

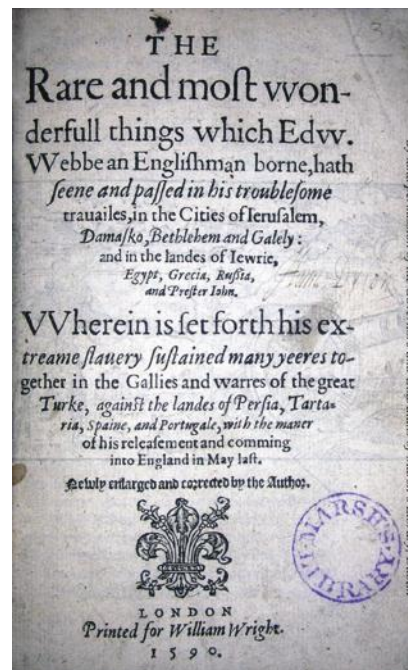
The True Story of Edward Webbe and Troublesome Travailes

by Connie Beane

In 1590 a 32-page pamphlet entitled *The Rare and most wonderful things which Edvard VVebbe an Englishman borne, hath seene and passed in his troublesome travailes*,... (*Travailes*) was published in London. In it is a short paragraph in which the author claimed to have seen Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, at a tournament in Palermo, Italy, at an indeterminate date. Although there is no corroborating documentation, this bit of information has been incorporated into de Vere's biography.

Since it emerged from bibliographic obscurity in the early nineteenth century, *Travailes* has been deemed by modern scholars to be a mostly factual Elizabethan travel narrative. Edward Arber edited and published a new edition in 1868 which cemented this identification. However, a careful re-examination of *Travailes* suggests that it is not a genuine travel narrative, but a parody that blends elements of the "captivity tale" with the classic travel narrative, a genre Elizabethans viewed with skepticism (Warneke 23-34, 61-62) due to its practice of carelessly mingling report, rumor, and legend without differentiation.

This article will present evidence that *Travailes* is a parody, not a genuine travel narrative; re-examine the meaning of the story about the earl of Oxford; and speculate on the identity of the author and his motives for mentioning de Vere in this context.



The title page of Troublesome Travailes, courtesy of "Reading East, Irish Sources and Resources", sponsored by University College of Dublin and the Irish Research Council (www.ucd.ie/readingeast/essay8.html).

On the nature of literary hoaxes

Brian McHale, in his article, “‘A Poet May Not Exist’: Mock-Hoaxes and the Construction of National Identity,” discusses the phenomenon of literary hoaxes at some length:

It would be convenient if literary hoaxing were a unitary phenomenon, a single thing that we might unequivocally identify....: unfortunately, it is not. We need to distinguish among at least three types of literary hoax. First, there are the “genuine” hoaxes, perpetrated with no intention of their ever being exposed....

Second, there are “entrapments” or “trap-hoaxes,” designed with didactic and punitive purposes in mind. The intention here is for the hoax to be exposed by the hoaxer himself or herself when the time is right, to the discomfiture of the gullible....

Finally, there is the class of phenomena that I propose to call “mock-hoaxes.” The deception here, as with trap-hoaxes, is temporary, but where trap-hoaxes depend for their effect on the dramatic moment of exposure (“gotcha!”), mock-hoaxes are meant eventually to be seen through without any traps being sprung. To that end, *they typically refer in a more or less veiled manner to their own double nature* [emphasis added], leaving it to their readers to draw the relevant inferences.... (236-237).

The history of *Travailes* before 1868, and evidence from the book itself, demonstrate that it has many of the hallmarks of a literary hoax of the third kind described by McHale.

McHale continues:

it might be inferred that the distinction among types of hoax...is entirely determined by the poet’s motives or intentions.... Intention does play a determining role—not, however, the poet’s “actual” intention..., but rather the intention that readers, in the process of reception, ascribe to the author....

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This approach to intention accommodates the disparities that often arise between what hoaxers appear to have intended and *public responses beyond their control* [emphasis added].... It also allows for...shifts in classification over time. Texts initially perceived as belonging to one category are apt to migrate to another as subsequent generations of readers come to construe them differently, sometimes clean against the intentions of the original hoaxers (237-238).

The history of *Travailes* shows that in the interval between 1626 and the beginning of the 19th century the author's original intention was largely forgotten, resulting in a shift in readers' perceptions and thereby transforming the book from literary parody to travel narrative.

The publishing history of *Troublesome Travailes*

In the last decade of the sixteenth century *Travailes* was published three times. This is unusual, since few titles received a second printing, much less a third. It may be supposed that the printings were small, as only a handful of copies survive; the current *Universal Short-Title Catalogue* lists just five. Of these, three printed by John Wolfe for William Wright in 1590, constitute the illustrated *editio princeps* (Webbe 1590). A second, undated printing, also illustrated, was issued *circa* 1592 by A. I. (probably Abel Jeffs) for William Barley (Webbe 1592). A third printing, not illustrated, was registered in 1600 by Ralph Blower (or Blore) for Thomas Pavier (Webbe 1600).¹

It is important to note that *Travailes* was not printed or even mentioned in the second edition of Richard Hakluyt's monumental compendium of travel literature, *Principal Navigations* (1598). Nor was it printed by Samuel Purchas in his continuation of Hakluyt's work (commonly known as *Purchas his Pilgrimage*), in editions published in 1613, 1614 and 1626. Purchas does mention Webbe in a brief note: "...[no unicorn] hath beene seene these hundred yeeres last past, by testimonie of any probable Author (for *Webbe*, which sayth he saw them in *Prester Iohns* Court, is a meere fabler²)..." (Purchas 564) (spelling modernized). *Travailes* was not reprinted in any other collection of travel narratives published between 1626 and 1868, although sale catalogs beginning about 1813 show that it was then being classified with books of history and travel (*Biblioteca Stanleiana* 63).

Two new editions of *Travailes* were published more or less simultaneously in 1868. One was a facsimile of the 1590 Wright text with the original woodcuts, which appeared under the original title in volume one of Edmund Wm. Ashbee's *Occasional Facsimile Reprints of Rare and Curious Tracts of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Webbe 1868). The other, heavily edited by Edward Arber, bore the title, *Edward Webbe, Chief Master Gunner: His Travailes (1590)* (Arber).³ Arber's became the standard edition and is now virtually the only one cited by scholars.

Although modern scholars Jonathan Sell and Daniel Vitkus have both addressed the long-standing doubts regarding the veracity of *Travailes's* content, and have made strong statements regarding the unreliability and fictional nature of parts of Webbe's narrative, neither has taken the next logical step of questioning *Travailes's* identification as non-fiction. They suggest that it should be treated as a blend of fact and fiction rather than straight fact. Both contend that Webbe's narrative is essentially a truth-analog, and that departures from fact should be excused on the grounds that Webbe and/or his publisher were simply engaged in heightening and embellishing reality for political, patriotic or economic motives.

Travailes: the paratext

Leaving aside the veracity of the contents of Webbe's narrative for the moment, an investigation of the paratextual elements reveals a constellation of hidden messages. In conducting this examination, it was necessary to set aside Edward Arber's edition, based on the Pavier text and its misleading notes and corrections. The EEBO text of Wright 1590 and the Ashbee facsimile were utilized instead. All references in this article are to the Ashbee edition (Webbe 1868).

The title-page

The full title of *Travailes* is prolix indeed:

The Rare and most wonderfull things which Edward VVebbe an Englishman borne, hath seene and passed in his troublesome travailes, in the Citties of Jerusalem, Dammasko, Bethelem and Galely: and in the Landes of Jewrie, Egípt, Grecia, Russia, and Prester John. // Wherein is set foorth his extreame slaverie sustained many yeres together, in the Gallies and wars of the great Turk against the Landes of Persia, Tartaria, Spaine, and Portugall, with the manner of his releasement, and coming into Englande in May last. Newly enlarged and corrected by the Author (Webbe 1868) (spelling modernized).

Lengthy titles were once common in publishing, as they informed book browsers of the book's subject and provided some indication of its tone. In the case of *Travailes*, however, the subject and tone indicate mendacity. The reader will eventually learn that Webbe never set foot in Bethlehem, the Galilee, or Greece during his travels. Prester John's "land" is mythical, as



An illustration of Prester John from Travailes.

Webbe's educated readers were well aware. Moreover, while the Turks were at war during his time with them, it was not with Tartaria, Spain or Portugal, although Webbe mendaciously claims participation in decades-past attacks by the Ottomans on Portuguese colonies in India.

The last sentence—"Newly enlarged"—insinuates that the 1590 Wright copy is not the first edition: another falsehood. No trace of any earlier edition has been found in the records of the Stationers' Company, and twentieth-century bibliographical research has determined that the 1590 date assigned to the Barley and Pavier printings in the nineteenth century were in error and should have been 1592 and 1600, respectively. Webbe's own internal statements reveal that he omitted a great deal for various reasons, thus contradicting the title's claim of *added* material. (The corrections to the Epistle to the Reader are discussed below.)

The Epistle Dedicatory (A2v-r)

This is literally a textbook example of the *epistle dedicatorie*. William Fulwood's *The Enimee of Idlenesse*, published in 1568, was the most popular of the books on epistolary writing published in England, with a fourth edition coming out in 1586.⁴ Webbe's phrasing parallels some of Fulwood's exemplars so closely that *Idlenesse* must have been his inspiration.

One of these exemplars mentions a person "lately returned from Turkie," another recommends that a certain man be granted knighthood for his services "against the Turkes and Infidels... with great pain and travail of his bodie," and a third urges his companions that in the fight "for the maintaining of the faith of Jesus Christ against the Turke, we ought to spare neither body nor goods...[lest] we be cowards, traitors, wicked heretics and worthy of perpetual reproach..."

In places we find that Webbe followed Fulwood's advice. In others he flouts it:

If we speak or write of or to our superiors, we must do it with all honour, humility and reverence, using to their personages superlative and comparative terms: such as most high, most mighty, right honorable, most redoubted, most loyal, most worthy, most renowned, altogether according to the quality of their personages. And it is to be noted that of superlative, comparative, positive or diminutive terms, *we must use but three at once at the most* [emphasis added] (Fulwood "First Booke, Instructions on how to endyte Epistles and Letters")

Against advice Webbe piles on the superlatives: "most mighty," "gracious and renowned," "most gracious and dread," "dread," "most excellent."

His request, "that I may be employed in such service and affaires, as may be pleasing to God, and found profitable to my Prince and Country" (A2r), is

a standard trope recommended by Fulwood in letters requesting a “corporall benefit.”

Two points suggest something of the author’s identity and/or true social status. First: the dedicatee is Queen Elizabeth. Protocol would normally inhibit, if not prohibit, a simple commoner or mere member of the gentry from dedicating a book—except perhaps a religious treatise or a serious work of scholarship—to her personally. To dedicate a flagrant hoax to the Queen suggests that the author was either confident of a favorable reception (Sell 2), or at worst, reasonably sure he would not be imprisoned for presumption.

Second, the author speaks of praying for his release and “...[longing] inwardly until I came to *see* [emphasis added] your Highness...and this my native country” (A2v). He almost seems to be suggesting that he had a face-to-face meeting with the Queen upon his return from captivity. The statement has the ring of authenticity, as if the author had in fact endured the fear and uncertainty of captivity at the hands of foreigners, and experienced the joy of “releasement.”

The Epistle to the Reader (Webbe 1868 A3r)

In the Epistle to the Reader Webbe’s first statement is a vow: “I have undertaken...to *utter*...[emphasis added].” The use of “utter” instead of the more usual “write” is ambiguous. At one time it meant “to offer for sale,” and it also had the connotation (as it still does today) of putting into circulation something *forged* or *counterfeit*. The author may be playing with both meanings, on the one hand emphasizing the commercial objectives that motivated him to publish, and on the other slyly hinting that his book is a forgery or a counterfeit.

In his next statement he vehemently protests the truth of the book’s contents. The reader may be forgiven for wondering why Webbe is so certain that people will say “that *these are lies and fained fables* [emphasis added]: and that *it containeth nothing else* [emphasis added].” Had word leaked out, or is the author simply warning the reader not to believe a word he says?

According to accepted rhetorical practice, one should bring forward witnesses to testify to the truth of one’s claims. Webbe observes this custom, but in a way that renders the gesture valueless: “he...that shall find fault and doubt of the truth hereof, let him but...make inquiry of the best and greatest travelers and merchants about all this land.” Instead of producing witnesses, Webbe advises doubters to search them out for themselves⁵—and then handicaps the search by naming no names. Webbe may be giving us a clue as to where to find his “witnesses,” however, because as H. W. L. Hime noted in 1916, “The whole might have been written anywhere by any one conversant with books of travel” (Hime 465).

Though promising that he will speak about the things he saw, the author proceeds to qualify this statement by saying that his story will consist for “the *most part* [emphasis added] of such things as I saw.” Webbe goes on to confess that he has left some things out of his account (contradicting the title page which claimed *added* material), things “which now I cannot call to remembrance, for that my *memory* [emphasis added] faileth me.” The issue of memory will surface again.

The corrections

At the end of the Epistle to the Reader, the author makes reference to “the [non-existent] first edition of this book,” and informs the reader that “a great fault in number did negligently escape” in this earlier edition. But then he does something strange: he gives both the *correct* numbers—which have been “corrected” in the text—and the original *wrong* numbers, which are *not* in the text and are in any case no longer relevant.⁶

Without knowing what the numbers represent, there is no context by which to judge the significance of the errors as opposed to their mere magnitude. Webbe once again throws out a stumbling block: he gives the approximate location of the errors in the (nonexistent) first edition, but not their location in the *current* edition (at B2v). If the reader wishes to discover the full context, he must search the text for the missing information—like Webbe’s missing witnesses—himself.

Jonathan Sell addresses the literary roots of this anxiety among sixteenth-century travel writers to not only *be* correct, but to be *seen* as correct:

...Webbe’s numerical nicety, and its foregrounding in the epistle to the reader, has greater significance than at first sight may appear... the correction of the numerical *errata* is mentioned immediately after Webbe has confessed that his memory has been impaired by his ‘travail’. What, then, are we to make of his extraordinary capacity for numerical recall? It might be suggested that poor memory is here a conventional trope or commonplace which Webbe unthinkingly reproduces, that, as such, it is devoid of truth content (or its truth is beside the point), and that we are to take the precision of the numbers in good faith. However, *I have found no other references to poor memory in the texts I have read* [emphasis added]; what is more, any such reference would sit awkwardly in the *admirabile genus* since what was at stake was, precisely, a persuasive illusion of factual accuracy.

...Webbe’s quibble over number is, I think, a generic tic or reflex that refers us back to More’s *Utopia*. ...So great was the influence of More’s work on sixteenth-century England in general, and on all matters relating to the discovery of new worlds in particular, that

traveller-writers often deliberately distanced their own works from More's in an effort to distinguish their truth from his fiction....

they also derived from the introductory matter to *Utopia* a series of tropes that served to configure the genre of travel writing. In More's letter to Peter Gilles, which accompanies the little book he has written..., he raises two doubts [both concerning exact measurements].... It is as if the credibility of the narrative depends on the reliability of memory, the best index of which is its capacity for numerical recall. Within the fiction, the truth of More's report...hinges on the accuracy of his recollection of a number. The same might be said of Webbe's work, the *irony being that Webbe seeks to enhance his truth with a stratagem derived from a work of fiction* [emphasis added]. It is easy to imagine that the first edition of his work had met with such skepticism that in the revised edition Webbe had to up its truth value by introducing this quibble over number. (Sell 69-70)

The acrostic poem

Scholars ignore the acrostic poem entitled, "The Verses Written Upon the Alphabet of the Queen's Majesty's Name":

Eternal God, who guideth still your grace,
Lengthen your life, in health and happy days [*state*].
Inspire your subjects' hearts in every place:
Zealous in Love, and free from secret hate,
And shorten life in those that breed debate.
Behold her Lord, who is our strength and stay
Even he [*sbe*] it is, by whom we hold our own:
Turn not thy face from her in any way,
Hew down her foes, and let them all be known.
Renowned Queen, your highness's subjects' joy,
Even for to see the fall of all your foes:
God of his mercy shield you from annoy
Intending treasons, still for to disclose:
None of us all, but will most duly pray,
Almighty God preserve you night and day.

FINIS.

The acrostic was a little-used poetic form, dating back to the Greeks, which was briefly in fashion in Elizabethan court circles during the last two decades of the sixteenth century. There can be little doubt that this effusion is intended

as a parody of similar poems circulating at court, but given the double nature of *Travailes*, there is likely to be more to it than appears on the surface.

The first thing of note is that the verses are unsigned, although the implication is that they were written by Webbe. (No one has questioned the ability of this confessedly ill-educated man to write competent, if undistinguished, poetry.) The double nature of *Travailes* might prompt the reader to question both Webbe's authorship and a singular hand. It would be thoroughly in the spirit of *Travailes* for the author to have taken individual lines from different poems—as he took his tales from different sources—and grafted them together into one gloriously overblown pastiche. To have the intended effect, moreover, it would be necessary that the lines be recognizable to his readers.

The acrostic's second line—"Lengthen your life, in health and happy state"—is a paraphrase of Edmund Spencer's *Faerie Queene's*, "Long may you live in health and happy state" (canto II, verse 23, line 8). Line 10 may be modeled on James Aske's *Elizabetha triumphans* (1588) which refers to the Queen as "Renowned Queen of this renowned land" and "sacred and renowned queen." Line 12 may be a paraphrase from Anthony Munday's "The Paine of Pleasure" (1580). Finally, line 13 may refer to a broadside published *circa* 1586, "A Short Discourse expressing the substance of all the late *intended Treasons* [emphasis added] against the Queenes Maiestie."⁷

Identifying Edward Webbe

In the dedication and the Epistle to the Reader we are presented with only the sketchiest outline of the *persona* of Edward Webbe. Modern scholars have searched for a person bearing that name, but found an "almost complete absence of Webbe in the historical record" (Sell 1-2). Vitkus admits that, "Aside from the pamphlet, we have no other evidence of his existence" (8). Webbe's biography in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (LX 109-110) is essentially the one Edward Arber invented to append to his 1868 edition of *Travailes*.

Without evidence that Edward Webbe was an actual person, the next likely possibility is that the name is a pseudonym, a widely practiced method in Elizabethan literature given the strict state censorship laws promulgated by Elizabeth and her Privy Council.

A pseudonym can be formed by simply picking a name out of the air, but there are often connections and parallels between the names and words which resonate with the real author's name and *persona*, themes being explored in the book, historical references, and so on.

The baptismal name "Edward" was too common in Elizabethan times to carry special significance except perhaps in a personal, individual context.

King Edward VI reigned from 1547 to 1553, and a significant number of male children born during those years were undoubtedly given “Edward” as a baptismal name. Arber calculated that Edward Webbe was born in 1553 or 1554. Oxfordians will note that “Edward” was de Vere’s baptismal name and that he was born in 1550 during the reign of Edward VI.

Web: the noun

The late Andrew Hannas examined Gabriel Harvey’s 1578 comment about de Vere, “*vultus/Tela vibra*” and noted that while, in Latin, *tela* could mean an object that could be thrown with the hand, such as a dart, stone or spear, there was a second meaning: “web of cloth: also any enterprise business or worke” (Hannas). In English, “web” denotes something woven, or a net-like structure such as a snare. It is associated with the verb “weave,” which derives from Old English *wefan* (Online Etymology Dictionary) meaning to form by interlacing yarn. Figuratively it can also mean *devise*, *contrive* or *arrange*. It also had the meaning from *c.*1200 “to move from one place to another.” Several of these meanings resonate with *Travailes*, underlining its trap-like character as a “mock-hoax,” and reflecting its narrative structure as an intricately contrived journey, going first one way and then another.

Web/Webb/Webbe: The surname

The author’s surname—spelled variously “Web,” “Webb,” or “Webbe”—while not as common as the baptismal “Edward,” was by no means rare in Elizabethan England.

Possibly the best-known Webbe of this period was William Webbe (*fl.* 1568-1591), author of *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586)⁸ who was the first commentator to praise Edward de Vere in print for his poetry. While it may be only a chance congruence of words, Webbe refers to *Discourse* as “my poore trauell” (15) and “this small trauell” (96), and to an earlier work as “my simple trauelles” (16). *Discourse* is also peppered with the words *true*, *truth* and *truly*, especially in the repeated phrase “*true* poetry.”

Genealogy

In the first line of his narrative proper, the author gives the reader a clue to his background by announcing that “I, Edward Webbe, was⁹ the son of Richard Web, master gunner of England” (Webbe 1868 A4r). Arber did not follow up on this clue to Webbe’s parentage, but it happens that there was a Richard Webbe (Web or Webb) who was a master-gunner during the early Elizabethan period.¹⁰ No one seems to have researched his biography, so there is no confirmation whether or not he was married, or if he had any children.

If the author was a London resident, as seems likely, he might have known of Gunner Webbe’s existence, and simply appropriated his name and profes-

sion for the father of his authorial *persona*, but would such a straightforward solution have been satisfactory to him? Might there be more nuances to the name “Richard Webbe” than just his profession? A cursory Internet search reveals the existence of a number of Richard Webbes who lived during the Tudor period. The phrase, “[Travelers] may lie with authority,” appeared in connection with one of these men, which prompted further investigation. This individual’s biography revealed associations which were remarkably apposite to the theme of *Travailes*.

Richard Webbe, a bookseller from Bristol, had what might be termed a walk-on part in Sir Thomas More’s *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answere* (1538):

Men say that he which hath been once at Jerusalem *may lie with authority* [emphasis added], because he shall be sure seldom to meet any man that hath been there, by whom his tale might be controlled.... (Book VII, 812, ll. 30-32)

Sir Thomas then mentions finding “...the selfsame wily folly in Richard Webbe” (813, ll. 9-11).

Webbe was accused of selling heretical books and summoned to London to answer the charges. Before presenting himself to More, he consulted with a London friend to coordinate their stories; unknown to Webbe, this friend had confessed everything to More, who cunningly invited Webbe to tell his version of the tale. *The Confutation* reports that Webbe “answered on his oath many a false answer..., *saving* the salve of his *remembrance*. For ever, for the most part *he referred and restrained all to his remembrance*.” When More accused Webbe of being untruthful, Webbe responded “if yet find any one [answer] false,...never trust me after while ye live” (814, ll. 16-17). [emphasis added]

More then told Webbe that he knew at least one of his statements was false; Webbe responded by claiming that “he swore no further than he *remembered*.” After further questioning, Webbe conceded that he had told a lie—but just one—and begged to be forgiven. “...for in good faith, sir, there is *not* in all mine answers any *one thing untrue but that*...and yet find any one more...then never believe me while ye live, but *take all for lies that ever I tell you*, and put me to open shame, and *make me an example to all the false, perjured knaves in the realm*” (814, ll. 35- 815, ll. 1, 4-7). [emphasis added]

By giving his father the same name as that of one of England’s most notorious liars, and using language in the Epistle to the Reader nearly identical to the words ascribed to Richard Webbe in *The Confutation*, the author of *Travailes* clearly expected his educated readers to draw the obvious parallel between “father” and “son.”

Troublesome Travailes and Lucian's *True Histories*

This review of the paratext of *Travailes* clearly establishes that the book qualifies as a mock-hoax, as defined by Brian McHale.

In retrospect, the alternative interpretation of *Travailes* as a parody should have been as obvious to modern scholars as it apparently was to many of its contemporary readers. *Travailes*'s putative genre—the travel narrative—has been a staple of imaginative literature from Homer's *Odyssey* to *Orlando Furioso* to *Euphues and his England*. Given that the author of *Travailes* all but labeled himself a liar, the most probable model for *Travailes* is the *Verae Historiae* of Lucian of Samosata, which “was so supremely wrought that most subsequent travel parodies are mere variations on its themes” (Cambridge 5). Significantly, the author of *Verae Historiae* begins by calling himself a liar:

everything here by me set down doth in a comical fashion glance at some or other of the old poets, historiographers, and philosophers, which in their writings have recorded many monstrous and intolerable untruths....

I could not...but wonder at them,...writing so manifest lies.... this made me also ambitious to leave some monument of myself behind me, that I might not be the only man exempted from this liberty of lying: and because I had no matter of verity to employ my pen in (for nothing hath befallen me worth the writing), I turned my style to publish untruths, but with an honest mind than others have done: for *this one thing I confidently pronounce for a truth, that I lie*: and this, I hope, may be an excuse for all the rest, when I confess that I am faulty in: for *I write of matters that I neither saw nor suffered, nor heard by report from others*, which are in no being, nor possible ever to have a beginning. *Let no man therefore in any case give any credit to them*. (Lucien 5, 9, 11). [emphasis added]

Although the works of Lucian were not available in English translation until 1634 (Hickes), numerous translations in French, Italian and Latin were in print more than a century earlier, including those by Desiderius Erasmus—which were among his most frequently reprinted works. T.W. Baldwin's monumental work on the English grammar schools of the Elizabethan era is sufficient evidence that the average Elizabethan boy educated under this system would have had exposure to Lucian both in Latin translation, and in the original Greek, if he was sufficiently diligent.

Lucian's body of work frequently addressed the questions of truth and fiction.

In the *VH*, Lucian...sets out to make fun of the extravagant fictions of poets, historians and philosophers alike, and does so in a narrative which manages to blend fact and fiction, and the incredible with the

credible, so successfully that the dividing line between truth and lies is no longer clear. The *VH* is, at the same time, a demonstration of how to recognize lies and of how to make them convincing. The authorial voice, speaking in the Introduction, emphasizes the untruthfulness of what follows, while the narratorial voice which tells the story strives to make it seem believable. By setting up this tension at the beginning, Lucian has exemplified the way in which the true and the false are constantly threatening to coalesce. The reader is hard pressed to keep the authorial voice from being subsumed into the narratorial voice.... (Georgiadou 3).

The text of *Travailes* follows in *VH*'s footsteps in these concerns. The very beginning of Webbe's narrative consists of his "reports" of a pair of actual historical events, accounts of which were not only published in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1589), but were printed on facing pages. Webbe's narrative conspicuously reverses their chronological order.

Like Lucian, Webbe makes use of the narratives of earlier writers, in his case that of "The worthie enterprise of John Fox an Englishman..." also printed in Hakluyt (1589). A comparison of the events in "Worthie Enterprise" and the story arc of *Travailes* show significant parallels and equally significant differences. Both heroes are gunners, and both are captured by the Turks. But Webbe inflates his experiences so that they are higher, wider, and more dramatic than those of Fox. His ship is bound for a more distant, more exotic destination and carries a larger crew. It fights against a much larger force of Turkish galleys; the battle continues for two days and two nights, and the majority of the crew is killed. Many events in Fox are matched by similar occurrences in *Travailes*.

Webbe's main story arc is interrupted three times, as that of *Verae Historiae* was interrupted by three subsidiary journeys (Georgiadou 15). In his first side-excursion, Webbe-the-slave becomes Webbe-the-artillerist and goes off with the armies of the Turk to have adventures throughout the Middle East. On his second, the newly-freed Webbe adventures his way through Italy, and on his third he takes himself off to fight in the very recent Battle of Ivry in France before returning to England for the second and final time.

VH uses famous literary characters and places them in situations where they meet Lucian and his crew (Pinheiro 28). Webbe's narrative is littered with references to both historical and mythical characters, like Prester John, whose stories he has lifted from Hakluyt, Sir John Mandeville, etc. With the notable exception of H.W.L. Hime, modern scholars have deemed these sources as corroboration of Webbe's tales rather than identifying them as his models.

Episode by episode, feature by feature, Webbe follows Lucian's trail: *VH* begins with a sea-voyage (Georgiadou 8); *Travailes* begins with a sea voyage.

Lucian is obsessed with numbers, and Webbe litters his narrative with them, especially flagging numerical *errors* in his Epistle to the Reader. In *VH* the narrative ends with references to further, unwritten adventures (Mheallaigh 253); *Travailes* ends with Webbe's tantalizing references to unwritten past adventures:

I have omitted therein my service done at the taking of Tunnis, and what I did in the Royal under Duke John of Austria; and many other thinges which I could heere discover unto you: onely let this suffice. (D4r)

The most interesting and tantalizing parallel between *Travailes* and *VH* is the fact that Lucian maintains his pose as the unnamed fictional narrator until near the end, where he requests Homer to write an epigram for him to engrave on a pillar. The epigram reads:

Lucian [emphasis added], the gods' beloved, did once attain
To see all this, and then go home again. (Hickes 195)

This epigram finally and explicitly identifies the narrator with the author.

Webbe maintains his pose as the named fictional narrator throughout *Travailes*, but near the end of the book (D1v-D2v), between his first return to England after being ransomed and his departure to France to fight for the King, he inserts three anomalous stories which have no links to one another, no links to anything else in his narrative, and no fixed points in time. The middle story of the three is the tale of Oxford in Palermo.

The Palermo Episode

When viewed in the context of *Travailes* as a genuine travel narrative, Webbe's description of de Vere's "challeng" in Palermo is frustratingly vague.

Many things I have omitted to speak of, which I have seen and noted in the time of my troublesome travel. One thing did greatly comfort me, which I saw long since in Sicilia, in the cite of Palermo, a thing worthy of memory, where the right honorable the Earle of Oxenford a famous man for Chivalry, at what time he traveled into foreign countries, being then personally present, made there a challenge against all manner of persons whatsoever, and at all maner of weapons, as Tournaments, Barriers with horse and armor, to fight and combat with any whatsoever, in the defence of his Prince and country: for which he was very highly commended, and yet no man durst be so hardy to encounter with him, so that all Italy over, he is acknowledged ever since for the same¹¹, the only Chevalier and Noble man of England. This title they give unto him as worthily

deserved. (Edward Webbe, *Troublesome Trauails...* (1590) (Webbe 1868 D2v). [spelling modernized])

There is so little meat on these dry bones that most scholars and biographers simply throw a brief acknowledgment in Webbe's direction and move on. However, there is meat here, and the bones are not as dry as they appear.

In sixteen lines the reader is given four pieces of data: (1) a general time-frame, (2) a locale, (3) the wording of "a challeng," and (4) the gist of a compliment given to the Earl by his Italian hosts. By this point, it should be apparent to the reader that this story, like everything else in *Travailes*, is almost certainly not based on truth. Why, then, was it included and what does it signify?

Like the epigram in *Verae Historiae*, this episode—which clearly refers to Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford—serves to point to the true identity of the author of *Travailes*.

The date and place

It is literally impossible to tell from the narrative when this event occurred because the Palermo episode and the tales which precede and follow it occupy a bubble of timelessness with respect to the rest of the narrative. For what it may be worth, historical records show that there was a general outbreak of the plague in Palermo during the 1575-1576 period when Oxford was in Italy, making it unlikely that there was a tournament there at that time (Anderson 492).

The location Webbe gives is specific, but no documentation has been found which actually places de Vere in Palermo. If the event was "worthy of memory," as Webbe asserts (D1v) it should have made some impact on the historical record. Webbe's own itineraries as outlined in the text of *Travailes* do not place him any further south than Naples.

Looking at the other stories in this time bubble, the reader will note that the first recounts an alleged rumor that Queen Elizabeth had been captured by the Spanish in 1588: in reality, the Queen was never in Italy. In the third grouping of "wonder tales" Webbe is not present at all. If the three stories are meant to be seen as parallels, this may suggest that Oxford was never in Palermo either. Which leaves the question: why did Webbe specify Palermo? Why not another—any other—Italian city? What is significant about Palermo in the context of *Travailes*'s particular concerns?

A clue may lie in the career of the printer of the first edition of *Travailes*: John Wolfe.

The Elizabethan printing industry was tightly controlled, with only a small number of influential printers being allowed to print the most lucrative classes

of books. In addition, the monarchy prohibited the printing of some titles or types of books for political or moral reasons. Wolfe, who had lived and worked in Italy for several years as a printer, specialized in Italian authors and had a comfortable niche in that market. Unluckily, many of the prohibited works (which were naturally in high demand) were by Italian authors, which negatively impacted Wolfe's income. In order to evade the prohibition on English printers publishing the highly popular works of Nicolo Machiavelli, for instance, Wolfe surreptitiously published five titles between 1584 and 1588, *Discourses*, *The Art of War*, *The Prince*, etc., in the original Italian, concealing his involvement by the expedient of naming an Italian city as the place of publication on the title page. Instead of bearing "London" as the place of publication, Wolfe's first three titles were falsely identified as having been printed in Palermo. The other two were "printed" in Piacenza and Rome.

Therefore, Palermo in this context does not mean a *place*, but points the reader to Wolfe and his association with other publications meant to deceive the reader in some way.

The challenge

The scope of de Vere's alleged challenge is so broad as to be ludicrous. It sounds more like theatrical posturing than anything else, suggesting the tournament might have been a play-joust or a masque in which de Vere took part, although no historical record has been found describing such an event.

It would have been a supremely arrogant gesture, and although some readers might believe de Vere capable of such an outrageous display, Webbe dismisses any question of reality when he adds that "no man durst be so hardie to encounter with him" (D1v). In the unwritten code of chivalry, such a refusal would have reverberated around the whole of Europe. Which of course it did not.

The compliment

Since there was no challenge, there must not have been a compliment from the Italians either, but Webbe records one:

This title they giue vnto him as worthely deserued, so that all Italy ouer, he is acknowledged *euer since for the same* [emphasis added], the onely Chiuallier and Noble man of England (D1v).

This identification of Oxford as "the onlely Chiuaillier...of England" unmistakably links him with one of the three major English figures in the medieval knight-errant tradition: Astolfo. Oxford was already associated with the second, Euphues, as dedicatee of the second Euphues novel (*Euphues and His England*) published in 1580 by playwright John Lyly, and to the third knight, Palmerin d'Oliva, by virtue of Anthony Munday's translations of several tales

in the Palmerin cycle, part one of which was published in 1588, also dedicated to the Earl of Oxford. In this regard, it is important to note that Lyly and Munday had both served as secretaries to the Earl of Oxford.

Famed as one of Charlemagne's twelve knights, Astolfo played a role in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* and in Ariosto's continuation of the story under the title of *Orlando Furioso*. Ariosto's *Furioso* was perhaps better known, but the author of *Travailes* may have been familiar with a later translation of Boiardo's *Innamorato* as well.

There are actually two different Astolfo's, although they are technically the same character. Boiardo's work is a burlesque of the medieval romance, and his Astolfo is cast in the traditional mold of "impudent buffonery and irrepressibility, craven lack of courage, and bad horsemanship" (Marinelli 36). Boiardo depicts him as a lover of practical jokes, provocative and insulting, (Marinelli 39). When Boiardo describes Astolfo, we are reminded of Oxford's reputation for extravagant display:

Astolfo, you should know, my lords
was English, handsome past compare,
very rich, but more courteous,
his clothes as charming as his air.
His strength was not as clear to me,
for often he fell off his steed,
but when he did, he'd blame bad luck
and fearlessly return to fall.
Back to the story. He was dressed
in armor worth a treasure chest,
his shield encircled by large pearls,
and he wore mail of solid gold.
His helmet was more costly yet,
due to a gem set in its work
that was, if Turpin does not lie,
a ruby of a walnut's size.
On his horse cloaked in leopard skin
with furnishings of fine-spun gold.
(Ross 10)



From Orlando Furioso, Astolfo leading the giant, Caligorante.

Ariosto does not introduce Astolfo until the sixth canto of his continuation of the Orlando saga, but when he does Astolfo undergoes a metamorphosis worthy of Ovid. He transforms Boiardo's buffoonish Astolfo into the perfect knight, savior of Orlando's sanity, possessor of every virtue and the true protagonist of what is titularly Orlando's saga. Jo Ann Cavallo calls him "the knight of second chances" who "acts consistently as an exemplary Christian knight, using his newfound virtues in the service of humanity" (Cavallo 97).

Webbe's linking of Oxford to Astolfo might be waved off as mere puffery, except for the fact that the two *Orlando* poems are, like Lucian's *Verae Historiae*, classic examples of the imaginative travel narrative. In both poems Astolfo is constantly on the move.

Prince Astolfo of England is already a world traveller in the *Innamorato*, setting out from Paris across the expanse of Eurasia into Cathay, then heading on a circuitous journey that takes him west to Morgana's Lake, to the extreme north at Manodante's realm, and then in a southwesterly direction to the shores of Alcina's kingdom. He continues to traverse the globe in the *Furioso*, travelling by sea, land, and air, from the easternmost reaches of Asia through the Middle East and to Africa. . . . (Cavallo) Although Webbe's travels are not as extensive as Astolfo's—he does not fly to the moon or descend to Purgatory for instance—he and Astolfo visit many of the same places: Jerusalem, Damascus, Cairo, the Red Sea, and India, and both of them encounter the mythical Prester John.

Given the extensive parallels between Lucian's *Verae Historiae* and *Travailes*, it is plausible to see the Palermo episode as overtly making the linkage of Oxford = Astolfo = Webbe = Oxford. In this vein, it is perhaps significant that one of the changes made by Barley in the second printing of *Travailes* was to delete the phrase “ever since for the same” from Webbe's description of Oxford as the only Chevalier and Nobleman of England.

Who was Edward Webbe?

Although the author of *Travailes* did not give the reader any verifiable biographical information about himself, he nonetheless provided a sufficient number of clues to postulate that Edward Webbe was Edward de Vere.

Oxford, being specifically named in *Travailes*, would have been within his rights as a peer of the realm to object to its publication. The fact that three editions occurred within his lifetime suggests his tolerance of, if not his full agreement with the contents—which would be true if he were the author. Only de Vere himself, with his sense of the ridiculous, would have written a tale like the Palermo episode with a challenge that makes him appear an arrogant fool, and a fake encomium from the Italians that makes hyperbolic comparisons between himself and the Astolfo of *Orlando Innamorato* and *Orlando Furioso*, two of the classics of Italian literature.

The dedication to Queen Elizabeth of what was an obvious tissue of untruths, including an undignified portrait of herself as a prisoner, was a risky business. “. . . would a writer seeking self-promotion knowingly lie to his Queen? If so, either Webbe was a foolhardy writer or Elizabeth a foreseeably gullible audience. . . .” (Sell 2). Perhaps neither, but an “allowed Fool”

exercising the kind of liberty that Elizabeth surely would not have tolerated from anyone else.

The author's plea that he might be employed "in such service and affaires as may be pleasing to God, and found profitable to my Prince and Country" (Webbe 1868 A2v) was one frequently voiced by de Vere, and may have been at least part of his purpose for publishing *Travailes*.

The author's statements in the dedication in which he expresses the fear of the captive and the joy of release reflect the kind of authenticity which suggests de Vere's experience of being captured by Danish pirates on his return from Italy in 1576.

The evidence of the pattern

Lucian was a staple in English education—"All the Elizabethans felt his spell" (Casson xvii)—and educated Englishmen would have been thoroughly familiar with *Verae Historiea* as well as many of Lucian's 80-odd works. In *The Dream*, for instance, he describes a sneering audience response to his own tale (Goldhill 68), just as Webbe anticipates audience criticism in his Epistle to the Reader.

Lucian is funny, irreverent, and controversial, which probably made him a favorite with young iconoclasts, but he was also a superb writer, whose wit, humor, irony, exuberant comic fantasy, and craftsmanship with words (Casson xv-xvii) made him the ideal model for an author who sought mastery of dialog and narrative.

The pun imbedded in the Latin title of Lucian's work—*Verae Historiae*—must also have made using it as a pattern irresistible: a *Vere* publishing an *untrue* history based on a Greek parody of true history.

The evidence of the author's sense of humor

Jonathan Sell characterized Webbe's *Travailes* as "an early modern bar-bore's tedious litany of tall tales..." (63). This description bears an uncanny resemblance to the picture of Edward de Vere seen in the accusations that Henry Howard and Charles Arundel leveled against Oxford in 1580/1 in an attempt to discredit his charges of treason against themselves. In the course of these accusations, Howard cataloged a long series of misdeeds:

his horrible untruths which he hath uttered so many times and with such confidence that he takes and swears them for approved verities. Of this sort is that constant and continual affirmative of his that the meanest shoemaker's wife in Milan...is more gallant and more delicately suited every common working-day than the Queen our mistress is at Whitsuntide; that he hath abused and polluted almost all the

noblewomen of account in England; that he took a principal town in Flanders by the Duke of Alva's direction, and had taken another but for the coming of Mr Bedingfield; that his judgment was demanded touching the fortification of Antwerp, and the curtain altered; that he should have had the government of Milan; that Don John sent him fifteen thousand men to surprise the state of Genoa during the civil war; that he might have had I know not how many thousand pounds a year at Naples; that the Countess of Mirandola came fifty mile to lie with him as the queen of Amazons did to lie with Alexander; that a greater lady far by some degrees than she made court to him in France; that St. Mark's church at Venice was only paved with diamonds and rubies; that a merchant in Genoa hath a mantel of a chimney that cost more than all the treasure in the Tower doth amount unto; that he read the rhetoric lecture at Strasbourg; ... that he had oftentimes copulation with a female spirit in Sir George Howard's house at Greenwich (Howard 6-7).

Travailes echoes the same kinds of “horrible untruths” complained of by Henry Howard, and the flights of fancy that ornament its pages—the Tartarian children who do not open their eyes until they are nine days old (A4v), the blue swans (C1r), and the Holy Sepulchre with its seven doors and seven steps (C2r)—are precisely the kinds of over-the-top tales that flowed from de Vere's imagination a decade earlier.

The evidence of the author's learning

The author of *Travailes* displays a polished writing style which would have been difficult for a merchant seaman to acquire, let alone one who supposedly endured years of slavery under Turkish masters. Edward de Vere's educational attainments are well-known: childhood spent in the care of Sir Thomas Smith; adolescence as a ward of state under William Cecil, Lord Burghley; honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge universities; and study at Gray's Inn. It requires no special pleading to suggest that he was fully capable of writing *Travailes*.

The author's use of such sources as Lucian's *Verae Historiae*, Hakluyt's 1589 *Voyages*, the two Italian poems *Orlando Innamorato* and *Orlando Furioso*, and many other books as the armature upon which to construct portions of his narrative indicates not only the eclecticism of the author's reading, but that he had access to materials which would not have been readily available to the general public. In particular, Oxford's interest in exploration is well documented: in the second and third Martin Frobisher voyages of 1577 and 1578, for example, the Earl of Oxford invested and lost more than 3,000 pounds in the hopes of finding a North West Passage to China. In 1581, Oxford invested another 500 pounds in Edward Fenton's North West voyage. Although

this expedition was a failure too, in 1584 Oxford became a shareholder in a new company known as “The Colleagues of the Fellowship for the Discovery of the North West Passage,” which fitted out an expedition in 1585 under Captain John Davis. Thus, we could expect him to have been familiar with most of the written literature on the subject circulating in Elizabethan England.

Conclusion

I believe this re-examination of Edward Webbe’s *Troublesome Travails* has produced sufficient evidence to repudiate the common assessment that it is a genuine travel narrative written by an historical (if obscure) Elizabethan merchant seaman. Without this conception clouding the reader’s view, it becomes possible to see *Travails* for what it is: a splendid example of the “wonder tale”—a literary genre employed by authors from Lucian of Samasota to Sir John Mandeville to Sir Thomas More.

The identity of the author may never be known, but the buried reference to Edward de Vere in the mythical episode of the tournament challenge in Palermo, Italy, coupled with the book’s almost obsessive ringing of changes on the subject of truth, half-truth and lies, strongly suggests a connection to the Earl of Oxford, if not actual authorship.

From the viewpoint of biographers of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, the debarring of *Travailes* as an historical narrative requires us to delete information we thought we knew about an important period of his life. However, as nebulous as this fact was, it is no great loss, and we have in exchange the possibility of an unknown prose work by the author of the Shakespeare plays and poems.

Endnotes

1. The first full bibliographic description of *Travailes*, published in W. C. Hazlitt's *Handbook of the Popular, Poetical and Dramatic Literature of England* (II 646) in 1867, was flawed, placing the three editions in the reverse order, with Pavier's first and Wright's last, and improperly dating them all 1590. Arber perpetuated this mis-dating in his 1868 edition.
2. The definition of the noun "fable" has three meanings: (1) a usually short narrative making an edifying or cautionary point and employing animals as characters; (2) a story about legendary persons and exploits; and (3) a falsehood; a lie. The verb "fabling" has the additional meaning of (4) to recount as if true. Thus Purchas is not accusing Webbe of lying, but merely labeling his story as a fiction which, despite its outward form, does not properly belong with genuine travel narratives.
3. A third edition published in 1885 by Edmund Goldsmid essentially plagiarized Arber, notes and all.
4. Angell Day's *The English Secretorie* (1586) was also available, but would not yet have been as well known and recognizable as Fulwood's manual.
5. "...if they believe it not to be so, let them take the pains to go thither themselves and they shall find my words true." – Lucian *True History*, p. 67.
6. The Wright copy mentions two errors in the "first edition" which necessitated increasing 30K to 300K and 50K to 500K. The Barley and Pavier copies have the requisite wrong figures to qualify for the first edition. However, both have a *third* wrong number of 40K *which in Wright is 400K*. Either Wright corrected the third error without mentioning it, or Barley and Pavier each "corrected" one too many errors in an effort to make it appear that his was the missing first edition.
7. A thorough scouring of EEBO for doublets of the acrostic's individual lines would be an interesting exercise.
8. Edward Arber published an edition of this work in 1895, in *English Reprints*, no. 26.

9. This is a peculiar use of the past tense. Even if one's father is deceased, the relationship still exists: "I *am* the son of Richard...who *was* master gunner." Taken literally, the phrase suggests that Edward Webbe has died (or ceased to exist?)—which is nonsensical given that he is speaking here-and-now.
10. The *Calendar of State Papers (Domestic)* for 1566 lists a master gunner of that name who was assigned an annuity or yearly pension. Francis Duncan's *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery* lists Richard Webb "Among the oldest Master-Gunners of England whose names are recorded" (I, 40), and Stephen Ashton Walton in "The Art of Gunnery in Renaissance England" states that Webbe served as a master-gunner from 1566-71 (300).
11. Edward Arber deleted this phrase "ever since for the same" in his edition of *Tranailes*.

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