

The 17th Earl of Oxford in Italian Archives: Love's Labours Found

by Michael Delahoyde and Coleen Moriarty

Our research in Italian state archives over the course of three summers has uncovered four previously unknown documents from the 1570s containing news of the 17th Earl of Oxford. We are also able to provide a much expanded, corrected, and contextualized version of one of the only two catalogued Venetian ambassadorial dispatches concerning Edward de Vere during his 1575-76 continental tour.¹ Rather than present our research in order of discovery, our aim here is to explicate each find while chronologically filling the gaps in the documentary record concerning Oxford's travels.²

We have come to realize that the Earl's continental tour was certainly not what we thought and what perhaps many generally think: a dilettante's year-long self-indulgence away from the stifling and artistically backwards English court. His zeal for escape seems to have manifested itself when Oxford fled to the continent without license from the Queen in the summer of 1574, though he did obey when called back to England. Shortly thereafter, he was listed more honorably among noblemen who "have served and are fit to serve in foreign employments" (qtd. in Nelson 119). Even if his subsequent journey had been merely a vacation, it is inconceivable that he would not have been briefed on what to say and not to say at various continental courts "and among the network of diplomats and ambassadors whose connections he needed in order to proceed in his travels" (Anderson 74). As Mark Anderson recognizes:

Something certainly persuaded Elizabeth to give de Vere leave to cross the English Channel. Practicality undoubtedly played a role in dispatching de Vere: The new king of France, Henri III, had scheduled his coronation for February 15, 1575, and his marriage for two days later. Elizabeth, whom Henri had once courted, would have needed an English delegate to attend the coronation—someone with enough clout in Catholic circles not to offend the French Catholic court. Furthermore, Venice had not sent an ambassador to England. The Italian city on the lagoon was still skittish about opening diplomatic relations with a Protestant realm, lest it offend the more fervent Catholic

nations of Spain or the Papal States. At the time she sent de Vere overseas, Elizabeth required the attentions of a high-ranking courtier fluent in French and Italian for important diplomatic missions in Paris and Venice. Could it simply be coincidence that the queen gave de Vere license to travel to these two key cities at the same time she needed these tasks completed? (74-75)

Oxford left English shores very likely in early February 1575 (Nelson 121). His first major stop was the French court, and his entry onto the continent was noted in ambassadorial letters and gossipy *bolletini* (bulletins). The French ambassador in England, La Mothe Fenelon, in a late January dispatch to Henri III, “cryptically added that he’d learned that Don John of Austria—the powerful Spanish general—might have a job for the English earl to perform” (Anderson 75; Nelson 120).

The Venetian Ambassador’s Letter from the French Court

The first notice of Oxford abroad came in early March 1575, in English ambassadorial letters from Valentine Dale in Paris to Lord Burghley (Nelson 121; Ogburn and Ogburn 82). In our initial foray at the Venetian archive in 2016, we viewed the original notice concerning Oxford’s 1575 arrival in Paris and his departure through the French court in 1576. Excerpted bulletins have been available since the late 1800s,³ and we owe a debt to Rawdon Brown (1803-1883) in this regard. Having initially visited Venice in search of the gravestone of Sir Thomas Mowbray, the Duke of Norfolk banished by King Richard II (in the Shakespeare play, Act I), Brown subsequently devoted fifty

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years to researching Anglo-Italian political history, eventually culling, amassing, and translating ambassadorial reports into *A Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts relating to English Affairs existing in the Archives of Venice and Northern Italy*—an enormous, multi-volume achievement funded by the British government.

However, the transcriptions and English translations are occasionally questionable or incomplete, there were confusions in the dating system, and the original documents mentioning Oxford are too frail to be circulated publicly. A tremendous and valuable effort, but with fallibilities: what else might Rawdon Brown have missed?

In 2016, we persisted in requesting access until one archivist agreed that we needed to peruse these documents for our research. Finally, we were escorted into the chambers of the cathedral-like Venice archive, where one of the main archival directors, Mr. Caniato, supervised the viewing of the documents, too fragile to be handled directly by visiting scholars, and carefully turned the crumbling pages.⁴ We were promised images of the documents, including a passage in ambassadorial secret code; but the file is in need of restoration work, and we left that year empty-handed. Our diplomatic persistence was ultimately successful: in 2017 we were allowed to photograph the entire document that includes the news of Oxford's arrival.

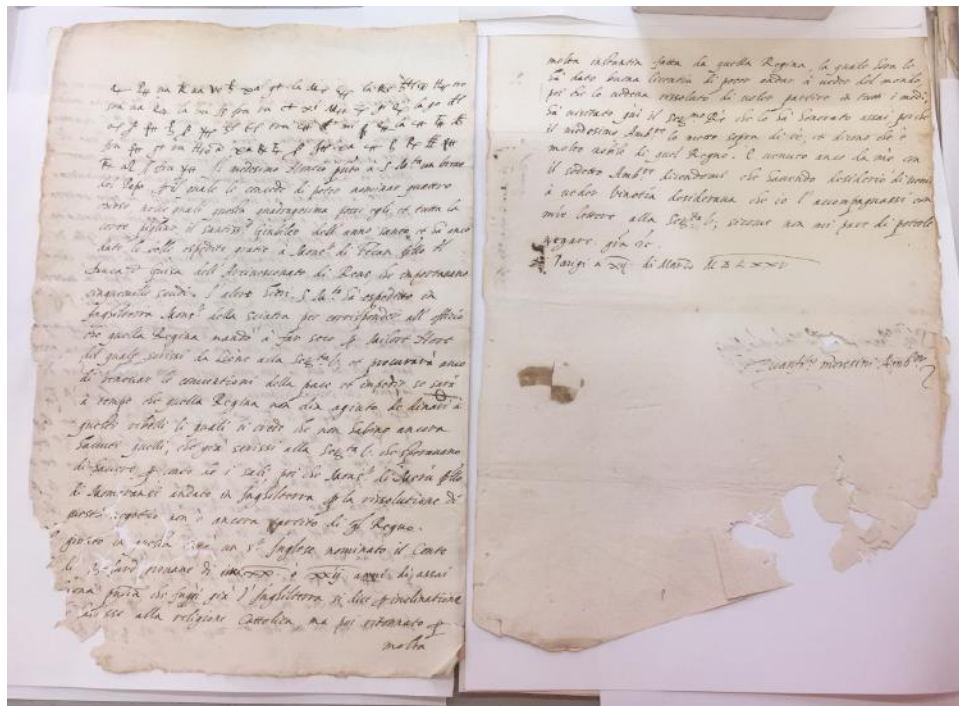


Figure 1: The original notice concerning Oxford's 1575 arrival in Paris.

For over the past century, this is what we could view as Rawdon Brown's translation from a portion of the Venetian Senate's Dispatches from Ambassadors and Residents concerning France:

An English gentleman, whose name is the Earl of Oxford, has arrived in this city; he is a young man of about twenty or twenty-two years of age. It is said that he fled from England on account of his inclination to the Catholic religion; but having returned he received great favour from the Queen, who gave him full licence to travel and see the world, when she ascertained that he had resolved to depart under any circumstances (Brown, *VII*. 527).

The announcement comes from Giovanni Morosini, the Venetian ambassador in Paris, writing on 12 March 1575 to the Signory in Venice, and notes Oxford's "reputation for Catholicism." The final line may suggest that he might be considered a valuably independent loose cannon, but includes also an "underestimation of his age" (Nelson 121). More troubling is that this *bolletino* is incomplete and severed from its context: seven more lines concerning Oxford specifically appear in the original. Problems with the transcript include: Rawdon Brown was a slightly unreliable translator; he died before editing the materials from the 1570s, so a collaborator was working from his notes; and the text was excerpted and abbreviated, with text in the crumbling corners of the document that were ignored.

Here in Italian transcription is the longer portion of the letter (Archivio di Venezia, *Senato*, *Filza* 9)⁵:

[After a section in code]

Il medesimo nunzio presentò a S[ua] M[ae]stà un breve del Papa per il quale le concede di poter nominar quattro chiese, nelle quali questa quadragesima possi egli et tutta la corte pigliar il santiss[im]o Giubileo dell'anno santo et ha anco dato le bolle espedito gratis a Mons[igno]r di Fecan fratello del Duca di Guisa dell'Arcivescovato di Rens che importavano cinquemille scudi. L'altro hieri S[ua] M[ae]stà ha espeditto in Inghilterra Mons[igno]r della Sciatra per corrisponder all'officio che quella Regina mandò a far seco per Milort Nort del quale scrissi da Lione alla Ser[en]ità V[ostra]; et procurarà anco di renovar le conventioni della pace et impedir se sarà a tempo che quella Regina non dia agiuto di dinari a questi ribelli li quali si crede che non habino ancora havuti quelli, che già scrissi alla Ser[en]ità V[ostra] che speravano di havere per conto de i sali, poi che Mons[igno]r Merù f[r]ate[l]lo di Mom [?] eransi andato in Inghilterra per la rissolutione di questo negotio non è ancora partito di q[ue]l Regno.

[Rawdon Brown's nineteenth-century translation begins with the next lines.]

E' gionto in questa città un s[igno]r Inglese nominato il Conte
 di Oxford giovane di circa XX o XXII anni di assai
 buona p[rese]ntia che fuggì già d'Inghilterra si dice per inclinatione
 che avesse alla religione Cattolica, ma poi ritornato per
 molta instantia fatta da quella Regina, la quale hora li
 ha dato buona licentia di poter andar a veder del mondo,
 poi che lo vedeva rissoluto di voler partire in tutti i modi
 [Brown ends here, but Morosini's commentary continues.]
 ha visitato qui il ser[enissi]mo Re che lo ha honorato assai poi che
 il medesimo Amb[asciato]re lo mette sopra di sé, et dicono che è
 molto nobile di quel Regno. E' venuto anco da me con
 il sodetto Amb[asciato]re dicendomi che havendo desiderio di venir
 a veder Vinetia desiderava che io l'accompagnassi con
 mie lettere alla Ser[eni]tà V[ostra]; siccome non mi pare di poterle
 negare—gra[tia] vo[stra].
 Parigi a XII di Marzo MDLXXV

Rendered into modern Italian:

Lo stesso nunzio presentò a Sua Maestà un breve
 del Papa che gli concede di poter nominare Quattro
 chiese in cui questa prima domenica di Quaresima egli possa insieme a
 tutta
 la corte fruire del santissimo Giubileo dell'anno santo e ha
 dato anche le bolle spedite gratis a Monsignor di Fecan dall'onorevole
 Duca di Guisa dell'Arcivescovado di Rens che valevano
 5000 scudi. L'altro ieri Sua Maestà ha inviato
 in Inghilterra Monsignor della Sciatra per rispondere alla missione
 che quella Regina aveva affidato a Milord Nort,
 di cui scrissi da Lione alla Serenità Vostra; e inoltre farà in modo
 di rinnovare gli accordi di pace e impedire, se farà
 in tempo, che quella Regina dia sostegno in danaro
 a questi ribelli, dato che si crede non abbiano ancora
 avuto quei (denari) che speravano
 di avere per conto dei sali, e poiché Monsignor Merù fratello
 di Mom [?] che era andato in Inghilterra proprio per risolvere
 questa faccenda non è ancora tornato da quel Regno.
 E' arrivato in questo città un signore inglese detto il Conte
 di Oxford, un giovane di circa 20 o 22 anni, di aspetto molto
 buono, che fuggì dall'Inghilterra si dice perché propendesse per
 la religione cattolica, ma poi era ritornato per la notevole
 insistenza di quella Regina, la quale ora gli
 ha concesso la libertà di viaggiare per il mondo,

poiché lo vedeva risoluto a partire ad ogni costo.
Ha fatto visita qui al serenissimo Re che gli ha reso molti onori,
poiché l'ambasciatore stesso lo considera di grado superiore a sé, e si dice
che in quel Regno è di assai nobile lignaggio. E' poi venuto da me
con il suddetto ambasciatore dicendomi che, volendo
vedere Venezia, desiderava che io gli fornisse lettere di raccomandazione
per la Serenità Vostra; siccome non mi sembra il caso
di negargliele, se Voi siete d'accordo.
Parigi, 12 marzo 1575

Finally, in English translation:

The same nuncio presented to His Majesty a papal brief that allows him to be able to summon four churches where on this first Lent Sunday he might attend the very Holy Jubilee of the Holy Year and he gave also the Papal Bulls—worth 5000 écu (scudo)—sent free of charge to Monsignor from Fecan by the honorable Duke from Guise of Ren Archbishopric. The day before yesterday His Majesty sent Monsignor from Sciatra to England to be responsible for the mission that the Queen had entrusted Milord Nort with, about which I wrote to Your Serenity from Lyon; moreover, he will act so as to renew peace negotiations and prevent, if he has the time, that Queen supporting these rebels by giving them money, given that they are believed not to have had yet the money they hoped to get on behalf of the salt, and since Monsignor Merù, brother of Mom [?], who had gone to England to solve the problem, hasn't come back yet from that kingdom.

An English gentleman, called Il Conte di Oxford [The Earl of Oxford] arrived in this city, a 20/22-year-old young man, very good looking. He escaped from England as he seemed to be in favor of Catholicism, but then he had returned because of the Queen's insistence, who has allowed him to travel all over the world as she understood he wanted to leave [England] at all costs. I visited the Most Serene King, who highly honored him, as the ambassador himself thinks he is superior to him, and he is said to be of a very noble high rank. Then, he came to me with the above-mentioned ambassador, saying that he wanted to see Venice and wished to have reference letters to be addressed to Your Serenity; I do not think we should deny his request, if you agree on that.

Paris, March 12, 1575

Along with the ubiquitous ambassadorial attempts to gauge any Englishman's degree of susceptibility to Catholicism, Morosini emphasizes the indications of Oxford's headstrong independence from Elizabeth. One can see that the left bottom corner of the page has deteriorated, explaining why Rawdon

Brown would have given up on trying to decipher the phrase “di assai buona p[rese]ntia” = “very good looking.” It is unfortunate that Brown unaccountably omitted three things: first, the subsequent lines of superlative praise for this distinguished visitor who made such a favorable impression on the Parisian court;⁶ second, the reference to Oxford’s energetic focus on visiting Venice; and third, Morosini’s final recommendation to the Doge that he meet with Oxford, couched in a diplomatic conditional—a careful but urgent suggestion to his superior.

The Medici Ambassador’s Letter to the Tuscan Duke

We found further confirmation that Oxford’s journey was of political interest in Italy when we discovered the following among the Medici materials at the Florentine archive (Archivio di Firenze, *Filza 4604*):

2d di marzo 75

[To the] Gran Duca

...

Il Conte d’Oxford

genero del gran Thesauriere d’Inghilterra che hoggi governa quella Regina sen’è passato [se ne è andato è passato] in Alemagna et verrà anco [anche] in Italia per veder il paese. Se arrivando costì parerà [sembrerà] a V. Altezza di vederlo volentieri, l’assicuro che ogni dimostrazione d’amorevolezza sarà trovata molto buona da quella Principessa et il suocero di lui non potrà ricevere il maggior favore.

...

~Vinc[enz]o Alamanni

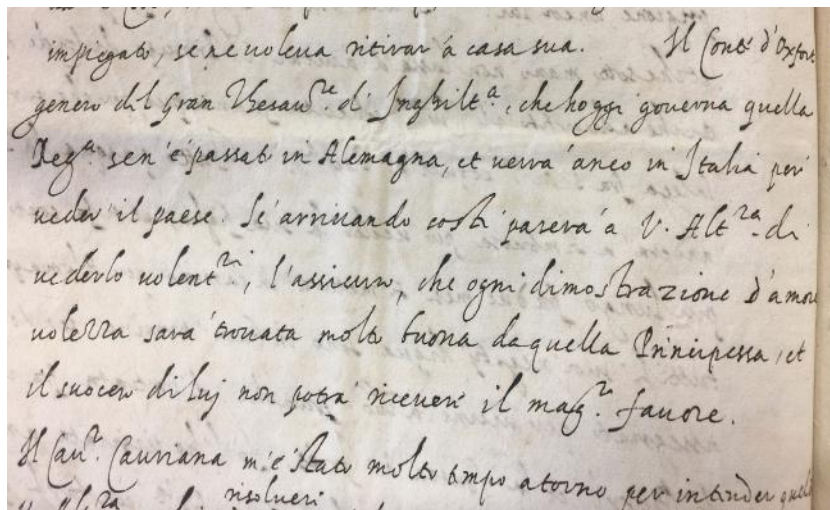


Figure 2: A letter to the Gran Duca in Medici materials at the Florentine archive.

Here is the English translation:

The Earl of Oxford, son-in-law of England's Lord High Treasurer who now advises the Queen, has visited Germany and is going to come to Italy next to see the country. If Your Highness would like to cordially meet with him when he comes here, I can assure you that every demonstration of affection would be well appreciated by the Princess, and his father-in-law cannot receive a greater favor.

Although this letter predates Morosini's above, it concerns Oxford's post-Paris activity. Alamanni, the Medici ambassador to France from 1572 to 1576, seems a good deal more focused, politically and financially, than Morosini's report about the Earl in Paris, and his notice here betrays an opportunistic bent, as if Morosini were a fan of Castiglione's notion of the courtier and this ambassador more a follower of Machiavelli. Of course, for all their political courting of this courtier, the Italians could not have known how strained the actual relationship between Oxford and his father-in-law Burghley was.

We know that Oxford proceeded through Germany and visited Sturmius, the humanist Protestant educator; but we are not certain how exactly he entered Italy, since, as he wrote, "For feare of the inquisition I dare not pas by Milan, the Bishop wherof exersisethe such tyranie" (qtd. in Nelson 123; cf. Anderson 80; Ogburn and Ogburn 83). Oxford seems also initially to have been inclined to visit the Turkish court at some point: in a mid-March letter to Burghley, he wrote, "then perhaps I will bestowe two or thre monthes to se Constantinople, and sum part of Grece" (qtd. in Nelson 124). We have no indication that Oxford was able to travel this far; yet since he had access to Turkish connections in the Parisian and Venetian courts, we speculate about his possible covert diplomatic mission. Elizabeth was known for her practice of designating unusual terms of endearment upon her courtiers—and she bestowed upon Oxford the nickname of "Turk." Over time a variety of speculative explanations have been put forth to explain the reason for the appellation, but none appear to be definitive. Mr. Caniato of the Venice archive reports that the Turkish portion of the Venetian collection is the most deteriorated: regrettable, but intriguing and not entirely hopeless.

Oxford's Request to See Secret Chambers

We previously published and presented on our first archival discovery (Delahoyde and Moriarty, "New Evidence")⁷ from summer 2015 in Venice: Oxford's signatures in Italian and Latin on a page preceded by a note from a scribe for the *Consiglio dei Dieci* (Council of Ten), recording the council's vote on Oxford's request for access to view their secret chambers in the Doge's Palace (Archivio di Venezia, *Capi, Pezzo* 76, 1575).

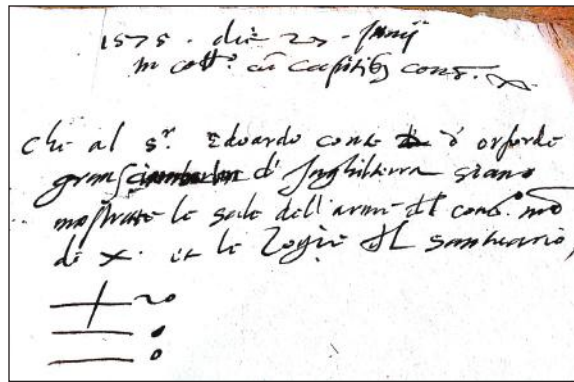


Figure 3A: A note from a scribe for the Consiglio dei Dieci, recording the council's vote.

1575 - day 27—June

In the meeting with the heads of the Council of X

[It was decided] That signore Eduardo Count of Oxforde, Great Chamberlain of England be allowed to be shown the chambers of arms of our Council of X and the places of sanctuary.⁸

Though Oxford received twenty yea votes and no nays from a council of ten, the Doge and other Venetian dignitaries often sat in during meetings (although other documents from the 1570s record only at most fifteen or sixteen attendees). This document, looking somewhat hastily scrawled, is followed by a page, originally folded, with Oxford's signatures in Italian and Latin, declaring himself:

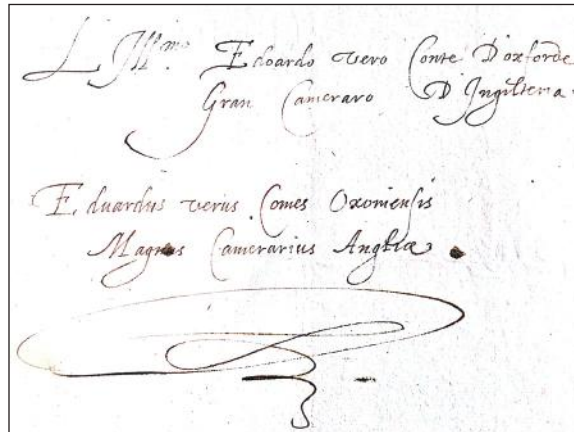


Figure 3B: Oxford's signatures in Italian and Latin.

L'Ill^{mo} [The most Illustrious] Edoardo Vero Conte D'oxforde
 Gran Cameraro D'Ingilterra [Grand Chamberlain of England].
 Eduardus Verus Comes Oxoniensis
 Magnus Camerarius Angliae.

He adds a decorative swirl underneath. Unlike William of Stratford with his six scrawled signatures on legal documents, here is someone clearly taking pride not just in his status ("The most Illustrious"), but in his name and in the artful flourish of his every written word.

Uncovering these documents begins to render obsolete the frustration that "There is no definite record of Lord Oxford's whereabouts in the summer months of 1575" (Ogburn and Ogburn 84). He was in Venice at least till late June, perhaps also because the theatrical season in Venice lasted to July (Anderson 81). In spite of the growing threat of plague in Venice in mid-summer 1575, this was ample opportunity to meet the great painter Titian (Anderson 95-96); to become connected to Santa Maria Formosa and San Giorgio dei Greci (Anderson 82); and on the north side to be visiting Campo San Geremia because of Virginia Padoana (Anderson 83), the famous courtesan.

We wish to point out that Oxford was not asking the Consiglio that he be present at a meeting of the intense and intimidating Council. Rather, the rooms to which he requested access were covered with the works of Italian Renaissance masters such as Veronese, Tintoretto, Aliense, Vassilacchi, and Zelotti. Here is evidence of Oxford the aesthete, eager for new sensory experience, especially of an artistic nature entirely unavailable in England. Now that we know Oxford accessed these chambers, we are continuing our research for possible connections from the paintings in these secret chambers with the Shakespeare works, especially *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

Oxford Incognito

Since this discovery, we have been increasingly troubled by the inability to uncover other Venetian documents concerning Oxford. "The earl would have had to present his papers of introduction from the Venetian ambassador in Paris to the *doge* (duke) and his court at the Palazzo Ducale—the city's central municipal building" (Anderson 81). As we wrote previously:

We know that a nobleman of Oxford's caliber—Lord Great Chamberlain of England—even if he had merely been indulging in a "continental tour," should have been written of, as we now have an understanding of the processes for when foreign dignitaries arrived in Italian cities such as Venice: how one had to receive licenses, permissions, letters of introduction and privileges of safe conduct, from various branches of royal courts and governments in order to move between cities and countries on the continent. When Philip Sidney traveled through in 1574, he had to register his presence and seek a license for carrying arms and maintaining a household for

which he accepted responsibility [Rawdon Brown, April 19, 1574, Consiglio dei Dieci, to Padua, arms and attendants]. Foreigners, nobility, and even locals were required to register any relocations. Sidney appears in the Venetian registry; but where is Oxford? We found him ...making his special request to view the secret chambers with all the artwork. But long prior to this request of late June, on arrival in Venice and regarding his doings there, he should be showing up somewhere in the dozens of buste we scoured. There should be a record of his presentation at some of the bureaucratic offices, the first stops for anyone of note received at the Doge's Palace: the Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Dispacci (lettere) degli ambasciatori (dispatches of ambassadors); the Consiglio di Dieci, Deliberazioni (deliberations); the Collegio (College); Notatorio (Notary); the Senato Deliberazioni, Terra (Senate deliberations concerning land matters); the Senato Deliberazioni, Secreti; the Ceremoniali; the Notarile, Atti (acts); the Bollettino storico, notizario estero (historical bulletins and newsletters concerning foreign matters); the Cancelleria (Chancellery); the Esecutori delle deliberazioni del Senato (executors of decisions by the Senate); the Capi di Consiglio, licenze per visitare ambasciatori e personaggi esteri (licenses for visiting ambassadors and foreign persons). And he should be registered somewhere in the *Antichi Inventari dell'Archivio Gonzaga* (Delahoyde and Moriarty, "Vanishing" 27).

We became concerned when we scoured *buste* (envelopes) containing documents from branches of Venetian government that should at least confirm the Consiglio's determination and found the designation "Carta Tagliata" (= Cut Page). We then viewed the *buste* first-hand and, although we have no expertise in the forensics of vandalism, the cut did not appear to us like a yellowed, seventeenth-century page tear, but the result of a much more recent blade cut, which of course is worrisome.

Still, we do not believe that traditional Shakespeare advocates are responsible for Oxford's archival obliteration. In de Vere's odd disappearance act, one is more encouragingly reminded of Shakespeare's "astonishing capacity to be everywhere and nowhere, to assume all positions and to slip free of all constraints" (Greenblatt 242). We have asked ourselves, "Did Oxford seek to gondola under the radar, another early chapter in his eternal curse of anonymity?" (Delahoyde and Moriarty, "Vanishing" 27).

Prior to his continental tour, the Earl had already demonstrated his stealth. His semi-defection of July 1574, according to French ambassador La Mothe Fenelon's report to Catherine de Medici, had Queen Elizabeth "completely shaken and full of apprehension" about Oxford having "passed incognito across the sea to Flanders" (qtd. in Anderson 70). In May 1575, Lord Burghley,

attempting to keep track of his son-in-law's movements, received a letter from Sir Richard Shelley in Venice, reporting that Oxford turned down "a house furnished that would have cost him nothing." Alan Nelson acknowledges, "Thus Oxford declined direct surveillance along with free housing" (Nelson 126). Oxford was also subsequently able to slip away from another of Burghley's agents:

There is no definite record of Lord Oxford's whereabouts in the summer months of 1575. [No longer entirely true, as per our discovery here.] William Lewyn, the painter, who had accompanied him thus far from Paris, lost track of his Lordship and reported to Burghley that he did not know whether he had gone to Greece or was still in Italy... Thus we find that Burghley was employing the portrait-painter, whom Ambassador Dale had recommended, as a spy. The mettlesome Earl of Oxford had obviously discovered what was up and had escaped in no little disgust (Ogburn and Ogburn 84).

Then, Anderson points to an "unusual wording—not that de Vere never made it to Milan but that he'd 'passed this way [in]visible to any English eye'—suggest[ing] that de Vere had entered Milan incognito" (Anderson 105).

Are all the disguises and dissembling in the Shakespeare plays merely theatrical, or do they also actually reveal another autobiographical element? Disguises occur in numerous Shakespeare plays: in *Love's Labour's Lost*; in *As You Like It*; in *Twelfth Night* with Feste pointlessly dressed as Sir Topas while Maria admits that Malvolio couldn't see him anyway; in *Henry V* when the King can lurk among the commoners (Anderson 104); in *Antony and Cleopatra* when the title characters go on a people-watching date—"Tonight we'll wander through the streets and note / The qualities of people" (I.i.53-54)—et al. It is highly conceivable that Oxford blurred theater and reality, exploring his own identities through the adoption of alter-egos in disguises that allowed him less restricted access to all strata of his world. He may even have established a diplomatic trend: according to an ambassadorial report from 7 October 1604, "Secretary Scaramelli reports to the Cabinet that the English Ambassador ([Henry] Wotton) has arrived in Venice, but that he desires to remain incognito for two or three days to put his house in order before receiving visits and take a purge" (Brown, X.282).

In a previous article ("Vanishing"), we speculated that perhaps Oxford was able to bypass the usual obligatory paper-trail of introductions, to skirt the bureaucracies, and to have been escorted secretly and immediately into the

interior circles of power if he were on a diplomatic mission for the Elizabethan court of sufficient importance. Perhaps this scenario accounts for making the character of Othello remind all present at his death scene, “I have done the State some service, and they know ’t” (V.ii.339).⁹

Was the real nature of Oxford’s presence on the continent top-secret enough for the reports of him to have been encrypted? We have seen a large number of ambassadorial documents partially or fully rendered in code. We will continue searching. We intend to explore the archives in Genoa, the location at which Oxford bragged that one of his military adventures took place (Anderson 91-92). In September of 1575, Oxford was returning from Genoa due to “extreme heats” and having injured his knee on a Venetian galley (Nelson 128; cf. Ogburn and Ogburn 84-85). In early October, he appeared in Venice, apparently having visited Milan after all (Nelson 130). Late in November, Oxford was in Padua, where we also hope to discover traces of him.

Further Continental Political Interest in the Earl of Oxford

In 2017, again in Florence, we discovered another Medici document recording political interest in the Earl of Oxford (*Archivio Mediceo del Principato, Varie*, Doc. 122). The reference occurs in a multi-page brief, summarizing for the Medicis the essentials regarding England and its organization: its districts, nobles, councils, barons, bishops and archbishops, etc., with an eye to their power, status, and Catholic affiliation.

The last few pages describe the military prowess of England (the number of horses, soldiers, etc.) and more specifically of the Catholics (e.g., how well armed the bishops are). The writer suggests that provided that some 10,000 Spanish and Italian soldiers volunteer to join them, they already have “10,000-12,000 Catholic soldiers [*santi soldati*] and a thousand horses with spears and a thousand archbishops on horseback [who will be] certainly sufficient to reinstate the Catholic religion in the Kingdom [*rimettere la Religione Cattolica in esso Regno*].” This has been reported by “some Captains,” according to the writer. Then he reports on the international trade of the kingdom, the import and export of goods: salt, for example, seems to be precious for the English too. The information comes from a merchant who was born in Milan but spent fifty years in England transporting goods to the thirty-nine “provinces” that are listed and classified in the document.

One list includes people who are either part of a particular office or a department (e.g., *tesorero delle rendite*—treasurer of the income department;

capitano di l'armaria—captain in the military; etc.).¹⁰ Of historic interest is the following:

Appreso saranno il Sig[no]ri del Regno che non sono de consili e quelli che sono Cattolici sono seg[na]ti co[n] + e li partiali Catt[olic]i con ++.

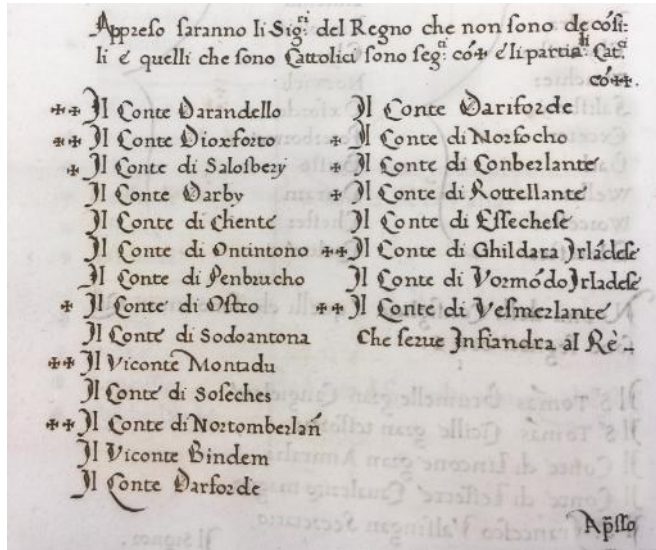


Figure 4: A Medici document listing nobles and Catholic affiliation.

The English translation:

What follows is a list of the Kingdom's Gentlemen who do not belong to the above offices/counsels, and those who are Catholic are marked with + and those who are partially Catholic with ++.

- ++ Il Conte Darandello
- ++ Il Conte Dioxforto
- + Il Conte di Salosbery
- Il Conte Darby
- ...

Of the twenty-three names, Oxford's is the second listed (after the Earl of Arundel), and he receives the two-cross designation, indicating that the Italian Catholics consider him a potential ally. This is where the assumption that religion and politics are all that matter about Oxford goes awry. The Italians assessed Henry FitzAlan, the Earl of Arundel correctly; but de Vere's informal or secret conciliatory functions notwithstanding, in essence he was inclined towards culture and art, not the pursuit of power. In Shakespeare's play, for example, the "seduction of Brutus" into the plot against Julius Caesar details the subtle luring strategies employed by would-be assassins, and

the disastrous results of letting oneself be influenced by those consumed by extremist politics.

In the end Oxford proved loyal to the crown, realizing that his cousin Lord Henry Howard, Sir Charles Arundell, and Francis Southwell were not simply appreciating the culture of Catholic countries but were murderous in intent. After Oxford attempted, just before Christmas 1580, to alert Elizabeth to the danger posed by these traitors and would-be assassins, “Arundell’s Accusations” were formulated to indict Oxford, declaring him guilty of a wide assortment of murderous, drunken, sexual, and satanic sins, including his ostensible insulting of Elizabeth’s singing voice (Ogburn and Ogburn 297ff, esp. 303; Anderson 165ff; Nelson 249ff). Although another bitter and defamatory “Loss of Good Name” for Oxford, Arundell proved to be a traitor, defecting to Spain (Ogburn and Ogburn 704). The conniving Howard bided his time and eventually found himself thriving at court again after the Machiavellian manipulator Sir Robert Cecil gained power.

In mid-December, Oxford travelled to Florence (Nelson 131), from which he proceeded south to Siena. Burghley saved Oxford’s Siena letter, dated 3 January 1576 (Fowler 203-247; Nelson 132; cf. Anderson 101), another in which he insisted that Burghley “sell my lands” so that he could continue his travels.

Where did Oxford stay while in Siena? Venice had the Doge; Mantua had the Gonzagas; Florence, the Medicis. In the Siena archive, we asked for help to determine who was the primary family there in 1575/76—with whom would a travelling English dignitary have resided? The librarian indicated that such an identification is impossible by presenting us with an enormous tome listing the main families of the time. No one family was supreme. Siena by the 1570s was no longer an independent *Repubblica*: its governorship was gone. It had been absorbed into the Medicis’ Tuscan empire, and it was now under Florentine rule.

Another archival researcher suggested that we turn our energies from the State Archive towards the Accademia dei Rozzi, where he believed documents concerning theater history were kept. We subsequently learned that the Accademia’s archival materials dating before 1690 were given to the Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati. The Accademia degli Intronati was a sixteenth-century intellectual and creative club, collectively responsible for the *commedia* titled *Gl’Ingannati* (*The Deceived Ones*), the source play for Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* and one regularly performed in Siena on 6 January: the Epiphany, or “Twelfth Night.” Clearly, finding more about Oxford in Siena in early January 1576 is a valuable enterprise.

Eventually, our research led us towards three Siennese luminaries Oxford would have wanted to meet: Piccolomini, Lombardelli, and Bulgarini. Bellisario Bulgarini (1539-1619) was an ambassador and a poet/playwright, active

when Oxford was in town, though mostly publishing later. *Gli Scambi* (*The Exchanges*),

recited by the students of the Studio of Siena in 1574 (in 1575 according to the Cerreta) and published in 1611, presents the typical characters of the Siena *commedia* of the time, imitating closely the motives of *The Deceivers* of Intronati Academics, and in the whole was judged mediocre by Sanesi “for the overwhelming enveloping of the fairy tale, for the proliferation of flirty dialogues of inappropriate considerations and the excessive number of horrific scenes” (trans. from Agostini).

Orazio Lombardelli (1545-1608) is another Sienese person of interest, having written books on grammar and literary subjects, and having dedicated works to Englishmen such as Robert Peckham and Henry Wotton, whom he may have hosted. The most promising leads, however, point to Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-1579)—a writer, philosopher, and playwright whose comedies were produced by the Accademia degli Intronati, and who, despite the communal attribution, is probably responsible himself for having written *G'Innannati*. We return to Siena in 2018 to follow up on this very promising lead.

One additional trail that we necessarily left incomplete focuses on the Venetian *filza* listed first in this article. Rawdon Brown translated not just Morosini's announcement of Oxford's arrival in Paris, but also his departure. Oxford left Venice in early March 1576 (Nelson 134), journeyed through Milan, and into Paris. On 3 April 1576, Morosini wrote from Paris to Venice (Nelson 135). Rawdon Brown records Venetian ambassador Morosini's *bolletino* to the Signory:

The Earl of Oxford, an English gentleman has arrived here. He has come from Venice, and, according to what has been said to me by the English ambassador here resident [Dale], speaks in great praise of the numerous courtesies which he has received in that city; and he reported that on his departure from Venice your Serenity had already elected an Ambassador to be sent to the Queen, and the English Ambassador expressed the greatest satisfaction at the intelligence. I myself, not having received any information from your Serenity or from any of my correspondents, did not know what answer to give concerning this matter (Brown, *VII*. 548).

We have a discrepancy to resolve. Early in 1576, Venice had voted against appointing an ambassador to England—in favor, 44; opposed, 131—as one can read in deliberations transcribed by Rawdon Brown (though misdated). Indeed, Venice did not resume ambassadorial relations until 1603! Did the Venetians lie to Oxford as he left Italy about what the polls were indicating concerning Venice's political leanings? Or was Oxford, before his Parisian departure on 10 April, deceiving the French? We are determined to access

this document, since, like the earlier Rawdon Brown excerpt (above), the transcription may be incomplete. Perhaps with added contextual information, we may illuminate this curious diplomatic deception.

Medici Bolletino Alludes to Oxford in 1579

Although Oxford likely absorbed what he needed to become Shakespeare from first-hand experience of Italian theater, we hypothesize that he still corresponded with key cultural centers and primary families after his continental trip, perhaps seeking musical scores, if not literary and theatrical publications. Indeed, professor Roger Prior discovered that Shakespeare had used very selective, even unique, Italian sources for both *As You Like It* and *Love's Labor's Lost* derived from Torquato Tasso's play *Aminta*.¹¹

We expanded our researches beyond 1575/76 to more inclusive *buste* when we exhausted the more focused resources in an archive. Consequently, we discovered a *bolletino* referencing Oxford from 1579. Many will recognize the newsworthy incident (*Archivio Mediceo del Principato, Varie, Doc. 113*).

The transcription:

A i giorni passati fra il Conte di Oxford et Filippo Sidney furon parole di dispregio et gravi; non si sono ancora potuti accommodare, et è di qualche conseguenza per esser il p.^o [= primo] nobiliss.^o [= nobilissimo], et l'altro nipote del Conte di Losseter.

Rendered into modern Italian:

Nei giorni scorsi fra il Conte di Oxford e Filippo Sidney ci furono gravi offese; non si sono ancora rappacificati, e questo comporta qualche conseguenza perché il primo è nobilissimo, e l'altro è nipote del conte di Losseter.

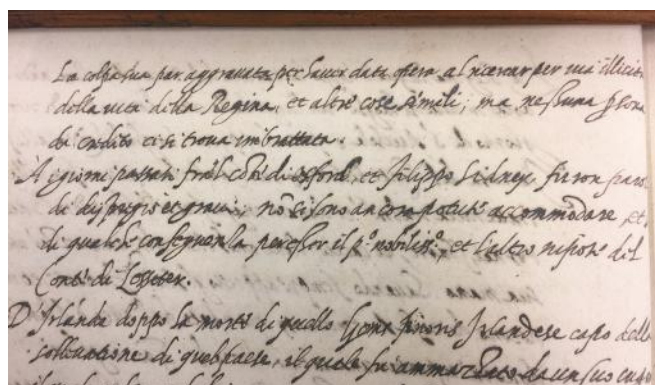


Figure 5: A bolletino referencing Oxford from 1579.

And the English translation:

Over the past few days, the Earl of Oxford and Philip Sidney have exchanged a few grave verbal offenses; they have not reconciled yet, which entails certain consequences as the former is of a most noble lineage and the latter is a nephew of the earl of Leicester.

Once again, diplomats connected to foreign courts show a keen interest at news of strife between Protestant parties and even petty tensions among luminaries in the Elizabethan court. The “tennis-court incident” is well known (Anderson 151f; Nelson 195ff), being the most vivid of the scant sources of information concerning Oxford in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Typically and unfortunately, interest in the Earl is limited merely to the political sphere, and his traditional biographers have judged him incorrectly.

The Oxfordian writer Charles Beauclerk has asserted, “if you get Shakespeare wrong, you get his plays wrong ... if you get Shakespeare wrong, you get the Elizabethan age wrong—its literature, its culture, its politics” (Beauclerk 16). I have added that if you get Shakespeare wrong, you get literature wrong, and probably you get the very phenomenon of creativity wrong (Delahoyde, “Preface” 1). The archival discoveries discussed here indicate that it all began with his contemporaries at home and abroad getting Edward de Vere wrong.

The State Archives concern state politics, but not all materials concerning 1575/76 have been donated and collected at the various archives, much less indexed. We think it noteworthy that descendants of Baldassare Castiglione decided recently to donate to the Mantovan archives a collection of early sixteenth-century letters. What else they and other families, in private collections outside the archives, may own from later in the century is a question we intend to pursue in discovering what transformed the Englishman Edward de Vere into the international, multi-cultural, universal “Shake-speare.”

Endnotes

1. Most of the material in this article was presented at the 2017 Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship annual conference in Chicago.
2. Our findings supplement the work by B.M. Ward, Mark Anderson, and Cheryl Eagan-Donovan regarding Oxford's continental tour.
3. Rawdon Brown and G. Cavendish Bentinck, eds, *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Vol. VII*, 1558-1580, London: 1890. We refer specifically to an ambassadorial letter from 12 March 1575, and another from 3 April 1576, each discussed in this article.
4. Mr. Giovanni Caniato, State Archivist in Venice, has given us the privilege of viewing the file in question and of photographing this first of the two de Vere documents.
5. An infinitude of gratitude is due from us to Elisabetta Gavioli and Claudio Fraccari, scholars and teachers in Mantova, for their help in transcribing and translating most of our discoveries discussed in this article, and to Mrs. Maria Luisa Aldegheri, now retired as Senior Archival Librarian at the Archivio di Stato di Mantova, who supplied detailed help with transcriptions and other subtleties. Additional acknowledgement is due to Elitza Kotzeva at Washington State University for her nuanced Italian-to-English fine-tuning.
6. Meanwhile, a group of young Venetian gentlemen were visiting the English court. Rawdon Brown misdated to a year later this simultaneous ambassadorial mission. We intend eventually to publish a fuller explanation of sixteenth-century Anglo-Italian diplomatic relations, including an explanation of the importance of the Schifanoia letters in England and of ambassador Michiel in Venice, tasked with monitoring English affairs.
7. Presentations include " 'Shakespeare' in Italy and Archival Spritzatura" at the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Conference in Ashland, Oregon, September 2015 (available online as "New Evidence of Oxford in Italy," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6D4SkN7UGPs>); "Vanishing Vere in Venice" at the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Conference, Boston, November 2016; and "Loves' Labours Lost and Found in the Italian Archives" at the SOF Conference in Chicago, October 2017.

8. According to Elitza Kotzeva, the less literal translation for “places of sanctuary,” sounding more natural in English, might simply be “sanctuaries.” The noun preceding “sanctuary” is plural, but it is unclear whether these are “luoghi del santuario,” or rather “loghi” del santuario.” In the Venetian dialect, luogo was often used as “logo” (*Dizionario del dialetto Veneziano*).
9. That Oxford may have been given some diplomatic work to do on the continent is proposed by Anderson (esp. 74-75, 461), and W. Ron Hess.
10. Elitza Kotzeva has provided this overall assessment of the document. Mrs. Maria Luisa Aldegheri helped us with the translation.
11. See Prior, “Tasso’s *Aminta* in Two Shakespearean Comedies.” In particular:

Shakespeare’s borrowings from the *Aminta* raise the question: what text of the play did he use? After its first performance in 1573, several different versions were in circulation. The Epilogo, for example, or “Amor Fuggitivo,” appears in only one extant edition, the Baldiniana of 1581, and in two manuscript copies. The short musical interludes between the acts, or “intermedi,” are even rarer. They are found in no existing manuscript, and do not appear in print until an edition of 1666 (Rome, Dragondelli), where it is said that they used to be performed during stage performances. There is no doubt, however, that the text that Shakespeare used, probably in 1593, contained both the Epilogo in *As You Like It*, and from the “Intermedio secondo” in both *Love’s Labor’s Lost* and *As You Like It*. He had available, therefore, a text of the *Aminta* which was more “complete” than any that has come down to us from that time. This means that he is likely to have obtained it from an unusually privileged and knowledgeable source. It also suggests that he knew what a complete text was, and took the trouble to get hold of one. There were plenty of incomplete editions of the *Aminta* available in England in the 1590s but Shakespeare seems to have rejected them (Prior 275).

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