* (most likely by Burghley, perhaps with Elizabeth's support), precisely to prepare the way for the open declaration of Southampton's princehood at some time in the future. In 1592, Burghley was courting Southampton, as shown by his indefatigable efforts to get him to marry Elizabeth Vere, Oxford's daughter and Burghley's granddaughter. When Southampton turned 21 in late 1594, and refused to marry Elizabeth Vere (at the same time casting his fate with Essex, Burghley's enemy), the spigot of praise was of course turned off, ending all thought of having him acknowledged as heir. No mystery here, and no evidence against the PT premise.

Our strongest argument is the evidence from the *Sonnets*, *Phoenix and Turtle* and the dedications to *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, which uniquely explains them, above all the *Sonnets*. Hamill doesn't tackle this, evidently because he can't. Bereft of Whittemore's thesis, Oxfordians are forced to explain a bisexual triangle theory that makes no sense. Anyone seeking to dispute Whittemore's version of "PT Theory" must own and defend the bizarre, absurd Stratfordian reading of the *Sonnets*.

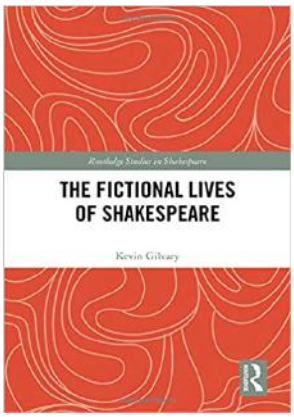
A broader confirmation of the updated Prince Tudor theory is its unique ability to explain the mysteries surrounding Oxford and Southampton (for which Katherine Chiljan has also contributed valuable evidence): why Oxford's authorship was concealed and never revealed; why Southampton wasn't executed in 1601; why James pardoned Southampton, but kept him constrained for two decades; why the publication of the *Sonnets* in 1609 was immediately suppressed; why the publication of new Shakespeare works all but ceased at that time; why Ben Jonson began fabricating the lie that Shakspere was an actor in 1615, shortly before Shakspere's death; why the First Folio contains none of Shakespeare's poems (Jonson's folio *did* include poems); and why Southampton was likely murdered in 1624. A thesis so fruitful ought to be wildly popular among Oxfordians, or at least examined in detail by all of us, with an open mind. The real mystery is why Hamill refuses to do so.

BOOK REVIEWS

Kevin Gilvary, *Fictional Lives of Shakespeare*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Reviewed by Richard M. Waugaman, MD

This sobering book validates Mark Twain's quip comparing Shakespeare biographies to brontosaur skeletons in museums—nine bones and 600 barrels of plaster of Paris. Despite the recent appearance of more than twenty-five such biographies, Gilvary exhaustively demonstrates why "no biography of his life is possible" (1). He ends with a plea that "those who admire the works of Shakespeare should accept that little is known" about him (205). Robert Bearman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust agrees: "It is not possible to write a biography of … Shakespeare within the normally accepted meaning of the word" (130). David Bevington admits, "A central problem is that Shakespeare wrote essentially nothing about himself" (51). Graham Holderness is another respected skeptic of such biographies. By contrast, "David Bevington notes that Shakespeare's silence on himself and his outlook 'positively invites speculation.' This may be so, but it is not justified in biography" (5).



Biographies of powerful people began with Suetonius and Plutarch. Medieval monks wrote biographies of saints. Victorian biographies of Shakespeare merged these genres: an important writer who was "divinely inspired" (3). In contrast with works of historical fiction based on plentiful historical sources, those who write on Shakespeare claim to be writing biography rather than fiction. "The very lack of biographical material allows biographers to indulge their own narrative flair and imaginative insight" (204).

Gilvary lists ten categories of evidentiary material that are absent for Shakespeare. These include his personal papers; allusions to Shakespeare as a writer in the Stratford records; and evidence linking the works to him as a person. Edmund Malone and E.K. Chambers admitted that their dating of the plays was conjectural, but later scholars took it as firmly established. Gilvary makes several objections to the assumptions underlying these chronologies. Henslowe's diaries mention twenty-seven Elizabethan era playwrights, but not Shakespeare. Although he lists some plays with Shakespearean titles, he records no payment for any of them. Enduring biographical myths began in the 17th and 18th centuries. Speculative biographical sketches by Nicholas Rowe, Lewis Theobald, Samuel Johnson, and Edward Capell later took on a life of their own, despite the lack of evidence for them. Distressingly, "Almost every

biographical note about Shakespeare is either false or unverifiable" (56). Although scholars know full well that there is no evidence Shakespeare ever attended school, many non-specialists are surprised to learn that fact (61). Steevens and Malone long ago disproved the assertion that Southampton gave Shakespeare £1,000.

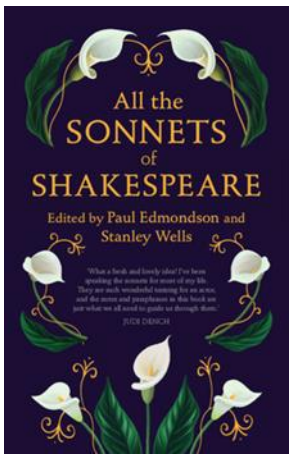
David Garrick's 1769 Stratford Jubilee sparked interest in Shakespeare's biography. Malone was the first scholar to show serious interest in the subject, in the 1770s. Shakespeare of Stratford's last will and testament was discovered in 1747; its reference to buying rings for his fellow actors was an interlineated addition. Malone doubted that the materials necessary for a life of Shakespeare would ever be found. Malone believed the Sonnets were autobiographical, but scholars still disagree on this point.

Samuel Schoenbaum attempted to set higher standards for Shakespeare biographies, but he used some of the same approaches he "castigates" (116) in previous biographies. "By linking events and situations in an imaginative way, Schoenbaum perpetuates many myths" (5). He acted as arbiter for deciding which anecdotes have a "kernel of truth" and which do not (125). Subsequent biographies often uncritically accept the speculative conclusions of previous ones. New biographies often claim to be based on newly discovered evidence, which turns out to be contextual, not about Shakespeare's own life.

In his similar 2012 book, David Ellis warns biographers against argument from absence; using weasel words such as "perhaps"; using the plays and Sonnets to make biographical inferences; substituting historical context for documented biographical facts; and assuming that people who were only distantly associated with Shakespeare were his close friends. Gilvary adds five more categories: inventing traditions; projection by the biographer; appeals to assumptions about normative behavior; presenting conjecture as fact; and suggestion by juxtaposition. Gilvary criticizes Ellis for accepting uncritically that the "Shake-scene" of Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) is Shakespeare; that Shakespeare knew Jonson; and that the Stratford monument is unaltered.

Gilvary concludes, "It is not possible to construct a biography of Shakespeare … as there are insufficient documents.... He remains a complete enigma" (203). If there is no new documentary evidence about Shakespeare's life, why do publishers keep selling new 'biographies'? Apparently, Shakespeare (like sex) sells.

***All the Sonnets of Shakespeare* (2020), edited by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, hardback edition, 299 pp.)**



Reviewed by Hank Whittemore

"We've removed the story which has plagued the Sonnets for centuries about the so-called Fair Youth and Dark Lady, because it was never there," co-editor Paul Edmondson declared in the run-up to publication of this book in September, adding that any presumed story "was an eighteenth-century invention."

In the process, Edmondson and Stanley Wells have let their fancies fly. "Success" would mean destroying the collection of 154 consecutively numbered poems printed as *Shake-speares Sonnets* in 1609, thereby removing its potential to identify the true author, not to mention any real-life story recorded therein. The effect would be to nullify centuries of scholarship — mainstream and Oxfordian —on the Sonnets. More importantly for Oxfordians, if the 1609 sequence no longer remains intact, the movement to promote Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, as the true "Shakespeare" would lose what is arguably the most powerful literary connection to his life. Perhaps that is exactly what Edmondson and Wells seek to accomplish.

"[Our] volume contains all the surviving sonnets of Shakespeare," they write. "It includes the one hundred and fifty-four sonnets collected together and published in 1609, alternative versions of two of them, as well as three of uncertain authorship but attributed to him in the unauthorized collection published as *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599) and twenty-three that he incorporated into the plays, making a total of one hundred and eighty-two sonnets. For the first time in their history, we endeavor to arrange them, so far as current scholarship allows, in the order in which they were written."

Edmondson and Wells credit (or blame) the editor Edmund Malone for printing the 1609 text in 1796 with commentary that, while bringing fresh scholarly attention to the *Sonnets*, also "began an emphatically biographical way of reading them" — an approach that gave Malone "critical and biographical anxiety" (apparently over the Bard's sexuality). In the centuries

since then, "much ink has been spilt trying to convince us of the identities of real-life counterparts believed to exist in Shakespeare's Sonnets," but that approach "is simplistic and overrides the nuances and complexities of some of the greatest poems ever written in English."

While never citing their work as a threat to Shakespeare authorship studies, Edmondson and Wells come close to it:

> It is time for readings and studies of the Sonnets to leave behind these biographical tropes. In contrast, our chronological approach enhances understanding of Shakespeare as a developing writer of sonnets and challenges the biographical assumptions and expectations that we as readers might take with us. A chronological ordering from pre-1582 to 1613 frustrates attempts to assume and impose a biographical narrative by (we hope) defamiliarizing the poems and presenting them afresh.

They begin with the premise that the 1609 quarto was unauthorized, though they feel that the poet himself probably did the arranging, while viewing the result as a "collection," rather than a coherent sequence. (Meanwhile, they do see numerous clusters of linked sonnets throughout.) The individual verses have been reassembled in an order that seems, to Edmondson and Wells, most likely to be chronological over a period spanning more than three decades, from pre-1582(!) to 1613. Having established that general time frame, they deemed it logical to include additional sonnets from other Shakespearean works.

Their new ordering begins with Sonnet 154, which is "possibly based on recalling a schoolboy exercise," followed by Sonnet 153, which "seems to be Shakespeare's later attempt to paraphrase" the same Greek epigram. (Exactly why 153 appears superior to 154 is unclear.) Then they proceed with Sonnet 145, written in tetrameter, which is "often thought" to be the Bard's first poem, composed "when he was a teenager courting Anne Hathaway, whose name is punned on in the couplet ('hate away' an alternate pronunciation of Hathaway; 'And' for Anne)." The "hate away/ Hathaway" pun is not original with Edmondson and Wells; Andrew Gurr came up with it in 1971, and many orthodox commentators have since jumped on the bandwagon.[1]

We may wonder how Edmondson and Wells could include such a manifestly "simplistic" biographical approach so soon in their new, supposedly non-simplistic arrangement. In fact, an amorphous biographical portrait of William Shakspere is already assumed to be emerging (i.e., he must have attended grammar school and practiced writing sonnets as a student, using first a translation of an ancient Greek inscription). Their feeling that Shakspere wrote Sonnet 153 as a later improvement over Sonnet 154 is yet another biographical assumption.[2]

All 182 sonnets are printed in full within Edmondson's and Wells's newly imagined three-decade chronology, followed by "literal paraphrases" for each one. The verses are addressed to males or females, as the editors envision them. To Edmondson and Wells, all 182 sonnets are love poems, with the author as bisexual.

Regardless of their disdain for the biographical approach, Edmondson and Wells view the sonnets as "miniaturized dispatches from life turned into poetry." Rather than turning them into "an historical, autobiographical narrative," however, all the sonnets "can instead be read for traces of [the poet's] personality, as though the poems were his emotional, psychological, and spiritual memoir, in part made up of his addresses to other people, in part his own soliloquies played out primarily for himself."

In other words, the biographical aspects of the sonnets as by Shakspere of Stratford are just as nebulous as before. Yes, the poet refers to his "books" and his lameness, for example, but who knows what those references mean? Edmondson and Wells are now confident that "nobody knows" if the "peace" that "proclaims Olives of endless age" in Sonnet 107 "refers to an actual political or personal moment," or whether the "canopy" of Sonnet 125 "might refer to an actual aristocratic or even royal procession, or one that took place in the context of stage production."

On and on goes the speculating. Edmondson and Wells now proclaim that *Shake-speares Sonnets* of 1609 "is most likely to encompass many different occasions and people in his life, unidentifiable and anonymous moments which, because [Shakspere] was inspired to write about them in the ways he did, are obscured by but not lost to time."

Critics of the Oxfordian movement, and perhaps some poetry lovers unaware of the authorship question, will probably be delighted with this book.

Endnotes

1. I emphatically disagree with the "hate away/Hathaway" pun interpretation of Sonnet 145. In my book, *The Monument* (2005), I wrote that "the [tetrameter] form of this verse marks it . . . as special. Throughout Oxford speaks in his son's voice" (731). In other words, the poet is using a different meter to indicate that another character is speaking

—not the poet himself, who uses pentameter verse everywhere else. This is a far more persuasive argument than the Stratfordian claim that Sonnet 145 is an early work fortuitously inserted (perhaps by the poet, perhaps not) at this point in the sequence. If Sonnet 145 is understood as being in the voice of another character, it fits perfectly with the two sonnets immediately before and after. See McNeil, "Shakespeare's Five 'Outlier' Sonnets," *Brief Chronicles* V (2014), 31, 36-38.

2. Again, I emphatically disagree. I read Sonnet 154 as a reworking of Sonnet 153 by a more mature poet who has had more life experience. See *The Monument* at 28; McNeil, op. cit. at 38-42.

Banned and Blocked from the "Shakespeare Forum"

by Keir Cutler

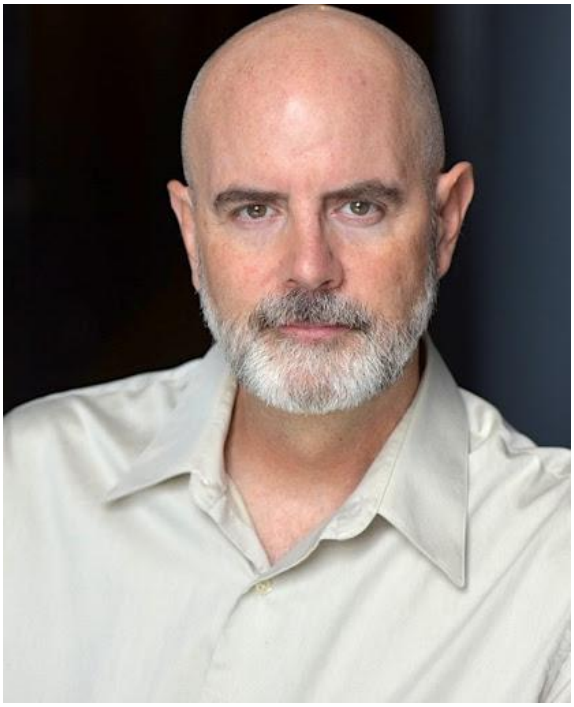
Many of you are aware of a Facebook group called the "Shakespeare Forum." It had several thousand members and seemed like a natural group for me to join. I have a PhD in theatre; I have been involved in various Shakespeare studies for many years and performed in several Shakespeare plays as well as penned several Shakespeare-related works. My monologue, "Teaching Shakespeare," won Best Solo Show at the 2000 New York Fringe Festival.

Unfortunately, there was one serious problem with the "Shakespeare Forum": It banned discussion of the Shakespeare Authorship Question (SAQ). It is the only issue banned. I had heard that the rule existed, but I didn't think they would have it written down, since it would be an obvious example of censorship and therefore indefensible.

Well, to start off the new year, the so-called "rules" of the group were posted and the members were asked to read them. There it was: no discussion of the Shakespeare Authorship Question. I was appalled. I felt I had no choice but to question this outrageous demand. As perhaps one might expect, I was met with immediate resistance and a series of ludicrous justifications.

First, I was very politely told that the SAQ was banned because it was a question that had "no solution and led to endless conversation." The administrator seemed to think this reasoning would satisfy me. Unfortunately for him, I immediately pointed out that the works of Shakespeare are over 400 years old, and that many, if not most, issues dealing with Shakespeare have no solution. For example, no one is certain who is the Dark Lady of the Sonnets. "Is the Shakespeare Forum banning discussion of the Dark Lady?" I asked.

Clearly frustrated that his reason had been so easily dispatched, he abruptly changed his "justification" to stating that the discussion of authorship was banned because it had "no educational value." I was not expecting anything this silly! I pointed out that scholars from Oxford, Harvard and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust have all written extensively on the SAQ. "Are you calling Oxford, Harvard and the Birthplace Trust uneducational?" I inquired.



Keir Cutler

At this point, another administrator—a very angry one—joined the defense. This person, who wasn't going to feign politeness and clearly detested any discussion of the SAQ, offered yet another reason for the ban. According to her, such discussion was banned not because of there being no solution, or a lack of educational value. Instead, it was because people who discuss it are "bullies" and "nasty," and people in the Shakespeare Forum (who are mainly from New York) "follow the prevailing scholarship" and are "kind"! (I believe this marks the first time in recorded history that the delicate sensibilities of New Yorkers have been used as a justification for anything.)

The administrator then stated that "authorship deniers are hijacking discussion after discussion, with a tone that echoes the one you are wielding in this thread." Suddenly it was the tone that mattered. Interesting! So the ban had apparently nothing to do with the previously stated reasons of "no solution" or "non-educational value." It was due to the hijacking of discussions and the tone of the hijackers. A tone that I was being accused of manifesting by having the temerity to question their use of censorship.

I was then given a warning: If I wanted to remain a member of this Shakespeare Forum I would have to accept their rules. The authority of the administrators is total and must never be questioned.

Nevertheless I persisted, sensing that my time with the Shakespeare Forum was likely to be short. I also realized it was unlikely that these administrators would want this thread to stay up, as it clearly displayed the shifting excuses for the ban. While I have no doubt that many of their members also detest questioning Shakespeare's authorship, some of them might have been uncomfortable with censoring speech.

The final statement from me—the one that ended my membership—was my pointing out that they already have extensive rules against bullying and nasty speech, hence there is no reason to single out the SAQ. If someone is a bully, ban them; it makes no difference what they're discussing. But to ban discussion of one solitary Shakespeare issue "is censorship, and is wrong."

With that succinct and damning indictment of their unjustifiable regulations, I found myself banned and permanently blocked from the Shakespeare Forum. Let me emphasize that I was not banned for breaking their rules, but rather for questioning them.

All I can say is shame on them! They claim to be victims of us authorship skeptics, but they're the victimizers. To me, their ban suggests that they're afraid of the topic.

A Postscript

Shortly after my expulsion, the group disbanded and a new group was created. Whether this was connected to my expulsion I do not know, but since it happened so quickly I assume there is a connection. The group changed its name from "Shakespeare Forum" to "Shakespeare Forum Community." Everyone was required to rejoin and agree up front to their rules, which, unfortunately, still provide that "posts about the authorship of Shakespeare's works are specifically prohibited." I know they did get some pushback about banning members, so they are restarting and trying to keep out authorship doubters from the outset. They claim to be a New York-focused group. If so, then the problem is their name. "Shakespeare Forum" or "Shakespeare Forum Community" hardly sound like something New York-focused. None of this would have happened if they simply had a name that reflected who they really are.

[An actor and writer, Keir Cutler is an authorship doubter who has presented one-man shows at several SOF conferences. Most recently he portrayed Mark Twain at the SOF's 2019 Annual Conference, which took place at the Mark Twain House and Museum in Hartford, Connecticut.]

In this issue: