A Reassessment of the French Influence in Shakespeare

by Elisabeth Waugaman

The great English actor, David Garrick, grandson of French Huguenot refugees, resurrected Shakespeare's works and assured his immortality by organizing the first Shakespeare Jubilee in 1769, describing the playwright as "the god of our idolatry" (England 129).

The source of Shakespeare's genius, however, has long been disputed by scholars. In 1776, in "An Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare," Richard Farmer maintained that 'Shakespeare was nurtured by Nature and his own tongue," (Farmer 94)—"his studies were most demonstratively confined to Nature and his own Language" (110). Farmer insists the French in the plays—indeed, entire scenes—were added later by another hand (Farmer 96-97). He notes that Michael Drayton, Sir John Denham, and Thomas Fuller are in agreement that Shakespeare was a natural genius (Farmer 5), in contrast to Alexander Pope, Lewis Theobald, John Warburton, and John Upton, who highlight Shakespeare's learning (Farmer 5-6). In 1792, the fashionable portrait painter George Romney chose to depict Shakespeare's birth as a nativity scene in which the baby Shakespeare is attended by Nature and the Passions. (The painting is now displayed at the Folger Library in Washington, D.C.) Thus, beginning with the resurrection of Shakespeare's works in the late 1700s, there has been scholarly disagreement concerning Shakespeare's education.

In *Cursory Remarks on Shakespeare and on Certain French and Italian Poets, principally Tragedians* (1776), William Richardson observes that the English have a tendency to deny any foreign influence in their literature despite their desire for foreign goods "for the ornament of our persons, for the luxury of our tables" (Richardson vi). Noting that he will be condemned for it, Richardson examines Italian and French influences in Shakespeare's works. The assessments of William Richardson, Alexander Pope, Theobald Warburton, and John Upton, however, did not stem the tide of the natural genius theory. Considering the long-standing hostilities between England and France in the 1700s, the Seven Years War, the Wars of the First and Second Coalition, and the 18th century English struggle against foreign influences, especially French, the Romantic rejection of any French influences in Shakespeare's work is not surprising.

At the height of the Romantic Era, in the highly influential book, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*, a collection of lectures delivered by Thomas Carlyle in 1840, Shakespeare is described as "the free gift of Nature" (121), "a rallying-sign and bond of brotherhood for all Saxondom" (294). "Yes, this Shakespeare is ours; we produced him, we speak and think by him; we are of one blood and kind with him" (133). Not only is Shakespeare the incarnation of "Saxondom," he is also "beatified" (101). Carlyle says, "Shakespeare and Dante are Saints of Poetry…*canonized*, so that it is impiety to meddle with them" (101). Shakespeare is "an unconscious intellect" (152); "those dramas of his grew up out of Nature (152); "But call it worship, call it what you will (…)," (157).

By the 1840s, Shakespeare had become widely regarded as a religious icon inspired by Nature, a representation of Saxondom not to be meddled with. What does this strange prohibition against meddling mean? Is meddling anything that endangers the concept of Shakespeare as an incarnation of Saxondom? This prohibition casts a long shadow which still stifles scholarly research into the foreign influences in Shakespeare's works. Yet without understanding the foreign influences in Shakespeare's *oeuvre*, we can never understand Shakespeare's place in the Renaissance, whose ideal was all-encompassing knowledge between cultures and fields of studies.

In 1857, the American writer Delia Bacon published *The Philosophy of the Plays of William Shakespeare*, with a foreword by Nathaniel Hawthorne, asserting that Montaigne had a significant impact on the philosophy of

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Elisabeth P. Waugaman *studied at Newcomb College of Tulane University, Princeton University, and Duke University, where she received a Ph.D. in medieval French studies. She has taught at Duke and Johns Hopkins Universities and in the New Directions Writing Program for the Washington Center for Psychoanalysis.*

Francis Bacon and the set of aristocrats she advocated as the real authors of the plays—Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Thomas Lord Buckhurst, Sir Henry Lord Paget, Edward Earl of Oxford (lv), and others who were all members of an aristocratic group Delia Bacon refers to as Raleigh's School (li). As members of the nobility, all these candidates would be fluent in French. This concept of group authorship anticipated current thinking about the authorship of the plays by 150 years. However, Delia Bacon's unedited, stream-of-consciousness style of writing resulted in the rejection of her ideas until recently.

Using textual analysis in his erudite "1910 study, *The French Renaissance in England*, Sidney Lee, the leading Shakespeare expert of his generation, proved not only that the Bard knew French but that French writers directly influenced Shakespeare. In 1919, in *Sous le Masque de William Shakespeare: William Stanley VI*e *Comte de Derby*, the French Renaissance scholar Abel Lefranc maintained that Shakespeare's knowledge of the French court and its secrets, French geography, and Shakespeare's erudition all indicate that William of Stratford could not be the author for "toute personne dont le jugement est resté libre…" [for anyone with an open mind] (xiii). In 1920, in *"Shakespeare" Identified in Edward de Vere, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, J. Thomas Looney maintained like Le Franc that the plays reveal a fount of erudition and familiarity with French court life, events in France, French geography and literature that cannot be credibly reconciled with the life of Shakspear of Stratford-on-Avon. Because Shakspear never developed a consistent signature, the Shakspear spelling, which he used the most frequently, will be used when referring to the merchant while Shakespeare will be used when discussing the author.

By 1920 three books written by an American, a Frenchman, and an Englishman all proposed that Shakespeare was actually a Renaissance man influenced by the art and erudition of France as well as Italy. In short, Shakespeare was a towering Renaissance figure who had assimilated European Renaissance culture and raised it to its apogee in his plays and poetry. Yet most English-speaking scholars ignored these studies; for them, Shakespeare remained a Romantic symbol of divinely inspired English Nature. A generation later came the vogue of "New Criticism," which divorced the work of art from its author's life, leading to the literary phenomenon of "the death of the author," and making any interest in the author and his biography not only superfluous but passé.

In 1962, Abel Lefranc's protege, Georges Lambin, published his landmark study, *Voyages de Shakespeare en France et en Italie*, a detailed work in which he presents not only Shakespeare's familiarity with French and Italian geography, but also his intimate knowledge of court intrigues in both countries. The

latter included suppressed stories not printed until after Shakespeare's death, as well as lessons on geography to explain previously misidentified locations. Lambin predicted that his book would be ignored by Shakespeare scholars because of their refusal to consider foreign influences in Shakespeare (17). Regrettably, he was correct.

In addition to idolization, "Saxon" cultural identity, and New Criticism came another cultural barrier to scholarly inquiry from academia itself. In 1962, William H. Whyte, Jr. coined the term "groupthink"—"a rationalized conformity" that maintains "group values" are "right and good," "guided almost totally by the whims and prejudices of the group," resulting in increasingly subservient Americans who "embrace groupthink as the road to security." In 1972, Irving Joes observed that groupthink "overrides realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action and also dehumanizes other groups" (Waugaman). In a 2009 study, "Groupthink in Academia: Majoritarian Departmental Politics and the Professional Pyramid," Daniel Klein and Carlotta Stern observe that scholars are less likely to engage with colleagues whose work threatens their own; and shockingly, that academics are less likely to revise their views after the age of twenty-five or thirty, gradually producing ideological uniformity. Since disagreement with accepted academic thought threatens the entire academic hierarchy, scholarly thinking becomes circular. The authors then provide a shocking list of discoveries that were discounted for years in the sciences, from genetics and the viral transmission of cancer to continental drift and DNA research. Shakespeare studies could easily be added to this list.

The traditional theory that Shakespeare was ignorant of French makes perfect sense considering what we know about Shakspear's life, which did not offer him a means of obtaining a sophisticated knowledge of French, French literature, and social events as revealed in the plays. More generally, by the 16th century, the average Englishman knew little or no French. Indeed, the English populace's failure to understand French is attested to in the 1362 Statue of Pleading, which decreed cases would be pleaded in the courts in English because the general populace no longer understood French (Ormrod 755). By the end of the 14th century, the gentry and the bourgeoisie retained only a minimal amount of French for administrative and accounting purposes (Ormrod 754). By the end of the 14th century, French was only spoken by the elite—the royal family, the central administration, senior judiciary, and a portion of the high nobility (Owen 754). According to Diana Price's study of historical documents of the Elizabethan period, there is nothing in Shakespeare's mercantile records, or any other records, to indicate Shakspear had any knowledge of French. (Price, personal communication). Access to French books by the general population was very limited; by the mid-15th

century, French books were a rare commodity found only in the homes of the upper aristocracy.

Considering the state of spoken French and access to French texts, Christopher Mulvey, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Winchester, a trustee for The English Project, makes a startling statement in "SHAKESPEARE: A French Poet?": "The vast majority of Shakespeare's vocabulary comes from French. More profoundly, much of the grammar and the syntax of Shakespeare's language comes from French" (Mulvey). Professor Mulvey's observation should give us pause considering the state of spoken French in England and the limited access to French books at the time.

It is all the more shocking, then, to acknowledge that Shakespeare is the only Elizabethan dramatist who wrote at length in a foreign language. George Watson rightly observes, "The French scenes in *Henry V* are surprising: not just that Shakespeare could write them, but that he should expect a London audience in 1599 to understand them" (Watson). Indeed, very few members of a typical London audience would have understood Shakespeare's French, which suggests that Shakespeare included so much French in his plays and sonnets because he was writing primarily for the nobility—otherwise, including French was pointless. Watson further maintains that Shakespeare was "a conscious linguist."

A striking example of the academic refusal to admit the possible influence of foreign sources in Shakespeare is the theory of the *Ur-Hamlet*. Like the Romantics, orthodox Shakespeare experts steadfastly assert Shakspear could only read English or Latin. This assumption makes perfect sense considering what we know of Shakspear's life; however, it created an unsurmountable problem concerning *Hamlet*, which was undeniably inspired by Belleforêst's *Histoires Tragiques* (1559), not translated into English until 1608, well after Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had been published in 1603 and 1604. The awkward problem of an untranslated French source for Shakspear, illiterate in French, led to the theory of the *Ur-Hamlet*, an earlier Hamlet which Shakespeare wrote based on "a lost translation" by Thomas Kyd that must have existed because the theory made it feasible for Shakspear to read the French source in English. It is only recently that traditional academics have begun to abandon the theory of the *Ur-Hamlet*.

Philological Evidence in French Sources

How extensive was Shakespeare's knowledge of French? Was it non-existent or just basic, as orthodox experts maintain, or was it actually sophisticated? Finally, to what extent does it permeate his works? Sidney Lee observes that Shakespeare gave the use of French words a new vogue; moreover, that

Shakespeare employs French vocabulary when there are English words that could otherwise be used: "sans" for "without" in *Hamlet*, "sans eyes, sans teeth" in *As You Like It*; "gouts (Fr. gouttes: drops) of blood" on the dagger over which Macbeth hallucinates.

In some cases, Shakespeare's French was adopted into English, as with mal content. Shakespeare uses the ending –ure, based on the French ending –eur, for example, re/join/dure, ron/dure—"more liberally than any contemporary English writer" according to Sidney Lee (244-45). Shakespeare is also fond of words ending in –ance, such as abidance. He coins individual English words based on French: omittance, deracinate, encave, rejoindure, exposture, rumourer (Lee, 245). He creates puns that require a knowledge of French—Le Foot (foutre/fuck) & le Coun (gown/cunt)" in *Henry V* (Billings 202-05); the Protestant Charbon (chaire bonne) and the Papist Poyson (fish) (Easy 106) in *All's Well that Ends Well*; Holofernes (fesses/arse) , posteriors (arses) of the day, culled (cul/arse), chose (pudendum) (Rubinstein xvi).

Sidney Lee also notes the influence of the French poets of the Pléíade in Shakespeare's creation of new words and the specific use of "double epithets," which Shakespeare uses frequently (Lee 248). Many of Shakespeare's double epithets are still used today, such as "snow-white" and "health-giving." Honneyman observes that nearly two-thirds of Shakespeare's sonnets have "vestigial remains of the continental octave" (38) as found in Sonnets 29, 44, 62, 153, and occasional, but startling, use of French words with their French as opposed to their English meanings, which are different: "travail" to mean "workmanship" as opposed to "difficult work" in Sonnet 79.

In these instances, it appears that Shakespeare is playing with the French and English meanings of vocabulary because he was writing for a noble audience who were fluent in French. Honneyman observes that the Sonnets have more French words used in the correct French sense than can be found in any English writer's work. The "vestigial remains of the continental octave" as well as imagery, vocabulary, and stylistic devices drawn from the Pléiade poets indicate that whoever wrote the Sonnets was steeped in the French sonnet tradition.

Orthodox experts have long insisted that Shakespeare read Montaigne in Florio's translation rather than the original French. In "The Bourn Identity: *Hamlet* and the French of Montaigne's *Essais*," Travis Williams observes, however, that Shakespeare uses Montaigne's French word "bourn," not Florio's English translation "boundary." It is, therefore, strange to insist Shakespeare did not read Montaigne in French, especially because Shakespeare has a marked fondness for the word "bourn" and proceeds to use it throughout his works. The following table will help readers visualize Shakespeare's extensive and varied use of French throughout the canon.

TABLE 1: Shakespeare's Use of French

(1) Use of French Words:

a) French words used in their French meaning, but never Anglicized:

- foison (harvest), sans (without), carcanet (diminutive of carcan meaning necklace), antres (see "antres vast and deserts idle" in *Othello* I.3), scrimeurs (escrimeurs) (Lee 244).
- Shakespeare uses the French word "bourn," which Florio translates to "boundary" (Williams 254-8).
- "gouts of blood" (Hamlet II.i.625)—"the only use of 'gouts of blood' before or since *Hamlet*," from the French 'gouttes' " (Lee 244).

b) French words Anglicized:

- mal content—used for the first time in *Love's Labor's Lost*, III.i.185 (Ogburn 194).

(2) Use of –ure ending (equivalent to French words ending in –eur): e.g. rondure, defeature, rejoindure, etc.—Shakespeare uses these words "more liberally than any contemporary" (Lee 245).

(3) Use of –ance ending: appliance, noyance, suppliance, quittance, portance, cognizance, appurtenance, esperance, grievance, etc.

(4) Coining New Words based on French:

- omittance, abidance, rejoindure (Lee 245).
- deracinate, encave, plantage, rejoindure, suraddition, exposture, legitimation (Richard Waugaman: email 4/18/2017)
- prophetic, control, confin'd, mortal (as adjectives), eclipse, augur, incertainties, balmy (all from Sonnet 107), potions, limbecks, applying, sphere, distraction, rebuked (Nosworthy 42)

(5) Influence of the French Pléiade:

a) Vocabulary:

- Othello tells Desdemona of "antres vast, " (vast, mysterious places: cf: *antre*, *Petit Robert 69*). "Antres": frequently in the Latinized vocabulary of the Pléiade. Very rare English usage (Lee 244).
- "scrimeurs"—a unique Angilicization of "escrimeurs" (fencers). *Escrimeur* was a neologism invented by the Pléiade poet Ronsard (Lee 52).
- "tirra-lirra" from Ronsard's tire-lire for the bird's song (Lee 245).

b) Double-epithets—one of best-known innovations of the Pléiade, based on Homer, using two words, specifically. Usage spread to England. Shakespeare: snow-white, health-giving, low-spirited (Lee 249).

TABLE 1: Shakespeare's use of French (continued)
(6) French Words used with their French as opposed to their English meaning: David Honneyman notes words that Shakespeare used with their French, not their English, meanings: embassage (Sonnet 26); "the region cloud" (Sonnet 33 région: meaning celestial or of the sky); travail (Sonnet 79: with French meaning of "workmanship" rather than English meaning of "difficult effort"); reserve (Sonnet 85: with French meaning of preserve/make permanent); impeacht (Sonnet 125: from the French empêcher); pain (Sonnet 141: with French meaning of "punishment," not English meaning of "pain"); Sidney Lee notes great morning (grand matin) instead of "broad daylight" used twice (245).
(7) Puns—Shakespeare was fond of puns based on French: *Henry V*: le foot & le coun; *All's Well* Charbon (Chair bonne) the Puritan and old Poysam (Poison) the Papist. *Love's Labor's Lost*: Holofernes (fesses/arse), Posteriors (arses) of the day, culled (cul/arse), chose (pudendum) (Rubenstein, xvi).

Since 1914 several books have examined the full spectrum of Shakespeare's sources. The most recent, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sources*, published in 2016, includes approximately 175 sources. Diana Price notes that, unfortunately, the author follows the traditional academic mold: "traditional scholars minimize the influence of a French source if there is an English translation" (Price 254).

Table 2 lists French sources within the Shakespeare cannon.

TABLE 2: French sources for Shakespeare's plays and sonnets
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1595): *Huon de Bordeaux*, 13th century, provides the name Obéron (translated by Sir John Bourchier, Lord Berner, 1534).
All's Well That Ends Well (1604-05): Antoine le Maçon, *Décaméron ou cent Nouvelles de Boccace* (1569); Symphorien Champier, *La vie Bayard*, Belleforest, *La pastorale amovrese*, Marguerite de Valois, *Mémoires* (Hillman).
Anthony and Cleopatra (1606): Robert Garnier, *Marc Antoine* (1578); Étienne Jodelle, *Cléopatre Captive* (performed 1552, published 1574), Nicolas de Montreux, Jacques Amyot, *Vies parallèles des homes illustres* (1559-1565), translated by Thomas North (1579).
As You Like It (1599): poetry of Maurice Scève (Kaston and Vickers 165-6).
Hamlet (1600): Belleforest, *Histoires Tragiques* (1568); L'Histoire d'Hélène Tournon, not published until 1628.
Henry V (1599): *L'Hostelerie*.
Henry VI, Part I (1591) *Le Rozier Historial de France* (1522), *Les Grandes Chroniques de France, Chroniques de Britaigne*.

TABLE 2: French sources for Shakespeare's plays & sonnets (continued)
King Lear (1605): *Le garçon et l'aveugle*, oldest surviving French farce.
Love's Labor Lost (1598): Pierre de la Primaudaye, *L'Académie française* (1577), *L'Histoire d'Hélène de Tournon* (no translation available).
Macbeth (1606): Pierre Le Loyer Seigneur de la Brosse, *Discours et histories des spectres*.
Measure for Measure (1604): *Histoires Tragiques*, Belleforêt; *Histoires admirables et mémorables de notre temps*, Goulart. "A Discourse on Life and Death," Plessis-Mornay, Philippe du, (Sieur de Marlay), translated by Mary Sidney (1592) influenced the Duke's "Be absolute for death" speech (3.1.5-41) (source: *Shakespeare's Books*).
Much Ado About Nothing, (1598): Belleforêt, *Histoires Tragiques* (no translation available).
Othello (1604): *Hecatommithi* (1565), Cinthio, Giovanni Battista Giraldi. No translation. Gabriel Chappuys, French translation (1583). In *Othello*, critics have noted direct verbal echoes of both Chappuys's French and Cinthio's Italian.
Richard II (1592): Froissart; Jean Créton, *Chronique de la traison et mort de Richard II* (1401), an eye-witness's account of the death of Richard II "Callirée," Ronsard (1573).
Taming of the Shrew (1593): *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* (1372): translation, 1483; La Comédie des Supposés, La Guisiade by Pierre Matthieu (1589).
Sonnets (1609): Pléiade poets (Ronsard, Jodelle), *Cymbeline* (1609): the Old French miracle play, *Miracle de Nostre Dame, comment ostes, roy d'Eespaigne; perdi sa terre* and its probable source *Le Roman du roi* (also in Boccaccio's story in the *Decameron* II,9, no translation until 1620).
The Winter's Tale (1610): *Théon et Obéron*.
The Tempest (1611): *Essais*, Montaigne, (Williams provides proof Shakespeare read Montaigne in French), Roman History Plays: Jacques Amyot's French translation of Plutarch's *Lives*.
Two Gentlemen of Verona (1594): Antoine Le Maçon's translation of the *Decameron*, the French edition of Montemayor's *Diana* (1582). *Diana* was only translated into English in 1598 (*Dictionary* II, 1123).

In addition to these sources, Hillman adds the influence of Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas, diplomatic correspondence, and political tracts. Hillman's research has led some Shakespeare scholars to conclude that it "affirms Shakespeare's proficiency in French" (Williams 358) and that "knowledge of French material can illuminate Renaissance English texts" (Haynes). Moreover, that "Hillman calls decisively into question any narrow Anglocentric view of Shakespeare" (Maskell 288).

Faced with recent discoveries of an increasing number of French sources, some untranslated, traditional Shakespeare scholars have sought to explain how Shakspear could have learned French. Price notes that academics now assume Shakspear hired French tutors during the lost years (1585-92) or studied French when he roomed for a year with the Mountjoys, a French Huguenot family in London. However, as Price observes, the problem with the Mountjoy theory is that Shakespeare had already written several plays influenced by French sources, including *Henry V* and *Hamlet*, before Shakspear went to live with the Mountjoys (Price 255). Even the duration of "the lost years" must be questioned because recent scholarship indicates that *Hamlet* and the *Henry* plays were written much earlier than previously thought (Price 278). Other orthodox scholars speculate that Shakspear was employed by noblemen and thereby gained access to their libraries where he could have learned French.

This list of French sources proves beyond a doubt that Shakespeare was deeply immersed in French language and culture. As Sidney Lee observed more than a century ago, "The matter and manner of French prose helped to mold Elizabethan thought and expression.… Familiarity with the themes of French prose—with the theology of Calvin, the ribald sagacity of Rabelais, the classical idealism of Amyot, the worldly ethics of Montaigne—signally helped to draw Elizabethan minds into the main currents of European thought and culture" (Lee 179).

Evidence for an Aristocratic Author

Unlike Shakspear of Stratford, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, had an outstanding education in French as a ward of Lord Burghley, receiving two hours of French instruction every day (Anderson 21-22). By the age of thirteen, he could write fluently in French, as a letter from him addressed to Lord Burghley demonstrates (Fowler 1-2; also see Appendix). When he was nineteen, de Vere ordered a copy of Plutarch's works in French (Anderson 41). When he was twenty-five, de Vere traveled to Paris and was introduced to King Henry III, Marguerite Valois, and Catherine de Médici, among others, then continued on through France to Italy (Anderson 74-75). At age forty-five, de Vere received a letter in French from King Henry IV of France, thanking him for his diplomatic efforts at Elizabeth's court (Henry IV).

One of the more important studies to address the French influence in Shakespeare's works is Hugh Richmond's *Puritans and Libertines: Anglo-French Literary Relations in the Reformation*. Like Lefranc, Richmond observes that Shakespeare modeled his protagonists in *Love's Labor's Lost* on historical men and women with a wealth of detail that makes it difficult to imagine how Shakespeare could have accurately assembled so many historical characters at the right place and time. Shakespeare describes their physical and psycho-

King Henry III, Marguerite Valois, and Catherine de Médici

logical traits, their favorite pastimes, their quirks and relationships, including references to time spent together in other places, even a depiction of the Russians who visited the Elizabethan court (Richmond 301-339).

Though *LLL* was first published in quarto in 1598, we know from its title page that this was a revised version, "newly corrected and augmented." As Felicia Londre points out, "Numerous internal references point to 1578 as the initial date of composition…" (Londre 5). "Of the internal evidence, most compelling is the fact that Euphuism—of which *Love's Labor's Lost* is universally acknowledged to be a textbook example—was a courtly fad in 1578-79, and even a year or so later the play's witticisms and in-jokes about that linguistic affectation among members of the court would have been quite stale" (Londre 6). This is corroborated by the external evidence that *The Double Maske: A Maske of Amasons and A Maske of Knights* was presented at Elizabeth's court on 11 January 1579 to honor the French envoy Simier, whose coming had been announced three months earlier. The *Double Maske* was described in the records of the Court Revels as "an entertainment in imitation of a tournament between six ladies and a like number of gentlemen who surrendered to them" (Londre 5).

In the play, Shakespeare describes Catherine and her *escadron volant*, "the flying squadron," a carefully picked group of the most intelligent, charming ladies of her court, whose assignments were to solicit information, to distract, and to sow discord when necessary. Catherine used them to spread disinformation, to hinder or to hasten political and social intrigues. In *Love's Labor's Lost*, she successfully deploys them to distract Navarre and his lords from their ultimate goal, just as she employed the *escadron volant* historically (Richmond 336).

Of the meeting of the king and his courtiers with Catherine's ladies, Richmond says, "if Henri de Navarre had not fought (and almost lost) the Battle

Ball at the court of Henry III of France, circa 1580

of the Sexes mounted by Catherine de Médici's *escadron volant*, Shakespeare would probably not have initiated the fascinating series of dynamic heroines which starts with the princess and her ladies in *Love's Labor's Lost* and lends verisimilitude of detail to figures like Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra" (Richmond 372). In other words, Shakespeare is clearly depicting people and events of which he had personal experience. For example, the king opens *Love's Labor's Lost* (1595) by stating, "Our court shall be a little Academe" (*LLL* I.1.13). Shakespeare thus knew about the introduction of academies into the French court, initiated by Ronsard to help with the education of Charles IX, the first being established by 1574. This concept was expanded by others, including the court of Navarre, where it is recreated in *Love's Labor's Lost* as an in-depth representation of the highly educated culture of the French court.

Richmond observes that the repartee between French characters in the play can be traced back to *l'amour courtois* of the Middle Ages. It is in this spirit that Shakespeare depicts men and women playing a game of wits in which women are not subservient to men. Moreover, the abrupt ending of the play, which has been condemned by critics, mirrors what actually happened when Catherine de Medici had to leave abruptly because of the sudden death of her son.

Richmond emphasizes that, "there can be no doubt the play deals with negotiations begun at Nérac in 1578" (302). In addition, "It is Shakespeare's genius to have copied, not invented such psychologies" (Richmond, 338). Once we not only understand all this intellectually but also sense it emotionally, we are left to speculate about the true dating of the play, which appears from its many topical allusions to have been written much earlier than its traditional dating of the mid-1590s.

The extent of the French influence in Shakespeare's plays is just beginning to be recognized. For example, Peter Moore found that *Love's Labor's Lost* is not the only play in which Shakespeare incorporates topical allusions from French politics and society, allusions that demonstrate an intimate knowledge of local events. He notes that *Comedy of Errors* is dated to 1592-93 by E.K. Chambers, who calls it Shakespeare's fifth play. Yet Act III, scene 2 has this curious exchange:

> Antipholus: Where France?
> Dromio: In her forehead; armed and reverted, making war against her heir.

In 1584, Henry III of France lost his brother and heir, whereupon his brother-in-law and cousin, Henry de Bourbon, King of Navarre, became heir to the throne of France. When Navarre rejected the King's demand in December 1586 to convert to Catholicism, the Catholic armies massed against Navarre from mid-1587 until December 1588, when Henry III had his ally, the Duke of Guise, murdered. The Catholic armies then turned against the King. This situation continued until Henry III was assassinated in August 1589, whereupon Henry of Navarre became Henry IV of France. Thus, France was at war with its heir from mid-1587 to 1588. Only someone with a sophisticated knowledge of French politics could make this distinction with such a simple line. (Moore 174-5)

An equally subtle reference to French royal behavior is included in *2 Henry VI*, where the character of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk and lover of Queen Margaret, is beheaded in Act IV, scene 1. In scene 4, Margaret brings his head to a conference at the palace, where she weeps over and embraces it. This is often been used as an example of Shakespeare's ignorance of royal deportment. Yet there was a story dating from 1574 that was the likely source of this incident. In that year the French Court was convulsed by a treason plot, which resulted in the beheading of two figures—Joseph de la Mole and Hannibal de Cocconas. These men were the lovers of Margaret Valois, Queen of Navarre, and the Duchess of Nevers. A few hours after the executions the heads disappeared, and it was said that Margaret's chamberlain brought them to the two ladies, who "wept over them that night and then had them embalmed and placed in jeweled caskets" (Moore 246-7). Whether the story is true is not at issue; the point is that it was told, and its similarity to *2 Henry VI* is striking. In both cases there is a French queen named Margaret who receives the head of her decapitated lover in order to weep over it. Then there is the resemblance between the names de la Mole and de la Pole. Finally, de la Mole actually visited Elizabeth's court in 1572 on an embassy, and Elizabeth intervened on his behalf in 1574, albeit unsuccessfully. Oxford was at Elizabeth's court in 1572 and then visited the French court in the

spring of 1575, being well placed to hear the story of Queen Margaret and de la Mole.

The most recent scholar to clearly demonstrate that Shakespeare not only knew French but was inspired by French sources is Richard Hillman. In *French Origins of English Tragedy*, Hillman compares early French dramas with Shakespeare's plays, yet never questions how Shakspear could have read Jodelle, a minor Pléiade poet who composed the first modern French tragedy, *Cléopatre Captive*. In "The Bourn Identity: *Hamlet* and the French of Montaigne's *Essais*," Travis Williams demonstrates that Shakespeare had read Montaigne in French. In 2009, Edward Wheatley discovered a new source for *King Lear* in *Le garçon et l'aveugle*, the oldest surviving French farce.

More orthodox scholars now agree that Shakespeare knew French and Italian because it is becoming increasingly impossible to deny that Shakespeare's works reveal a profound knowledge of their language and literature, including French court masques, unpublished papers, and local topography.

Investigating Shakespeare's foreign sources is key to discovering the scope of his creative genius. I believe he consulted as many different sources as possible because each source offered him a slightly different prism of insight. He then integrated these stories with the events of his day in allegories that reflected the social and political tensions current in Elizabethan culture. When we add this complexity to the medieval and Renaissance concept of seeing multiple levels of meaning in a text—the literal, the allegorical, historical, and the spiritual—the dizzying complexity of Shakespeare's work can begin to be fully appreciated.

As Ben Johnson tells us, Shakespeare was the "soul of the age"—a mirror into the complex world of Renaissance thought. This psychological and cultural complexity helps explain why Shakespeare's works are still so popular. Shakespeare's plays, even his comedies, always leave us with an odd feeling of malaise because, as with the Rubin's vase image, we sense the different realities, the "both/and" as opposed to "the either/or."

Shakespeare's love-hate relationship with French is so important because it is a source of energizing tension that permeates his work. David Steinsaltz maintains he was haunted by the shadow of the Norman Conquest, and so continually employs effeminizing references to the French in the plays as a psychological weapon to assuage the shame of national defeat, the original narcissistic wound, compounded by England's failure to hold onto its French territories.

In Shakespeare's day, French public affairs were a continuing political issue between 1560 and 1581 given Elizabeth's four French suitors, and from 1562–1598 as a result of the French religious civil war, which mirrored

what was happening in England. Shakespeare's history plays portray the French-English encounter overtly; however, this tense literary relationship continues throughout all of Shakespeare's works in what scholars have described as "the anxiety of influence" (Martin and Melehy 3). Shakespeare lived in a world of dual ancestry that was reflected not only in English history and law, but in English language and art. This paradoxical love-hate theme runs throughout the Shakespeare canon.

Conclusions

Recent authorship theory in academia has returned to a group process first advocated by Delia Bacon in the 19th century. The new hypothesis, recently propounded by the editors of the Oxford University Press edition of the canon (2017), posits that Shakespeare was a producer-writer passing play manuscripts around a circle of intimates in a collaborative effort. As this is becoming the consensus of many mainstream academics, proponents of an alternate authorship should be welcomed into the academic debate.

For Shakespeare scholars to refuse to open the discussion to other authorship candidates, some of whom are now proposed as part of Shakespeare's writing group, shows that academia prefers a conspiracy theory on a grand scale (multiple authors working in collaboration) as opposed to a conspiracy theory on a small scale (a single author). Alternative authorship theories have never been accepted by Stratfordian academics because there was no paper trail, no direct evidence of authorship. There is no contemporary paper trial for Shakspear as a writer (Price 311-13), and no paper trail for a group of Elizabethan writers circulating manuscripts, which seems even more improbable than having no paper trail for one author. These studies also fail to consider the shared vocabulary, colloquialisms, and political aims of a small group of writers spending much of their time with one another.

With regards to the Shakespeare authorship question, the French have a similar experience with anonymity that should be helpful in approaching the Shakespeare conundrum. Often described as the French Shakespeare, Molière employed a *nom de plume* in writing all his plays because he did not wish to use his real name, Poquelin, for fear of tarnishing his family reputation. Other French playwrights commenting on social matters also employed a *nom de plume*, thereby demonstrating that the need for literary concealment was not just a phenomenon restricted to England.

More in-depth studies of Shakespeare's French and the influence of the French Renaissance upon his works clearly are needed. However, the area that has received the least attention is the impact of French poetry on Shakespeare's sonnets and long poems, and it is time for a book that investigates this area with the scholarship that it deserves.

Appendix 1:

Letter by Edward de Vere, written at age thirteen, to Lord Burghley

August 23, 1563
Monsieur treshonorable

Monsieur j'ay receu voz lettres, plaines d'humanite et courtoysje, & fort resemblantes a vostre grand'amour et singuliere affection enuers moy. comme vrais enfans dueument procreez d'une telle mere. pour la quelle je me trouue de jour en jour plus tenu a v. h. Voz bons admonestements pour l'obseruation du bon ordre selon voz appointemens, je me delibere (dieu aidant) de garder en toute diligence comme chose que je cognois et considere tendre especialement a mon propre bien et profit, usant en cela l'aduis et authorite de ceux qui sont aupres de moy. la discretion desquels i'estime si grande (s'il me conuient parler quelque chose a leur advange) qui non seulement ilz se porteront selon qu'un tel temps le requiert, ains que plus est feront tant que je me gouverne selon que vous aves ordonne et commande. Quant a l'ordre de mon estude pour ce que il requiert un long discours a l'expliquer par le menu, et le temps est court a ceste heure, je vous prie affectueusement m'en excuser pour le present. vous asseurant que par le premier passant je le vous ferai seavoir bien au long. Cependant je prie a dieu vous donner sante.

Edward Oxinford

(Translation by William Plumer Fowler)

My very honorable Sir

Sir, I have received your letters, full of humanity and courtesy, and strongly resembling your great love and singular affection towards me, like true children duly procreated of such a mother, for whom I find myself from day to day more bound to your honor. Your good admonishments for the observance of good order according to your appointed rules I am resolved (God aiding) to keep with all diligence, as a thing that I may know and consider to tend especially to my own good and profit, using therein the advice and authority of those who are near me, whose discretion I esteem so great (if it is convenient to me to say something to their advantage) that not only will they comport themselves according as a given time requires it, but will as well do what is more, as long as I govern myself as you have ordered and commanded. As to the order of my study, because it requires a long discourse to explain it in detail, and the time is short at this hour, I pray you affectionately to excuse me therefrom for the present, assuring you that by the first passer-by I shall make it known to you at full length. In the meantime, I pray to God to give you health.

Edward Oxinford

Appendix 2

The "Lomenie" referred to in the letter was Antoine de Lomenie, the French Ambassador to England at the time. Henry of Navarre became King of Navarre in 1572 and King Henry IV in 1589.

Lettre du Roy a Monsieur
Le Grand Chambellan d'Angleterre
Monsieur le Grand Chambellan.

Je vous fais ce mot par Lomenie que j'envoic vers la Royne ma bonne soeur pour les affaires qui concerment le bien de ses affaires et les miennes, pour vous faire savoir le contentement quej'ai des bons offices quevous m'aves rendu aupres d'Elle, lesquels je vous prie de continuer et croire que j'aurai toujours fort agreable de m'en revancher et ce qui s'offrira pour votre satisfaction particuliere, ainsi quej'ai charge ledit de Lomenie devous dire, lequel je vous prie croire comme moi momo qui prie Dieu vous avoit Monsieur Le Grand Chambellan en sa garde.

Ce 5 Octobre a Paris.

Signo Henry, et au dessus est ecrit a Monsieur le Grand Chambellan d'Angleterre

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(Translation by Craig Huston)

Letter from the King to the
Lord Great Chamberlain of England
Lord Great Chamberlain,

I am having this note brought to you by Lomenie whom I send before the Queen my good sister with respect to the matters which concern the well being of her affairs and of mine, in order to inform you of the satisfaction I feel for the good offices you have performed on my behalf in her presence, which I beg you to continue and believe that I will always consider it a great pleasure to reciprocate in whatever might bring about your personal satisfaction, as I have charged the said Lomenie to tell you, whom I pray you to believe as myself, who prays God to keep you, Lord Great Chamberlain, in his care.

This 5th of October at Paris. [1595]

Signed Henry, and above is written to the Lord Great Chamberlain of England.

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