



## *Hamlet's Sources and Influences, and Its “Forerunners” by Oxford*

by Richard F. Whalen

The primary sources of *Hamlet* were both personal and literary, as are the sources of the creative writings of recognized artistic genius. The personal sources are found in the turbulent, troubled life of the mercurial dramatist Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. The literary sources, which are the subject of this article, were primarily the ancient Danish legend of the hero Amlethus,

first published in Latin and later retold in French by Francois de Belleforest in a free translation. And the most important influence on the play was probably the story of the Greek hero Orestes.

But that's not all. This survey of the literary sources and influences also suggests how difficult, if not impossible, it would have been for Will Shakspeare of Stratford to have seen them—a problem for Stratfordian commentators—whereas the Earl of Oxford had them close at hand.

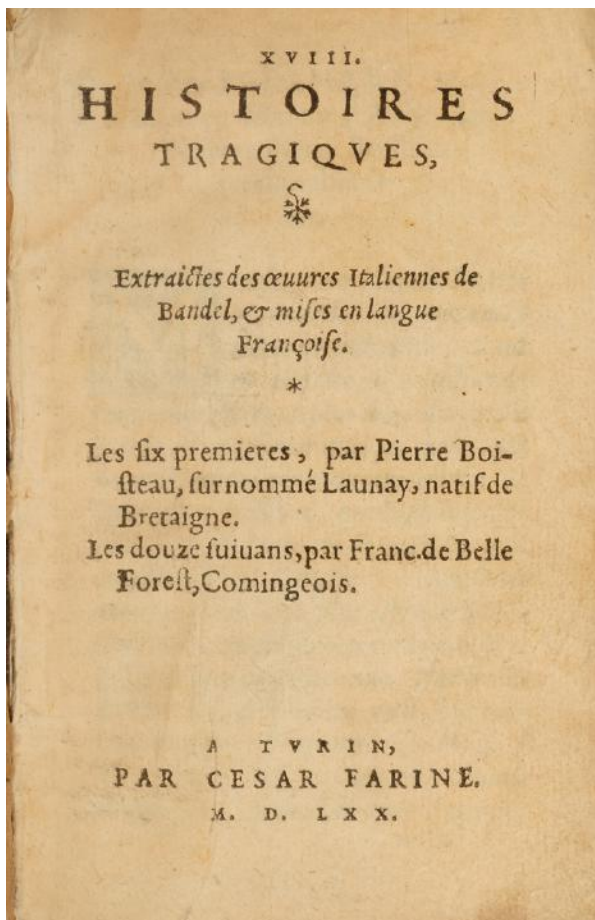
In addition, this survey presents evidence indicating that Oxford was the author of three plays, the first when he was seventeen, that Stratfordian scholars have considered sources for *Hamlet* or influences on it. For Stratfordians, the authorship of these three plays is not entirely clear, but they may well have been “forerunners” by Oxford of what would become his final version of *Hamlet* just before he died.

To begin at the beginning, the Danish legend of Amlethus, written in Latin by Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1150-1220), appeared in a multi-volume history of Denmark, published in Paris in 1514. Belleforest's much embellished translation of Saxo's story into French and set in a Renaissance court was published in a multi-volume set of books, in 1572, also in Paris.

The parallels in *Hamlet* to the Saxo/Belleforest story of Amleth are clear. Amleth (Gallicized by Belleforest from Saxo's “Amlethus”) was Prince of Denmark, a troubled young man who found himself entangled in the intrigues of court power politics, as is Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (whose name is Anglicized by anagram from “Amleth”).

Amleth was the son of King Horwendil (old King Hamlet), who was murdered by his brother Fengo (Claudius) to become the sole ruler and who married his brother's widow, Amleth's mother (Gertrude). Fearing that he might suffer the same fate as his father, Amleth feigned madness and talked in riddles and doublespeak to turn aside suspicions (as does “antic” Hamlet). Fengo

(Continued on p. 19)



Belleforest's translation of the “Amleth” story

## From the President:

### The SOF Making Waves

Dear SOF Members,

Thanks to all of you for joining the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship for 2018 or renewing your memberships. Many of you also generously donated to the SOF's Research Grant Program (see p. 5 of this issue for an announcement of the latest winners) or to the headstone for J. Thomas Looney (see *Newsletter*, Fall, 2017, pp. 2, 3) or to our general fund. The SOF continues to make waves, thanks to you! Here are a few highlights of the SOF's current activities:

#### **SOF Oakland Conference, October 11-14, 2018**

Our annual conference will take place at the Marriott Oakland City Center (1001 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94607), where we have secured a \$149/night group rate. This is a huge savings over the regular rate of \$350/night. See p. 36 for details. You can register for the conference online or by sending in the flyer inserted in this newsletter. We hope to see you there for what we expect to be another exciting conference.

#### **The Oxfordian Seeks New Editor**

Chris Pannell has stepped down after three outstanding years as Editor of *The Oxfordian*, our annual scholarly journal, in order to devote more time to his literary pursuits. See p. 8 for details. We thank Chris for his service and wish him the best! A search committee is now going through applications for the next editor. We expect to announce the new editor by the time the next issue of this newsletter appears.

#### **Coming Soon to the SOF Website**

We have some major projects in the works for the SOF website, some of which may even be online by the time you get this newsletter:

- (1) **Comparing Oxford's known poetry to Shakespeare's works.** This project combines the work of many scholars over a period of almost a century. I think this will confirm to many people that Oxford and Shakespeare were the same person (either that, or Shakespeare was obsessed with imitating Oxford's poetry).
- (2) **Steinburg on Bate's Debate.** Steven Steinburg, Oxfordian author of *I Come to Bury Shakspeare*, has written a detailed critique of Jonathan Bate's performance in the September 2017 debate against Alexander Waugh. As you may recall if you watched

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

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

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

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

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the debate (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgImgdJ5L6o&sns=fb>), Bate had about fifteen minutes to present his opening argument, in which he spouted one questionable “fact” after another. There was no way that Alexander Waugh could have rebutted all of Bate’s claims in the time allotted for the debate. Steinburg’s 16,000-word article goes through Bate’s monologue and some of his later statements in the debate, point by point, and, in my view, handily deflates them.

- (3) **Shakespeare Fellowship (American) Newsletters.** Oxfordian Eddy Nix has kindly sent us pdf scans of all issues of the Shakespeare Fellowship (American) newsletters from 1939 to 1948. This was the first major Oxfordian group in the United States and was a predecessor of our current Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship. There was also an early Shakespeare Fellowship in the UK. These SF (USA) newsletters contain wonderful articles by such American Oxfordian pioneers as Eva Turner Clark, Charles Wisner Barrell, and Louis Bénézet—a treasure trove of Oxfordian insight. We plan to have all 600+ pages of these newsletters posted and easily accessible on our website very soon. This will be a valuable research tool for us and a precious window into the history of the Oxfordian movement in the USA.

The SOF website, containing hundreds of outstanding articles, is a great place to research the authorship question and the Oxfordian theory. Explore!

### Data Preservation

Do you have letters from prominent Oxfordians? Early records from Oxfordian organizations? Unpublished manuscripts of Oxfordian articles? Copies of ancient Oxfordian publications that are not available online? Any important Oxfordian documents that might be lost to posterity if someone doesn’t do something to preserve them? If so, the SOF’s Data Preservation Committee wants to help. To find out how we can ensure that this valuable data survives, please contact [info@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org](mailto:info@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org).

### SI-100 Committee

Fresh off its success in helping to erect a headstone on the J.T Looney gravesite in England, the “SI-100” Committee, which was formed for the observance of the upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Looney’s *“Shakespeare” Identified* in 2020, has discovered an additional way to honor the founder of Oxfordianism at the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne in England, where Looney conducted the bulk of his research for *“Shakespeare” Identified*. See p. 9.

Stay tuned to our website and this newsletter for continued adventures in the quest to bring the truth to light!

—Tom Regnier, President

## From the Editor:

Welcome to the Winter 2018 *Newsletter*, which I hope comes to you more promptly than the preceding issue. Nobody seems to know why the delivery of the Fall 2017 issue to U.S. members was so delayed. We do know this: they were all printed on schedule in mid-November; the printer’s postage meter was down, so he used a mailing service that he regularly employs; the mailing service delivered the copies to the main post office in Boston, with the correct payment for first-class service, on November 29. After that things fell into a black hole. A few copies were quickly returned to us at the Auburndale post office, but neither the Auburndale nor the Boston postal authorities can figure out why (in any event they were remailed by the printer with new postage).

Members started reporting receipt of the Fall issue around December 10, though some persons did not receive theirs until after Christmas, a month after the copies were taken to the post office. We apologize, and our printer apologizes. It won’t happen again, as the printer assures us he will not use a mailing service; if his postage meter isn’t working, we’ll put stamps on them ourselves. If by some chance you are a U.S. Newsletter

member and didn’t receive the Fall 2017 issue (headline is the Chicago Conference report), let me know ([newsletter@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org](mailto:newsletter@shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org)) and I’ll get one to you.

In late November I had the opportunity to speak about the Authorship question at Newbury Court, a senior retirement community in Lincoln, Mass. (thanks to SOF member Lynn Gargill for arranging it). Since I hadn’t given a presentation in a while, it gave me an opportunity to rethink my approach, and to pare down what had been a 65- to 70-minute PowerPoint talk. Newbury Court’s social director, who knew her audience, strongly advised me to keep my remarks to about 45 minutes. Cutting it down was painful, as I agonized over what could and could not be left out. It’s like what movie directors face when the first cut of their film is four hours, but it needs to be two and a half. Anyway, the presentation went well, and quite a few people seemed convinced not only of the huge holes in the standard story of the Stratford man, but also of the strong case for Oxford as the true Bard.

In this issue I’m happy to feature two articles about *Hamlet*, Shakespeare’s most fascinating (and most autobiographical) play. The longer one is by Richard Whalen, and thoroughly explores the sources of the play and the dramatic forerunners of it. A version of Whalen’s



article will also appear in the Oxfordian edition of *Hamlet* (prepared by Jack Shuttleworth) that is expected soon.

The second article, “The Three Queens of *Hamlet*,” by Ren Draya, examines some particular aspects of the play (you’ll have to read it yourself to see what she means by “three” queens). Professor Draya touches on something in her article that also struck me when I reread *Hamlet* about two years ago, something that few commentators appear to have discussed. How does the audience learn about the death of Ophelia? From Gertrude, the Queen, who relates Ophelia’s drowning in detail in a fifteen-line speech at the end of Act IV. And how does Gertrude know this? Apparently she knows it because (as Draya suggests) she saw it herself. It would have been easy for the playwright to have Gertrude say “’twas told to me” if he wanted to distance Gertrude from the scene, but he didn’t. Gertrude was close enough to see exactly which tree Ophelia fell from (“a willow grows aslant a brook”), how it happened (“an envious sliver broke”) and that at first “her clothes spread wide

and ... bore her up.” Gertrude is also close enough to hear Ophelia in the water chanting “snatches of old tunes, as one incapable of her own distress.” We can assume that, if Ophelia is singing or chanting, she’s doing it softly, which again indicates that Gertrude is nearby. Thus she must have been in a position to help Ophelia (“Could the Queen have saved the young girl?” asks Draya). Again, it would have been easy for the playwright to add a line or two to Gertrude’s speech (“I tried to save her but the weeds were too thick,” or “I called for help, but no one answered”), but he didn’t.

If Gertrude saw everything and did nothing, that’s pretty damning. There is one other possible explanation, however, and it’s equally damning. Perhaps Gertrude is not telling the truth, and is deliberately spreading a “cover story” of Ophelia’s death. If so, that means she knows what really happened to her, i.e., that she was murdered.

—Alex McNeil

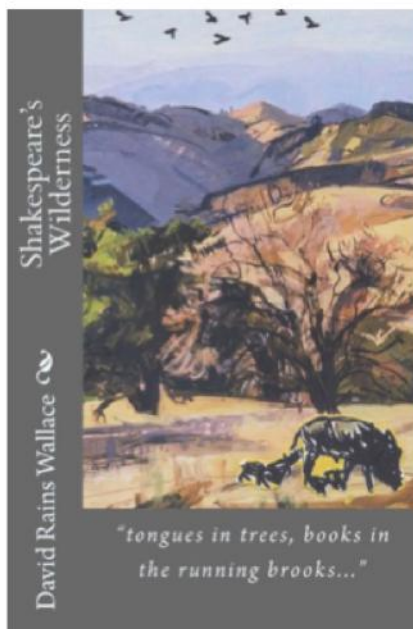
Advertisement

## Shakespeare’s Wilderness

By David Rains Wallace

Shakespeare is often praised for his love and understanding of nature. Less has been written about how he acquired those qualities. Biographers assume they arose from a youth in the countryside around Stratford on Avon. Yet relatively few Shakespeare works are set in the English Midlands’ tamed farmland. More are set in wild places: Scottish heaths, Welsh mountains, a Balkan seacoast, a desert island.

Did Shakespeare imagine the wild places in his works? Or did he experience them?



Available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) at \$15.95

“I thoroughly enjoyed *Shakespeare’s Wilderness*.... Its summary of the evidence against Shakspeare, and for Oxford, was as concise and evenhanded as I’ve seen.”

- Ramon Jiménez

“In his masterpiece of a hybrid work of literary criticism and natural history... Wallace has seized on a bronco of a thesis statement, and he’s masterfully following it through the entire Western Canon.... *Shakespeare’s Wilderness* is also the most comprehensive post-Stratfordian response to one of the most ambitious and enigmatic works of Stratfordian literary criticism: Ted Hughes’s 1992 book, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*.”

- Mark Anderson



# SHAKESPEARE

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## OXFORD FELLOWSHIP

P.O. BOX 66083, AUBURNDALE, MA 02466

### 2018 Conference Registration (Oakland, California)

**Full conference registration**, October 11-14 (includes all conference presentations and two provided meals):

Qty.

**SOF members:**

(A member may buy up to two registrations at member price.):

If postmarked on or before August 31, 2018:

\$250 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

If postmarked after August 31, 2018:

\$275 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**Non-members:**

If postmarked on or before August 31, 2018:

\$275 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

If postmarked after August 31, 2018:

\$300 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**For those attending only specific conference days:**

Single conference days (specify day(s): \_\_\_\_\_)

\$75 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday banquet luncheon only:

\$40 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

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**To make reservations at the Marriott Oakland City Center, call 877-901-6632 and mention the SOF Conference, or go to the SOF website and click on "Conference"; then click on "Registration" in the drop-down menu.**

**Mail this form with your check or credit card information to:**

**Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, P.O. Box 66083, Auburndale, MA 02466**

## What's the News?

### Winners of the 2017 Research Grant Program

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Research Grant Program Committee has announced the awards of three grants. In 2017 the Committee had \$20,000 available to award, of which \$10,000 came from donations, and \$10,000 in matching funds. Below is the list of awards,

together with the applicants' summary of their proposals:



**Michael Delahoyde and Coleen Moriarty: "Oxford on Record and Incognito in Italy" (\$14,100)**

"After uncovering several previously unknown documents in Italian State Archives from the 1570s containing

news of Oxford; obtaining access for what can now be put forth as the full, correct, and contextualized version of one of the two Venetian ambassadorial dispatches concerning him; and widening our network of local experts in archival research, history, and the Shakespeare Authorship Question, we seek to follow up on last summer's trail in northern Italy and Tuscany, focused primarily on Oxford's travels in 1575-76, expanding our scope to later years, and ideally including archives and collections in more cities."

**Gary Goldstein: "Discovering books from the 17th Earl of Oxford's personal library" (\$2,300)**

"At the present time, only two books from Oxford's personal library are available for research: a Geneva Bible and an Italian edition of the *History of Italy* by Francesco Guicciardini, both owned by the Folger Library. Oxford's copy of Herodotus's *Histories*, published in Venice in 1565, was auctioned by Sotheby's in 2015 to a private buyer who remains anonymous [see *Newsletter*, Fall 2017]. To advance the Oxfordian hypothesis in a significant way, we need to find a repository that contains a cache of Oxford's books. To that end, I researched the entries on Sir Francis Vere and other close family members in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. According to it, 'Between 1605 and his death

Sir Francis Vere made generous donations in money and books to the library which his old friend Sir Thomas Bodley was founding at Oxford.' Since the Earl of Oxford died in 1604, it is possible that at least a portion of Oxford's library was donated to Oxford University by his first cousin, Sir Francis Vere. I will go to Oxford University to research whether the books given by Sir Francis were originally owned by Edward de Vere."



**Emma (Eddi) Jolly: "Hunting for De Vere in English Archives and Libraries" (\$3,600)**

"More concrete evidence is required to substantiate the case for de Vere's proposed authorship of the Shakespeare canon, which requires a number of different approaches. One is to ensure that all possible public and private archives are investigated, in England and abroad, in areas where de Vere is known to have traveled; a second is to try to track down other books which may have been owned by de Vere or the author of the plays, and either marked as owned by him or with similar annotations and manicules as those found in the de Vere bible, books which may

be found in private libraries. I propose investigating more archives and making inquiries at specific libraries in order to locate further information about de Vere. England has forty-nine counties and slightly more public record offices with archives.

One line of investigation is to carry out online research for each of these record offices, and make a personal visit to each one with an indication of a document related to de Vere. England also has a number of stately homes with Tudor origins and archives, and significant libraries."



This is the fourth award made to Michael Delahoyde and Coleen Moriarty to pursue their efforts in Italy. This is the second award made to Eddi Jolly. Last year she received an award to look for evidence of de Vere in France.

The 2017 Research Grant Program Committee included John Hamill (chair), Katherine Chiljan, Bonner Miller Cutting, Ramon Jiménez and Don Rubin.



## Kevin Gilvary Announces New Book

Kevin Gilvary has announced that his book, *The Fictional Lives of Shakespeare*, has been published by Routledge as part of its Routledge Studies in Shakespeare series. As described on the publisher's website:

Modern biographies of William Shakespeare abound; however, close scrutiny of the surviving records clearly show that there is insufficient material for a cradle to grave account of his life, that most of what is written about him cannot be verified from primary sources, and that Shakespearean biography did not attain scholarly or academic respectability until long after Samuel Schoenbaum published *William Shakespeare A Documentary Life* in 1975.

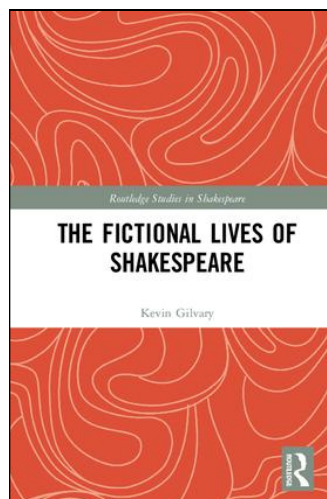
This study begins with a short survey of the history and practice of biography and then surveys the very limited biographical material for Shakespeare.

Although Shakespeare gradually attained the status as a national hero during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were no serious attempts to reconstruct his life. Any attempt at an account of his life or personality amounts, however, merely to "biografiction."

Modern biographers differ sharply on Shakespeare's apparent relationships with Southampton and with Jonson, which merely underlines the fact that the documentary record has to be greatly expanded through contextual description and speculation in order to appear like a Life of Shakespeare.

Kevin Gilvary earned a B.A. and two M.A. degrees (one in Classics, one in Applied Linguistics) from the University of Southampton. In 2015 he received a Ph.D. in English Literature from Brunel University in London. He is the former Chair of the De Vere Society and has also edited its newsletter. He has spoken at several SOF annual conferences. He is the editor of *Dating Shakespeare's Plays*, published by Parapress in 2010.

In deciding how to approach his topic, Gilvary stated that, "I have always seen the Shakespeare Authorship Question as a two-step argument. Firstly, the ordinary Shakespeare lover needs to be convinced (not just informed) that there is an Authorship Question. And this is where I have been working. Secondly, when Shakespeare lovers graduate into authorship skeptics, then and only then is it worth presenting the arguments for Oxford's claim. For my doctoral thesis at Brunel University London, I thought long and hard over my approach and eventually decided that for mainstream Shakespeare lovers, it would be most effective to concentrate on mainstream sources. Thus I hope to avoid



the *ad hominem* argument that 'you are only highlighting the paucity of documentary records because you are an authorship skeptic.' Not at all. Just the opposite. I am only an authorship skeptic because of the paucity of documentary records linking the Stratford man to the great works. I have thus reluctantly confined my citations to mainstream scholars in the hope that they will be less likely to dismiss my thesis out of hand. When the Shakespeare lover turns skeptical, he/she will find a wealth of excellent

scholarship among the non-Stratfordian writings, most especially those of the SOF and the DVS."

*The Fictional Lives of Shakespeare* is available in hardback or as an e-book. It can be ordered here: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Fictional-Lives-of-Shakespeare/Gilvary/p/book/9780815394433>

The book will be reviewed in our next issue.

## SOF to Sponsor Free Forum in Ashland, Oregon

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, based in Ashland, opens its 2018 season in February. This season's Shakespeare-related productions include *King Henry V*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as Lauren Gunderson's imaginative fiction on the creation of the First Folio, *The Book of Will*. For the OSF season schedule and ticket information see: <https://www.osfashland.org/>

In conjunction with the OSF program, the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship is sponsoring a free, one-day forum at the Hannon Library at Southern Oregon University in Ashland on Monday, July 9. Topics will include critical commentaries on *Henry V* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, and presentations on dating Shakespeare's plays. A distinguished group of authorship scholars, including Katherine Chiljan, Ramon Jiménez, Bonner Cutting, and Stanford University Professor Rima Greenhill, will be presenting papers. Chiljan is the author of *Shakespeare Suppressed* (2011), and Jiménez's study of literary, theatrical and historical evidence, *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship: A New Analysis of the Earliest Plays by the Real Shakespeare*, will soon be published by McFarland & Company.

Although admission to the forum will be free and open to the public, advance registration is required as there is limited seating in the Meese Room of Hannon Library. For further information and advance registration, contact Earl Showerman at [earlees@charter.net](mailto:earlees@charter.net).

## In Memoriam: Gareth Howell (1942-2018)

Gareth Howell, an Oxfordian who played a leading role in raising awareness of the Shakespeare authorship issue in Washington, D.C., and around the country, died January 4, 2018, after a valiant struggle with pancreatic cancer. He was 75.

A native Welshman with an extraordinary career in international development, Howell once said that if you walked into a department of religion at any major university and said you didn't believe in God, "they would invite you in for coffee to hear your point of view. But if you walk into the English department at the same school and say you don't believe an illiterate glover's son from a country town wrote the plays of Shakespeare, they would throw you out on your ear."

Howell did not believe the man from Stratford wrote the plays, and after considerable study concluded that the principal author was Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Not knowing that discussion of the authorship question was informally banned at a private club he had recently joined, he reacted to Tom Regnier's talk on "Hamlet and the Law" by asking if it wasn't more likely that the Earl of Oxford, with his legal training, wrote that play and all of Shakespeare's plays. His innocent question led to a formal strengthening of the club's taboo against discussing such matters. After six months of effort, he persuaded the club, with its Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winning members, to permit him and others to form a new group devoted to the subject. The new group was soon attracting as many attendees as the orthodox Shakespeare group. Howell said he had been an Oxfordian for thirty years, but it was only at this club that he began to meet fellow Oxfordians. After he was diagnosed with cancer in the summer of 2016, he gave up all of his many volunteer positions except for his leadership role in the authorship group.

In 2016, Howell gave a talk at the club, "The Stratford-Upon-Avon Shakespeare Cult & Profit Center," in which he focused on the economic interest Great Britain and the town of Stratford have in maintaining the belief that the merchant of Stratford is the true author of the canon. Shakespeare, he calculated, was worth \$513 million to the town of Stratford-Upon-Avon, and \$32 billion to the United Kingdom.

Gareth Howell was born in Rhiwbina, Wales, and received an Honors Degree in Law from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. He started his career in labor relations at the Ford Motor Company in the United Kingdom, and later worked for the World Bank Group on improving higher education in Nepal and Pakistan, and helping the governments of Mexico and Colombia on designing labor development strategies. During his time at the International Labor Organization, he worked with the United Nations on reconstructing Kosovo and East Timor. He was fluent in several languages, including French, Spanish, Italian, German, Urdu, and Welsh.



Howell, who lived in the United States from 1999 until his death, was also passionate about the Welsh heritage that shaped his life. He was a Welsh magistrate and drafted early proposals for the Welsh constitution, which was enacted in 1999. The Law School of the University of Aberystwyth awarded him an Honorary Fellowship in July 2017 in recognition of these contributions. He was also President Emeritus of the St. David's Welsh-American Society of Washington, D.C., a board member of the Welsh North American Association, and North America Secretary for the Welsh Legal History Society.

He is survived by his beloved wife, Amy Titus, and sons Llewellyn Howell and Rhys Howell.

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## Locating Oxford's Library

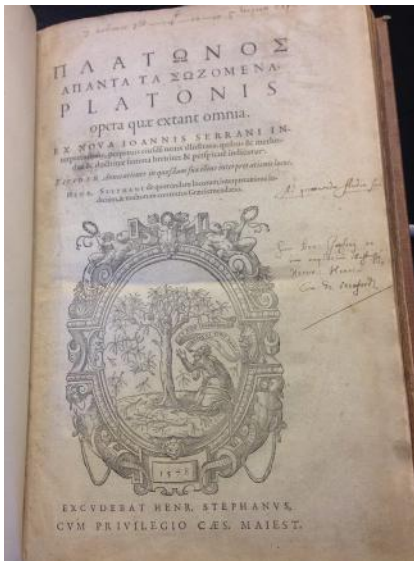
The late Ruth Miller discovered that Chetham Library in Manchester, England, owns a three-volume set of Plato in Greek and Latin, published in 1578 in Geneva. The library notes that the books were once owned by Ben Jonson and, before him, by Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford. Recently, an Oxfordian examined the books to see if they contain marginalia by Jonson, the 18th Earl or, possibly, the 17th Earl since the books were published fifteen years before the 18th Earl's birth.

Heidi Jeanne Jannsch reported in December on the ShakesVere page on Facebook that she carried out an examination of the three volumes in the spring of 2017, "but didn't see anything other than the inscriptions on the title pages of each volume." In short, neither Jonson nor de Vere left marginalia in the contents of the three volumes.



The inscriptions are described by the Library as follows:

- Inscription at top of (half-)t.p. of each volume: *tanquam Explorator*.
- Inscription on t.p. of T.I: *Ad promouenda studia sua. Sum Ben: Ionsonij ex dono amplissimi. illustrissi[m]i[q]ue] Herois: Henrici Com. de Oxenford.*
- Inscription on half-t.p. of T.II: *Ad promouenda studia. Donu[m] amplissim[i] Herois Illustrissimique] Do. Henrici comitis oxoniensis exto et Ben Ionsonij liber.*
- Inscription on half-t.p. of T.III: *Ad promoue[n]da studia sua. Donum amppissimi [sic] Herois Illustrissimiq[ue] D. Dom. Hen. De Vere. Com. Oxoniens. Exto. Et Ben: Ionsonij Liber.*



Title page of Vol 1 showing inscription

Jonson received the books directly from the 18th earl. According to Chetham's website, "The Library acquired the three-volume copy of Plato ... on 2 August 1655 at a cost of £3 10 shillings. What the Library didn't realize at the time was that the copy they bought had once belonged to the Renaissance playwright and poet Ben Jonson. His motto *Tanquam explorator* (As it were an explorer) is

written at the top of the title page. In the margin, just above the imprint is his signature *Sum Ben Jonsonii* ('I am Ben Jonson's'). The book had been given to Jonson by Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford (1593-1625)." The books are located in Chetham Library's Main Collection (Shelfmark : L.4.8-10).

In determining whether this set was originally owned by the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, we need to consider two pieces of contemporary evidence. First, account books kept by Lord Burghley while Oxford was his ward show that he purchased Plato's works in folio from stationer William Seres in the autumn of 1569, when Oxford was nineteen years old (see Ward, 33). This set was published in Geneva in 1578.

Second, the three books known to have been owned by the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford contain his emblem of a boar on the front cover: his Geneva Bible and copy of Guicciardini's *History of Italy* (both at the Folger), and his copy of Herotodus's *Histories* (sold by Sotheby's in

2015). The Chetham Library set does not bear his emblem. In light of this evidence, these volumes may not have been in Oxford's personal library, though they may have been purchased for his son, Henry de Vere, who later gifted them to Ben Jonson.

[Contributed by Gary Goldstein.]

## Chris Pannell Steps Down as Editor of *The Oxfordian*

In December 2017 Chris Pannell resigned as editor of the SOF's annual journal, *The Oxfordian*, in order to have more time for his other literary interests. SOF President Tom Regnier thanked Chris for his service to the cause: "Chris Pannell proved to be an outstanding editor of *The Oxfordian*. Writers who submitted articles to the journal raved about Chris's firm but gentle style, which helped to bring out the best in these writers and in their articles. He has produced some beautiful volumes for the SOF. We hope that Chris's successor can follow in the giant footsteps that Chris has left behind."

Pannell edited volumes 17, 18, and 19 of *The Oxfordian*, all of which were highly regarded by SOF members. They were the first issues of the journal to be made available for sale on Amazon. He has also published five books of poetry, edited two anthologies, and has led writing workshops and provided editorial help to writers in both the technical writing and literary spheres. One of his poetry books, *Drive*, won the Acorn-Plantos Peoples Poetry Prize, in 2010. After clocking many hours as editor of the *The Oxfordian*, Chris felt the need to put in more time on his other interests, including a novel that is in the works.

*The Oxfordian* was edited by Stephanie Hopkins Hughes from its inception in 1998 to 2007, and by Dr. Michael Egan from 2009 to 2014.



Chris Pannell

## ***“Shakespeare” Identified Centennial*** **Progress Update: December 2017**

Compiled by Kathryn Sharpe, chair, SI-100 Committee

### **SOF works with J. T. Looney’s grandson to put headstone on Looney’s grave**

A historically accurate granite headstone and surround now mark the grave of John Thomas Looney and his wife, Elizabeth, thanks to the joint efforts of Looney’s grandson Alan Bodell and the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship [see *Newsletter*, Fall 2017].

When our committee learned that Looney’s grave was unmarked in Saltwell Cemetery in Gateshead, England, we secured the permission of his grandson, Alan Bodell, to share the costs of purchasing and installing a granite headstone. SOF President Tom Regnier sent a motivating letter to the membership, sharing two previously unseen photos of Looney with young Alan, and inviting people to take advantage of a unique opportunity to contribute. The response was overwhelming. The SOF quickly raised more than half of the funds. The mason installed the stones in November 2017, when Alan and his daughter visited and took photos. Heartfelt thanks go to everyone who contributed to this project. We have posted additional photos and a link to the cemetery on our SI-100 webpage.

To date, people have contributed \$4,365 to the SI-100 effort. The most common donation was \$100. The SOF sent \$3,000 to the mason, leaving a balance of \$1,365.

Alan Bodell prefers to pay half the cost of the headstone himself, so we have additional funds to initiate or support other efforts that will highlight Looney’s achievements. The committee has prioritized a list of ideas including design and publicity of James Warren’s book on the impact of *“Shakespeare” Identified* and efforts to memorialize Looney at the Literary & Philosophical Society in England.

### **Alan Bodell searches house for authorship materials**

I have continued a fruitful correspondence with Alan Bodell in Scotland. Alan has looked through his home for relevant materials and:

- Sent a handwritten copy of Looney’s poems—never meant for publication—that reveal his poetic and philosophical interests.
- Searched the family albums and found four photos of John Thomas Looney with his family and a lovely engagement photo of Looney’s wife, Elizabeth.
- Searched bookshelves for John Thomas Looney’s books—he found many, mostly Roman and Greek classics, history, literature, biographies, etc., but nothing on the Shakespeare question, and no penciled comments.
- Confirmed that there are no research papers, letters, or clippings of book reviews in the house, saying Looney did his research at local libraries, including the “Lit & Phil,” and possibly gave his research materials to someone in the United States.
- Confirmed that “Looney” rhymes with “Rooney.”





### Literary & Philosophical Society approves ways to remember Looney

The Newcastle Literary & Philosophical Society in Newcastle on Tyne is where J.T. Looney conducted the bulk of his research while writing *Shakespeare Identified*. I contacted Kay Easson, the head librarian, with several suggestions regarding how we might honor Looney as one of their historic researchers. Easson responded positively to all our proposals.

The SOF has funds raised specifically for the Centennial that we could use for projects, which might include:

- Making a framed informational display for the main library about Looney's work and its impact (with a



donation to the Lit & Phil).

- Writing an entry for its online timeline for the decade when Looney did his research there.
- Donating funds to rebind some Elizabethan era books (in the SOF and Looney's name).
- Contributing toward purchasing additional books on the authorship question and the role of the Earl of Oxford.
- Directly donating books (we will send James Warren's 2017 *An Index of Oxfordian Publications* and Kevin Gilvary's *Dating Shakespeare's Plays*, and will suggest others).
- Writing an article for the library's newsletter about Looney, his work, and its impact.

For more about the Lit & Phil, see:

- Lit & Phil website: <http://www.litandphil.org.uk/>
- Historical timeline: <http://www.litandphil.org.uk/information/history/>
- Reflections of Newcastle 1914–1918: <https://reflectionsofnewcastle.wordpress.com/> (the time during which Looney was a member of the Lit & Phil).

### First annual SAM Day on November 8 sowed seeds of doubt

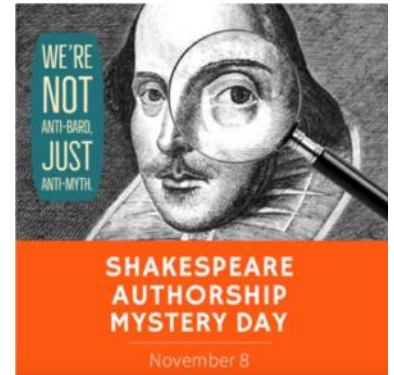
Committee members Jennifer Newton and Linda Theil kicked off a new effort to raise doubt using social media

and collaborating with other authorship doubters. Shakespeare Authorship Mystery Day (SAM Day, for short) was registered with Chase's Calendar of Events and will occur annually on November 8, the date of the initial publication of the First Folio. Shakespeare Authorship Mystery Day is designed to raise the visibility of the Shakespeare authorship question. It is a single day when all authorship doubters can amplify their voices while commemorating the First Folio publication date—a more appropriate Shakespeare holiday than April 23. While the SOF officially started SAM day, ideally it will provide a platform for all groups and individuals studying the authorship question to promote their work and increase curiosity about the true authorship of Shakespeare's plays and poems.

This year the SOF celebrated SAM Day as follows:

- Invited all doubters—individuals and organizations—to celebrate a day of mystery.
- Created doubt-provoking memes to share on social media channels and post through the day.
- Sent dozens of tweets using the hashtag #shakespeareauthorshipmysteryday.
- Sent a Shakespeare Authorship Mystery Day email to our members and network.
- Linked to the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt.
- Posted new articles or videos.
- Posted lists of recommended resources—books, websites, movies, and articles.
- Shared Shakespeare quotes.
- Linked to classic SAQ articles.
- Pointed to blogs/websites for more information.

The meme that generated the most reader comments was one that quoted the late Robin Williams as an authorship doubter. Some of the responses to them were interesting, taking us on point by point, and can be analyzed to provide ideas for improving our communication materials going forward. One lesson we took from this is that we need to have people ready and able to respond to comments, with a professional attitude and concise information. Other groups celebrated SAM day by sharing and posting our memes (example at right, from a German doubter group), and gathering to watch





a video of the September 2017 debate between Alexander Waugh and Jonathan Bate [see *Newsletter*, Fall 2017].

### Three J. T. Looney articles reprinted in SOF publications

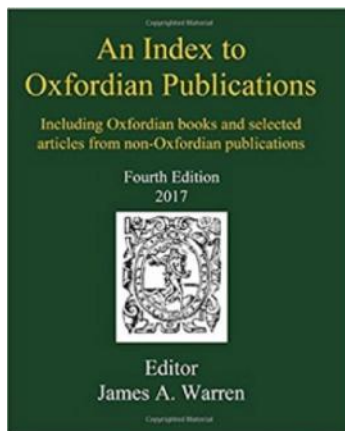
We encourage SOF members to take advantage of two opportunities made possible by the SOF Board, the Research Grant Committee, and the publications editors, by doing research on or writing articles related to J. T. Looney. No Looney-related research has yet been funded, but thanks to James Warren, three articles written by Looney have been reprinted and are available on the SOF website:

- “Shakespeare: Lord Oxford or Lord Derby?” written in 1922, reprinted in the *Newsletter*, Spring 2017.
- “The Earl of Oxford as ‘Shakespeare’: New Evidence,” written in 1922, reprinted in *The Oxfordian*, Vol 17 (2015).
- “Shakespeare: A Missing Author,” written in 1941, reprinted in *The Oxfordian*, Vol. 19 (2017).

### James Warren strikes gold mining the impact of *Shakespeare Identified*

James Warren continues to expand, organize, and analyze materials for his book on the impact that Looney’s 1920 *Shakespeare Identified* has had on Shakespeare studies and the wider literary world. Warren has:

- Completed an expanded fourth edition of *An Index to Oxfordian Publications*, creating reading lists and specialized bibliographies; updating current Oxfordian publications through the summer of 2017; adding over 2,600 new entries from 460 non-Oxfordian publications from around the world (from the 1920s to 2017) which have covered Oxfordian events, reviewed books and films, or otherwise commented on the authorship debate in terms of the Oxfordian thesis. The list also includes a list of 660 overt references in print to Edward de Vere as Shakespeare, all from the 1920s and 1930s.
- Identified five literary “revolutions” in Shakespeare thinking that Looney started.
- Identified 700 major Oxfordian events since 1920, and, using the 2,600 articles about de Vere’s authorship in non-Oxfordian press, is matching the



articles with the events to see which ones received publicity.

- Discovered that Canon Demant, Chancellor of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, held a memorial service for Looney in the spring of 1946, attended by Looney’s two daughters. In his “Personal Recollections of the Late J. T. Looney,” Demant highlighted Looney’s “wise and tranquil disposition” and said he “concealed under the quietest exterior a searching and wide-ranging mental activity.”

In coordination with Warren’s efforts to locate the research materials of Looney and other early Oxfordians, the SI-100 is working with the Data Preservation Committee to find, inventory, and archive valuable historic materials.

### Goals for 2018

- Stay in touch with J. T. Looney’s descendants.
- Implement memorials at the Newcastle Literary & Philosophical Society.
- Assist with design and publicity for James Warren’s book and related materials.
- Leverage SAM day to explore social media and connect with other doubters.
- Explore possible ways to coordinate with a planned celebration of William Cecil’s 500<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2020 at Burghley House in Lincolnshire.
- Investigate having an actor read letters of J. T. Looney.

### About the SI-100 Committee

We are coordinating a powerful celebration of the 100-year anniversary of J. T. Looney’s publication of *Shakespeare Identified* in 2020, using the SOF website, social media, publications, and annual conference. We encourage Oxfordians to create and implement their ideas to celebrate locally, and we will help them publicize their events using SOF resources.

### Get involved:

Volunteer to help the SI-100 Committee.

Follow us on Twitter: @ShakesOxFellows#2020Looney  
Ask to be put on our email list for news updates.

### Contact us:

Web: <http://www.shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/shakespeare-identified-100/>  
Email: [2020looney@gmail.com](mailto:2020looney@gmail.com)



**2017 SOF CONFERENCE – MEMBER SURVEY**

[On a 1-to-9 scale, indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements. “1” indicates strongest disagreement, “9” indicates strongest agreement.]

**AUTHORSHIP**

- 1a. Edward de Vere is the principal author of the Shakespeare Canon.
- 1b. Someone else (not de Vere or Shakspeare of Stratford) is the principal author of the Shakespeare Canon.
2. The Canon was written by several authors under de Vere’s general “supervision.”
3. William Shakspeare of Stratford wrote no literary works.
4. Shakspeare of Stratford served as a literary “front man” for the true author(s).
5. De Vere’s authorship role was widely known in his literary community.
6. De Vere’s authorship role was widely known in Queen Elizabeth’s court.
- 7a. De Vere himself did not wish his authorship role to be known even after his death.
- 7b. De Vere’s posthumous literary anonymity was arranged by his children and by Pembroke and Montgomery, with help from Ben Jonson.
- 7c. De Vere’s literary anonymity was imposed by the State.

**EDWARD DE VERE, 17TH EARL OF OXFORD**

- 8a. He was the natural son of the 16th Earl and Margery Golding.
- 8b. He was the natural son of Princess (later Queen) Elizabeth.
9. The 16th Earl died of natural causes in 1562.
10. Edward was the biological father of his wife’s (Anne Cecil’s) first child in 1576.
11. Edward had a sexual relationship with Queen Elizabeth.
12. The 1000-pound annual grant to him in 1586 was made in connection with his literary activities.
13. Edward did not die in 1604, but lived on for several more years.
14. He is buried in Westminster Abbey.
15. He wrote many other literary works which are not attributed to him.

**HENRY WRIOTHESLEY, THIRD EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON**

16. He was the natural son of the 2nd Earl and his wife.

- 17a. He was the son of Queen Elizabeth.
- 17b. He was the son of Edward de Vere.
- 17c. He was the son of Edward de Vere and the Queen.
- 17d. He was the object of Edward de Vere’s homosexual infatuation, not his son.
18. The dedications to him in *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* were for political reasons as much as, if not more than, literary reasons.
19. He is the “Mr. W. H.” to whom the Sonnets are dedicated.
20. De Vere played a key role in sparing Southampton’s life after the latter’s conviction for the Essex Rebellion.

**THE SONNETS**

21. The Sonnets are published more or less (or entirely) in correct order.
22. The Sonnet Dedication is some sort of anagram or word puzzle.
23. The “Fair Youth” is Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton.
- 24a. The “Dark Lady” is Queen Elizabeth.
- 24b. The “Dark Lady” is Emilia Bassanio.
- 24c. The “Dark Lady” is Elizabeth Trentham, Oxford’s second wife.
- 24d. The “Dark Lady” is Penelope Rich.
- 24e. The “Dark Lady” is someone else.
- 25a. The principal story of the Sonnets is concerned with homosexual love and romance among real persons.
- 25b. The principal story of the Sonnets is concerned with heterosexual love and romance among real persons.
- 25c. The principal story of the Sonnets is concerned with both homosexual and heterosexual love and romance among real persons.
26. The principal story of the Sonnets is about politics and succession.
27. The Sonnets are just literary works and aren’t “about” anything.
28. We don’t yet know what the Sonnets are about.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

29. The illustration on the title page of *Minerva Britanna* (the hand behind the curtain) is an allusion to the authorship issue.
30. The publication of the Folio was organized by de Vere’s children and Pembroke and Montgomery, with Ben Jonson’s assistance.
31. Many academics privately harbor doubt about the case for Shakspeare of Stratford as author, but won’t publicly admit it.



## 2017 SOF Conference Survey Results

by Alex McNeil

Every three years since 2008 we've distributed a survey at our annual conference, to get a measure of attendees' views on various authorship-related topics. This year's survey (see opposite page) was identical to the past two, with the addition of one question.

The survey contained some forty-four statements; responders were asked to mark their agreement or disagreement with each on a 9-point scale, with 9 indicating strongest agreement and 1 strongest disagreement. About forty surveys were turned in.

### Areas of Greatest Consensus

This group includes statements where the weighted median response was either firmly in on "Agree" side (8.0 or greater) or firmly on the "Disagree" side (2.0 or less).

- #1a (Edward de Vere was the principal author of the Shakespeare canon, median 9). It should be no surprise this had the highest degree of consensus. It was one of only two statements with which all the respondents indicated agreement; thirty persons circled "9," eight circled "8" and three circled "7."
- #30 (Publication of the First Folio was arranged by de Vere's children, and Pembroke and Montgomery and Ben Jonson, median 8.6). This was the other statement with which everyone agreed, though not quite as strongly as #1a. Twenty-three persons circled "9," eight circled "8" and seven circled "7."
- #3 (Shakespeare of Stratford wrote no literary works, median 8.4). Thirty-four agreed, most of them strongly, five disagreed and two were uncertain.
- #1b (Someone other than de Vere or Shakespeare is the principal author, median 1.7). There was strong, but not universal disagreement with this statement; thirty-five persons disagreed, most of them strongly, but two agreed.
- #6 (de Vere's authorship was widely known in Queen Elizabeth's court, median 8.5). Thirty-four agreed, five were uncertain, none disagreed.
- #7b (de Vere's posthumous literary anonymity was arranged by his children and by Pembroke and Montgomery and Ben Jonson, median 8.3). Thirty-one agreed, seven were uncertain, one disagreed.
- #27 (The Sonnets are just literary works and aren't "about" anything, median 1.5). There was almost universal disagreement with this statement; twenty-nine persons circled "1," seven circled "2," and one circled "4."

- #23 (Henry Wriothesley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton, is the "Fair Youth" of the Sonnets, median 8.5). Thirty persons agreed, four disagreed and two were uncertain.
- #22 (The Sonnets dedication is an anagram or word puzzle, median 8.3). Thirty-two agreed, two disagreed and four were uncertain.
- #29 (The title page illustration on *Minerva Britannia* alludes to the authorship issue, median 8.3). Twenty-nine agreed, five were uncertain.
- #12 (The £1000 grant to de Vere was for literary activities, median 8.4). Twenty-nine agreed, three disagreed and five were uncertain.
- #13 (de Vere did not die in 1604, but lived on, median 1.7). Twenty-six disagreed, five agreed and seven were uncertain.
- #15 (de Vere wrote many other works not attributed to him, median 8.0). Thirty-one agreed, one disagreed and six were uncertain.
- #2 (The Shakespeare canon was written by multiple authors under de Vere's supervision, median 2.4). Twenty-four disagreed, four agreed and eleven were uncertain.

### Areas of Significant Consensus

This group includes statements where the weighted median response was between 7 and 7.9, or between 2.1 and 3.

- #24c (The "Dark Lady" of the Sonnets is Elizabeth Trentham, median 2.4). Twenty-seven disagreed, one agreed and eight were uncertain.
- #24b (The Dark Lady is Emilia Bassanio, median 2.4). Twenty-six disagreed, three agreed and seven were uncertain.
- #28 (We don't yet know what the Sonnets are about, median 2.9). Nineteen disagreed, eight agreed and nine were uncertain.
- #20 (de Vere played a key role in sparing Southampton's life after the Essex Rebellion, median 7.4). Twenty-six agreed, two disagreed and eight were uncertain.
- #19 (Southampton is the "Mr. W.H." to whom the Sonnets were dedicated, median 7.3). Twenty-five agreed, three disagreed and eight were uncertain.
- #5 (de Vere's authorship role was widely known in the literary community, median 7.3). Twenty-four agreed, two disagreed and eight were uncertain.
- #7c (de Vere's literary anonymity was state-imposed, median 7.4). Thirty agreed, two disagreed and seven were uncertain.
- #8a (de Vere was the natural son of the 16<sup>th</sup> earl and his wife, median 7.3). Twenty-seven agreed, three disagreed and eleven were uncertain.



- #8b (de Vere was the natural son of Princess Elizabeth, median 2.7). Twenty-five disagreed, one agreed and eleven were uncertain.
- #21 (The Sonnets were published substantially in correct order, median 7.2). Twenty-five agreed, three disagreed and nine were uncertain.
- #31 (Many academics have private doubts about authorship, median 7.2). Twenty-four agreed, one disagreed and twelve were uncertain.

### Areas without Consensus

For the remainder of the statements the weighted median was between 3.1 and 6.9. In some cases this was because a plurality of responses were in the “uncertain” range, and in some cases substantial numbers of persons agreed and disagreed with a particular statement.

- #14 (de Vere is buried in Westminster Abbey, median 6.8). Twenty agreed, one disagreed and sixteen were uncertain.
- #10 (de Vere was the biological father of Anne Cecil’s first child, median 6.9). Twenty-four agreed, six disagreed and eleven were uncertain.
- #4 (Shakespeare of Stratford served as a literary “front man,” median 6.6). Twenty-two agreed, seven disagreed and ten were uncertain.
- #18 (The *V&A* and *Lucrece* dedications to Southampton were for political reasons, median 6.5). Twenty-one agreed, seven disagreed and eight were uncertain.
- #24e (The Dark Lady is someone other than the four candidates named in prior statements, median 3.7). Seventeen disagreed, five agreed and twelve were uncertain.
- #25a (The main story of the Sonnets is homosexual love and romance involving real persons, median 3.4). Twenty disagreed, eight agreed and nine were uncertain.
- #7a (de Vere did not want his authorship revealed after his death, median 5.6). Fourteen agreed, ten disagreed and sixteen were uncertain.
- #11 (de Vere had a sexual relationship with the Queen, median 5.9). Sixteen agreed, six disagreed and seventeen were uncertain.
- #26 (The principal story of the Sonnets is politics and succession, median 5.9). Eighteen agreed, thirteen disagreed and seven were uncertain.
- #25c (The principal story of the Sonnets is both heterosexual and homosexual love among real persons, median 5.7). Sixteen agreed, sixteen disagreed and ten were uncertain.
- #17c (Southampton was the son of de Vere and the Queen, median 5.6). Sixteen agreed, fifteen disagreed and seven were uncertain.
- #17b (Southampton was the son of de Vere, median 5.5). Fourteen agreed, twelve disagreed and ten were uncertain.

- #17d (Southampton was not de Vere’s son, but the object of his homosexual infatuation, median 4.4). Seventeen disagreed, eleven agreed and eight were uncertain.
- #16 (Southampton was the natural son of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Southampton and his wife, median 4.8). Ten agreed, thirteen disagreed and fourteen were uncertain.
- #24d (The Dark Lady is Penelope Rich, median 4.9). Seventeen disagreed, eleven agreed and seven were uncertain.
- #24a (The Dark Lady is Queen Elizabeth, median 4.8). Fourteen disagreed, eleven agreed and eight were uncertain.
- #25b (The principal story of the Sonnets is heterosexual love involving real persons, median 4.9). Twelve disagreed, six agreed and nineteen were uncertain.
- #17a (Southampton was the son of Queen Elizabeth, median 5.0). Fifteen disagreed, thirteen agreed and nine were uncertain.
- #9 (de Vere’s father died of natural causes in 1562, median 5.0). Eleven disagreed, eight agreed and twenty were uncertain.

### Analysis

Once again there were some significant changes in the responses compared to the prior survey. In what could be viewed as moving toward greater consensus, in 2017 responses to fourteen statements were within the “Areas of Greatest Consensus;” in 2014 only eleven statements fell into that category. Compared to 2014 responses, the median shifted by 1.0 or more in thirteen cases (and in eleven cases the shift was toward consensus). In 2014, when compared to the 2011 survey, the median shifted by 1.0 or more in eleven cases (and in eight of those cases the shift was away from consensus).

The biggest shift was in **Statement 22** (that the Sonnets dedication is a word puzzle), where the median shifted from 5.5 in 2014 (no consensus) to 8.3 in 2017 (firmly within the areas of greatest consensus).

The second biggest shift was in **Statement 17c** (Southampton was the son of Oxford and the Queen), where the median shifted from 3.5 in 2014 (tending toward disagreement) to 5.6 (uncertainty).

Other median shifts of 1.0 or more were in **Statement 14** (Oxford is buried in Westminster Abbey), with a shift from 5 in 2014 to 6.8 (tending toward agreement). It may well be that the big shifts in Statements 22 and 14 are due to Alexander Waugh’s presentation on those topics at the Conference (see *Newsletter*, Fall 2017, pp. 31-32).

In **Statement 28** (we don’t know what the Sonnets are about), the median shifted from 4.5 in 2014 (uncertainty) to 2.9 (tending toward disagreement).

With regard to **Statement 10** (that Oxford was the biological father of Anne Cecil’s oldest daughter) the median shifted from 5.5 in 2014 (uncertainty) to 6.9 (tending toward agreement).

In **Statement 7b** (that Oxford's posthumous literary anonymity was arranged by his children and others) the median shifted from 7 in 2014 (agreement) to 8.3 (strong consensus).

In **Statement 24a** (the Dark Lady is Queen Elizabeth) the median moved from 6.0 in 2014 to 4.8 (both within the range of uncertainty).

In **Statement 24b** (the Dark Lady is Emilia Bassanio) the median shifted from 3.5 in 2014 (tending toward uncertainty) to 2.4 (disagreement).

In **Statement 25b** (the main story of the Sonnets is heterosexual love) the median shifted from 6.0 in 2014 to 4.9 (both within the range of uncertainty).

In **Statement 4** (Shakespeare of Stratford was a literary "front man") the median shifted from 5.5 in 2014 (uncertainty) to 6.6 (tending toward agreement).

In **Statement 7a** (Oxford did not want his authorship known even after his death) the median shifted from 4.5 in 2014 to 5.5 (both within the range of uncertainty).

In **Statement 17a** (Southampton was the son of the Queen) the median shifted from 4.0 in 2014 to 5.0 (toward greater uncertainty).

Finally, in **Statement 6** (Oxford's authorship role was widely known in Court) the median shifted from 7.5 in 2014 (agreement) to 8.5 (strong consensus).

## Summary

As in prior years, Oxfordians remain in general agreement on the outlines of the Authorship Question, but disagree about particulars.

- **Authorship:** There continues to be strong consensus that Oxford alone is the principal author of the Shakespeare canon, that his authorship was known within Elizabeth's court and among his fellow writers, and that his literary anonymity was arranged by his daughters with assistance from Pembroke, Montgomery and Ben Jonson. There is also continuing consensus that Shakespeare of Stratford wrote no literary works, and a growing consensus that he served as a literary "front man." There continues to be a lack of consensus about whether Oxford wished for his authorship role to be known after his death.
- **Oxford's Biography:** There continues to be strong consensus that he was the natural son of the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl and his wife, and that he died in 1604. There is a greater consensus that his £1,000 annual grant was for literary activities, and greater agreement that he wrote many other literary works. Opinions that he was the father of Anne Cecil's first daughter have shifted from uncertainty closer toward agreement, but it cannot be said there is "consensus." The same can be said about beliefs that he is buried in Westminster Abbey. Whether he had a sexual relationship with the Queen remains

unclear to Oxfordians—sixteen thought so, but seventeen were uncertain and six disagreed.

- **Southampton:** Again, very little agreement about him. There continues to be consensus that he is "Mr. W.H." of the Sonnets dedication, and that Oxford played a role in sparing his life following his 1601 treason conviction. As to everything else there is no consensus, though it should be noted that, as to whether he's the son of Oxford and the Queen, opinions moved from "tending toward disagreement" in 2014 to "uncertain" in 2017.
- **The Sonnets:** There was some movement toward greater consensus here. There continues to be consensus that they're published in correct order, that the "Fair Youth" is Southampton, and that they are not simply literary (i.e., fictional) works. The largest area of movement concerned whether the Dedication is some sort of word puzzle, where there is now strong consensus (compared to uncertainty in 2014). As to what is the principal story of the Sonnets, there was greater disagreement with the statement that "we don't know what they're about" than in 2014; but there continues to be no consensus about whether the story is political, is one of heterosexual love, homosexual love, or heterosexual and homosexual love. "Politics and succession" leads slightly (at 5.9), but it's well within the range of uncertainty and is down from 2014 (6.5). As to the identity of the Dark Lady, Queen Elizabeth and Penelope Rich are the favored candidates (Penelope Rich was added this year; it's the only new statement on the survey), but the medians are squarely in the range of uncertainty. In any event, they appear to be stronger candidates than Elizabeth Trentham (more or less steady at 2.4 in the range of "disagreement") and Emilia Bassanio (whose popularity fell from 3.5 in 2014 to 2.4). Curiously, few persons maintain that the Dark Lady is someone other than one of the above four.
- **Other matters:** Opinions here continue essentially unchanged. There is strong consensus that the illustration on the title page of *Minerva Brittana* alludes to authorship, and that the publication of the Folio was arranged by Oxford's children and by Pembroke and Montgomery, with Ben Jonson's assistance. There was slightly less strong consensus that many academics privately harbor doubts about Shakespeare of Stratford as author, though the median remained about the same as in 2014.



## *Verò Nihil Verius*—Nothing Truer than What?

by Ramon Jiménez

“Nothing Truer than Truth” is the commonly used translation of *Verò Nihil Verius*, the Latin motto of Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford. This has never made much sense to me. I can understand how something can be truer than something else. But, how can something be, or not be, truer than truth?

A grammatical equivalent is “Nothing Stronger than Strength.” What sense does that make? Another is “Nothing Greener than Green.” I would call these phrases “linguistic fallacies” or “declarative circularities.” Furthermore, the phrase “Nothing Truer than Truth” says nothing about Edward de Vere, who adopted *Verò Nihil Verius* as his motto. But if the phrase were translated as “Nothing Truer than Vere,” it would not only be an accurate rendition, but also a forceful and logical motto that contains a pair of genuine compliments to de Vere.

Latin is a condensed and highly inflected language, in which word order is less important than in English. *Verò* is the Latin for “truth,” and in the ablative of comparison *verò* means “than truth.” *Verò* is also a play or a pun on the name “Vere.” Thus, the first word “*Verò*” is a bilingual pun that can be translated as “than Vere.” The Latin adjective *verus-vera-verum* means simply “true” in the basic or positive degree. But in the comparative degree, it means “more true,” or “truer,” and the forms are *verior-verior-verius*. So, a word-for-word translation produces “Than Truth, Nothing Truer” or, as a motto for the de Veres, “Than Vere, Nothing Truer.” Put into standard English, this reads “Nothing Truer than Vere,” a logical and grammatical assertion that is a clever pun on the Latin and a succinct compliment to the Veres.

That Oxford himself considered “Nothing Truer than Truth” to be nonsense is made clear in a passage from *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, in which Boyet reads a letter that the pompous Don Armado has written to Jaquenetta:

By heaven, that thou art fair, is most infallible;  
true, that thou art beauteous; truth itself, that  
thou art lovely. More fairer than fair, beautiful  
than beauteous, truer than truth itself, have  
commiseration on thy heroical vassal!  
IV.i.60-64

The letter continues for another twenty lines in the same extravagant and artificial style. Don Armado’s inflated language is one of the satirical targets in the play. John T. Looney explains Oxford’s use of the phrase “truer than truth” as a “mode of exaggerating” and of satirizing Euphuism.<sup>1</sup>

As we know, Oxford was passionate about, if not obsessed with, the idea of truth, and used “true” hundreds of times in his plays and sonnets, in at least nine different meanings. He also used it to form some twenty compound adjectives, from “true-anointed” to “true-sweet.” But he never used “truer than truth,” except in this single facetious instance.

Several scholars have searched for the origin of Oxford’s motto, but have found no record of it before the 1570s.<sup>2</sup> One of the first references to it appeared in what is commonly called *Gratulationes Valdinenses*, a group of four encomiums in Latin to four prominent Elizabethans,

including Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Oxford, that Gabriel Harvey wrote in 1578. In Book IV, Harvey includes two dialogues in which the participants banter with each other about Oxford, using half a dozen Latin permutations of his name, and of “truth,” such as *verine*, *veri*, *verius*, *verum*, etc. Harvey introduces the first dialogue as “*Dialogvs in Effigiem Nobilissimi Comitiss Oxoniensis; illiusq[ue]; elegantissimum Symbolum Verò nil verius.*” In his translation of *Gratulationes Valdinenses*, Thomas Hugh Jamison rendered these lines as “A dialogue on the picture of the most noble Earl of Oxford and on his most elegant motto Naught verier than Vere.” The last phrase is a simple rearrangement of “Nothing Truer than Vere.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1944, Charles Wisner Barrell wrote that “experts in the College of Heralds read it [*Verò Nihil Verius*] as “no greater verity than in Vere.”<sup>4</sup> In his 2003 article on the Vere name, Robert Prechter renders the motto as “None Truer than Vere.”<sup>5</sup>

These translations confirm that those familiar with the context of the motto—that it was associated with Edward de Vere—agree that “Nothing Truer than Vere” is not only an accurate translation, but a clever pun that expresses two things that we know were important to him—his personal truthfulness in all its meanings, and his loyalty and commitment to his Queen and country.

I am grateful to the late Andy Hannas for his assistance with the Latin grammar.





## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> “*Shakespeare*” *Identified*. London: Frederick A. Stokes (no date), 455.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Paul and Clive Willingham. Elizaforum, October 29 and 30, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> In his Yale University dissertation (1938). The translation is available at [http://www.oxford-Shakespeare.com/ShortTitleCat/STC\\_12901\\_Gratulationes\\_1578.pdf](http://www.oxford-Shakespeare.com/ShortTitleCat/STC_12901_Gratulationes_1578.pdf) (accessed January 10, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> “Contemporary Proof that the Poet Earl of Oxford’s Nickname was ‘Gentle Master William,’” *The Shakespeare Fellowship Quarterly* (October 1944), note 3 in the “Key to The Epistle Dedicatorie.”

<sup>5</sup> “Veres and de Vere,” *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* (Winter 2002), 10.



## Exercise in Rhetoric: Let’s Learn to Write Like Shakespeare!

by Sky Gilbert

We are not all Shakespeare. But was Shakespeare simply a “genius,” or was he the most extraordinary product of the education of his time? I teach a class in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph in Ontario where we explore this question. The fourth-year class, “Research Seminar I,” focuses on Shakespeare’s writing style and its relation to euphuism. All students in my class were given exercises in copia, paradox and lists. Early Modern students were drilled in the same exercises, day after day. Did this contribute to the extraordinary brilliance of the poets of the Early Modern era? I think this exercise proves that when we use Shakespeare’s techniques we may not become Shakespeare, but we most certainly become *better writers*. And if the Ciceronian justification for rhetoric is true, we become better people, too. Here are some of the efforts from my students.

### Adam Newton:

Those who are dealt hate oft hate in turn. Persecution drives the discriminated to incriminate another as little more than a worm. Ah, “another.” To ward off torment, brutalization must be met with brutality upon another. As a chained dog growls, the hiding suffocate a baby’s wail, a nation of assimilators fear assimilation, an escapee abandons their cellmate to the guard, a burst home births a bully, a broken blade cuts deeper, the scapegoat must always have their patsy. These wretched commit their sin not from deadly ignorance’s burn, but they have, under villainy’s vile hand, had to learn.

### Alain Croteau:

Fulfillment of ambition obstructs the path to a soul filled full.



Sky Gilbert

Once the mountain is scaled, there is nowhere to climb but down.

Perhaps it’s better to be nearer to the bottom, where there is purpose, yet just high enough that one can ignorantly laugh at gravity as one defies it in one’s ascent—thus yielding to the illusion that something greater lies ahead... though nothing is yielded in return. I am king of the world—yet my crown is duller than cobblestone. At Everest’s peak I have made my castle, where purpose suffers motivational hypoxia. I’d rather be a blade of grass growing in a field, the waving wheat on a farm, a sunset shadow on a wall, a fire’s flame in a pit, a small sapling in a great forest. There is no living beyond the timberline.

### Fox Grant:

Darkness, or light—doth the answer wander in thy soul  
Whether ’tis more acquainted to figure within thine  
breast

The dark, a blanket of icy indecision shrouds thee  
 Moreover, the light, warm, so warm t'would make the  
 love of God rejoice  
 Yet, a battle doth stir  
 Dark against light, light against dark  
 They battle as if real men themselves  
 Victory, ah yes... Victory  
 Canst it be won upon both sides?  
 Doth dark and light have'st middle ground?  
 A place in which it was as if twain doth tug the rope of  
 struggle no more  
 So calm, the stillness, pure, two armies of different  
 sides in agreement  
 Perhaps thy middle ground doth not stir longer and  
 settle, embrace thy body and soul  
 To feel thine body at rest, peace, tranquility  
 Not a war within thy self no longer  
 Finally, one's whole self becomes a tune.

### **Christina Molenaar:**

It gets worse before it gets better  
 There is no rainbow until a storm has passed  
 If we wish to succeed, we must embrace the failures  
 Like splintering wood, cracked eggs, foggy glasses,  
 overgrown garden, unset alarm, missing wallet, or gum  
 on a shoe  
 After you trip you stand back up.

### **Natalie Jachimowicz:**

I am most hungry when I am full. It is when I am  
 satiated, that I crave so much more. For my body and  
 mind need the satisfaction of gluttony to not feel empty  
 on the inside. This feeling resides in me like an all-you-  
 can-eat buffet, a diet of junk food, a love for painkillers,  
 a "happy" relationship, a perfume that loses its scent  
 easily, a trip to the good old casino, or a discontinued  
 book series that you had just started. We all want more  
 than what we currently have.

### **Charlie Rosenberg:**

A Cheeseburger with cheese or without? Yet the oozing  
 answer lies deep beneath my breast bone carry'd out by  
 that of a blood pumping vessel.  
 Weather thee is acquainted with the satisfaction of  
 warmth, familiarity, and the comfort that a soothing  
 dairy product doth induce  
 Tho if one was to violently upset themselves, the  
 darkness of lactose will melt over  
 Brie against gouda, lactose against man  
 art thou a generational skirmish, or is thou an evolved  
 state of being?

Will those who decide to consume decadent dairy one  
 day be at the knees of a great pain that transforms the  
 breast to an opaque state and walks you into the cold  
 night?

Tho is it wrong to assume a burger be it just a burger,  
 cheese or not?

Can a succulent slice a dairy, creamy and divine in  
 texture, bubbling in the confines of my gut adjust the  
 state of mind to that of satisfaction?

Perhaps no, perhaps never. Perhaps the satisfaction of a  
 burger lies in more than just a creamy endeavour.

Perhaps burger consumption alone is enough to make a  
 disordered soul anew again.

### **Chelsea Armstrong:**

1. At the end of the day, it is always you.
2. When the sun sets, it is you my heart beats for.
3. As the day fades, I still love you.
4. As the sun says goodbye, we do not.
5. With the moon's greeting, my heart sings for us.
6. As stars shimmer in the night sky, my confidence of  
 you remains a sturdy foundation.
7. When the day kisses the night, it is you I long for.
8. As light turns to darkness, you will know the depth  
 of my love.
9. As night falls, I still yearn for you.
10. With the night, come our hearts entwined.

### **Adam Newton:**

1. An idea popped into my head.
2. The light of truth dawned within me.
3. My cranium exploded with inspiration.
4. The aftershocks of revelation wracked my body.
5. In the pursuit of knowledge, the planets aligned, and I  
 have been blessed with the strictest vision of what is  
 now known to me.
6. My quiet melody of thought rose to a crescendo of  
 conceptions, dwarfing all notes which came before it.
7. I have made the unknown known.
8. What pure electricity raced through my veins as my  
 new muse kissed me.
9. A most unpleasant notion forced itself upon me as a  
 stranger in the night.
10. In the wake of Eve's apple, I beheld the world with  
 changed eyes.



*Hamlet's Sources (continued from page 1)*

tried to trap Amleth by entangling him with his foster-sister (Ophelia), by putting an eavesdropper in his mother's bedchamber (Polonius) and by sending him to the English king with two henchmen (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) carrying instructions to the king to have him killed. Amleth, however, changed the instructions to have the two henchmen killed (as in *Hamlet*). In the end, to avenge his father's death, Amleth killed Fengo with Fengo's own sword. (Analogously, Hamlet kills Claudius with the poison-tipped foil that Laertes intended for Hamlet's death in his duel with Laertes.)

Details that are in Belleforest but not in Saxo give Belleforest an advantage as the more important source for *Hamlet*, although Oxford probably read both. For example, Belleforest adds the "incest" and adultery of Amleth's uncle, as in *Hamlet*. In Belleforest, Amleth's character traits include melancholy and conscience qualms, as do Hamlet's, while Saxo's Amleth was stalwart, confident, cunning and ruthless. In Belleforest, but not in Saxo, the young woman enlisted to seduce Amleth is said to be in love with him, as was Ophelia. Belleforest has Amleth twice mentioning *ombres*, French for "shades" in the afterlife, or ghosts. One mention referred to the appearance of the ghost of Amleth's murdered father the king when Amleth berates his mother in her bedroom (as does the Ghost in *Hamlet*). There was no ghost in Saxo.

It must be emphasized that Oxford would not have mechanically copied plot elements and character traits from Saxo and Belleforest. He certainly read widely (including Greek drama), and when he began to draft what would become his *Hamlet* he would naturally remember from his readings parallels to his own life and concerns, drawing from his readings for what he intended to say in his personal story of himself as Hamlet. The same would be true for other Shakespeare plays, but *Hamlet* in particular came from the depths of his being. Finding and analyzing "sources" and "influences" is legitimate and important, but overemphasizing them risks trivializing what Oxford brought to his plays, how he selected and adapted what he would use in his own plotting and character development. And perhaps not incidentally, his so-called "borrowings" would provide cover, if needed, for the expression of his personal concerns and problems and especially his satires of prominent contemporary figures.

Establishment Shakespeare scholars recognize that somehow the stories of Amlethus in Saxo and of Amleth in Belleforest were the primary literary sources for *Hamlet*. Significantly, however, they can only speculate tentatively about how that happened. They steer clear of addressing whether Will Shakspeare acquired or read either of them. They use qualifiers such as "may possibly," and "seems to have read," "directly or indirectly," but without any supporting detail.

Their problem is that both Saxo and Belleforest were multi-volume sets of books published on the Continent.

There was no single-volume edition entitled something like "Amleth's Story," as Stratfordian commentary might lead one to believe. The Amlethus story in Saxo's long narrative history of Scandinavia, *Gesta Danorum*, begins in the middle of volume three (of sixteen volumes), without a chapter title, and ends in the middle of volume four. In Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, written in French, the Amleth story is the fifth of twelve stories in volume five of seven volumes that were not published in English until 1894. Even if Will Shakspeare had the opportunity and time to see Belleforest's seven volumes and notice the Amleth story, there's no historical evidence that he had an opportunity to learn French; it was not taught in the Stratford grammar school.

These two multi-volume sets of expensive, imported books were not likely to have been sold in the bookstalls at St. Paul's churchyard where Will Shakspeare was supposed to have browsed. In England they were rare and very valuable sets of books, typically purchased on the Continent for a few wealthy collectors for their libraries. One of the most active book collectors was William Cecil Lord Burghley, Oxford's guardian during his teenage years.

Even if Will Shakspeare somehow gained access to them somewhere it's very doubtful that he would have had the time to plow through the multi-volume sets and notice the Amleth story amid scores of other legends, myths and historical accounts. In the Stratfordian view he was not only a busy actor memorizing his roles, rehearsing and performing, but he was also a real estate investor with properties and a family in Stratford-on-Avon, a three-day journey from London, and the author of at least thirty-nine plays, two long narrative poems and 154 sonnets. None of the research and reading could have been begun before he was twenty-one, when he was still in Stratford and his twins were born. It's all very improbable, and *Hamlet's* editors have struggled with the problem.

The most significant influence on *Hamlet*, if not a direct source, was probably Greek drama, especially the *Oresteia* trilogy. Surprisingly, modern-day editors of *Hamlet* have overlooked it or chosen to ignore it. The story of Orestes is found mainly in the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus and in versions by Euripides and Sophocles, which were written in Greece in the fifth century BCE. Nicholas Rowe, the first editor of the Shakespeare plays, was the first to notice the influence of the Orestes story. In his attempt in 1709 at a biography of Will Shakspeare he wrote that *Hamlet* was founded on Sophocles's version of the Orestes story in his *Electra*. Sixty-five years later, the Shakespeare editor George Steevens would note the influence of Greek drama in the original Greek. He wrote that a plea for proper funeral rites in *Titus Andronicus* convinced him that its author "was conversant with the Greek tragedies in their original language." He called the passage a clear allusion to Sophocles's *Ajax* "of which no translation was extant in



the time of Shakespeare.” Since then, Shakespeare scholars have paid almost no attention to the influence of Greek drama on *Hamlet*, while scholars of Greek language and literature have found numerous clear similarities in *Hamlet* to the Greek plays.

To cite a few of the more striking similarities in *Hamlet* to the story of Orestes in Greek drama, as described by Earl Showerman in “Orestes and Hamlet” in volume 7 of *The Oxfordian* (2004):

Both Orestes and Hamlet revered their fathers, Agamemnon and Hamlet senior, who were honorable men and successful warriors. Agamemnon led the victorious Greek forces at the siege of Troy. Hamlet senior, king and leader of the Danish military, was challenged to single combat by the Norwegian king and leader of his army, the elder Fortinbras, and killed him in their sword fight, winning the Norwegian's lands and averting a battle between the two armies.

Orestes and Hamlet were away from their homes when their fathers were murdered by close relatives at their homes. Agamemnon was stabbed in his bath by his wife; Hamlet senior was poisoned by his brother while napping in his garden.

Both Orestes and Hamlet suspected that the otherworldly apparitions who call on them to seek revenge for the murder of their fathers might be evil, deceiving spirits, the Furies for Orestes and the Ghost of Hamlet's father. Both young men take on the responsibility to seek revenge.

Orestes and his sister Electra are scandalized that their murdered father was buried without public mourning or suitable funeral rites. For the Greeks, this was considered intolerable. In *Hamlet*, the Ghost of Hamlet's father laments that he was murdered before he could confess his sins and avoid Purgatory: “O horrible. O horrible. Most horrible” (1.5.80). Laertes later complains that his father Polonius (like Agamemnon) had an unhonored “obscure burial” (3.4.209) without public acknowledgment that Hamlet killed him and without a funeral procession or noble rites of mourning.

In addition, Orestes and Hamlet each have a trusted friend, Pylades and Horatio. Both Orestes and Hamlet see phantoms that no one else sees when they are in their mothers' bedchambers, Orestes the Furies and Hamlet the ghost of his father, Gertrude's first husband. Importantly, their strange madness is a major characteristic of both distraught Orestes and “antic” Hamlet.

The opening scenes are very similar. In the *Oresteia* trilogy, a watchman on the roof of a Greek castle just before dawn eagerly awaits news of the siege of Troy by the Greeks led by Agamemnon. In the opening scene of *Hamlet*, sentinels on the ramparts of Elsinore castle at night nervously await the arrival of Horatio to verify the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father.

The closing scenes of the *Oresteia* and *Hamlet*, however, could hardly be more different. In the *Oresteia*,

Orestes is on trial for killing his mother to avenge his father, whom she murdered. In a secret vote, the ballots of the chorus are evenly split. The goddess Athena casts the deciding vote and Orestes is acquitted. Although the prosecuting chorus bitterly denounces the verdict, Athena mollifies them by reminding them of their split vote and assuring them that Athens will have a peaceful, glorious future. Through a jury trial, justice is served, however imperfectly. *Hamlet* ends in a stark and no doubt deliberate contrast. Hamlet, Claudius and Laertes die in a violent melee, the result of Claudius's corruption and his murderous poisonings gone awry. The poisoned Hamlet dies, and young Fortinbras arrives at the head of his army and asserts his claim to the vacant throne of Denmark.

If the *Oresteia* was not a primary source for *Hamlet*, it was almost certainly a significant influence, as were other Greek and Roman classics. Once again, however, it is problematic how Will Shakspeare might have found and read the Greek plays. There is no evidence that he could read the ancient Greek language, which is much more difficult than Latin, or that he attended a university where it was taught. Even in Latin translations published on the Continent, the plays were rare and expensive books in England.

Oxford, however, had the Greek and Roman classics close at hand in the libraries of William Cecil Lord Burghley at Cecil House where he lived during his youth. What may have been the only copy in London of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, the most significant influence on *Hamlet*, was in the library of Mildred Cooke Cecil, William Cecil's wife. She had a leading role in the education of their own children and probably influenced that of her husband's wards as well. She and her siblings had been brought up and educated in a household that valued intellectual achievement, especially in the classics. Her father, Sir Anthony Cooke, renowned for his learning and for his teaching skills, was a tutor of the young King Edward VI, along with the more famous John Cheke and with Roger Ascham, who was also a tutor of the future Queen Elizabeth.

At Cecil House, Mildred Cecil built her own library of books and was reputed for her skill in writing and speaking Latin and especially ancient Greek. Caroline Bowden cites John Strype quoting Roger Ascham as saying that she understood and spoke Greek as easily as she spoke English. She could have influenced Oxford's reading and also been the first to foster in the teenager an appreciation of intelligent, educated, strong-willed women, often depicted in his Shakespeare plays. One of her biographers suggests that she was also involved in the translation of the Geneva Bible, which Shakespeare scholars consider to have been the principal biblical source for the author of Shakespeare's works. Oxford owned a copy, now in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D. C.

For scholars of the Greek classics, the influence of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* trilogy on the writing of *Hamlet*

has been both too strong to ignore and a problem to explain. Two early twentieth century scholars of the Greek language and literature explored in considerable detail what they saw as the significant influence of Greek drama on the Shakespeare plays, especially the *Oresteia* on *Hamlet*. J. Churton Collins and Gilbert Murray both found many similarities that they considered remarkable, even extraordinary, but they had to resort to conjectures and hypotheses to try to explain how Will Shakspeare could have read the *Oresteia*.

Collins found scores of parallels of language and incident, some stronger than others, between Greek drama and Shakespeare plays, including *Hamlet*. His purpose was “to establish a probability that reminiscences, more or less unconscious perhaps, of classical reading not in English translations but in Latin and possibly in Greek, were constantly occurring to Shakespeare’s memory [that is, Shakspeare’s]. They could not be ignored. And cumulatively they are remarkable.” The title of the first chapter of his collected *Studies in Shakespeare* (1904) is “Shakespeare as a Classical Scholar.” A graduate of Oxford, where he studied the classics, Collins was professor of English literature at Birmingham University.

Collins makes a strong case for “Shakespeare as a Classical Scholar” with the ability to read Greek with facility and understanding. (There’s no evidence that Shakspeare knew Greek; it was not in the elementary school curriculum.) Although he initially suggests that the parallels he will describe could have been commonplace sayings or coincidences of language, he then cites with great admiration more than seventy-five passages in Greek drama that correspond closely to passages in Shakespeare plays, including a dozen in *Hamlet*. He often adds comments such as “exactly Aeschylus,” “exactly Sophocles,” “a remarkable parallel,” “an admirable paraphrase,” “nothing could be more purely Greek,” and again with admiration “how exactly does he [Shakspeare] recall the speech of Agamemnon.”

Will Shakspeare, Collins contends, gained a remarkably extensive, in-depth knowledge of Greek drama and its diction through Latin translations. He says that “it is indeed in the extraordinary analogies— analogies in sources, in particularity of detail and point, and in the relative frequency of employment—presented by his metaphors of the Attic tragedians that we find the most convincing testimony of his familiarity with their writings.”

“It is not likely,” he continues, “that Shakespeare [i.e., Shakspeare] could read the Greek language with facility, but if he possessed enough of it to follow the original Latin version, as he probably did, he would not only be able to enrich his diction with its idioms and phraseology but would acquire that *timbre* in style of which I have given illustrations.” *Timbre*, from the French, describes distinctive overtones, as in music, and

a characteristic “color” or style of writing—for Collins the *timbre* of the ancient Greek writing even when translated into Latin. That kind of in-depth understanding and appreciation of a Greek poet’s diction, however, could realistically only be acquired by being able to read and absorb the ancient Greek language with facility, not through Latin translations. As the Italians warn: *Traduttore, traditore*. Moreover, his examples of parallels are not from the Latin translations that Shakspeare is supposed to have read. They are in the original Greek, with his own translations into English.

Toward the end of his chapter, Collins hedges his enthusiasm: “I do not, as I have already said, cite them [the many parallels] as positive proofs of imitation or reminiscences on the part of Shakespeare. They may be mere coincidences. But if on the other hand further and more satisfactory evidence of Shakespeare’s acquaintance with the Greek dramatists can be adduced [not so far], then surely such parallels will not be without importance as corroborative testimony.” Collins makes an excellent case for the author of the Shakespeare canon as a “Classical Scholar,” but is conflicted about the validity of his conjectures since it’s so difficult to see how Will Shakspeare could have done it.

Then there still remains the problem of where Shakspeare would have had access to the Latin versions of the Greek plays. Published on the Continent, many of them were ornately decorated, beautiful books. Some included the Greek on facing pages. Typically, they would be printed in limited editions. Wealthy English aristocrats and nobility who had an interest in literature and education would have their agents on the Continent purchase such valuable editions for their libraries. For commoners in England they would have been hard to find and very expensive.

Collins implicitly recognizes their rarity but conjectures that Shakspeare could have had access to them through the Earl of Southampton, in the private libraries of the wealthy, and in other private libraries such as those of Ben Jonson, the historian William Camden and even the Archbishop of Canterbury and Queen Elizabeth. This astonishing ease of access would have been quite unusual, if not impossible, for a commoner from an illiterate Stratford family and an actor. Actors were officially branded “rogues and vagabonds.” Moreover, it’s almost impossible to conceive that he could have had the time to secure access to these private libraries, read through their holdings and come across the Greek plays in Latin, immersing himself in them to such an extent that they would influence him, as Collins suggests, in the writing of *Hamlet*.

Five years later, William Theobald, a Baconian, noted Collins’s work, and in *The Classical Element in the Shakespeare Plays* (1909) he provided a long list of references and allusions to Greek and Roman authors in Shakespeare, including many in *Hamlet*. Theobald’s purpose was to support the proposition that Sir Francis

Bacon, the philosopher/scientist and statesman, was the author of the Shakespeare canon. Bacon, however, left no poetic, imaginative writings that would qualify him as the author of the Shakespeare works.

The classicist Gilbert Murray also recognized what he called the many “extraordinary” similarities between ancient Greek drama and Shakespeare plays, especially between the heroes Orestes and Hamlet. Murray was professor of Greek at Glasgow University and then at the University of Oxford. He published translations of several Greek plays.

In chapter 8, “Hamlet and Orestes,” of his *Classical Tradition in Poetry* (1927), Murray describes in detail how “the points of similarity, some fundamental and some perhaps superficial, between these two tragic heroes are rather extraordinary.” He notes, for example, that both heroes are sons of kings who are murdered by kinsmen who succeed to the throne. The widows of the kings marry the murderers, and the heroes undertake to avenge their fathers. Some forms of madness and disguise characterize the heroes, who act as Fools or gross Jesters to hide their intentions. Both are prone to soliloquies and to hesitating before acting. Both go on sea voyages. And so on.

To try to explain how Will Shakspeare could have created the hero of *Hamlet* whose story resembles so closely the story of Orestes, Murray proposes that, independently of Greek drama (and presumably independently of Saxo/Belleforest), Shakspeare drew on a collective, unconscious “tradition” of myths and legends, including the Amleth story, that existed before Saxo first wrote them down. They became essentially an ingrained, unconscious memory of a prehistoric, mythical hero who surfaced in the collective minds of writers as both Orestes in the fifth century BCE and Hamlet more than a thousand years later.

In his concluding paragraph, Murray describes his suspicion that Shakspeare experienced “a strange, unanalyzed vibration below the surface, an undercurrent of desires, fears and passions, long slumbering yet eternally familiar, which have for thousands of years lain near the root of our most intimate emotions and been wrought into the fabric of our most magical dreams.” Thus, according to Murray, did Shakspeare create *Hamlet*, without ever having to read the Saxo/Belleforest story of Amleth or the Greek plays in ancient Greek or in Latin translations, although he allows that Shakspeare’s university friends (whom he does not identify) might have told him about the Greek plays, a rather desperate conjecture.

Gilbert Highet, a famous professor of Greek and Latin at Columbia, came to the same conclusion as Murray but without mentioning him and in a simpler form. In *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (1949), he wrote: “We can be sure that he [Shakspeare] had not read Aeschylus. Yet what can we say when we find some of Aeschylus’s

thoughts appearing in Shakespeare’s plays? The only explanation is that great poets in times and countries distant from each other often have similar thoughts and express them similarly.” He then adds conjectures that Shakspeare might have heard the Greek plays discussed or seen adaptations of them in the works of his contemporaries, but without citing examples or any evidence for that. In any case, he concludes, “we must make the widest possible allowance for his power of assimilating classical ideas from the classical atmosphere that surrounded him.” Highet and Murray were driven to conjure up a sort of mystical, cerebral osmosis to explain what they saw as the significant Greek influence on the Shakespeare plays.

Colin Burrow of Cambridge University offers yet another unusual explanation. In *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (2013), he says: “Shakespeare [i.e., Shakspeare] almost certainly never read Sophocles or Euripides (let alone the much more difficult Aeschylus) in Greek, yet he managed to write tragedies that invite comparison with those authors. . . . Having ‘less Greek’ could therefore have enabled him to appear to understand more about Greek tragedy [through Plutarch] than if he had been able to read Aeschylus and Euripides in the original Greek.” This trick of seeming to know more about Greek tragedy by knowing less received the implied endorsement of leading establishment Shakespeareans Peter Holland and Stanley Wells, who included Burrow’s book in their series “Shakespeare Topics.”

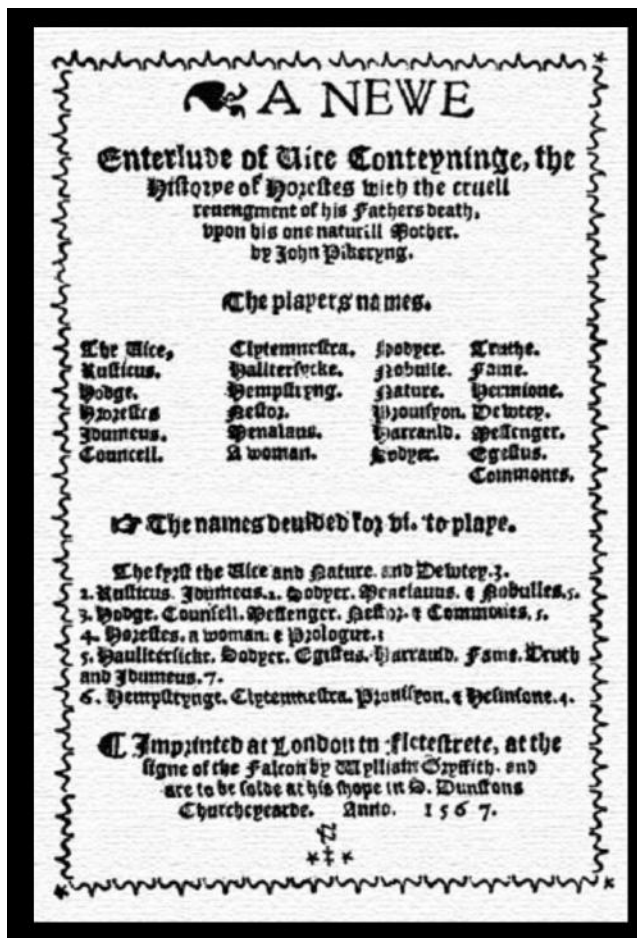
Modern-day editors of *Hamlet* are unaccountably silent on its significant parallels to Greek drama despite the enthusiasm for its influence by respected classical scholars like Collins, Murray and Highet. Perhaps the editors have understood how unlikely it is that Shakspeare could have read ancient Greek or had access to Greek plays in Latin translations.

Scholars hunting for sources for *Hamlet* and influences on it have proposed a wide variety of possibilities, and three of them stand out for their significance by virtue of the historical and internal evidence. They are the court interlude *Horestes* (1567), the anonymous *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1584-92) and the so-called “Ur-Hamlet” (c.1588). Close examination of the evidence, however, suggests that these three plays were not just sources for *Hamlet* but were Oxford’s own early and quite different versions of his final Shakespeare play, published in 1604. Some Stratfordian scholarship supports this view, albeit unintentionally.

### ***Horestes***

The seventeen-year-old Earl of Oxford might well have been the author of *Horestes*, a short play that has prompted comparisons to *Hamlet*. It was published in 1567 as by a “John Pickeryng” and was performed at court as *Orestes* during the Christmas season of 1567-68, but scholars have been puzzled about the author’s





Horestes

identity. There is no record of it ever being performed again. Nor was it reprinted, or even mentioned, as far as can be determined, in any contemporary records—all indications that the unusual play by such a young, aristocratic author was probably controversial.

*Horestes* was the first revenge play in English drama, and scholars have admired its fluid, innovative writing. It re-tells the tragic Greek story of Orestes (“Horestes”) but adds from the English medieval morality plays the comic villain Vice and other allegorical characters, such as Revenge and Truth. Slapstick scenes with rustics, horseplay with the audience and the low comedy of the devious but entertaining Vice character alternate with appalling scenes of the hero Horestes’s grave moral crises, including the execution on stage of Clytemnestra’s lover and co-conspirator by hanging. Especially unusual for the time are four songs sung to popular tunes, prefiguring Ophelia’s songs, plus drumming at crucial plot points. The hybrid play appears to be the exuberant and daring work of a young, unpolished genius.

Some scholars of *Horestes* pair it with *Hamlet* in a way that suggests that it was a forerunner of the Shakespeare play. Jodi-Anne George of the University of Dundee, Scotland, says *Horestes* “keenly anticipates” *Hamlet* and finds “striking” similarities at times between *Hamlet*’s situation and that of Horestes. Robert S. Knapp

of Reed College calls *Horestes* the first revenge play of the English Renaissance and makes several thematic comparisons with *Hamlet*. Shakespeare scholar and editor John Kerrigan linked the two names in a book chapter title, “‘Remember Me!’: Horestes, Hieronimo and Hamlet,” a study of revenge memories. “Remember me!” are the words of the Ghost in *Hamlet*. (Hieronimo is the hero of *The Spanish Tragedy*, also a forerunner of *Hamlet*.) Tucker Brooke of Yale put *Horestes* at the pinnacle of the traditional “interlude” as drama. Interludes were short plays and other entertainments written to be performed for Queen Elizabeth and her court.

The editor of *Horestes*, Daniel Seltzer, cited it as having the first, if imperfect, example of the Shakespearean soliloquy in its purest form—the expression, moment by moment, of the evolving, inner thoughts and feelings of a character such as Hamlet. In his article in *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977) Seltzer also expresses twice in the opening paragraph some uncertainty about the identity of the author, first “probably” John Pickering, even though that’s the name on the title page, and then “John Pickering, whoever he was.” Seltzer was a professor of English at Harvard and Princeton.

Oxfordian scholarship has overlooked the possibility that *Horestes* was a *Hamlet* forerunner by Oxford, except for Earl Showerman’s 2008 report that the late Elisabeth Sears told him about a lecture by Seltzer that she attended. It was probably the basis for Seltzer’s 1977 article.

*Horestes* has also been seen as a political allegory supporting calls for the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. She was Queen Elizabeth’s close cousin and fellow monarch, but also a rival for her throne. Mary was widely believed, although without proof, to have been an accomplice in the murder of her husband-consort in Scotland in 1567, the year *Horestes* was published. Soon after, she married the man believed to have arranged the assassination. She was deposed and imprisoned but escaped and fled to England where she was put under rural house arrest as a threat to Elizabeth, who would have her executed two decades later.

In 1567, Oxford was living in Cecil House, where he would have heard about the sensational developments that year in Scotland and might have even seen reports of them that William Cecil was receiving almost weekly. *Horestes* would be Oxford’s first use of drama to comment on current events.

Oxford was only seventeen when *Horestes* was published and performed at court. That he was capable of such an achievement at that age is witnessed by Arthur Golding, his uncle and a scholar-translator who lived in Cecil House where Oxford was a ward of the Crown. Golding saw great literary promise in him. In the dedication to Oxford in one of his books three years earlier Golding had written that he and others noted Oxford’s eagerness at age fourteen to read the classics

and follow current political events, as well as his mature judgment. Golding noted Oxford's ingrained "earnest desire . . . to read, peruse and communicate with others as well, the histories of ancient times, and things done long ago, as also of the present state of things in our days, and that not without a certain pregnancy of wit and ripeness of understanding" (see Green). He added that everyone expected great things of him.

The title page of *Horestes* gives the author as "John Pickeryng," not a name associated with plays or any other imaginative works. At least two Stratfordian scholars suggest that he was a young John Puckering, who decades later would serve as speaker of the House of Commons and be an ardent foe of Mary Queen of Scots. John Puckering, however, never published any other plays or imaginative works, quite unusual for the author of such an innovative, accomplished and topical interlude.

Oxford might well have used "John Pickeryng" as a pseudonym to deflect attention from himself, a teenage, titled nobleman, as the author of such a daring play that managed to be performed at court. He may have impishly taken the pseudonym from the surname of William Pickeringe, a career diplomat, retired ambassador to France and a colorful, eccentric courtier, who would have caught young Oxford's attention as a kindred spirit. As a leading courtier-diplomat, Pickeringe would have been a familiar at Cecil House. Rowdy in his youth, he studied Greek at Cambridge, was mentioned as a possible husband for Queen Elizabeth, and was briefly involved (perhaps as a spy?) in the Throckmorton conspiracy to assassinate her and put Mary Queen of Scots on the throne, but he was never accused of disloyalty to Elizabeth. As it happens, he also bought books in Paris for Cecil (see the DNB for Pickering).

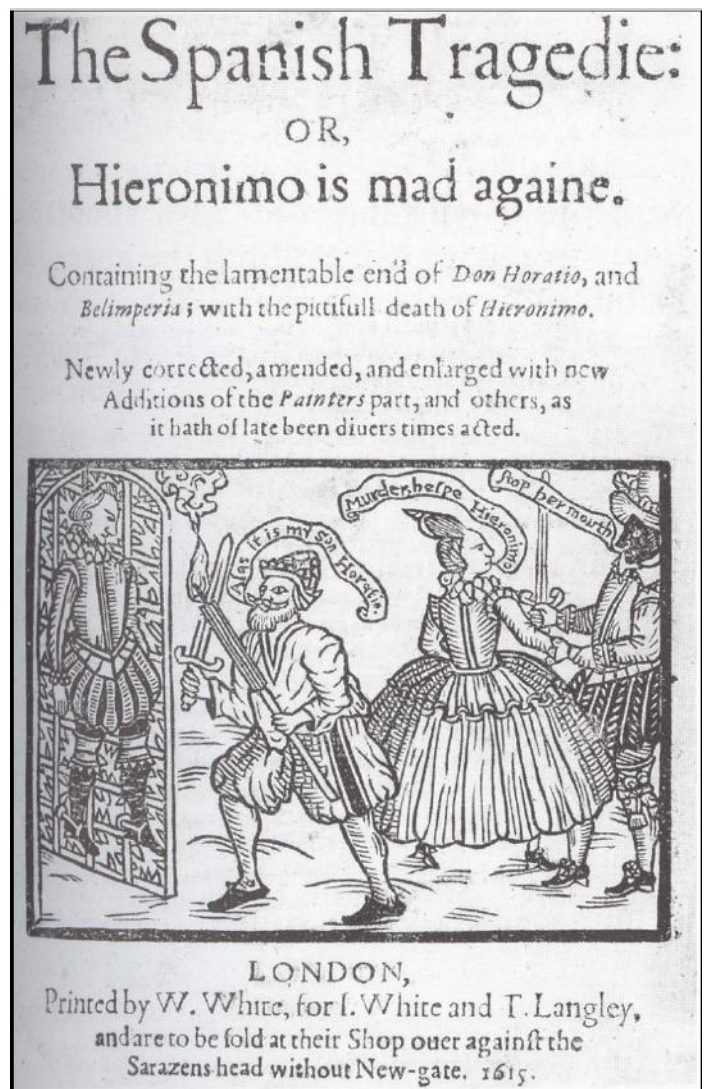
The full title of the play in its 1567 printing was *A New Interlude of Vice Containing the History of Horestes with the Cruel Revengement of His Father's Death Upon His One Natural Mother*. Worth noting are the similarities of the title's wording to Hamlet's anger at his mother's remarriage in act 3 scene 4 and to Oxford's apparent estrangement from his mother. For Oxford, the hero Horestes might naturally have represented himself, and much later been Hamlet, who exacted "cruel revengement" when he berates his "natural mother," Gertrude, for her hasty remarriage after "his father's death." The son's metaphorical revenge on his mother in both *Horestes* and *Hamlet* suggests that the teenage Oxford may have had an angry encounter with his mother after his father's death and her remarriage soon after to a man he thought much inferior to his father, the sixteenth Earl of Oxford.

On balance, the precocious Earl of Oxford, ambitious to be a dramatist and see his first play performed at court, might well be the best candidate as the author of *Horestes*, especially given his authorship of *Hamlet*, which would have many thematic similarities to it.

### *The Spanish Tragedy*

Often cited by Stratfordians as a source for *Hamlet* or influence on it is *The Spanish Tragedy, or Hieronimo Is Mad Again*, the title page of which gave neither the author's name nor a publication date. The consensus for a date of composition is between 1584 and 1592, perhaps 1587 (when Oxford was thirty-seven). Today the anonymous play is routinely attributed to Thomas Kyd, but on shaky evidence not embraced until the eighteenth century.

The revenge play is set in the royal courts of Spain and Portugal. Just a few years earlier Spain had defeated Portugal at the battle of Alcantara in 1580-81. A long, fictionalized account of the battle opens *The Spanish Tragedy*. Two years later, a Spanish fleet of a hundred ships captured Terceira, the island capital of the Portuguese Azores, after a sea battle. Terceira is mentioned in *The Spanish Tragedy* in act 1 scene 3, and a knowledgeable court audience would recognize the references to Spain becoming a major naval power and potential threat to England. The Spanish Armada would



*The Spanish Tragedy*

try to attack England in 1588. The play demonstrates an in-depth and insightful knowledge of the international religio-politics of the time, as detailed by Eric J. Griffin in his *English Renaissance Drama and the Specter of Spain: Ethnopoetics and Empire*.

The many parallels and similarities in *Hamlet* to *The Spanish Tragedy* have struck commentators as obvious, although they avoid calling it a source. Both plays are typical revenge plays whose heroes are torn apart by questioning if it is right to obey an instinctive impulse to avenge the murder of a close relative by killing the murderer. Both Hieronimo and Hamlet feign madness (as did Amleth in Saxo/Belleforest) to deflect suspicion about their intent to seek revenge. In both plays, it is left unclear whether the heroes feigned madness or were having episodes of neurotic madness under great emotional stress.

Several features of *Hamlet* are found in *The Spanish Tragedy* and sometimes *Horestes* but nowhere else. For example, all three plays weave comedy into the tragic plot, which was unusual at the time for an Elizabethan tragedy. *The Spanish Tragedy* has a ghost commenting on the action of the play in its conversation with a Revenge character from the morality plays. The hero Hieronimo seeks revenge for the murder of a family member, as will Hamlet. Hieronimo distrusts a letter that reveals the murderer, just as Hamlet suspects the Ghost's call for revenge. Hieronimo pledges to avenge the murder of his son, Horatio, just as Hamlet and Laertes both pledge to avenge their fathers, respectively King Hamlet and Polonius. Both Hieronimo and Hamlet ponder revenge in soliloquy.

Hieronimo reproaches himself for his delay, as does Hamlet. Both have thoughts of suicide. Both arrange for a play-within-the-play that is crucial to the plot. Both plays have dumb shows. Both have a major character named Horatio, who is a trusted friend of the heroes. In both, a brother kills the lover of his sister. In *The Spanish Tragedy* Bel-Imperia's suicide foreshadows Ophelia's. There are further parallels of lesser significance (see Jenkins, Thompson-Taylor, Stoll).

Leading Stratfordian scholars have noted the significant resemblances in *Hamlet* to *The Spanish Tragedy*. The first was Frederick Boas, in 1901, who cited in the first critical edition of the play its many parallels in *Hamlet*, calling it a "forerunner." David Bevington says that the "extensive similarities" between Hieronimo's dilemma and Hamlet's underscore the dramatist's debt to *The Spanish Tragedy*. Philip Edwards says in his edition of *Hamlet* that the relationship between the two plays is "profoundly important." Kenneth Muir says *Hamlet* "was clearly influenced" by *The Spanish Tragedy* and provided a model for the Shakespeare play. And significantly the editors of the Arden 2006 edition of *Hamlet* say that *The Spanish Tragedy* has "many similarities" to *Hamlet* that are not in Saxo/Belleforest, listing a few of the more important.

E. K. Chambers found clear resemblances of dramatic technique and noted several echoes of *The Spanish Tragedy* in *Hamlet*. *The Reader's Encyclopedia* called it a "remarkable counterpoint" to *Hamlet*. William Empson in his 1994 essay said "Hieronimo is just like Hamlet in being both mad and not mad, both wise and foolish, and so forth." T.S. Eliot went even further, writing that "there are verbal parallels so close to *The Spanish Tragedy* as to leave no doubt that in places Shakespeare [that is, Shakspeare] was merely revising the text of Kyd" (his emphasis). It would seem more likely that these revisions and the extensive similarities were the result of Oxford's adapting and reshaping passages from his *Spanish Tragedy* for his *Hamlet*, not plagiarizing it.

None of these editors and commentators considers the possibility that *The Spanish Tragedy* was the author's own forerunner to his *Hamlet*. Instead, they struggle to find a way to attribute it to Thomas Kyd, but the only evidence for that attribution before the late eighteenth century was an elusive allusion by Thomas Nashe, a brief, offhand mention in a book and a misspelling in a mid-seventeenth-century book catalog. (The book catalog even listed Shakespeare as the author, along with a "Kyte" spelling for Kyd. Shakespeare scholars have nothing to say about the possible significance of this tantalizing mention of Shakespeare.)

The earliest potential attribution to Kyd, in 1589, was allusive at best and probably not intended. Thomas Nashe wrote in a long passage criticizing inept translators that Seneca provides "whole Hamlets, I should say, handfulls of tragical speeches." (This was the first mention in the records of a *Hamlet* play.) A dozen lines later Nashe castigated Seneca's inept followers who "imitate the Kidde in Aesop" by taking up work for which they are not qualified, translating literary works. But the reference to a young goat—a kid—in Aesop has no direct connection to his earlier reference to "whole Hamlets." It seems merely illustrative of unqualified translators. Another problem with the idea that Nashe is suggesting that he thought Kyd wrote this early version of *Hamlet* is undermined by more than a dozen references in the "Kidde" passage to the offending translators in the plural, not just one (see Nashe and Erne).

The next supposed attribution of the play to Kyd was in 1612, almost two decades after he died. The playwright/actor Thomas Heywood wrote that "therefore M. Kid, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, upon occasion presenting itself, thus writes," followed by three lines from the play. That's all. No elaboration or indication of his source. This offhand mention, perhaps prompted by the vague "Kidde" connection in Nashe, went unnoticed.

Then, four decades later, a book catalog attributed *The Spanish Tragedy* to "Thos. Kyte," but surprisingly also attributed *Jeronimo* (another title for *The Spanish Tragedy*, Or *Hieronimo Is Mad Again*) to "Will. Shakespeare," by now the famous spelling of the famous



dramatist, and Oxford's pen name. Stratfordian scholars give some weight to the "Kyd" attribution but none to the "Shakespeare" attribution. There may well have been some unspoken suspicion that the author of *Hamlet* wrote *The Spanish Tragedy* (see Erne).

Finally, in 1773, when still no one had found direct evidence for Kyd, a book on the origins of English drama elevated to hard evidence Heywood's offhand mention in 1612 of "M. Kid, in *The Spanish Tragedy*," to assert that Kyd was indeed the author. Until then, his name had not been on the title page of any of the many editions. Nevertheless, ever since, scholars of Kyd and Shakespeare have routinely accepted Kyd as the author of the play.

Thomas Kyd neither claimed nor received credit for the very popular play. The ten reprints of it up to 1633 were anonymous. It was performed almost thirty times in its first five years, but Kyd's contemporaries never left word that he wrote it or other plays that would later be cautiously attributed to him, also on slight evidence. In the 184 years since Nashe's reference to Aesop's "Kiddle" no one had stated that Kyd wrote the well-known, popular *Spanish Tragedy*. Little is known about Kyd's life, and in sum the evidence for Kyd is woefully inadequate.

It is much more likely that the author of *The Spanish Tragedy* was the Earl of Oxford, a successful dramatist as Shakespeare and a courtier in his late thirties who was close to England's leaders, especially William Cecil, the queen's principal adviser, and who was immersed in the international religio-politics of the day involving England, Spain and France.

In 1952, Oxfordians Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn noted a "pervasive connection . . . between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*" and later in a footnote "a hundred instances [of] the unmistakable mark of Shakespeare's hand" in *The Spanish Tragedy* but without elaborating. (No one suggests that Will Shakspeare wrote it; he was in his early twenties, too young to have written this highly sophisticated, topical play.)

### The "Ur-Hamlet"

The third of the three plays that arguably were early versions of the Hamlet story, and which Oxford probably wrote, was the lost, anonymous play dubbed the "Ur-Hamlet." No manuscript has been found, nor any evidence for its publication, nor any direct evidence for its author, but that such a play existed in 1589 or earlier is not in doubt. In that year Thomas Nashe alluded to "whole Hamlets . . . of tragical speeches." It was acted on stage at Newington Butts, south of London, in 1594, and mentioned in 1596 by Thomas Lodge, who referred to a "ghost which cried so miserably at the Theatre, like an oyster-wife, Hamlet, revenge."

The Stratfordian consensus is that the "Ur-Hamlet" was not written by Will Shakspeare, but perhaps by Thomas Kyd, and they include it among the possible sources for *Hamlet*. They probably resist attributing it to

Shakspeare because he was too young to have written it in time for publication, performance and the published comment by Nashe in 1589. He was only in his early twenties and not mature enough to have written even an early version of *Hamlet* (whose composition they date around 1600, more than ten years later).

Some go so far as to suggest, indeed imagine, certain characters and plot elements in the phantom "Ur-Hamlet" that prefigured characters and situations in the final *Hamlet* despite the fact that no text of the play exists. Those conjectured elements, they suggest, came from various sources and even, retrospectively, from the final *Hamlet*. Much of their conjecturing amounts to a form of circular reasoning. Unsaid but implied is that Will Shakspeare somehow saw the lost "Ur-Hamlet" manuscript and used it as a source. It's all very improbable.

The theory of the "Ur-Hamlet" as a source or influence has been adopted to a greater or lesser extent by most editors of *Hamlet*. For example, Philip Edwards, editor of the New Cambridge edition (1985-2012), concludes that *Hamlet* was influenced by the "Ur-Hamlet" and by *The Spanish Tragedy*. The "Ur-Hamlet" is cited as "the immediate source" of *Hamlet* by the co-editor of *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*.

A few commentators, however, do argue that the author of *Hamlet* was the author of the "Ur-Hamlet." In *Hamlet Studies* (1988), Eric Sams critiqued at length the debates and disagreements among his fellow Stratfordians and described the "mare's nest and wild goose chase" they created trying to situate it as a source or influence and assigning it to Kyd. He argued that scholars have found so many similarities in the "Ur-Hamlet" that "either Shakespeare was a great dramatist who wrote U [the 'Ur-Hamlet' in his parlance] or he was a gross plagiarist who abused it." Sams concluded that the "Ur-Hamlet" "is logically connected through Q1 to



Thomas Kyd

Q2 [of *Hamlet*], which are plainly announced on both their title pages as Shakespeare's successive versions of his own play. All these roads lead straight to the expression U---->Q1. Only a dizzying U-turn can avoid it."

Back in 1936, the Stratfordian scholar A. S. Cairncross included a discussion of *The Spanish Tragedy* and the "Ur-Hamlet" in *The Problem of Hamlet, a Solution*. He concluded that the second and final quarto of *Hamlet* in 1604 was the play mentioned by Thomas Nashe in 1589 that became known as the "Ur-Hamlet" (probably an early version.) Neither Sams nor Cairncross have won the support of editors of *Hamlet* probably because Will Shakspeare was too young to have written the "Ur-Hamlet."

The "Ur-Hamlet" and *The Spanish Tragedy*, and their relationship to each other, to the first quarto of *Hamlet* and to the final *Hamlet* of 1604, have generated endless debate among Stratfordian scholars. To cite a recent example of the uncertainty of it all: The editors of the 2006 Arden edition conclude that "perhaps Shakespeare's play [the 1604 *Hamlet*] draws on Kyd's play [*The Spanish Tragedy*], but perhaps both plays draw on the Ur-Hamlet." Uncertainty, speculation and disagreements pervade the Stratfordians' debates about the sources of *Hamlet* and influences on it. With Oxford as the author of *Hamlet* and the Shakespeare canon, he almost certainly was the author of the "Ur-Hamlet," the earliest version of the play, written when he was in his late thirties and first mentioned in 1589 by Thomas Nashe.

### A Scenario

A more realistic and much simpler scenario would explain why Stratfordian commentators struggle to identify the authors of the three plays, which instead make more sense as forerunners of *Hamlet* by the author of *Hamlet*.

In this scenario, when Oxford was seventeen he wrote the *Horestes* interlude, a court entertainment mixing brash comedy with grim tragedy and a serious, topical theme. In his early thirties, no doubt inspired in part by the concerns in Queen Elizabeth's court about the threat to England of the growing Spanish naval power, he wrote *The Spanish Tragedy*, setting it in the courts of Spain and Portugal, with Spain conquering Portugal in land and sea battles. In his late thirties he wrote the first version of his *Hamlet*, which was performed and mentioned by Thomas Nashe and Thomas Lodge but not published. This version became known much later as the anonymous, lost "Ur-Hamlet," and for Stratfordians a supposed source for *Hamlet*.

In 1603 *Hamlet* first appeared in print as "By William Shakespeare," Oxford's pen name, "as it has been diverse times been acted," according to its title page. This so-called "bad" quarto was arguably a pirated version created by an actor who had memorized an "acted" performance, written it down and sold it to the publisher. Meanwhile, Oxford, now in his early fifties,

had no doubt been continuing to write and rewrite his *Hamlet*, and just a year after the flawed "bad" quarto appeared he finished his *Hamlet* (perhaps with some speed in order to replace the pirated version) and had it published in 1604 with the title page stating that it was "newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was according to the true and perfect copy." It was twice as long as the pirated text of the "acted" play and it was a "true" copy set in type from the author's manuscript. Most scholars consider it the best text, even better than the posthumous text in the First Folio of 1623.

Thus Oxford wrote and rewrote, from age seventeen to his early fifties just before he died, the bitterly comic tragedy that was his most personal play and the closest to his lifelong concerns and experiences, a revenge play about the dilemma of whether it's right to kill to avenge the murder of a close relative, as was traditionally believed. It drew originally on the Danish Amleth story and the Greek Orestes story and for the final scene in *Hamlet* probably also on the death of Beowulf in the ancient Anglo-Saxon epic poem. All based on his experience of the corruption in Queen Elizabeth's court, the loss of his inheritance to the Earl of Leicester (Claudius in the play) and his conflicted feelings about revenge stemming from his suspicions about Leicester's rumored strategic poisonings, including that of Oxford's father, and their rivalry for the queen's favor. More textual and historical research and analysis might well confirm this scenario.

Unlike Shakspeare, Oxford was perfectly placed to see the printed sources for *Hamlet* and influences on it. During his preteen and teenage years, he lived in households with scholars of Greek and Latin and had ready access to their libraries of the classics, among the largest at the time.

As was customary for sons of high-ranking noblemen, Oxford at a very early age was sent to live with and be educated by a tutor. Sir Thomas Smith, a leading scholar of Greek, brought him up until age twelve. Smith had been the head of Eton, the boarding school for boys, and a professor at Cambridge University, where he taught the Greek language and literature. An experienced educator of boys, he began the education of Oxford, no doubt including Greek. He also hired Thomas Fowler, a graduate of Cambridge, as a tutor for a short time. Smith had one of the largest libraries in England. Based on his inventory, he owned at least 400 books, nearly all in Latin, Greek, French and Italian (only twenty-one in English). They included Saxo Grammaticus in Latin and plays by Euripides and Sophocles in the original Greek and in Latin translations (see Hughes).

When Oxford was twelve, he became a ward of the Crown during his minority. He was sent to live with William Cecil, later Lord Burghley, and Cecil's wife, Mildred, in their London mansion. Cecil was Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State, her most influential adviser, and later Lord Treasurer. He recognized the importance of education in the classics for young

noblemen like Oxford, and as the queen's master of the court of wards, he arranged for the education of the sons of deceased noblemen. He was also an avid book collector and had friends and associates on the Continent buy books for his library. His library included many classics, including Saxo Grammaticus and Francois Belleforest as well as Euripides and Sophocles with their treatments of the Orestes story. His library held about a thousand books when Oxford lived in the Cecil household (see Jolly and Bowden).

Historians have called Cecil House the best school for boys being groomed to become statesmen. It is also thought to have been an unrivaled meeting place for intellectuals. The guidance of tutors may have been important, but the teenage Edward may well have achieved a largely self-directed education, living as he did in close proximity to the riches of the Cecil House libraries, where he almost certainly read the epic poem *Beowulf*.

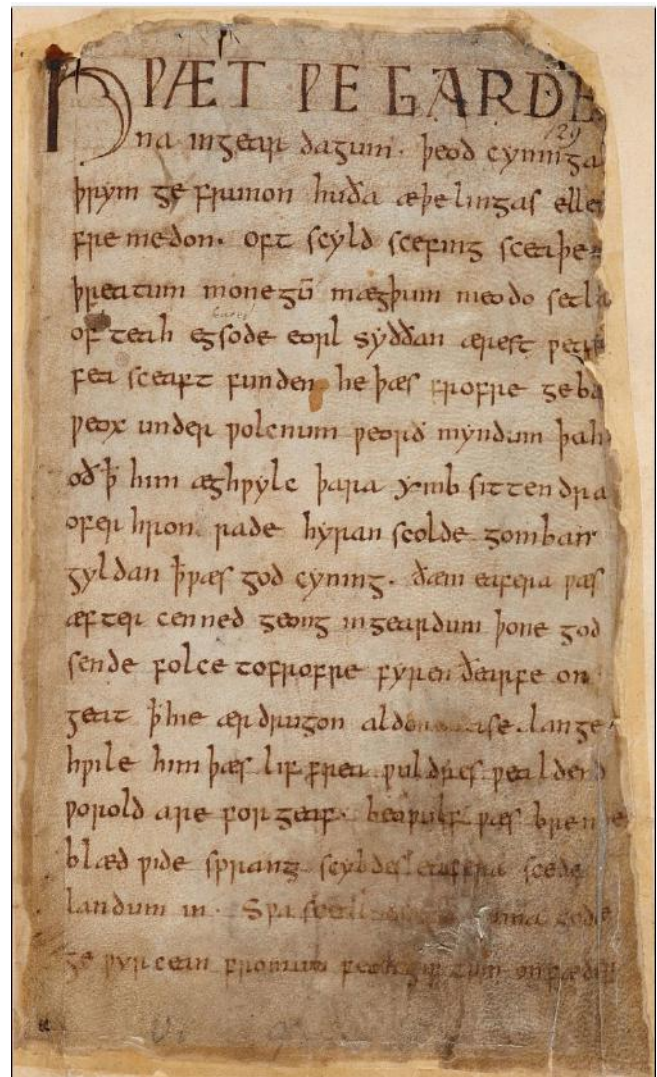
### ***Beowulf***

The dying words and death of the hero Beowulf evidently inspired the way Hamlet died by poison and his dying words to Horatio. The only text of *Beowulf* was a manuscript at Cecil House in the hands of Laurence Nowell, Oxford's tutor. Nowell, who lived at Cecil House while tutoring Oxford, was the foremost scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature; he compiled the first Anglo-Saxon/English dictionary. The anonymous manuscript, written in Anglo-Saxon (Old English), is dated around 1000 AD. It was not transcribed and printed until the nineteenth century. Will Shakspeare could not have seen it.

The similarities between *Beowulf* and *Hamlet* are striking. One of the monarch's two sons killed the other unintentionally with an arrow that went wide of its mark. When Hamlet apologizes to Laertes for killing his father, he says he did not intend it and asks Laertes to "Free me so far in your generous thoughts / That I have shot my arrow over the house / And hurt my brother" (5.2.213-215). If Hamlet and Ophelia had married, Hamlet and Laertes would have been brothers-in-law. (Oxford would probably have also noted that, like himself, Beowulf also became a ward of the monarch when a preteen.)

Just as the villainous dragon in *Beowulf* had stolen the people's treasure of jewels and gold, by usurping Denmark's throne the villain Claudius in *Hamlet* stole its crown jewels and treasury. In Oxford's view the villainous Earl of Leicester had managed to steal by appropriation much of Oxford's inheritance during his minority.

At the tale's climax the hero Beowulf, leader of his people and called a prince, battles a fifty-foot dragon that guards treasure it stole from the people by terrorizing them. The dragon bites Beowulf on the neck with its poisoned fangs, but Beowulf, before dying and with the help of his loyal comrade Wiglaf, kills the dragon with his dagger and ends its tyranny.



*Beowulf*

Poison as the cause of death figures prominently in *Beowulf* and *Hamlet* (and in Leicester's reputation). The dragon's poisoned fangs kill Beowulf, and in the play the hero Hamlet is fatally poisoned by Laertes's foil in their fencing match (the poisoned foil tip having been Laertes's idea). Before the poison takes effect, however, Hamlet kills Claudius with the same foil. Claudius's use of poison reflects Leicester's reputation for strategic poisonings by henchmen, including (as Oxford probably suspected) the sudden, unexpected death of his father.

Both Beowulf and Hamlet live long enough to utter their dying thoughts, which are quite similar. Beowulf tells his loyal friend Wiglaf that he is dying, that the dragon's treasure should be used for the needs of his people and that he wants Wiglaf to build a monument over his grave and call it Beowulf's Barrow, his burial mound, so that his name and achievements will be remembered. In his dying words, Hamlet says to his loyal friend: "Horatio, I am dead. . . . Report me and my cause aright . . . tell my story" (5.2.323-324, 335). If Hamlet is the voice of his creator, his "cause" or purpose (OED



obs.) and his “story” can be interpreted as Oxford’s monument, the treasure he leaves for posterity, i.e., the plays and poems that appeared as by William Shakespeare, his pseudonym. Hamlet’s dying words are powerfully evocative of Beowulf’s.

Both Beowulf and Hamlet leave no heirs, and their kingdoms will go to foreigners. Both have had the support of their people and are solicitous for them. Beowulf tells his friend Wiglaf that he wants the dragon’s stolen treasure to go to his people, but soon it’s clear that without their leader a foreign power will conquer them. Hamlet, now the direct heir apparent to the Crown of Denmark but himself without an heir, tells his friend Horatio that he gives his dying voice to the foreigner Fortinbras to take the vacant throne of Denmark.

It’s hard to imagine any Elizabethan youth who aspired to be a writer enjoying a richer literary environment than young Oxford, brought up by the scholar-diplomat-book collector Sir Thomas Smith and living and reading during the most formative years of his life in the highly educated Cecil household with its huge library. Reading the classics and coming across the stories of the heroes Amleth and Orestes, and of Beowulf in manuscript, Oxford no doubt saw the parallels in them to his own life experience, his deepest concerns and his mercurial, “antic” temperament and was driven to combine them into his most intensely personal and autobiographical play, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

### Select Annotated Bibliography

Of the many annotated, Stratfordian editions of *Hamlet*, the following are of special interest for their extensive line notes and commentaries reflecting decades of scholarship:

Edwards, Philip, ed., *Hamlet*. Cambridge UP (1985, 2003). Esp. for *The Spanish Tragedy* and the “Ur-Hamlet” (2-4).

Hibbard, G. R., ed., *Hamlet*. Oxford UP (1987). In his section on sources (5-14) he calls Belleforest the most likely source, oddly omitting mention of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Jenkins, Harold, ed., *Hamlet in the Arden Shakespeare Series*. London: Methuen (1982). For its analogies to *The Spanish Tragedy* (97-98).

Thompson, Ann and Neil Taylor, eds., *Hamlet in the Arden Shakespeare Series*. London: Thomson Learning (2006, 2016). For the difficulties in sourcing and dating *Hamlet* (43-59), the similarities to *The Spanish Tragedy*, the uncertainty about the “Ur-Hamlet” (4-7, 70) and for the academic phenomenon of “source-hunting” (59-74). Theirs is the only modern-day edition to even mention Greek drama as a possible source or influence (63-64), citing the 1990 article by Louise Schleiner. Their revised edition of 2016 with “Additions and Reconsiderations,”

includes mention of a book by the Oxfordian Margrethe Jolly on Q1 and Q2.

Among the most pertinent works of research and commentary for this article are the following:

Alexander, Peter. *The Heritage of Shakespeare: Tragedies*.

Anderson, Mark. “*Shakespeare*” by Another Name: *The Life of Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, the Man Who Was Shakespeare*. New York: Penguin (2005). For his education (6-9, 20-35); for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (191-192), esp. the endnotes for those pages.

*Beowulf* (anon.) c. 1000. Translation from the Anglo-Saxon (Old English) manuscript by Seamus Heaney. New York: Norton (2000). See esp. pp. 165-213. Translations vary considerably. Cf. Francis Barton Gummere’s (1910), Albert W. Haley’s (1978), Burton Raffle’s (1963). See also Ignoto.

Berney, C.V. “Who Wrote *The Spanish Tragedy*?” in *Shakespeare Matters* (Winter 2005); “Hidden Allusions in Oxford’s *Spanish Tragedy*” in *Shakespeare Matters* (Summer 2005); Oxford’s *Spanish Tragedy*: More Hidden Allusions” in *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* (Spring 2015).

Bevington, David, ed., *The Spanish Tragedy / Thomas Kyd*. Manchester UP (1996). Esp. p. 11.

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influenced *Hamlet*” and conjectures that Will Shakspeare might have read Latin translations of Aeschylus and might have seen performances of two anonymous, lost English plays about the Orestes story or could have heard about them from friends. (29-48)

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[This article and its bibliography have been prepared for and will appear in a slightly different form in the forthcoming edition of *Hamlet*, the fourth play in the Oxfordian Shakespeare Series, following *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*.]





## The Three Queens of *Hamlet*

by Ren Draya

I like asking people to name the queens of *Hamlet*. They quickly blurt out “Queen Gertrude!” Then there’s a pause. “Ah,” they go on, “the Player Queen.” I propose that we add Queen Hecuba to the list and consider the three queens of this engrossing tragedy.

Hecuba is perhaps the least obvious. In greeting the Players upon their arrival, Hamlet warmly approaches the “first Player”—most likely, the leader of the troupe, a person who has known Hamlet for some years. Hamlet asks him to recite “a passionate speech” (2.2.432), singling out “an excellent play . . . set down with as much modesty as cunning” (440): “One speech in it I chiefly loved, ’twas Aeneas’ tale to Dido and thereabout of it especially when he speaks of Priam’s slaughter” (445-448). Hamlet himself, working from memory, begins the fiery speech and then the Player takes over. Hamlet prompts him to relate the part about Hecuba, Priam’s wife; and, in recounting the details about Priam’s dead body and Hecuba’s grief-stricken reaction, the player himself is in tears.

The inclusion of Hecuba reinforces the Oxfordian thesis Earl Showerman has contributed with his many excellent analyses of the Greek connections in the plays: strong evidence for Oxford’s authorship. Yes, Christopher Marlowe wrote a play called *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and Thomas Nashe treated similar material. But the lines recited by the First Player are nothing like Marlowe’s or Nashe’s. Highlighting Hecuba is the author’s original contribution and springs from someone well versed in details of the Trojan War. Hamlet clearly identifies his own father with Priam of Troy, for Priam, like Hamlet Senior, was a powerful king and famed warrior. A classically educated audience would know that the slaying of Priam was an egregious sin—a prime offense (an echo to Claudius’s words when he fails to pray)—because it occurred at the altar and in full view of Queen Hecuba. Thus, Priam’s death is the linchpin which condemns the Greeks and means that they must face the consequences of the angry gods.

The Player’s tears deeply move Hamlet. After hearing the Player’s recitation, Hamlet (in a soliloquy) castigates himself as a “rogue and peasant slave” (550), in contrast to the actor who,

But in a fiction, in a dream of passion  
Could force his soul to his own conceit . . .  
And all for nothing! For Hecuba!  
What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba  
That he should weep for her? What would he do  
Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
That I have? (552-553; 557-562)

The soliloquy ends with Hamlet’s resolve to use the Players to observe Claudius; by the king’s reaction, Hamlet can determine the accuracy of the Ghost’s accusations.

Therefore, we can blame Queen Hecuba for the play which catches the conscience of the king! Turning to that play, we find Queen Two, the Player Queen. The play-within-a-play has two titles. When Claudius asks its title, his nephew says, “The Mouse Trap,” Hamlet’s own little joke to himself, and a reference to his own resolve “to catch the conscience of the king.” Its official title is “The Murder of Gonzago”; with strict rhyme and elevated, often archaic diction, the script is in the spirit of a medieval morality play. The mood is somber, melodramatic; characters are more accurately called caricatures; and there is an introductory dumb show (enacting Hamlet Senior’s death), not a common practice in English Renaissance drama.

The author represents Hamlet as choosing and adapting an old play. But does anything like “The Murder of Gonzago” exist from sixteenth-century (or earlier) Italy? Are there any references to a wife named Baptista, a nephew Lucianus, a poisoning in the garden? If Italian sources are found, Stratfordians will have a difficult time explaining how Will Shakspeare knew about or read such manuscripts. De Vere, of course, traveled and lived in Italy.

The play-within-a-play device appears in several other plays: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Tempest* offer effective examples. As for “The Murder of Gonzago,” scholars argue about the “dozen or sixteen” lines which Hamlet pens and the Player agrees to include, thus creating a play-within-a-play-within-a-play. Questions to consider:

- Are the twelve-to-sixteen lines in a block?
- Are they all spoken by one character?
- Do these lines all get uttered? Or are one or two (and the sight of a player in the role of a poisoner) enough to trigger Claudius’s alarm?
- Is there any extant script with phrases such as these?

Even if answers will never be found, we can make some objective statements about “The Murder of Gonzago”: the Player King (representing Hamlet Senior) speaks forty-four lines in all, the Player Queen (representing Gertrude) thirty. Here is a portion of the devoted and melodramatic Player King (PK) and Player Queen (PQ):

**PK:** Full thirty times hath Phoebus’ cart gone ’round  
Neptune’s salt wash and Tellus’ orb’d ground,  
And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen  
About the world have times twelve thirties been  
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands  
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

**PQ:** So many journeys may the sun and moon  
Make us again count o’er ere love be done!  
But, woe is me, you are so sick of late,  
So far from cheer and from your former state,  
That I am distrustful for you. Yet though I distrust,  
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must;  
For women’s fear and love holds quantity,

In neither aught, or in extremity  
 Now, what my love is, proof hath made you know,  
 And as my love is sized, my fear is so.  
 Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear,  
 Where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

**PK:** Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly, too.  
 My operant powers their functions leave to do;  
 And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,  
 Honored, beloved, and haply one as kind  
 For husband shalt thou—

**PQ:** Oh, confound the rest!  
 Such love must needs be treason in my breast;  
 In second husband let me be accurst!  
 None wed the second but who killed the first.

**PK:** I do believe you think what now you speak,  
 But what we do determine oft we break . . . .  
 This world is not for aye, nor 'tis strange  
 That even our loves should with our fortunes change  
 For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,  
 Whether love lead fortune or else fortune love . . . .  
 Our wills and fates do so contrary run,  
 That our devices still are overthrown,  
 Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own:  
 So think thou wilt no second husband wed,  
 But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

**PQ:** Not earth to me give food nor heaven light!  
 Sport and repose lock from me day and night!  
 To desperation turn my trust and hope!  
 An anchor's cheer in prison be my scope!

What do we notice about these two, specifically, about the Player Queen? They seem to have been married a long time, and the King is now close to death. He seems more practical than the Queen, for she thinks she could never marry again—oh, how she loves her first (and only) husband. Perhaps we see a link here to Oxford's concern for the fidelity of his wife, Anne. The Player Queen stresses her great love for her husband, her fears for his safety, and her staunch refusal to consider a second marriage. She speaks up for herself, at one point interrupting her husband ("Oh, confound the rest . . ."); thus, she is Hamlet's idealized version of his mother. So now we must turn to Gertrude, Hamlet's mother and our third queen.

For starters, consider line counts: depending on which text we consult, the play *Hamlet* has close to 3,900 lines. Claudius, who is in every act, speaks 552 lines; Gertrude, also in every act, speaks 154 lines. That's king 552, queen 154. Gertrude has 10 lines in Act 1, 19 in Act 2, 57 in Act 3, 49 in Act 4, and 19 in Act 5. Her longest speech occurs when she describes Ophelia's death (4.7.167-184). Except for twice, when she addresses Ophelia, all of Gertrude's

lines are directed at males. She speaks to Hamlet, Claudius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Polonius, and Laertes. About half the time, she utters a single line—"More matter with less art" (2.2.96), "But look sadly where the poor wretch comes reading" (2.2.168), "O me, what hast thou done?" (3.4.29). Unlike the Player Queen, Gertrude merely interjects or echoes; only occasionally is she truly part of a conversation.

We never see Gertrude alone. One or two of her lines may be said as asides, but she is always with someone. In her first appearance (1.2), the queen is part of the assembled court; King Claudius is completely in control, and her lines echo or complement his. The first time she speaks is to her moody son:

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off  
 And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.  
 Do not forever with thy vailed lids  
 Seek for thy noble father in the dust.  
 Thou know'st 'tis common, all that lives must die,  
 assing through nature to eternity. (1.2.68-73)

Hamlet sneers at the word "common," thus—considering the very public nature of this family conversation—he insults both his mother and his uncle. Gertrude calmly continues,

If it be,  
 Why seems it so particular with thee? (74-75)

Hamlet jumps on the word "seems." After setting himself apart from conventional mourners, he proclaims (or brags), "I have that within which passes show; these but the trappings and the suits of woe" (85-86).

Claudius laces into the melancholy prince with thirty-one lines of criticism, accusing Hamlet of "obstinate condolment," "impious stubbornness" and "unmanly grief." Yet in the midst of his rant, Claudius reminds Hamlet (and the crowd) that the prince is "the most immediate to our throne" (109) and commands that Hamlet not return to university. The queen pipes up with two lines: "Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet. I pray thee, stay with us, go not to Wittenberg" (118-119). "Stay with us," she has asked.

Although the next time we see Gertrude it is still a public situation, she seems to be more natural, more of an individual than a mouthpiece. In greeting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern her words seem gracious: "If it will please you to show us so much gentry and good will as to expend your time with us awhile for the supply and profit of our hope . . ." (2.2.21-24). "The supply and profit of *our* hope"—there is something that Claudius and Gertrude hope for, some purpose that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can help achieve. She goes on to assure them, "Your visitation shall receive such thanks as fits a king's remembrance" (25-26). In other words, we'll pay you. The

fact that she is the one to convey this message indicates that the king does indeed share a number of his concerns with her. When Gertrude and Claudius are alone, she seeks to allay the king's worries about the source of Hamlet's alleged madness:

I doubt it is no other but the main,  
His father's death and our o'er hasty marriage. (56-57)

If this is Gertrude at her most natural, most honest, then we can label her, like the Player Queen, a supportive, calming wife. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern return to report on their encounter with Hamlet, she asks them the conventional, polite questions: "Did he receive you well?" (3.1.11); "Did you assay him to any pastime?" (14-15). The king dismisses the toadies and asks Gertrude to leave as well so that he and Polonius can spy on Hamlet. Ophelia is present and is to be the bait. Gertrude speaks first to her husband, "I shall obey you" (38), then to the frightened young girl,

And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish  
That your good beauties be the happy cause  
Of Hamlet's wildness. (39-41)

"Wildness": Does Gertrude truly believe that what she has labeled "wildness" is the product of his love for Ophelia? She has already said to Claudius that she believes the source of Hamlet's behavior is his father's death and this hasty second marriage. Of course, to Ophelia, she says nothing about her own marriage. So, what do we make of Gertrude? Is she the woman she *seems* to be here—obedient to her husband, gracious to visitors, kind to her future daughter-in-law? Or was she involved in some way with King Hamlet's death? Did she have knowledge of Claudius's murder of his brother? Did she assist? These questions are central to the play.

At this point it is good to remember two things:

- 1) The Ghost of Hamlet's father cautioned Hamlet:  
"Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge  
To prick and sting her." (1, 5, 86-89)

"Leave her to heaven" is itself an ambiguous directive: it could mean that Gertrude *is* guilty (i.e., is implicated in the death of Hamlet Senior) but heaven, not her son, shall judge her. "Leave her to heaven" could also mean she is not guilty.

- 2) The second point is that Hamlet himself refers to Claudius and his mother as a unit, for instance, saying to Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, "I know the good King and Queen have sent for you" (2.2.282) and making other such references throughout the play. Still, although Hamlet does

know they now act in concert, we can't be sure if he assumes his mother's complicity goes further than a hasty marriage.

The Players' enactment of "The Murder of Gonzago" comes at the exact midpoint of the play (3.2) and is at the center of our assessing all three queens. During that crucial scene, Gertrude speaks only twice. She does not take the initiative, she merely responds. Her first line comes in the midst of the Players' performance. After the lines quoted above, the Player King wants to nap and asks his wife to leave him for a while. The Player Queen complies, "Sleep, rock thy brain and never come mischance between us twain!" (225-226). Presumably, this is one of the lines the prince has inserted into the playlet. As if to call attention to a good wife's wish, "never come mischance between us twain," Hamlet asks his mother, "Madam, how like you this play?" (3.2.227) and Gertrude gives the often quoted, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (228).

"Protest," during Oxford's time, meant "declare, affirm, vow." Gertrude is saying, perhaps with a wry snort, "That woman is making too much of her love and devotion to husband number one." As a woman who has recently taken husband number two, the Queen knows it is possible to love again, to marry again. But we are left with the tangled web of ambiguity: Does "never come mischance" suggest that mischance *did* actually come between Gertrude and Hamlet Senior? Was that mischance Gertrude's participation in, or awareness of, Claudius's vile deed? Does "the lady doth protest too much" cover Gertrude's own guilt?

The Queen's only other spoken line here comes in response to the king's rising in alarm. Gertrude asks, "How fares my lord?" (265). Whew! In many ways, this moment presents the turning point for the drama, for Hamlet now has clear proof that the Ghost's accusations are correct, that Claudius did indeed murder his own brother, and that the young prince must seek vengeance.

"How fares my lord?" Let us consider the ways the actress might ask her question. Is the Queen utterly bewildered? If so, then we have proof that she is not to be judged guilty of complicity in Hamlet Senior's death. Is she embarrassed, worried that Claudius is giving away something best kept secret? Is her question soft? shrill? polite? jocular? hysterical? Claudius calls out, "Give me some light. Away!" And the royal entourage sweeps out of the room.

In this central scene, what we make of Gertrude's two lines depends on the director's and actor's interpretations. Shakespeare is tantalizingly, deliberately, ambiguous.

Although the Player Queen voices publicly Hamlet's private feelings about his mother, until Hamlet asks her for an opinion, Gertrude says nothing. Is she diplomatic or oblivious or simply unaware that the portrayal mimics her own situation?

Of course, any assessment of Gertrude also hinges on the second key scene in Act 3: Hamlet's conversation with



his mother in her private room, Polonius hiding behind the infamous arras, Hamlet's inadvertent killing of Polonius, quite a bit of emotional scolding from Hamlet, and the Ghost's reappearance (scene 4). In this scene, Gertrude speaks more lines than at any other time in the play. First, she reassures Polonius that she plans to be blunt with her son (that takes two lines). Hamlet bursts into her room. Although Hamlet does more talking than his mother, it is the only time we see her at least attempt a dialogue. She comes right to the point, "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" (3.4.10); by "father," she means stepfather, Claudius. Hamlet quickly throws her words back to her, "Mother, you have my father much offended" (11); he means Hamlet Senior. The verbal duel, a foreshadowing of the actual duel which Hamlet will fight with Laertes, is not between two equals. Hamlet bullies her, she screams, the sword pierces through the arras and the eavesdropping old man. Traumatized by the slaying of Polonius and convinced that Hamlet is mad, the queen loses her initial resolve.

She repeats several times, "What have I done?" Does she really not know? Do we believe her when she says that her heart is cleft in twain? (163). And, "Thou turnest my eyes into my very soul, And there I see such black and grained spots/As will not leave their tinct" (90-92). What does she see? What are the black spots? Is she simply saying what she thinks this mad person wants to hear? Or is she recognizing her own guilt and repenting her sins? She agrees to Hamlet's demands, including that she not align herself with Claudius, but as soon as her son departs, she runs straight to Claudius. And, except for a few moments with the courtiers, we always see Gertrude with the king.

In Act 4, hearing of Ophelia's distress, Gertrude is initially unwilling to see the young girl but does relent. Before Ophelia is brought in, the Queen speaks in an aside,

To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,  
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss. . .  
(4.5.16-17)

Most pathetic. Gertrude admits that her soul is "sick." But Shakespeare has not lifted the veil of ambiguity; we still must decide for ourselves if "sin's true nature" has been Gertrude's hasty marriage or something far darker. It is clear that Gertrude is unable to help Ophelia; except for murmurs and gentle words, the queen is too caught up in her own woes and Ophelia may well be beyond solace.

Poignantly, ironically, when Gertrude tells Laertes that Ophelia is dead, her language reaches a lyricism we have not heard before—"There is a willow grows askant the brook . . ." (4, 7, 167). How does she know so precisely the details of Ophelia's death? "Her clothes spread wide/ And mermaidlike awhile they bore her up . . ." (176-177). Could the Queen have saved the young girl?

At the muted funeral services for Ophelia, Gertrude does act queenly/appropriately, saying,

Sweets for the sweet! Farewell.  
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's  
wife . . . (5.2.242-243)

And she does react to Hamlet's sudden appearance, his leaping into the grave to grapple with Laertes, his passionate words. She cautions the others to be gentle and understanding with her son, believing that his "fit" will soon pass.

In the play's final scene, the queen has very few lines: she offers Hamlet a handkerchief, and she is excited about the gala duel. "The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet" (291). An impulsive act—a toast to her son—is an innocent, yet fatal, gesture. Claudius tells her not to drink, but she does. "I will my lord, I pray you pardon me" (293). Finally Gertrude acts on her own. Just a few moments later she realizes what has happened:

Oh, my dear Hamlet—  
The drink! the drink! I am poisoned. (312-313)

"Poisoned." It is her last word. Hamlet cries "Villainy . . . Treachery. Seek it out" (314-315). "Seek it out," the mission we Oxfordians all recognize.

And so we have the three queens of *Hamlet*: Hecuba prompts Hamlet to action, the Player Queen reveals his idealized vision of his mother, and Gertrude dies knowing the truth.

[This article is adapted from a paper presented at the Shakespeare Authorship Conference, Concordia University, Portland, Oregon, April 9, 2010.]

#### Notes:

1. Quotations are taken from David Bevington's edition of *Hamlet* (Pearson Longman, 2009).
2. When Daniel Wright first announced that Queen Elizabeth would be a major motif for the 2010 Authorship Studies Conference, I started to think about the various queens in the plays, looking for correspondences to Elizabeth. I quickly realized that Queen Elizabeth did not think of herself as "merely" a queen or as a typical woman of the time. In her 1586 answer to a petition from Parliament to execute Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth states "we Princes, I tell you, are set on stage, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed . . ." We *Princes*: there not being a plethora of queens leading their kingdoms in her time, Elizabeth saw herself as a prince, a monarch, a leader equal to a man. Her 1588 address to the English troops at Tilbury, facing the Spanish Armada, includes the famous declaration: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too . . ." And

the famous “Golden Speech” of 1601 contains references to herself as prince or king *and* as queen.

These remarks are simply to say that Elizabeth presents quite a challenge for us: We are tempted to look for queens in the plays, to compare Elizabeth to Cleopatra or perhaps to Queen Eleanor in *King John*. But she is far more than a queen. She is prince, king, ruler. And she is the stuff of which myths are made. I recommend a 2009 book by London College professor Helen Hackett, *Shakespeare and Elizabeth: the Meeting of Two Myths*. Hackett assumes that Shakespeare is the man from Stratford and traces the popular myth that Shakespeare and Elizabeth met, providing a fascinating study of the way myths develop and are cherished.



## SOF 2018 Conference in Oakland October 11-14

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship is pleased to announce that its next Annual Conference will be held from Thursday, October 11, to Sunday, October 14, 2018, in Oakland, California.

### Accommodations

We have reserved a block of rooms at the Marriott Oakland City Center (1001 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94607). Room rates at the Marriott have a published rate of over \$350 a night. SOF, however, is offering conference attendees a significantly reduced rate of **\$149 per night** plus tax (single or double room). This rate is \$30/night less than the room rate at our recent conference in Chicago.

The conference itself will take place at the hotel in the ballroom and the Skyline Room on the top floor of the hotel.

Our rate also includes in-room Wi-Fi for \$1 a night (usually \$9.95). And for anyone joining the Marriott Rewards program (it is free to join), even the \$1 a night charge will be waived. So we recommend that you join Marriott Rewards online when booking (or you can do it when you check in). If you are interested in arriving a day early or staying an extra night, you can get the same rate for the nights of October 10 and 14 as well.

The Marriott is well located and may easily be reached from either the San Francisco or Oakland airports by BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit).

Room reservations are available now by phone or through its website and can be changed or canceled up to a week before the conference. Marriott's special group reservation line is 877-901-6632. They will ask you which city you are booking for and the name of the group. Or go to the SOF website and click on “Conference”; then click on “Registration” in the drop-down menu. Because the special rate covers single or double rooms, the online

reservation may show only one person booked even if the room is being booked for two people. Not to worry. If you book a room, the rate will be good for two.

### Conference Registration

A full conference registration includes all conference materials, numerous coffee/tea/Danish breaks over the four days, a buffet lunch on Saturday, and the closing awards luncheon on Sunday. Daily rates are also available.

The full conference registration fee is **\$250** for SOF members who register by August 31 and **\$275** for SOF members registering after that date. The full conference fee for non-members is \$275 for registration by August 31 and \$300 after that date. Daily fees are \$75/day and an extra Sunday luncheon can be purchased for \$40.

Registration is available now on the SOF website, or by mailing in the flyer inserted in this newsletter. We urge you to watch the SOF website for further details on the program agenda.

### Call for Papers

The Conference Program Committee is now accepting paper and panel proposals. In response to comments from previous conferences, papers can be proposed for the usual 45-minute length or for 30 minutes. In either case, five to ten minutes of the time must be used as a question period. Additionally, the Program Committee is interested in receiving proposals for panel discussions of 60 to 90 minutes. Panel proposals should include a title, suggested panelists, and a paragraph justifying the proposal. A chair may also be proposed, or the committee can be asked to suggest one. All proposals should be sent to Earl Showerman ([earlees@charter.net](mailto:earlees@charter.net)).

We hope to see everyone soon in Oakland!

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