



THE SHAKESPEARE OXFORD NEWSLETTER

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Fall 2024

A Mile-High SOF Conference in Denver

by Virginia Evans, Heidi Jansch and Alex McNeil

The SOF's 2024 annual conference was held from Thursday, September 26, through Sunday, September 29, at the Hyatt Centric in downtown Denver, Colorado. Eighty-two registrants attended in person and an additional fifty-seven took advantage of the livestream option and viewed the conference from other locations.



Thursday's festivities concluded with a welcome reception; Phoebe Nir, Earl Showerman and Jan Scheffer relax together. Attendees enjoyed a warm Denver evening with refreshments on the outdoor deck.



2024 SOF Conference Day 1 – Thursday, September 26

Session One:

Following a welcome from outgoing SOF President **Earl Showerman**, Conference Chair **Tom Woosnam** introduced each of the first session's speakers.

In the opening presentation, "Finding Shakespeare from An Historical Perspective" **Tom Townsend** posited that those who support the Stratford man

(Continued on p. 26)



The Ox-Tones perform "Who Will Believe My Verse in Time to Come? Sonnet 17," music composed by Phoebe Nir and arranged by Bonner Miller Cutting. William Niederkorn accompanied the singers on keyboard. Images by L.S. Foulke.

The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter

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The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to investigating the Shakespeare Authorship Question and disseminating the evidence that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford (1550–1604), is the true author of the poems and plays written under the pseudonym “William Shakespeare.”

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship pursues its mission by supporting research, educational and scholarly initiatives, annual conferences, website and social media, and by publishing this Newsletter and an annual scholarly journal, *The Oxfordian*.

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship was formed in 2013 when the Shakespeare Oxford Society, founded in 1957, and the Shakespeare Fellowship, founded in 2001, united to form a single organization. Dues, grants and contributions are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

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Articles, essays, commentary, book reviews, letters and news items of interest to the Shakespeare Oxfordian community are welcome. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship. As provided in the bylaws, “The conferences, publications, and other educational projects of the Fellowship will be open forums for all aspects of the Oxfordian theory of authorship.”

Heidi Jansch, Newsletter editor: newsletter@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org

Lucinda S. Foulke, Newsletter layout & design; Alex McNeil, Editor Emeritus

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From the President

Dear colleagues:

I am delighted to have been asked at our Annual General Meeting to take the reins again until a permanent president can be elected. My term will run for four months, ending on January 31, 2025. These 123 days will keep me in the hot seat for more time than Edgar the Æthling (two months, twelve days), Sweyn Forkbeard (forty days) and Lady Jane Grey (nine days). That’s ninety-one days, but I will end my historical sleuthing there since not all of these leaders died peacefully in bed (Lady Jane Grey was executed at the Tower of London in 1554 at the age of seventeen and there was the nasty business of Henry I, who died in on December 1, 1135 from food poisoning after eating a “surfeit of lampreys,” a kind of jawless fish). But I digress.

The next months will be quite exciting for the SOF. Our two new educational programs: Shakespeare Illuminated and Blue Boar Tavern, will be conducted on a regular basis.

Shakespeare Illuminated, hosted by Prof. Michael Delahoyde, will look at four plays in the next four months: *Macbeth* on November 10, *Winter’s Tale* on December 8, *Twelfth Night* on January 5, 2025, and *Timon of Athens* on February 16. (There’s a possibility that *Timon* may be postponed for technical reasons, in which case a taped talk by Michael will be substituted.) At the same time, we hope to finish the editing of the plays that have gone before and make those available on our YouTube channel.

These interactive programs were originally conceived as fund-raising vehicles, as well as to help people understand the plays’ remarkable connections to the life of Edward de Vere. The cost of producing a single episode is \$1,144. If you would like to support an episode, or even part of an episode (the actors, the scholarship, etc.), please contact me at info@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org. If you like, we will be honored to give you an on-screen credit.

Another program started several years ago is zipping along, too. It is the Blue Boar Tavern, in which

Oxfordians of different perspectives gather to hoist an imaginary pint and talk about all things Edward. The next two digital meet-and-greets are: “What Was 16th Century London Really Like?” on November 13, and “Ask Us Anything” on December 17.

Your permanent barkeep is Jonathan Dixon and board members Dorothea Dickerman, Bonner Miller

Cutting, Tom Woosnam, Don Rubin and others often drop by. If you missed any you might like to check our website at <https://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/the-blue-boar-tavern/> to make up for lost time.

I look forward to hearing from you,

— Bob Meyers

What’s the News?

Online Access to Authorship Videos

Since 2015, the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship has had its own [YouTube channel](#), now with over 200 videos and boasting over 5,000 subscribers. Viewers can tune in to see the many playlists of content available including past SOF conference videos, Blue Boar Tavern episodes, interviews, classic video contest submissions and more!



Two SOF members have recently shared news of their own authorship video content that they invite others to view:

On June 27, 2024, John Milnes Baker, author of *The Case for Edward de Vere as the real William Shakespeare* held a book signing and talk at the Kent Memorial Library in Kent, Connecticut. The talk is now available to view on [YouTube](#).

Since October 2023, Ron Roffel has uploaded forty-six videos of varying length and subject matter to his [YouTube channel](#) including a challenge to those who doubt the de Vere theory of authorship. (As of August 28, 2024, nobody has taken him up on the challenge). His videos explore evidence that the name William Shakespeare was

a pseudonym for Edward de Vere and topics such as Elizabethan and Jacobean publishing, printing, writing and theater.

Finally, several authorship-related programs and feature-length documentary films are currently available to view online free of charge:

“*Frontline: The Shakespeare Mystery.*”

This *Frontline* episode from 1989 “investigated the controversial theory that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, a poet and intimate of Queen Elizabeth I, was, in fact, the real bard and author of the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare.” The entire episode is available to view on [YouTube](#).

“*Last Will and Testament*”

Directed by Lisa Wilson and Laura Wilson Matthias, this film has “scholars, writers, actors, and critics weigh in on the greatest literary debate of all time: who actually wrote the works of William Shakespeare?” It is available for viewing on [tubitv.com](#).

“*Nothing is Truer than Truth*”

Cheryl Eagan-Donovan’s documentary follows Edward de Vere as he travels throughout Italy in 1575–76, discovers commedia dell’arte, and collects the experiences that would become identified with the works of Shakespeare. The film explores the role of de Vere’s bisexuality as a reason for the pseudonym “Shakespeare.” It is available on [tubitv.com](#).

“*Shakespeare, the Truth Behind the Name*”

Robin Phillips’s multi-award-winning documentary declares that “romance, betrayal, and disgrace pulsate through William Shakespeare’s works, but the biggest scandal is hiding behind the author’s name.” It is available on [tubitv.com](#).

Apply Now for an SOF Research Grant

To foster new and original research about Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and the Elizabethan Age as it relates to de Vere's authorship, the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship is accepting applications for research grants to be awarded in 2025. The award can be used for travel, research assistance or technical equipment, as long as the focus is on de Vere as the true author of the Shakespeare canon.

Applicants should include a strong statement about the proposed project, timeline and budget. The grant, if awarded, may be used with other grants or awards. The award must be used within one year of receipt with a report and financial accounting at the end of the grant period. Applicants must be members of SOF and include their CV. Applications must be sent by email only to info@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org. The deadline for receipt of applications is December 1, 2024.

The *Curious Realm* of Shakespeare Authorship

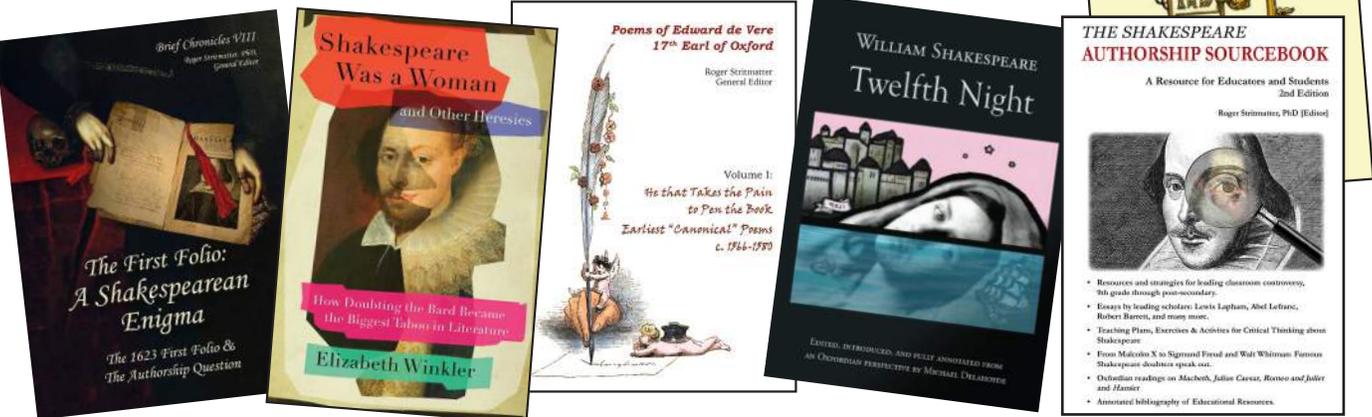
During the SOF Conference in September, Christopher Jordan, founder and host of the *Curious Realm* podcast, invited attendees to be interviewed about different aspects of the Authorship Question and the Oxfordian theory. The podcast explores interesting and unusual topics related to science, technology, history and culture in its quest to shine "the light of truth on the darkest corners of our reality." The episode, titled "On Location at the 2024 Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Conference," includes interviews with Don Rubin, Roger Stritmatter, Cheryl Eagan-Donovan and Katherine Chiljan. It can be heard on various music streaming platforms as well as on the [Curious Realm website](https://www.curiousrealm.com). Earl Showerman also appeared on the program recently in the episode "Shakespeare Authorship with Doctor Earl Showerman and Angelic Messages with Michael Carter." Earl's episode is also available on the [website](https://www.curiousrealm.com).

Great Books a Click Away!

- ▶ Are you looking for all the important research on the First Folio?
- ▶ Heard about a popular new book suggesting *Shakespeare Was a Woman* but can't find it?
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We have links to all the books you've been looking for & more!

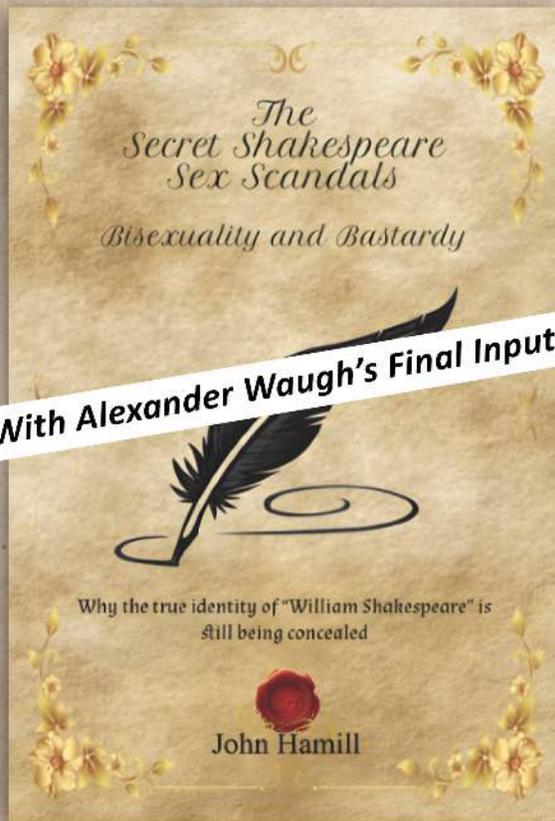
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Would he self-identify as gay or bisexual were he alive today?

Were bisexuality and bastardy the primary motivators for the adoption of an alias? Disentangle the web of lies and secrets to uncover the true identity of the beloved Bard.

SONNET 144

*Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits suggest me still.
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worsser spirit is a woman colored ill.*

The Secret Shakespeare Sex Scandals Bisexuality and Bastardy

Why the true identity of "William Shakespeare" is still being concealed.

By John Hamill

\$19.95 | AVAILABLE ON **amazon**

Report of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Annual General Meeting

by Bonner Miller Cutting, Secretary

The Annual General Meeting of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship was held at the Hyatt Centric Hotel in Denver on Saturday, September 28, 2024. President Earl Showerman called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. Many of the in-person attendees at the SOF conference were at the meeting and another fifty-four members attended virtually by Zoom link for an estimated total of over 100 members attending.

Earl provided the membership with the minutes of the AGM held at the Hyatt Centric Hotel in New Orleans, LA, on November 11, 2023, and the membership unanimously approved these minutes. Earl also provided the attendees with the current committee reports.

Earl thanked the membership for their “heartfelt convictions” during his two years as SOF President and told the members that—for a small organization—the SOF is having a huge impact. Earl praised Jennifer Newton for the technical improvements she has made. Also, Earl noted that he has attended the conferences of the De Vere Society and Shakespeare Authorship Trust in England and encourages a more formal link in the future with these organizations.

Finance Report

SOF Treasurer Richard Foulke gave the Treasurer’s report for 2023. In his report, he set out the totals for income and expenses for the years 2022 and 2023 and provided the balance sheet for the year ending December 31, 2023. The balance sheet showed a stable financial position with available funds and net assets for a total of \$264,000. He noted that the reserves and endowments are 100% invested in the Vanguard Balanced Index Fund and the Fidelity Balanced Fund. Both funds have performed well in 2023.

Rick pointed out that even though membership is a bit down, 2024 has been a good year for the organization. Due to the initiation of Lifetime Memberships in 2023, the net revenue was \$167,000—an increase of \$58,000 over the revenue in 2022. The conference in New Orleans was well attended and the additional funds from the grant increased conference revenue by \$20,000 over the previous conference in Ashland, OR.

Overall, expenses were up by \$36,000 in 2023,

driven primarily by the additional conference expenditures, additional work done for website improvements, and setting up the new video series *Shakespeare Illuminated*.

Website & Search Engine Optimization Report

Dorothea Dickerman has been looking into the feasibility of a Members Only Section (MOS) to give members the opportunity for in-house discussions. At the July meeting, the Board of Trustees requested that preparations for the MOS be put on hold until the new Board sets its budget in early 2025. It was noted that a forum for discussions will need to have an ambassador and a moderator. The training for these positions and other technical arrangements would need to be coordinated by Jennifer.

Earl thanked Dorothea for the reports she has given throughout the year to keep the Board current with information on the website data and viewing information from the search engine optimization (SEO), YouTube and Blue Boar Tavern (BBT). The YouTube channel is the “star performer” for the SOF, having surpassed over 1,000,000 views! There were almost 25,000 views of SOF videos in July of 2024 alone. Videos from the NOLA conference have garnered 36,800 views to date, up 10,000 views since June.

Dorothea closely follows the numbers of viewers for the BBT episodes, both live during the shows and the videos posted afterwards on the website. It is informative for the Board to know which subjects are getting the most attention. Information for Michael Delahoyde’s newly developed series, *Shakespeare Illuminated*, will be forthcoming as these episodes are posted.

Conference Committee Report

Tom Woosnam, Conference Committee chair, began his report by noting the committee’s seven volunteer members. Serving with him were Don Rubin, Lyle Colombo, Bonner Cutting, Rick Foulke, John Hamill, Richard Joyrich and Alex McNeil. SOF President Earl Showerman attended the meetings ex-officio. Tom thanked his committee for the work they put into this conference and is grateful to Don Rubin for taking over as chair for the 2025 conference.

The Denver conference had eighty-two in-person attendees with an additional fifty-seven livestreaming. In the past, conferences have been regarded as break-even events, but as travel, hotel and AV costs escalate, breaking even is becoming more difficult to achieve. Tom pointed out that the cost of videography is increasing at an alarming rate. Ethan Hill, the videographer for the 2022 conference in Ashland, OR, traveled to Denver to provide the AV at a price within the conference budget. However, Tom predicts that AV costs may become prohibitively expensive in future years.

The responsibilities of the committee in planning a conference are formidable. Earl thanked Tom for setting up an Excel spreadsheet to set out and monitor the timeline for the conference preparations.

Research, Education and Outreach Report

Shelly Maycock provided the report, noting both Cheryl Eagan-Donavan and Rima Greenhill, recipients of grants in 2023, conducted their research over the summer. Rima went to Dubrovnik, Croatia to continue to explore the State Archives. She has been searching for references to indicate that the Earl of Oxford visited Dubrovnik during his stay in Italy in 1575-1576. Cheryl returned to England to further her research in manuscript collections that may contain information on the lives of the poets, dramatists and writers in Oxford's literary circle. Rima and Cheryl will submit their final reports by the end of the year.

The SOF is making plans for a booth at the National Conference of Teachers of English (NCTE) to be held in Boston, MA from November 21st to the 24th. This conference is attended by thousands of teachers of Language Arts, middle school and high school English and Drama teachers, and college professors. Shelly said that this is a unique opportunity to engage with the educators who introduce American's young people to Shakespeare. Shelly and Cheryl are coordinating the SOF exhibit table.

In addition to the funds for this event allocated in the 2024 SOF budget, the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition (SAC) will donate \$3,000 for the SOF booth and send approximately 25 SAC books to be distributed at the event. The SOF participated in the NCTE conference held in Baltimore in 2019, and the authorship exhibit was well received by the conference attendees.

Data Preservation Committee Report

Kathryn Sharpe, chair, reported that the committee is working to expand SOAR (Shakespeare Online Authorship Resource). Hundreds of new records have been added for publications through 2023 and for past Oxfordian materials, all with tags and abstracts to enhance existing records. The link for SOAR is <https://opac.libraryworld.com/opac/home.php>.

In addition, SOAR can be used to analyze the contents of important websites and make content more widely available. A major step was taken in uploading records from Nina Green's Oxford Authorship site, and there are now more than 10,000 records in SOAR from her website. Nina's site has a wide range of materials ranging from transcriptions of wills and documents, authorship articles and reviews as well as YouTube videos and documentary sources. More will be added in the coming year.

Bill Boyle continues his work on the Ashbourne Portrait, the painting held by the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. He has published his research in the 2024 Spring issue of the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* in which he reported on his 2023 interview with Lisa Oehrl Dean, who worked on the portrait in 1979 with art restorer Pater Michaels. In his article, Bill updates the long controversy reported by Barbara Burris in her series of articles in *Shakespeare Matters*, and SOAR provides links to the original full text documents.

Plans to connect NESOL (New England Shakespeare Oxford Library) and SOAR to the Internet Archive remain on hold for another year as a major publisher's court case against the IA's controlled Digital Lending policies continues. It is hoped that NESOL will find a platform to make scans of rare and out-of-print authorship books available.

Much discussion has gone into trying to find a home for the hard copies of books, materials, papers and documents in the NESOL library. Some materials will be moved to a storage facility in 2025. Michael Dudley has reported to the SOF Board that NESOL and SOAR would like a more formal relationship with the SOR, including arrangements for possible long-term storage of the archival collections. It has been suggested that the SOF pay storage fees directly and work out a contract to provide funding for Bill's work.

Oral History Project and Preserving Oxfordian Archives

Renee Euchner has identified and contacted Oxfordians to interview for the DPC Oral History Project. She completed a first interview with Bonner Miller Cutting and a second interview with Barbara Burris. The Oxfordians or their families that she has contacted include Richard Whalen, Earl Showerman and Richard Kennedy.

Communications Committee

Bob Meyers, chair, said that the committee consists of Lucinda Foulke, Gary Goldstein, Heidi Jansch, Alex McNeil, Phoebe Nir, and Ann Routon. Earl has attended meetings as ex-officio. The committee does not meet regularly, but Bob calls meetings when there is a significant matter to discuss.

The committee worked to ensure a smooth transition from Alex McNeil as *Newsletter* editor to Heidi Jansch. Both Heidi and Gary met their deadlines and were praised for the professional appearance of their publications. The newly minted SOF social media project is still evolving.

Nominations Committee

The 2024 committee, appointed by Earl at the annual meeting in New Orleans, LA, has been chaired by Don Rubin with Cheryl and John Hamill serving as committee members.

Of the current trustees, the three-year terms of Dorothea Dickerman, Tom Woosnam and Don Rubin will expire in 2024, and Don has chosen not to serve another three-year term.

Brent Evans is nominated for a first three-year term. According to the SOF bylaws, Brent will be eligible thereafter for another three-year term on the Board of Trustees.

Tom Townsend is nominated for one year to complete the remaining year of Earl's term. Also, according to the bylaws, Tom will be eligible for two successive three-year terms.

Dorothea and Tom are nominated for second three-year terms.

Bob Meyers, currently a member of the Board, is nominated to be the incoming SOF President. Bob served previously as president from 2021-2022. Don

officially informed the membership that Bob will serve in an interim capacity to give the Nominations Committee more time to search for someone to fill this office.

On behalf of the Nominations Committee, Don formally moved that the membership accept the slate as proposed. He asked for a show of hands and the motion was approved unanimously.

For the record, the following terms will expire in the Fall of 2025: Rick Foulke, Ben August, and Tom Townsend (completing the year of Earl's term). The following terms will expire in the Fall of 2026: Bonner Cutting, Bob Meyers, and Michael Dudley.

President Showerman turned the meeting over to newly elected President Meyers, and the meeting was adjourned.

Elevate your research results by quickly searching [SOAR](https://soarcat.com) (Shakespeare Online Authorship Resources) at soarcat.com, an independent database of most Oxfordian publications since the 1920s!

You will find a century's worth of articles, essays, papers, book reviews, and news reports that have been published about the Oxfordian movement and the Shakespeare authorship debate, including coverage of almost all newsletter and journal articles in publications of the SOF and its predecessor organizations.



Bonner Miller Cutting Named 2024 Oxfordian of the Year

During the annual conference in Denver, Cheryl Eagan-Donovan, chair of the Oxfordian of the Year Selection Committee, announced that Bonner Miller Cutting is this year's recipient.

The committee, consisting of Cheryl, Bill Boyle, Alex McNeil and Roger Stritmatter, was unanimous in its decision, noting that Bonner has made many important contributions to the Oxfordian cause through scholarly research; publication of several articles and a book; bringing wider awareness to the authorship question through her speaking engagements at conferences, local book clubs and universities; and taking an active leadership role in Shakespeare studies and the authorship community.

Cheryl noted “Her presentations are always thoroughly engaging and impeccably polished, the result of her commitment to rehearsal, which is not surprising because she is also a classically trained pianist. She is always respectful and gracious in her interactions with colleagues, yet never afraid to disagree with other experts on new ideas and discoveries. She is a true risk-taker and a powerful advocate for our movement. Her most recent research, on the portrait of Susan Vere, the theatrical works owned by Francis Bacon, and the manuscript by Percival Golding regarding Oxford's burial in Westminster, on which we collaborated to write an article, constitute major discoveries and have great potential for further inquiry and analysis.”

Cheryl shared Alex McNeil's comments that “Bonner is one of only a few ‘lifelong’ Oxfordians. Her parents, Ruth Loyd Miller and Judge Minos Miller, were active in the movement for many years. She is an indefatigable researcher. In preparation for her work on the last will and testament of Will Shakespeare of Stratford, she read and analyzed abstracts of hundreds of wills from that time period. Amazingly, she seems to know ‘who was who’ from the Elizabethan era—with ease, she can tell us whose daughter married whose son, how many children they had,



and what families they all married into. If there had been a newspaper back then, she could have been the society columnist. In addition to her book, *Necessary Mischief*, she has written more than three dozen articles for Oxfordian publications on many different topics, including Oxford's 1000-pound annuity, the wardship system, and the apparent misidentification of two women in portraits of that time.”

Roger Stritmatter's comments added to Bonner's praises: “Bonner has a keen eye for relevance in the authorship question. Her work has strategically developed foundations passed on to all of us through the many years of research and scholarship of her parents, Judge Minos and Ruth Loyd Miller. For example, Bonner's work has encompassed such related leverage points in the authorship question as early modern censorship, the history of the revels office, the Shakespeare will, and the legacy of concealment (and revelation) from the English aristocracy of the 17th and 18th centuries. Her research on the Wilton triptych definitely established that Lady Susan Vere, the first wife of the Earl of Montgomery, is depicted in the painting even though her presence had been denied for decades, if not centuries, as part of the cultural amnesia that had erased Susan's father from Elizabethan and Jacobean history.

“Bonner has obviously not squandered or disregarded her parents' valued legacy but has built upon the best of it in a most impressive way. She has also over several decades been a consistently cheerful presence who takes a genuine interest in the work of other post-Stratfordians and Oxfordians, has given of her time and intellect through service on the board of the SOF, and has been setting standards for the organization by raising money from independent and objective outside sources. Bonner's contributions to the Oxfordian cause have over many years been exemplary; both her scholarship and her educational outreach will continue to repay benefits for the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship for many coming years and decades.”

Bill Boyle noted that Bonner has also opened up the “Miller archives” for everyone, which will be inventoried and catalogued, and SOAR will eventually help share this important resource with the Oxfordian community.

Cheryl concluded “Her generosity, diplomacy, and passion for the study of Shakespeare are boundless. I cannot think of a more valuable member of our Oxfordian community. Thanks so very much Bonner! Congratulations!”

As Bonner was unable to attend the SOF Conference in person, she prerecorded her acceptance remarks. Below is a transcript of her response:

“ I was absolutely stunned to be notified that I was chosen to receive the Oxfordian of the Year award. I’m grateful for this beyond what these words can possibly say, but I’m especially grateful for the many opportunities I’ve had to get to know and work with the amazing people in the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship.

Taking a brief trip down memory lane, I’ve attended sixteen SOF conferences (not counting the two virtual ones); I’ve lost track of how many conferences I went to at Concordia University; and I’ve attended all of Earl’s seminars in Ashland, Oregon. I’ve presented papers at most of these conferences.

I’d like to think that what I have to offer to Oxfordian studies is a result of being involved in the Authorship Question for a LONG TIME! It’s often said that “we stand on the shoulders of giants” and of course this is true for no one more than me. Both my Mom and Dad were great teachers, and many of their Oxfordian friends mentored me as I was getting started with independent research and writing articles.

Speaking of my parents, I want to say a few words about how my family got started with this inimitable quest. It all began in the late 1950s when the *American Bar Association Journal* ran a series of articles on the authorship question. These articles were called “Shakespeare Cross-Examination.” A few years later, the articles were compiled into a book. Mom had been very interested in the

journal’s series, and when the book became available, she ordered several copies, so I had one all to myself!

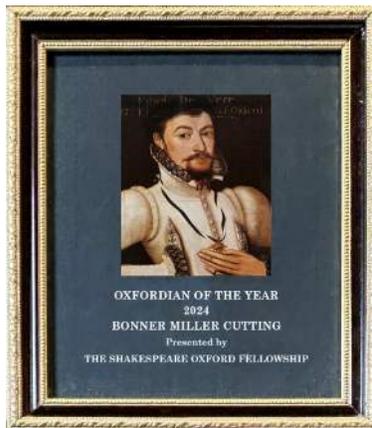
I was in high school at the time, and was totally bedazzled, fascinated, overwhelmed by what I read in (what we started calling) the “little green book!” I recall that I was working on the obligatory high school term paper. The notes for the paper were on index cards that I kept in a small wooden box. When the paper was done, I threw out the cards, and the new set of cards that went into the box would be dedicated to my research on the Shakespeare Authorship Question! Little did I know that my future in the world of Shakespeare authorship would have much more in store for me than a box of index cards!

Not long ago—in a fit of nostalgia—I revisited the Bar Association’s “little green book” where my journey started. Reading it again (with the beauty of hindsight) several things strike me about these articles. First of all, the case for the Stratford man has been totally stagnant in the decades since this book was published. I found the articles defending the Stratfordian position to be terribly shallow and poorly researched. A famous historian described Stratfordians as “armies of scholars formidably equipped” searching steadfastly through archives, looking for anything to support the Stratford story.

One might think that this “formidably equipped army” could come up with something better. But instead, to this day, the Stratfordians keep BELLOWING AWAY with the same old, tired and even ludicrous arguments that were actually put in place centuries ago.

However, in stark contrast to the Stratfordians, the Oxfordian case is light years ahead of what was in the “Cross Examination” book. Not that the articles weren’t good: they were excellent and provided me with a solid foundation on which to launch my authorship research project so long ago.

I could go on all day enumerating the incredible research that has been and is being done by



Oxfordians. This research is being conducted worldwide, and the productivity of our researchers—from the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship to the De Vere Society and Shakespearean Authorship Trust in England—to independent researchers in Italy, Australia, Germany—all over the world—their productivity on the Earl of Oxford as the author of the works of Shakespeare is staggering!

So, with this amazing progress in mind, I'd like to close with something I remember reading in (of all things!) a tennis magazine. The article was about Andre Agassi, and it described his rise from junior tennis to becoming a world champion. His father was his coach when he was getting started and his father's advice to him was (reportedly) this: "Son, you go out there on that court and you hit the ball as hard as you can, and sooner or later your shots will start falling in."

I offer this as a metaphor for the work we are doing in our Authorship studies. We DO have a

tough opponent on the other side of the net. We're up against a mainstream academia that is deeply engrained with the Stratford man's story, and a vastly profitable Shakespeare Industry based on this story. But we're giving it our all, and I suggest that we're beating to smithereens the tired, shallow Stratfordian narrative. As a measure of our success, there are now thousands of signatories on the internet *Declaration of Reasonable Doubt*, and this attests to a growing acceptance of the authorship question.

Thank you again for this award and do know that all of you have my most sincere appreciation for what you are doing for this phenomenal cause that we care so much about. THANK YOU! ”

Watch the award ceremony video and Bonner's acceptance speech on YouTube:
<https://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/bonner-miller-cutting-2024-oxfordian-of-the-year/>.

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First Folio Prologue: How King James and the Earl of Pembroke Foiled the Puritans in 1619

by Thomas Millar

In an earlier article, I argued that the publication of the First Folio was an effort by William Herbert, the third Earl of Pembroke, to rescue his political standing with King James by promoting theater to draw people away from Puritanism see (“The First Folio, Anti-Puritan Disinformation,” *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Fall 2023, also available at www.OxfordianFirstFolio.wordpress.com). Now, new research shows that in 1619, two years before planning began for the First Folio, Pembroke collaborated with James to squash a Puritan initiative to close the Blackfriars playhouse.

The events of 1619 allowed Pembroke to see how intensely King James resented growing Puritan boldness and influence. I propose that the events of 1619 provided Pembroke with a blueprint for how to ingratiate himself with the King when his political standing was threatened in 1621. When Pembroke had the First Folio published, he was following the King’s example and pushing back against Puritan interests by celebrating the works of a common Englishman to be read, performed, and revered as a monument to English culture. Of course, Oxfordians know that the plays published in the First Folio were not written by a common Englishman but rather by the 17th Earl of Oxford, the deceased father of Susan de Vere, Pembroke’s sister-in-law.

Pembroke’s collaboration with the King in 1619 is reported here based on a manuscript recently rediscovered in the British National Archives and shown in this article with Pembroke’s signature for the first time. The text of the manuscript was published, without Pembroke’s signature, by the Malone Society in 1907 and by Irwin Smith in his 1964 *Shakespeare’s Blackfriars Playhouse: Its History and Its Design*. I became aware of the original manuscript when looking through 1918 research notes of scholars Charles and Hulda Wallace, which are now held at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Included among the research notes is a handwritten copy of the 1619 manuscript showing the signatures of both James and Pembroke. At my request, the staff at the British National Archives retrieved the original manuscript and provided a high-quality scan that shows the signatures.

The relevant events began in early January 1619 when a group of eleven churchmen and municipal officers from the Blackfriars precinct, headed by Puritan minister William Gouge, petitioned the Lord Mayor of London to close the Blackfriars playhouse because of “the abuse and danger arising by the Coaches coming to the Playhouse there... the unruliness of some of the resorters to that howse, and of Coaches, horses, and people of all sorts gathered together by that occasion, in those narrow and crooked streets” (*The Malone Society Collections Part I*, 1907). Puritans had been complaining about theater for decades, but their 1619 petition avoided the usual claims of immorality and blasphemy which were routinely ignored by authorities as hysterical rantings of meddling, religious zealots. This time the Puritan committee chose to pursue their goal more cunningly by describing the theater as an encumbrance to safe, free flowing traffic. With impressive haste, the London City Common Council granted the request on January 21, “This Court doth think fit, and so order, that the said playhouse be suppressed, and that the players shall from henceforth forbear and desist from playing in that house, in respect of the manifold abuses and disorders complained of as aforesaid” (Smith).

The company of players known as The King’s Men was ostensibly under the supervision of the King, but the players would have probably communicated their concerns about the closure in writing to Pembroke, the Lord Chamberlain of the King’s Household, who oversaw the operations of the King’s Men. Such a petition would have reached Pembroke during a difficult time for King James because his wife was gravely ill. By 1619, James’s relationship with Queen Anne had become distant, but they retained mutual respect and shared two surviving children. Anne’s health had been deteriorating for several years, by 1619 she was bedridden, and she died on March 2nd. Anne’s sickness and death was surely a distraction for James, but on top of that he had to wrestle with his abhorrence of death and his eventual decision to skip Anne’s funeral, just as he had done in 1612 when Prince Henry died.

Anne's death precipitated a financial crisis because both her and James's profligate spending had nearly bankrupted the kingdom. Plans for the funeral had to be delayed for more than two months while funds were pulled together (Akrigg). Moreover, shortly after the death of the Queen, James, who was at his hunting lodge in Royston, fell seriously ill. On March 25th, Prince Charles and several high-ranking lords including Pembroke and his younger brother, the Earl of Montgomery, rushed the fifty miles to Royston thinking that the King might be on his deathbed. On March 27th the Court gossip John Chamberlain wrote that on the previous day the King had "voyded three stones [kidney stones]...but the phisicians wish him not to stir or remove for eight or ten days." March 27th was the same day the King and Pembroke drafted a license to the King's Men company of players, authorizing them to perform plays at Blackfriars playhouse and anywhere else they wanted. Only one day after the King suffered a painful medical emergency and was cautioned not to stir from his bed, both James and Pembroke saw the closure of a playhouse as so urgent a matter that they drafted a license to reopen the theater on that same day. After the events of March 27th and through Easter on March 31st, we know that the King remained bedridden because he knighted a departing diplomat from his bed in Royston on April 9th (Nichols).

It seems likely that Pembroke took a petition from the player's company with him to Royston because the license they drafted on March 27th included the names of twelve players from the King's Men. Surely neither James nor Pembroke could have come up with

the twelve names from memory. Without the full Court staff there in the small village of Royston, the names must have been provided by Pembroke. Included among those names, incidentally, were Henry Condell and John Hemminge, who will reemerge later in this article.

The King refrained from explicitly describing the license as a reversal of the Blackfriars closure, which would only have lent prestige to the Puritans. Rather, James focused on building up the players as men of "place and qualitie," and he "commanded" everyone to protect them from "hindraunces or molestacone" and also to aid and assist them if any wrong to them be offered. James authorized the players to perform all manner of plays, including "Comedies, Tragedies, Histories, Enterludes, Morralls, Pastoralls, Stage plaies and such like," and he repeated this list a second time. James specified that the players were authorized to perform publicly or otherwise except during times of plague. He also defined their allowed venues to include the Globe theater, the Blackfriars playhouse and "whatsoever within our said Realms and Domy-nions." Without mentioning Puritans, James made it clear that their initiative to interfere with theater was countermanded.

The scene is one of an exasperated monarch exhausted from his painful illness with Pembroke and a secretary at his bedside. At his wit's end with family and financial worries, James was caught off guard by the audacity of the London Puritans to have the playhouse closed. Under normal circumstances, James probably would have delegated the matter to others,

Pembroke signatures above from left to right, 1619 license, 1621 letter, 1616 letter

or offered compromise solutions; however, under the stresses of March 27th he showed his true feelings and provided Pembroke with a valuable example of how the King thought Puritans should be dealt with.

Images of the March 27th manuscript can be found along with this article at www.OxfordianFirstFolio.wordpress.com. Since it has not previously been reported, Pembroke's signature on the license is shown opposite along with other closely matching examples from letters held in the Huntington Library archives.

In my earlier article, "The First Folio, Anti-Puritan Disinformation," there is a discussion of how the Puritan movement steadily gained support and assertiveness during the reign of King James. We should consider that 1618 was a pivotal year in the struggle between James and the Puritans. It was in 1618 when Protestant rebels overthrew the Catholic leader, Archduke Ferdinand, in Bohemia, precipitating a marshaling of Spanish forces in opposition. Warfare between Protestants and Catholics on the Continent triggered Puritan ministers in England to expand their focus, from guarding against Papists in England to advocating for support of Calvinists in Bohemia and the Netherlands (Spurr). The Puritans in 1618 had become agitators for a revamped English foreign policy, a development that threatened James's view of himself as a divine monarch solely responsible for England's foreign affairs. It is therefore not surprising to see his vigorous reaction to the closing of Blackfriars playhouse in 1619. He was beginning to realize that strong measures were needed to protect his royal prerogative. Promotion of theater and other recreations was one way to remind the population of what they stood to lose with Puritanism.

As explained in my earlier article, in 1621 Pembroke found himself with an urgent need to reassure the King of his loyalty. In 1621 the King asked Pembroke to use his well-developed powers of persuasion to broker a compromise with Puritan supporters in Parliament (Briley). The Puritans took this as a sign of weakness by the King and intensified their efforts to influence foreign policy. Pembroke was then accused of being a Puritan himself by the powerful Spanish ambassador who had gained James's ear. At the same time, the King's new, young favorite, the Duke of Buckingham, was beginning to view Pembroke as a political rival ripe for attack. Pembroke's entire political, financial, and social standing was in jeopardy. Based on Pembroke's

experience with the license in 1619, he knew exactly how to make a strong impression on the King. My conjecture is that Pembroke arranged for his sister-in-law, Susan de Vere, to contribute her father's plays for the cause. Susan, and her husband, were highly dependent on the political standing of Pembroke. I surmise that, having accepted, up to that point, that publication of her father's works under his own name was a political impossibility, she agreed to the plan to publish under the name of William Shakespeare.

With the plays in hand, Pembroke followed the game plan earlier demonstrated by James. In the prefatory pages there is no mention of the First Folio as an anti-Puritan project but rather the focus is on the content, the artist and the audience. The works are such that "neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much." The author is described as "Soule of the Age! The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!" The public is encouraged, "It is yours that reade him. And there we hope, to your diuers capacities, you will finde enough, both to draw, and hold you." Further, readers are extolled to "Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe."

Instead of publishing the plays anonymously, Pembroke attributed them to a real person, just as James had put down the names of the twelve players in 1619. In both cases this served to put human faces on the enterprises, faces that common Englishmen would see as springing from the same heritage. In the case of the plays, the real artist, the Earl of Oxford, was useless as a symbol of traditional English culture. In fact, Oxford was, in some ways, emblematic of the moral shortcomings and Court excesses that drove people towards Puritanism. Fortunately for Pembroke's purposes, there was already another person associated with some of the plays, William Shakespeare. Shakespeare had died five years earlier, but the only people who knew much about him were those directly involved in London theater. This included some of the actors who had benefited from the support of King James and Pembroke in 1619. And so, with the assistance of the Puritan-mocking Ben Jonson, the fake editors but real actors, Henry Condell and John Hemminge, the enthusiasts of Hispanic literature, Edward Blount, James Mabbe and Leonard Digges, the friend of Jonson, Hugh Holland, and the hungry-for-business Isaac Jaggard, Pembroke crafted a fake but believable image of Shakespeare as a charismatic master of English

literature. In this way the First Folio was published, and Pembroke regained the confidence of the King.

Below is the full text of the 1619 license with spelling minimally modernized for clarity. As mentioned above, scanned images of the manuscript provided by the British National Archives can be viewed at www.OxfordianFirstFolio.wordpress.com.

James (Signature)

James by the grace of God king of England Scotland France and Ireland defendor of the faith &cs. To all Justices Mayors, Sheriffe, Constables, Headborowes [deputy constable] and other our Officers and loving Subiects Greeting

Knowe yee That wee of our speciall grace certaine knowledge and meere mocon [intent] Have licensed and authorized, and by these pfente [patents?] Doe lycence and authorize theis our welbeloved Servante John Hemminge, Richard Burbadge, Henry Condall, John Lowen, Nicholas Tooley, John Underwood, Nathan ffeild, Robert Benfeild, Robert Gough, William Ecclestone, Richard Robinson and John Shancke and the rest of their Associates freely to use and exercise the Art and ffacultie of playing Comedies, Tragedies, Histories, Enterludes, Morralls, Pastoralls, Stage playes, and such other like, as they have already studied, or hereafter shall use or studie, as well for the recreation of our loving Subjects, as for our solace and pleasure when we shall thinke good to see them during our pleasure **And** the said Comedies, Tragedies, Histories, Enterludes, Morralls Pastoralls, Stage plaies and such like to show and exercise publiquely or otherwise to their best comoditie when the infection of the plague shall not weekly exceed the number of ffortie by the certificate of the Lord Mayor of London for the time being as well within these two their now usual houses called the Globe within our Countie of Surrey; and their private house scituate in the precentce of the Blackfriars within our City of London, As also within any Towne Halls or Moutehalls or other convenient places within the liberties and freedom of any other Cittie Univer-sitie Town or Burrough whatsoever within our said Realms and Domynions **Willing** and Commanding you and every of you, and all other our loving sub-jecte as you tender our pleasure not onely to permit and suffer them herein without any you lett hin-draunces or molestacone during our said pleasure. But

also to be ayding and assisting to them, if any wrong be to them offerd And to allow them such former curtisies as hath byn given to men of their place and qualitie And also what further favor you shall shew to these our Servants and the rest of their Associates for our sake, we shall take kindly at your hand
In witness wherof &cs.

Pembroke (Signature)

By order from the the [sic] Lord Chamberlin of your Ma_te Houshold
Ex.t [Executed?] Levinus Munck
[Munck was a clerk of the Signet]

[Reverse]

March 1619

Expedit [illegible]

Signed, Windebank [Francis Windebank was acting clerk of the Signet]

License to act playes

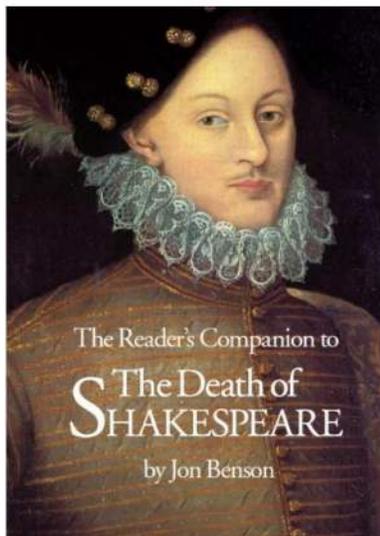
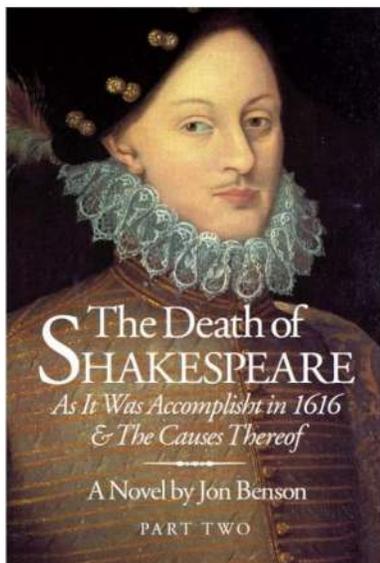
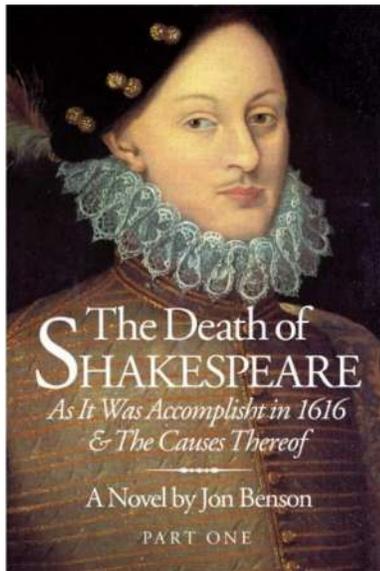
27 March 1619

[Thomas Millar is an independent researcher living in San Marino, California.]

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The Death of Shakespeare, Parts 1 & 2

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Identifying John Doleta

by Robert R. Prechter

Context

From 1587 to 1596, the Earl of Oxford engaged in a pamphlet war with the Harvey brothers—Gabriel, Richard and John.¹ Gabriel and Richard published under their own names and at least one pseudonym (discussed below). John did not join the fight, but he was included among Oxford’s targets. By my estimation, Oxford attacked the Harveys through a dozen pseudonyms and allonyms,² some of which are listed at the end of this article.

Oxford’s tactic made it appear as if numerous writers held the same low opinion of the Harveys, but such was not the case. Through his pen names, Oxford entreated two fellow writers, Edmund Spenser and Thomas Watson, respectively, to reconsider amity towards Gabriel Harvey and to join the fight on his side.³ But Spenser did not respond (at least, not publicly), and Watson died shortly after the entreaty, leaving Oxford with no allies in the fight.

Evidence of animosity between Gabriel Harvey and Oxford dates from 1577, when Oxford passed over Harvey for the position of personal secretary, and 1578, when Harvey presumptuously tutored Oxford on a course of life in a speech before the queen and courtiers at Audley End. Oxford’s takedowns of Harvey seem to have begun immediately thereafter. Nicholl proposed that Shakespeare mocked Harvey in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, where in “the ridiculous Armado... we find Harvey drawn to a ‘T’” and where “Armado’s greeting of ‘Chirrah!’... refers to the opening title of Harvey’s Audley End panegyric....”⁴ Fitting our timeline, Oxfordians have dated the genesis of the play to 1578,⁵ and in 1579 Harvey complained to Spenser that he was being lampooned on stage.⁶

In 1580, Harvey’s Latin poem, “*Speculum Tuscanismi*,” to which Oxford took offense, escalated the conflict, yet Harvey vigorously denied any ill will. For the next few years, the two men fell into an uneasy truce. But in 1587, Oxford decisively escalated matters.

Enter John Doleta

In 1587, a pamphlet titled *Straunge Newes out of Calabria: Prognosticated in the yere 1586. upon the yere 1587. and what shall happen in the said yere: Praying*

the Lord to be mercifull unto us, was published. Numerous sources state that this pamphlet is by John Doleta, but it is not. The tract was published anonymously. It purports to recount ten prophecies made in 1586 by someone named John Doleta.

Mr. Doleta has no known existence. The very surname is mysterious, with Forebears.io showing only four people in the world carrying that surname as of 2014, one each in England, Ukraine, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands.⁷



The drawing on this book’s cover features a vision of a fire-breathing dragon in the sky and three fearful, penitent witnesses. “The Preface to the Reader” speaks of many strange Signes and tokens, forewarning us unto repentance...tokens in the Heavens...Lightnings, Earthquakes, Ground-openings, Fluddes, Tempestes of the Sea, great Windes, Infections, Ayre, Warres, Mortalities, Plagues, straunge diseases and such like, which things, Commets doth commonly Prognosticate to ensue...threatning unto us calamities for our unthankfulness...the

feare of Gods heavy displeasure...cause speedie repentaunce, and amendment of life....

The body of the pamphlet, amounting to just three pages, declares that in 1586, “a learned man, named maister John Doleta, who is very well seene in Astronomie,” issued ten prophecies of events to come in 1587, and it proceeds to review them.

The first prophecy, reflecting the cover drawing, is, “the Sunne shall be covered with the Dragon, in the morning from five a clocke until nine, and will appear like fire.” Exactly which morning the author does not say. The remaining predictions are for floods, winds, pestilence, earthquakes and two special events: a “great change and alteration in Religion” and the undoing of the Turks and Islam, all due in the coming year.

A bit of investigation reveals that Doleta’s prophecies are not in earnest. Rather, they parody the astrological predictions of Richard Harvey’s 1583 book, *Astrological Predictions*—which similarly foresaw “many fierce and boysterous winds” and a “great abundance of waters”—and John Harvey’s supplement of the same year, *An Astrologicall Addition*, which contains similar prognostications. Both brothers mention Turks and predict changes in religion, and so does Doleta.

The depiction of a sky dragon on the cover of the Doleta pamphlet was inspired by a mention of dragons in Richard’s book and a comment in John’s book: “the amiable Planet Venus...is associated with the Dragons taylor.” This very image annoyed Shakespeare. In *King Lear* (I.ii), he has Edmund scoff, “My father compounded with my mother under the dragon’s tail; and my nativity was under Ursa major; so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous.”

The drawing on the cover features three trembling witnesses to the sky dragon. Now we can surmise whom they represent: the three Harvey brothers. John and Richard, in astrologers’ garb, are standing, and Gabriel is prostrate before their visions.

Understanding this context prompted a closer look at the name DOLETA. It happens to be an anagram for A DOLTE. Thus, the faux prognosticator’s implied name is “John a Dolte,” a construction that indicates just what the hidden author thought of John Harvey and his predictions.

It seems we may have found another item written by the Earl of Oxford for the purpose of embarrassing the Harveys. The project is abundantly clever, from the

mocking anagram to the visual depiction of the trembling trio to the blithering language parodying John and Richard’s prognostications.

A Harvey Replies in Print

Straunge Newes out of Calabria prompted a swift reply titled *A Confutation Of the tenne great plagues, Prognosticated by John Doleta from the Countrey of Calabria, to happen in the yeare of our Lorde, 1587*. In it, an astrologer designated only as “T.R.” spends fifteen pages (five times the length of the Doleta text) applying logic to expose the predecessor pamphlet’s lack of astrological validity. T.R.’s reference to “the late *jest* of Doleta” shows that he knew the tract was a lampoon. Yet his reply is earnest throughout, implying that T.R. took the Doleta pamphlet seriously and was annoyed by it.

Richard and John Harvey’s writing styles are similar in some ways. For instance, they both employ lengthy Latin passages, brief Greek passages and quotations from Moses. Yet certain aspects of composition indicate that T.R. is Richard.

John does not mention Queen Elizabeth in his works, but Richard does, and so does T.R. Their language is similar, as you can see in these passages:

I trust Inland is still to continue in Gods favour, who may...mightily preserve our gracious Queene, as hitherto he hath done: who graunt hir most excellent Majestie, a long and prosperous raigne over us...and continually blesse hir soveraigne Highnesse....

— Richard Harvey, *An Astrological Discourse* (1583)

I pray God almighty at his pleasure to amende and long to continue the happy and prosperous estate of our dread & soveraign Lady the Queenes Majestie, graunting her to have such loyall, and obedient subjectes....

— T.R., *A Confutation* (1587)

Both John and Richard include religious passages in their works, but Richard’s expressions are closer to T.R.’s. Richard and T.R. both speak of “tokens” of God’s wrath, list various sins, call readers to repentance and say “Amen.”

Three years later, in 1590, a pseudonymous author named Plaine Percevall inserted himself into the Martin Mar-prelate battle with a book titled *Plaine Percevall*

the Peace-Maker of England. Scholars have attributed it to Richard Harvey, substantially because his book, *A Theological Discourse*, which came out the same year, is likewise “disposed to take a middle line between the bishops and their opponents....”⁸ Richard Harvey’s use of a pseudonym in 1590 fits his use of the earlier one in 1587.

T.R., then, is Richard Harvey. He replied to the Doleta pamphlet because he was personally embarrassed by it.

Wrapping Up the Story

That summer, Thomas Nashe—whom I propose is one of Oxford’s pen names⁹—began working on *Anatomic of Absurditie*, in which he complains,

yea, the Country Plowman feareth a Calabrian floodde in the midst of a furrowe, and the sillie Sheehearde...in his field naps dreameth of flying Dragons...no star he seeth in the night but seemeth a Comet; hee lighteth no sooner on a quagmyre, but he thinketh this is the foretold Earthquake, whereof his boy hath the Ballet.... Who made them so privie to the secrets of the Almightye, that they should foretell the tokens of his wrath, or terminate the time of his vengeance?

The “Country Plowman” and the “sillie Sheehearde” stand for John and Richard Harvey, fretting once again over “Calabrian” floods, sky Dragons, comets and earthquakes.

Yet Oxford was not quite done confounding the Harvey brothers. In a brilliant stroke, a new pamphlet came out in the name of Thomas Nashe, titled in the same manner as the Doleta pamphlet: *Strange Newes, Of the intercepting certaine Letters, and a Convoy of Verses, as they were going Privilie to victual the Low Countries* (1593). In it, a passage aimed at Gabriel lays the authorship of the Doleta book on one of his brothers:

The next weeke Maister Bird (if his inke-pot have a cleare current) hee will have at you with a cap-case full of French occurences, that is, shape you a messe of newes out of the second course of his conceit, as his brother is said out of the fabulous abundance of his braine to have invented the newes out of Calabria, (John Doletas prophesie of flying dragons, commets, Earthquakes, and inundations.) I am sure it is not yet worne out of mens scorn, for every Miller made a comment of it, and not an oyster wife but mockt it.

So, here is what happened: First, Oxford anonymously penned a throwaway piece parodying the prognostications of John and Richard Harvey. Then, perceiving Richard’s pique over the tract, he had Thomas Nashe tell the world that one of the Harvey brothers wrote the anonymous pamphlet! That false assignation is akin to many “of Nashe’s misrepresentations of [Gabriel] Harvey, [which] must not be taken accurately to represent what Harvey wrote....”¹⁰

As an aside, if you prefer to believe that Thomas Nashe was a real writer working for or with Oxford, you can see that the result was the same: In pamphlets not bearing his name, Oxford embarrassed and confounded the hapless Harveys.

By my lights, Oxford’s mockery of astrology and the Harveys appeared in numerous other contemporaneous publications published under pseudonyms, including Double V’s *Pappe with an Hatchet* (1589), Adam Fouleweather’s *A Wonderfull Strange and miraculous, Astrological Prognostication* (1591), Simon Smel-knave’s *Fearefull and lamentable effects of two dangerous Comets* (1591), the first edition of Robert Greene’s *Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (1592), Cuthbert Conny-catcher’s *Defence of Conny-Catching* (1592) and Thomas Nashe’s *Have with you to Saffron-walden* (1596). The anonymous report on Doleta in 1587 and Nashe’s attachment of it to a Harvey brother in 1593 were two additional campaigns launched in the Pamphlet War, and very funny ones at that.

This article is condensed from the John Doleta and T.R. chapters of *Oxford’s Voices*, an online bookset by Robert R. Prechter (oxfordvoices.com).

Endnotes

1. Prechter, Robert. “The Pamphlet War Between Gabriel Harvey and Oxford’s Voices,” *Oxford’s Voices*, 2021–2024, oxfordvoices.com.
2. See the Thomas Nashe chapter of *Oxford’s Voices*.
3. Ibid.
4. Nicholl, Charles. *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1984, 213, 217.
5. Miller, Ruth Loyd. “Introduction to Eva Turner Clark’s *The Satirical Comedy of Love’s Labour’s Lost*” within Eva Turner Clark, *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare’s Plays*, 1974, Kennikat Press Corp., Port Washington NY, 136. Also, Ruth Loyd Miller, “Oaths Foresworn in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*,” *The Oxfordian*, Vol. IX, 2006, 41. See

- also Felicia Londré, “Elizabethan Views of ‘The Other’: French, Spanish, and Russians in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*,” *The Elizabethan Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring/Summer 1995, 5,7.
6. “Robert Wilson,” *Dictionary of National Biography*.
 7. <https://forebears.io/surnames/doleta>.
 8. “Richard Harvey,” *Dictionary of National Biography*.
 9. Prechter, Robert. “Was ‘Thomas Nashe’ a Pen Name of the Earl of Oxford?” *The Oxfordian*, Vol. 26, 2024.
 10. McKerrow, Ronald B. *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1910, Vol. IV, 161.

Deceivers Ever: Political Motives of the 18th-Century Wits Who Knew

by Phoebe Nir

The Stratfordian authorship myth was born during Edward de Vere’s lifetime, and advanced through the 1623 publication of the First Folio, but it was during the 18th century that Bardolatry evolved into both a feature of English national identity and a full-fledged tourist industry. This was due in large measure to the actions of an influential group of men of arts and letters, and their aristocratic patrons, whom I will refer to collectively as the 18th-Century Wits. These Wits did much to enhance what was at the time a fairly thread-bare Stratfordian narrative.

A biographical essay about Will of Stratford, penned by Nicholas Rowe in 1709 and repeated by his friend Alexander Pope in his 1725 *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear*, purported to feature authentic theatrical lore courtesy of their friend, actor Thomas Betterton, who claimed dubiously to have acquired it on a research trip to Stratford-upon-Avon. The Shakespeare sculpture installed in Westminster Abbey in 1740, designed by William Kent and executed by Peter Scheemakers, showed the world a new face for the Bard,¹ and the addition of a quill pen to the Holy Trinity Church funerary monument helped to transform a statue that had formerly depicted a jowly man holding a pillow into the semi-plausible likeness of a writer. Furthermore, Shakespearean actor David Garrick’s Stratford Jubilee in 1769 did much to bolster the tourist industry of Stratford-upon-Avon, which at the time boasted a population of just 2,200.

Oxfordians in recent years have made a shocking discovery: that the 18th-century men who undertook these Bardolatrous activities seem to have known the truth about Shakespeare’s authorship. Bonner Miller Cutting’s presentation “[Connecting the Dots: How](#)

[Shakspeare became Shakespeare](#)” proposes that the Wits carried out a coordinated “scheme” to generate phony lore and imagery for the Stratford man. David Shakespeare’s YouTube presentation “[Is this the face of Shakespeare?](#)” demonstrates how the Wits actually based their new imagery for “Shakespeare” on Edward de Vere’s likeness via a miniature portrait of de Vere in the possession of Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, who, along with his father, patronized the work of Rowe, Pope, Kent, and engraver George Vertue.

As such, the 1740 Shakespeare monument placed in Westminster Abbey’s Poets’ Corner represents a startling paradox: it simultaneously promotes “Shakespeare” the country gentleman-cum-artistic genius, as an icon or mascot for the general public, while winking at Those Who Know by showing Edward de Vere’s face. But why?

Cutting has asserted that the Wits, at least one of whom had familial links to Robert Cecil, were carrying out a vengeful scheme to deprive Edward de Vere of his rightful place in history as retaliation for his insulting portrayals of Richard III and Polonius. Alexander Waugh, on the other hand, holds that Edward de Vere was, in his lifetime, involved with a proto-Rosicrucian organization which would later blossom into the Freemasons, and that these Freemasons worked together over the course of more than a century to preserve Edward de Vere’s secret in the manner of his choosing.

Both Cutting and Waugh conceive of the 18th-Century Wits as having been in direct cahoots, or at the very least in alignment, with the desires of figures from the Elizabethan period, whether it’s the Freemasons loyally working to protect de Vere’s legacy, or descendants

of Robert Cecil working to sabotage it. However, I believe that both of these opposing frames of reference fail to account for the very strong political motives that these Wits had in the context of their own time, and wish to present the case for them as independent operators.

Anti-Walpoleism and the Creation of the Westminster Abbey Shakespeare Monument

I will now focus on the Shakespeare statue that was placed in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner in 1740, because the circumstances around its creation are very straightforward in their illustration of my thesis. To set the scene, in the late 1730s the powerful Robert Walpole, England's de facto prime minister, was hated by the literati to a degree that might be compared, for simplicity's sake, to Hollywood's sentiments toward Donald Trump today. The resistance to his agenda was called the Patriot Opposition. A major culture war had overtaken England, and a key battlefield was the representation and semiotic control of England's historic cultural heroes. Prominent Opposition Patriot Richard Temple, 1st Viscount Cobham, sponsored the creation of the Temple of British Worthies, a pantheonic statuary celebrating (and symbolically claiming for the Patriot Opposition cause) numerous British intellectual icons including Newton, Locke, Shakespeare, and Milton.

But in April of 1737 Walpole's government struck back. A member of Walpole's administration sponsored the installation of a brand-new bust of Milton in Poets' Corner. The bust was accompanied by an obnoxiously large marble tablet giving credit to the current administration.

Before the month was out, the Opposition had begun to plot their countermove. A letter printed in the *London Daily-Post and General Advertiser* read as follows:

Sir, I Perceive with the utmost Pleasure, that there is a great *Spirit* for promoting the Design of erection SHAKESPEARE'S monument, by acting his Play of JULIUS CAESAR the 28th of this month. I am persuaded, this will appear still more, when it is known, that the Right Hon. the Earl of Burlington, Dr. Mead, Mr. Pope, and Mr. Fletewood are the Trustees, and have the sole direction of the Monument.

The letter was signed only with the initials "A.Z.," but the names listed, including Alexander Pope, and Robert Boyle, Earl of Burlington, were a who's who of

leading Anti-Walpoleists. The benefit performance of *Julius Caesar* was planned as a fundraiser for the new Shakespeare monument, as the organizers hoped that a public-funded Shakespeare statue would be the perfect rebuttal to the government graft-funded Milton bust. An original prologue opened the play, emphasizing the significance of public funding for the statue:

While Brutus bleeds for liberty and Rome
Let Britons crowd to deck his Poet's tomb
To future times recorded let it stand
This head was lawrel'd by the public hand

Unfortunately, the fundraiser fell short of the amount necessary to build the statue, and Lord Burlington had to step in to cover the shortfall. This makes it all the more notable that Alexander Pope's Latin inscription says only:

Gulielmo Shakespeare
Anno Post Mortem CXXIV
Amor Publicus Posvit

William Shakespeare
124 Years After Death
[This statue erected] By Public Love

Were the Freemasons involved?

Alexander Waugh has demonstrated links between several of the Wits and Freemasonry, and pointed out multiple features of the 1740 statue that may have Freemasonic significance. Lord Burlington's house, a large-scale Freemasonic temple featuring gardens by William Kent, was entered through an elaborate gateway flanked by Freemasonic "Jacin and Boaz" pillars, and stamped with an unusual sarcophagus-like shape, reported to be associated with Freemasonic ceremonies.



Lord Burlington's Chiswick House, a large-scale Freemasonic Temple.



A close-up of the unusual shape on the gateway.

This sarcophagus-like shape appears again as the granite slab upon which Alexander Pope's Latin inscription is engraved in the 1740 monument. Likewise, the statue's cross-legged stance may pay homage to the burial posture of the Knights Templar, whom the *Encyclopedia Masonica* refers to as "Cross-Legged Masons."



Westminster Abbey Statue. Note the shape of the dark granite above head.

In the time of the 18th-Century Wits, elite societies like the Freemasons played a major role in both social life and politics. The Freemasons were only one of the exclusive organizations that numerous members of the Wits belonged to; others include the Royal Society, the Scriblerius Club, The Rose and Crown Club, and

even the writing staff of Lord Bolingbroke's Patriot Opposition newspaper, with its intriguingly Masonic moniker *The Craftsman*. I believe that these social circles overlapped, and all were contained within the larger circle of the Patriot Opposition. It's my opinion that while the Wits who commissioned these Shakespeare statues must have been proud Freemasons, it's highly unlikely that every member of the Freemasons in England at the time knew about Edward de Vere and was in on the cover-up. But for the small circle of men involved in the creation of the New Bard, invoking Freemasonic imagery allowed them to posthumously induct "Shakespeare" into their order. In this way, they were able to anoint themselves as his living heirs, and view themselves as justified in manipulating his legacy, which they did with great relish.

Alexander Pope received harsh criticisms for his heavy-handed alterations of Shakespeare's texts, and so did celebrity actor and Freemason David Garrick, sponsor of the 1769 Stratford Jubilee, who deemed it his life's mission to "rescue [Hamlet] from all the rubbish of the 5th act." By the time Garrick produced the Stratford Jubilee in 1769, Walpole was no longer in power, and continuing to uphold the Stratford farce might have become a ritual for its own sake, or an inside joke amongst elites. Or perhaps, in the grand tradition of the theater, Garrick was simply looking to promote himself.

Conclusion

I've demonstrated above how the 1740 Westminster Abbey Shakespeare monument was commissioned as part of the broader Patriot Opposition movement, which to me is more plausible as a motive for its creation than as the culmination of a generations-long plot dating back to the Elizabethan era. Despite the temptation to view Oxfordianism as central to the intentions of the sculpture's creators, I believe that in this case, the Wits were more concerned with making a political statement via Shakespeare, and the opportunity to present themselves as insiders with hidden information about Shakespeare was merely icing on the cake.

Though the adoption of Edward de Vere's face for the statue, and its esoteric Freemasonic messages, indicate that the commissioners were "dog-whistling" their knowledge of Shakespeare's true identity, I don't think that either promoting or suppressing the authorship question was high on their list of concerns; their top priority was to create a mascot for their patriotic

movement as a means of thwarting Walpole, and splitting hairs around the true author’s identity would have added distracting layers of confusion. Furthermore, during a time of increased social mobility in England, gatekeeping the secret of Shakespeare’s true identity was a means of conserving power amongst the privileged, and could serve as a status symbol, the way that membership in the Freemasons or the Royal Society allowed one to socialize away from the rabble in the increasingly congested city of London.

Though these 18th-Century Wits no doubt believed that they were honoring Edward de Vere’s legacy by making him the face of their political movement, I personally feel disappointed by the narrowness of their vision. De Vere deserved so much more than to be transformed into a puppet and mascot for a cause whose relevance expired before the Victorian age began, and the smug and unnecessary deception of these Wits is particularly hard to swallow given De Vere’s famous motto, “Nothing is Truer Than Truth.”

Endnote

1. The “face” had been previously published in Alexander Pope’s 1725 edition of Shakespeare in the form of an engraving by George Vertue.

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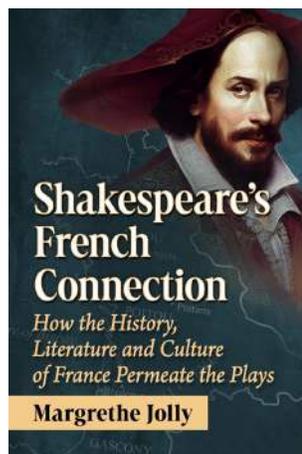
Book Review

Margrethe Jolly. *Shakespeare’s French Connection: How the History, Literature and Culture of France Permeate the Plays*

McFarland, 2024; 257 pages
(Paperback \$49.95, Kindle \$29.99)

Reviewed by Frank Lawler

Shakespeare’s French Connection by Margrethe Jolly is a thorough and insightful survey of French references in the Shakespeare canon. It covers not only allusions to French history and geography, but also sources found in French language and literature. These sources appear even in plays whose storylines don’t take



place in France, leading the reader to an inescapable conclusion: Shakespeare was familiar enough with Gallic culture and speech that this influence shows up almost inadvertently. A great example of this is his use of the single syllable “sans” instead of “without” in non-French contexts to avoid breaking meter.

Shakespeare’s French Connection is delightfully readable, but its most brilliant aspect is how it is nominally “Stratfordian,” yet also subtly “post-Stratfordian.” Dr. Jolly has deftly walked the difficult line of following orthodox Shakespeare biography while exposing its gaping holes. She may even be giving winks to Oxfordians throughout the book. For example:

- She mentions *The Merchant of Venice*’s foppish English lord, Falconbridge, who only buys his hose from France: “Falcon-Bridge” is both metrically and etymologically close to “Oxen-Ford,” as pointed out by Chuck Berney (“The Merchant

of Venice: 2004 and 1980,” *Shakespeare Matters*, Vol. 4, #2, Winter, 2005).

- She notes that John de Vere (Edward de Vere’s great-grandfather) is sent to Picardy, France, at the end of *Henry VI, Part 3*.
- She also (off-handedly?) remarks that a copy of Marguerite d’Angoulême’s *Heptameron*, which strongly influenced the Shakespeare canon, was owned by William Cecil, Edward de Vere’s guardian and, subsequently, father-in-law.
- She notes the similarities between Bertram (a ward of the royal court in *All’s Well That Ends Well*) running from his betrothed Helena, and Henry Wriothesley (a ward of the real royal court) running from Edward de Vere’s daughter Elizabeth, to whom Wriothesley was betrothed.
- Finally, Jolly explicitly references the bed trick rumor circulated about Edward de Vere and his wife Anne Cecil.

In his famous eulogy from *Julius Caesar* (III.2), Antony starts and ends with the assertion that “Brutus is an honorable man,” all the while leading his audience from unquestioning agreement to troubling doubt. Similarly, throughout Jolly’s book her highlighted tidbits from Will Shaksper’s biography cunningly lead readers from an acceptance of tradition to the disquieting dissonance between the known facts of Will’s life and the playwright’s background as inferred from the works. For instance:

- “Shakespeare seems to have known an anonymous French manuscript from c. 1400.”
- “It’s not clear where Shakespeare picked up his apparent knowledge of the characteristic shape of [the Château of Angers in *King John*].”
- “There’s no evidence of Shakespeare having traveled abroad,” yet “he had a surprising knowledge of French geography.”
- And, my favorite, “The [accurate] spelling [within the entire French Act III, Scene 4 in *Henry V*] contrasts with the carelessness or inconsistency of his signatures.”

These seeds of doubt are sown *without once mentioning the Shakespeare Authorship Question (SAQ)*. Genius!

I have only a couple of minor gripes with the book. One is her discussion of Shaksper’s “tiny but

solid French connection” with Christopher Mountjoy, his Huguenot landlord sometime between 1602 and 1604, an experience which would have been “invaluable for someone learning French” and which reveals an “echo” in the name of the herald Montjoy in *Henry V*. This tenant-landlord relationship postdates two of Shakespeare’s most “French” plays by at least two years (*Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *Henry V*, first printed in 1598 and 1600, respectively). I seriously wonder, however, if this inclusion is merely a red herring to sneak the work past Stratfordians. Leaving out Mountjoy might have ruffled the feathers of orthodoxy, but pointing out the anachronism would have been worse.

The other is that Jolly admits “there is general agreement that Shakespeare knew French” but qualifies the statement with “we don’t know how,” along with a couple of “perhaps” theories, including somehow teaching himself the language. She then begins a two-page digression about the details of a particular French-language primer which “seems” like the sort of book the Stratford man might have used. Given that there’s no indication Shaksper owned this book (or any book for that matter), the topic feels like the sort of padding one finds in Stratfordian biographies: If you lack evidence, then write about an adjacent topic and hope people don’t notice.

Beyond those two quibbles, Jolly’s book is both informative and well written. In addition to its value in researching the SAQ, Jolly’s work provides an excellent description of French history during the 16th century. If you’ve ever been confused by the fact that there were two Queens of Navarre, both named Marguerite, or marveled that there were *seven* kings of France, mostly named “Henry,” over the course of the life of Elizabeth I, or wondered how on earth England went from being uniformly appalled at the 1572 St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in Paris to seriously considering a marriage in 1579 between Elizabeth I and the son of the instigator of the slaughter... this is the book for you.

Jolly deftly conceals her personal stance on the authorship question, maintaining the book’s overall objectivity. *Shakespeare’s French Connection* should appeal to hardcore Stratfordians and skeptics alike. I found it an absolute joy to read.

[Frank Lawler is an actor and writer based in Seattle. He is a member of Actor’s Equity Association, the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, and the De Vere Society.]

Denver Conference (*continued from page 2*)

as the true author cannot explain where he acquired the knowledge apparent in the work that covers so many subjects not taught in 16th century schools. In addition to the absence of a literary paper trail and lack of education, Townsend noted that Will Shaksper of Stratford's associations with Catholics would make his contention as the author impossible, since Elizabeth wouldn't have tolerated a Catholic playwright. Understanding Edward de Vere was Shakespeare, on the other hand, provides a candidate with superior intelligence, a recorded first-class education from superior tutors, and explains the "genius" that is seen in the works.

During "The 1604 Question and More" **Shelly Maycock** responded to the objection that Edward de Vere could not have written the works of Shakespeare because he died in 1604, and several works are thought to have been written after that date. Maycock reviewed the problems of chronology including how the lack of composition dates and manuscripts have led to plays being incorrectly dated close to when they were staged. The customary dates being tentative and the fact that there are no more revisions recorded on title pages after 1604 (proclaiming that the author was "augmenting and correcting" his works) may indicate that the plays were, in fact, composed prior to de Vere's death. Maycock concluded that the 1604 "problem" is simply a distraction from the inadequacy of evidence supporting the Stratfordian authorship claim.



Ron Roffel's recorded presentation "How the Physical Construction of the First Folio Provides Clues to the Identity of the Real Author of the Plays" explored how the physical structure of the First Folio directs readers to a specific page in the 1591 edition of John Dee's book *Monas Hieroglyphica*. Roffel suggests Dee's theorem 20: "The Quaternary is Concealed Within the Ternary" is displayed in the structure of the Folio itself, as it is made up of ternaries (groups of three sheets folded to make twelve pages of the book) with a quaternary (a group of four sheets or sixteen pages) in the center. Roffel also pointed out several adding ladder puzzles present in the Folio's Catalogue of Plays and argues that "these puzzles solve

key enigmas in the book which have vexed scholars for generations, such as why *Troilus and Cressida* is not listed in the Catalogue, why each section begins on page 1, and why *Henry V* is on page 69 rather than page 101." (Note: Roffel's presentation combined material from his videos "Solving Some First Folio Enigmas" and "The Secret Heart of the First Folio" which can be viewed on his [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/@ronroffel1462) at <https://www.youtube.com/@ronroffel1462>).

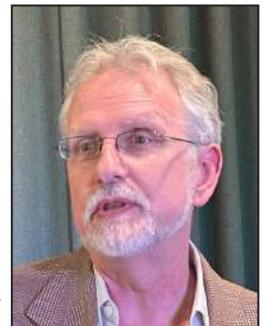
Session Two:

After a brief refreshment break, the second session began with Earl Showerman's introduction of Neuroscientist and Psychiatrist **Lisa Quattrocki-Knight** who presented "A Theory of Mind Approach to Understanding the Sonnets." Quattrocki-Knight constructed a psychological profile for the author of the first 126 (Fair



Youth) sonnets and considered a collection of letters written from 1573–1581 that she feels may suggest the French Humanist scholar and Protestant reformer, Hubert Languet, authored the sonnets in Latin and sent them to the much younger Philip Sidney as expressions of his complicated feelings. She hypothesizes that if these sonnets were later translated and compiled with the Dark Lady (127–152) and Cupid (153–154) sonnets by someone else, this would explain why these three groups of sonnets differ in both voice and subject matter.

In "The Literary Battle in the First Published Works of Shakespeare," Sidney scholar **David W. Richardson** reviewed the literary and historical evidence that he purports connects the first published works of William Shakespeare (*Venus and Adonis* in 1593 and *Lucrece* in 1594) with



a battle over the literary and political legacy of Philip Sidney. From the perspective that Mary Sidney was the primary author of the Shakespeare works, Richardson explored the textual parallels between the dedications of contemporary works associated with Mary Sidney and her circle of writers that he believes eventually led to the emergence of the author "Shakespeare."

The final presentation of the day was a video by **Matt Hutchinson** titled “Penelope Rich as the Central Muse of the Elizabethan Sonnet Sequence,” which examined how Philip Sidney’s sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* in 1591 led to an influx of sonnet cycles all featuring Penelope Rich, the older sister of the Earl of Essex. Described by Leslie Hotson as the “most libeled aristocratic woman of her time,” Penelope Rich had a reputation of being an unfaithful wife, but has been seen as “Stella” of Sidney’s sequence and “Diana” of Henry Constable’s *Diana* sonnets. The many allusions to her within the sequences themselves, and the biographical background of the sonneteers (many who were connected to the Essex circle) have led Hutchinson to conclude that Penelope Rich inspired the flood of sonneteering during this period.

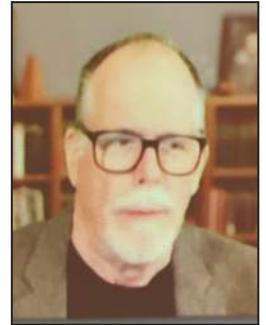
The afternoon session closed with a moving and heartfelt video by **Phoebe Nir** and **Linds Gray** titled “A Tribute to Alexander Waugh” (now on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJci68yA-T8>). The video was followed by a performance by the Ox-Tones of “Who Will Believe My Verse in Time to Come? Sonnet 17,” music composed by Phoebe and arranged by Bonner Miller Cutting. **William Niederkorn** accompanied the singers on keyboard. The Ox-Tones’ performance is also on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgVn858pXNc>.

The day’s festivities concluded with a welcome reception, offering attendees an opportunity to socialize and enjoy refreshments in a relaxed setting on the outdoor deck under the clear Denver evening sky.

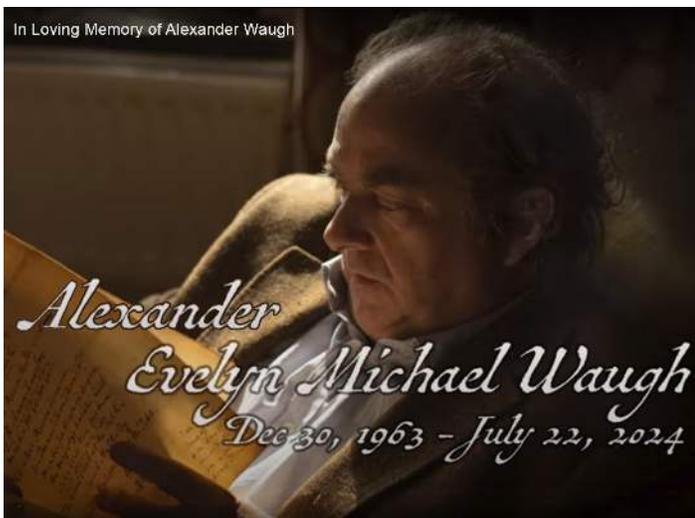
Day 2 – Friday, September 27

Session Three:

Alex McNeil introduced the speakers in the Friday morning session, beginning the program with a “A Comparable Pair,” a recorded presentation in which **Christopher Carolan** explored two authorship allusions: the character of Sparkish (an anagram of “Shakspir”) in William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1675) and the use of the word “sparkish” by Roger l’Estrange in his 1693 version of *Aesop’s Fables*. L’Estrange was the crown’s official censor at the time Wycherley’s plays were published. Carolan pointed out the connection between the use of “sparkish” in the Aesop’s description; “a daw that had a mind to be sparkish, tricked himself up with all the gay feathers” and Greene’s description of “shake-scene” as an upstart crow in his *Groatsworth of Wit*. Carolan also connected these allusions with the theme of breaking social barriers that Jonson and Chapman included in their works.



In **Bonner Miller Cutting’s** video “Hiding in Plain Sight: Ben Jonson and the Editors of Shakespeare’s First Folio,” she relayed an interaction with a Folger Librarian who told her that Ben Jonson was not involved in the editing of the Folio. Her presentation disputed this claim and explored the Folger Shakespeare Library’s adherence to the unlikely involvement of Heminge and Condell in the preparation, planning and editing of Shakespeare’s First Folio. Cutting presented the many reasons that Ben Jonson would have been the most likely to serve as editor: his experience in editing his own Folio a few years prior, his reputation for checking progress and making revisions at the printer, and his association with the Herbert Brothers, the dedicatees of the First Folio, who would have been footing the substantial cost of producing the Folio. Thus, Jonson had the experience and the connections needed to oversee the production of a project like the Folio. Since about 1700 editorial changes were made in the second edition of the Folio, Cutting suspects that the same editorial team (led by Jonson) was editing the Second Folio.



After learning of the existence of a deposition from 1623 that showed Ben Jonson was residing at Gresham College, Cutting now proposes that the editing of the First Folio was done at Gresham College. Cutting noted that Jonson's biographers had not considered the reasons for Jonson's residency at Gresham, but Riggs says Jonson probably went there after returning from Scotland in 1619. Cutting suggests that Gresham would have been an ideal environment for the First Folio project: the College would have provided a library, apartments and a space to work for as long as needed while the lack of documentation on what exactly Jonson was doing there makes one wonder if he was working on a secret project.

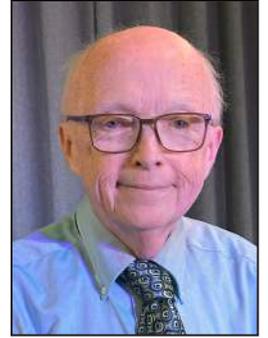
After a short break, **Roger Stritmatter** took the stage to highlight the publications from the *Brief Chronicles* series, including two volumes of Edward de Vere's poetry, *Shakespeare and the Law*, and *The Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook: A Workbook for Educators and Students*. He introduced the upcoming edition on Ben Jonson which will include an introduction by Stritmatter and essays by George Greenwood, Richard Malim, Lansdowne Goldsworthy, Ted Story, Gerald Rendall, Alexander Waugh, Nina Green and Gabriel Ready. He also noted that the long-awaited *Shakespeare Allusion Book* that he and the late Alexander Waugh compiled is expected to be published by the De Vere Society this coming spring.

In "Edward de Vere and the Renaissance Art of Memory" **Daniel Cowan** proposed that Edward de Vere practiced the "art of memory," the use of mnemonic techniques such as a "mind palace" technique of visualizing spatial environments to recall information. These methods of recall derive from classical Greece and Rome and were practiced by the Greek lyric poet Simonides of Ceos, Cicero, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Cowan also explored memory techniques used in the 16th century by Venetian philosopher Giulio Camillo, Giralamo Cardano (who had noted he "owed everything he knew to this art") and Giordano Bruno. Cowan suggests that de Vere and his circle were aware of these techniques and used them for literary purposes.



Session Four:

After the lunch break, attendees were invited to play *Oxfordian Jeopardy!* hosted by **Alex McNeil**. With the assistance of Sarah Brennan-Green as official scorekeeper and Edmund Wilkinson as operator of the reset button (or, more loftily, Contestant Response System Operator), McNeil challenged three teams of competitors to three rounds of answers and questions consisting of categories such as "Early Oxfordians," "Anagrammed Shakespeare Titles" and "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" The three teams that competed were Ren Dreyea, Cheryl Eagan-Donovan, and Bob Meyers; Amanda Hinds and Shelly Maycock; and Frank Lawler, Brent Evans, and Heidi Jansch. After a lively competition Lawler, Evans, and Jansch became the 2024 *Oxfordian Jeopardy!* Champions.



Following the game show, Don Rubin took over as emcee for the afternoon session, which began with **Michael Dudley**'s video presentation of "Something 'Wicked' This Way Comes: Towards a Metaunderstanding of the Shakespeare Authorship Debate." Sharing work from his book *The Shakespeare Authorship Question and Philosophy: Knowledge, Rhetoric, Identity*, Dudley presented the social, epistemological, and institutional dimensions of the authorship debate to establish a "metaunderstanding" of the true scope of the debate and why it is considered to be a "wicked" problem. A complex issue to begin with, the authorship debate has become even more complicated due to issues such as the lessening of academic freedom and the hostile atmosphere of social



media. Factors such as the lack of a shared terminology, widespread ignorance and misunderstanding, the quasi-religious nature of the subject, elevated epistemic status and authority of Shakespeare scholars, the isolation of Shakespeare as a subject of inquiry, and a political bias toward egalitarianism contribute to making it into a "wicked" problem. Because it lacks a single shared understanding, the authorship debate cannot be resolved satisfactorily because each solution depends on the individual's initial framing of the problem. To move forward, Dudley impressed the importance of distinguishing between our knowledge claims and our own identities as knowers.

In "The Moral and Spiritual Vision of Edward de Vere" **Jonathan S. Jackson** explored the spiritual influences of Eastern Christianity on Edward de Vere. Quoting St. Porphyrios that "Whoever wants to become a Christian must first become a poet," Jackson suggested that Eastern Christianity, the most poetical and art-affirming Christian tradition, would have attracted and influenced Edward de Vere.



Jackson suggested that in de Vere's time, people cared more deeply about spirituality and the centrality of the Bible in Shakespeare's works indicates that de Vere was a deeply spiritual person. Jackson proposed de Vere was drawn to the poetry, mystery and paradox of Greek Orthodox Christianity, which became a major influence of de Vere's spiritual vision.

De Vere's ability to read Ancient Greek, his attendance at a Greek Orthodox church in Venice, his purchase of a Greek New Testament for his wife, Anne, and a publication of work by St. John Chrysostom, *Upon the Epistle to the Ephesians* being dedicated to Anne de Vere all provide evidence that the two were familiar with Eastern Christian thought. In addition, Jackson indicated that passages in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (another major influence on de Vere) also express a spiritual ethos much aligned with the works of Shakespeare and Eastern Christian thought. The appeal of the mystery, beauty, and immortality in Eastern Christianity enabled de Vere to transcend the Catholic-Protestant conflict of his physical time and space to become the "Soul of the Age."

The final presentation of the afternoon was **Sky Gilbert's** "Shakespeare at Palazzo Te." In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare names "that rare Italian master Giulio Romano," but scholars have neglected to explore why Shakespeare chose to include only this particular artist by name in his writing. Gilbert provided a potential explanation for this neglect in his presentation, suggesting that Shakespeare may have had an affinity for Romano's scandalous work. In an examination of the Palazzo Te in Mantua, designed by Romano as a 'pleasure palace' for Frederico II Gonzaga and his mistress in 1535, Gilbert described the mannerist style used by Romano as anti-classical: a style that was intended to unsettle the viewer's confidence in his or her own point of view through its use of chiaroscuro and anatomically incorrect and contorted bodies. Gilbert shared images of Palazzo Te with its uniquely designed walls and columns made to look like they are deteriorating, explaining that the architecture was intentionally built to make the viewer feel unstable, as if there is no firm ground to stand on. Gilbert suggested that Shakespeare's work is akin to Romano's and that the two had an identical sensibility: seeking to unsettle us and force us to question our view of the world.

After the session concluded, over sixty registrants attended the Friday evening performance of *Hamlet* directed by Chris Coleman at the Denver Center for the



Performing Arts.

Day 3 – Saturday, September 28

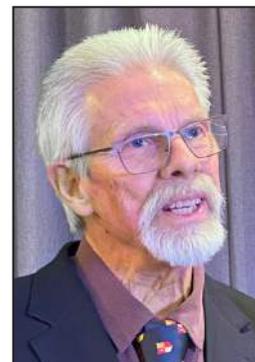
The Annual Membership Meeting was held at 8:30 AM. (see the full Report on page 7).

Session Five:

Following the annual meeting and a brief break, Brent Evans introduced the day's first speaker, **Dorothea Dickerman**, who delivered "Upholding and Raising the Ancient and Most Honorable House: Elizabeth Trentham and What She Tells Us About Shakespeare." Dickerman suggested that Trentham and de Vere may have first met and fallen in love at the tournament at Whitehall in 1581, but at that time he was married with a pregnant mistress, so they were not able to be together until many years later. Dickerman corrected the misconception that Elizabeth Trentham was an heiress—stating that her dowry pales in comparison to other women of the time—and stressed that contrary to what has previously been suggested, it was not her brother Francis, but Elizabeth Trentham herself who was financial advisor to de Vere before and during their marriage, citing her father Thomas Trentham's will, which indicates that Elizabeth was more trustworthy in money matters than her brother. Together, the couple were able to combine Trentham's financial literacy with Oxford's knowledge of the ward system and estate laws to put Oxford's hereditary properties into a land trust so that all the wrongs of the wardship system could be avoided for their son, Henry de Vere, the 18th Earl of Oxford. Trentham's support and commitment to "uphold and raise" Oxford's "house" and his real estate portfolio during their marriage gave de Vere the financial stability that allowed him to polish his works into what has come down to us as the Shakespeare canon.



In "From *Horestes* to *Hamlet*: Topical Allegories Relevant to the Abdication and Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots," **Earl Showerman** considered the correlations between the life and reign of Mary Queen of Scots and the stories presented in the





Panel from the Wolf Theater's production of *Hamlet* (left-right): Chris Coleman (director), Leann Kim Torske (dramaturg), and Brian Vaughn (King Claudius) with moderator Don Rubin.

plays *Horestes* and *Hamlet*. Mary was believed to have conspired with her lover, the 4th Earl of Bothwell, to assassinate her husband, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley in February 1567. Three months later, Mary married Bothwell but was imprisoned and deposed soon after.

Showerman shared the findings of scholars who have noted that *Horestes*, performed at the English court during the holiday festival of 1567–68, was a topical allusion to the detention and abdication of Mary in July 1567. Scholars have also noted a close correspondence in Mary's actions and the plot of *Hamlet*. Showerman noted that the inclusion of the phrase "whole Hamlets" in the introduction to *Menaphon* in 1589 establishes a credible timeline for a topical interpretation of this tragedy that presents "a case of murderous treason and justifiable regicide." William Cecil's decades-long campaign against Queen Mary would explain his family's inclusion in *Hamlet*, and Showerman concluded that even though Oxfordians note the many autobiographical aspects that de Vere included in *Hamlet*, it may also bear serious consideration as a political allegory about Mary Queen of Scots.

The panel discussion "**The Denver Hamlet**" followed as moderator **Don Rubin** led an engaging and informative discussion with panelists Chris Coleman (director), Leann Torske (dramaturg) and Brian Vaughn (Claudius) about the production of *Hamlet* that attendees had enjoyed the previous evening.

Session Six:

Dorothea Dickerman introduced **William Niederkorn**. In "Discoveries in a Secular Tour of *The Tempest*," he argued this play, traditionally dated as the last of Shakespeare's works, is actually the earliest of Shakespeare's comedies. He believes the comedies and the tragedies in the 1623 First Folio are presented in the order they were composed, which explains why *The Tempest* appears first. He suggests the play was written in 1579 for the wedding of Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange, and Alice Spencer (the word "strange" appears 29 times in the play). Niederkorn discussed the word "Bermoothes" (spoken by Ariel in Act 1, scene 2). Orthodox scholars maintain that it's a variant of "Bermuda," site of an English shipwreck in 1609, which bolsters their conclusion that *The Tempest* is a late play. Niederkorn pointed out the island of Bermuda would have been virtually unknown to the English in 1579, and that "Bermoothes" is an Anglicized version of the French word *Vermouth* (German *Wermut*), or wormwood. He also believes that parts of the play are based on improvisations made by the actors, that Oxford himself may have played Caliban and that actor Richard Tarleton, who was a virtuoso on the tabor and pipes, originally played Ariel. (Note: Niederkorn's talk was a condensed version of the second volume of his book series, *Shakespeare Discoveries*.)



In “Oxford: His Russia,” **Rima Greenhill** further explored a topic developed in her recent book, *Shakespeare, Elizabeth and Ivan: The Role of English-Russian Relations in Love’s Labours Lost* (McFarland, 2023). In her view, Edward de Vere probably viewed English-Russian relations through the “special lens” of his contacts not only with Russians, but also with Swedish and Finnish nobles and diplomats who visited England. A Russian envoy who came to England in 1557 stayed with an associate of the 16th Earl of Oxford (the first three Russian envoys to England are all mentioned in *LLL*). She reminded the audience that the 17th Earl knew most of the members of the Muscovy Company, the trading company established in England in 1555 to control trade between England and Russia, and knew most of the English envoys to Russia, especially Thomas Randolph and Sir Jerome Horsey. Greenhill believes that *LLL* was probably written around 1581, “at the height of [Oxford’s] passion for Anne Vava-sour,” noting that the play concludes with a song of “Ver.”



Katherine Chiljan examined three works of art—two paintings and an etching—in “Oxford’s Religious Portraits.” The first (five versions of which are known to exist) is an allegory of youth and age; the young courtier (identified in the 1980s as Oxford) is surrounded by excerpts from the Book of Psalms and three anonymous excerpts, which Chiljan thinks were likely composed by Oxford. The second item, an etching about two inches in diameter, depicts an unknown gentleman with a message of Christian mortality. The sitter is wealthy, and, although the etching is now in France, he’s English because the message is written in English. The third work is a painting of a man and a young boy, both in prayer position. Chiljan believes that it depicts Oxford and his son Henry around 1597-98. Chiljan then cited several points that show the depth of Oxford’s Christian faith, including his ownership of a Geneva Bible, the fact that four religious works were dedicated to



him, numerous statements of faith in his letters to William Cecil, and the testimony of others, including George Buc and Gervase Markham.

The final presenter of the day was **Phoebe Nir**. In “Who Is Michael Drayton’s Unnamed ‘vertuous friend’?” she examined the career of poet Michael Drayton (1563-1631). Drayton’s laudatory poem, “To the majestie of King James,” was not well received when it appeared in 1603, most likely because in it Drayton had urged the new monarch to oust the “fool,” the “pander” and the “parasite,” believed to refer to Robert Cecil, Thomas Howard and Henry Howard. A year later Drayton published “The Owle,” in which he castigated his fellow poets for failing to come to his defense. Drayton continued to publish works. He was buried on Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey and was lauded by Ben Jonson. In a 1627 poem addressed to his friend George Sandys, Drayton wrote, “I scarce dare praise a vertuous friend that’s dead.” Nir argues that this “vertuous friend” may be Edward de Vere, because of the play on “ver” and because Sandys and his brother were allies of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare’s first two published works were dedicated.



Day 4 – Sunday, September 29

Session Seven:

Bob Meyers emceed the final session, first introducing **Ralph McDonald**, who explored Oxford and Bacon’s different concepts of time in “Bacon’s Hand, Oxford’s Drama.” By comparing Oxford and Bacon, McDonald pointed out that both were tutored under the direction of William Burghley and that both attended Gray’s Inn for legal studies, but Bacon was eleven years younger than Oxford and outlived him by over two decades. Importantly, the attitude of the two men toward the concept of time turns out to be quite at variance. To Shakespeare, time is not a linear flow but changeable, subjective, differing for individuals. Shakespeare plays



with time, sees the universe not as ordered but full of accident and bizarre conjunctions, and sees art as capable of overcoming time. Bacon, on the other hand, sees time in a new Protestant way, as a linear progression, in which improvements to nature can be affected and new horizons opened. This more scientific perspective is at odds with Shakespeare’s poetic view in which “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”

In “What Pieces, If Any, Did the Earl of Oxford Contribute to the Christopher Marlowe Canon?” **Robert Prechter** looked at thirteen items among Marlowe’s writings—two translations, two letters in Latin, two poems and seven plays—using various criteria including the critical reception of the work, to come to some conclusions about the actual author of the Marlowe canon.



Prechter suggested that both translations (one from Ovid, the other from Lucan) are poor ones, follow the original closely, use rhyming couplets, and did not receive favorable receptions. The letters—one to Mary, Countess of Pembroke and the other an epitaph for Roger Marwood, who had played a role in his acquittal—are unremarkable and the poems show the use of rhyming couplets. These all display phrasings typical of Marlowe. *Tamburlaine* displays all the typical traits of Marlowe’s writing: an aggressive style, little humor, military terms, characters who are not royal or noble, a celebration of ambition, and locations that do not include Italy. *The Jew of Malta*’s Barabas is a one-dimensional character, a stock villain unlike Shakespeare’s Shylock, and in *The Massacre at Paris* a Friar stabs the King of France, something out of keeping with the type of friarly conduct one sees in Shakespeare.

The plays, however, are another matter entirely. With *Edward the Second*, Prechter notes, we feel we are in the presence of a thoroughly Shakespearean experience. Critical appraisal rates it highly, and it seems to belong naturally with George Peele’s *Edward I*, and with the anonymous *Edward III*, now considered part of the Shakespeare canon. It was registered five weeks after Marlowe’s death. Prechter’s examination of *Dido of Carthage* finds Marlowe’s style in Acts I

and II, but a thoroughly Shakespearean treatment of the remainder. With *Doctor Faustus*, he finds some very un-Marlovian features, such as a clown, which was added posthumously. He concludes that Marlowe made no contribution to the Shakespeare canon, while Oxford wrote *Edward II*, finished *Dido of Carthage* and expanded *Dr. Faustus* after Marlowe’s death.

Cheryl Eagan-Donovan

introduced the audience to “Katherine Eggar: A Forgotten Heroine.” Born in 1874 in England, Eggar was a composer, concert pianist, archivist and feminist. At age nineteen, she was the first English woman to perform a work of her own composition in concert and she later co-founded



The Society of Women Musicians. Looking into the Eggar archive at the Senate House Library, University of London, Eagan-Donovan discovered there is a massive amount of research Eggar conducted into Edward de Vere and his contemporaries for a book she had planned to write. The extent of Eggar’s research was quite startling to Eagan-Donovan; and her initial dive into the archive revealed Eggar’s work on topics such as Oxford’s lyric poetry, his possible collaboration with Ben Jonson, the ‘fighting’ Veres (noting a mistake in dating at the Westminster monument to them), Oxford’s burial at Hackney, de Vere’s Italian travels, ceremonies in Venice, and the relationship of John Lyly and Oxford.

Among Eggar’s correspondents were Capt. B.M. Ward and Thomas Looney. Eagan-Donovan finds Eggar’s observations “original and insightful” and her correspondence with Looney “both professional and intimate.” In her pamphlet writings, Eggar addressed the bias against noble writers among her contemporaries, the natural adoption of disguise in a born actor, the group of writers and actors coalescing around Oxford (and that expense), and misconceptions about Oxford’s profligacy. Although an inspired speaker, her views were not accepted by her peers in the music world, right up to the time of her death in 1961.

The presentation concluded with a video recording of a beautiful piano piece composed by Eggar, followed by the trailer for Cheryl’s latest film *All the World’s a Stage*, soon to be an Oxfordian blockbuster.

After a short break, **Michael Delahoyde** spoke about “*Nothing*,” in a recorded presentation. He related that the word “nothing” occurs over 640 times in Shakespeare’s plays, and there are additional variations such as “nought” and “O.” While the playwright may often play with the word “nothing,” in *Lear* it has a serious side, and it takes the whole play for *Lear* to learn about it. For *Macbeth*, it is what the “tale full of sound and fury” adds up to.



Delahoyde provided several examples where “nothing” is used as a plot device: Edmund, for example, peaks Gloucester’s curiosity by saying he is reading nothing, Hamlet besmirches Ophelia’s reputation with a dirty joke on it, and Mercutio’s long Queen Mab speech adds up to exactly that. Hamlet’s smutty joke helps explain the odd lines earlier in the play, “For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot” (III.ii).

As a reflection of his own identity, Oxford was fond of the syllables “-eo” or “-io.” For example, changing names ending in “-us” in sources to the ending that constituted his initials, E.O. (*Romeus* becomes *Romeo*). The “-io” ending of many names is also the Italian pronoun for “I,” which without an “i” is just “O.” Some poignant instances of this sort of wordplay include the First Folio ending of *Hamlet*. After “the rest is silence” come four O’s, four “nothings” constituting the code number for Oxford at court (40). *Richard II*’s “Aye, no; no, aye” in the First Folio is “I, no; no, I.” Interestingly, the “i” in the illustration on the title page of *Minerva Brittana* is missing, with a hovering pen about insert it.

Delahoyde concludes that there must be something in being nothing.

Roger Stritmatter presented the final talk of the conference. In “Theatre and Theatricality in the Audley End Annotations,” he noted that in comparison to the quite small number of annotations in Oxford’s Geneva Bible, a treasure trove of notations exists in the privately owned collection of Henry Neville’s library at Audley End near Saffron Walden, Essex. The notes have recently been claimed to be in the hand of Henry Neville himself, but Stritmatter sees the matter quite differently and has published his findings attributing the annotations to Edward de Vere in the *Journal of*

Forensic Document Examination (Vol. 31, 2023).

Studying the annotations in three works that could have provided Shakespeare with the Greek and Latin sources for the period of the plays *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Stritmatter points out that the notes have to do with theatre, actors, theatre history, censorship and treason. In them can be found a wide range of theatrical elements that found their way to the stage, while also revealing that the annotator had an outstanding command of the Greek language. The Audley End annotations have the power to afford us a glimpse of the polymath mind of Shakespeare, absorbing materials for making the English stage a great theatre and for the staging of some of the great moments in history.

Awards and Announcements

As **Roger Stritmatter** concluded his presentation, he was asked to remain on the stage so that Earl Showerman could bestow the **Tom Regnier Veritas Award** upon him. The award is named in honor of actor, attorney, and prominent champion of the Oxfordian movement Tom Regnier, and given to authorship doubters “who best demonstrate through their creative endeavors, dogged scholarship, and overall tenacity, the potential to make a lasting impact on the history of the Authorship Question by exemplifying ‘the mark and glass, copy and book’ fashioned by Tom.” In his presentation of the award to Stritmatter, Showerman noted:

“For over two decades Roger Stritmatter has been the most productive, adventuresome, and successful scholar in the Oxfordian pantheon. From his Ph.D. analysis of Edward de Vere’s Geneva Bible to his most recent findings confirming the relevance of Oxford’s annotations in classical Greek texts at the library of Audley End, no one has published more insightful and radically important articles in both Oxfordian and mainstream journals than Roger. His most recent article on the interpretation of Francis Meres’s *Palladis Tamia* in *Critical Survey* is just one example. He has served as editor of the *Brief Chronicles* series of journals and books, presented at every conference and seminar sponsored by the SOF for a quarter of a century, and co-authored with Lynne Kositsky a volume on the dating and sources for *The Tempest*. Clearly, a most deserving recipient of this award.”



Cheryl Eagan-Donovan then represented the Oxfordian of the Year Selection Committee and announced the winner of the **2024 Oxfordian of Year** to be **Bonner Miller Cutting**. Bonner was lauded for her many contributions to the Oxfordian cause through her scholarly research, the publication of several articles and a book, and her speaking engagements at conferences, local book clubs and universities—all efforts which have brought wider awareness to the authorship question. (Read the entire presentation text and Bonner’s acceptance speech on page 10 or watch the entire presentation online on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEXiH6AJT8o>.)

Before inviting attendees to the closing banquet, incoming president Bob Meyers concluded the proceedings by announcing that the **2025 conference** will be held in **New Haven, Connecticut**, from September 18–21, 2025. Hope to see you there!



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The Oxfordian 26 Published

Volume 26 of *The Oxfordian*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, has been published in print and electronic editions. Edited by Gary Goldstein, the 306-page volume offers ten research articles, five book reviews and a debate. It is available on the SOF website electronically, where SOF members have [access to the entire issue](#) using the 2024 publications password.

The print edition can be purchased for \$14.99 plus postage from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



SOF Membership Renewal for 2025

Online Renewal: You may have noticed this issue doesn’t contain a reminder to renew your SOF membership. That’s because, if you paid for an annual membership online using a credit card, your membership will automatically renew.

- Your card will be charged the appropriate amount twelve months after your 2024 payment.
- An email reminder will be sent thirty (30) days prior to your card being charged.
- If you do not wish to renew, you can easily cancel. Specific instructions will be sent to all members on the auto-renew plan.

Auto-renewal was requested by many members over the past several years and we were excited to make it available. Not only does it mean you’ll never get behind on your membership, but it also reduces the administrative load on the SOF, enabling us to focus

more resources on research and outreach. So, thank you to all our auto-renewers!

US Mail Renewal: If you order or renew thru the mail (i.e., by check, or by mailing your credit card info), automatic renewal is not available.

- You will receive an email reminder in early December, including an SOF membership form you can print out and mail back with your payment.
- There is also a downloadable mail-in form on the SOF website. If you renewed by mail this year, you are encouraged to renew online for the upcoming year, but it is not required.

There is no increase in annual membership dues for 2025. If you have any questions about your membership, send an email to: membership@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org.