


From the Pulpit – a Few Home Truths

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 According to the testimony of the distinguished 17th century antiquary and Garter Principal King of Arms, Sir William Dugdale, Shakespeare's Monument at Stratford-upon-Avon was originally surmounted by two carved cherubs, the one on the right held an hourglass, the one on the left, a spade. At some point in the late 17th or early 18th centuries these figures were replaced with newer, tidier models, whose chubby legs no longer dangled precariously over the ledge upon which they were sitting and whose arms were now neatly tucked close to their bodies. The one on the left still holds a spade, though it is no longer so easy to see, while the one on the right, now deprived of his hourglass, holds an inverted torch. A minute skull — pointless given that there was already a skull crowning the top of the monument — has been placed by the torchbearer's bottom. If it had not been for Dugdale's declared determination to "preserve those monuments from that fate which time, if not contingent mischief, might expose them to" we might never have known what message the monument's conceivers intended to convey. The spade and inverted combo that is seen on the monument today represents (or we are told) the figures of "Labour" and "Rest."

At least one commentator believes that the alteration of symbols has not changed the message. Of the original monument he writes: "Placed upon the cornice are two wingless cherubs, one holding a spade representing 'Labor', the other holding an hourglass and representing 'Rest.'"¹ I have not managed to find a shred of evidence to support this contention that the hourglass was ever used as a symbol of "Rest" — unless by "Rest" is meant "Death," or, more correctly, a *memento mori* — a reminder of the transience of life. But we should not confuse reminders

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of the transience of life with representations of “Rest.” What the hourglass patently and indisputably *does* represent is “Time.” The conjunction of spade and hourglass (“Labour” and “Time”) is not uncommonly found on English funerary monuments of this period. The 1623 monument to Richard and Elizabeth Berney, for instance, at St. Peter’s Parmentergate, displays a weary figure leaning on an hourglass and holding a spade; the glorious monument to Sir Edmund Plowden at Temple Church crosses spade, mattock and hourglass under a pile of autumn fruit. These symbols serve, not only as reminders of our mortality, but as images of those tools that are needed in life and that will be needed in death, in order for us find the “Truth.” As William Gurnall preached in his *Christian in Complete Armour* (1655): “thou must bestowe some time for thy diligent search after Truth. Truth lies deep, and must be digged for; this treasure of knowledge calls for spade and Mattock.”

The idea that “Truth” lies underground can be traced back to Democritus and the ancient Greeks, who had her slumbering at the bottom of a deep well. In Hebrew scripture God is said to have hidden Truth at the center of the earth and humans are expected to expend their time and effort excavating for her. Luther accused the Devil of deliberately distracting men from their labour so as to deprive them of the time necessary to their search after Truth. Iconography of the 16th and 17th centuries is replete with images of a winged, raddled Time holding his hourglass in one hand while hauling the luscious figure of “Truth” (his daughter) out of a dark pit in the ground.

In September 1623, two months before the publication of Shakespeare’s First Folio, Joseph Hall preached a sermon before that great book’s two illustrious dedicatees (Lords Pembroke and Montgomery) in which he said: “The vein of Truth lies low, it must be digged and delved for to the very centre.” His sermon took the form of an extended rumination on “Truth,” according to a phrase from Proverbs 23:23: “Buy the truth and sell it not.” Hall’s sermon mused on Latin words and phrases like *veritas domini* (God’s truth); *dilexisti veritatem* (thou hast loved Truth) and *verum omne vero consonat* (“all truth accords with every Truth”).

The preacher was, of course, the very same Joseph Hall who, two decades earlier and before he had joined the priesthood, had slandered Oxford/Shakespeare in a set of “tooth-lesse satyrs” called *Virgidemiarum* (1598). As post-Stratfordians are aware, the poet whom Hall accuses of running a scriptorium of writers and “shifting his name” like a “craftie cuttle who lieth sure in the black cloud of his thicke vomiture” was “Shakespeare,” even though Hall hides his identity behind the name “Labeo” — a classical reference to Quintus Fabius Labeo, the Roman aristocrat-poet-playwright who, according to Santra as reported by Suetonius, arranged for his comedies to go out under the allonym “Terence.”²

In his Third book of Satyrs from *Virgidemiarum* (1597) Hall attacks someone whom he calls “Great Osmond.” This person wonders how he shall be remembered once he is “dead & gone.” His name is not attached to any of his works and he is reviled for his living deeds. Hall insists that no fancy tomb will ever save his “rotten name,” and suggests that once “Great Osmond” is dead he should be “inditched in great secrecie where no passenger might curse [his] dust.” This attack appears

in the same book as Hall's darts against the shamed pseudonymous poet "Labeo" (Shakespeare) and we may tentatively identify "Great Osmond" as "Great Oxford" through Hall's veiled allusions to the Vere name in "true vertue" ("thy monument make thou thy living deeds: No other tombe then that true vertue needs"), and in the line: "where then is Osmonds name? Deservedst thou ill?"

That Oxford was eventually buried "in great secrecie" at Westminster Abbey may suggest that Hall possessed notable powers of prophecy, but Oxford was already ahead of the game. In the sonnets ascribed to "Shake-speare" we learn of a poet whose reputation and social standing are, like "Great Osmund's" and "Great Oxford's," in tatters, whose name has "received a brand" (111), who is, like "Great Osmond" and "Great Oxford" "despised" (37), "shamed" (72) "vile esteemed" (121) and "in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes"; who feels "all alone," and beweeeps his "outcast state" (29). Shake-speare knew that the pomp of a stately funerary monument would not have been appropriate at his passing, for he suffered a "bewailed guilt" (36) at the "vulgar scandal stamped upon [his] brow" (112). "If you read this line," he wrote, "remember not the hand that writ it" (71); "In me each part will be forgotten" (81); "My name be buried where my body is and live no more to shame nor me nor you" (72); "After my death...forget me quite" (72); "no longer mourn me when I am dead...do not so much as my poor name rehearse [for] I once gone to all the world must die" (71).

As Hall's attack on Oxford recommends that his remains "be inditched in great secrecie" so that "no passenger might curse his dust," the Stratford cenotaph defiantly urges the passenger to "Stay" and "read (from this monument) if thou canst, whom envious death hath placed with Shakespeare." "Judicio Pylum," "Genio Socratem" and "Arte Maronem" – clever allusions respectively to Beaumont, Chaucer and Spenser which allow the riddle-solving passenger to discover that "Shakespeare" was secretly "inditched" by "envious death" near to those three poets, thus confirming what Oxfordians have long supposed, that his body was removed from under an "uncarved marble" at Hackney and now, as stated by his cousin, Percival Golding, "lieth buried at Westminster."³ We have taken a long time to work all this out and it is a matter of no small regret that the two delightful cherubs — purposefully designed to encourage the Stratford passenger to bestow his time and labour in his search for Truth — are not still around to gloat over it.

If Hall ever read the Stratford epitaph he would undoubtedly have sensed the rebuke to his vulgar "satyr" against "Great Osmond" and, as a self-elected advocate of truth, might also have recognized the specific "truth" for which the cherubs ordained us to spend our time excavating, for he could not have been oblivious to the fact that *Vere* in Latin means "truly" or "truthfully," and that from this, Great Oxford had drawn his motto *Verò nihil Verius* ("Nothing Truer than Truth"). Those playful little putti on the Stratford-Shakespeare cenotaph were telling us all along that with time and labour we must dig for Vere.

And so to the present coal-face where the digging still goes on. The internet has allowed us to work at a much faster pace with a more productive rate of return

than ever before, and so (as those who are abreast of recent developments in the authorship question will be aware) the full shape and form of the once hidden treasure is now clearly in view. But as time and the hard sweat of an army of remarkable scholars approaches that moment when the truth can be finally winched from its 400-year-old pit, the diggers must strap their helmets tightly to their heads in expectation of the fiercest and bloodiest resistance from those who passionately prefer the truth to remain buried for ever.

Professor Don Rubin, who has achieved much success in inspiring students at the University of Toronto to take a keen interest in the Shakespeare authorship problem has, like most of us, made his fair share of enemies along the way. In this issue he tells of the hair-raising animosity levelled against his work by one James Kelly Nestruck, a theatre critic of *Toronto's Globe and Mail*. Stratfordians enjoy speculating on the psychological aberrations that motivate those who question their orthodoxy — we are snobs, anarchists, neo-romantics, Shakespeare-haters, mentalists, holocaust deniers, supporters of South African apartheid, etc., etc., *ad nauseam*. Above all we are scary. Professor Stanley Wells, in a television interview with his colleague, Carol Rutter, announced, in quite hysterical tones, that it is “dangerous to encourage people to question history.” A petrified educationalist called Alasdair Brown, in internet discussion, similarly announced that the Oxfordian challenge to his creed was “insidious, reactionary and dangerous.” Professor Rubin’s study of Nestruck’s craven attempts to have him discredited serves as a fascinating case study into how a human might behave when he is hell-bent on keeping a raft afloat that is slowly and ingloriously submerging beneath the muddy waters of a rising tide.

How often do Oxfordians have to hear their objectors cry: “What does it matter who wrote Shakespeare, so long as we have the plays?” While my own enjoyment of Shakespeare’s works has been unquestionably enriched by my understanding who wrote them and how they relate to his life and times, I accept that this is a personal attitude that others may not share. However, he who asks “What does it matter so long as we have the works?” is missing the point. History needs to be true and accurate if it is to serve any purpose at all. To plead that Shakespearean biography does not matter since it does not affect one’s personal enjoyment of his works displays not only a gross disregard for the concept and purpose of biography, but a myopic and wholly self-centered confusion of history and private, personal responses to aesthetic stimuli.

Addressing this topic Bernd Brackmann employs his spade and hourglass for a philosophical investigation of the relationship between genius, inspiration and an artist’s biography. His declared aim is not to uncover new facts about Shakespeare but to provide what he terms “a tangible approach to the man.” Brackmann argues that since the works of a writer of “genius” are necessarily “inspired” by his life’s experience, understanding a writer’s biography allows the reader to enter into a quasi-personal relationship with him — a relationship which he believes “may reveal new aspects of the work and enable an inner conversation with him in his work.” So to those who insist that Shakespeare’s biography is irrelevant to the appreciation

of his works, Brackmann eloquently recommends that “we open our experience to a new kind of writer: one who, in his works, confronts us not as one who writes about life, but one who writes in order to experience it.”

The question of the spelling of Shakespeare’s name and its relevance to the authorship question has been widely debated over recent years, most notably (for the anti-Stratfordians) by Professor A. J. Pointon in his book *The Man who was Never Shakespeare* and in *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?* and by David Kathman (for the Stratfordians) on his own authorship web page (shakespeareauthorship.com). Richard Whalen reopens the case with an attack on the methodology that Kathman uses to swing the evidence so as to suggest that the spelling of “Shakspeare” was unregulated and therefore irrelevant to whether or not the playwright used a pseudonym. Whalen explains why Kathman’s statistics were misleading and shows that the figures could equally be interpreted to reveal the very opposite of that which Kathman believes. While Whalen achieves a battle victory for common sense, the spelling war will undoubtedly continue. J. E. Laughton in his *Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (1894) showed that the Elizabethans altered the spelling of their surnames in much the same way as they differenced their arms, to indicate precedence within the family. Walter Raleigh, for instance, spelled his name one way during the life of his grandfather, another after his decease, and when his father died he finally adopted his father’s spelling (“Raleigh”), which he maintained consistently until his death. We see variant spellings of *Vere* (*Ver*, *Veare* etc) used by different family members at different times, with the particule, *de*, seemingly reserved for the head of the family. In a letter to the *London Times*, Laughton argued that the spelling variations in Shakespeare’s signatures, which all postdate the death of his father, give “grounds for suspicion that they are not all genuine.”⁴ This is a field of enquiry that would certainly benefit from further Oxfordian research.

Robert Detobel has, for many years, been urging historians to concentrate on the culture and mindset of feudal Europe in order to make better sense of the Shakespeare authorship mystery. Elsewhere he has shown how a small passing phrase, such as Shakespeare used in his dedication to *Venus and Adonis* (“I vow to take advantage of all idle hours”), denotes that Shakespeare was not a professional writer but a courtly poet. Here he builds on that theme by closely examining the conflicts that assailed the European courtier from medieval times, between his feudal duty to arms and his courtly duty to letters. Detobel’s appeal for a more culturally sensitive historicity is bolstered with citations from across a spectrum of English and European literature, showing how the issue of arms and letters was of central concern to the gentlemen members of ruling class in Europe, and that the pseudonym “William Shakespeare” was born of this very concern.

It is well known that no direct evidence exists for any single individual as the author of Shakespeare’s works. If it could be found there would be no authorship debate. Stratfordians have insisted that there is nothing odd about this, that we have more information about Shakespeare than any contemporary playwright. They insist, moreover, on the immortally fatuous words borrowed by Donald Rumsfeld to urge a war over nonexistent weapons of mass destruction: “absence of

evidence isn't evidence of absence."⁵ That argument was shattered in Diana Price's *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (2001), which exposed Stratford-Shakespeare as unique among contemporary writers for having left no literary paper trail. Whether you profess Stratfordianism or something a little more enlightened, reasons need to be found to explain the extraordinarily anomalous gap in the documentary record. James Warren boldly asserts that the absence of evidence points to a high-level cover-up sparked by Southampton's potential claim to the throne as a bastard son of Elizabeth. The author, who is to be heartily congratulated for his remarkable industry and dedication in producing the monumental *Index to Oxfordian Publications*,⁶ will undoubtedly stir up much controversy with some of his thesis, but whether you agree with his outline or not, he should be applauded for entering into an area which, for fear of ridicule, is usually ignored to the wider detriment of the post-Stratfordian cause. Warren's plucky salvo should, at very least, inspire a new generation to focus on the mystery of Shakespeare's absent records.

In "Chaucer Lost and Found in Shakespeare's Histories," Jacob Hughes examines Shakespeare's attitude to Chaucer and in particular the Chaucerian influence on the character of Sir John Falstaff, without pressing too hard at the gates of the authorship debate. Chaucer, just like Shakespeare, came from a higher social class than we are told in schools. His name (like Thomas Sackville's and Edward de Vere's) derives from old French and would have denoted high birth in his time. He was a prominent figure in the court circle of John of Gaunt, one of his nephews was the Earl of Somerset, another the Marquess of Exeter. His granddaughter married a duke.

In 2011, much to the amazement of anti-Stratfordians around the world, Stanley Wells acknowledged an article in *The Oxfordian* — "Shakespeare's Lesse Greeke" by Andrew Werth.⁷ If he is seriously interested in the subject of Shakespeare and Ancient Greek drama, he must turn his attentions to the extraordinary excavations of Dr. Earl Showerman, who may be described, without the slightest recourse to exaggeration, as one of the world's leading experts on Shakespeare's indebtedness to the Greeks. In this issue he demonstrates how, once again, Shakespeare's reliance on Greek texts seems to have been recklessly overlooked, citing Aristophanes's Dionysian comedy, *The Birds*, as a likely source for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

We all like to quote Mark Twain's observation about Shakespearean biography as "a brontosaurus of nine bones and 600 barrels of plaster-of-paris," but how many have actually read his book *Is Shakespeare Dead?* It was heavily criticized at the time of its publication (1909) for all the obvious reasons plus the fact that he appeared to have cribbed passages from Greenwood's 1908 masterpiece, *The Shakespeare Problem Restated*, without acknowledgment, but this book, while superseded in a few facts, is still an excellent and amusing read, which I would strongly recommend to any person of literary persuasion, who is making his first forays into the Shakespeare authorship question.

Twain teaches, quite sensibly, that the anti-Stratfordian must be primarily concerned with setting the record straight and not exhausting himself in trying to

persuade others unapt to rational appeal, “for,” he writes

I am aware that when even the brightest mind has been trained up from childhood in a superstition of any kind, it will never be possible for that mind, in its maturity, to examine sincerely, dispassionately and conscientiously any evidence of any circumstance which shall seem to cast a doubt upon the validity of that superstition.

For this reason Twain asks himself “Am I trying to convince anybody that Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare’s works?...No-no.” Following his brilliant talk at the Madison Conference 2014, James Norwood wittily reminds us of the background to Twain’s anti-Stratfordianism and his surprising affinity to the playwright, Shakespeare.

A recent disappointment has been reading the exhaustive and expensive study of a Victorian charlatan, *John Payne Collier – Scholarship and Forgery in the Nineteenth Century*, by Arthur and Janet Ing Freeman (2004). There is of course much of interest to be mined from its two fat volumes, but as to the key matter of what Collier did or did not forge the work is pretty feeble. Collier is always given the benefit of the doubt, and while we may appreciate that it is tiresome for the Stratfordians if too much of what little there is about Shakespeare turns out to be forged, it is clearly the proper duty of the self-respecting scholar who embarks on a 1500-page study of a known forger to reopen every case, to re-examine all original sources, to readdress all of the accusations that have been leveled against him on a point-by-point basis and, with due diligence, to search out and expose any further documents whose authenticity is deserving of doubt due to Collier’s involvement with them.

In several cases (e.g., Sydney Race’s 1954 aspersions against the “Manningham Diary”), the accuser is simply rubbished as a person, without a single one of his accusations being tested, rebutted or even reported. I hope the Oxfordians will resist the temptation to treat the Freemans’ study as the final verdict on what might or might not be a forgery and will carry on investigating Collier in the same detective spirit as our intrepid digger, Richard Malim, has boldly reopened another forgery case that has lain dormant ninety years. Was Ben Jonson’s peculiar “Censure of the English Poets,” apparently recorded from conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden on the occasion of Jonson’s visit to Scotland in 1619, an early 18th century imposture? As Malim reveals there are many sensible reasons to treat this source with extreme caution. It is possible that not one of the perplexing utterances ascribed to Jonson actually came from his lips.

Richard Waugaman gives an excellent summary of what a lately discovered manuscript by William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, tells us about Shakespeare, reading perceptively behind the few lines and many omissions of Scott’s literary criticism. Curiously it is the same impulse to Shakespearean omission that has, according to Michael Dudley, inspired Peter Kirwan and Christie Carson to excessive coyness about the authorship question in their new anthology of essays, *Shakespeare and*

the Digital World. Dudley's sharp and informative review of this unappealing tome brings the current edition of *Brief Chronicles* to a close.

It remains only for me to congratulate all of these scholarly diggers on their splendid contributions, to encourage them, with hourglass and spade, to continue in their splendid endeavors, and assure each one of them, in Euphanes's words from Fletcher's *Queen of Corinth*, that "with all my nerves I'll labour with ye till Time awaken Truth."

Endnotes

¹ Peter Usher, *Shakespeare and the Dawn of Modern Science*, 2010.

² See *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars by C. Suetonius Tranquillus to which are added his Live of the Grammarians, Rehtoricians and Poets*, trans. Alexander Thomson & rev. T. Forester (1893), 534. *The Life of Terence* was preserved in a 4th century commentary by Aelius Donatus who attributed it to Suetonius. It was later published in Suetonius *de Viris Illustribus*. Both sources were available in printed editions by the end of the 16th century.

³ Alexander Waugh, "'Thy Stratford Monument' – Revisited Holistic Interpretation," ShakespeareOxfordFellowship.org. March 8, 2015. Reprinted from the *De Vere Society Newsletter*, October 2014.

⁴ 27 November 1908.

⁵ The maxim, well known to lawyers, is often attributed to the cosmologist Martin Rees. Rumsfeld is also know for his classification of "unknowns": "there's what we know that we don't know, and there's also what we don't know that we don't know."

⁶ Somerville, MA: ForEver Press, 2013, 2014, 2015.

⁷ *The Oxfordian*. 29:1-8.