



# Shakespeare Matters

"The Voice of the Shakespeare Fellowship"

Vol. 1: no. 1

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments..."

Fall 2001

## A Golden Book, bound richly up *Comparing Chapman's words in Bussy d'Ambois with Ashbourne portrait images*

By Barbara Burris ©2001

In George Chapman's play, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, an unsuccessful imitation of *Hamlet* published in 1613, the main character, Clermont D'Ambois, describes with glowing praise a "famous Earle" as he was seen traveling from Italy to Germany; ending with the words, "And t'was the Earle of Oxford."<sup>1</sup>

And yet Clermont—who is modeled after Hamlet—also attacks Oxford and his poetry and "works" in an earlier speech, which includes an amazingly detailed description of the book in the Ashbourne portrait of Shakespeare:



Courtesy, Folger Shakespeare Library

*The Ashbourne portrait (owned by the Folger Shakespeare Library) has been a point of contention within the Oxfordian movement for the past 60 years.*

As these high men doe, low in all true grace,  
Their height being privilege to all things base.  
And as the foolish Poet that still writ  
All his most *selfe-loved verse* in paper *royall*,  
Or Partchment rul'd with Lead, smooth'd with  
the Pumice;

*Bound richly up, and strung with Crimson  
strings;*

*Never* so blest as when hee writ and read  
The *Ape-lov'd* issue of his braine; and *never*  
But joying in himselfe; admiring *ever*.  
Yet in his workes behold him, and hee show'd  
Like to a ditcher. So these painted men,  
All set on out-side, looke upon within,  
And not a pezzants entrails you shall finde  
More foule and mezel'd, nor more sterv'd of  
minde.

( Lines 184-195, II,i; emphasis added )<sup>2</sup>

This speech about the high-born Poet is crammed with references that link the Poet and his richly bound book to the book held by the nobleman in the Ashbourne Shakespeare portrait, and which identify him with Edward de Vere, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford. Further evidence of this connection is to be found in *Romeo and Juliet*, where Lady Capulet speaks of a book "That in gold clasps locks in the

golden story"<sup>3</sup>

These passages in Chapman's and Shakespeare's plays add another layer of evidence to the January 1940 *Scientific American* report on Charles Wisner Barrell's infra red and X-ray examination of the Shakespeare Ashbourne portrait—an examination which revealed that the portrait had been over-painted, and beneath the over-painting was the real Shakespeare: Edward de Vere the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford.<sup>4</sup>

The Ashbourne portrait (pictured above) is one of the key points of contention in the

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*From the Editors:*

## Oxford is Shakespeare: any questions?

This first newsletter of the Shakespeare Fellowship comes off the press at a momentous crossroads in intellectual history. The paradigm has shifted. The intellectual revolution adumbrated in 1920 by the man with the funny name has finally, in the wake of Charlton Ogburn's *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* (1984) and subsequent events, come of age. The proverbial handwriting is on the wall: an overwhelming preponderance of circumstantial evidence, much of it accumulated only in the last 25 years, supports the "Looney" theory identifying Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, as the man behind the Shakespeare myth. "Shakespeare" matters—in spite of, and sometimes because of, the fact that he's a rose by some other name.

Welcome, therefore, to the first issue of *Shakespeare Matters*. We aren't going to bore you with all the reasons why, in October 2001, we've struck off on this new Shakespeare adventure. The most important reason is the simple one given by the title of our publication. Shakespeare Matters. That's what we care about—and, frankly, we don't care a fig for those lost souls who still adhere to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century biographical tradition in which Shakespeare is a bland, colorless, uncontroversial, boringly predictable writer of commercial potboilers.

In fact, if you've followed the recent history of the authorship question in publications such as the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, you've noticed that a corresponding premise—that Edward de Vere was too notorious, by one criteria or an-

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## Letters:

To the Friends of the Shakespeare Fellowship:

The formation of the Shakespeare Fellowship is, without question, the most exciting development in the Oxfordian movement this year. I am enthusiastic about its membership, heartened by the high principles that have led to its formation, and am most impressed with the calibre of the people who have spearheaded this effort to rescue our hopes from the despair born of the impotence and inaction that have paralyzed and aborted, for years, so many possibilities and opportunities that might have been spawned and succored by its predecessor organization.

The Shakespeare Fellowship promises to become an active home and intellectual treasury for the nurture and support of scholarship that one day will lead the world to recognize Edward de Vere as the author of the Shakespeare canon.

With all good wishes and support,

Professor Daniel Wright  
Director  
The Edward de Vere Studies Conference  
Portland, Oregon  
10 September 2001

To the Editors:

I for one am quite excited about the formation of the Shakespeare Fellowship. Oxfordians have long needed a forum that takes advantage of the full capabilities of the Internet, in terms of research forums, archiving Oxfordian research online, and generally making the Oxfordian case in a more effective form to a world-wide audience. There are many projects waiting in the wings for support.

The Shakespeare Fellowship promises to provide the opportunity for these projects to gain the support they need to get off the ground and make a significant contribution to Shakespeare scholarship.

Mark Alexander  
Woodside, California  
24 September 2001

## Fellowship Home Page and discussion boards

As part of the establishment of the Shakespeare Fellowship, long-time Oxfordian Marty Hyatt has agreed to administer an Internet discussion bulletin board as part of the new Shakespeare Fellowship Home Page (located at: [www.ShakespeareFellowship.org](http://www.ShakespeareFellowship.org))

Hyatt, along with *Shakespeare Matters* co-editor William Boyle, co-founded the first Oxfordian Listserv—Evermore—back in 1994. Evermore eventually became the Phaeton discussion group, now managed by Nina Green of Canada.

Hyatt is also responsible for establishing the Usenet discussion group **humanities.lit.authors.shakespeare** in 1995, a group on which authorship is always a hotly debated topic.

Present plans call for the site to have one or two all-comers discussion boards on the gateway page, accompanied by links to any number of private boards for members only, available to explore issues in smaller, more focused groups, or available for teachers to set up groups for their own students and other students around the country. Private boards would, of course,

require signups and passwords.

The Fellowship Home Page should be up and running in its first incarnation by the time our first subscribers are reading this. The page will feature some of the usual fare for any Internet Home Page, such as FAQs, links to other sites of interest, and current news on all things Shakespeare and Shakespeare-authorship related.

One exciting feature that will be available immediately is the full text of J. Thomas Looney's *Shakespeare Identified*, available for searching—and if you wish, downloading. Spread the word! The book, published in 1920, is in the public domain, and we encourage its distribution to as wide an audience as possible by anyone wishing to copy it or forward it to a friend. The Fellowship will soon be offering its own printed edition of Looney, with an Introduction by Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens.

Look to the Fellowship Page for other such online text ventures in the near future, such as Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn's *This Star of England*, and Sir George Greenwood's *The Shakespeare Problem* and *The Shakespeare Problem Restated*.

### Shakespeare Matters

Published quarterly by the  
The Shakespeare Fellowship

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The Shakespeare Fellowship

Subscriptions to *Shakespeare Matters* are \$30 per year (\$15 for online issues only). Family or institution subscriptions are \$45 per year. Patrons of the Fellowship are \$75 and up. Send subscription requests to:

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The purpose of the Shakespeare Fellowship is to promote public awareness and acceptance of the authorship of the Shakespeare Canon by Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), and further to encourage a high level of scholarly research and publication into all aspects of Shakespeare studies, and also into the history and culture of the Elizabethan era.

The Society was founded and incorporated in 2001 in the State of Massachusetts and is chartered under the membership corporation laws of that state (nonprofit status pending).

Dues, grants and contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

*Shakespeare Matters* welcomes articles, essays, commentary, book reviews, letters and news items. Contributions should be reasonably concise and, when appropriate, validated by peer review. The views expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the Fellowship as a literary and educational organization.

*Editors (continued from page 1)*

other, to fill the Bard's sanctified conformist shoes—seems to be enjoying a revival in some academic circles. To us this seems like a further exercise in reducing scholarship to pre-intellectual dogma. The argument assumes, sometimes to comic excess, that “Shakespeare” was a wallflower.

We prefer to indulge in a minimum number of assumptions.

With this in mind, we welcome to the Fellowship “skeptics” of any persuasion. Although we're committed to pursuing the implications of the theory of de Vere's role as the author, we acknowledge that the short list of plausible “Shakespeare” suspects must also include William Stanley, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby (de Vere's son-in-law, and an important Elizabethan playwright), international espionage agent Christopher Marlowe (probably associated with de Vere during the 1580s), and de Vere's cousin, the scientific and legal mind Francis Bacon. We have no doubt that, although most evidence points towards de Vere, these three individuals played important and even critical roles in the “Shakespeare” story. Only by pursuing a policy of open questioning are we likely to obtain a clearer picture of just what roles they actually did play.

Does this mean that we won't take up the challenge to debate and, when necessary, correct, the misapprehensions of Stratfordian apologists such as David Kathman and Terry Ross or their more exalted Stratfordian brethren like Berkeley's Alan Nelson? Not at all. We won't ignore the unfortunate necessity of sometimes engaging the debate with those who want to foreclose discussion by attacking the legitimacy of the very subject of authorship, or by reflexive appeals to the authoritative pronouncements of leading Stratfordian scholars.

*Shakespeare Matters* will carry a regular feature on the “state of the debate”; the Fellowship's web-page will engage the cyberspace debate with some long overdue exposé work on the sloppy and dishonest methodologies regularly employed on the Shakespeare Authorship web page. It only means that the compass of our intellectual imagination will not be defined or circumscribed by the misperceptions of cold warriors for the Stratford paradigm. Our job isn't to fetch new evidence for folks who can't read the evidence already in front of their eyes.

And, of course, we'll bring forward corroborative evidence for the Oxfordian paradigm as we chance upon it: witness, in this issue, Barbara Burris' outstanding detective work on the Ashbourne portrait and George Chapman, the first of three articles on the Ashbourne by Ms. Burris which we'll be publishing.

But these goals, however laudable and significant they may be in their own right, won't define our reasons for existence.

Instead, as the title of our publication implies, the leading edge of our efforts is to reflect on the significance and value of Shakespeare and Shakespearean studies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We see the Fellowship and this publication as a forum for advancing the dialogue about why Shakespeare matters as well as for pursuing research and education on the authorship question. An example of the contemporary significance of Shakespearean studies can be found in Hank Whittemore's essay, “The politics of massacres, the need for intelligence” (pages 4-9, 19).

This direction is inspired by our observation of the paradoxical trend of contem-

porary Shakespeare studies. All over the English-speaking world, Shakespeare is being eliminated from curricula bending under the weight of cries for political correctness. Ironically, those advocating this elimination are also, predictably, often the most vehement defenders of the orthodox view of Shakespearean authorship. One way to avoid uncomfortable discussions about who Shakespeare was—and therefore what his works might say to a 21<sup>st</sup> century readership—is simply to eliminate the course offerings in which such a discussion might naturally become a part of the curriculum. This is called orthodoxy with a vengeance.

A further irony is that this dumping of Shakespeare from the curriculum is taking place at a time when public interest in the Bard has never been greater. On stage, on screen, and in the spontaneous intellectual life of the English-speaking world, Shakespeare has never been a bigger phenomena than he is today.

One reason for this popular renewal of interest in the bard is the natural curiosity people feel about the authorship question. “The life of Shakespeare is a fine mystery,” wrote Charles Dickens, “and I tremble every day lest something should ‘turn up’.” Now that things have started to “turn up”—and the two articles in this issue by Barbara Burris and Paul Altrocchi are potent witness to just how much is now “turning up”—public curiosity about the authorship question is a bonanza for Shakespearean educators. To date, only a small minority of teachers have treated the authorship question as a legitimate field of inquiry, but those who have are quite aware of the explosive potential of the issue to ignite the spontaneous intellectual fires of student inquiry.

As educator Bob Barrett (Bremerton, Washington) reported in the Winter 1999 issue of the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* regarding his experience teaching authorship to junior high school students, “I underestimated the topic—the response was explosive. They asked question after question ... they wanted to know about the topic itself to satisfy their own aroused curiosity. They pushed me for clarification and more detail ... I'd never seen anything like it.”

Beyond the new evidence for Oxford's authorship and the opportunity to revisit critical related topics such as the portraits

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## Coming in 2002

**Among the writers and feature articles appearing next year in *Shakespeare Matters* will be:**

Barbara Burris: Parts 2 and 3 of the Ashbourne portrait story  
 Hank Whittemore: *The Sonnets*;  
 Will Shaksper and Ben Jonson;  
 Oxford's 1000 pound grant  
 Dr. Roger Stritmatter: Shakespeare's Bible and the Catholic issue; the Martin Marprelate pamphlets  
 Dr. Daniel Wright: Who was Thomas Kyd?

### Plus...

Full reports on the 2001 SOS and 2002 Edward De Vere Studies conferences, other regional Oxfordian events, and a calendar of coming events; regular features such as Confidential Video Bard and a Mark Anderson column, plus new regular features on the Internet, on the State of the Debate (who to debate, and how), on Shakespeare authorship in the classroom, Shakespeare theatre ... and, of course, book reviews, film reviews, news, commentary, opinion, and more...

# The politics of massacres, the need for intelligence

## *Shakespeare's role in an Elizabethan England under seige*

By Hank Whittemore

Our world has been forever altered by shock, fear, horror, anger and grief. The simultaneous attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon immediately generated a deeper level of awareness that our nation's security can never be taken for granted; and with a reinvigorated spirit of patriotic unity, we also knew that we were already at war.

More than four centuries ago there was another day of shock, fear, horror, anger and grief when Elizabethan England learned about the St. Bartholomew's Massacre that had begun during a holy pageant on the night of August 24, 1572. At least 10,000 French Protestants in Paris lost their lives, while the bloodbath of Huguenots spread into the provinces until the total number slain was estimated to be no fewer than 20,000 and possibly more than 100,000 victims.<sup>1</sup>

As Carolly Erickson writes, this was a holy war:

The religious warfare in France between Catholics and Protestants was unlike any European conflict since the age of the crusades. This was relentless slaughter, carried out by desperate men and women driven by inner conviction to annihilate, root and branch, all those who opposed them in matters of religious conscience. And nothing short of mass butchery would please the vengeful God who commanded the killing.<sup>2</sup>

Queen Elizabeth and her courtiers (among them the young Shakespeare, 22-year-old Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford) heard the news after returning to London at the end of her royal progress that summer. The entire Court of England, in a state of shock and disbelief as well as trepidation, went into a period of mourning. Only a few months earlier, on June 2, 1572, Oxford had been deeply affected by the execution of Norfolk, for which he held William Cecil, Lord Burghley, largely responsible (indeed the Duke's destruction was Cecil's triumph, serving to solidify his hold upon the Queen), and six weeks after the execution he became Lord Treasurer. Yet now, in early September, amid genuine

alarm and patriotic fervor, the young earl was moved to communicate the warmest expressions of loyalty to his father-in-law. Oxford conveyed his true feelings "at white heat," as Eva Turner Clark puts it, "at a



Courtesy, CNN.com

New York, September 11, 2001

moment when his mind was filled with anxiety and apprehension."<sup>3</sup> For all he or anyone in the government knew, England might soon be under attack, with both Elizabeth and her chief minister as targets for assassination; and Oxford, having written to discuss certain business details, came to the natural close of his letter by telling Burghley, "I am to be governed and commanded at your Lordship's good devotion" – but then, as if unable to stop himself, he began all over again. What now came forth was a single flowing sentence running to more than 100 words of Shakespearean fluidity:

I would to God your Lordship would let me understand some of your news, which here doth ring dolefully in the ears of every man, of the murder of the Admiral of France,<sup>4</sup> and a number of noble men and worthy gentlemen and such as greatly have in their

lifetimes honored the Q(ueen's) Majesty our mistress, on whose tragedies we have an number of French Aeneases<sup>5</sup> in this city, that tell of their own overthrows with tears falling from their eyes, a piteous thing to hear but a cruel and far more grievous thing we must deem it them to see.<sup>6</sup>

This sentence launched an unbroken paragraph of more than 500 words. It was by no means a "studied" composition, Clark notes, but the "natural outpouring of an anxious heart and mind." Here was the whirling rapidity of Edward de Vere's mind as he raced to keep up with his reaction to the tragic news. Next, referring in passing to young Alençon as "Monsieur," he framed the Bartholomew's massacre within an historical context by aptly comparing it to the murder of 8,000 French in Sicily three centuries earlier. That notorious bloodbath of the past, on the eve of Easter Monday, March 31, 1282, had also begun with a religious pageant:

All rumours here are but confused, of those troops that are escaped from Paris, and Rouen, where Monsieur hath also been and like a *vesper Sicilianus*,<sup>7</sup> as they say, that cruelty spreads all over France, whereof your L(ordship) is better advertised than we are.

With undisguised sincerity, Oxford expressed concern for the safety of both Burghley and Elizabeth, adding he knew about recent "practices" made against the chief minister's own life:

And sith the world is so full of treasons and vile instruments, daily to attempt new and unlooked-for things, good my Lord, I shall affectionately and heartily desire your L(ordship) to be careful both of yourself, and of her Majesty, that your friends may long enjoy you, and you them. I speak because I am not ignorant what practices have been made against your person lately...<sup>8</sup>

Young Oxford in this letter went on to acknowledge Cecil as the key figure behind Elizabeth's throne and even as the main architect of the English Reformation. The Lord Treasurer was "a block and a crossbar"

in the way of the “papists” or Catholic traitors; the nation “hath depended on you a great while” and now all men’s eyes were “on a sudden bent and fixed on you, as a singular hope and pillar<sup>9</sup> whereto the religion hath to lean.” These were no sentiments from an “ill-conditioned” son-in-law, as he allowed contemporaries to view him; they represented impromptu and blazing declarations of his personal commitment to the state policies that Burghley was determining and directing. “I am one that count myself a follower of yours now in all fortunes,” Oxford assured him, “and what shall hap to you, I count it hap to myself: or at least I will make myself a voluntary partaker of it.” Offering his “zeal and affection” toward Cecil, he added that he had “builded my foundation” upon him “either to stand or to fall.” From here onward he would “spend my blood and life” with the powerful Lord Treasurer, “so much have you made me yours.”

Oxford, too, understood that his country was already at war. On September 22, 1572, he wrote another letter to Burghley, now expressing his desire “to show myself dutiful” to Elizabeth in some military capacity:

If there were any service to be done abroad, I had rather serve there than at home where yet some honor were to be got; if there be any setting forth to sea, to which service I bear most affection, I shall desire your L(ordship) to give me and get me that favour and credit, that I might make one. Which if there be no such intention, then I shall be most willing to be employed on the sea coasts, to be in a readiness with my countryman against any invasion.<sup>10</sup>

“Queen Elizabeth I was a woman in danger,” writes historian Christopher Haigh. “From the beginning of her reign to the end, she faced plots and rumors of plots. Some of the conspiracies posed real threats to her throne and to her life.”<sup>11</sup>

Among those threats had been the 1569 revolt of the northern Catholic earls, who had hoped for Elizabeth’s removal and the crowning of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. This uprising by her own subjects so thor-

oughly terrified the Queen that she ordered fierce reprisals, with the result that 800 rebels were hanged. In reaction the Pope excommunicated the Queen in 1570, absolving English citizens from obedience to her – a virtual declaration of war by Rome – and in 1571 the Florentine banker Roberto Ridolphi schemed for a revolt to be raised by Norfolk, accompanied by a Spanish invasion, ending with the deposition of Elizabeth. Then came the terrible slaughter of French Protestants in 1572, sending its shock waves through England; and just



Courtesy, Catholic Encyclopedia

*St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (Paris, August 24, 1572)*

as those of us in the early 21st century face moral, political and strategic decisions as a result of terrorist attacks, Elizabethans of the 16th century had to grapple with issues of retribution and vengeance:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles and,  
By opposing, end them.<sup>12</sup>

It was no coincidence that little more than a year after the Bartholomew’s massacre, on December 20, 1573, the Queen, at Burghley’s urging, appointed Francis Walsingham as joint Secretary of State with Sir Thomas Smith.

“The best defense against terrorism is good, timely intelligence,” *The New York Times* editorialized the day after the attack against the United States, and that was precisely Walsingham’s reaction more than four centuries earlier. His response was to organize a Secret Service on so thorough a

basis that knowledge of the most furtive designs of England’s enemies might be freely at the command of his sovereign. “Knowledge is never too dear,” he often reminded his fellow ministers, and to that end he practiced most of the arts that human ingenuity had devised in order to gain information. At one time his system of espionage included 53 private agents in foreign courts, as well as 18 spies who performed functions that could not be officially defined, and intelligence from all parts of England reached him every day.<sup>13</sup>

### An antic disposition?

“Tell a lie and find the truth,” Walsingham counseled his operatives, reciting a maxim that Hamlet followed by putting on his “antic disposition” and deliberately allowing all but his closest friends to misjudge his behavior and even to falsely conclude he was mentally unstable.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the Prince of Denmark had decided to serve his country by leading a double life.

Edward de Vere also suffered from frustrating incapacities to act as he might have wished (i.e. to serve in the

military); and it may well be that in response he undertook to serve England in more ways and dimensions than most of us have suspected. Oxford, too, displayed an antic disposition that gave an impression of unpredictability and even instability; but all evidence shows that the Queen, despite her displays of temper and even her ill treatment of him, never doubted his underlying convictions and patriotic intentions. When Oxford bolted to the Continent in the summer of 1574, rousing alarm that he might have gone over to the side of Catholic refugees from the northern rebellion, both Burghley and Walsingham went out of their way to make clear that the earl’s loyalty was assured.

### Preparations for war

Over the rest of that decade, Oxford lent his support to Burghley and Elizabeth in regard to the French Match, knowing that

(Continued on page 6)

*Whittemore (continued from page 5)*

Elizabeth's flirtation with Alençon was a grand deception calculated to give England time to prepare for war with Spain. He also found himself taking sides with Burghley against their common enemy, Leicester—who threw in his lot with the Puritan extremists and gained the friendship of zealous Walsingham, regardless of the fact that the spymaster continued as Cecil's subordinate.

Burghley's objectives, simply put, were to stamp out Catholic practice in England, to kill Mary Stuart and to maintain diplomatic relations with France until the inevitable conflict with Spain could no longer be postponed.<sup>15</sup> While Oxford himself undoubtedly agreed with the overall need for better national security through espionage and military defense, his nobler sensibilities prevented him from supporting the drastic measures of persecution, torture and execution that Burghley and Walsingham apparently relished. Moreover, plunging into the publishing and theatrical worlds as a means of service, Edward de Vere also had to contend with mounting Puritan hostility and calls for restricting the very liberties upon which those worlds depended.

As the Queen and Burghley drew closer to challenging the Spanish giant, Oxford began to gather around himself the "university wits" recruited largely from Cambridge, of which Burghley was chancellor. Anthony Munday, whose career in espionage began in 1578 when he was sent to spy on English Catholic refugees in France and Italy, wrote the first of his dedications to Oxford soon afterward in 1579.<sup>16</sup> (It was evidently on Cecil's own advice<sup>17</sup> that Edward de Vere employed Munday as well as Thomas Churchyard, John Lyly and Ralph Lane, among others.) And in mid-1580, when Gabriel Harvey wrote to Spenser with his "rattling hexameters"<sup>18</sup> about Oxford as an Italianate Englishman, the Cambridge scholar was undoubtedly revealing more of the earl's doings than has been generally recognized:

In Courtly guiles a passing singular odd man,  
For Gallants a brave Mirror, a Primrose of Honour,  
A Diamond for nonce, a fellow peerless in England.  
Not the like discourser for Tongue, and head to be found out,

Not the like resolute man for great and serious affairs,  
Not the like Lynx to spy out secrets and privities of States...<sup>19</sup>

In effect, Harvey was describing Hamlet. He depicted Oxford as a man operating on two levels, for an unseen purpose. He viewed the earl humorously in terms of outward behavior, yet in the same breath he declared that in all England there was no sharper-eyed lynx or wildcat capable of uncovering secrets vital to the state. Oxford, he reported privately to Spenser, was a spy—a certain kind of undercover agent, involved in "great and serious affairs"—carrying out his mission while others misapprehended and underestimated him. The truth, as Harvey expressed it within the guise of satire, was not unlike Hamlet's declaration to his mother: "Make you to ravel all this matter out, that I essentially am not in madness, but mad in craft."<sup>20</sup>

Six months later, in December 1580, Oxford reported treasons against the state by his erstwhile Catholic associates.<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth in 1581 threw him into prison (ostensibly for having fathered Anne Vavasour's child), but Burghley and Walsingham worked to secure his speedy release.<sup>22</sup> In that year, Thomas Watson (future friend of Cambridge spy Christopher Marlowe) became associated with Walsingham; and Watson in 1582 began dedicating work to Oxford,<sup>23</sup> who was still enduring banishment from court.

And we might dare ask: Was Her Majesty's show of royal displeasure a means of maintaining his cover? Did she banish him only to protect him? Was the Queen putting on an "antic disposition" as well? Although the "eccentric" Edward de Vere undoubtedly had sincere affection for the Roman church and its rituals, had he really undergone a "conversion" to Catholicism?<sup>24</sup> Or had he instead lulled his Catholic associates into revealing their designs, knowing the price he would have to pay in terms of contemporary and even historical perceptions of him?

#### Payments for service rendered

Walsingham received his first regular allowance for Secret Service work in July 1582, when a Privy Seal Warrant granted him 750 pounds per year to be paid in quarterly installments.<sup>25</sup> The following

year, when Elizabeth restored Oxford to favor at court, virtually at the same time she established the Queen's Company of actors at the suggestion of none other than Walsingham himself (a curious sudden interest in theater by the puritanical, busy spymaster);<sup>26</sup> and Oxford in 1584 apparently lent his secretary, John Lyly, as stage manager and coach for the new troupe.<sup>27</sup> Later that year, when the Bond of Association<sup>28</sup> was created to protect Elizabeth amid the growing military and civilian preparations for war, Oxford wrote to Burghley to rail at him for snooping into his affairs; and in the process, he reminded the Lord Treasurer: "I serve Her Majesty, and I am that I am..."<sup>29</sup>

After war with Spain had been officially declared, Burghley wrote to Walsingham on June 21, 1586, asking if he had had an opportunity to speak to the Queen on Oxford's behalf;<sup>30</sup> on June 23, 1586, the Star Chamber issued a wartime decree giving the government severe and rigid control over the printing press;<sup>31</sup> and on June 26, 1586, Elizabeth signed a Privy Seal Warrant granting Edward de Vere 1,000 pounds per year to be paid in quarterly installments—a grant strikingly similar to Walsingham's allowance for espionage and intelligence. "From the year 1586 until the Spanish Armada actually came in the mid-summer of 1588," writes Conyers Read, "the English Government was in constant fear of attack from Philip of Spain."<sup>32</sup> Within those two years, the grants to Walsingham accordingly rose to a regular allowance of 2,000 pounds. This was "a large amount of money in the later sixteenth century," Read notes, adding:

The fact that Elizabeth, for all her cheeping, was willing to invest so much in secret service shows how important she conceived it to be. No doubt it was efficient. Elizabeth was the last person in the world to spend two thousand pounds unless she could see an adequate return.<sup>33</sup>

Surely this was also the Queen's attitude toward the funds she was paying Edward de Vere, who, after all, was receiving one-half the entire amount allocated to the head of the country's intelligence network at the height of wartime! It would seem obvious that Oxford had created and developed his own unique category of quasi-military work for the government ("I have

done the state some service," Othello says, "and they know it."<sup>34</sup> his annual grant was continued through the victory over the Armada and then all during the 1590s, when threats of new Spanish invasions persisted; and it was even continued into the next reign by King James, until Oxford's recorded death in 1604, the year when peace was finally concluded.

### The policy of plays

The full scope of what Edward de Vere was delivering in return may have included much more than what has appeared on the surface. In any case, it certainly involved the writers to whom he gave patronage and employment as well as organization, motivation and guidance. Among these writers were Lyly and Thomas Nashe and Robert Greene, who all three contributed to the pamphlet war against extremist Puritan attacks from "Martin Marprelate." And Nashe, in *Pierce Penilesse* of 1592, undoubtedly gave us a vivid reflection of Oxford's own thinking about the value of chronicle plays of English history during wartime. In fact, he launched into this theme with words Oxford had used in his letter to Burghley of September 22, 1572. In the following, for example, echoes of Edward de Vere's language are italicized:

That state or kingdom that is in league with all the world, and hath no foreign sword to vex it, is not half so strong or confirmed to endure as that which lives every hour in fear of *invasion*. There is a certain waste of the people for whom there is no use, but war: and these men must have some *employment* still to cut them off ... If they have no *service abroad*, they will make mutinies *at home*.

For such citizens, Nashe added:

It is very expedient they have some light toys to busy their heads withal, cast before them as bones to gnaw upon, which may keep them from having leisure to intermeddle with higher matters. To this effect, the *policy*<sup>35</sup> of Plays is very necessary, howsoever some shallow-brained censors (not the deepest searchers into the secrets of government) mightily oppugne them.

In other words, theatrical entertainment tended to distract the Queen's subjects from civil war or rebellion against the crown; and this "policy" of plays was essen-

tial, no matter how much the Puritans and others wanted to curtail or banish stage productions. In his sarcastic way, Nashe was saying that such "shallow-brained" moralists seemed to have no clue that the government itself was secretly supporting these performances:

Nay, what if I prove Plays to be no extreme, but a rare exercise of virtue? First, for the subject of them (for the most part) is borrowed out of our English Chronicles, wherein our forefathers' valiant acts (that have lain long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books) are revived, and they themselves are razed from the Grave of Oblivion, and brought to plead their Honours in open presence...

Stage presentations such as *Henry VI* offered vivid lessons:

In Plays, all coosonages, all cunning drifts over-gilded with outward holiness, all stratagems of war, all the cankerworms that breed on the rust of peace, are most lively anatomized: they show the ill success of treason, the fall of hasty climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the misery of civil dissension, and how just God is evermore in punishing of murder. And to prove every one of these allegations, could I propound the circumstances of this play and that play...

Two years later, in 1594, shortly after the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's Company) was formed amid annoying restraints against plays by the Privy Council, Oxford wrote Burghley to complain about "sundry abuses" by which "both her Majesty and myself were in *mine office* greatly hindered." In the same letter he also asked Burghley "not to neglect as heretofore, such occasions as to amend the same may arise from *mine office*"<sup>36</sup> – making clear that, regardless of appearances, he was performing highly valued functions for England while the country was still vulnerable.

The subsequent legend that William Shakespeare had an allowance for writing plays enabling him to spend "at the rate of a thousand pounds a year"<sup>37</sup> turns out to be correct. And this same man, in his chronicle plays, was promoting his country's military and the need for patriotic loyalty, as he did in the closing lines of *King John*:

O, let us pay the time but needful woe,  
Since it hath been beforehand with our

griefs.  
This England never did, nor never shall,  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself.  
Now these her Princes are come home again  
Come the three corners of the world in arms  
And we shall shock them! Nought shall  
make us rue  
If England to itself do rest but true!<sup>38</sup>

His sentiments, along with concerns throughout his works about the need to balance military power and national security with justice and tolerance, are not unlike those being expressed today.

### Footnotes:

1. William Plumer Fowler in *Shakespeare Revealed in Oxford's Letters*, 1986, reports the higher figures of 10,000 slain in Paris alone and 100,000 in both Paris and the provinces. Other estimates of the total vary from 20,000 to 50,000 and higher.
2. Carolly Erickson, *The First Elizabeth*, 1983, 269
3. Eva Turner Clark in *Oxfordian Vistas*, edited by Ruth Loyd Miller, 1975, 516
4. Admiral Coligny of France was murdered during the St. Bartholomew's massacre.
5. Aeneas, the hero of Vergil's great epic, is mentioned 28 times by Shakespeare. Nineteen of these occur in *Troilus and Cressida*.
6. All excerpts are from Fowler. The letter at hand is reprinted on pp. 54-56
7. Italics added. *Anthony and Cleopatra*, 4.14.8: "They are black vesper's pageants."
8. In the letter Oxford refers to Madder, or Mather, who apparently had conspired to murder members of the Privy Council, Burghley included, and to free Norfolk from the Tower. In this respect Oxford, who had hoped to rescue Norfolk, may have been deliberately distancing himself from such treachery.
9. Burghley as a pillar of the church. *2 Henry VI*, 1.1.75: "Brave peers of England, pillars of state."
10. According to Fowler, 97, the singular "countryman" is correct.
11. *Elizabeth I: Profiles in Power*, Christopher Haigh, 1988-1998, 149
12. *Hamlet*, 3.1.65-68
13. *Dictionary of National Biography* on Walsingham
14. *Hamlet*, 1.5.194-197. The prince tells Horatio and Marcellus to reveal nothing of his true purposes no matter "how strange or odd so'er I bear myself."
15. *William Cecil, the Power Behind Elizabeth*, Alan Smith, 1935, 175
16. Munday dedicated *A Mirror of Mutability* to Oxford in 1579.
17. *Oxfordian Vistas*, Miller, 219
18. Thomas Nashe's phrase for Harvey's verses

(Continued on page 19)

# A Portrait Analysis of William Cecil

## *Is there a heretofore untold story hidden in plain sight?*

By Paul Hemenway Altrocchi, MD

No matter how much Oxfordians abhor the amoral *modus operandi* of William Cecil, who is largely responsible for forcing Edward de Vere to the brink of permanent anonymous extinction, it is hard not to respect his record of achievements. By hook or by crook, more often the latter, he was extraordinarily successful in fulfilling his major life goals:

1. To create an illustrious, albeit fictitious, ancestry.
2. To reach a position of high political eminence close to the Queen.
3. To become a great English leader in the eyes of history.
4. To achieve noble status.
5. To become supremely wealthy.
6. To found a noble posterity.
7. To obliterate records of Edward de Vere's life and literary genius.



Courtesy, National Portrait Gallery, London

Fig. 1. "Type A" portrait of William Cecil (NPG #604) clearly shows the dark anomaly that appears in the middle of his moustache in many—but not all—versions of this portrait.

Any new insights into William Cecil's personality and idiosyncrasies may help us understand his pre-eminent 40-year role in the Elizabethan era, inextricably linked both to the Queen and de Vere.

### Cecil Portraits

Portraits may be as candid as photographs or falsier than dicers' oaths.<sup>1</sup> Artists often paint their subjects as more handsome, beautiful, or youthful than reality, as in many paintings

of Queen Elizabeth. For example, portraits may not depict conspicuous birthmarks.

To avoid frequent sittings, prominent individuals in the Elizabethan era posed for standard portraits, usually by an artist of proven merit. Painters within that artist's "school," or other artists,

then painted their own versions, with or without modifications, for specific clients.

William Cecil was born in 1520 and died in 1598. During his long life, he sat for three basic portraits, now categorized as:

1. Type A—early 1560s, in Cecil's early 40s. This three-quarter length portrait shows a serious black-garbed, black-hatted, brownbearded Cecil holding a white staff. The National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in London believes that Arnold van Brounckhorst may have painted the original, but the identity of the original is unknown.<sup>2</sup> There are many versions of this portrait, including three at the NPG, several at Hatfield House, and many in private hands.<sup>3</sup>
2. Type B—early 1580s, in Cecil's early 60s. He stands full length as Lord Treasurer with brownish-white beard, black cape over bright red robe of his Order of the Garter, right hand on long staff. The identity of the original is unknown. Several Type B portraits have been attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger but this is quite unlikely since the first validated portrait by Gheeraerts was in 1594.<sup>4</sup>
3. Type C—circa 1596, when Cecil was 76. Full-length, seated or standing, garbed in black with a tall black hat and white beard, still holding a white staff but this time in his left hand.

In addition, there are three other well-known paintings of Cecil:

4. Sitting on his mule, wearing a red and black robe and black cap, in the garden of Theobalds, "taking his exercise." The original hangs at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, given to them in 1797 by William Fletcher, former Mayor of Oxford. The Bodleian has had continuous possession of the portrait for 205 years. There are no known copies.
5. Presiding over the Court of Wards, of which he was Master from 1561 to his death in 1598, a major source of his ill-gotten wealth. He is dressed in black, sitting at the head of a table with 11 other men. At least one copy exists.
6. A double portrait of William Cecil and his son, upper half body of each, both garbed in black with white ruff. Each is holding a staff, but the white staff held by Robert suggests that he is now Principal Secretary, placing the portrait in the 1590s when he was in his late 30s or early 40s, and his father in his 70s. At least one copy exists.

### Portrait analysis by the author

While reading Neville Williams' 1972 book, *All the Queen's Men*<sup>5</sup>, the author did a quick double-take when he encountered, facing page 42, a Type B portrait of William Cecil from the Burrell Collection at the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum. Based upon his experience teaching medicine and pediatrics all over the world, and as a Faculty member of the Pediatrics Department of Stanford Medical School, it seemed obvious that Cecil had a cleft lip (Fig. 2).



If Cecil did indeed have this condition, it is a fact that has never found its way into biographies of him nor histories of the Elizabethan period.

Cleft lip and cleft palate are not uncommon congenital anomalies, usually occurring together once every 700 births. A small percentage is genetic but most are of unknown etiology. Cleft lip used to be called hare-lip because of its similarity to the midline-divided lip of rabbits.

Cleft lip is the result of failure of fusion of upper lip tissue in the second month of embryonic development, causing a gap at or near the midline. In cleft palate there is failure of fusion in the third month.

Statistics favor the assumption that William Cecil had both a cleft lip and a cleft palate. Commonly associated speech defects include:

1. Poor pronunciation with verbal indistinctness.
2. Softness of speech due to poor control of intra-oral air pressure.
3. Embarrassing nasal quality of speech because of an open connection between palate and nose.
4. Slowness in speech.
5. Vocal monotony.

In an era before surgical correction was available, it was difficult for such children to grow up with emotional normalcy. The disfigurement is major, causing an inevitable lack of self-esteem. They feel different and unsightly, and they are. Their speech defects make them even more "different." Other children respond by teasing, taunting, calling them names like "ugly," "hideous," or "stupid," or even spitting at them. Childhood and adolescent friendships are difficult to initiate and maintain; rejection and ridicule lead to social isolation. Repressed anger and depression are frequent accompaniments.

In the portrait reproduced in Fig. 2, nubs of non-united upper lip tissue surround an angular gap to the right of the mouth's midline. The tongue, incompletely filling the gap, appears to have been enlarged in the past because the tip is of two different hues of red, with an unnatural line separating the colors, easily seen when magnified.

How fascinating! Did Cecil really overcome such a hideous birth defect to reach such a high pinnacle of success? In a search for corroborative evidence, photographs of all portraits at the National Portrait Gallery plus selected others were examined by the author, again using simple methods—enlarged prints, magnifying glasses with varying degrees of power, and slide projections. No attempt was made to examine all known Cecil portraits since so many are in private hands.



Images courtesy of Glasgow Art Museum

*Fig 2 (on left) is the Type B portrait that the author first spotted in Neville Williams' All the Queens Men, leading him to note that the sitter clearly had a cleft lip. Then, even more surprisingly, the author, in checking with the Glasgow Art Museum, found that the current version of this same portrait (Fig. 3, right) had been touched up so that the gap showing in the upper lip (Fig. 2) was now gone, replaced with new upper lip.*

## Findings

The results of this research into a sample of existing Cecil portraits was as follows:

1. Type A. NPG (National Portrait Gallery, London) #604 (Fig. 1) shows a cleft lip delineated so dramatically that it must be considered a prime candidate for being the original Type A portrait by Arnold von Brounckhorst. Among other Type A Cecil portraits at the NPG (not pictured in this article), #715 does not show a cleft lip and #2184 has a mouth that appears to be touched up.
2. Type B. Based upon cleft lip evidence alone, the Glasgow portrait (Fig. 2) may well be the original Type B portrait. Type Bs from Burghley House and NPG #362 and #1905 do not show a cleft lip. NPG #525 appears to have a touched-up cleft lip. In the years since Neville's book illustration in 1972, the Glasgow cleft lip portrait has been retouched by lengthening the mustache to mask the cleft lip entirely (Fig. 3). The Glasgow Art Gallery's records show no repainting since the portrait was first hung in their new Burrell Collection gallery in 1983. The last cleft-lip touch-up, therefore, was apparently done between 1972 and 1983 while the portrait was in their possession.
3. Type C. NPG #4881 does not show cleft lip.
4. Cecil on a mule, Bodleian Library, Oxford. There is no cleft lip

*(Continued on page 10)*

*Cecil (continued from page 9)*

today or on a reproduction in a 1967 book<sup>6</sup>, but one can see the cleft lip in a 1904 Monograph<sup>7</sup> and a 1937 book.<sup>8</sup> One can state, therefore, by cleft-lip analysis alone, that the touch-up was done between 1937 and 1967. The Bodleian's records confirm that the painting was in the hands of a private art restorer, Sebastien Isepp, for 10 months in 1943-1944 and for shorter periods in 1948 and 1951. In a communication with Steven Tomlinson of the Bodleian, it was learned that normally, the

B o d l e i a n  
"would have expected him to clean the picture and restore it as far as possible to its original state; that, after all, is what restoration is about."<sup>9</sup> Review of the Bodleian's records provides no information on what Isepp was asked to do, or actually did, so we don't know whether the cleft-lip "touch-up" was his decision or the Bodleian's.

5. Cecil presiding over the Court of Wards. Jessop's 1904 Historical monograph shows a Court of Wards painting in which

Cecil does not have a cleft lip, this version being derived from the engraving by George Vertue.<sup>10</sup> The candidate for being the original by Vertue does show a cleft lip and is owned by the Duke of Richmond (Fig. 4, closeup). This portrayal of Cecil was supposedly patterned after a Type C Hatfield House portrait<sup>11</sup> but the latter does not show a cleft lip, so it is not likely to be the precursor, nor is NPG #4881 for the same reason.

6. Double portrait (William and Robert Cecil). A candidate for the original double portrait of the two Cecils hangs at Hatfield House. William Cecil's mouth is peculiarly twisted to his right, highly suggestive of a cleft lip touch-up. A version in Williams' *All the Queen's Men* shows a normal mouth; therefore it cannot be an original.

7. Tomb engraving. After Cecil was buried in Stamford, a full-sized likeness was chiseled in marble of a supine Lord High Treasurer resting on his ornate tomb. Did Burghley request the truth about his cleft lip on his final resting place as he did on all of his original portraits? Or did Robert Cecil or others of his descendants choose to cover up Burghley's cleft lip for his trip

into eternity? To get photos of the face, a very cooperative Curator of Burghley House, Jon Culverhouse, climbed the tomb to take close-up views. The result? For his heavenly ascendancy, Cecil's descendants gave him an entirely normal face.

### Tentative conclusions

The cleft lip is a valid finding. With Cecil tightly controlling his authoritarian *Regnum Cecilianum*, no painter would risk his right hand or his freedom by giving Cecil a disfiguring cleft lip unless he had one.

Cecil must have allowed the three original portraits to show his cleft lip, plus all three derivative paintings—on his mule, at the Court of Wards, and the double portrait with his son, Robert. Candidates for being original portraits thus must show evidence of a cleft lip.

Obviously, therefore, a painting with no evidence of a cleft lip cannot be the original version, no matter what other artistic considerations there are. Whether this falsification of history was the painter's choice, or the client's, is lost in the mists of time.

Some portraits originally had a cleft lip, subsequently eliminated by over-painting, e.g. by painting an upper lip across the gap, or filling the gap with teeth, or filling the gap completely with skin, mustache and lip, or covering the gap with a longer mustache. Those who made the touch-up decisions, some in the past 100 years, in most cases are unknown, as are the reasons for going against William Cecil's wishes.

### The nickname Ponus

Queen Elizabeth and her court loved nicknames. She held William Cecil in high esteem and called him "Spirit" or "Leviathan." The court had other opinions and called him "Ponus," as evidenced by a letter from Roger Manners to his nephew Edward Manners, Third Earl of Rutland, dated June 2, 1583:

Her Majesty came yesterday to Greenwich from the Lord Treasurer's. .... The Earl of Oxford came to her presence, and after some bitter words and speeches, in the end all sins are forgiven, and he may repair to the Court at his pleasure. Master Raleigh was a great mean herein, whereat Ponus is angry for that he could not do so much.<sup>12</sup>

With slow ponderous speech and other speech impediments due to cleft lip and a presumed cleft palate, Cecil's nickname of "Ponus" might seem unkind, but it was appropriate. He was agonizingly circumlocutious in letters, but whether this was true of his speaking is not known. Most individuals with cleft lip do not prolong their speaking beyond necessity.

It is apparently an Oxfordian myth that "Polus" was a nickname for William Cecil. Where "polus" was used by Gabriel Harvey in his 1578 Address in Latin, *Gratulationes Valdenses*, at Audley End, the translation was its usual Latin meaning of "heaven," and not a sobriquet for Cecil.<sup>13</sup>

Whether the nickname Ponus was the source for the inane, foolish Polonius in *Hamlet* or the trite, repetitive Pandarus in



Courtesy, National Portrait Gallery, London

Fig. 4. In this enlargement from the Court of Wards engraving owned by the Duke of Richmond it can be seen that Cecil's cleft lip is prominently displayed.

*Troilus and Cressida*, is speculation.

### The cleft lip as an interpretative clue

During the last 30 years of Elizabeth's reign, the rack and other means of torture, after being discontinued by Henry VIII, were reintroduced and used systematically to pry confessions out of reluctant, and often innocent, mouths.<sup>14</sup> As Portia says in *The Merchant of Venice*: Ay, but / fear you speak upon the rack, Where men enforced do speak anything.<sup>15</sup>

It has been cited by some historians—with little proof—that William Cecil not only condoned torture but also participated in its usage; no proof of such participation has ever been found. However, aided by the significant clue of a cleft lip as being a possible means of identification in otherwise anonymous images, let us turn our attention to an Elizabethan woodcut (Fig. 5, top right, reproduced from Joel Hurstfield's *The Queen's Wards*) which shows Cutbert Simson being tortured on the rack, observed by three men. The center figure is bent over to his right, appearing to gesture with his right arm to the two rackers to tighten the ropes further.<sup>16</sup>

When the three faces are magnified (Fig. 6, bottom right), there is a triangular gap in the central man's upper lip, very suggestive of a cleft lip. This most likely identifies the person in charge of the racking as William Cecil himself. A courageous artist indeed, who placed historical truth above personal risk, as did Edward de Vere.

### Final comments

Simple methods of portrait analysis lead to the inescapable anatomical conclusion that William Cecil, Baron Burghley, was born with a prominent cleft lip.

What remains for future psychological and historical analysis is the impact of such a major facial disfigurement upon Cecil's personality and the conduct of his life as Elizabethan England's most powerful politician.

As a child and adolescent, Cecil must have undergone the cruel stings and arrows of outrageous fortune caused by his embarrassing facial deformity and the complex emotional consequences derived therefrom.

As an adult he always wore a thick mustache which lessened his unsightliness but could not adequately mask his cleft lip, as demonstrated in the original portraits of him.

How might his cleft lip have influenced his life, his behavior, and his career? Many pertinent questions are available for future research, for instance:

1. Those with socially-embarrassing physical defects often sublimate their energies in other self-assertive directions. Did psychological over-compensation drive him relentlessly onward to the incredibly successful achievement of his lifetime goals—the "I'll Show Them Syndrome"?
2. Did his easily-visible congenital anomaly and his abnormal ponderous speech play a role in his eschewing all court activities except essential political interactions, mainly with the Queen?
3. Was his disfigurement the reason he spent so much time alone at his Cannon Row townhouse even though his el-



Images from Hurstfield's *Queen's Wards*  
 Figs. 5 & 6. Can this new clue about Cecil's appearance help in identifying figures in otherwise anonymous images from the period? In Fig. 5 (top) in a woodcut of Cutbert Simson upon the rack can be seen a figure (center) who seems to direct the procedure. In the enlargement (Fig. 6, bottom) we can see the tell-tale dark wedge under the bent-over figure's nose. Is this William Cecil? And lest anyone doubt his moustache is drawn differently, look at the figure standing on the right and his perfectly normal moustache.

egant home on the Strand with 80 servants was nearby?

4. How much did Cecil's cleft lip personality motivate his ruthless quest for fame, thereby eliciting his pitiless strategy against his perceived enemies? Does this help explain his crushing authoritarian response to Edward de Vere's insistence on as large a charter as the wind, to blow on whom I please<sup>17</sup>, especially Cecil, in his plays?
5. Did he choose to have his ugly cleft lip portrayed on all three original portraits and the other three original paintings in order to demonstrate to history his courage and fortitude in overcoming such a distressing birth defect to reach the pinnacle of success?

Trying to comprehend the character traits, habits and motivations of the wily, power-hungry, avaricious William Cecil may help us fathom why Edward de Vere chose to characterize Cecil so truthfully but so adversely in his plays, thus leading to de Vere's coerced pseudonym.

(Continued on page 20)

*Golden book (continued from page one)*

authorship debate. The Ashbourne Shakespeare portrait was bought in March 1931 by Mrs. Folger for the Folger Shakespeare Library.

The portrait, along with two other well-known Shakespeare portraits (the Janssen and the Hampton Court), was examined in 1937 by a team of experts in the fields of x-ray and infrared photography under the direction of professional photographer and Oxfordian Charles Wisner Barrell.

In Barrell's examination of these portraits, evidence was found indicating that all three paintings had been over-painted portraits of Edward de Vere. Due to space constraints Barrell's article about the paintings in the January 1940 issue of the *Scientific American* was primarily confined to his investigation of the Ashbourne portrait.

Although the Folger had their own x-rays of the portrait done in 1949 they did not release them to counter Barrell, even when the director, Dr. Dawson, was sued by Barrell for slander to his professional reputation.<sup>5</sup> The Folger has never acknowledged the Oxford connections uncovered by Barrell.

Instead, in 1979—after a cleaning of the painting by the Folger, in which the coat of arms first revealed in Barrell's x-rays was uncovered—the library claimed that the sitter was Sir Hugh Hamersley, a Lord Mayor of London in 1627/8. This claim for Hamersley as the sitter was published in the Folger's *Shakespeare Quarterly* by William Pressly in 1993.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past two years I have been researching the true identity of the sitter in the Ashbourne, and will make a presentation on my findings at the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Carmel this October. I have found a wealth of material that calls into serious question any notion that the original sitter could possibly have been Hamersley. Moreover, I have also found much material that corroborates Barrell's original finding that the sitter is Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford.

The Folger has been most cooperative in my contacts with them, and some of what I will present is taken from their files on the Ashbourne, including correspondence from former Director O.B. Hardison about Folger's project in the late 1970s to restore the painting. Following my conference presentation all these findings will be published in *Shakespeare Matters*, most likely

in several installments, in 2002.

### The Golden Book

By way of introduction to this important topic of the portraits, I would like in this present article to give my reasons for thinking that George Chapman must have been aware that Oxford was Shakespeare by showing the connections he makes to Oxford in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*; a play based on *Hamlet*. In *Revenge* Chapman's description of the noble poet's book seems very much like an exact description of the book held by the Ashbourne

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***"In this extremely rare occurrence in which a nobleman is actually named on stage, Oxford is described as 'valiant and learn'd.'"***

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portrait sitter; further, later in the play he names Oxford directly, thereby clearly indicating that Oxford should be taken as this noble Poet who wrote "his most selfe-loved verse in paper royall."

The following are my reasons for believing that the book in the painting is the one referred to in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*.

#1 Chapman had a deep ambivalence towards Oxford. He admired Oxford and yet he was spitefully envious of him. Like numerous other poets and playwrights at the time he was drawn to telling Oxford's story as well as making use of his works. In *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, he names the Earl and describes him personally in magnificent terms in the following passage.

*Clermont*... you make me remember  
An accident of high and noble note,  
And fits the subject of my late discourse,  
Of holding on our free and proper way.  
I over-took, coming from Italie,  
In Germanie, a great and famous Earle  
Of England; the most goodly fashion'd man  
I ever saw: from head to foote in forme  
Rare, and most absolute; hee had a face  
Like one of the most ancient honour'd  
Romanes,  
From whence his noblest Familie was  
deriv'd

He was beside of spirit passing great,  
Valiant, and learn'd, and liberall as the  
Sunne,  
Spoke and writ sweetly, or of learned subjects,  
Or of the discipline of publike weales;  
And t'was the Earle of Oxford...  
(lines 80-95, III, iv.)<sup>7</sup>

In this extremely rare occurrence in which a nobleman is actually named on stage, Oxford is described as "valiant and learn'd." We are told that he "writ sweetly, or of learned subjects..." wording that brings to mind the "sugared sonnets" and references to Shakespeare as "honey-tongued."

In these two passages—the derogatory one about the high-born poet and his book of verses and the one about the valiant and learned Nobleman writer—Chapman also expresses his highly ambivalent attitude towards Oxford; the one negative and grudging towards the Noble poet, and the other admiring of him.

Chapman made sure that he highlighted the Oxford connection in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*. By openly describing and naming Oxford in this play, Chapman made it clear that he not only knew who really wrote *Hamlet*, but that the original character of Hamlet was modeled on Oxford himself.

Besides borrowing from the plot of *Hamlet*, Chapman openly paraphrased lines from Shakespeare's play. For example:

*Clermont*. (Like the ghost appearing to Hamlet)  
My brother's spirit urging his revenge.  
*Guise*. (Like Gertrude to Hamlet upon the visitation of the ghost)  
Standest thou still thus, and applyest thine ears, and eyes to nothing?  
*Clermont*. Saw you nothing there?  
(lines 100-105, V.i.)<sup>8</sup>

*Clermont*. (cf. Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech)  
...this imperfect  
Bloud and flesh,  
Shrincke at in spite of me; their solidst part  
Melting like snow within me...  
(lines 7-9, V.iv.)  
...While this same sincke of sensualitie swels,  
Who would live sinking in it? and not spring  
Vp to the Starres, and leave this carrion  
here,  
For Wolfes, and Vultures, and for Dogges to  
teare?  
(lines 16-19, V.iv.)<sup>9</sup>

### Chapman's Response to Hamlet and Oxford

Although Chapman used *Hamlet* as the basis of his play, as Oxfordian Percy Allen has shown he did not accept Shakespeare's portrayal of Hamlet as a tragic hero. Instead Chapman developed a character based on his own Stoic philosophy—the antithesis of Hamlet—in the person of Clermont D'Ambois, his model of a perfect man.<sup>10</sup>

Noted Chapman commentator Thomas Marc Parrott, supports a similar view of Chapman's characterization of Clermont, though not perceiving the Oxford connection that Allen makes.

Parrott states that, "The connexion between *Hamlet* and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* is a commonplace of criticism; but it does not seem to have been noticed that this relation, except in certain details, is not one of imitation. On the contrary, it is one of deliberate and carefully planned contrast."<sup>11</sup>

Parrot is referring here to the characterization of Clermont, about which he explains, "It is hardly too much to say, I think, that such a disciple of Stoic doctrines as Chapman must have felt something like contempt for the character of Hamlet. The very qualities which humanize Hamlet and render him more sympathetic to our modern minds, his irresolution, his self-contempt, his excess of emotion, his incapacity for deliberate action, his sudden and spasmodic bursts of energy, must all have unfitted him in Chapman's mind for the high position of a tragic hero... In short, we have in this play Chapman's full length portrait of the perfect man of Stoic doctrine... It reveals his own conception of the tragic hero..."<sup>12</sup>

A tragic hero based on Oxford Shakespeare's great play and using elements of that play yet negating the persona of Hamlet and replacing it with Chapman's own perfect stoical hero. Parrott, like Allen, makes clear that Chapman's *Revenge* is an antagonistic response to *Hamlet*, not simply an imitation.

Yet Parrott is puzzled about the insertion of the Earl of Oxford into this play, stating in his Notes to the play, "*The Earl of Oxford*: Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), a famous patron in his day of art and letters. He maintained at one time (1581) a company of actors, and was himself a poet of consider-

able talent... Lyly dedicated *Euphues and his England* to him in a highly laudatory letter, and Spenser addressed to him one of the Sonnets prefixed to the *Faerie Queen*. I know of *no special reason* why Chapman should have chosen this opportunity to panegyricize the deceased Earl." (emphasis added)<sup>13</sup>

As Allen showed, however, this lengthy and strikingly unusual passage about the Earl of Oxford in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* has a crucial connection to the play. Describing and naming the Earl of Oxford in the *Revenge* is a direct statement by Chapman that this play and his character of Clermont is a response to his despised yet revered rival, the true author and prototype of *Hamlet*, Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford.<sup>14</sup>

This same play which praises and names the Earl of Oxford, describes the high born Poet's book, whose every detail fits exactly the book in the Ashbourne portrait of Shakespeare, which X-rays revealed beneath crude over-painting to be the poet and playwright Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. In the portrait Oxford Shakespeare is holding this richly bound book of his own verses as described in the play. Here we have actual physical evidence of the gold bound and crimson stringed book in the painting that is described in the play, which I will show that there is reason to believe is Oxford's own specially bound copy of the *Sonnets*.

### Catullus and the Golden Book

As Parrott notes, parts of the passage about the high born "foolish poet" in the *Revenge* paraphrase a mocking poem of the ancient Roman lyric poet Catullus. In his poem Catullus attacked the poetry of Alfenus Varus under the satirical name Suffenus. Catullus writes that Suffenus is "a charming fellow, and has wit ... He also makes many more verses than anyone else. I suppose he has got 10,000 or more written out in full... imperial paper, new rolls, new bosses, red ties, parchment... wrappers; all ruled with lead and smoothed with pumice. When you come to read these, the fashionable well-bred Suffenus I spoke of seems to be nothing but any goatherd or ditcher... the same man who was just now a dinner table wit... is more clumsy than the clumsy country whenever he touches poetry... and, at the same time... he delights in himself and admires himself so much."<sup>15</sup>

Chapman, using Catullus' terms of contempt, could not resist a dig at his poetic rival Oxford, whom he considered less learned than himself. Yet by hiding behind these sneering passages in the Catullus poem Chapman also described in detail the book in the Ashbourne sitter's hand, while making specific references that linked this description up to Oxford.

#2 The "foolish Poet" described in the passage in Chapman's play is a somewhat fastidious nobleman who writes his verse on

...paper royall,

Or Parchment rul'd with lead and smooth'd  
with Pumice: Bound richly up.

"Paper royall" implies a connection of the Poet with the royal court, of which Oxford was a Courtier and close confidante of the Queen. In this regard it is interesting to note that Queen Elizabeth kept a special small jeweled book in which she wrote her own personal prayers, which she carried with her to her devotions.

#3 Chapman's attacks on the noble birth of the "foolish Poet" link the Poet with his richly bound book to the Ashbourne portrait of the nobleman Edward de Vere. In a sudden diversion from a long speech attacking the Earl of Sureau and nobles in general, Clermont launches into the scurrilous passage maligning a noble high-born poet which we quoted at the beginning of this essay. Derogatory references preceding and following the passage about the "foolish Poet", in which Clermont grumbles about "high men" or noblemen, saying they are "base; and yet they thinke them high", clearly denote that the Poet is a nobleman. In his poem, Catullus described Suffenus as a fashionable and well-bred man, but he does not attack high born men or noblemen as Chapman does.

In his *Connoisseur* magazine article in 1910, Art historian M.H. Spielmann noted that the gentleman in the Ashbourne portrait wears the attire of a nobleman.<sup>16</sup> After comparing the costume in the Ashbourne to a portrait of James Douglas, Earl of Morton, who died in 1581, Spielmann notes that the sitter resembles one of the gentlemen who accompanied Queen Elizabeth in her progress to Hunsdon House. The

(Continued on page 14)

*Golden book (continued from page 13)*

portrait's sitter sports an expensive black velvet doublet and velvet trunk hose, with a richly tooled dress dagger belt draped around his waist. Visible in his left hand is the very top of a gauntlet glove, of rich, maroon material, tasseled and appliqued with cloth of gold, of the kind Courtiers wore on dress occasions. Similar to the one in a known 1575 painting of Oxford as a young man, called the Welbeck portrait.

#4 The direct statement in Chapman's play that the book contains verses:

All his most selfe-lov'd verse in paper royall

Given this statement, the small size of the book in the Ashbourne portrait is perfectly fitting. It is too small for a Bible, and it looks as if Oxford's hand could almost enclose or cover it. The passage also makes it absolutely clear that the verses are the Poet's *own verses*; "his most selfe-lov'd verse".

The playwright's detailed depiction of the nobleman's book is explicitly for the purpose of emphasizing the fact that this book is unique, it has not been bought at a booksellers shop, it is a book of the Poet's own verses, richly bound up in gold for the Poet himself. And the Noble Poet and his book are mentioned in this play because this is not just any nobleman, he is well known for his verse and other works relating to the stage, that those in the know would recognize and identify with the *Hamlet* theme of the play.

The Crimson strung book in the Ashbourne portrait is small enough to be carried about easily, and Chapman must have seen Oxford with the book to depict it in such detail. And what book could be more special and personal for Oxford-Shake-speare to carry about with him than his "sugared" sonnets?

It is beyond the scope of this article to go into more detail about the significance of this book and its relation to the Sonnets and their unique publication under the name of Shake-speare.

But to understand that significance we need to look anew at some entrenched assumptions about the late dating of all the sonnets and consider that Oxford wrote in the sonnet form from a very early age, revising and improving selected poems over time, as he did his plays. The Sonnets

publication was uniquely different from the publication of Oxford's other smaller poems, many of which were published under various names and collections during his lifetime. The existence of a personal book of Oxford's verses shown in this portrait and described by Chapman in his play suggests a valid reason for the publication of a collection of these verses in the book of *Sonnets* under the pseudonym Shake-speare in 1609.

#5 In *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, Clermont describes the book of the Poet as:

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***"This book is unique ...  
[not bought] at a  
booksellers shop,  
... it is a book  
of the Poet's  
own verses."***

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Bound richly up, and strung with Crimson strings

In Barrell's article on the Ashbourne portrait he states, "In his right hand Shake-speare holds a small, elegantly bound volume, tooled in gold and displaying *open tie-strings of sheer crimson silk*" (italics added).<sup>17</sup>

In the Elizabethan period dedication copies of books were often bound with crimson strings but they were two inches larger than normal copies. This book is no larger than six inches by four inches (based on the size of the hand and the skull in relation to the sitter)—a very small book indeed; but just the right size for a sonnet on each page. If two inches had been added to this book to make this a dedication copy the original book would have been a ridiculously tiny two inches by four inches. Hardly a book at all. In addition dedication copies were not specially created and covered in gold with a raised oval for a crest as this one is, very similar to the crest ovals on Edward de Vere's personalized gilt Geneva Bible.

#6 Those ubiquitous "never" and "ever" puns on his name that Edward de Vere as Oxford-Shake-speare sprinkled throughout his poems and plays, even signing a number of his earliest poems with the posey

"Ever or Never" in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*,<sup>18</sup> are here employed by Chapman in Clermont's speech in a tight group of three lines.

*Never* so blest as when hee writ and read  
The Ape-lov'd issue of his braine; and  
*never*  
But joying in himselfe; admiring *ever*.  
(Italics added)

In this speech the "never" puns fit into the flow of the lines, but special attention is drawn to "ever" by the punctuation, causing it to be read as a commonly used pun on Oxford's name E.Ver (Edward Vere). "Admiring ever" stands alone with a semicolon before and a period after it, an unusual construction that produces an awkward meaningless phrase, except in its intended perception as "Admiring E.Ver." Chapman used these ever and never puns more than once in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* and in other of his plays and poems in reference to Oxford.<sup>19</sup>

# 7 Some lines in *Romeo and Juliet* seem to corroborate a direct Shake-speare link to the book in the Ashbourne portrait. Lady Capulet's speech in *Romeo and Juliet* seems to symbolically refer to the book of *Sonnets*. Describing how Juliet should observe Paris as if he were a book and after reading over "the volume of young Paris face...and what obscured in this fair volume lies...this precious book of love...for fair without the fair within to hide...." Lady Capulet concludes with, "That book in many eyes doth share the glory/ That in gold clasps locks in the golden story."<sup>20</sup> (Lines 81-92, I, iii.)

Here again a rich book is depicted, a precious golden book of love that locks in the golden story, which the poet-playwright is alluding to on the two levels of Lady Capulet's speech. On one level he is alluding to Juliet's observance of Paris, and on another level to the golden book of the golden story of the *Sonnets*.

#8 The use of the term Ape in the portrayal of the nobleman Poet in the play is another clue Chapman drops about the Poet's identity as the earl of Oxford, when he describes the Poet's verses as:

The Ape lov'd issue of his braine...

Earlier in *Revenge* Chapman refers to

the martial glories of the nobility of the past. In a passage about great noble warriors of the past he snipes at Oxford throughout, ending with the lines:

In Daring Enemies, armed with meanest arms;  
Not courting strumpets, and consuming birthrights  
In Apishness, and enuy of attire.  
(Lines 37-42, l.i.)<sup>21</sup>

In 1580 Gabriel Harvey used the words “apish” and Ape to lampoon Oxford and the French and Italianate dress and tendencies that Oxford brought back from his travels to the continent, in his satirical yet equally admiring poem about the earl of Oxford, *Speculum Tuscanismi*, which included the following lines:

A little Apish flat couched flat to the pate like an oyster  
A vulture’s smelling, Ape’s tasting, sight of an Eagle,<sup>22</sup>

And in Chapman’s previous play, *Bussy D’Ambois*, whose main character is largely based upon Oxford, the Bussy character also attacks Oxford’s French and Italianate dress, echoing Harvey, in these lines:

As they have ever aped us in attire;  
Never were men so wearie of their Skins,  
Who when they travell to bring forth rare men,  
Come home delivered of a fine French suit  
Like Apes disfigured with the attire of men.  
(l.i.)<sup>23</sup>

Ape was also a common Elizabethan term for actors and some of these lines of Harvey and Chapman refer to Oxford-Shakespeare’s plays and Oxford’s occasional role as an actor in his own plays, when he took “kingly parts in sport.”

### The Rival Poet

Besides confirming the Oxford-Shakespeare relationship to his play, Chapman had another major reason for fixing the nobleman Poet’s identity with a physical description of his book of verses. This other interest of Chapman’s was his own relationship to *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. Since these connections are too involved to explore in this article, they are merely summarized as follows:

a) Arthur Acheson, a Stratfordian, makes a strong case for Chapman being the “rival poet” of the *Sonnets*, in his book *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet*.<sup>24</sup> As Percy Allen shows in his book, *Anne Cecil, Elizabeth and Oxford*, Chapman was well aware that the *Sonnets* were the work of de Vere.<sup>25</sup> In *The Case for Edward de Vere 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford as “Shakespeare,”* Allen notes that in numerous of his poems Chapman attacked Oxford and his sonnets. Allen cites the appended verses to Chapman’s “Achilles Shield” dedicated to Harriots having “long been recognized by Mr. Acheson and others, as, almost certainly, referring to Shakespeare; the last named commentator describing them as affording the only instance, that he knows, of any praise being accorded by Chapman to Shakespeare.”<sup>26</sup>

b) J.M. Robertson, a Stratfordian, in his book, *Shakespeare and Chapman*, makes a strong case also for Chapman’s authorship of *A Lover’s Complaint*,<sup>27</sup> a poem that was appended to the pirated and quickly suppressed first publication of the *Sonnets* in 1609, and which many Stratfordians and Oxfordians doubt was written by Shakespeare.

c) In the 1590s and in 1609 Chapman unsuccessfully sought the patronage of Henry Wriothesley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton, considered by most to be the “fair youth” to whom many of the *Sonnets* are addressed.<sup>30</sup>

Percy Allen in *Anne Cecil, Elizabeth & Oxford*, has an excellent chapter on Chapman and *A Lover’s Complaint*, in which Allen elucidates the poem’s references to the *Sonnets* and *Venus and Adonis* in its “refutation” of their portrayal by Oxford of his relationship with the Queen. *A Lover’s Complaint* tells the story of a distraught and aging woman’s regret over being seduced many years before by a young man. In numerous passages the woman’s identification with Queen Elizabeth in her person and powers is cautiously revealed.

Among these identifications are the “thousand favors”, which “like usury, a Monarch’s hands”, are the posts and privileges of a sovereign to bestow, and “the plaited hive of straw” she wears on her head, like Elizabeth’s gold red periwig, etc. Similarly, many references identify Oxford as the young seducer.<sup>28</sup>

Allen also draws attention to a passage in *A Lover’s Complaint* similar to the description of the sonnets book in *The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois*:

...of folded schedulls had she many a one,  
Which she perusd, sighed, tore, and gave the flud;  
Crackt many a ring of posied gold and bone,  
Bidding them find their Sepulchers in mud,  
Found yet mo letters sadly pend in blood,  
With sleided silke, feate and affectedly  
Enswath’d and seald to curious secrecy.<sup>29</sup>  
(Emphasis added)

### Symbols of Oxford’s Life

The above list of arguments that have linked the Poet’s book of verses in Chapman’s play with the Earl of Oxford, the real Shakespeare revealed underneath the Ashbourne portrait, lead us to the symbolism that is expressed within the painting.

In a time when portraits often exhibited the sitter’s social position and occupation which the painter depicted with physical articles that were associated with or symbolized these functions and states, the Dutch painter Ketel was particularly prone to include these articles in his paintings. In his portraits of registrar Thomas Pead, merchant explorer Martin Frobisher, and German merchant Adam Wachendorff, Ketel depicts these men in proximity to or holding articles that define their occupations, and in the case of Pead, in a style strikingly similar to the Ashbourne portrait.<sup>31</sup>

So it is not surprising to see Oxford, the nobleman poet playwright and courtier, holding a special book of his own poems in one hand and a courtier’s gauntlet glove in the other hand in the Ashbourne portrait of Shakespeare. It is absurd however to claim that this golden book of verses and the courtier’s gauntlet glove would define either the Stratford grain dealer Shakespeare or the London haberdasher merchant Hamersley, whom the Folger Shakespeare Library now claims to be the Ashbourne subject. This merchant Hamersley—who did not have a coat of arms until 1614 and did not become Lord Mayor of London until 1627—would have been depicted with articles commonly associated with his haberdasher merchant’s trade at the supposed 1611 date shown on this painting.

A 1976 document in the Folger Ashbourne portrait file from Paul Cherrett,

(Continued on page 16)

*Golden book (continued from page 15)*

M.A. of the Reynolds Gallery in Plymouth England, describing the original head and shoulders portrait of Hamersley in the Gallery's possession at that time, states that it "is dated 1592, when he was 27, but, like most men and women of that era, was already looking middle-aged and very experienced...He is wearing the Lord Mayor's Chain and Jewel," which "were added to the portrait about 1628 and clearly is in another hand from the rest."<sup>32</sup>

"This is the only contemporary portrait of him," Cherrett notes, but adds, "There is, however, at Haberdashers' Hall a full length portrait of him presented to the Company by his great-grandson, Sir Harcourt Masters, in 1716. The head and shoulders are identical with this earlier portrait and must be a copy, with trunk, legs and arms added in a baroque posture which smacks of an artist of around 1716."<sup>33</sup> In this portrait Hamersley is also shown in his long red Alderman robes with the Chain and Jewel of the Lord Mayor's Office suspended from the open robes.

On the table next to him is some sort of leather or metal object perhaps associated with his military interests. He became Sheriff of London in 1618, an Alderman in 1622, and Lord Mayor in 1627.

Cherrett notes in his letter that Hamersley was "one of those shrewd and hard-working Elizabethan merchants and financiers who survived in a tempestuous age and rose to considerable wealth, a title and civic fame. He was closely associated with the Haberdashers' Company...Clearly he was a very powerful figure in the commercial life of the capital..." and "... was also very active in public life..." Records show "him a regular and dutiful attender at meetings of his various companies and civic bodies on which he served.

But his greatest interest was in the army. He was first Colonel of the City's forces...and President (1619-1633) of the Hon. Artillery Company..."<sup>34</sup> Hardly the man to commission a portrait of himself in 1611 holding an elaborately gilded book with crimson tie strings in one hand and a courtier's gauntlet glove in his other hand.

### Conclusion

The Ashbourne painting reveals four profound symbols of Oxford's life. The top of the Courtier's dress gauntlet observable

in his left hand is a symbol of the Court, the martial background of his nobility, and his championships in the Tiltyard. The signet seal thumb ring has on it, under a concealing blob of gold paint, a wild boar's head, the wild boar being the famous crest of the illustrious de Vere family. (Hatfield House documents reveal a signet seal of Oxford's with a wild boar on a coronet)<sup>35</sup>. For visibility in the painting, due to the small size of the ring, the artist may have chosen to represent only a boar's head rather than the entire boar and coronet, or it may be that Oxford had a boar's head ring. It is very likely that Oxford had other signet seal

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***"The Ashbourne  
painting reveals  
four profound  
symbols of  
Oxford's life."***

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rings separate from any held at the Cecil's Hatfield House, whose only example is described as a poor quality ring. But the important point is that a boar is shown, which connects the ring to the boar of the Oxford's. Dr. Spielmann of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, who examined the Ashbourne in 1910, pointed out that "it is rare to find it (a thumb ring) in the portraits of Englishmen not of exalted rank, and that of John Fletcher is the only one I can recall."<sup>36</sup>

Yet he goes on to say somewhat disingenuously that there was no reason why Shakespeare from Stratford would not have worn a thumb ring any more than he may have worn an earring in the Chandos portrait. Oxford of course was Lord Great Chamberlain of England and would have had good reason to display a thumb ring with the Oxford boar on it.

Oxford's positioning in the portrait indicates that the two remaining symbols in the painting are closely connected together. He is shown resting his right arm on the cranium of a skull on the table next to him, with the book "bound richly up and strung with Crimson strings" in his right hand, his index finger holding his place between the pages. Here contemplation of death, philosophy and the writing of poetry merge

together and complete the pictorial life story.

As noted previously many portraits of the time represented the social status and occupation of the sitter. In a very few portraits personal books are shown, such as prayer books, or more rarely, books denoting a sitter's special interest in learning. In a number of Queen Elizabeth's portraits she is shown with books, including the 1590 portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts portraying the Queen with her hand resting on some books on a table.<sup>37</sup> And the learned Sir Thomas Smythe, who tutored the young Edward de Vere, is shown in his burial monument holding a book.<sup>38</sup> However, in all the research I have done into English portraiture I have not come across another portrait of another nobleman, or anyone else, holding anything resembling the elaborate and richly bound golden book with red silk tie strings that is the focus of the Ashbourne painting.

Further, the startlingly exact connection between the noble Poet's book described in Chapman's play—"bound richly up and strung with Crimson strings"—and the book in the Ashbourne is most significant. This unique, personal, specially made book, as represented in the Ashbourne portrait and Chapman's play, provides direct physical evidence for the identification of Oxford with Shakespeare.

In conclusion then—based on the analysis presented in this paper and the research and analysis I have been engaged in for the past two years—I believe that the case for the Earl of Oxford hidden beneath the over painting of the Ashbourne portrait of Shakespeare as presented in the January 1940 *Scientific American* remains solid.

My presentation at the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual SOS Conference will expand on the points made in this paper as well as add new evidence for Oxford as the Ashbourne sitter, and all my findings will be published in upcoming issues of *Shakespeare Matters*.

*Note: A special thanks to Richard Whalen for alerting me to the Catullus connection, and to Bill Boyle and Roger Stritmatter for all their patient work and advice in preparing this article for publication.*

### Footnotes:

1. George Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, ed. by Robert J. Lordi, Salzburg



- Studies in English*, (Salzburg, Austria: University of Salzburg, 1977), 464.
2. *Ibid.*, 464.
  3. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet, The Riverside Shakespeare*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974), 1063.
  4. Charles Wisner Barrell, *Identifying "Shakespeare"*, (*Scientific American*, January 1940), 4-8 and 43-45.
  5. Ruth Loyd Miller, *The Case of Barrell Versus Dawson*, in *Shakespeare Identified in Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford*, Vol. II. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), 419-429. Note: Chapter XX, "Lord Oxford and the Shakespeare Portraits," in Vol. II, presents an excellent overview of the portraits issues and Barrell's investigation along with reproductions of the portraits.
  6. William Pressly, *The Ashbourne Portrait of Shakespeare—Through the Looking Glass (Shakespeare Quarterly, 44 No. 1 SPR 1993)*, 55-72.
  7. Chapman, *Revenge*, 479.
  8. *Ibid.*, 497.
  9. *Ibid.*, 502, 503.
  10. Percy Allen, *The Case for Edward de Vere 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford as "Shakespeare"* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1930), 117.
  11. Thomas Marc Parrott, *The Plays and Poems of George Chapman* (New York: Dutton, 1910), 575.
  12. *Ibid.*, 537, 575, 576.
  13. *Ibid.*, 584.
  14. Percy Allen, *The Plays of Chapman in Relation to French History* (London: Denis Archer, 1933), 94.
  15. Parrott, *Chapman*, 581.
  16. M.H. Spielmann, F.S.A., *The Ashbourne Portrait of Shakespeare*, Part I (*Connoisseur* Jan-April 1910), 249.
  17. Barrell, *Identifying Shakespeare*, 43.
  18. Meritum petere grave, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, Ed. by Ruth Loyd Miller (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press Corp. 1975) 193-199, 203, 216, 221.
  19. Percy Allen, *The Oxford Shakespeare Case Corroborated* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1931), 41-42. One example of Chapman's use of the never/ever puns to denote Edward de Vere occurs in his *Caesar and Pompey* which Parrott dates 1612-13. Cato, who Dr. Parrott has observed undoubtedly stands for Chapman, uses the following lines concerning Caesar (Oxford): "...But I have (ever) been in (every) justice/Better than Caesar, and (never) conquer'd./Or made to fly for life, as Caesar was./But have been victor (ever) to my wish./Gainst whomso(ever) ever hath opposed." Allen observes that there are no less than 7 Vere puns in 6 lines, all attacking Oxford.
  20. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1063.
  21. Chapman, *Revenge*, 446.
  22. Gabriel Harvey, *Speculum Tuscanismi*, in Charlton Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare, The Myth and the Reality* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1984), 630.
  23. George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois, The Comedies and Tragedies of George Chapman*, Vol. II, Ed. by R.H. Shepherd (London: J. Pearson, 1873), 14-15.
  24. Arthur Acheson, *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet* (New York: John Lane, 1903).
  25. Percy Allen, *Anne Cecil, Elizabeth and Oxford* (London: Denis Archer, 1934), 244.
  26. Allen, *The Case for Edward de Vere*, 136.
  27. J.M. Robertson, *Shakespeare and Chapman: A Thesis of Chapman's Authorship of A Lover's Complaint*, (London: T F Unwin, 1917).
  28. Allen, *Anne Cecil*, 139. Also I might add here that I came independently to the same discovery Percy Allen also made (*The Plays of Shakespeare and Chapman in relation to French History*, p. 204) that the book in the hand of the Ashbourne sitter was described in the passage about the Noble poet in Chapman's *Revenge*.
  29. *Ibid.*, 243.
  30. Acheson, *Rival Poet*, 117.
  31. Pictures found in: The Berger Collection at Jane Ashelford, *A Visual History of Costume: The Sixteenth Century* (New York: Drama Book Publications, 1983), #93.; Karen Hearn, *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England, 1530-1630* (Petersborough, Cambridgeshire: Tate Gallery, 1995), 104, #55.
  32. Paul Cherrett, M.A., a descriptive piece of the Reynolds Gallery, Island House, Barbican, Plymouth, England, titled *Portrait of Sir Hugh Hamersley*, in the possession of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C. in their Ashbourne Portrait File under "Hamersley Portraits".
  33. *Ibid.*
  34. *Ibid.*
  35. Barrell, *Identifying Shakespeare*, 44.
  36. Spielmann, *Ashbourne*, 250.
  37. Herbert Norris, *Tudor Costume and Fashion* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997), Plate XLII.
  38. Memorial to Sir Thomas Smythe, Theydon Mount, Essex.
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## Confidential Video Bard

*Love's Labour's Lost*: the BBC vs. Branagh

By Chuck Berney

The first of this series of essays comparing versions of Shakespeare's plays on video appeared in the Spring 2001 *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*. It dealt with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play so popular that five different versions were available for comparison. In the case of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the competition is less fierce—there are only two versions, and one is a musical adaptation retaining less than half of the spoken dialog.

Elijah Moshinsky was one of the more reliable directors to work on the series of Shakespeare plays filmed by the BBC from about 1978 to 1985. He directed one of the productions of *Dream* I reviewed in the last essay; in fact it was one I liked least, due largely to what I thought were misguided interpretations of Puck and Oberon. With this 1984 version of *Love's Labour's Lost*, however, he redeems himself completely—it's a beautiful piece of work.

For me the high points of this production were the appearances of the fantastical Spaniard Don Armado and his servant Moth, played by David Warner and John Kane. Their first scene ("Boy, what sign is it when a man of great spirit grows melancholy?") opens with Armado practicing the bassoon. The following dialog immediately establishes their characters—the master dreamy, self-absorbed, the servant intellectually superior and slightly condescending (rather in the manner of Jeeves and Wooster, the creations of a later British writer).

*Love's Labour's Lost* is well represented in Ruth Loyd Miller's edition of Eva Turner Clark's book, *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays*. Miller contributes a lengthy introduction to Clark's chapter, and the two pieces together occupy 127 pages. Clark furnishes a historical counterpart for every character in the play—Elizabethan audiences must have felt like they were watching a newsreel. The historical Berowne was the Marechal de Biron, but in the play he represents Oxford himself (Maria refers to him using the code-word "mad-cap"). Clark's choice for Don Armado is Don John of Austria, the half-brother of Philip of Spain whose armada had defeated the Turkish fleet at Lepanto in 1571. The

elder Ogburns, more sensitive than Clark to personal references in the plays, suggest in *This Star of England* that Armado is also an Oxford figure, a Hispanified version of the "Italianate Englishman." In Armado's inflated rhetoric, Oxford is spoofing his own love of words. Watching the BBC video tends to confirm this suggestion;

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***"The [Branagh] version ...  
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Hollywood musical."***

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the two men conduct parallel romances (Berowne with Rosaline, Armado with the peasant girl Jaquenetta), and they are the only characters allowed to address the audience directly.

It is clear that Rosaline is the Dark Lady. Berowne describes her as "A whitely wanton with a velvet brow/With two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes/Ay, and by heaven, one that will do the deed/though Argus were her eunuch and her guard" (this is the authorial voice breaking through, since in the play Rosaline is innocent of the slightest impropriety). The Ogburns identify her with Anne Vavasor.

Who then is Jaquenetta? The fact that she is a peasant surely disqualifies her from being a duplicate of the courtly Vavasor. On the historical level, Clark identifies her with Mary Stuart, since Don John at one point was plotting to marry the Scottish queen (Clark points out that if Mary had been male she would have been named James, and Jaquenetta is the corresponding French diminutive). But there must be more to it than that—her lowly status is even more inappropriate for Mary Stuart than it is for Anne Vavasor. Even her

admirer Armado comments on it: "I do affect the very ground (which is base) where her shoe (which is baser) guided by her foot (which is basest) doth tread." When an author as fond of name-clues as Oxford hits a note so insistently, I get suspicious. In the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* for Fall 2000, Stephanie Hughes made the case for a relationship between Oxford and Emilia Bassano, a member of a family of Jewish musicians who had moved to the English court from Venice. Does Jaquenetta represent Emilia Bassano? Has Oxford provided his Mediterranean alter ego with his Italian sweetheart?

I think the question is important because Jaquenetta is so important to the play: its strange ending is precipitated by Costard's announcement (in the middle of the masque of the Nine Worthies) that she is pregnant by Armado. Preparations for a duel between Armado and Costard are interrupted by the arrival of Mercade with his message of death, which quenches the frivolous spirit which characterized the play to this point. The courtly lovers say goodbye, then Armado re-enters and introduces two songs that close the play. The first is sung by Ver (Spring)—"The cuckoo then on every tree/ Mocks married men . . ." The second is sung by Hiems (Winter, Hiver)—"While greasy Joan doth keel the pot." ['Joan,' like 'Jill,' is a stock term for a peasant wench; Berowne too seems to have them on his mind: "Some men must love my lady, and some Joan" (3.1); "When shall you see me write a thing in rhyme, or groan for Joan" (4.3); "Our wooing doth not end like an old play: Jack hath not Jill" (5.2).] Armado has the last line of the play: "You that way; we this way." Or is it a stage direction?

The second version of *Love's Labour's Lost* is the play joyously re-imagined as a Hollywood musical by Kenneth Branagh, who produced, directed, and stars as Berowne. He uses the device of a *faux* newsreel to set the scene, which is Europe on the brink of World War II. The newsreels-grainy b/w with an occasional frame skipped-are wonderfully done; the gossipy tone of the narrator is pitch-perfect, and the

commentary allows the viewer to stay on top of the story in spite of massive cuts in the text. The device is more than a gimmick, as it provides the historical context that the Elizabethan audience got from their familiarity with names that a modern audience doesn't recognize. Sprinkled throughout the film are nine worthy songs from the 1930s by writers like Porter, Berlin and the Gershwins, plus a song from 1946 ('There's No Business Like Show Business') which serves as the climax of the festivities before the arrival of Mercade. Just as the play is stuffed with references to other literary works, the film is crammed with movie allusions (*Casablanca*, *The English Patient*, and *The Wizard of Oz*, to name three out of more than a dozen).

The cast is uniformly excellent. Nathan Lane plays Costard as a veteran vaudeville performer, and is hilarious. Timothy Spall's Armado is an interesting contrast to David Warner's portrait in the BBC video—with his lines drastically cut he's forced to give us a sketch, but it's a funny one. Richard Clifford is suave and charming as Boyet, the Princess's *aide-de-camp* (when the ladies enter on boats, Boyet is riding beside them on a bicycle, a bit of business perhaps

inspired by the Princess addressing him as "our best-moving fair solicitor"). Rosaline is played by the gorgeous Natascha McElhone, and Jaquenetta by the equally gorgeous Stefania Rocca. In fact, not only are they equally gorgeous, they look a lot alike, as if Branagh were telling us he recognizes that Berowne and Armado are two sides of the same coin.

Branagh's film ends with a three-minute newsreel version of World War II in which the lovers prove that they are worthy of their ladies (the only casualty is Boyet). Although Branagh cuts the scene where Costard announces Jaquenetta's pregnancy, he includes the pregnancy itself. A brief clip in the newsreel shows Armado and Moth in a detention camp with a barely recognizable Jaquenetta standing outside the barbed wire holding an infant. A later clip shows them in the midst of a victory celebration, the infant now a toddler. Branagh agrees the pregnancy is important, but he makes you look for it.

I erred when I titled this piece "BBC vs. Branagh." These two versions are not competitive, they're complementary—they illuminate each other.

See them both.

*Whittemore (continued from page 7)*

19. *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, Charlton Ogburn, Jr., 1984-1992, 630, italics added.
20. *Hamlet*, 3.4.208-210
21. Henry Howard, Charles Aundel and Francis Southwell
22. Letters about securing Oxford's liberty went back and forth between Burghley and Walsingham in July 1581, reported in *Hidden Allusions*, Eva Turner Clark, Miller edition, 493.
23. *Hekatompathia* of 1582
24. *The Life of Elizabeth I*, Alison Weir, 1998, 332. "The eccentric Oxford was also out of favour, having announced his conversion to the Roman faith."
25. *Mr. Secretary Walsingham and the Policies of Queen Elizabeth*, Conyers Read, 1978, Vol. 3, 370-371.
26. *Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, Vol. VI, Part X, Chapter 4
27. *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, B. M. Ward, 1928, 271-274
28. The bond was formed in 1584 around a Protestant oath to take up arms on the Queen's behalf and destroy Mary of Scots if she became involved in any plot against Elizabeth.
29. Italics added. Oxford wrote to Burghley, Oct. 30, 1584, mentioning Lyly by name. "I am that I am" was God's description of himself to Moses; Sonnet 121: "No, I am that I am, and they that level at my abuses reckon up their own."
30. *Hidden Allusions*, Eva Turner Clark (Miller edition) 801.
31. The decree came after Elizabeth had empowered Archbishop Whitgift and the Privy Council to draw up new rules regarding printing.
32. Read, 299
33. Read, 371, both the quote and the grant figures
34. *Othello*, 5.2.339
35. Italics added.
36. Italics added. Oxford to Burghley, July 7, 1594.
37. Reverend John Ward, vicar of Stratford Parish, in his diary of 1661-1663 (published in 1839) wrote that Shakespeare "supplied the stage with two plays every year, and for that had an allowance so large that he spent at the rate of 1,000 pounds a year, as I have heard." *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*, edited by Oscar James Campbell (1966, 936). The vicar must have been puzzled, since he surely knew that an annual "allowance" or subsidy of that size could have come only from the government's royal treasury. (Nicholas Rowe in 1709 reported that the Earl of Southampton once gave Shakespeare "a thousand pounds to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to.")
38. *King John*, 5.7.110-118

## 6th Annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference April 11th to 14th, 2002 Concordia University Portland, Oregon

Speakers tentatively scheduled include Lynne Kositsky ("A Sea of Troubles, Part Deux: The Risks Attendant in Challenging Shakespeare Orthodoxy"); Keynote Speaker Hank Whittemore ("Ben and Will: A New Oxfordian Approach to the Lives of Ben Jonson and Will Shakspeare"); (Hank Whittemore will also speak on "A Real Life Inspiration for Hamlet's Mousetrap?"); Dr. Paul Altrocchi ("Did Edward de Vere Die of 'Ye Plague?"); Oxfordian editor Stephanie Hopkins Hughes ("Who was 'The Duchess of Malfi'? The Relevance of John Webster to the Authorship Question"); Professor Daniel Wright ("Who's Kyd-ding Whom? Was Thomas Kyd a Front for the Writer Who Called Himself Shake-speare?"); Dr. Eric Altschuler and William Jansen ("Defragmenting Shake-speare: Does Oxford = Shake-speare = Weelkes?"); Dr. Roger Stritmatter ("Unspeakable Moments in Troilus and Cressida: Vetus Comoedia, The 1599 Bishop's Ban, and the Rhetoric of Authorship"); Barbara Burrell ("The Counterfeit Presentment: The Ashbourne Portrait"); Mark Alexander ("Shakespeare and Oxford: 25 Curious Connections"); Shakespeare-in-Italy expert Richard Roe ("The Italian Plays and a Visit to Venice."); as well as Professor Steven May; Professor Michael Delahoyde; Professor Steffen Silvis; Professor William Rubinstein; Richard Whalen; Professor Kevin Simpson; Professor Ren Draya; Jason Moore; Andrew Werth; and many others.

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*Editors (continued from page 3)*

of William Cecil, lurk the great unanswered, and mostly un-asked, questions: What are the historical implications? What does it mean to realize that the record of European history has been, in effect, grossly mistaken about Shakespeare's identity? Orthodox academicians love to deride the Oxfordian case as a "conspiracy theory." Such terminology, of course, is a two-way street. The most predictable consequence of applying this label will be a proliferation of public curiosity about other "conspiracies."

As Richmond Crinkley wrote in his *Shakespeare Quarterly* review of *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, if the depressing standards of scholarship documented in Mr. Ogburn's book are characteristic of the production of knowledge in general in our society, we have more things to worry about than who Shakespeare was.

Unfortunately, however, the impulse for premature foreclosure of critical questions is not limited to orthodox academicians.

Indeed, some of us have been disturbed for many months by the prevailing tendency in certain Oxfordian circles to turn "speculation" into a dirty word. Sometimes there seems to be a visceral need to categorize every sentence, lecture or essay into the philosophically naïve categories, "speculative" and "factual." Such a trend, we think, deserves to be resisted: all significant inquiry in the humanities involves the creative interdependence of the factual and the speculative. Rigorous scholarship em-

ploys the factual to bolster and establish what often originated as pure speculation. That was the method employed by Oxfordian pioneers such as J. Thomas Looney, and we see no reason to abandon it now.

In our mailbox is a letter from Toronto journalist Sky Gilbert which illustrates the commitment to responsible speculation which, we hope, will characterize the content of these pages:

I think it's terribly important to make it clear that the Shakespeare Fellowship is not setting up another orthodoxy. What's appalling and revealing to me, is how the Shakespeare-the-actor-of-Stratford defenders get hysterical when defending their views. My answer back is another question: 'Aren't people allowed to question? Isn't questioning, in fact, important, and the very province and duty of scholars?'

Some "Oxfordians," of course, prefer to wait for the next two decades before certain questions can be legitimized. We prefer to start asking—and, to the best of our abilities—answering them, now.

*Cecil Portrait (continued from page 11)*

Whatever our personal feelings about the cunning, conniving Baron Burghley, he was a remarkable achiever. Edward de Vere's words in *Much Ado About Nothing*<sup>18</sup> are relevant:

*He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion. He hath indeed better bett' red expectation.*

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14. Williams, *op cit.*
15. *The Merchant of Venice* (III.ii.32).
16. Hurstfield, *op cit.*
17. *As You Like It* (II.vii.48).
18. *Much Ado About Nothing* (I.i.13).

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