

THE 1623 FOLIO EDITION OF SHAKESPEARE AND THE EXCLUSION OF THE EARL OF OXFORD AS ITS AUTHOR

By Charles Graves

The purpose of this article is to suggest, in the 400th anniversary year of the *First Folio* edition of Shakespeare, that Susan de Vere Herbert would have known the relation between her father Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and William Shaksper (to use the local spelling of his name) of Stratford-upon-Avon – whose grandfather Robert Arden was related to Elizabeth Trussel, Edward de Vere’s paternal grandmother of the Billesley, Warwickshire line of the Trussel family. This article also suggests that Edward’s bi-sexuality (i.e. feminine tendencies) in addition to his philosophy of Euphuism being at variance with the ideas of Philip Sidney and his family, and the satire in the plays reflecting on Robert Cecil and (particularly for Susan) on Anne Cecil portrayed as Ophelia, made it unacceptable to name Edward de Vere as the author. So, Susan and her husband Philip Herbert went along with the decision to give William Shakespeare the credit for the published plays. That Susan and Edward’s family were aware that William was their kinsman can be seen in the various characters involved in William Shaksper’s purchase of ‘New Place’ in Stratford whereby the actor left London and became a maltster at his birthplace. Furthermore, the genealogical connections with William Shaksper were, perhaps, a reason for Edward using William Shakespeare as his pseudonym, the result being that, in some plays (e.g. *As You Like It*, *Taming of the Shrew*), his professional differences with William of Stratford were comically set forth.

In order to consider whether Susan de Vere was aware that she was related to William of Stratford, some explanation is required. It involves the de Vere family connections to the Trussels, Ardens, Throckmortons and Christopher Hatton, a poet and important political figure on the Queen’s Privy Council, as discussed in my book of essays (Chapters 19–21).¹

The grandfather of William Shaksper’s mother Mary Arden was Thomas Arden of Wilmcote, Warwickshire, the village next to Billesley where the Trussels had lived since the 12th century as explained by Jan Cole (p.22).² Mary’s father was Robert Arden, who married Ann Trussel and was related to Elizabeth Trussel,

Edward de Vere's paternal grandmother. According to *Wikipedia*, these Ardens were related to Edward Arden who was implicated by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in the John Somerville plot to kill Queen Elizabeth. John Somerville was the son-in-law of Edward Arden (who was probably innocent). Both Arden and Somerville were executed in 1583 – around the time that Lord Oxford's players visited Stratford (sometime between September 1583 and September 1584) – among other visiting players including the Queen's Men (1587): see Jan Cole (p.29)²

The Throckmortons were a large Catholic family who lived at Coughton Court, eight miles from Stratford-upon-Avon. Edward Arden's wife, also called Mary (died 1603) was the daughter of Sir Robert Throckmorton whose nephew Arthur was a close friend and supporter of Edward de Vere and had an estate at Alderminster, a few miles south of Stratford. The Throckmortons were also distantly related to William of Stratford, as was Edward de Vere through Elizabeth Trussel his grandmother, which makes it possible that Arthur introduced William to the theatre in London and perhaps to Edward de Vere (Jan Cole, note 2).²

After his execution, Edward Arden's head was displayed on the Tower of London. Thus, it is very probable that Susan knew about her father's connections to the Ardens, Throckmortons, and William of Stratford, who would have been her distant cousin in the Trussel line. How could she not have known since William Shakespeare was her father's pseudonym? She might have been told by her grandparents why such a name was chosen. Similarly, we might ask, are we certain Edward de Vere *knew* that the Trussels, Ardens and Shaksper were his cousins? Was such a name as William Shakespeare chosen 'out of the air', or for the traditional Oxfordian view that it referred to Minerva shaking a spear? That would be less likely to be true if Edward was aware of his family's Trussel and Arden connections. Anyone who could write the 'History Plays' with precise and correct placing of the de Vere ancestors and relations within them, could have certainly found the Trussels (his grandmother's family) and understood the link with William Shaksper, the actor. However the pseudonym was decided, there can be no doubt that Susan's grandfather William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Archbishop Whitgift (and possibly also the Queen) would have had to have approved the name when it was first used for the publication of *Venus and Adonis* in 1593.

Moreover, Susan's grandfather William Cecil was on the Queen's Privy Council together with Christopher Hatton (d. 1591) who was also accused briefly as being part of the Arden/Somerville plot. Christopher Hatton's ward was William Underhill II, and it was he who sold New Place in Stratford to William Shaksper in 1597. In that same year, William Underhill II died of being poisoned by his heir, Fulk Underhill. Fulk, accused of his father's murder, was hanged in 1599. Hatton had died by that time, but William Underhill II would have certainly been known in the de Vere family because of Christopher Hatton's close association with William Cecil in the Queen's Council. Moreover, it was widely known that Hatton was disliked (and ridiculed in *Twelfth Night*) by Edward de Vere. Of course, the question arises: if Edward was disturbed by any claim of William of Stratford that he was the famous playwright, how did it happen that a protégé of Christopher Hatton, William Underhill II, provided William with New Place? It is conceivable that Robert Cecil, Edward's brother-in-law, or William Cecil himself (colleague of Christopher Hatton in the Privy Council), supported Underhill's sale of the property, himself paying William Shaksper the £60 cost. That would have stifled any further discussion of Shaksper's claims. Did Fulk Underhill poison his father because New Place was sold to Shaksper and not inherited by himself (as William Underhill II's heir)? It has been noted that William Underhill II was in financial difficulties in 1597. Although his patron Christopher Hatton had already died, Hatton's sister Dorothy had been William Underhill II's stepmother (his father's second wife) and perhaps she or her kin were also involved in the sale of the house.

Returning to the question of Edward de Vere's use of a pseudonym, Edward apparently desired avoidance of public scrutiny during his lifetime and was in disgrace judging by several of his sonnets (e.g. 29, 66, 112), perhaps regarding his sexuality among other reasons. It appears that 17th century English court society had not yet accepted the fact that a man could have a certain erotic love for both men and women, which might have embarrassed Henry Wriothesley in later life. Later, with the publication of *Shake-speare's Sonnets*, such tendencies in Edward had again become evident, which might have been one reason the sonnets were not published in the First Folio. Did everyone at court know about Edward's feeling towards Henry Wriothesley? It is likely that Edward's daughters knew since he was once a candidate to marry his eldest daughter, Elizabeth. Moreover, they must have

known that their father, using the name William Shakespeare, had lovingly dedicated the hugely popular *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* to Henry.

These feelings the author set directly in contrast to another passion. This was his heterosexual love for a young woman, considered by some to be Anne Vavasour (with whom Edward had an illegitimate child called Edward Vere) and the ‘dark lady’ of the Sonnets. In contradiction, the author expresses his shame for his affair with the ‘dark lady’ which betrayed his great love for the young man. In fact, several sonnets state that his love for his boyfriend was the ‘muse’ by which all his poetry and prose were being written.

It should also be noted again here that Edward de Vere considered himself ‘in disgrace’. This came from something wider than simply writing bi-sexual poems. It probably involved spending much of the de Vere fortune (in houses and lands), lampooning Robert Cecil and his father in the plays (as Richard III and Polonius respectively), his treatment of Anne Cecil his wife by accusing her of infidelity after his return from Italy, and for portraying her as Ophelia in *Hamlet* and suggesting she took her own life. (Perhaps regret for his treatment of his wife was in *Othello*.)

On the other hand, Susan’s father was a ‘Euphuist’ (in contrast to the Sidney family ‘Romanticist’ grouping of poets). The Euphuist heritage of John Lyly’s *Euphues and his England (1580)*³ was influential in several of Edward de Vere’s plays as I have shown in articles published in the *DVS Newsletter*.⁴ Euphues was also mentioned in Thomas Lodge’s introduction to *Rosalind*. The character Euphues, at the end of his life, established his retreat cave at ‘Sylexendra’ in Athens and there dictated the story of *Rosalind* for his early companion Philautus. These Euphuist-inspired works gave value to the contributions of women in society and Lyly’s stories were widely read by English women of the court. They delighted in a literature showing salient traits of both women and men. Euphuist writings were quite out of tune with the subjugation of women as seen in the ideas of Euphues’ companion Philautus (for whose sons *Roselyn* was written by Thomas Lodge). So, some of the revolutionary Euphuistic ideals may have caused fundamental tensions between what Susan de Vere’s father believed and promoted, and views that had been held by Philip Sidney and were perhaps supported by his sister Mary.

Taken together, could these reasons have been enough for the powers that be to conceal the author's identity in the First Folio and transfer it to William of Stratford in perpetuity? This is a question that has not fully been answered here.

Several of his plays refer obliquely to a certain personal challenge to Edward – i.e. William Shakespeare holding on to the authorship – especially in *As You Like It* (V.i.) where Touchstone (representing Edward) explicitly prevents 'farmer William' from marrying Audrey, claiming that he was the one to marry her (i.e. he, Touchstone, was the true 'husband' of the literary works). Touchstone says: 'you are not *ipse*, for I am he' (V.i.43). In this scenario, 'Audrey' represents the heritage of Edward's ancestor Aubrey de Vere, i.e. as productions of the de Vere family and not those of William. Also, In the Induction scene of *Taming of the Shrew* (and in the Epilogue, which is not in the latest quarto or the First Folio version but was in the 1594 play *A Shrew*) the 'shrew' appears to represent Anne Hathaway, and the Inn outside which the drunken Sly, representing William, was found was in Warwickshire, while the play-within-the-play was in Padua. Sly was the victim (thinking he had a woman with him, but it was really a boy). But using the name Bartholomew for the page boy (which was the name of Anne Hathaway's brother) who was in the 'hidden sex' scenario, means that the author was trying to show, perhaps, that the Shaksperc (Sly and Bartholomew) knew nothing about homosexuality and could be 'victims' of those who did know about it. Here perhaps Edward de Vere was illustrating the fact that William and his family could never understand Edward's own, or his colleagues', views on sex.

Susan probably believed her father had chosen his pseudonym, for whatever reason, and that if he wished to use his distant cousin's name in life's challenges, perhaps she had his permission to subordinate him lovingly under William Shakespeare's name after his death. Thus, her father could be made, through Shakespeare, a benefit to the courtly society she very well knew. If the Queen knew the real author of Shakespeare's works, which she apparently did, since she had promoted and allowed the plays and satires of Edward de Vere, her Lord Great Chamberlain, Susan found a different situation in the following reign with Robert Cecil in a position of power along with the Sidney/Herbert/Pembrokes.



End notes

1. Charles Graves, *27 Essays on Edward de Vere and William Shakespeare*, Iver Publications 2014 (essays 19–21). The genealogy of the Trussels is to be found on pp. 274–83 and includes detailed information about each link in the chain. It begins with Osbert Trussel who held Billesley in 1166 and continues through four William Trussels there and at Acton Trussel, Staffs. The last William's daughter gave Billesley to Sir Alfred Trussel whose heir was a Thomas Trussel (*temps.* Edward IV) whose grandson was Sir Edward Trussel, K.B. (d. 1499). His daughter Elizabeth married John de Vere 15th Earl of Oxford. William Trussel (d. 1432) was ancestor of Ann Trussel, her daughter Mary Arden and grandson William Shaksper. Ann Trussel married Robert Arden of Wilmcote next to Billesley. This continuous line at Billesley included a Thomas Trussel, sheriff of Warwicks. (d. 1517) and his brother William, grandfather of a John Trussel of Billesley whose daughter Ann married Robert Arden father of Mary Arden. It appears from this that although Edward de Vere and William Shaksper were distant 8th cousins, the two branches in which they were descended kept close relations in Billesley. The genealogy of Ann Trussel who married Robert Arden was also presented by Percy Allen and Mrs. C.C. Stopes, in a slightly different form in the 1920s–1930. Their findings are to be seen on pp. 284–7.
2. Jan Cole. 'Oxford's friend, Arthur Throckmorton: a personal link with William Shaksper of Stratford'. *DVS Newsletter*, Vol. 22, No. 2, p.22–30, April 2015.
3. The two main books of John Lyly (1553–1608) were *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* (1579) and *Euphues and his England* (1580). The first tells of the Athenian Euphues in Naples as a courtier. He goes with his Napolitan friend Philautus to England, and they part ways over their concepts of men-women relations. Euphues returns as hermit-philosopher to a cave at Silexedra in Greece. Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynd* is a tale told by Euphues in Silexedra for Philautus' sons (the plot is repeated in *As You Like It*). Lyly, Lodge and de Vere belonged to the group of writers called Euphuists; John Lyly was Edward's personal secretary.
4. Charles Graves' articles in the *DVS Newsletter*: 'Edward de Vere, Euphuism and Bi-Sexuality', Vol. 27, No. 2, April 2020 (*Much Ado, Twelfth Night, As You Like It* and *Measure for Measure* in which women play roles in positive outcomes); 'Euphuist Elements in Edward de Vere's Tragedies', Vol. 28, No. 3, July 2021; '*Two Gentlemen of Verona*: a Euphuistic Story by Edward de Vere', Vol. 29, No. 1, January 2022.