

A Few Curiosities Regarding Edward de Vere and the Writer Who Called Himself Shake- speare

Unlike William of Stratford—born to illiterate parents in a virtually bookless market town in provincial Warwickshire—Edward de Vere was born to a mother of prominent literary associations (Margaret Golding) and a father who kept an acting company (the Earl of Oxford's Men) that his son inherited; Edward de Vere's father also was one of the early nobleman patrons of the theatre and a patron to John Bale, one of the early writers of the history play, the genre with which the writer known as Shakespeare is widely regarded to have begun his own playwriting career.

The Shakespearean sonnet (also known as the English sonnet) was not original with Shakespeare (merely popularized by him). The Shakespearean sonnet actually was invented by Edward de Vere's paternal uncle—Henry Howard, the 5th earl of Surrey.

Scholars regard Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a leading influence on Shakespeare, second only to the Bible. Arthur Golding was Edward de Vere's maternal uncle, and Edward, when a teen, lived with him. Golding, in a dedication of one of his works to the young Edward de Vere, saluted his nephew's interest in and command of history.

The Geneva Bible, widely recognised by scholars as Shakespeare's Bible, was the edition of the Scriptures owned by Edward de Vere, and his personal copy (now in the possession of the Folger Shakespeare Library) contains notations and marginalia that bear striking correspondence to passages, themes and image clusters that appear in the works of the writer who called himself Shakespeare. William of Stratford, to the best of our knowledge, not only owned no Protestant Bible but, as many Stratfordian adherents attest, was, in personal conviction, a deeply-committed, radical Roman Catholic who went so far as to purchase the notorious Blackfriars Gatehouse in 1613 - a den of Catholic conspiracy and sedition - a purchase that is utterly unaccountable and laughably ridiculous if the buyer were the demonstrably Anglican playwright, Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's history plays rewrite the histories of the earls of Oxford—even in incidental ways that are inconsequential to the plays' substance—in order to bestow a uniformly shining and patriotic legacy on the de Veres.

The writer who called himself Shakespeare was multi-lingual. He had access to a massive, rarefied library, the works of which (many yet untranslated into English in Shakespeare's era) saturate the poems and plays of Shakespeare. Oxford lived, and was tutored, in Cecil House, the household with not only the best library in England but one of the finest libraries in Europe. There is no evidence, however, that William of Stratford ever owned—let alone read—so much as a single essay or book; indeed, not only do we have no correspondence from William of Stratford to his supposed colleagues—we have no record of any correspondence from him to

anyone. No writer of the Elizabethan age ever wrote or even hinted that William of Stratford was a poet or a playwright. No one ever dedicated anything to him. Astonishingly, Phillip Henslowe, the great diarist of the Elizabethan theatre, makes no mention of even *knowing* the man.

Shakespeare's intimate knowledge of statecraft, politics and law has always impressed but bewildered scholars, particularly as Will Shakspeare of Stratford is not known ever to have attended so much as a single day of school. Astonishingly, no tutor or pedagogue of the era ever left any record that he taught William of Stratford or recorded that he knew him to be anyone else's student. Unlike Kit Marlowe, no one offered Will Shakspeare any scholarly aid or assistance in furthering his education. Edward de Vere, however, was praised by scholars for the breadth of his learning. He received tutelage from some of the finest minds in Europe—most notably, Sir Thomas Smith; he was awarded degrees from Cambridge and Oxford Universities and enrolled at Gray's Inn to study law. He served on the Privy Council during the reign of King James. One writer of a book on Renaissance politics has said that Shakespeare is the age's best tutor on the inside workings of political power. Accordingly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the man to whom Oxford's care and education was entrusted was England's chief politician and statesman, William Cecil, and Oxford, following his father's death, was raised in Cecil House—arguably the most political house in England. Oxford's tutors, moreover, were experienced as well as learned men; Smith, for example, was Regius Professor of Civil Law at Cambridge University, twice Ambassador to France, and later, Principal Secretary.

Edward de Vere owned the lease to the Blackfriars' Theatre, was an acknowledged poet and playwright himself, was a patron to players and was a playhouse producer. He provided dramatic entertainment for the court at Whitehall. According to the writer of *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), he was known, however, as a courtier who did not reveal the authorship of the works he wrote.

Scholars regard John Lyly and Anthony Munday as writers who exerted prominent influence on Shakespeare. Both, interestingly enough, were employed by Edward de Vere. Anthony Munday was Oxford's secretary and an actor in Oxford's Men; the playwright, John Lyly, was also a private secretary to Oxford, and he and Oxford co-produced plays. No evidence has ever been uncovered to establish that Lyly and Munday even *knew* Will Shakspeare of Stratford-Upon-Avon.

George Baker's medical book, *The Newe Jewell of Health* (1576) is widely acknowledged as a book that was a key influence on Shakespeare. George Baker was the household physician of Edward de Vere, and Baker's medical book that Shakespeare used was dedicated to the Countess of Oxford. Stephen Booth is one prominent orthodox scholar who, in his study of the Sonnets, points to the importance of Baker's book to Shakespeare, but he excludes any mention of Baker's connection to Oxford or Baker's dedication of his book to Oxford's wife, Anne.

Scholars long have noted that Baldesar Castiglione's *The Courtier* was an influence on the writer who created *Hamlet*. When he was 21, Oxford wrote a Latin preface to Clerke's translation of *The Courtier*.

Scholars note that *Cardan's Comferte* was an influence on the writer who created *Hamlet*. The English translation of this book was dedicated to Oxford; Oxford himself commanded that this work be translated and published.

We know from Thomas Nashe's preface to Greene's *Menaphon* that *Hamlet* was in performance as early as 1589. Some orthodox scholars, however, believe that William of Stratford had barely settled in London by that time. This still does not deter some Stratfordians from arguing that in the space of perhaps less than a year, Stratford Will, after or while working as an ostler, and without any known literary background, education, apprenticeship or theatrical experience, launched his dramatic career by writing and staging what today is broadly regarded as perhaps the greatest play ever written. Other Stratfordians choose to sail past Scylla rather than navigate this Charybdis by imaginatively suggesting that the *Hamlet* to which Nashe referred must have been—*had* to have been!—a play called *Hamlet* that someone else wrote; this *Hamlet*, they propose, Stratford Will later stole, adapted and made his own.

Many traditional scholars, for almost 100 years, have acknowledged that Polonius (originally named Corambis) from *Hamlet* is based on Oxford's guardian and father-in-law—the Queen's chief minister of State, William Cecil, Lord Burghley—whose family motto, *cor unam via una* (one heart, one way) is parodied in the earliest version of *Hamlet* (Corambis effectively means "double-hearted" or "two-faced"). Burghley's daughter, Anne, the wife of Edward de Vere, they have argued, was the basis for Ophelia, Polonius's daughter. There is no evidence that the commoner, William of Stratford, even knew Lord Burghley or his daughter, the Countess of Oxford.

Scientists have observed that Shakespeare's record of astronomical knowledge acquired during the Elizabethan Age (such as the discovery of Mars' retrograde orbit) and the record of major celestial events (such as the supernova of 1572) cease with the occurrence of astronomical events and discoveries that had been made by mid-1604. William of Stratford, however, lived until 23 April 1616—long enough, if he were Shakespeare, to continue to record in the Shakespeare plays the discovery of sunspots, the invention of the telescope, the discovery of Jupiter's moons, and other significant celestial phenomena and developments in astronomical science that occurred between 1604 and 1616. But the Shakespeare plays, while abundantly referential to such discoveries prior to 1604, are silent on those astronomical discoveries and celestial phenomena that were made or observed between 1604 and 1616. Edward de Vere died on 24 June 1604.

Shakespeare's intimate knowledge of Italy has perplexed scholars, especially as William of Stratford never traveled farther from Stratford-Upon-Avon than London. Oxford's travels, however, took him to practically all of the locations in Shakespeare's Italian plays, including Milan, Padua, Verona, Venice (where he built a home), Mantua, Sicily and a host of other Italian cities and sites. The orthodox Italian scholar, Professor Ernesto Grillo, accordingly, has declared that Shakespeare's familiarity with his native land indicates that Shakespeare *had* to have traveled extensively in Italy; as he writes: "When we consider that in the north of Italy he [Shakespeare] reveals a more profound knowledge of Milan, Bergamo, Verona, Mantua, Padua and Venice, the very limitation of the poet's notion of geography proves that he derived his information from an actual journey through Italy and not from books."

When Oxford was in Venice, he borrowed 500 crowns from a man named Baptista Nigrone. When in Padua, he borrowed more money from a man named Pasquino Spinola. In Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, Kate's father is described as a man "rich in crowns." Where does this character in Shakespeare's play live? Padua. What is his name? Baptista Minola—a conflation of Baptista Nigrone and Pasquino Spinola.

In May 1573, in a letter to William Cecil, two of Oxford's former employees accused three of Oxford's friends of attacking them on "the highway from Gravesend to Rochester." In Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff and three roguish friends of Prince Hal also waylay unwary travelers—on the highway from Gravesend to Rochester.

Such singular events in the plays as the Gad's Hill robbery in *1 Henry IV*, the attack on and release of Hamlet by pirates at sea, and the bed trick of *All's Well That Ends Well*—any one of which would constitute a highly unusual event in any man's experience—are *all* documented events in Oxford's life.

The three dedicatees of Shakespeare's works (the earls of Southampton, Montgomery and Pembroke) were each proposed as husbands for the three daughters of Edward de Vere. (*Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* were dedicated to Southampton and the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays was dedicated to Montgomery and Pembroke.) Southampton declined the hand of Elizabeth Vere to marry Elizabeth Vernon (Elizabeth Vere later married William Stanley, the 6th earl of Derby, himself a man of the theatre); Montgomery married Oxford's daughter, Susan, in 1604; and Bridget Vere, proposed by her prospective father-in-law, the earl of Pembroke, as a bride for his son, married Lord Norris after her father's death. There is no record, anywhere, that any of these powerful aristocrats, exclusively connected with the works of Shakespeare, even *knew* Will Shakspeare. (Needless to say, none of them proposed to or married any of *his* daughters!)

Following the death of his father, the 18th earl of Oxford, Henry de Vere, participated in the formation of a Protestant resistance to a proposed English alliance with Catholic Spain. Who were Henry de Vere's leading compatriots in this resistance? The earls of Southampton, Montgomery and Pembroke—the three dedicatees of the poems and plays of Shakespeare.

The writer who called himself Shakespeare possessed the largest published vocabulary of any writer who has *ever* lived. Like many other orthodox scholars, Edward T. Oakes, in "Shakespeare's Millennium," recognizes Shakespeare's unique achievement as a wordsmith; he notes that "one-twelfth of the words in the Shakespeare canon make their appearance, at least in print, for the first time in English," and he acknowledges that "most of [these] must have been of his coinage." Oakes also records that "nearly half of Shakespeare's words were what scholars call *hapax legomena*, that is, words that Shakespeare used only once." Even allowing William of Stratford the benefit of an elementary schooling that there is no evidence he received, Oakes himself declares "[t]he idea that the greatest playwright of the human race could have poured forth such a cornucopia of genius with only the benefit of a grammar school education does seem to stretch stupefaction past the point of credulity."

Researchers have discovered that words frequently credited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* and other sources as having had their first usage in Shakespeare actually have shown up earlier in Edward de Vere's personal letters.

"I am that I am" is peculiar to Shakespeare as an appropriation from Scripture (Exodus 3: 14)—but it shows up, in the same form, in a letter from Edward de Vere to Lord Burghley.

In 1589, in order to raise much-needed funds, Edward de Vere hurriedly sold his London residence, Fisher's Folly, to William Cornwallis who, with his young daughter, Anne, took up residence in the earl's former home. In 1852, Shakespeare biographer J. O. Halliwell-Phillips discovered Anne Cornwallis's copybook from her days at Fisher's Folly in which she had transcribed verses from Edward de Vere, presumably from manuscripts left behind when the residence changed hands. Interestingly, however, Halliwell-Phillips observed that Anne's copybook included not only then-unpublished poetry by Edward de Vere but two unpublished sonnets that later would be attributed to Shakespeare. Anne's copybook, moreover, included another poem scholars later would attribute to Shakespeare that was printed by William Jaggard in 1599 in his miscellanies of Elizabethan poetry, *The Passionate Pilgrim*. Halliwell-Phillips estimated that Anne Cornwallis made her transcriptions of these then-unpublished verses in 1590, the year after she and her father took up residence at Fisher's Folly. Of course, how Anne Cornwallis, in 1590, would have acquired unpublished poems by Shakespeare in the former home of Edward de Vere no one in orthodox circles ever has been able to persuasively explain.

On 22 July 1598, the Stationers' Register records: "Entred for his copie under the handes of bothe the wardens, a booke of the Merchaunt of Venyce or otherwise called the Iewe of Venice. / Provided that yt bee not printed by the said Iames Robertes [the printer who presented the work for registration]; or anye other whatsoever without lycence first had from the Right honorable the lord Chamberlen." As (1) no such license was ever extended by the Stationers' Office to anyone other than an author of a registered work, and as (2) no Lord Chamberlain of the Royal Household ever licensed (or possessed the authority to license) the publication of another's work, and as (3) numerous examples exist of Oxford and others referencing Oxford as Lord Chamberlain (rather than Lord Great Chamberlain—the title that formally distinguished him from the Lord Chamberlain of the Royal Household), one can reach no other conclusion than that the Stationers' Register entry of 22 July 1598 indicates Oxford to be the author of *The Merchant of Venice* and, accordingly, the only person with the legal authority to oversee and authorise its publication. The attendant conclusion, based on all the evidence, is unmistakable: if Oxford is the author of *The Merchant of Venice*, Oxford is Shakespeare.

Henry Peacham, in *The Compleat Gentleman* [1622], praised Oxford above all other writers among the Golden Age writers during the reign of Queen Elizabeth — and his list makes no mention of any William Shakespeare.

Oxford received the kinds of literary accolades worthy of (and that one would expect would go to) Shakespeare. William of Stratford, however, never had anything dedicated to him, from anyone, in the whole of his life. Yet, despite the accolades accorded Oxford by his contemporaries, no traditional scholar has yet identified what plays of the era that were so highly

praised of Oxford might be Oxford's; if his works are not those of the great Elizabethan spear-shaker, where are they? Is it credible to assert that every single one of his plays was lost?

Gabriel Harvey saluted (in English translation from the Latin) the 17th Earl of Oxford in *Gratulationes Valdinenses, libri quatuor* (1578): "English poetical measures have been sung thee long enough. Let that Courtly Epistle—more polished even than the writings of Castiglione himself—witness how greatly thou dost excel in letters. I have seen many Latin verses of thine, yea, even more English verses are extant; thou hast drunk deep draughts not only of the Muses of France and Italy, but hast learned the manners of many men, and the arts of foreign countries Thine eyes flash fire, thy countenance shakes a spear"

William Webbe, in *A Discourse on English Poetry* (1586) wrote: "I may not omit the deserved commendations of many honourable and noble Lords and Gentlemen in Her Majesty's Court, which, in the rare devices of poetry, have been and yet are most skilful; among whom the right honourable Earl of Oxford may challenge to himself the title of most excellent among the rest."

George Puttenham, in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) wrote: "And in Her Majesty's time that now are have sprung up another crew of Courtly makers, Noblemen and Gentlemen of Her Majesty's own servants, who have written excellently well as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest, of which number is first the noble gentleman Edward Earl of Oxford."

John Marston, in *Scourge of Villanie* (1598) hailed a great, unacknowledged writer with a "silent name" bounded by "one letter" who one day would achieve the recognition he was due when pretenders to his greatness would be exposed: "Far fly thy fame, / Most, most of me beloved, whose silent name [Edward de Vere?] / One letter [e?] bounds [T]hy unvalu'd worth / Shall mount fair place when Apes are turned forth."

Francis Meres, in *Palladis Tamia* (1598) declared of the era's playwrights: "The best for comedy amongst us be Edward Earl of Oxford."

Edmund Spenser, in his dedication to Oxford in *Fairie Queene* (1590) wrote of Edward de Vere's favour with the nation's literary elite: "And also for the love, which thou doest beare / To th' Heliconian ymps, and they to thee, / They unto thee, and thou to them most deare...."

John Soowthern, in *Pandora* (1584) wrote: "De Vere, that hath given him in part: / The love, the war, honour and art, / And with them an eternal fame. / Among our well-renowned men, / De Vere merits a silver pen / Eternally to write his honour. / A man so honoured as thee, / And both of the Muses and me."

In *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, George Chapman recalled: "I over-tooke, coming from Italie / a great and famous Earle / Of England . . . / He was beside of spirit passing great, / Valiant, and learn'd, and liberall as the Sunne, / Spoke and writ sweetly, or of learned subjects, / Or of the discipline of publike weals; / And 'twas the Earle of Oxford"

When *Shakespeare's Sonnets* were published in 1609, the work's dedication (composed, unlike Shakespeare's earlier dedications, not by the poet but by the poems' editor, Thomas Thorpe) memorialized the writer as "our ever-living poet"—an acclamation not used for a living person and a clear indication, thereby, that Shakespeare was dead. In 1609, Edward de Vere *was* dead; Stratford Will lived until 1616.

When Shakespeare "went public" in 1593, he connected his name, irrevocably and exclusively, to Henry Wriothesley, the 3rd earl of Southampton. Southampton, like Oxford, was one of the great peers of England and he, like Oxford, was one of the royal wards who had been raised and educated by Lord Burghley in Cecil House. Southampton also was actively encouraged by Burghley, at age 17, to marry Elizabeth Vere, Oxford's eldest daughter, and many scholars are convinced that the first 17 "marriage sonnets" of Shakespeare were composed by the great poet in 1590 as an inducement for Southampton to marry Elizabeth Vere. But who is the more likely poet to have undertaken that charge? A yet-unpublished provincial from Warwickshire — or Edward de Vere, the acclaimed poet who himself had married Burghley's only daughter in 1571?

The Sonnets were not the only works of Shakespeare to appear with an enigmatic prefatory note in 1609. When *Troilus and Cressida* was published in 1609 (the first publication of a new Shakespeare play since 1604, the year Edward de Vere died), a cryptic preface on the title page of the play (suppressed when Shakespeare's plays were published in folio in 1623), enigmatically declared that the play was from "A never writer to an ever reader" (an E. Vere writer to an E. Vere reader?). The preface declared, as well, that the manuscript had not come to the printer from the playwright; rather, the unnamed writer of the preface invites the reader of the play to "thanke fortune for the scape it hath made" from a group which the writer of the preface refers to as "the grand possessors."

As Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, has expressed his astonishment at Shakespeare's ability to know the intimate character of royalty: "When I re-read [*Henry V*] nearly twenty years after performing it at school, I found myself wondering in amazement at Shakespeare's insight into the mind of someone born into this kind of position."

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