

“Bestow How, and When you List...”: The de Veres and the 1623 Shakespeare Folio

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Advocates of the Oxfordian view attributing the authorship of works published in the 1623 “Shakespeare” folio to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, have naturally drawn attention to the fact that the folio was dedicated to, and apparently published under the patronage of, Phillip and William Herbert, the two sons of Mary Sidney who were respectively de Vere’s son-in-law and near son-in-law. Although this striking circumstance was not included among the elements of evidence adduced in J. Thomas Looney’s original 1920 book on the theory, by 1984 when Charlton Ogburn published *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, the Herbert brothers are pegged, very plausibly, as the folio’s ringleaders, “engineers of the crucial artifacts,” in Charlton Ogburn’s words (216-239).

It is not difficult to see how readily the evidence supports such inference. In 1621, when work on the folio’s production began in earnest, these two renowned arts patrons possessed the power, the political connections and, quite likely, the requisite manuscript materials, to turn the folio into a reality. Pembroke had in 1615, after several years of angling, finally obtained the position of Lord Chamberlain and was therefore in administrative control of the archives of the King’s Men, formerly the “Lord Chamberlain’s Men” who had acted many of the Shakespeare plays. Thus, whether unpublished play material came from the archives of the Company or from private holdings among de Vere’s descendants and in-laws, it was Pembroke and Montgomery—and perhaps Susan Vere—who were positioned to hold final authority over any plans to publish. It was this trio, apparently, which authorized, facilitated, and subsidized the *First Folio*’s 1623 publication by the firm of Isaac and William Jaggard.

In evaluating the undoubtedly complicated process by which the folio came to be published, literary historians would do well, however, to avoid the great

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bugaboo of mono-causal explanation and instead consider the potentially contrary or converging motives of all the historical actors involved, in one way or another, with the production. Jaggard and other publishers may have had their own motives for seeking the laurels of publishing the works of “Shakespeare.” Two years before the publication of the folio began (during the summer of 1621), in 1619, the Jaggard firm collaborated with Thomas Pavier to publish a series of seven Shakespearean and pseudo-Shakespearean quartos. This series of plays, known collectively as the Pavier quartos after the name of the publisher, included quartos of 2 & 3 *Henry VI*, *Henry V*, *Pericles*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. For reasons not well understood, as William J. Neidig documented in a remarkable 1910 article in *Modern Philology*, three of these plays were falsely backdated to 1600 or 1608.

This venture indicates Jaggard’s apparently mounting enthusiasm for undertaking publication of the Shakespearean plays, which by 1619 must have been viewed as a prize to be bestowed on some eager printer, who could hope not only for profit but lasting fame from the enterprise. By many accounts, however, Jaggard was not the most likely candidate for the job. It is not without some interest, therefore, that in the same year that the Pavier quartos were published, the Jaggard firm dedicated a major folio volume, *ARXAIO-PLOUTOS. Containing, Ten following Bookes to the former TREASURIE of AUNCIENT AND MODERN TIMES* to Phillip Montgomery and also, very pointedly, to Montgomery’s wife, Lady Susan Vere, daughter of the 17th Earl. As Montgomery is also one of the two dedicatees of the Folio, four years later, this connection is not without some interest.

The Jaggard-Vere link was brought to my attention in 1990 while working at a Northampton (Mass.) book auction at which the volume was offered for sale. Among other bibliographical links between *ARXAIO-PLOUTOS* and the folio, the book employs many of the same typographical devices which appeared four years later in the Shakespeare folio. Before that time, this concrete 1619 link between Susan Vere and the Jaggard firm was not known to students of the authorship question.

Incidentally, the fact that this discovery represented a new and unprecedented connection between the Jaggard firm and the de Vere family did not stop orthodox scholars whom I approached about the book from authoritatively pronouncing that there was “nothing new” about the find. This statement was apparently made in attempt to splash cold water on any enthusiasm that might have been generated by the potential implications of such an unambiguous 1619 link between Susan Vere and William Jaggard. Charlton Ogburn, for his part, was “floored” by the discovery and considered it of the highest importance.

ARXAIO-PLOUTOS is a translation and amalgamation of several works detailing the customs and cultural traditions of the Gauls, Spaniards, and Italians, to which the English Herald Thomas Milles has added material on the heraldry and customs of England. As the reproduction below shows (left), the book is prominently dedicated to Susan Vere, as well as her husband, the patron of the 1623 *Folio* (right).

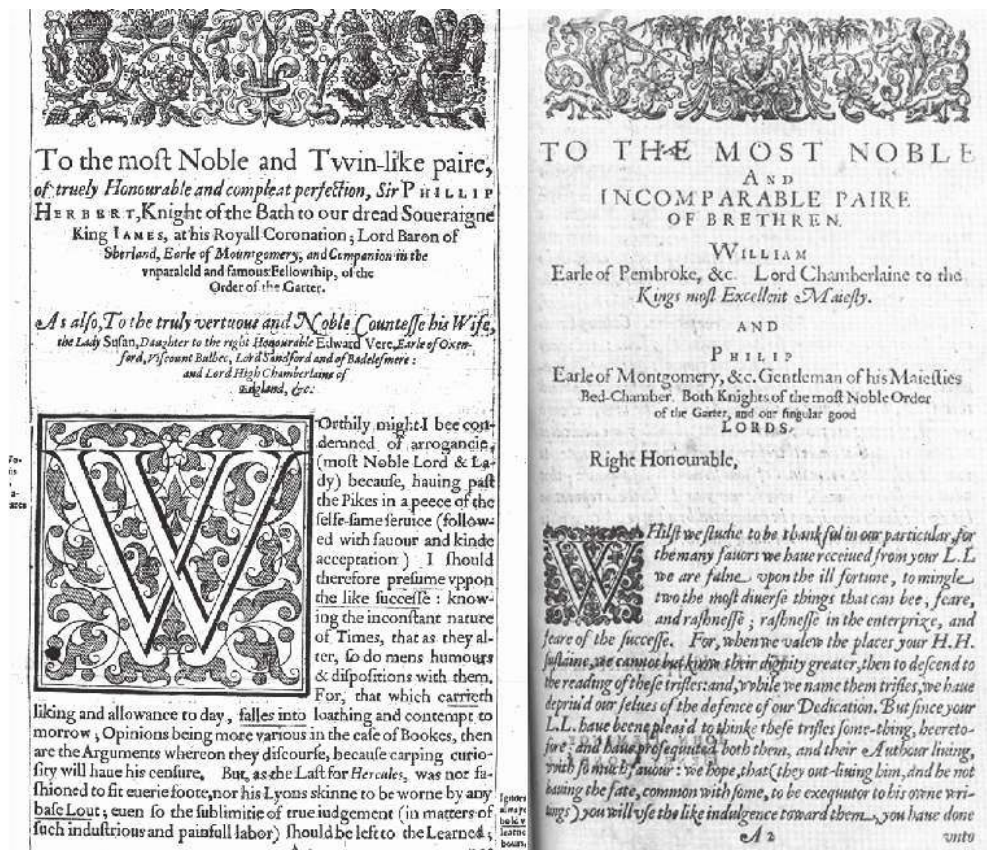


Figure One: 1619 dedication to Susan Vere, daughter of the 17th Earl, and her husband Phillip Herbert, compared to the 1623 Folio dedication to Herbert and his elder brother, the Earl of Pembroke.

The similarities of both design and language between the 1619 dedication “To the Most Noble and Twin-like Paire” and the 1623 Folio dedication, “To the Most Noble and Incomparable Pair,” are striking enough to constitute a clearly deliberate creative allusion, employing both visual elements of design and linguistic cues to connect the Shakespeare volume to the *Archaeoploutos*. It is difficult to believe that Jaggard did not have the 1619 version in mind when he designed the 1623 Folio dedication. It is easy to believe, on the contrary, that when he wrote the 1619 dedication to Susan Vere, extolling both her and her illustrious father, he wasn’t thinking ahead to a day in the future when there would be a Shakespeare Folio. Yet since Stratfordians cannot imagine any logical reason why Jaggard would have intended one dedication to echo another, this evidence is naturally ignored if not suppressed, by Shakespearean authorities.

In fact, a close reading of the dedication suggests that Susan is the primary covert dedicatee of the volume; although the dedication initially makes appeal to the “most

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Noble Lord & Lady,” subsequent passages are directed solely to the “gracious madam,” Susan Vere. The complete title-page dedication reads,

To the moft Noble and Twin-like paire,
*of truly Honourable and compleat perfection, Sir Philip
Herbert, Knight of the Bath to our dread Soueraigne
King Iames, at his Royall Coronation ; Lord Baron of
Sherland, Earle of Mountgomery, and Companion in the
vnparaleld and famous Fellowship, of the
Order of the Garter*

*As alfo, To the truly vertuous and Noble Counteffe his Wife,
the Lady Sufan, Daughter to the right Honourable Edward Vere, Earle of Oxen-
ford, Vifcount Bulbec, Lord Sandford and of Badelefmere :
and Lord High Chamberlaine
of England, etc.*

The extended praise of Susan’s father, Edward de Vere, is also noteworthy, given that it ends with an “etc.,” which invites filling in the following blank space with some “other honors” to which he may be entitled, but which remain unmentioned. While this was a convention of the time when printing the names of important persons, given the reasonably obvious echoing of the first dedication page by the second it does not seem inappropriate to consider the implications of such a convention if the writer is thinking of the fact that the countess’s father was “Shakespeare.”

The dedication itself invites both patrons to “enter into a spacious Forrest” — evidently a metaphor for the world of historical customs embodied in ARXAIO-*PLOUTOS* — “affording all choise of pleasing Game, either for Hawking, Hunting, Fishing, Fowling, or any other Noble exercise beside.” The dedication goes on from this to assure the book’s patrons that,

*...an Orchard stands wide open to welcome you, richly abounding in the fairest
Frutages: not to feed the eie only, but likewise to refresh the Heart, inviting you to
plucke where, and while you please, and to bestow how, and when you list: because
they are all yours, and whosoever else shall taste of them, do enioy such freedome
but by your favor.*

In this garden, the dedication assures Lady Vere,

*...you may meete with a faire Bevey of Queenes and Ladies, at diverse turnings
as you walke, and everie one will tell you the Historie of her life and fortune (rare
examples of Vertue and Honor) as themselves can best, truly & plainly discourse
unto you. Some other also you shall see, sadly sitting under Eughe & Cipresse tress,
with Garlands of those leaves wreathed about their heads, sighing out their divers*

disasters: whom your noble nature cannot choose but commiserate; as greeving to see a scratch in a cleare skin, and a bodie beautified by Nature, to be blemished by unkinde Destiny.

Is the dedication, in this final passage, referring to the bounteous literary exploration of female subjectivity embodied in the “Shakespeare” canon? Certainly, his language calls to mind characters such as Ophelia, Desdemona, Cleopatra, Lucrece or Imogen—who all are made to tell “the history” of their “lives and fortunes” in a manner quite unprecedented for early 17th century England and undoubtedly quite capable of stirring considerable emotional response in a cultivated arts patron such as Lady Vere. She was one who could commiserate with the “divers disasters” of such characters, not only from literary precedent, but out of secret sympathy with her own father and other relatives who had survived the hurricane of his life.

If so, the entire address to Montgomery and his wife assumes an awesome consistency. Jaggard’s patrons are credited with being stewards of the orchard. The fruits “are all yours, and whosoever else shall taste of them, do enioy such freedome but by your favor.” These stewards are therefore urged to “bestow how, and when you list [i.e., please].”

Do we have here a public appeal to the “grand possessors”—who are in the 1609 preface to the second state of *Troilus and Cressida* also referred to as the “grand [theatrical] censors”—powerful insiders ultimately responsible for the inhibition of controversial plays such as *T&C*? Is Jaggard signaling his flattering enthusiasm for proceeding with the folio project and requesting the approval and patronage of Montgomery and his wife, the daughter of Edward de Vere?

Whether or not the reader accepts this interpretation of Jaggard’s dedication, *ARXAIO-PLOUTOS* establishes a tangible and telling political link between Phillip Montgomery, his wife Susan Vere, Edward de Vere’s youngest daughter, and the folio publishers, during the period in which the political decisions leading to the 1623 First Folio publication were being made.

This article first appeared in the *Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter* 34:3 (Fall 1998), 18-19. It has been slightly modified in this version, so as to reflect the editor’s awareness of the collaborative authorship of the *ARXAIO-PLOUTOS* dedication. Most likely, it represents a collaboration between the publisher, Jaggard, and the translator, Thomas Milles.

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