



# The Shakespeare OXFORD Newsletter



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"Let me study so, to know the thing I am forbid to know"

Spring 1998

## A Society of Secrets

*How the Elizabethan Era  
still confounds us today*  
by Stephanie Hopkins Hughes

"Think upon every word that you will speak before you utter it, and remember how nature hath ramparted up, as it were, the tongue with teeth, lips, yea, and hair without the lips, and all betokening reins or bridles for the loose use of that member," Sir Robert Sidney wrote in a letter to his 11-year-old son, Philip.

In his *Selected Poems of Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey*, Dennis Keene refers to "the Stalinist atmosphere of the English Court" in the latter years of the reign of Henry VIII (14), an atmosphere that was not much better in the reigns of his children, Edward and Mary. A great deal of the excitement and glamour of Elizabeth's Court came from the relief felt by the nation with the realization that a semblance of reason had dawned, and the reactionary horrors appeared to be at an end.

But the difference was only one of degree. The tensions that created the paranoid atmosphere of her father's and siblings' reigns did not miraculously vanish with Elizabeth, and although her peculiar genius was the ability to maintain her own image as a fair and just queen surrounded by a Court that sparkled with gaiety and glamour; under the veneer of Faeryland, of Camelot, of Joyeuse Garde, Valhalla, Illyria or Elysium, lurked the hellish world of the rack and thumbscrew, painted for posterity with horrific clarity by the German, Hans Breugel. The same forces that created the Inquisition on the Continent were at work in England as well, only under different names. Historians shrink from de-

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## Ciphers, codes, and the authorship debate:

*Shortcut to the truth, or fatal attraction?*



A Hilliard painting was meant to be "read." - See "Society of Secrets," page 1.

TO THE ONLIE BEGETTER, OF  
THESE INSVING, SONNETS.  
M. W. H. ALL HAPPINESSE,  
AND THAT ETERNITIE,  
PROMISED.

BY.  
OVR EVER LIVING, POET.  
WISHETH.  
THE WELL WISHING.  
ADVENTVRER, IN.  
SETTING  
FORTH.

T. T.

"Is 6-2-4 the answer?"  
For a possible solution,  
see page 3.

Whether one is looking at such Elizabethan artifacts as the famous Hilliard miniature "Unknown Man Holding a Hand Issuing from a Cloud" (left), or puzzling over the enigmatic Sonnets dedication (right), the one constant involved is the Elizabethan penchant for secrecy and misdirection.

In this issue of the Newsletter both our page 1 stories explore the significance of the secrecy factor in considering the authorship question, and especially the pitfalls that may await intrepid historians, detectives, or decipherers in setting forth to a solution.

Recent months have witnessed several provocative authorship-related stories appearing in publications ranging from authorship journals to the mainstream media.

*The Elizabethan Review* (Autumn 1997) and *The De Vere Society Newsletter* (February 1998) both presented several proposed solutions to the Sonnets dedication from English Oxfordian John Rollett, and at about the same time a feature story by Charles A. Young in the specialty publication *Games Magazine* (February 1998) claims to have found a hidden message on the Stratford man's tombstone (amid the doggerel engraved on the floor slab "...Good friend for Jesus sake....[etc.]")

While the *London Times* gave a prominent—and positive—review to Rollett's work last December, the biggest public splash was probably made by *Games Magazine*, which had once before, in October 1994, tackled the authorship story. *USA Today* gave a half-page of coverage to this story in their December 9th, 1997 issue, reporting it as a major news story, and in recent months the *Newsletter* has heard from individuals from around the country who have encountered the story and written to us about it, each time asking if we were aware of it.

How well the proposed solutions stand up to scrutiny only time will tell, but the larger story in all this is  
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### Inside:

"E.L. Oxon."  
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Visiting Castle Hedingham,  
and St. Augustine's in Hackney  
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## Russian says Earl of Rutland was Shakespeare

The *Christian Science Monitor* for December 31st, 1997 carried a story about a new Shakespeare authorship book, this one from a Russian writer who is stoutly anti-Stratfordian, but who has settled on the Earl of Rutland as the true Shakespeare.

In *The Game of Shakespeare* author Ilya Gililov uses "careful textual analysis, detective work on ancient manuscripts, and some striking pieces of circumstantial evidence" to make his case.

For example, two of Rutland's classmates while he attended the University of Padua were Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern. He has also found that Rutland once paid "Shakespeare" 44 shillings (in 1612), and that the two brothers who built the Shakespeare memorial in Stratford also built Rutland's tomb, to a very similar design. Such details as these, especially the last, will have to be corroborated by other researchers.

The *Monitor* article dutifully reports the usual storyline that Shakespeare authorship stories are inherently unbelievable, quoting, for example Richard Wilson (of the University of Liverpool) who says authorship theories are "less respectable than ever."

Wilson further comments that attributing all of Shakespeare's plays to someone else is reading too much into the evidence, quoting from *Anthony and Cleopatra* that, "Sometimes we see a cloud that is dragonish."

However, later in the article a different scholar (Jonathan Sawday, an expert in Renaissance literature at the University of Southampton) is quoted as saying, "Most people now work on the assumption that all late 16th-century plays were collaborations—more like what we would call a theater workshop today ... You should think of Shakespeare as the character who put the whole process into motion."

Well-said, Mr. Sawday. Of course, Oxfordians already do think of Shakespeare as someone "who put the whole process into motion," although that key event in the history of Elizabethan theater occurred in the 1580s, not the 1590s, a reading of history which, of course, presents a major obstacle for Mr. Shaksper of Stratford.

## Washington researcher offers new theory on *Folio* publication and the authorship

The Library of Congress, through its Office of Scholarly Programs, hosted two presentations by Peter Dickson (January 25th and March 11th) dealing with key issues relevant to the Shakespeare authorship dispute. The subject of the lecture, which offered a new perspective that may produce the solution to the authorship dispute, is suggested by its title, "Shakespeare's *First Folio*: A Response to the Tyranny of Buckingham and the Spanish Marriage Crisis of 1621-1623."

Until now, Oxfordians and Stratfordians (except for a few specialists like Willoughby, Greg, and Hinman) have ignored the *First Folio* as a serious subject of study. Dickson was drawn to this anthology after his review of works by Michell, Whalen, and Sobran for *The Washington Post* (August 17, 1997) suggested to him that there was something peculiar about the historical sequence beginning with Lady Pembroke's death in late September 1621 and ten days later the sudden registration of *Othello*, whose villain's name is the diminutive form of James in Spanish (Iago).

Dickson's research revealed further evidence of a full-court political vendetta, beginning with the fall of Bacon in May 1621, between Buckingham (the tyrannical royal favorite and King James' varlet) and the three popular earls (Southampton, Pembroke, and Oxford). This triumvirate tried to resist the dissolution of parliament and the King and Buckingham's plan to marry Prince Charles to a Spanish Princess, the first sign of what they perceived as a "creeping Catholicism" about to engulf the throne, if not the nation, given the King's pro-Spanish foreign policy and inclination to soften restrictions on English Catholics.

In a timeline covering 1612-1624, Dickson argues that: 1) the decision by the King and Buckingham (Bacon's protegee) to imprison Southampton and Oxford in mid-1621, followed by: 2) a final imprisonment of Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford, from April 1622 until December 1623 (with an initial plan to execute him) are both key acts in the *Folio* drama; the *First Folio* first appears in London book stores in December 1623.

He argues that for Oxfordians it is impossible to view the *First Folio* as merely a literary project. Even Stratfordians need to reassess their position since it was Charlton

Hinman's landmark work, *The Printing and Proof-reading of Shakespeare's Folio* (1963), which proved that the project began much later than once believed, not in 1618 or 1620 but in 1622, perhaps as late as the month of May that year.

This means that the *Folio* project did not get started until the political-religious crisis in question had reached monumental proportions. Dickson believes that the historical sequence of events as shown in the timeline tends to confirm the intuition that the *First Folio* was a desperate effort by the Southampton-Pembroke-Sidney clique (the Anti-Spanish, Protestant faction) to preserve the Bard's plays as the nation's literary crown jewels.

Dickson's analysis also includes a discussion of the tabu subject of the possible Catholicism of the Stratford man and his family, perhaps even as late as 1613 when he purchased the Blackfriars's Gatehouse, a notorious center of the Catholic underground in London. Dickson did not try to resolve this issue but emphasized that since Hongimann's *Shakespeare: The Lost Years* (1985), the major Stratfordian biographers have split over this religious issue. The matter of the true Shakespeare's true religious affiliations and beliefs is, of course, also a concern for Oxfordians.

The last two months of 1623, when the Spanish Marriage negotiations collapsed and the *First Folio* appeared, were a time of jubilation and emotion that exceeded that in 1588. The *First Folio*'s late appearance in the midst of the dramatic climax to the Spanish Marriage Crisis begs for further explanation as to how this celebration of the incumbent Bard whose wife (Ann Hathaway) had died in August 1623 was so meager in 1623-1624, to say nothing about the total silence in 1616 when the Stratford man died.

Dickson has recently stated that, except for Roger Stritmatter, prominent Oxfordians appear uncomfortable with his research, perhaps fearing that the historical timeline will kill Oxford's claim. And indeed, the fact that King James planned to execute Henry de Vere (18th Earl of Oxford) does raise serious problems, but Dickson believes that, when taken as a whole (including the Catholic Question), the evidence is more likely to both wipe out the Stratford man and to clinch the claim for Oxford, with the former

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# English Oxfordian finds Southampton, De Vere in the *Sonnets*

A simple albeit unsophisticated cipher has been discovered in the dedication to *Shakespeare's Sonnets* that states that "EVER" was the author.

The discovery was made by John M. Rollett, a retired physicist in England, who published his findings in the autumn 1997 issue of *The Elizabethan Review*. In his article Rollett explains how the layout of the awkward and obscure text, all in capital letters, led him to the cipher.

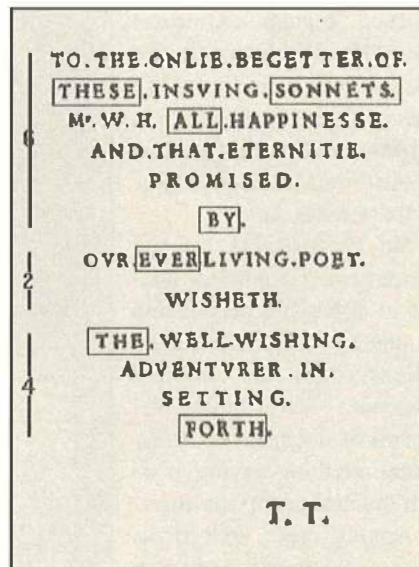
For no textual reason periods separate the words and initials of the dedication, and the lines are printed in three blocks, each an inverted pyramid (See illustration). The layout seemed to Rollett to invite counting. The top block has six lines, the next has two and the bottom one has four. If 6-2-4 is the key to the cipher, the message could be revealed by the sixth word, followed by the second after that, and the fourth after that, and the sixth after that, etc., counting each initial as a word and hyphenated words as two. The hyphen is unusually low, almost like a period. This 6-2-4 counting yields: "THESE SONNETS ALL BY EVER THE FORTH." And, as it happens, 6-2-4 also describes the number of letters in "Edward de Vere." Cryptologists would consider this cipher as relatively unsophisticated: it simply takes words at regular intervals and the key is found in the format. This unsophistication can be seen as a virtue or a weakness.

Oxfordians, of course, find "ever," or a variant, in contexts in Shakespeare's works where it seems to identify the author as "E. Ver," that is, Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. For example, in sonnet 76 Shakespeare says, "That every word doth almost tell my name."

Rollett has also found "HENRY" and "WR...IOTH...ESLEY" in the text of the dedication when it is written in two "arrays." An array is a rectangle similar to a crossword puzzle layout but without blacked squares. The name of Henry Wriothesley, the third earl of Southampton, who many suggest was "Mr. W.H." of the dedication, appears in an array with lines of fifteen letters across and one with eighteen letters. Such arrays are standard methods of encrypting messages. To judge the likelihood that his method would produce a hidden message Rollett consulted books of cryptography. He calculates the odds in the millions or billions for an encrypted message that is specific to the authorship controversy and the identity of Mr. W.H.

In a similar article in *The De Vere Society Newsletter* (February 1998) Rollett says he discovered the 6-2-4 cipher in 1967 before he knew about Edward de Vere as a possible author of Shakespeare's works. Not until he read Charlton Ogburn's *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*:

*The Myth and the Reality* two decades later did he see the significance of his finding and of the word



Sonnet graphic courtesy of Rae West

*The rather simple, elegant solution to the Sonnets dedication discovered by John Rollett is keyed by using the line count of the three segments of the dedication ending in a single word (which yields 6-2-4, the same count as the number of letters in the name Edward de Vere), and then counting the words in the dedication, selecting the sixth word, the second word after that, then the fourth word after that, and so forth.*

"EVER" years earlier. Then he went on to test various arrays of the 144 letters in the dedication. *The Times* of London, in a major article on New Year's Eve, reported on Rollett's work with arrays.

Ever since the Baconian ciphers were largely and loudly discredited earlier in the century, authorship scholars have been wary of ciphers and cryptography. Rollett's method of investigation, however, seems to have been quite cautious and thorough. He says four specialists in cryptography reviewed his manuscript. His published work will probably require independent testing and validation by recognized authorities before Stratfordians (and some Oxfordians) will take it seriously. One difficulty is that his cipher solution requires reversing the initials "W.H." and taking "EVER" as standing for "E. Ver," the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. (John Ogilvie has suggested in the same *De Vere Newsletter* that the "THE FORTH" could refer to Oxford as the fourth in his family to use the Bolebec crest, a lion shaking a broken spear.)

Even Stratfordian professors recognize the possibility of ciphers in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. In her edition of the *Sonnets* Professor Katherine Duncan-Jones notes that Jonson mentions a cipher in his dedication of his *Epigrammes* (1616) to William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. Jonson notes that his own epigrams are not dangerous and that he had nothing on his conscience "to expressing of which I did need a cipher." Duncan-Jones suggests that Jonson may be alluding "to some other, more compromising or 'dangerous' form of poetry, which had indeed required use of 'a cipher.'" She thinks the passage might refer to *Shakespeare's Sonnets* of 1609, but carries the thought no further.

Professor Helen Vendler also sees ciphers. In her *Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* she says, "There is always something cryptographic in Shakespeare's sonnet-surfaces—sometimes literally so, as in the anagrams of 7, or as in the play on "vile" and "evil" in 121, but more often merely an oddness that catches the eye and begs explanation." She does not, however, even mention the enigmatic dedication.

Rollett is not alone in finding a cipher in the dedication. John Michell in his 1996 book *Who Wrote Shakespeare?* states flatly that Thorpe knew who the author was and conveyed it in an anagram on the phrase "our ever-living" in the dedication. The letters in the phrase can be rearranged to read "Vero Nil Verius," but a final "G" has to be substituted for a final "S" and "Nil" substituted for "Nihil." Oxford's family motto is usually written "Vero Nihil Verius," although Michell says it was written with "Nil." (He also votes for a William Hall as being Mr. W.H.)

Michell's anagram has only thirteen letters and one of them is changed. Usually cryptologists require a longer phrase if the anagram, which must use all the letters and no more, is to be considered valid. In their book *The Shakespeare Ciphers Examined* (1954), generally considered quite authoritative, William F. and Elizabeth S. Friedman cite approvingly a mathematician who says the minimum length for an anagram should be about twenty-five letters in order to eliminate the possibility of a chance solution or of alternate solutions. That's twice the length of Michell's anagram.

The Friedmans also point out that if a text begins to yield more than two or three hidden messages, the chance that the author of it actually encoded several messages in the same text begin to diminish rapidly. If someone finds a third, seemingly valid cipher in Thorpe's 144-letter cryptic dedication to *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, there will be serious doubts about the validity of any of them.



*Ciphers, codes, etc. (continued from page 1)*  
that the authorship debate in the 1990s continues to gather momentum, making news and occasionally making headlines, no matter how much our friends in academe may gnash their teeth over it.

A separate story on page three will give readers a closer look at John Rollett's work, particularly his "6-2-4" solution to the *Sonnets* dedication, which many observers believe has great merit and may well be on the mark.

On the other had, the response to Young's *Games Magazine* story has been harsh from both Stratfordians and from many Oxfordians. The Oxfordian response to date has ranged from wary interest tinged with skepticism to outright rejection, for reasons such as an overall wariness towards any "decoded" messages purporting to solve the Shakespeare authorship debate (Rollett's work notwithstanding), to more particular objections to the details of Young's work itself. An overview of the solution that Young has proposed can be seen in the box on this page.

In short, he claims to have found the name "Vere" encoded twice on the tombstone, using a pyramid template extracted from Henry Peacham's book of emblems, *Minerva Britanna*, published in 1612. The use of this pyramid also then signals that the tombstone is the "Star-ypointing Pyramid" that John Milton wrote of in *Paradise Lost* (1630). This would then mean, Young states, that the manuscripts are hidden under the tombstone, since,

the hollow'd reliques should be hid  
Under a Star-ypointing Pyramid."

However, it has already been quickly pointed out by both Stratfordians and Oxfordians that the original tombstone had been replaced in the 18th century, and further that hiding the manuscripts in this particular location would have been highly unlikely, since it is very damp and musty, lying close to the water table of the nearby river Avon.

And finally, since the tombstone had once been removed, anything in the tomb would have been noted, and the historical record tells us that nothing was noted at the time.

On the Internet's usenet Shakespeare discussion group the news of Young's work garnered only four posts over two days in December 1997, and then died. Regular Stratfordian poster David Kathman derided Young's work, and couldn't resist adding a dismissive shot at *Minerva Britanna* as "that old anti-Stratfordian chestnut," before moving on.

No Oxfordians on the Internet group seemed too anxious to delve any deeper into the matter. This is probably indicative of the dreaded "Baconian" factor in any discussion of deciphering or decoding anything having to do with the authorship question.

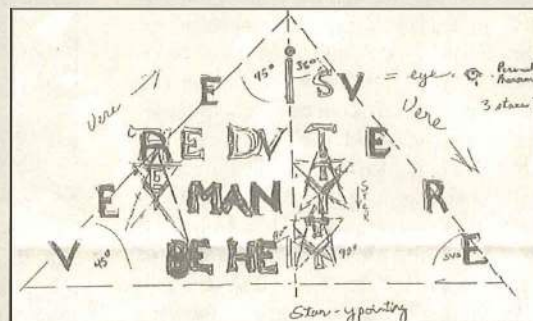
Among other Oxfordians who have taken a close look at this thesis, perhaps the most cogent commentary comes from John Rollett (of Ipswich, England), whose own work on the *Sonnets* dedication appears in this issue.

Rollett has stated unequivocally that he considers Young's work to be far off the mark and worried that its faults could come back to haunt the authorship debate by resurrecting the old Baconian cipher-hunt days and providing easy ammunition to our opponents.

In commenting on the particulars of Young's solution, Rollett notes that the "VERE" appearing on the right side of the pyramid could simply be a coincidence, given that E and R are such common letters, but he can only describe the "VERE" on the left side as "ludicrous," given that the actual letters on that side are V, E, TH, and F.

Further, Rollett also seriously questions the use of the pyramid shape from *Minerva Britanna*. "Who in their right mind," he asks, "would invent such an unlikely proceeding to

## A Star-ypointing pyramid?



Charles Young's proposed solution to the Stratford man's gravestone is based on his having found a particular "asymmetrical" (45 degrees/54 degrees) pyramid shape, a shape which is keyed (Young believes) by certain shapes and alignments found in many of the images in Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britanna* (1612), the famous/notorious book of emblems, impressas and enigmatic poems. The example shown (bottom) is the first image in the book, accompanied by a poem that begins, "A SECRET arme out stretched from the skie, / In double chaine a Diadem doth hold :"

The photo at the top shows the gravestone as it appears in the Holy Trinity Church today. In the middle is a drawing of the inscription, with the 45/54 pyramid overlaid, which in turn highlights the letters "VERE" on the right side, and a "VERE" also on the left side, but which is only made possible by taking a scrunched TH in "The" as an "R," and the F in "For" as an "E."



point to a name on a gravestone with no conceivable connection with the book?"

Another Oxfordian in England, David L. Roper—who has taken on the monument and its inscriptions himself (see the box on this page)—has also reviewed the *Games Magazine* article and made many of the same points as Rollett, adding that “Young’s efforts seem to be what statisticians call tuning and snooping ... a common failing of human nature when the desire to validate one’s findings causes the investigator to tune his results to what is needed.”

Despite such critiques of Young’s methodology there are other Oxfordians who believe that he may be on to something. Charles Boyle has commented about Young’s thesis that “considering the tombstone itself as just one more deliberately obscure piece of the authorship puzzle does not seem that outrageous a proposition to me.”

And further, he added, “While Young could well be wrong in his methods, he may still have instinctively come upon something. *Minerva Britannia* is a significant book in the authorship story. The pyramid shape he claims to have found on many of its pages should be explored further.”

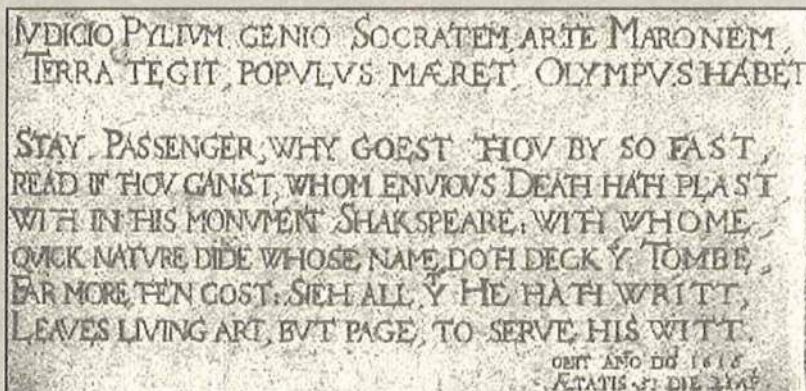
### The larger problem

However, to echo what John Rollett stated in his critique of Young’s work, there is a much larger problem in these current authorship news stories about decoding and deciphering our way to a convincing resolution of the authorship debate.

“There is indeed a tactical risk in pursuing ciphers/codes because of the Baconian disrepute factor,” Rollett recently wrote in correspondence with the *Newsletter*. “However,” he continued, “this is partly a generation thing. No one under 50 (say) now knows much about the worst excesses of the Baconians.”

Speaking as someone who has himself ventured into this danger zone of codes and ciphers, Rollett has also told us that he chose to finally publish his own findings primarily *because* they involved the *Sonnets* dedication. The dedication, of course, is the one piece of the authorship puzzle that virtually everyone agrees does look like a cryptogram. In fact Rollett has noted that,

### “Read if thou canst...”



Yet another perspective on “deciphering” text associated with Shakespeare can be seen in interpreting the other inscription in Stratford’s Holy Trinity Church, the one that appears directly under the bust of Shakespeare. Recently published on the Internet was one chapter from a work in progress by David L. Roper that attempts to make sense of the inscription. While part of Roper’s work does involve finding a cipher that can lead one to an “I am Vere” solution (a solution with which a number of other Oxfordians strongly disagree), another part of what he discusses has found more general agreement—Charlton Ogburn talks briefly about it in *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*—and illustrates another way to read the text with which one is confronted.

This solution involves simply reading the two lines of Latin with which the inscription begins (“The judgement of Nestor, the genius of Socrates, the Art of Virgil: the earth encloses, the people sorrow, Olympus possesses”) and asking oneself what is actually being said here.

The key observation is that it is “passing strange” to be comparing Shakespeare to these three particular figures from antiquity, and not to a more universally agreed upon source of inspiration—if not intimacy—such as Ovid. Frances Meres, for example, had written in *Palladis Tamia* in 1598 “that the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous & honey-tongued Shakespeare...,” and all modern criticism universally agrees that Ovid and his *Metamorphoses* would head a list of the chief sources of material and inspiration for Shakespeare.

On the other hand, all three of the ancients cited in this Latin inscription seem *not to fit* Shakespeare. Nestor was simply an old man around whom myths were woven, Socrates was written about, but never himself wrote anything, and Virgil’s story is interwoven with its own legends of how he was “secretly inspired” in some unknown manner, or was perhaps even a front for someone else.

“One eminent cryptologist I broached the matter with said the dedication was so *obviously* a cryptogram that it couldn’t be one!”

Therefore, he concluded, “[the dedication] was the one unique place where concealed information could be hidden cryptically, and where there was an imperative to do so—for who could foretell that the *First Folio* would appear fourteen years later?”

To conclude, then, this recent flurry of stories having to do with ciphers and codes is really a reminder of how difficult making the right moves in the authorship debate can be. Theories and strategies abound, and along with them strong disagreement among

a variety of strong-willed, sincere, intelligent advocates of the authorship debate.

As with any authorship discussions having to do with political conspiracy in general or the “Who was Southampton?” debate, ciphers and codes carry their own pejorative baggage, and anyone engaged in debating the authorship question needs to be aware of that problematic downside when bringing the debate to public forums.

Yet, as Charles Boyle has noted about Young’s observations on *Minerva Britannia*, we should also remain open to exploring new leads, for who knows where such leads may eventually take us?

W. Boyle



*Hughes (Continued from page 1)*

scribing the infernal machines that were routinely used to extract secrets from those accused of treason abroad, a not very well defined category who were forced to endure them without benefit of the legal protections we take for granted.

People were careful, and they were good at keeping secrets. They had to be. The World War II slogan, "Loose Lips Sink Ships," would have been well understood, for indeed, the citizens of the Tudor State were half a step from being at war with each other, over matters of economics, of social propriety and morals, but chiefly over religious issues; issues that were inching ever closer towards demands for political equality; demands feared and dreaded by authority.

Wisely Elizabeth declared publicly that she wished "no windows into men's souls," but in reality she kept as close a watch as she could on what was going on behind the windows of a number of souls. Secrecy reigned, not only at Court, but on every level of society, and not only in matters of politics or religion, but in every facet of life. This intense secrecy was a legacy of the Middle Ages, a period we still refer to as "The Dark Ages"; a time when society closed in on itself, and the light of learning that had blazed for all (educated men) to see during ancient times was reduced to the flicker of a candle behind the walls of a monastery; a time when people kept secrets so well that still to this day there is much about the period that remains hidden, that we can know only through guesswork.

### Secrecy of the Trades

In our modern world, information on how to make and do everything conceivable, from building a cathedral to making a bomb, is available in paperback on the how-to shelves of every bookstore; a state of affairs that would have utterly confounded the tradesmen of the sixteenth century. We would be equally astonished by the intense secrecy surrounding every aspect of sixteenth century trades and crafts. In the days before complex machinery and electronics it took an apprentice anywhere from seven to fifteen years to acquire enough knowledge about a craft to go to work on his own, and

every morsel of that knowledge was considered a secret. Learning a craft was said to be learning its "mystery"; in fact the words "craft" and "mystery" were interchangeable. (It can be no accident that there is only one letter's difference between the words "mystery" and "mastery.")

The process whereby a member of a trade was admitted into a Guild was actually called "The Induction into the Mystery," involving rites as arcane as those for joining a Masonic Lodge, or a Greek Fraternity at a University. (In fact the Masons or Masonic Lodge of today first began as a medieval craft guild of stonemasons.) Every apprentice was enjoined to silence about his master's secrets. To break this vow of silence was to

*"Where the atmosphere hummed with intrigue ... people channeled their feelings into poems, riddles, anagrams and guessing games."*

invite loss of his apprenticeship, as well as the loss of future membership in the trade Guild and all that went with it, including citizenship.

### Secrecy of Politics

Although Americans think of ourselves as an "open society," we are far more open than that of sixteenth century England; yet clearly there is no such thing as a totally open society. Secrecy is a fact of human community, and always will be (or there would be no market for document shredders). Think of the deadly secrecy surrounding such things as corporate mergers or takeovers, or the secrecy surrounding the patenting of some device that may revolutionize an industry. Think of the deadly repercussions of selling classified government information. Consider how valuable his knowledge of the personal secrets of high elected officials was to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover throughout the fifties and sixties, and to what extent they enabled him to retain his appointment as Director through five successive administrations. Consider as well the terrible effect Hoover's own secret had on the history of our country; how knowing it enabled the criminal Mafia

to take root and flourish without interference from the very agency instituted by the government to deal with such matters. And finally, consider how, in a society such as sixteenth century England, where all high level offices were inherited, or appointed by inheritors, and thus not open to the natural cleansing of the electoral process, such deadly secrets would be multiplied and compounded, handed down from one generation to the next.

The pressure both to keep one's own secrets and to discover those of others must have been enormous. (The importance of secrets in ancient and medieval times is revealed in many legends and folk tales, where the protagonist must discover someone's secret name, such as "Rumplestiltskin"; solve a riddle, such as the one Oedipus was given; or acquire a potent formula, such as "Open sesame.")

### Sexual Secrets

On the social level, in a society where aristocratic and wealthy middle class marriages were hedged by countless official and cultural proscriptions, people often married in secret to escape them—a situation found at the heart of numerous plots of romantic stories. And since most, if not all, marriages where any property or rank were involved were far more likely to be business arrangements between families than partnerships based on emotional or physical bonds, private sexual alliances were inevitable, and indeed, were accepted as such. Thus it happened that children would be conceived and borne in secret, and raised by others than their parents, or by a parent who claimed they were adopted. (It may be that this practice lies at the heart of the many folk tales and myths in which an infant is "discovered" floating on a river or abandoned on a beach or hillside, taken in, and raised by members of another family, often of another class or nationality.)

We can be sure that sexual secrets were abundant at Elizabeth's Court; partly for reasons endemic to inherited position, but particularly with this Queen because she so heartily enjoyed the role of matchmaker. Elizabeth took a far greater interest than most monarchs in arranging the marriages of her peers. This perhaps partly for psycho-

logical reasons—as a replacement for the family and children she herself never had—and perhaps partly out of the same instinct that interested so many aristocrats in the breeding of horses, hunting dogs and birds of prey. While her courtiers bred horses, Elizabeth bred courtiers.

Certainly it was known to all that defiance of her will in such matters could bring disastrous consequences, and so we can safely assume that nature, which will have its way in spite of the prohibitions of monarchs, sought refuge behind a variety of subterfuges.

### Impresas, mottoes, posies and symbols

Secrecy, necessary in a closed society for security and self-protection, had its pleasures as well as its anxieties. Where the written word could result in execution, imprisonment or banishment, and where times and places for private talk were hard come by, facial expression and body language would have acquired tremendous weight. Where the atmosphere hummed with intrigue, where the possibilities of hidden meaning lurked within every intercepted glance, every conversation hushed, every unexplained blush or silence, people channeled their feelings into poems, riddles, anagrams and guessing games. Shakespeare's emphasis on the eyes as vehicles of passion may reflect not merely a purely personal attitude, but one that was, at least to some extent, impressed on him by his milieu. Impresas were images essentially heraldic in nature, carved in stone, engraved on jewelry, embroidered on fabric or painted on portraits, signs, or the sides of coaches. As devices which carried a hidden meaning to a viewer in the know, they were often a combination of several images, sometimes including a motto, usually in Latin, though occasionally in Greek. To be in the know, to find out what such things meant, was essential to maintaining social power and protecting oneself. As one historian of the period has put it, "allegorical lock picking was a courtly pastime amounting to a disease." (Bevington, 9) The paintings of Elizabeth's time were filled with such devices to an extent that we might feel mars the artistry of the painting. A true or attractive rendition of the human subject came to be of less

importance than the meanings encrypted in the objects surrounding them. The Ermine



*One of the more famous of Nicholas Hilliard's series of miniature portraits is the "Unknown Man Clasp[ing] a Hand issuing from a Cloud." Leslie Hotson has analyzed this portrait in his book Shakespeare by Hilliard (1977), and demonstrated the incredible amount of information that can be extracted just by counting the number of points on the lace collar, or the presence of the feather in the sitter's cap.*

portrait, the Sieve portrait, and the Rainbow portrait identify three of the most important portraits of the Queen, not by the painter, not by the date, or her gown, or an event, or the present location, but by the chief symbolic objects in paintings crammed with the insignia of her time and class. Her head, hands and arms burdened with symbolic objects, the Queen peers out at us, a prisoner of her own importance.

Nicholas Hilliard, for years Elizabeth's Court painter and creator of her official image, filled even his tiny miniatures with such devices. Painted with exquisite delicacy, tiny hands issue from clouds, a background is in flames, bouquets are made up of flowers that, despite their small size, can actually be identified; spelling out a symbolic meaning to the Elizabethans that we can only guess at; perhaps a meaning known only to a handful; perhaps only to two. Hilliard himself may not have been privy to

the meaning of the objects he was asked to portray. Heads are surrounded by cryptic phrases in Latin whose meaning still defies interpretation. And this not because of our ignorance, but because they were devised on purpose to defy interpretation, by a people grown extremely clever at keeping secrets!

Published poems by members of aristocratic literary circles were signed, not with real names, but with "posies," Latin phrases that identified the author to the limited circle in on the code. Part of the pleasure that the Queen took in her court theatricals came from figuring out the hidden meanings, as is evident from a number of contemporary quotes, such as the one written by the Spanish ambassador to Philip II about a comedy performed at Elizabeth's Court, "I should not have understood much of it if the Queen had not interpreted as she said she would do."

The pet names that she dreamed up for her courtiers aren't the kind of pet names we generally confer on friends and family, but codenames, words meant to convey a meaning while at the same time hiding it, names based on the relationship she had with each of them, with arcane knowledge of myth perhaps, and with their chief function for her in a personal sense. What else could be the meaning of the nicknames she gave her courtiers: Leicester, her "Eyes" (for seeing what needed to be seen?), and Hatton, her "Lids" (for hiding what needed to be hidden?). One of Raleigh's nicknames was "Water," a pun based on the pronunciation of his name and the fact that his special interest was in ships and the sea; but she also called him her "Oracle," which again suggests the ability to penetrate secrets, to know things that are hidden from others. In this context we can also consider the eyes, ears and mouths that decorate the Queen's gown in the Rainbow portrait. Although Frances Yates relates them to Elizabeth's fame (*Astraea* 216-219), they could as easily be seen as symbols of her divine awareness of everything that went on around her, of the utter impossibility of getting anything past her.

Where there are secrets on one side there is always intense curiosity on the other. There are always secrets buried in the hearts of families; and where leadership is

(Continued on page 8)



*Hughes (Continued from page 7)*

hereditary, families rule kingdoms; therefore secrets are many and powerful, and so will be the desire to find them out. There will be an obsession with "truth" on the one hand, and with presenting a front and maintaining silence on the other, and those who are in a position to find out hidden truths can wield tremendous power. Knowing as we do now how J. Edgar Hoover maintained his position over a lifetime by virtue of his knowledge of the secrets of the men in power even in our own electoral government, whose members come and go, imagine how great this power is when the government is entirely hereditary, and can only be replaced by violent overthrow?

### A Theater of Secrets

The Elizabethan theater, as it developed, did so very much in the spirit of this atmosphere of code words, double meanings and disguised identities. The masque, a form of Court drama that combined dance, spectacle and music with a slender plot, was also known as a "disguising." The Masque was, in many ways, less a form of entertainment than a residue of ancient, even prehistoric, seasonal rituals. In the Masque, the performers—many of them courtiers who were well known to each other—wore costumes and face coverings which were intended to hide their identities. Known as "vizards" to the Elizabethans, the origin of these face coverings is revealed by the fact that we now call them "masks." In the public and private theaters, an actor's true identity, his age, his rank, even his sex, could easily be disguised with costume, face paint, wig, posture and tone of voice. Partly in order to evade a dress code that still required that members of a class conform to medieval standards, and partly out of the disguising spirit of the ancient revels, members of the public theater audience might also arrive in disguise; both men and women of rank often wore masks to public performances, or came disguised as persons of lesser degree, while women would sometimes go to such public entertainments dressed as men.

It should come as no surprise then that the favorite plays at Court were those that were rich with inside jokes, with convoluted plots, sub-plots and counterplots that fre-

quently turned on the hiding and discovering of secrets, on hidden marriages, lost children, mistaken identities, of the whereabouts of handkerchiefs and rings, and the like, much of it layered with allegories relating current personalities and issues to the myths and medieval romances that were the chief intellectual sustenance of the renaissance aristocracy.

### Commercial Publishing and Secrecy

We may think of publishing things as the very opposite of keeping them secret, that is, publishing is for making things known to a wide audience that would otherwise be known to only a few. But with the advent of

*"There are always secrets buried in the hearts of families, and where leadership is hereditary, families rule kingdoms."*

publishing came the potential for broadcasting ideas quickly throughout a community without the necessity of revealing their source. For the first time in history, the author of a given work could remain unknown, as could the printer (and even, to a lesser extent, the publisher). In a way that was not possible before printing, those with a political point to make or a personal axe to grind could disguise themselves, either as persons who did not exist, or as someone other than themselves, as we see clearly with the Martin Marprelate pamphlets.

This new freedom gave rise to both serious propagandizing on the one hand, and satires and sheer foolery on the other, on a scale that had never been seen before. Thus, even with writers, printers and publishers whose purposes were purely directed towards commercial ends, the entire industry was affected by the atmosphere of intrigue created by the tension between the suspicions of authority, the temptations of political thinkers and social and religious activists, and the curiosity of a reading public just beginning to come into being.

Nor does a society so walled in with secrets on all levels present a problem for us, its students, purely in terms of its inherent hiddenness. The problem is compounded

by at least two other factors: the purposeful obfuscation of the contemporary record; and the unwillingness of modern scholars to make allowances for it, and for the natural consequences of Elizabethan secrecy.

### Historians and Elizabethan Secrets

Right from the start there is a great deal of confusion in all of the English records of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some of this is inherent; for instance, single individuals may be known by a variety of names in the records, while the same official or honorific name may refer to two or even three different individuals within a brief time period. Scholars have spent much ink guessing just who is meant in a certain document by "his lordship." Add to this the variations in spelling and handwriting and the laxity in dating documents, and it can be seen how hard it is for a historian, even for many historians over a long period of time, to piece together an accurate picture.

Historians who rely on letters, even social letters exchanged by close friends and family members, must deal with the fact that they are frequently written in code. These ran the gamut from code names for important individuals to out-and-out cryptographs that required a key to decipher. Even where there is no discernible code, letters often sound like that end of a telephone conversation carried on within earshot of someone whom the telephoner intends to keep in the dark as to the topic of the conversation. (There is a certain flat quality to such a conversation that will be immediately recognized by the parent of a teenager.) It is evident that one person and one person alone was intended to understand the full import of the letter, no matter who else got their hands on it. The Queen was good at this. So was Burghley. So were they all. It makes it tough for a modern historian to piece an event together, when all the letters involved deal with it in only the most general or roundabout terms.

The problems wouldn't be as difficult as they are however, if such unintentional complexities were the only factors. Added to these are intentional obfuscations of the record. That individuals in positions of power altered or blurred the records often becomes apparent only when things like

*(Continued on page 23)*



## 21st Annual Conference - Followup Report

Space limitations did not allow a complete report in the last *Newsletter* of everything that took place at the Conference in Seattle. In addition to papers, debates and play performances, much also happened concerning the operation of the Society and our plans for the future.

At the Annual General Meeting of the Members (October 11th, 1997) the main agenda items involved revisions in the Society's By-laws, a budget report that showed the Society's operations in a new standardized format (see the pie charts on this page for an overview of income (\$60,101) and expenses (\$60,157) for last year compared with the proposed \$62,000 1998 budget), an announcement that we are proceed-

ing on clearing up our past tax problems (required Forms 990 had not been filed since 1991—1996 has been filed and the backlog will be completed by the end of the year), and also an announcement that the Price lawsuit had been settled with a \$10,000 lump sum payment, and a signed agreement bringing complete closure to the matter and foreclosing any future claims against the Society.

The membership report indicated that for the second year we would realize substantially more in membership dues than in any previous year (1996's total of \$18,428 had exceeded 1995's \$13,058 by 41%...the final figure for 1997 was \$19,071, exceeding the October 1997 estimate of approximately \$18,000, and exceeding 1996's total by 3.5%).

Boyle also reported that current paid membership is 529, plus 14 honorary lifetime members (current paid membership includes all members who have either renewed their memberships or who are no more than 3 months in arrears). While we are gaining about 100-120 new members each year, there had been a great deal of turnover in the past 18 months, probably because of fallout from the political battles during this period.

The overall renewal rate during these 18 months has averaged just 72%. Boyle stated that 1998 would be a key year in learning how many of the 200 plus new members we have gained in the past two years will stay on, and therefore whether we can set our sights on growing towards a membership base of one thousand plus

in the near future.

Such growth would be critical in having a solid, fully-funded budget year in and year out. As can be seen in the charts for 1997-1998, we depend heavily on donations each year to maintain operations, and with the recent commitment to pay individuals for Society work (Internet, newsletter, *The Oxfordian*, office operations), and to pay for facilities (office in Somerville, library in Cambridge), having a stable income flow is imperative.

The Board is also anxious to begin a formal grant application process, and to this end Grant Gifford announced that he had developed a standard application form for Society members to apply for financial support for authorship-related research or projects. There will be more information later this year about Society-sponsored support (to be announced in the newsletter).

In other news from the General Meeting, a total of seven trustees were formally elected to the Board. This includes the four individuals (Mildred Sexton, Walter Hurst, Elliott Stone and Grant Gifford) who had been appointed at the April 18th, 1997 Board Meeting to fill the positions left vacant by the four resignations at Minneapolis in October 1996 (Richard Whalen, Len Deming, Morse Johnson, Trudy Atkins).

In addition to these four, the three individuals nominated for one of the three annual recurring vacancies on the Board were also elected: Michael Pisapia, Katherine Chiljan and Dr. Daniel Wright. While Pisapia was re-elected to a second 3-year term, Chiljan and Wright will be serving on the Board for the first time. They had been nominated to run in the two positions occupied by Isabel Holden (who had chosen not to stand for re-election) and Elisabeth Sears (who was not renominated). Sears, who had served on the Board since 1987, was nominated from the floor by Stephanie Hughes.

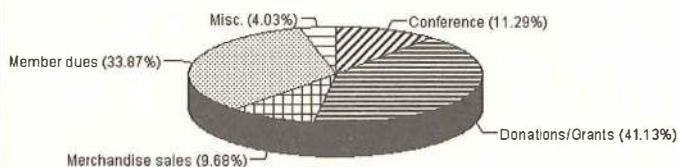
The results of the Board elections were:

|         |    |
|---------|----|
| Hurst   | 77 |
| Pisapia | 75 |
| Sexton  | 75 |
| Gifford | 74 |
| Wright  | 74 |
| Chiljan | 68 |
| Stone   | 59 |
| Sears   | 35 |

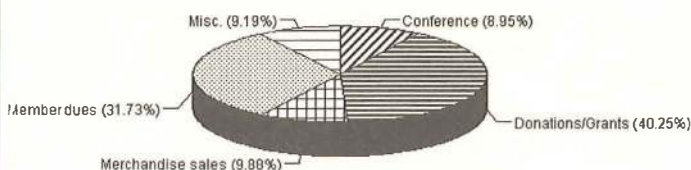
### Budgets, 1997-1998

#### Income

1998

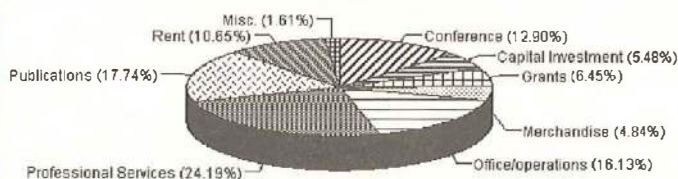


1997

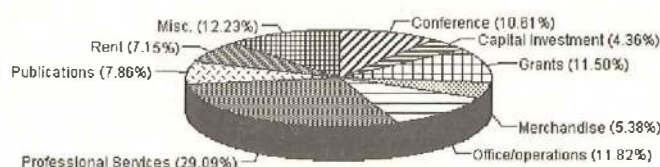


#### Expenses

1998



1997





## “E.L. Oxon.”

By James Fitzgerald

*Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.* - Shakespeare (1 Henry IV)

*When life hands you lemons, make lemonade.* - Ann Landers

The pursuit and culmination of research—after arduous voyaging to stand silent upon a peak in one’s own Darien and gaze out on one’s own Pacific—can be turned into research’s undoing and ignominy if the “x” marking the spot on the crepitating parchment went astray. Suddenly, here be dragons...

My indefatigable collaborator, Andrew Hannas, still uneasy in a corner of his mind at the attribution to Edward De Vere of the “E. L. Oxon.” eulogy in the 1605 *Divine Weeks* of Josuah Sylvester, undertook a late sortie among the E. L.’s in the *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*. And there he found Edward Lapworth. In brief, a persuasive case can be made for Lapworth’s authorship of the “E. L. Oxon.” eulogy. (See the box on page eleven for Hannas’s exposition of the force of that case.) That the locale of the revelation should have been the *DNB*, which is a holding of most decent libraries and has been around since clouds, was paid for in the coin of my humbling and so, salutary, embarrassment.

Apart from the signature (E. L. Oxon) attached to the eulogy, which hardly debarred Oxford from authorship, the principle element of [self]-deception lay in the timing of the publication of the 1605 *Divine Weeks*. As discussed in “Shakespeare, Oxford, and Du Bartas” (*Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Winter 1997), an unaccounted-for delay, puzzling even to Sylvester’s editor, Susan Snyder, had intervened between publication and the probable completion of composition (“no later than autumn, 1603”). When you add now the fishy datum that only Oxford among the ten eulogists was surely dead in 1605, you have fashioned a lure too attractive for your ichthyous investigator to have refrained from gulping down.

Nevertheless I continue to trust in a portion of the theory presented in the “Du

Bartas” article: that publication of *Divine Weeks* was delayed until Oxford passed from the scene; for, whoever had written the “E. L. Oxon.” eulogy, its substance remained unchanged; it was still *about* Oxford, as elucidated in the 1997 “Du Bartas” article.

Indeed, before the momentous Hannas

### *Iosua Silvester Anagr: Verè Os Salustij.*

**O** STA SILVESTER nostro cur Ore uctaris?  
An quod in Ore feras Mel: quod in Aure Mel: os?  
An quod BARTASSI faciem dum pingis et ORA,  
ORATui pariter quelibet ora colit?  
Nempelicit duram prae te fers nomine SILVAM,  
Siluas et saebras carmina nulla tenent:  
Sed quod Atheniarum COR, dux Salaminius olim  
Dixit, Inest libris Osq; vigorq; tuis.  
Ergo Os esto alijs, mihi Suadæ LINGVA videris;  
Musiset Phæbocharus QCELLVS eris.

Ad Gallum de Bartassio iam toto Anglice donato.  
Quod Gallus factus modo sit, mirare, Britannus  
Galle: novum videas, nec tamen inuideas:  
Silvester vester, nofter Bartassius; ambo  
Laude quidem gemina digni ut et ambo pari.

In detraçtores ad Authorem.  
Taceat malevolum Os male strepentis Zoili;  
Monstrum bilingue, septuplex Hydra caput:  
Dum Septimanam septies fas flam canis,  
Te Septimana septies fasstum facit  
Quævis, nec ulla delet Iosuiam Dies.  
Nempe ORE fari Vera si licet meo,  
Os ipse VBRB diceris: SALUSTII;  
Qui si impetaris dentibus mordentibus  
Impurioris ORIS, ædæ Theon  
Os non carere dentibus sciat tuum.

E. L. Oxon.

The original “E.L. Oxon.” dedicatory poem, as it appeared in the 1605 edition of *Divine Weeks*. The abundance of prominent letter “O’s,” and the two prominent uses of “Vere” are unmistakable.

dispatch, I had begun to drift away from the presumptive certainty that Oxford was the author, and to look with increasing favor upon Ben Jonson, whose Latin skills would have been adequate to the task and whose machinating influence, as examined in “Enter Ben Jonson” (*Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Fall 1997/Winter 1998), flagged him as a natural candidate—or suspect, if you prefer.

The notion of Oxford’s composing the Sylvester eulogy at the end of his days in a despairing attempt to sustain a connection to the works of “Shakespeare” across le pont Du Bartas-Sylvester possessed strong pathetic appeal. However, the mundane reality of a Lapworth authorship may actually prove more productive of scholarly advancement toward the resolution of “Who was Shakespeare?” At bare minimum, the contents of the “Oxon.” eulogy demonstrate that Lapworth was one more member of the clerisy privy to, and if he wrote it, subtly alluding in the “Oxon.” eulogy to a literary cover-up involving De Vere. And Jonson. I add Jonson because I take him to be “R.R.,” and because R.R.’s eulogy in the 1611 *Divine Weeks* looks back to Lapworth’s “Oxon.” eulogy in the 1605 *Divine Weeks*.

I should like to take another look at the authorial designator “E. L. Oxon.” which Hannas treats at some relative length on page eleven. (The spirit of W. C. Fields is alive in “authorial designator” because I do not confide in the absolute good faith of “E. L. Oxon.”)

Of the thirteen poems attributed to Lapworth in the *DNB*, the six that Hannas has seen are unambiguous in showing Lapworth to be their author. However, “E. L. Oxon.” as representative of Edward Lapworth is ambiguous. Very ambiguous, when we stop to consider that the Latin portion of the eulogy begins with *Vere* in the heading anagram and ends with “Oxon.” in the authorial designator. The feasible reading of “Oxon.” is that it abbreviates the toney Latinate form of the name of that university town—Oxonia. *Oxford. Vere ... Oxford.*

Without having seen the remaining seven poems, we can nevertheless make certain projections. An “E. L. Oxon.” (*ELO*) attached to a Lapworth poem that precedes the 1605 *ELO* will tend to drain the latter of significance, just another way of saying, “by me, Edward.” If the 1605 *ELO* is the first of two or more *ELO* signings of Lapworth literary works, it may have significance. If the 1605 *ELO* is the only *ELO*, then we really have something: a potential deniability of authorship that nicely parallels and buttresses the deniability present in the two instances of *Vere* in the



1605 *ELO*. In a tight spot, one can swear on a stack of Geneva Bibles that *Vere* always means “truly,” never means “[De] Vere.” (A laughing-place of loopholes, the “Oxon.” eulogy is also a virtuosity of weasel wording, hence my initial inclination to assign it to the Prince of Weasel Worders, Ben Jon-

son. Then again, whose decision was it to identify Edward Lapworth in precisely that way—E. L. Oxon.?)

In his final paragraph Hannas discusses the two VERES of the “Oxon.” eulogy: the one in the heading anagram and the one in line 21. First, line 21, and the two possible

interpretations of the line as he has them: “You yourself TRULY are called the voice of Salust” or “You Yourself, VERE, are called the voice of Salust.” Hannas suggests to the reader that “such usages could be merely coincidental.” Yet it seems to me that his conclusion is much too diffident for the

(Continued on page 24)

To the Editor:

Though long an enthusiast for Oxford’s authorship of “Iosua Sylvester Anagr: Vere Os Salustii”, with “E. L. Oxon.” possibly standing posthumously for “Edward Lord Oxenford,” I now believe the author far more likely to be, from the entry I recently found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, “physician and Latin poet” Edward Lapworth (1574-1636), of Oxford University, master of Magdalen College School (1598-1610). According to the *DNB*, “Lapworth contributed [Latin] verses to a variety of books. Bloxam gives a list of thirteen, including the Oxford verses on Elizabeth’s death, James’s accession, and those of Magdalen College on Prince Henry and William, son of Arthur, lord Grey de Wilton, as well as John Davies’s ‘Microcosmos,’ and the ‘Ultima Linea Savilii,’ 1622. To these must be added lines in Joshua Sylvester’s *Du Bartas, his Devine Weekes and Workes*, 1605....” Charles Lethbridge Kingsford wrote the *DNB* entry.

At this writing, I have seen via microfilm six of the poems by Lapworth listed in the *DNB* (on Elizabeth, on James, on Henry, on Grey, to Davies, and to physician Edward Jordan, with some seven, not listed, still to be found). The bearing of the six on the authorship of the “E. L. Oxon.” poem is, in my view, mixed, though on balance favoring Lapworth.

Mildly against Lapworth’s authorship are his names below the six poems, all of which have the name “Lapworth” in full, preceded by “Ed.” or in one instance “Edoardus.” In three, his residence at Magdalen College appears, but never as “Oxon.” One should keep in mind that none of De Vere’s poems has “E. L. Oxon.,” either (typically “E. O.,” or “Earl of Oxenford,” with “E. of Ox.” in *Brittons Bowre of Delights*, 1591, the closest to the Sylvester designation). To use the latter against Lapworth is to argue equally against De Vere. Yet thus far I haven’t found another, corroborative, “E. L. Oxon.”

In structure, style, and theme, four of the six compare neutrally with the Sylvester piece, neither for nor against, at least on initial survey (no anagrams). The verses to Davies (1603) do, however, show punning skeins of the sort to Sylvester (e.g., ‘parvum-mundum-magnum-parvum-mundum-immundi- munda; munda-

minuta-minuta-mirum-modum; occidentem-gentem-orbem-orbis; orbis-fronte-antipodes-oriens-occiduum’), as well as the use of iambic-trimeter and elegiac-couplet verse-forms, the same two meters used by “E. L. Oxon.” to Sylvester. Moreover, the closing couplet of Lapworth’s elegy on the death of Queen Elizabeth bears striking similarity to the last three lines by “E. L. Oxon.”:

On Elizabeth (1603):

At si quis rigido mea carmina vulneret ungue,  
Ne laceret caveat Nomen (Elisa) Tuum.

But if anyone should wound my verses with  
jagged nail,

Let him beware not to tear Your Name  
(Elisa).

On Sylvester’s detractors (1605):

Qui si impetaris dentibus mordentibus  
Impurioris Oris, atheos Theon  
Os non carere dentibus sciat tuum.

Who if you should be attacked by biting  
teeth

Of a fouler Mouth, let the godless of gods  
know that your mouth lacks not teeth.

Not only are the grammatical constructions virtually identical (less-vivid subjunctive “if ... should” clauses concluded by jussive subjunctive “let” clauses); their imagery—of critics’ teeth attacking and nails wounding poems, mirrored by admonitory ‘last words’ to such critics—seems more than coincidentally alike. When the “tuum” (“your”) ending each poem is noted, the likelihood that the “Ed. Lapworth” writing the former is the “E. L.” writing, within two years, the latter seems to me quite strong.

(In passing, here I should note, among the tributes from Oxford University both to Elizabeth and to James, another candidate for “E. L. Oxon.,” “Edmundus Lilius” or “Edw. Lillius” [? Edmund Lily / ? Edward Lilly], theologian and Master of Balliol College, and apparently a chaplain to the Queen. His tributes, second and third, respectively, in the volumes, are magisterially official, piously devoid of anything resem-

bling, even in grammar, the tooth- and-nail anxiety over critics in the examples above—very unlikely the Sylvester-poet, despite the initials and university.)

Further, the presence, among the poems of 1605 to Sylvester, of one by John Davies of Hereford, for whose 1603 *Microcosmos* Lapworth had written verses and in whose “Scourge of Folly” (ca. 1610) Davies would include a complimentary epigram “To my deere friend Mr. Edward Lapworth, in Oxon.,” lends (even ignoring the “Oxon.”) some support-by-association to Lapworth. (Likewise in “Scourge,” Davies has an epigram to Charles Fitzgeffrey, [Broadgates Hall, Oxford] and one to Samuel Daniel [Magdalen Hall, Oxford] both of whom contributed verses to Sylvester in 1605, suggesting a group mutually aspiring, if not admiring.)

If Lapworth is the author, one nevertheless is puzzled, if not the more so, by the “Vere Os Salustii” anagram, as well as by the conspicuously printed and grammatically ambiguous “VERE” in the line, “Os ipse VERE diceris SALUSTII,” (“You yourself TRULY are called the voice of Salust” or “You yourself, VERE, are called the voice of Salust”). While such usages could be merely coincidental, Lapworth’s authorship by itself would not preclude—and might even clarify—praise written to “you,” Sylvester, but squinting at “you,” de Vere. Of interest in such a possibility is again Davies (? 1565-1618), who seems to have tutored at Magdalen College (*DNB*), for it is of course his “Scourge of Folly” which contains the epigram “To our English Terence, Mr. Will. Shake-speare.” If “E. L. Oxon.” was Lapworth, which I favor, perhaps Davies was his link to de Vere, if such knowledge indeed was intended in the poem to Sylvester.

**Addendum (March 22, 1998):** I have now seen an additional eight poems, all in encomial works from Oxford University (1613-1633), all by “Ed. Lapworth”; none has “E.L.” or “Oxon.” (Many thanks go to John Rollett, who had also suggested “Oxon.” as the University, for locating John Rouse Bloxam’s complete list.) Seven poems stand neutrally, but the last two couplets of Lapworth’s eulogy on the scholar Henry Savile, 1622, twice use the same subjunctive construction as that, described above, closing his elegy on Elizabeth and the dedication to Sylvester. Lapworth remains my choice.

Andrew Hannas



# A London Visitor's Homage to Edward de Vere

by Keith D. Jewell

I arrived in London early last September, just two days after the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales. The city was enshrouded in grief. I concluded my business as quickly as possible and, on the following Friday, witnessed the funeral cortege near its starting point at Kensington Palace. Diana, as most Society members are aware, was a direct descendant of the de Vere family.

During this time, I made two "pilgrimages" outside central London to deepen my understanding of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford and the times in

which he lived. The first was to Hedingham Castle, the hereditary home of the de Veres, and the 17th Earl's birthplace. The second was to the London suburb of Hackney, and the presumed burial place of de Vere, at St. Augustine's.

Both sites are within an hour's train ride from the West End and easily reached via underground and surface rail. I have provided specific travel instructions below for those planning a visit to England.

## Castle Hedingham

Edward de Vere's birthplace, Castle Hedingham, is located just outside the town of Braintree, in the county of Essex. The castle is a great rectangular tower built on a commanding, grassy hilltop about the size of a football field. The trees that stand today at the perimeter of the hill and in the park below were planted in 1719, when Hedingham gave up all pretense of being a military fortification and became a gentleman's residence. The park provides ample space for visitors' cars.

Considered among the most magnificent and best preserved Norman keeps in

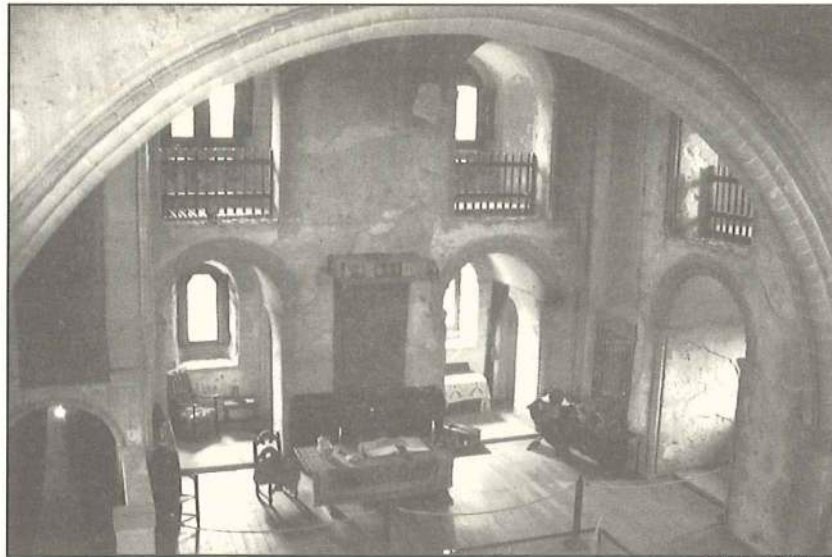


Photo by Keith Jewell

*The Great Hall in Castle Hedingham. The current owner of the property, Thomas Lindsay, told the author that "he preferred not to attract visitors" to the Castle until the authorship case is proven or otherwise.*

Europe, Hedingham was built by Aubrey de Vere II, father of the 1st Earl of Oxford, in about 1140. The walls of the keep are immensely strong, twelve feet thick at the base and ten feet at the top. Hedingham is completely faced with stone brought from Northamptonshire. Very few Norman castles were completely faced because of the cost of construction, but there were few nobles as rich and powerful as the de Veres.

The castle is approached from the east by a beautiful Tudor bridge built by John de Vere, the 13th Earl of Oxford, in 1496. This spans a moat, now dry, and must have replaced the original drawbridge. Just outside the main door to the castle is a roofless chamber formerly used as a dungeon. It is thought that the unlucky prisoners were lowered into this dark and gloomy hole through a trapdoor in the ceiling.

The entrance to the keep is on the first floor, rather than the ground floor, another precaution against attack. Now occupied by a very pleasant tea shop and bookstore, this was the garrison room. The soldiers lived here, the armorer had his forge here and the cooking was also done on this level. You can imagine the noise and activity that went on!

To reach the upper levels one ascends a spiral staircase thirteen feet wide in circumference and beautifully constructed around a central column. The staircase ascends in a clockwise direction to allow the defending soldiers to have their right hands free to wield their swords as they descended against an enemy. In fact, Castle Hedingham was besieged at least once in its history.

The next floor, the Banqueting Hall, is by far the most splendid room in the castle. The timbered ceiling rises twenty feet and is supported by a magnificent central arch

twenty-eight feet wide. The well-done guidebook, available in the ground floor bookshop, describes this as the largest Norman arch in Europe. The Banqueting, or Great, Hall was used for entertaining, giving audiences, and served as principal office area for the earls of Oxford.

A gallery, twelve feet high, runs around the entire Hall. This was where the minstrels and troubadours played and was used as a spectators' gallery. As I stood in the Great Hall I could imagine young Edward de Vere seated with his parents at the head table in front of the fire, the walls richly decorated with fine hangings and the entire scene bathed in warm, flickering light from tallow candles. I imagined, too, the young Queen Elizabeth seated there as guest of honor on her one recorded visit to Hedingham, in 1561, when Edward was just eleven.

The next, and final, story is the dormitory floor. This space, now completely bare, was originally divided by rugs and hangings to give some modicum of privacy. Most people we are told, slept on straw on the floor, but the lord and his family had simple wooden beds and their own sleeping alcove. This room, above all, presents the



harsh realities of medieval and Tudor life. I suspect that one of today's maximum security prisons would be in a state of riot if inmates were forced to live in conditions considered fit for lords and ladies in medieval and Tudor times.

In 1592, Lord Burghley made a survey of the property. From this it is known that several important Tudor buildings were built by the 13th Earl. These have long since been razed. Some of the materials from these buildings were probably reused in the fine brick mansion house that now stands across the moat bridge from the castle.

Luckily, as I was leaving Castle Hedingham, I ran into the present owner, the Hon. Thomas Lindsay, a distinguished designer. Mr. Lindsay answered my questions most courteously. After I identified myself as a member of the Shakespeare Oxford Society he mentioned that both he and his wife have de Vere blood. I commented that there was relatively little evidence of the Shakespeare/Oxford controversy in the bookstore selections (just one book on the controversy) or in the historical exhibits on the ground floor.

Mr. Lindsay indicated that he preferred not to attract visitors on this basis until the case is proven or otherwise. I replied that I respected his decision very much but also expected that some day there would be a flood of visitors to see the undisputed birthplace and youthful home of the true "William Shakespeare."

### St. Augustine's in Hackney

My second "pilgrimage" was to the probable burial place of Edward de Vere, in 1604. It lies in the northeast London borough of Hackney. Removed from the smells and unhealthiness of central London, Hackney was regarded from the 16th century onward as the perfect country retreat for rich merchants and courtiers. Indeed, Sutton House, on Homerton High Street, now a museum open to the public, was built in 1535 for Henry VIII's principal secretary of state. I spent a very enjoyable hour going through Sutton House and highly recommend a visit.

In the 17th century Hackney was famous for its many schools. There were so many girls' boarding schools that Hackney was dubbed the "Ladies University of Fe-

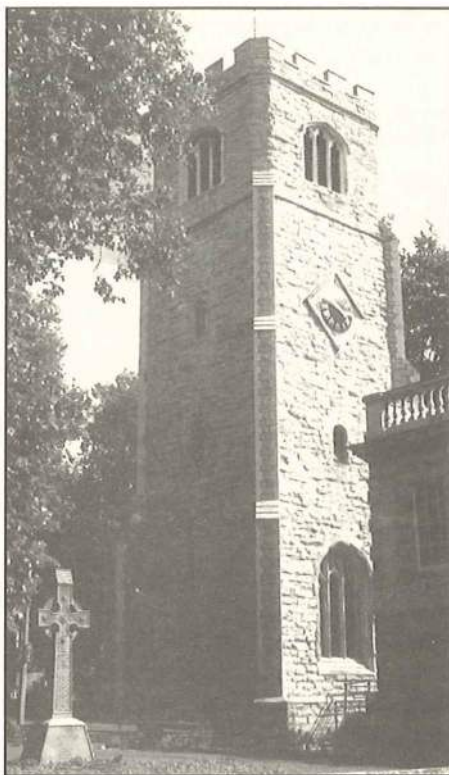


Photo by Keith Jewell

*All that remains of St. Augustine's Church in Hackney is the Bell Tower, located in a park now surrounded by such modern landmarks as a McDonalds.*

male Arts." Samuel Pepys records attending church in Hackney simply in order to admire the young ladies. Modern Hackney, it must be admitted, now appears to have lost much of its original luster and is a working class suburb.

By the end of the 13th century there was a church in Hackney dedicated to St. Augustine. It is commonly supposed that it was built by the Knights Templar, the order of military monks who defended Jerusalem during the crusades. Certainly, they had extensive landholdings in Hackney until they were suppressed in 1308 and their properties were acquired by the Knights of St. John. The original St. Augustine's Church was demolished at the end of the 18th century, but the original church tower survived. The new church, named St. John at Hackney, was built a quarter mile away.

When I got off the train at Hackney I immediately began asking for "St. Augustine's." I enquired at St. John's Church, at the Hackney police station, and in a pub. Nobody had heard of "St.

Augustine's" but everybody was polite, and probably used to Yank tourists asking peculiar questions. My frustration remained even after refreshing myself with a pint of the local bitter because I remembered the photograph and name from Charlton Ogburn's great work, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. Fortunately, as I was returning to the train station by way of a beautiful and very green park, I suddenly recognized the tower of St. Augustine's through the trees. It is no longer associated with a church, perhaps accounting for its lack of local recognition. The tower has been kept in very good repair and has a working clock on its face, a late addition. A very modern addition, a McDonalds, is directly across the street.

The lovely park behind the bell tower was once occupied by the original St. Augustine's church and cemetery. It might, therefore, be the final resting place of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. There are just a few 19th century gravestones at the far end of the park but no visible evidence of burials in his era. Will this obscure park in a London suburb become someday one of the most hallowed shrines in all of England?

As I waited for my train I discovered, somewhat to my chagrin, that St. Augustine's tower is easily visible from the train station platform and barely 200 yards away from the starting point of my search.

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For visitors to London and environs, here are some travel directions to reach Hedingham and Hackney:

### Castle Hedingham:

Take the Central Circle or Bakerloo tube line to Liverpool Street Station. Buy a British Rail ticket to Braintree, an hour's trip. From Braintree Station take a cab (rather pricy), or instead walk to the nearby Hedingham Omnibus Terminal and take a Castle bus.

### Hackney:

Take the Victoria Line tube north to Highbury & Islington Station. Go upstairs to British Rail and take the surface train to "Hackney Station," just three stops away.



## Oxfordian News

### Oxfordians at SAA in Cleveland; De Vere Society Meets in London

#### California

Former Society trustee Sally Mosher will include William Byrd's *The Earl of Oxford* march in two of her spring performances.

On May 9th she will present a lecture/recital of English Renaissance music for the annual Renaissance Conference of Southern California at the Huntington Library, 1151 Oxford Road, **San Marino**. Mosher will discuss the relationship between Byrd and his patron Oxford in the context of patronage at the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts. She will perform some of the finest and best known keyboard pieces of the period. Attendance is limited to those registered for the Conference; registrations will be accepted at the door.

On June 10th she will present a harpsichord recital as part of the biennial Berkeley Festival & Exhibition at Music Sources (1000 The Alameda at Marin, **Berkeley**). This program will feature both English Renaissance music and Mosher's own compositions. Call (510) 528-1685 for more information.

#### Ohio

A small contingent of Oxfordians and non-Stratfordians spent three days mixing with the Shakespeare establishment at its annual conference in **Cleveland** during the third week of March. They renewed old acquaintances and made new friends while gently pressing for a free and open inquiry into the authorship question in academia.

The Oxfordian challenge came up at least twice during the proceedings of the 26th annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, attended by about seven hundred professors.

In one session a professor suggested that Shakespeare is coming to stand for all early English authors as they are pushed out of the curriculum by modern concerns of gender, class and deconstruction. We know so little about Shakespeare himself, she said, that he is not associated with any particular point of view, and indeed the Oxfordians and others try to prove that he was not even the author of Shakespeare's works.

Professor Alan Nelson of the University of California at Berkeley, well-known to

Oxfordian scholars for his archival work on Edward de Vere (while arguing against him as the author), delivered a paper on Humphrey Dyson and his library. He seemed at one point to argue that Dyson, like Shakespeare of Stratford, had an illiterate father and wife; worked with Oxford's associate, Anthony Munday; and yet fully accepted *Troilus and Cressida* as by William Shakespeare.

One of the small-group seminars brought together two of the leading editors of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*—Professors Katherine Duncan-Jones of Oxford University and Helen Vendler of Harvard (A review of their editions can be found on pages 18-19). Among the questions discussed were whether the ending of *Venus and Adonis* was tragic or merely pathetic, and whether Lucrece's suicide is the ultimate expression of revenge.

At the close of the seminar the hidden meaning of the dedication to the *Sonnets* was put on the table. A professor distributed photocopies of the dedication page and tried to elicit a group discovery of its hidden meaning. She noted its hourglass shape and suggested that the letters, like grains of sand, could flow from the top to the bottom. Time was running out, however, and she did not get a chance to explain her theory to everyone's satisfaction. Many left the room mystified (See page three for an alternative theory on the dedication).

Before the seminar began Professor Duncan-Jones had sought out Diana Price of Cleveland to compliment her on her article regarding Dugdale's sketch and Hollar's engraving of the monument at the Stratford church. (Price's paper was reviewed in the Fall 1997/Winter 1998 *Newsletter*).

Other Oxfordians and non-Stratfordians at the conference were John Price Jr. and Richard Whalen, past presidents of the Shakespeare Oxford Society; Gerald Downs of Redondo Beach CA, who discussed his work on the *King Lear* texts with leading scholars; Roger Parrish of Hayesville OH; and Pat Dooley of Cleveland. The book exhibit included Oxfordian books by society members Felicia Londre, Joseph Sobran and Whalen. Featured at the opening reception was a wind ensemble led by a society member, Dr. Ross W. Duffin of Shaker Heights OH, who has also presented on Oxfordian matters musical at society conferences.

#### England

The Annual Meeting of the De Vere Society took place in **London** during the first weekend in February. DVS member Derran Charlton wrote to us that nearly half the current members of the DVS attended, including Society patron Sir Derek Jacobi. SOS member Gerit Quealy from New York was also in attendance.

Special events at this year's DVS meeting included a performance of a new Oxfordian play (*Edward de Vere*, by Elizabeth Imlay), and a tour of the Globe theatre, which included an hour's informal discussion with Artistic Director Mark Rylance.

Among the talks given this year was one by John Rollett on his work on the *Sonnets* Dedication, and one by Arthur Challinor, author of *The Alternative Shakespeare* (under the pseudonym Arthur Maltby).

**The Globe in London**, a replica of the Elizabethan theater, has invited Felicia Hardison Londre, former trustee of the Shakespeare Oxford Society, to lecture to visiting teachers in July, with one of the lectures to be on the case for Oxford as the true author of the works of Shakespeare.

Londre, who is curators' professor of theater at the University of Missouri, will be one of the faculty at the second annual workshop, "Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance." The workshop draws drama and English teachers from all over the world. Londre will also give lectures on "Shakespeare and the 1990s Culture Wars," using *The Merchant of Venice* in her discussion of the perceived or actual anti-Semitism in the play and its effect on modern productions.

Authorship issues are not new to the new Globe, which opened last year. Its first artistic director, Mark Rylance is a young actor and director who has stated that he does not consider Will Shaksper of Stratford to be the author of Shakespeare's works.

Londre will also take the authorship issue to the world congress of the International Federation for Theatre Research, which is meeting in Canterbury in July. Her lecture there on the culture wars of the 1990s will also include the case for Oxford as the true author. Londre is one of several society members who are introducing the authorship issue to their fellow professors in academia at conferences. She also speaks to



general audiences, most recently in December to a church-sponsored forum in Kansas City, Missouri, where she lives and teaches. Her latest book is a collection of essays on *Love's Labour's Lost* (1997, Garland).

## Germany

SOS Vice President Aaron Tatum visited with German Oxfordian and co-editor of the *Neus Shake-Speare Journal* Robert Detobel in January while visiting his wife's family in **Munich**. Detobel, a resident of Frankfurt and a professional translator, brought hundreds of pages with him for an all-day meeting.

He told Tatum about several projects he has been working on in the Frankfurt library, including ones involving copies from Robert Greene's *Mamillia*, *The Second Part* and Harvey's *Speculum Tuscanismi* (the longer version published in his letter-book), a Burghley letter to Walsingham that he's never seen quoted by Oxfordians, and material from the calendar of state papers in 1599 involving testimony from a spy who drew out John Pole, a follower of the Stanleys.

The Greene project, Detobel maintains, shows that there was cooperation between de Vere and Greene as a repartee to Harvey's libel. A parody exists there, he believes, on Harvey's *Speculum*.

Burghley's letter, dated five days before Oxford received his annuity, adds to Ward's theory that it was Walsingham who managed the formation of the Queen's Men in 1583.

The state papers provide a bit of testimony from Pole who, while ensconced in Newgate, said that "the Queen wooed the Earl of Oxford, but he would not fall in." The statement was given on 25 July 1587.

Among his other projects are a paper aiming to prove that the author of *The Merchant of Venice* can only have been the Lord Chamberlain (Hunsdon or, as expected, Oxford), and work on Nashe and "apis lapis," and "The Importance of Being Honest," which appeared in the *Neus Shake-Speare Journal* as of late last year.

He has provided Tatum with electronic copies of all his work, which he says can be shared with any willing researchers. Interested parties should contact Tatum directly.

The German Oxfordian contingent is quite enthusiastic and energetic, reports Tatum. A television program will be filmed later this year for Swiss, Austrian and German TV stations, and there is some interest again from Germany's second largest magazine, *Focus*, in doing an authorship article later this year.

## Notes from the Debate Trail:

# Sonnets are Stratfordian Achilles' heel

by Joseph Sobran

The *Sonnets* are the only work by "Shakespeare" that give the immediate impression of being directly autobiographical. The plays may contain some autobiographical elements, but their form is predominantly fictional.

Only in the *Sonnets* does the poet speak in the first person. His complaints about his "fortune" sound real; so do many details, such as his passing references to his "lame-ness."

Moreover, the *Sonnets* lack the form and style of Shakespearean fiction: they have no exposition, development, or characterization. The first 126 are addressed to a young man who is expected to understand the poet's complaints and allusions, which the context doesn't explain and which are consequently opaque to other readers.

There is only one reason to think the *Sonnets* are "fictional": if we take them as autobiography, they don't match what we know of their supposed author's life.

The poet says he is "old," "lame," and "in disgrace." He is a public figure of sorts, the subject of "vulgar scandal." His life and fortune are on the wane; he hopes that his "name" will be "buried" with his body. His fondness for legal terms and metaphors also suggests that he has been trained in the law.

None of this can be shown to square with the records of "William Shakespeare of Stratford" and much of it contradicts those records. Most of the *Sonnets* were evidently written before 1603, the likely date of Sonnet 107, and two were published in *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599. One of these two describes the poet as "old," his days "past the best," though in 1599 William was only 35 (and the sonnet was probably written several years earlier).

Moreover, William was never a figure of "vulgar scandal." During the 1590s he was prospering, both in London and in Stratford. He would have had no reason to wish his name "buried": if he were the author of the popular and highly praised poems bearing his name, such a wish would be inexplicable, especially when he expects his "verse" to be "immortal."

Who was the young man to whom the first 126 sonnets speak? He closely resembles Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, a young, handsome, highly

eligible bachelor. The first seventeen sonnets urge the young man to beget an heir in the same peculiar terms as Venus urges Adonis to procreate in *Venus and Adonis*, the first published work by "William Shakespeare," dedicated to Southampton in 1593.

At the time, Southampton was being pressured by Lord Burghley to marry Elizabeth Vere, Burghley's granddaughter and the daughter of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. Only if Oxford was the poet can we make sense of such lines as this one in 10: "Make thee another self, for love of me." No common poet could have taken such liberties with a nobleman.

The simplest explanation is that Southampton was the young man. If so, the case for Oxford's authorship is greatly strengthened.

Oxford, past 40 when the Southampton match was being pressed, was aging and in disgrace. His letters mention several ailments, and in one he wrote to Burghley in 1595 he speaks of himself as "a lame man." He had also been trained in law at the Inns of Court.

Read without prejudice — that is, without prior assumptions about their authorship — the *Sonnets* confirm that Southampton was the young man, as even many of William's partisans have agreed. This, along with the poet's self-description, supports the belief that Oxford wrote them.

Such, in brief, is the case I made for Oxford in my book *Alias Shakespeare* and in subsequent exchanges and debates with Stratfordian reviewers and scholars. This was the most original and distinctive part of my book; I devoted two chapters to it. (I also argued a thesis many of Oxford's partisans reject: that after the proposed marriage fell through, Oxford and Southampton had a long homosexual amour.)

I was surprised by the Stratfordian response. Not one of the hostile reviews even tried to argue that the *Sonnets* support William's claim to authorship.

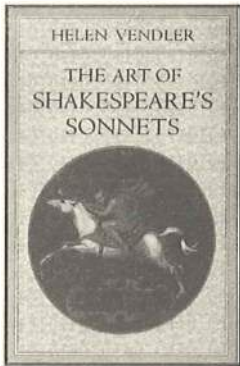
The chief arguments were old ones, addressed not only in my book itself but long since answered by earlier Oxfordians: Oxford died too soon to have written the later plays, too many people would have to have been fooled, and Stratford had one hell of a grammar school. But nobody wanted to

(Continued on page 22)



*Column*  
**The Paradigm Shift**  
 by Mark K. Anderson

## The Art of *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*



*Vendler's Art*

A few years ago, I interviewed a feminist scholar who always kept extra soft-soled shoes at hand when she watched TV. That way, she said, she always had retaliatory options within reach whenever something or someone particularly annoying or offensive appeared on her set.

Undoubtedly, throwing footwear at one's television may not be the ideal means to achieve positive social change. But there is one advantage to her system for those of us who haven't yet embraced television's interactive future. Namely, she at least has the opportunity to vent, while the rest of us are merely left to stew.

In the time since our interview, I can't say that I've adopted the cultural studies professor's unusual video viewing policy. But I do sometimes think of her when the image of, say, Sen. Jesse Helms or Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas appears on the evening news. (A few times I've been tempted to shout, "Duck!" to the unsuspecting newscaster in the line of fire.)

There is at least one subject, though, where one's natural desire to search for the truth—whatever it may be—combined with the shamelessness and chicanery of the field's many expertise-dispensing professionals occasionally has me reaching for the nearest unused sneaker or bedroom slipper.

Indeed, witnessing the recent critical fawning over Prof. Helen Vendler (whom *The New York Times* has called the "enemy of seeking moral messages or biographical allusions in poetry") and her 1997 tome célèbre *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* can be summarized for me in four words: My countenance shakes shoes.

The problem is, for those who haven't

yet bothered to explore Vendler's tangled web, pursuing her many critical pronouncements and pontifications can be downright exhausting. (And for the present essay, I'll only be considering her introductory remarks and not her equally audacious commentary on the individual sonnets.) I ran out of footwear in the section "Conventions of Reference." That's before the Introduction, even. When the pages are still counted in roman numerals.

As Hotspur might say: 'Zounds!

Vendler begins her critical journey into the author's poetic memoirs with an observation:

"Though many of the Sonnets play (often in blasphemous or subversive ways) with ideas central to their culture, I assume that a poem is not an essay, and that its paraphrasable propositional content is merely the jumping-off place for its real work. As I say in my Introduction, I do not regard as literary criticism any set of remarks about a poem which would be equally true of its paraphrasable propositional content." (xiii)

Thus, in two sentences, she has effectively shut off any discussion of thematic meaning, let alone authorial self-revelation. To suggest that the latter can be found anywhere in the *Sonnets* is, to Vendler's estimation, preposterous. Or at least it's beneath those who appreciate Art with a capital "A."

"Any treatment of the *Sonnets* that focuses chiefly on their themes loses almost all of their aesthetic richness," she alleges. (7)

The unspoken caveat, of course, is that the above is only true so long as one stands by the dewy banks of the Avon river, pondering the ripples and eddies as the poet surely must have done four centuries ago. However, once one steps away from Stratford and trusts the works rather than The Birthplace, the "aesthetic richness" that Prof. Vendler so doggedly pursues through 650 pages of charts, graphs, word

games and play-by-play analyses appears almost as a by-product. The art is there and in abundance. No weather maps or macro-economic diagrams are needed. Just a real, live author.

Curiously, as with another Lear-like Shaxperotician, Harold Bloom, Vendler is acutely aware of her own conundrum. And sometimes she's too damned astute for her own good.

One of the reasons she is recognized as such a penetrating and perceptive commentator on poetry is her remarkable ability to dissect a poem like a medical student with a cadaver. She finds the liver, kidneys and intestines with great skill and dexterity. She can probe the brain's functions, at least to the extent that one can learn about animate matter from the inanimate. But no matter how vast her knowledge of anatomy and no matter how swift she is with a scalpel, she still can't bring that corpus to life.

She admits as much, too, although I'm sure she'd never admit that she admits it. "A psychological view of the *Sonnets* (whether psychoanalytically oriented or not) stresses motivation, will and other characterological [sic] features, and above all needs a story on which to hang motivation," she writes in her Introduction. "The 'story' of the *Sonnets* continues to fascinate readers, but lyric is both more and less than story. And, in any case, the story of the *Sonnets* will always exhibit those 'gaps' and that 'indeterminacy' ... intrinsic to the sonnet sequence as a genre. A coherent psychological account of the *Sonnets* is what the *Sonnets* exist to frustrate." (3)

Not only does she have to state that her reading cannot bring a coherent narrative to the poems—an enterprise that generations of Shaxperoticians have only undertaken with marginal, if any, success—but she then hypothesizes without any justification that the author created his poetic series in part for the perverse purpose of confounding his readers! The motive of the author is unknowable, she says, because one of the author's overriding motives was to obfuscate his



motive.

"[I]t does no good to act as if these lyrics were either a novel or a documentary of a lived life," she asserts, again without reason or probable cause. (2)

As she does when she writes, "[C]ontent by itself (as it is usually defined) cannot possibly be the guide at work in determining the author's choice of words and syntactic features." (xiv)

Or when she states, "Lyric poetry, especially highly conventionalized lyric of the sort represented by the *Sonnets*, has almost no significant freight of 'meaning' at all, in our ordinary sense of the word." (13)

New York humorist Fran Lebowitz once described a certain well-heeled set of her friends from Southern California with the priceless four-word description, "Their tan is audible."

Well, if suntans can be carried across telephone wires, it's a small stretch to suppose the 12-point Garamond typeface that carries Vendler's pronouncements must have been blessed with a holy oil of critical incantations.

To mangle a phrase first uttered by Vendler's Shakespearean counterpart: Reason not the need; need not the reason.

### The Invisible Man

Concessions come in fancy packages in *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Vendler knows there's a storyline to be found uniting the sonnets and making them a single text, not 154 separate poetic exercises and quill-waggings. Here's the closest she comes to admitting as much, however:

"Still, there is a factual minimum account of Shakespeare's compositional acts in any given poem on which all readers of a text must agree." (14)

Untie the ribbon and unwrap the shiny paper, and you might have something to ponder. It's a sad commentary on the state of Shaxperotics today, however, that Vendler not only has to bury her admission, but she then goes nowhere with the observation.

Just as quickly as she reminds the reader that, yes, the author of the *Sonnets* may have actually been trying to convey something more than a series of disjointed musings, she returns to whittling the knotty dogwood of Stratford town. The reader is told again

and again about the "fictive speaker" of the Sonnets as if it were a fact of history, not the artful dodge that it has always been.

The extent that Vendler relies on the fictionality of the *Sonnets*' narrator, in fact, is in itself an admission: Try as she may to swat the pesky author away from his writings, he continues to leave his fingerprints everywhere. So, in the one work in the

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***"Not only does [Vendler] have to state that her reading cannot bring a coherent narrative to the poems ... but she then hypothesizes without any justification that the author created his poetic series in part for the perverse purpose of confounding his readers!"***

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***"The reader is told again and again about the 'fictive speaker' of the Sonnets as if it were a fact of history, not the artful dodge that it has always been."***

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Shakespeare canon where there are no fictional characters or mythological topoi to hide behind, she has to invent a fiction.

What's most frustrating of all is that she is so clearly adept at wielding her scalpel. Not for convenient evasions or unbecoming denials is she known today as perhaps the nation's most revered and even feared poetry critic. Yet convenient evasions and unbecoming denials would be my briefest paraphrase of the propositional content of *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*' Introduction.

Like her eloquent admonitions against seeking out storyline in the *Sonnets*, the fiction of the fictive speaker first appears

before the reader fully vested—and, of course, without any introduction—in the book's Conventions of Reference section.

"When I refer to 'Shakespeare,' I mean the author who invented the text spoken by the fictive speaker, and who structured and ornamented that text for his own aesthetic ends," she writes. "'Shakespeare' stands always in an ironic relation to the fictive speaker, since the written poem exists on a plane other than the temporal 'now' of the imagined speaker's moment." (xii-xiii)

That there's irony to be found in abundance is clear. But I'm not so sure it's the author of the Sonnets who's standing in ironic relation to the supposed fictive speaker. The author of *The Art* may be a more proximate source.

To Vendler's credit, she also quotes one of the most fluent critics of critics in literary history. A selection from Alexander Pope's letter to Joseph Addison, warning about the "underlying auxiliaries to the difficulty of work," begins her Introduction to *The Art*.

In his famous "Essay on Criticism," Pope deftly calls out for the ideal literary critic— as his age spelled it. The qualities he seeks highlight perfectly what is so lacking in the world of the Stratford paradigm today:

But where's the Man, who Counsel *can*  
bestow,  
Still *pleas'd* to teach, and yet not *proud* to  
know?  
Unbiass'd, or by Favour or by Spite;  
Not *dully prepossest*, nor *blindly right*;  
Tho' Learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred,  
sincere;  
Modestly bold, and Humanly severe?  
Who to a *Friend* his Faults can freely show,  
And gladly praise the Merit of a *Foe*?  
Blest with a *Taste* exact, yet unconfin'd;  
A *Knowledge* both of *Books* and *Human*  
*kind*;  
*Gen'rous Converse*; a *Soul* exempt from  
*Pride*;  
And *Love to Praise*, with *Reason* on his Side?

Where is she indeed?

"As I see it," Vendler writes, "the poet's duty is to create aesthetically convincing representations of feelings felt and thoughts thought." (16)

In Prof. Vendler's aesthetics, it appears to be the duty of the critic to deny those feelings and thoughts to the last syllable of recorded time.



# Book Reviews:

**Shakespeare's Sonnets.** Edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones. (Arden Shakespeare series, Thomson Pub. Co., 1997).

**The Sonnets.** Edited by G. Blakemore Evans. (The New Cambridge Shakespeare series, Cambridge University Press, 1996).

**The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets,** by Helen Vendler. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997).

## By Richard F. Whalen

Three new editions of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, each with elaborate commentary, compete for a reader's attention this year. All of them continue the long academic tradition of raising (but mostly not answering) the many questions posed by the *Sonnets* and their publication in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe.

The 154 sonnets, of course, are first and last the *Sonnets*, certainly the most accomplished, extended work of personal poetry ever written. They are to be read, re-read, pondered and memorized, as much for the extraordinary music of the language as for the impassioned yet controlled expression of intimate emotional experience. In the marketplace, they reportedly are Shakespeare's best seller.

Scholars, of course, have wrestled endlessly with the questions of textual analysis, autobiographical content and circumstances of publication: Are the sonnets autobiographical? Do they suggest the poet was bisexual? Who are the young man, the Dark Lady and the rival poet?

When were the sonnets written? Are they in the correct order? Were they published with Shakespeare's (i.e. the Stratford man's) knowledge? Were they pirated and then suppressed? What is the meaning of Thomas Thorpe's "dedication," and who was "Mr. W.H."?

## The Arden Edition

The new Arden edition, edited by Professor Katherine Duncan-Jones of Oxford, is perhaps the most useful and provocative of the three for Oxfordians. In her long introduction she indulges in highly specu-

lative ruminations about the author of the sonnets, their dating and their publication. She suggests that most of the sonnets were written between 1599 and 1604 (which happens to be the year of Oxford's death) and that Shakespeare revised them right up to their publication in 1609. She calls them "Jacobean sonnets." She is sure that the poet authorized their publication and that they are not so badly printed as many believe. The title, she says, strongly suggests that the sonnets are about Shakespeare as well as by him, but she offers no ideas about what they say about the man she conceives to be the author.

She builds a strong case for William Herbert, the third earl of Pembroke, as the "Mr. W.H." of the so-called dedication; "Mr." was appropriate because when the sonnets were first "begotten" he was not yet an earl, married or of age. She finds this role for Pembroke "overwhelmingly attractive" even as she believes that conclusive evidence for his friendship with Shakespeare is lacking. Of course, she is thinking of Will Shakspeare of Stratford, whereas Pembroke did have close ties to the seventeenth earl of Oxford.

At times Duncan-Jones seems to be reaching too hard to come up with new and challenging interpretations of the evidence about the sonnets. She speculates unabashedly and piles conjecture upon conjecture. On a single page she uses phrases such as: there is a remote possibility ... if this were the case ... might serve ... at least a possibility ... may or may not ... could have been ... if the sonnets ... it is possible, etc. After several more pages of this, any factual information or considered judgments tends to be swamped by the waves of speculation and back-pedaling.

The layout of the 485-page Arden edition is generous. The *Sonnets* are printed in modern type one to a page, with line-by-line commentary on the facing page. Unfortunately, the edition lacks an index of first lines. The edition also includes *A Lover's Complaint*, which was published with the *Sonnets*. Although Duncan-Jones recognizes questions about its authenticity, she sees the poem as a "carefully balanced thematic counterpart" to the sonnets.

## The New Cambridge Edition

The New Cambridge edition manages to be firmly evasive on the issue of autobiography. In the introduction Professor Anthony Hecht of Georgetown University quotes W.H. Auden on how "thought, emotion, event" dictate the form of a poem, and he argues that "the question of the documentary nature of the *Sonnets* is largely irrelevant." His reasoning is not clear, especially since he goes on to conclude that "we cannot fail to hear in them a voice of passion and intelligence." He hears this powerful voice expressing thoughts, emotions and events but nevertheless considers them irrelevant to an appreciation of the poetry. Also seemingly ambivalent about autobiography in the *Sonnets* is the edition's editor, Professor E. Blakemore Evans of Harvard, who is also co-editor of the *Riverside* collected works of Shakespeare. First he declares that such questions and speculations are "irrelevant and intrusive." Then he says students of Shakespeare must examine these questions and make it possible for readers to arrive at their own conclusions. Finally, he declares that "to some extent, of course, all significant art is autobiographical." In four paragraphs Evans manages to be immensely erudite and totally equivocal. He then addresses a series of questions about the *Sonnets* by saying: "If the *Sonnets* are to be read autobiographically..." Evans mentions Oxfordians in this regard and perhaps betrays his anxiety about the authorship issue by getting tangled in a semi-triple-negative sentence. As a result the sentence probably says the opposite of what he really meant it to say. He writes:

No critic with a conscience (unlike Baconians, Oxfordians, etc.) would now deny that such a Shakespeare signature is writ large in the *Sonnets*, as it is, of course in the plays and other poems.

With the negatives untangled, he's saying that critics with a conscience—unlike the Oxfordians, who have none—affirm that Shakespeare's signature is writ large in the *Sonnets*, plays and other poems. But Oxfordians of course are famous for finding the



poet/dramatist's signature, i.e. Oxford's, in his works. Unwittingly, Evans has aligned his esteemed critics with the Oxfordians.

Evans prints the *Sonnets* in modern type, two to a page. The commentary and line-by-line notes follow after the last sonnet. The reader who is interested in the notes for a sonnet must flip pages to find them. Each note begins by giving the gist of the sonnet's meaning, sometimes in a rather blunt and cursory way. An index of first lines is provided at the end of the 297-page edition.

Vendler on the Sonnets

Diagrams, matrices, and flow charts of key words are at the core of Helen Vendler's intricate analyses in *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. The Harvard professor, "arguably the most powerful poetry critic in America" according to *The New York Times*, takes to the ultimate extreme the proverbial "close reading" of poetry, a reading that excludes anything autobiographical about the poet. In a multi-page essay for each sonnet, she provides an abstract analysis of it as a "verbal contraption." She borrows the term from the poet W.H. Auden. Auden, however, raises a second and equally important question in the same passage—the "moral" question: "What kind of guy inhabits this poem?" Vendler simply dismisses his question as one of very little interest.

Her analyses, almost mathematical in their cold precision, seem to belabor the obvious and obsess about the linguistic details. The essays go on and on about grammar, syntax, rhyme schemes, orthographic variations, word repetition, word contrast, word echoes, even syllable echoes. Diagrams and charts illustrate relationships. She has invented a new term in critical analysis, the DEFECTIVE KEY WORD, which she capitalizes. This is a word that is significant because it is not in the poem; it is missing where one would expect to find it.

34

Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,  
And make me travel forth without my cloake,  
To let base cloudes o'ertake me in my way,  
Hiding thy brav'ry in their rotten smoke?  
Tis not enough that through the cloudes thou break,  
To dry the raine on my storm-beaten face,  
For no man well of such salutes can speake,  
That heales the wound, and cures not the disgrace:  
Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief;  
Though thou repent, yet I have still the losse:  
Th'offenders sorrow lends but weak relief  
To him that bears the strong offences losse.  
Ah, but those teares are pearle which thy love sheeds,  
And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.

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To let base cloudes o'ertake me in my way,  
Hiding thy brav'ry in their rotten smoke?  
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For no man well of such a salve can speak,  
That heals the wound, and cures not the disgrace:  
Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief;  
Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss:  
Th'offender's sorrow lends but weak relief  
To him that bears the strong offence's cross.  
Ah, but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,  
And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.

SONNET 34

Structure of Sonnet 34, Lines 7-14

| Metaphor                 | Line  |                   |        |        |            |          |       |           |
|--------------------------|-------|-------------------|--------|--------|------------|----------|-------|-----------|
|                          | 7     | 8                 | 9      | 10     | 11         | 12       | 13    | 14        |
| A. Medicine              | salve | heals wound cures | physic |        |            |          |       |           |
| B. Emotional pain        |       | disgrace          | grief  | loss   | relief     | hears    | tears |           |
| C. Religion              |       |                   | shame  | repent | sorrow     | cross    |       | ransom    |
| D. Sin / Ethical offence |       |                   |        |        | offender's | offences |       | ill deeds |
| E. Wealth                |       |                   |        |        |            |          | pearl | rich      |
| F. Love                  |       |                   |        |        |            |          | love  |           |

Prof. Vendler finds six metaphorical categories in lines 7-14 of Sonnet 34 (diagram above, one of two for Sonnet 34) and identifies what she calls an "interconcatenation" effect. In her book many sonnets are explained by means of various matrices, flow charts and diagrams. On the left is sonnet 34 as it appeared in the 1609 quarto, followed by a modern-type rendition by Vendler. All 154 sonnets are presented this way in *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

Certainly Shakespeare's genius with language deserves the reader's appreciation, and Vendler does offer some interesting observations here and there. In the end, however, the reader may be overwhelmed by the excessive emphasis on the "verbal contraptions" to the exclusion of any other reason to read poetry. For example, to find out what kind of guy wrote them, in what historical context he wrote them, and what he was trying to communicate.

Vendler's handsome tome comes complete with a compact disc on which she reads the sonnets. She says she has memorized all of them. She thinks other recordings by actors are deficient because the actors don't understand the words and syntax. Each sonnet is printed twice on a page; at the top is the original from the 1609 quarto and below is her modern-type version. She provides a long list of works consulted and an index of first lines. Her book received generally admiring reviews in major publications, although one reviewer, Professor Margaret Boerner of Villanova University, called it "astoundingly bad... in making the obvious arcane, elevating the banal, printing up lecture notes, and rabbitting on for nearly seven hundred pages."

Each editor of these three competing volumes carefully acknowledges debts to the others, or sometimes demurs, but ever so

gently, on one or more points of scholarship. Harvard professors Evans and Vendler each read the other's manuscript. Evans notes that she took time out from her own manuscript book to offer corrections to his, and Vendler calls his review of her manuscript "an act of extraordinary generosity." On the other hand, Evans demurs on evidence cited by Duncan-Jones describing Thorpe's actions as a publisher. He says it "remains necessarily speculative."

All three acknowledge debts, although sometimes qualified, to Professor Stephen Booth's ground-breaking edition of twenty years ago. Booth provides a lengthy line-by-line gloss for each sonnet in order, he says, to resurrect "a Renaissance reader's experience of the 1609 Quarto." He also wants to show "how the sonnets work." Like Vendler, he reproduces the sonnets from the Quarto and in modern type on facing pages; but he also reproduces full pages from the Quarto, which means some sonnets are broken and run from one page to the next. Although it was published two decades ago by the Yale University Press, Booth's edition is still in print. It's a good alternative to the Arden edition. And to lighten the load of solemn linguistic analysis, Booth occasionally shows a wry sense of self-deprecating humor.



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## From the Editor:

### The tactics of the authorship debate

Everyone who becomes involved in the great Shakespeare authorship debate sooner or later learns an important lesson: it is a battle, and a battle that must be fought over the long haul. And like any battle, it demands a consideration of tactics in how one proceeds.

As public awareness continues to increase about the authorship debate, so do the counterattacks from our friends in academe, and if the major media outlets ever do pick up on it, the first wave of coverage will be relentless attacks on our weaknesses rather than on addressing the fundamental problems of "why is Shakespeare's authorship questioned at all?" and "why is he the *only* author whose authenticity is questioned?"

In the past two years, we have seen the two most vexing issues about the debate come to the fore, and bring us again to this debate within the debate—tactics.

First, with the publication of Sobran's *Alias Shakespeare* the questions about the *Sonnets*, the Fair Youth and just who is the Earl of Southampton were given fresh life. Sobran's homosexual answer caused Charlton Ogburn to go publicly on the record that he had come to accept the controversial "royal heir" theory rather than a gay—or even a bisexual—Shakespeare/Oxford. This exchange illustrated both the clear disagreements about various authorship theories and the attendant debate about how publicly such disagreements should be aired.

And now in the last six months we have seen a flurry of stories that have in common the other issue that can so easily divide Oxfordians—ciphers and codes—and along with these stories the same tactical debate, i.e. should it be debated in public?

The ciphers/codes story is, of course, a search for an authorship smoking gun, with this gun carefully encoded in the works themselves—or in some cases, in monuments, inscriptions or other authors' works. Baconians lived—and perhaps died—by the search for ciphers and codes. Many Oxfordians want no part of repeating that history.

In putting together this issue of the newsletter, we found anew just what a "hot-button" issue this is. Recommendations ranged from full coverage to no coverage. But finally, we must say simply that news is news, and cover it we must.

We were fortunate to have Stephanie Hughes' article on secrecy in Elizabethan times on hand, since it aptly covers the larger picture that must be kept in mind about this issue. That larger picture being, of course, the unmistakable fact that this was a society *full of secrets*, and what talk there was of them *had to be* deliberately enigmatic, and even encoded in some manner.

So the several stories we have prepared for this issue provide the basics of what has been recently published, and we'll let our readers decide for themselves what it may mean or where it may lead.

## The Oxfordian

Two full years after we first promised to provide our members with a second Society publication, *The Oxfordian* is now about to become a reality.

Editor Stephanie Hughes has been hard at work since January of this year on the premier issue, which will be mailed to all members in late summer.

The role of *The Oxfordian* will be as the venue for the longer, more scholarly research articles that are regularly presented at our annual conference, and now also at

such conferences as the Edward de Vere Studies Conference.

The Board of Trustees will decide by the time of the first issue's mailing whether it can be provided in future years to all paid-up members as part of the current dues schedule, or whether to treat it separately with a special subscription rate for just those Society members who wish to receive it.

In any event, members should rest assured that the premier issue is on the way, and all current members will receive a copy.



## Letters:

To the Editor:

In his article "Enter Ben Jonson," (Fall 1997/Winter 1998 issue) James Fitzgerald overlooked a rich source for commentary in the fifth stanza of the "R. R." dedicatory poem:

As Camomile, the more you tread it downe,  
The more it springs: Vertue despihtfully  
Used, doth use the more to fructifie,

*King Henry IV*, Part I, Act II, scene iv,  
has Falstaff assuming the role of King Henry  
and admonishing his "son" Prince Hal:

Harry, I do not only marvel where thou  
spendest thy time, but also how thou art  
accompanied: 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.

Falstaff's words about camomile parody  
a line from one of John Lyly's *Euphues*  
books; so the source for "R. R.'s" camomile  
Euphuism could be either Shakespeare or  
Lyly or both. In Ben Jonson's *First Folio*  
commendation, "Lily" is named as one of the  
poets/playwrights outshone by Shake-  
speare. Lyly's *Euphues and His England*  
was dedicated to Oxford. Hence the "camo-  
mile" in "R. R.'s" verse can be seen as a  
further linkage to Ben Jonson, Shakespeare,  
and Oxford. Perhaps Mr. Fitzgerald or some-  
one else can tread on these lines fruitfully.

Fran Gidley  
Baytown, Texas  
18 February 1998

To the Editor:

I should like, if I may be permitted, to  
make two criticisms of James Fitzgerald's  
article, "Enter Ben Jonson."

I have some doubts about the interpre-  
tation of the parentheses. Mr. Fitzgerald  
declares, "If Ben Jonson, that stickler for  
correctness [elsewhere, I agree], is making  
an exacting use of the parentheses enclos-  
ing 'Shakespeare,' then he is providing in-  
formation complementary or ancillary.... If  
we can remove '(Shakespeare)' it cannot be  
the name of the addressee, as that would be  
essential information." Chettle, for example,  
and others made use of parentheses instead  
of commas in addresses or appositions.  
Among numerous examples, please ob-  
serve the following trenchant instance  
drawn from *Piers Plainness*:

and hast thou thus (false Celydon) requited  
all my good?

Second, Mr. Fitzgerald seems to have  
lightheartedly thrown away, or failed to  
notice, a most obvious connection between  
R.R. and Jonson's *Folio* verse. R.R. writes:

That all the Muses had their graces sowne  
In *Chaucers*, *Spensers*, and sweet *Daniels*  
Rimes;

(So good seemes best, where better is  
unknowne).

Jonson writes in the *First Folio*:

My *Shakespeare* rise; I will not lodge thee by  
*Chaucer*, or *Spenser*, or bid *Beaumont* lye  
A little further, to make thee a roome...

Apart from the substitution of Beau-  
mont for Daniel (each still alive in 1611), both  
phrases express the same thing: that  
Sylvester is the greatest in the same way as  
Shakespeare is the greatest. In the light of  
Jonson's assertion in the *First Folio*, I  
cannot think of it as pure laudatory conven-  
tion. The similarity of the two superlatives is  
just one more argument for Mr. Fitzgerald's  
identification of R.R. as Ben Jonson (writ-  
ing, in fact, about Shakespeare, not  
Sylvester).

Robert Detobel  
Frankfurt, Germany  
18 March 1998

To the Editor:

Joseph Sobran, in his book *Alias Shake-  
speare*, notes that in the years after Oxford's  
death in 1604, a number of plays suppos-  
edly by William Shakespeare were pub-  
lished in quarto form that scholars agree  
were not authored by Shakespeare. As  
listed in his book at pages 145-146 these  
include *The London Prodigal*, the *York-  
shire Tragedy*, and the *Troublesome Reign  
of King John*. Mr. Sobran notes that the  
litigious Mr. William Shaksper (as we will  
call him to distinguish him from the author)  
would have sued the publishers for misuse  
of his name, if he was in fact the playwright  
known as William Shakespeare.

But Mr. Sobran overlooks the more  
important point: the fact that Mr. Shaksper  
filed no suit indicates that he approved of  
the publications. Thus, he was allowing  
plays that he had not written to be pub-  
lished as if he had. This is direct evidence  
of the key element in the Oxford case: that  
Mr. Shaksper allowed his name to be used  
by other writers.

In fact, he may well have been involved  
in the publications of the spurious works;  
he may have held a financial interest in  
them. It would make sense that Mr.  
Shaksper, who up until then had acted as  
Oxford's conduit or play-broker, would  
seek to perpetuate his stream of income  
after Oxford's death, by passing off other  
plays under his name by other authors. He  
would not have cared who authored the  
plays that appeared under his name, so  
long as he stood to make financial gain.

(Continued on page 22)

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Letters (Continued from page 21)

It would be interesting for a scholar to compile a list of all works published as "William Shakespeare" that scholars agree were not by the true author, and look at their dates of publication. It may be that these spurious works appeared either after Oxford's death, or at other times in which Oxford may have been incapable of restraining his "front man" Mr. Shaksper from misusing the Shakespeare name by attaching it to the works of other authors.

Edward Sisson  
Chevy Chase, Maryland  
1 February 1998

Sobran (Continued from page 15)  
tangle on the Sonnets.

A couple of reviewers accused me of "assuming" that the *Sonnets* "must be" autobiographical. I not only didn't assume this; I dealt with the old dispute at some length. But these reviewers preferred to create a false impression rather than confront the problems the *Sonnets* raise for William of Stratford. Others dismissed my argument with a word or two ("over the top," "questionable") without further explanation, then changed the subject back to anti-Stratfordian "conspiracy theories." Others made no mention of the *Sonnets* at all!

As I debated the authorship question in print and in person, I found every single opponent unable to explain either how the *Sonnets* support William's claim or why, if William wrote them, they seem powerfully to support Oxford's. Even if they are "fictional," they present a remarkable fact: that their hero should so closely resemble a real man who has been suspected of being "Shakespeare" on other grounds.

This took no great debating skill on my part; the most learned scholars, when challenged to face the evidence of the *Sonnets*, were simply at a loss. Even their habitual mockery of anti-Stratfordianism became a little subdued.

My experience has taught me one great lesson: the *Sonnets* are the Achilles' heel of the Stratfordian view, an insuperable problem for the myth of "Shakespeare of Stratford." The strongest line William's partisans can take is that the *Sonnets*, despite all appearances, tell us nothing about their author—a truly desperate defense of a bankrupt position.

See pages 16-17 (Mark Anderson) and 18-19 (Richard Whalen) for further discussion about The Sonnets and today's mainstream critics.

New theory (continued from page 2)

as the cover-story in order to save the King's face when he had to release Henry de Vere after Buckingham and Prince Charles returned from the marriage negotiations in Madrid empty-handed! The need to close ranks against the mortal enemy (Spain) after this national humiliation explains the continuation of a pre-existing concealment strategy.

Dickson believes that it is no mere coincidence that the public Buckingham-Southampton reconciliation and the decision to release Henry de Vere from the Tower took place only a few days before the *First Folio* printer, Isaac Jaggard finally visited the Stationer's Hall to register the 18 dramas

that had never appeared in print.

This sequence also strongly suggests that the shift in political winds that confirmed the wisdom of critics of the Spanish Marriage (Southampton, Pembroke, and Henry de Vere) was a factor in the *Folio* publication process because there is no credible argument why Jaggard would have waited until just that moment to register half the *Folio's* plays after already having embarked on such a costly publication project.

P. Dickson/W. Boyle

### Nota Bene:

We have discontinued selling the current line of gift items through the Blue Boar. Look for a whole new gift selection later this year.

## The Blue Boar

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*Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time.* By Joseph Sobran. Item SP7. \$25.00

*The Anglican Shakespeare: Elizabethan Orthodoxy in the Great Histories.* By Prof. Daniel L. Wright. Item SP11. \$19.95

*The Elizabethan Review.* A Scholarly Oxfordian Journal. Editor: Gary Goldstein. Two issues per year. Item 125 \$35.00 (individuals); \$45.00 (institutional, US); \$55 (overseas).

*Freeing Shakespeare's Voice. The Actor's Guide to Talking the Text.* By Kristen Linklater. Of special interest is the last chapter, "Whose Voice?", in which Linklater acknowledges her Oxfordian beliefs. Item SP8. \$12.50

*A Hawk from a Handsaw. A Student's Guide to the Authorship Debate.* By Rollin De Vere. Item SP13. \$12.00

*The Man Who Was Shakespeare.* By Charlton

Ogburn, Jr. (94-pp summary of *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*) Item SP5. \$5.95

*The Mysterious William Shakespeare: The Myth and the Reality.* Revised 2nd Edition. By Charlton Ogburn, Jr. Item 121. \$37.50

*Shakespeare and the Tudor Rose.* By Elisabeth Sears. Item SP3. \$12.50

"Shakespeare" Identified in Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford. By J. Thomas Looney. Paperback facsimile reprint of the 1920 edition. Item SP4. \$20.00

*Shakespeare: Who Was He? The Oxford Challenge to the Bard of Avon.* By Richard Whalen. Item 123. \$19.95

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*Hughes (Continued from page 8)*

letters from foreign ambassadors to persons at home can be compared with the Court records, although contemporary rumors in letters and privately circulated pamphlets can also give clues.

The easiest way of all to alter a paper trail, of course, is simply to destroy it, in which case, even if it is possible to reconstruct the truth somehow, it is not possible to point the finger at any one individual, especially after a long time has elapsed. Thus the historian is at the mercy to a great extent of the contemporary individuals who had control over the records. In general, of course, persons appointed to high office were privy to account books and the flow of important, and often secret, correspondence, but others undoubtedly had the opportunity to get their hands on the records as well. There is also the strong possibility that minor officials might have been willing to add, subtract or alter records in exchange for favors or bribes.

To ignore the likelihood that there would have been frequent motivations in a society filled with secrets, to destroy or alter the records, would seem to be naive perhaps, yet historians rarely take this into account. Trained to the utmost respect for docu-

ments and records, and to the maintenance of the most scrupulous standards in their own sphere, they are often protected to a great extent from the rather less orderly world outside their ivy walls. Thus they may not have their eyes sufficiently open to the likelihood that the records they study could have been subject to alteration or falsification. In general they accept the record as they find it, ignoring anomalies or peculiarities, or relegating them to footnotes.

Given the Elizabethan penchant for secrecy, and considering the terrible consequences of discovery of certain kinds of secrets, it seems like a proper approach to take a more questioning stance towards the official records of the time as we find them than the historians have generally done. Certainly in all the many areas where there are no anomalies to perplex, no sudden and unexplained gaps in the records, above all no reason for considering that anyone might have had cause to hide the truth, there is also no reason to question the veracity of the records.

But surely in areas of authorship of plays and pamphlets, with their newly acquired powers to disseminate what authorities would justly fear as dangerous and polemical social and political ideas, it might be-

hoove students of the period to consider whether the records that are so often treated as solid gold fact by orthodox historians might not be more useful if regarded in a somewhat less sacred, and, one might suggest, more natural and realistic light.

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We can accept payment by MasterCard or Visa in addition to checks. The Society is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. Donations and memberships are tax-deductible (IRS no. 13-6105314; New York no. 07182). Clip or xerox this form and mail to: The Shakespeare Oxford Society, PO Box 263, Somerville MA 02143 Phone: (617)628-3411 Fax: (617)628-4258

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Fitzgerald (Continued from page 11)

evidence. As observed in "Du Bartas," lines 1 and 21 ("Os tu *Silvester*...vocalis." / "Os ipse *Vere* diceris...." "You *Silvester* are called a voice. / You yourself *Vere* are called the voice.") manifest a conspicuous parallelism of grammatical elements. The position of *Vere*, like *Silvester*, as third word in its line, and each following *Os* ("Voice") and a pronoun (*tu*, *ipse*), compels, in my view, the deduction that the surname "Vere" is intended as the primary, albeit esoteric, meaning, and the Latin adverb "truly" as the secondary exoteric pun. Necessarily I must demur from the judgement that "such usages could be merely coincidental. The surname 'Sylvester,' appearing first, and in line 1, establishes the pattern which compels that 'Vere' be taken as the surname first, the adverb second. This I conceive to be the absolute and irresistible core of esoteric meaning in the eulogy, which irradiates all else in the poem with its import.

Although the heading anagram "*Vere Os Salustii*" is first by position, it is only after line 21 is made perspicuous through the recognition of its syntax parallel to line 1, that we can return to the first *Vere* of the heading anagram and with confidence as-

sign in their proper order the two meanings of *Vere*: *Vere* truly the voice of [Du Bartas]. Yet so astute and seamless an artifice are these *Veres* that, as noted above, such interpretation might be indignantly rejected if a representative of the crown came calling.

Hannas also calls to our attention an enigmatic relationship between Lapworth and John Davies of Hereford, who also contributed one of the ten eulogies published in the 1605 *Divine Weeks*. He remarks that Davies's "Scourge of Folly" contains the epigram "to our English Terence, Mr. Will Shakespeare." The playwright Terence was a slave from Carthage and a contemporary of the other great Roman playwright, Plautus. This epigram has become notorious among Oxfordians because, as Charlton Ogburn remarks: "Terence was accused in his own day of being a front for the actual [aristocratic] playwrights, Scipio and Laelius."

Edward Lapworth was an eminent man. The *DNB* commences his entry with a description of him as "physician and Latin poet." He received the B.A. in 1592 and the M.A. in 1595 at Oxford. The entry states that "he supplicated for the degree of M.B. and for license to practice medicine" in 1602.

Both were granted in 1605. Thereafter he taught medicine and science ("natural philosophy") at Oxford, and practiced as a physician, primarily at Bath. (His father appears to have been a medical doctor before him.) As a poet he would seem to have been foremost a composer of occasional verse for great events of state. The portion of the entry quoted by Hannas indicates that he attended in his poetic function at the greatest events of state, that is, in the ceremonial of the passing and accession of crowned heads. He was a native of Warwickshire. A certain Guidott described him as "not tall, but fat and corpulent."

### Call for papers 22nd Annual Conference

Individuals wishing to present papers at the Conference should send them to:

Katherine Chiljan  
82 Malta Drive  
San Francisco CA 94131  
Tel: (415) 586-5867  
email: chilj@earthlink.net

Papers should be delivered typed double-spaced, or on disk in ASCII, WordPerfect 5.1 or Word 6.0.

Length should be based on a presentation time of approx. 30 minutes

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