

# News-Letter

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### "Shake-speare's" Own Secret Drama

**Discovery of Hidden Facts in the Private Life  
of Edward de Vere, Proves Him Author of the  
Bard's Sonnets.**

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(Part Six)

In tracing Edward de Vere's life between the "plain, true-telling" lines of *Shake-speare's Sonnets*, let us go back to the crucial year of 1581.

As we know, the poet Earl was then confined to the Tower of London for two months or more for committing adultery with Anne Vavasor, one of Queen Elizabeth's household servants. To Sir Francis Walsingham, Principal Secretary of State and head of the Secret Service, Anne had "avowed" Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, to be the father of her unauthorized son. Oxford himself appears to have admitted the impeachment; otherwise, the Queen would hardly have confined him in the Tower and later debarred him from her Court for two years. Moreover, Oxford's dark-eyed mistress had given her illegitimate offspring the Earl's family name—Edward Vere.\* All of these circumstances are categorically echoed in the Sonnets.

It is also a telling circumstance that the author of the Sonnets in addressing his mistress declares himself to be married to another. "In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn . . ." (Sonnets 152, etc.)

Oxford had married Anne Cecil, daughter of his guardian, Sir William Cecil, the Great Lord Burghley, on Wednesday, December 19th, 1571, in Westminster Abbey, Queen Elizabeth herself being present to bless the union.

Of the two daughters of the house of Cecil who lived to marriageable age, Anne was the eldest and

quite evidently her father's favorite. She appears to have been, even in that age of filial subserviency, a model of obedience to parental authority, with what Freud designates as a "father fixation." Contemporary references indicate that she was a miniature blonde, ingratiatingly amiable. Born on Sunday, December 5, 1556, "little tannikyn" as Burghley calls Anne in letters of the period, was less than six years of age when the orphaned Earl of Oxford (then in his thirteenth year) came to take up his official residence at Cecil House in London under the guardianship of Anne's father who was Master of the Royal Wards. This was in September, 1562. Thus the two children grew up together.

While an important state official, Sir William Cecil had not yet been raised to the peerage as Baron Burghley. In fact, he was not so honored until the year 1571. Meanwhile, despite his great qualities as a national administrator, Cecil and his whole family ranked as mere "commoners" in the social scale. In fact, many eyebrows were raised when Oxford's engagement to Cecil's daughter was announced. Among some of the ancient aristocracy the newly-made baron was considered a rank upstart and his daughter hardly a fitting consort for the head of the great Vere family whose title designated him as a "companion of the Monarch." A most interesting and illuminating discussion of such social distinctions appears in *All's Well That Ends Well*, providing the dramatic motivation there for young Count Bertram's refusal to consummate his enforced marriage to the beautiful and intelligent Helena whose father had, unfortunately, been nothing more than a famous physician.

\*The *de* in this patronymic was applied by courtesy, during Tudor times, only to those members of the Vere family who represented the Earldom of Oxford. As a matter of fact, the 17th Earl is very frequently referred to in contemporary records as "Edward Vere, Earl of Oxford or Oxenford."

According to her documentation, as it appears in Ward's *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* and other sources, Anne Cecil possessed physical charms and mental accomplishments comparable to "Shakespeare's" Helena. In all fundamentals of characterization, the leading figures in *All's Well* match so closely the personalities of the Earl of Oxford, his wife and several of their familiars that the play can be said to be almost as autobiographical in background as the Sonnets. Mr. Looney makes much of this in "*Shakespeare Identified*." It is a notable fact, moreover, that *All's Well* is one of the plays not published before its inclusion in the 1623 First Folio; that is to say, long after the death of its author and the more influential members of the Cecil family.

Anne Cecil had quite evidently loved Oxford from early childhood. We can picture them at Cecil House, sometimes conning their books together; the young Earl, in accordance with his penchant for encouraging other earnest students, helping the vest-pocket Venus in the definition of some difficult word and rewarding successful efforts with a piece of "marchpane," filched from the Royal commissary. "Sweets to the sweet," as Queen Gertrude says of Ophelia. And, as it happens, this is the precise adjective used by her contemporaries to describe the charming but unlucky Anne Cecil. "My sweet jewel," Sir Henry Sidney calls her in 1568 when he is seeking to arrange a marriage contract between Anne and his son, Philip Sidney. And again, some ten years later, we find Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, ending a letter to Lord Burghley with remembrances to "my good lady your wife, as likewise to the sweet little Countess of Oxford."

Setting great store by learning, Sir William Cecil saw to it that all of his children, boys and girls alike, were provided with the best educational facilities that the day afforded. Both of his wives were of the intellectual type, Mildred Cook, Anne's mother, being widely known as one of "the three learned daughters of Sir Anthony Cook." Sir Anthony had been a great classical scholar and tutor to Edward VI. It is said of him that "he taught his daughters at night what he had taught the Prince by day," his maxim being "that sexes as well as souls are equal in capacity." Mildred Cook Cecil became one of the ablest Greek translators of the Elizabethan period.

Brought up in a bookish atmosphere, where philosophy and the classics were discussed at large, Anne Cecil was a proficient Latin scholar and

sometimes turned her hand to English poetry. Four threnodies over the death of a child are accredited to her in John Soothern's rare edition of *Pandora* which was published in 1584 with a dedication to the Earl of Oxford. Incidentally, these poems by the Countess of Oxford contain one or two unusual figures of speech which "Shakespeare" also utilizes. It is further significant to note that in two of the "Epytaphes," Anne Cecil de Vere speaks longingly of her own death as a way out of her grief. Several of her lines seem to prefigure Ophelia's distracted psychology.

By all accounts Anne Cecil was one of the most lovable personalities of her day—and one of the most unfortunate, a homing dove, mated to a roving falcon. Most of the sufferings of Helena, Desdemona, Hermione, Imogen, Hero and Ophelia appear to have been her lot. It is one of the most astounding "coincidences" in Elizabethan history that the mysterious Bard should know so well the type of wife that the Earl of Oxford had married and subjected to identical trials of uncertainty, suspicion, jealousy, unfaithfulness and injustice which one or another of the Shakespearean heroines mentioned above are made to experience in the plays. Certainly bitter remorse must be taken into account here as a creative factor in these immortal delineations of beauty disvalued and wrongfully accused. I read both remorse and self-reproach in these works, summed up for all time in the final speech of Desdemona's maid to Othello:

O murderous coxcomb! what should such a fool  
Do with so good a wife?

Yet all evidence indicates that Oxford's alliance with Anne Cecil began as a mutual love-match. In the early summer of 1571 when their engagement was formally announced by Lord Burghley in a letter to the Earl of Rutland, Anne was only fourteen, the same age at which Juliet plighted her troth to Romeo. A few months previous to this Anne had been chosen one of the Queen's Maids of Honor. Oxford, born April 12, 1550 (Old style; but according to the revised calendar promulgated by Pope Gregory XIII, April 23, or the day now celebrated throughout the world as "Shakespeare's" birthday), appears to have been eager to consummate the marriage forthwith. Anne's parents, however, arranged for the nuptial ceremonies to take place in December, two weeks after Anne's fifteenth birthday. There is an amusing reference to these matters in *As You Like It*:

Men are April when they woo, December when  
they wed.

The literary Earl and his "sweet little Countess" seem to have been a happy and loving couple for some years following their marriage. Occasionally, as noted in a previous chapter, Lady Burghley appears in the role of an over-zealous mother-in-law, while Anne herself manifests an Ophelia-like tendency to report her love problems, vexations and disappointments promptly to her father. True to her reputation as "the master spy of England," Burghley meticulously docketed many of these pitiful little records and they can still be read in their original state among the Cecil family papers at Hatfield House.

Oxford undoubtedly knew all about this and was naturally annoyed by his wife's habit of prattling all her troubles into her parents' ears. But the fatal break between the houses of Cecil and Vere did not occur until early in the year 1576, following Oxford's travels through France, Germany and Italy. During his absence on the Continent, Anne gave birth to their first child, the daughter Elizabeth to whom the Third Earl of Southampton was so persistently urged to affianch himself in the years 1590-91, as we have shown.

Malicious enemies of both Burghley and Oxford, including an unnamed financial agent of the Earl's and Oxford's villainous, smooth-spoken cousin, Lord Henry Howard, had put afloat stories impugning Anne Cecil's chastity in much the same manner that Iago poisons Othello's mind against Desdemona. As a result Oxford refused to accept the child as his own and upon his return to England would have nothing to do with his wife or her family for several months.

The Earl's actions during this unhappy crisis must be set down as wrong-headed, misguided, not to say thoroughly reprehensible, yet his reactions were understandable. His ancestral pride was deeply wounded by the fact that his domestic affairs now made him the laughing stock of the Court, while his father-in-law's proclamations of Anne's innocence had only succeeded in making her "the fable of the world," as Oxford expresses it in a letter to Burghley, dated Friday, 27th April, 1576.

... I must let your lordship understand this much: that is, until I can better satisfy or advertise myself of some mislikes, I am not determined, as touching my wife, to accompany her. What they are—because some are not to be spoken of or written upon as imperfections—I will not deal withal. . . . And last of all, I mean not to weary my life any more with such troubles and molesta-

tions as I have endured; nor will I, to please your Lordship only, discontent myself.

Wherefore—as your Lordship very well writeth unto me—that you mean, if it standeth with my liking, to receive her into your house, these are likewise to let your Lordship understand that it doth very well content me; for there, as your daughter or her mother's, more than my wife, you may take comfort of her; and I, rid of the cumber thereby, shall remain well eased of many griefts. . . .

This might have been done through private conference before, and had not needed to have been the fable of the world if you would have had the patience to have understood me; but I do not know by whom, or whose advice it was to run that course so contrary to my will or meaning, that made her so disgraced to the world (and) raised suspicions openly that, with private conference, might have been more silently handled, and hath given me more greater cause to mislike. . . . Your Lordship's to be used in all things reasonable,

Edward Oxeford.\*

In giving this, the husband's side of the picture, we see at once that Oxford's determination to break with his wife did not proceed from any rooted belief in her unchastity. It was, in fine, a protest against long-continued family interferences, accentuated now by the stupidly loquacious manner in which Anne's father had proclaimed her innocence from the housetops to the unholy joy of those undercover enemies who seized the occasion to fan the flame of scandal. Oxford, as the arch-satirist of the Court, now had his own weapons turned upon himself with a vengeance!

So Burghley's over-insistence upon public reparation for his daughter's injured innocence, plus Oxford's conviction that his father-in-law had pointedly neglected to carry out certain financial arrangements designed to provide the Earl with traveling expenses during his tour of the Continent (with the result that he had been obliged to put himself under bond to a money-lender in Venice) were really the intrinsic items in the long bill of particulars that the playwright peer was to file against his wife's parents. These documents may also be found among the Cecil family papers. As both Mr. Looney and Capt. Ward point out, they should have been read with a little more human understanding by historians of the period who have always sided

\*The full text of this letter may be read in Ward's *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, pps. 121, 122.

with the Cecils in commenting upon Lord Burghley's troubles with his "ill-conditioned" and "fickle-headed" son-in-law. It has been too generally assumed that Burghley was not only the super-statesman, but just about the wisest man of his era. His actions during the initial period of his daughter's domestic shipwreck prove him quite the opposite. No mature man of great sensitivity, experienced in the ways of the world (as Oxford most assuredly was) could with any degree of self-respect allow his most intimate affairs to be handled in the officious, muddle-headed manner in which the Great Lord Burghley approached this delicate problem. Considering the situation in the light of our fuller knowledge of actual events and of Oxford's true character, the wonder is that the Earl succeeded as well as he did in patching up his differences with the Cecil family and its indiscreet and egotistical patriarch who sought to direct the moves of his "children" as though they were chessmen. The most illuminating presentation of this side of Burghley's personality and the unhappiness which it fostered is to be found in *Hamlet*. Polonius is so sharp a portrait of Burghley in his relationship to Anne Cecil (Ophelia), to his son Thomas Cecil (Laertes) and to Oxford (as Hamlet) that we need no longer wonder why this drama, which was well known to Elizabethan playgoers during the 1580's, was not printed until some years after the Lord Treasurer's death—and then first in an actor's surreptitious "memory" version, under the obvious, hyphenated pen-name of "William Shake-speare." In fact, the characterization of Burghley as Polonius is now so generally accepted by unprejudiced students of the age that an historian such as Alan Gordon Smith, the latest biographer of Burghley, does not hesitate to refer continually to the Lord Treasurer as "Polonius" throughout his work, *William Cecil, The Power Behind Elizabeth* (1935). Mr. Smith infers that the biting lineaments of Polonius could have been etched by none other than Cecil's playboy son-in-law who was, despite the scandal that obscured his rightful deserts, "an even greater than the Great Lord Burghley!"

The sonnets also contain direct personal commentaries upon Oxford's relations with Anne Cecil and her father.

It is pretty safe to assume that if Anne had been left an orphan, as Oxford himself was, her marriage would have proved far happier than it turned out to be under parental tinkering.

Despite the suspicion and bitterness that events of 1575-76 had engendered, the Earl did finally

consent to live with his wife for a time during the winter of 1576-77, as correspondence among the Hatfield House manuscripts proves.† He also appears to have been lured into the acceptance of his two year old daughter as the result of a charming little conspiracy engineered by the Duchess of Suffolk and Oxford's younger sister, Lady Mary Vere.\* The child was brought to his attention as a presunable stranger, just as the discarded Perdita finally meets and captivates her father, Leontes, in *The Winter's Tale*. This is another of the innumerable "coincidences," occurring in the private life of Edward de Vere, that cry aloud the autobiographical inception of so many dramatic incidents and characterizations in "Shake-Speare."

But the poet Earl's reconciliation with his family proved of uncertain duration. Lady Burghley soon visits her daughter and proceeds to stir up dissension in the household. She "draws her daughter's love" to herself; reproves Oxford for threatening "to kill his servants"; and finally voices a devout wish that he himself "were dead." All this reminds us of the scene in *II Henry IV* when Doll Tearsheet, Pistol and Falstaff threaten various forms of homicide on one another while the Hostess of the Boar's Head screams:

"Here's a goodly tumult! I'll forswear keeping house, afore I'll be in these tiritris and frights. So; murder I warrant now.—Alas, alas!"

While Oxford, endorsed in 1598 by Francis Meres as the number one example of "the best for comedy among us," was so constituted that he could ultimately extract immortal laughing matter from his own errors and annoyances, he was too human to put up with this present burden of complaints and "molestations."

Early in 1578, he appears to have retired to bachelor quarters which he had set up for himself at Oxford Court, next to London Stone. This was in Candlewick Street, a continuation of Eastchepe; and here, within a few blocks of Oxford's headquarters, stood the Boar's Head Tavern of Falstaff's delight—the self-same hostelry designated in 1602 by the players of the Earl of Oxford and the Earl of Worcester in a letter addressed to the Lord Mayor by members of the Privy Council as "the place they

†Martin Home in *The Great Lord Burghley* quotes two entries from the uncalendared household books of the Elizabethan Lord Treasurer, now at Hatfield, as follows: "Saturday, December 1576. My Lord and Lady Oxford came from London to Theobalds; 28 servants with them." And again, "Monday, 14th January 1577. My Lord and my Lady of Oxford and 28 persons came from London." In reading over these notes, Mrs. Eva Turner Clark suggests with considerable plausibility that the large number of people in Oxford's retinue on these occasions would indicate that the Earl and Countess were accompanied by a group of players to provide entertainment for the holidays.

\*Lansdowne MSS. 25:27; reprinted by Ward, pp. 154-56.

have especially used and do like best of" for the presentation of plays within the City of London. At least two of the actors specifically mentioned in other records as members of this 1602 Oxford-Worcester group were later listed in "Mr. William Shakespeare's" First Folio as among "the Principall Actors in all these plays." Their names are William Kemp and John Lowen.

It was evidently during the early period of his occupancy of Oxford Court, near the Boar's Head, that Oxford became intimate with Anne Vavasor. She was then about fifteen or sixteen years of age and at this period of 1579-80 was being widely discussed in English literary circles under the poetical alias of Rosalind. For Edmund Spenser had used this name to describe her as the "scornful Northern lass" who caused Colin Clout so many heartaches in Spenser's quaint new collection of acknowledged personalia, *The Shepheard's Calendar*.

We cannot pause here to give full details of this identification. All essential evidence, based on Spenser's realistic portraiture, the contemporary notes of explanation that accompany the *Calendar*, and Gabriel Harvey's revealing lines addressed to the recalcitrant "Mistress Anne" on behalf of his good friend Spenser, may be read in Mrs. Clark's volume, *The Man Who Was Shakespeare*. It will be found that Anne Vavasor answers in every respect the unusual requirements of Spenser's unconventional delineation. By the same token, she can be identified as the original of "Shake-speare's" mockery-loving Rosalind in *Love's Labors Lost* and *As You Like It*, as well as the Rosaline of the "bright eyes," "high forehead," "scarlet lip" and "quivering thigh" mentioned in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Following the scandalous culmination of Oxford's affair with Anne Vavasor in 1581, their mutual disgrace and banishment from Court circles, the Earl, like many another erring husband before and since his time, began to think more kindly of his wife.

Among the Lansdowne Manuscripts\* have been preserved copies of two letters addressed to Oxford by his long-neglected Countess, Anne Cecil de Vere, dated respectively December 7th and December 12th, 1581. These letters deserve careful scrutiny for they supply important human documentation helping to verify the creative genesis of an important little group of "Shake-speare's" sonnets, including Nos. 116 to 119.

In these personal poems the Bard seeks and achieves reconciliation with the woman he formerly

loved, married and wilfully wronged.

Let us observe how clearly and circumstantially the questions raised by the heart sick little Countess of Oxford are finally answered by the Poet:

My Lord, In what misery I may account myself to be, that neither can see any end thereof nor yet any hope to diminish it. And now of late having had some hope in my own conceit that your Lordship would have renewed some part of your favour that you began to show me this summer, when you made me assured of your good meaning, though you seemed fearful how to show it by open actions. Now after long silence of hearing anything from you, at the length I am informed—but how truly I know not and yet how uncomfortably I do feel it—that your Lordship is entered into some misliking of me without cause in deed or thought. And therefore, my good Lord, I beseech you in the name of that God, which knoweth all my thoughts and love towards you, notwithstanding your evil usage of me, let me know the truth of your meaning towards me; upon what cause you are moved to continue me in this misery, and what you would have me do in my power to recover your constant favour, so as your Lordship may not be led still to detain me in calamity without some probable cause, whereof, I appeal to God, I am utterly innocent. From my father's house at Westminster, the 7th December 1581.

The repentant husband replies. Note how frankly he admits the chief derelictions with which Oxford has been charged:

Accuse me thus: that I have scanted all  
Wherein I should your great deserts repay.  
Forgot upon your dearest love to call,  
Whereto all bonds do tie me day by day;  
That I have frequent been with unknown minds,  
And given to time your own dear-purchased  
right;  
That I have hoisted sail to all the winds  
Which should transport me farthest from your  
sight.  
Book both my wilfulness and errors down,  
And on just proof surmise accumulate;  
Bring me within the level of your frown,  
But shoot not at me in your waken'd hate;  
Since my appeal says I did strive to prove  
The constancy and virtue of your love.

(Sonnet 117)

No one can question the fact that the above lines are addressed to a wronged but lawfully wedded wife who has evidently borne a child to the writer

\*Nos. 104:63 and 64.

and from whom he has been separated by his own "wilfulness" for a considerable period of time.

Sonnet 118 may be read as a categorical reply, masterfully expressed, to the one vital question that oppresses Anne Cecil de Vere in her letter of December 7th: *Why does her husband find her personally distasteful?*

"... I am informed . . . that your Lordship is entered into some misliking of me without any cause in deed or thought."

"Shake-speare's" explanation is undoubtedly one of the most eloquent ever devised by truant husband. It is unusually effective from this particular human angle, moreover, because the Poet seizes upon the Countess of Oxford's well documented characteristic of "sweetness" to excuse his own unfortunate appetite for more pungent fare.

Like as, to make our appetites more keen,  
With eager compounds we our palate urge;  
As, to prevent our maladies unseen,  
We sicken to shun sickness when we purge;  
Even so, being full of your n'er-cloying  
sweetness,

To bitter sauces did I frame my feeding;  
And sick of welfare found a kind of meetness  
To be diseased, ere that there was true needing.  
Thus policy in love, to anticipate  
The ills that were not, grew to faults assured,  
And brought to medicine a healthful state,  
Which, rank of goodness, would by ill be cured:  
But thence I learn, and find the lesson true,  
Drugs poison him that so fell sick of you.

(Sonnet 118)

It seems apparent that both these poems were composed by Oxford in December, 1581, and may have accompanied a letter which he sent to his wife at the time. The Countess' reply to the latter missive bears date of December 12th in its Lansdowne transcription.

My very good Lord, I most heartily thank you for your letter, and am most sorry to perceive how you are unquieted with the uncertainty of the world, whereof I myself am not without some taste. But seeing you will me to assure myself of anything that I may as your wife challenge of you, I will the more patient abide the adversity which otherwise I fear, and—if God would so permit it and that it might be good for you—I would bear the greater part of your adverse fortune, and make it my comfort to bear part with you. As for my father, I do assure you, whatever hath been reported of him, I know no man can wish better to you than he doth, and yet the prac-

tices in Court I fear do seek to make contrary shows. . . . Good my Lord, assure yourself it is you whom only I love and fear, and so am desirous above all the world to please you, wishing that I might hear oftener from you until better fortune will have us meet together.

It is good to report that these pleas for mutual understanding were successful. From the March 3rd, 1582, entry in the *Diary* of the Rev. Richard Madox we learn that "My Lord of Oxford . . . hath company with his wife since Christmas."

The Oxfordian origin of the sonnets is here again strikingly confirmed. For we are told in Sonnets 116 and 119, first, that the writer is going back to his early love, having refused to "admit impediments to the marriage of true minds," and finally that the "ruin'd love" which he hath "built anew, grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater"; so he returns "rebuked" to his "content." The use of the phrase "true minds" would be characteristic of Oxford in describing two Veres. His armorial motto, *Vero nihil verius*, (Nothing truer than truth)\* is one of the oft-quoted punning mottoes of the age, and is pointedly played upon by contemporary letter-writers such as Gilbert Talbot and others in referring to Lord Oxford and members of the Vere family. Moreover, there is a Latin poem among the Hatfield House manuscripts addressed "To the illustrious Lady Anne de Vere, Countess of Oxford, while her noble husband, Edward Vere, Earl of Oxford, was occupied in foreign travel," which is made up of a series of puns on the words *Vera* and *veritas*. Capt. Ward gives this in an English translation. "*May thy mind always glow with love of the truth*" is one of the exhortations here recommended to the Countess which speaks with the authority of first-hand identification when printed in parallel with the opening line of "Shake-speare's" Sonnet 116.†

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be  
taken.

\*Boutell in *The Handbook of English Heraldry*, also translates this motto as *No greater verity than in Vere*.

†It may well be that Sonnet 113, ending with "My most true mind thus maketh mine untrue," is also addressed to Anne Cecil de Vere instead of Anne Vavasor. The last line is a very obvious pun on the Vere who wrote it.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and  
 cheeks  
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
 If this be error and upon me proved,  
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

The deathless beauty of these words confirms the best contemporary opinion of Edward de Vere that, despite his shortcomings as husband, father and man of property, he stood supreme "in the rare devices of poetry."

As the wayward genius, now sufficiently chastened, settles down with the reclaimed wife of his youth to a normal enjoyment of the holiday season of 1581-82, he philosophises upon the errors of judgment that have led him so far afield in his mad pursuit of fleshly joys with the Yorkshire Gypsy.

What potions have I drunk of Siren tears  
 Distill'd from limbeckes foul as hell within,  
 Applying fears to hopes and hopes to fears,  
 Still losing when I saw myself to win!  
 What wretched errors hath my heart committed,  
 Whilst it hath thought itself so blessed never!  
 How have mine eyes out of their spheres been  
 fitted,

In the distraction of this madding fever!  
 O benefit of ill! now I find true  
 That better is by evil still made better;  
 And ruin'd love, when it is built anew,  
 Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far  
 greater.

So I return rebuked to my content,  
 And gain by ill thrice more than I have spent.  
 (Sonnet 119)

Oxford had lived apart from his wife and outside the personal orbit of her dominating father for the better part of five years before taking up his life with her again. All factors indicate, however, that he was entirely sincere in his determination to retrieve opportunities lost, rebuild his sadly shattered home and reputation and make up to Anne Cecil in some degree for the misery and heartache he had caused her. There can be no question regarding the sweet little Countess' passionate devotion to her elusive consort. Having suffered so cruelly herself from false accusations of adultery, it seems to have been her nature to forgive more freely the sensationally *proven* sins of her husband. Neither does old Burghley himself offer any recorded reproaches to the returned prodigal at this time.

But during his self-imposed exile, the Earl had formed many new and absorbing interests among

the bohemian literary set wherein Anne Vavasor had reigned as the heartless May Queen of mockery. His house had become the familiar resort of writers, poets, musicians, actors and mountebanks. John Lyly, novelist and comedian, was Oxford's private secretary, while Thomas Churchyard the poet, autobiographer and playwright, lived upon the Earl's bounty for years. Anthony Munday, spinner of tales, dramatic plots and ballads, also looked to Oxford as a sort of permanent patron for he dedicated a whole series of books to him and hailed him as his mentor and literary master.

Other writers who dedicated books to Oxford, saluting him as a literary leader of special potency, were John Lyly, Thomas Watson, Robert Greene and Edmund Spenser, not to mention such scholars as Arthur Golding, Oxford's own uncle, whose influence upon "Shakespeare" is universally acknowledged. In fact, the list of Oxford's proteges and retainers whose literary, theatrical and musical activities are identified in one way or another with the Shakespearean creative structure is much too long for inclusion here.

Let it suffice to say that by the time he had reestablished his home, Oxford's interests were more those of the creative artist and theatrical entrepreneur than of the conventionally correct Tudor nobleman whose thought and energy should have been devoted to the maintenance of social rank and the accumulation of wealth, military glory or political power.

Unlucky investments in Frobisher's unsuccessful voyages to discover the North-west passage to China, the maintenance of an important theatrical company which he had taken over from the Earl of Warwick in 1580, together with the undoubtedly heavy expenses of his affair with Anne Vavasor, had reduced Oxford's personal income to shadowy proportions. By 1582 he had been obliged to sell thirty-five of his ancestral estates to obtain ready cash. More than one of his personal stewards had either embezzled monies due the Earl or arranged things so that they could buy in valuable properties of the Earldom under highly suspicious circumstances. Oxford's vulnerability in all business deals was a constant source of worry and irritation to his father-in-law, one of Burghley's personally-devised maxims being:

"That gentleman who sells an acre of land sells an ounce of credit, for gentility is nothing else but ancient riches."

It was inevitable, therefore, that upon his return to the Lord Treasurer's daughter, Oxford should

soon be obliged to seek this financial wizard's assistance in holding importunate creditors at bay. Burghley's chief concern was naturally to prevent the Earl from letting all his property slip through his fingers before proper provision had been made for his family. The shrewd old materialist looked with contempt, not to say open distrust, upon the Poet's retinue of impecunious scholars, scoffing playwrights and pert mountebanks. In more than one of his personal memoranda he comments tartly upon these "lewd friends" who rule the Earl to his own disadvantage. The long hours that Oxford spent in their company when he should have been pushing more profitable "suits" at Court or elsewhere, irked the Lord Treasurer. He determined to find out what Oxford was really up to by drawing out his secretary or the Earl's confidential business agent. We can reconstruct this interesting situation from the postscript of a letter in Oxford's handwriting, dated October 30th, 1584.\*

My Lord, This other day your man, Stainer, told me that you sent for Amis, my man, and that if he were absent that Lyly should come unto you. I sent Amis, for he was in the way. And I think (it) very strange that your Lordship should enter into that course towards me; whereby I must learn that (which) I knew not before, both of your opinion and good will towards me. But I pray, my Lord, leave that course, for I mean not to be your ward nor your child. I serve Her Majesty, and I am that I am; and by alliance near to your Lordship, but free; and scorn to be offered that injury to think I am so weak of government as to be ruled by servants, or not able to govern myself. If your Lordship take and follow this course you deceive yourself, and make me take another course that I have not yet thought of.

Wherefore these shall be to desire your Lordship, if that I may make account of your friendship, that you will leave that course as hurtful to us both.

Here again we have first-hand documentary evidence of indisputable legal value that the 17th Earl of Oxford was indeed the "Shake-speare" of the Sonnets. For when we study this heated personal protest in parallel with Sonnet 121, it becomes immediately apparent that both missives evolved from the same clenched fist. Not only is the emotional point of view identical and the circumstances complained of precisely similar, but Oxford uses a specific and arresting literary phrase to sum up

his own personality which "Shake-speare" employs for exactly the same purpose. All of these elements combine to point directly to Edward de Vere as the author of this revealing poem.

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,  
When not to be receives reproach of being;  
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed  
Not by our feeling, but by others seeing:  
For why should others' false adulterate eyes  
Give salutation to my sportive blood?  
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,  
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?  
No, I am that I am, and they that level  
At my abuses reckon up their own:  
I may be straight though they themselves be  
bevel;

By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be  
shown;

Unless this general evil they maintain,  
All men are bad and in their badness reign.  
(Sonnet 121)

In his protest to his father-in-law, Oxford objects primarily to the indirect means Burghley has employed to extort confidential information from personal servants. The imputation is that he himself is not to be trusted and that Burghley will reward these servants for spying on their master. Such a course can only be justified on the ground that the Earl has been guilty of wrong-doing or is incompetent to live his own life and pursue his own interests without undercover supervision. As a man of brains and genius, despite acknowledged "frailties," he naturally resents this bitterly.

The sonnet not only restates the protest of the letter, but Oxford relieves his feelings in a way he could not do under his own signature with a scathing reference to Burghley's penchant for snooping:

For why should others' false adulterate eyes  
Give salutation to my sportive blood?  
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,  
Which in their wills count bad what I think  
good?

The name Cecil means *dim-sighted*, a circumstance which gives added punch to Oxford's characterization of his father-in-law.

"I serve her Majesty, and I am that I am," says Oxford in his own person refusing to apologize for following his natural bent.

"No, I am that I am," says the same voice in the sonnet, refusing to grant the premise of his annoyances that a poet's way of life is a bad way.

The phrase, "I serve her Majesty" indicates that Oxford at this time, with the help of John Lyly,

\*Lansdowne MSS., 42:39, reprinted by Ward, pps. 247-48.



Anthony Munday and his other playwrights and mountebanks, was acting as chief purveyor of theatrical entertainment to Elizabeth's Court. In addition to his patronage of the company of adult actors that bore his livery, we know that Oxford then held a lease on the Blackfriars Theatre. He was also patron of the company of boy actors from the Queen's Chapel who presented comedies at Court.

The duties of his office of Lord Chamberlain of England only occupied the Earl's time for brief periods and at rare intervals, having to do exclusively with state ceremonials. He is not mentioned in any other Court or administrative connection at this period. In fact, if he had been so engaged, we can be sure that his father-in-law would not have adopted his devious means of worming information out of Oxford's confidential servants regarding the Earl's activities.

“. . . and they that *level*

At my abuses reckon up their own.”

Read as a supplement to Oxford's letter, we find in the use of this word *level* (aim) a typical Elizabethan pun on the name of the steward Amis who carried tales to Burghley. For British genealogists assure us that this name was pronounced Ames, as it is now spelled.

This particular person was one Israel Ames who handled properties for the Earl for a time and in 1583 came into possession of Oxford's ancient estate of Tilbury, Essex, in the valley of the Stour.

In the letter to Burghley we find another significant Shakespearean expression when the Earl reminds the Lord Treasurer that he is not a child nor a puppet:

“. . . and by alliance near to your Lordship, but free.”

“And take thou my oblation, poor but free,” echoes the Bard in Sonnet 125 in exactly the same tone of royal independence.

And finally, toward the end of Oxford's message to his father-in-law, we come upon a combination of word and thought, or, rather, a combination of word and heated emotion, so distinctively *personal* that it stands out like a psychological signpost to make the identification of Edward de Vere as “Shake-speare” plain to every student of human reactions:

“If your Lordship . . . follow this course you . . . make me take another course *that I have not yet thought of.*”

The Earl is angry and threatening, but his threat ends so indefinitely that it is really laughable. He is, in fact, so worked up over Burghley's invasion of his rights that he will have to think seriously how to punish this impertinence.

In the titanic tragedy of *King Lear*, precisely the same unique psychological twist is expressed by that much-abused monarch when he ponders revenge upon the daughters who have wrecked his household (II . 4 . 284-5):

“I will do such things,

*What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be  
The terrors of the earth.*”

So parallel may be added to parallel to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Edward de Vere's personality in the long-sought human entity to account for the distinctively autobiographical elements that give the Shakespearean plays and sonnets their ageless vitality.

Charles Wisner Barrell.

## From Letters Received

Letters have been received from several correspondents abroad and their comments on Mr. Barrell's interpretation of the Sonnets will be of interest to our members.

Mr. J. T. Looney regards Mr. Barrell's solution of the problem of “the dark lady” as “not only sensational but completely convincing.”

Mrs. Arthur Long writes from London, “I am in complete agreement with all your surmises and feel a great admiration for the industry and enthusiasm behind your discoveries. . . . It is most heartening to know that it [the problem of Shakespeare authorship] has been taken up in America with such zeal, skill and enthusiasm and it is undoubtedly from your side of the Atlantic that Edward de Vere will finally receive his due recognition. . . . I might mention, apropos of an author being able to conceal his identity during his lifetime, that I have myself been in “Who's Who” under three different pen names without the editor discovering the fact until I pointed it out myself.”

Mr. A. C. Gifford, the famous astronomer, writing in June from distant New Zealand, says, “The April number of the NEWS-LETTER, which I have read through with the greatest interest, carries the thrilling story a stage further. We are very much indebted to you for carrying on the research with such enthusiasm and success.”

## NEWS-LETTER

## THE SHAKESPEARE FELLOWSHIP

AMERICAN BRANCH

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Charles Wisner Barrell

Occasional meetings of the American Branch will be held, for which special notices will be sent to members. Dues for membership in the American Branch are \$2.50 per year, which sum includes one year's subscription to the NEWS-LETTER.

The officers of the American Branch will act as an editorial board for the publication of the NEWS-LETTER, which will appear every other month, or six times a year.

News items, comments by readers and articles of interest to all students of Shakespeare and of the acknowledged mystery that surrounds the authorship of the plays and poems, are desired. Such material must be of reasonable brevity. No compensation can be made to writers beyond the sincere thanks of the Editorial Board. Articles and letters will express the opinions of their authors, not necessarily of the editors. They may be sent to Charles Wisner Barrell, 17 East 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

## Pertinent

Oxfordians are charged with being interested in the Shakespeare plays merely for the purpose of identifying Lord Oxford's contemporaries as originals of characters in them, and similar detective sleuthing, lacking the higher interest in the plays as literature, which Stratfordians claim as their own.

This charge calls for a pertinent question. Have not Stratfordians turned over every old document discoverable in order to learn something about the life of Stratford William and have not the results proved most disappointing? What they have learned in their exhaustive research proves him to have been a very different type of man from the learned author indicated by the plays. Stratfordian sleuthing has not been productive.

On the other hand, Oxfordian sleuthing has been endlessly fruitful. Of our author we have learned many things which qualify him for the part he played in Elizabethan literature—his background, his education, his culture, his recognition as "best" poet-dramatist by contemporary critics, his connection with the stage through employment of such men as Lyly and Munday—and in consequence we are helped to understand what was in his mind when he wrote the great dramas. By Oxfordian chronology, which places the plays earlier than they are generally supposed to have been written, many passages in them connect up with the history of that earlier period, showing references to events and incidents never recognized under the old chronologies, thus proving Shakespeare's dictum: "The players . . . are the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time."

If Stratfordians had ever been able to produce a hundredth part of the evidence collected by Oxfordians, there would never have been an authorship problem. Shakspeare of Stratford, brought up in a village of 1,400 souls where the rude Warwickshire patois was the common speech, received no university education, or there would be records to prove it, but the plays indicate that they were written by a university bred author.

Even though the poet-dramatist did not come up from the simple provincial life so long proclaimed, he was no less a genius for, making use of his knowledge and his talents, he did arrive at heights in literature far above his fellows, to heights no one else has since, even with his example to show the way, been able to reach.

## The Folger Library

Dr. Joseph Quincy Adams, Director of the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library at Washington, D. C., has issued A Report on Progress, 1931-1941, telling of the acquisitions of early printed books and manuscripts to the Library since the death of the founder, Henry Clay Folger, in 1930.

The new acquisitions amount to 11,992 items of English books printed between 1475 and 1640, of which 1474 are recorded as unique in the "Short Title Catalogue." Besides printed books, 1,727 manuscripts have been added to the collection.

The student of Shakespeare, and of other early authors as well, finds an overwhelming amount of material on which to work, for the collections cover a far wider field of literature than is implied by the name of the Library.

## Hand C in Sir Thomas More and the Plot of The Seven Deadly Sins

The world of scholarship is indebted to the enterprise and industry of Dr. W. W. Greg who has published in two great works facsimiles of most of the surviving manuscripts and letters of Elizabethan dramatists. *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses* was published in 1931 by the Clarendon Press; *English Literary Autographs, 1550-1650*, in three volumes, was published in 1932 by the Oxford University Press.

One of the most important facsimiles reproduced in *Dramatic Documents* is the Plot of *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins*, a play supposed to have been written by the famous comedian, Richard Tarleton, who died in 1588. The word "plot," as here used, is not a brief story of the play, but a guide for the actors, a kind of bulletin "to remind those concerned when and in what characters they were to appear, what properties were required, and what noises were to be made behind the scenes." Such a Plot was necessarily exhibited in a place convenient for ready reference during a performance.

The Plot of *The Seven Deadly Sins* is believed to have been written some time after Tarleton's death, perhaps about 1590. It is in a large, clear, Italian script, easily read at a glance by the actors for whom it was prepared. Dr. Greg and others who have examined the handwriting have been unable to identify it, though they find the same hand in other stage documents of the period, chief among them being the fragment of manuscript of the play, *Sir Thomas More*.

It will be remembered that, of six distinct hands in that manuscript, many arguments have raged about Hand D as that of William Shakspeare of Stratford, several students believing it to be like his signatures which are bad examples of the old English secretarial script. Hand D of the *More* manuscript is written in the same type of script but in far better form.

"The manuscript," says Dr. Greg, "contains six different hands, exclusive of that of Edmund Tilney, the Master of the Revels, who as censor made certain notes and alterations." The manuscript bears neither signature nor date, but one man "is responsible for the whole of the original fair draft of the play so far as it has survived." This man, according to Dr. Greg, "wrote a well-formed and very regular hand with almost meticulous care, but it is dis-

tinctly of a literary rather than a professional type." This handwriting, Dr. Greg tells us, is that of Anthony Munday. He it was who was "charged with the task of preparing the fair copy," as was natural "in the case of a piece written by several playwrights in collaboration."

In the Malone Society's edition of the play, these various hands are designated as A, B, C, D, E, and S, the last being the hand of "the scribe of the original play," that is, Anthony Munday. "E, we are told, is the writing of Thomas Dekker, while C, the most extensive and most widely distributed of the revising hands, approaches more than any other to the professional type both in calligraphic style and in the distinctive use of Italian script, and such being the case we are somewhat surprised at being told that this hand, with its calligraphic style and distinctive use of Italian script, was once believed to be the same hand as that of D, which, as Dr. Greg says, with commendable restraint, may perhaps (italics of Sir George Greenwood, whose argument has here been used) be the hand of Shakspeare himself. Moreover, the same learned writer informs us that this belief in the identity of the two hands 'has not yet been universally abandoned'. This is remarkable, seeing that Shakspeare of Stratford, as Sir Sidney Lee tells us—and the six signatures fully bear him out—'was never taught the Italian script, which was winning its way in cultured society.'" (Greenwood).

Hand C of the *More* manuscript is the hand of the Plot of *The Seven Deadly Sins*. It is this scribe "to whose technical ingenuity and appreciation of theatrical requirements we largely owe the development of the stage Plot as it appears at the end of Elizabeth's reign," says Dr. Greg. This scribe wrote the Plot of *Fortune's Tennis*, of which only a small fragment survives, supposedly about 1597-8, though nothing later from his hand has been found.

Scholars are agreed that Hand C is not that of Chettle, Dekker, Munday, or any of the usual recognized playhouse scribes, though it is similar to that of George Peele and in certain respects to that of Thomas Lodge. Sir Edmund Chambers suggests that this scribe was just a "book-holder," or prompter, but that seems hardly likely when we consider the importance of the revisions he made in the play of *Sir Thomas More*. That man would appear to have been a person of authority in the dramatic world. Considering the Shakespearean quality of the revision of the *More* play, it is tempting to search a little further for some one with the necessary knowledge of the stage and with the in-

ventiveness of mind, not only to revise an important play, but to summarize the procedure of a play so that actors could read their instructions at a glance.

To those of us who are familiar with the activities of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, in the stage and dramatic life of Elizabeth's day, the thought springs to mind that his may have been Hand C of the *More* manuscript and the hand which wrote the Plot of *The Seven Deadly Sins*. His experience in writing dramas, his employment of John Lyly as secretary through those years when Lyly was directing the Queen's Company and Paul's Boys, and the fact that Anthony Munday, scribe of the main part of the *More* manuscript, was also employed by him, are suggestive points which bring him very close to the stage and to these dramatic documents under discussion. Hand C is not that of Lyly, nor is it that of Munday, to whom has been assigned Hand S, as we have seen.

Lord Oxford wrote the Italian script and his extant Letters show a great similarity to the writing of the Plot of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, which is clearer and more legible than the *More* manuscript. In most respects the hand are alike, though there are a few differences. After noting these differences, the question arises, would a person engaged in writing a Plot large enough for ready reference change an occasional letter of his usual script in order to make it more legible to the average actor in haste to know his cue?

In surviving Letters, written at somewhat distant intervals through the years, Lord Oxford's script shows changes in form of certain letters; even within a single Letter, different forms will be found. In 1584, writing the word "and," he finishes the "d" with a backward curve at the top, just as it is found in the Plot, though this form is not found in his Letters written years later. The frequently recurring capital "A" is the same in the Oxford Letters and the Plot, with slight variations in both, as are also the capitals "B", "P", and "W", all surprisingly small for capitals. There is more variation in the "E's" of Oxford's signatures in 1584 and 1600 than in these and the numerous "E's" in the Plot. "F", made like a long "S" with a short horizontal stroke through the middle is exactly the same in Oxford's Letters and the Plot. A comparison of lower case letters shows them to be essentially the same throughout the alphabet, though there are occasional variations in both and within the same document.

The general slant of the writing is the same in Oxford's Letters and the Plot and so is the tendency to connect or separate letters within a word. These

are important considerations in a study of calligraphy.

It must be remembered that Lord Oxford's still extant Letters were of a social or business nature, written in haste to Lord Burghley or Sir Robert Cecil, men familiar with his script, and there was no necessity on his part to make an effort at special legibility. It must also be remembered that the Plot was written in a large hand, to be seen at a glance on a bulletin board where an actor could quickly catch his cue, and a special effort at legibility was an obvious necessity.

I do not insist that Hand C of the *More* manuscript and the Plot of *The Seven Deadly Sins* were written by Lord Oxford, but I do believe the problem is one of sufficient importance to merit a careful examination and comparison by experts in calligraphy.

Eva Turner Clark

## Army Captain Now

Maurice Evans, leading actor of our times in various Shakespeare roles, was in August commissioned a captain in the Army Specialist Corps and has been assigned to the 7th Service Command at Omaha, Nebraska, in charge of organizing amateur theatricals in remote Army posts.

Mr. Evans' devotion to his chosen profession and his close study of the parts he has played have, as a result, given this generation its finest productions of Shakespeare. He came to New York from England in 1936 to act in *Romeo and Juliet* with Katharine Cornell.

## Shakespeare At Dieppe

Drew Middleton of the Associated Press, in his fascinating account of the recent raid on Dieppe, relates the following incident:

As it grew light we discovered scores of other ships—destroyers, motor gunboats, lighters, assault craft and Chasseurs of the fighting French Navy all converging on Dieppe.

One 24 year old sub-lieutenant whistled softly at the sight and said:

"What's that line in Shakespeare about 'gentlemen of England now abed?' They ought to see this. It makes you proud."

According to the AP, the quotation referred to is taken from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. King Henry, speaking on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, says:

"And gentlemen in England now abed  
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here."

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