

Transforming Productions of Shakespeare's Plays

by Gary Goldstein

When one accepts the traditional author of the Shakespeare canon—let's call him William of Stratford—both scholars and theatre professionals begin with a blank slate on which to impose their own ideas about the author's original intent. That is, if the Bard was a self-tutored genius from the provinces with no access to Elizabeth's Court, his plays are simply imaginative displays of wit by a working-class author, designed to amuse a general public. They are fantasies, in effect, of society and politics in England and Italy.

Thus, the crux of this paper: how does the authorship debate change the way in which the plays can be produced for modern audiences if the true Shakespeare was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and if the plays were written 20 years earlier and then revised?

That was the question Michael Miller, Dean of the graduate theatre program at New York University, asked me a generation ago after reading an essay on the authorship written by U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens (Stevens 1373). I would like to answer that question now.

This particular alternate case—that an aristocrat from Elizabeth's Court wrote the Shakespeare plays under a pseudonym—was introduced in 1920 by English scholar J.T. Looney in his book, *'Shakespeare' Identified in Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford*.



John Thomas Looney

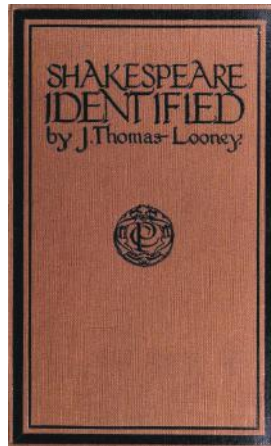
Looney's contention was that the plays take on a different perspective if the true author was the Earl of Oxford (1550-1604). Clearly, they were designed

to entertain as well as educate all levels of Elizabethan society: from performances at the Royal Court, to the upscale private Blackfriars Theatre seating 800 spectators, to the two enormous public theatres each seating 2,500 theatregoers.

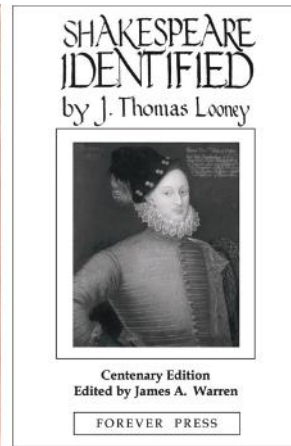
If we accept this new identity of an aristocratic author who lived at the apex of Elizabethan society, the plays can then be examined as ambitious dramas on the political crises facing the Elizabethan state: the English and Scottish royal successions, the 19-year war with Spain, the French civil war, and internal dissension by English Puritans. What's more, the numerous plays set in Italy and France may be viewed as the dramatist's lifelong effort to transplant the Renaissance culture of Europe into England through the stage. Indeed, Oxford visited France and Italy for 15 months while there is no evidence that William of Stratford ever left England.

At the same time, Oxfordians contend that the Shakespeare plays are intensely personal. That is, the works grow out of an individual life, which influences the way the plays are viewed and read. With-

out that there is the sense they are all just "words, words, words" and this becomes dismissive in an age when few people recognize what Ben Hecht called "a magnificent march of words."



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A key line of evidence in arguing the case for Edward de Vere focuses on the numerous parallels in the Shakespeare canon with his biography. Like Hamlet, Oxford was captured by pirates off the coast of Denmark; like Bertram in *All's Well* he was a ward of state; like Timon in *Timon of Athens* he was a bankrupt; like Prince Hal and his merry band in *Henry IV* both Oxford and his servants robbed Treasury agents on the same road, Gad's Hill; like the servants of the Montagues and Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*, the servants of Oxford and of Sir Thomas Knyvet fought and killed each other in the streets of London; like Bassanio in *Merchant of Venice* he lost 3,000

Gary Goldstein holds an MA in Media from New York University and is currently editor of the annual journal, *The Oxfordian*. He is the former editor of *The Elizabethan Review* and author of *Reflections on the True Shakespeare* (2016). He has worked as a television producer, co-producing the program, *Uncovering Shakespeare: An Update* (1992) with William F. Buckley Jr. as moderator.

pounds on seafaring investments; like King Lear he was the father of three daughters, two married and one unmarried.

Does knowing these personal echoes increase a modern audience's understanding of any Shakespeare play? Or rather, does knowing the author's human psychology enhance the emotional intensity of our modern theatrical experience?

Confining ourselves just to the play of *Hamlet*, we find numerous personal allusions to Oxford's life throughout the text, as Tom Bethell pointed out in the October 1991 issue of *The Atlantic*:

- His father-in-law, Lord Burghley, wrote out a set of precepts ("Towards thy superiors be humble yet generous; with thine equals familiar yet respective") strongly reminiscent of the advice Polonius gives to Laertes ("Be thou familiar but by no means vulgar..."). Other precepts also echoed the advice of Polonius. For example, Burghley writes that, "Neither borrow of a neighbor or of a friend, but of a stranger, whose paying for it thou shalt hear no more of it ... Trust not any man with thy life credit, or estate." Compare with Polonius: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be; for loan oft loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry."



William Cecil,
Lord Burghley

Burghley's *Precepts*, intended for the use of his son Robert, was published in 1618. *Hamlet* first appeared in quarto in 1603. Edmund K. Chambers, one of the leading Shakespeare scholars of the twentieth century, offered the following explanation: "Conceivably Shakespeare knew a pocket manuscript." A more likely explanation is that Oxford, being Burghley's son-in-law from 1571 to 1588, had easy access to the original manuscript.

- In Act II, Polonius sends Reynaldo to spy on Laertes in Paris, possibly catching him "drinking, fencing, swearing, quarreling," or "falling out at tennis." In real life Burghley's older son, Thomas Cecil, did go to Paris, whence the well-informed Burghley somehow received information, through a secret channel, of Thomas's "inordinate love of... dice and cards." Oxford, incidentally, did have a real "falling out at tennis"—not a widely practiced sport in those days—in 1579 at Court with Sir Philip Sidney, the Earl of Leicester's nephew.
- In Act II, Scene 2 Hamlet makes a cryptic remark to Guildenstern:
Hamlet: But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.
Guildenstern: In what, my dear lord?"

Hamlet: I am but mad north-northwest: when the wind is southerly,
I know a hawk from a handsaw.

Hamlet's answer is a topical allusion to Elizabethan attempts to discover a North West passage to China from 1577 to 1585. 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 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. Oxford truly was "mad" north-north-west.

- Oxford and Hamlet are similar figures, courtiers and Renaissance men of varied accomplishments; both were scholars, athletes, and poets. Many critics have noted Hamlet's resemblance to Castiglione's beau ideal in *The Courtier*. At the age of twenty-one, Oxford wrote a Latin introduction to a translation of this book. What's more, both Oxford and Hamlet were patrons of play-acting companies.
- In 1573 Oxford contributed a preface to an English translation of *Cardanas Comfort*, a book of consoling advice which the orthodox scholar Hardin Craig called "Hamlet's book." The book includes passages from which Hamlet's soliloquy was surely taken ("What should we account of death to be resembled to anything better than sleep.... We are assured not only to sleep, but also to die....").
- Hamlet's trusted friend is Horatio. Oxford's most trusted relative was the general, Sir Horace Vere, called Horatio in some documents (and so named by the *Dictionary of National Biography*).
- Polonius is stabbed and killed by Hamlet while spying on him. When he was 17 years of age, Oxford accidentally stabbed and killed a servant of Burghley's (possibly another of Burghley's spies) at Burghley's house. At the coroner's inquest the next day, a jury found that the servant was drunk and had caused his own death. Burghley later recorded the event in his diary:
"Thomas Brinknell, an under-cook, was hurt by the Earl of Oxford at Cecil House, whereof he died, and by a verdict found *felo de se* with [Brinknell] running upon a point of a fence sword of the said Earl" (Nelson 47).

Burghley also later wrote that, "I did my best to have the jury find the death of a poor man whom he killed in my house to be found *se defendendo*." (Cecil II, 170) Whether Oxford's act was premeditated, provoked, accidental, or done in self-defense, he faced a penalty ranging from death (if it were

murder) to imprisonment for up to a year (if it were manslaughter) to loss of personal property (if it were accident or self-defense). De Vere escaped all of these through legal hairsplitting.

Oxford likely was satirizing the legal fictions that saved his own neck when he had the gravediggers in *Hamlet* discuss the legal rules of self-defense:

Second Clown [Gravedigger]...The crowner hath sat on her, and
finds it Christian burial.

First Clown. How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own
defense?

Second Clown. Why, 'tis found so.

First Clown. It must be *se offendendo*, it cannot be else.

Attorney Tom Regnier has analyzed the scene as follows:

The first gravedigger means “se defendendo,” or self-defense, not “se offendendo,” but here the lower-class characters misstate the law, as they usually do in Shakespeare’s plays. The idea that one could drown oneself “in self-defense” (presumably to prevent oneself from killing oneself) is as zany a piece of illogic as to think that a man would commit suicide by running into another man’s sword. It is also a parody on legal treatises of the time that analyzed suicide by the same formulae as homicide while completely ignoring that in suicide the “murderer” and “victim” were the same person (Regnier 116).

In other words, the author of *Hamlet*—Shakespeare’s most autobiographical play—integrated a host of biographical parallels between Oxford’s life and that of Hamlet’s by design, but none that connect the life of William of Stratford to the play. Would modern audiences find that this personal subtext adds value to their understanding and enjoyment of the drama? I think it would.

Modern Strategies for Updating the Plays

Perhaps the first principle for directors is deciding whether to present the plays unedited. In commenting upon the drama of *Hamlet*, theatre director and visual artist Gordon Craig thought Shakespeare revised and enlarged the play for the Second Quarto’s publication with the goal of transforming the piece into a dramatic novel. And that this method was also applied by Shakespeare to the rest of the canon when he chose to publish the playscripts. If this is the case, then the entire canon may already be one step removed from the author’s original conception.

Indeed, the Second Quarto version of *Hamlet* is 50 percent longer than the First and thus unworkable as a stage production, running to four hours and losing its dramatic coherence with the author’s multiple digressions, most

of which do not advance the plot or add to characterization. Anyone who doubts this can decide for themselves after watching Sir Derek Jacobi's performance in the best full-length version of *Hamlet* on DVD, the 1980 Royal Shakespeare Company production.

The great American director and actor of Shakespeare's works, Orson Welles, concurred in this interpretation, for he aggressively edited the texts in preparing the plays for stage and film over a 30-year career. This began with his stage production of *Julius Caesar* in 1937, continued with his versions of *Macbeth* and *Othello* for TV and film, and ended with his 1966 movie, *Chimes*



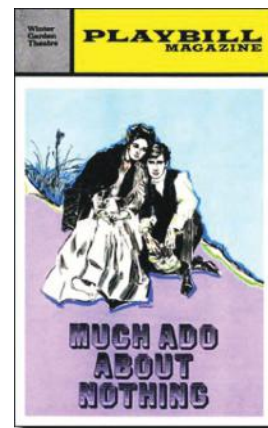
Julius Caesar (1937)

at Midnight, an amalgam of *Henry IV Parts I and II*, *Henry V* and *Merry Wives*, by focusing on Falstaff's relationship with Prince Hal. Welles did not add a word to the screenplay; he simply edited out extraneous material that detracted from the dramatic action to accommodate the two-hour structure of a commercial film.

At this point let us review other methods which directors can employ in making Shakespeare relevant for 21st century audiences.

As a result of William of Stratford's anemic biography, modern directors are unable to provide their audiences with greater insight into the author's psychology, and instead choose to experiment with casting to incorporate the latest social fashions. For example, they substitute the gender of a protagonist to see if greater social insight can be achieved by having a male sensibility re-filtered through a different sexual persona. A recent success in this regard was the casting of Helen Mirren as Propsera [sic] in Julie Taymor's movie version of *The Tempest*. However, such inspired casting, which relies mostly on the strengths of an individual talent, often fails when the method is extended to gender-switch all roles or cast the entire play with just a single race. Such radical re-casting has usually confused audiences because it violates too many assumptions integral to the characters' motivations as originally conceived by the author. Often, the play becomes a modern joke employing irony as a means of integrating the latest sociological currents.

I think a more effective way is finding a modern analogue for each of the cultural elements in the play being produced. For example, the 1972 production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by A.J. Antoon, set the action not in Renaissance Sicily but in 1900 America at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War.



That decision allowed Antoon to use the full panoply of *fin de siècle* popular culture in the production: the orchestra played ragtime music; his choreographer used One-Step dances; his costume designer dressed the actors and actresses in seersucker suits, straw boaters and floor-length Victorian dresses; and his set designer staged the action in saloons, drawing rooms, and gazebos. It even enabled Antoon to begin the play by having the actors march onto stage through the audience dressed in Army uniforms to the brass band accompaniment of a John Philip Sousa march.

By centering the play in the Gay Nineties, the director also could make excellent use of minor cultural archetypes, which fleshed out Shakespeare's lesser characters for a modern American audience and ensured immediate social recognition. An example of this was having Dogberry perform his slapstick interrogations as a Keystone Cop in dress uniform while wagging his baton behind his back.

The resonance achieved by integrating this local knowledge of 1890's America created a commercial success that reached national audiences: the play ran for three months in the Winter Garden Theatre, which seats 1,500 people, and was then televised nationally by CBS-TV to an audience of 20 million, and finally produced as a commercial video. The theatrical production was effective enough to attract the attendance of President Nixon.

Of course, in addition to a modern-dress staging, or even a modern language production, there is yet another option: the modern ideas interpretation. *Julius Caesar* becomes Mussolini; *King Lear*, absurdist despair; *The Tempest*, an allegory of colonialism. Great actors are especially susceptible to this: Lawrence Olivier made Hamlet a Freudian study and Coriolanus a fascist.

By updating the period or centering the play in a specific social or political era, directors may well dispense with the mystery of discovering the author's original intent. If they choose to center the action in the Elizabethan period, however, then the ability to reveal authorial intent becomes vital.

The Theatrical Value of Topical Allusions

I propose another method that can achieve theatrical relevance—charting the numerous topical allusions in Shakespeare's *oeuvre*. The goal here, of course, is to create a more intense theatrical experience for modern audiences. My argument is that topical allusions would show audiences a new sense of application by connecting a play with both Elizabethan history and a particular life.

Let me illustrate how the concept can be executed using several plays from the canon. Obviously, the extensive ringing of the bell in *Macbeth* was chosen by the author for its dramatic impact. By following Shakespeare's directions,

the bell functions only as a signal to Macbeth from his wife. As *E Notes* describes it:

In Act II, Scene 1, the ringing of the bell is the sign that tells Macbeth it is time for him to go and kill Duncan. The plan is that his wife will ring the bell when it is safe for him to go and commit the murder. She will do this when the chamberlains are safely asleep (E-Notes).

Yet Shakespeare chose this inspired auditory device to intensify the effect on English audiences because it paralleled a contemporary political event: the massacre of 10,000 Huguenots attending the 1572 wedding of Margaret of Valois to the Huguenot leader, Henry of Navarre, in Paris, apparently on the order of her mother, Catherine de Medici. As *Wikipedia* succinctly notes:

It seems probable that a signal was given by ringing bells for matins (between midnight and dawn) at the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, near the Louvre, which was the parish church of the kings of France (Wikipedia).

Indeed, Macbeth comments on the compelling nature of the bell's sound:

[A bell rings]

Macbeth: I go, and it is done. The bell invites me.

Clearly, Shakespeare's Elizabethan audiences felt the visceral terror of the impending murder of Duncan by recalling the massacre of innocents in Paris due to the country's religious civil war, also carried out as a betrayal of aristocratic hospitality.

Shakespeare used the public ringing of bells to achieve a totally different effect in the comedy of *Twelfth Night*, understood especially by those who lived in London.

In Act V, Scene I the Clown makes the following opaque statement, at least to modern audiences:

Primo, secondo, tertio, is a good play; and the old saying is, the third pays for all: the triplex, sir, is a good tripping measure; or the bells of St. Bennet, sir, may put you in mind; one, two, three.

Hugh Holland and Ruth Loyd Miller discovered that the reference to the three bells was not to bells from one church of St. Bennet but from three different churches all named St. Bennet, described in John Stow's *Survey of London*. The three churches were called St. Bennet Fynke, the Parish Church of St. Bennet, and St. Bennet Hude.

What made the reference a multi-layered joke for its London audiences was that the three churches were so located as to form an equilateral triangle, within which were inns where plays were performed. What the Clown was saying is, “When you hear the bells, let that put you in mind to come to the play.” From these inns, the bells from the three St. Bennet churches would be clearly audible from three directions.

There were yet more elements to Shakespeare’s joke. In this short speech, the Clown speaks several times of units of three. The triplex he mentions is primarily a musical term, meaning triple time. The “tripping” is a dance that was often a feature of plays that London churchmen complained about. Finally, for Shakespeare’s playgoers, the triple sound of which the Clown speaks had a special meaning: after the third sound of the trumpets at the theatre came the prologue to the play. Thus, the sound of the trumpets was a warning to those at the theatre that the play was about to begin. It was likely a jibe at the churchmen that the bells of St. Bennet can also put people in mind of the theatre. Since City authorities tried to suppress the production of plays on Sunday afternoons in 1574, but were not successful until 1581, this particular allusion referred to a particular time period. After 1581, the bells of St. Bennet would put theatre goers in mind of church, not of plays and tripping.

Shakespeare and the Puritans

Shakespeare even embeds a topical allusion in a comedy that refers to a religious controversy in England. In Act V, Scene I of *As You Like It*, Shakespeare clearly puns on a Puritan scandal that began after the defeat of the Spanish Armada—the publication of the seven Martin Mar-prelate pamphlets from October 1588 to September 1589 by a pseudonymous author. All seven pamphlets attacked the prelates of the Anglican church for corruption in the name of Puritan principles. Shakespeare has Audrey and Touchstone allude to this:

Audrey: Faith, the priest was good enough, for all the old gentleman’s saying.

Touchstone: A most wicked Sir Oliver, Audrey, a most vile Mar-text. [sic]

These pamphlets, it appears, were even “found in the corners of chambers at Court”:

and when a prohibition issued that no one should carry about them any of the Mar-prelate pamphlets on pain of punishment, the Earl of Essex observed to the Queen, ‘What then is to become of me?’ drawing one of these pamphlets out of his bosom and presenting it to her (Disraeli).

In a 1589 pamphlet, Elizabethan playwright John Lyly openly acknowledged this use of the stage to comment upon social and political issues, for he “remarks that a Marprelate play, ‘if it be showed at Pauls...will cost you four pence’” (Gair 88-89).

Lyly, however, was not a Puritan writer or sympathizer. As E.K. Chambers states, Lyly and other dramatists were hired by the Church of England to counter the pseudonymous Puritan attacks with plays of their own:

The state is brought into the church and vices make play of church matters, said one episcopalian writer...[Francis] Bacon also condemned this “immodest and deformed manner of writing lately entertained, whereby matters of religion are handled in the Style of the stage.” But before long, the vigor of the attack drove the Bishops to seek on their side for an equally effective retort. They hired writers, including Lyly and Thomas Nashe; and these not only answered Martin [Mar-prelate] in his own vein, but also made use of the theatres for what must have been the congenial task of producing scurrilous plays against him (Chambers I: 294).

A Welsh preacher named John Penry was arrested four years later, in 1593, as their author and printer, then tried and sentenced to death for sedition.

Sometimes the allusions were a fusion of the personal and the political. In *Titus Andronicus*, Marcus first sees Lavinia after the Goth brothers have chopped off her hands and ripped out her tongue. Marcus laments the loss of Lavinia's musical abilities: “O, had the monster seen those lily hands / tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute” (2.4).

Then, in Act Three, Aaron enters with the message for Titus that if he cuts off one of his own hands, the Emperor will spare his sons. Marcus and Lucius argue that they should sacrifice their hands, but while Titus sends them off for an axe, he gets Aaron to cut off his hand.

These dismemberments were publicly meted out to members of Oxford's family circle. Oxford's first cousin, Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, was beheaded for treason in June 1572, when Oxford was 22 years old. Further, in November 1579, the husband of Oxford's other first cousin, Anne Vere, the unfortunately named John Stubbs, had his right hand publicly amputated for writing a pamphlet (*The Gaping Gulf*) critical of the Queen's proposed marriage to the French Duke of Alençon and therefore judged seditious.

In an even more personal vein, Oxford incorporated a criminal act that doubled as a topical allusion to those in know at Court.

Madcap Lords and *1 Henry IV*

On May 20-21, 1573, three of Oxford's servants helped him carry out an elaborate prank involving the robbery of two of the Earl's former employees, lying in wait for them at Gad's Hill, by the highway between Rochester and Gravesend. The two men were traveling on state business for Oxford's father-in-law William Cecil, England's Lord Treasurer, carrying money intended for the Exchequer.

The former associates of Oxford who were robbed, William Faunt and John Wotton, later submitted a complaint to the Lord Treasurer endorsed "May 1573 from Gravesend." After referring to the Earl's "raging demeanor" toward them, they recall "riding peacefully by the highway from Gravesend to Rochester" when

three cavaliers charged with bullets discharged at us by three of my Lord of Oxford's men ... who lay privily in a ditch awaiting our coming with full intent to murder us; yet (notwithstanding they all discharging upon us so near that my saddle having the girths broken fell with myself from the horse and a bullet within half a foot of me) it pleased God to deliver us from that determined mischief; whereupon they mounted on horseback and fled towards London with all possible speed (Whittemore 45-48).

In 1580, when John Stow published the first edition of his *Chronicles of England*, he reported that more than a century earlier Prince Hal "would wait in disguised array for his own receivers, and distress them of their money: and sometimes at such enterprises both he and his company were surely beaten: and when his receivers made to him their complaints, how they were robbed in their coming unto him, he would give them discharge of so much money as they had lost, and besides that, they should not depart from him without great rewards for their trouble and vexation."

As Hank Whittemore pointed out in his examination of the incident:

During the 1580s the Queen's Men performed *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, an anonymous play that was a forerunner of Shakespeare's royal histories, where Prince Hal and his friends carry out the same prank in the same place: the highway near Gad's Hill between Rochester and Gravesend, and the money is also intended for the Exchequer (Whittemore 45-48).

No such escapade by Prince Hal (much less one at Gad's Hill) appears in any of the historical sources.

Shakespeare adopted the Gad's Hill episode in *Famous Victories* for one scene in *Henry the Fourth Part One*. In act two, scene two, Falstaff and three of Prince Hal's other companions from the Boar's Head Tavern hold up and rob some travelers bearing "money of the king's ... on the way to the king's Exchequer," on the highway near Gad's Hill between Rochester and Gravesend—just as in *Famous Victories*, performed in the 1580s, and just as in the real-life episode involving Oxford and his men in 1573.

The Resonance of *King Lear*

Oxford had three daughters named Elizabeth, Bridget and Susan. When Oxford passed away in 1604, two of them were already married, leaving his youngest, Susan, like Cordelia, without a husband. This real-life situation, with its echo in *King Lear*, very likely prompted the following incident, according to Warren Hope, writing in the autumn 1997 issue of *The Elizabethan Review*.

A couplet recorded in the Diary of John Manningham had been used as part of court entertainment before the Queen at the home of Sir Thomas Egerton in the summer of 1602. Ladies of the court drew lots and each gift was accompanied by a couplet. Sir John Davies, who previously wrote ten sonnets celebrating the 1595 marriage of Oxford's daughter, Elizabeth Vere, and William Stanley, Lord Derby, wrote the couplet.

Blank: LA [DY] Susan Vere
Nothing's your lott, that's more then
can be told
For nothing is more precious then gold.

The couplet clearly indicates that Lady Susan Vere is the recipient of a priceless gift—one that is both "more then can be told" and "more precious then gold," a very special kind of "nothing" indeed. The couplet is in fact a riddle, awarding Susan Vere an inexpressible and precious gift that merely appears to be "nothing." What could that be? A look at the text of *King Lear* unravels the riddle.

In the first scene of *King Lear*, the scene which precipitates the action of the play, a kind of drawing of lots takes place. Lear divides his kingdom and announces the dowries



Countess of Montgomery, Susan Herbert (née de Vere) played a part in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens* in 1609. This illustration shows the costume of Queen Tomyris of the Massagetai.

to be awarded to his three daughters. He gives equal portions of the realm to Goneril and Reagan and their respective husbands, Albany and Cornwall. He reserves the largest portion of the kingdom for his youngest daughter, the unmarried Cordelia. To be awarded this portion, she is to declare publicly her love for her father in terms that will please him—no doubt by renouncing marriage in her father’s lifetime. The dialogue, beginning with the words of Lear, begins:

Lear: What can you say to draw
 A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak

Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.

Lear: Nothing?

Cordelia. Nothing.

Lear: Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

Cordelia: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
 My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
 According to my bond, no more nor less.

Lear: How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little
 Lest you mar your fortunes.

 ...

Lear: But goes thy heart with this?

Cordelia: Ay, my good Lord.

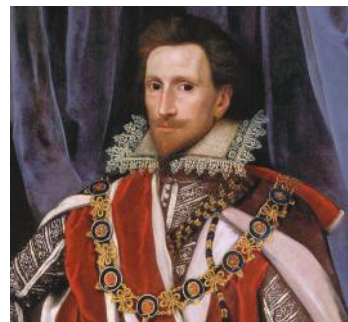
Lear: So young, and so untender?

Cordelia: So young, my Lord, and true.

Lear: Let it be so, thy truth then be thy dower!

This dialogue solves the riddle of the couplet John Davies wrote for Susan Vere in 1602, when she was fifteen and unmarried. Truth, a pun on her family name and a reference to the motto used by her father, *Vero Nihil Verius*, or nothing truer than truth, is the “nothing” that is at once “more then can be told” and “more precious then gold.” Poor as he was, Oxford provided his youngest daughter with a priceless dowry, his name, truth, that is the point of Davies’ couplet and the kind of Elizabethan compliment and in-joke that the Queen and courtiers at Harefield would have understood and appreciated.

Unlike Cordelia, Susan Vere did not marry in her father’s lifetime. She eventually married Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery, one of



*Philip Herbert,
4th Earl of Pembroke
and 1st Earl of Montgomery*

the “incomparable paire of brethren” to whom the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays was dedicated. Perhaps we only now begin to glimpse the actual value of the “nothing” Susan Vere inherited from her father, the truth contained in Shakespeare's plays.

In Conclusion

My method seeks to reattach the visceral memory of personal experience for modern audiences by reassembling for them the canon's contemporary allusions. Modern actors may not choose to perform their roles differently, but audience members would still be able to bring their new knowledge of the era and the author to the various roles and overall dramatic action. In short, it would enable audiences to become a more active part of the theatrical experience. Of course, directors would need to flesh out the allusions in the plays sufficiently for the technique to be effective.

Directors can also use their Playbill programs to educate audiences—before the play is performed—about the play's social and political context and the personal references that Shakespeare incorporates throughout the text. In the same way, the printed insert in most DVD cases can function as a program for movie buyers before they view the film on television. Through the mechanism of print, then, the dramatic action which resonated for Shakespeare's original audiences may be rediscovered by modern ones.

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