



THE SHAKESPEARE OXFORD NEWSLETTER

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The Curious Events on Sheppey Island in September 1610

by Thomas H. Millar

In a letter dated October 1, 1610, Sir William Browne wrote, “The Lord of Montgomery made a feast at his house in Sheppey where...sports were provided, hawking, hunting, fishing, dancing, The King’s Players with comedies and tragedies, 2 every day. The feast lasted 4 days.” This letter is included in the report on the Downshire papers published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) in 1936, but I believe it has not been otherwise reported.

Sir William Browne (not to be confused with the poet William Browne) was a close friend and collaborator of Robert Sidney, Viscount L’Isle, later Earl of Leicester. When Sidney was made governor of the cautionary town of Flushing in 1588, he appointed the experienced soldier to be deputy governor. The two worked closely together until Browne’s death in 1611. HMC papers include scores of letters between the two touching on town governance, diplomatic matters and family affairs. Browne’s information about the activities on Sheppey Island in 1610 must have come from Sidney, who also notes the island events in two letters included in the HMC report on the manuscripts of De L’Isle and Dudley:

- Viscount Lisle to Lady Lisle, September 20, 1610. Nonsuch, “...The journey to Shepey holdes and you did very wisely not to be of it. For we are like to have very foul weather. My Lady of Montgomery [Susan Vere] scaped yesterday a greate danger with a fall from her horse, butt hath little or no hurt. To-morrow wee appoint your daughter [Lady Mary Wroth] to meet us a Greenwich....”
- Viscount Lisle to Lady Lisle, September 21, 1610. Sherlan [Shurland], “...Wee are all very well heer and you were much wished for: and my Lady of Montgomery will needs lay the fault of your not coming upon mee. But I leave to Mr. Whyte to deliver all the particularities unto you....”

From these letters we can deduce that on September 20, 1610, Robert Sidney was with Susan Vere at Queen Anne’s Nonsuch Palace. Sidney was Chamberlain of the Queen’s household and Susan was a Lady in Waiting. Susan Vere, the daughter of the 17th Earl of Oxford, was married to Philip Herbert, the Earl of Montgomery, and as such was the Countess of Montgomery. Montgomery and his older brother, William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, were nephews of Robert Sidney.

(Continued on p. 10)



The Countesse of Mountgomeries Urania, illustrated by Simon van de Pass, 1621. Wikimedia Commons.

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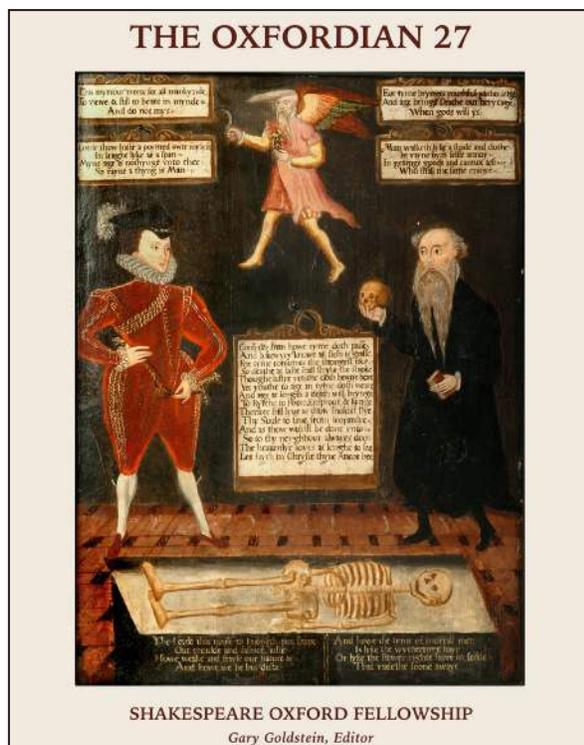
Articles, essays, commentary, book reviews, letters and news items of interest to the Shakespeare Oxfordian community are welcome. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship. As provided in the bylaws, “The conferences, publications, and other educational projects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

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The Oxfordian 27 Coming Soon!

Volume 27 of *The Oxfordian*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, is nearly complete. Edited by Gary Goldstein, the 300+ page volume will offer eight all-new research articles and new book reviews. The print edition will be published in September, and available electronically on the SOF website to all Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship members.

From the President: Putting AI to Work for the Oxfordian Cause

Businesses today are leveraging artificial intelligence to keep pace with the competition. Experts in the field describe current AI capabilities as equivalent to having an assistant with an IQ of 140 combined with unlimited access to the internet and exceptional processing speeds. It's an extraordinary tool for most businesses. Today, success demands fresh content on multiple platforms, and this requires massive generative capabilities.

For businesses on the leading edge, AI enables them to leapfrog competitors who haven't yet adopted the technology, creating a gap that may be difficult to close. At this early stage of AI development, it seems one must learn to use AI effectively or risk eventual obsolescence, depending on the pace of adoption in their industry.

The good news, for now, is that many fields in industry, science and the arts still rely on individuals with IQs above 140. In these areas, we still need artists and thinkers who can break new ground, imagine new horizons, connect seemingly unrelated ideas, and compose original arrangements of words, notes, materials, or concepts.

Over the past few months, I've been experimenting with ChatGPT to see whether it could generate original Oxfordian arguments. I've found the experience frustrating. It seems unable to drift from its training data. In fact, after working with it for several hours, I noticed that it becomes even more entrenched when asked questions on subjects that border on conspiracy theory—like the authorship of Shakespeare.

I tried many times to get ChatGPT and Grok to ignore the authority of a source and focus solely on the merit of the evidence, but they appear unable or unwilling to do that. They consistently defer to traditional sources, the kind typically endorsed by Wikipedia.

As we all know, one of our greatest challenges is overcoming orthodox perspectives—primarily because those perspectives are given weight merely for having been accepted by “experts.”

If the Oxfordian movement were my business, I'd conclude that new research and new insights probably

won't originate from AI. But there's another way we *can* use AI—to attract and engage new audiences. It starts with having the best product, the best argument, in this case, the idea we hold to be true.

If a business has the best product in its category, it can succeed as long as people walk into the shop. Our task is to get people to walk in. AI can help us do that. That's not rocket science, and it doesn't require an IQ of 140. Trust me.

So, I've reset my expectations and begun asking Grok and ChatGPT for marketing ideas on how to spread the seeds of our idea, to produce some original and intriguing suggestions I'm inclined to try. Here are two of the prompts I've used to generate ideas from AI:

- Provide me with a list of 20 celebrities or influencers most likely to find the Oxfordian argument interesting enough to support our group and to lend their platform to spread our message to their audience. Include after each person, the rationale for suggesting them.
- Oxfordians produce a monthly program that features four of them sitting in a virtual Blue Boar Tavern discussing a Shakespearean topic that includes Oxfordian arguments. Provide topics that Oxfordians and Shakespeare enthusiasts would find compelling based on the title alone.

The answers I got to these two prompts provided fertile soil worth tilling.

There's a new development in AI called agentic. It involves autonomous agents that can operate in digital environments without continuous prompting after they're given a task or even a complex mission. This technology is producing remarkable results, from making restaurant reservations to tackling sophisticated assignments that might otherwise require a team of patient academics (like responding to Oxfraud assaults).

I truly believe an autonomous agent working on behalf of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship could be used effectively to discover countless opportunities to introduce our arguments to new audiences. For example, I recently asked ChatGPT:

- Provide an example of how I could use agentic to further my mission of persuading historians, schoolteachers and English professors that Edward de Vere was the author of the works of Shakespeare.

The reply I received was a highly detailed plan—one that’s stunning to consider. I’m not going to give you the answer here, but I hope I’ve piqued the interest of a few Oxfordians who might want to run with this ball. In business, I’ve had some success by engaging people smarter than me. ChatGPT can do a lot in my hands, but I have a feeling someone reading this is even better suited to explore this potential and put it to work. If you’d like to connect on this or compare notes, reach out to info@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org

— Verily Yours,
Ben August

P.S. Tom Woosnam has experimented with AI bots as well, and we’ve discussed our findings. One of the points he emphasizes is the importance of pushing back on the answers you get—don’t stop at the first response that suits you. By doing so, he says, you engage critically and learn, which is the point, isn’t it? He also recommends including in your queries Perplexity.ai <https://www.perplexity.ai/>.

Cinquain Life of William Shakespeare

by Michael Ryle

*He would
have, could have, might
have, likely, probably,
conceivably, assuredly—
you know?*



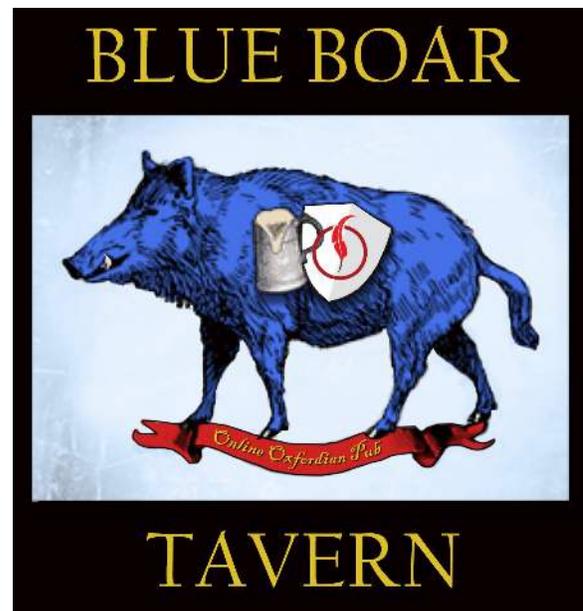
Join us at the Blue Boar Tavern!

The Blue Boar Tavern is a virtual gathering which convenes monthly to talk about all things Shakespeare.

Join this lively, sometimes irreverent, gathering of Oxfordians and share a pint with regulars: Bonner Cutting, Dorothea Dickerman, Alex McNeil, Phoebe Nir and our bartender Jonathan Dixon!

The tavern is open to all on the SOF mailing list. If you are not on our mailing list, sign up [HERE](#) and watch your email for notice of upcoming episodes.

If you missed a live Blue Boar Tavern episode or want to watch an episode again, you can catch up on over twenty episodes by visiting the [Blue Boar Tavern link](#) on the SOF website.



Words to the Wise: Book Soon for the New Haven Conference

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship's 2025 annual conference in New Haven, Connecticut, is looking like it might well be the organization's third straight sell-out event following packed conferences in New Orleans and Denver. Scheduled for September 18–21, 2025, conference sign-up details are on page 7 and the [SOF website](#).

"Registrations are well over the half-way mark with three months to go," reports Conference Chair Don Rubin. "We are normally somewhere about one-third full at the three-month mark. That we are over 50 percent booked right now tells us that we're probably going to hit the hundred mark early. One hundred is pretty much the maximum our hotel meeting space right across from the Yale University campus can hold. If it goes much over that, we can ask for a larger venue but there's no guarantee the hotel will be able to accommodate us at that time.

"My suggestion to people wanting to be sure they are part of this conference is to register as soon as possible, and there's a discount for doing so. The same goes for hotel rooms at the Omni. We've secured a limited number of rooms at a really good rate which works for either single or double. Again, we can try to get the hotel to add more if we hit the reserved room maximum, but whether they will be able to offer more depends on how much space they still have available. That time of year is pretty busy in most university towns."

No deposit is required by the hotel and the reservation can be canceled without charge up to 24 hours in advance.

The conference will include a guided afternoon walking tour of the Yale campus, one of the most beautiful in the country. Following the tour will be a guided visit to

EITHER the world famous Beinecke Rare Book Library or the fabulous Yale Center for British Art, home to an impressive collection of 16th- and 17th-century British paintings. Both of those tours are limited to 50 people each (five groups of ten) so early registrants will have the best choice. (It will be possible to do these tours on your own if you can find time within the packed conference schedule.)

Both Yale tours are part of the registration fee, which also includes some two dozen formal presentations

(speakers to be announced soon), an opening wine and cheese reception, a pizza party (New Haven says it makes the best pizza in North America...we will see) and the annual Awards Lunch which is taking place this year on Saturday rather than on Sunday. Sunday is now reserved for the SOF's Annual General Meeting (members only) and will be followed by a visit to early authorship doubter Delia Bacon's gravesite led by Board member Brent Evans. Brent will be giving a paper on Delia Bacon during the conference.

Though the full speakers' list with topics was not available as of press time, we can confirm that in addition to Brent Evans' presentation, conference papers will be given by Margo Anderson, Bonner Cutting, Dorothea Dickerman, Bob Meyers, Earl Showerman, and Roger Stritmatter.

Finally, this year's conference will also include two special performances on Friday evening: a reading of a new tongue-in-cheek Authorship 101 piece written by director Ron Destro called *Shakespeareacy* and a one-woman musical "Shakespeare" cabaret called *Petty Tyrant* by New York performer Carla Kissane.

Watch for full details in the coming weeks on the SOF website.



Margo Anderson



Bonner Cutting



Dorothea Dickerman



Brent Evans



Bob Meyers



Don Rubin



Earl Showerman



Roger Stritmatter

What's the News?

SOF Awards Funding to Preserve Ron Hess and Dan Wright Collections

by Kathryn Sharpe, Chair, Data Preservation Committee

Perhaps the most important function of the SOF is to preserve what can so easily be lost forever.

—Tom Woosnam

The New England Shakespeare Oxford Library (NESOL), led by Bill Boyle, received a 2025 SOF grant to catalog the extensive book collections of Oxfordian researchers and authors Ron Hess and Professor Daniel Wright. After their deaths, NESOL inherited Hess's photocopied books and Wright's books and papers.

Thanks to this grant, Boyle can focus on cataloging the approximately 1,000 books Hess copied from leading research libraries over decades. These books relate to Hess's trilogy, *The Dark Side of Shakespeare: An Elizabethan Courtier, Diplomat, Spymaster, and Epic Hero*. Hess, with degrees in European and Russian History and Computer Science, dedicated himself to researching Shakespeare's life and times, looking for crossover connections between doubters and mainstream scholars. His extensive research led him to believe he had uncovered new evidence, viewing Shakespeare as an internationalist with a dark side.

Boyle will continue cataloging the book collection of the late Daniel Wright, a Professor of English at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, and Director of its Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre. As Boyle noted in his obituary, Wright's impact on the Oxfordian community was significant. He presented at conferences, published papers, and was named Oxfordian of the Year in 2008. Wright authored *The*

Anglican Shakespeare: Elizabethan Orthodoxy in the Great Histories, which views the history plays as expressions of Shakespeare's patriotism and argues he was an intelligent, well-read, and theologically literate defender of the Anglican Church.

Once cataloged, work can commence to identify books in the public domain (available digitally through the Internet Archive or HathiTrust) and those NESOL should digitize for its patrons. At the 2025 Annual Meeting and in the next issue of the *SON*, Boyle will report on work supported by this grant, as well as plans

for creating and maintaining an Oxfordian/SAQ library, emphasizing digital content and online access. For instance, both the Hess and Wright collections could be further analyzed in the SOAR (Shakespeare Online Authorship Resources) catalog and database. This would involve cataloging the individual chapters in each digitized book and providing links to them. Currently, SOAR boasts over 10,000 entries, primarily covering published articles, essays, papers, book reviews, and news reports related to the Oxfordian movement and the authorship debate spanning the past century.

The Data Preservation Committee is grateful to the SOF for the grant to add the Hess collection to SOAR, a unique literary archive preserving Oxfordian history and offering access to primary source materials. Support from the SOF ensures the archive's vital role in creating new knowledge and understanding of literature and history. We kindly request your support as well—if you wish to donate money, time, or materials to the archive, please contact Kathryn Sharpe at info@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org for further details.



Ron Hess, Chicago Conference, 2017.



Rev. Dr. Daniel L. Wright, 2018.

2025 SOF Conference Registration Open

Online registration for the SOF Conference in New Haven, Connecticut from September 18–21, 2025, is now open on the SOF website at: <https://shakespeare-oxfordfellowship.org/product/sof-2025-conference-registration/>.

Please note that space is limited, so register now to ensure you can attend. Registration includes attendance at all conference presentations plus a Thursday reception and a Saturday banquet. You can read more about the scheduled speakers and activities on page 5.

Early registration fee is \$275 for members and \$300 for non-members. After August 18, prices will increase to \$300 for members and \$325 for non-members. A member may buy up to two registrations at member price.

We will not be offering daily rates until Sept. 10, when we will have a clearer picture of our fiduciary commitment. We have committed to paying the hotel a minimum fee for booked rooms, food and catering and we will be assessed a penalty if we don't meet that minimum. To best anticipate avoiding a penalty, we will issue a full refund up to and including August 18. After August 18, we will issue a refund of whatever a registrant paid minus \$119. That \$119 will be applied to the Livestream option so you will still be able to enjoy the meeting. Livestream registration information will be available closer to conference time.

The conference will be held at the Omni Hotel in New Haven, where the special room rate is \$219 plus tax for single or double rooms. This room rate is good from Wednesday, Sept. 17–Thursday, Sept. 25, but bookings must be made by August 18. If any problem arises or if a particular date or room type is unavailable, please contact Don Rubin at drubin@yorku.ca. As conference director, Don can contact the hotel to make adjustments on your behalf.

Reserve your hotel room at <https://bookings.omnihotels.com/event/new-haven-yale/shakespeare-oxford-fellowship-conference> and remember to register for the conference as soon as you can, so we can keep track of overall numbers, which are limited. Our last two conferences were both sold out in advance.

We Need to Hear from You!

As a valued member of our SOF community, your voice truly matters. We are asking you to take just a few minutes to complete a short questionnaire by clicking [HERE](#) if you are reading a digital copy of the newsletter or by scanning this QR Code:



Why is this important? Because our programs, events, articles and website are shaped by what matters to you. Your insights help us ensure that our work reflects the needs, interests and priorities of our members. From shaping the agenda of our annual conference to choosing topics for articles, we rely on your feedback to stay relevant and responsive.

We're also eager to get to know more about you—your experiences, your areas of expertise, and your aspirations. Our strength lies in the diversity and talents of our members, and by understanding your skills and interests, we can build a stronger, more connected organization. Identifying emerging leaders and fresh ideas from within our membership is key to our shared future.

It's vital that we hear from you. Your input will make a real difference, and we promise the questionnaire won't take long.

Thank you for helping us grow, improve and move forward—together.



Oxfordians in London: Searching for de Vere at the National Portrait Gallery

On my trip to London in June 2024, I spent two days at the Senate House Library at the University of London, immersed in the collection of composer and Shakespeare researcher Katharine Eggar. Her contributions to the authorship movement were the focus of my talk at Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Authorship Conference in Denver last fall.

Before returning home, I managed to get last-minute discounted matinee tickets for *Player Kings*, a nearly four-hour adaptation of *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, starring the one and only Ian McKellen as Falstaff and the fabulous Toheeb Jimoh as young Hal. It was a thrilling production, and I had the good fortune to meet them both after the show outside the stage door. A week later, McKellen fell off the stage during the Gad's Hill battle scene, ending his run with the show prematurely.

After a traditional dinner of fish and chips at The Salisbury next door to the Noel Coward Theatre (still owned by the Cecil family and most famous as one of Oscar Wilde's watering holes) I wandered back through Covent Garden and decided to visit the National Portrait Gallery, which is open late on Saturday nights. I headed upstairs to the Elizabethan gallery, looking for



Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, Wikimedia Commons.

the 1575 Welbeck portrait of Edward de Vere that is included in the collection as [NPG L111](#).

I found portraits of all the major players: Queen Elizabeth, Lord Burghley, Essex, Sidney, Leicester, Hatton, Raleigh, Drake, Jonson, the Countess of Pembroke, Philip Herbert, and of course, the Chandos portrait by John Taylor, said to be William Shakespeare. But no Oxford.

I found a docent and asked where I might find the portrait of the 17th Earl of Oxford. "Let me check," she said, and consulted her iPad. I waited patiently. "Oh, it's currently in storage," she explained.

Needless to say, I was disappointed, but not entirely surprised. Isn't this the same fate that befell the Ashbourne portrait when the Folger Library was recently renovated? Mere coincidence, or a concerted effort to erase the poet? I'm afraid my discovery begs the question.

— Cheryl Eagan-Donovan



During my brief visit to London this spring, I reached out to the National Portrait Gallery requesting that the de Vere portrait be put on public display:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I was disappointed that the National Portrait Gallery does not display your portrait of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. Recent research has revealed that he was perhaps the most important patron of the arts in Elizabethan England, in poetry, music and theatre. Over 33 works were dedicated to him, including Golding's famous translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and works by John Lily and William Byrd. He was also a favorite of Queen Elizabeth on par with Robert Dudley, Robert Devereux or Christopher Hatton, all of whom are being displayed.

I would appreciate your reviewing this request and consider putting his portrait on display.

Many thanks,

Brent Evans

Olympia, Washington state, USA

I received the following response from the Contact Centre Team at the NPG:

Dear Brent,

Thank you for taking the time to offer us feedback. Your constructive feedback is much appreciated, and I

shared your comments with our Collections team. I can confirm that your feedback will be used in our ongoing discussions regarding our portraits on display as we continue to seek to offer all visitors the best possible experience.

Just to let you know, any visitors interested in viewing the portrait of Edward de Vere, that we have in our collection, are able to do so by making an appointment to see the portrait by either visiting the Heinz Archive & Library or one of our other locations. Please see the following link where you can find more information: (<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/research/archive/>)

Additionally, our permanent displays are in the process of rotating throughout the year, hence, there is a possibility you might see it on display in the future!

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further assistance.

All the best,
Viktorija

Unfortunately, I was not able to make an appointment due to the brevity of my visit, but if any of our readers are able to make arrangements to view the de Vere portrait or notice that it has been included in the display at the National Portrait Gallery (or elsewhere) please share your findings with us at newsletter@shakespeare-oxfordfellowship.org.

— Brent Evans



I try to visit London every spring and always make a point to stop by the NPG with the hope that the Welbeck portrait of de Vere might be on display. I have not yet seen it in the Tudor Room during any of my attempts, although I do remember one year bringing it up on one of the public computers that were available for searching the collection and covertly leaving the portrait on the screen as a way of getting it some exposure, however briefly. If the portrait is not on display during my next trip, I look forward to arranging to see it now that Brent Evans has shared a process for requesting a viewing.

In the past, I have consoled myself by instead seeing the portrait of Ben Jonson by Abraham van Blyenberch, but this April I was disappointed to discover it was not on display, either. As I entered the room where it usually hangs, another visitor was disgruntled to see that the Chandos portrait of “Shakespeare” that he had come to see was also not in its usual place. Even more

dismaying was its replacement: a glass-encased early 20th-century plaster cast of the ever-disappointing Stratford Monument figure.

But the reason for these absent pieces in London may be of interest to our literary friends Down Under; I later learned the NPG’s portraits of Jonson, dozens of other authors and the Chandos are currently on display at Home of the Arts in Surfers Paradise, Australia, as part of a Writers Revealed exhibition until August 3, 2025. The portraits featured can be seen on the National Portrait Gallery website but the HOTA exhibition also includes “intimate handwritten manuscripts, letters and illustrations, as well as rare, published editions from the British Library...alongside outstanding portraits of authors from the National Portrait Gallery, London, exploring the connection between literature and visual expression.”

Hopefully our continued efforts will ensure Edward de Vere’s portrait a place in future exhibitions like these.

— Heidi Jannsch



© National Portrait Gallery, London.

Sheppey Island (continued from page 1)

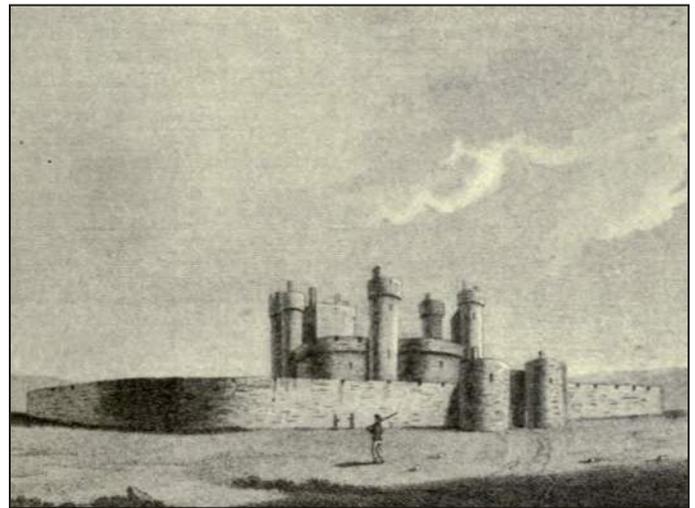
From Nonsuch, Robert Sidney and Susan traveled twenty miles to Greenwich where they met up with Robert's daughter, and Susan's best friend, Lady Mary Wroth. On September 21, probably early in the day, at high tide and in inclement weather, they boarded a vessel for the one-day journey out to Sheppey, a sparsely populated island about five miles by ten miles lying on the southern side of the mouth of the River Thames. Apparently, Mr. Roland Whyte, a business manager for the Sidney family, accompanied them.

Sidney's second letter is written from "Sherlan," a reference to Shurland Hall, a manor house on the island. In 1605, after gaining the favor of King James, the 21-year-old Montgomery was made Baron Herbert of Shurland and Constable of Queenborough Castle. Even though Shurland Hall was a substantial house, it was remote and not always easy to get to. September 1610 is the only time Susan Vere is known to have visited the house.

Additional insights into the Sheppey Island activities can be gleaned from Wroth's romantic novel, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, published in 1621. In that groundbreaking work, Wroth chronicles the adventures of a group of characters, many of whom resemble real people from Wroth's circle of friends and relatives. According to Josephine Roberts, the leading authority on Wroth's literature, "Wroth created a highly complex fiction that provides for the intermittent shadowing of actual lives and events, often under multiple figures." *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* is the first published work of fiction by a female English author.

Writing in the *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Roberts notes, "Lady Mary's literary works reveal a strong interest in theatricals, for within the *Urania* she included frequent references to the stage and described a number of imaginary entertainments. One of the major episodes of the *Urania* takes place in a round building like a Theater, carved curiously, and in mighty pillars." The section Roberts refers to is clearly based on the expedition to Sheppey Island and on events that took place at Queenborough Castle, the major building on the island. In the relevant section, Wroth describes the characters Urania and Pamphilia arriving at a Rocky Island. Wroth writes:

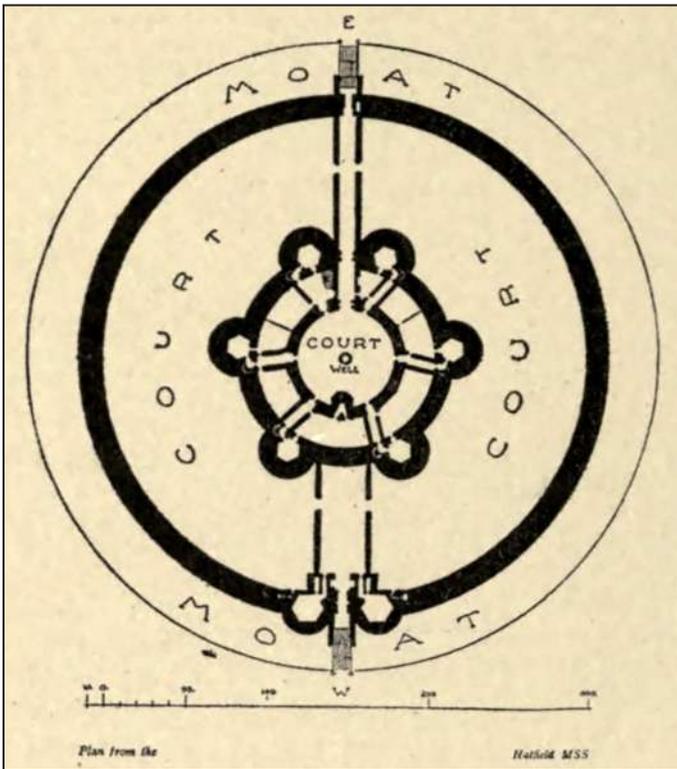
Pamphilia [Wroth] most patiently tooke it, at least most silently: She climbing the Rocke till at the



Two images of Queenborough Castle as it appeared before demolition in the latter part of the 17th century; a 1784 engraving based on a drawing by Wenceslaus Hollar (1607–1677) (above) and Plan of Queenborough Castle, Kent, from the Hatfield MSS (right).

top she discover'd a fine Country, and discerned before her a delicate plaine, in the midst whereof was a most sumptuous building, of Marble, shee joyfully call'd to the other, who followed her.... They found a round building like a Theater, carved curiously, and in mighty pillars; light they might in many places discern between the pillars of the upper row, but what was within, they could not discover, nor find the gate to enter it. (321)

The description of the circular building closely matches Queenborough Castle (sometimes called Sheppey Castle). A coastal defense work originally built in the 14th century and updated by King Henry VIII, Queenborough Castle had what was for England an unusual circular design. A central castle with six towers was surrounded by an outer circular curtain wall. The only entrance through the outer wall was through a gate on the western side. The entrance gate for the inner castle was on the eastern side, so anyone entering the outer wall could not immediately see how entrance could be gained to the inner castle, consistent with the description in Wroth's book. The inner castle surrounded a circular courtyard with a diameter of about 60 feet, a convenient size for a theatrical stage and a small audience. The upper rooms of the castle looking down on the courtyard could have been used by musicians and some members of the audience.



In her section concerning activities on and around the Rocky Island, Wroth mentions the theater several times, including a final reference:

...there they Shipp'd, and pass'd unto the Rocke, where landing, she went to the Theater, and looking up she read the words, Leonia reading in her eyes, at that instant the Gate opened, but with such Musicke as amazed them all, as wel those at the entring, as the troopes within... (387)

Surely the garrison soldiers at Queenborough Castle must have been amused to find that their remote, wind-swept outpost had, for four days, become the epicenter of English theater!

The Countess of Montgomery's Urania is a complex work involving approximately 150 characters and scores of interweaving plot lines. In pages 320 to 389, Wroth describes the activities of the group of characters on the Rocky Island, their adventures and "enchantments" as they congregate at the theater, travel around the Island and eventually depart separately and in groups to proceed with their complicated lives.

In her introduction to a 1995 reprinting of the book, Josephine Roberts explains that Wroth doesn't provide a key linking character names with actual

people; nevertheless, several characters quite obviously represent real persons. Roberts provides the identity of fourteen people, some of whom are represented by more than one character. Relying on Roberts's identifications we can make a partial list of the participants in the events at Sheppey Island, as follows:

Susan Vere (Urania, Veralinda)
 Lady Mary Wroth (Pamphilia, Bellamira, Antissia)
 Earl of Montgomery (Steriamus, Leonius)
 Earl of Pembroke (Amphilanthus)
 Robert Wroth (Treborius)
 Robert Sidney 1st Earl of Leicester (Dettareus, King of Morea)
 Robert Sidney 2nd Earl of Leicester (Rosindy)
 Lady Philippa Sidney (Philistella)
 Benjamin Rudyerd (Ollorandus)
 Elizabeth Harrington (Melasinda)

Robert Wroth was Lady Mary Wroth's husband, Lady Philippa Sidney was the younger sister of Lady Mary Wroth, Robert Sidney 2nd Earl of Leicester was Wroth's younger brother. Rudyerd was a close friend and confidant of Pembroke and Harrington was Rudyerd's wife.

Readers interested in Roberts's basis for the above identifications are encouraged to explore the detailed explanations provided in her introductory essay. To give a feeling for Roberts's approach here are a few examples: Urania is, of course, identified as the Countess of Montgomery (Susan Vere) in the title of the book. In the book Urania's best friend and nearly constant companion is Pamphilia. In real life Susan Vere's best friend and frequent companion was Lady Mary Wroth. In the book Urania's love interest is Steriamus. In real life, as noted above, Susan Vere was married and in love with the Earl of Montgomery. In the book, the character Amphilanthus was the inconstant lover of Pamphilia. In real life, after the death of her husband in 1614, Lady Mary Wroth was the mistress of William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. In the book, the King of Morea is the father of Pamphilia. In real life Robert Sidney, the 1st Earl of Leicester was the father of Lady Mary Wroth. In the book Rosindy, a near anagram of Robert Sidney, was a dashing young man. In real life, Robert Sidney, the 2nd Earl of Leicester was the younger brother of Lady Mary Wroth. In the book, Philistella was "sweet and dainty." In real life, Philippa was the beloved and beautiful younger sister of Lady

Mary Wroth, named Philippa to connect her to her famous deceased uncle, Sir Philip Sidney. The character Philistella is further connected to Philip Sidney by incorporating “stella” in her name. Philip Sidney’s well-regarded sonnet sequence was titled “Astrophel and Stella.” In the book, Philistella is referred to as “treasure of the truest sweetnesse.” In real-life, Philippa Sidney died an early death in 1620 and was greatly mourned by the entire Sidney family.

In addition to the ten real life participants in the events on the Rocky Island identified by Roberts, there are approximately ten other characters portrayed as participating in activities on the Rocky Island but whose real-life identities are not known. This suggests a total number of celebrants on Sheppey Island of about twenty. Perhaps new research will reveal the real-life identities of additional participants.

From Wroth’s description of the activities on the Rocky Island it is apparent that one objective of the four-day excursion was to honor Susan Vere and Mary Wroth. In one scene they are described in the theater as follows, “Pamphilia [Wroth] and Urania [Susan] sitting in the throne, beheld by the rest, as fittest to be admired” (355).

With these insights from Wroth’s book plus the information in the Browne and Sidney letters, we can see that the Sheppey Island excursion was curious in several ways. The remote location, length and variety of activities, eight theatrical performances, music, dancing, hunting and hawking, would have made it enormously expensive. Almost all staff and provisions would have to have been imported from London since Shurland Hall could not have supported such an elaborate enterprise with its own resources. The difficulty of traveling to Sheppey would have been inconvenient for the guests, even dangerous for those braving the stormy mouth of the Thames. The known attendees were all close associates, family members and confidants of the Herbert-Sidney circle. Why undertake such an excursion on Sheppey Island when various other Sidney or Herbert homes would have been far more convenient and economical?

I suggest that all of these factors—the honoring of Susan and Wroth, the remoteness of the Sheppey site, the in-crowd nature of the guest list, the emphasis on theatrical performances, and the timing in 1610—are consistent with the idea that the purpose of the

expedition was to honor Susan for canceling her plan to publish the works of her father under his own name in 1609. A discussion of those plans, and evidence to support that theory is discussed in my previous article, “Shakespearean Intrigue,” found here: www.OxfordianFirstFolio.wordpress.com. Briefly, the idea is that leading up to 1609, Susan Vere was encouraged by her best friend, Wroth, to publish her father’s works. By encouraging Susan in this way, Wroth was following the example of her aunt, Mary Herbert née Sidney, Dowager Countess of Pembroke, who edited and published Sir Philip Sidney’s works after his death. While preparations were underway the unexpected publication of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* in 1609 forced a rethinking of the plan. Revealing the authorship of the 17th Earl of Oxford would, given the publication of the sonnets, expose the homoerotic nature of the relationship between Oxford and the Earl of Southampton. According to this theory, Susan sought help from her uncle, Robert Cecil, who was Secretary of State and Lord High Treasurer of England, hoping to quash the publication of the sonnets. Cecil, realizing the great political risk of allowing Southampton to be linked with Oxford in that way, enlisted the aid of Robert Sidney to guide Susan and Wroth through the process of canceling plans to publish under Oxford’s name.

The expedition to Sheppey Island was, I believe, a way to celebrate Susan’s cooperation and willingness to bow to the political need of avoiding scandal among the non-extremist (i.e., non-puritan) Protestant faction holding great power and influence in 1610 England. The remoteness of the Sheppey Island site would have allowed Robert Sidney and Montgomery to limit the guest list to trusted family members and close confidants. Presumably all the attendees would have been aware of the reason Susan was being honored and of the need to maintain confidentiality about the authorship of Susan’s father.

This knowledge of the Sheppey Island expedition is new, and further research may reveal additional details. Surely Oxfordians would expect the performance schedule of eight plays in four days to include or be entirely devoted to the works of Susan’s father. The King’s Men repertoire of Shakespearean works would have been sufficient to fill that schedule, but it would be interesting to find that one or two of the performances were of works from Susan’s archive not

previously known to the King's Men. Two candidates for such a possibility are *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. Both plays were publicly performed for the first time by The King's Men in 1611, and registered and published for the first time as part of the First Folio in 1623. Perhaps these two plays were included in the Sheppey Island schedule as readings of scripts provided by Susan. It's intriguing to consider that in both the opening scene of *The Tempest* and in the beginning of the events on the Rocky Island portrayed in *Urania* (320), characters brave heavy seas to reach a mysterious island. Also, in both Mary Wroth's description of enchantments on the Rocky Island and in *The Winter's Tale*, Apollo is referenced (387) and a bear plays a role (364–368). Perhaps this was Wroth's way of reminding her friends of their Sheppey Island experiences.

It will be exciting to see what further research into the Sheppey Island excursion reveals.

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Lyrics of Lords Vaux and Vere: Looney's Claims

by Michael Hyde

In *“Shakespeare” Identified* (1920; centenary ed. 2019), J. Thomas Looney notes that in Alexander Grosart’s collection of Elizabethan era poetry published in the *Fuller Worthies’ Library* in 1872, “the poet whose work immediately precedes that of De Vere is Thomas Lord Vaux, the representative of another old family whose ancestor, like De Vere’s, ‘had come over with the Conqueror’” (136–137). This collection, as Looney tells us (123–124), had, for the first time, brought together from various sources the 22 known poems of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. The collection also prints a baker’s dozen of poems by Vaux (d. 1556, though Looney says 1562) immediately preceding those of de Vere. Grosart pronounces himself “emphatically and exclusively in favor of the older [Vaux]” as the writer of the Vaux verses. Like de Vere, Thomas Vaux, the second Baron of Harrowden, was a Cambridge alumnus and poetic contemporary of Lords Surrey and Wyatt and other early Elizabethan rhymesters.

Even today, the Wikipedia articles on the 2nd and 3rd barons of Harrowden make us wonder, in Looney’s words, “if it is possible that both father’s and son’s work appear mingled together...in this collection.” This point matters to Oxfordians, as Thomas Vaux is indeed easily confused with his son, 3rd Baron William Vaux (d.1595), whose manor, King’s Place, was purchased and occupied by de Vere and his second wife, Elizabeth Trentham, in 1596. Grosart credits the elder Vaux with a special form of rhyming sestet (*ababcc*), which Looney would otherwise have called the Vere stanza.

Looney asserts that he has “little...doubt that... when as a young man De Vere began to write poetry he was strongly under the influence of Lord Vaux’ work,” and took Vaux as his model in his juvenile lyrics. Looney also claims that “by curious chance” the final Vaux poem in Grosart’s collection preceding those by de Vere is the “identical song” that “‘Shakespeare’ adapts for the use of the gravedigger in *Hamlet*.” These are the gravedigger verses in *Hamlet* 5.1.61–97, which popped up on my smartphone as I searched “gravedigger verses in *Hamlet*” under the title “The Aged Lover Renounceth Love” by 2nd Baron Vaux of Harrowden!

So Oxfordians have multiple Vaux issues to untangle thanks to Looney: first, the older Thomas Vaux as de Vere’s juvenile model; next, the son William Vaux as the contemporary whose King’s Place house became de Vere’s residence in 1596; and significantly, the gravedigger’s song in *Hamlet*, which is identified today as an early Vaux poem. Looney’s overall context here is his chapter on the “Lyric Poetry of Edward De Vere,” which is his first and foremost argument, using dozens of parallel passages to claim that de Vere was Shakespeare.

I am usually a foe of the overuse of parallel passages for literary attributions of authorship, but I find Looney’s fusillades of paired quotes from de Vere and Shakespeare to be convincing. I especially agree with those from “Women” on the “haggard” hawk. I refer Oxfordian readers to Roger Stritmatter’s edition of de Vere’s poems (*The Poems of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford and the Shakespeare Question, Volume I: He That Takes the Pain to Pen the Book*, Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, 2019) and the text of “E.O. 20: ‘If Women Could be Fair and Yet not Fond’” (141), which is written in a Vaux/Vere *ababcc* six-line stanza. The key lines are “Unsettled still, like haggards wild they range/These gentle birds that fly from man to man.” Here I insert a personal digression. Years ago, I noticed and printed out Thomas Vaux’s “The Aged Lover Renounceth Love,” whose four-line stanzas of rhyming trimeter, with the third line of each stanza a four-beat line, struck me as a model for Shakespeare’s lyrics. Here is the second stanza from Vaux:

*My lusts they do me leave
My fancies all be fled
And tract of time begins to weave
Gray hairs upon my head.*

Perhaps I was reminded of the aging poet’s melancholy rejection and recollection of his lusty youth that has become “Winter” in the Sonnets— “That time of year thou may’st in me behold” (sonnet 73). In any case, Thomas Vaux was a court poet and contemporary of Oxford’s uncle, Lord Surrey, and of Sir Thomas Wyatt, my favorite of early Tudor poets—“They flee from me,

who one time did me seek/ with naked foot stalking in my chamber.”

Whatever the case, as an aged (75 years) reader of Looney and lover of Shakespeare who was recently hooked up on kidney dialysis, I began puzzling over Looney’s claims for Vaux and Vere. Virtually all the scholarly and Oxfordian attention to the Vaux/Vere families owes to the Vaux house in Hackney having been the scene of priestly exorcisms of devils as described in Oxfordian Gwynneth Bowen’s sensational article on the lost Miracle Book: “Hackney, Harsnett and the Devils in ‘King Lear.’” This article was first published in *Shakespeare Authorship Review* (Autumn 1965). She credits the research of Colonel B.R. Ward for uncovering the parish records of the Vaux house having been the refuge of the Jesuit missionary and Catholic poet, Robert Southwell. The Vaux family was notorious for recusancy. 2nd Baron Thomas had attended Mary’s coronation in 1554; 3rd Baron William was jailed for harboring the fugitive priest Edmund Campion c. 1581. Bowen shows that the lost Miracle Book, according to Samuel Harsnett himself, was the early source (1586–1592?) of the names of the devils in *King Lear*. She speculates that Harsnett, as a chaplain for the Bishop of London, may have been involved in the censoring of the *Lear* manuscript in the early 1590s. Her zinger is that true Catholics believed that these miracles were performed by priests at the Vaux house in the mid-1580s. She suggests de Vere may have seen the Miracle Book before 1594 thanks to his friendly acquaintance with William Vaux (see below). For more on the role of Catholic gentry in late Elizabethan England, see Jessie Childs, *God’s Traitors: Terror & Faith in Elizabethan England* (OUP, 2014), which focuses on the Vaux family via the rediscovery in 1828 of their Tresham Papers; Godfrey Anstruther, *Vaux of Harrowden: A Recusant Family* (Johns Ltd. 1953); also, the Folger Shakespeare Library has the text of poems written in Latin at age thirteen by grandson Henry Vaux (d. 1587), STC 222957.

Anecdotally, in *Strange Newes* (1593) Thomas Nashe reminds Lord Oxford of a “breakfast you won” in a “rhyming contest” with Lord Vaux (n. 32 in Charles Wisner Barrell’s edition). Alas, no further details are given, but the anecdote suggests frequent association between de Vere and the Vaux family before 1593, which must have been with 3rd Baron

William. It’s reminiscent of the rhyming or poetry contests in Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar* (1579) between “Willie” and other nobles hidden in various pseudonyms.

The final question raised by these Vaux/Vere comparisons is what have we learned about their poems, especially how the juvenilia of de Vere was inspired and influenced by the poems of Thomas Vaux? The word that comes to mind is *concinnity*, an odd term applied to de Vere’s early poems by a commentator who may have been grateful that young man’s known literary output was scanty, chiefly in the form of lyrics. Yes, de Vere’s juvenile lyrics are brief, witty, and pointed. But can we conclude they are modeled on or derived from those of Thomas Vaux? To find an answer, we went to the treasure trove of Vaux’s twelve poems published in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576), as collected by de Vere’s friend and possible collaborator, Richard Edwards of the Chapel Royal—poems written by 1566, as that was the year of Edwards’s death.

My online facsimile of the first edition of *Dainty Devices* was edited by the redoubtable Hyder Edward Rollins and printed by Harvard University Press in 1927. Its massive apparatus finally arrives at the dozen contributions of Lord Vaux immediately preceding the seven poems of Edward de Vere (signed or initialed E.O.) as Looney correctly stated. Rollins’s notes offer up a dyspeptic, vehement attack on Looney’s heresy (244, 246) for having dared to doubt Stratfordian orthodoxy: “The ‘haggard hawke’...one of Lord Oxford’s lines...says of women ‘Unsettled still like haggards wild they range.’ Mr. Looney thinks this important evidence towards proving...that ‘Shakespeare’ (who, he says, refers to the haggard three times)...was identical with Oxford. He has been unable to ‘find much about the haggard hawk’ outside of ‘Shakespeare’ and Oxford. This is, however, far from being ‘rara avis in terris’ and is referred to by Richard Edwards at 27.22 and 71.3.... [T]hey could be largely augmented. Of such a flimsy nature is Mr. Looney’s ‘proof’ by parallels (cf. pp. lix f., above) that Oxford was ‘Shakespeare.’” It requires great patience to plod through Rollins’s erudite notes to discover this dismissive attack. But in 1927 Looney’s heresies were novel and orthodox scholars such as Rollins merely dismissed Looney’s parallels in footnotes as “flimsy.”

In rebuttal, I would argue that Rollins's attacks actually prove Looney's argument that de Vere echoes both Vaux and Shakespeare! If we cannot find "much about the haggard hawk outside of 'Shakespeare' and Oxford," we are still awaiting the other examples that Rollins claims he can easily and "largely" augment. Or is "haggard hawke" a striking image simply not found elsewhere in Elizabethan poetry?

The real question is whether the Vaux/Vere/Shakespeare parallels are more convincing than Rollins admitted. Oxfordians today are aware that de Vere and Richard Edwards, the 1566 compiler of *Dainty Devices*, collaborated on theatrical and perhaps musical productions for the Chapel Royal. So, these early Vaux/Vere/Shakespeare parallels cannot be easily dismissed as mere commonplaces. Here are lines verbatim from Vaux that are found in de Vere: "while grass grows...

the seely horse he sterves"; "I watch the net and others have the prey." (Fowler's Letters and E.O. 1, lines 25-26). Rollins also notes (viii) that de Vere, while on a Queen's Progress in 1566, saw a performance of a play called *Palamon and Arcite* that is attributed to Edwards. Today many Oxfordians view *Palamon and Arcite* as an early version of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. We also note that the title of Vaux 71 in *Dainty Devices* is "No pleasure without some paine," which antedates "The Pleasure of Paine" (1580), a poem attributed by Oxfordian Sarah Smith to Edward de Vere.

I conclude with the modest suggestion that Roger Stritmatter's recent edition of de Vere's poems take into account Looney's claims for the influence of Thomas Vaux's lyrics on the juvenilia of de Vere.

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The Fool, the Monk and The Courtier: A Textual Connection of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to Baldassare Castiglione's Masterpiece

by Jens Münnichow

In an article published in *The Oxfordian* I proposed the notion that the frequent coining of new words within the works of Shakespeare might have been caused by Edward de Vere's intensive exposure to language-related ideas presented by Baldassare Castiglione in his 1528 Renaissance masterpiece *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*, or *The Courtier*).

After reading *Twelfth Night* in an online reading group of Shakespeare enthusiasts, I'd like to propose another connection of Shakespeare to Castiglione. This time, it might not be just a connection of mere ideas and thought, but a more concrete one, the usage of an exact line of Castiglione's text in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

In the final scene of Act 1, Olivia has had enough of Feste's foolery, and he defends himself with the lines "Misprision in the highest degree! Lady, cucullus non facit monachum; that's as much to say as I wear not motley in my brain" (1.5.52–54). Since Shakespeare often lets uneducated sidekick characters use false Latin forms or misleading Latin phrases as comic relief, it is always interesting to take a closer look at Shakespeare's Latin phrases.

The one presented here—"cucullus non facit monachum"—is indeed a correct Latin sentence. It translates into English as "The cowl does not make a monk" and it is used as a proverb in the sense of "Thou shall not judge a book by its cover" or "All that glisters is not gold." So, alas, there is nothing to be found here for the fun-seeking Shakespeare reader.

The proverb exists in two different Latin forms, one using the noun "cucullus" and one using the word "habitus." "Habitus non facit monachum" translates into English as "The habit does not make a monk." In this context, the word "habit" is not used in the sense of a behavioral pattern, but as a description for the specific monastic clothing.

The two Latin versions differ significantly in their prevalence, with the "habitus" version being the one more frequently used. The fact that the proverb is formed in all other Latinian languages from the "habitus" version might suffice to show the more frequent

use of this version, where the first word of each sentence is the respective translation of the Latin "habitus." In Italian it is "**L'abito** non fa il Monaco," in French "**L'habit** ne fait pas le moine," in Spanish "**El hábito** no hace al monje" and in Portuguese "**o hábito** não faz um monge."

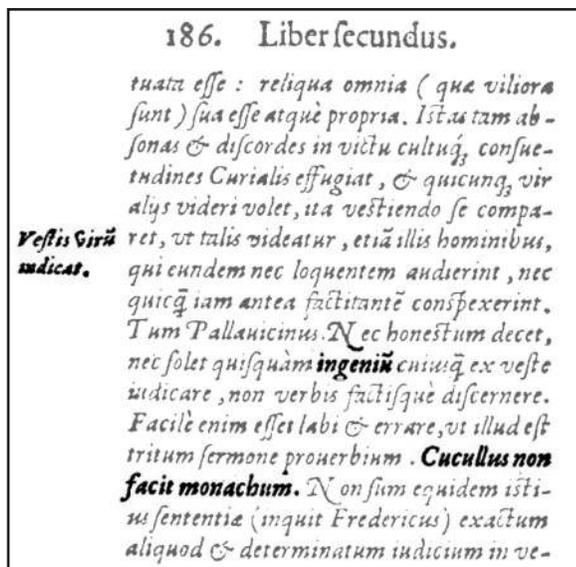
Maurizio Tondolo, a native speaker of Italian from Zurich, Switzerland, pointed out in an email exchange that the modern Italian word "cucullo," which translates to "cowl," is rarely used in everyday conversation, but almost exclusively in contexts where elaborated speech is used. In a 2024 piece on his blog on "Proverbs of My Culture," Tondolo states that the origins of the proverb itself and of its particular Latin phrasing are unclear and that at least the concept of the proverb can be traced back to the Roman fabulist Phaedrus, who ends his fable "Lanius et Simis" ("The Butcher and the Ape") with the words "Formosos saepe inveni pessimos et turpi facie multos cognovi optimos" ("I often found that beautiful people were the worst and I have known many people of ugly countenance that were the best").

Especially interesting for Oxfordian scholarship, Tondolo mentions that the Latin form of the proverb can be found in Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier*. Fortunately, he shares the exact source reference as Book 2, Chapter 28. The development of this text passage in the different Italian, English and Latin editions of *The Courtier* might shed light on the creation of the line in *Twelfth Night*.

Although Latin has been the language of civilized culture and publication from antiquity until long after Shakespeare's time and although the concept of the proverb might be traced back to Phaedrus, the Latin form of it does not appear in Castiglione's Italian version or in Sir Thomas Hoby's first English translation. Castiglione presents the proverb in the Italian form of "l'abito non fa il Monaco" (102), while Hoby has it as "many a manne might be deceived: and this proverb arriseth not without cause: The habit maketh not the Monke." Hoby's choice of words is interesting because he has a few Italian and Latin sentences in his

translation that he has taken directly from Castiglione’s original, but not the one about the habit and the monk.

It is in Bartholomew Clerke’s Latin translation of *The Courtier* in 1571 that the proverb is presented in its Latin form. He uses the less frequently used “cucullus” version of the proverb and has it as “Cucullus non facit monachum.”



Clerke uses the correct classical accusative singular case form of the male word “monachus” of the second declension, which is “monachum.” This is remarkable because Clerke’s text shows the frequent use of ligatures if the letter *m* is interconnected with a vowel. In those instances, the *m* is left out and a tilde is added above the vowel. Examples of this kind of ligature can be found on the very same page, in “ingeniu,” just three lines above the word “Cucullus,” and in the margin note “Vestis viri indicat.” The classical forms of the words would have to be “ingenium” and “virum” respectively.

In a 1606 edition of Clerke’s book that was printed in Germany (now available on Google Books) the sentence is indeed to be found with the ligatured form “monachu” (126). As shown above, Shakespeare used the correct classical Latin form “monachum” in *Twelfth Night* and again in *Measure for Measure* in the same sense when Lucio utters “‘Cucullus non facit monachum:’ honest in nothing but in his clothes; and one that hath spoke most villanous speeches of the duke,” using the Latin as a quote within his speech (5.1.271–273). The exact repetition of the whole sentence in two plays might be an indicator for the Bard’s preference

for this rhetorical device, which might, in turn, be seen as a preference for the origin of the proverb.

Geoffrey Bullough mentions Castiglione in his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* only in the introduction to the chapter on *Much Ado About Nothing*—but Castiglione is neither mentioned as a source for *Twelfth Night* nor for *Measure for Measure*. Therefore, *The Courtier*, Castiglione’s seminal work of Renaissance literature, might be a rewarding field of future scholarship to see whether further Latin lines or ideas from its text could be found in Shakespeare’s works.

Given that neither the EEBO nor the Google Books facsimiles are accessible to digital search functions due to its font, I would need a text format of Clerke’s 1571 Latin translation of *The Courtier* that is accessible to digital search functions to continue my research effectively. If any fellow Oxfordian had access to such a text format of *The Courtier* and shared it with me, I’d be glad to continue my work on it.

In conclusion, if Shakespeare had wanted to present the proverb to his audience in its most frequent use and in a form that would have been the easiest to comprehend, he would most probably have chosen the “habitus” version of the proverb. Instead, he deliberately chose the less frequent, but more elaborated “cucullus” version, that can be found neither in Castiglione’s original nor in Hoby’s first English translation, but in Clerke’s 1571 Latin translation of *The Courtier*—a translation that was not only sponsored, but also explicitly commissioned by Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford.

If we assume that the rare Latin phrase in *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure* is indeed taken from a literary source and did not just derive from everyday conversation or the author’s command of Latin, then the probable origin from a literary work and the specific edition of that work that Edward de Vere was personally involved with might add to the already strong case that Edward de Vere was indeed the author of the works traditionally attributed to “William Shakespeare.”

Isn’t it a sweet irony that the words of a Fool, borrowed from *The Courtier*, might help us to recognize the nobleman who told us in Sonnet 110 that he had made himself a motley to the view?

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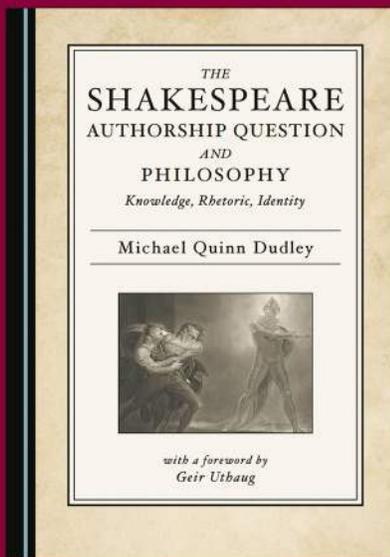
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Land Carracks and Crusadoes in *Othello*: Were New Topical Details Added in Revision?

by Tom Goff

One of the Oxfordians' strongest arguments in favor of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1550–1604) as “Shakespeare” has always been the many topical references in the plays and poems, which point toward much earlier composition than can be claimed for William Shakespeare of Stratford (1564–1616). If a poll were taken among Oxfordians about the composition date(s) for *Othello*, the likely consensus would favor the mid-to-late 1580s; agreement on 1588 would encompass the play's fiction, the wreckage of the Turkish fleet in a storm at sea, analogous to the real-life breaking, that year, of the Spanish Armada warships on the coasts of Ireland.

Still, consensus is not unanimity. According to Oxfordian scholar Noemi Magri, 1588 is “accepted as the most likely Oxfordian date,” and topical and chronological hints about when the play was written range from 1583 to c. 1588 depending on whether we follow Eva Turner Clark or Admiral H.H. Holland¹ (411). For Clark, 1583 is a viable end date for a composition embracing events on the European continent of 1581 and 1582 as well (552–569). So, we can at least settle on the proper decade for Oxford to have drafted *Othello*.

But what about additions to the play? If we suppose that topical allusions were added as *Othello* progressed from early stagings through revivals, then was brought closer to printing—a posthumous (1622) quarto printing came first—possibilities emerge. Could the playwright, at some point prior to 1604, have added new allusions without discarding earlier topical layers? Could “Shakespeare”/Oxford have alluded to English privateers' capture of the Portuguese *nau* (i.e., carrack or cargo vessel), *Madre de Deus* in 1592? The hints are few but tantalizing.

A recent article about the seizure of the *Madre de Deus* and its treasures may help us find what inspired Iago's words to the uncomprehending Cassio: “Faith, he [Othello] tonight hath boarded a land carrack: / If it prove lawful prize, he's made forever” (1.2.50–51). In “The Inventories of the *Madre de Deus*: Tracing Asian Material Culture in Early Modern England,” art

historian, Dr. Elsje van Kessel, senior lecturer at the University of St. Andrews, examines documents about the fate of a gigantic “land carrack,” unintentionally letting us glimpse oblique references to events, perhaps, in passages of *Othello*.

According to Dr. van Kessel, “Seized from the Portuguese in 1592, the *Madre de Deus* is the best documented of Elizabethan privateering successes—although for its failures as much as for its triumphs.” Before investigating that seizure, Van Kessel quotes Elizabethan naval chronicler Richard Hakluyt on a first significant capture, that of the *São Filipe* in 1587. She notices that in speaking of the first confiscation, Hakluyt can't help referring to the second:

And here by the way it is to be noted, that the taking of this Carak wrought two extraordinary effects in England: first, that it taught others, that Caracks were no such bugs but that they might be taken (as since indeed it hath fallen out in the taking of the *Madre de Dios*, and fyreing and sinking of others) and secondly in acquainting the English Nation more generally with the particularities of the exceeding riches and wealth of the East Indies...(207)

Van Kessel places the *Madre de Deus* in context: “As a Portuguese cargo ship on the India run or *Carreira da India*, the *Madre de Deus* was one of the four or five vessels that were annually destined to return from Goa to Lisbon filled every inch with goods from the East”(209). She gives the historical framework for the English privateering ventures (i.e., piracy with the state's acquiescence) that culminated in the 1592 seizure:

From the 1580s onwards, England (as well as the United Provinces of the Netherlands) increasingly contested Portugal's monopoly in Asia by attacking and seizing Portuguese and Asian ships. This needs to be seen against a background of continuing warfare. In 1581, after a short period of armed conflict, King Philip II of Spain was crowned also as Philip I of Portugal, and until 1640 that country remained in a dynastic union with Spain...the

first Anglo-Spanish war broke out in 1585, and because of the Iberian union, Portugal was swept into it. Capturing Portuguese carracks both in Asian and in European waters, English privateers were the first to bring large quantities of Indian and Chinese objects directly to their own country. (209)

Van Kessel narrates the drama of the *Madre de Deus*'s capture, and sifts through contemporary documents, including extensive inventories of the seized goods aboard the gigantic vessel. She provides key details: the privateering voyage, planned by Sir Walter Raleigh², and meant to raid Panamanian waters, was diverted to the Azores, and the scheme was executed by commanders John Burroughs and the Earl of Cumberland.

On the night of August 3, 1592, the *Madre de Deus*, under fire for much of that day, was taken. Van Kessel quotes 19th-century scholar William Drake (“the Carrack was more like a floating house seven stories high than any existing specimen of naval architecture”), and then describes the pillaging of the damaged vessel by the Earl of Cumberland’s unrestrained sailors and brigands, stepping over Portuguese corpses, taking whatever they could pry loose and carry away, yet barely skimming the ship’s vast cargo, valued as “at least £83,000 [Queen Elizabeth’s eventual share] out of a total of £141,000 according to Drake’s calculations...” (210).

I’ve mentioned the 1587 capture of the carrack *São Filipe*, which indicates that the *Madre de Deus* incident was not unique. So then: why suggest that a few scattered lines in *Othello* allude to the *Madre*'s capture and subsequent plunder? Dr. Van Kessel provides one possible clue: “The first inventory of sorts to be examined here...[and] the most familiar one—Hakluyt’s summary of the cargo...in his *Principal Navigations*...” She connects this catalogue with “lesser-known materials created months or even weeks from the ship’s capture...[describing] something of the havoc that characterized this first period” (211). That is, the capture and the resulting scramble for booty were sensational, and the reverberations were felt for decades. In Van Kessel’s words, “the taking of the ship [soon became] a popular episode in nationalist



Replica of the *Madre de Deus* at the Maritime Museum of Lisbon, Portugal © Marco2000, Wikimedia Commons.

historiography of the British empire” (210). What better material for a poet-dramatist?

The topicality, faint-seeming at first, turns more impressive on closer view. Van Kessel notes, “When the ship arrived in Dartmouth Harbour early in September, pilfering continued, so that the queen felt compelled to set up a commission to retrieve the embezzled goods—a move that had only limited success” (210). Given that the ship was firmly docked and easily accessed from land, have we targeted the inspiration for the lines about the “land carrack?” When Desdemona arrives safely on Cyprus after the storm has spared Othello’s command vessel and sunk the warlike Turks, Cassio’s apostrophe to Othello’s new bride, “The riches of the ship is come on shore!” (2.1.83) evokes images of a treasure-filled carrack like the *Madre*. Excessive rhetoric, even allowing for Cassio’s typical hyperbole or Desdemona’s status as a Venetian senator’s daughter! Desdemona, after all, has arrived on a warship, not a richly laden cargo vessel.

There is another exhibit. Once we’ve absorbed Iago’s repeated admonitions to Roderigo (“Put money in thy purse”: 1.3.325 et seq.), isn’t it a bit strange to hear Desdemona, flummoxed to have lost her

handkerchief, tell Emilia, “Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse / Full of crusadoes” (3.4.19–20)? The image jars ironically with Iago’s “Who steals my purse steals trash” (3.3.161), but the point is, why do Portuguese crusadoes, not some other coinage, enter Desdemona’s head? Crusadoes were Portuguese coins engraved with an emblematic cross; an inventory of the *Madre’s* holdings by a ship’s purser, Vicente de Fonseca, lists estimates of various contents valued in crusadoes (Van Kessel 214), and there were surely crusadoes aplenty on board, at least before the pilfering started.

I agree with Oxfordian editors Ren Draya and the late Richard Whalen that *Othello* was influenced by Cinthio’s tale of a jealous, murderous Moor, reflecting the Earl of Oxford’s own jealous suspicions of infidelity by his wife, Countess Anne (21–22, 29). Also, I agree that this poignant tragedy is constructed from the elements of the *commedia dell’arte* (30–32). Furthermore, the play may have existed in draft as early as “the late 1570s and mid-1580s,” when “a resurgent Catholic Spain was a serious threat” (20). So, it’s risky to assign a “local habitation” and a later time to three widely separated snippets and declare them topical, but Oxford’s biography may help support these conjectures.

Many Oxfordians believe that, by 1592, Edward de Vere had largely retired from court activities.³ J.T. Looney and Percy Allen, among others, thought that Oxford was now revising plays drafted much earlier for court audiences, adapting them with one eye on the public theater, but one eye (the dominant eye?) perhaps on the printed page. We can imagine the aging Oxford, years removed from seafaring ambitions, remembering his long-ago hankering—unrealized—after naval command, sprinkling his sea vista of serenely confident Othello and miserably drowned Turks with bits of privateering imagery. Oxford may have had time to add a few topical flourishes, given a dramatist’s enforced leisure, as the theaters were closed by the plague from much of 1592 through part of 1594.

And Oxford would have been aware that Hakluyt, writing about the *Madre de Deus* in his *Principal Navigations* (1599), knew Raleigh and Robert Cecil (Van Kessel 211). The earl could have known that Hakluyt’s inventory of “the riches of the ship” was derived from the “Leadenhall estimate” or “Leaden Hall catalogue,”

compiled when “all the goods that remained from the carrack’s cargo had been transported to Leadenhall Market in the City of London.” Significantly, “At least two copies of it have been preserved, one in the British Library, and another version amongst the Cecil Papers at Hatfield House” (213). Oxford’s surviving letters show him still in contact, by visit or by written word, with Lord Burghley, a keen promoter of the navy and shipping interests in general, and with Burghley’s son Robert Cecil. Oxford’s extant late-in-life letters are addressed almost solely to the Cecils, his erstwhile father-in-law and brother-in-law.

But if Oxford was recalling the *Madre de Deus* episode while revising *Othello*, what might he be revealing of his mental state? The scattered images could hint that the playwright took a cynical view of the great capture. Here was Edward de Vere, by 1592 a “lame man,” frustrated in his hopes to reap hefty returns from exploratory voyages or to win renown in sea battles. As a youth he regarded the navy, “to which service I bear most affection” (Anderson 60), as a possible career, yet he would later take, at best, a small part in combating the Spanish Armada (222–226).

And nothing like a “land carrack” had ever been in store for de Vere. Years earlier, without boarding a vessel, he had invested £3000 in a voyage to seek out the fabled Northwest Passage and bring back what soon proved, not gold but worthless ore (Ogburn 601–604). Would it be surprising if the *Madre’s* celebrated capture reached his ear in faintly mocking echoes?

Be that as it may, circumstance allows us a bit more matter: in *Dating Shakespeare’s Plays: A Critical Review of the Evidence*, Noemi Magri identifies a play called *The Mawe* (*The Moor*?) as a possible version of *Othello*. That play’s performance in 1594 is recorded in theater impresario Philip Henslowe’s diary as “ne,” which Magri interprets as “new,” but which Stephanie Hopkins Hughes reads, more convincingly, as “newly emended,” given Henslowe’s probable spelling of “amended” (see Hughes, Appendix E, 343–348). What added topical “emendations” may have helped boost Master Henslowe’s takings at the gate?

Finally, I haven’t given Cassio’s full apostrophe to the “divine Desdemona.” Here it is:

O, behold,
The riches of the ship is come on shore!

You men of Cyprus, *let her have your knees.*
Hail to thee, lady! And the grace of heaven
 Before, behind thee, and on every hand
 Enwheel thee round! (2.1.82–87)

Am I the only reader who, marking these lines, will recall the religious invocations in the Hail Mary: “Hail Mary, full of grace” and “Holy Mary, Mother of God?” (Madre de Deus!) My Oxfordian fellow readers can decide how topical or useful these apparent references may be.

Endnotes

1. A landlubber like me can at least appreciate Admiral Holland’s “weather eye” for events like the unusual perigee of the moon which occurred on December 8, 1588, and may account for Othello’s line late in the play, “It is the very error of the moon,” thus indicating a version of the play complete or nearly so. Holland also favors the parallel between drowned Turks and drowned Spaniards of the Armada (103–105, 108).
2. Raleigh, having planned the privateering expedition to Panama, was imprisoned in the Tower of London after secretly marrying and impregnating Elizabeth (Bess) Throckmorton, a Maid of Honour to the Queen (Queen Elizabeth habitually became incensed at bride and groom when one of her Maids dared to marry), but his plan, including the fleet’s later diversion to the Azores, was successfully followed (Trevelyan 169–187).
3. This impression of retirement may be substantially correct, though Oxford was at least attending court often enough to press his claim to various forest properties wrongfully denied to him and his father, described variously as the Forest of Essex and the keepership of Waltham Forest and the Park of Haverling. See Green 178 and Chiljan 41–55.



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Book Reviews

Jodi Picoult. *By Any Other Name: A Novel*

Ballantine Books, 2024; 544 pages
(\$30.00, Kindle \$14.99)

Reviewed by Don Rubin

I first heard the name Emilia Bassano many decades back when the acclaimed Elizabethan scholar of last century, A.L. Rowse, announced in 1979 that he had found proof that she was Shakespeare's 'Dark Lady' of the Sonnets. Rowse, a formidable researcher, had apparently outed her by studying the private papers and star charts of the sexually sleazy astrologer, Simon Forman. It seemed that Forman had made lots of coded notes about Bassano's willingness to (umm...how does one say it in Elizabethan) *halek* with an unusually large number of aristocratic sexual partners as well as having been both muse and amusement to frolicking artists of various stripes and predilections. Over the decades, the Rowse identification as simply a sexual plaything was challenged by numerous others (especially feminist researchers) who saw her as a serious poet in her own right with Forman's own astrological *bona fides* significantly shredded by the #MeToo movement.

Was Bassano a serious poet? It seems so. Was she the Dark Lady? Still unclear. What we do know now is that she was arguably the first woman in the Elizabethan era to publish a volume of poetry under her own name (the volume was published in 1611 and was called *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum—Hail God, King of the Jews*). That said, we still don't know her real place in the Shakespeare authorship story, which leaves lots of space for fascinating speculation.

A dark-haired beauty from a family of formerly Jewish Italian musicians (*conversos*—people converted under duress to Christianity), Emilia was brought to the Tudor court as a child and was educated beyond her class. The subject of a 2017 novel called *Dark Lady* by Atlanta writer Charlene Ball, the interest in Emilia by feminist researchers has been enormous. In 2018, she was the heroine of a quite successful British play done at the restored Globe called simply *Emilia*. The play, written by playwright and screenwriter Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, showed Emilia in many guises featuring multiple Emilias on the stage simultaneously along with

her patron, Mary Sidney. In this theatrical incarnation, Emilia was, to be sure, a coat of many colors including brightly sexual, darkly seething and multitalented as poet and playwright. Clearly, Emilia was portrayed as a proto-feminist calling out to today in a clear voice for female agency.

The Bassano phenomenon emerged again in 2019 when, as I am sure most readers here will recall, a young American cultural journalist with an impressive Princeton background named Elizabeth Winkler, wrote an essay in *The Atlantic* speculating on where the feminism came from in Shakespeare's works (think, for instance, Portia in *Merchant*, think Kate in *Shrew*, think Venus, think Lucrece and on and on). Winkler wondered aloud if a woman—perhaps Emilia Bassano—had input into the works or could have written all or parts of them. Winkler was, of course, quickly denounced by Stratfordians for daring to step outside the Church of True Believers, attacks that made Winkler, in her turn, wonder what it was that so enraged those invested in the church of Stratford. Eventually she wrote her own well-researched and thoughtful examination of the Stratford belief phenomenon called provocatively, *Shakespeare Was a Woman and Other Heresies*. Winkler's book sold thousands of copies worldwide and stirred new interest in the authorship question and, of course, in Bassano. All to the good, I think.

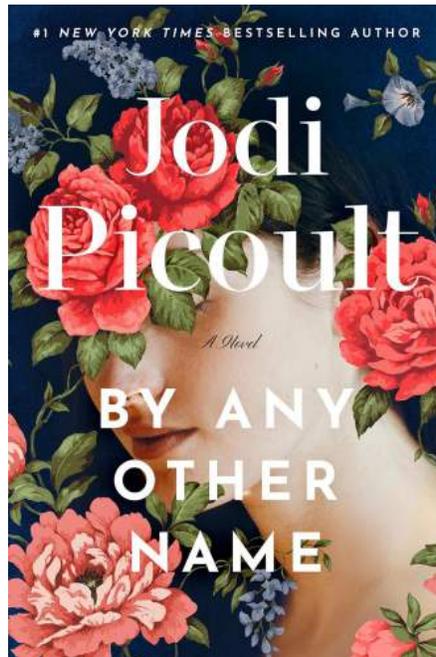
Which brings me to Jodi Picoult's latest book, *By Any Other Name*. Picoult, a best-selling author in her own right with thirty novels to her credit, read Winkler's volume with interest. Indeed, it set her on her own search for the mysterious Emilia. Published in 2024, Picoult's book became a bestseller, and it deserves to be. It also deserves to be read by anyone interested in the authorship: it is a clever and delightful fiction.

Picoult gives Emilia full throttle as a writer. In this version of the life, Emilia is not only the author of the 1611 *Salve Deus* but is also the author of *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece*, two arguably female-centered poems. For Picoult, Emilia is also the creator of *Taming of a Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello* (Emilia in the play—note the

name—is a key figure), *Merchant of Venice* (with Portia as key along with a character blatantly named Bassanio) and even *Hamlet* (with the Ophelia-like Emilia hoping for a Prince out of her orbit). Picoult's Emilia even helps her dubious play broker, Will Shakespeare, in revising his own flawed shot at writing a play, *Titus Andronicus*, including the adding in of two characters with the names Aemilius and Bassianus.

Picoult's novel, a breezy and bumptious wander through both Emilia's life and the authorship question for people of all persuasions, does not lack for either sexuality or intellectual *chutzpah*. As one example, Picoult's Emilia Bassano is a converted Christian in public but she and her family are actually practicing Jews in secret. They celebrate the sabbath with candles and prayers and she does her best not to eat on the fast day of Yom Kippur. If that's not enough to sate Shakespeareans who wonder how the Bard could have known so much about Venetian Jews, there's Picoult's imagined Marlowe story. Turns out he's the one who early on recognized Emilia's talent and was the one who linked her to the playbroker Shakespeare. When she learns of his death, she sits *shiva* for him, and as part of her secret mourning ritual rends a piece of her clothing and recites the mourner's *kaddish*. I have a sneaky feeling that the atheist Marlowe would be spinning in his grave if he knew.

But Emilia's life is only part of Picoult's literary tapestry. *By Any Other Name* is a double narrative with the Emilia story framed around another showbiz tale—this one about a struggling and hesitant contemporary female playwright named Melina (a play on the Emilia name) who finds out that Emilia Bassano was one of her own ancestors. So, she writes a play about Emilia called, in a nod to meta-fiction, *By Any Other Name*. (Very Shakespearean all these double meanings and double plots.) After Melina's graduation as a Theatre major at the only college a Shakespeare descendant would, of course, study—Bard College—and after rejections of her plays because, as she sees it, female playwrights don't get a fair shake, her gay roommate



submits her play under the more masculine name, Mel. That apparently male-authored play is, of course, soon picked up by a director and a producer and supported by the female-hating critic of the *New York Times*.

The two narratives play off one another quite effectively. We get to know and care deeply about both women though the Emilia story is certainly richer and less didactic. We follow Emilia from her childhood in the service of Susan Bertie (note to Oxfordians: Susan was married to Peregrine Bertie, himself connected to Edward de Vere through marriage). Well-educated by Susan, Emilia is ultimately passed on to Henry Carey who, as Lord Hunsdon, happens to be

the Queen's Lord Chamberlain, a man whose main task is to read, edit and license the Queen's theatrical entertainments. Emilia becomes his mistress despite their sexually icky age difference (Hunsdon is fifty-nine to Emilia's thirteen) but Picoult paints him as actually a nice guy who in return for a bit of loving, offers her access to amazing digs, great clothing, fabulous jewels, the aristocratic world she had only tasted early on and the opportunity to meet everyone who is anyone including the Queen herself. Eventually, the writer Emilia starts to emerge. She begins reading manuscripts with him and for him and finds that poetry and playwriting come quite naturally to her.

The novel moves backward and forward in time between the life of the would-be contemporary playwright Melina and would-be Elizabethan playwright Emilia who finds she enjoys attending theatre with Hunsdon. When Hunsdon realizes his young lady has real talent as a writer, he sets up a visit for her to Mary Sidney at Wilton House where she joins Mary and the boys—Ben Jonson, Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton and others—to share their latest manuscripts. She, of course, wows them and becomes something of a confidante to Mary. Emilia eventually finds her real voice though not any kind of personal or economic freedom, and because women at this time could not put their own names to anything but religious material, she grudgingly accepts the idea that someone else's name

will always be attached to her work. That’s modern Melina’s problem too.

Through her life with the Lord Chamberlain, Emilia’s story touches all the required bases to link her to Shakespeare’s plays. For example, during a visit to Denmark’s spanking new Kronborg Castle (Elsinore) with Peregrine Bertie (the English ambassador to Denmark) she dines near astronomer Tycho Brahe, who speaks of the heavens to her and introduces her to his relatives, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. All this is, of course, far too neat for credibility, but Picoult does it all with such a deft hand that you really do buy it. (Well, okay, I really bought it, and I am not an easy shopper.)

At the center of Emilia’s story is her meeting with the dashing Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton. She is nineteen and still Hunsdon’s mistress, while Southampton is just sixteen. Together, the two teens begin what turns out to be a lifelong—but necessarily hidden—affair. I won’t give away the rest, but I will say again that Picoult’s research into the period is absolutely terrific. She accurately conveys how people lived, what they wore, how they partied and how they loved, the horrific conditions in which the poor lived and especially the conditions that women without money or status were forced to endure.

Finally, let me say to my Oxfordian friends here, that, yes, de Vere flits in and out of Picoult’s book and comes off quite well despite being incidental. We meet him at the tiltyard, in court and even in the modern section where Melina’s research into Emilia’s life leads her to say to the critic of the *New York Times*—as

Picoult has also said in interviews—that the plays of Shakespeare were written not by a single person but by a group of many talented writers using ‘Shakespeare’ as a codename and agreed collective pseudonym. She even adds a knockout punch: “Oxford,” she says, “was the ringleader.” Yup. Clearly, both Emilia and Melina also know well of the Oxford scriptorium at Fisher’s Folly and of his personal support of numerous writers, while Melina is even aware of Alexander Waugh’s work. Suffice it to say, de Vere comes off incidentally, but rather well.

Let me end here by noting another interesting modern connection to Emilia. When Emilia gets pregnant and becomes an embarrassment for Hunsdon, she is married off by him to one Alphonso Lanier, a drunkard court musician and a lout with a nasty temper. Thereafter—not in the book—follows a whole slew of begetting over the next centuries leading us to today when Emilia’s great-great-great-descendant eventually emerges in the 20th century as a writer himself named Thomas Lanier Williams.

Not ringing a bell? Fun fact: he’s probably better known to you as Tennessee Williams.

Thanks for Tennessee, Emilia. Thanks for Emilia, Jodi. All good stuff.

[Don Rubin is President of the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition (doubtaboutwill.org) and a lifetime member of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship. An emeritus Professor of Theatre Studies at Toronto’s York University, he is the Series Editor of Routledge’s 6-volume *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*.]

Sky Gilbert. *Shakespeare Lied*

Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2024; 139 pages
(\$18.95, Kindle \$9.95)

Reviewed by Michael Dudley

In March 2025, newspapers around the world reported that the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was embarking on a project to “decolonize” its collections to address aspects of his works that modern audiences may find “problematic.” According to the *Daily Mail* (March 16, 2025) this will include no longer referring to him as the “world’s greatest playwright” but rather that he was

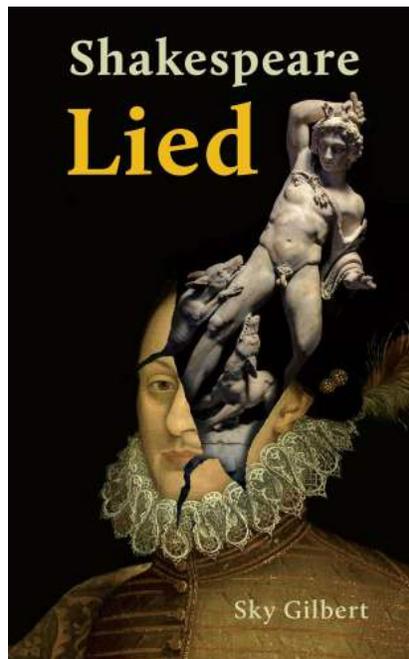
merely “part of a community of ‘equal and different’ writers globally.” Of particular concern according to some scholars and activists is that “Shakespeare creates a ‘dark/light binary’ which casts dark or black as negative and white or fair as positive.”

Before embarking too deeply on such a project, the SBT’s Board of Trustees would be well advised to read Sky Gilbert’s new book, *Shakespeare Lied*, hopefully finding in its pages the resolve to not only reject such simple-minded and ideologically motivated 21st-century interpretations of Shakespeare’s works, but also defend his singular genius for complexity and ambiguity.

Gilbert argues that, in a dramatic departure from the Christian passion plays of previous generations, Shakespeare was simply not engaged in didactic moralizing of any kind. Gilbert demonstrates that many of Shakespeare's characters argued for multiple sides of issues, presenting audiences with a wide array of viewpoints and moral positions, but he left it to individuals to decide for themselves what to think—something Gilbert believes audiences of the time would have found deeply unsettling, and which now seems equally discomfiting to progressive activists.

Shakespeare Lied is a fascinating and urgently important exploration of the ways in which the poet-playwright “confront[ed] the spectator with impossible situations, impossible choices, and impossible people. He believes in asking unanswerable questions” (15). John Keats (1795–1821) would famously make a very similar observation of Shakespeare, noting that he possessed “Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Cornish 136). In Gilbert's view, this now puts Shakespeare at stark odds with current-day woke moralizers and thought police who want to use the arts to preach their particular ideological gospels. While Gilbert says he may sympathize with some of the social and political aspirations of such activists, he believes that the intrusion of their politics into art threatens to destroy it, for once it takes hold, art can no longer grant audience members the individual autonomy Shakespeare offers, but instead can too easily become propaganda.

A professor emeritus at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Gilbert is a stellar figure on the Canadian theatre scene, having seen more than forty of his plays produced. As the co-founder and onetime artistic director of the queer theatre Buddies in Bad Times in Toronto, and currently the artistic director of the Hammer Theatre Company in Hamilton, Ontario, Gilbert is renowned for his oftentimes subversive and experimental explorations of gender and sexuality.



With *Shakespeare Lied*, Gilbert engages with the philosophical foundations of Shakespeare's writing, but does so with two openly admitted agendas: to challenge the ideologues who would shackle the poet-playwright to their postmodern, identitarian projects, and make the case that these philosophical underpinnings clearly point to the true identity of the author in Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. A short book at less than 140 pages, *Shakespeare Lied* is nonetheless replete with big ideas, with each of its six chapters providing sufficient basis for entire books unto themselves.

Chapter One, “Skepticism,” sets the stage for Gilbert's theorizing by establishing Shakespeare as a profoundly skeptical author, one who creates fantastical fictional realities filled with characters who behave in ways contrary to anything approaching reality, yet whom audiences accept as real because they make sense. The plays have a self-contained logic that may be psychologically true, but are, in Gilbert's estimation, impervious to interpretation. Indeed, he criticizes the literary scholars who have devoted their careers over decades in an attempt to do so. It is obvious, he writes, that Shakespeare's skepticism was gained from extensive reading of Greek and Roman philosophers in their untranslated texts, yet conventional literary scholars and biographers have resisted acknowledging this for what it would mean for the viability of their preferred—i.e., unlearned—authorial candidate.

Chief among these classical authors for Gilbert's analysis is the Greek sophist Gorgias (483–375 BCE), who philosophized on the nature of *nothing*, arguing that because we can imagine things that do not exist, and that each of us perceives the world differently and cannot communicate these realities to one another, there is no escape to the un-cognized world. In this respect Gorgias anticipated Immanuel Kant, who argued that the “thing-in-itself” (*Ding an sich*) must remain unknown to us. All that is left to us in such a world, argued Gorgias, is rhetoric, rather than philosophy or reason.

For Shakespeare and Gorgias alike, *metaphor* provides us with the means to understand the world and

the minds of others. As such, the power of mere words is enormous. As Gilbert puts it, “[w]ords that we take as truth can be lies, and a master orator can persuade us that anything is true. So how do we operate in a world where our reality can be changed simply through the words used to describe it?” (50).

Subsequent chapters develop Shakespeare’s Gorgian approach to building fictive worlds—which is to say, “lies”—first by illustrating the degree to which he experimented with the meta-theatrical (more popularly known as “camp”), thereby showing audiences how easily and profoundly they can be fooled by fiction. Next Gilbert elaborates on Shakespeare’s anti-didacticism, stressing that the playwright never seeks to persuade us of one point of view or another—and certainly not to moralize—but only to demonstrate (often as a warning) the power of persuasion.

Shakespeare’s devotion to metaphor is shown to be tied closely to his love of Ovid, author of *The Metamorphoses*, for what else is metaphor, Gilbert posits, than a form of metamorphosis? He writes, “[t]he gods who transform people into beasts and flowers in myth are like the poet who transforms ideas into images, images into stories, and experience into metaphor” (95).

Tying all of this together for Gilbert is Shakespeare’s biggest lie of all, which was about who he actually was, a matter which he hints at throughout his works with some urgency. Gilbert is convinced that de Vere was the author, but that he needed to keep this secret owing to “something terrible” that happened to him as a young man, which Gilbert believes was a “kind of rape” (121) about which “he could not ever tell anyone about” (129). For Gilbert, the highly controversial Prince Tudor theory provides the likely answer: that Shakespeare was “the victim of the advances of an older woman who was his mother—who also happened to be the Queen of England” and that this was a “tortured truth...that might burn a hole in his heart” (125). This, Gilbert argues, would explain Shakespeare’s choice of subject matter in works that have otherwise mystified scholars, such as *The Rape of Lucrece*, the embodiment of sexuality in the “dark lady” of the Sonnets, and Hamlet’s obsession with his mother. If not, he asserts, then there had to have been some *other* horror that Shakespeare faced.

There is also clearly a dark cloud hanging over Sky Gilbert himself: that “something terrible” also

happened to him in the form of the highly-publicized “cancelation” he suffered over the reaction by activists to his poem “I’m Afraid of Woke People” which he published on his personal blog on November 10, 2018, and which cost him the production of his play *Drag Queens in Outer Space* and all association with Buddies in Bad Times, the company he co-founded in 1979. While some might be tempted to attribute his arguments against wokeness to mere bitterness over the experience, he vows in the epilogue that he wrote this book not to defend himself or other victims of cancelation, but rather to defend art itself—a project in which Shakespeare himself was also engaged throughout his life. *Shakespeare Lied* warns us that this project is threatened by those who completely misunderstand both Shakespeare the man and the nature of his lies.

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Warren Thomas Hope. *Is That True? Shakespearean Explorations*

Edited by Gary Goldstein. Laugwitz Verlag, 2024; 210 pages (\$12.00)

Reviewed by Richard M. Waugaman, M.D.

This fascinating book is the eleventh in Uwe Laugwitz’s series “Neues Shakespeare Journal,” and the fifth edited or written by Oxfordian scholar and editor Gary Goldstein. It collects 50 years of Warren Hope’s Oxfordian publications that were previously, as Hope writes of those of another Oxfordian, “hidden away in tiny periodicals with small readerships” (145). Hope was one of the few Oxfordians whose Ph.D. was in British literature. Goldstein’s Introduction tells us that he taught Renaissance literature at Temple University and other colleges in Philadelphia. Based on his

dissertation research, he published two books on the Scottish poet Norman Cameron. Hope also published several books of his own poetry. In 1992, he published his first Oxfordian book, *The Shakespeare Controversy*. He researched Elizabethan theater and book trade to find further evidence that Oxford was the real Shakespeare. As Goldstein recounts, “For a country that was mostly illiterate, the stage was the primary means of public discourse” (10), reaching far more Londoners than attend live theaters today.

Hope addresses the stubborn prejudice of Shakespeare scholars against any questioning of the “pseudoscience” (75) of their deeply flawed authorship theory. He devotes six pages to Delia Bacon—a pioneer of Shakespeare authorship skeptics—and narrates in detail Nathaniel Hawthorne’s generous sponsorship of her work. While American consul in Liverpool, he visited Bacon in London, wrote to her often, and “became the only sympathetic contact she had in the world” (29). Hawthorne went on to have published, at his own expense, her 1857 book *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded*. Things did not go as well when Bacon visited Thomas Carlyle in 1853. She reported that, when he learned she was an authorship heretic, he “shrieked” at her. But, with Hawthorne’s support, Bacon persuaded Emerson, Whitman, Mark Twain, and Henry James to become skeptical of what Hope labels the “cult” (31) of the Stratfordian theory.

One of Hope’s many fascinating observations is that a child’s name has “a special attraction. Our names are usually the first words we learn to write” (51), so the Latin word “*ver*,” meaning both “truth” and “spring,” would have had a formative appeal for de Vere. *Loves Labour’s Lost* may have been the first play published under Oxford’s famous pen name; near the end, the Braggart introduces “This *Ver*, the Spring,” and commands, “*Ver*, begin.” *Ver* then sings his song, while de Vere himself begins to publish other plays under his pseudonym.

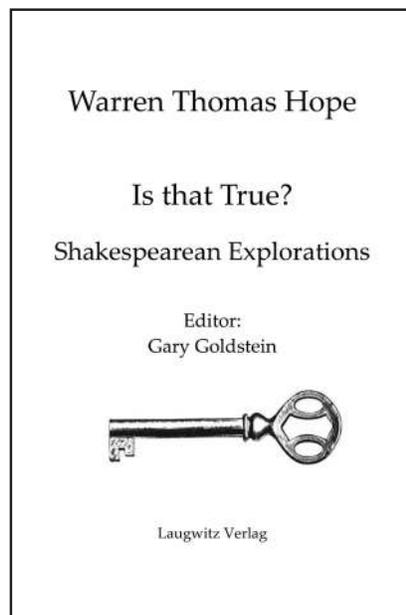
Observing that “Psalm... is just another word for sonnet,” Hope emphasizes that Oxford “clearly echoes

phrases and sentiments found in...the Psalms” (57). Traditionalists have until recently rejected autobiographical readings of the Sonnets, but Hope quotes Samuel Butler’s astute characterization of them as “unguarded letters in verse” (59).

Repeatedly, Hope makes intriguing connections between the works and Oxford’s life. “Like Lear, Oxford was the father of three motherless daughters... Like Gloucester, Oxford was also the father of two sons,” (61) one legitimate and the other not. Hope follows up on a tantalizing story told by Alan Nelson. In sharp contrast with Nelson, however, Hope provides a more plausible explanation for a couplet that was recited before Queen Elizabeth in the summer of 1602. It was said of Oxford’s youngest daughter, “Susan Vere/Nothing’s your lott, that’s more than can be told/For nothing is more precious than gold” (62). Hope links the repetition of “nothing” here with Cordelia’s answer when Lear asks what she can say to one-up her sisters in declaring how much she loves him. “Nothing, my lord” is her reply. Furious, Lear eventually retorts, “thy *truth* then be thy dower.” Always alert to the layers of divergent meanings in Oxford’s works, Hope interprets “nothing is more precious than gold” as an allusion to Lear’s “truth” and the bilingual pun on “Vere.”

Linking the title character of *Timon of Athens* with Oxford, Hope points out that Timon refuses to engage in usury, or charging interest when friends borrow money from him. “Usury” is in fact one of the keywords Oxford wrote in the margin of his Geneva Bible several times, when that word was used in the text. In terms of the generosity to a fault that Timon shared with Oxford, the largest of all the words Oxford wrote in his Bible’s margins was “Almes,” alluding to generosity rather than usurious greed.

Following the eight articles reprinted in Part One, Part Two reprints several book reviews, and Part Three, “Notes and Obituaries.” Hope turns his devastating wit on the hapless author of the 1993 book, *Deciphering Elizabethan Fiction*, which he calls “unreadable,” and “short but far too lengthy” (96). Ridiculing the once



popular “death of the author” trend in English departments, Hope compares trying to be interested in what they write with “trying not to stare at the little piles of dandruff on a professor’s shoulders” (95). Further, he charges such professors with “deaden[ing] in the young the...pleasures [of] reading” (96). Likewise, Hope skewers Harold Bloom’s and James Shapiro’s “faith”-based attacks on the Oxfordian theory. As he points out, both Bloom and Shapiro use unscholarly circular reasoning to assume Oxford died before many of Shakespeare’s plays were written. I enjoyed learning that Peter Moore—“one of the very best Oxfordian scholars” (139)—found Alan Nelson to be cooperative when Moore asked for his help. I met Alan through a college classmate whose sister is Alan’s wife, and we have a friendly relationship.

Much as I share Hope’s dim view of Bloom and Shapiro, I part company with him when he harshly attacks Helen Vendler’s brilliant, sophisticated analysis of the Sonnets. I do, of course, share Hope’s opinion that the Sonnets were written by Oxford and about Oxford’s life, rather than by Vendler’s “fictive speaker.” Similarly, I find Hope to be too harsh on Kevin Gilvary’s strategy of pretending to accept the traditional authorship theory in his 2018 *The Fictional Lives of Shakespeare*, while debunking the entire genre of Shakespeare biography. Hope overlooks the fact that Gilvary succeeded in having his book published by Routledge, in contrast with the majority of Oxfordians,

whose open “heresy” means they can publish only in Oxfordian journals. And Hope might have mentioned the similar book by the traditionalist David Ellis, who devastatingly complained that Shakespeare biographies are all so speculative that they damage the credibility of biographies in general (see his 2012 *The Truth about William Shakespeare: Fact, Fiction and Modern Biographies*).

In reviewing a book on Thomas Watson by Ian Johnson, Hope mentions Oxford’s early sonnet “Love Thy Choice,” published in Watson’s 1593 *Tears of Fancy*. A prominent Elizabethan scholar confessed to a mutual friend that Oxford’s signed sonnet convinced him that Oxford wrote Shakespeare’s Sonnets. But he was afraid of jeopardizing his academic reputation by announcing his conclusion publicly. Though we look in vain for profiles in courage among Stratfordian scholars, it is heartening to know that Uwe Laugwitz and Gary Goldstein have once again collected the works of a significant Oxfordian for those seeking the truth.

[Richard M. Waugaman is Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University. He has written 230 publications, half of them on Shakespeare. His two e-books are *Newly Discovered Works by “William Shake-Speare,” a.k.a. Edward de Vere*, and *It’s Time to Re-Vere the Works of “William Shake-Speare”’: A Psychoanalyst Reads the Works of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford*.]



*It was a lover and his lass,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
That o’er the green corn-field did pass
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding.
Sweet lovers love the spring.*

— As You Like It

The Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive, Michael John Goodman, “Rosalind” illustrated by Kenny Meadows, 1846.

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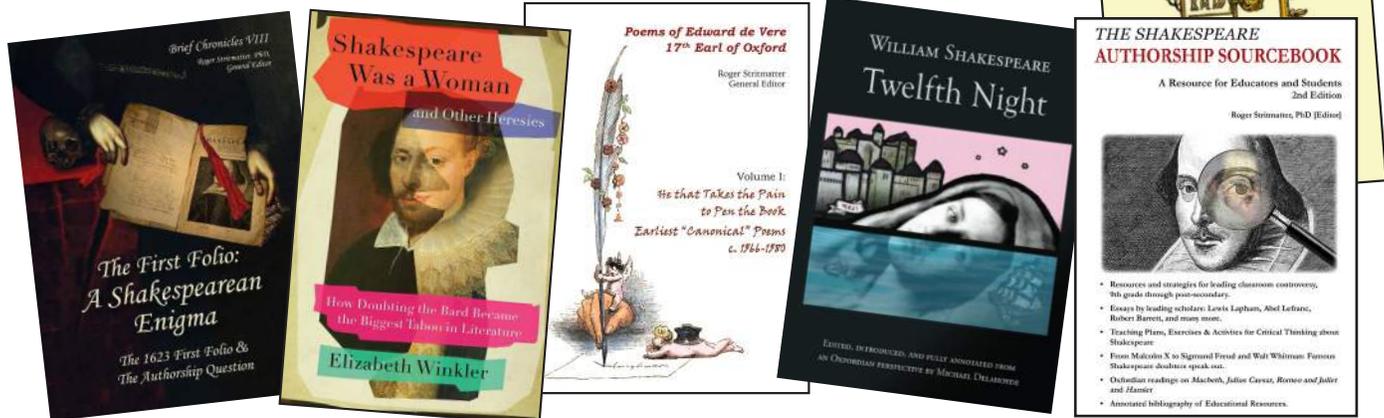
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