

Oxford as ‘Shakespeare’

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The following is reproduced from a new scholarly book, My Shakespeare, edited by William Leahy and published by EER. The anthology also prints new pieces arguing for Marlowe (Ros Barber), for Mary Sidney (Robin Williams), for Francis Bacon (Barry Clarke), for Stratford-Shaksper (Alan Nelson), for Henry Neville (Rubinstein, Casson & Ewald), as well as thoughtful contributions from William Leahy (an amalgamated Shakespeare) and Diana Price (Stratford-Shaksper as broker). The following essay argues the case for Oxford as Shakespeare and is reprinted here in its entirety, though without its bibliography, which can be sent upon request.

1. Enter Oxford

The precocious, madcap, scandal-ridden and brilliantly learned poet-playwright, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604) was born into a play-loving family — one of the first in England to keep its own company of actors. His grandfather was a great patron of theatre for whom the eminent dramatist, John Bale, wrote at least fourteen plays, including *King Johan*, identified as the major source of Shakespeare’s *King John*. Orthodox scholars have never explained how Shakespeare found himself in possession of Bale’s old, unpublished manuscript (Moray 1994, 327-31).¹ Among Oxford’s uncles were Arthur Golding, the translator of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (a major source for many passages in Shakespeare), Henry, Earl of Surrey, a pioneer of the so-called ‘Shakespearean sonnet and Edmund Sheffield, a sonneteer after the Italian fashion and a skilled musician.

Oxford was tutored by Thomas Smith, Regius Professor of Civil Law, and by Lawrence Nowell, the celebrated legal historian. Lawyers lived with his family from his earliest years and he continued his father’s habit of hospitality to lawyers throughout his adult life (see Byrd 1580 and Nashe 1592).² At the age of sixteen he entered Gray’s Inn to study law. Since the 18th century it has been noted how Shakespeare naturally, frequently and accurately placed legal metaphors into his poems and plays. Lord Penzance, Baron of the Exchequer, believed Shakespeare “to have thought in legal phrases,” while Shakespearean scholar Richard Grant White observed how “legal phrases flow from his pen as part of his vocabulary and parcel of his thought” (White 1859, 102).

In 1562, when the 16th Earl died, his twelve-year-old son was made a ward of the Queen and placed under the guardianship of the Master of Wards and Lord Treasurer,

Sir William Cecil (later Lord Burghley), who, nine years later would become his father-in-law. Among Burghley's private peculiarities was his habit of returning home after a long day's work, laying down his official robe and saying to it: "Lie there, Lord Treasurer." In Shakespeare's *Tempest*, the magician Prospero "lays down his mantle" and commands it to "Lie there, my Art!" (I.ii). In 1869 George Russell French identified Shakespeare's Ophelia as a portrait of Oxford's wife, Anne Cecil, and Polonius (her father) as a caricature of Lord Burghley, an identification that has been accepted by many scholars since (see French 1869, 301-06; Gollancz 1898; Phillips 1936; Jolly in Malim 2004, 173-4). In the first quarto of *Hamlet*, Polonius is called Corambis (meaning "double-hearted"), teasing Burghley's armorial motto, *cor unum, via una* ("One heart, one way"). Like Burghley, Polonius is cast as Senior Advisor to the Queen and like Burghley, who sent servants to spy on his son, Polonius sends servants to spy on his son; like Burghley, who gave the boy ten moral "Precepts" to memorize, Polonius requires his son to memorize ten moral precepts which, in tone and substance, closely ape those of Burghley. Hamlet calls Polonius a "fishmonger" in apparent mockery of Burghley's zealous promotion of a bill to make fish-eating compulsory on Wednesdays,³ and "Jephthah," in apparent mockery of Burghley's active campaigning for the 'Assassins Charter' in the mid-1580s (see Beane 2016, 23-30).

Acknowledging these coincidences, E. K. Chambers (1930) asked: "Can Polonius have resembled some nickname for Burghley?" (1930, 418). 'Polonius,' when attached to a name, means a Pole (i.e., a native of Poland) and Oxford was present at New College, Oxford, on 2 September 1566 when poet, George Coryat, gave an oration in which Lords Burghley and Leicester were repeatedly referred to as "poles" (meaning axis poles). Coryat's poem ended: "Long may you live in joy and health, O Poles!" (see Nichols 1823, Vol 1. 231-36).⁴ Hearing his illustrious guardian called a "pole" in front of an audience of dignitaries must have struck the sixteen-year-old Oxford as singularly amusing, not least because the word "pole" (which much offended the Polonians) was also a slang term for "prick" (Williams 1994, Vol 2. 1069).⁵

Oxford was a precocious learner. His tutor, Lawrence Nowell, wrote to Cecil: "I clearly see that my work for the Earl of Oxford cannot be much longer required" (Landsdowne 6/54, f. 135), a comment that prompted Oxford's first biographer, B. M. Ward, to remark: "That a scholar of Lawrence Nowell's attainments should speak thus of his pupil, aged 13½, argues a precocity quite out of the ordinary" (1928, 20-21). It was certainly noticed by Arthur Golding, who wrote to Oxford in the following year: "I haue had experience therof myself, howe earnest a desire your honor hath naturally graffed in you, to read, peruse, and communicate with others, as well the Histories of

ancient tyme, and thynges done long ago, as also of the present estate of thinges in oure dayes, and that not withoute a certayn pregnancie of witte and rypenesse of vnderstandyng” (1564, iiii).

Neither Golding nor Nowell would have been surprised when Oxford became the youngest man of his generation to be honored by both universities. One of the first nominated fellows of Trinity College, the distinguished Cambridge scholar, John Brooke, noted that the honour bestowed upon him by Cambridge University was awarded “by right” of his “excellent virtue and rare learning” (1577, Aiii). Scholar and actor Thomas Twynne — who, with his brother Lawrence, provided source material, respectively, for Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and *Pericles* — noted the “singular delight” with which Oxford read “books of geography, histories and other good learning”(dedication to *Breviary of Britain*, 1572). So intense was his love of learning that another famous scholar, Thomas Underdowne, had to warn him against the temptation to be “too much addicted that way” (1569). Underdowne’s translation of Heliodorus’s *Aethiopika*, dedicated to Oxford in 1569, is cited as an important source for Shakespeare by Crewe, who noted how “traces of the *Aethiopika* persist in William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (1623) and *Cymbeline* (1623), and in *The Winter’s Tale* (1623) (2009, 603).”⁶

While no evidence survives that Stratford-Shakespeare owned a single book, volumes known to have belonged to Oxford are recognized sources of influence on Shakespeare. An expense account of 1570 proves that he bought himself volumes in Italian and French. Shakespeare based several of his plays (*Hamlet* and *Othello*, among others) on Italian and French works that had not yet been translated into English. The same account shows Oxford buying Chaucer’s works (the source for *Troilus & Cressida* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*), a volume of Plutarch (upon which Shakespeare drew for *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus* and *Merchant of Venice*) and a *Geneva Bible* (Ward 33), of which Oxford’s copy, preserved at the Folger Library in Washington, contains annotations of no fewer than 199 Biblical passages, all of which are used in Shakespeare (Stritmatter 2001, 305).

Oxford’s devotion to books and learning drew many playwrights and scholars to him. Robert Greene extolled him as “a worthie favorer and fosterer of learning” to whom “scholars flock” (dedicatory letter to Gwydonius, 1584) and playwright George Chapman, as “of spirit passing great,” who “writ sweetly of learned subjects” (Bussy d’Ambois, c. 1610); George Buc, the man in charge of licensing all plays for the stage, described him as a “magnificent and very learned” nobleman (1609). Oxford’s lifelong enthusiasm for poetry, language, astrology, history, military science, medicine, Classical literature, theatre and music (all subjects of which the playwright “Shakespeare” was supremely knowledgeable) are well documented. John Soothern wrote of Oxford:

For who marketh better then he,
 The seuen turning flames of the Skie:
 Or hath read more of the antique.
 Hath greater knowledge in the tongues:
 Or vnderstandes sooner the sounds,
 Of the learner to loue Musique (*Pandora*, 1584).

Composer John Farmer lauded Oxford's skill in music, noting that he had "overgone most of them that make it a profession" (1599). Gabriel Harvey, reported that among "Gallants" at court in 1580, "this English Poet" was considered a "fellow peerless in England ... not the like discourser for Tongue, and head to be found out" (1580, 36), and Queen Elizabeth, writing "*ex animo*" ("from her heart") described Oxford as possessed of an "outstanding mind...innately endowed with manners, virtue and learning" (1575).⁷ Allied to this "outstanding mind" was a limitless generosity. Oxford's "exceeding bountie," as Angel Day described it in 1586, was remembered after his death by Gervase Markham who recalled: "It were infinite to speake of his infinite expence, the infinite number of his attendants, or the infinite house he kept to feede all people," the "bountie which Religion and Learning daily took from him" are as "trumpets so loude that all eares know them" (1624, 16-17). But the trumpets heralding Oxford's generosity were never his own. Indeed he was remarkable for his self-effacement, following Christ's example to give generously but in secret. Many of the underlined verses in his *Geneva Bible* attest to the importance he placed on charity and self-effacement, including from Matt. 6: "when thou givest thine almes, thou shall not make a trumpet to blowen before thee."⁸

An "infinite Maecenas," as Thomas Nashe described him, is necessarily headed for financial ruin and, typical of many poets and men of intellect, Oxford had no head for figures. Like the eponymous nobleman of Shakespeare's *Timon*, he was generous to a fault and found himself squeezed by parasites quick to exploit his largesse. As Henry Lok recorded in a letter to Lord Burghley (6 Nov 1590), Oxford was brought to ruin by the "over many greedy horse-leeches which had sucked too ravenously on his sweet liberality" (Nelson 2003, 326-7). In 1584 William Warner, in possibly the earliest allusion to Shakespeare's *Timon*, wrote "let the Athenian misanthropos, or Man-hater bite on the Stage" — a reminder of Shakespeare's *Timon* who memorably snaps: "I am Misanthropos and hate mankind." Orthodox scholars tend to place *Timon* among the 'late,' 'problem' plays (1606-7), but more recent studies have shown that it cannot

postdate 1602 (Billington 1998, 351-52; Detobel 2004; Anderson 2006, 184, 207-34; Showerman 2009, 207-34; Steinburg 2013, 280-95). If Warner's 1584 allusion relates to this play, then Timon's cry "Let my lands be sold," precisely reflects the desperation that Oxford felt between 1580 and 1585 when he (like Timon) was besieged by creditors, flatterers and scroungers, and for want of cash, forced to sell thirty-two of his estates to cover debts.

It is not known how much of Oxford's patrimony was squandered on theatrical entertainments for the Queen. In 1601 he reminded Robert Cecil of his "youth, time and fortune spent in her Court" (AMS Hatfield MSS, Cal. XI.27; see Chiljan 1998, 64). The historian Edmund Bohun described him as a courtier "drawn into great expenses, Chargeable Feasts, Balls and Interludes and an excessive Gallantry" (1693, 82). In 1579 he presented a lavish comedy at Greenwich described in a letter by Mauvissiere, the French Ambassador, as "*une belle comedie qui se conclust par un mariage*" (in Woudhuysen 1981, 309-10). The French word "*comedie*" here meaning "a Play or Enterlude that begins in dissention, or sorrow, and ends in agreement or merriment" (Cotgrave 1611). This particular comedy involved a spectacular shipwreck. Anthony Mundy, remembered the scene in which "a brave and comely ship brought in before her Majesty wherein were certain of her noble Lords, and this ship was made with a gallant devise that in her presence it ran upon a rock & was despoiled. This credit was the bravest devise that I ever saw, and worthy of innumerable commendations" (Mundy 1580, 35). Mauvissiere described how Oxford had concealed himself within the ship and, after its destruction, danced his way from the wreck into the audience, where he presented a splendid jewel to the Queen. The name of this "beautiful comedy" of 1579 is unfortunately lost, but its shipwreck and final scene of happy marriage brings Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to mind, as does a handwritten manuscript note by Abraham Fleming (one of Oxford's secretaries) listing "a pleasant conceit of *Vere*, Earl of Oxford, discontented at the Rising of a mean Gentleman in the *English Court*, circa 1580" (Peck 1732, 50).⁹ Is this the lampooning of Christopher Hatton as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*? Could both records refer to a 1579 version of this comedy? If so, could Oxford have acted the part of Sebastian? It was, after all, in that same year that poet Fulke Greville sneeringly referred to Oxford as a "passionate actor" (1651, 77).¹⁰ Some months later a courtier recalled Oxford helping him rehearse some lines: "he desired me to repeat the wordes, which after some study, calling them to remembrance ... with his helpe, rehearsed them to him" (Arundel, LIB-2.1.5/24 in Nelson, 209). The verse was pure mischief, a prophesy concerning Queen Elizabeth and was designed, no doubt, to "catch the conscience of the Queen," just as Shakespeare's prophetic prince, Hamlet, rehearsed the actors at the court of Elsinore: "Speak the speech, I pray you, as

I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue” in verses designed to “catch the conscience of the king” (II.ii).

In his *Seculum Proditori* a poet known as “Davies of Hereford” described his past acquaintance with a man of high birth; “too worthy,” he wrote, to have been an actor, but one who had nevertheless played the part of a king “in game” at court (1616, F⁶). According to Davies this unnamed man had “said to himself” that in acting the king he had experienced “a taste of raigne with power to leave” and so gotten “for noight, what kings do buy so dear.” In his well-known verse, “My Mind to Me a Kingdom is,” Oxford had expressed precisely the same sentiment, stating to himself that he could experience the pleasures of being king in his mind without need or desire to suffer the burdens to which a real king is heir. In another poem by the same “Davies of Hereford,” the playwright “Shake-speare” is described with his “raigning wit” as one who had riskily “played some kingly parts in sport” before the court, suggesting precisely the same high-born fellow whom he described as having played a king “in game” in *Seculum Proditori*. The former poem was entitled “*To our English Terence, Mr. Will. Shake-speare*” — comparing “Shake-speare” to the African slave, Terence, who, according to Suetonius, had pretended the authorship of plays that were actually written by concealed poet and Roman nobleman, Quintus Fabius Labeo. Carolyn Morris provides extensive evidence that Joseph Hall’s attack on a hidden high-born poet named “Labeo” in *Satyres* (1597-8) was a loosely veiled attack on Oxford (2016, 33-82). In these verses Hall accuses “Labeo” of running a studio of writers and shifting his fame to “another’s name.” John Marston, in the following year, while “scourging magnificos” (*magnifico* - “a great noble person; any person of high rank or position,” *OED*) revealed the poet “Labeo” to be none other than William Shakespeare (*ibid*).¹¹

Not all were so puritanical as Marston and Hall. In 1589 the anonymous author of *Arte of English Poesie* had declared that “for such doings as I have seen” Oxford’s “Comedies and Enterludes ... deserve the highest prize,” and nine years later, Francis Meres placed him first on a list of 17 contemporary English playwrights named as “best for Comedy.” It is hardly surprising that he should have excelled at comedy for he was considered among the funniest men of his age, with a talent for fantastical story-telling that threw his companions into fits of uncontrollable laughter. Charles Arundel recorded how he “glories greatly” in the telling of a story, “diversely hath he told it, and when he enters into it, he can hardly out, which hath made such sport as often have I been driven to rise from his table laughing. So hath my Lord Charles Howard and the rest” (1581).¹²

For over two decades Oxford was involved with Court and public theatre. In the 1580s he supported, in addition to his own bands of acrobats and musicians, several acting companies including Oxford's Men, Oxford's Boys, the Queen's Majesties Players, the Children of Windsor, Paul's Boys and the Children of the Chapel Royal (see Chambers 1923, Vol. 4, 497), making him, for a while, the single most important patron of theatre among the English nobility. In 1583 he acquired the lease on England's first public indoor theatre, later transferring it to his secretary, the playwright John Lyly and Rocco Bonetti, a fencing master, despised by Oxford, whose preposterous fencing terms are said to be ridiculed in *Romeo and Juliet*.¹³ In the 1590s his players elected as their favourite performing space the yard of the Boar's Head Tavern adjacent to Oxford's home and 'Great Garden' east of Aldgate. This public theatre shares its name and reputation for rowdiness with the infamous 'Boar's Head Tavern' in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, in which Falstaff and his men mount an ambush on messengers bringing money for the exchequer along the road from Rochester to Gravesend on 20 May, an event that precisely mirrors an ambush by Oxford's men on Burghley's servants bringing money for the exchequer along the same stretch of road between Rochester and Gravesend on 20 May 1573 (see Whittemore 2016).

In his mid-twenties Oxford wrote, "I have appointed for myself to serve my turne beyonde the seas In consideration whereof I am content to resign my interest and estate in Combe" (Nelson, 102)¹⁴ and thus, like Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, who "sold his lands to see other men's" (IV.i), Oxford sold his to see foreign countries too. From Padua (November 1575), he wrote to his father-in-law urging him to underwrite a loan of 500 crowns. Burghley agreed, setting up lines of credit through the banking firm of Baptista Spinola. Is it mere coincidence that Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, set in Padua, portrays a wheeler-dealer, who is rich in crowns, called Baptista Minola, who demands that Lucentio's marriage bond be underwritten by the young man's father? While Stratfordians are content to assume that "Shakespeare was thinking of London" when he composed this play, Richard Roe shows how specific details in that comedy — the proximity of merchants' houses to a lodging house, a university and a port within the parish of St Luke's — can only apply to 16th century Padua, and not to London, where there was no church of St Luke's until 1733 and no university until 1826 (Roe 2011).¹⁵

As a scene from Shakespeare's *Henry V* masterfully presents the comedy of an Englishman trying to speak French at the French court, so Oxford spoke fluent French, Latin and Italian and had first-hand experience of speaking all three languages in foreign courts. In Italy he based himself in Venice, where two of Shakespeare's plays

are set. Armed with personal letters of introduction from Queen Elizabeth to the ducal heads of Italian city states, he is known to have visited Florence, Milan, Padua, Bologna, Genoa, Siena and Sicily and is assumed to have entered several cities in between. Shakespeare, who derives plots from untranslated Italian sources, set 106 dramatic scenes in Italy, making references to many of the places that lay on Oxford's trail, including 52 specific references to Venice, 25 to Milan, 23 to Florence, and 22 to Padua. In his comprehensive study of Shakespearean allusions to Italy, Richard Roe leaves no doubt that Shakespeare's precise details of Italian places, names, paintings, buildings, routes, rivers, manners, customs, habits and language, demonstrate that the playwright had first-hand knowledge of Italy.¹⁶

In a scene that cannot be attributed to any known source of the Hamlet story, the eponymous prince is "set naked" upon the shore having been attacked and stripped of his clothes by pirates in the English Channel, just as Oxford was attacked, robbed and stripped naked by pirates in the English Channel on his return journey to England in 1576. As one of his companions, Nathaniel Baxter, recalled: "Naked we landed out of Italy, enthralled by pirates, men of no regard; horror and death assailed nobility" (1606).

While Oxford was abroad, a false friend informed him that the baby (a daughter), born to his wife in his absence, was not his. In rage he spurned her upon his return, only to regret his behaviour when he learned of her innocence. Is it mere coincidence that Shakespeare chose to write *Othello* about a foreigner in Venice who destroyed his wife when informed by a false friend of her infidelity, only to regret his actions on discovering her innocence? Is it mere coincidence that Shakespeare also set for the stage the story of *Cymbeline* about a young nobleman, who (like Oxford) is married to the daughter of the most powerful man in Britain, who (like Oxford) leaves England for a tour of Italy where he hears of his wife's infidelities, who returns (like Oxford) in unforgiving mood to repudiate her and his father-in-law, only to seek their forgiveness later on? And is it mere coincidence that Shakespeare wrote in *The Winter's Tale* (II.iii) of a scheme to bring the queen's newborn daughter before the furious king (who denied his paternity) in the hope that the king might "soften at the sight o' the child," just as the Duchess of Suffolk (in a letter to Lord Burghley on 15 Dec 1577 (BL MS Landsowne 25, ff 56-58) concerning one whose paternity Oxford denied), schemed to "bring in the child as though it were some other child of my friend's, and we shall see how nature will work in him to like it, and tell him it is his own after?" (see Ward 1928, 154-56).

Before Oxford's departure for Italy, the French ambassador to England had reported that he had "more followers and was the object of greater expectation than

any other man in the realm” (in Mothe-Fénelon in Cooper, ed., 1840, 361).¹⁷ On his return he was noted for his enthusiastic, if somewhat effeminate, espousal of all things French and Italian. As the playwright, Shakespeare displays intimate knowledge of the French and Italian peoples, their manners, customs, literature, language, their art and their laws, so Gabriel Harvey wrote of Oxford that “of French and Italian muses, the manners of many peoples, their arts and laws [he has] drunk deeply.” Harvey continued his address to Oxford; “Pallas will instruct your heart and spirit as long since Apollo cultivated your mind in the arts. Your English poetry has been widely sung. Let your courtly epistle — more polished than even the writings of Castiglione himself — witness how greatly you excel in letters. I have seen many of your Latin verses and even more of your English verses are extant” (1578, 2-7).¹⁸

Despite contemporary acclaim for Oxford’s poetic output, little is now known of it because he, like all the courtier-poets of his generation, concealed his authorship of literary works. In the 16th Century noblemen considered poetry something to be written or enjoyed only in their “idle hours.” A courtier’s duty was primarily to arms, to Commonwealth and Crown; social custom prohibited him from publishing poetry or fiction under his own name. Even in manuscript, the literary courtier would sign his verse with quaint pseudonyms known as “poesies.” The author of *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) writes that the nobility are “loath to be known of their skill” as poets and consequently “suffer it to be publisht without their owne names to it” (16). In this same book Oxford is ranked top among all the excellent poets of Elizabeth’s court: “and in her Majesties time that now is are sprung up an other crew of Courtly makers Noble men and Gentlemen of her Majesties owne 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 that noble Gentleman *Edward Earle* of Oxford ...” (49). Oxford’s position as the pre-eminent poet of the English court, hinted as early as 1579 by Edmund Spenser in his portrait of “Cuddie,” is confirmed by William Webbe in his *Discourse on English Poetrie*: “I may not omittle the deserved commendations of many honourable and noble Lordes and Gentlemen in Her Maiesties Courte, which in the rare devices of poetry, have beene and yet are most excellent skylfull; among whom the right honourable Earl of Oxford may challenge to himself the tytle of most excellent among the rest” (1586, sig. C iiiiv). On a long list of poets drawn up by Henry Peacham in 1622, Oxford is placed first among those “refined wits and excellent spirits” who “in the time of our late Queene Elizabeth, which was truly a golden Age” had “honoured Poesie with their pennes and practice.” The name “William Shakespeare” is noticeably absent from this list (95-6).

It is hardly surprising that a concealed poet, playwright, musician and patron of Oxford's innate abilities and extravagant generosity should be associated, in the minds of his classically obsessed peers, with the patron god of poets and the Muses, Phoebus-Apollo. Those who liken Oxford to a modern-day Apollo include Chapman, Soothern, Lok, Lucas de Heere, Angel Day and John Lyly. Thomas Nashe explains of Oxford that he has purchased "high fame" by his pen: "being the first (in our language) I haue encountred, that repurified Poetrie from Arts pedantisme, & that instructed it to speake courtly. Our Patron, our Phoebus [Apollo], our first Orpheus or quintessence of inuention he is" (1596, M2v).¹⁹

The admission in *Art of English Poesie* that nobles published their works without putting their own names to them is confirmed by John Bodenham in *Bel-védere* (1600) who writes that Oxford's works are "extant among other Honourable personages writings" (sig. A⁵), i.e. published under other men's names. Crawford identified over 200 lines in Bodenham's book that had elsewhere been published under the name "William Shakespeare" but found none that he could attribute to Oxford (1910). In Bodenham's ensuing list of "modern and extant poets that have lived together," the name William Shakspeare appears in the Apollonian centre (thirteenth of 25) of a large number of poets who can be individually linked to Oxford but who have no known connection to Stratford-Shakspeare.

One of these is Thomas Nashe, who in 1592 was accused by Gabriel Harvey of "obscure lurking in basest corners." Nashe responded in a work called *Strange Newes*: "I lurke in no corners but conuerse in a house of credit as well gouerned as any Colledge, where there bee more rare quallified men, and selected good Schollers than in any Noblemans house that I knowe in England. If I had committed *such abhominable villanies, or were a base shifting companion*, it stode not with my Lords honour to keepe me" (1592). Nashe does not name "my Lord" who "keeps" him in this remarkable household of scholars, but it is easy to identify him as the same patron whom elsewhere he identifies as "My Lord of Oxford." *Strange Newes* is dedicated to a pseudonymous patron, "Gentle M. William," who (like Oxford) is revealed to be an "infinite Maecenas to learned men," and (like Oxford) is a prolific poet who has lately run out of money, and (like Oxford) one who keeps three "maidens" (his three daughters) under his roof, and whose "hospitality" has resulted in a scandal at the Archdeacons Court.

The Latin word *vere* means "truly" or "verily." and Nashe further betrays the identity of his pseudonymous dedicatee with the line: "Verilie, verilie all poore Schollers acknowledge you as their patron, prouiditore and supporter."²⁰ When Nashe wrote of the "selected good Schollers" who acknowledge Oxford as their patron, he included

poets and playwrights (1596, sig. V) such as Greene, Mundy, Lyly, Watson and Churchyard, whom he also referred to as “scholars.”²¹ It is from the Nashe-Harvey pamphlets that we learn (again indirectly) that the novelist, playwright and translator Robert Greene was another of Oxford’s “secretaries.”²²

Why should Nashe’s dedication to Oxford be anonymised? Why should Robert Greene’s position within Oxford’s secretariat be veiled? The answer lies in Oxford’s shadowy position at the centre of a secret group of scholars, authors and poets writing and publishing learned works and propaganda pamphlets for the Crown. “I serve her Majesty and I am that I am,” he wrote to Lord Burghley in an echo of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 121: “I am that I am and they that level at my abuses reckon up their own.” It is not known when Oxford began this service but Nelson places him at the centre of a literary propaganda group as early as 1580, when a number of his scholar-servants or “secretaries” (Abraham Fleming, Arthur Golding, Thomas Churchyard, Thomas Twynne, and Anthony Mundy) came together to write social propaganda pamphlets in the wake of the Dover Straits earthquake (223). Fleming assembled the essays into a single volume published by Henry Denham who made at least twelve books with him, including the vastly expanded second edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, instigated and corrected by Her Majesty’s Privy Council, published under the royal imprimatur, and identified, not only as a singularly important source for Shakespeare, but as a significant contribution to “a deliberate movement to elevate the stature of England, English letters, and English language through writing and publishing maps, histories, national epics, and theoretical works on English poetry” (see Clegg 1997, 138). Another Fleming-Denham production, Baret’s four language dictionary, *Alvearie*, (1580), is cited by Koppelman & Wechsler (2014) and T.W. Baldwin (1944, 715) as seminal source for Shakespeare. Can it be by chance alone that Mundy, Lyly, Greene, Nashe and others employed to defend the established Church (of which the Queen was “Supreme Governor”) against the published onslaughts of the so-called Disciplinaryans, happened also to be servants of Oxford and happened also to be poets and playwrights cited by orthodox commentators as seminal influences on William Shakespeare?

In 1592 Nashe described a “policy of plays” as one of the “secrets of government,” explaining that stage adaptations of wholesome English chronicles were “very necessary” to the moral wellbeing of a target audience of certain types — whom he identified as courtiers, lawyers, captains and soldiers (sig. F3).²³ He did not include university scholars, but they too were targets of the Privy Council’s “policy of plays.” The first allusion to a play *Hamlet*, dated to the summer of 1589, is contained in a lecture addressed by Nashe “To the Gentleman Students of Both Universities” in

which he urges the scholars of Oxford and Cambridge to abandon the old school of Senecan translations and to embrace those “rare excersises in virtue,” English chronicle plays (in Greene 1589).²⁴ In 1580 Oxford’s theatre company was recommended to both universities by no fewer than three members of the Privy Council: the Lord Chamberlain (Sussex), the Lord Chancellor (Bromley), and the Lord Treasurer (Burghley) (letter from John Hatcher to Burghley on 21 June 1580, S.P. Dom., 139.26, quoted in Ward 267-68). Three years later, another core member of the Privy Council, Francis Walsingham, requested that Oxford’s best actors be transferred to the newly formed Queen’s Majesties Men under the management of John Lyly, who was, and remained, Oxford’s secretary and director of his theatrical enterprises, including his public theatre at the Blackfriars.²⁵

It would appear then that Oxford, patron and author of acclaimed poems and plays, was exerting a considerable influence on Court and public theatre, while simultaneously maintaining covert command of a government-sponsored program of learned, historical, moral and didactic publications. Thus Harvey explained why “so many singular learned men laboured [Oxford’s] commendation,” for he was “the godfather of writers, the superintendent of the presse, the muster-maister of innumerable bands, the General of the feilde” (1593, 36).²⁶ In similar vein Oxford’s in-laws, the Cecils, appear to have exerted a covert control over the public theatres used by the Chamberlain’s and the King’s Men. The Theatre, the Blackfriars and the Globe were all set up and managed by the Burbages, who were servants of the Cecils’ long-serving right-hand man, Sir Walter Cope. Cope later became protector and benefactor of Oxford’s daughter, Bridget.

In 1586, when Oxford’s finances were in a parlous state, the Queen granted him an annuity of £1000 a year. Sir Francis Walsingham, the Queen’s “spymaster” (Oxford’s “constant and approved frend” according to Charles Howard (Nelson, 200)) arranged for the money to be paid in quarterly instalments by a deed of grant which stipulated that he was to leave no account of expenditure, in wording almost identical to the formula applied to Walsingham’s own secret service budget (see Ward, 257). Thomas Wilson (1601) presumed Elizabeth’s unprecedented generosity to have been “for his nobility’s sake,” but the naturally parsimonious queen, who set high store on Oxford’s “innate learning” and “outstanding mind,” did not give fortunes away for nothing at a time when the treasury was depleted due to expensive military actions against Spain. It is a curious fact that payments to the Master of Revels (the office responsible for theatrical performances at court) dropped by an average of £1048 per annum from 1587, (the year after Oxford’s £1000 annuity was granted).²⁷ Oxford declared “I serve

her Majesty,” but during the last sixteen years of Elizabeth’s reign, during which time she paid to him the enormous sum of £16,000, he cannot be shown to have held any important *public* position for the Crown, let alone one that would merit this colossal stipend. The government’s “policy of plays” and its programme for national improvement through theatre, literature, poetry, and learning appears to have been conducted beneath the radar. Perhaps it was to Oxford’s £1000 salary that George Chapman alluded in *Tragedy of Chabot* when he wrote of “the corruption of a captain [that] may beget a gentleman-usher, and a gentleman usher may beget a lord, whose wit may beget a poet, and a poet may get a thousand pound a year” (1639, sig. H²). Perhaps it was to this that John Ward was alluding in 1662, when he recorded a Chinese whisperer that William Shakespeare had “supplied y^e stage with 2 plays every year, and for y^t had an allowance so large, y^t hee spent att y^e rate of a 1000*l.* a year, as I have heard” (Ward in Severn, ed., 1839).

Two of Oxford’s secretaries, Nashe and Greene, principal agents in the pamphlet wars, collaborated on plays together. Nashe also collaborated with Marlowe. Marlowe was arrested with Oxford’s acolyte, Thomas Watson, for killing a man in a dispute over £14 owed to a tavern, the Pye Inn, Bishopsgate, “lying next the house of the Earl of Oxford” (Warner in Eccles 1934, 65). The tavern was owned by the celebrated actor Edward Alleyn and his brother, John. The Alleyns were represented by Watson’s brother-in-law, Hugh Swift, one of the many lawyers known to be gracing Oxford’s table at this time. Freeman locates Kyd among a circle of playwrights strongly associated with Oxford (Lyly, Watson, Peele and Achelley), while surviving letters from Kyd to Sir John Puckering show him to have collaborated with Marlowe on plays for “my Lord ... whom I have servd almost these six years, in credit until now” (in Freeman 1967, 13-21).²⁸ It is not possible to identify “my Lord” with certainty, but (like Oxford) he maintained an acting troupe and hired playwrights at least from 1587 and (like Oxford) was noted for his piety, and (like Oxford) was not a member of the Privy Council and held no powerful position in government. On this basis Oxford is the most likely patron to Kyd and Marlowe.²⁹ If Marlowe was indeed one of the many playwrights contributing to English chronicle plays under Oxford’s patronage for the Crown’s “secret policy of plays,” evidence of his hand in the *Henry VI* plays finds a natural explanation; as does the extraordinary support given to him in 1587 by Whitgift, Burghley, Hunsdon, and other members of the Privy Council against defamers “ignorant of the affairs he went about” concerning his employment “in matters touching the benefit of this country” (PRO Privy Council Registers PC2/14/381).

Shakespeare's supposed "indebtedness" to Marlowe, Kyd, Watson, Lyly, Greene, Nashe and other "Cambridge wits" among Oxford's circle is richly documented. Whole phrases from their works are said to have been lifted by Shakespeare, yet the orthodox Bard was known neither to Oxford, nor to a single one of the many writers in his entourage. Was Shakespeare really in thrall to all these playwrights as the orthodox suppose, or did they work under Oxford (as assistants to a master) on the original drafts of history plays later said to be Shakespeare's?

2. Enter "Shakespeare"

In the late spring or early summer of 1593, the name "William Shakespeare" was associated for the first time with literature when it appeared beneath a dedicatory epistle to the prominent courtier, Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, then engaged to Oxford's oldest daughter, Elizabeth. The work was *Venus & Adonis*, a polished, bawdy, narrative poem, rooted both in the Latin of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in its English translation made by Oxford's uncle, Arthur Golding. In courtly language "Shakespeare" promised Southampton he would compose some greater work "in my idle hours"³⁰ said to be *Lucrece* (1594), another long poem also dedicated to Southampton, derived from the *Fasti* of Ovid, that were not translated into English until 1640. From these facts alone the literary sleuth of 1594 would have guessed that the new poet calling himself "Shakespeare" was a scholar and able Latinist, well known within court and literary circles and from these facts alone, he would have discounted Stratford-Shakspeare as their author. Indeed, in a comedy performed by the students of Cambridge University (*Returne from Parnassus Part 1*, c. 1600), a wealthy patron and Shakespeare fanatic commissions an impoverished scholar to write a poem for his mistress in the style of Shakespeare. When the parody of *Venus & Adonis* is read to him, the delighted patron exclaims: "Noe more! I am one that can judge according to the proverb, *bovem ex unguibus*." Here the Shakespeare-lover has altered the well-known saying "*leonem ex unguibus aestimare*" ("to know a lion by its claws") to "*bovem ex unguibus*" ("to know an ox by its hoof"), a joke easily comprehensible to those who knew that Oxford was referred to by his contemporaries as "Ox," and thus the hand of Oxford has been recognised in these Shakespearean lines (IV.i.1223-24; see Macray 1886).³¹

Despite the bawdy and secular content of *Venus*, the poem was licenced for publication by none other than the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, whom Oxford's team had been assiduously defending from the onslaughts of the Disciplinarians. Field was to become the favoured printer of Oxford's father-in-law, Lord Burghley, to whom he dedicated one of his most important publications, *The Arte of English Poesie*.

Magri provides evidence that in *Venus*, Shakespeare draws from a specific copy of a painting (the “Barberini” *Venus & Adonis* by Titian), which was on display at Titian’s studio in Venice when Oxford was living there in 1575 (in Malim 2004, 79-90), while Delahoyde shows that an ekphrastic description of a painting of the siege of Troy in Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* appears to describe the unique details of a mural by Giulio Romano at the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua (2006, 51-66). Shakespeare praises Giulio Romano by name in *The Winter’s Tale*, but orthodox scholars cannot explain how Stratford-Shakespeare came into contact with this artist’s work, which was only to be found painted onto the walls of the private apartments and chapels of Italian dukes.

Although at least 15 plays from the Shakespeare canon are known to have existed before 1598, there is no record of any *dramatist* called “William Shakespeare” until that year, when plays (as opposed to poems) first appeared in print under that name. Between 1593 and 1597 *all* the records pertaining to literary “Shakespeare” concern only his two published poems. Why Oxford should have chosen the pen-name “William Shakespeare” is a matter for conjecture. In 1628 the theologian Thomas Vicars suggested it was chosen as a verb-object compound of “shake” and “spear.”³² The most famous “will” ever to have shaken a spear was, of course, that of Pallas-Minerva, whose will caused the spear of Achilles to shake in his right hand, thus empowering it to slay Hector.³³ Many English Renaissance poets appealed to this patron-goddess of learning and eloquence for help in writing their verses, and Oxford was no exception.³⁴ Roman dramatists held their assemblies at the Temple of Minerva on the Aventine. Gosson (1582), Stubbes (1583) and “I.G” (1615) all confirm that Pallas-Minerva, the spear-shaker, was regarded by their English contemporaries as the patron goddess of playwrights³⁵ and Oxford is associated with the image of Achilles (whose “heart and mind” was instructed by Pallas and whose spear was shaken by her will), in works by Harvey, Lyly, Baker and others.³⁶ In Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* (line 1473) a seemingly irrelevant interposition of a passage about Achilles’ spear guided by the invisible will of Pallas-Minerva suggests the hidden author behind the shaking spear of the poet’s pen-name, while vividly recalling Harvey’s 1578 description of Oxford as an Achilles reborn, inhabited by the spirits of Mars, Pallas-Minerva and Bellona: “Mars keeps thy mouth, Minerva lies hidden in thy right hand and Bellona reigns in thy body, thine eyes flash, thy will shakes spears; who would not swear that Achilles had come to life again?”³⁷

That Oxford, in the 1590s, was disgraced and ostracised from the life of the court is evidenced by the uncharacteristic absence of records pertaining to him at this time and by his failure to secure a single vote in successive elections to the Companion of the

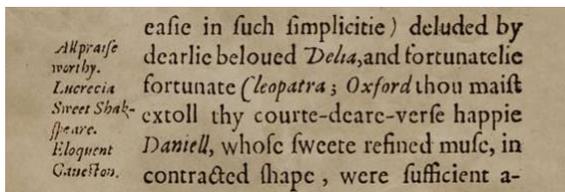
Garter where once his name was popular and prominent. The title page of *Venus* (1593) hints at contemporary scandal. Juno, the goddess of fertility, is depicted in the headpiece beneath which a Latin quotation implies that the poet has chosen to set, in pure Apollonian verse, such vile matter as is marvelled at by the vulgar.³⁸ The sonnets of “Shake-speare,” written in the first person, explain that their author is embroiled in a scandal, that his “name receives a brand” (111), he is “despised” (37), “shamed” (72) and “vile esteemed” (121), “in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes;” he has made himself “a motley to the view” (90); he feels “all alone” and beweeps his “outcast state” (29); he suffers a “bewailed guilt” (36) because of a “vulgar scandal stamped upon [his] brow” (112), and so Oxford wrote movingly of “the losse of my good name” in a poem (“Fram”d in the front of forlorne hope”), which Nelson reasons “might have been connected to any of the numerous scandals in Oxford’s life” (388).

Orthodox scholars accept that the contemporary printed allusions to Shakespeare are “cryptic,” but have made little effort to explain why this should be the case, or to unravel their hidden meanings. Instead they are dismissed as of no biographical value.³⁹ But to understand Shakespeare the man, it is necessary to understand what his contemporaries wrote about him and since the majority of these allusions are set as cryptic verses, it is beholden upon the biographer to investigate their deeper meanings.

In the whole decade of the 1590s, Shakespeare’s name appears only five times in printed allusions. All of these instances point to Oxford as the poet behind the pseudonym, and all but one hint at a scandal. These five references, each glossed below, use typical ciphering techniques of the period — puns, allusions, symbols, acrostics, anagrams, charades and such devices as were commonly used by writers of the ‘Jacobethan’ age to avoid censorship or prosecution for libel. Defamation of a nobleman was a treasonable offence tried by the Star Chamber, for whom “Nobility and men of mark” were considered “the flowers that stand about the Prince’s Crown garnishing and giving a grace to it: to deface any one of them is an open injury offered to the Crown itself” (Anon 1590, sig. B²). It was therefore treasonable to publish — in print or written letter — the reasons for Oxford’s infamy, to identify him as an agent of the crown, or to name him as the play-maker “Shakespeare.” This explains, quite simply why all the extant references to literary Shakespeare are cryptic and why they need to be read with special attention. The five printed references to literary Shakespeare of the 1590s are as follows:

a. **Willobie his Avisia.** *Willobie his Avisia* (1594) is a long, anonymous, tongue-in-cheek poem that contains the first printed third-party allusion to the poet “Shakespeare.” Scholars have long been intrigued by this work, which narrates the attempts of six suitors to seduce the lady Avisia and which was censored, with others critical of Oxford, by Archbishop Whitgift in 1599. Toward the end of the poem appears an “old player” (referred to only as “W.S.”) spouting jumbled parodies of lines from Shakespeare’s *Passionate Pilgrim* and Oxford’s *A Lover Rejected Complaineth*, while advising a “new actor” (“H.W.”) how to seduce Avisia. The coincidence of “W.S.” and “H.W.” sharing a mistress, just as “William Shakespeare” and Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton appear also to share a mistress in *Shake-speares Sonnets*, (41 and 144) was first noticed by Collier in 1858. While the identifications of “W.S.” and “H.W.” as Shakespeare and Southampton have been accepted by some orthodox scholars, all remain oblivious to the inherent dangers that this poses to Stratfordianism, for attentive study reveals that “W.S.,” who first appears in the 44th canto of the poem, is making not his first, but his *second* appearance in the work, under different initials. “W.S.” (who admits to having already tried his luck with Avisia), is easily identifiable as the same character as Avisia’s second suitor (Cantos 23-33), who appears under the initials “D.B.”, a once rich, but lately impoverished, overly generous, musical, playwriting, poetical lord and patron. In his attempt to seduce Avisia, “D.B.” had kept up a “continued course of courtesy, with Jewles, Rings, Gold and divers gifts” (Canto 23); when he returns as “W.S.,” he advises the young “H.W.” to “apply Avisia with Divers things, sometimes with gold sometimes with rings” (Canto 47), a conceit that was noted by Lee (1895) as constituting “identical counsel” and “in the same metre” as the advice offered to the wooer in Shakespeare’s poem “When as thine eye hath chose the Dame” from *Passionate Pilgrim*. Likewise “D.B.” is said to “smile while others smart” (Canto 27), while on his reappearance as “W.S.,” he “takes pleasure for a time to see H.W. bleed” (Canto 44). When “D.B.” informs Avisia that he has portrayed her in his literary works, she responds, “O Mightie Lord that guides the Spheare; Defend me by thy mightie will.” In this, the hasty reader may perceive only an appeal to God, but those who recall how the will of Pallas went to the defence of Achilles, (who promptly exclaimed “Pallas guides my spear!”) may note the association between the will of this poetical Lord (“D.B.”) and the name of the poet (“Will Shake-speare”) who “paints poore Lucrece rape.” Allusions to Shakespeare and Oxford in both the “D.B.” and “W.S.” Cantos could have left *Willobie’s* learned contemporary readership in no doubt that Oxford was hiding behind the initials “W.S.,” which stood for “William Shake-speare.”

b. **William Covell.** The second printed reference to “Shakespeare” the poet appears in a book called *Polimanteia* (1595). In an essay concerning the alumni of Oxford, Cambridge and the Inns of Courts, the words “Sweet Shakspeare” are set as a margent note by a line containing a unique and cryptic epithet “courte-deare-verse”



This epithet contains the letters of “our de Vere” in their correct word and letter order, allowing the remaining letters (t,r,e,s,c,e and a) to form a perfect anagram of “a secret.” Thus the message glossed by the margent “Sweet Shak-spere” reads “our de Vere — a secret,” with the words “de Vere” neatly placed beneath the italicized name of the poet’s title “*Oxford*.” While orthodox scholars affect to disbelieve the intentionality of this cipher, none has yet succeeded in offering any explanation as to how the margent “Sweet Shak-spere” serves to explain, elucidate or contribute anything to the line by which it has been so precisely and conspicuously affixed.

c. Richard Barnfield. The third printed reference to Shakespeare of the 1590s is provided by Richard Barnfield in a poem called “A Remembrance of some English Poets” (1598). Spenser, Daniel and Drayton are praised in separate stanzas of four lines each, while the fourth and final stanza, addressed to Shakespeare, is extended to six lines by an extra couplet:

And *Shakespeare*, thou, whose hony-flowing Vaine,
 (Pleasing the World) thy Praises doth obtaine.
 Whose *Venus*, and whose *Lucrece* (sweet, and chast)
 Thy Name in fames immortall Booke have plac’t.
 Live ever you, at least in Fame live ever:
 Well may the Bodye dye, but Fame dies never.

The surface meaning of these lines is obvious (“Shakespeare’s works should live for ever”) but a closer reading reveals a critical attitude to the poet. The repeated reference, “in fames” and “in Fame” (lines 4 and 5) invokes old definitions of “infame,” defined as: “ill fame, infamous, an infamous person, one branded with infamy” (OED). By placing the word “ever” twice in line 5, and ending lines 5 and 6 with “ever” and “never,” Barnfield invokes Oxford in a word-game that would have been easily recognisable to his contemporaries. Here the pun allows for a paraphrase of Barnfield’s last two lines: “Your name be placed in the immortal leger of infamy; live E. Ver, at

least live, E. Ver, by your infamy, for though you shall die, your evil repute will never be forgotten.” In the final couplet, Barnfield switches pronouns from “thou/thy” to “you” which, at first glance, appears to shift his address from Shakespeare to *all* of the poets previously named (Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, *and* Shakespeare); however, the double use of “in fame” establishes a connection between the addressee of the quatrain (Shakespeare — “thy/thou”) and the addressee of the final couplet (E. Vere — “you”). While a pseudonymous poet (“Shakespeare”) would be informally addressed as “thee/thou,” a nobleman would be formally addressed by a commoner as “you.”

d. Francis Meres. The fourth allusion to Shakespeare from the 1590s appears in a book called *Palladis Tamia* (1598) by theologian and numerologist, Francis Meres. In a chapter entitled “A comparative discourse of our English Poets, with the Greeke Latine and Italian Poets,” Meres compares English poets with equal numbers of classical or Italian poets, beginning each paragraph with an “as” clause and proceeding to a “so” clause. Thus a typical example sets six Italian poets against six English poets: “As Italy had *Dante, Boccace, Petrarch, Tasso, Celiano* and *Ariosto*: so England had *Mathew Roydon, Thomas Atchelow, Thomas Watson, Thomas Kid, Robert Greene & George Peele*.” When not arranging his classical and English authors symmetrically (as above), Meres adopts a pattern of “trinities” based on the holy observation with which he opens his dedication to Thomas Eliot “*Tria sunt omnia*” (Three is all): “As Greece had three Poets of great antiquity, *Orpheus, Linus* and *Musaens*; and *Italy*, other three auncient Poets, *Livius Andronicus, Ennius & Plautus*: so hath England three auncient Poets, *Chaucer, Gower* and *Lydgate*”:

On the surface Meres is simply informing his readers that England can match any other nation for poetry, but by arranging poets into structured, symmetrical or triadic patterns, he is also pursuing a deeper theological agenda that aims to silence Puritan objections to poetry as “ungodly” by proving poetry an emanation of God’s will. His adherence to his method is persistent; only four of his 58 paragraphs (7, 34, 37 & 39) appear to abandon triadic or symmetrical structures and on close inspection even these anomalies are shown to be illusory. In three of them (7, 37 and 39) Meres uses a single name to represent two different persons, thus even these paragraphs are, like the others, symmetrically or triadically balanced.⁴⁰

In the fourth anomalous paragraph (34), the names “Edward Earle of Oxforde” and “Shakespeare” are among the 17 English poets listed as “best for Comedy” and the appearance of both names on the same list has prompted some to suppose that Meres knew them to be two different people. James Shapiro writes: “Crushingly, for those

who want to believe that the Earl of Oxford and Shakespeare were one and the same writer, Meres names both and distinguishes between them, including both Edward Earl of Oxford and Shakespeare in his list of the best writers of comedy” (2010, 268). Careful consideration of Meres’ method and purpose, however, reveals the very opposite to be the case: that Meres was aware of Oxford’s use of the pseudonym “Shakespeare” and, like other writers in the 1590s, ciphered this fact into his published work.

At first glance paragraph 34 appears to set 16 classical poets against 17 English, where the reader would expect a symmetrical balance (16:16) in conformity with his policy; but Meres is again deceiving the unwary reader, this time by employing *two* names to represent *a single* playwright. It is no accident that this 16:17 imbalance should occur in paragraph 34, for the number 34 contains two 17s and the deciphering reader is invited to ask: if *two* names refer to just *one* playwright, and if the overspill occurs on the English side with 17 names (the highest number on any list in the entire “Discourse”), is no. 17 somehow doubled in paragraph 34? In other words, is there an English poet represented by the number “17”, who appears twice among the English poets under two different names? As the name “Shakespeare” is placed in the Apollonian centre of the English list (9th of 17), so the “Earle of Oxforde” is placed in the Apollonian centre of *all* of the poets in paragraph 34 (17th of 33).⁴¹ Thus is Oxford identified as number “17” not only by virtue of his position as the 17th playwright in Paragraph 34, but also by virtue of his title, 17th Earl of Oxford. Having established Oxford as number 17 (the central poet), the reader now needs to restore the Classical: English symmetry of Meres’ paragraph 34 to 16:16 by identifying and eliminating his double.

Oxford’s name appears first on the English list because (according to some) Meres considered him the best of the English comic playwrights, or (according to others) because of his social rank. But, to a numerologist like Meres, “*unus non est numerus*,” or, as Clapham explains in his *Bibliotheca Theologica* (1597), “One properly is no number.” In Shakespeare’s Sonnet 136, the poet explains his desire to disappear into nothing behind the pseudonym “Will”: “My name is Will” he writes “and my will one, among a number one is reckon’d none / Then in the number let me passe untold.” By treating Oxford as “none” (zero), and laying the sixteen classical poets above his name alongside the sixteen English poets below it, Stritmatter (2014) discovered that Meres had carefully paired each of the classical playwrights to an English counterpart. For example, Menander (first on the classical side) pairs with Gager (first on the English side) because Menander was the imitator of Euripides and Gager the adapter of

Euripides; Lyly, who wrote a famous comedy about nymphs (*Love's Metamorphosis*) is paired with Alexis Terius (fourth) who wrote a play called *The Nymphs*; Nicostratus and Lodge (fifth) are paired because Nicostratus wrote *The Moneylender* and Lodge's most famous play, *A Looking Glass for London* (1592), is about a moneylender; Amipsas and Gascoigne (sixth) are paired because Amipsas wrote *The Adulterers* and Gascoigne caused an infamous scandal with bawdy poems about adultery in 1573, and so on and so forth. Observing this consistent pattern, Stritmatter asks why Meres should have paired Shakespeare with Aristonymos (both eighth on their respective lists), for nothing is known of Aristonymos except that his name means "noble name" or "aristocratic name." Since Oxford is the only poet with an aristocratic name among the seventeen English playwrights, Meres thus exposes Shakespeare as Oxford's sought-for double. Oxford (as Shakespeare) assumes the Apollonian position at the centre of the English playwrights (9th of 17), while the apparent asymmetry of paragraph 34 (16:17) is restored to balance with 16 classical playwrights set against 16 English playwrights, one of whom (no. 17) uses two names.

e. John Weever. Meres' technique of number-doubling to link the author to his pseudonym (his "double") was also used by John Weever in *EPIGRAMMES* (1599), in the fifth and final appearance of Shakespeare's name in printed sources of the 1590s. In his Epigram 11 ("Fourth Weeke") Weever mocks a "certain writer" called "Spurius" who has composed a brazen poem about Venus (sig. E^{2b}).⁴² Since Shakespeare's infamous *Venus & Adonis* (1593) had been printed in no fewer than four editions by 1599, it would have been obvious to Weever's contemporaries that "Spurius" was "William Shakespeare," and since the word "spurious" means "not really proceeding from its reputed origin, source or author" (*OED*), Weever's readers would naturally have inferred that "Spurius" had published *Venus & Adonis* under a pseudonym. The "doubling" technique is confirmed by turning from this "Spurius" epigram (11) to its double (22), in which witty verses about a poet, who has also written bawdily about Venus, reveal Spurius' double to be none other than "William Shakespeare." Epigram 22 begins: "Honie-tong'd *Shakespeare* when I saw thine issue / I swore Apollo got them and none other." This unrhymed couplet is rich in meaning, the most obvious being that Weever supposed "Apollo," not "William Shakespeare," to be the true author of Shakespeare's works. As already shown, it is Oxford who is cast as "Apollo" ("our chief") among his contemporaries and since Weever intended his epigrams to be biting topical satires, it may fitfully be assumed that he was here reposting the "secret" of his Cambridge tutor, William Covell, that "sweet Shakespeare" is the pseudonym of "our

de Vere” (*ibid*, A7a).⁴³

Thus are all five printed allusions to the literary name Shakespeare of the 1590s shown to be carefully conceived conundrums each, by devious means, revealing “Shakespeare” (or “Shake-speare”) to be the pseudonym of the central concealed poet and playwriting patron known to his contemporaries as the “poetical Earl of Oxford” (Wood 1691, 795).

3. Exit Oxford

On 24 June 1604 Oxford died at his house at Hackney having transferred his few remaining assets to members of his family in the weeks before his death. “Shakespeare,” who drew upon hundreds of published literary and scholarly sources cannot be shown, with any degree of confidence to have derived anything from any printed source published after 1604. In the seven years from 1597 to Oxford’s death, no fewer than thirteen new Shakespeare titles were published or registered for publication, many with title-pages proclaiming authorial correction, revision or augmentation. But immediately following his death, the Shakespearean production-line fell silent. No new Shakespeare title appeared in print for four years except for a King’s Men comedy called *The London Prodigal*, falsely ascribed on its title page “By W Shakespeare” in 1605. As J. T. Looney noted, there was “nothing more published with any appearance of proper authorization for nearly 20 years” (1975, 357).

The anonymous author of a 1605 pamphlet (*Voiage into Rusbia*) described recent murders at the Russian court of Boris Godunov as “a first but no second to any *Hamlet*,” naming playwrights who might have adapted this real-life Russian tragedy for the stage — Sidney, Jonson, Fulke Greville, and du Bartas. Despite his knowledge of *Hamlet*, the author does not mention Shakespeare by name, but continues: “I am with the late *English* quick-spirited, cleare-sighted *Ovid*. It is to be feared Dreaming” (Anon 1605, K & K2^v).⁴⁴ Here the author appears to be referring to Oxford, whom Harvey had publicly described as “this English Poet” who is “winged like to Mercury” (i.e., “quick-spirited”), “eyed like to Argus” (i.e., “clear-sighted”) and “nos’d like to Naso” (i.e., resembling “Ovid”). Oxford was reported by historian Thomas Coxeter (1689-1747) to have been a translator of Ovid and was nephew and patron to Shakespeare’s favourite translator of Ovid, Arthur Golding. Stratford-Shakespeare did not die until 1616 and could not have qualified as “late” in 1605, yet Francis Meres (1598) describes Shakespeare as possessed of the “sweete wittie soule of Ovid” and when the author and *Hamlet*-fan explains that this “late English Ovid” had written that “it is to be feared dreaming,” he is surely referring to Hamlet’s famous “to-be-or-not-to-be” speech:

To die, to sleep -
To sleep - perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.

Moments before delivering this great monologue, Hamlet is seen “poring upon a booke” (Q1), which scholars since 1839 (see Douce 1839, 238; Hunter 1845, 243) have identified as *Cardanus Comforte*, whose English editions of 1573 and 1576 were not only dedicated to Oxford but also expressly “published by commaundement of the right honourable the Earle of Oxenford,” who knew the work in Italian and, in his own words, had “long desired” to have it published in English to “comfort the afflicted, confirme the doubtful, encourage the cowarde, and lift up the base minded man” (1573). Of all contemporary books *Cardanus Comforte* was most assuredly “Oxford’s book.” In 1934 Stratfordian scholar Hardin Craig concluded: “without exaggeration that *Cardanus’ Comforte* is pre-eminently “Hamlet’s book,” since the philosophy of Hamlet agrees to a remarkable degree with that of Cardan” (1934, 18).

The provenance of the sole surviving Elizabethan manuscript (c. 1585-95) of any acknowledged “Shakespearean” work can be traced to the ownership of a cousin of Oxford’s, Anne Cornwallis, whose father acquired Oxford’s mansion, Fisher’s Folly, in the early 1590s. Bound as *Poems of Vere Earl of Oxford & Co*, this un-ascribed transcription of Poem XVIII from Shakespeare’s *Passionate Pilgrim* is held in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.⁴⁵ The sale of Oxford’s last home, King’s Place, Hackney in 1608 by his down-scaling widow is cited by some Oxfordians as a possible reason why several Shakespeare works appeared for the first time in print four years after Oxford’s death. *King Lear*, for instance, was published in a quarto edition as “by William Shak-speare” in 1608. Based on ancient chronicles, this play tells of a widower who ostracises himself by alienating his ancient patrimony to his three daughters, precisely mirroring Oxford’s alienation of the 500-year-old seat of the Vere family (Castle Headingham in Essex) to his three daughters after the death of his first wife in 1588. Scholars accept that this poor quarto was not overseen by the author, while recent attempts by James Shapiro to assign the composition of *Lear* to 1606 are comprehensively undone in the critical anthology, *Contested Year: Errors, Omissions and Unsupported Statements in James Shapiro’s “1606 Year of Lear”* (2016).

In 1609 a quarto edition of *Troilus & Cressida* was published as “written by William Shakespeare.” Following Clark, some Oxfordians suppose this work to have originated in the lost play *Agememnon & Ulysse* performed by Oxford’s boys at Court in 1584, to which comic interludes about Pandarus and the two lovers were added in the 1590s (1931, 449-55). A record in the Stationers’ Register shows that *Troilus* (or some version of it) had been publicly performed by the Chamberlain’s Men sometime before February 1603; prior to this, the play appears to have been “stayed” by “grand possessors,” but a manuscript copy evidently escaped the censors. A prefatory epistle published in one of the 1609 quartos that states the play has never been performed in public, may therefore be confidently dated to sometime *before* documentation of a public performance in the Stationers’ Register for 1603. The epistle is addressed to the “Eternal reader” and bears the title “A Never Writer, to an Ever Reader. News” (“an E.Vere writer to an E.Vere reader?”), suggesting that Oxford wrote it himself (c. 1595-1602), and addressed it to future readers whom, he hoped, might encounter the play in print after the censors’ ban was lifted. Also in 1609 appeared for the first time in print a book entitled *SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS*. The orthography of “Shake-speare” (with the name hyphenated on the title page and running header throughout the book) and the dedication to “OVR EVER-LIVING POET” has led many to suppose that the name was a pseudonym of a poet who (like Oxford) was deceased at the time of publication.

One of Oxford’s official duties as hereditary High Chamberlain of England was to attend to the security and comfort of the Queen on her visits to Westminster Hall. Even today the Chamberlain of England greets and escorts the Queen into the Hall at openings of Parliament. In Oxford’s day Elizabeth alighted from her boat on the Thames, and it was his function as High Chamberlain to escort her to the Hall under an elaborate canopy carried on poles by men of honour and high dignity. When Shakespeare writes (Sonnet 125) “Were it ought to me I bore the canopy / With my extern and outward honouring,” authorship enquiry points away from Stratford-Shakspere (who would never have been permitted to carry the Queen’s canopy) and toward Oxford, who was uniquely responsible for the bearing of the canopy on these occasions. Not only does the “Shake-speare” of the sonnets write as a learned, sophisticated 40-year-old nobleman, but he describes himself three times as “lame” (Sonnets 37 & 89), just as Oxford deplores his own lameness three times in letters to Burghley and Cecil. Moore shows that the three epithets that Shakespeare applies to himself in Sonnet 37 (“poor”, “lame”, and “despised”) all reflect the documentary record for Oxford at a time when Stratford-Shakspere was prospering with no hint of poverty, lameness or scandal (2009, 234-39).

Stratfordian scholar, Alastair Fowler, demonstrates how Shake-speare's 154 sonnet sequence is structured geometrically and numerically as an equilateral triangle based on the number 17 — a number of considerable significance to Oxford (2004, 183-90). In many of these poems Shake-speare bewails his tainted reputation, expressing his belief that his name will be obliterated from the record, so that only his work will live on: "If you read this line, remember not the hand that writ it" (71); "In me each part will be forgotten ... your monument shall be my gentle verse" (81); "My name be buried where my body is and live no more to shame nor me nor you" (72); "After my death ... forget me quite"(72); "no longer mourn me when I am dead ... do not so much as my poor name rehearse" (71); "I once gone to all the world must die" (81); "I'll live in this poor rhyme ... and thou in this shall find thy monument" (107); "not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme" (55).

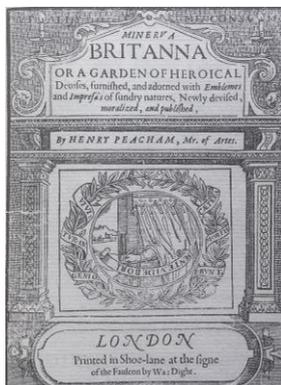
Following Thorpe's edition of the *Sonnets* in 1609, no new work by Shakespeare appeared in print for 13 years — a long silence was eventually broken by printer Thomas Walkley, who in 1622 printed *Othello* in the same year as he professed himself a dutiful servant of the Vere family, dedicating another of his books to three of Oxford's grandchildren and praising his "virtuous" daughter, Elizabeth.

Oxford was buried in the church of St Augustine, Hackney. In her will his widow, Elizabeth (*née* Trentham), expressed her desire for her body to be placed "as neare unto the bodie of my said late deare and noble lorde and husband as maye bee... Onelie I will that there be in the said Church erected for us a tombe fitting our degree." An uncarved and uninscribed tomb of grey marble, said to be that of the Earl of Oxford, was destroyed when the church was demolished in the 1790s, but its image has survived. Sometime after March 1616 William Basse, who, according to Sidney Lee, may have been secretary to Oxford's son-in-law, Lord Norreys (1900, 1293)⁴⁶, wrote a poem campaigning for Shakespeare to be removed from his "uncarved marble" tomb and placed in Westminster Abbey next to the remains of Beaumont, Chaucer, and Spenser. But, wrote Basse, if social "precedence," even in death, prohibits his burial next to these commoners, then he must continue to occupy his own tomb as "Lord," not as "tenant," of his grave. There is no sign that Oxford's uncarved marble tomb at Hackney was ever upgraded with his name, titles or achievements of honour carved upon it, but there is evidence that he was quietly reinterred in Westminster Abbey as his first cousin, Percival Golding recorded (c. 1619): "Of him [Oxford] I will only speak what all mens voices confirme: He was a man in minde and body absolutely accomplished with honourable endowments. He died at his house at Hackney in the monthe of Junne Anno 1604 and lieth buried at Westminster" (College of Arms

archive, Vincent MS 445).⁴⁷ Extensive evidence for Oxford’s reinterment in Poets’ Corner at the exact spot upon which the monument to Shakespeare was erected in 1740 is given in my paper (A.Waugh “Hidden Truths,” *De Vere Society Newsletter*, vol. 24, no. 2 (April 2017), pp 14-46) and online at Youtube (“Where is Shakespeare REALLY buried? 1/3”).

Oxford’s identity as “Shakespeare” was not forgotten in the years that followed his death; nor was his ignominy. He was omitted from Robert Naunton’s extensive survey of Queen Elizabeth’s court favourites (*Fragmenta Regalia*, 1643), even though Naunton’s daughter married Oxford’s grandson. Within four months of his death, his youngest daughter Susan was engaged to Philip Herbert (one of the dedicatees of the Shakespeare Folio of 1623). Their nuptials were lavish and the Court was entertained with performances of eight different Shakespearean plays, seemingly in the playwright’s honour. Stratford-Shakspere did not attend.

A book of cryptic emblems and anagrams, devised by the Shakespeare fan, Henry Peacham, and published in 1612 as *Minerva Britannia* (“British Minerva”) depicts, on its title page, the hand of a concealed author emerging from behind an Elizabethan theatre curtain (see below):



Title-page of Henry Peacham’s *Minerva Britannia* (1612)

The hand has just written the Latin words *MENTE.VIDEBOR* (“with the mind I shall be seen”). The “P” of this phrase puns with the letter *i*— thus inviting the reader to engage his mind to find the hidden letter *i*. There is, of course, the strong semblance of an *i* in the quill nib and the dot it is drawing, giving the message “*MENTE.VIDEBORI*”, a nonsense in Latin, but as Turner Clark (1937) discovered, a perfect anagram of “*TIBI NOM. DE VERE*” (“To you the name de Vere” or “Your

name is de Vere”). When the image is turned upside-down, it shows the concealed playwright to be an earl, richly robed seated upon an earl’s coronet - identified by its raised pearls - (see below):



Central image from the title-page turned upside-down to reveal a seated earl whose quill provides the anagram: “TIBI NOM. DE VERE” (“Your name is de Vere”)

Thus, the British Minerva, the British patron of playwrights and the concealed ‘will’ that shakes the spear, is revealed by the mind’s *i* to be Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. On the scroll around the poet’s wreath is written “VIVITUR INGENIO CAETERA MORTIS ERUNT” (“Genius survives when all else is claimed by Death”), a message repeatedly endorsed by “Shake-speare” in his sonnets, reminding the reader that Oxford’s works will survive even when his name is forgotten.

The prefatory pages of Shakespeare’s Folio (1623) may have provided the evidential starting point for modern Stratfordianism, but over time they have proved a negative asset to the cause. Ben Jonson, who appears to have assembled the Folio under the patronage of Lord Pembroke and with the possible assistance of Oxford’s cousin, Francis Bacon, creates a mire of ambiguity around everything that is written about Shakespeare, providing the learned reader with a multitude clues to the true identity of the author. The Heminges-Condell letters (shown to be the work of Ben Jonson by George Steevens in 1770) may allude to Stratford-Shakespeare’s play-broking, but reveal nothing about his authorship. In the epigram “To the Reader,” set as a caption to Droeshout’s famous engraving of an egg-headed, left-handed, sartorially-challenged clown, Jonson embeds the message “Ver had his wit, Ver writ his Booke,” unlocked by a key suggested by the title and subscribed initials “B.I.” (Armstrong (1969) quoted in Horne (1972-73, 13).⁴⁸ In the ensuing encomium, “To my beloved THE AUTHOR

Mr WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,” Jonson spends sixteen lines explaining why the letters of “THE AUTHOR” are printed in a font twice the size of those used for “Mr WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,” or (more precisely) why he will not praise the author’s *name*—for those of “silliest ignorance,” he writes, will mistake an echo for a true sound; those of “blind affection” will only grope in darkness for the truth, while those of “craftie malice” will “pretend” to praise, but “thinke to ruine, where it seem’d to raise.” Having dispensed with his reasons for refusing to praise Shakespeare’s name, Jonson begins his encomium “to my beloved THE AUTHOR” on line 17 (the symbolic number for the 17th Earl of Oxford): “I, therefore will begin. Soule of the Age! The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage! My *Shakespeare*, rise.” Jonson continues praising *his* “Shakespeare” as the “sweet Swan of Avon,” using “Avon” (the name of at least seven rivers in England) to pun on “Avon,” the original name of Hampton Court. Jonson is telling his readers that this “gentle” (i.e., noble) dramatist was a courtier-poet, whose works were written to be performed before the King and Queen at Hampton Court (see Waugh 97-103).⁴⁹ Jonson further describes his “Shakespeare” as one who “outshone” his contemporary peers, naming Kyd, Lyly and Marlowe, three playwrights and likely servants of Oxford in the 1580s, none of whom wrote a single play *after* 1593, when the name “Shakespeare” made its first appearance on the literary scene.⁵⁰

Jonson describes *his* Shakespeare as a persistent reviser or editor of his own work, one who “sweated” to “strike the second heat upon the Muses anvil,” whose “filed lines” would “shake a lance” at the “eyes of ignorance.” The last decade of Oxford’s life was spent in relative poverty and exclusion from Court. He was bereft of servants. Nashe, Lyly, Mundy, and Churchyard had moved to other patrons. Marlowe, Watson, Kyd and Greene were all deceased by 1594. Oxford appears to have spent the last decade of his life in anchorite isolation at his house in Hackney revising and rewriting the plays that he and his band of scholars and playwriting associates had assembled for Court and public performance from the late 1570s to the early 1590s. Shakespeare’s plays appeared in more revised printed states than those of any other contemporary playwright and in the last six years of Oxford’s life, new Shakespeare quartos appeared with notices upon their title pages explaining that they were “newly augmented,” “newly corrected,” “newly amended,” “amended,” “enlarged,” etc. by their author.⁵¹ No new Shakespeare play appeared in print after Oxford’s death advertised in this way, suggesting either that the author had stopped correcting his own plays, or that he had died in 1604.

Other authors did however continue to edit and revise the Shakespearean canon after Oxford’s death. Stylistic analysis may be correct in identifying the Jacobean hands

of Middleton, Fletcher and others in plays like *Macbeth*, *Timon of Athens*, *Henry VIII* etc. since the updating and revising of old court plays was common-place for each new production. Thomas Heywood (c. 1607) records that “court plays have been yearly rehearsed, perfected and corrected before they come to the public view of the prince and the nobility” (1612, sig E1^v).⁵² Despite posthumous corrections found in a small minority of Shakespeare’s plays, the individual voice that resonates through most of the canon remains that of a lofty courtier-poet, an exile, writing in pursuit of an Ovidian ideal, one who has intimate knowledge of the court but writes of it from the perspective of a respectful but critical outsider, one who repents his life through his works and one, who in true Ovidian spirit, ultimately erases his own identity as he metamorphoses into his art. From his earliest years, Oxford had sought “neither external wealth nor the praise of poetry” (Coryat 1905, 395-96)⁵³ and like Shakespeare, he appears to have accepted that his name would be “buried where my body is.”

Stratfordianism did not begin in 1623 with the publication of the Shakespeare folio. Records from 1623-50 indicate that Jonson’s ambiguous nods and winks created no Stratfordian mind-set. The Stratfordian movement evolved gradually as the Jonsonian joke that the Puritans had failed to get slowly and deleteriously morphed from open secret among the learned classes, to pleasant myth and finally to accepted history in the second half of the 17th century. The first unequivocally Stratfordian commentary appeared in 1680s and 1690s. Writers like Fuller, Langbaine and Winstanley drew their conclusions from literal readings of the prefatory pages of the four Shakespeare folios, ignoring their predecessor, Endymion Porter, who had accused Jonson and Randolph (respective editors of Shakespeare’s First and of the Second Folios) of contriving to “rape” Shakespeare’s fame,⁵⁴ and ignoring a whole generation of post-1623 commentators who had continued to employ ingenious devices to share among their learned contemporaries the fact that “Shakespeare” was the pseudonym of the 17th Earl of Oxford. These include William Davenant, who in 1637, warned poets that their eyes would be “mocked” if they looked to Stratford-upon-Avon “in remembrance of Master William Shakespeare.” In a verse that shares Oxford’s known pleasure in identifying his own name in words like “*ever*”, “*fever*”, “*quiver*”, “*deliver*”, etc, Davenant hid “our Vere” in the thrice-named “River” that he challenged his readers to “look if they could spie,” while audaciously ridiculing the shallow poetry of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, whose home at Warwick Castle was situated upon the banks of the Warwickshire Avon, a few miles from Stratford:

Beware (delighted Poets!) when you sing
 To welcome Nature in the early Spring;
 Your num'rous Feet not tread
 The Banks of Avon [...]

The piteous River wept it selfe away
 Long since (Alas!) to such a swift decay;
 That reach the Map; and looke
 If you a River there can spie;
 And for a River your mock'd Eie,
 Will finde a shallow Brooke (1638, 37-38).⁵⁵

Jonson's friend, the playwright Richard Brome, left a description of Shakespeare as "that English Earle, that lov'd a Play and a Player so well" in his play *Antipodes* (1638), while John Warren (1640) stated that the "learned" or those of "true judgment" would be astonished to discover that the glory for "lofty" Shakespeare's "high-tun'd straine" had been taken up by a "twice-lived" and "Virbius-like" impostor. Virbius, a name derived from the Latin *vir* (man) and *bis* ("twice", "double" or "twofold") puns *vir* on Oxford's name (Vere) to suggest "twice," "double" or "two-fold" Vere, making clear the fact that Warren, like so many of his contemporaries, knew that Stratford-Shakespeare, who had written nothing was reaping the posthumous glory:

What, lofty *Shakespeare*, art again reviv'd?
 And *Virbius*-like now show'st thy self twice liv'd,
 'Tis love that thus to thee is shown,
 The labours his, the glory still thine owne (1640).⁵⁶

Back in the mid-1590s, as the name "William Shakespeare" first appears on the literary scene, the documentary record for Oxford as a famous poet curiously evaporates and by the 19th century his literary fame was all but forgotten. John Plumer Ward (1827) wrote of him "who in the days of Elizabeth united in his single person the character of her greatest noble, knight and poet" (1827, 88),⁵⁷ but Alexander Grosart, who published eighteen of Oxford's poems in 1872, remarked that "an unlifted shadow somehow lies across his memory" (1872, 359).⁵⁸ W. J. Courthorpe, Oxford Professor of Poetry, praised the "wit", terse ingenuity", and "remarkable concinnity of style" of Oxford's verses in 1897 and Sidney Lee (1899) acknowledged the high esteem in which his poetry was held by his contemporaries, opining that he "wrote verses of much lyric beauty." But all of these commentators were writing before the publication of

“Shakespeare” Identified (1920). Since then it has become fashionable among Stratfordians to sneer at the small number of youthful poems (half of which are song lyrics composed by the age of 16) that are extant under Oxford’s name. Lewis (1944, 267) typically finds them “for the most part undistinguished and verbose:” Kathman (2012, 259) deplores their “plodding alliteration and shaky versification,” while Nelson (158-59) considers them “atrocious” and “numbingly repetitive” with a consistent and pervasive “egocentric, cry-baby attitude.”⁵⁹ None of these commentators refers to the remarkable similarity of style and idea that exists between Shakespeare’s and Oxford’s verses as illustrated by Oxfordian scholars Sobran, Wainwright and Goldstein. Indeed so alike are Shakespeare and Oxford in pastoral mood that a seventy-two-line canto, assembled from four- to eight-line gobbets of each poet by Louis Benezet has proved impossible to disentangle by even the most able of literary sleuths (1937).⁶⁰ The leading pre-1920 Stratfordian scholar, Sir Sidney Lee, could not help but notice how Oxford and Shakespeare wrote verses “in a kindred key” (1920, 227).⁶¹

While the documentary record proves that Oxford was revered by his contemporaries as a first-rate playwright and scholar who operated at the hidden heart of English literary and theatrical life, modern orthodoxy insists that all of his dramatic works are lost and the only complete canon of thirty-six first-rate plays to have survived from this period—one that is intimately concerned with kings, courts, the nobility, dynastic squabbling, Italy, language, scholarship etc., be assigned to Stratford-Shakespeare, a figure who made no claim to be a playwright or scholar, who has no educational record and who is entirely absent from the rich literary record of his lifetime. “These facts alone,” wrote J. T. Looney, “each in its own way so amazingly strange and wholly unique, being contemporary and complementary, would justify, without further proof, a very strong belief that the Shakespeare plays are the lost plays of the Earl of Oxford” (197).⁶²



- ¹ According to Jesse Harris, “Bale’s heading to the catalog of fourteen plays in the *Anglorum Heliades* (1536) states that he composed them especially for Master John Vere, the Earl of Oxford. Apparently the statement is inclusive and means that all fourteen of the plays were written for the earl of Oxford” (1940, 68).
- ² Samuel Byrd, in *A friendlie communication or dialogue betweene Paule and Damas* (1580), records that Oxford’s father “kept Lawiers in his house” Nashe, in his dedication to *Strange Newes* (1592), records Oxford being among “men of judgment in both laws [i.e., civil and canon law] everie day”. The Alleyns’ lawyer, Hugh Swift, was one of the lawyers who graced Oxford’s table.
- ³ For extracts from Burghley’s parliamentary speech advocating Wednesday as a second compulsory fish-day entitled “Arguments to prove that it is necessary for the restoring of the navy of England to have more fish eaten and therefore one day more in the week ordained to be a fish day, and that to be Wednesday rather than any other”, see www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/cecil-sir-william-1521-98 (accessed 19 May 2017)
- ⁴ George Coryat’s Latin lines were delivered at New College Oxford (2 Sept 1566); the poem was first published by his son, Thomas, in *Coriates Crudities* (1611).
- ⁵ For this reason Poles preferred to be called “Polonians” rather than “Poles”; see Baluk-Ulewiczowa in Gibinska & Romanowska 2016, 35-44; see also Waugh, *DVS*, October 2016, 9-13.
- ⁶ For Shakespeare’s allusion to the story of Theagenes and Chariclea from Heliodorus’ *Ethiopica* (first noted by Theobald), see Furness, ed., *Twelfth Night*, (1901, 287, n.123).
- ⁷ Quotation extracted from two letters of introduction written in Latin on the same day (24 January 1575) by Queen Elizabeth to foreign monarchs. In one, to the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian II, she writes: *Is eo ingenio moribus virtute doctrina est praeditus* (“He is innately endowed with manners, virtue and learning”); in the other: *“cui propter praestantes animi virtutis ex animo non vulgariter favemus”* (“We commend him not in the usual way, but from the heart, on account of his outstanding mind and virtue”).
- ⁸ For further examples from Oxford’s bible, see Stritmatter 2001, 27-30.
- ⁹ Peck proposed to publish this work, but failed and the MS is now lost.
- ¹⁰ Apropos Oxford’s remonstrance in a quarrel with Philip Sidney over tennis in the spring of 1579.
- ¹¹ In *Venus & Adonis* (1593) Shakespeare complains of the fair Adonis that he is “obdurate, flintie, hard as steele ... Nay more than flint, for stone at raine relenteth”. John Marston, in ‘The Author in Praise of his Precedent Poem’ (1599), remarks of the poet and magnifico “Labeo”: “So *Labeo* did complaine his loue was stone, Obdurate, flinty, so relentesse none”. In his 6th Satire Marston explains that writing *Pigmalion* his fist was guided by his genius “to scourge Magnificos”.
- ¹² Charles Arundel allegations against Oxford (1581) SP 12/151/45, ff. 100-2.
- ¹³ MER: Ah! The immortal passado! The punto reverse! The hay! / BEN: The what? / MER: The pox of such antick, lisping, affecting fantasticoes! These new tuners of accents! (*Romeo and Juliet*, I.iv).
- ¹⁴ Hatfield MS CP, ii, 58 (159/113-14), f. 114; endorsed ‘Master of the Roolls, Erl of Oxfordes answer to the articles’.
- ¹⁵ “England is never out of sight ... Shakespeare was thinking of London when he composed the play” (Höttteman 2010, 211-12); for rebuttals see Waugh, in J. Shahan & A. Waugh, eds., 2013, 78.
- ¹⁶ Those arguing for Shakespeare’s first-hand knowledge of Italy before the Oxfordian challenge include Brown 1838, 100; Knight, ed., 1839, 433, and Elze 1874, 315.
- ¹⁷ [“le comte d’Oxford est] le mieulx: suiry et de trop plus d’esperance que nul aultre seigneur du royanlme”.
- ¹⁸ Originally in Latin.
- ¹⁹ Like many of Nashe’s allusions to Oxford, this one does not name him, but internal evidence identifies Oxford as the only courtier famed for his poetry, who was also Nashe’s patron, who served at Court, and was a knight companion in tilting tournaments with Sidney, and who lost the fortune of his youth. In this passage

Nashe is responding to a living person to whom Harvey behaved condescendingly in his *Gratulationis Valdinensis* (1580), thus Detobel & Brackmann (2016, 108-9) show, by process of elimination, that Nashe can only be referring to Oxford.

²⁰In old French the word *vere* means a “boar” hence Oxford’s armorial crest (a boar passant) and his badge, or cognizance (a blue boar), displayed on his servants’ livery. The 17 iterations of the word “boar” in *Venus & Adonis* may be an allusion to the poem’s author, the 17th Earl of Oxford.

²¹Nashe wrote that he was reckoned “amongst the famous Schollers of our time, as S. *Philip Sidney*, M. *VVatson*, M. *Spencer*, M. *Daniell*” in *Have with You to Saffron Waldon*, sig. V.

²²In his dedication to *Strange News* — Nashe’s rebuttal of Harvey’s *Four Letters* — Nashe defends Oxford against Harvey’s slur of his being a “conny-catcher” (i.e., a con man). In a long tirade against Robert Greene, Harvey had written: “Lorde, what a lewde Companion was hee? What an egregious makeshift. Where should Conny-catchers have gotten such a Secretarie?” (25 D²). Nashe is described as “sometimes secretary” to “Pierce Penillesse” (the penniless peer, Lord Oxford) by Dekker in *News from Hell* (1606).

²³Passage identified by a margent note (“The defence of Playes”) from *Pierce Penillesse*.

²⁴Nashe writes: “if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfulls of tragical speeches.”

²⁵For the relationship between Oxford’s Men and the Queen’s Men under Lyly see Ward (1928, 271-82); Oxford’s friendship with Walsingham is referenced in a letter from Lord Henry Howard to the Queen (December 1580-January 1581), BL Cotton Titus C.6, ff 7-8.

²⁶Harvey, *Pierces supererogation*; in this passage Oxford is referred to as “Euphues” and Lyly as “Pap-hatchet”.

²⁷Frederick Dietz (“The Exchequer in Elizabeth’s Reign” *Smith College Studies in History*, Vol VIII, No. 2, Jan 1923) records expenditures of the exchequer in just 21 years from the period 1560-1586. Payments to the Master of the Revels in these years add up to £22,560, 3s and 8d – an average of £1,074.2 per annum in the years that have been accounted. After which Dietz records expenditures for every year from 1587 to 1602 inclusive, in which the total payments to the Master of Revels were £411, 2s and 2d (a single payment in 1594), making the average payment to the Master of the Revels in those 16years, just £25.6. per annum.

²⁸Kyd’s two letters to Sir John Puckering [MS Harl. 6849, ff.218-19 and MS Harl. 6848, f. 154] are transcribed in Appendix A, pp. 181-83.

²⁹Oxford’s piety is attested by Orazio Cuoco (1577), who also confirms his liberality toward non-Anglicans, for which see Magri (2014, 199-211); Andrew Trollop (1587) writes that Oxford was “imbued with special piety”; Gervase Markham (1622) called him “*Honestas, pietas & Magnanimus*.”

³⁰Detobel (2014) traces the history of the European tradition prohibiting noblemen from writing poetry except in their “idle hours”, quoting early examples, e.g., German poet, Hartmann von Aue (1160-1210): “A knight who learned was / And from the books did read / When he had no better use / for his hours / also wrote poems”. Thus Detobel believes Shakespeare revealed himself as a courtier in his dedication to *Venus and Adonis* (Detobel 2014).

³¹Charles Arundel (c. 1581) repeatedly referred to Oxford as “Ox” and, in one letter complained of his being confined to his chamber for four months “while Ox was grazing in the pastures” (SP 12/151/44, f. 99).

³²*Istis annumerandos censeo, celebrem illum poetam qui a quassatione & hasta nomen habet...* (“To these [Chaucer, Spenser, Drayton and Wither] I believe should be added that famous poet who takes a name from *shaking* and *spear*”).

³³Ovid (*Metamorphoses* VII, 79) describes Achilles’ “*vibrantia tela*”, as opposed to “*vibrans tela*”, the distinction being that his spear did its own shaking and was not shaken by the arm of Achilles (see also n. 94).

³⁴Arthur Brooke in his *Romeus and Juliet*, a primary source for Shakespeare’s play, wrote: “In moorning verse, a wofull chaunce / To tell I will assaye. / Helpe learned Pallas, helpe. / When none of you will scarce credit / That ere it was so bad: / Well, yet I would assay / To tell it, if I might, / But O Minerva, helpe

me eye.” Oxford, in his poem “Desire of Fame” (1575), wrote: “For Pallas first, whose filed flowing skill / Should guide my pen some pleasant words to write.”

³⁵Playes are the institution of the Diuell himselfe, and the practize of Heathen people nouzeled in ignorance: seing they took originall from Paganisme, and were dedicated to their Idol-Gods, as now also they are the house, stage and apparell to *Venus*, the musicke to *Apollo*, the penning to *Minerva* . . .” I.G (1615, 58); see also Stephen Gosson (1582) and Phillip Stubbes (1583), for earlier presentiments of this point.

³⁶Harvey in *Gratulationis Valdiensis* (1578) writes: *Anglia te Patrium iamque experietur Achillem...Pallas pectusque, animumque Instruet ipsatum* (“England shall find in you her homegrown Achilles...Pallas will instruct your heart and mind”); “I.L.” (assumed to be Lyly) in *An answer to the Untruths*, London (1589), writes of Oxford (1598): “His tasked Boar ‘gan foam for inward ire / While Pallas filled his breast with warlike fire”.

³⁷From Gabriel Harvey’s address to Oxford in *Gratulationes Valdinenses*: “*Mars occupat ora: Minerva in dextra latitat: Bellona in corpore regnat: Martius ardor inest; scintillant lumina; vultus tela vibrat: quis non rediuuum iuret Achillem?*” — the controversy as to whether “*vultus*” can be translated as “will” instead of “countenance” is settled by multiple editions of Elyot’s Latin-English Dictionary (1528, 1542 and 1545) where it is explained that “*vultus* of olde wryters is taken for *nylle*” (see also n. 90).

³⁸“*Vilia miretur vulgus: mihi flavus Apollo / Pocular Castalia plena ministret aqua*” from Ovid, *Amores*, I, xv, 35-36.

³⁹In *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt* (2013), Stanley Wells boggles at the “cryptic nature” of *Groatsworth* (79), calling Skoloker’s 1604 allusion to Shakespeare in “*Diaphantus*” [sic]: “a cryptic allusion” (79) and suggesting that Davies of Hereford’s epigram to Shakespeare is “somewhat obscure in its allusiveness” (79). In email correspondence with the present author (13 October 2013) Wells remarks of Covell’s allusion to Shakespeare (1595): “certainly the author was deliberately being cryptic, like the author of *Willobie his Arisa*. But I have no solution to the puzzles he poses”; of the inscription on Shakespeare’s Stratford monument Wells writes that it “somewhat cryptically calls upon the passer-by to pay tribute to his greatness as a writer”, (2003, 47-48). David Ellis, reviewing James Shapiro’s *1606: The Year of Lear* (March 2016) writes: “almost all the fifty or so references to [Shakespeare] by contemporaries which E. K. Chambers collected together are, from a biographical point of view, worthless”.

⁴⁰This discovery was first made by Detobel & Ligon (2009), in which they supposed the four anomalous paragraphs to be 7, 34, 46, and 39. However, paragraph 46 is symmetrically balanced (6:6), but its allusion to unnamed and unnumbered “translators of Senecas Tragedies” causes confusion. In private email correspondence with the present author Robert Detobel confirms that 37, not 46, is the fourth anomalous paragraph. In 37 *one* classical name, *Mymnerus Collophontius*, is used to represent *two* persons. Nineteenth century reprints of this passage (e.g., Egerton Brydges and Joseph Haslewood) inserted a comma between Mymnerus and Colophonius to indicate that they were two different authors (Mymnerius and Nicander, also known as “Colophonius”), but Meres deliberately omits the comma, thus creating the allusion of one name (*Mymnerus Collophontius*) referring to a single comic poet, known as “Mymnerius of Colophon”.

⁴¹For the symbolic importance of numerical centrality to English Renaissance thought see Fowler (1970, 23-32). Fowler here quotes Catari (1647) on the reasons for Apollo’s position in the midst of the Muses: “The central position is given to Apollo not only here but also in the universe, because he diffuses his virtue through all things — which is why he is called the heart of heaven” (24).

⁴²Weever, ‘Fourth Weeke’, Epig. 11 (sig. E^{2b}): *In Spurium quendam scriptorem: “Apelles did so paint Venus Queene, / That most supposed he had faire Venus scene, / But thy bald rimes of Venus savour so, / That I dare swere thou dost all Venus know”.*

⁴³“To the generous Readers” (A7a); this entire pamphlet is reproduced in facsimile in Honigmann (1987).

⁴⁴Anon., *Sir Thomas Smithes Voiage and Entertainment in Russhia*, Nathaniel Butter, London (1605), K & K2; see Cole (May 2014); Buckley cites historian Thomas Coxeter (1689-1747), who names Oxford as a translator of Ovid (London 1882).

- ⁴⁵Once the “Cornwallis-Lysons MS”, now catalogued as “Leaves from a poetical miscellany of Anne Campbell, Countess of Argyll” (Folger V.a.89), an anthology of poems from the 1570s and 1580s, bound as “MSS Poems by Vere Earl of Oxford & Co”, inscribed “Anne Cornwaleys her booke”; Halliwell-Phillipps dated it 1585-90 but the presence of one poem, “When as thine eye hath chose the dame”, printed in *Passionate Pilgrime* under Shakespeare’s name (1599), confounds the orthodox scholar and the Folger Library consequently dates it “c. 1600”.
- ⁴⁶Lee writes: “from the references made in Basse’s poems to Francis, Lord Norreys, it has been inferred that the poet was at one time also attached to his household at Rycote, Oxfordshire”.
- ⁴⁷Christine Reynolds, Librarian at Westminster Abbey, informs the present author that records of bodies removed from other places to be reburied at Westminster Abbey were not entered into the Abbey registers.
- ⁴⁸Charlotte Armstrong, *Seven Seats from the Moon* (1969) quoted in Richard C. Horne, *Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter* (Winter 1972-73), 13; the message is retrieved by counting the metrical feet 11:9:11:9, suggested by the 11 letter title “To the reader” and the initials “B.I” at bottom, which stand for the 9-letter name “Ben Inson.”
- ⁴⁹For “Avon” as a name for Hampton Court noted by Leland, Camden, Weever and others, see A. Waugh, “Waugh on Jonson’s Sweet Swan of Avon”, *Oxfordian*, vol. 16 (2014), 97-103.
- ⁵⁰“For, if I thought my iudgement were of yeeres, / I should commit thee surely with thy peeres, / And tell, how farre thou didst our *Lily* out-shine, / Or sporting *Kid*, or *Marlowes* mighty line.” Ben Jonson, “To the Memory of my beloved THE AUTHOR” Mr William Shakespeare”, F1 (1623), lines 27-30.
- ⁵¹Quarto editions which advertised new revisions, often by the author, include. *Henry IV* part I (Q2, 1599); *Loves Labors Lost* (1598); *Hamlet* (Q2, 1604), *Romeo and Juliet* (Q2, 1599) and *Richard III* (Q3, 1602).
- ⁵²Thomas Heywood, *Apology for Actors* (c. 1607/8, printed 1612), sig E1^v.
- ⁵³George Coryat “*Ad illustrisimum Comitem Oxoniensem*” (c. 1585?), appended to Thomas Coryat’s *Crudities* (1611), reprinted as “George Coryat’s Poems” in *Coryat’s Crudities*, vol. 2, James MacLehose, Glasgow (1905), pp. 395-96.
- ⁵⁴“Even Avon’s swan could not escape / These letter-tyrant elves; / They on his fame contrived a rape / To raise their pedant selves”; Endymion Porter, “Upon Ben Jonson, and his Zany, Tom Randolph” (c. 1628); reprinted in Bradley & Adams (eds.), *Ben Jonson Allusion Book* (1922), p. 189.
- ⁵⁵William D’Avenant, “In remembrance of Master William Shakespeare—Ode”, *Madagascar with other Poems*, Thomas Walkley, London (1638), pp. 37-38.
- ⁵⁶John Warren, “Of Mr. William Shakespeare”, *Poems; Written by Wil. Shake-speare. Gent.* John Benson, London (1640), 4th preliminary (verso).
- ⁵⁷Robert Plumer Ward, *De Vere: Or, The Man of Independence*, Henry Cockburn, London, vol 1 (1827), p. 88
- ⁵⁸Alexander Grosart (ed), *Miscellanies of the Fuller Worthies’ Library*, vol. IV, Private Circulation (1872), p. 359.
- ⁵⁹C.S. Lewis, *Poetry and Prose in the Sixteenth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1990) [1944], p. 267; David Kathman, “de Vere, Edward Earl of Oxford” in *Encyclopedia of English Renaissance Literature*, vol. 1 (2012), 259; Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary*, Liverpool (2003), pp. 158-59.
- ⁶⁰Known as the “Benezet Test”, first printed in Louis O. Benezet, *Shakspeare, Shakspeare and de Vere*, Granite State Press, Manchester N.H. (1937); reprinted in Richard Whalen, *Shakspeare: WHO WAS HE?* Praeger, Connecticut (1994), pp. 143-45.
- ⁶¹Sidney Lee, *The French Renaissance in England*, Charles Scribner, New York (1920), p. 227.
- ⁶²J. T. Looney, “*Shakspeare*” *Identified*, London (1922), p. 197.