

## REVIEWS

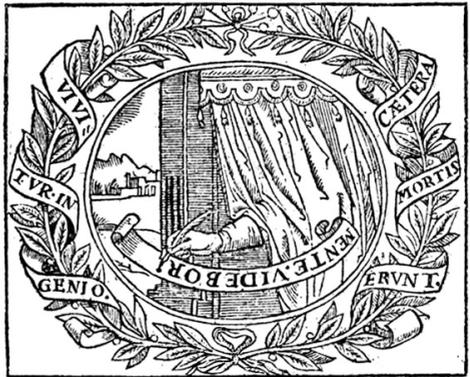
### *Shakespearean Authorship Trust Conference*

*13th–14th November 2021 held online via Zoom*

**Volumes that I prize above my dukedom: Shakespeare's Sources**

**Review by Amanda Hinds**

The excellent presentations and interludes in this Zoom Conference can now be seen in a series of YouTube videos (see Nos. 1–13 below). In No. 1, Professor William Leahy, formerly of Brunel University now of Limerick University, introduced Sir Mark Rylance, who recited the speech by Prospero referred to in the title of the Conference (*The Tempest* I. ii.). The



focus on Shakespeare's Sources clearly did not involve debate about the Shakespeare Authorship Question although 'authorship' is, of course, central to the Shakespearean Authorship Trust (SAT) as confirmed in their mission statement: 'To seek, and if possible, establish the truth concerning the authorship of Shakespeare's plays and poems.'

Before dealing with the conference itself, we need a word about SAT and – something of particular interest to Oxfordians – the apparent development of an ambivalent and even negative attitude towards Edward de Vere. SAT started life as the Shakespeare Fellowship, an organisation truly diverse in its views, founded in 1922 by Colonel Bernard R. Ward, a convinced Oxfordian, who encouraged Sir George Greenwood to be the first President. Greenwood opined that 'many pens, one Master Mind' wrote Shakespeare's works but declined to express an opinion as to the identity of the Master Mind. Vice-Presidents included J. Thomas Looney and Abel Lefranc, who respectively promoted Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford and his son-in-law William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby

as the great author. Interestingly, Derby is not represented in *My Shakespeare: The Authorship Controversy*, (ed. William Leahy, Edward Everett Root Publications, 2018). The early history of the SF is reported in detail by James A. Warren in *Shakespeare Investigated: Publication of the Shakespeare Fellowship 1922-1936* (Cary, North Carolina: Veritas Publications, 2021), in which he publishes the early articles published in *The Hackney Spectator* between 1922 and 1924. After its name was changed to the Shakespearean Authorship Society in 1959, the same organisation registered with the Charity Commission in 1981 as The Shakespearean Authorship Trust. While SAT and its precursor SF have the same open-minded intentions with respect to the SAQ, it is hard not to gain the impression that while the SF progressively moved towards Oxford as the Master Mind, SAT tends towards an ‘Anyone but Oxford’ point of view. From an Oxfordian perspective, the author’s identity becomes, rather than an elephant in the room, a silenced spider at the centre of a web.

Introduced by William Leahy, Stuart Gillespie gave the keynote speech based on his *Shakespeare’s Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources* (2005: Bloombury Academic). Gillespie presented numerous parallels – such as between Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* and *The Tempest*; Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi* and *Othello*; North’s *Plutarch* and Holinshed’s *Chronicles* and the history plays; and between Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s *Of the Canniballes* and *The Tempest*. He suggests a theory that the author skimmed works via marginal notes to find relevant passages. In answer to Leahy’s question as to who he meant by ‘our author’ Gillespie said he remained neutral; to one about his statement that *Othello* was written in 1604, he said he didn’t get involved in dating discussions; and to Richard Waugaman’s as to whether he knew that the adolescent Edward de Vere might have written his uncle Arthur Golding’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, he said he didn’t know and had not worked on Oxford, or on Golding except as a source. The presentation was followed by a dialogue by Sir Mark Rylance and Annabel Leventon of ‘Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves ...’ from *The Tempest* (V. i.) and Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*; it was very hard to discern which was which (No. 2).

Ros Barber gave an excellent analysis of Dennis McCarthy’s methods in *North by Shakespeare* by Michael Blanding. Barber explained difficulties with recent versions of Early British Books Online and their inability to find early or

‘foreign’ phrases. Plagiarising was fashionable in Elizabethan England; parallels between North’s *Dial* and *Anne of Faversham* were hardly surprising for it concerned North’s family; he would not have needed Holinshed. Many parallels were common rhetorical pairings or associated words, came from earlier sources or were necessary words. She said there were more parallels between Shakespeare and Marlowe than North (No. 3). For an Oxfordian perspective on the North family, see Jan Cole’s article in this newsletter (pp. 18–37). Following this presentation, Annabel Leventon and Sir Mark Rylance read passages respectively from Holinshed’s Chronicle and *Henry V* demonstrating their similarity (No. 4).

After a short break, the same incomparable pair read respectively from Montemayor’s Spanish prose romance *Diana*, written in 1550 but not translated until 1598, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (No. 5).

William D. Rubenstein of Monash University in Melbourne (previously of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth) gave a talk referring to Diana Price’s *Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography* effectively excluding William of Stratford as author of the works attributed to Shakespeare. He claimed the greater likelihood that Sir Henry Neville was the great author in view of his position, family background, travels in Europe, access to books and annotated books in his library (No. 6). In answer to a question as to why having annotated books associated with Shakespeare in his library meant he wrote them, and another as to how we knew they were in his handwriting, Rubenstein gave his assurance that they were the same known handwriting; in answer to James Alexander asking how many similar libraries were in existence, he didn’t know but admitted that the Earl of Oxford had such a library.

Christopher Corolan spoke of a fascinating parallel between the St Chrispin’s Day speech in *Henry V* and *William of Palerne*, an anonymous romantic poem translated into Middle English from French (circa 1350–60) commissioned by Humphrey de Bohun, 6th Earl of Hereford and 5th Earl of Essex, who was a great-great-granduncle of Henry V. Notably, *Palerne* contains a 14-line exhortation to his troops, which he said Shakespeare ‘mined’ for his Agincourt speech (No. 7). Carolan emphasised the powerful use of alliteration, repetition and internal rhyming used by Shakespeare in this speech – reminiscent of the author of *Palerne*; he also noted ‘as an Oxfordian’ Shakespeare’s extensive use of

libraries of books. Leahy asked if he was further exploring Shakespeare's 'sources'? Carolan said these were not his main interest, which was the SAQ; he had followed the Rambler (see the Quake-speare Shorterly blog) and said that the works of other playwrights, such as Chapman and Jonson, tell the whole Shakespeare story. The session ended with Sir Mark Rylance reading the St Crispin's Day speech from *Henry V* (IV. iii.) (No. 8).

The following evening, Professor Leahy introduced Sir Mark Rylance's recitation (No. 9) from Ulysses's speech in *Troilus and Cressida* (I. iii.), which demonstrates Shakespeare's familiarity with:

The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre  
Observe degree, priority and place ...

Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark, what discord follows!

Earl Showerman's presentation about the extensive allusions to Greek plays and poetry – not known to have been taught at Stratford Grammar school and not yet translated in the 16th century – in the works of Shakespeare; giving the obvious lie to the misinterpreted phrase 'Small Latine and lesse Greeke' in Ben Jonson's Ode in the First Folio – whatever its intended grammatical meaning, Leahy, in a slip of the tongue, introduced Showerman as 'a former president of the Shakespeare Fellowship' (omitting Oxford). Showerman's presentation was too detailed and intense to do justice to here – but he helpfully directed the audience to his informative article 'Shakespeare's Greater Greek: Macbeth and Aeschylus' Oresteia', *Brief Chronicles*, Vol. 3, 2011 (No. 10).

Eddi Jolly, introduced by Leahy as having achieved a brilliant PhD thesis at Brunel University, based her presentation 'The Ghost, the Prince and the Queen: *Les Histoires Tragique* and Hamlet' on her paper, 'Hamlet and the French Connection', as well as her subsequent book *The First Two Quartos of Hamlet* by Margrethe Jolly (McFarland & Co., 2014) (No.11). The source material for *Hamlet* lies in the third of five volumes of *Les Histoires Tragiques* translated from Latin into French in 1576 by François de Belleforest. Eddi first described the dramatic transformation of the cunning brutal Amleth of Belleforest into the Hamlet we know so well. She showed how much of the plot and characters in *Hamlet*, including the ghost, come from *Amleth* while the use of the source book

is reflected more in Q1 than Q2, which she regards as a revision. A stunning reading in French by Annabel Leventon illustrated this; followed by the ‘murder most foul’ speech (*Hamlet* I. vi.) recited by Sir Mark as the ghost and Annabel as Hamlet – demonstrating the very different and pivotal role of the ghost in both quartos of *Hamlet* compared with *Amleth*. Leahy raised the question of the name Hamlet; Heidi (Jannsch) asked whether Eddi could keep a straight face to suggestions that the source was William of Stratford’s son Hamnet?; well yes, said Eddi politely but would the author use his deceased son’s name as the hero in such a tragedy? (Isn’t the anagram Amleth enough?)

The final presentation was an impassioned plea by John Shahan to revisit the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt with the aim of increasing the number of signatures from 4,865 to 5,000 by 2023 (No. 12). Shahan described the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s refusal on three occasions to rise to the challenge of proving in a mock trial, to the legal standard of ‘without reasonable doubt’, their claim for *Shakespeare Without Doubt* – even with the offer by the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition of £40,000 if they could prove their point. Thus, the SBT had conceded by default. Shahan acknowledged and thanked those who had initiated the Declaration, including Diana Price, William Leahy, Sir Derek Jacobi, Sir Mark Rylance and SAT, of which Sir Mark was Chairman at the time. Shahan proposed a renewed challenge in 2023.

The last session was a conversation between Joel Coen and Sir Mark Rylance (No.13). Their friendship had built up when Sir Mark was acting in Coen’s *The Bridge of Spies* – for which he got an Oscar. Sir Mark said that 100 years after Looney had recognised that Oxford met the requirements for the authorship of Shakespeare’s works, he had received personal attacks while artistic director of The Globe for raising authorship doubts; he asked whether there were clues in Coen’s own work if he hadn’t been known as the author. Coen described numerous personal elements in *Serious Man* – a film, unusually, without another source. They discussed Coen’s films with sources from novels, other films and *O Brother Where Art Thou* as an adaptation of the *Odyssey*. They discussed dramatic differences between stage plays and movies; how collaboration with other directors might be anonymous to avoid commercial problems. Annabel Leventon recited the ‘milk of human kindness’ speech by Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth* I. v.).

## Conclusion

The Conference was entertaining and informative, and the interludes brought the topics to life with convincing parallels between the works of Shakespeare and extensive source material well beyond anything available to William of Stratford. However, to return to the ‘Anyone but Oxford’ impression mentioned at the beginning of this review, the SAT is in serious danger of losing its original aim of finding the identity of the true author, or the Master Mind behind the works, if it persists in barely mentioning Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford (although in several instances his name slipped in through questions and answers – usually from Oxfordians) for whom there is by far the most evidence: see the 700 pages of *Shakespeare Revolutionized: the First Hundred Years of J. Thomas Looney’s “Shakespeare” Identified* by James A. Warren, Veritas Publications, 2021. Reflecting the shadowy presence of Oxford, a survey during the SAT conference in November 2020 showed that 47% of attendees favoured de Vere as the author, 23% joint authorship and only 1–8% an alternative single candidate (see *DVS Newsletter* 2021, Vol 28, No. 1: Oxfordian News, p.3). None of the other ‘candidates’ stand on their own as the great author or as the Master Mind behind the massive transformative revolution of literature and drama that took place in the 16th century, while almost all of them were either closely connected with or related to Edward de Vere – or are known to have worked with or for him, which the SAT would be ideally placed to investigate. Get over it – Edward de Vere was the author and Master Mind you were looking for!

### SAT Conference 2021 videos:

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAUeg4qfSA8>.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vVZ7DHYFtk>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7MyhMTS84M>
4. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6j\\_YHpKJ5ug](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6j_YHpKJ5ug)
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPj7DzLrr0>
6. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ofiKSSN9aE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ofiKSSN9aE)
7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T23dOr7Lw0A>
8. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wc7h4StnL\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wc7h4StnL_4)
9. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnpMGZNs1Go>
10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkDDBrDr760>
11. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqej\\_Sdug6U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqej_Sdug6U)
12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4BUlmFpPsI>
13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZL8M4ipJ3c>