

One Pretty Secret: Gervase Markham Reveals Shakespeare's Identity

By Heidi Jansch

"...this Nobleman breakes off his Gyues, and both in Italie, France, and other Nations, did more Honour to this Kingdome then all that haue trauelled since he tooke his iourney to bea\uen.¹

These familiar lines complimenting Oxford are included in *Honour in His Perfection* by Gervase Markham. This work, glorifying soldiery and celebrating four military leaders and their ancestors, was written by Markham to generate support for a military action against Spain in the 1620s. Two of the leaders involved in this effort were Oxford's son, Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford, and Henry Wriosthesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, and so Markham dedicates substantial ink to the houses of Oxford and Southampton. An exploration of the Vere and Wriosthesley sections in *Honour in His Perfection* suggests that Markham knew that Edward de Vere was Shakespeare and left indications to that effect within the text.

Gervase Markham was born in the late 1560s and began publishing literary and informational works in London in 1593. Throughout the 1590s, Markham had strong ties to the Essex circle. In *A Bibliography of Gervase Markham*, F.N.L. Poynter summarizes this attachment:

The patrons of Gervase's literary efforts were all of the 'Essex Party.' His poem on Grenville (1595) included Southampton² and Mountjoy among its patrons. *The Poem of Poems* (1596) was dedicated to Elizabeth Sidney, who was soon to marry the young Earl of Rutland, Southampton's bosom friend. 'Devoreux' (1597), dedicated to the two sisters of Essex, is almost pure Essex propaganda, and even his two religious poems (1600-01), published at the height of the Essex drama, cannot be entirely acquitted of allusion to that affair. These facts establish the circle in which Gervase Markham was moving in the last years of the Queen's reign.

After the Essex rebellion, Markham left London and commented later that he "did for nine years follow the plow" as a tenant farmer on the estates of his relatives. Once his father and brother had died and most of the family wealth and property were gone,

Markham returned to the pen, resulting in a bibliography filled with a variety of literature and multiple re-printings and re-workings of practical guides on subjects that included horsemanship, veterinary medicine, and husbandry.

Markham's work that is most of interest to those who acknowledge Oxford as the author of the Shakespeare canon is *Honour in His Perfection* published in 1624. This work was produced a year after Shakespeare's *First Folio* and was compiled in response to England's relations with Spain. Poynter describes the political atmosphere at that time:

His nobles at home and his allies abroad had long been urging upon James, the *Rex Pacificus*, the necessity for curbing the increasing Spanish arrogance. The discourtesies suffered by the Duke of Buckingham when he visited Spain in 1623 to negotiate the marriage of Prince Charles with the Infanta finally persuaded the reluctant James that war could not be avoided. An attempt to recruit troops for the recovery of the Palatinate from the Spaniards had been made in 1622. When Parliament met in February 1624 and heard what Buckingham had to say of his reception in Spain there was general agreement that action should be taken. In June, a defensive treaty with the Dutch, aimed at the recovery of the Palatinate, was signed. Four regiments of 6000 men were raised, command of the first given to Henry, Earl of Southampton, Markham's first patron; of the second to Henry de Vere, Earl of Oxford...; of the third to Robert Devereux, earl of Essex; and of the fourth to Robert Bertie, Lord Willoughby, afterwards Earl of Lindsay. After the long peace, the armory was found to be neglected, and the treasury, as usual, empty. To arm and equip this army required a good deal of money and the awakening of the people from their prevailing apathy to support its actions. Markham may well have been commissioned to write *Honour in His Perfection* to secure moral support for the four commanders in their task.

Markham attempted to raise this support by relating some of the heroic family histories of these four leaders. In the section on the Vere family, he references the 15th-18th Earls of Oxford by number in the marginal notes, while using the title "Earle of Oxford" within the text (with one notable exception).

**The Storie of
John Earle of
Oxford the 15.
Earle.**

A discourse of
John the 16.
Earle of Ox-
ford.

Henry Earle of
Oxford the 18.
Earle.

Edward the 17.
Earle of Oxford.

Interestingly, the title of Edward de Vere (whose name is only given in the marginal notes) is misspelled “Eale,” and the main text never refers to him by name or as an earl. Instead, Markham uses the phrases “noble father of this princely Oxford now living,” and “this Nobleman,” unlike the other earls of Oxford who are referred to by first name and/or as “Earle” somewhere within the text.

| Marginal Notes | References/titles of <u>Veres</u> within <i>Honour in His Perfection</i> |
|---|--|
| The <u>Storie</u> of John Earle of Oxford the 15. Earle | High and Illustrious Prince - John Earle of Oxford – Oxford – John of Oxford – the Earle – this brave Earle – Earle of Oxford – this excellent Prince - this good Prince |
| A discourse of John the 16 Earle of Oxford | John – this Earle of Oxford – the Earle of Oxford – the Earle – the Earle – the Earle |
| Edward the 17 <u>Eale</u> (sic) of Oxford | noble father of this princely Oxford now living – this Nobleman – the great man(s) family) |
| Sir Frances <u>Vere</u> and Sir Horace <u>Vere</u> | Two famous wonders - Sir Frances <u>Vere</u> and Sir Horace <u>Vere</u> (his noble brother) |
| Henry Earle of Oxford the 18 Earle | now Earle of Oxford - this Nobleman - great Prince |

This could just be a stylistic choice, but on the page following his description of Edward de Vere (page 17), Markham begins relating the famous exploits of Sir Frances and Sir Horace Vere, but then goes off on a tangent imploring his readers to “looke,” “see” and “finde” – repeating each of these words twice – before alluding to “one pretty secret or mystery” and a “mistaking of names” in the recording of true events:

...you shall see a Vere in a Souldiers Triumph. Looke in many of the views of France, and there you shall finde Vere armed: see the Stories of the dissentions in Gerl manie, and there you shall finde Vere struggling with Honour; nay, looke in all that hath beene written in the Neatherlands, within the compasse of the longest memory now liuing, and belieue it in euel ry page, in euery action, Vere cannot be omitted: **on|ly in that Storie there is one pretty secret or mysterie which I cannot let passe vntouched, because it brings many difficulties or doubts into the minde of an ig|norant Reader; and that is, the mistaking of names ...**

Anyone who had noticed the ‘mistake’ in the marginal notes on the previous page, the word “Eale”³ instead of “Earl,” might now interpret the following as referring to the 17th Earl of Oxford, indicating that a certain name associated with him was not being recorded accurately. Page 18 continues:

... for the Authour of that Worke bindes himselfe too strictly to the Scripture phrase, which is to make one name to containe another; as the name Al dam to containe the name Eua also, and the word man to containe the word woman also; **and so the Authour speaking of many notable and famous exploits fortu|nately performed, deliue|rs you peraduenture but the name of Nassau, or the Dutch, and such like; whereas in truth and true meaning, the name of Vere should euer be included within them, & the sence so read, the Story is perfect.** I speak not this to derogate any thing from the excellencies of that most excellent Prince to whose Vertues I could willingly fall down & become a bond-flaue; for the whole World must allow him a Souldier vnparelled, and a Prince of infinite merit: **but only to shew that the least spark of Vertue which is, cannot chuse but repine when it finds a great Ver|tue iniur’d by a pen whose blanching might make the whole World forgetfull.**

In addition to the word “pretty” meaning attractive, it originally meant “cunning, crafty,” and later “clever, skillful, able,” as well as “cleverly or elegantly made or done; ingenious, artful, well-conceived.” The “pretty secret” Markham is referring to has been cleverly orchestrated, but he is lamenting someone being injured by the “blanching,”⁴ that “a great Ver|tue” is being cheated by the whitewashing resulting from this clever secret. Is Markham expressing his frustration that Oxford’s literary contributions would be known to posterity as someone else’s, arguing that the name of Vere should be part of the Shakespeare story to correct this injustice?

Honour was published a year after the *First Folio* as the identity of Shakespeare was being placed onto the Stratford man. Markham includes this excerpt within the description of the Vere cousins as a veiled homage to the soon-to-be-forgotten



‘Author.’ If Markham was actually commenting on the records of the ‘Fighting Veres’ in the Netherlands, he was being extremely vague. He expresses upset with there being a secret in a history written by someone in another country that he can’t leave untouched, but then doesn’t give specific information to correct the mistake.

A closer look at Markham’s text reveals that he is mentioning these stories as a misdirection for he then proceeds to provide a solution to the mystery with repeated instructions to “looke, see, finde,” and includes the phrases “pretty secret or mystery,” “mistaking of names,” “making one name contain another” and “Vere should ever.” These words and phrases direct readers to look for an anagram within the text itself. This anagram is hidden in the phrase “the least spark” which, when rearranged, provides the obvious solution: SHAKESPEAR(E). Sample anagrams from this period display creative spellings, use letters more than once, leave extra letters unused (which occurs here with an extra T-T-L), or add needed letters to complete solutions.⁵ This being the case, it would not be out of the ordinary to find an anagram that reads ‘Shakespeare’ if the ‘e’ is reused, which is necessary here, though it would certainly be more satisfying to have another letter ‘e’ for a complete, correctly spelled solution.⁶

...euer loued and admired this Earle, that liued many yeares where I daily saw this Earle; that knew him before the warres, In the warres, and since the warres; shall I that haue seene him indure the worst mallice or vengeance, that the Sea, Tempests, or Thunder could vtter, that haue seene him vndergoe all the extremities of warre, that haue seene him serue in person on the enemy, and against the enemy: shall I that haue seene him receiue the reward of a Souldier (before the face of the Enemie) for the best act of a Souldier (done vpon the Enemie;) Shall I be scarrd with shalldowes? No; Truth is my Mistresse, and though I can write nothing which can equall **the least sparke** of fire within him, yet for her sake will I speake some thing which may inflame those that are heauy and dul and of mine owne temper.

Markham then concludes his story of the Veres and moves on to the Earls of Southampton. When he reaches his description of the Third Earl, Henry Wriothesley, Markham relates that he:

...euer loued and admired this Earle, that liued many yeares where I daily saw this Earle; that knew him before the warres, In the warres, and since the warres; shall I that haue seene him indure the worst mallice or vengeance, that the Sea, Tempests, or Thunder could vtter, that haue seene him vndergoe all the extremities of warre, that haue seene him serue in person on the enemy, and against the enemy: shall I that haue seene him receiue the reward of a Souldier (before the face of the Enemie) for the best act of a Souldier (done vpon the Enemie;) Shall I be scarrd with shalldowes? No; Truth is my Mistresse, and though I can write nothing which can equall **the least sparke** of fire within him, yet for her sake will I speake some thing which may inflame those that are heauy and dul and of mine owne temper.

Here the phrase “the least sparke” is used again, and it is even spelled with the extra ‘e’ for an even more accurate anagram of “SHAKESPEARE.” This time, Markham is placing himself in the position of an inferior writer, seeming to state that, ‘I can write nothing equal to what Shakespeare has written about you.’

distresse, and though I
 equall the least sparke of
 lake will I speake some

Markham’s publications during the rise and fall of the Essex faction place him close to Southampton during the 1590s, and his own description in *Honour in His Perfection* relates that the two were close for many years. If Markham was in fact as close to Southampton as he claims in *Honour*, he could have been in a position to know the details about the Shakespeare authorship ruse. Both uses of “the least spark(e)” are included when Markham is talking about writing “stories,” “Author of that worke,” “injured by a pen,” and “I can write nothing to equal ...” These all lend additional support to the idea that he was thinking about a certain writer at this point.

The phrase “the least spark(e)” is used only twice in this work, once in the Vere family section with the pretty secret/mystery/mistaking of name comments, and once in Southampton’s section. This would be a terrific coincidence if it weren’t done intentionally by Markham. But since we now purport that Edward de Vere was the author Shakespeare, and know that Henry Wriosthesley, was the only dedicatee of the Shakespeare works, linking them with this anagrammed name makes perfect sense for one who was concerned with the truth reaching posterity. The additional comments about the mistaking of names (page 17), the misspelling of Edward de Vere’s title, and the absence of his name within the text, all suggest that Markham was leaving a trail of clues for us to follow to ensure that Oxford’s contributions to literature as Shakespeare would not be forgotten.

Notes/Reference

1) *Honour in his perfection or, A treatise in commendations of the vertues and renowned vertuous vndertakings of the illustrious and heroycall princes Henry Earle of Oxenford.* Henry Earle of Southampton, Robert Earle of Essex, and the euer praise-worthy and much honoured Lord, Robert Bartue, Lord Willoughby, of Eresby: with a briefe cronology of theirs, and their auncestours actions. And to the eternall memory of all that follow them now, or will imitate them hereafter, especially those three noble instances, the Lord Wriouthesley, the Lord Delaware, and the Lord Montioy. London: 1624. Copy from: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, Early English Books Online

Text segments of *Honour in His Perfection* from

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A06935.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

2) Paul Altrocchi has suggested that Markham is alluding to Shakespeare in this dedication to Southampton when using the phrase “most victorious pen.”

Altrocchi, Paul, MD, *Moniment*, Bloomington, IN : iUniverse, 2014, p 324

Markham, Gervase, *The most honorable tragedie of Sir Richard Grinuile, Knight* , 1595

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A06960.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

To the right Honorable, Henrie Wriothesly, Earle of South-hampton, and Baron of Titchfiede.
 THou glorious Laurrell of the Muses hill,
 Whose eyes doth crowne the most victorius pen,
 Bright Lampe of Vertue, in whose sacred skill,
 Liues all the blisse of eares-in chaunting men,
 From grauer subiects of thy graue assayes,
 Bend thy coragious thoughts vnto these lines,
 The graue from whence mine humble Muse doth raise
 True honors spirit in her rough deseignes;
 And when the stubborne stroke of my harsh song,
 Shall seasonlesse glide through almightie eares,
 Vouchsafe to sweet it with thy blessed tong,
 VVhose wel tun'd sound stills musick in the spears,
 So shall my tragick layes be bleft by thee,
 And from thy lips suck theyr eternitie.

I. M.

3) The misspelling of the word “Earle” to “Eale” may refer to other hidden names associated with Edward de Vere. An eale is mythological bull-like beast. Thomas Nashe referred to an ox when he spoke of Will Monox (French for “my ox”) and Apis Lapis (Latin for “stone ox”). An Eale was a mythical ox-like animal with boar’s tusks, possibly alluding to both the name Oxford and the boar on the de Vere crest. <http://www.theoi.com/Thaumasios/Eale.html>



4 Definitions from www.oed.com:

Blanch: To deceive, cheat, bilk. Cf. blench v.1 1. to blanch of: to cheat or do out of: 1581 J. Bell tr. W. Haddon & J. Foxe *Against Jerome Osorius* 155 Your impudent usage in lyeng and blanchyng.

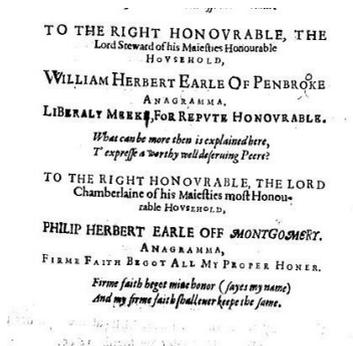
Blanching: n.1 - The action of making white

Blanching: n.2 - †1. Telling of falsehoods. Obs.: 1581 J. Bell tr. W. Haddon & J. Foxe *Against Jerome Osorius* 73 These blasphemous flatteries, detestable and horrible blanchyngs.

Pretty: adj., n., and int. a. Originally: cunning, crafty. Subsequently: clever, skilful, able: 1577 R. Stanyhurst *Treat. Descr. Irelande* vii. f. 27v/2, in R. Holinshed *Chron.* I Andrew White a good humanitian, & a pretty philosopher.

Cleverly or elegantly made or done; ingenious, artful, well-conceived.: 1589 ‘M. Marprelate’ *Hay any Worke for Cooper B j*, A very pretty way to escape. 1611 T. Coryate *Crudities* sig. Ee8, In these wals are many strong and auncient Towers,..being built with a pretty kinde of stratagematical inuention.

5) This sample of anagrammed names from Taylor, John; *All the Works of John Taylor the Water-Poet*, 1630, copy from the British Library, Early English Books Online



PEMBROKE – Solution substitutes Y for I, changes W to U, changes M to an N in Pembroke
MONTGOMERY – Solution created using the A twice, extra E left over

This sample from Sampson, William, *Virtus post funera vivit or, Honour tryingmpling over death*, 1636, p47, British Library, Early English Books Online



FARRINGTON – Solution has extra I-I-N-T, Added E

6) Similar to samples above, the anagram solution “the least spark(e)” = SHAKESPEARE allows for three ‘extra’ letters T-T-L.

