

Additional Evidence for Edward de Vere's Authorship of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida

by Michael Hyde

But I hope truth is subject to no prescription, for truth is truth though never so old, and time cannot make that false which once was true.

—Edward de Vere, 7 May 1603 letter to Sir Robert Cecil

In the first scene of *Troilus and Cressida* (TC) the Greek warrior Ulysses tells of “A true knight, they call him ‘Troilus’ in the city of Troy. This hint of linking *true* and ‘Troilus’ via alliteration leads to the pivotal moment of the unmarried sexual encounter (III.ii.89–92) when Troilus proclaims his constant eternal love to Cressida: “Few words to fair faith...Troilus shall be such to Cressid as what envy can say worst shall be a mock for his truth, and what truth can speak truest, not truer than ‘Troilus.’”

The last clause of this speech is a natural hexameter, heroically and alliteratively praising “Troilus—his truth—what truth—truest—truer.” The poet soon amplifies his words on the truer and truest truth of ‘Troilus’ in language that one recognizes as wordplay on the de Vere family motto *Nihil Vero Verius*: “Yet, after all comparisons of truth, as truth’s authentic author to be cited, ‘as true as ‘Troilus’ shall crown up the verse, and sanctify the numbers” (II.170–3).

Troilus himself poetically invents his own tag or motto in this scene, making himself the “author” of his own original authentic comparison to be cited in future times, “as true as ‘Troilus.’” The complex wordplay in these two

passages is based on a tautologous conceit, a verbal challenge to audiences and to readers, to remember for all time the truth of *Troilus*—however *Cressida* reacts. The bedroom consummation is delayed while *Troilus* invents his motto. The additional tautology of “authentic author” recalls the main source of *TC*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which the poet cites as authority his invented authorial source, Lollius. *Troilus* makes himself the erotic and poetic standard by which “true swains in love shall in the world to come, Approve their truth by *Troilus*” (ll. 163–4). The *Troilus* motto is said to “crown up” and to “sanctify” the verse. But how?

“Crown up” refers to the crown, or fair smooth side, of a board installed correctly by carpenters, that is, right side up to prevent rot beneath. Hence, the verse is weatherproof, permanent, and durable. “Sanctify” is a word borrowed from religious ceremony, stressing the nobility and truth of *Troilus* even if irreverently in a scene of sexual consummation. And we may wonder how future swains will be approved or tested, perhaps found wanting and unsatisfactory, when compared to the noble example of *Troilus*?

Troilus and his clever grammatical comparisons of truth are apparent to those who recognize the intricate interweaving of the de Vere motto in these lines. As we shall note later, “as true as *Troilus*” and the accurate rendering of the de Vere motto in English as “nothing truer than Vere” share the same source—the poet himself, Edward de Vere. The play's text after the bedroom scene then demonstrates the use of echolalia as a literary device, as the truth of *Troilus* is dramatically and ironically undercut by the falsity of *Cressida*. The best example is IV.iv.56 *passim*, where *Troilus* and *Cressida* debate whether she will “be true” once she is delivered to the Greeks. In 15 lines the single word “true” is echoed three times each in “be thou true” and “be true.” The lover's debate over *Cressida*'s fidelity so suddenly and immediately following their consummation prepares us for her infidelity. While Samuel Johnson may have tired of the incessant punning and quibbles of Shakespeare's dialogues, the true-truer-truest truth of *Troilus* repeatedly and successfully hammers home that his constancy is doomed to fail and that he will soon lose false *Cressida*.

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“Vero Nihil Verius—Nothing Truer than...?”

Historian Ramon Jiménez recently argued (Winter 2018, 1) that the de Vere family motto is frequently misquoted and misunderstood as “Nothing Truer than Truth.” As rendered by Jiménez, the correct English translation of *Vero Nihil Verius* is “Nothing Truer than Vere.” This bilingual pun can easily lead to the kinds of “declarative circularities” deplored by Jiménez, which we have explicated in the speeches of Troilus especially at the moment of the bedroom consummation scene of *TC*. Jiménez cites the nonsensical and extravagant Euphuistic hyperbole of Armado to Jacquenetta in the seduction scene of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (IV.i.60–64)—Armado begins with “truer than truth itself.” Whereas our rendering of “As true as Troilus” is an example of the de Vere motto being used correctly, not tautologically. Intriguingly, Jiménez also notes that Ron Paul and Clive Willingham have searched for the origins of the de Vere motto used repeatedly by Edward de Vere, not finding any usages prior to the 1570s. The implication is that de Vere invented his motto, as does Troilus in *TC*.

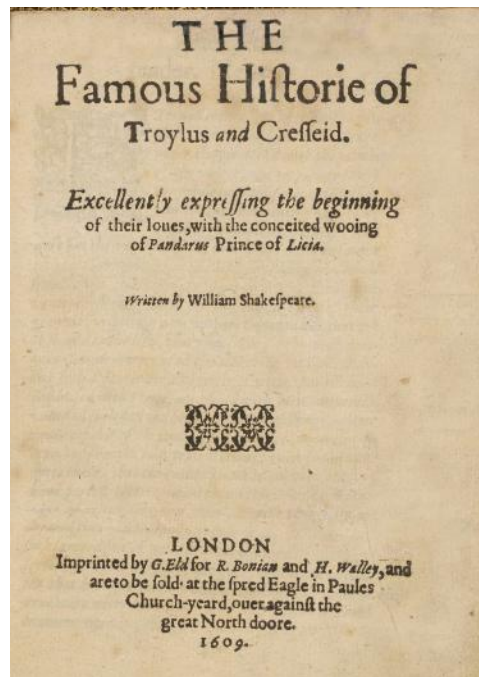
Jiménez anticipates our case for *TC* in his later article (Spring 2018, 15–18) titled “An Oxfordian Looks into Henslowe’s Diary.” *TC* or perhaps another version of the Troilus and Cressida story is mentioned four times by Philip



Troilus and Cressida, Act V, Scene II, engraving by Luigi Schiavonetti. Troilus sees his wife in loving discourse with Diomedes and he wants to rush into the tent to catch them by surprise, but Ulysses and the others keep him back by force.

Henslowe, once in 1594 and three times in 1599. The latter involves a note “in fulle payment” to Henry Chettle and Thomas Dekker on May 26th of 1599, for “their books called the tragedie of Agamemnone” with “troyells & cresseda” crossed out.

Jiménez supports the view that these references are to a version of the canonical *TC*, not to a lost play—perhaps being revised by Chettle and Dekker. As he observes, the British Library pasteboard fragments present a list of characters the same as *TC* (save one); use the same sources of Homer, Caxton and Chaucer; locate the bedding scene in the same spot in the middle scenes of the play; and follow in order scenes involving Achilles-Diomedes and the Greeks rejoicing at the death and murder of Hector. Performances of the play could have occurred prior to the Stationers' Register entry of February 1603—whether privately at Court, or by the Lord Chamberlain's Men in a theater. Jiménez also mentions the “Ever Reader/Never Writer” preface to the second 1609 quarto of *TC*, often cited as a pun on the name of E.Ver(e).



The Insight of Eva Turner Clark

In 1937 Eva Turner Clark argued for de Vere's authorship of *TC* based on a Revels play of December 1584. This was “Agamemnon and Ulysses” performed at Greenwich for Elizabeth on Dec 27th during the Christmas Revels—a day also known as St. John the Evangelist's Day. Most crucially, the play was performed by the Earl of Oxford's Boys under the directorship of Henry Evans, who also worked with Oxford's collaborator and secretary John Lyly—leading many to conclude that de Vere was the author as well as patron of the play. Clark cites J. T. Looney on *TC*'s connection to “Agamemnon and Ulysses”: “Looney expresses the opinion that it is the play later called *Troilus and Cressida*, when published under the name of Shakespeare” (449). Coincidentally, in an *Ironickall Letter* of 1585, written by Jack Roberts to Sir Roger Williams, there is contemporary evidence regarding Oxford and Lyly's dramatic methodology. “I pray you take heed and beware of my Lord of Oxenfordes man called Lyllie, for if he see this ltr, he will put it in print, or make ye boyes in Poules play it vppon a stage” (Wilson 81).

We can only wish that we knew something about the lost unprinted text of *Ulysses and Agamemnon*. Biographer Mark Anderson likewise cites Clark's discovery, "This 'lost' play was probably a draft of part of Shakespeare's dark satire *Troilus and Cressida*" (201). He sees Ulysses as de Vere "promoting himself to Queen Elizabeth" (202) as "England's next generalissimo" in the Lowlands against Spain. Curiously, neither Clark nor Anderson link the character of 'Trojan Troilus to de Vere, who had recently (1576–81) avoided his allegedly faithless wife, Anne Cecil. De Vere's life was more that of Troilus than Ulysses. *TC* is neither a Greek nor a Roman play as it is set in ancient Troy, with scenes of battle, sexual impropriety and infidelity in year ten of the Trojan War.

De Vere's Chaucer and his "wonted" Chaucerism

De Vere ordered a Chaucer from a bookseller named Ceres in early 1570, along with "Italian books... a Geneva Bible gilt... and Plutarch's works in French" (Anderson 41). The Chaucer may have been William Thynne's edition of 1532 or John Stow's 1561 edition. But the purchase suggests he did not have a Chaucer of his own, although he previously had access to the works of Chaucer in the libraries of Sir Thomas Smith and Sir William Cecil before and after the death of his father in 1562. Yet, as we will explain, the de Vere family once possessed the most famous early illuminated manuscript of Chaucer, known as the Ellesmere Chaucer.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for modern readers of *TC* is how utterly the Shakespeare text of the bedroom and consummation scenes departs from Chaucer's poem, which focuses on sexual intimacy, foreplay, and Troilus' stroking of Cressida's body:

Hir armes smale, hir straighte bak and softe,
 Hir sides longe, fleshly, smoothe, and white,
 He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte
 Hir snowish throte, hir brestes rounde and lite,
 Thus in his hevene he gan him to delite;
 And therwithal a thousand time hire kiste,
 That what toon for joye unnethe he wiste.
 (Donaldson ed. p. 694)

As we have seen, *TC* delays the consummation, with Troilus stating and repeating his truth and constancy as "truth's authentic author." The bawdiness and teasing sexual innuendo of Shakespeare's comedies is missing in *TC*; it does not celebrate Cressida's "brestes rounde" as does Chaucer in his original *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Yet in 1593, Thomas Nashe in his preface and dedication to Gentle Master William in *Strange Newes*, addresses de Vere as the “blue boar in the Spittle” whose jests and poems are expressed “according to your wonted Chaucerism” (Greene modern transcript, 3). And Nashe closes his dedication with an obscure request to the blue boar who is de Vere himself: “Let Chaucer be new scoured against the day of battle”—presumably Nashe’s pamphlet war with Gabriel Harvey in the 1590s. The only battle poem in Chaucer is *Troilus and Criseyde*, set in the midst of the Siege of Troy in its tenth year. Are Nashe’s Chaucer and de Vere references a clue that *TC* was composed and already known to Nashe himself?

The Ellesmere Chaucer and the Rotheley Flyleaf

The Ellesmere Chaucer and its provenance as a possession of the 12th and 13th Earls of Oxford were recently investigated by Martin Hyatt (1). His focus on the Rotheley poem, found inserted in the flyleaf of the Ellesmere Chaucer, led us to a significant contribution from Chaucer scholars Ralph Hanna and A. S. G. Edwards. Regarding the Rotheley flyleaf, they state the following:

The poem is quite elaborately heraldic and it interfaces neatly with Chaucerian lyric “Truth’.... Ever since their days as descendants of the Vikings in the Contention, the De Veres seem to have been given to elaborate punning (on the name Vere). This wordplay not only figures in the heraldic display but also, like medieval etymology, generally stands for a relationship with ‘trouthe’.... Most especially the name Vere leads to connections with Latin ‘verus’ true—the family motto was *Vero Nichil* (sic) *Verius*, nothing is truer than truth/Vere (22).

The poem celebrates Spring as the “seasoun of lusty Veer,” echoing Chaucer’s “Aprill with his showres soote.” He admires no one more “Than lusty Veer whom I liken to a bore,” and wishes all honour and grace to “thys blew bore.” He describes the de Vere “bore” as “styfe in tryeuth”—as “contyn-ewyng trouth”—as “feyfull trouth”—and the most “trwyste” lineage. These words are virtually identical to those I have quoted from *Troilus* in *TC*, and Hanna’s version of the de Vere motto in English agrees with Jiménez.

Hanna and Edwards locate the provenance of the Ellesmere Chaucer manuscript in Bury St. Edmunds, ten miles from Castle Hedingham, the ancestral seat of the de Veres. The family circle is similar to that of the Pastons in Norfolk, the Drurys at Hawstead in Suffolk, and the de Veres at Hedingham in Essex. Both Hanna-Edwards and James Ross, biographer of Earl John the 13th Earl of Oxford, agree that the likely author of most of the flyleaf poem was Thomas Rotheley, who lived nearby at Witham, Essex (Hanna 19; Ross 208). The Ellesmere was later owned by Robert Drury, barrister, for whom

Drury Lane is named—at least during the years 1528–36—before the manuscript passed to the Egertons.

Drury was one of the executors of Earl John the 13th's estate in 1513, while Thomas Rotheley was a local attorney too. James Ross argues for dating the poem as follows: “However, with a later dating, the most likely candidate to have written the poem is probably Thomas Rotheley of Witham, Essex, a local attorney who served a de Vere annuitant in 1489” (208 n. 21). Hanna says that the estate of Earl John the 13th contained “a Chest full of frenshe and englisshe books”—possibly the Ellesmere manuscript itself. Thanks to the meticulous work of Hanna-Edwards and James Ross, we can trace the Ellesmere from the 12th and 13th Earls John of Oxford to Drury and thence to the Egerton family, who owned the manuscript until the early 20th Century and its sale to Henry Huntington (1917). Today it rests in the Huntington Library in California.

Ross likewise recognizes the “elaborate punning” on the name Vere that Hanna and Edwards have so fully delineated: “Using a boar to stand for the earl (playing on the Latin verres/Vere) and indeed an image the earl himself used” (Ross 208). It is Ross’s note that led me to the Hanna-Edwards article; thus we have independent confirmations from both Chaucer specialists and a medievalist historian of literary punning on the name de Vere as early as Rotheley’s poem.

The evidence for de Vere connections is manifest in the Rotheley poem. In the Appendix with the full poem that Hanna provides, the Vere section is headlined “Incep(i)o materies cum p(ro)prietatibus Veer.” Hanna comments that “Rotheley’s poetry smacks of Bury & the Suffolk Circle” (20). The poem uses the word *tarrage* (scent), known only from Lydgate, who lived at a nearby deVere property, Hatfield Broadoak. Hanna speculates, “Because the de Veres were involved in local literary efforts, they may well have patronized a poet like Rotheley” (21). I therefore conclude that Rotheley’s poem, written from “a prysone colde,” was written shortly before the Battle of Bosworth—perhaps before Earl John the 13th had escaped from his own imprisonment at Calais. It would then later have been copied into the flyleaf of the Ellesmere.

Kevin Gilvary, William Caxton, 13th Earl John—and *TC*

Gilvary’s dating article on *TC* says in his first note, referring to Charles and Michelle Martindale’s research in *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*: “[they] review the use of various sources and conclude that only Caxton’s is absolutely established” (322). Indeed, my Oxford edition of *TC* notes in line two of the Prologue that the Greek princes being “orgulous” or proud is a word straight from Caxton and is “used frequently by Caxton (though) obsolete by Shakespeare’s day.”

It is Caxton's 1471 printing of *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* that uses the word "orgulous." Gilvary's section on Sources for *TC* states that Caxton's translation from the French of Lefevre's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* "may have been used for the scenes of military action" in *TC* (318). Following the Prologue, Priam's six-gated city of Troy in *TC* (I.i.15) is also from Caxton's *Recuyell* (ii.507).

Finally, Wikipedia states that Caxton's popularity was owed both to royal patronage and to the appeal of his newly printed books among the "English upper classes in the late fifteenth century.... [H]e was supported by (but not dependent on) members of the nobility and gentry," among whom was Earl John the 13th Earl of Oxford (Anderson 5). The 13th Earl commanded his translation of *The Four Sons of Aymon*, introduced Caxton to Henry VII, and "his name appears in the dedication to Caxton's *Faytes of Arms* in 1489" (Ross 219). The 13th Earl replaced Edward IV and Richard III as Caxton's (1422–91) leading patron under King Henry VII.

Conclusions

First, the use of the de Vere motto through *TC* III.ii ff is a unique signature attributable to Edward de Vere and strong evidence of authorship.

Second, the scholarship of Jiménez renders an accurate translation of the de Vere motto as "Nothing Truer than Vere," which supports our case in *TC* for "Nothing Truer than Troilus" and "As True as Troilus" being the work of de Vere.

Third, the claim of Eva Turner Clark that the Court Revels production of *Agamemnon and Ulysses* by Oxford's Boys in December 1584 was an early version of *TC* is strongly affirmed.

Fourth, the evidence of de Vere's purchase of a Chaucer in 1570, and of the 12th and 13th Earls of Oxford being the first known owners of the Ellesmere Chaucer, is striking. Hanna and Edwards and James Ross suggest to us that Edward de Vere's use of the family motto dates back to the de Vere "trouthe" praised in Rotheley's poem—preserved with Chaucer's "Truth" in the flyleaf of the Ellesmere.

Finally, the unique words and phrases of Caxton's "Recuyell" that appear in *TC*, such as "orgulous," uniquely point to the great grandson of 13th Earl John, Edward de Vere as the *TC* author.

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