

A Response to W. Ron Hess, “Did Shakespeare Have a Literary Mentor?”

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The Oxfordian scholar W. Ron Hess and I share a unique tie: we both believe that the Elizabethan poet and statesman Thomas Sackville (1536-1608), long overlooked as a Shakespeare authorship candidate, may have played an important role in creating the Shakespeare canon. However, we disagree on the nature and extent of Sackville’s possible contributions. In my article “The Swallow and the Crow: The Case for Sackville as Shakespeare,” published in the 2010 *The Oxfordian*, I advanced Sackville for the first time as the main author of the Shakespeare canon. In response, Hess argues in his 2011 article, “Did Shakespeare Have a Literary Mentor?” that Sackville may instead have been an important literary mentor for Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. As early as 2002, Hess speculated in his book *The Dark Side of Shakespeare: Volume I* that Sackville might have belonged to a literary circle surrounding Oxford. He amplified his arguments in an article posted in 2009 on his website, “Did Thomas Sackville influence *Shake-speare’s Sonnets?*” (unknown to me when I wrote my 2010 article), portions of which were reprinted in the March 2011 *DeVere Society Newsletter*.

The Faerie Queen

I am grateful for this opportunity to counter-respond to Hess’s thoughtful and detailed answer to my 2010 *Oxfordian* article. Rather than addressing each of his individual points in turn, I’d like to focus on the key areas where we disagree: whether Sackville mentored Oxford in the 1590s and early 1600s, and which man is most likely to have written the Shakespeare canon. To begin, I should explain how I became a Sackvillian in the first place.

I became aware of the Shakespeare authorship question in April of 1999 when I read the cover story, “Who was Shakespeare?” in *Harper’s* magazine. The arguments for the Earl of Oxford impressed me more than those for William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, and I soon became a dedicated Oxfordian. However, in the back of my mind I remained troubled by Oxford’s early death in 1604 and the minor quality of his acknowledged poetry, so I continued to research all sides of the debate. In 2007 I re-read Edmund Spenser’s prefatory verses to his 1590 *The Faerie Queen*. Although I was familiar with his dedicatory sonnet to the Earl of Oxford, I wondered how these lines compared to his lines to other court figures. One of Spenser’s dedicatory sonnets particularly struck me: his tribute to “the Lord of Buckhurst, one of her Majesty’s Privy Council.” I had never heard of Buckhurst, but Spenser highly praised his “golden verse,” “lofty numbers,” and “heroic style,” even declaring that Buckhurst was “much more fit” than he to write a work such as *The Faerie Queen*. Spenser added that Buckhurst’s “dainty pen” could file the “gross defaults” of his own work, the product of a “baser wit.” Although Spenser was not above ingratiating himself to the powerful, it seemed to me

that he sincerely considered Buckhurst to be the better poet. I decided to learn more about this privy counselor who was such a gifted writer.

I soon discovered that the title Lord Buckhurst belonged to Thomas Sackville, an English poet born in 1536 to an ancient family of knights and courtiers, and a second cousin of Queen Elizabeth through her mother, Anne Boleyn. The general facts of Sackville's life are summarized in my earlier article, as well as in Hess's comments, but the following immediately intrigued me: (1) Sackville died in 1608, making his lifespan more consistent with the standard chronology of Shakespeare's works than the Earl of Oxford's; (2) his acknowledged poetic works are of greater literary importance than the Earl of Oxford's; and (3) his co-authored play *Gorboduc*, written with Thomas Norton in 1561, was so influential that it paved the way to the flowering of the late Elizabethan drama, with a particularly strong connection to Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Literary scholars widely agree that by the age of twenty-five, Sackville had composed "the best poetry written in the English language between Chaucer and Spenser," as George Saintsbury wrote in his 1887 *A History of Elizabethan Literature* (11). According to John Cunliffe in the *Cambridge History of English and American Literature* from 1907-1921, "Only the small extent of Sackville's poetical work has prevented him from inclusion among the masters of the grand style...He conceives greatly, and handles his great conceptions with a sureness of touch which belongs only to the few" (200). In 1938, the literary critic Fitzroy Pyle described Sackville as "one of the great might-have-beens" of literature (315).

Oxford vs. Sackville

Sackville and Oxford share many of the traits and experiences reflected in *The Collected Works*. Both studied the law, traveled to Italy, were intimately familiar with the people and events of the English court between the 1560s and 1580s, and had expertise in aristocratic sports such as falconry, bowls, and deer hunting. Indeed, nearly all of the arguments made to support Oxford's candidacy can be readily transferred to Sackville. Either one could have been the major hidden poet in "purple robes" (worn only by elite members of the nobility) whom Thomas Edwards lauded in his 1593 poetry volume *Cephalus and Procris, and Narcissus* (Barrell). Either could have been the beloved hidden poet John Marston honored in his 1598 *Scourge of Villainy*, Satire IX. Marston longs for the poet he loves best of all, a man whose "silent name" is bounded by a single letter, to achieve the fame he so richly deserves:

...Far fly thy fame,
Most, most of me beloved, whose silent name
One letter bounds. Thy true judicial style
I ever honour, and if my love beguile
Not much my hopes, then thy unvalu'd worth
Shall mount fair place when Apes are turned forth.

Edward de Vere's name is bounded with an 'e,' while Thomas Sackville's name is

bounded with a ‘t’, as Thomas Lord Buckhurst.

As I continued to research Sackville’s life and writings, I became convinced that he was a stronger Shakespeare authorship candidate than Oxford, not only because of his longer lifespan and demonstrated poetic genius, but also because his mindset seemed to be more “Shakespearean” than Oxford’s. Sackville’s acknowledged poetic works—one dedicatory sonnet, the narrative poems *Induction* and *The Complaint of Henry Duke of Buckingham*, the verse epistle *Sacvyle’s Olde Age*, and the play *Gorboduc*, co-authored with Thomas Norton in 1561—explore a wide range of historical and philosophical topics. In contrast, Oxford’s known poems are focused on his inner state of mind and cover a narrower range of themes.

I was fascinated to learn that in his early twenties, Sackville formulated a grand plan to relate the histories of England’s past kings, similar to the plan carried out by Shakespeare in his history plays. When Richard Baldwin introduced Sackville’s two poetic contributions to the 1563 edition of the *Mirror of Magistrates*, *Induction* and *Complaint*, he noted that Sackville had planned to complete the cycle of English history stories himself (Sackville 112):

(Sackville) purposed with himself to have gotten at my hands, all the tragedies that were before the Duke of Buckingham’s, which he would have preserved in one volume. And from that time backward even to the time of William the Conqueror, he determined to continue and perfect all the story himself...

More than a century ago, Walt Whitman wrote of Shakespeare’s history plays, “it is impossible to grasp the whole cluster of those plays...without thinking of them as, in a free sense, the result of an *essentially controlling plan*” (110, original italics). Shakespeare’s sustained and sweeping interest in relating the histories of England’s past rulers was unique among the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, so it is significant that as a young man Sackville wanted to tell their collective stories.

Oxford’s Death

After I began investigating the case for Sackville in earnest, I came to believe that during my years as an Oxfordian I had not paid sufficient attention to the evidence that two of Shakespeare’s plays, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, were composed or substantially revised in 1606. Traditional scholars have long debated when Shakespeare wrote his last play, but based on what appear to be topical allusions to events from 1605 and 1606 in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, they widely agree that he was still active as a playwright in the summer of 1606. Some of these allusions might be coincidental or could point to earlier similar events, as Oxfordians maintain, but others strike me as specific and unique to this two-year period. (This is another area where Hess and I disagree; readers may wish to consult Hess’s article, “Shakespeare’s Dates: Their Effects on Stylistic Analysis,” printed in the *Oxfordian* 1999, for a useful compilation of Stratfordian and Oxfordian opinions on the dating of the canonical plays.)

Stratfordian scholars generally hold that Shakespeare wrote the surviving version of *Macbeth* not long after the sensational Gunpowder Plot of November 5, 1605, in which a group of dissident English Catholics tried to blow up Parliament (e.g., Paul, Wills, Greenblatt 332-355). Shakespeare appears to allude to this episode in several different ways in *Macbeth*. Most obviously, the play depicts the bloody and unprovoked murder of a sleeping king of Scotland. It also alludes to the image of a snake hiding under a flower—Lady Macbeth tells her husband, “look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it,” shortly before King Duncan arrives at Macbeth’s castle. This very image was stamped on a royal medallion to commemorate James’s escape from harm after the Gunpowder Plot was discovered.

Finally, the play appears to refer to the trial and execution of the English Jesuit Henry Garnet for his involvement in the Gunpowder Plot. When Garnet was tried on March 28, 1606, he used the techniques of equivocation to give misleading answers to the government’s questions, as laid out in his own *Treatise of Equivocation*. In the drunken Porter scene in *Macbeth*, the Porter says, “Faith, here’s an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven.”

Collectively, these allusions suggest that Shakespeare completed *Macbeth* not long after Garnet’s execution on May 3, 1606. (For a counter-argument from an Oxfordian perspective, see Richard Whalen’s article in the *Oxfordian* 2003.)

The strongest indication that *Macbeth* was composed in the summer of 1606 concerns its allusion to a ship named the *Tiger*, which sailed to the near east en route to Aleppo, an ancient trading city in Syria. The First Witch incants, “Her husband’s to Aleppo gone, master o’ the *Tiger*: But in a sieve I’ll thither sail, And, like a rat without a tail, I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do.” She threatens to torment the poor *Tiger*’s captain for a weary space of seven nights times nine and nine, or for 567 days:

I will drain him dry as hay:
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid;
He shall live a man forbid:
Weary se’n nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine:
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.

As the scholar E. A. Loomis established, a ship named the *Tiger* really did sail to the Far East on December 5, 1604, returning to Milford Harbor on the west coast of Wales on June 27, 1606 after enduring many calamities. It was gone 81 weeks or 567 days, the span of time over which the First Witch threatened to wreak havoc upon it.

As I wrote in my 2010 article, some scholars believe that Shakespeare drew particular inspiration for *Macbeth* from a welcoming pageant performed before King James at Oxford University in August 1605, in which three weird sisters hailed him as the descendant of the Scotsman Banquo. “The little ceremony of greeting—whether

Shakespeare stood in the crowd watching it or heard about it from one of the bystanders—seems to have stuck in the playwright’s imagination” (Greenblatt, 334).

King James’s visit to Oxford was hosted by none other than Thomas Sackville, the University Chancellor, whose “generous hospitality was the theme of universal approval,” according to a nineteenth-century biographical sketch in *Athenae Cantabrigienses* (C. Cooper and T. Cooper, 487). After the King’s departure, Sackville sent “twenty pounds and five brace of bucks to the disputants and the actors in the plays before the king. He also sent money and venison to every college and hall.” Because Sackville hosted the royal visit, he would have taken a particular interest in the contents of the plays shown before the royal family—of course, as Shakespeare appears to have done.

When King James and his family arrived at Oxford on August 27, 1605, they were greeted by a welcoming pageant composed in Latin by the scholar Matthew Gwinne. This pageant reenacted a legend about the eleventh-century Scotsman Banquo, from whom King James claimed descent. According to Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, one day the future King Macbeth and his friend Banquo were journeying through the woods when they happened upon “three women in strange and wild apparel” with unearthly powers. The weird women prophesied that Macbeth, not Banquo, would become King of Scotland, but that Banquo would enjoy the greater triumph because his descendants would rule Scotland for many generations. During the 1605 pageant at Oxford, three boys dressed as “sibyls” emerged from some greenery to greet the royal party, explaining that they were the “three same fates” who “once foretold power without end” to Banquo. They flatteringly predicted that King James’s descendants would also enjoy *imperium sine fine*—rule without end—and hailed him in grand terms:

Hail, whom Scotland serves!
Whom England, hail!
Whom Ireland serves, all hail!
Whom France gives titles, lands besides, all hail!
Hail, whom divided Britain join’st in one!
Hail, mighty Lord of Britain, Ireland, France!

(Absurdly, the British monarchs clung to the official title “ruler of France” long after England lost Calais, the nation’s last military outpost in France, at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign.)

Shakespeare seems to have known several details of this pageant. When Macbeth and Banquo first encounter the three witches on the heath in Scotland, they hail Macbeth in nearly the same fashion as the three “sibyls” hailed King James:

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| First Witch | All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis. |
| Second Witch | All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor. |
| Third Witch | All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter! |

Shakespeare may have drawn upon other elements from Gwinne's pageant in *Macbeth*. For instance, in one scene Macbeth demands to know of the three witches, "shall Banquo's issue ever reign in this kingdom?" The witches show him a procession of eight kings featured like Banquo, the last of whom holds a looking glass in his hand. Banquo's ghost follows the kings, pointing to them as his descendants. "Filthy hags! Why do you show me this?" Macbeth exclaims. "What, will the line stretch out to the crack of doom?" When he looks into the eighth king's mirror, he sees even more of Banquo's descendants, some carrying "two-fold balls and treble scepters." The "two-fold balls" represent the unification of Britain and Scotland under King James, and the "treble scepters" refer to King James's nominal title as ruler of Britain, Ireland, and France.

Additional evidence that Shakespeare attended the 1605 reception of King James at Oxford University can possibly be found in the last act of *Macbeth*. After Macbeth and his wife conspire to murder King Duncan as an innocent guest in their home, Lady Macbeth cannot sleep because of her troubled mind. Macbeth asks the doctor if he can provide medicine to soothe his wife's mind: "can'st thou not minister to a mind diseased" and relieve her from "that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart?"

The Doctor answers that no medicine can relieve a troubled mind: "Therein the patient must minister to himself." As Kenneth Muir noted in his 1977 *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (208-9), Shakespeare was apparently echoing a passage from Samuel Daniel's play *The Queen's Arcadia*, performed at Oxford University before the queen (but not James) on August 30, 1605. In one act, the errant shepherdess Daphne visits a quack doctor before soliloquizing: "Oh what can physic do to cure that hideous wound my lusts have given my conscience?" She recognizes that she is only "diseas'd within" her mind, not in her body. Her unquiet mind "keeps me waking," and when she finally falls into "broken sleeps" she sees "forms of terror." These horrible visions lay "upon my heart this heavy load that weighs it down with grief." Daphne says that because she has "no disease...there is no cure I see at all, nor no redress."

Because Shakespeare appears in *Macbeth* to have drawn on powerful dramatic moments from Gwinne's pageant *Three Sibyls* and Samuel Daniel's *Queen's Arcadia*, both performed at Oxford University during King James's visit in August of 1605, one wonders whether he was physically present at the Oxford performances. This was true of Thomas Sackville as the royal family's host.

Like *Macbeth*, *King Lear* contains internal clues that it was written or revised in 1606. The play includes what seems to be a clear allusion to a pamphlet published in February, 1606 about the lunar eclipse of September, 1605 and the solar eclipse of October, 1605. (This is a commonplace of literary criticism: see, for instance, Russell Fraser's recent edition of *King Lear*.) Superstitious people believed that the closely spaced eclipses were divine portents of impending doom. In February, 2006, the almanac writer Edward Gresham printed an English translation of a Dutch pamphlet detailing the dire consequences that would surely follow from the recent eclipses. According to the pamphlet, "the Earth's and Moon's late and horrible obscurations" would "without doubt" lead within a few years to all sorts of calamities. Among the troubles sure to ensue

were “new leagues, traitorous designments, catching at kingdoms, translation of empire, downfall of men in authority, emulations, ambition, innovations, factious sects, schisms, and much disturbance and troubles in religion and matters of the Church, with many other things infallible...”

One scene in *King Lear* apparently refers to Gresham’s pamphlet, suggesting the play was composed between February and December of 1606 (when the King’s Men performed *King Lear* at Whitehall Palace). In it, the Earl of Gloucester declares, “These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked “twixt son and father.”

After Gloucester leaves the room, his bastard son Edmund begins thinking about how to turn the eclipses to his advantage. When his half-brother Edgar enters the room, Edmund says, “I am thinking, brother, of a prediction I read this other day, what should follow these eclipses.” He adds, “I promise you, the effects he writes of succeed unhappily; as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent; death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.”

In the context of 1606, Gloucester’s description of “in palaces, treasons” and Edmund’s allusion to “menaces and maledictions against king and nobles” would have been recognized as allusions to the failed Gunpowder Plot. In its aftermath, the London authorities placed extra guards at the city gates, closed the ports, and took other steps to secure the city. They also began a manhunt for the conspirators, proclaiming that anyone who knew the whereabouts of the conspirators was to come forward. Edgar was subject to a similar proclamation in *King Lear*: “I heard myself proclaimed, and by the happy hollow of a tree escaped the hunt. No port is free, no place that guard and most unusual vigilance does not attend my taking.”

If *Macbeth* and *King Lear* were indeed written in 1606, as internal clues indicate, then Oxford could not have written these plays unless (1) he did not actually die in 1604 (a theory Hess alludes to), or (2) they were substantially revised by a second author in 1606 whose style closely resembles Shakespeare’s. On the other hand, Sackville was alive and well in 1606, and retained his intellectual vigor until his death on April 19, 1608.

Sackville and de Vere

Thomas Sackville and Edward de Vere certainly knew each other, and they may have been friends for a time. Although there is no direct evidence for their friendship, as Hess notes in “Did Shakespeare Have a Literary Mentor?,” both contributed commendatory Latin epistles to Bartholomew Clerke’s 1571 Latin translation of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, known in English as *The Book of the Courtier*. (Clerke was Sackville’s friend and private secretary.)

Another link between Sackville and Oxford can be found in Gabriel Harvey’s 1577 *Rhetor*, containing the text of Harvey’s recent two-day speech on the principles of

rhetoric. A sycophantic writer who enjoyed hanging about the court, Harvey dedicated the work to Bartholomew Clerke, a senior rhetorician whom he admired and who had requested that *Rhetor* be published. He also praised Sackville and Oxford in *Rhetor* as “two most noble and magnificent lords...perfect courtiers of unsurpassed excellence.” From the context, it is clear that Harvey meant to praise them in part for the eloquent commendatory Latin epistles they had contributed to Clerke’s Latin translation of Castiglione’s work. It was unusual for lords to allow any of their writings, even commendations, to appear in print, and Harvey was impressed by the “remarkable favor” that Sackville and Oxford had shown to Clerke by honoring his Latin translation with a “signal commendation and public endorsement.”

I enjoyed learning from Hess’s article that “R. S. of the Inner Temple,” who edited the 1593 poetry anthology, *The Phoenix Nests*, containing a poem by “E. O.,” was plausibly Robert Sackville, Thomas’s oldest son. I had not previously considered the possibility that Robert might have shared his father’s poetic inclinations.

Although Thomas Sackville and Oxford may have been friends before the mid-1590s, they came into conflict in 1595, when both sought to gain the lucrative right to oversee tin mining operations in England on behalf of the crown. It seems that Sackville began the bidding with an artificially high offer, driving Oxford to make an overly generous bid for the monopoly which he could ill afford. Aggrieved by Sackville’s behavior, Oxford complained to his father-in-law William Cecil, Lord Burghley on March 28, 1595:

As to the matter of the tins...I have found Lord Buckhurst [Thomas Sackville] to have dealt with me very strangely and otherwise than till this experience of his disposition I would have believed or suspected...It is true my gains shall be very little or nothing, yet since my Lord Buckhurst hath so hardly dealt with me as I will inform you whensoever I have opportunity, I rather will content myself with nothing, and make up the sum I have promised, than he should effect his cross and overthwart towards me.

As it later transpired, neither Oxford nor Sackville received the tin monopoly—Queen Elizabeth gave it to Sir Walter Raleigh. Oxford’s full set of letters concerning his bid for the tin mining rights can be found at Nina Greene’s excellent website, “The Oxford Authorship Site.” Because Oxford was so offended by Sackville’s poor treatment of him when they competed to gain the tin mining rights in 1595, I find it unlikely that they would have collaborated to any meaningful extent on playwriting after this time, even if they and their courtier friends co-authored dramatic works earlier in Queen Elizabeth’s reign.

Biographical Parallels

A strength of the Oxfordian case is that so many parallels can be drawn between Oxford’s life and passages in Shakespeare’s works, especially *Hamlet*. There can be little doubt that Shakespeare based Polonius—at least in part—on Lord Burghley, Edward de Vere’s father-in-law, but also Sackville’s ally on the privy council. It is unlikely that a commoner would have thought it a good idea to burlesque Lord Burghley on the public

stage of London, and in any case a commoner wouldn't have had ready access to Burghley's 1584 precepts for his son Robert Cecil (which seem to have loosely inspired Polonius's precepts for Laertes). The most plausible explanation for why Shakespeare would have based Polonius on Burghley is that the Bard belonged to Burghley's world, as Sackville and Oxford both did. Although I find Sackville to be a more plausible author of the Shakespeare canon than Oxford, I still believe that Oxford's life maps uncannily onto *Hamlet*, particularly in the incident where Hamlet's ship is boarded by pirates and he is left naked on the Danish shore. If the author wasn't Oxford, he certainly knew Oxford and his life circumstances well.

Other topical allusions in Shakespeare's plays map better onto Sackville's life than Oxford's. The most significant of these are the well-known allusions to the Kenilworth festivities of 1575 in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see Greenblatt, 42-53, whose discussion I have largely followed). In July 1575, the Earl of Leicester invited Queen Elizabeth and other luminaries of the court to his country residence, Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire, for nineteen days of dancing, frolicking, and splendid entertainments in her majesty's honor. It was one of the most celebrated social events of the Elizabethan age. Among other spectacles, the Lords and Ladies of the court were treated to rustic shows, acrobatics, a bear baiting, and an elaborate water pageant. Amazingly, Shakespeare alludes to the Kenilworth water pageant in a *Midsummer Night's Dream* as if he had been a front-row spectator—which Thomas Sackville was. But the Earl of Oxford was unable to attend—he was then traveling in Italy.

As the water pageant commenced, Queen Elizabeth was invited to walk across a bridge at the edge of the Kenilworth Lake. A mechanical dolphin swam to her, ridden by a local villager dressed as the mythological singer Arion. The player addressed Elizabeth with some polite phrases and began singing to the accompaniment of musical instruments inside the dolphin's body. One observer, Robert Laneham, recalled that Arion sang "a delectable ditty," "deliciously delivered" and "so sweetly sorted" into parts for each instrument. Laneham found the musical harmony echoing from the calm waters in the evening of the day to be "incomparably melodious." As Elizabeth continued crossing over the bridge, a mermaid swam to her and delivered a speech from Neptune commanding the winds, waters, and sea creatures to give attendance to her majesty:

You winds, return unto your caves
And silent there remain,
You waters wild, suppress your waves,
And keep you calm and plain;
You fishes all, and each thing else
That have here any sway,
I charge you all in Neptune's name
You keep you at a stay.

The evening concluded with a fireworks display over the lake. Laneham describes the it as a "blaze of burning darts, flying to and fro, leams of stars coruscant, streams and hail

of fiery sparks, lightnings of wildfire a-water and land; flight and shoot of thunderbolts, all with such continuance, terror, and vehemency, and the heavens thundered, the waters scourged, the earth shook.”

According to general scholarly consensus, Shakespeare deliberately remarked on the Kenilworth festivities in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Most clearly, Oberon says to Puck,

Oberon ...My gentle Puck come hither: thou remembrest,
 Since once I sat upon a promontory,
 And heard a Mermaid, on a Dolphin's back,
 Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
 That the rude sea grew civil at her song,
 And certain stars shot madly from their Spheres,
 To hear the Sea-maid's music.

Puck I remember.

Oberon continues reminiscing about the evening:

Oberon That very time, I saw (but thou could'st not)
 Flying between the cold Moon and the earth,
 Cupid, all arm'd: a certain aim he took
 At a fair Vestal, throned by west,
 And loos'd his love-shaft smartly, from his bow,
 As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:
 But, I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
 Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery Moon:
 And the imperial Votress passed on,
 In maiden meditation, fancy free.

The “fair Vestal, throned by west” seems to be Queen Elizabeth—the imperial Votress who “passed on, in maiden meditation, fancy free” despite the Earl of Leicester's efforts to charm her into marrying him.

The Kenilworth festivities had their share of ham-handed country entertainments and botched performances. This aspect too finds its way into *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Robert Laneham's recollection of Arion's enchanting song from atop the mechanical dolphin's back belies what really happened. The music that transported Laneham was the lovely sound of the wind instruments inside the dolphin's body, which carried farther than a human voice. However, those in the Queen's party—including Sackville—would have known that the local singer Harry Goldingham who played Arion was not in good voice on the night of the water pageant. According to an unpublished anecdote from a manuscript collection in the British Museum, Goldingham's voice was “very hoarse and unpleasant when he came to perform” his song. Instead of continuing to sing in bad form, “he tears off his disguise, and swears he was none of Arion, not he, but even honest Harry

Goldingham; which blunt discovery pleased the Queen better than if it had gone through in the right way.”

Goldingham’s claim to be no Arion but only honest Harry Goldingham may be echoed by Snug the Joiner in the play-within-a-play in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. When Bottom and his troupe of country rustics perform “A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe” before the noble couples at court, Snug the Joiner reassures the ladies that they need not “quake and tremble” when they hear him roaring because he is no lion but only Snug the Joiner.

Another highlight of the Kenilworth festivities was a traditional Hock Tuesday show performed by certain “good-hearted men of Coventry” about the expulsion of the Danes from England before the Queen. Elizabeth arrived late for their first performance, but asked for them to repeat their show on the following Tuesday. “Accordingly it was presented, whereat her Majesty laughed well.” Elizabeth rewarded the Coventry players generously for their performance. They were so jubilant that they “prayed for her Majesty long happily to reign and oft to come thither that they might see her—and what rejoicing upon their ample reward and what triumphing upon the good acceptance, they vaunted their play was never so dignified nor ever any players afore so beatified.”

The Kenilworth Festivities seem to have made an enduring impression on Shakespeare’s imagination. His allusions to Kenilworth are infused with rustic fun, lovers’ laughter, and the warmth of a July evening when a resplendent queen was pursued by an amorous Earl while being entertained by a botched performance and a magical water spectacle. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* similarly mingles noble lovers and country rustics in an enchanted forest setting. The author scatters moonlight and flower petals across the woodlands paths, banishing dark clouds from the fairy world.

Many Stratfordian scholars have tried to account for Shakespeare’s knowledge of Kenilworth by speculating that the eleven-year-old William Shakspeare made the twelve-mile trek from Stratford to Kenilworth, where he milled around with the crowds outside the grounds listening to gossip about the lavish entertainments being held within the castle walls. Others find it more plausible that he read about the events in a published account. However, neither of these suppositions accounts for the evocative and romantic nature of the Kenilworth allusions in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. They make more sense from a Sackvillian authorship perspective than from an Oxfordian or a Stratfordian one.

Concluding Thoughts

Although I now find the case for Sackville to be more compelling than that for the Earl of Oxford, based on Sackville’s longer lifespan, greater demonstrated poetic ability, and arguably more Shakespearean temperament, I would not be at all surprised if he and Oxford collaborated on court plays in the 1570s and 1580s, some of which may underlie Shakespeare’s canonical plays. Like W. Ron Hess and other Oxfordians, I suspect that many of Shakespeare’s plays originated at court long before William Shakespeare moved from Stratford to London. Textual analysis increasingly indicates that many of the canonical plays have complex revision histories, and are best seen as palimpsests that

evolved over the years. Because so many of the plays appear to contain internal topical allusions to people and events of the Elizabethan court from 1560s to 1580s, it is possible that events from both Sackville's life and Oxford's life are relevant to understanding the play's origins. Perhaps a group of poetically inclined courtiers enjoyed crafting stories together during the middle years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. To write was to wield power, including the power of flattery, mockery, and political persuasion. What gifted writer at court wouldn't have taken advantage of the opportunity to advise and flatter the queen while mocking his enemies through the drama, given her love of play-going?

Finally, although Hess and I disagree on whether Thomas Sackville played a mentoring role or a main role in authoring the Shakespeare canon, we can both agree that William Shakespeare was not the author. Unfortunately, I did not have space in my 2010 *Oxfordian* article to provide a detailed overview of my theory that the Stratford actor was the main author not of the Shakespeare canon but of the apocryphal Shakespeare plays and bad quartos. This theory can help strengthen all alternative theories, whether for Oxford, Sackville, or any other non-traditional candidate.

Traditional scholars don't actually know how the apocryphal plays and bad quartos came into being. The only way to argue William Shakespeare didn't write them, at least in part, is to use stylistic arguments and invoke the authority of the 1623 First Folio. The anomalous existence of two sets of works exhibiting distinct poetic voices printed under one man's name (or otherwise assigned to him) suggests a fascinating possibility. Could William Shakespeare have been the main author of the apocryphal plays and passages in the bad quartos while serving as a front man for a hidden poet who wrote the canon? After I made this basic argument in *The Oxfordian*, a similar idea was proposed by Dennis McCarthy in his book *North of Shakespeare*, published as a Kindle ebook in June of 2011. The argument that William Shakespeare wrote the apocryphal plays is new to the authorship debate. It provides an interesting 'third way' by endorsing William Shakespeare as a legitimate and popular playwright, but questioning his primary authorship of the Bard's works. It would explain why some of the Stratford actor's contemporaries hailed him as a great poet, but others mocked him for being a literary hack.

An extended argument for William Shakespeare as the author of the apocryphal plays and bad quartos can be found in my book *The Apocryphal William Shakespeare*, Book One of *A 'Third Way' Shakespeare Authorship Scenario*, self-published in the fall of 2010. The full case for Thomas Sackville as the author of the Shakespeare Canon will appear in my book *Thomas Sackville and the Shakespearean Glass Slipper*, Book Two of *A 'Third Way' Shakespeare Authorship Scenario*, to be self-published in 2011.

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