



# Shakespeare Matters

*"The Voice of the Shakespeare Fellowship"*

## Falstaff in the Low Countries

By Robert Detobel

In his book *Monstrous Adversary*<sup>1</sup> Prof. Alan Nelson has Oxford boast of his participation in the battle of Bommel during his visit to the Low Countries in the summer 1574. Nelson's statement, my article shows, results from a double error. First he has failed to note the basic difference which existed between a battle and a siege in the Low Countries since 1573; second, and more importantly, Nelson did not perceive (perhaps because he did not want to) that Oxford's tale about his great feats was a Baron Münchhausen's tall tale and was clearly so intended. More properly spoken it was a "Falstaffiade," as will appear in the second part in which we observe the similarities between Oxford's tale and Falstaff's tales.

*(Continued on page 4)*



*The truth is, Sir John, you live in great infamy  
He that buckles him in my belt cannot live in less*  
--II Henry IV, 1.2



*James Newcomb, Fellowship member and Oregon Shakespeare Festival leading man, with Mark Anderson (right), winner of the 2005 Oxfordian of the Year Award. Newcomb stars this OSF season as a wickedly energetic Richard III.*

## OSF, SF, and SOS Join Forces in Historic Conference

By Howard Schumann

The first ever jointly sponsored conference of The Shakespeare Fellowship and The Shakespeare Oxford Society was a "breakthrough" and an important step in piercing the "bastion of orthodoxy" regarding the Shakespeare authorship issue, according to James Newcomb, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) actor who portrayed the villainous King Richard in the OSF's magnificent production of *Richard III*.

"The Ashland Conference reunited friends in a gorgeous Shakespearean setting," said SOS President James Sherwood. "Both Shakespeare Fellowship President Lynne Kositsky and I enjoyed affirming a spirit of good will which found universal support in more Oxfordians attending a longer conference than any in previous memory. Together we look forward to next year."

The conference took place from September 29<sup>th</sup> to October 2<sup>nd</sup> at the historic Ashland Springs Hotel in Ashland, Oregon, home of the largest repertory theater group in the United States, and featured presentations by prominent Oxfordians, members of the OSF artistic staff, and renowned scholars and educators. Included as part of the four-day conference was a backstage tour, a First Folio viewing, and two plays, *Richard III* and *Twelfth Night, Or What You Will*.

*(Continued on page 10)*

# Letters

Dear Editor:

*Shakespeare by Another Name*, Mark Anderson's recently published book on the Shakespeare authorship question, signals the dawn of a new day in the authorship controversy. With forthright command of well organized and well documented information and logic, Anderson has put the world of orthodox academia on notice of just how high the bar is set.

SBAN fulfills the requirements set out by United States Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens in the moot court debate held in Washington DC in the fall of 1987. In a review of the watershed event by the *New Yorker*, the Justice's subsequent remarks were recalled: "If Oxfordians were ever going to make further progress with their argument they would have to put together a concise, coherent theory of how and why Oxford came to write the plays without owning up to them, and how the subterfuge was continued after his death."

Anderson has done precisely that.

Although each and every Oxfordian will not agree with Anderson across the board, there is no denying his grasp of the multitudinous data laboriously extracted from verifiable research, "put together" in a presentation that is both "concise" and "coherent." No mean feat in and of itself. The added beauty of his writing style is sheer serendipity, to wit: "The outlines of Hamlet are so pronounced within de Vere's life that one invariably illuminates the other."

Salutations Mr. Anderson; may the Force Oxfordian be with you.

Bonner Miller Cutting  
Houston, Texas  
17 October 2005

*Photo credits for this issue: Julie Young, Ted Story.*

Dear Editor:

It is presumptuous of Dr. Altrocchi to write a one-sided article on "The Origins and History of the Prince Tudor Theory" — an article which either ignores, or gives short shrift, to virtually all contrary evidence and arguments — and expect that the result will be to reduce the level of "contentious debate among Oxfordians." Those, like myself, who have examined the PT theory and found it wanting, will not be convinced by an endless stream of articles which repeat the same, tired old arguments which have been thoroughly discredited. Ideological fervor is no substitute for rigorous scholarship, including a willingness to consider alternative explanations, rather than jumping immediately to the PT conclusion and then staying put.

An obvious example: Dr. Altrocchi points out that upon learning that his wife was pregnant in 1575, Oxford wrote in a letter that ". . . it hath pleased God to give me a son of my own . . ." According to Altrocchi, "'Son of my own' is an odd way to express news of his wife's pregnancy, suggesting

the existence of a prior son he was not allowed to acknowledge." The editor considered this point sufficiently important that it is printed separately on the page in bold. There is a much simpler explanation. Oxford was a Christian. To be a Christian means to think of God as someone who had a son. Is it not obvious that the other "son" Oxford is referring to is God's son, Jesus? Are PT theorists so used to taking Christianity with a grain of salt that they cannot imagine someone like Oxford taking his religion so seriously that its tenets would be reflected in his personal writings?

This is not the first time that this rather obvious alternative explanation has been pointed out. Nor, probably, will it be the last.

Sincerely,  
John M. Shahan  
Glendale, California

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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. It is a recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit (Fed ID 04-3578550).

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*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.

# Oxford's Torment: The Last Chapter in the Authorship Controversy

By Greg Swann

*Editor's Note: normally this space is reserved for commentary from your editor, but sometimes lightning strikes: "gee whizz, I couldn't have said that better if I had written it myself!" Gregg Swann's internet parody of orthodox bardology, posted in its original format at Greg's **Presence of Mind** website, is such an essay.*

The enduring mystery of William Shakespeare has become a little less mysterious.

It may be that we can never fully plumb the genius of our ever-living Bard, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't muck around in the basement. You never know what you'll find down there.

Witness: we now have in our possession the long hypothesized 'lost works' of Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford. Oxford has been regarded by heretics and assorted lunatics as the true author of the works of Shakespeare. This myth can finally be laid to rest.

Marvel at the genius of Shakespeare! Defenders of the Swan of Avon have always been hard put to explain how a glove-maker's son from a provincial backwater—a man who may not even have known how to read—could have written the sublime corpus we know as The Works of William Shakespeare. What life experiences led the glove-maker's son to his subject matter? What intensive education lent him his deep erudition? How can the paired and parallel sonnet cycles be reconciled with his seemingly mundane life history?

Literary scholars almost always attempt to excavate the details of an author's life to inform the reading of his works. Almost always. With Shakespeare we have forborne to do this. Embarrassingly, the life of our immortal poet is... embarrassing. Taking account of every factual evidence we have of his comings and goings, he seems to have been an ignorant, rough-hewn knave. Not Iago, surely, but not Jack Falstaff either. Not a Pistol, to be sure, but not that far from Nym.

If the details of Shakespeare's life lend us any clues to the quality of his literary output, we should excavate at once in search of misspelled dirty jokes and forged invoices. Wisely, orthodox Shakespearean

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scholars have elected to conjecture that Shakespeare is the one exception to their theory, the only serious writer in the Western canon who was able to keep his life experiences *out* of his work.

But the advent of the Oxfordian claim has only made matters more difficult. For while Shakespeare's work does not parallel the events of his own life, education, upbringing and presumed concerns, it does—again embarrassingly—match Oxford's life point for point. The Oxfordians seek to argue that this is evidence that

Oxford wrote the works, not Shakespeare. But this is demonstrated to be absurd by the long-standing and indisputable precept that anything that challenges orthodox Shakespearean scholarship is absurd.

Taking account that we know almost nothing of how Shakespeare spent his days, there is nothing to stop us from positing that he spent a great deal of his time in research. Positing, which is not—emphatically *not*—making things up, is again a long-standing precept of Shakespearean scholarship. Since we already have the Bard researching in a general way everything he would have known if he *were* the Seventeenth Earl of

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**We need only posit that Shakespeare spent some particularly huge amount of time researching Edward de Vere himself! This must be so, since there is no other non-heretical way to explain the inexplicable parallels between Shakespeare's works and Oxford's life.**

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Oxford, it takes only one posit more to close the gap entirely on the Oxfordians. Thus: We need only posit that Shakespeare spent some particularly huge amount of time researching Edward de Vere himself! This must be so, since there is no other non-heretical way to explain the inexplicable parallels between Shakespeare's works and Oxford's life. How did Hamlet come to be captured and held for ransom by pirates, just as was done to de Vere? Research. How could Shakespeare set so many works in Italy, when it was de Vere who had toured that peninsula? Research. How came Shakespeare to know so much of the law, which Oxford had studied? Research. How could the Bard write characters who are clearly parodies of Oxford's friends and

*(Continued on page 29)*



*Falstaffe (cont. from p. 1)*

### Sieges and Battles

After October 1573 the Spaniards changed their strategy in the Low Countries. The Duke of Alva resigned his command in December 1573 and was succeeded by Luis de Requesens. The change of strategy was not due to the change of governor. Alva himself defined the new strategy as a consequence of the last two disastrous sieges. On 11 December 1572 the siege had been laid on the town of Haarlem. Despite repeated assaults it was not until 12 July 1573 that Haarlem surrendered. For Spain it was a Pyrrhic victory. The staunch defence of the citizens of Haarlem had led to a heavy death toll. Another ruinous siege was soon to follow. From 23 August to 8 October 1573 Spanish troops tried to take the town of Alkmaar by assault, again paying a high price in casualties and this time without success. The siege had to be broken off.

From then on the strategy was radically changed. "No longer sieges after the old system with cannonades and assaults, but encircling of the towns through occupation of the surrounding terrain with a number of entrenchments in order to overcome the rebels by starvation or perhaps to surprise them in a dark winter night by an assault on the ice."<sup>2</sup> The first town to be besieged in this manner was Leiden. The siege commenced on 31 October 1573, was raised on 21 March 1574, it was resumed on 25/26 May 1574 and lasted till 3 October 1574. Finally, it was unsuccessful. The Dutch, too, developed a new strategy, flooding the camp of the

besiegers by piercing the dykes during a high water period. This is what happened at about the same time in Leiden and Zaltbommel (or Bommel). Bommel, a town in the Bommelerwaard, an isle between the rivers Meuse and Waal, was a strategic locality, the most southern fortified town of the Low Countries under the control of the patriots. The siege of Bommel lasted from June till October 1574. In Leiden the defenders of the town tried one sally, in Bommel there were some skirmishes mainly to the purpose of ensuring the food supply from the surrounding lands.

The only battle in the Low Countries in 1574 was the battle of Mook Heath on 14 April, between the first and second phase of the siege of Leiden. It was precisely to bind the Spanish forces elsewhere and so to compel them to terminate the siege of Leiden that Count Louis of Nassau, William of Orange's brother, had levied a considerable army of mercenaries in Germany. At least this goal was realized. As seen, Don Francisco de Valdez, the commander of the siege, had to interrupt the siege in March. Twenty-five companies under captain Gonzalvo de Braccamonte were sent from Leiden to Maastricht where Count Louis hoped to cross the river Meuse. Further troops were called in from other Dutch provinces. From Zeeland came the aged Christophoro Mondragón<sup>3</sup>. Also involved with some companies was Don Bernardino de Mendoza, the future Spanish ambassador in England.

Three of these names occur in the charges leveled by Charles Arundel against Oxford in 1580: "At his [Oxford's] being in

*(continued on page 7)*



***Shakespeare Fellowship members Merilee Karr, Ian Haste, and Mark Anderson puzzle over the correct answer to a round of Alex McNeil's Oxfordian JEOparady. Anderson, with the advantage of having spent eight years researching and writing Shakespeare By Another Name, won the round handily. Note the strategic product placement..***

# From a Never Writer...News

## Washington DC's Shakespeare Theatre Promotes Authorship Dialogue

Program notes for Shakespeare plays almost always include a biography of the dramatist that is routinely Stratfordian, reinforcing the false notion about his identity for millions of theatergoers browsing their programs before the curtain rises.

Not, however, at the Shakespeare Theater in Washington D.C., home of one of the world's most acclaimed Shakespearean acting companies.

In its new program, the opening and the closing words of the biographical sketch cast grave doubt on the belief that Will Shakspeare of Stratford was the dramatist. The one-page biography opens with these words:

No man's life has been the subject of more speculation than William Shakespeare's. While Shakespearean scholars have dedicated their lives to search for evidence, the truth is that no one really knows what the truth is. Scholars agree that a William Shakespeare was baptized at Stratford-upon-Avon..." (Emphasis added)

The biography then mentions his marriage, his career as an actor, *Groatsworth of Witte*, the two narrative poems, the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the theaters.

It closes with these words:

In the years since Shakespeare's death, he has fallen to the depths of obscurity only to be resurrected as the greatest writer of English literature and drama. In the 1800s, his plays were so popular that many refused to believe that an actor from Stratford had

written them. To this day some believe that Sir Francis Bacon was the real author of the plays; others argue that Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, was the man. Still others contend that Sir Walter Raleigh or Christopher

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**Flawed as it is, a biography so skeptical of the conventional view of the great poet-dramatist's identity goes a long way toward changing how many theatergoers think . If more Shakespeare theater companies and festivals were to do the same in their programs, the skepticism could put the Stratford man's claim to fame in serious jeopardy.**

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Marlowe penned the lines attributed to Shakespeare. Whether the plays were written by Shakespeare the man or Shakespeare the myth, it is clear that no other playwright has made such a significant and lasting contribution to the English language.

Flawed as it is, a biography so skeptical of the conventional view of the great poet-dramatist's identity goes a long way toward changing how many theatergoers think. If more Shakespeare theater companies and festivals were to do the same in their programs, the skepticism could put the Stratford man's claim to fame in serious jeopardy.

--Contributed by Richard Whalen



## New Book Identifies Sir Henry Neville as the True Bard

"A small academic industry has developed to prove that William Shakespeare, a provincial lad from Stratford-upon-Avon, could not have written the much-loved plays that bear his name," reports an October 19 AP story. The occasion for the story, picked up by CNN among other major news outlets, is the October 2005 Pearson Longman release, by Brenda James and William Rubinstein, *The Truth Will Out: Unmasking the Real Shakespeare*, which promotes Sir Henry Neville (1564-1616) as the true author. Oxfordians have awaited the book's publication since Rubinstein, a history professor at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and Shakespeare Fellowship member, first mentioned the project at the 2003 De Vere Studies Conference, but concealed the identity of the candidate. However, participants in the Fellowship's online discussion forum had predicted Neville's identity as early as January 2005. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the press coverage of the new book is the

(News cont. from p. 5)

gullibility of major media outlets. "His life has been found to mirror the evolution of The Bard's works so precisely that the authors believe that it cannot be dismissed as coincidence," gushes Dalya Alberge, Arts correspondent for the *London Times* online.

Coincidence never ceases. Around the time of the book's release, the Shakespeare Fellowship's online forum was frequented by an English enthusiast of the new theory, posting under the handle Bookman1974, who appears to have been an employee of the publisher but posed as an independent researcher. When asked to deny that s/he was an employee of Pearson, Bookman disappeared. Perhaps not surprisingly given such creative marketing techniques, *The Truth* is apparently selling well in England, but has not been released in the U.S. and is difficult to obtain here. Stay tuned.

### Ruth Loyd Miller, Oxfordian Pioneer, Honored



*Ruth Loyd Miller, 1922-2005*

In recognition of the passing of Ruth Loyd Miller, the following tribute, written by Fellowship Trustee K.C. Ligon, was read by Dr. Stritmatter to the attendees:

The world of Shakespearean authorship studies lost one of its greatest champions this past September 15th, the legendary Ruth Loyd Miller. For many of us, Ruth's

editions of Looney, Clark, and both Wards (bound in purple covers and brimming with illustrations and lavish color portraits), are her most enduring legacy, for not only did she maintain the worldwide availability of these seminal works but she also provided her own copious research and brilliant annotations, and her aptly named companion volume, *Oxfordian Vistas*. As many here know from personal experience, Ruth Miller answered all queries about the authorship with boundless enthusiasm, generously bringing her years of study into play, sharing it all with a sublimely ironic wit and humor in an ever-courtly Mississippi Delta drawl. For Ruth the voice on the other end of the telephone line could belong to one whose unique contribution would ultimately trigger the great sea-change in the world's view of the man who was Shakespeare, thus she always treated you as if you might be that one. It is with a keen sense of her profound contribution to all of us present, and to all those who will embark on this journey of discovery, that we pause in silence to honor our beloved friend and mentor Ruth Loyd Miller.

Ms. Miller's article, "The Crown Signature: An Enigma Awaiting Time's Solution," appears in this issue of *Shakespeare Matters*.

--Contributed by KC Ligon

### University of Miami to Offer Course in Shakespeare's Law

Mrs. Miller would be gratified, we are sure, to know that the beat marches on. Shakespeare Fellowship member and recipient of the 2004 Fellowship Award for excellence in authorship studies Tom Regnier (LLD), a faculty member at the University of Miami School of Law, will be teaching a new UMSL on "Shakespeare's Law" during Spring 2006. The seminar course, capped at 15 students, will focus on legal terms and issues in Shakespeare's works, but will, of course, "have to address the issue of where Shakespeare acquired all that legal knowledge."

The course will also explore such legal issues as law vs. equity in *Merchant of Venice*, marriage "pre-contract" law in *Measure for Measure*, the law of fraudulent conveyance in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and inheritance law in *Hamlet*. Other works



*Tom Regnier at the 2005 SF Conference*

to be studied include *Othello*, *Richard III*, and the sonnets. The course will approach the plays as literature and as keys to the English legal system, and will consider "how the Magna Carta, the Statute of Uses, the Statute of Wills, and cases like *Hales v.*

--Contributed by Lynne Kositsky





*Falstaff (cont. from p. 4)*

Flanders, the Duke of Alva will constantly affirm, grew so much to affect him for the several parts he saw in him, as he made him his Lieutenant General over all the army then in the Low Countries, and employed him further in a notable piece of service, where according to his place he commanded and directed the Ambassador of Spain that is now here [Mendoza], Mondragon, Santio d'Avila, and the rest of the captains; but these who I have named, as he will say of all others, were most glad to be commanded by him. And so valiantly he behaved himself as he gained great love of all the soldiers, and in less admiration of his valour of all sorts."<sup>4</sup> One would have liked Arundel tell us which other captains were named. It would be no great surprise if Oxford had also named the Spanish commanders Tarragon, Cinnamon, and Oregano. Then, clearly, what Oxford had in mind was not bragging of his famous deeds but setting the table in a roar, as Arundel himself confirms: "which hath made such sport as often have I bin driven to rise from his table laugheinge..."<sup>5</sup>

It is fairly clear from the beginning that Oxford's tale was meant for entertainment: the Duke of Alva who would have placed him in command had left the Low Countries seven months before Oxford arrived there. But as others would rather lose a good friend than a good jest, so Nelson preferred to lose a good jest rather than a "monstrous" enemy.

Charles Arundel, the man who provided Nelson with the title of his book, had to be honorable and serious. Correspondingly, Nelson had to find some place to locate Oxford's fictitious battle. He writes: "Oxford would later boast that he had taken part in the battle of Bommel, known to historians as the battle of Mook and dated 14 April 1574. Protestant troops under Count Louis of Nassau were routed by the combined forces of three Spanish generals. Though Ward (98) imagines that Oxford may have gone to have a look, he missed the battle by some three months. Conceivably Oxford witnessed the siege of Leiden, which lasted from June to October 1574."<sup>6</sup>

Nearly everything in this paragraph is wrong! Ward does not "imagine" that Ox-

ford could have visited the battlefield of Mook Heath but writes: "he must have visited the Spanish lines outside Bommel in July."<sup>7</sup> That is: the Spanish camp around Bommel. It should be repeated that historians do not speak of a battle of Bommel in 1574 for the good reason there never was one! Nor would historians speak of the battle of Mook Heath as the battle of Bommel for the good reason that the two places are at a linear distance of about 22 miles!!

Not only does Nelson confuse places, he also confuses dates. The second stage of the siege of Leiden lasted from May to October 1574. "June to October 1574" is the period given by B.M. Ward, but for the siege of Bommel, not Leiden. In his desperate quest for locating "Oxford's battle" Nelson seems to have lost any orientation, no longer knowing where he is: in Bommel, Leiden, or Mook, and, to boot, he seems no longer to know where Bommel is situated

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**As others would rather lose  
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(perhaps because the town is often mentioned with its full name Zaltbommel). Of course, there is Arundel's statement that Oxford pretended he would have taken Bommel by surprise had Thomas Bedingfield not called him back. But in the endnote to this passage Nelson considers the possibility that the place might be "Bouwel, about 15 miles E.S.E. of Antwerp, and separated from it by four rivers."<sup>8</sup> These rivers are very small rivers, needing

no bridges and having no straits, things Nelson needed because they are mentioned in Arundel's reproduction of Oxford's fanfaronade. Moreover, so zealously obsessed is Nelson with not missing anything further disparaging to Oxford's character that there is no place in his head for a simple question which contains its own answer: why should the Spaniards lay siege on a small, unimportant, unfortified place like Bouwel in that part of the Low Countries which they controlled perfectly? But let us first return to the only historical battle in the Low Countries in 1574, the battle of Mook.

Oxford's tale is a mixture of the battle of Mook and the siege of Bommel. We have already seen that a great number of Spanish generals and captains were placed by Alva under the command of "generalissimo" Oxford, who apparently became something of a legend in his own right during his campaign in the Low Countries. However, these generals had nothing to do with the siege of Bommel. Here the commander was the Sieur de Hierges who was also one of the commanders at the battle of Mook to which we shall now return.

In February 1574 Count Louis of Nassau came from Germany with an army, trying to cross the river Meuse at the city of Maastricht. He was prevented from it by d'Avila and forced to move the north. Avila followed him on the opposite bank of the river. On 13 April Count Louis reached the village of Mook. The same day General d'Avila built a bridge of boats over the Meuse and attacked on a narrow plain between the rivers Meuse and Waal. Louis' army of mercenaries, of whom a great deal had deserted several weeks before, was crushed. Count Louis of Nassau and his two brothers Henry and John were killed.

Oxford's tale partly refers to this battle on the bank of the river Meuse, partly to the siege of Bommel: "And in this journey he passed many straits and divers bridges kept by the enemy, which he let them from with the loss of many a man's life. But still he forced them to retire, till at the last he approached the place that he went to besiege; and using no delay the cannon was planted and the battery continued the space

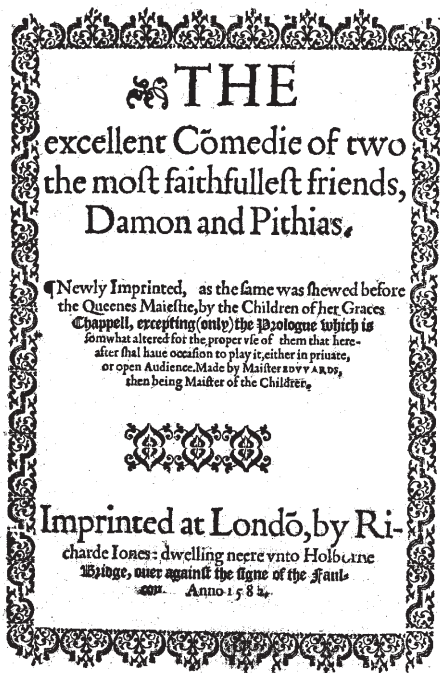
*(Continued on page 11)*

# Damon and Pithias: Oxford Juvenalia?

by Michael Delahoyde, Ph.D.

Surely there were Elizabethan plays written by people other than the Earl of Oxford, and this may indeed be one of those. But at the very least, the play *Damon and Pithias* reveals the kind of theater a young Oxford would have relished and several key themes instantly recognizable to Shakespeareans that must have taken hold in the mind of Edward de Vere from very early on.

Three copies of the 1571 quarto are extant, but ample evidence points to *Damon and Pithias* being performed before Queen Elizabeth at Whitehall during the Christmas season of 1564 (White 6), shortly after her severe bout with fever. The quarto edition somewhat ambiguously attributes the work to Richard Edwards (1524-1566), for his five last years Master of the Children of the



Title Page of the 2nd Quarto (1583) of  
*Damon and Pithias*.

Chapel Royal. An elegy from a lost play, *Palamon and Arcite* (the Chaucerian story behind *The Two Noble Kinsmen*) and 26 poems and songs (some in poulter's measure) are the only other pieces that survive from, or are attributed to, Edwards (White 4).

*Damon and Pithias*, considered the first tragicomedy in English, recounts the classical story of sworn friendship put to the most severe test. The two title characters, travelling with their servant Stephano, have the misfortune of touring the kingdom of a tyrant king, Dionisius, just when a sycophantic courtier, Carisophus, seeks to curry royal favor by preying upon the king's

paranoia and rage-aholism. Despite the good courtiership of Aristippus, who recognizes Carisophus for the parasite he is, and despite the good advice of the counselor Ebulus, Dionisius believes that Damon is a spy and condemns him to death. Damon asks for a rain check — he must get his affairs in order — and Pithias agrees to serve as human collateral. After some comic business with the courtiers' lackeys, Will and Jacke, and with a few other mechanicals such as Grimme the collier, the due date brings no sign of Damon. Gronno the king's executioner gleefully anticipates another professional accomplishment, but Pithias remains stalwart. Damon bursts onto the scene at the very last moment, at which time the two friends vie for the right to die for each other. Dionisius is awestruck: "Ebulus, my spirites are sodenly appauled, my limes waxe weake, / This straunge friendship amaseth me so, that I can scarce speake" (1651-1652); "Before this day I never knew what perfect friendship ment, / My cruell mind to blouddy deedes, was full and wholly bente" (1671-1672). The joyful ending includes Carisophus being beaten out of the court and taking a final stand like a more loquacious version of Malvolio:

Why whyp ye me alone? a plague take Damon and Pithias, since they come hither

I am driven to seke releef abroad alas I know not whither,  
Yet Ebulus, though I be gone, here after time shall trie,  
There shall be found even in this Court as great flatterers as I:  
Well for a while I wyll forgo the Court, though to my great payne,  
I doubt not but to spie a time when I may creepe in againe.

(1729-1734)

Last words are reserved for good counselor Ebulus: "True friendship, and true friendes full fraught with constant faith, / The geuver of friends, the Lord, grant her, most noble Queene Elizabeth" (1759-1760), a sentiment repeated in "The last song":

True frindes for their tru Prince, refuseth not their death:  
The Lorde graunt her such frindes most noble Queene Elizabeth.  
Longe may she governe in honour and wealth,  
Voyde of all sicknesse, in most perfect health:  
Which health to prolonge, as true friends require,  
God graunt she may have her owne hartes desire:  
Which friendes wyll defend her most stedfast faith,  
The Lorde graunt her such friendes most noble Queene Elizabeth.

(1767-1774)

These tributes to Elizabeth remind us of who was the primary audience member for the Shakespeare plays, but their blatancy is stylistically unfamiliar. Perhaps a bit subtler is a moment much earlier in the play, when Pithias comments extraneously, and therefore still somewhat awkwardly, on Dionisius' tyranny: "As thynges by their contraries are alwayes best prooved, / How happie are then mercifull Princes of their people beloved? / Havyng sure friends everie wheare, no feare doth touch them" (310-312). Elizabeth, as we know, cultivated and cherished the title Prince.

The importance of male friendship, though prominent in plays such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, is an Elizabethan-era commonplace but one that would have impressed

(Continued on page 12)



# The Crown Signature: An Enigma Awaiting Time's Solution

by Ruth Loyd Miller

*Editor's Note: Ironically, the present article, written in 1988, has become an article awaiting time's solution. Never published, it circulated only in manuscript within the Oxfordian community and became a subject for controversy, known to many only through the writings of either advocates or critics of the so-called "Tudor heir" hypothesis identifying Henry Wriostheley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, as the changeling child of Edward de Vere and Queen Elizabeth I. Although Mrs. Miller, who died this past September, was never an advocate of the theory, her discovery of the "crown signature" seemed to many to imply a dynastic problem of significant dimensions. Although it must be conceded at the outset that critics of Mrs. Miller's work raised a reasonable objection by arguing that the alleged crown might merely be a coronet, the chronological argument, clearly supported by the extant evidence — that de Vere dropped the signature after James I came to the throne — definitely supports Mrs. Miller's view and has not been countered by her critics.*

Some four dozen letters in the holograph of Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, and bearing his signature, are extant. These date from 1563, when he was thirteen years old, to 1603, a few months before his death in 1604. A few of these signatures have been reproduced in facsimiles of Lord Oxford's letters printed in various books and biographies. Some of his letters have been quoted at length in books by Looney, Clark, Ward, and others. More recently, thirty-seven letters have been accurately transcribed and published by William Plumer Fowler in his 1986 book, *Shakespeare Revealed in Oxford's Letters*.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, one must return to the original letters, or photocopies and facsimiles, arranged chronologically and sequentially, to find Oxford left us — among the many mysteries of his life<sup>2</sup> — an interesting and fascinating riddle to solve. The riddle: to find the meaning of and the reason for the diagrammed signature which he used for the greater part of his adult life (figure one). The mystery extends not only to why he used it, but why he abandoned it in 1603. Was the abandonment connected with Queen Elizabeth's death?

The next extant holograph letter is dated in 1569, when the earl was nineteen years old. This letter was also addressed to Sir William Cecil. It was signed with a new, distinctive, personalized signature which he was to use for the next thirty-four years. In this

Figure One: The "Curlicue" Signature

the first appearance of the signature he spelled his name "Edward Oxenford" though he varied it occasionally in years to come as "Edward Oxeford."

The earliest extant signature (figure One) is found signed to a 1563 letter written in French by Oxford to his guardian, Sir William Cecil<sup>3</sup>. He was thirteen when he wrote this letter. His signature consisted of his name "Edward Oxinford" underlined with a single horizontal loop flourish. Note the space between the two words "Edward" and "Oxford" with a line drawn across the space from the top of the terminal -d" to the top of the initial "O"

Figure Two: A Crown, or a Coronet?

in "Oxford." This line is, in turn, crossed by four short, linked, vertical lines topped with dots, resembling four lower case letters "i." Underneath the "Edward Oxeford," connecting the two words, is a longer line beginning at the bottom of the medial "d" in "Edward" extending to the bottom of the final "d" in "Oxford." Seven separate vertical slash marks are grouped toward the center of this line and actually cross the line

The appearance of this distinctive, personalized signature is much like a coronet or crown. Did it have special significance? Did it have significance to someone besides Oxford himself? If so to whom?

*(Continued on page 28)*



*Ashland Authorship Conference coordinator and Shakespeare Fellowship Trustee Earl Showerman (right) with Shakespeare Fellowship Honorary Member and OSF Executive Director Paul Nicholson (left).*

*Historic Conference (cont. from p. 1)*

The conference was coordinated by Dr. Earl Showerman, a Fellowship trustee and prominent physician from Southern Oregon, who was awarded by the conference as the “Earl of Ashland.” Showerman was assisted by a joint committee of Shakespeare Fellowship and Shakespeare Oxford Society members Lynne Kositsky, John Hammill, Roger Stritmatter, Virginia Hyde, Sue Sybersma, and Matthew Cossolotto. Dr. Showerman said that he was very grateful to those who came to Ashland, many from across the country, to join the faculty and audience for a memorable conference and theatric experience. “The support we received from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in broadening our program was superb,” said Showerman, “and there could not have been a better program of scholarship, entertainments, victuals, and felicitous sharing than what we experienced.” Oxfordian Elizabeth Sears stated, “the conference was an incredibly important melding of the SOS, the Fellowship and Dan’s (Professor Dan Wright) Concordia attendees. It accomplished so much healing and showed how important it is for us all to work together.”

There were many highlights as the conference welcomed back Shakespeare Fellowship regulars Lynne Kositsky, Roger Stritmatter, Hank Whitemore, Dan Wright, Mark Anderson, Paul Altrocchi, Thomas Regnier, Elizabeth Sears, and Dr. Richard

Desper. Other speakers included John Hamill, Dr. Frank Davis, Dr. Michael Hays, Dr. Peter Austin-Zacharias, Dr. Earl Showerman, Prof. Ernest Rehder, Prof. Marilyn Loveless, Katherine Chiljan, Ramon Jimenez, Mary Berkowitz, Prof. Lew Tate, Derran Charlton, and Dr. Thomas Hunter. Talks focused on the literary, historical, political, and religious significance of the works of Shakespeare and the mystery of the authorship question.

Production Stage Manager Kimberley Jean Barry, who has been with OSF for nearly 20 years serving as the backstage tour manager and stage manager for the annual Daedalus Project AIDS Benefit Shows, led off the conference with a history of the OSF. She related how the Festival grew from three performances staged in the old Chattaqua Theater in Ashland to become the largest regional theater company in the country with 800 performances a year. She cited the leadership of Agnus Bowmer, a local teacher whose vision was to bring the works of Shakespeare to the general public.

Oxfordian Paul Nicholson, OSF’s Executive Director since 1995, told the more than 100 Fellowship and SOS members, scholars and theatre-lovers who attended the conference that the Festival’s mission is to “create fresh and bold interpretations of classical and contemporary plays shaped by the diversity of American culture”. With three different theaters, the Festival runs from around May to October each year and employs over eighty Equity actors, 30% of which are of color, the largest percentage

*(Continued on page 26)*

*Falstaff (cont. from p. 7)*

of ten days, by which time he had made such a breach as by a general consent of all his captains he gave an assault, and to encourage his soldiers this valiant prince led them thereto, and through the force of his murdering arm many were sore wounded, but more killed."

The passing of straits and bridges and the presence of "reiters" (German cavalry) are features belonging to the battle of Mook and the attempts of the Protestant army to cross the river Meuse and the crossing of the same by means of a bridge of boats by Sancho d'Avila. These military operations have no connection with the siege of the town of Bommel or any other town. On the other hand, the shelling of a town during ten days consecutively are alien to the battle of Mook and specific for the siege of a fortified town. If not already at the point of stating that all illustrious Spanish captains were glad to serve under him, the satirical and literary character of Oxford's tale should at least transpire here (it becomes fully clear in the next passages). But even here, even in Arundel's reproduction, the euphuistic style is recognizable in the phrase "many were sore wounded, but more killed."<sup>10</sup>

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**The Arundel libels supply us with a humorous portrait of Oxford telling a fantastical story closing with a parody on euphuistic style through a comic anti-climax. We see Sir John Falstaff doing the same in 1 and 2 *Henry IV*. In act II, scene i of that play Falstaff and his three companions first rob travellers at Gad's Hill and are subsequently robbed themselves by Prince Hal and Poin in disguise.**

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**The Falstaffiade**

But the dramatic climax is followed by a true Falstaffian comic anti-climax. Just before accomplishing the great feat and reaching the top of military glory the "generalissimo" Oxford is fetched away from the field of honor and glory like a post package by the very unmilitary master Bedingfield, Alexander the Great called home by an obscure clerk: "Notwithstanding being not well followed by the reiters and others, he was repulsed, but determining to give a fresh and general assault the next day Master Beningefeld, as the devil would have it, came in upon his swift post-horse, and called him from this service by Her Majesty's letters, being the greatest disgrace that any such general received."<sup>11</sup>

"As the devil would have it"... Was this devil who had sent the

"misbegotten" master Bedingfield not the same which deprives Sir John Falstaff of his booty and glory at Gad's Hill? "But, as the devil would have it, three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green came at my back and let drive at me; for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldst not see thy hand."<sup>12</sup> The tale closes in pure euphuistic narrative style: "And now the question is whether this noble general were more troubled with his calling home, or Beningefeld more moved with pity and compassion to behold this slaughter, or his horse more afeared when he passed the bridges at the sight of the dead bodies – whereat he started and flung in such sort as Beningefeld could hardly keep his back."<sup>13</sup>

Compare Lyly: "Euphues having sojourned by the space of two months in Naples, whether he were moved by the courtesie of a young gentleman named Philautus, or enforced by destiny: whether his pregnant wit, or his pleasant conceits wrought the greater liking in the minde of Euphues I know not for certainty..."<sup>14</sup>

The same style, of which the carefully balanced sentence, is one of the characteristics, is found in Robert Greene: "Samela was so desirous to end her life with her friend, that she would not reveal either unto Democles or Melicertus what she was; and Melicertus rather chose to die with his Samela, then once to name himself Maximius."<sup>15</sup>

If we added to Greene's sentence a third constituent ("and the bell-wether shook his neck, signifying by the ring of the bells that rather would he lead the whole flock to the slaughter than to live out their master"), the sentence and with it the euphuistic style would be turned to parody. This is precisely the effect of the final clause in the example from Oxford's tale as reproduced by Arundel: "or his horse more afeared when he passed the bridges at the sight of the dead bodies."

The Arundel libels supply us with a humorous portrait of Oxford telling a fantastical story closing with a parody on euphuistic style through a comic anti-climax. We see Sir John Falstaff doing the same in 1 and 2 *Henry IV*. In act II, scene i of that play Falstaff and his three companions first rob travellers at Gad's Hill and are subsequently robbed themselves by Prince Hal and Poin in disguise. At the Boar's Head Falstaff his adventures to Hal in the brightest colors, piling it on incessantly: "I have scap'd by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose; my buckler cut through and through; my sword hack'd like a handsaw... (l. 164-6)... but if I fought not with fifty of them I am a bunch of radish... (l. 182-3). Even when Hal reveals he has been robbed by himself and Poin and saw him run away like coward, Falstaff does not lose his ready tongue: "Why, hear you, my masters. Was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules; but beware instinct. The lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter. I was now a coward on instinct" (l. 265-9).

Falstaff's fanfaronade is followed by a mock-dialogue between Hal and his father, in which Falstaff takes the role first of the king, then of Hal himself with Hal now as father. "I will do it in King Cambyses' vein," Falstaff says (l. 381) Commentators have recognized in this scene parodies on the style of Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene and John Lyly. "Among the euphuistic traits Falstaffe

(Continued on page 12)



*Falstaffe (cont. from page 11)*

parodies are the use of similes from natural history, the affectation of recondite learning, trite quotations, rhetorical questions, and verbal antitheses and alliterations<sup>16</sup>: “For though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my son I have partly thy mother’s word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villanous trick of thine eye and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip that doth warrant me” (I. 394-400)<sup>17</sup>

Or in *2 Henry IV*: “For the box of the ear that the Prince gave you- he gave it like a rude prince, and you took it like a sensible lord” (I.ii.193-5).

Even the truncated account of Charles Arundel reveals how Oxford’s tale with his parody on the euphuistic style is mirrored in the characterization of Falstaff. According to Harold Bloom, Shakespeare portrayed himself not only as Hamlet but also as Falstaff. As we have seen, one of his inspirations was Oxford. The creator of Falstaff had no need for Robert Greene, as Stephen Greenblatt argues in his recent Shakespeare biography, to inspire his comedy of the cowardly knight, full of tall tales about his military misadventures.

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Nelson, Alan H. *Monstrous Adversary*. Liverpool University Press. 2003

<sup>2</sup> Blok, Pieter J. *Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Vol. III, Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1907, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> Whom Nelson gives the first name Cristobal.

<sup>4</sup> Ward, B.M. *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford—1550-1604*. London: John Murray, 1928, p. 99; Nelson, pp. 205-6.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, Peter R. “The Lame Storyteller, Poor and Despised” in *The Elizabethan Review*, Vol. 3, No.2, Autumn 1995, p. 5. Interestingly, Nelson does not quote this passage in his book.

<sup>6</sup> Nelson, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> Ward, p.98.

<sup>8</sup> Nelson, endnote 2 to chapter 39, p. 467.

<sup>9</sup> Ward, p. 99; Nelson, p.205-6.

<sup>10</sup> Compare for instance John Lyly, “Euphues – The Anatomy of Wit” in *The*

*Descent of Euphues*, edited by James Winny. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1957, p. 19: “Certes how much the more the mynde is to be preferred before the body, by so much more the graces of the one are to be preferred before the gifts of the other.”

<sup>11</sup> Ward, p. 99; Nelson, p. 206.

<sup>12</sup> *1 Henry IV*, II.iv.216-9.

<sup>13</sup> Ward, p. 100.

<sup>14</sup> Lyly, *Euphues—The Anatomy of Wit*,

*Damon and Pithias (cont. from p. 9)*

itself on a young, (officially) 14-year-old de Vere (just as the *Damon and Pythias* story did on the younger title character in a memorable episode of *Leave It To Beaver*).

More interesting is Aristippus’ reference to a dramatic mood alteration in Dionisius as “a sodayne chaunge in deede, a strange Metamorphosis” (646)—metamorphosis being an obsession of Shakespeare’s (see *Two Gentlemen* I.i.66, *The Taming of the Shrew*, etc.) and the obvious theme of Ovid’s famous anthology of classical legends translated into English by Oxford’s uncle Arthur Golding, or by Oxford under his uncle’s tutelage.

An exchange between Eubulus — “A cruell kyng the people hateth” — and Dionisius — “Let them hate me, so they feare mee” (728-729) — indicates that the playwright knows his basic Machiavelli, something Shakespeare will explore with more sophistication in the History plays and works such as *Macbeth*.

Most noticeable, though, is the following musing by Damon: “Pithagoras said, that this world was like a Stage, / Wheron many play their partes” (348-349). Shakespeare editors assure us that the famous conceit was well-worn by the time Shakespeare trotted it out for *As You Like*

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*The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, or the playwright responsible for *The Taming of A Shrew* or *The Damon and Pithias: A Critical Old-Spelling Edition*. NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1980.

## *Players: The Mysterious Identity of William Shakespeare*

*by Bertram Fields*

*Reviewed by K.C. Ligon*

In this new book by high profile entertainment attorney Bertram Fields, the Shakespearean Authorship question is, not surprisingly, treated as a case history and in some respects a brief for the anti-Stratfordian view. However, being an astute lawyer, Fields does not attempt to prove what he has said is an unprovable case, but instead sets out to establish that reasonable doubt exists about the traditional attribution.

He begins with this basic premise, familiar to all who study the Authorship:

For centuries, scholars, other professionals, and amateurs have debated the true identity of the author of the magnificent body of poems and plays attributed to William Shakespeare. Most of the literate world thinks of the author as the bearded, balding man from Stratford-upon-Avon,” and yet, Fields affirms, “some very competent and credible people have questioned this...

And of course the author of *Players* is one of them. With respect to the present work, he offers this caveat:

If you’re cowed by ‘authority,’ this

analysis will be disturbing” (a nod to Sonnet 66’s ‘art made tongued by authority’)...most authorities insist there is no authorship question at all. My own guide in approaching a subject of this nature is Jeremy Bentham, who said: ‘Let us not judge on authority, let us seek reason.’” After an evaluation of each of the principal candidates, the author continues, “we will consider what might have happened.”

Thus Fields, invoking the empirical method of Bentham, English philosopher and advocate of legal reform, (especially of legal ‘fictions’), clearly aware that even in 2005 merely questioning the man from Stratford’s authorship of Shakespeare’s works opens the doubter to ridicule, poses the question against a backdrop of his status and authority as a major player in Hollywood. His primary aim seems to be to get the question squarely on the table for those who have never given it any thought, and who may hold the perception that only crazies and conspiracy theorists are engaged in it.

Herein lies one of the book’s secret weapons. Bert Fields is simply too successful to be labelled a loony or a fantasist. The worst he will be called is an eccentric or dabbler in off-beat theories. The top brass traditionalists can’t effectively discredit him (his livelihood and prestige hardly depend upon their opinion). In fact, if Stanley Wells or Stephen Greenblatt were ever invited to one of Fields’ famous dinner parties in Malibu they would likely accept in a heartbeat, not only to mingle with the A-List guests, but also to banter about Shakespeare with the famous attorney while sipping vintage Pinot Noir as the Pacific waves roll and tumble outside.

Reading the book, which Fields has composed in a relaxed and amiable style, one imagines listening to him hold forth in such a setting, posing many lawyerly questions as he assiduously postpones definite conclusions, deftly sidestepping the endorsement of any single theory, gently stimulating one’s consideration of the possibilities. In avoiding pronouncements,

Fields especially encourages the reader with no previous experience of the question to absorb the cumulative effect and implication of significant anomalies, and to openmindedly examine the likelihood of the traditional scenario accepted for centuries, in light of these mysteries.

One critical area of debate in which we would expect attorney Fields to express a strong opinion is the law and use of legal terms in the canon, and indeed he does devote a portion of his chapter ‘What Shakespeare Knew’ to the subject. Here, despite traditionalist claims that 1) “in the Elizabethan Age, many ordinary people had knowledge of legal terms...that the Stratford man would have gained an even greater

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familiarity with such terms through his own legal proceedings and that of his father,” and 2) that he “may have worked as a law clerk,” Fields observes that the poet Shakespeare’s legal references are “consistent with the legal knowledge of a nobleman who studied law at the Inns of Court but never actually practiced as a lawyer.” He also points to the relation between the Gravediggers’ discussion of Ophelia’s right to Christian burial though she was a suicide, and the “identical

argument advanced by defendant’s counsel in the case of Hales v. Petit,” noting that Plowden’s report of it was in legal French (though if he comments anywhere on the likelihood of the Stratford man’s fluency in that argot I missed it).

He also cites the difference between Shakespeare’s legal usage and Jonson’s: “Shakespeare used legal terms naturally and in proper context...By contrast, Jonson tended to interlard his character’s speeches with legal terms that were not necessarily given their proper meaning but were used to make the character appear foolish or perhaps to show off the playwright’s erudition and versatility.” One wonders when he says that Shakespeare uses legal terms ‘naturally,’ if he means metaphorically; at any rate it is the closest he comes to making the distinction between a legal term’s correct usage and abstracting a character’s thoughts or actions in legal terms.

In any event, Fields’ overall style of presenting evidence has undoubtedly raised hackles on both sides of the debate, since many speculative items are entered without the context that would unambiguously demarcate them as speculation or opinion (though he does at times cite authorities for support, there are no notes or bibliography). Thus, unless you’re already familiar with the case it would be difficult to ascertain what is fact, or simply probable, or likely a mere fable, and perhaps more important, what the missing pertinent information is (that the author seems unaware of). It is therefore satisfying to report that Fields does acknowledge our esteemed editor Dr. Roger Stritmatter (in his 2001 Phd dissertation), by stating that the professor has made a “compelling case for the proposition that the passages noted in Oxford’s Bible show that in many areas his interests and views paralleled Shakespeare’s” (though, counsellor, one note: Stritmatter’s name is spelled with three t’s not four).

But who would ask for notes at a party? Were one of the guests to say, ‘now Bert, is that really true’ or ‘how do you know,’ one feels that he would reply, ‘no-one is really sure, it can’t be proved, but some well-informed people think so.’

Thus for roughly three quarters of its  
(Continued on page 25)

## The Monument

by Hank Whittemore, 843 pages,  
Meadow Geese Press,  
Marshfield Hills, Massachusetts,  
2005.

Reviewed by Richard Desper

I first met Hank Whittemore at the Palm Beach conference of the Shakespeare Oxford Society in 1981, the first conference I attended on the authorship question. At that memorable conference Whittemore delivered a paper on *The Phoenix Nest*, a collection of poems printed in 1593,<sup>1</sup> the year the name “William Shakespeare” first appeared as that of an author. I remember Whittemore as a speaker: he was vivid, witty, endearing, and spoke with a most persuasive tongue. He spoke not only of *The Phoenix Nest*, but of *Venus and Adonis*, of *Narcissus*, and of *Cephalus and Procris*.

Whittemore has now completed<sup>2</sup> his massive writing project, *The Monument*, an exegesis of the content of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, an interpretation involving, at its heart, the “Prince Tudor” theory, one which has a goodly number of both supporters and detractors among Oxfordians. This theory views Henry Wriothesley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton, as the child of Queen Elizabeth and Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, and finds numerous allusions to this relationship in the Sonnets as well as elsewhere in the Shakespeare canon. The matter is one of great controversy among Oxfordians. While proponents of “Prince Tudor” see their position as central to the authorship question, a large number of Oxfordians view it as an unproven theory, thus not one suitable for use in promoting the Oxfordian cause. Hank is unabashed as a partisan on the “Prince Tudor” side, and has been for many years. The Monument is his defining opus.

The association of Southampton's name with the poet of *The Sonnets* begins in 1593 when that author (whoever he was) first published under the name “William

Shakespeare” the poem *Venus and Adonis* with its dedication to the young earl. This has naturally led scholars, whether of orthodoxy or of the Oxfordian bent, to identify Southampton with the “Fair Youth” of the Sonnets. But orthodoxy has reined in its curiosity as to the possible subject matter in *The Sonnets*. As reported by the Oxfordian scholar Peter Moore, “Shakespeare's autobiographical Sonnets pose such problems for the Stratfordian theory that since around 1960 the story behind them has been declared off-limits by the orthodox authorities.”<sup>3</sup>

Not that Peter is in any way a proponent of “Prince Tudor.” He sees *The Sonnets* as a problem for interpretation in terms of Stratfordian authorship: the “Shakespeare” who wrote the Sonnets was (evidently)

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deceased by 1609, and both old and lame when they were written, none of which fits William Shakspeare of Stratford. As for the “Prince Tudor” theory, Peter's attitude is that it should be presented for proper historical scrutiny, an attitude that approximates that of the present reviewer. Having said that, let's take a look at what Whittemore has to say.

The book begins with an extensive Introduction and Prologue section, culminating in a dateline of historical material running from Elizabeth's accession in 1558 to 1589. Hank suggests, as have other proponents of “Prince Tudor”, the birth of a royal child to Elizabeth, somewhere in the time frame May-June 1574 (see 22-23). Within this sequence, he relates Sonnets 153-154 to the visit of Queen Elizabeth to the town of Bath, August

21-23, 1574. Sonnet 153, according to Whittemore (29-35), discusses how the newborn son of Elizabeth was spirited away to remove all trace of his royal heritage, and was likely written in 1574, after the presumed birth of the child, and near the time of Oxford's visit with the Queen at Bath. In Whittemore's view, Sonnet 154 (36-41) is retrospective, written many years later about the situation. Whittemore sees the two, the final sonnets of the set, in terms of an epilogue/prologue encapsulating the central message for the reader.

The major premise of *The Monument* is that there is a basic, meaningful structure to the sonnet set. A quotation from Alastair Fowler<sup>4</sup> appears on the back cover: “It is hardly to be expected that the sonnet sequence of a poet so intellectually brilliant as Shakespeare should lack the structural art and finesse valued in his age. And in fact his sequence abounds with the intricate formal devices requisite to its genre. The spatial arrangement of Shakespeare's sequence leaves little room for permutations: its form asserts a design far too positive for us to be free to change it at will. The pyramidal numbers imply, most obviously, that Shakespeare designed the sequence to function as a monument.”

Whittemore delineates his proposed pyramidal structure on p. xxvii. The central foundation is a hundred sonnet sequence, nos. 27-126, flanked by two twenty-six sonnet sets, nos. 1-26, the “Fair Youth” set and 127-152, the “Dark Lady” set, by Whittemore's reckoning. As for the other well-known “personage” of the sonnets, the “Rival Poet”, Whittemore sees him as the poet's alter ego, the paper identity “William Shakespeare” created to conceal the true poet's name.

To demonstrate the methodology of Whittemore's approach, let us consider his discussion of Sonnet 18, “Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?” on pp. 133 ff. Whittemore is always alert for code words, for hidden meanings, and sees great significance in these words addressed to Southampton as the Fair Youth. His translation: “Shall I compare you to a royal prince?” For in his estimation “Summer's day” signifies a king, a symbolism seen elsewhere in Shakespeare: in *Richard II* (1.3.145-146), in *Richard III* (1.1.1-2,



1.3.18, 3.4.3, 1.2.133-134), and in *Lucrece* (1013). The poet continues with a promise to commemorate the youth in his verse. Thus the lines: "Nor shall death brag thou wandr'st in his shade, / When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st," interpreted by Whittemore as "Nor will Elizabeth's death conquer it, / When it grows in these eternal lines of my diary."

The inevitable question is whether the allusions seen in The Sonnets are specific enough to encourage confidence that they were put there intentionally, and that the interpretations are on the mark. At this point the matter can become subjective: different individuals can come to different conclusions. Does the phrase "all one, ever the same" deliberately invoke the mottos of Lord Southampton and Queen Elizabeth: "One for All, All for One" and "Ever the Same?" Other code phrases are identified (p. lxxiv): "Rose" for the Tudor dynasty; "Eclipse" for the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, "Desire", "Pleasure", and "Will" for the Queen's royal will.

One is haunted by the possibility of being beguiled into seeing things that weren't really intended by the poet. However, consider this: Leslie Hotson, an orthodox scholar, declared in 1964<sup>5</sup> that the poet was addressing the younger man literally as his sovereign: "... What he sets before us is not the powers of a peer, but those peculiar to a king: power to grant charters of privilege and letters patent, power to pardon crimes – in short, the exclusively royal prerogative ..." This type of specificity one would like to find to grant validity to a set of allusions as being intended by the poet.

The space available here is far too limited to delineate in a comprehensive manner the numerous code words and interpretations set forth in Whittemore's book. The Fair Youth sonnets take on added urgency with the interpretation that it is not just Southampton's blood line that needs continuation, but also the Tudor blood line of Queen Elizabeth. The message is most coherent, most beguiling, but what do a dozen such insinuations add up to? Indeed your reviewer has beguiled himself by contemplation of such thoughts over the years, and, as a trained scientist, has developed a yearning in response: oh, but

for just two strands of hair, one from each of the tombs of Queen Elizabeth and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton, for DNA analysis<sup>6</sup> to lay to rest these issues, with a definitive "Yea" or a "Nay." The Bard had a phrase for this situation, wanting to know what to believe, but not seeing a sufficiency to the evidence: "imputation and strong circumstances / Which lead directly to the door of truth /".<sup>7</sup> That's the problem – are we merely led to the door of truth, or are we led through it?

Whittemore continues with his exegesis of the hundred sonnet central sequence, Sonnets 27-126, which he sees<sup>8</sup> as a chronology of the poet's reflections on

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Southampton's arrest for treason as part of the failed Essex Rebellion, his imprisonment, his trial, his death sentence, its commutation, and finally his release. This newsletter has printed articles from a "Yea"-sayer, William Boyle,<sup>9</sup> and from "Nay"-sayers, Lynne Kositsky and Roger Stritmatter.<sup>10</sup> There seems little point to going over that ground again. The matter is at an impasse – on the one side, even with Whittemore's epic efforts, I do not see "Prince Tudor" as having been proved; nor do I see it as having been disproved.

In this regard, I find it important to separate the Authorship Question from the "Prince Tudor" Question. One can make a very

good case for Oxford as the true identity of the author "William Shakespeare" without reference to "Prince Tudor", so there is no need, in my estimation, to have the outcome of the former hinge upon the resolution of the latter. The "Prince Tudor" question is a subset of the Shakespeare authorship question with its own independent solution.

There is sometimes a basic problem in evidence, and in our evaluation of evidence: sometimes we don't have everything we need to come to a definitive conclusion. My final conclusion is that I don't know everything, perhaps a healthy attitude. I find solace in the words of Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."<sup>11</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Like *Shakespeare's Sonnets, The Phoenix Nest* was unaccountably not reprinted for a long time after its original printing, despite the excellence of its poetic content. It may be found on the internet at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/phoenix.html>.

<sup>2</sup> For information about *The Monument*, see

<http://www.shakespearesmonument.com>

<sup>3</sup> Peter Moore's paper, "Recent Developments in the case for Oxford as Shakespeare," is available online at <http://www.webcom.com/wboyle/progres1.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Alastair Fowler, *Triumphal Forms*, 1970.

<sup>5</sup> See p. xix in Whittemore; from Leslie Hotson, *Mr. W. H. 1964*, pp. 26-36.

<sup>6</sup> The reviewer sees little chance of that happening in the foreseeable future.

<sup>7</sup> *Othello*, 3.3.406-7.

<sup>8</sup> Hank Whittemore, "Authorize thy trespass with compare", in *Shakespeare Matters*, Vol. 3 No. 4, Summer 2004, p. 1 ff.

<sup>9</sup> William Boyle, "With the Sonnets now solved," in *Shakespeare Matters*, Vol. 3 No. 4, Summer 2004, pp. 1 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Lynne Kositsky and Roger Stritmatter, "A critique of the 'Monument theory'," in *Shakespeare Matters*, Vol. 4 No. 1, Fall 2004, pp. 1 ff.

# Beyond Shakespeare: Expanding the Authorship Theory

By Stephanie Hopkins Hughes

The question of who actually wrote the Shakespeare canon is one that goes back many years, decades, possibly even centuries. Some think, not without reason, that the question is as old as the canon itself, that originally there was—there had to have been—a community of writers, theater devotees and patrons who knew for a fact the identity of the true author, and who therefore must have handed down their certain knowledge from one generation to the next, to close friends and intimate family members, first as a secret, later as the kind of knowledge that couldn't be allowed to enter the public record (for reasons of politics or class solidarity), until what began as certain knowledge faded over time to uncertainty, then to rumor, and finally to silence.

## Too Many Candidates?

When it rose to the surface, whether again or for the first time, in the nineteenth century, it took the form in which we have it today, namely, that Shakespeare must have been one candidate or another, first Francis Bacon, then, with the failure of Bacon, others, chief among them the Earl of Oxford. At some point the need for a single candidate was matched by the so-called group theory that attempts to resolve the problems posed by this plethora of theories by imagining that some or all of the candidates worked together to create the canon we label Shakespeare's.

Apart from the fact that it gets us nowhere, the biggest drawback to this lack of certainty is that it leaves us open to ridicule. Who hasn't heard the standard opening line from journalists and other commentators, that anti-Stratfordians attribute the authorship to anyone and everyone from Bacon to Queen Elizabeth? Ha ha ha! We must be fools if after all this time we still can't agree on a viable candidate! Oh how ridiculous, Queen Elizabeth! When would she have the time? Luckily they don't know that someone has actually suggested Cervantes!

What most of them also don't know, thank goodness, is that there is a whole other layer to this problem of too many hands, namely, too many works. Once you begin reading the works of other writers of the period, you realize that there are quite a few plays and poems that sound too much like early Shakespeare to be ignored. Confronted with the possibility that Shakespeare, whoever he was, wrote a great deal more than the 38 plays and 200 poems attributed to him, plays and poems that either have no known author or are attributed to various otherwise unknown individuals, one is forced to come up with an explanation, and not surprisingly the explanations have been as various, and often as ridiculous, as the theories of who wrote the accepted canon.

Forced by our rejection of the untenable Stratford biography we are left with something—one can hardly call it a theory—that on the one hand gives us no certifiable candidate and on the other, gives us no certifiable canon. After a century and a half of study, we are not only still without an author, we have added an immense new problem, that the canon itself may be a good deal larger and more diverse than what we had thought. No wonder that at a conference of the orthodox Shakespeare Association of America some years ago, when the authorship question arose, one of the conferees termed it a "can of worms." Oxfordians may disagree with orthodox adherence to the Stratford biography, but we can hardly condemn traditional skepticism for the present chaos of alternatives.

Because too many candidates have accumulated, the discourse has become

stuck at a point we should have passed long ago. Too much time and energy is being spent arguing which one (or ones) wrote the Shakespeare canon. Since it seems impossible at this point to reduce the size of this group, to which new names are being added all the time, the better path may be to open up the question in a way that will admit all of them. We should stop focusing on the candidacy of Shakespeare, stop fighting over who should be eliminated, and embrace a more comprehensive authorship thesis, one that includes all the writers of the period, and all the works.

This does not, however, mean endorsing the idea that there were co-authors of the Shakespeare canon, not, at least, in the sense that Brian Vickers advocates, whereby Shakespeare and some other sat down together and decided who would write which act of the so-called "late plays," a process he describes in his recent book, *Shakespeare Co-author*, a process that, according to Dean Keith Simonton, professor of psychology at the University of California at Davis, is most unlikely.

Simonton, the leading force behind the newly-developing branch of psychology known as the psychology of creativity, has spent much of his career studying the nature of genius. With facts derived from scientific methods and clinical studies, he assures us (as if our own experience and common sense did not) that creating art by committee just doesn't work. According to Simonton: "Experimental research has actually demonstrated rather conclusively that group problem-solving using more egalitarian "brainstorming" techniques usually yields dismal results in comparison with more solitary forms of problem solving. Individuals working alone will generate more and better ideas than will the same individuals working in a group" (91-2).

This should explain why those plays that, as Vickers demonstrates, were "co-authored" by lesser writers, are among the weakest in the Shakespeare canon. Nor does Vickers, for all his grasp of things literary, pause to consider why in the world Shakespeare—unlike every other artistic genius under the sun—would stoop to sharing a work with a poor fish like George Wilkins. Did the world's greatest writer, at

the peak of his career, lose interest in writing? Surely this would make him unique among the great creative writers of the world.

We're not looking for more than one Shakespeare, but we should look for the other characters in his story. If we wish to find Shakespeare, we must seek him among his fellows, the actors, patrons, publishers and (most important) the other writers who shared in the creation, not just of the Shakespeare canon, but of all of English Renaissance literature. Were Shakespeare the only authorship problem of the period, scholars would have solved it long ago.

If a doctor questions a patient suffering from a mysterious disease, his diagnosis for that patient must be affected when he learns that the patient's entire community suffers from the same symptoms; diagnosing the patient will do little good if the real problem lies with his environment. In fact, it is not just the authorship of Shakespeare that is—or should be—in question, but the authorship of much written during the Elizabethan era that qualifies as literature.

By "literature" I mean literature of the imagination, that is, poetry, plays, romance tales, songs, and satires, for the authorship of many of these is just as dubious as Shakespeare! It is a fact that we do not know for certain who wrote, not just Shakespeare, but just about everything that qualifies as imaginative literature that was written during the very period in English history that saw the most ebullient uprush of literary art ever produced in the West!

The authorship question is not just about Shakespeare; it's about Shakespeare plus Bacon plus Philip Sidney plus Mary Sidney plus Christopher Marlowe plus Ben Jonson plus Robert Greene plus Thomas Watson plus George Gascoigne plus Richard Edwards plus a host of names that most readers have never even heard of. The problems that plague Shakespeare's authorship plague every single member of his creative community to a greater or lesser degree. Whatever the reasons for this, they go well beyond the problems of Shakespeare alone.

So for now we'll leave aside Shakespeare's problems, such as the fact that, like many of his comic characters, his name is a pun on his function—"Will shake spear!" How often does an author have such a name as a matter of sheer coincidence?—a name that not only provides a perfectly-tuned pun, but that also forms a sentence, complete with subject (understood), verb in the future tense, and object, one that describes the intention of the author of some of the most stirring battle scenes and sword fights ever staged? Or that the biography of William of Stratford shows no evidence of an education of the sort that could produce plays like *Julius Caesar* or *Hamlet*, or even the ability to produce a legible signature?

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Or that no solid evidence has ever surfaced to indicate that he—I mean the great playwright—was personally known to anyone in what must have been his community of writers—or to any community at all, for that matter.

For now, let's set Shakespeare (the writer) aside and look at the problems that concern his entire community.

## Two Groups of Writers

This community can be roughly divided into two groups. We'll call one group Commoners and the other Court writers—an awkward division, not strictly accurate, but for now it will serve. For there are two distinct groups—and class identity is the most obvious means of distinguishing them. Within each of these groups there are certain problems that affect most or all of the members of that group, problems different from those that affect the members of the other group.

The Commoners Group includes, in somewhat chronological order: George Gascoigne, Barnabe Riche, George Pettie, Thomas Lodge, Edmund Spenser, John Lyly, George Peele, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, Thomas Watson, Thomas Nashe, Gabriel Harvey, William Shakespeare—and, moving forward a bit into the reign of James—Ben Jonson and John Webster. There are many more names than these, but these are the most prominent.

The Court writers group is much smaller. It consists (at the moment) of six names: the Earl of Oxford, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Francis Bacon, Lady Mary Sidney (a.k.a. Mary Herbert and the Countess of Pembroke), and Sir Walter Raleigh. Many Elizabethan courtiers wrote poetry, and some are quite good, but these are the ones whose works have lasted, and whose reputations as poets have survived the centuries.

### The Commoner's Group

Most of this group shows the same problems as Shakespeare of Stratford: a pressing need to put bread on the table, troubles deriving from a Catholic or otherwise problematic family background, an anomalous career pattern, and no evidence of the kind of education required to support the erudition of the works that bear their names. Not all of the Commoners have all of these problems, but all have at least two of them and some have all of them. In any case, with every one there is something seriously amiss with the record. What is most obviously true of

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*Beyond Shakespeare (cont. from p. 17)*

all of them is that their biographies fail to support the aristocratic nature of their works. True, that is, of all but Marlowe. Marlowe is the exception that we must keep in mind along the way. He is the classic case of the exception proving the rule.

**The Court Writer's Group**

Although some in this group show some of the same problems as the Commoners—*anomalous career patterns for instance—for all but one the predominant problem is that their reputations as writers far exceed the evidence of their published works, leaving us (and their biographers) to assume that they wrote a good deal more than they published—or, we should say, than they published under their own names.*

And we must note that, as with the commoners, this is true of all but one, in this case Sir Philip Sidney, who died too young to have written much more than he published, and whose work would probably not have survived had he not been assiduously promoted after his death by his friend Fulke Greville, and most assiduously by his sister Mary (in much the same way that, 200 years later, Mary Shelley would promote her dead husband, Percy Bysshe, to icon stature). Thus, each of these groups has their great exception, Sidney among the Court writers, Marlowe among the Commoners. Unlike the other Court writers, Sidney published only under his own name, while unlike the other Commoners, Marlowe gave voice to the impulses and visions of his own class, not the aristocracy. Sidney and Marlowe show us what we should expect to see in all writers of their groups. It is what we do not see that we should see in these biographies that drives our expanded inquiry.

**Paltry Interactions**

Now let's consider problems that affect, not just one group, but the entire writing community. One such problem is that all

(but Sidney and Marlowe) have anomalous career paths, that is, all have writing careers that fail to follow what we would consider to be the normal growth and decline curve for writers capable of rising to the high level of artistry that distinguishes the English literary Renaissance. But a full examination of this complex problem will have to wait.

One problem common to both groups that we can consider here is the peculiar fact that, if we were to rely strictly on the record, these two groups of artists would seem to have had no interaction with each other. Apart from Marlowe, whose biography shows evidence of, if not a presence at Court, at least a connection

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with two leading Court patrons, (1) and Edmund Spenser, who referred once or twice in letters he wrote to Gabriel Harvey, another commoner, to associating with Court writers Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Edward Dyer, there's no evidence for interrelations between the groups during the forty years of the Elizabethan era.

So separated are these two groups in the academic mind that the author of a recent and mostly valuable book on the Elizabethan Courtier poets treats the commoners as if they didn't exist. By ignoring such works as the first edition (1574) of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* and

the poems of Robert Greene, Steven May is free to hand over the credit for all innovations in English versification during this period to Sir Philip Sidney (185, 225, 367).

Consider also how limited are the interactions we know about even among the tiny community of genuine Court writers, who not only must have known each other but known each other well and who, like all true artists, would certainly have been watching each other's development like hawks. Apart from Philip and Mary Sidney, whose relationship is a given, all we have is the 1580 tennis court quarrel between Oxford and Sidney. We can guess that their literary rivalry had something to do with this, but where's the evidence? Both innovative poets, both considered at one time or another to be the best Court writers, both were more or less permanently at Court from 1574 when Sidney returned from his two-year tour of the Continent, Sidney being twenty at the time, and Oxford twenty-four. Earlier they had both been at Cecil House for the

Christmas holidays of 1568 when eighteen. Bacon joined them at Court in 1579 at the age of eighteen, when Sidney was twenty-five and Oxford twenty-nine.

Raleigh became a permanent member of the Court community in 1582 when both he and Sidney were twenty-eight and Oxford was thirty-two. The following year, when Raleigh helped Oxford get back into the Queen's graces after his two-year banishment from Court, Raleigh's reference to Aesop's tale of the ungrateful snake that bit his rescuer may refer to Oxford's (possible) tendency to lampoon his rivals onstage (or it may not).

In 1588, when Mary Sidney came to Court to take her dead brother's place as a voice for her family's interests, for the Protestant cause on the Continent, and (possibly) to assume his place as a leading patron of the arts, she and Bacon were twenty-seven, Raleigh was thirty-four, Oxford thirty-eight.

Are we to assume that these five young writers, all burdened with excessive leisure, all burning with Renaissance ambition and bursting with talent, had nothing to do with each other beyond a single argument

on a tennis court or an aspersion lightly cast in a letter?

So far, the only evidence of a connection between Oxford and Bacon is a single mention by Oxford of his “cousin Bacon” in a 1595 business letter to Robert Cecil, while many years later Bacon passed on an unsubstantiated rumor about the thirteenth earl of Oxford in his history of Henry the Seventh. There’s also the rumor handed down by the seventeenth-century gossip-monger John Aubrey that, early in the reign of James, Mary Sidney went to Wilton, by then her son’s estate, to beg the King for Raleigh’s life. But to what extent should we be trusting Aubrey’s testimony? All? None? Some? And if some, where do we draw the line?

We’re not much better off with interactions among members of the Commoners group. Apart from a number of dedications to each other in their published works we know only that in 1592 Marlowe and Watson got into a brawl on Hog Lane near the Bishopsgate theaters in which a third man was killed and that Kyd and Marlowe once shared a room. Marlowe and Matthew Royden have been frequently mentioned by historians as members of Raleigh’s “School of Night,” but where’s the evidence? And then there are the various comments on Shakespeare by Ben Jonson, almost every one of which he managed to contradict somewhere else.

The community of writers in Shakespeare’s time was small, very small; compared with ours today, it was tiny. There were only a handful of printers available to publish their works, all located in London, and a handful of booksellers who could sell their wares, only in Paul’s churchyard. Writers, publishers, printers and patrons would all have been well known to each other. The small size of their community makes it a certainty. Yet it is a certainty without any substantiating evidence. Why should this be so?

The history of art should assure us that all such arts communities gather together as a matter of shared instinct. Most innovative artists are drawn to each other by their common passion. For the genuine artist, there is no audience like an audience of other artists. Some works of art have been conceived for the eyes or ears of just

one other artist—witness the behavior of Picasso and Matisse, who, late in life, seemed to be producing works for each other’s eyes alone.

Sidney wrote *The Arcadia* for his sister, “only for you, only to you . . . being done in loose sheets of paper, most of it in your presence, the rest by sheets sent unto you as fast as they were done.” What about the other works of the English Renaissance? For whom were they written?

During the 1950s in America, writers Laurence Ferlinghetti, Jack Kerouac, and Alan Ginsburg, all as yet unpublished, were drawn across the country to find each other. Much of the history of this group consists

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of trips taken together and to see each other. During a later supernova of English literature, we know what Keats was to Shelley, what Shelley was to Byron, what Wordsworth was to Coleridge. We know what Byron was to Goethe and to several generations of budding writers from Tennyson to Carlyle to Walt Whitman. We know what Carlyle was to John Stuart Mill, what Whitman was to Emerson, what Robert Browning was to Elizabeth Barrett, what Sylvia Plath was to Ted Hughes, and so forth throughout the entire history of English literature.

Why then is there no solid record of which members of the Elizabethan Court writers’ community were important to members of the Commoners’ community

(beyond that of employer or patron) and vice versa? Or even what members of the Court community were important to each other, apart of course from the Sidneys? Or what members of the Commoners group were important to each other?

In all but two instances, all we have to connect the so-called University Wits are a handful of published dedications. Nor can we explain away these missing interactions by attributing them solely to the losses of Time. We know more about the relationships among the writing community of first-century Rome, or, even further back, third century BC Athens.

Where other people might just talk or think, writer’s write, and they don’t just write poems, pamphlets and books. Of all people writers are the most apt to write letters to friends and to keep journals, letter books and diaries, records in which they rarely fail to comment on the other writers of their time, both their personalities and their work. Where are the letters among this group? Or even letters to others that refer to members of these groups as writers?

The only ones we have are the ones that were published, which—until we know for certain that they were originally written as private letters and that the names they carry are the names of their real authors—are of no use as genuine evidence. Why is there information for every similar period in literary history and not for this one? Although the problem is most obvious with Shakespeare, it’s true of every single member of this writing community, commoners and courtiers alike.

### **More Problems with the Commoner’s Group**

With the Court writers it is their works that are hidden—with the Commoners it is their biographies that are hidden, or at least anything that might connect them to the world of playwrights and audiences, novelists and readers. Why, if we’ve found anything, has it been only the most banal notice of baptisms, marriages, deaths of wives and children, and, for some, a family connection with some kind of business,

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*Beyond Shakespeare (cont. from p. 19)*

unrelated in most cases to anything literary or theatrical? That so many of these commoners have this problem suggests that such connections have not been lost, that, in fact, they do not and never did exist. Were it only one, or even two, out of a large group for whom we had sufficient evidence of their actual functions as writers (as is the case in the early seventeenth century), we might shrug it off. But there are at least five of these Elizabethan commoners that I can think of right off the top of my head for whom we have no evidence beyond their names on title pages that they ever wrote anything.<sup>(2)</sup> The writing community of mid-to-late sixteenth century England is by no means large enough to sustain so many gross anomalies.

Certainly facts have been suppressed—there can be no other explanation. These writers knew each other. They had relationships with each other, relationships that affected their work. The long history of art requires it.

But the suppression of their connections with each other has to be something voluntary, something that goes beyond the possibility of a systematic eradication of records by some third party. No one, not even the Queen or the Cecils, had the power required to eliminate records on this scale. There may very well have been some eradication of records, but it can't explain the volume of this thundering silence.

I need to make it clear that when I say there's no solid proof of a particular thing, I mean there's no evidence of the sort that comes from sixteenth-century sources outside the realm of literature, from things like unpublished letters, journals, diaries, letterbook entries, holograph marginalia in privately owned books, entries in the Stationers Register and in parish records and the like. Because of the problems I'm about to outline, I'm purposely not giving evidentiary weight to anything that was obviously, or even possibly, written primarily for publication. Not that poetry, romance tales and plays are lacking in important evidence, quite the contrary. But we must begin with the non-literary evidence, because we need to know, first,

how much of it there actually is; second, what kinds of non-literary evidence we have; and perhaps most important, what kinds of non-literary evidence seem to be in unreasonably short supply. Literary historians tend to lump the two sources of information together: that deriving from the writers themselves plus their publishers

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**So separate are these two groups in the academic mind that the author of a recent and mostly valuable book on the Elizabethan Courtier poets treats the commoners as if they didn't exist. By ignoring such works as the first edition (1574) of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* and the poems of Robert Greene, Steven May is free to hand over the credit for all innovations in English versification during this period to Sir Philip Sidney (185, 225, 367).**

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and printers, and that deriving from outside sources, private letters, etc. For purposes of comparison, we must begin by separating these.

**Four Strange Biographies**

There's no room here for a full examination of all the anomalous biographies of the Commoners' group, but let's just look briefly at four of the strangest:

**Robert Greene**, author of thirty-seven pamphlets written between 1581 and 1592, was an innovative writer whose popularity sparked the evolution of the pamphlet, the first ever English periodical. Yet although Greene had the longest-documented career of any Elizabethan writer (over a decade), years of research by his biographers failed to turn up any solid evidence of his existence, until his name was discovered in the Earl of Leicester's household account book as having received payment for a Greene pamphlet (Adams).

Until this discovery we had nothing that connected any one of the many Robert Greenes listed in various parish and university records with the production of these popular periodicals. Yet even this does nothing to quell suspicions that he was not their true author, suspicions based on the fact that Greene's favorite themes reflect an aristocratic upbringing rather than that of the Yorkshire shoemaker<sup>(4)</sup> (or was it the Norwich saddler?) that hopeful biographers have dug from the records.

Not that Greene lacks a biography; on the contrary, Greene's problem is that he has too much biography. No author of the period has as fully developed an image as does Robert Greene. Unfortunately it was provided entirely by Greene himself, with flourishes added by fellow pamphleteers Nashe and Harvey. Although he, and they, claim that he was well-known to his readers, no corroboration from a non-literary source has ever surfaced. The suspicion remains that the writer as he is described in these pamphlets is as fictional as everything else published in his name. His biographers know perfectly well that neither he nor his fellow pamphleteers are to be trusted, yet they continue to repeat his self-portrait. Why? Because the page must be filled and they have nothing more substantial to offer.

Greene's style, fluid, easy, rich in Shakespearean tropes and metaphors, was—



—according to the current wisdom—the model for the soon-to-be-popular Bard, who, according to the academics, kicked off his illustrious career by plagiarizing poor impoverished Robert Greene. Greene's death—as described in his supposedly final pamphlet—while entertaining, is utterly ridiculous as an account of a real death, which may say something about the generations of academics who have managed to swallow it whole without blinking.

**Thomas Nashe**, pamphleteer, is equally innovative, equally entertaining, and equally suspect. And like Greene he seems a purely literary being. Born fully formed, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus, Nashe appears to have been inseminated by the unknown instigator of the Martin Mar-Prelate pamphlet war against the bishops c. 1589-92. Unlike Greene, however, biographers have managed to find a slightly more substantial Thomas Nashe. The son of a provincial vicar, the real Nashe earned his BA at St. John's by washing dishes and peeling turnips, which seems hardly sufficient to explain either the depth of his erudition—he was, apart from Francis Bacon, the most obviously learned writer of his generation—or his sheer gall, astounding in a society where a libel suit could cause a man to lose an ear or a hand. How on earth did this humble vicar's son manage to escape any real reprisals while continuing to produce one merciless satire after another?

**Edmund Spenser**, whose *Faerie Queene* was the great Court entertainment of his generation, is credited with the second most conscious style development since Chaucer (Lyly's *euphuism* was the first). The real Spenser is a shadowy figure who got his degree at Cambridge by means of a scholarship for poor boys. Following a few years "in obscurity," he sailed for Ireland at age twenty-eight (as secretary to the fierce Lord Grey of Wilton). After two decades in Ireland, where Spenser's life would have resembled that of the early English settlers in America, he returned to England when his home was burned to the ground by angry natives. Despite the baroque nature of *Faerie Queene*, based on the kind of

Greek romances and Arthurian-type legends that the Court community had enjoyed for centuries, and the obvious if opaque references to Court gossip, there is no record that he was ever so much as introduced at Court.

Why would a poet of Spenser's stature, one who produced a canon far greater in size than either his fellow commoners or the Court poets, one whose books were obviously aimed at a Court audience, why would such a one not be absorbed into the Court community by means of a small sinecure (3) so that he could continue to

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entertain his primary audience, the nobility, close at hand, as would have been the case had he been born in France or Italy? Why instead was he allowed to suffer the slings and arrows of the angry Irish for twenty years until they finally drove him back to England, where, at the age of forty-seven, he died a pauper's death within weeks of his arrival?

**John Lyly**, who may (or may not) have been the grandson of the famous grammarian, had a degree from Magdalen College, Oxford, afterwards working for Lord Burghley, then for Burghley's son-in-law, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. Although Lyly is credited with two

immensely popular novels, and with being the first real English novelist, and with creating the most innovative and popular prose style since Chaucer, and with seven plays that entertained the Court throughout the 1580s, why, after losing his post at Court in 1590 at the age of thirty-six, did he never, for the sixteen years left to him, publish another word? Why did this popular writer, despite the fact that he seems to have been in great need of paying work, cease to write so early in his career?

All of the Commoners Group show similar problems.

### Why So Long?

You may ask why it's taken so long to realize that all these writers share the same kinds of authorship problems that until now have been seen as Shakespeare's alone?

Most readers rarely read enough by or about one of these authors for such questions to arise. Those with no time for the sort of in-depth studies required must depend upon academics who have chosen it as their life work. Unfortunately, since university training nowadays is highly specialized, academics themselves often don't read widely enough to see the extent of the problem. They tend to focus either on

Shakespeare or on one of the other writers, such as Sidney, Jonson or Marlowe, or they may concentrate on a group such as the University Wits or the Courtier poets.

Although they are certainly aware of the anomalies in their own subject area, they may assume that their chap is the only one with problems. Read the biography of any one of these writers and—if the biographer is honest—you will find that he or she is well aware of the anomalies peculiar to that writer, but when they're asked to write for the encyclopedias or to introduce a new edition of the plays, they tend to smooth out the rough patches. Why confuse the ordinary reader? No expert will willingly display his or her confusion over some problem within their domain before an ignorant and unforgiving world.

Shakespeare scholars are certainly aware of the authorship question, but they don't want to open it for discussion, mostly

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*Beyond Shakespeare (cont. from p. 21)*

because their primary interest—I might say their sole interest—is the text. Problems of provenance are no more than annoying distractions for these folks, so they continue to cling to the names on title pages, refusing to take the question any further. As for those who focus on the other writers of the period, they simply accept what the Shakespeare scholars choose to tell them about the Great One. Should questions arise, they trust their colleagues to be telling them the truth, and in any case, do not want to make trouble, since Shakespeare studies represents the elite of the Humanities Division.

Even problems arising from the text, such as why it is that one occasionally hears exactly the same tropes and phrasing in Shakespeare as in Marlowe, or in Shakespeare as in Robert Greene, or in Robert Greene as in John Lyly, though they may be noted in passing, are usually quickly brushed aside in discussion because any comment quickly leads to questions of who wrote what when, and whether these guys knew each other—questions for which no one can give them an answer, and—oops! here we are at that darned authorship question again! Run away! Run away!

**An Expanded Thesis**

Let's not run away. Let's come up with a workable thesis that we can all embrace.

First—let's consider how small the English writing community was at that time, far too small for these two groups to be as separate in fact as they appear to be from the records.

And let us also consider the nature of the works in question, most of which are based on the kinds of plots and themes long since favored by the nobility, themes of no great interest to the intermediate classes, who would have known the reality of the countryside well enough to be bored by the kind of artificial pastoral fantasies that pleased their so-called betters.

Let us in addition consider the quality of the works in question, many of them huge

watersheds in the development of English literature.

Let us also consider the relentless drive a group of genuinely gifted writers feels to connect with as wide an audience as possible, a drive felt by all genuine writers, one comparable to that of a thirsty desert traveller in search of water.

Thus, matching the need of the authentic Court writers to publish to the equally pressing need of the Commoners to survive during the uncertain economy of the mid-sixteenth century, and BINGO! we end up with the same scenario for the entire Elizabethan writing community that we

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have for the poet Shakespeare and his standin, the Stratford entrepreneur with the remarkably punnable name.

Here then is the expanded form of the authorship thesis that I wish to present. It is actually already well-established, the only difference between the new and the old being the addition of a few dozen names. The old authorship thesis goes something like this:

The works of Shakespeare were written by the Earl of Oxford (or Bacon or Marlowe or whoever), which, due to his desire for privacy, were published under a pen name derived from the real name of the financially needy William Shakspeare of Stratford (who apparently could barely write his own name).

The new and expanded thesis might go something like this:

The English literary Renaissance was created by a small group of highly-educated and talented writers who, for the most part, like their European counterparts, were born into Court society, and who bypassed the social constraints of their class and the religious and political constraints of their times by publishing over the names of commoners who lent or sold them the use of their names in exchange for cash, patronage or other benefits.

Although this subterfuge operated on a fairly broad scale at the beginning, it continued in full force for a relatively brief period of time, beginning at some point in the 1560s and gradually diminishing in the seventeenth century as the commercial stage and press became sufficiently lucrative that members of the entrepreneurial classes, who had no need to hide their identities, began to earn their livings as writers. Even so, for a variety of reasons, publishing under pseudonyms would continue well into the nineteenth century.

It was not just Shakespeare the Poet who used a standin to publish during the Elizabethan era, but all the court writers, that is, all but Sidney. And if we feel squeamish about taking the glory from commoners Greene, Nashe, Watson, etc., let us not forget

Marlowe, the genuine working-class genius, who was, in some ways, greater than all the Court writers. All that is, but one.

**Problems Solved**

Although admittedly this scenario raises new problems, let's see what problems it solves right off the bat.

- it returns the Elizabethan Renaissance to its expected source, the Court community, which, as with every other European nation, was the only group with enough education and leisure to devote to the time- and mind-

consuming business of creating a vernacular literature of the imagination.

- Shakespeare is no longer a wierd anomaly, but simply one (though possibly the first) of a number of similar writer/standin combinations.
- it helps to explain why authors like William Shakespeare, Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Watson and John Webster, are so lacking in biographical particulars, why they show such peculiar career paths, and how it is that, at the end of their careers, rather than be accorded real funerals and notices in parish burial records, they seem simply to vanish.
- it explains why Court writers like the Earl of Oxford and Mary Sidney lack enough published works to support their reputations.
- it explains why so many of the early greats of the English Renaissance, unlike their European counterparts, never appeared at Court.
- it helps to explain some strange coincidences, such as the fact that the two most anomalous writers of their time, Robert Greene and Thomas Watson (probably both covers for the same Court writer) supposedly died within days of each other—or, how the development of euphuism seems to migrate from one writer to another, as it leaves one appearing in another, like a thieving servant who goes from one master to another, leaving a trail of paltry thefts behind.

#### Other Problems Solved

The theory may in time also help to explain a number of other problems, such as:

- Why there is no juvenilia for Shakespeare, who, like Nashe, appears to have emerged fully developed at the age of twenty-five.

- Why similarly there are no early works for the brilliant Francis Bacon, whose long and impressive writing career seemingly commenced only in his mid-thirties, despite his obvious boredom at having nothing important to do throughout his twenties and early thirties.

- Why, conversely, John Lyly, after blazing a literary trail with his Euphuus novels in his late twenties, fell silent just as he was reaching the apex of his career in his late thirties and, despite his apparent need for work and money

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**Unfortunately, since  
University training  
nowadays is highly  
specialized, academics  
themselves often don't read  
widely enough to see the  
extent of the  
problem.....Although they  
are certainly aware of the  
anomalies in their own  
subject area, they may  
assume that their chap is  
the only one with problems.**

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as expressed in letters begging the Crown for a job, seems never to have published another thing for the rest of his life.

- How Thomas Kyd managed to write one smash hit play when everything published under his name was mediocre to poor, and why his one great success was never published under his name.

- How George Gascoigne managed to write, in a single year, two plays that

permanently raised the artistic level of English dramaturgy, then settled into a dull style that would have ensured his obscurity were it not for these two plays.

- Who wrote *Greene's Groatsworth* and why. Who was "Shake-scene," and who wrote the "posthumous" Greene pamphlets and why.

- What was the real cause of the Nashe-Harvey pamphlet war.

This expanded theory of authorship does not, and probably never will, answer every single question that we have about this period, but it does offer solutions to some of the most perplexing, and for that alone it is worth our attention. At the same time, like every new thesis, it raises a number of new questions, perhaps the most pressing being: Why were the English Court writers forced to use subterfuge in order to publish when those of the Continent were not? There are answers to this, some obvious, some that will require a good deal more thought than has yet been given to them, but here we have room only for the questions in their simplest form.

#### Conclusion

Of course by expanding the authorship question beyond Shakespeare to include all the poets, playwrights and novelists of the Elizabethan era we are also expanding the nature of the problem. No longer is it: Why did Shakespeare hide his identity?—the question now becomes: Why did they hide their identities? And then: Who were they? Above and beyond it all, of course, comes the ultimate question: Who wrote what? And when? And why? For answers to these we are going to have to buckle down and examine the extra-literary records to see just what we know for certain about these writers, and what we don't know that we should know.

We must also begin to do the kind of work on the works themselves that we see demonstrated in Brian Vickers's recent book, *Shakespeare Co-author*. I urge everyone who is genuinely interested in  
(Continued on page 24)



*Beyond Shakespeare (cont. from p. 23)*

the authorship question to read this book. It is dense, it is difficult, particularly for those like myself who do not have training in statistics or much of a gift for numbers, but I believe that most will agree that this is the way of all future attribution studies. As Vickers so thoroughly proves, writers do reveal their identities through their styles when examined with processes developed by generations of word study scholars. With these tools we have far more solid means of identifying Elizabethan authors, I assure you, than the often misleading names on title pages, because we will be able to discern differences between voices based on something more solid than tradition or our own subjective responses.

First, we must strive to ask the right questions, and second, to consider all possible conclusions. Where Vickers assumes that Shakespeare is writing at the same time as his Jacobean “co-authors,” it does his conclusions no harm to propose that, in every almost every case they were adding to or amending work done many years earlier by an author who was no longer alive (4).

Possible misinterpretations by Vickers and others are minor when compared with the certainty that will come from using these techniques to nail down, not just who amended Shakespeare’s work after his death, but further, who wrote the Greene canon, the Nashe canon, the Spenser canon, and a number of other works that (may) have been attributed to the wrong authors, either purposely or by later guesswork. What did Bacon write before he assumed the grave persona of his later years? What did Mary Sidney write that she dared not publish under her own name? And how about Raleigh? Or Sir John Harington, Jr. Or even some new Court figure that so far we haven’t identified? (Sir Henry Neville and Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, have been suggested.) The truth is, we cannot guess what we will find when we use these techniques to examine all the works of Renaissance literature.

Most important, we need to change our thinking about the works themselves. Until we can be certain who wrote what, we must first divest them of the mystique lent them

by the author’s name and reputation (particularly so great a name as Shakespeare). In the same way that the text of the unpublished play *Sir Thomas More* has been broken down into its separate authors, or more likely, scribes, as Hand A, Hand B, and so forth, we must label all Elizabethan works of the imagination with similarly neutral identifiers. This will allow us to examine them as though they were anonymous, with no identifying characteristics beyond what is offered by the text and publication data. In other words, until a particular work passes a set of dependable tests of its validity, all published works of the imagination, their title pages, the names of their authors, their introductory material including

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**I urge everyone who is genuinely interested in the authorship question to read Vickers’ book. It is dense, it is difficult, particularly for those like myself who do not have training in statistics or much of a gift for numbers, but I believe that most will agree that this is the way of all future attribution studies.**

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dedications, printer’s remarks, author’s remarks, and authorship of dedicatory verses, each must be considered open to interpretation until its evidentiary value has been properly assessed.

A big job, granted, but after almost twenty years of study of the authorship problem, I believe this to be the only way we will ever totally resolve it to everyone’s satisfaction: first, by expanding it to include all the writers of imaginative literature; then, by expanding it to include all the works of imaginative literature, subjecting

them to the same kind of rigorous testing that Vickers describes in his book. Hopefully at some point Oxfordian scholars will begin to work together (possibly even, at some point, with orthodox scholars of the stature of Vickers, May and Simonton) in a common effort to assemble this seemingly immense and complex puzzle.

**An Intellectual Frontier**

At the same time we may be venturing into an as-yet-unexplored and exciting new intellectual frontier. For by delving into the truth behind the production of these great works of the English Renaissance, we will be following in the footsteps of their authors, their real authors—as they studied the lives and works of the poets of ancient Greece and Rome, reading and translating them into English, absorbing the inner processes of their style and thought and thereby laying the groundwork for a new literary language for themselves and generations of future readers. It’s much the same process by which those same predecessors, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, created the modern literary language of Italy, as they rescued the literature of ancient Greece and Rome from the dust and decay of monastery libraries, translating them into vernacular Italian and, in the process, evolving a new way of thinking, speaking and behaving that spread to all the nations of Europe via their royal courts. And so may we, by uncovering the truth, or at least by creating the most likely scenario, reclaim poetry and poetic language for our own creativity, a thing sorely needed in this second, longest, and most deadly era of ultra “drab poetry.”

We may also achieve a much truer vision of what was really going on at the Court of Elizabeth and in the pubs and drawing rooms and bedrooms where these creative souls spent time together, all questions of religions and class division set aside by the overarching needs of creative artists to know each other, work together, drive each other crazy, and finally, some of them, ripen into full maturity. The clues are there. Once we know where to look we’ll find

them. And what a story it will be! Truly the story of stories.

### The Process

First, we should agree on an expanded authorship thesis, one that recognizes all the problems, not just Shakespeare's. We should also agree to work together and to not allow our differences in interpretation to stop us. Second, we must separate the literary evidence of authorship from the non-literary evidence. Third, we should remove the authors' names from all questionable works, identifying them instead by genre, subject, personality, age and sex of protagonist, and available date marks, and then translating them (if necessary) into modern English spelling. Finally, we must subject them to a battery of stylometric tests as described by Brian Vickers in his book *Shakespeare Co-author*, providing a friendly statistician with the results so he or she can run the numbers and give us sufficient data to compare to each other and to an agreed-upon control group.

From this point on the steps should be obvious.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, and Lord Strange, soon to be Earl of Derby (Nicholl xx).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Nashe, Robert Greene, Thomas Watson and William Shakspeare.

<sup>3</sup> Spenser was granted an annuity of £50 by the Queen in 1591, but the history of this annuity raises more questions than it answers. It was granted during the period that the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* were published, supposedly at a time when Spenser was back in England, although there appears to be no other evidence that he was in fact in England at that time. It seems that Spenser himself never collected the annuity, which was collected at first by Edward Blount, apprentice to Ponsonby (who printed TFQ),

then Ponsonby, and thereafter by a series of individuals, some with no apparent relation to Spenser (Berry 254-9). The facts surrounding his famous funeral at Westminster Abbey are equally questionable.

4 In the case of George Peele, it does no harm to consider that "Shakespeare" may have gotten tired of trying to make something out of the glutinous story of Titus Andronicus, and so passed it along to Peele, his colleague or secretary, to complete.

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The preceding is an expanded version of a lecture given April 10, 2005 at the Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference in Portland, Oregon.

### Fields (cont. from p. 13)

just under three hundred pages the book ambles along like genial after-dinner conversation about a fine whodunnit. Then in the last quarter (after midnight at our gathering in Malibu) Fields begins unveiling his personal hypothesis of the manner in which the Shakespearean canon came into being. Since virtually anything is possible (especially at the late hour and after several bottles of wine), and the case cannot be conclusively proved, Fields now enters into his personal reconstruction of the events and actions of the major players, or what might have happened.

Fields proposes that Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, was the poet and playwright, and that William of Stratford was the canny theatre practitioner who

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**Fields's style of presenting evidence has undoubtedly raised hackles on both sides of the debate, since many speculative items are entered without the context that would unambiguously demarcate them as speculation or opinion...**

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knew what the groundlings wanted, thus serving as Oxford's consulting associate producer. In his final chapter, "Summing Up," Fields fills in his treatment with what he believes were the roles of William Stanley, Earl of Derby, as well as Robert Greene, Chettle, Bacon, Pembroke and Montgomery et al, in a tantalizing scenario complete with imagined dialogue between the "hustling, provincial actor named Shaksper" and the Earl who "yearns to try his hand at the public theatre," as they grapple over the style and presentation of Hamlet and The Merchant of Venice. Whether any of it really happened as he proposes, Fields, ever the ideal host, has given his guests a

(Continued on page 31)



*Earl Showerman receives the "1st Earl of Ashland" Award from SOS President James Sherwood and Shakespeare Fellowship President Lynne Kositsky.*

*Historic Conference (cont. from p. 10)*

of any theater group in the country. The diversity of its plays and the excellence of its quality and production design prompted *Time* magazine to list the OSF as one of the top five regional theatres in the country.

The room was charged with energy when James Newcomb spoke to the group. He gave a talk on his craft as an actor and also participated in a panel discussion on *Richard III* along with Professor Ren Draya, and actress Robin Goodrin-Nordli who played Margaret. In the panel discussion, Ms. Goodrin-Nordli described her role as that of an "omnipresent spirit," a device that represents a reflection on how the grief and pain of memory can haunt the present. She said that her character was an example of how Shakespeare saw the role of women in a patriarchal society, how the men do the killing and get the glory while the women are left to deal with the aftermath.

In a separate presentation, Newcomb noted that Richard did not function in a vacuum but reflected the atmosphere of greed and mistrust present in the aristocratic society. He called attention to

the fact that Shakespeare used history, not as an accurate history lesson, but as a device to warn people about the present. He talked about his process in approaching Richard in terms of both his physicality and his psychology, telling the conference that his conception of Richard's limp, withered hand, and hunchback was developed in order to show how his physical duplicity enhanced his psychological duplicity. With his emphasis on Richard's physical handicap, he wanted to demonstrate the paradox of how someone on crutches could also be "quite agile and adroit."

In discussing the events that shaped Richard's character, Newcomb pointed to the death of Richard's father at the Battle of St. Albans as a turning point as depicted in *Henry VI, Part Three*. Richard idolized his father who had taught him how to fight and believed in his father's right to the crown. When his father was killed, he focused his entire being on revenge and plotted to take the crown for himself even if it meant using deception. According to Newcomb, the seminal moment for Edward de Vere was, like Richard, the loss of his father, whom he believed to have been murdered and thus devoted his life to "righting a wrong."

Newcomb suggests that the context of his plays is consequently one of "profound injustice." He noted that de Vere must have been an extremely lonely man whose grief and sense of loss was translated into the diverse characters of the plays, including the manic quality of his historical figures, his fools such as Touchstone and Feste, and the artifice of Malvolio and Orsino.

The next day's panel discussed the OSF production of *Twelfth Night: Or What You Will*. Reminiscent of other Shakespearean cross-dressing comedies such as *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* is mostly about the ins and outs of romantic love but it is also about pride, "overweening ambition", disguises, and mistaken identities. The play contains some of Shakespeare's most memorable characters: Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's drunken uncle, his friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek who is also trying to court Countess Olivia, Olivia's gentlewoman Maria, Feste, the "knowing" fool, and Malvolio, the prudish steward. The panel consisted of Michael Elich (Orsino), Linda K. Morris (Viola/Cesario), Professor Ren Draya, and Dr. Michael L. Hays, a Shakespearean scholar and civic activist. The panel seemed to interpret the meaning of the title as Shakespeare saying



to the audience “take of it what you will” and to the actors “make of it what you will.” It is definitely a play that is open to interpretation. Elich said he finds *Twelfth Night* to be a “sad play” about lonely individuals that cannot make contact with each other and who are in love with the idea of love rather than its reality. Professor Draya also pointed out that the joke on Malvolio is rather cruel and Dr. Hays remarked that Feste is vindictive in reminding everyone of Malvolio’s humiliation.

Though the OSF’s interpretation was full of fun, the panel’s interpretation called to mind James Newcomb’s earlier remarks that when Oxford’s authorship is widely accepted, the overall interpretation of the plays will be subject to a different context (possibly one of “injustice”) and therefore viewed as considerably darker. It was also noted that here is another example of the impact of a father’s loss, as the twins Viola and Sebastian lost their father when they were only thirteen, another concurrence with the life of Edward de Vere, who with his sister Mary (b.d. unknown) lost his father at about that age.

According to Dr. Richard Desper, a PhD in Chemistry and specialist in polymer materials science, *Twelfth Night*, although ostensibly reflecting the twelfth day after Christmas, a time for celebration in Elizabethan days, reveals an “element of underlying darkness, images of sadness and regret.” In the play, nothing is what it seems, that meanings are turned inside out. Feste says “nothing that is so is so” and his portrayal of the priest Sir Topas who interrogates Malvolio in a darkened room has overtones of the 1581 trial and execution of Edmund Campion, a Jesuit priest who was executed by the English government. In his speech of less than fifty words, which appears to resemble mere nonsense, there are no less than five phrases that refer directly to Edmund Campion and his 1580-81 mission to England. Dr. Desper also pointed out that the mock trial scene works as a parody of the government persecution of Catholic martyrs. “The playwright,” he says, “demonstrates for us a world turned upside down, with clowns passing themselves off as men of learning, while men of learning ...are pressed to

deny what they believe to be true to serve political ends.”

Dr. Showerman spoke on the topic “*Orestes, Horestes, Hamlet: Myth to Masterpiece*”. He pointed out how the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus and other Greek and Roman sources including the epics, tragedies, and philosophies are intricately woven into the plot, characters, rhetoric, and allusions in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Many of the sources, according to Dr. Showerman, that Shakespeare used were untranslated at the time *Hamlet* was published suggesting the author could read

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**Edward de Vere’s  
connection to Gray’s Inn,  
his classical education  
under the guidance of  
Thomas Smith, Lawrence  
Nowell, and Arthur  
Golding, and his  
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considering Oxford’s  
authorship claims to both  
dramas.**

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and had access to many Greek and Latin classics in the original. Showerman explored the 1567 play *Horestes* that was first performed at Gray’s Inn and noted the remarkable similarities in plot and theme between *Horestes* and *Hamlet*. Oxfordian Elizabeth Sears was the first to suggest that a young Edward de Vere may have penned *Horestes*.

A close analysis of the plot, languages, rhetorical devices, allusions, and topicality of this Tudor interlude suggests many similarities to *Hamlet*. Edward de Vere’s

connection to Gray’s Inn, his classical education under the guidance of Thomas Smith, Lawrence Nowell, and Arthur Golding, and his documented access to the numerous original classical sources cited for both *Horestes* and *Hamlet*, make a credible case for considering Oxford’s authorship claims to both dramas.

Earlier, English Professor Dan Wright of Concordia University in Portland, Oregon and Dr. Michael Hays discussed other aspects of Shakespeare’s plays. Professor Wright asserted that a central theme of Shakespeare’s plays is that of legitimacy and the right of succession. He cited *King John* as an example of a conflict over rightful succession but focuses not on the historical record but invents a royal bastard who becomes the fictional hero of the play. Prof. Wright raised the question of what Shakespeare’s purpose might have been in giving pre-eminence in a history play to a character whose existence lay only in his imagination. He stated that Shakespeare’s plays are “not disinterested objective plays but serve as mirrors that reflect Elizabethan policy.” Shakespeare, according to Wright, was an “informed commentator on the political scene and his work is about “the rulers who sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind.”

Dr. Hays interpreted Shakespearean tragedies as chivalric romances. His thesis counters the conventional wisdom and its biases against romance, and questions received opinion about literary genre and cultural history. Echoing Professor Wright’s analysis, Dr. Hays stated that Shakespeare exploited chivalric romance to explore themes of governance, legitimacy, and succession in his plays. Subordinating tragedy to romance, Dr. Hays argued that plays such as *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear* articulate an informed idealism and a tempered optimism about the outcome of contested issues, citing Shakespeare’s use of “poetic justice” and the idea that “right makes might”.

Music in Shakespeare was discussed in two presentations, one by Elizabeth Sears, musician and author of the book *Shakespeare and the Tudor Rose*, and spokespersons for the ensemble group Mignarda, Ron Andrico and Donna Stewart

(Continued on page 28)

*Historic Conference (cont. from p. 27)*

who also treated the audience to some lovely renaissance songs. Andrico talked about how music was used in Shakespeare's plays, who played the music and what it might have sounded like. According to Andrico, musicians were considered servants at the time and it was demeaning to a person of noble rank to show their musical skills as a performer. Musicians such as John Dowland required patronage to support their talent.

Elizabeth Sears cited 32 references to music in Shakespeare's plays and 36 plays that included musical stage directions. This point was underlined by her reference to Dr. Edward Naylor's book written over one hundred years ago that explored Shakespeare's profound knowledge of music, both in the songs, stage directions, and references to musical matters in the text. She noted, however, that most of the music from Shakespeare's plays seems to have been lost and what has survived is said to be anonymous or traditional or credited to well-known composers of the sixteenth century. She cited the possibility that Oxford was the author of the song *Greensleeves* and cited John Farmer's declaration to the Earl of Oxford in Farmer's *First Set of English Madrigals*, "For without flattery be it spoke, that using this science as a recreation, your Lordship have over-gone most of them that make it a profession."

A speaker whose presentations have been heard at the 2004 De Vere Conference in Portland and the 2004 SF Conference, Dr. Thomas Hunter, told the conference that the key to full appreciation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* lies in understanding the sources of Portia's "mercy speech". He called *Merchant of Venice*, "a wonderfully human drama" whose stereotyped anti-Semitic reputation is simply wrong and called Portia's speech "the evidence that connects this play to Edward de Vere."

Prof. Lewis Tate, who teaches English Literature and Shakespeare at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia, as well as in England, spoke about the confluence of events in the year 1598 and how it was a springboard for future occurrences. These events included the

death of William Cecil, Francis Mere's *Palladis Tarnia*, Ben Jonson mentioning Shakespeare in his 1598 play, and the writing, printing, publishing, registering, and performing of the Shakespeare canon.

Artistic director of the theater program at Walla Walla College since 1999, where she recently directed a production of *Othello*, Professor Marilyn Loveless gave us a survey of how various scholars and writers have interpreted Shakespeare's final bequest to his wife of his second best bed.

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**Dickens told the group that Shakespeare was an "unpainted Sistine Chapel ceiling, whitewashed and newly plastered, that invites us to ascend the scaffold and become Michelangelo." and caused uproarious laughter as he speculated on what would happen if the village-born deity from Stratford-on-Avon were to be dethroned by an "arrogant, insubordinate rebuffer of the Queen."**

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Some suggestions have been that the second best bed was: a treasured possession, a sweet and innocent gesture, the bequest of a businessman, and the best bed he owned after giving his best property to the church. The truth is, according to Prof. Loveless, we simply do not know what he meant by this bequest.

In a lighthearted vein, the conference banquet received a surprise visit from none other than Mr. Charles Dickens who temporarily "borrowed" the body of well-known Shakespearean actor and Fellowship member Michael Dunn and

*Crown Signature, (cont. from p. 9)*

This signature is found on all extant holograph signed letters from 1569 to April 1603, a year before his death [two weeks following the death of Queen Elizabeth]. Except for one letter after the Queen's death which bore the coronet or crown signature, those of 1603 onward revert to a double loop horizontal flourish similar to the single loop flourish found in the youthful letter of 1563. Here is a facsimile of that signature.

The abandonment of the distinctive signature, following so closely on the death of Queen Elizabeth, suggests the crown signature was adopted in the nature of a device or emblem expressing some aspiration, ambition, hope, desire or reminder of a promise. With the death of the Queen, did these aspirations and hopes die?

On another issue, the time of abandonment of the coronet or crown signature and the switch to a double loop flourish put<sup>5</sup> to rest the question of when Oxford became a member of the Privy Council. Though Percival Golding [f. 1624] in *Armes, Honours, Matches and Issues of the Ancient and Illustrious Family of Veer* [British Library, Harl. MSS. 4189] stated Edward de Vere was "... of ye privy Counsell to the Kings Matie [James I] that now is", some Oxfordians have insisted Oxford had been appointed to the Privy Council in the time of Elizabeth. They cite an undated Privy Council letter on which Oxford's signature appears. Oxford's signature on this letter bears the double loop flourish, not the "crown." It becomes conclusive that as Oxford did not revert to the looped flourish signature until after Elizabeth's death, thus supporting Percival Golding's placement of Oxford's membership on the Council to the time of James I.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Fowler did not include the extant tin mining letters, some of which are part of the Huntington Library's Ellesmere Manuscripts.

<sup>2</sup> Not the least of which is: why more of his letters and papers have not been found in the public records. While many of Oxford's letters seem to have been lost or

destroyed, there might be hundreds waiting to be found.

<sup>3</sup> As head of the Court of Wards, Sir William kept the young Lord's wardship for himself.

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*Oxford's Torment, (cont. from page 3)*

relatives? Research. How was he able to do all this research without leaving any evidence of ever having owned—nor even having *read*—a book? Research.

But there is more. William Shakespeare is commonly regarded as the proof of the democratic premise, a man who rose from the mud to a place of highest esteem. Such was his craft, such was his genius, that *none* of his works celebrate the virtues of common people. To the contrary, ordinary people in Shakespeare are either thieves, comic figures or repugnant social climbers. Courtiers fare no better in the end, but they are better presented. It must be that the Bard was seeking to disguise himself as a nobleman disguised as a commoner. This conjecture would also explain why a cipher of democracy would write so many plays buttressing the claim of Elizabeth I to the throne of England. This is the kind of toadying we would expect from a fawning courtier, a true son of the nobility, so it must be that Shakespeare's curious patriotism was of a piece with his disguise.

And how all of this must have infuriated Oxford! For the very apogee of Shakespeare's research came about when he began to write hectoring, presumptuous love poems to Edward de Vere's secret homosexual lover, Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton. These sweet sonnets, whispered by lovers down unto our day, read as though they were written by Oxford himself. What a triumph for Shakespeare!

But Shakespeare's magnificent research skills took him one step further still. By methods about which we can only posit conjectures, Shakespeare managed to

cajole Oxford into using—in his own correspondence and anonymous and pseudonymous plays and poetry—phrases and turns of phrase which later turn up in their refined and beautified form in the immortal works of the immortal Bard. Shakespeare caused de Vere to use locutions that did not appear in public until long after the Earl's death in 1604. Remarkable!

The Oxfordians are quick to seize upon this, of course, but we ought not listen to

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**The Oxfordians are quick to seize upon this, of course, but we ought not listen to them. Instead we must answer them with our usual fusillades of blistering flatulence, adhering to the long-standing and indisputable precept that anything said by Shakespearean heretics is not only wrong, ipso facto and Q.E.D., but necessarily evil.**

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them. Instead we must answer them with our usual fusillades of blistering flatulence, adhering to the long-standing and indisputable precept that anything said by Shakespearean heretics is not only wrong, ipso facto and Q.E.D., but necessarily evil.

But they do ask a dangerous question: "If Oxford was such a well-known anonymous or pseudonymous author, where are his works?"

And this is a question we can answer at last!

Using the time-tested methods of posit and conjecture, we have recovered the 'lost works' of Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford. More tangible evidence

will be presented when suitable facsimiles can be prepared, but for now we can discuss these works at least in summary.

And they are remarkable! Not only do the works of Shakespeare curiously parallel the life of Oxford, but the lost works of Oxford seem to parallel the life of Shakespeare!

Consider as an example the plot of *Love's Labour's Foundlings*: A churlish boy impregnates the neighbor's spinster daughter—a chary maid who was prodigal enough once she unmasked her posited beauty to the moon. The two are married hastily, and they are in rapid succession blessed with a daughter and then twins, a boy and a girl. Then the churlish boy, by now a churlish man, vanishes from their lives, leaving them to starve.

Or take note of *The Merchant of Stratford*, which concerns the banal and ultimately pointless machinations of a greasy-fingered burgher who cheats his neighbors and defaults on his tax debt. He ends his life more beast than man, spacious in the possession of dirt, and no one laments or even notices his passing.

There are others, including a play that prefigures modern literary issues: At a legal deposition, a man presumed to have a fine education and a prodigious memory is able to remember nothing. And there is a Lear-like tragedy about a man who tries to divide his worldly goods among his heirs. In the end, though, he is frustrated, first by his monolithic ignorance and then by his unreasoning greed. He is buried under a piece of vile doggerel that is his life's one literary accomplishment.

As we can easily see, the matter is now settled to the satisfaction of all who dare not whisper a word of dissatisfaction. Shakespeare wrote poems and plays that parallel the life of Oxford, and for his vengeance Oxford wrote plays that parallel the life of Shakespeare. What could be clearer?

Without doubt the Oxfordians will raise some new hue and cry, claiming perhaps  
(Continued on page 30)



*Oxford's Torment (cont. from p. 29)*

that the newly-discovered plays of Oxford are forgeries. But it is a long-standing and indisputable precept that forgeries that support the positions of orthodox Shakespearean scholars are, by virtue of *their* high office, inherently and automatically genuine. So much for that.

At bottom, there can be no doubt that the argument that Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, is the author of the works attributed to Shakespeare is entirely plausible. That is why it is false. The claim that William Shaxsper of

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**By methods about which we can only posit conjectures, Shakespeare managed to cajole Oxford into using—in his own correspondence and anonymous and pseudonymous plays and poetry—phrases and turns of phrase which later turn up in their refined and beautified form in the immortal works of the immortal Bard. Shakespeare caused de Vere to use locutions that did not appear in public until long after the Earl's death in 1604.**

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Stratford-Upon-Avon, to all evidences an illiterate, is the true creator of those works is not just implausible but preposterous. Therefore it is true.

Shakespeare tormented poor Oxford for the entire lifetime of that tormented lord. It is the solemn duty of all responsible Shakespearean scholars to continue the torment of Oxford and his champions even to the edge of doom.

To read more by Greg Swann, visit him online: [www.presenceofmind.net/GSW/index.html](http://www.presenceofmind.net/GSW/index.html).

*Players (cont. from p. 25)*

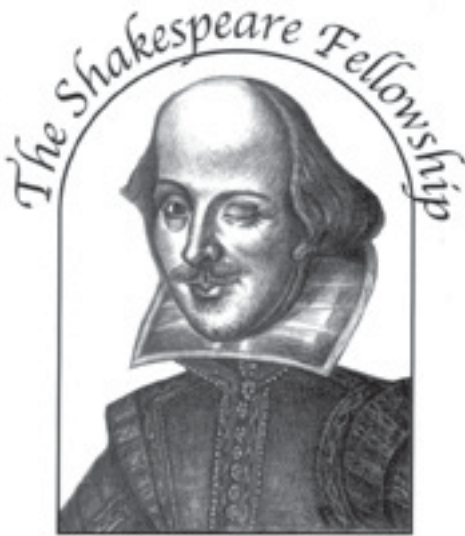
rich mystery (with echoes of old Hollywood) that they will surely continue to ponder while wending their way down the Pacific Coast Highway to their respective abodes. There will be excited conversations long into the night, and hopefully beyond. Mission accomplished for Fields: reasonable doubt has been established.

So taken for what it is—an invitation to consider the Authorship mystery-- *Players* is an enjoyable read: attractively produced, the quality of paper, even the dustjacket (with its cover art by Raquel Jaramillo, a fanciful portrait of Will whose features and sensibility lie somewhere between the Chandos and the Ashbourne) pleasant to the touch, the burnished parchment color neatly evoking Shakespeare's era. If you take issue with the little volume's scholarship, remember, you are probably not its target audience.

And if Fields invites you to dinner, by all means, go.



*Shakespeare Fellowship Founding member Betty Sears with Mignarda members Ron Andronico and Donna Stewart at the 2005 Ashland Conference.*



VERO NIHIL VERIUS

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*Shakespeare Fellowship Members Earl Showerman (MD) and Ren Draya (Phd, English), with special panelists James Newcomb (Richard III) and Robin Goodrin-Nordli (Margerat) of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival Richard III cast at the Fellowship's October Conference in Ashland, Oregon (Details Inside).*

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*Oxford's Torment*

*The Crown Signature Revealed*

*Falstaff in the Low Countries*

*Authorship Beyond Shakespeare*

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