

Henry Peacham and the First Folio of 1623

Peter W. Dickson

In the Shakespeare authorship debate, there is a general perception among both Stratfordians and Oxfordians that after Francis Meres' famous list of great poets and dramatists in *Palladis Tamia* (1598), the awareness of Edward de Vere as a literary figure largely disappeared until Alexander B. Grosart collected and published in 1872 some of the poems of the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford.

This perception is inaccurate because one can reconstruct a trail of interconnected historical references to him as a literary figure through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In a separate annex entitled "Oxford's Literary Reputation in the 17th and 18th Centuries", the reader can find a brief survey of references to him as a literary figure spanning the two centuries after his death. This reconstruction also permits some useful comparisons with the emergence in the early 1700s of the Bardolatry associated with William Shakespeare of Stratford, a topic which goes well beyond the scope of this essay, but which is a subject worthy in its own right of close analysis of students of the authorship question.

Of utmost importance among all these posthumous references to Oxford, however, is the one from Henry Peacham's list in *The Complete Gentleman* published in mid-1622 when the *First Folio* project was underway. For it is Peacham who lists Oxford among the greatest Elizabethan poets and *yet fails to mention Shakespeare at all*.

Peter Dickson is a former intelligence analyst and author of Kissinger and the Meaning of History (Cambridge, UP, 1978).

This essay's primary objective, therefore, is to contextualize Henry Peacham and his list of great poets in *The Complete Gentleman* (1622) in order to show that Peacham knew Shakespeare and Oxford, and knew that there was no difference between the two. Peacham made this deliberate decision to exclude Shakespeare's name from his list of the greatest poets of the Elizabethan era based on a number of different factors, including the politics of the time in which he lived.

Peacham was well aware that the *First Folio* project was underway before he finished writing *The Complete Gentleman* and he certainly was aware of the ongoing political vendetta which King James and his homosexual lover (the Duke of Buckingham) were engaged in against the 3rd Earl of Southampton (Henry Wriosthesley) and the 18th Earl of Oxford (Henry de Vere), son of Edward de Vere, the alternative Bard to the Stratford man. Both these Earls were imprisoned in the Tower, Henry de Vere a second time for treasonous activity for twenty months during 1621-1623, because they had criticized or otherwise opposed the Crown's soft stand on Catholicism at home and its effort to arrange a dynastic union by marrying Prince Charles to a sister of the Spanish King.

Thus, Peacham was sensitive to the fact that Oxford's son, Henry de Vere, and Southampton were the main leaders of the Anti-Spanish, Protestant faction at Court during the fierce debate concerning the Spanish Marriage. Peacham also was well aware that these two popular Earls were willing to take risks in challenging Buckingham's effort to grab more and more unto himself and his extended family.

In such a delicate situation, Peacham's decision to exclude Shakespeare from his list of the greatest Elizabethan poets was his way of signalling truthfully but diplomatically--in the delicate political situation of the early 1620s--that the father of Henry de Vere, whom King James sent to the Tower via the Star Chamber process was, in fact Shakespeare.

In his calculations, Peacham had to weigh one other factor that complicated his effort to be truthful and at the same time avoid political backfire. Ironically, he wrote and dedicated his work to a young scion of the famous Howard family: in fact, to a direct descendent of the Catholic cousins of Edward de Vere, cousins whom Oxford exposed as untrustworthy and treasonous in the 1580s. Therefore, a decision even to include Oxford in any of great poets list, especially one in which Shakespeare's name is conspicuously absent, in *The Complete Gentlemen* was no trivial matter for Peacham, given the past.

Despite the firm nature of our conclusions, we should emphasize or caution the reader that this is a most difficult subject which requires close attention and careful evaluation. Nonetheless, the contextualization of Peacham's *The Complete Gentleman* and its relationship to the near simultaneous First Folio project provides, in this writer's estimation, the key which resolves the Shakespeare authorship dispute conclusively in Oxford's favor.

Possible Sources of Peacham's List

Henry Peacham devotes a separate chapter to poetry in *The Complete Gentleman* and concludes with a list of those whom he believes were the greatest poets of the Elizabethan era. Peacham begins his list with Oxford and Buckhurst, and then continues with Paget, Philip Sidney, Dyer, Spenser, and Daniel.

On the surface, it might appear that the focus in Peacham on Oxford and Buckhurst derives directly from the lists found in Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* (1598) which cites Oxford as best for comedy and Buckhurst as best for tragedy. However, as we shall demonstrate, this is not correct, at least not for Peacham who was directly utilizing and revising to his own satisfaction an earlier list from George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589).¹ This fact is crucial to our close analysis of Peacham's thought process as he ranked the great Elizabethan poets, failing to list Shakespeare.

There is little sign that Mere's lists had any impact on Peacham. Meres, who graduated from Cambridge in 1587, eight years before Peacham, provides many different lists of poets, including those versed in Latin and other foreign languages, and offers sub-lists for eight categories or styles of poetry. However, his main list for the greatest poets in the English tongue is as follows: Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Shakespeare, Marlow, and Chapman. Oxford's name does not appear, though Meres, following Puttenham's evaluation, listed him among the best for Comedy, along with the name of Shakespeare.

Meres suggests in 1598 that Oxford and Shakespeare are two different men but there is some doubt what he really knew in a direct personal sense because he lists as best for tragedy, Buckhurst and "the author of the *Mirroure for Magistrates*" when Mere's contemporaries would have insisted that these are one and the same man. In any case, Meres was a cleric who departed from the London scene about 1602 and never returned. His familiarity with the literary scene never compared to that of Peacham who was living in the London suburb of Hotson when preparing his own list in 1622 while the *First Folio* was being printed.

Writing more than twenty years after Meres, Peacham (1578-1643?) explicitly excludes from his list those Elizabethan-era poets who were still alive in 1622, which would explain the exclusion of Chapman and Drayton, whom Meres' gave top billing. Nonetheless, it is puzzling why Peacham omits others such as Marlow and especially Shakespeare whose famous poems such as *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and *The Sonnets* — plus numerous popular quarto editions of his plays — had all been published (sometimes in several editions) during the three decades preceding the publication of *The Complete Gentlemen* in the Summer of 1622.

This glaring omission of Shakespeare's name from Peacham's list is astounding. As we will demonstrate, this omission was not an oversight but,

on the contrary, was a *deliberate exclusion* because Peacham knew that Oxford and Shakespeare were the same person.

Who Was Henry Peacham?

First, Henry Peacham (1578-1643?) unlike Meres was extremely well-connected in the world of art and literature in London as well as the royal court both as a artist and as writer for more than three decades.² Like a good courtier, he cultivated relationships across a broad terrain, both with Ben Jonson and also his great rival Inigo Jones who valued Peacham's artistic talent; and with Prince Henry prior to his death in 1612 and the antipode to this fanatically Protestant prince, namely, the Howard family, which was notorious for its pro-Catholic and pro-Spanish sentiments.

Peacham was also on good terms with Daniel and Drayton who, as members of the Herbert-Pembroke-Sidney literary circle, were drawn into the cult and worship of Prince Henry, as the perfect Protestant Prince whom this circle hoped would someday slay the Catholic dragon at home and abroad. For example, Peacham (unlike Shakespeare) joined John Selden, a famous, erudite lawyer, to write many poems upon the death of Prince Henry and then more poems a year later celebrating the marriage of his sister (Princess Elizabeth,) whom many Protestants hoped would succeed her father as the monarch rather than Prince Charles.³

The most important point to emphasize about Peacham is that he was extremely well-connected to the literary world for decades and that he had to know the identity of Shakespeare as did his close friends, Jonson, Drayton, and Daniel.

We can be certain of this conclusion for one other important reason. If Peacham is famous for anything among Shakespeare scholars, it is because he is the artist who drew and added his name (Henricus Peacham) and the year (1595) to a sketch of costumes designed for a performance or a rehearsal of *Titus Andronicus*.⁴ At the time, Peacham was seventeen and had just graduated with his degree from Cambridge University. This sketch is one of the most cherished documents relating to Shakespeare because it is the only drawing relating to one of his plays known to survive. It remains in the library of the Marquis of Bath at Longleat House (Wiltshire). E. K. Chambers brought it to the public's attention only in 1925.

A few scholars have tried to question the authenticity of this sketch, but a motive for forgery of this kind of document makes little sense. Most recently, Jonathan Bate editor of *Titus Andronicus* for The Arden Shakespeare (1995) declared "the authenticity of the drawing and the transcription themselves are not in doubt".⁵ Exactly twenty years earlier, Samuel Schoenbaum who reproduced the sketch in *William Shakespeare - A Documentary Life* (1975) stated at best skepticism was only justified concerning an inscription in the upper right margin by the notorious John Payne Collier, not Peacham's signature in the lower-left portion of the manuscript or the sketch itself. In his

words, this signature is “authentic enough”.

This curious phraseology may convey Schoenbaum’s sour grapes about a treasured document pertaining to Shakespeare which plays right into the hands of those who wish to advance the Oxfordian theory on the authorship question as we shall demonstrate below. Ironically, Oxfordians for seventy years have overlooked the significance of this document for their claim.

Peacham’s List: Other Factors

Given what we know about Peacham’s close friendship with insiders on the literary scene for three decades and his sketch relating to *Titus Andronicus*, his omission of Shakespeare’s name on the list of great poets in *The Complete Gentleman* could not possibly have been an oversight. One possible argument to explain Peacham’s omission of Shakespeare — that Peacham wished to list those poets who wrote only *non-dramatic* poetry — makes no sense because Buckhurst, Daniel, and — evidently Oxford — wrote plays as well as poetry. Also, Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* (1609), arguably the most celebrated, had been published more than a decade earlier, to say nothing about *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Both these epic poems of the 1590s went through multiple printings, were quite popular, and were even referred to in other poems of the period. So there was certainly more than ample reason to include Shakespeare’s name in a list of major poets during Queen Elizabeth’s reign. Furthermore, there is other substantial evidence why the omission of the name “Shakespeare” was not an oversight, but a deliberate exclusion at a time when this famous name was impossible to ignore.

The first of these factors pertains to the physical circumstances pertaining to both the publication of *The Complete Gentleman* and the *First Folio*. Peacham’s publisher, Francis Constable, owned the White Lion, a book store in the courtyard on the north side of St. Paul’s Cathedral, the center of the book trade in London at that time. Sixty or seventy feet from the front door to The White Lion in the same block were The Black Bear and The Parrot, two other book stores owned, respectively, by Edward Blount and William Aspley.⁶ Along with another man named John Smethwick, Blount and Aspley were the principal members of the Syndicate behind the *First Folio* project which was printed by the Jaggard firm. Smethwick’s book store was only a few blocks away on Fleet Street to the west of the Cathedral. Given the proximity of the White Lion to these other book stores, the small circle of those in the book trade, and Peacham’s extensive network of literary friends, it is highly improbable that he and Constable would not learn about the *First Folio* project before its completion.

Second, we know for certain that Shakespeare could not have escaped Peacham’s attention in 1621-1622 given the timing of the Shakespeare folio project. In his landmark work, *The Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* (1963), Charlton Hinman conclusively demonstrated that this syndicate and Jaggard began the actual printing of the folio in 1622

sometime between February and August of that year.⁷ Obviously, the plans for the folio preceded the actual printing, though Hinman argued in his book that the decision to assemble a comprehensive folio had to have come after October 1621.⁸ In his view, those behind the folio would have never registered *Othello* with the Stationer's Hall for its first ever publication as a quarto, if they had a comprehensive folio project underway at that time.

Whatever the truth, a folio project of this magnitude associated with arguably the greatest name in English literature could not be hidden from others in the book trade for long. And we know that Peacham dated the dedication to his own work on May 28, 1622 and was still making last minute alterations in the text to include material pleasing to his then patron Richard Sackville (grandson of the same Lord Buckhurst whose name follows Oxford's in Peacham's list of poets).⁹ Peacham's publisher (Constable) finally registered *The Complete Gentleman* with the Stationers' Register on July 3, 1622 and we can assume that the work appeared in book stores not long after that date.

Another separate factor that had an important impact on Peacham's list of the greatest Elizabethan poets is that he had to be sensitive about whether to include Oxford's name at all in any list given the political situation. Like most persons, he was aware of the crisis over religion and foreign policy associated with the Spanish Marriage Crisis in 1621-22, and the increasing repression against the freedom of thought and expression under King James and his homosexual lover, the Duke of Buckingham. He also knew that the Earls of Southampton and Oxford (Henry de Vere), along with his good friend (John Selden, the famous lawyer), had been imprisoned for a time in the Spring of 1621 for challenging the King and the Duke over these issues.

Since *The Complete Gentleman* appeared well after these imprisonments and even after King James dissolved Parliament on January 9, 1622, Peacham and Constable were fully aware of how rapidly the political situation was deteriorating. There can be no doubt about this because Peacham wrote his dedication on May 28 a full month after the second imprisonment of Henry de Vere (an imprisonment which lasted twenty months). Thus, the decision to include the father of Henry de Vere (the 18th Earl) among the great poets was no light matter, whether he was Shakespeare or not. At a minimum, Oxford had to have been a substantial literary figure in Peacham's mind to justify his inclusion at all.

A final reason why Peacham's decision on whom to include in his list was a step taken with great deliberation relates to the *The Complete Gentleman* dedication. The work was dedicated to William Howard, the youngest son of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel. Peacham had been a tutor some years earlier for the three older sons and became William's tutor sometime after August 1620, which strongly suggests that the bulk of this book dedicated to the young man had been drafted in 1621.¹⁰

The most important point concerning this dedication is that politically astute

persons knew that Edward de Vere was held in low regard by this particular branch of the Howard family, given that he had betrayed his Catholic cousins in the 1580s as traitors to Queen Elizabeth to save his own neck. The two individuals who suffered most from this betrayal directly or indirectly were William's grandfather (Philip) who died in prison in 1595 and especially his grandfather's uncle, Henry Howard, the First Earl of Northampton (second iteration). Northampton's bitter feud with Edward de Vere included counter-accusations that Oxford was a homosexual as well as a traitor in his own right.

Furthermore, the notorious Lady Somerset (Francis Howard) was first cousin to young William's father, Thomas. She and her own uncle (Northampton again) who was the leader of the court faction partial to Catholicism and Spain in foreign policy, were suspected of being responsible for the murder in the Tower of Thomas Overbury, a member of the Protestant faction at Court associated with the Herbert family and Southampton. Francis Howard and her husband (Somerset) spent nearly six years in the Tower for the crime and were released just three months prior to the second imprisonment of Henry de Vere (Oxford's son) for his opposition to King James' dissolution of parliament in January 1622 and the monarch's zeal to marry Prince Charles to a sister to the Spanish King.

Given the revolving door to the Tower involving the release of the Somersets and the second incarceration of Henry de Vere in April 1622, Peacham's dedication has a special political edge to it. He had revered Prince Henry and Peacham's politics were much closer to the Herberts, Southampton and Henry de Vere in their longstanding struggle to counter the influence of the pro-Catholic, pro-Spanish Howard family. Nevertheless, here in 1622 when Henry de Vere has been sent to the Tower a second time with a good chance of never coming out alive, Peacham is dedicating to a Howard family member a work that places Edward de Vere's name among the greatest English poets. The genealogical chart on page 75 helps illustrate the tricky political waters that Peacham was navigating in the explosive situation in the 1621-22 period.

Peacham, Puttenham, and Minerva Britanna

While the above evidence clearly indicates that Peacham knew quite well the significance of, and was self-conscious about, the exclusion from his list of "Shakespeare" and the inclusion of "Oxford", there are several more pieces of evidence to be considered. This crucial information, coupled with the historical context surrounding the publishing of *The Complete Gentleman*, further strengthens the case that in Peacham's mind--Oxford and Shakespeare--were one and the same individual.

The first piece of additional evidence is Peacham's prior identification of Oxford as an important literary figure who required concealment for some reason. In 1612, Peacham published *Minerva Britanna*, a compilation of literary emblems dedicated to Prince Henry. Minerva is the Roman equivalent

for Athena, the *hasti-vibrans* (spear-shaking) patron Goddess of Greek theater. The title page consists of a large emblem with a pen in a hand jutting out from beneath a curtain attached the proscenium of a theater arch. That the image depicts the concealment of a person involved with the theater and/or literature should be obvious to any reader. The logical question then is: "Who is this mysterious individual?"

The hand in question has nearly completed writing on a scroll the words MENTE.VIDEBORI which immediately brings to mind the Latin phrase "mente videbor" which translates as "in the mind I shall be seen." In other words, only through this person's literary works will others come to know this writer but evidently never his true identity. The other Latin inscriptions attached to the wreath surrounding the theater proscenium and curtain are: VIVITUR IN GENIO and CAETERA MORTIS ERUNT. There are several possible renditions of the entire three-part inscription, but that offered by John Astley-Cock in 1975 is as follows:

In the Mind I Shall be Seen
Resurrected by the Talent,
All Else by Death Concealed.¹¹

The most important aspect of this emblem in Peacham's work is that the first line in Latin - "mente.videbori" - contains an anagram as first suggested Eva Clark Turner in her work, *The Man Who Would be Shakespeare* (1937). There are several obvious clues that Peacham has given us an anagram containing the true name of the mysterious writer. First, as Clark and Astley-Cock observe, "mente." is followed by a totally superfluous period in terms of Latin grammar and also flanked by the intriguing letters E and V. Second, if the writer was not writing an anagram, he would have either stopped at "mente videbor" which means "I shall be seen" or have continued on to write "mente videberis" which means "he shall be seen".

However, the writer did *not* choose either of these grammatically correct options and we know that Peacham knew his Latin. Instead, he stops abruptly after drawing one extra letter - in this case, the letter "i" which is obviously desired to complete an anagram. Furthermore, the writer evidently did not wish to have to replace the "o" in "videbor" with an "e" which would have been required in proper Latin if he had proceeded to complete "videberis" with the final "s". Thus, Peacham deemed an extra "i" and the retention of the letter "o" essential to convey something about the writer, in this case his true identity.

There can be no question that a deliberate calculation was made to fudge the Latin inscription to create an anagram. For otherwise, the writer would simply have stopped with "videbor" or gone on to write "videberis". Our analysis which refines that originally developed by Clark and Astley-Cock leads to a virtually unavoidable decipherment in this anagram concerning the writer's

true identity:

TIBI NOM. DE VERE, or Thy Name is De Vere.¹²

We do not believe that the crucial portion of this anagram, the residual six letters DEVERE, can be jumbled in any other way to yield the name of any other known or recognizable literary figure of the period who needed to avoid using his real name for whatever reason.

Therefore, barely a decade before publishing *The Complete Gentleman*, at the zenith of the cult of Prince Henry who revered Shakespeare's works, Peacham had already hinted on the title page of his work *Minerva Britanna* (1612) that an important English writer's identity was hidden or concealed for some mysterious reason and that this writer's name was Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford.

The second additional piece of evidence which further illuminates Peacham's thought process as he sat down in 1622 to compose his list of the greatest Elizabethan poets pertains to the close parallel between his list and that which Puttenham gave thirty-three years earlier in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589).

The crucial point to understand at this juncture is that Peacham did not use any of Mere's lists from 1598, but instead revised that of Puttenham from 1589, and in so doing Peacham reveals clearly his deliberate, self-conscious exclusion of "Shakespeare". First, we provide the passage from Peacham who is very emphatic about the importance of what he is about to say concerning the greatest Elizabethan poets:

In the time of our late Queen Elizabeth, which was truly a golden Age (for such a world of refined wits, excellent spirits it produced, whose like are hardly to be hoped for, in any succeeding age) above others, who honoured Poesie with their pennes and practice (to omit her Majestie who had a singular gift herein) were Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, the Lord Buckhurst, Henry Lord Paget, our Phoenix, the noble Sir Philip Sidney, M. Edward Dyer, M. Edmund Spenser, M. Samuel Daniel, with sundry others (together with those admirable wits, yet living, and so well known) not out of Ennuie but to avoid tediousness, I overpass. Thus much of poetrie.¹³

Now let us compare this passage on great poets from Peacham with that found in Puttenham's work:

And in her Majesties time that now is are sprung up an other crew of Courtly makers Noble men and Gentlemen of her Majesties servantes, who have written excellently well as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made publicke with the rest, of which first is that noble Gentleman, Edward, Earl of Oxford, Lord of Buckhurst,

when he was young, Henry Lord Paget, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Rawliegh, Master Edward Dyer, Master Fulke Grevell, Gascon Britton, Turberville and a great many other learned Gentlemen, whose names I do not omit for enuie, but to avoyde tediousnesse, and who have deserved no little commendation.

Now, it is quite obvious from the concluding parallel phraseology (enuie/ tediousnesse) in both citations, as well as the sequence of the names of the poets, that Peacham did not start from scratch with a blank sheet of paper when he sat down to compose his list. He clearly is utilizing (plagiarizing?) Puttenham's list.¹⁴

His revisions give us an insight into his thought process. Even with the benefit of considerable hindsight (33 years!) concerning that "truly golden age" of literature, Peacham repeats the first four poets from Puttenham's list, then drops Ralieggh, retains Dyer, and then drops the last four names. To round out his own list, Peacham then adds, Spenser and Daniel, but for some reason cannot bring himself to add "Shakespeare" despite the great fame attached to this name for non-dramatic and well as dramatic poetry.

Given that the facts about Peacham's life clearly show that he had to have known Shakespeare for nearly thirty years, and the fact that he and his publisher (Constable) had to know the *First Folio* project was underway in 1622, and that Peacham in *Minvera Britanna* (1612) had already fingered Edward de Vere as a literary figure who could not be identified openly with his works, we draw the obvious, logical, and inescapable conclusion that Peacham excluded "Shakespeare" because it was the penname of Oxford.

The only alternative to this conclusion would be for an anti-Stratfordian scholar of non-Oxfordian persuasion to argue that the redundancy that would have been created by adding the name "Shakespeare" to the list, pertained to one of the other six poets on Peacham's list. However, the mountain of evidence in favor of Oxford accumulated since the 1920s and the *Minerva Britanna* emblem from Peacham's own hand, make such alternative arguments unconvincing.

Further evidence that Peacham had no second thoughts about the exclusion of Shakespeare is the fact that *The Complete Gentleman* was a national best seller as the preeminent guide for those in the higher social strata or for those aspiring to such rank. It was as well known as the *First Folio* because there were three other editions in 1627, 1634, and 1661. Peacham, who lived until 1643, had ample opportunity to correct the obvious absence of Shakespeare's name from the list of the greatest Elizabethan poets, if there had been an oversight on his part or a technical error by the printer of the first edition in 1622, but he never did. These facts provide powerful reinforcement of our argument that the real Shakespeare was already on the list, no doubt, Edward de Vere.

Summary and Conclusion

Given that Peacham is quite emphatic in *The Complete Gentleman* about characterizing the Elizabethan era and its most famous poets as a glorious period in the nation's history probably never to be equalled in the future, the deliberate exclusion of Shakespeare's name makes no sense unless Oxford and Shakespeare were one and same man. All the evidence presented and analyzed in this essay supports this inescapable conclusion.

Peacham's personal dilemma was that he could not really ignore the question of Shakespeare because he knew the Bard going back to 1590s and both he and his own publisher had to be aware of the folio project, to say nothing about the numerous quarto editions of the Bard's plays, *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and the *Sonnets*.

If Shakespeare really was a different person from any of the other names on Peacham's list, it would have been logical and rational for Peacham to include the Bard because again we know that he had to have known - as did Jonson and Drayton - who the Bard was. This step to include the name would have avoided any possible confusion in the reader's mind and not raise any questions about Peacham's competence as a literary expert, a reputation which he valued highly.

Certainly, if Shakespeare really was a separate person and the nation's greatest poet, then the temptation for Peacham to *exclude Oxford's name* instead would have been overwhelming. There can be no doubt that to include the name of a notorious Earl ran some risk of upsetting some within the particular branch of the Howard family given the wounds from the past. So, it would have been quite easy and even convenient for Peacham to drop Oxford, especially if he was really more or less a minor court poet.

Logic and the evidence (Oxford's inclusion) clearly indicate that Peacham's thought process came from the opposite perspective, namely, that Oxford's name absolutely needed to be on the new list as it had been on the one prepared in 1589 by Puttenham. We should observe that Peacham in the final analysis did not permit political factors to dictate his literary evaluations. For example, he praised in *The Complete Gentleman* both Bacon and John Selden (Peacham's close friend) as worthy models for any would-be gentleman, even though these two great lawyers and intellectuals were of different political persuasions and had served time in the Tower in 1622. Ironically, it was Southampton who spear-headed the successful impeachment of Bacon for bribery and corruption in April 1622, and then Selden who joined Southampton and Henry de Vere in the Tower in June 1622.

Despite this messy political landscape, Peacham did not allow this situation to cloud his judgment about contemporary literary figures and intellectuals. And this outlook informed his efforts to finesse the only real and tough question: namely, whether to add the name "Shakespeare" to his list of great poets, knowing the redundancy that such an inclusion would entail. Ultimately, he decided upon reflection to exclude the name "Shakespeare" which indicates

clearly that he knew and assumed others would know that Shakespeare was the penname for Oxford.

Thus, Peacham's final choice which represents *the least probable* among the four possibilities open to him, *if Oxford and Shakespeare were really different persons*. His choice to include Oxford and exclude Shakespeare confirms their identity and underscores Peacham's ability to finesse the awkward political situation in the early 1620s. Peacham could not risk stating "Oxford also known as Shakespeare" because this overkill ran the risk of upsetting the Howards, and also would have risked the anger of the King and Buckingham following their imprisonment of Southampton and Henry de Vere in June-July 1621 (which included Peacham's friend John Selden) and then the second imprisonment of Henry de Vere in mid-April 1622. Peacham's solution was to honor the true Bard by omitting the penname "Shakespeare" trusting that most educated or sophisticated readers would read Oxford's name and make the logical connection on their own, especially given that a large folio of his plays would be available within the next year or so.¹⁵

In contrast to Peacham, those in the Syndicate sponsoring *The First Folio* project faced a different dilemma. They were assembling the plays of the Bard already known by the Shakespeare penname, no doubt with the assistance of the Lord Chamberlain (Pembroke) and his brother (the Earl of Montgomery). These prominent Earls were brothers-in-law to Henry de Vere, and *The First Folio* was dedicated to them, i.e., "The Incomparable Paire". Placing Oxford's name on the title page was not a viable option for Pembroke and Montgomery (the son-in-law of Edward de Vere) because the pre-existing rationale for concealment (whatever it was) concerning the true author dating back three decades was still quite compelling and also because the political situation was most awkward given the King's imprisonments of Edward de Vere's son (Henry) and Southampton.

Thus, our conclusion that Oxford was Shakespeare rests on the inescapable correlation of crucial, solid pieces of evidence which include: Peacham's personal knowledge of and association with the real Shakespeare dating back to the 1590s, the emblem/anagram in *Minerva Britanna* (1612) signalling Oxford's need for concealment, Peacham's determination in 1622 to list the greatest Elizabethan poets, his simultaneous awareness and that of his own publisher (Francis Constable) concerning *The First Folio* project prior to the completion of *The Complete Gentleman*, Peacham's curious decision to list Oxford's name but not "Shakespeare", and lastly Peacham's acute awareness of the delicate situation involved in listing Oxford's name given the Howard family's sensitivities and the Court's ongoing vendetta in 1621-22 with Southampton and Henry De Vere, Oxford's son.

There is no longer any reason for anyone to have any doubt that Peacham knew that Edward de Vere and Shakespeare were one and the same man. What was true for Peacham in 1622 is also true today for us.

FOOTNOTES

1. It was actually Puttenham (not Meres) who ranked Oxford and Buckhurst as first respectively for Comedy and Tragedy. See George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, Cambridge University Press, 1936, pages 62-63.
2. Background information concerning the life and work of Henry Peacham was obtained from *The Dictionary of National Biography* (1895-96), Volume XV, pages 578-580; Robert Ralston Cawley, *Henry Peacham - His Contribution to English Poetry* (1971); and Alan R. Young, *Henry Peacham*, (1975).
3. The poems written by Peacham and John Selden were collected in *The Period of Mourning*, published in 1613.
4. Samuel Schoenbaum reproduced this drawing on pages 123-124 of his work, *William Shakespeare - A Documentary Life* (1975).
- 5 See Jonathan Bate, *Titus Andronicus*, The Arden Shakespeare, page 40. Bate makes a strong argument that while Peacham's signature is authentic, the date under his name has been mistakenly interpreted to be 1595, whereas 1605 is more probable.
6. See the map of Paul's Cross Churchyard on page 27 of Peter Blayney's *The First Folio of Shakespeare* (1991).
7. See Hinman, *The Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare*, 1963, pages 342-346.
8. *Ibid.*, pages 28-29.
9. Cawley, *op cite.*, page 10; Young, *op cite.*, pages 27, 103, and footnote 56 on page 144.
10. Young, *op cite.*, page 70. After settling in the Norwich area in 1615 as a schoolmaster, Peacham evidently was drawn toward the family of Thomas Howard, the Earl of Suffolk, because of this Lord's interest in fine art as well as literature.
11. See pages 311-314 for Astley-Cock's essay in "Oxfordian Vistas" the subtitle of a supplemental volume of essays attached to the 1975 reprint of Thomas Looney's "*Shakespeare*" *Identified*, originally published in 1920.
12. When Looney published his work in 1920 he did not have the benefit of

knowing about this anagram or the emblem in Peacham's *Minerva Britanna*, nor about the inclusion of Oxford in a list of great poets in *The Complete Gentleman*. Apparently, the first person who suspected the significance of this title page emblem in Peacham's work for the Shakespeare authorship debate was Eva Turner Clark sometime after 1930. She included it in her 1937 work as cited in this essay. In our refinement of the Clark/Astley-Cock analysis of *Mente.Videbor(i)*, we had the benefit of comments from Roger Stritmatter of the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) and Professor William McCulloh of Kenyon College.

13. Peacham, *The Complete Gentleman*, 1622, pages 95-96.

14. Puttenham, *op cit.*, page 61.

15. Peacham's predicament in 1621-1622 brings to mind that of Ben Jonson who felt compelled to make deletions/insertions in his famous folio for political reasons after the Overbury Murder scandal broke upon the country in late 1615. Although never really close to the pro-Catholic Howard faction, Jonson removed some material in their honor from the folio because the scandal badly damaged the Howard clique at Court and included poems in favor of the newly triumphant and staunchly Protestant faction associated with Herbert-Pembroke-Sidney family network.

APPENDIX: Oxford's Literary Reputation in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Between Peacham's list in 1622 and Grosart's publication of some of Oxford's poems in 1872, there are six major commentators on him as a literary figure.

The first and only one (other than Peacham) known from the seventeenth century was Anthony Wood (1632-1690) who published the *Athenae Oxonienses* and *Fasti Oxonienses* in 1675. In these two compendia listing all the great writers educated at Oxford University, Wood reveals that his knowledge of Oxford as a famous court poet comes from his poems as they appeared in Richard Edward's *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* published in 1576, 1578, and eight more times thereafter. Wood describes Oxford as "an excellent poet and Comedian as several matters of his composition, which were made public, did shew, which I presume are now lost or worn out."¹ However, Wood closes with a list of the titles of several of Oxford's poems which appear in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576).

Wood in some fundamental sense was the creator of a surrogate literary reputation for Oxford to replace that which was hidden and which Peacham was not willing to divulge in 1622. His actions were in probability unintentional because there is no reason to believe, and no way at this point to know, that Wood ever knew the real truth about the name “Shakespeare”. Wood was almost thirty years old when the fourth and final edition of Peacham’s *The Complete Gentleman* appeared in 1661. And at this time, there was no written biographical material of any consequence or availability to the general public concerning the Stratford man.

At that moment, at the time of the Restoration and for few more decades, the name of “Shakespeare” was synonymous with the title page of the various editions of the folio of his plays. And there was little else for a reader to build up an image in his mind as to the real person behind the name, no matter who he was.

With regard to Oxford as the well-known Earl, two genealogists in the next century repeated almost verbatim Wood’s observations about his literary talent, and that he was the first to introduce embroidered gloves and certain perfumes from Italy which impressed Queen Elizabeth. These genealogical experts on the British Peerage were Arthur Collins (1682?-1760) and Samuel Egerton Brydges (1763-1837). Collin’s passages concerning Oxford can be found on page 265 of his *Historical Recollection of the Noble Families of Cavendish, Hollis, Vere, Harley and Ogle*, 1752.² A prominent publisher and expert on Elizabethan literature and poetry, Brydges in his *Memoirs of the Peers of England during the Reign of King James the First* (1802) makes four terse but emphatic references to “Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, the poet.”³ In his prior work *Reflections on the late augmentation of the English Peerage* (1798), Brydges offers a detailed biographical sketch of Oxford which echoes Wood’s description, stating that Oxford was “a celebrated poet, distinguished for his wit, adroitness in his exercises, and valour and zeal for his country”.⁴

Brydges in his earlier work from 1798 revealed that in addition to Wood, he had two other sources of information about Oxford. The closest in time to Brydges was the classic three-volume work, *The History of English Poetry of Thomas Warton* (1726-1790). In volume one published in 1774, Warton makes passing references to the lists of famous poets, which included Oxford, that Meres’ published in *Palladis Tamia* in 1598 and George Puttenham published in *The Arte of English Poesie* in 1589.⁵ William Webbe’s reference to Oxford in *A Discourse of Poetrie* (1586) is not given but Warton cites this book in other places.

Far more important than Warton is Brydges’ reference to *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England, With Lists of their Works* published in 1758 by Horace Walpole (1717-1797), the Fourth Earl of Oxford (second iteration). Son of the famous Prime Minister, Walpole was a high-regarded scholar who voiced only qualified praise of Shakespeare which upset others

who questioned this Earl's talent as a literary critic. Nonetheless, he was famous as the publisher who established the Strawberry Hill Press and was a major expert on English literature, like Warton with whom he had a great rivalry.

In a section devoted to Oxford in volume one of his work, Walpole cites *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* and initially repeats almost verbatim what could be found in Wood's prior work from 1675.⁶ Along with Oxford's reputation as a poet, Walpole confirms that he was "reckoned as the Best writer of Comedy in his time" but adds that "the very names of all his plays are lost".

Nevertheless, Walpole offers his own unique perspective concerning Oxford a few pages later when he reveals his thought about the most important figures in English literature prior to 1600. He reveals his thinking in a section on another writer, Thomas Sackville (Lord of Buckhurst and the Earl of Dorset), the same author whose name follows Oxford's in Peacham's list in 1622. Walpole's comments are extraordinary because he refers to Shakespeare as well as Oxford and Buckhurst. The passage question is as follows:

Tiptoft and Rivers set the example of bringing light from other countries, and patronized the art of printing, Caxton. The Earls of Oxford and Dorset struck out lights for Drama, without making the multitude laugh or weep at ridiculous representations of Scripture. To the former we owe Printing, to the two latter Taste — what do we not owe perhaps to the last of the four! Our historic plays are allowed to have been found on the heroic narratives in the *Mirrors for Magistrates*; to that plan, and to the boldness of Lord Buckhurst's new scenes perhaps we owe Shakespeare. Such debt to these four Lords, the probability of the last obligation, are sufficient to justify a *Catalogue of Noble Authors*.⁷

Walpole has clearly identified and highlighted two distinct pairs of aristocrats for their historical contribution to English drama and literature. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Tiptoft and Rivers were two Earls who introduced foreign literature and the art of printing into England in the second half of the fifteenth century. They were John Tiptoft, a Baron and also First Earl of Worcester; and Anthony Woodville, the Second Earl of Rivers.

Walpole then links Oxford and Sackville (Buckhurst-Dorset) as essentially as the fathers of English drama and he highlights the impact on Shakespeare of the latter's multivolume work *Mirroure for Magistrates* which first appeared in 1559. Walpole's selection and emphasis on Sackville was no doubt influenced by the fact that this Earl was famous as the co-author of the first English tragedy in blank verse, namely *Gorboduc* written in 1561.

Since Walpole, like Warton a decade or so later, refers to Shakespeare as a distinct person in this passage, we must conclude that he did *not* think that

Oxford and Shakespeare were the same man, even though the latter is never discussed with any specificity. The main reason for this omission of any detail about "Shakespeare" is that Walpole only wanted to write about authors of royal or noble blood.

Some Oxfordians might try to force an interpretation of the foregoing passage by arguing that since Burkhurst-Dorset preceded Oxford by a full decade or more, then Walpole is hinting that it is Oxford "as the real Shakespeare" who owed the great literary debt to Buckhurst. This interpretation is impossible to prove and in fact there is other evidence that Walpole assumed that the Stratford man was in fact Shakespeare.⁸

The final and an extraordinary detailed literary reference concerning Oxford (long overlooked) can be found *Bibliographica Poetica: A Catalogue of English Poets* (1802) by the literary critic, Joseph Ritson (1752-1803). The passage is worth quoting in full for the record:

Vere Edward, earl of Oxford, the 14th (sic) of his surname and family, is the author of several poems printed in "The Paradise of Daintie Devices," 1576, etc. and in "Englands Helicon." One piece, by this nobleman, may be found in "The Phoenix nest," 1592, another is subjoin'd to "Astrophel & Stella," 1591, and another to "Brittons Bowre of Delights," 1597 (selected by mister Ellis). Some lines of his are, also, prefix'd to "Cardanuses Comforte," 1573. All or most of his compositions are distinguish'd by the signature E.O. He dye'd in 1604; and was bury'd at Hackney (not as Wood says, at Earls-Colne in Essex). Webbe and Puttenham applaud his attainments in poesy: Meres ranks him with the "best for comedy." Several specimens of Oxford's poetry occur in Englands Parnasus, 1600. In the posthumous edition of Lord Oxford's works, Vol. I. two poems, by the Earl of Oxford, are given from an ancient MS. miscellany: but the possessor is not pointed out. One of these is reprinted by mister Ellis.⁹

Ritson also reveals that Oxford's first wife (Ann Cecil) also wrote a few poems, a fact which he extracted from the last edition of Walpole's work cited above.¹⁰ Walpole obtained his information concerning Lady Oxford from an article written by the famous Shakespeare expert and editor (George Steevens) in the *European Magazine*, issue dated June 1788.

In retrospect, it is clear that Anthony Wood (1675) largely provided the detail for the general perception of Oxford that carried down to Brydges and Ritson. The supposedly great comedies written by this Earl were lost to history, leaving us with a smattering of poems. Meanwhile, at least in the seventeenth-century, the Stratford man's identification as the real Shakespeare existed only in brief, scattered written accounts (Thomas Fuller in 1662, John

Aubrey in 1680, and Gerard Langbein in 1691). Prior to 1700, the name "Shakespeare" in the public mind was again almost exclusively associated with the works as found in the four folio editions of his plays.

The Bardolatry associated with the Stratford man is largely a phenomenon of the eighteenth-century, though Irvin Matus in *Shakespeare In Fact* (1994) warns against Oxfordian attempts to push the emergence of this cult forward in time, specifically to David Garrick's sponsorship of the Jubilee in Stratford town in 1769. Matus points to the town's active interest in its famous son as early as 1746.¹¹ Matus is correct but unintentionally deflects attention from the Cult of Bardolatry promoted by the Drury Lane Theater under the leadership of Colley Cibber and his son, Theophilus, long before Garrick became an actor and co-manager of this theater in the 1740s.

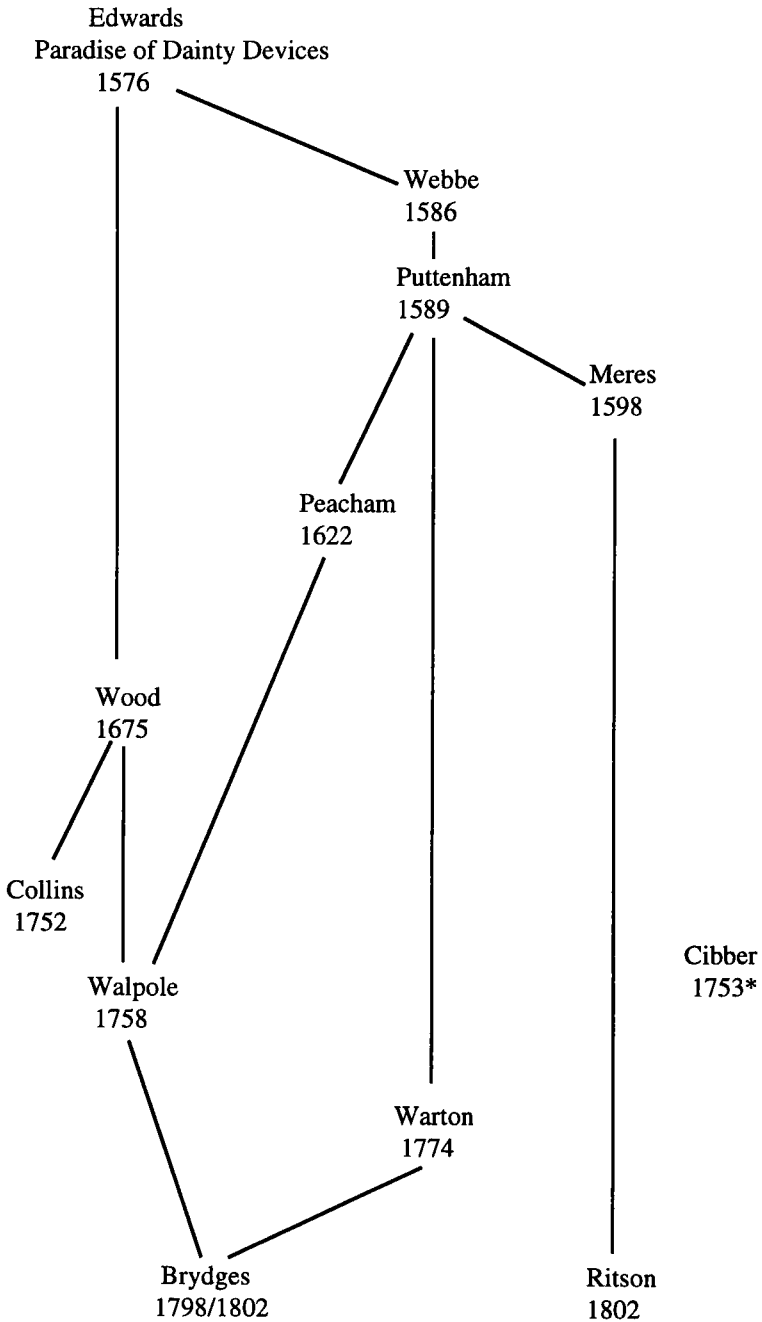
It is intriguing to observe that in his *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* (1753) Theophilus Cibber (1703-1758) significantly expanded on the first serious biographical account of the Stratford man that Nicholas Rowe attached to his critical edition of the Bard's works in 1709.¹² At the same time, the younger Cibber who had been connected with the Drury Lane Theater, makes no mention of Oxford despite his prominence in the lists of well-known poets prepared by Webbe (1586), Puttenham (1589) Meres (1598) and Peacham (1623). Cibber explores the lives of more than 25 Elizabethan poets, but not Oxford. This exclusion may have been deliberate, though the similar absence of Dyer and Paget from the list may provide a rationale for Cibber because these poets' works, like those of Oxford, had been largely lost or never published. Nonetheless, Oxford becomes a non-person for those reading Cibber's work, whereas contemporaries such as Collins (1752), Walpole (1758), and Warton (1774) reiterate the high praise for the Earl found in the lists from a century or more earlier.

Whatever Theophilus Cibber's motives, it is hard to avoid the impression that Bardolatry was stimulated by Rowe's biographical essay in 1709 and intensified with the reopening of the old Theater Royal (renamed The Drury Lane Theater) in 1710-11 under the leadership of Colley Cibber. Thus, when Garrick joined this theater in the 1740s, the Bardolatry was well underway. For their part, however, the people of Stratford town remained relatively passive even after the Jubilee in 1769 and did not build and dedicate a local theater to their favorite son until 1870. Meanwhile, Oxford's literary reputation never died out completely, and was saved for posterity when Grosart collected some of his poems in 1872.

Endnotes for Appendix

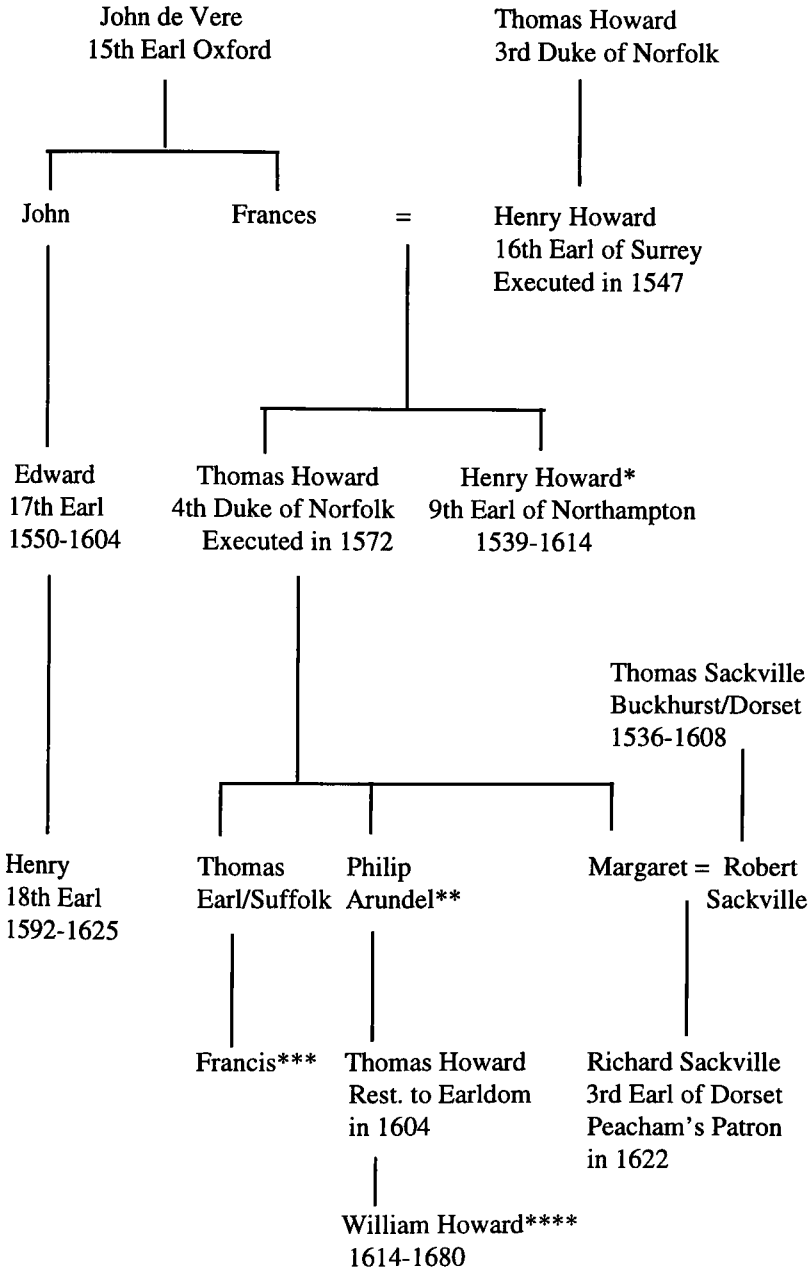
1. The passages in Wood can be found in *Athenae Oxonienses*, column 152 and in *Fasti Oxonienses*, page 99, column 1.
2. Collins's was the only eighteenth-century work which cited Oxford as a significant poet known to Thomas Looney (the originator of the Oxfordian theory in the 1920s).
3. The references can be found on pages 2, 148, 494, and also in footnote at the bottom of page 163.
4. The biographical sketch can be found on pages 50-51.
5. Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, pages 242-244.
6. The passage concerning Oxford in Walpole's work can be found on page 144. We should note that Walpole might have cribbed this passage directly from Collins's work which had been published only six years earlier in 1752.
7. Walpole, *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England* (1758), page 144.
8. See Schoenbaum, Samuel. *Shakespeare's Lives*, 1993 edition, pages 203 and 339 which cite Walpole's belief that the Chandos portrait was "the only original picture of Shakespeare" and the Earl's offer shortly after the Stratford Jubilee in 1769 of 300 guineas for Shakespeare's skull.
9. Ritson, *Bibliographica Poetica*, pages 381-382.
10. *Ibid.*, page 380-381.
11. Matus, *Shakespeare In Fact*, 1994, page 201. Matus devotes his eighth chapter to the origins of Barolatry.
12. Rowe devotes forty pages to the Stratford man at the very beginning of the first volume of his seven volume critical edition of Shakespeare's works in 1709. Theophilus Cibber devotes more than 20 pages in his 1753 work.

History of Oxford's Literary Reputation



*No Reference to Oxford

The Howard-Sackville-de Vere Connection



- * Bitter enemy of Edward de Vere and his family.
- ** Died in Tower for his Catholicism in 1595.
- *** Notorious for key role in Overbury Murder Scandal (1613-15).
- **** Peacham dedicated *The Complete Gentleman* (1622) to him who later was executed for alleged role in Papist Plot (1678).