

Who Was James Joyce's Shakespeare?

by Gary Goldstein

As Vincent Cheng and other scholars have noted, James Joyce had a lifelong admiration for William Shakespeare, to whom Joyce compared himself through-out his life (Cheng 1). Indeed, this fascination led Joyce to incorporate into *Finnegans Wake* a thousand allusions to the person and works of his English rival as well as to the claimants of Shakespeare's crown.

I offer these prefatory remarks because Joyce left provocative evidence in *Ulysses* and *Wake* that, thoroughly examined, enables one to hear the echoes and see the shadows of the man who may be Joyce's Shakespeare.

The Testimony of Joyce's Ulysses

In Chapter 7 is a wonderful example of the wit that foreshadows the many Shakespearean allusions in Chapter 9.

Clamn dever, Lenehan said to Mr. O'Madden Burke. (U 137)

The original meaning of "damned clever" turns into an ingenious pun on Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford – "de Ver" – through the rhetorical devise of metathesis, which transposes sounds or letters in a word or phrase.

Two chapters later, at the start of the Shakespeare chapter in *Ulysses*, Joyce dismisses Francis Bacon with dispatch. "Good Bacon: gone musty" (U 195). He then has a librarian spur on the conversation by declaring: "I hope Mr. Dedalus will work out his theory for the enlightenment of the public" (U 196). Joyce proceeds to do this by listing the Shakespeare authorship speculations of George Bernard Shaw and Frank Harris (U 196), Walt Whitman (U 201) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (U 205). He then writes:

Gentle Will is being roughly handled, gentle Mr. Best said gently. Which will? gagged sweetly Buck Mulligan. (U 206)

Joyce has his characters continue questioning the traditional authorship of the Shakespeare plays.

When Rutlandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare or another poet of the same name in the comedy of errors wrote Hamlet . . . (U 208)

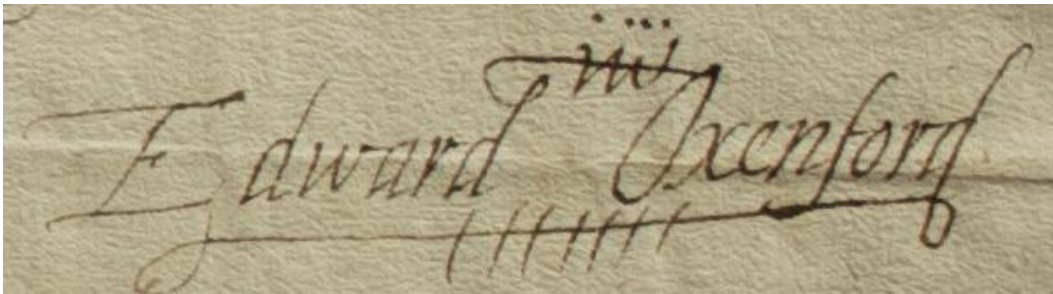
Joyce later has a character talk briefly about the theory that the Earl of Rutland had written the works of Shakespeare (U 214). Obviously exasperated with all the talk about Shakespeare's identity, someone exclaims:

I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief. (U 214)

Despite this ironic appeal to God or a nobleman, Joyce still hadn't closed the discussion on who wrote Shakespeare, for he issues a final comment on the matter at the end of the chapter.

Manner of Oxenford. (U 217)

The reference is to the 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), for Oxford had signed his poetry, both in manuscript and published form, as E.O., E. of Ox., and Earle of Oxenford. He also signed all his extant letters as Edward Oxenford (see below).



What makes Stephen Dedalus's comment unique is the manner in which Joyce positions the statement. Until this point, Joyce doesn't mention Oxford; when he does, he tums it into the conclusive comment on the authorship of Shakespeare's works. As if to emphasize this, Joyce highlights the final but unexpressed thought of Stephen Dedalus about Shakespeare by making it a three-word paragraph.

After Dedalus is led to silently draw a conclusion on the authorship question based on the preceding conversation, he chooses not to share it with his friends, although Joyce shares this conclusion with the readers of his novel.

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Here I watched the birds for augury. Aengus of the birds. They go, they come. Last night I flew. Easily flew. Men wondered. Street of harlots after. A cream-fruit melon he held to me. In. You will see. The wandering Jew, Buck Mulligan whispered with clown's awe. Did you see his eye? He looked upon you to lust after you. I fear thee, ancient mariner. O, Kinch, thou art in peril. Get thee a breech pad.

Manner of Oxenford. [emphasis added]

Day. Wheelbarrow seen over arch of bridge.

A dark back went before them. Step of a pard, down, out by the gateway, under portcullis barbs.

They followed. (U 217-8)

Joyce also highlights the paragraph's inference – that Shakespeare wrote in the Earl of Oxford's *manner*, or *manor* – by making it the only statement on Shakespeare in Ulysses not rebutted by another character, even in humor. Equally important, Joyce inserts the statement within the chapter on Shakespeare, a chapter written entirely in doubt about Shakespeare's identity. Earlier, Joyce has a character voice his concerns about that identity.

Certainly, John Eglinton mused, of all great men he is the most enigmatic. We know nothing but that he lived and suffered. Not even so much. Others abide our question. A shadow hangs over the rest. (U 194)

The tenor of the preceding paragraph, especially its last sentence, echoes Hamlet's dying words as well as a contemporary comment about the Earl of Oxford's life, connecting the English Bard with the chief claimant to his title.

At the conclusion of *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet prophesies that the new monarch will be Fortinbras, yet doesn't finish saying what the preceding events have prompted, thereby leaving behind a mystery. Thus, his dying words, “ – the rest is silence” (5.2.360). In commenting on this line in *Ulysses*, Joyce uses the word “shadow” probably because it represents the physical and outer equivalent of the ear's silence.

Indeed, Eglinton's remark – “A shadow hangs over the rest.” – directly echoes Dr. A.B. Grosart's published view of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford: “An unlifted shadow lies across his memory.”

Grosart's edition of the Earl of Oxford's poetry, the first such collection, was published in 1872 in the *Miscellanies of the Fuller Worthies' Library*, Volume 4. J. Thomas Looney included Grosart's assessment of Oxford in his book, *“Shakespeare” Identified in Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford*, published in England in 1920 (155). Since *Ulysses* was later printed in 1922, it's likely that Joyce had read Looney's book and was conversant with the theory that the Earl of Oxford had written the Shakespeare plays and poems under a pseudonym.

Two well-known contemporaries of Joyce, novelist John Galsworthy and Sigmund Freud, both agreed with Looney's hypothesis. Freud wrote: "The man of Stratford... seems to have nothing at all to justify his claim, whereas Oxford has almost everything" (Ogburn 146). Galsworthy handed out copies of Looney's book to friends, writing it up as "the best detective story I have ever read" (Ogburn 146). Such actions by Galsworthy, a contemporary and a literary peer of Joyce's, may have aroused the latter's curiosity to examine evidence in support of the hypothesis.

Such a proposition is borne out by the references to Oxford and Looney that Joyce incorporated into *Finnegans Wake*, a book published seventeen years after *Ulysses*.

Dreaming of Oxford in *Finnegans Wake*

Adaline Glasheen and other Joyce scholars have discovered that Joyce punned upon the names of Vere and Oxford in *Wake* at least half-a-dozen times, often combining allusions to Oxford and Shakespeare in his puns. The first allusion to Oxford also alludes to his father-in-law, William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's principal advisor for forty years, first as Principal Secretary of State (1558-1572), then as Lord Great Treasurer (1572-1598).

. . . cutting a great dash in a brandnew two guinea dress suit and a burled hogsford . . . (FW 182.26)

The pun refers to Sir William Cecil who, by virtue of marrying his daughter Anne to the 17th Earl of Oxford, was created Lord Burghley by the Queen only months before the wedding in 1571.

Within the context of Joyce's sentence, one's impression of the phrase "burled hogsford" is of a furled or closed-up umbrella. In fact, that visual pun corresponds to what transpired after Oxford became a ward of Cecil's when he was orphaned at the age of twelve. As Master of the Court of Wards, Cecil managed much of Oxford's lands while Oxford was his ward for nine years, until his twenty-first birthday. Cecil then compelled Oxford to marry his daughter, Anne, when Oxford attained his majority at age twenty-one. Burghley later purchased these estates after Oxford sold them to finance his social and political obligations at Court. Burghley even ordered Oxford to pay an exorbitant marriage fee at the age of forty, after his daughter Anne had died, leaving Oxford destitute. Indeed, the family of Cecil would eclipse that of the Vere's politically, socially and financially during the lifetimes of both men, due largely to the efforts of Queen Elizabeth's all-powerful Treasurer and Secretary of State.

This reading is confirmed by examining the other puns about Burghley in *Wake*, several of which refer specifically to him as a "bully."

Bullyclubber burgherly shut the rush in general . . . (FW 335.13)
 Bully hurley yet hardly hurley . . . (FW 511.24)

In other references to Oxford in *Wake*, Joyce abandons the Burghley connection and proceeds to praise Oxford's musical talents.

And he can cantabb as chipper as any oxon ever I mood with, a tiptoe singer!
 (FW 467.31)

De Vere had signed his poetry and letters in a variety of ways: E.O., E. Ox., and Edward Oxenford. Moreover, de Vere often was referred to in state documents as the Earl of Oxon. *Ever* is an obvious pun upon Edward de Vere, as it represents a phonetic trace of his name: E. Ver.

Joyce also alludes to the musical reputation of Oxford, to whom Elizabethan composer John Farmer dedicated two books of compositions. Farmer, a native of Ireland, was at times an employee of Oxford's, as well as Organist and Master of the Children's Choir of Dublin's Christ Church Cathedral. Farmer's second book was dedicated to Oxford in 1599 as follows:

Without flattery be it spoken, those that know your Lordship know that, using this science as a recreation, your Lordship have overgone most of them that make it a profession.

To the greatest composer of the Elizabethan era, William Byrd, Oxford conveyed the manor of Batayles for 31 years in 1574. Byrd, in turn, would compose "The Earl of Oxford's March" and set several poems by Oxford to music. Additional evidence of Oxford's musical interests is reflected in other musical compositions named in his honor, such as the "Earl of Oxford's Galliard."

The phrase "a tiptoe singer" may also refer to Grosart's comment on Oxford's poetry that Looney included in his book. "They [Oxford's poems] are not without touches of the true Singer . . ." (Looney 155). As this quote comes on the same page in Looney's book that contains Grosart's other comment about "an unlifted shadow" lying across Oxford's memory, it points to Joyce having read Looney's book.

Perhaps the most clear-cut and positive reference that Joyce makes to Oxford in *Wake*, and the entire Joycean canon, is the line:

. . . my dodear devere revered mainhirr was confined to guardroom...
 (FW 492.16)

The phrase represents a series of admiring puns on Oxford's name. In addition to "dear" and "revere" is the phrase "mainhirr," a multilingual pun on the Dutch and German expressions for "my dear sir" – *mijn beer* and *mein herr* – similar in

pronunciation and meaning but not spelling. The phrase also provides another pun on “dodear.” Moreover, playing on the German and Dutch with “main” offers up a final pun – my main gentleman – that broadens Joyce’s praise of de Vere even further.

The phrase “confined to guardroom” also is historically accurate, for de Vere was confined to the Tower of London in 1581 for several months after Queen Elizabeth uncovered his liaison with Anne Vavasor, one of her ladies in waiting, who had just born de Vere an illegitimate son, Sir Edward Vere (Ogburn 646).

Is Oxford being revered by James Joyce or by a character in *Wake*? Either way, it lauds him in a way that no other Shakespeare claimant was ever praised in Joyce’s works, including Bacon, Rutland, Southampton, and William Shakspere of Stratford.

Joyce also included in *Wake* two puns that refer to J. Thomas Looney, probably commenting on Looney’s situation after publication of his book, “*Shakespeare*” *Identified*, which came under sustained public attack, along with its author. Note the line, “Loonaced! Marterdyed!” (FW 492.5), which precedes the previous explicit allusion to Oxford by just 11 lines. Equally resonant is the line, “Loonely in me loneness” (FW 627.34).

As Joyce placed this statement on the next-to-last page of *Wake*, perhaps Joyce was comparing Looney’s experience with his own artistic situation vis-a-vis contemporary critics, in whom Joyce and his creative works aroused an intense and antagonistic response.

The preceding literary correspondences in *Ulysses* and *Wake* show that Joyce had extensive knowledge about Oxford which he chose to include in his two novels. It also shows that Joyce believed Shakespeare wrote in the Earl of Oxford’s manner. Moreover, Joyce made his reverence for Oxford explicit in a willfully obscure book, *Finnegans Wake*. Equally important, Joyce connects Oxford to Shakespeare in allusions in *Wake*. Finally, as both books were published seventeen years apart, the positive references to Oxford, spanning an entire generation of time, represent much more than an awareness of the debate of who wrote Shakespeare.

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