THE SHAKESPEARE OXFORD
NEWSLETTER

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A Legacy Decryption: Charlotte Armstrong's Solution of the First Folio Epigram

by Shelly Maycock

In the Winter 1973 issue of the *Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter*, Richard C. Horne writes that Rhoda Messner had asked him whether anyone had studied the solution to an encryption in Ben Jonson's epigram, "To the Reader" on the verso opening leaf of the Shakespeare First Folio. The solution to Jonson's cipher had appeared in the last novel by one of the best-selling suspense writers of the 1950s and 60s, Charlotte Armstrong, entitled *Seven Seats to the Moon* (1969). Horne's newsletter article reveals that the decryption was known at least to Oxfordians Horne, Mrs. Messner and Gordon and Helen Cyr. The then SOS president, Gordon Cyr, had noted that they could not ask the author about it, since she had passed away in 1969. As far as we know that was all that was said about Armstrong's solution in 1973.

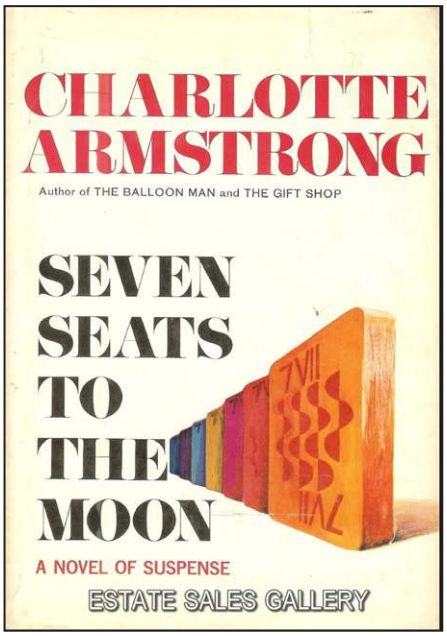

Figure 1: Original hardback cover of Armstrong's *Seven Seats to the Moon*.

Fortunately, Roger Stritmatter reads old Oxfordian newsletters and took up Armstrong's decryption pre-Covid. While he has presented on Armstrong's decryption at recent Fellowship conferences[1], in two articles in the *South Atlantic Review*, Stritmattter has provided a detailed academic explanation of Ben Jonson's esoteric coded messages in the First Folio paratexts, including the genuine cipher in the epigram.[2] Roger's and my recent search at Boston University's Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center indicates that the solution of Ben Jonson's cypher was most likely discovered by Armstrong herself. This conclusion makes sense because she is known for the highly logical originality of her acclaimed mystery and suspense plots, and was also, according to her family, a Shakespeare authorship researcher. According to her son, she studied the authorship question "to determine who the Bard really was and who really wrote all the good stuff."[3]

Armstrong lived for much of her adult life in Glendale, California, and kept her maiden name as her nom de plume, going by her married name, "Mrs. Lewi," in her everyday life. Our examination of the Armstrong archives has brought new information to light concerning her highly analytical habits of mind and interest in Shakespeare. Also, her papers document her use of and fascination with codes and symbolic logic, as found in her stories, notebooks and other papers held in the Gotlieb Center archives.

The fictional context Charlotte Armstrong chose for including her decryption of Ben Jonson's First Folio message in the "To the Reader" epigram is one of her last, masterful Cold War era "suburban noir" suspense novels, in which the truth and who knows it, are artfully withheld in various forms from both a broad cast of characters and her readers alike. She methodically weaves in her personal vision of legacy—of the urgency of passing truths from generation to generation, felt especially during the uncertain times of the Cold War—as well as high intrigue mingled with her literary sense of the importance of words.

The plot in *Seven Seats* involves a doomsday scenario in which her protagonist, J. Middleton Little, who goes by the initial, J, while out of town on business in Chicago, finds himself detained in the hospital, having been struck by a rich elderly woman's car. In his shared hospital room, J accidentally overhears a conversation between his dying wardmate and a stranger using

(Continued on p. 16)

The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter

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

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

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

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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In This Issue:

SAQ Products

A *great* assortment of Oxfordian merchandise, designed by SOF member Bill Glaser, is now available for purchase online! Visit ***Amazon.com*** and search "***SAQ Products***." You'll find t-shirts, pillows, and other items featuring the image of Edward de Vere, his shield, the Blue Boar Tavern logo, and more. Costs currently range from $16–$25 and many items are available in a variety of colors!

From the President

Dear colleagues:

First, some news: our hard-working board member, Michael Dudley, is leaving the Board of Trustees a bit ahead of time. An Oxfordian since the 1980s, Michael is a skilled academic librarian based in Canada, and with his personal and professional activities, he simply doesn't know how he can complete everything to the high degree of skill and competence he demands of himself while also serving on the board. To be fair to us, he is leaving the board early, so we can find another skilled trustee.

Michael has spent a lot of time recently working with the Data Preservation Committee to help the SOF retain a historical memory of all the great work that has been done over the years. He has also contributed presentations and interviews that can viewed at the SOF website and on our YouTube channel. His experience and personality will be sorely missed.

Second, several trustees led by Tom Woosnam, have sought to develop a mechanism whereby more people could be added to the leadership of the SOF during any particular year. The idea was developed to bring in more skills at once, and Tom's group proposed a process which was approved by the entire board. In this arrangement, a board president's term will be two months, and each will be assisted by both a trustee serving as a vice president and the immediate past president.

As you know, I agreed to serve as president for four months (October–January). On February 1, Tom Woosnam succeeded me as president, and he is being assisted by Ben August and me. In two months, Ben will become president, assisted by Tom and Dorothea Dickerman. Then Dorothea will become president, assisted by Ben and Brent Evans, etc. This interweaving of talents is intended to make sure that historical continuity is not lost, and the members get to benefit from the wide-ranging skills of the trustees. We think this system has merit, but if it proves otherwise, we will work on something else.

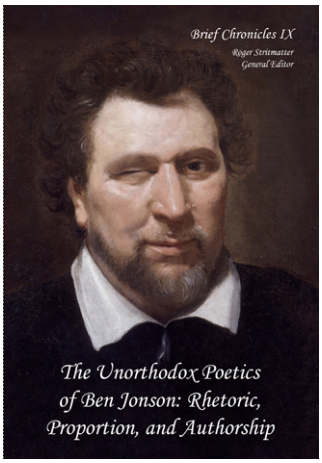
Finally, I appreciate the opportunity to serve again as your president, and the support and encouragement I've gotten from the other trustees and the membership.

— Bob Meyers

From the Board of Trustees

After many years of giving valued insights, wisdom and calm guidance to the SOF, we are very sorry to say that Jennifer Newton, our web manager, has decided to pursue other opportunities. Few of us who read the website, watch the Blue Boar Tavern or the Conference livestream have any idea how much planning and hard work Jennifer has put into them. We will miss her greatly and wish her all the best, happy in the knowledge that she remains a dedicated Oxfordian.

Coming Soon: *The Unorthodox Poetics of Ben Jonson: Rhetoric, Proportion, and Authorship*



Roger Stritmatter, Editor

This fascinating new Brief Chronicles, Vol. IX, will cover: Jonson's parody of the Stratfordian author as Sogliardo in *Every Man Out of His Humour*; his exploration of the Shakespeare question in the masque, *Neptune's Triumph*; his authorship of the verses on Shakespeare's Holy Trinity monument in Stratford; his paratextual contributions to the 1623 Shakespeare Folio, with the concealed implication of his phrase "sweet swan of Avon"; his "17th century Tribe of Ben" and the emotional complexities embodied in the word "envy."

Ben Jonson's testimony on the Shakespeare question has been fruitful territory for "post-Stratfordian" scholars for over a century. In 1921, Sir George Greenwood showed Jonson was the author of at least one of the two 1623 Shakespeare Folio dedications attributed to Hemmings and Condell!

Watch the SOF website for this provocative new book!

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for this unique and crucial magazine. I read every sentence and have for several decades believed in the Edward de Vere concept. I taught high school English and lectured on the de Vere possibility and some of my students truly cared.

—Victoria Franke
Teaneck, NJ

I have been a member of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship for many years. I am enclosing an example of Stratfordian ignorance from a recent book, *The Dirty Tricks Department: Stanley Lovell, the OSS, and the Masterminds of World War II Secret Warfare* by one John Lisle.

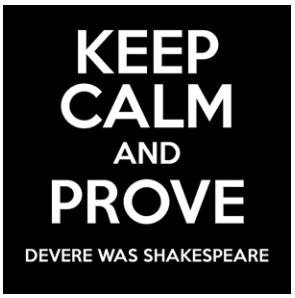
I discovered it almost by random on a remainder table at a store in Harvard Square. My father was in the OSS and never wanted to talk about what he did there, so I thought the book might tell me a little more about him. (It did not, for the most part, but I did learn a couple of new things about the formation and dissolution of the organization.) The book has a breezy and somewhat shallow style, with a number of diverting accounts of exploding fountain pens and the like, but nothing that generates a deep respect for the author. On pages 229–230 Lisle writes:

> Besides writing his memoir, Lovell's other postwar hobbies included painting, gardening, and playing the piano. He also read the great plays of history, a hobby that morphed into an obsession. A skeptic at heart, he became convinced that William Shakespeare wasn't the true author of the works that bear his name. Lovell instead subscribed to the Oxfordian theory of Shakespearean authorship, which claims that Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, actually wrote Shakespeare's plays.
>
> Lovell became so obsessed with the issue that he wrote a short pamphlet, "A Mystery Beyond Words," to prove the Oxfordian theory. "Come with me into the greatest detective problem ever posed," he teased his readers in the opening paragraphs. "I can promise a most interesting plot."
>
> Lovell flat-out dismissed the idea that William Shakespeare, "an unschooled, penny-pinching peasant from Stratford," could have achieved the genius displayed in the writing attributed to him. He then denounced the claim that Francis Bacon was the author of Shakespeare's plays: "It was so absurd–every reference to 'pig' or 'ham' was held to really mean 'bacon.'" Finally, he gave his own "proofs" for why de Vere was the true author. In one proof, he noted how Elizabethan writers "delighted in concealing their names in cryptograms and double meanings." Perhaps the true author concealed his name somewhere. Lo and behold, Lovell found what he was looking for in a line from sonnet seventy-six: "That every word doth almost tell my name." He rewrote the line to reveal the hidden message: "E. Ver-y word doth almost tell my name." And what name doth the word "E. Ver-y" almost tell? De Vere. *Voilà*. Never mind that de Vere died before several of Shakespeare's plays were written.

Truth be told, it's probably not that different from a zillion other examples, but for some reason this one got to me, in its breathtaking assurance, and the fact that it hit me by surprise, coming at the end of a book that had been about something completely unrelated.
So, for what it's worth, I just wanted to share it.

—Tom Price
Nahant, MA

From the Editor: The "breathtaking assurance" on the subject can certainly be upsetting, and it often requires a "Keep Calm and Carry On" attitude. Better yet, this version of the sentiment courtesy of young Oxfordian, Carlin Jannsch:



A note about our cultural loss of Kris Kristofferson (June 22, 1936 – September 28, 2024).

I learned while watching Ken Burns's documentary "Country Music" that Kris Kristofferson was a Rhodes Scholar with a passion for Shakespeare. Upon noting that nugget, and being a dyed in the wool Oxfordian—who thinks Hank Whittemore has an amazing

insight into the *Sonnets*, that Richard Paul Roe nailed Shakespeare's Italian travels, that Diana Price imitates the action of the tiger as she knocks down Stratfordian walls—and feeling that I see the Actual Author clearly, thanks to the works of all contributors to this newsletter, I had to ask Mr. Kristofferson where he was on the authorship subject. Did he feel Shakespeare was a pseudonym (enlightened) or not (unwashed)? After all, he had been a serious Shakespeare studier and had the experiences of many lives in his 80 years.

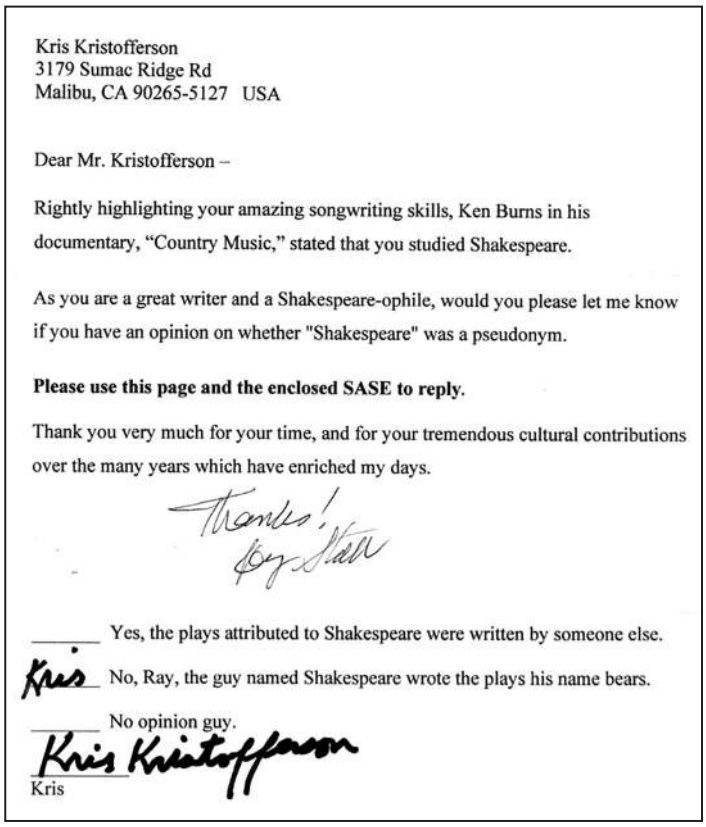
Here is how I found out firsthand, and had to accept, that Kris Kristofferson, author of the line "feeling near as faded as my jeans," was, sadly (to me) a follower of the standard stale Stratfordian story.

Thank you, internet, for providing me access to a mailing address which he replied to fans from, and to the "Country Music" documentary for noting that Johnny Cash helped Kris Kristofferson break into the music business. In posting my letter to him I used a USPS-issued Johnny Cash Forever stamp, hoping that in his pile of daily mail, mine would speak to him right from the surface because it visually featured one of his best friends prominently. In the letter I asked him if he felt Shakespeare was a pseudonym, and to keep it simple I just gave him multiple choice answers. To keep it simpler, I asked him to just send back my letter with his feedback. Maybe I should have asked for more, for comments or a favorite quote, but I wanted him to reply so I kept it brief and to the point. Lord knows how many rambling letters from songwriter wannabes he's seen!

Sending the letter, I expected a thirty- to sixty-day wait, but it was only a little over a week when I received my SASE back from Mr. Kristofferson. I opened the envelope, read the response, and lo and behold, my heart was no longer in the trim. Kris Kristofferson, the author of so much top-rated popular music, reported in the Stratford camp.

It's not clear if the author, former rugby player, former boxer, *summa cum laude* graduate in literature, former Army officer helicopter pilot, musician and actor, had ever read Looney. I'm guessing not. I almost sent him my copy of Whittemore, but I'm not sure he had the interest to read an unsolicited book, and from my experience I don't care for books others tell me I must read; I've got too much to read as it is. So, I had to accept it, and like Macbeth, be careful in what I wish for.

His signed antithetical response to me is a treasure, nonetheless, and it speaks to who the man was—here's a guy who is kind enough to reply to some random



Kris Kristofferson
3179 Sumac Ridge Rd
Malibu, CA 90265-5127 USA

Dear Mr. Kristofferson –

Rightly highlighting your amazing songwriting skills, Ken Burns in his documentary, "Country Music," stated that you studied Shakespeare.

As you are a great writer and a Shakespeare-ophile, would you please let me know if you have an opinion on whether "Shakespeare" was a pseudonym.

Please use this page and the enclosed SASE to reply.

Thank you very much for your time, and for your tremendous cultural contributions over the many years which have enriched my days.

Thanks!
Ray Stoll

_____ Yes, the plays attributed to Shakespeare were written by someone else.

Kris No, Ray, the guy named Shakespeare wrote the plays his name bears.

_____ No opinion guy.

Kris Kristofferson
Kris

authorship doubter (although he may have known a few other different-thinkers in his day.) In closing, let me say that as we know, William Shakespeare is the invention of someone who put English on the map, and the English language owes part of its staying power to Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Kris Kristofferson's work tells us that "Shakespeares" live among us and can push the English language forward for future generations to use.

—Ray Stoll
Fairfax, Virginia

Dear Ms. Jannsch,
I typically read the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, of which I understand you are the newly appointed editor, six months in arrears, when it is opened to public view. I've hence only now seen various comments in your Spring 2024 edition concerning my protest against the London Library's hosting a public event last June for Elizabeth Winkler and Sir Derek Jacobi to expound their views on Shakespearean authorship. I'd be obliged if you would publish this letter to correct a number of falsehoods.

Letters to the Editor (continued)

In his column "From the President" (pp. 2-3), Earl Showerman writes: "Kamm accused the London Library of hosting a presentation that indulges an 'anti-intellectual conspiracy theory that Shakespeare was a woman,' an irresponsible misrepresentation of Elizabeth Winkler's arguments in her brilliant book, the topic of discussion."

This purported quotation from me is faked. I certainly did use the phrase "anti-intellectual conspiracy theory" to denote the ludicrous notion that William Shakespeare of Stratford was an allonym for a concealed author, but the subordinate clause "that Shakespeare was a woman" is pure invention by Dr. Showerman.

Though such behavior by your president is reprehensible, I can see a perverse logic in it because I'm familiar with the expedient twists and turns of Ms. Winkler's argument. The original article in *The Atlantic* in 2019 proposing Emilia Bassano as the true author of Shakespeare was a fiasco for Ms. Winkler and the magazine, requiring three separate and substantial corrections in the next issue. In a heroic attempt to repair the damage to its reputation, *The Atlantic* also commissioned responses from, among others, James Shapiro, who patiently dismantled the article's misconceptions.

Ever after, in public comments and in correspondence with me and others, Ms. Winkler has implausibly maintained that she wasn't really advancing a case for Bassano but was raising wider issues of authorship, gender and (apparently) much else. Such caginess clearly soothes the Oxfordians, for if Bassano wrote Shakespeare's works then, *ex hypothesi*, Edward de Vere did not. But they still have to contend with the sensationalist title selected (presumably by her publisher) for Ms. Winkler's book, invoking her original spurious speculation about Bassano's alleged authorship of Shakespeare and which she has since discreetly jettisoned. For Dr. Showerman to accuse me of irresponsibly misrepresenting her argument, when I understand its tergiversations perfectly well and he is the one engaged in cherry-picking the bits of it he likes, takes an impressive amount of cheek.

Even so, faking comments from someone (namely, me) who is in a position to point out this malfeasance is less shocking than misrepresenting the dead, and this Dr. Showerman does too. He writes: "Journalist and social critic Christopher Hitchens was famous for his assertion that what can be asserted without evidence, e.g. Shakespearean biographical speculations, can also be dismissed without evidence."

I can scarcely believe the evidence of my eyes at this indecency. The parenthetical comment in this sentence is not a sentiment ever uttered by Hitchens; it is entirely of Dr. Showerman's devising. I presume that, in being caught in such trickery, Dr. Showerman will now plead that he has merely amplified Hitchens's dictum by providing a purported example of it; but any disinterested reader would read these words as a statement of Hitchens's view. So let me spell this out.

Hitchens was a friend of mine. He was a man of rigorous intellectual honesty and held it as a matter of honor that writers should properly attribute an argument and never misrepresent it. Dr. Showerman's sly insinuation that Hitchens held to, or ever advocated, Shakespeare denialism is contemptible. As it happens, the last time I saw Hitchens—and we both knew it would be the last time, for he was dying of cancer—was at the end of 2010 when I spent the best part of a weekend at his flat in Washington in extended conversation. I took the opportunity of recommending to him Professor Shapiro's then newly published book *Contested Will*, and he expressed characteristic enthusiasm for an expert dissection of irrationalism. He was, to put it mildly, not on the side of anyone like Dr. Showerman, on anything.

Further in the same edition of your newsletter, an anonymous contributor writes ("What's the News?", p. 7): "In her Substack newsletter…author Ros Barber shares Kamm's letter [to the London Library] and wryly comments: 'In his complaint to the library, he scoffs at the idea that this subject is taboo while demonstrating the taboo in action by demanding the discussion be cancelled.'"

As you will by now be aware, Dr. Barber has deleted the article you quote, and two others, and apologized to me at the High Court in London for a series of false and defamatory allegations they contained. The comment you quote is a minor matter by comparison, but it is still entirely untrue. At no time did I urge the London Library to cancel the event with Ms. Winkler and Sir Derek; rather, I urged the inclusion of a Shakespeare specialist in the discussion and criticized the decision to give an uncontested platform to a couple of conspiracy theorists, which I consider was a betrayal of the ethos of a historic cultural institution.

I trust this is clear.

Sincerely,
—Oliver Kamm
London, UK

From the Editor: In the Spring 2024 *Newsletter* issue, two assertions were made that require correction.

- In the first, a column stated that Oliver Kamm "accused the London Library of hosting a presentation that indulges an 'anti-intellectual conspiracy theory that Shakespeare was a woman…'" Kamm did not use the phrase "that Shakespeare was a woman."
- In the same column the late journalist and social critic, Christopher Hitchens, was cited for his assertion that "what can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence." The phrase, "e.g. Shakespearean biographical speculations," was inserted by the column's author without any indication that it was not a part of the original statement, which appeared in Hitchens's 2007 book, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.

On seeing the reference to the *Frontline* video in the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Fall 2024, I couldn't help sharing this little ditty, having seen the first airing with great excitement:

Frontline: The Shakespeare Mystery (1989)

On YouTube, ignore the too-quaint VCR
Tape blur; it at least preserves the episode;
For one brief documentary, it goes far
To speak articulate doubt, perhaps to goad
The thoughtful viewer into taking action.
Reactionary MP, Enoch Powell may be,
But who knows politics better, faction on faction,
Or where "our great ones" hide each skeleton key,
Key to the bones none but a true Bard would know?
Hear Alfred Leslie Rowse's rants, then savor
Charlton Ogburn's eloquence in flow,
Owing no Stratford, no rich foundation a favor.
He feels—if ancient pathos dies no death,
Hear Ogburn recite "Tomorrow and tomorrow"
—More deeply affecting than many a stage Macbeth:
A righteous yearning for truth, tinged with some sorrow.
I wrote him a note congratulating him;
He wrote back, *Yes*, *for once we had good luck:*
In bold Al Austin's research, wit, and vim,
The way he can interrogate with pluck.
Best of all, in his choice of adversary.
Al draws close to Rowse; he catches his prey unwary.
Who saw the exchange that wouldn't begin to think
There, Al to Al, both sit—which Al will blink?
Then: If this is how Stratfordians construe,
What a big Nothing, tricked out with "much ado."

—Tom Goff
Carmichael, CA

From the Editor

Readers will see from our lengthy *Letters* sections that we have received compliments, critiques, corrections and creative responses to items included in the past year's issues. Thank you to our readers and contributors for your continued engagement, contributions and feedback!

Tom Price's letter (page 4) reminded me of an incident years ago when an issue of my college alumni magazine included an interview with my favorite English professor. I was eager to see how "Doc" felt about the authorship question—a topic that had never come up during his classes but that I had, twenty years later, become intrigued by. I hoped that he might be an academic who would go against the grain and respond to a question about the authorship with a reasonable and thoughtful answer. Instead, I felt the sting of his dismissive reply:

> "The Anti-Stratfordians continue to say this upstart from the sticks couldn't possibly have written such deep, thoughtful plays, or know as much as he did about language, custom and behavior. But their evidence is shaky. It's gimmickry pretending to be scholarship," says Erath. Should you encounter one of these folly-fallen clotpoles in conversation, lob this gem at them (courtesy of our pal, Will): "Were I like thee, I'd throw away myself."

Over time, I have come to understand that this is a bog-standard response; accuse authorship doubters of poor scholarship, provide no counterevidence to support Will of Stratford, and then lob insults. Fortunately, most of us have learned to withstand or ignore the "slings and arrows" that come along with this fascinating subject, and, as tiresome as they can be, many consider insults such as this one to be badges of honor.

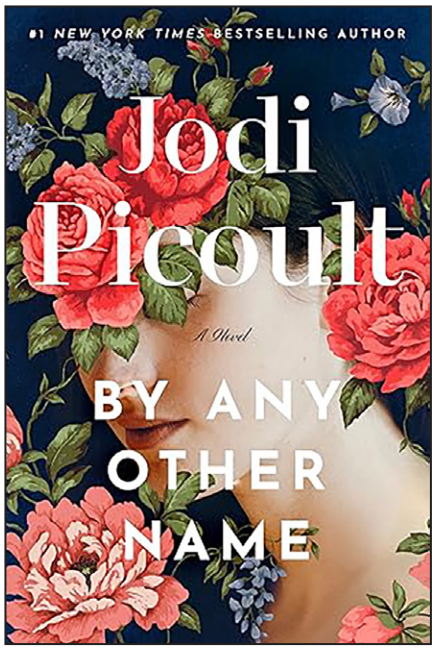
Thankfully, our *Newsletter* provides a forum for doubters to engage in authorship studies in thoughtful and innovative ways. For example, in this issue, instead of slinging insults, Jens Münnichow considers how even Shakespeare's insults lead us to an author with specific, insider knowledge on certain subjects (page 10) and Oxfordians' willingness to "Keep Calm and Prove de Vere was Shakespeare" (as suggested by my daughter's illustration on page 4) is apparent in the dedicated outreach efforts of our members (page 14) and our willingness to combine resources to support new and exciting research (see page 26).

It is a delight to be in such good company,
—Heidi Jannsch

What's the News?

New Authorship Novel by Jodi Picoult

In August 2024 a new book focusing on the authorship of Shakespeare's works was released by best-selling author, Jodi Picoult. The novel, *By Any Other Name*, advances the theory that poet Emilia Bassano ghostwrote many of the Shakespeare's works, a theory familiar to many doubters thanks to Elizabeth Winkler's June 2019 *Atlantic* article "Was Shakespeare a Woman?" and subsequent book, *Shakespeare Was a Woman and Other Heresies: How Doubting the Bard Became the Biggest Taboo in Literature*. In her Author's Note, Picoult recommends Winkler's book and acknowledges the likelihood of Edward de Vere's involvement in the Shakespeare works. During a recent interview with *Princeton Alumni Weekly* Picoult also states:



> In reality, based on everything that I dug up when I was researching this book, I think that Alexander Waugh was probably the closest; he was the one who came up with the idea that there was a stable of authors, kind of like James Patterson has now, where there's one person giving out ideas, but lots of different authors are writing the books. I think that was what was happening. I think that Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, was the ringleader. I think he was the one who was sort of corralling all of these different authors.
>
> I didn't really go into it in the book, because this was a story about Emilia that I wanted to tell. I do not believe that Emilia wrote all of the plays, either. I think she only wrote several of them, based on the places I so heavily see her fingerprints in the plays. I think that de Vere probably wrote most of the history plays, for example….

The novel is sure to bring the authorship issue to a large audience. As well as being a *Good Morning America* Book Club Pick and a *People* magazine's Book of the Week, Picoult's novel spent two weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list in September 2024. A review of *By Any Other Name* is scheduled to appear in the next issue of the *Newsletter.*

Call for Papers

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship is now accepting proposals for papers and panels for its upcoming annual conference to be held in New Haven, Connecticut, on September 18–21.
While the organizers are happy to consider papers on any aspect of Oxfordian and authorship studies, the Conference Planning Committee is particularly interested in receiving proposals for papers connected to the official conference topic for 2025: "Oxford, Women and the Authorship Question." This wide-ranging topic can include anything from Oxford's own relations to women to studies of women who have made contributions to the authorship question itself.

Anyone interested in proposing a paper or hosting a panel should send a 250–500 word abstract plus two–three sentences of biographical background (if a new speaker) to the Conference Organizer:

> Emeritus Prof. Don Rubin
> Department of Theater
> York University, Toronto M3J 1P3
> E-mail: drubin@yorku.ca

Papers can be presented in 45-, 30- or 20-minute sessions (all presentations must include a minimum of five minutes for questions). Panels can be 60 or 90 minutes. A limited number of video presentations will also be accepted with a maximum presentation time of 25 minutes. All proposals will be acknowledged.

The deadline for this first round of papers will be April 15, 2025, with an announcement of acceptances shortly thereafter.

Oxford's Voices Theater Festival

The first live-streamed Oxford's Voices Theater Festival took place on January 25, 2025. Directed by Phoebe Nir and edited by Linds Gray, the program showcases Phoebe, Robert Prechter, and an assorted cast of Oxfordian all-stars who present excerpts from three plays that Prechter proposes to have been written in whole or in part by Edward de Vere: *David and Bethsabe* (attributed to George Peele), *James the Fourth* (attributed to Robert Greene) and *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (attributed to Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe).

Based on his work that can be found at oxfordsvoices.com, Prechter suggests that de Vere wrote or contributed close to 100 plays behind various pseudonyms and allonyms. The Oxford's Voices Theater Festival format includes Prechter's comments interspersed with dramatic presentations from *David and Bethsabe*, *James the Fourth* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage* performed by himself, Frank Lawler, Phoebe Nir, Tom Woosnam, Daniel Cowan, Cait Courtelyou, Michael Dudley, Jonathan Jackson, John Cecil, Hank Whittemore, Linds Gray, Rima Greenhill and Meg Van Dusen. The program also features musical performances on the harp by Joanna Newsom and Robin Prechter.

The event concluded with the presentation of an award to Alister Hill for his work exploring Oxford's contribution to *Holinshed's Chronicles*. Hill's research on the subject can be found at www.oxfordholinshed.com and the recording of the Oxford's Voices Theater Festival can be viewed on YouTube.

Shakespeare's Insults

by Jens Münnichow

Starting with Socrates in Greek antiquity, one underlying ideal of western civilization and art for almost two millennia has been the triad of "the true, the beautiful and the good." The fact that Shakespeare included insults frequently in his works although they don't fit the categories of "true," "beautiful" and "good" most of the time, can be seen as evidence for the fact that he lived, observed and wrote in times of change. Living in the Renaissance and being influenced by humanism, he moved away from ancient rules and regulations and turned toward an art that is more focused on human nature than art had been before. Since insults are part of said human nature, Shakespeare does not back down from showing them in his artistic depiction of humanity.

Beware of Internet Insults

While internet searches provide a vast number of results and easy access to the fun topic of "Insults by Shakespeare," it is important to note that not every insult attributed to Shakespeare is, in fact, an insult at all.

For example, in various online lists of Shakespeare insults, you can find a supposed insult from *Henry V*; "Thine face is not worth sunburning."

As an insult it would be a really sophisticated one; given that the sun is freely available to anyone and that nobody can control it, it is impossible to put an actual value on it. So, logically speaking, the sun is "worthless." What Shakespeare *seems* to be saying here is "You are not even worth being touched by something that is completely worthless itself," i.e. "You are completely worthless."

However, if you look at the actual *Henry V* text, you will find that the line is indeed different and is not an insult at all. When Henry is wooing the French Princess Katherine to marry him, he says: "If thou canst love a fellow of this temper, Kate, whose face is not worth sunburning, that never looks in his glass for love of anything he sees there, let thine eye be thy cook" (5.2.147–150).

Henry might feel a little frustrated here because he must work so hard to woo Kate, but he is in no way angry at her. Consequently, the alleged insult is not directed toward her, but is used to describe himself, maybe to show some sort of courtly humility or modesty. Since it is his clear intent to present himself as an attractive candidate for a marriage, it is not plausible that he *seriously* wants to make a fool of himself. So, this seemingly self-denigrating comment is not an insult, but rather something of a playful joke at his own expense.

Another example of a false Shakespeare internet insult is "You have a February nose, so full of frost, of storm and cloudiness" from *Much Ado About Nothing*. Don Pedro does not actually insult Benedick here. Rather, he seems to sense that something is wrong with Benedick given his facial expression and so he asks him how he is: "Good morrow, Benedick. Why, what's the matter, That you have such a February face, So full of frost, of storm and cloudiness?" (5.4.40–42).

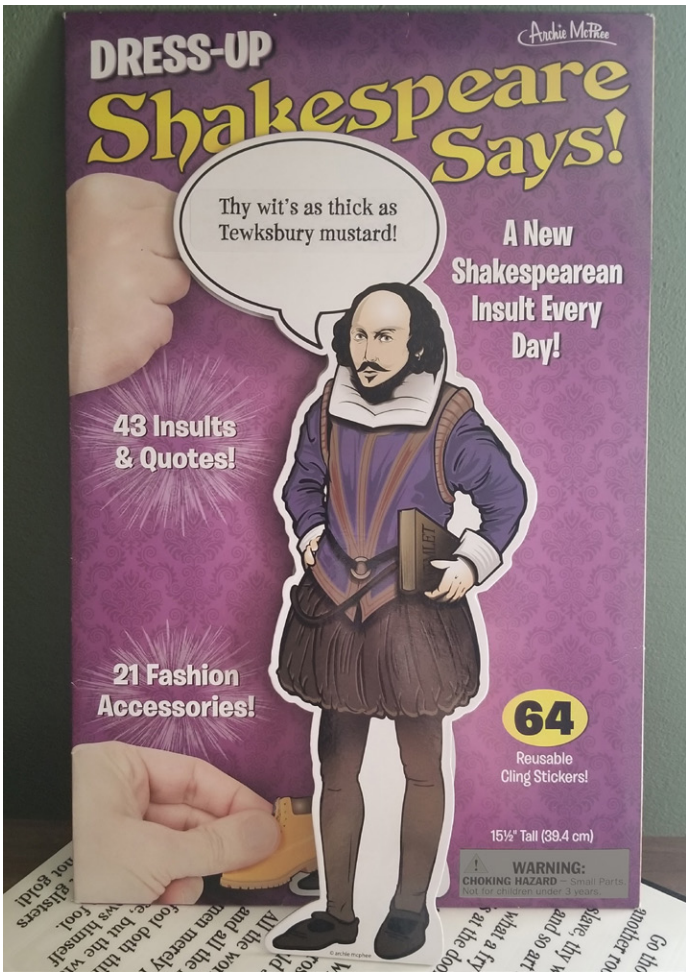
How Shakespeare Insults Work

Given the diversity of human temperament and humor, it is no surprise that the great observer of humanity reflects these differences in his works when showing insults as fits of different temperaments. Throughout the works, Shakespeare displays a variety of insult techniques including name-calling, plain statements, rhetorical devices, courtly insults and insults based on special knowledge.

Name-calling

The simplest form of an insult is name-calling. In *Henry V*, Captain Fluellen tries to encourage his cowardly soldiers to a little more offensive fighting spirit at Harfleur: "Up to the breach, you dogs! avaunt, you cullions!" (3.2.19–20). Later in the play, they might become a band of brothers with the King, but right now, to Fluellen, they are not brothers, just dogs and cullions. Fluellen's insult "cullions" is rare in Shakespeare, it only appears one more time, in *2 Henry VI*, when Queen Margaret sends off petitioners with the words: "Away, base *cullions*!" (1.3.40).

A medicine-based name-calling incident appears in *King Lear* when Lear talks to his daughter Goneril: "Thou art a boil, A plague sore, or embossèd carbuncle in my corrupted blood" (2.4.224–226). Interestingly, the word "carbuncle" appears five more times



Dress-up Shakespeare Says! promises a new Shakespearean insult every day. ©Archie McPhee

in Shakespeare, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline* and *Hamlet*, and in all those appearances the word refers to the precious mineral used in jewels and is used in a positive way. Only Lear uses it to form an insult from the ailment of that name.

Plain statements

If one wishes to insult above and beyond just calling names, one can use plain statements to insult an opponent. A very dark example of an insult of this kind can be found in *Richard III* when Lady Anne tells Richard: "And thou unfit for any place but hell" (1.2.111). Isn't that a much more sophisticated way than just saying "Go to hell!"? The absolute darkness of this insult comes to light if it is put into a contemporary perspective. People were far more religious back in Shakespeare's time and they envisioned God's creation as infinite. So, what Lady Anne is saying here is that although God's creation is infinite with infinite places, there is not a single place in England, in the world, in God's entire creation for Richard, but only the one place that is the farthest away from the saving presence of God—and that is hell. That must have been a far more severe insult to Shakespeare's contemporaries than a "F*** off!" would be to us today!

Rhetorical devices

Interestingly, even a rather base thing like an insult often comes in an artistic form in Shakespeare. He often used rhetorical devices including comparison, climax, contradictions, chiasm, puns, and accumulation to form his insults.

The device of ***comparison*** is frequently used, as seen in *Measure for Measure* where Lucio tells the Second Gentleman: "Thou conclud'st like the sanctimonious pirate that went to sea with the Ten Commandments, but scraped one out of the table." The insult is made clear when Lucio and the Second Gentleman continue their dialogue "'Thou shalt not steal?'—Ay, that he razed" (1.2.7–11). So, the insult is in the contrast of a really pious person who obeys all ten of the Commandments and a pirate who only pretends to do so, but actually obeys only to the ones he sees fit.

Another insulting comparison can be found in *2 Henry IV* when the Lord Chief Justice tells Falstaff that he is just a sorry relic of better days long gone: "What, you are as a candle, the better part burnt out" (1.2.155–156).

Anyone who thinks that Shakespeare is somewhat "old-fashioned" should look at *Titus Andronicus* where Aaron includes a "Yo' Mama" joke in his dialogue with Demetrius and Chiron. Hundreds of years before this kind of insulting exchange became known in American urban youth culture, Shakespeare wrote:

> **Demetrius**. Villain, what hast thou done?
> **Aaron**. That which thou canst not undo.
> **Chiron**. Thou hast undone our mother.
> **Aaron**. Villain, I have done thy mother.
> (4.2.74–77)

From Aaron's first line to his second, the tension rises, so both lines create a ***climax*** and Demetrius's use of "do" and Aaron's use of "undo" form a ***contradiction***. This contradiction is repeated in Chiron's and Aaron's exchange, just inverted, which brings us to

even another rhetoric device. If we put the two exchanges, Demetrius vs. Aaron and Chiron vs. Aaron, and align them into just two lines, they form a ***chiasm***, the rhetoric device that is named after the Greek letter "Chi," which looks like an "X" in the Latin alphabet. The two arms of the X are formed by two pairings of the verbs "to do" and "to undo."

> **Demetrius**. Villain, what hast thou ***done***? **Aaron**. That which thou canst not ***undo***.
> **Chiron**. Thou hast ***undone*** our mother. **Aaron**. Villain, I have ***done*** thy mother.

What a great playful mastery of a language, to have insults based on a chiasm!

Finally, there is a ***pun*** on the word "undo." While Aaron uses the word to show how impactful and strong his deed was, i.e., something that cannot be reverted, Chiron uses the same word to show how bad Aaron's deed was, i.e., that he ruined their mother.

While some of the rhetoric devices are sophisticated, the ***accumulation*** is the insult-overkill, the brute force massing of insults. The young Henry V gives an example of this way of insulting in *1 Henry IV*, when he talks to Falstaff: "Thou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated fool, thou whoreson, obscene, grease tallow-keech" (2.4.223–226).

In that same scene the young prince continues his rant:

> Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humors, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend Vice, that gray Iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? (2.4.443–449)

As if Henry has not had enough insults in this scene, Shakespeare gives him a third accumulation when Henry talks to Francis: "Wilt thou rob this leathern-jerkin, crystal-button, not-pated, agate-ring, puke-stocking, caddis-garter, smooth-tongue, Spanish-pouch—" (2.4.69–71).

"Courtly" insults

Apart from the direct insults, there are examples of rather indirect insults, that seem almost "courtly"—insulting someone without actually insulting him, saying something without saying something, just beating around the bush. This form of insult appears when people of equal social status engage with each other and an open, direct insult might have repercussions for the person that utters the insult. Perhaps the best-known example is to be found right at the beginning of *Romeo and Juliet*, when Abraham and Sampson, servants of the opposing houses of Montague and Capulet, meet in Verona's streets:

> **Abraham**. Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
> **Sampson**. I do bite my thumb, sir.
> **Abraham**. Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
> **Sampson**. [Aside to Gregory] Is the law of our side, if I say ay?
> **Gregory**. No.
> **Sampson**. No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite my thumb, sir.
> **Gregory**. Do you quarrel, sir?
> **Abraham**. Quarrel, sir? No, sir.
> **Sampson**. But if you do, sir, I am for you: I serve as good a man as you.
> **Abraham**. No better.
> **Sampson**. Well, sir.
> **Gregory**. Say 'better.' Here comes one of my master's kinsmen.
> **Sampson**. Yes, better, sir.
> **Abraham**. You lie.
> **Sampson**. Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy swashing blow. (1.1.44–63)

As soon as Tybalt appears and the balance of power seems to shift in favor of the Capulets, Sampson musters up the courage to utter an actual insult, but only after Gregory encourages him and pushes him to do so.

Another example is to be found in *Henry V* when the Welsh and Irish captains Fluellen and MacMorris, both equal in rank, seem to have a discussion on the qualities of the Irish nation:

> **Fluellen**. Captain Macmorris, I think, look you, under your correction, there is not many of your nation—
> **Macmorris**. Of my nation! What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal. What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?

Fluellen. Look you, if you take the matter otherwise than is meant, Captain Macmorris, peradventure I shall think you do not use me with that affability as in discretion you ought to use me, look you: being as good a man as yourself, both in the disciplines of war, and in the derivation of my birth, and in other particularities.

Macmorris. I do not know you so good a man as myself: so Chrish save me, I will cut off your head. (3.2.119–132)

Had Fluellen's first statement not been interrupted by MacMorris, it would have included the insult that there were not many members of the Irish nation that are sufficiently invested in discipline, especially of war. After Fluellen recognizes MacMorris's furious resistance and defense of his own nation, he backs down from formulating the insult properly to avoid further, maybe even bloody, strife within the English army. As shown above, Fluellen has no problem insulting cowardly soldiers, but when it comes to someone that is a peer to him in rank, he knows what is due is a somewhat "courtly" behavior.

Insults based on special knowledge

Finally, there are insults that are based on special knowledge of Shakespeare's day and are difficult for a modern general audience to understand. An example might be the use of humorism and humoral medicine as a basis to create metaphors. The Earl of Kent in *King Lear* (2.2.17) and Macbeth in *MacBeth* (5.3.15) both describe their opponents as being "lily-livered." According to the medicinal philosophy of the first-century AD Greek physician Galen, the liver is connected to the choleric temper and yellow bile. Furthermore, it is connected to the male, to youth and obsessive and dominant behavior. So, a healthy, yellow liver might be suitable to form a metaphor to describe an active, strong, young man. In contrast, the flower lily often appears as white, and this color is connected to phlegmatic temper and phlegm in Galenic philosophy. It is connected to the female, to the old age and to passiveness and cautiousness. A "lily-livered man," then, can be seen as an unmanly, even cowardly, passive man.

One might ask how the Man from Stratford might have gotten an intimate knowledge of humoral medicine—a knowledge that was so established that he could use it even as basis for metaphors in completely different fields. Much like Tom Regnier's article "Could Shakespeare think like a Lawyer?" in which he showed that Shakespeare had so firm a command of knowledge of the law and legalese that he could use that as basis for metaphors in different topics, an extensive knowledge of humoral medicine was much more likely to be in Edward de Vere's wheelhouse. De Vere was classically educated, mastered the Greek language and knew Greek philosophy, and is a much more probable candidate to have had access to and an understanding of the philosophy of a first-century Greek physician.

Another example of special knowledge is found in the insults uttered by Mercutio toward Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*. Mercutio describes Tybalt as "A braggart, a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic!" (3.1.100–101) and informs us that "He fights as you sing prick-song, keeps time, distance, and proportion" (2.4.20–21).

This may seem to a modern audience like rather harmless remarks on an opponent's style of fencing but would have been much more insulting to a noble audience in Shakespeare's time. Traditionally, martial prowess had always been an integral part of the nobility's self-understanding and had always been connected to traditional virtues like courage and physical strength—and it was taught along the lines of these virtues.

However, in Shakespeare's time new ways of fencing and the teaching of fencing emerged from Italy and Spain, clearly not adding to their popularity among England's nobility. These new techniques involved a more rational approach toward fencing. The old qualities of strength and courage were substituted by the scientific observation of movements. Distances were measured to create areas of control around a fighter and those were put together to form some kind of maps that looked almost like astrological maps, so that students could learn fencing by the book.

One of the proponents of the new Spanish style of fencing was Gerard Thibault d'Anvers (d'Anvers = of Antwerp), who started fencing in the 1580s and became a famous fencing instructor himself. He published a book called "Academy of the Sword: wherein is demonstrated by mathematical rules on the foundation of a mysterious circle the theory and practice of

the true and heretofore unknown secrets of handling arms on foot and horseback."

The words "mathematical rules" and "theory" must have horrified traditional English fencers of the nobility. Considering that Thibault is even said to have used metronomes to measure the alternating back and forth of defensive and offensive movements, then the description "He fights as you sing prick-song, keeps time, distance, and proportion" is not one of praise for a mobile, agile fencer, but an insult to a fencer who had gotten rid of traditional values and chivalry.

How could the Man from Stratford, with no connection to traditional values of the nobility, create insults in defense of such traditional values? Edward de Vere, on the other hand, was a traditionally trained fighter, personally fought in duels and excelled in several chivalric tournaments in England and Italy.

Although anyone can engage in name-calling and plain statement insults, Shakespeare's composition of insults using rhetorical devices and courtly and special knowledge add to the already strong case that Edward de Vere was the author.

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Outreach Efforts at Teacher Convention Increase SOF Membership

by Cheryl Eagan-Donovan and Heidi Jannsch

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention was held in Boston, Massachusetts, in November 2024, and was attended by more than 7,000 educators from around the country. This year's theme was "Heart, Hope, Humanity" and attendees included elementary, middle school, high school and college instructors and administrators.

SOF members Shelly Maycock and Cheryl Eagan-Donovan, also representing Virginia Tech and Lesley University respectively, arrived at the convention hall on Thursday morning, November 21, to set up a booth on the Exhibit Hall floor. The booth was co-sponsored by the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship and the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition.

Late Thursday afternoon, Shelly attended the opening keynote speaker event featuring Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. Justice Jackson spoke about her academic and legal careers and her recently published memoir,

Shelly Maycock, Anne E. Pluto and Cheryl Eagan-Donovan at the 2024 NCTE Convention.

Lovely One. On Friday morning, Cheryl attended a talk by Emmy-winning actor and author Kate McKinnon. Kate entertained the capacity crowd with stories of her favorite teacher, her love of theater, and her debut novel, *The Millicent Quibb School of Etiquette for Young Ladies of Mad Science*. Shelly and Cheryl also attended a workshop on teaching banned books where they met and spoke with teachers about Shakespeare and censorship in the classroom.

When the Exhibit Hall opened on Friday morning, Shelly and Cheryl were immediately met with a nonstop stream of teachers eager to learn more about the Shakespeare Authorship Question, the SOF, the works of our member authors on display, and the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt. Professor Roger Stritmatter, representing Coppin State University, and Professor Anne E. Pluto, award-winning poet and theater director from Lesley University, later joined them at the booth.

Most teachers were familiar with the authorship question and were very enthusiastic about teaching the SAQ in the classroom as a means of engaging students. Cheryl noted:

> We spoke with hundreds of teachers over three days and gave away dozens of books donated by me, Bonner Miller Cutting, and John Shahan to those who signed our mailing list and/or the Declaration. We distributed folders with print materials about the SOF, SAC, and Shakespeare authorship educational resources, and collected email addresses from teachers. Many more educators scanned the QR codes provided for more information about membership and benefits.

Special attention to the collection of contact information had been requested by SOF Board of Trustees member Brent Evans, who later reached out to these interested teachers and offered them a free six-month membership to the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship. Those who choose to remain members after the free trial will be eligible for a $29 annual teacher membership.

Some of the enthusiastic responses to the special offer included the following notes of appreciation:

— *I would love to be a member of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship! I will be teaching* Romeo & Juliet *after winter break and will eagerly devour any and all resources that you can provide!*

— *I am thrilled to have a free membership. Currently, I am teaching* Hamlet *and need new invigorating lessons for my students.*

— *I would love to take advantage of the 6 months free membership trial for NCTE Conference attendees. It was great getting to meet you all at the conference. I look forward to learning and working more with you in the future*.

Brent reports that this small membership drive "resulted in a 14% rate of membership enrollment. Out of the 70 contacts, 10 convention attendees responded and joined under the new 'teacher category.' Generally, a response rate of 1–5% is common for 'cold' email recruitment efforts of this kind, but higher rates are achievable with targeted and personalized outreach."

He is hopeful that this attempt may form the foundation of greater and more effective efforts in the future. In the coming year, he plans to convene a study group of teachers among the SOF ranks to develop strategies for attracting more educators and students to join our organization, and to create teaching materials to aid teachers in incorporating the authorship question into their curriculum.

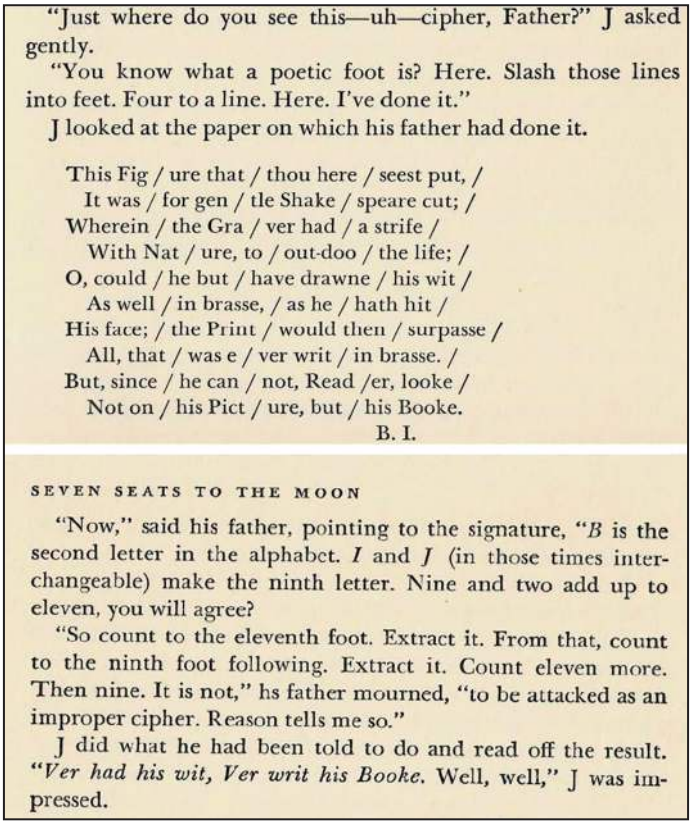
Those interested in participating in this initiative are encouraged to contact Brent at brentevans50@gmail.com.

Charlotte Armstrong's Solution (*continued from page 1*)

incomprehensible jargon. When his eavesdropping is discovered, he is burdened with an unbelievable reward in exchange for his silence about what he overheard—that there is to be a global catastrophe in the near future, and that seven seats on a spaceship to escape to and colonize the Moon will be his to bestow upon seven loved ones whom he must choose. J assures the dying man that in the aftermath of what he had overheard, "the rest," would, as in *Hamlet*, be "silence." J is unsure whether the secret is real or cover for something maybe more sinister. What he does not know includes whether his knowledge of the doomsday scenario is real or trumped up, true or false; nor does he know whether he is alone in the secret—that his knowledge will mean that as he returns to his family in California, he will be surveilled by rival groups of threatening, shadowy figures.

In the First Folio epigram, Ben Jonson's signature "B. I." is the key to the encryption. "B," the second letter of the alphabet, corresponds to 2, and "I" is the ninth letter, so we have 2 and 9, which add up to 11. The key numbers are 2, 9, and 11, as Stritmatter has argued, the "elvish" trick or wildcard number in relevant early modern folk and calendric numerology as well as that of card games.[4] The encryption in *Seven Seats* is revealed through a plot complication. Armstrong's character, J's elderly father, is an independent historian, who shares his Shakespeare Ben Jonson discovery with his son as he is about to publish it, because J has been managing his father's affairs. When J returns from his fateful trip, trying to both cover up and act on his secret knowledge that the world is about to end, he must decide who among his loved ones will go to the Moon. This dilemma includes the complication that his father's unpublished knowledge may be lost if the world is really ending. It is possible that Charlotte Armstrong had a similarly doomed feeling about passing down her own Shakespeare discovery, if the decryption is hers, as she knew she had cancer, and was nearing the end of her life, as were her characters, J and his elderly father. Her characters often do the seeming impossible when faced with sudden mortality. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of Jonson's epigram from the Shakespeare First Folio from *Seven Seats to the Moon* (259).

J's father identifies the keys to the cypher, the numbers 2 and 9, which add up to 11, based on Jonson's initials under the poem, and asks J to count the feet in



"Just where do you see this—uh—cipher, Father?" J asked gently.

"You know what a poetic foot is? Here. Slash those lines into feet. Four to a line. Here. I've done it."

J looked at the paper on which his father had done it.

This Fig / ure that / thou here / seest put, /
It was / for gen / tle Shake / speare cut; /
Wherein / the Gra / ver had / a strife /
With Nat / ure, to / out-doo / the life; /
O, could / he but / have drawne / his wit /
As well / in brasse, / as he / hath hit /
His face; / the Print / would then / surpasse /
All, that / was e / ver writ / in brasse. /
But, since / he can / not, Read /er, looke /
Not on / his Pict / ure, but / his Booke.
B. I.

SEVEN SEATS TO THE MOON

"Now," said his father, pointing to the signature, "*B* is the second letter in the alphabet. *I* and *J* (in those times interchangeable) make the ninth letter. Nine and two add up to eleven, you will agree?

"So count to the eleventh foot. Extract it. From that, count to the ninth foot following. Extract it. Count eleven more. Then nine. It is not," hs father mourned, "to be attacked as an improper cipher. Reason tells me so."

J did what he had been told to do and read off the result. "*Ver had his wit, Ver writ his Booke.* Well, well," J was impressed.

Figure 2: *Seven Seats to the Moon*, pp. 295–96 used under fair use and by permission of the estate of Charlotte Armstrong.

the Jonson poem to the eleventh foot, "Ver had" then to the 9th, "his wit," then 11th again, "Ver writ," and then 9th, "his booke." So, it says, "Ver had his wit; Ver writ his booke" (Armstrong 295–6).[5] The father asserts correctly that it is a logically sound encryption. In this encryption, Jonson reveals that Edward de Vere (Ver) may be the true author of the Shakespeare works published in the First Folio. Armstrong's revelation shows that she was aware of de Vere's claim. If this is her own discovery and decryption, as we believe, she has made an important contribution to supporting the Oxfordian claim.

Our research questions about the decryption and our work at Boston University concerned whether the solution was original to Armstrong. In the novel, the decoded message was described as an unwelcome, even unbelievable, but clearly valid encryption. J's father, a fictional historian, perhaps standing in for Armstrong herself, had discovered it while he was writing a book on the period. Due to time constraints on our research, we have not yet discovered Armstrong's Shakespeare authorship research notes in detail, which do not seem to be present in the Gotlieb archive. We

examined many of the notebooks, which she used to plan her novels, her correspondence with her editors, and other artifacts from her daily life and writing career. The boxes that were thought to hold the materials of her last years did not include a notebook for *Seven Seats to the Moon*. However, the archival collection's arrangement is not strictly chronological, and not all documents are labeled or identified clearly in the inventory. However, we were able to examine the first hand-annotated typescript draft for *Seven Seats*, and a large portion (eight boxes) of her lifetime papers, including letters, drafts, and her many individual notebooks in which she made detailed notes, charts and encoded formulas for many of her twenty-nine novels.

Armstrong's life story, as reflected by Rick Cypert's biography, the biography she wrote of her father, Frank Hall Armstrong (1877–1955), and her papers in the Gotlieb archive, show the daughter of a mining engineer and inventor, with an active and precociously creative analytical mind. We found that she was familiar with symbolic logic and fascinated with puzzles, codes and cyphers. She wrote her first play at age ten. Her parents had provided Charlotte and her siblings books suitable for precocious children, including *Tales from Shakespeare, Robinson Crusoe* and the Sherlock Holmes stories.[6] Her father was responsible for building and maintaining the machinery of a Michigan Upper Peninsula iron mine. Charlotte shared her father's delight in math, problem solving and puzzle-making from an early age. He quizzed her and her sister often to challenge them. She graduated from her Vulcan, Michigan, high school at sixteen, and attended community college, then the University of Wisconsin, and finally transferred to Barnard College of Columbia University, from which she graduated with an AB in English Literature in 1925.

Charlotte Armstrong clearly had a strong interest in Shakespeare, demonstrated by her many successful Shakespeare-themed novels. She began her career as a playwright for Broadway, but had limited success, so she switched to fiction. In her papers are early handwritten notes in a vintage 1930s composition notebook for what seems have been an ambitious, but unrealized plan for a historical Elizabethan novel. It would have featured an actor protagonist who begins as a Paul's boy (a member of the Elizabethan boys' acting troupe associated with St. Paul's), later goes to Cambridge, and then finds himself dazzled by Queen Elizabeth as a Lord Chamberlain's Men actor. Armstrong's protagonist was to then help expose the deadly Dr. Lopez plot. The Earl of Oxford was listed in the detailed character list for the project, but the character roles seem to have never been fleshed out.[7] However, we can see that she was aware of Oxford's existence from early in her career.

In addition to the published novels, the many examples of notes, analytical heuristics, plot and thematic outlines, essays and other writings clearly demonstrate her critical thinking skills that allowed her to write her bestselling mystery and suspense novels, as well as the prerequisite skepticism of a Shakespeare authorship researcher. In an early unpublished essay titled "Conversation Pieces,"[8] Armstrong criticizes the superficiality of social conversation and clichéd interpretation of literary and political texts, analyzing misinterpretations of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Emerson's 1862 essay, *"American Civilization*," in which he refers to "hitching your wagon to a star," the "Out, out" speech from *Macbeth*, and Lear's lamentation upon the death of Cordelia, concluding,

> I must say I resent furiously this distortion [of meaning/interpretation in literature]. I think it's a shame that a man lies in his grave and we go around assuming carelessly that he said and meant exactly [CA's underlining] what he was arguing against. I wonder how many distortions and misunderstandings are keeping us from some wisdom we might have tucked into our private minds and found useful?[9]

It is clear from her novels, notebooks (some with diary-like entries), correspondence, and the thought process that engendered them, that for Armstrong, being understood, particularly with regard to ethical concerns, was a priority in her writerly life. She was also concerned with misinterpretations and ensuing myths in literature, which apparently extended to researching the authorship question.

We found that Armstrong carefully copied out Jonson's First Folio epigram in holograph (handwritten) form on two separate leaves included with the otherwise typewritten manuscript of *Seven Seats*, one showing the meter in two lines and the other for including the whole poem. The metrical notation she wrote out indicates that she was analyzing the meter herself, which is integral to the decryption (see fig. 3, p. 18).

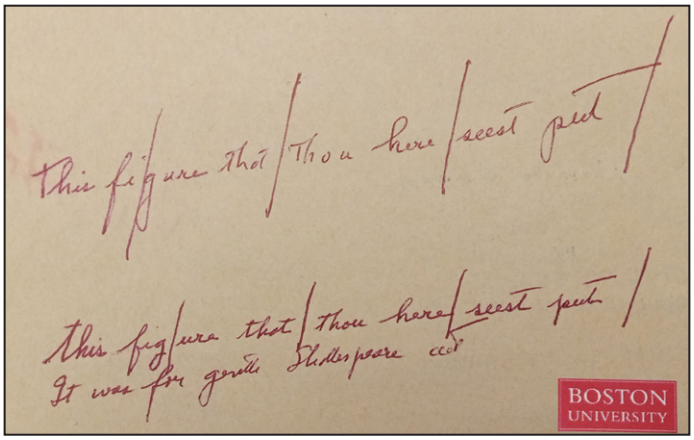


Figure 3: Armstrong's handwritten metrical analysis of Jonson's First Folio epigram.

That Armstrong had herself solved Jonson's cryptographic puzzle, or deemed it important enough to include it in what would be her last novel, is highly characteristic based on her interactions with her father as described in the biography she wrote of him. This was not the genre of puzzle her engineer father would have created, as he was a math and machine whiz who was very articulate, but not a literary type. But he nurtured his daughter's analytical mind. As she said in the biography, "Rhetoric and other cultural subjects were not for him, he thought."[10] But he valued the Arts, and saw that his daughters had literature to read, including Shakespeare. Armstrong's solution to Jonson's poem is the same kind of analytical discovery that would have pleased him. As the title indicates, the novel is organized around the number seven (and takes place in one week), so it is rich in other examples numerical symbolism. The character in *Seven Seats* who has discovered the solution is the protagonist J's dying father who wants to pass on his historical discovery and his analytical gifts to his children.

Armstrong's strong encryption skills are further evidenced by the fact that she devised and published at least one original formal double acrostic in a serial fan puzzle collection from Simon and Schuster in 1961. Double acrostic puzzles are complex for the solver, involving discovering and unscrambling a coded message after solving dozens of traditional crossword puzzle clues and scrambling letters from those solutions; double acrostics qualify as formal encryptions. Not only could Armstrong solve such complex puzzles, but she was also able to create and publish this elegant double acrostic with its own encoded literary

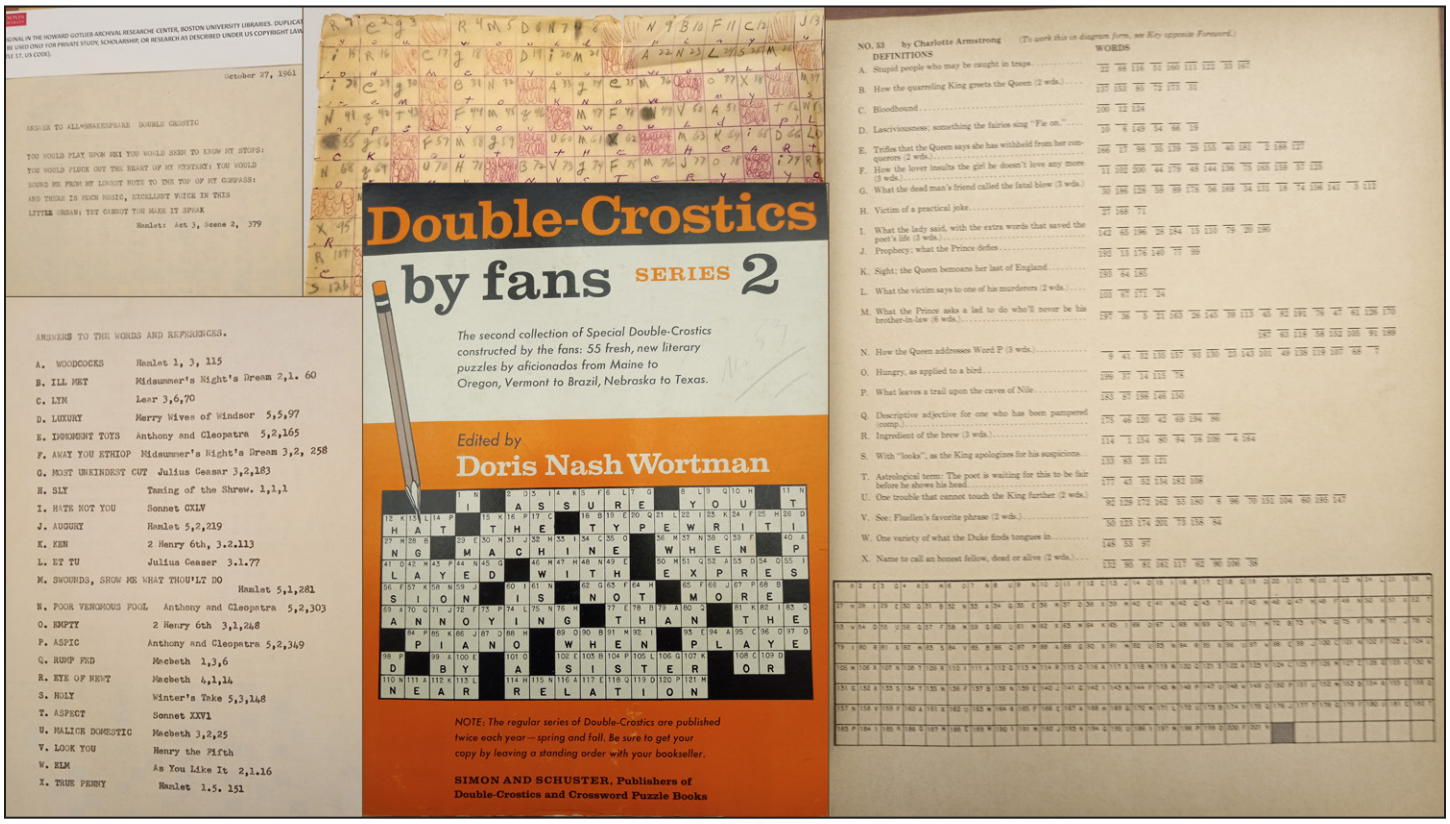
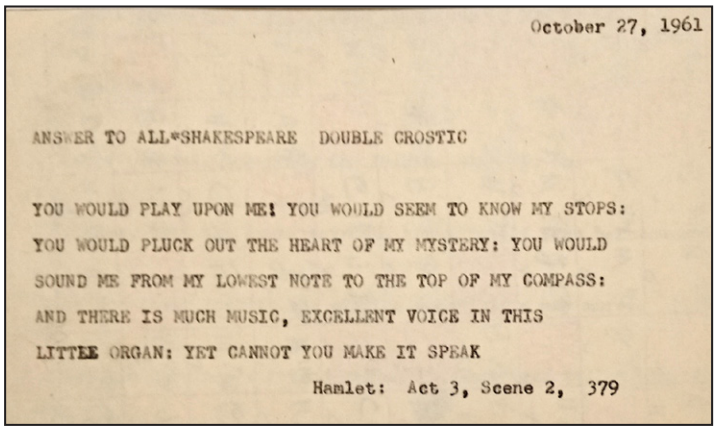


Figure 4: Montage of Armstrong's Double Acrostic drafts published in the Simon and Schuster fan puzzle book.

message. Her published acrostic draws its clues from Shakespeare's plays. She calls it the "All-Shakespeare Double Acrostic."

The solution to her published literary double acrostic also may point to her interest in the identity of the true author of the Shakespeare works. Here we must realize that Armstrong's choice of quotation would be the focus for her entire coding effort, which was generally a literary passage that would impress the clever double acrostic solvers. She chose a not-often-cited speech by Hamlet about his autonomy and identity from Act III, scene 2. Prince Hamlet accuses the spying would-be assassins, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, of "playing him," just after his own composition, the mousetrap play-within-a-play, has snapped (in Hamlet's mind), revealing King Claudius's guilt in murdering his father. Figure 5 shows Armstrong's draft of her solution quotation.

Since, in the scene, Guildenstern refuses Hamlet's inducement to play a "recorder," one of the players' wind instruments, it is ironic, in that his charge is to observe and report Hamlet's actions. The recorder as prop provides some dark comic relief after the tension of the mousetrap scene, with puns linking the author's poetic music to covert surveillance and deception as Hamlet personifies himself as a "played instrument." He contrasts Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's outward reluctance "to play [have fun or make music]" with his suspicions about their secret mission to deceive him and to eventually convey him to his death. By choosing this quotation for her puzzle, Armstrong demonstrates her sensitivity to the author's "mystery," that the conflicted author may have covertly given voice to his own soul in *Hamlet*. We also can see her awareness that there were those who would destroy or at least kidnap his authorial voice.



October 27, 1961

ANSWER TO ALL*SHAKESPEARE DOUBLE CROSTIC

YOU WOULD PLAY UPON ME! YOU WOULD SEEM TO KNOW MY STOPS:
YOU WOULD PLUCK OUT THE HEART OF MY MYSTERY: YOU WOULD
SOUND ME FROM MY LOWEST NOTE TO THE TOP OF MY COMPASS:
AND THERE IS MUCH MUSIC, EXCELLENT VOICE IN THIS
LITTLE ORGAN: YET CANNOT YOU MAKE IT SPEAK

Hamlet: Act 3, Scene 2, 379

Fig. 5: The quotation from *Hamlet*, solution to her double acrostic from her typescript draft for the puzzle published by Simon and Schuster.

You would play upon me! You would seem to know my stops:
You would pluck out the heart of my mystery: You would
sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass:
And there is much music, excellent voice in this
little organ: yet cannot you make it speak [?] (my addition)
[Transcribed by me; Armstrong's punctuation]

Armstrong also showed her knowledge of and skill in creating her own legitimate complex encryptions like Jonson's of the FF epitaph in her fiction—in two short stories, "The Cool One" and "The Ring in the Fish," both published alongside other great writers in the popular mystery and suspense magazines. "The Cool One" (published 1967) was about a kidnapped grandmother who communicates her location in code to her grandson using the telephone's numbers and associated letters as a key, thus enabling the police to rescue her. Her character, the wily grandmother, felt that the savvy grandson would be more likely to understand the code associated with the telephone than his parents would.

I wondered how she came to be so intrigued with cyphers, and it turns out she was living New York City during World War II, working as an advertisement writer for *The New York Times*. I posit that she may have been just the sort of person who could have been secretly recruited by the war effort to be trained, or even to work, in coding and encryption. Her notebooks in the Gotlieb archive show that she used letter and number codes regularly in her everyday life to record and plan her family's activities as well as to map out the sophisticated themes, plots and character profiles in her novels. The code in "The Cool One" fits Armstrong's predisposition for using alphanumeric codes to drive her acclaimed suspense plots. As in *Seven Seats*, we see her desire to cast esoteric information as sufficiently important to be passed down in her fictional families from the eldest to the youngest generations, in this case using electronic communications technology. The dark Cold War era of the fifties and sixties was a time when there was a great divide between generations, and a sense that the wisdom of the past might be lost or passed on to the wrong persons because of

technological, political and cultural turmoil. To her highly analytical mind, in a world of surveillance and doomsday threats, information needed to be transmitted ethically to the good guys and trusted family members.

Armstrong's earlier 1959 short story, "The Ring and the Fish," with an accompanying postscript, presents a puzzle for readers based on a different aspect of typography, the features of printed, or in this case, engraved capital letters. A young wife named Sally finds a diamond solitaire ring inside a fish caught by her husband. It has four capital letters engraved inside the band, "W" or "M" depending on the angle, and an "O," and two other letters. The inscription is the same both right side up and upside down. Sally wants to keep the cryptically engraved diamond ring, but her honest husband decides they must advertise to try to find the owner, mentioning only two of the letters, asking the owner to identify the other two. A pair of grifters answer the advertisement, visit Sally, and attempt to identify the two unknown letters, thinking they must be "H," "I," or "X," but Sally tells them this is wrong, and they leave. Sally calls the police, and when the grifters return to attempt to bully her to steal the ring, they are arrested. The story ends with Sally having successfully repelled the fraud. But a postscript asks readers to spot the error in the typography premise, and the answer/solution is included separately in the middle of the *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in which the story was published. The answer adds three more letters that can be read the same upside down especially in a tiny, engraved form, "N," "S" and "Z." Creating such a puzzle requires curiosity about how written messages can be interpreted from different perspectives, a staple skill or aspect of cryptography. Any reader can experience the variety of this kind of cryptographic literacy and curiosity that can be found in other examples in Armstrong's work.

In her plot for *Seven Seats*, Charlotte Armstrong both shared her knowledge of encryption and linked that knowledge to that of Ben Jonson's hidden Shakespeare authorship revelation. Whether or not it is her discovery, the solution is a breakthrough that she shared in one of her final works of fiction, suggesting that she felt strongly, like her character J's father, that what she had discovered, Jonson's ingenious encryption revealing de Vere as Shakespeare, needed to be passed on to future generations. We know from her son's account that she researched Shakespeare's authorship, but at this moment her other authorship work or activities remain mostly a mystery, perhaps due to her desire to preserve her substantial literary reputation as a popular and best-selling novelist and writer for Hollywood. Perhaps those who were familiar with her circles in Glendale, California, might know something. This was perhaps one of the parting salvos of her long, successful literary career, preserving her discovery in her art form for prosperity, if the decryption was indeed hers, and it seems that it clearly was.

Author's Note: We would like to thank Jane Parr of the Howard Gotlieb Center for Archival Research and Cheryl Eagan-Donovan for their help with this research. Also, this would not have been possible without the help of Roger Stritmatter, as the two of us examined the several boxes of Armstrong's papers.

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———. "Ver had His Wit": The Oracle of the Bottle in Ben Jonson's 1623 'To the Reader' Epigram." *South Atlantic Review*, vol 89, no. 4, Winter 2024, 118-154. *Gale Literature Resource Center*.

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2. Stritmatter, Roger. "Ver had His Wit: The Oracle of the Bottle in Ben Jonson's 1623 'To the Reader' Epigram." *South Atlantic Review*, Vol 89, no. 4, Winter 2024, 118–154, Gale Literature Resource Center.
3. Lewi, Jerry. "A Son's Remembrance." *Charlotte Armstrong*, charlottearmstrong.org, 2023, https://charlottearmstrong.org/about.
4. Stritmatter, Roger. "Through a Glass Darkly: Elvish Numbers in Ben Jonson's 1623 First Folio Poems." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2024, 116–141, Gale Literature Resource Center. Accessed Aug. 5, 2024.
5. In addition to Armstrong's cypher, to account more fully for the twos, we posit that the dualities are indicated as well in that each part of the message is two syllables, and there are two duo-iambic sentences.
6. Cypert, Rick. *The Virtue of Suspense: The Life and Works of Charlotte Armstrong*. Susquehanna UP, 2008, 37.
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8. "Conversation Pieces," unpublished essay in typewritten ms, *Papers of Charlotte Armstrong*, Box 27, Envelope marked "Essays." Gotlieb Center for Archival Research, Boston University.
9. "Conversation Pieces," 8.
10. Armstrong, Charlotte. *I Knew a Fellow Who Was Six Feet High: The Life of Frank Hall Armstrong*. Jake Menghini Museum, Norway, MI. Kindle Edition, 76.

Figures 3–5 from the Charlotte Armstrong papers appear courtesy of the Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University.

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Thomas Middleton—An Ever Reader and Writer

by Bruce Johnston

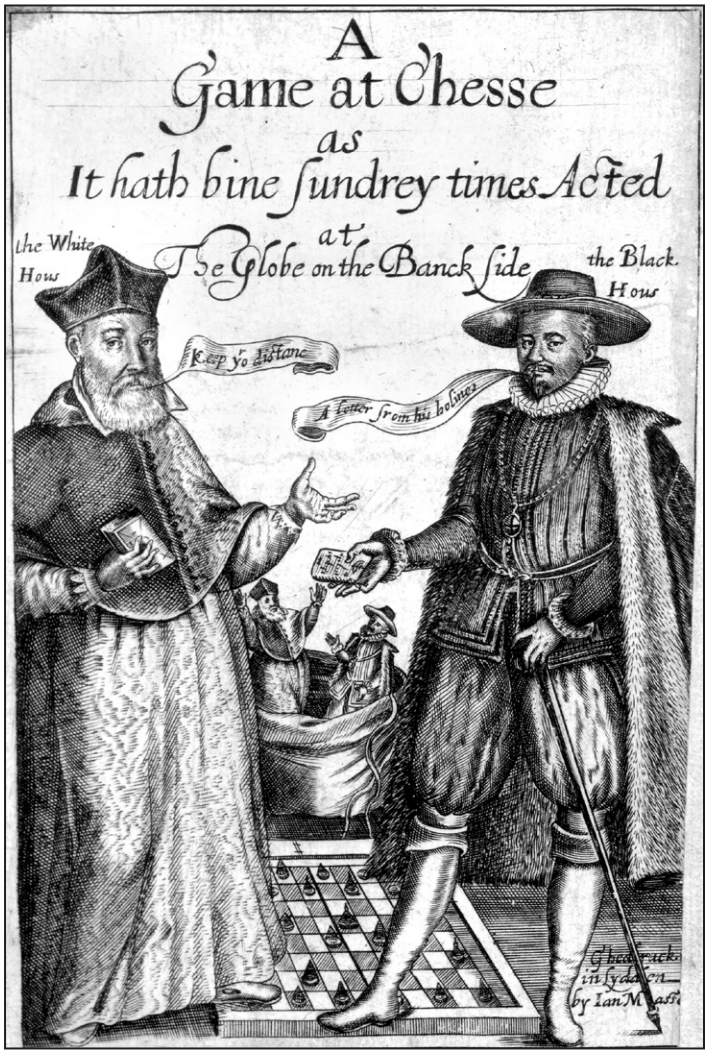
In Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, London's Globe stage became a chessboard where the King's actors were chess pieces and topical persons. Protestant England was virtuous (White) while Catholic Spain was duplicitous (Black). Overlapping plots unfolded among two chess groups: the ruling powers (Kings James and Felipe, Prince Charles, Spanish Ambassador Gondomar, etc.) and pawns (whose identities orthodox scholars still debate). The intertwined topics in the play include religion, geopolitics, history, the failed Spanish marriage and chess, while Middleton's stagecraft contained mockery, satire, topicality, metaphor, and allegory.[1]

A Game at Chess played for nine consecutive business days in August 1624 and set Globe theater records for estimated attendance (over 25,000) and revenue (1,500 pounds). The play survives in nine text editions—six manuscripts and three quartos.[2] This essay shows how Middleton crafted two English *Chess* pawns to evoke Queen Elizabeth and Edward de Vere as the patron Monarch muse and her engaged author whose chronicles of English and Tudor legacy and literature appear in the 1623 First Folio.

Middleton Revered Oxford

Orthodox scholars liken Middleton's writings to Aristophanes, Greene, Nashe[3] and Shakespeare. Abundant in Middleton's canon[4] is evidence that he learned, admired and advanced Edward de Vere's values, ideas and stylistics. Middleton shared Oxford's love of music and lyrics, mixed-genre compositions and bloody endings. In 1600 at age 20, Middleton's dark 665-line *Ghost of Lucrece* was derivative of de Vere's 1594 poem *Rape of Lucrece.*[5] With its alliteration, emphases on "eyes" and sight derivatives, apostrophe, and anaphora, *Ghost of Lucrece* is a visceral homage and complement to de Vere's famous rhyme-royal narrative.[6]

In *A Game at Chess* the first character to speak is the long-dead Jesuit founder Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). An early Oxford presence is seeded by Ignatius in the Induction—"ever," "never," "every," "truth" and "honour" are de Vere fingerprints and Ignatius readily confesses to being a calculating, Machiavellian autocrat.[7]



Title page of *A Game At Chess* by Thomas Middleton, from his Collected Works, Wikimedia Commons.

The Virgin White Queen's Pawn (WQP)

The role of the Virgin White Queen's Pawn is pivotal. Her identity bewilders orthodox scholars,[8] but step outside the Stratfordian silo and WQP's mysteries clarify. A ten-line *Chess* "Prologue" juxtaposes "**virtue**'s foes"[9] and the "**fairest jewel**." The former is Spain, the latter is likely the Virgin WQP. The WQP is the first and last English chess piece to appear and to speak. The character exudes constancy, truth, Anglicanism and dominates the Pawn plots, and she has more verse lines than any other Englander. WQP also delivers the play's *Epilogue*, an honor generally denoting the highest-ranking or most highly esteemed character in historical plays.

In the opening three lines of *Chess* (I.1.1–3 H-H) a female Jesuit pawn describes the Virgin WQP (emphases added):

> I *ne'er* see that face but that my pity rises;
> When I behold so clear a *masterpiece*
> Of *heaven's art***,** wrought out of *dust and ashes*

Heaven? Dust and ashes? Like the Jesuit founder Ignatius, the WQP is deceased. Her often-cited virginity correctly reminds us of the Virgin Queen Elizabeth.

"Truth" is the third word spoken by the Virgin WQP. As a theme "Truth" branded Edward de Vere from cradle to grave: first by his de Vere family motto ('*Nothing is Truer Than Truth*' or '*Nothing Truer than Vere*') and then decades thereafter—including the self-benediction in Oxford's last extant letter: "*[T]ruth is truth though never so old*, *and time cannot make false which once was true*" (Fowler, 771).

In WQP's sixty-eight-line Act I exchanges with Jesuit pawns: "**ever**" words appear three times, "**virtue**" twice, and "re**vere**nd," "**perfection**" and "re**vere**nce" once each. Thus, *Chess* readers see titular words from Gervase Markham's 1624 *Honour in His Perfection* along with various de Vere evocations.[10] More allusive Oxford clues appear at (III.1.57–69 H-H). Spoken by Gondomar to a Ben Jonson character-composite, readers find references to: "truth," four masked "ver" words, "honour," "shook," "spears" and stylistics evoking Oxford.[11]

Queen Elizabeth proudly claimed to have "married" England. Oxford was royally "engaged" to Elizabeth by a 1586 Privy Seal Warrant Dormant (Cutting, 133–150). That document conveyed a quarterly 250-pound annuity for Oxford. *Ex post* and metaphorically, that annuity can now be construed as a quasi-jointure that had totaled 18,000 pounds by de Vere's death. During her lifetime Oxford defended Elizabeth's Anglican religion from both Catholic and Puritan assaults.[12] Oxford's poetry and 1623 Folio of plays preserved England's and Elizabeth's Tudor literature and history. These were the gifts, the resilient rewards of her 1586 warrant.

The Gelded White Bishop's Pawn (WBP)

The Virgin WQP (at I.1.190–1 H-H) speaks the words "**virtue**", "**ever**" and "re**vere**nce" just before the first entrance of the **W**hite **B**ishop's **P**awn. Talking mostly in "asides" to the audience, the WBP admires WQP's *constancy*—the motto of Eliza being "Always the Same." In the opening *Chess* moves the WQP is fatally endangered but quickly shielded and saved by WBP.[13]

The White Bishop's Pawn is "gelded." The Catholic chess pawn that "gelded" WBP is a servant/slave of Spanish Ambassador Gondomar—a duplicitous, Machiavellian, anal-fistula-ridden villain that Middleton ridiculed to delighted howls from Globe audiences. At I.1.205 H-H, by labeling both the gelded and gelding pawns as "inhuman," Middleton signaled that both characters were dead. Orthodox scholars aver that Middleton's "*gelding*" was a metaphor for *censorship* (T&L *Companion*, 182–94). It is proposed here that the silenced, censored, heroic, Protestant WBP is Edward de Vere.

In his lifetime de Vere purposely self-censored—publishing only with pseudonyms or allonyms due to his own (and perhaps Elizabeth's) aristocratic "stigma of print." But in 1594 Oxford was scandalized when *Willobie His Avisa* poisoned his invented *Venus & Adonis* and *Lucrece* pseudonym of "William Shakespeare." The allegorical *Avisa* poem disgraced both the Earls of Southampton and Oxford—and whoever was "Avisa." The 1609 publication of *Shake-speare's Sonnets* was another ambush likely intended to defame Southampton, the deceased Edward de Vere and his son Henry de Vere. Agents of crypto-Catholic Henry Howard might have caused one or both of those *Avisa* and *Sonnets* shamings,[14] while de Vere's post-1623 and continuing censorship and silence was orchestrated by his own "Incomparable" aristocrat relatives.[15]

Another Elizabeth-Oxford connection appears at III.3.57–60 H-H. In four verse lines the Virgin WQP replies oddly to the surrounding insipid conversation flow. But her turgid aphorism is a poignant de Vere-Elizabeth lament:

> What certainty is in our bloods or state?
> What we still write is blotted out by fate,
> Our wills are like a cause that is law-tossed;
> What one court orders, is by another crossed.

Both Elizabeth and Oxford were obsessed with their bloodlines, propagation and legacies. Both likely would have been appalled by: (1) Robert Cecil's secret negotiations to anoint James as England's next

monarch; (2) the Cecil/James' resurrection and elevation of odious crypto-Catholic Henry Howard; (3) the rash Prince Charles-Buckingham 1623 farce in Madrid; and (4) Spanish match manipulations by Gondomar and Rome and the humiliating submissions thereto by King James and Prince Charles. As to blotted-out writings and "[W]ills," Oxford expressly foresaw his tragic fate and silence in *Shake-speare's Sonnets*.

Near the *Chess* endgame (and having saved Elizabeth after her dangerous first entrance) the gelded White Bishop's Pawn/Oxford is fatally threatened but saved by White Queen's Pawn/Elizabeth (V.3.112–17 H-H). She "takes" (terminates) the murderous gelding pawn. Those two *Chess* rescues meld to symbolize the congruence of Queen Elizabeth, Oxford and the First Folio. In her ten-line *Chess* "Epilogue" WQP cites "truth" and a contraction of "ever." Truth ever! Elizabeth ultimately funded de Vere's canon for herself and England. The Virgin Queen with her 1586 annuity enabled "Debtor" Oxford as canon author to honor his Monarch, muse, patron and royal "Creditor" Elizabeth.[16]

Conclusion

Text analyses above show how Thomas Middleton's choices of history, core values, allegory and words in *A Game at Chess* echo Edward de Vere's themes, poetry, plays, letters and life.[17] Middleton thereby signals the mutual triumphs of Lord Oxford, his royal muse and patron Elizabeth, and their Folio offspring. Queen Elizabeth inspired and incentivized, Oxford wrote, and the Herberts delivered their Folio issue. Each executed the axiom of editing the past to control the present and shape the future but such thoughts transcend the ken of Stratfordia. As De Vere Society founder Charles Beauclerk concluded in *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom* (16): "…if you get Shakespeare wrong, you get the Elizabethan age wrong—its literature, its culture, its politics."

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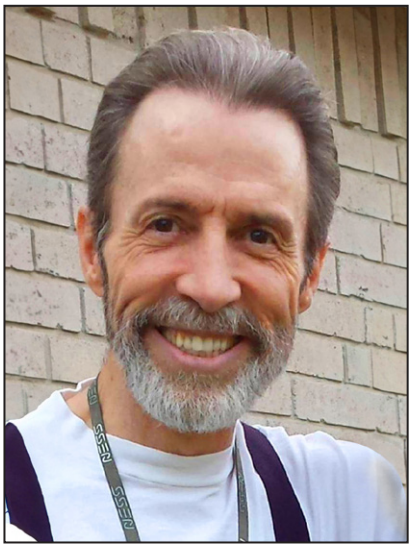
Endnotes

1. See *Enigma*, *Brief Chronicles VIII.* This essay builds on the formidable prior scholarship of Peter Dickson, Roger Stritmatter, Shelly Maycock, Katherine Chiljan, Heidi Jannsch and Gabriel Ready on the First Folio, the Spanish marriage, 1624 and related impacts on Middleton's *Game at Chess*.
2. Extant texts reflect iterations where characters, lines, scenes and plots were expanded, cut or moved in the months before and during *Chess* performances. Three Middleton quartos were printed later. Modern editors picked and stitched from those sources (and *Chess* attendee comments) to create annotated, emended scholarly texts.
3. Middleton wrote a prologue and epilogue for a 1602 revival of Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (T&L *Works*, 37). Middleton's "Penniless Parliament of Threadbare Poets" published 1601 (T&L *Works*, 1999–2011) entered Nashe's domain.
4. See the 2,016-page *Thomas Middleton, The Collected Works*, gen. eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino and their 1,183-page *Thomas Middleton And Early Modern Textual Culture*, *A Companion*, both published in 2007; and the *Revels* 1996 *Chess* text (223 pages) edited by T.H. Howard-Hill.
5. *Ghost of Lucrece* was printed by Valentine Simmes in 1600. Oxford had a printing history with Simmes (Brazil, 107) so perhaps Oxford helped Middleton get his *Ghost of Lucrece* printed.
6. See the October 2023 *De Vere Society Newsletter*, pages 32–39.
7. Ignatius's *Induction* confessions echo Oxford's *Richard III*'s autocracy and brutality: "Pish. I would rule myself, not observe rule…;" "I would do anything to rule alone…;" and "If I had stood so nigh I would have cut/That Bishop's throat…."
8. T&L's editor opined that information ambiguities and overloads in *Chess* made its allegories and intent difficult to unravel (*Works*, 1825–29). Yet independent scholar Christopher Haile in 2019 concluded that: the WQP represented the First Folio; the Fat Bishop of Spalato was a composite character delivering a caustic parody of Ben Jonson; William Herbert collected allegorical artwork illuminating *Chess* and furthermore was the court facilitator behind Middleton and *Chess*.
9. England faced Spanish/Catholic dangers from: the bloody reign of Mary Tudor (1553–58), a Papal Bull in 1570, the Ridolfi plot in 1571, the Babington plot in 1585, the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the Gunpowder plot in 1605.
10. Middleton, Ben Jonson and Gervase Markham each risked much, armed with their keen literary skills, to plant authorship clues that contradicted the Stratford narrative in the 1623 First Folio. Professor Stritmatter (*Enigma*, 303) notes the synchronicity of Middleton's and Markham's 1624 texts. See Markham essays at *Enigma* pages 289, 297 and 307. Both authors favored England's Protestant, anti-Spanish-match faction led by the "Incomparable Paire" of Herbert brothers, two Herbert cousins, "Two Noble Henries" (Southampton and Oxford's son) and two de Vere cousins. Their 1624 texts suggest that both Middleton and Markham knew of the witty 1609 *Troilus and Cressida "*Epistle" and tactically infused "ever," "never" and other de Vere clues. For that "Epistle" see: https://digitalcollections.folger.edu/img16638.
11. Joining the text at (II.2.21–2 H-H) and (III.1.47 H–H), Middleton fantasized, speculated (or perhaps revealed) that "Fat Bishop" Ben Jonson in November 1623 purposely set fire to the "*True Originall*" thirty-six de Vere manuscripts and edited Quarto play "books" underlying the First Folio publication. After Middleton's flaying of Ben Jonson in *Chess*, the embittered playwright countered that Middleton's play was suited for toilet paper. See also the Fireside talk by Gabriel Ready at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beWj4U9Q_z8.
12. Daniel Wright (235) concluded that Oxford's plays brought "Protestant theology to the Elizabethan stage." Oxford and his acolytes also opposed "Martin Mar-Prelate" and other Puritan attacks on Anglicanism.
13. See T&L *Works* (1838–9), the first chessboard illustration.
14. See Charlton Ogburn, chapter 32 for the fiery animus of the Howard-Arundel-Knyvet-Vavasour circle aimed at Oxford.
15. William and Philip Herbert buried Edward de Vere's canon authorship and reattributed it to "William Shakespeare" in the 1623 First Folio. See *Enigma* at pages 151–177 for details of how and why.
16. See Gabriel Ready (*Enigma*, 67–71) for his discoveries of centralized gift/reward and creditor/debtor bases for the First Folio. It is also possible that de Vere, perhaps without Elizabeth's knowledge, before or after 1586, underwrote or subsidized some publications of fellow authors, acolytes and allonyms (e.g., Lyly, Marlowe, Greene, Nashe, Lodge and Peele). In any event the structural *top-down* literature patronage of Elizabeth and the Herberts fundamentally contradicts the orthodox narratives (e.g., from Emma Smith, Chris Laoutaris, etc.) of *bottom-up*, commoner text creations and commercial "syndicate" financing by collaborating, humanist actors, printers and booksellers.
17. Middleton's 1613 *Triumph of Truth* created "an explicit system of correspondences that enables the poet to connect moral ideas and historical persons…" (T&L *Works*, 966). So did Oxford. So did Middleton's *Chess*.

2025 Research Grants Announced

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Research Grant Selection Committee has announced this year's grant recipients to be Cheryl Eagan-Donovan and Christopher Paul. The grants are awarded to "support and promote new research about Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford: his biography, his literary life, and the evidence that he is the true author of the Shakespeare canon."

Cheryl Eagan-Donovan, MFA



Christopher Paul

Cheryl Eagan-Donovan, MFA, is a writer, director, and producer, whose documentary *Nothing Is Truer than Truth* is now available on Amazon Prime in the U.S. and Canada and has been released in Europe and the rest of the world as *Shakespeare: The Man Behind the Name*. She was honored as the Oxfordian of the Year in 2019 and was a recipient of SOF Research Grants in 2021 and 2024. This year she has been awarded a grant of $2,600. Cheryl comments:

> I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the SOF Research Grant Committee. I am honored to receive this grant, and I am very excited about the opportunity to continue my research in 2025 with the support of the SOF.
>
> My research will focus on the search for evidence that manuscripts were shared by the writers in Oxford's literary circle and other contemporary poets and playwrights, and further evidence of Oxford's involvement in theatrical performances at Cambridge University, Oxford University, The Inns of Court, and at Blackfriars and the Curtain. As related to his work in theater, I will also examine music manuscripts at the British Library and Cambridge University. Regarding the development of theater in the Elizabethan age, I am interested in viewing any manuscripts that pertain to productions of plays at the university from 1558 through the 1570s, especially any records of the productions during Queen Elizabeth's 1564 visit including *Dido*, and other plays put on at Queens College in 1558 and 1559. At the Old Library at Queens College are books donated by Mildred Cooke Cecil, which will be of great interest to Oxfordians.
>
> I plan to publish articles on my research at Westminster Abbey and Oxford University later this year in collaboration with colleagues who have expertise in the relevant subject areas. I look forward to sharing my work with SOF members through the *Newsletter* and at future conferences. I am most grateful to the SOF for their very generous support and to my colleagues for their assistance.

Christopher Paul, a self-styled "scholar-adventurer," is an independent Oxfordian researcher whose articles, book reviews, and correspondence have appeared in *The English Historical Review*, *The Oxfordian*, *Brief Chronicles*, *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, and *The De Vere Society Newsletter*.

Paul was awarded $3,000 to fund his research on "Searching for Oxford-Shakespeare in Uncalendared Country." His investigation will take him back to Atlanta's Emory University Library, where he will pursue a detailed study of the "Uncalendared state papers foreign of Elizabeth I for the period May 1592-March 1603: Denmark, Flanders, France, Germany (Empire) and Hungary, Germany (states), Hamburg and Hanse towns, Holland, Italian states and Rome, Spain, Venice." Christopher states:

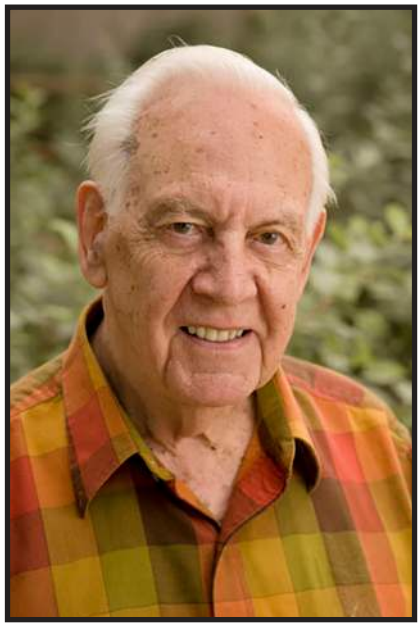
> This generous research grant from the SOF will enable me to return to the Woodruff Library at Emory University, which houses an abundant

collection of microfilmed archival manuscripts covering the early modern period. I carried out a good deal of research utilizing these archives when I lived in Atlanta. An advantage with much of that research was that the collections examined were accompanied by published "calendars" that served as guides to the order of the filmed material, the manuscript numbers, and abstracts of each letter or document.

This section of the *State Papers Foreign*, consisting of 31 microfilm reels, is of particular interest in that it has *never* been calendared; in essence, this material presents uncharted territory. Most of the papers are in the form of correspondence from emissaries, local governors and officials. They were addressed primarily (until his death) to Lord Burghley, to Queen Elizabeth, and to other government officials. Outgoing papers include instruction and commissions as well as letters which are interspersed with anti-government correspondence as well as letters between foreigners. It is not improbable that Edward de Vere could be mentioned among the myriad manuscripts in this untapped resource. The date range of May 1592–March 1603 is tantalizing, as it overlaps the period during which Oxfordians theorize de Vere was writing and revising the Shakespeare canon. This research, while painstaking since much of the material will be in a variety of foreign languages, could potentially lead to a discovery or discoveries of biographical importance about Oxford and, not inconceivably, his case for the Shakespeare authorship.

To learn more about the requirements and application process for the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Research Grant Program visit the SOF website.

In Memoriam: Peter A. Sturrock (1924-2024)



Oxfordian (and polymath) Peter Sturrock has died. The Stanford University Physics Department announced that "Sturrock, distinguished physicist and emeritus professor at Stanford University, passed away peacefully in his home, surrounded by his friends and family, on August 12, 2024, at the age of 100. A pioneering scientist, Sturrock was known for his profound contributions to the fields of astrophysics, plasma physics, and solar research."

Born in England in 1924, Sturrock began to study mathematics at Cambridge University in 1942, but interrupted his studies during World War II to help develop radar systems for the British government. After the war he resumed his studies, eventually earning a PhD in astrophysics.

In 1961 Sturrock was appointed a professor of applied physics at Stanford, a position he held until he retired in 1998; after retirement, he remained at Stanford as an emeritus professor of physics and applied physics. He was active in the American Astronomical Society, chairing its Plasma Physics Division and its Solar Physics Division.

In 1982 Sturrock became a founder of the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE), serving as its president from 1982 to 2001. According to its website, the SSE provides "a critical forum for sharing original research into conventional and unconventional topics. Subjects often cross mainstream boundaries yet may have profound implications for human knowledge and technology." Among the topics explored are ufology, "consciousness physics," and parapsychology.

The SSE's peer-reviewed quarterly *Journal of Scientific Exploration* devoted an entire issue to the Shakespeare Authorship Question. Its Summer 2023 issue contained articles by fifteen prominent Oxfordians.

Although Sturrock was not directly involved with that volume, he had long been interested in the SAQ. In 2013 he published a book, *AKA Shakespeare: A Scientific Approach to the Authorship Question*, in which four characters examined the SAQ. Sturrock gently introduced readers to the statistical concept of Bayesian analysis, a method for updating the probabilities of a given conclusion as new, independently derived data are applied to it. In connection with the book, Sturrock had created a website where readers could enter their own views on the SAQ into a Bayesian framework, upon which the website would calculate the reader's level of certainty.

The book was reviewed by Prof. Roger Stritmatter in the Spring 2014 issue of the *Newsletter*, who noted that "the Bayesian procedures [Sturrock] walks the reader through are, if nothing else, a powerful heuristic for assessing the cumulative weight of the circumstantial evidence for Oxford's authorship."

Stritmatter also interviewed Sturrock in the same issue of the *Newsletter*, in which Sturrock confessed that before writing the book he'd emailed five Shakespeare scholars in Stanford's English department, none of whom even replied. These and other "interactions with orthodox scholars made it clear that the Authorship Question is not simply a scholarly issue," Sturrock said. "It is just as much (perhaps even more) a political issue. I realized some time ago that a heresy comprises a proposition that is both a challenge to understanding and a challenge to power. To question the Authorship is a heresy! Heretics have never been treated kindly by the relevant establishment."

Sturrock also told Stritmatter that one of his goals was "to organize the analysis along the lines of the Bayesian procedure. Too much of the writing about the Authorship Question is loaded with words like *if, perhaps, presumably, no doubt*, etc. The Bayesian procedure replaces these weasel words with options that can be rated numerically. The resulting numbers can then be processed in such a way as to arrive at final probability estimates for whatever hypotheses one has decided to address."

Sturrock received the Vero Nihil Verius award at the 2014 Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference held at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon. Sturrock touched on the authorship again in a 2015 book, *Late Night Thoughts About Science*, and he was a Lifetime Member of the SOF.

Peter Sturrock's wife, Marilyn, predeceased him. He is survived by two children, three grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

A Remembrance of Peter Sturrock

I met with Peter several times on campus after his book *AKA Shakespeare: A Scientific Approach to the Authorship Question* came out. I had never heard of him before he published it (he was in the Physics department, and Stanford is so big, our paths never crossed) and didn't know another fellow Oxfordian was on campus. In April 2014, he planned to attend our Concordia conference but fell ill right before and couldn't travel to Portland. Dan Wright planned to present him with his Vero Nihil Verius award but couldn't do so, so I suggested that I take it back to Stanford and hand it to Peter from our society. Peter was very touched.

— Rima Greenhill