

# HARPER'S

HARPER'S MAGAZINE/APRIL 1999



## THE GHOST OF SHAKESPEARE

Who, in Fact, Was the Bard?

Harold Bloom   Marjorie Garber   Joseph Sobran  
Jonathan Bate   Richard Whalen   Mark Anderson  
Tom Bethell   Gail Kern Paster   Irvin Matus   Daniel Wright

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Notes on the Aural Life

By Mark Slouka

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# THE GHOST OF SHAKESPEARE



*Who, in fact, was the bard: the usual suspect from Stratford, or Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford?*

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

### FOR OXFORD

**TOM BETHELL** is the Washington correspondent of the *American Spectator* and the author of *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages*.

**DANIEL WRIGHT** is Professor of English at Concordia University in Portland, Oreg. He is the director of the annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference, a trustee of the Shakespeare Oxford Society, and Co-Patron, with Sir Derek Jacobi, of the De Vere Society of Great Britain.

**MARK K. ANDERSON** is a writer living in Northampton, Mass. His book with the de Vere Bible scholar Roger Stritmatter, *Prospero's Bible: The Secret History and Spiritual Biography of the Man who was "Shakespeare,"* is currently in preparation.

**JOSEPH SOBRAN** is a syndicated columnist and a contributor to several national publications. He is the author of *Alias Shakespeare*.

**RICHARD F. WHALEN** is a writer, lecturer, and former president of the Shakespeare Oxford Society. He is the author of *Shakespeare: Who Was He?*



### FOR SHAKESPEARE

**GAIL KERN PASTER** is Professor of English at George Washington University and editor of *The Shakespeare Quarterly*. She is the author of *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*.

**MARJORIE GARBER** is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English at Harvard University and director of the Center for Literary and Cultural Studies. She is the author of numerous books, including *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers* and, most recently, *Symptoms of Culture*.

**IRVIN MATUS** is an independent scholar and the author of *Shakespeare, in Fact*.

**HAROLD BLOOM** is Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University and Berg Professor of English at New York University. He is the author of more than twenty books, including *The Western Canon* and, most recently, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*.

**JONATHAN BATE** is King Alfred Professor of English at the University of Liverpool. He is the author of *The Genius of Shakespeare* and editor of the new Arden edition of *Titus Andronicus*.

# I. LIFE

## i.

### A NEVER WRITER

By Tom Bethell

**T**he documentary record of William Shakspere of Stratford consists of little more than a few court records, one important book, the First Folio of 1623, and a bust in Stratford's Holy Trinity Church. The evidence does not establish that he was the author of anything, let alone the erudite works of "Shakespeare." We are left in all honesty wondering whether he could write his own name. The great problem with the conventional biography is that it conflates what we know about the man from Stratford (1564-1616) and the author of the works. Whether they are one and the same person is the very point at issue. The former I shall call Shakspere, as his name was usually spelled, especially in Stratford, and Shakespeare will be reserved for the author, whoever he was.

Thick biographies of the bard are written—but mostly in the conditional. (Shakespeare would have . . . must have . . . could hardly have avoided . . .) In them, an uneasy, composite picture emerges, combining the taciturn Stratford grain-hoarder and the eloquent poet. We have no letter or manuscripts in Shakspere's hand, though we do have six signatures, quavering and ill-written, on legal documents. (One imagines a bailiff helpfully at his elbow: "Keep goin', Will, now an S. That's good . . .") In Stratford, we have records of baptism, marriage, lawsuits, death, and taxes. Not one gives us a reason to think that Shakspere was an author. We don't know that he went to school, though he may have attended Stratford Grammar. His daughter Judith signed her name with an X. So did Anne Hathaway, his wife.

Shakspere did go to London, and in one account he first found work minding the horses of theatergoers. Certainly he became an actor, as did his young brother Edmund. Will joined the Chamberlain's Men and was paid for Christmas performances at court in 1594. The London tax collectors sought him twice in the 1590s, with-

out success, speculating that he may be "dead, departed, and gone out of the said ward." One William Wayte, evidently threatened by our Will, "craves sureties of the peace against William Shakspere," whereupon the Sheriff of Surrey was ordered to arrest him. The next year Will bought New Place in Stratford. Toward the end of his stay in London, we know that he was renting a room in Cripplegate, a meager item that was discovered by Charles Wallace in 1909 and was later hailed by biographer S. Schoenbaum as "the Shakespearean discovery of the century." But Wallace was "disappointed," and reasonably so, as he saw that the Cripplegate lodger did nothing to strengthen the Stratford case. In fact, all research in the last 200 years has tended to reduce the older literary anecdotes to mythical status and to expose modern-day readers to this stark contradiction: the author of *King Lear* was a litigious businessman.

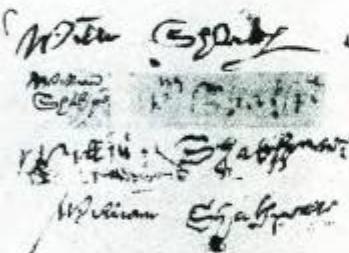
The indications are that Shakspere left London in 1604, at the age of forty. He must

have been the only great writer in history to "retire" so young and in the midst of such triumph. He shows up almost immediately in Stratford, suing a neighbor for a malt debt of 35 shillings—this soon after the publication of *Hamlet*. J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, the nineteenth-century scholar, admitted that this was

"one of the most curious documents connected with Shakespeare's personal history known to exist." At the height of his powers, we are led to suppose, England's greatest writer threw down his pen, perhaps in mid-play, and headed back to Warwickshire, preferring the milieu of Stratford's small-claims court and its conveyance office to literary London. A trader like his father, he engaged in several more property deals.

In his will he attends to the disposition of bowls, even his own clothes, and, notoriously, his second-best bed. He makes no mention of any literary remains. At that time, half of Shakespeare's plays had not been published anywhere. The contrast between the life of the Stratford trader and the exalted verse reaches the level of absurdity.

We must seek some explanation of these problems beyond "genius," the Stratfordians' one-word reply to all difficulties. Genius does not convey knowledge. Yet the author was sure-



ly one of the best-educated men in England. Ben Jonson's jibe that Shakespeare had "small Latin and less Greek" cannot be taken at face value. When *Othello* was published, its Italian source had not been translated into English, nor had the French source of *Hamlet* when that play first saw print (1603). The Latin source of *Comedy of Errors* was not yet translated when the play was first performed. *Love's Labour's Lost*, a parody of court manners dated by some scholars to the late 1580s, contains allusions to the 1580 visit of Marguerite de Valois and Catherine de Medici to the Court of Henry of Navarre at Nérac, the names of French courtiers remaining largely unchanged in the play.

In the nineteenth century, such considerations encouraged men of letters to believe that the real author had concealed his name. For many years the preferred candidate was Francis Bacon, but that hypothesis was not fruitful and became encrusted with absurdities: ciphers, buried manuscripts, excavations by moonlight. By the twentieth century the authorship question had become a target of ridicule. Scholars intoned, as though speaking to children: "Let's just say Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare!" At an unpropitious moment in 1920, an English schoolmaster named J. Thomas Looney published a book claiming that the real author was Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. (Now comes the Looney theory! Oh, what fun!)

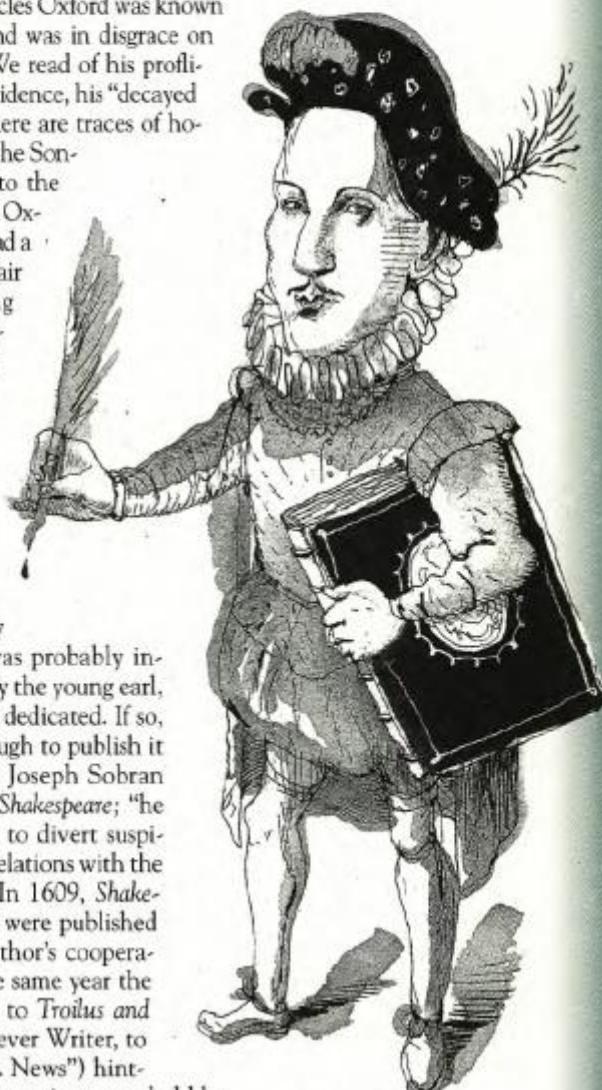
**O**xford (1550–1604) grew up as a ward in the household of Elizabeth's minister Lord Burghley. He married Burghley's daughter, Anne, and they had three daughters. The oldest was engaged to Henry Wriothesley, the 3rd Earl of Southampton, to whom the long Shakespeare poems were dedicated. Two daughters were engaged and married, respectively, to the two dedicatees of the First Folio, the earls of Pembroke and Montgomery. Oxford's uncle, Henry Howard, introduced the sonnet form into English; another uncle, Arthur Golding, translated Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, an important Shakespeare source. Macaulay wrote that Oxford "won for himself an honorable place among the early masters of English poetry," and of all the courtier poets, Edmund Chambers wrote, "the most hopeful" was de Vere, but "he became mute in later life."

Oxford traveled to Italy in 1575. With stops in Paris and Strasbourg, he went to Padua, Genoa, Venice, and Florence. Shakespeare's detailed knowledge of these parts has long mystified conventional scholars. In his thirties, Oxford controlled the Earl of Warwick's acting company and employed playwright John Lyly. His company of boy actors went on tour (to Stratford, once) and

performed at court. He leased the Blackfriars Theatre. Lord Burghley complained of his "lewd friends." Oxford, we would say, was slumming. In 1580, he had accused three courtiers of treason and was in turn accused by one of them of "buggering a boy that is his cook and many other boys." Three were named, including one whom Oxford had brought back with him from Italy. It seems that in court circles Oxford was known as a pederast and was in disgrace on that account. We read of his profligacy, his improvidence, his "decayed reputation." There are traces of homosexuality in the Sonnets addressed to the "fair youth," and Oxford may have had a homosexual affair with the young Earl of Southampton, whom he later urged to marry his daughter Elizabeth.

*Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare's debut ("the first heir of my invention"), was probably intended to glorify the young earl, to whom it was dedicated. If so, "it was not enough to publish it anonymously," Joseph Sobran writes in *Alias Shakespeare*; "he needed a blind to divert suspicion about his relations with the younger earl." In 1609, Shakespeare's Sonnets were published without the author's cooperation, and in the same year the cryptic preface to *Troilus and Cressida* ("A Never Writer, to an Ever Reader. News") hinted that the manuscripts were held by unnamed "grand possessors," no doubt Oxford's son-in-law, the Earl of Montgomery, and his brother. These were the "incomparable pair of brethren" of the Folio's dedication.

**S**upreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, an Oxfordian himself, has commented that the advocates of Oxford lack "a single, coherent theory of the case." Such a theory might go like this. In writing for publication, the public theater in particular, noblemen could not allow their names to be used. The Elizabethan author of *The Art of English*



By Gail Kern Paster

Poesie (probably George Puttenham) knew "Noblemen and Gentlemen of Her Majesty's own servants, who have written excellently well, as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest, of which number is first that noble gentleman Edward Earl of Oxford." Although they often wrote well, he added, they "suffered it to be published without their own names to it: as if it were a discredit for a gentleman to seem learned." In the book *Palladis Tamia* (1598), Francis Meres wrote that "the best for comedy among us be Edward Earl of Oxford."

No plays with Oxford's name on them have come down to us, but we are told that he was writing them and that he withheld his name. If so, why would the author go so far as to impute them to an actual person? The imputation is made in the prefatory material to the First Folio, and we should note that this is the only document that unambiguously unites Shakspere and Shakespeare. In the Folio, Ben Jonson refers to the author as "Sweet Swan of Avon," and Leonard Digges alludes to "thy Stratford Moniment." There is indeed a monument in the Stratford church. The references to "Shakespear" in Jonson's private notebook, the alleged allusion to him in Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, as well as the other scanty references put forward by proponents of the standard view, do nothing to advance their case. They can easily be taken as references to the pen name, just as we usually refer to Mark Twain and George Orwell by their pseudonyms.

By 1623, if the foregoing is correct, we may be sure that Southampton, by then a powerful figure, wanted no further reminders of his misspent youth with Oxford. Pembroke and Montgomery must have felt the same way. All traces of Southampton, and of Shakespeare's poems either dedicated to him or associated with him, were removed from the Folio. For Stratfordians, the Folio (and everything else) is taken at face value. Perhaps that is reasonable. For both sides there's a trade-off, but Stratfordians must live with many baffling questions. Oxfordians, on the other hand, can answer these: Why was the author referred to in the past tense two or three times after 1604? Why did he "retire" so young? Why did he employ a collaborator in his maturity? Why were plays such as *The London Prodigal* (1605) and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608) published with his name on the title page—but only after 1604? Why were the Sonnets published without his cooperation in 1609? Why was he referred to as "ever-living" if he were still alive? Why was there no tribute in London when Shakspere died in 1616? Why did the author say that his verse would live on but that his name would be "buried," and also say, in Sonnet 76: "That every word doth almost tell my name,/Showing their birth, and where they did proceed"?



Most Shakespeareans of my generation have spent little time thinking actively about William Shakespeare's biography or trying to fit that life into his works. Hypersensitive to the excesses of biographical critics of the past, we convince our students that imagined glimpses into the interior life of the poet are likely to be an exercise in self-reflection. Today, preoccupation with Shakespeare's life is mostly for others—those for whom Shakespeare the man is the object of cultlike devotion or equally cultlike denial. And so although popular interest in the life of the National Poet may serve as a fit subject for post-structuralist critique, the life itself remains strongly off-limits to most scholars. The works—suitably renamed "the texts" or even sometimes "the scripts"—command the central field of professional vision while responsibility for what they contain devolves from the author to his culture.

For well-schooled professionals, then, the authorship question ranks as bardolatry inverted, bardolatry for paranoids, with one object of false worship (Shakespeare) replaced by another (Marlowe, Bacon, Edward de Vere). To ask me about the authorship question, as I've remarked on more than one occasion, is like asking a paleontologist to debate a creationist's account of the fossil record. But the authorship question does have the merit of returning the scholarly mind, with sudden and surprising violence, to the real salience of biographical interpretation. For much worse than professional disclaimers of interest in Shakespeare's life is the ugly social denial at the heart of the Oxfordian pursuit. To deny the life of William Shakespeare its central accomplishment, to deny the man his standing as the necessary (if still not sufficient) cause of at least thirty-six plays, two long poems, and a substantial sequence of sonnets requires not only a massive conspiracy on the part of a generation of Elizabethan theater professionals, courtiers, and kings but a ferociously snobbish and ultimately anachronistic celebration of birthright privilege. It is almost always the case that proposed authors of the plays are scions of famous families, aristocrats. The anti-Stratfordian position is a summary judgment about the curse of provincial origins and barbarian rusticity, one that radically underestimates the classical rigors

of Tudor public education and overestimates the scope of aristocratic learning. It is pernicious doctrine.

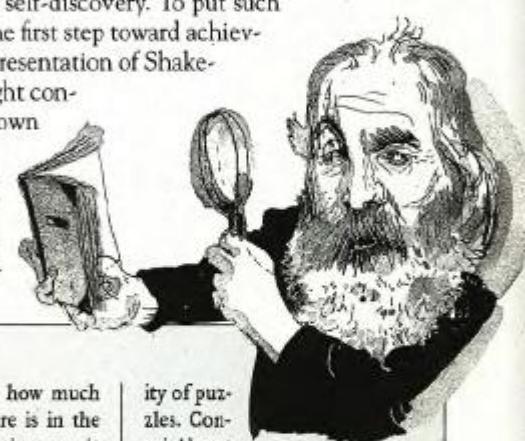
Shakespeare's biographers have always wrestled with the famous gaps in the biographical record. Nothing I have to say here will make those gaps disappear, though they are predictable enough given Shakespeare's unexceptional middle-class origins and the fragility and obscurity of the public records in which his biographical traces have been found. We know little more about the lives of Shakespeare's theatrical peers, even those, such as Ben Jonson, who carefully controlled the terms of their public self-presentation. We do know that the men who inhabited the Elizabethan theater world came from the middle ranks of Elizabethan life, whether they were lucky enough, like the shoemaker's son Christopher Marlowe, to win a scholarship to Cambridge or to become classical scholars on their own, as did Ben Jonson, the stepson of a bricklayer. As S. Schoenbaum put it in his definitive study, *Shakespeare's Lives*, "No formal life of Shakespeare laying claim to serious regard can limit itself to the facts and to logical deductions from the facts alone." But the problem with the facts that we have, as the editors of *The Norton Shakespeare* note in their prefatory account of the life, is "not that they are few but that they are a bit dull."

Yet Shakespeare's defenders, as opposed to his biographers, have a narrower obligation to historical truth. All we need to prove is that such a man from Stratford could have written the plays, not that he did so. And for such a task, even the dullest biographical facts, aided by the unblinded historical imagination, prove suggestive indeed.

**I**t is important for Shakespeare's defenders to emphasize the immense social distance traversed in only three generations of Shakespeares from Richard to John to William. Arguably John played the pivotal role, making the great leap from his farmer father's utter obscurity in the Warwickshire hamlet of Snitterfield to his own acquisition of a trade, possession of property, marriage to a well-born woman, and election to high civic office in Stratford-upon-Avon. These accomplishments, substantial but by no means unique in the annals of early modern English social history, made his sons eligible for grammar-school education and brought the Shakespeare family to the brink of gentry status. His son William's prudent acquisition of property in Stratford and London, presumably so central to his motive in becoming an actor in the first place, would finally give John Shakespeare the coat of arms he desired.

In assessing the importance of the Shakespeares' acquisition of prominence and status in Stratford, we would do well to remember that for men in early modern England (a period comprising roughly the years 1500–1700), personal identity was construed primarily in and through one's place in the social order and self constructed not from the inside out but from the outside in. That the upwardly mobile paths of the Shakespeares make them look like free-wheeling modern individualists should not be misunderstood. In the plays, those who proclaim themselves radical individuals, self-begotten and self-made (Iago, Edmund, Richard III) are the arch villains, who represent a modern and immoral sensibility that Shakespeare shows to be profoundly destabilizing. Rightly to see William Shakespeare in his social context is to render anachronistic any biographical understanding of him grounded in narratives of autonomous self-creation and romantic self-discovery. To put such narratives aside is the first step toward achieving an historical representation of Shakespeare's life that might conceivably match his own self-portrait.

William's professional choice itself is less than exceptional for several rea-



We all know how much *mythus* there is in the Shakspere question as it stands to-day. Beneath a few foundations of proved facts are certainly engulf'd far more dim and elusive ones, of deepest importance—tantalizing and half suspected—suggesting explanations that one dare not put in plain statement. But coming at once to the point, the English historical plays are to me not only the most eminent as dramatic performances [my maturest judgment confirming the impressions of my early years, that the distinctiveness and glory of the Poet reside not in his vaunted dramas of the passions, but those founded on the contests of English dynasties, and the French wars,] but form, as we get it all, the chief in a complexity of puzzles. Conceive'd out of the full-est heat and pulse of European feudalism—personifying in unparalleled ways the medieval aristocracy, its towering spirit of ruthless and gigantic caste, with its own peculiar air and arrogance [no mere imitation]—only one of the "wolfish earls" so plenteous in the plays themselves, or some born descendant and knower, might seem to be the true author of those amazing works—works in some respects greater than anything else in recorded literature.

—WALT WHITMAN,  
*"What Lurks Behind  
Shakspere's Historical Plays?"*  
[1889]



sons. One is the remarkably rich tradition of civic theatricals throughout late medieval England, a tradition that made the profession of public entertainer widely available to men of Shakespeare's class and gifts. Another is the rhetorical opportunities built into the Tudor grammar-school curriculum, which required boys in the several social ranks mingling there to learn Latin oratory as they

read their Ovid and Cicero, their Virgil and

Quintilian. To become an actor would not have seemed to Shakespeare the first step toward becoming the National Poet, not even the National Playwright.

But granting in the young man from Stratford a desire to perform and access to a traveling company of players, imagining the rest is not difficult. For a young man from the provinces, performing plays held out the pragmatic attractions of the entertainer's craft and perhaps even the allure of entrepreneurship. It could not have meant the elevation of art.

Shakespeare could reasonably have anticipated hiring on with an established acting company lucky enough to receive the token protection of an aristocratic patron. This is, in fact, what happened. What quickly evolved, thanks to the historical accident of great literary talent emerging in precisely the right conditions for it to flourish, was an arrangement unique in Elizabethan theater. Shakespeare the player turned playwright and shareholder, taking commissions from the company to which he belonged just as they commissioned new plays from many others.

**T**he swiftness of actor Shakespeare's ascent once in London is far more remarkable than the historical circumstances that brought him there during the late 1580s, the years when professional public theater became established. Here the testimony of others in and around the theater adds vivid personal detail to the documentary traces of the biographical record. By 1592 Shakespeare had already aroused the jealousy of university-educated playwright and pam-

phleteer Robert Greene. Greene warns against this "upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his tyger's heart wrapt in a player's hyde, supposes he is well able to bombast out a blank verse as well as the best of you: and . . . is in his own conceit the onely Shakespeare in a countrey." The allusion is unmistakably to Shakespeare, not only as a player costumed in the words (the "feathers") of writers such as Greene but as an author presuming to write—"bombast out"—blank verse himself. Shakespeare apparently taking offense, Greene's friend Henry Chettle tried to make amends: "I am as sorry, as if the original fault had been my fault, because myself have seen his demeanour no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes." The quality being professed was acting.

Tribute paid to the plays comes in 1598 from Francis Meres, a minor figure on the London literary scene fond of comparing living writers to the ancients. "The sweet, witty soul of Ovid lived in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare," writes Meres, mentioning the poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* as well as the Sonnets circulating privately in manuscript. Such evidence is sweet no less for biographers than it is for editors looking to date the plays: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errours*, his *Love Labour's Lost*, his *Love Labour's Won*, his *Midsummer's Night Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice*; for tragedy, his *Richard the Second*, *Richard the Third*, *Henry the Fourth*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*." That no one has successfully identified *Love's Labour's Won* does little to compromise the truthfulness of Meres's list. Nor should we accuse Meres here, as the Oxfordians must, of special pleading on Shakespeare's behalf, since Meres reserves much more notice in his *Palladis Tamia* for the poet Drayton and mentions many writers besides Shakespeare, including Edward de Vere. One might ask why Meres would do so if they were one and the same writer.

The testimony of Ben Jonson is more valuable still, not only because it comes from Shakespeare's great rival and temperamental opposite but because it occurs in personal notebooks not published until after Jonson's death. This is testimony irrelevant to any conspiratorial intent. Jonson criticizes Shakespeare for writing with too great facility: "I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out [a] line. My answer hath been, would he had

blotted a thousand." Jonson eulogizes his friend as "indeed honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions. . . . His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too." The point of citing such remarks is not that they have the self-evident ring of truth about Shakespeare's habits of authorship or that they offer a reliable picture of the man. They are invaluable because they represent the common currency of everyday literary opinion, right or wrong, and can be yoked only with violence to an absurd authorial conspiracy designed to protect the identity of the plays' "real" author.

It does not dim the accomplishment of the plays nor take away from our high regard for their author if we imagine that Shakespeare remained a provincial man of Stratford, true to his origins, whose main purpose in undertaking the business of writing plays was personal and familial advancement in Stratford-upon-

Avon. For Shakespeare, like most other playwrights in early modern England, immortality would not have been conceivable as a function either of print or of performance. Even the immortality imagined to be within the poet's gift was mentioned only in sonnets never meant for the printed page. The recognition of London's multitudes and the gratification of playing before monarchs on command—however important they must have been to Shakespeare—would not have helped to secure gentleman status on the terms and in the place where it mattered most to a man from Stratford. For us to comprehend the nature of Shakespeare's professional desire as centered in the most prosaic—hence the most meaningful—forms of social recognition is to comprehend something of the wide historical gap that separates our supreme valuation of Shakespeare's plays from his own more practical and happy self-regard.

## II. MYSTERY

### i.

#### THE LIE WITH CIRCUMSTANCE

By Daniel Wright

**I**n the early 1780s, the Reverend Dr. James Wilmot, a friend of Dr. Johnson's and the rector of a small parish church near Stratford-upon-Avon in the county of Warwickshire, went searching for the legacy of that literary prodigy, William Shakespeare—an artist whose poetry and drama were renowned but about whom very little was known. He searched for years in Shakespeare's environs for information of any kind that might illuminate this prominent man—arguably the most celebrated resident in the history of the Cotswolds. For four years, Dr. Wilmot searched diligently for letters to or from the man; he sought records and anecdotes about his personal life in diaries and family histories; he combed the region for books and other artifacts. To his consternation, he found absolutely nothing that linked Tradition's candidate to the writing of those incomparable works that had appeared in England two centuries earlier under the name of "William Shakespeare."

What Dr. Wilmot found, instead, was the record of a simple, untutored wool and grain

merchant, baptized Gulielmus Shakspere, who apparently began life as a butcher's apprentice and later excelled in various business ventures but who otherwise lived a fairly nondescript life. Dr. Wilmot discovered, in short, a rather ordinary man who had no connection to the literary world and who, at the conclusion of a relatively uneventful life, was buried without ceremony in a grave that failed even to identify its occupant by name. Dr. Wilmot's findings stunned him into dazed silence about the matter, and he confided nothing of his discovery for years. He eventually confessed to a friend that despite his arduous labors in Warwickshire, he had unearthed nothing in his expeditions to connect Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon to the works of the Elizabethan dramatic giant whom Ben Jonson had apostrophized as the "Soule of the Age."

Serious doubts about the authorship of the Shakespeare canon followed hard thereon—doubts that continue to bewilder and puzzle readers. The past two centuries of quixotic campaigns that so desperately have attempted to establish the man from Stratford as the author of the plays (or even to corroborate his reputation as a writer!) are now leading many scholars to conclude that these would-be discoverers of Shakespeare repeatedly fail—not due to their lack of zeal or skill but because they, like good Dr. Wilmot, are seeking a writer where no writer (or, more accurately, another writer) exists.

Such skeptics of orthodox claims about Shakespeare propose, therefore, that his poems and plays were not the throwaway work of an inexperienced and unpublished playwright who as his first foray into poetic and dramatic composition produced the Shakespeare canon. Instead, they argue, these works are the mature achievements of someone else—a worldly and urbane *littérateur*, a dexterous and experienced writer endowed with broad linguistic ability and an extraordinarily particularized knowledge of many arcane and specialized studies, an erudite, well-traveled man of prior achievement with something more than money as a motive for his art who could not tell the world his name.

**I**f Oxford were this versatile and formidable talent, why did he deny himself acclaim and reputation? What possible reasons could he have had to cloak himself in obscurity? These questions can be answered only by considering the conventions that governed writing and publication in Elizabethan England. The invention of the printing press challenged absolutist regimes such as those of the Tudors. The ability to anonymously publish pamphlets, books, plays, essays, tracts, and other texts limited the ability of authorities to silence individuals for disseminating allegedly seditious ideas or unflattering satires. This revolutionary technology threatened to place writers beyond the effective control of the state and led the English to establish civil and ecclesiastical licensing measures and censorial offices to regulate and control the press with the goal of stifling the flow of unapproved ideas. Unlicensed presses were frequently destroyed; pamphlets were seized; writers were imprisoned; theaters were closed.

For playwrights, the need to dissemble was especially urgent, particularly as the public theater—already much mistrusted and often suppressed by authorities for its alleged traffic in corrupt material—was exiled in Shakespeare's day to the darker districts of London (such as Southwark), where the theater's supposed viciousness could be restricted to people who commonly were regarded as derelicts and scoundrels. Playwrights and their families were likely to be impugned by such bad association if they were discovered; some had reputations to protect. Those who disdained anonymity, moreover, often faced frightful consequences for their daring. Many writers were hauled before the Privy Council for interrogation (as was Samuel Daniel for his *Philotas*); others were imprisoned (as were George Chapman and Ben Jonson for *Eastward Ho*); others were savagely

mutilated (as were John Stubbs, Alexander Leighton, and William Prynne); and some may even have been assassinated (as was, perhaps, Christopher Marlowe).

Many playwrights, therefore, published anonymously, shielding themselves and their families from persecution. In fact, as Princeton Professor Gerald E. Bentley attests, "the large majority of all English plays before the reign of Elizabeth are anonymous, and even from 1558 to 1590 the authors of most plays are unknown." The unattributable nature of these works bears directly on scholars' attempts to resolve the Shakespeare authorship controversy, for the playwriting career of Shakespeare also was maintained in total secrecy. Even when the plays of Shakespeare were published, they were published without attribution. In fact, for seven years after the Shakespeare plays began to be printed, they were published without any name at all affixed to them. Not until the end of the sixteenth century—well into the Shakespeare playwright's supposed career and bordering on his "retirement"—did any plays begin to appear in print under the name of "William Shakespeare." Even then, several of them (such as *The London Prodigal* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*) were clearly misidentified by their publishers. Not even the publishers of his works knew who he was!

Moreover, if the writer behind the Shakespeare pseudonym were Edward de Vere, he would have been constrained, as the 17th Earl of Oxford, by more than ordinary apprehensions about publishing his poems and plays. Convention discouraged many noblemen from identifying themselves with any works they composed. Some disdained publishing their work at all (a nobleman's proper weapons, and his reputation, were to be won by sword and shield, not achieved by pen and ink). Accordingly, the works of several court writers, such as Sir Philip Sidney and the Earl of Surrey, were published under their names only after they had died. If Oxford were Shakespeare, he would have been prompted to shield his name from discovery because court practice and precedent urged it.

A writer for the public stage could ill afford to be linked to the court. The plays might be misinterpreted (or correctly interpreted!) as satirical commentary on the life, mores, and personages of the court, and no courtier, after all, was more prominent than Oxford's own father-in-law, the great Lord Treasurer, spymaster, and chief counselor to the Queen, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, to whom Oxford was personally as well as politically beholden (Burghley had been Oxford's guardian before he became his father-in-law).

By adopting the pseudonym William Shakespeare, Oxford would have provided himself, his family, and the crown with the means of preventing the public from looking to the court in search of the Shakespeare playwright. That the "secret" was something of an open one in certain literary circles seems confirmed by Oxford's receipt of more dedications by his fellow Elizabethans than any other contemporary contributor to the art of letters, even though he published nothing under his own name after 1576. By contrast, no one ever dedicated a thing to anyone named William Shakespeare.

**B**ut why Shakespeare? Why would Edward de Vere adopt that name? There is little mystery here. Like Martin Mar-Prelate, the well-known sobriquet of an anti-episcopal dissident in Shakespeare's day, Shakespeare was a pseudonym that addressed the chief realm of the writer's attention: in Mar-Prelate's case, his focal point was the prelacy of the Anglican Church; in Shakespeare's case, it was the theater.

"William Shakespeare" is a name that might have been adopted by almost any writer who desired to conceal his title, office, or baptismal name yet wished to assert his identity as a playwright. After all, Pallas Athena, the mythological patron of the theatrical arts, wore a helmet (crowned by a Sphinx) that, when its visor was drawn, made her invisible; in her hand she carried a great spear. She was known to all and sundry as "the spear shaker." For a writer to be a "spear-shaker" intimated that he was an invisible writer of plays. That Oxford should have resorted to this pseudonym makes eminent sense. Moreover, the merchant from Stratford-upon-Avon never once spelled his own name "Shakespeare," and the hyphenated (broken) spelling of the poet-playwright's name on many of the play texts may also have been adopted to allude, with a wink and a nudge, to the author's person. The crest of the Earl of Oxford as Viscount Bulbeck, after all, was that of an English lion shaking a broken lance. The allusion takes on additional significance when we read Ben Jonson's knowing commemoration of Shakespeare in the First Folio: "He seems to shake a Lance/As brandish'd at the eyes of Ignorance."

Writers always have taken terrible risks by writing "offensive" works. Dante was exiled from his beloved Florence; Voltaire (the pseudonym of François Marie Arouet) was imprisoned in the Bastille and subsequently exiled; Emile Zola was driven from France following his publication of "J'accuse." Women, in par-

ticular, have required pseudonyms merely to get into print. Consider Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) and the Brontë sisters (who published under the names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell). Jane Austen wrote anonymously (her name was attached to her work only after her death).



**A**s long as the question is of talent and mental power, the world of men has not his equal to show. But when the question is to life, and its materials, and its auxiliaries, how does he profit me? What does it signify? It is but a Twelfth night, or a Midsummer's night's dream, or a Winter evening's tale: What signifies another picture more or less? The Egyptian verdict of the Shakspeare Societies comes to mind, that he was a jovial actor and manager. I cannot marry this fact to his verse: Other admirable men have led lives in some sort of keeping with their thought, but this man in wide contrast. Had he been less, had he reached only the common measure of great

authors, of Bacon, Milton, Tasso, Cervantes, we might leave the fact in the twilight of human fate; but that this man of men, he who gave to the science of mind a new and larger subject than had ever existed, and planted the standard of humanity some furlongs forward into Chaos,—that he should not be wise for himself,—it must even go into the world's history, that the best poet led an obscure and profane life, using his genius for the public amusement. \*

—RALPH WALDO  
EMERSON,  
*Representative Men* [1850]

Daniel Defoe used more than twenty pseudonyms; Salman Rushdie probably wishes he had used at least one.

English nobility who have employed pseudonyms since Elizabethan days include King George III, who published as Ralph Robinson, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who sometimes published as Merlin. Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, who wrote crime fiction in the 1940s, styled himself as George Milner. Edward de Vere might have been comforted to know that the tradition of adopting a disguise when venturing into publication continues even today among England's peers. That the chief courtier-poet-playwright of Elizabethan England, son-in-law of the Lord Treasurer, and cousin to the Queen should have chosen the devices of anonymity and pseudonymity to assure himself freedom of expression is hardly surprising. That he—rather than an unlettered wool and grain merchant from Warwickshire—should be Shakespeare is even less so.

## As THEY LIKE IT

By Marjorie Garber

**T**he success of a film called *Shakespeare in Love* may owe a great deal to its witty script by playwright Tom Stoppard and screenwriter Marc Norman, as well as to its personable stars, but not a little of the film's appeal lies in its title. Who among us would not want a front-row seat or a voyeuristic peephole for the spectacle of Shakespeare in love, especially if that love is seen to be the "cause" of his genius? In Stoppard's film the aspiring young Will is presented as a playwright who hasn't yet hit his stride. He lacks the right muse. When the fictional Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow) auditions for a part in one of his plays—necessarily cross-dressed, since women were not permitted on the public stage in England—the result is *Romeo and Juliet*. Although love's labor is ultimately lost—Viola dutifully marries a nobleman who covets her family money, and is shipped off to the colony of Virginia—Will is left with a rejuvenated quill, the money to buy a share in a company of actors, and a royal fan in the person of Queen Elizabeth. *Shakespeare in Love*, in fact, presents the wishful audience with not one but two primal scenes: the scene of Will in bed with his muse, and the scene of his liberation from hired-player status. Each in its own sphere, the one aesthetic, the other economic, seems to mark the inception of a singular career. Both, it should be made clear, are entirely fictional.

No evidence connects Shakespeare with Lord Strange's Men, the company that played at the Rose. The correspondence of chief player Edward Alleyn never mentions Shakespeare, nor does Shakespeare appear in any cast list for Strange's Men. There has been much speculation about the playwright's early career—might he perhaps have freelanced as a dramatist, or acted with another company in these years?—but the first record we possess that firmly connects William Shakespeare with an acting company lists him in 1595 as a leading member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later taken under royal patronage as the King's Men), the company with which he was to be associated until he retired from the stage. In other words, the Shakespeare rescue-fantasy and the Shakespeare "star is born" scenario offered by Stoppard's film answer to a modern audience's desire to know the origin of literary culture's greatest hero.

As for the lovely Viola, she, too, is a figment

of our wishful imagination. What could turn an ordinary playwright into the genius of the age? Nothing but love, and not even ordinary love, but love, needless to say, à la Romeo and Juliet. Hints of Shakespeare's famous bisexuality are very lightly traced (the playwright's impulsive kissing of the scant-bearded "Thomas Kent" is followed, only a beat later, by the discovery that "he" is a lady), and what is shown us is a classic Petrarchan structure, the unattainable woman replaced, and displaced, by an overactive pen.

The logic of a fully Shakespearized world is already at work, else we would not find the supposed original title, *Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate's Daughter*, any sillier than our familiar *Romeo and Juliet* or, indeed, than the title of Shakespeare's principal source, Arthur Brooke's *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*. *Romeus, Romeus, wherefore art thou Romeus?*

Stoppard's play does not purport to be history, but its particular choices are highly symptomatic. For what we want—and what people have wanted over the years from Shakespeare's death to the present time—is the answer to the conundrum of "authorship" itself. Not just "Who wrote the plays?" but "How does great writing happen? Where does it come from? And why?" In a secular world, Shakespeare is our bible, a quotable and excerptable compendium of citations for every purpose. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," intone American lawmakers, reading the tedious sententiae of Polonius, a puffed-up public man, into the Congressional Record. "Who steals my purse steals trash. . . . But he that filches from me my good name/Robs me of that which not enriches him,/And makes me poor indeed." The glozing words of Iago, baiting the trap for the gullible Othello, become disembodied "wisdom" and are quoted, without their attendant irony, not as the trickery of Iago but as the sagacity of "Shakespeare." This is the *Shakespeare of Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, the passages cited there without speech prefixes and thus contributing to the "Shakespeare effect," the idea that there is Someone—call him "Shakespeare"—who knows the timeless truth of the human heart and mind.

What biography could stand up to this test of greatness?

Shakespeare is an effect. To go against the effect is to set up an argument against a myth. In a sense, whatever the outcome of historical investigations, "Shakespeare" is whoever wrote the plays. As a result, the famous "Shakespeare authorship controversy" is "overdetermined"—that is to say, it is both the result of several different causes and related to a multiplicity of underlying elements, each of which is coherent and meaningful even though they may seem to be at odds with one another. Thus, for example, it is contended by some anti-Stratfordians that

William Shakespeare was of the wrong socio-economic class to have been the author of the plays. Since the plays exhibit such a thorough knowledge of the court, the author must have been an aristocrat (Oxford); since the plays display such learning about the law, the author must have been a lawyer (Bacon). On the other hand, there are those who are deeply convinced, following the Miltonic and Romantic ideology of the poet "warbling his native woodnotes wild," that this greatest of all playwrights must have been a child of nature, unsullied by excessive book-learning, unconstrained by courtly manners. Both groups are left unsatisfied by an account of the curriculum of the Stratford grammar school, which suggests that Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek" in fact involved a detailed study of classical literature, mythology, rhetoric, and moral philosophy. Likewise, the information that Shakespeare's father was not just a glover but also the highest elected official in Stratford, who presided at the Court of Record and at council meetings and served the borough as justice of the peace, will satisfy neither those who want the playwright to be very lowborn or those who insist that he is a closet nobleman.

**A** number of investments motivate the controversy on both sides. Let me quickly summarize them:

*Institutional investments.* The Shakespeare Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon; the reconstructed Globe Theatre on the Bankside in London; the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.; numerous "Stratfords" from Ontario to Connecticut, with their annual Shakespeare-festival seasons; the collected works of Shakespeare as merchandised by publishers from Norton to Riverside to Bantam and Arden—these are institutions that depend upon the Shakespeare logo, and the man from Stratford, for their existence. But Oxfordians—and again, before them, Baconians—have likewise banded together. The Bacon Society was founded in England in 1885, and its American counterpart was organized in 1922; the Shakespeare Authorship Society (originally the Shakespeare Fellowship) has been promoting the claims of Oxford since 1922, and an American version was started up in 1939. All these groups have newsletters, T-shirts, and itinerant spokesmen. An Oxford descendant currently makes numerous personal appearances on the campus lecture circuit.

*Psychological investments.* Noting that Sigmund Freud himself became a proponent of the Oxford candidacy, Shakespeare biographer S. Schoenbaum suggested that Freud was motivated by his own theory of the family romance,

replacing a known (human) father figure with an unknown, greater one, in this case an aristocrat. There are also those who want there to be no Shakespeare, no idealized poet-father. The group-authorship theory is one response to this impulse, fragmenting Shakespeare into many hands and voices.

*Territorial investments.* It is striking that Americans have been by far the most zealous group of combatants on both sides of the authorship question. Turn-of-the-century critic Georg Brandes, noting this trend, fulminated that literary criticism had fallen into the hands of "raw Americans and fanatical women." From John Greenleaf Whittier to Mark Twain and Henry James, American writers have professed their doubts about the Stratford man. "Is Shakespeare Dead?" asked Twain in an essay that faulted Stratfordians for conjuring their man's life story out of little or no evidence. Why should the authorship controversy be an "American" preoccupation? For one thing, it reverses any lingering sense of colonial inferiority by rendering the true identity of Shakespeare an American discovery, despite the fact that he may have been born an Englishman. At the same time, it speaks to Americans' fascination with and ambivalence about aristocracy, something simultaneously admired and despised. Henry James's story "The Birthplace," without ever using the words "Shakespeare" or "Stratford," superbly evokes the dilemma of the tour guide who shows visitors around "The Holy of Holies of the Birthplace," the "Chamber of Birth," where "He" (the unnamed author of the capitalized "Works") is said to have been born. Should he allow his doubts to show? "What we can say is that things have been said; that's all we have to do with. 'And is this really'—when they jam their umbrellas into the floor—the very spot where He was born? 'So it has, from a long time back, been described as being.'" Ultimately the guide goes in the other direction, becoming a tourist attraction himself as he convincingly retells the story. The idea that "[p]ractically . . . there is no author" paradoxically frees him to become one himself—and at a handsome profit.

In fact, although the authorship question seems to be desperate for an answer, the absence of an answer is often more satisfying. "Others abide our question. Thou art free," wrote Matthew Arnold in his sonnet on Shakespeare. "We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still,/Out-topping knowledge." It begins to become clear that Shakespeare is the towering figure he is for us not despite but rather because of the authorship controversy. Were he more completely known, he would not be the Shakespeare we know.

It is therefore far from surprising that two of the stage roles we think that Shakespeare the

actor may have taken in his own plays—that of Old Adam in *As You Like It* and, most famously, the Ghost in *Hamlet*—are both spectral father-figures, who advise their “sons” and protégés, then disappear from the stage. They become, as I have argued in a book of that title, Shakespeare’s ghostwriters. In fact, the uncanny appearances of ghosts in the plays, often juxtaposed, as in *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Richard II*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, with scenes of writing and reading, and with the dead hand of the father, stage the authorship controversy within the plays as a textual effect.

The plays are full of ghostwriting: questions raised about who wrote a document and in what hand, suspicions voiced that a document may be a forgery or a “double” or a copy or a substitution (think of Hamlet’s “dozen or sixteen lines” added to the “Mouse-trap” play, or the death sentence on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he forges, in his father’s hand and with his father’s seal, to replace Claudius’s “commission” for his own death), encounters with spectral doubles, other selves, whether they are witches, gravediggers, apothecaries, or magicians. Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* is gulled by a forged letter. So is Gloucester in *King Lear*. Even the

vexed question of the signature—could Shakespeare write? could his parents? could his daughters?—and the paucity of handwritten evidence (only six signatures of Shakespeare survive, all of them on legal documents, none of them affixed to the plays) seem uncannily thematized within the plays.

The authorship controversy, in short, is itself a cultural symptom. For what we desire is the answer to the genesis of “genius.” But there are those—most of them, significantly, poets and writers themselves—who cherish the question rather than the answer, who prefer not to know: “Is it not strange,” writes Emerson, “that the transcendent men, Homer, Plato, Shakespeare, confessedly unrivaled, should have questions of identity and genuineness raised respecting their writings?” Yet it is that kind of question that certifies their transcendence. They are not mortals but myths. “Shakespeare led a life of Allegory; his works are the comments on it,” claimed Keats. And Charles Dickens, a novelist often characterized by that all-purpose adjective of praise, “Shakespearean,” remarked with satisfaction, “The life of Shakespeare is a fine mystery and I tremble every day lest something should turn up.”

### III. DRAMA

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THY COUNTENANCE  
SHAKESPEARS

By Mark K. Anderson

**E**or a host of persuasive but commonly disregarded reasons, the Earl of Oxford has quietly become by far the most compelling man to be found behind the mask of “Shake-speare.” As Orson Welles put it in 1954, “I think Oxford wrote Shakespeare. If you don’t agree, there are some awful funny coincidences to explain away.” Some of these coincidences are obscure, others are hard to overlook. A 1578 Latin encomium to Oxford, for example, contains some highly suggestive praise: “Pallas lies concealed in thy right hand,” it says. “Thine eyes flash fire; Thy countenance shakes spears.” Elizabethans knew that Pallas Athena was known by the sobriquet “the spear-shaker.” The hyphen in Shake-speare’s name also was a tip-off:

other Elizabethan pseudonyms include “Cutbert Curry-knave,” “Simon Smell-knave,” and “Adam Fouleweather (student in asse-tromony).” \*

The case for Oxford’s authorship hardly rests on hidden clues and allusions, however. One of the most important new pieces of Oxfordian evidence centers around a 1570 English Bible, in the “Geneva translation,” once owned and annotated by the Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere. In an eight-year study of the de Vere Bible, a University of Massachusetts doctoral student named Roger Stritmatter has found that the 430-year-old book is essentially, as he puts it, “Shake-speare’s Bible with the Earl of Oxford’s coat of arms on the cover.” Stritmatter discovered that more than a quarter of the 1,066 annotations and marked passages in the de Vere Bible appear in Shake-speare. The parallels range from the thematic—sharing a motif, idea, or trope—to the verbal—using

\* Another intriguing reference comes from the satirist Thomas Nashe, who included a dedication to a “Gentle Master William” in his 1593 book *Strange News*, describing him as the “most copious” poet in England. He alludes to “the blue boar,” Oxford’s heraldic emblem, and roasts “William” with the Latin phrase *Apis lapis*, which translates as “sacred ox.”

names, phrases, or wordings that suggest a specific biblical passage.

In his research, Stritmatter pioneered a stylistic-fingerprinting technique that involves isolating an author's most prominent biblical allusions—those that appear four or more times in the author's canon. After compiling a list of such "diagnostic verses" for the writings of Shakespeare and three of his most celebrated literary contemporaries—Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and Edmund Spenser—Stritmatter undertook a comparative study to discern how meaningful the de Vere Bible evidence was. He found that each author's favorite biblical allusions composed a unique and idiosyncratic set and could thus be marshaled to distinguish one author from another. Stritmatter then compared each set of "diagnostics" to the marked passages in the de Vere Bible. The results were, from any perspective but the most dogmatically orthodox, a stunning confirmation of the Oxfordian theory.

Stritmatter found that very few of the marked verses in the de Vere Bible appeared in Spenser's, Marlowe's, or Bacon's diagnostic verses. On the other hand, the Shakespeare canon brims with de Vere Bible verses. Twenty-nine of Shakespeare's top sixty-six biblical allusions are marked in the de Vere Bible. Furthermore, three of Shakespeare's diagnostic verses show up in Oxford's extant letters. All in all, the correlation between Shakespeare's favorite biblical verses and Edward de Vere's Bible is very high: .439 compared with .054, .068, and .020 for Spenser, Marlowe, and Bacon. Was "Shakespeare" the pen name for Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, or must we formulate ever more elaborate hypotheses that preserve the old byline but ignore the appeal of common sense and new evidence?

**O**ne favorite rejoinder to the Oxfordian argument is that the author's identity doesn't really matter; only the works do. "The play's the thing" has become the shibboleth of indifference-claiming doubters. These four words, however, typify Shakespeare's attitude toward the theater about as well as the first six words of *A Tale of Two Cities* express Charles Dickens's opinion of the French Revolution: "It was the best of times." In both cases, the fragment suggests an authorial perspective very different from the original context.

"The play's the thing," Hamlet says, referring to his masque "The Mouse-trap," "wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." Hardly a précis for advocating the death of the author, Hamlet's observation reports that drama's function comes closer to espionage than to mere entertainment. Hamlet's full quote is, in fact, a fair

summary of the Oxfordian reading of the entire canon. If pressed, Shakespeare, like Hamlet, would probably deny a play's topical relevance. But, as an ambitious courtier, he would have valued his dramaturgical ability to comment on, lampoon, vilify, and praise people and events at Queen Elizabeth's court. It is hard to deny that Hamlet is the closest Shakespeare comes to a picture of the dramatist at work.

Nowadays, assertions that one can recover the author's perspective from his own dramatic self-portraits are often ridiculed as naive or simplistic. Yet the con-



I am "a sort of" haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practised on a patient world. The more I turn him round and round the more he so affects me. But that is all—I am not pretending to treat the question or to carry it any further. It bristles with difficulties, and I can

only express my general sense by saying that I find it almost as impossible to conceive that Bacon wrote the plays as to conceive that the man from Stratford, as we know the man from Stratford, did.

—HENRY JAMES,  
*letter to Violet Hunt*  
[August 26, 1905]

verse—that Shakespeare somehow evaded the realities and particulars of his own life in creating his most enduring, profound, and nuanced characters—is absurd on its face. Of course, the infinite recesses of the imagination make an appealing refuge to the savvy debater. Shakespeare was a creative genius (a claim no one would dare dispute); ergo, he could and did make it all up. Following the same reasoning, though, Hamlet's own masque holds no political purpose either. Rather than seeing it as a ploy to "catch the conscience of the king," a strictly Stratfordian reading of "The Mouse-trap" would be compelled to see it as little more than a fanciful Italian fable divorced of its obvious allegory to the foul deeds committed at the court of Elsinore. The fact that, just like Hamlet, "The Mouse-trap" stages a king's poisoning and a queen's hasty remarriage becomes just another "awful funny" coincidence.

**I**n the history of the Shakespeare authorship controversy, every claimant to the laurels has queued up offering the promise of mouth-watering connections to the

canon. Justifiably, skeptics have countered that if you squint your eyes hard enough, any scrap or biographical datum can be made to resemble something from Shakespeare. With Oxford, however, everything seems to have found its way into Shakespeare. Gone are the days when heretics would storm the ramparts whenever some thread was discovered between the character Rosencrantz and Francis Bacon's grandpa. Today it's more alarming when a Shakespeare play or poem does not overflow with Oxfordian connotations and connections. The problem for any Oxfordian is the perhaps enviable task of selecting which handful of gems should be brought out from the treasure chest. In what follows, then, I will touch on five Shakespearean characters—Hamlet, Helena, Falstaff, King Lear, and Prospero—and will briefly point out a few parallels with Oxford.

**Hamlet.** More than a mere authorial specter, the Prince enacts entire portions of Oxford's life story. Oxford's two military cousins, Horace and Francis Vere, appear as Hamlet's comrade-at-arms Horatio and the soldier Francisco. Oxford satirizes his guardian and father-in-law, the officious, bumbling royal adviser Lord Burghley (nicknamed "Polus"), as the officious, bumbling royal adviser Polonius. The parallels between Burghley and Polonius are so vast and detailed that even the staunch Stratfordian A. L. Rowse admitted that "there is nothing original" anymore in asserting this widely recognized connection. Furthermore, like Polonius, Burghley had a daughter. At age twenty-one, Oxford was married to Anne Cecil, and their nuptial affairs were anything but blissful. The tragically unstable triangle of Hamlet-Ophelia-Polonius found its living parallel in Oxford-Anne-"Polus." In short, from the profound (Oxford's mother quickly remarried upon the untimely death of her husband) to the picayune (Oxford was abducted by pirates on a sea voyage), Hamlet's "Mouse-trap" captures the identity of its author.

**Helena.** Just as details of Oxford's life story appear throughout each of the Shakespeare plays and poems, Anne Cecil's tragic tale is reflected in many Shakespearean heroines, including Ophelia, Desdemona, Isabella, Hero, Hermione, and Helena. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Helena seeks out and eventually wins the hand of the fatherless Bertram, who is being raised as a ward of the court—precisely the situation Oxford found himself in when Anne was thrust upon him by his guardian and soon-to-be father-in-law. Like Helena, Anne was rejected by her headstrong new husband, who fled to Italy rather than remain at home with her. Both Oxford and Bertram refused to consummate their vows—and both eventually impregnated

their wives by virtue of a "bed trick" (the strange and almost unbelievable stratagem wherein the husband thinks he is sleeping with another woman but is in fact sleeping with his own wife).

**Falstaff.** The comic conscience of the *Henry IV* plays, Falstaff can be read as an authorial self-parody embodying two of Oxford's more notorious qualities: a razor wit and a wastrel's worldview. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff also provokes Master Ford's jealousy, lampooning the author's own hypocrisy in flying into a jealous rage at his wife when he suspected her of infidelity. And the romantic subplot involving the daughter of the other "merry wife"—Anne Page—so specifically skewers the marriage negotiations between Oxford, Anne Cecil, and her onetime prospective husband, Sir Philip Sidney, that the dowries and pensions mentioned in the play match precisely those of the play's historical counterparts. In the same play, Falstaff brags to Master Ford that he "fear[s] not Goliath with a weaver's beam." This odd expression is in fact shorthand for the biblical Goliath's spear as it is detailed in II Samuel 21:19: "Goliath the Gittite: the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam." Not only did Oxford mark the verse in his Bible; he even underlined the words "weaver's beam."

**King Lear.** In a play whose dramatic engine is the family dynamics of two tragically flawed patriarchs (Lear and the Earl of Gloucester), Shakespeare stages the exact familial relationships that Oxford faced in his twilight years. His first marriage to Anne Cecil left him a widower, like Lear, with three daughters, of whom the elder two were married. His second marriage produced only one son, whose patrilineal claims could conceivably be challenged by Oxford's bastard son—a mirror of the gullible Earl of Gloucester's situation. As if highlighting one of the thematic underpinnings of *King Lear*, in his Bible, Oxford marked Hosea 9:7 ("The prophet is a fool; the spiritual man is mad"), which Lear's daughter Goneril inverts in her venomous remark that "Jesters do oft prove prophets."

**Prospero.** *The Tempest's* exiled nobleman, castaway hermit, and scholarly shaman provides the author's grand farewell to a world that he recognizes will bury his name, even when his book is exalted to the ends of the earth. Oxfordians, in general, agree with scholarly tradition that *The Tempest* was probably Shakespeare's final play—and many concur with the German Stratfordian critic Karl Elze that "all external arguments and indications are in favor of [the play being written in] the year 1604." Before he takes his final bow, Prospero makes one last plea to his eternal audience. Drawing from a contiguous set of Oxford's marked verses at Ecclesiasticus 28:1–5 concerning the need for reciprocal mercy as the pre-

condition of human freedom, Prospero delivers his farewell speech with the hopes that someone will take him at his word:

[R]elease me from my bands  
With the help of your good hands!  
Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill or else my project fails,  
Which was to please. Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Mercy itself and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.

Like Hamlet, *The Tempest*'s aristocrat cum magus begs those around him to hear his story and, in so doing, to free him from his temporary chains. The rest, as the academic ghost-chase for the cipher from Stratford has ably demonstrated, is silence.

**A**t the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero uses the metaphors of shipwrecks and stormy weather to deliver his closing salvo against the desolate island he called home. During the final year of his life, the Earl of Oxford clearly had such imagery on his mind, as can be seen in his eloquent April 1603 letter to his former brother-in-law, Robert Cecil, on the death of Queen Elizabeth: "In this common shipwreck, mine is above all the rest, who least regarded, though often comforted, of all her followers, she hath left to try my fortune among the alterations of time and chance, either without sail whereby to take the advantage of any prosperous gale, or with anchor to ride till the storm be overpast." The alterations of time and chance have been cruel to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. But the last five years of discoveries and developments have made two things increasingly clear: the tempest has broken, and Prospero's indulgence is finally upon us.

## ii. THE REPROOF VALIANT

By Irvin Matus

**G**he "Shakespeare Discussion Area" is a Web page where visitors may exchange comments and opinions on the dramatist and his works, but the greatest

number of postings by far are from students seeking help with an assignment. One such plea was for information "on what awards Shakespeare won—either during his life or after his death." From "Harry" came the succinct, definitive answer: "You need a new project." Go ahead and laugh, but you, dear reader, may have a similar question you were afraid to ask. How many times has an educated, thoughtful person prefaced a query to me with, "This may be a silly question . . ." And how many times has that question sent me to the books to discover a fresh topic of fascinating and fruitful research.

In a way, no question about Shakespeare is silly. It may reflect a general lack of knowledge about how these miraculous creations came into being, but it will almost certainly reveal a problem that has been present in the study of both the man and his works for more than 300 years: the common tendency to view the people and products of another age through the glass of one's own. In the case of Shakespeare and the theater of his time, this is particularly pronounced, for in the years between the outlawing of the theater by the Roundheads in 1642 and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the records of most of the theater companies disappeared. Nearly all that survive are records of performances and the business of the theater. This was all for the best when the apotheosis of the Sweet Swan of Avon took wing in the last third of the eighteenth century. There was nothing to impede his scholars from indulging in their flights of fancy—not until Delia Bacon came along in 1857, that is. The playhouse Shakespeare, she declared, was but "a stupid, ignorant, third-rate player" in a "dirty, doggish group of players," with nothing in his background that qualified him to be the author of works whose depth and breadth of knowledge had been discerned by his scholars over the preceding ninety years.

Drawn from the ranks of the literary world, these scholars ripened the early-eighteenth-century notion that the plays were only incidentally works for the stage; first and foremost they were works of literature to be read and studied. It is "an indisputable certainty," declared Algernon Swinburne, "that Shakespeare never wrote merely for the stage, but always with an eye on the future and studious reader, who would be competent and careful to appreciate what his audience and his fellow actors could not." This may be recognized as a recipe for Shakespeare studies, and, indeed, ever since his plays were admitted to academia they have been increasingly overwhelmed by footnotes, critical studies, and, nowadays, an array of fashionable methodologies.

This primacy of the page over the stage is agreeable to the Oxfordians. In the words of the late Charlton Ogburn, the Earl of Oxford's force-



**S**hakespeare pronounced "Venus and Adonis" "the first heir of his invention," apparently implying that it was his first effort at literary composition. He should not have said it. It has been an embarrassment to his historians these many, many years. They have to make him write that graceful and polished and flawless and beautiful poem before he escaped from Stratford and his family—1586 or '87—age, twenty-two, or along there; because within the next five years he wrote five great plays, and could not have found time to write another line.

It is sorely embarrassing. If he began to slaughter calves, and poach deer, and rollick around, and learn English, at the earliest likely moment—say at thirteen, when he was supposedly wrenched from that school where he was supposedly storing up Latin for future literary use—he had his youthful hands full, and much more than full. He must have had to put aside his Warwickshire dialect, which wouldn't be understood in London, and study English very hard. Very hard indeed; incredibly hard, almost, if the result of that labor was to be the smooth and rounded and flexible and letter-perfect English of the "Venus and Adonis" in the space of ten years; and at the same time learn great and fine and unsurpassable literary form.

However, it is "conjectured" that he accomplished all this and more, much more: learned law and its intricacies; and the complex procedure of the law-courts; and all about soldiering, and sailing, and the manners and customs and ways of royal courts and aristocratic society; and likewise accumulated in his one head every kind of knowledge the learned then possessed, and every kind of humble knowledge possessed by the lowly and the ignorant; and added thereto a wider and more intimate knowledge of the world's great literatures, ancient and modern, than was possessed by any other man of his time—for he was going to make brilliant and easy and admiration-compelling use of these splendid treasures the moment he got to London. And according to the surmisers, that is what he did. Yes, although there was no one in Stratford able to teach him these things, and no library in the little village to dig them out of. His father could not read, and even the surmisers surmise that he did not keep a library.

It is surmised by the biographers that the young Shakespeare got his vast knowledge of the law and his familiar and accurate acquaintance with the manners and customs and shop-talk of lawyers through being for a time the *clerk of a Stratford court*, just as a bright lad like me, reared in a village on the banks of the Mississippi, might become perfect in knowledge of the Bering Strait whale-fishery and the shop-talk of the veteran exercises of that adventure-bristling trade through catching catfish with a "trot-line" Sundays. But the surmise is damaged by the fact that there is no evidence—and not even tradition—that the young Shakespeare was ever clerk of a law-court.

It is further surmised that the young Shakespeare accu-

mulated his law-treasures in the first years of his sojourn in London, through "amusing himself" by learning book-law in his garret and by picking up lawyer-talk and the rest of it through loitering about the law-courts and listening. But it is only surmise; there is no evidence that he ever did either of those things. They are merely a couple of chunks of plaster of Paris.

There is a legend that he got his bread and butter by holding horses in front of the London theaters, mornings and afternoons. Maybe he did. If he did, it seriously shortened his law-study hours and his recreation-time in the courts. In those very days he was writing great plays, and needed all the time he could get. The horse-holding legend ought to be strangled; it too formidably increases the historian's difficulty in accounting for the young Shakespeare's erudition—an erudition which he was acquiring, hunk by hunk and chunk by chunk, every day in those strenuous times, and emptying each day's catch into next day's imperishable drama.

He had to acquire a knowledge of war at the same time; and a knowledge of soldier-people and sailor-people and their ways and talk; also a knowledge of some foreign lands and their languages: for he was daily emptying fluent streams of these various knowledges, too, into his dramas. How did he acquire these rich assets?

In the usual way: by surmise. It is *surmised* that he traveled in Italy and Germany and around, and qualified himself to put their scenic and social aspects upon paper; that he perfected himself in French, Italian, and Spanish on the road; that he went in Leicester's expedition to the Low Countries, as soldier or sutler or something, for several months or years—or

whatever length of time a surmiser needs in his business—and thus became familiar with soldiership and soldier-ways and soldier-talk and generalship and general-ways and general-talk, and seamanship and sailor-ways and sailor-talk.

Maybe he did all these things, but I would like to know who held the horses in the mean time; and who studied the books in the garret; and who frolicked in the law-courts for recreation. Also, who did the call-boying and the play-acting.

For he became a call-boy, and as early as '93 he became a "vagabond"—the law's ungentle term for an unlisted actor, and in '94 a "regular" and properly and officially listed member of that [in those days] lightly valued and not much respected profession.

Right soon thereafter he became a stockholder in two theaters, and manager of them. Thenceforward he was a busy and flourishing business man, and was raking in money with both hands for twenty years. Then in a noble frenzy of poetic inspiration he wrote his one poem—his only poem, his darling—and laid him down and died: "Good friend for Jesus sake forbear / To digg the dust enclosed heare: / Blest be ye man yt spares thys stones / And curst be he yt moves my bones." He was probably dead when he wrote it. Still, this is only conjecture. We have only circumstantial evidence. Internal evidence.

Shall I set down the rest of the Conjectures which constitute the giant Biography of William Shakespeare? It would strain the Unabridged Dictionary to hold them. He is a brontosaurus: nine bones and six hundred barrels of plaster of Paris.

—MARK TWAIN,  
"Is Shakespeare Dead?"  
[1909]

ful champion, "Though he gave us marvelous theater, I think we must recognize that he was above all a novelist, and a novelist above all other novelists." Shakespeareans and Oxfordians converge as well in the assumption that the author's age held him in no less estimation than does our own, and this agreement is the well-spring of the authorship debate; for if Shakespeare was, in the words of Ben Jonson, "not of an age, but for all time," surely his contemporaries broadcast his greatness as we do. But they didn't. Why not? This is the "mystery" at the heart of the mysteries the Oxfordians discern in the record of Shakespeare.

**T**here was indeed a time when Shakespeare's position in the theater was unrivaled—because he was quite literally without a rival. In Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia*, we find the names of many playwrights, but Meres places Shakespeare far above all others. Meres names twelve plays as examples of Shakespeare's excellence in both comedy and tragedy, five of which had already been published in individual quarto editions. Therein lurks another Oxfordian mystery, which is that the author's name was not in the first editions of any of these, nor of two other early plays not noted by Meres.

The Oxfordians have a solution: the author's noble name could not be affixed to lowly drama, and so the decision was made to use a pseudonym, supposedly coined years earlier: "William Shakespeare." That it was similar to the name of an ignorant player, William "Shakspere," perhaps made the choice more amusing to the knowing. But if the need to hide the identity of a noble author of this disdained literature is indeed the reason why these works were published without attribution, playwriting must have been quite the fashion among aristocrats, for in only seven of the forty-two popular plays printed between 1590 and 1597 was the author identified.

Nor were any of Shakespeare's plays brought to press with evident approval from their creator, and the texts of some truly earned their description in the First Folio as "maimed and deformed." This the Oxfordians regard as further proof that the author was a nobleman; a common man, they argue, certainly would have, and could have, complained. The generic anti-Stratfordian Sir George Greenwood acknowledged that although there was no copyright law at the time, authors had recourse to English common law as "a remedy for the violation of so elementary a right." This is as far as the Oxfordian argument usually gets, and so Greenwood's conclusion that there is no record of this common-law right being successfully appealed is not heard, anymore than is his conces-

sion that authors may have found "it was better to 'take it lying down'" than to try and obtain justice against a publisher protected by the "powerful Stationers' Company."

What makes the attempts to deny these facts remarkable is that Oxfordians are aware that Shakespeare's acting company—the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later the King's Men—tried at various times between 1598 and 1640 to block the unauthorized publication of their plays, only to be flouted on each occasion by members of the Stationers' Company. In initiating these efforts to prevent the publication of plays, the Chamberlain's/King's Men were not acting on behalf of Shakespeare or any of the dramatists who wrote for them. Rather, as the plays were the property of the company and its shareholders, the company was seeking to protect its own interests. This was true of every syndicate or acting company of the day, and the evidence to this effect, in contracts and in the words of playwrights themselves, is overwhelming.

The Oxfordians are unsatisfied nevertheless and point to Ben Jonson's control over his plays. How he pulled this off is not known, but the probable explanation is that he was a dramatist in great demand, and acting companies therefore were willing to surrender to Jonson the rights to his plays. Unlike Jonson, who freelanced his plays, Shakespeare was attached to a single acting company in which he was a shareholder, and the Chamberlain's/King's Men were unrivaled in the protection of their plays. In the forty-eight-year history of the company, only three plays by one of its resident dramatists were published with the participation of their author and with the evident permission of the company.

**T**he most difficult problem for Oxfordians is the dating of the plays, fully one third of which are given as 1605 or later in the Shakespearean chronology, whereas the Earl of Oxford died in June 1604. The Oxfordian response is the assertion that the scholars have fashioned their chronology to suit the lifetime of the man they assume to be the author and that there is no documentary evidence that proves any were written after 1604. But, of course, it is necessary for the Oxfordians to fashion their chronology to suit the lifetime of the man they would make the author, and there is no evidence whatsoever that any of the thirteen plays in question were written before 1605.

Of the twenty-six plays dated 1604 or earlier, fifteen were published and two more were entered for publication with the Stationers' Company; eight more are mentioned in print or in documents, leaving only *The Taming of the Shrew*

without certain contemporary mention before 1605. Which leaves us to wonder why, if the plays ascribed to years after 1604 had indeed been written before then, a stationer would print *Titus Andronicus* but not *Macbeth*, why Meres would mention *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* but not *King Lear* or *The Tempest*.

This last play is one of several for which there is solid evidence of late composition, to which some current Oxfordians give tacit assent. The tempest that gave its name to the play has definite parallels to two tracts and a letter, all three written in 1610, that contain accounts of a shipwreck near Bermuda of the Virginia Company flagship *Sea-Venture*. There are many such references, and they are so scattered throughout the play that the Oxfordian suggestion that they were later additions made by another is implausible. Nor can there be any doubt that *Henry VIII* was composed well after 1604. It was during a performance of this play on June 29, 1613,

that the Globe playhouse burned to the ground, which is attested to by two letters written within days of the event that describe Henry VIII as a "new play," one of which states that it "had been acted not passing 2 or 3 times before." What is more, this play is the second of three that Shakespeare wrote in collaboration with John Fletcher, whose career as a dramatist began two years after Oxford's death. The Oxfordians also ignore the fact that the Shakespearean chronology is based not only on the dates of publication or on mention of plays in books or documents but on Shakespeare's development as an artist. Where among the pre-1605 plays the Oxfordians would put these later plays, in which are found the highest achievement of the playwright's art, is a problem they have yet to approach. Put plainly, they have no chronology.

Another issue in which Oxford's premature death plays a part is the playwright's sources. All of the primary ones for the later plays, they note, were in print before 1605; "Did he stop reading?" they ask. This is an interesting question, but it is the wrong one. A better question is, "What precisely did he read?" And what we find is North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* and Holinshed's *Chronicles* accounting for five of the plays, an old play first published in 1605 as the source for *King Lear*, and popular works for the rest. In other words, very much the same sources, exactly or of a kind, that he used for the plays written before 1605, which raises a question about the Oxfordians' Shakespeare. Whereas he is proclaimed to be a person of great erudition, well-schooled and fluent in the ancient tongues, which the Earl of Oxford was indeed, apart from classical authors common to the grammar-school curriculum of the day, or deciperable to someone with even "small Latin and less Greek" (as Jonson defined Shakespeare's ability in these languages), there are relatively few allusions that suggest the author of the plays was particularly well-read in the ancients. There is nothing of Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny, Dio Cassius, or Velleius Paterculus, among others found abundantly in Jonson's *Sejanus*, the 1605 edition of which has the author's own citations cramming the margins.

Margin notes of a different kind are of great interest to Oxfordians nowadays. These are in a copy of the 1568-1570 Geneva Bible bound especially for the Earl of Oxford, in which there are annotations and underlinings that have led his adherents to anoint it "Shakespeare's Bible." One example of its supposed parallel to the plays is Hamlet's declaration that Claudius "took my father grossly, full of bread," the last phrase of which is an allusion to Ezekiel, chapter 16, verse 49. We are told—in an article by Mark Anderson in the *Hartford Advocate* about a



In the morning Sir Archibald Flower, the mayor of Stratford, called at the hotel and conducted me over to Shakespeare's cottage. I can by no means associate the Bard with it; that such a mind ever dwelt or had its beginnings there seems incredible. It is easy to imagine a farmer's boy emigrating to London and becoming a successful actor and theatre owner; but for him to have become the great poet and dramatist, and to have had such knowledge of foreign courts, cardinals and kings, is inconceivable to me. I am not concerned with who wrote the works of Shakespeare, whether Bacon, Southampton, or Richmond, but I can hardly think it was the Stratford boy. Whoever wrote them

had an aristocratic attitude. His utter disregard for grammar could only have been the attitude of a princely, gifted mind. After seeing the cottage and hearing the scant bits of local information concerning his desultory boyhood, his indifferent school record, his poaching and his country-bumpkin point of view, I cannot believe he went through such a mental metamorphosis as to become the greatest of all poets. In the work of the greatest of geniuses humble beginnings will reveal themselves somewhere—but one cannot see the slightest sign of them in Shakespeare. \*

—CHARLES CHAPLIN  
*My Autobiography* [1964]

study of Oxford's Bible by Roger Stritmatter—that "over a span of more than 300 verses in the book of Ezekiel, Edward de Vere marks only one: Ezekiel 16:49." This is indeed remarkable, because there are as many as fifteen other allusions to Ezekiel in Shakespeare's plays. What happened to them?

This selectivity is made apparent in a further study of Oxford's Bible, by Dave Kathman, on the "Shakespeare Authorship" Web site. Kathman found that of the more than 200 parallel verses identified by Stritmatter, only about 80 are recognized by scholars of Shakespeare's biblical use. Granting Stritmatter the other 120-plus (as well as the benefit of the doubt that all the markings were made by Oxford), Kathman notes that there are roughly 1,000 verses marked in the Oxford Bible, whereas there are at least 2,000 biblical references in Shakespeare's works. Therefore, "only about 10 percent of Shakespeare's biblical allusions are marked in the Bible, and only about 20 percent of the verses marked in the Bible are alluded to in Shakespeare."

**T**he Oxfordian justification for this passionate battle over the identity of the author is that our understanding and appreciation of the plays will be enhanced if they may be viewed in the light of the author's life. Let's see what happens to *Hamlet*, in which they discern a "master metaphor," the purported "projection" of de Vere's pseudonymous intent: to use his knowledge of court life to expose its inner corruption. But precisely what is the manifestation of the corruption in the court of Denmark? To all appearances, Claudius is an able ruler, sure in statecraft, and respected in his own court as well as in the courts of other nations. The corruption in Denmark's court is hidden in the soul of Claudius, and drama is its purge, in the mortal world of Shakespeare's time as it was in his play. In 1612, Shakespeare's colleague Thomas Heywood wrote a defense of the stage in which he told of performances that "have been the discoverers of many notorious murders, being concealed from the eyes of the world," two examples of which Heywood states occurred twelve years earlier, which would be about the time that *Hamlet* was written. And in the play we hear Hamlet say:

I have heard  
That guilty creatures sitting at a play  
Have by the very cunning of the scene  
Been struck so to the soul that presently  
They have proclaimed their malefactions.

It would appear that the author of *Hamlet* used his knowledge not of court life to expose its cor-

ruption but of drama to expose the corruption in the human soul. And this is, as the scholar Henri Fluchère put it, "the domain of art, not the poet's life."



elf-promoting though he may have been, Ben Jonson has been proved right in eulogizing Shakespeare as "not of an age, but for all time." Later ages have admitted him into their cultures as a contemporary, sought images of the human experience in his words when their own failed, and proclaimed his genius to a degree that Jonson could never have dreamed of. The unvarnished life of the singularly self-obsessed Oxford offers no explanation for the scope of humanity found in the plays, and it is this that must be explained. For the unique achievement of the author is that, in the words of William Hazlitt, "[e]ach of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind." And these are qualities that are the special province of the theater and the actor. Shakespeare was a character actor relegated to playing two or three roles in a play, as was the custom of the time, and the actor bears a likeness to the dramatist, who, as Gary Taylor defined him, "had to perform all the parts in his head, momentarily recreating himself in the image of each." In this Shakespeare has had no equal.

The human qualities of Shakespeare's characters have proven common to people of every age and society. Thus could Akira Kurosawa unite the pre-Christian world of *King Lear* with the medieval Japan of warlords in *Ran*, and thus could South African playwright Welcome Msimi create *Umabatha: A Zulu Macbeth*, acknowledging surprise at how readily Shakespeare's play lent itself to Zulu oral tradition. And, most tellingly of all, Peter Brook, who made his reputation directing Shakespeare, said that in the modern theater "we are faced with the infuriating fact that Shakespeare is still our model." The Oxfordians ask us instead to cast the stage aside as incidental to these creations, a disposable framework for the overarching genius of their noble creator.

To those who find that the stage is the only place where the plays truly live, it is a sort of poetic justice that the man who found so many lives within himself has come down to us seemingly without a life of his own. But his mastery of drama and his unique ability to create "an improvisation of life" upon the stage confirms what the documentary records of Shakespeare and his time tell us: that the domain of the poet's life, no less than the domain of his art, is the theater.

# IV. LOVE

## i EVERY WORD DOTH ALMOST TELL MY NAME

By Joseph Sobran

**S**hakespeare's Sonnets have long baffled the academic Shakespeare scholars, and with good reason. Published under mysterious circumstances in 1609, these 154 intimate love poems clearly refer to real people and situations in the poet's life. They ought to be a gold mine for Shakespeare's biographers, who are otherwise forced to work from monotonously opaque baptismal registers and real estate titles that give no hint of the turbulent inner life the Sonnets disclose. But the Sonnets don't fit what we know of William of Stratford, their supposed author. Consequently, frustrated scholars, giving up the attempt to connect them to William, file them under the headings of "poetic fictions" and "literary exercises." They try, in effect, to declare the Sonnets inadmissible evidence, like lawyers who sense that a crucial document may be fatal to their client's case. This won't do. The Sonnets are too odd and earthy, too guarded and allusive, too personal and idiosyncratic, too full of loose ends, to have been fictional. The author of the Shakespeare plays knew how to tell a story, but these poems respond haphazardly to events and problems as they arise, unforeseen.

Who are the Fair Youth, the Dark Lady, the Rival Poet? These old questions have proved unanswerable, because the scholars neglect to ask the prior question: Who was the poet himself? They assume they already know the answer, so for them the Sonnets become a conundrum. The "riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets," as Princeton's Edward Hubler called it, is really a facet of the riddle of Shakespeare's authorship. Once we recognize the author of the Sonnets as Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, the chief difficulties take care of themselves, and there is no need to resort to calling the poems fictions.

Of course the scholars won't hear of this: they prefer the legend of Stratford Will, self-made middle-class man, and their response to any doubt of his authorship is merely to jeer at it. But the evidence for Oxford is easier to mock than to refute.

**T**he first 126 Sonnets lovingly address a handsome young man. They begin by unsuccessfully urging him to marry and beget a son; then the poet woos the "lovely boy" for himself, promising to give him "immortal life" in verse. Along with praise of the youth's beauty, the Sonnets record estrangements between him and the poet, charges of infidelity, a rival poet, a separation, reconciliation, and hints of the poet's own infidelity. The remaining Sonnets, wavering between love and insult, concern the poet's dark, sluttish mistress.

In the course of the poems, "Shakespeare" drops many clues about himself. He's "old," "poor," "lame," "despised," and "in disgrace." His face is "beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity," bearing "lines and wrinkles." He alludes to his "high birth." He seems to be a public figure, a target of "vulgar scandal." He never says what the source of the "scandal" is, but he implies that it is sexual, and he seems to have lovers of both sexes. He uses two hundred legal terms, showing wide knowledge of the law. He proudly expects his "powerful rhyme" to outlive marble and the gilded monument of princes, yet somehow hopes that his own name will be "buried" and "forgotten" after his death, which he feels approaching.

At the time the Sonnets were written, probably the early 1590s, William was under thirty and just beginning to prosper, with a long life ahead of him. There is no indication that he was lame. He had no legal training and caused no public scandal; we have no reason to think he was bisexual. He was rising in the world, not falling. If he wrote the works bearing his name, he would have expected immortal fame, not obscurity.

But the poet's self-description matches Oxford perfectly. Born in 1550, he hailed from the old nobility. He received the finest education, including legal studies at the Inns of Court. (His surviving letters use more than 50 of the 200 legal terms in the Sonnets.) By the 1590s Oxford was in his forties, over the hill and ailing. In three separate letters, written years apart, he describes himself as "lame" and "a lame man." He had wasted a huge patrimony and was forced to scrounge for money. His life had been marked by scandals; he had been accused of "buggering boys" and taunted about his "decayed reputation." He had made enemies, fallen from favor at court, served time in the Tower of London (at the Queen's command), nearly wrecked his marriage, and suffered grave wounds in a sword fight. Oxford also had a very high reputation as a poet and a playwright, though only a few short poems have been ascribed to

him. In 1589 it was reported that he had declined to publish his works under his own name. If he were writing poems under an alias, he might well hope both that his works would survive him and that his real name would be forgotten—which is exactly what happened.

And the youth? Stratfordian scholars now admit that his description matches Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton (to whom Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*). Oxford had reason to urge him to marry and procreate; his powerful father-in-law, Lord Burghley, had been pushing Southampton to marry his granddaughter and Oxford's daughter, Elizabeth Vere, which explains why Sonnet 10 pleads with the youth to beget "another self"—a son—"for love of me." Oxford is asking for a grandson. Coming from William of Stratford, such an appeal to Southampton would be bizarre, if not insane. And even if William wrote the Sonnets as fictions, is it credible that he would have created a narrator who closely resembles Oxford, addressing a "lovely boy" who so resembles Southampton, at a time when Southampton was being pressured to marry Oxford's daughter? We should also recall that the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare's plays was dedicated to two more earls, Pembroke and Montgomery, who had also been candidates for marriage to Oxford's other two daughters, Bridget and Susan Vere. Furthermore, Oxford's uncle the Earl of Surrey was a pioneer of the "Shakespearean" sonnet form. And his uncle and mentor Arthur Golding translated "Shakespeare's" favorite book, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Clearly, the standard view forces us to accept too many coincidences.

As many scholars now acknowledge, the Sonnets to the youth are homosexual. No common poet would have dared make amorous advances to an earl, but another earl might. Read rightly, the Sonnets tell us that Oxford fell deeply in love with Southampton, a fact that gives a practical edge to the poet's warnings to the youth to keep a discreet distance from him, as in the famous lines of Sonnet 71: "No longer mourn for me when I am dead/... Lest the wise world should look into your moan,/And mock you with me after I am gone." The "wise world" doesn't mock people for mourning their friends, though it might mock them for a scandalous affection, as homosexuality would certainly have appeared to the Elizabethans. In this view it seems clear that Oxford was afraid that his own soiled reputation would rub off on Southampton, which is why he hoped that his real name would be "buried where my body is... And live no more to shame nor me nor you."

Again and again the poet complains of his "disgrace," "bewailed guilt," "shames," "blots," "vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow." He is "despised," "attainted," "vile esteemed": his "name

receives a brand." At a time when "Shakespeare" was being universally praised, the poet who wrote under that name was speaking strangely about his name. "Every word [of my poetry] doth almost tell my name," he says, as if his name is being concealed. And so it was. This is an obsessive theme of the Sonnets, yet mainstream scholars not only have failed to explain it but have hardly noticed it.

**O**nly one detail in the Sonnets supports the traditional identification of the poet as William. In the bawdy and sometimes bitter later Sonnets to the Dark Lady, the poet puns on the name "Will" ("And then thou lovest me, for my name is Will"). But the context doesn't tell us whether this is his real name, a pen name, a nickname, an inside joke, or an alias his mistress knew him by. Otherwise, the Sonnets offer no help to those who insist that William wrote them. Perhaps the most telling fact of the authorship controversy is that William's partisans steer away from the very poems that tell us most about the poet. They don't really argue that William did write the Sonnets but that he could have—if they are fictional.

The Sonnets were published in 1609, five years after Oxford's death. The cryptic dedication was supplied by the publisher, not by the author, who is praised as "our ever-living poet." All we are told of the dedicated is that he is "the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets, Mr. W.H."—Southampton's initials, but reversed. By praising the poet in such terms while presuming to dedicate his poems for him, the publisher invites the inference that the real author was no longer able to speak for himself: he was already dead. (William of Stratford still had seven years to live.) The poet's self-revelations match Oxford and nobody else in Elizabethan England. If the Sonnets and the other works of Shakespeare had been ascribed to Oxford from the start, it's hard to imagine that anyone would doubt his authorship today.

## ii.

### A SALVO FOR LUCY NEGRO

By Harold Bloom

#### I

**A**s my correspondence shows me, since the October 1998 publication of my *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Oxfordians are the



sub-literary equivalent of the sub-religious Scientologists. You don't want to argue with them, as they are dogmatic and abusive. I therefore will let the Earl of Sobran be and confine myself to the poetic power of Shakespeare's Sonnets, and the relation of that power to the now

We will have a lot to discuss about Shakespeare. I do not know what still attracts you to the man of Stratford. He seems to have nothing at all to justify his claim, whereas Oxford has almost everything. It is quite inconceivable to me that Shakespeare should have got everything second-

hand—Hamlet's neurosis, Lear's madness, Macbeth's defiance and the character of Lady Macbeth, Othello's jealousy, etc. It almost irritates me that you should support the notion. \*

—SIGMUND FREUD,  
*letter to Arnold Zweig,*  
[April 1, 1937]

venerable quest to demonstrate that someone—anyone but "the Man from Stratford"—wrote the plays and poems of William Shakespeare.

The academy, as everyone knows, is shot to pieces. Even at Yale, I am surrounded by courses in gender and power, transsexuality and queer theory, multiculturalism, and all the other splendors that now displace Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, and Dickens. But the worst may well be over. A decade ago, I would introduce my Graduate Shakespeare seminar (never my Undergraduate) by solemnly assuring the somewhat resentful students that *all* of Shakespeare, and not just the Sonnets, had been written by Lucy Negro, Elizabethan England's most celebrated East Indian whore. Anthony Burgess, in his splendid fictive life, *Nothing Like the Sun*, had identified Lucy Negro as the Dark Lady of the Sonnets and thus Shakespeare's peerless erotic catastrophe, resulting in heartbreak, venereal disease, and relatively early demise. Stone-faced (as best I could), I assured my graduate students that all their anxieties were to be set aside, since the lustful and brilliant Lucy Negro actually had composed the plays and Sonnets. Thus they could abandon their political reservations and read "Shakespeare" with assured correctness, since Lucy Negro was, by definition, multicultural, feminist, and post-colonial. And also, I told them, we could set aside the covens of Oxfordians, Marlovians, and Baconians in the name of the defrauded Lucy Negro.

Since I long ago joined Samuel Butler, who had proclaimed that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman, when I suggested in *The Book of J* that the Yahwist was a human female, I felt it would have been redundant had I introduced Lucy Negro into my Shakespeare book as the creator of Falstaff, Hamlet, Rosalind, Iago, Cleopatra, and the other glories of our language. And I propose to say no more about Lucy Negro here, except that she far outshines Oxford as a rival claimant, since she at least slept with Shakespeare! Instead I will devote the remainder of this brief meditation to a surmise as to why the Oxfordians, Marlovians, and Baconians cannot cease to try to badger the rest of us.

The sorrows of the poet of the Sonnets are very complex, worthy of the best shorter poems in the language. In fact, we don't know for sure who this narcissistic young nobleman was, though Southampton will do, and there are many candidates for the Dark Lady, though none so exuberant as Lucy Negro. All we actually do know, quite certainly, is that the frequently unhappy (though remarkably restrained) poet indeed was Will Shakespeare. These are "his sugared sonnets among his private friends," doubtless a socially varied group extending all the way from lowlife actors (and Lucy Negro!) to the petulant Southampton, patron and (perhaps) sometime lover.

There is a shadow upon the Sonnets, as upon so many of the darker Shakespearean plays. We can call it scandal or public notoriety, something that transcends the poet's usefulness at being a poor player upon the stage of the Globe. If the late *Elegy for Will Peter* is Shakespeare's (and I think it is, despite being a weak poem), then the shadow of scandal lingered for more than a decade. Yet the sense of self-wounding is only a small edge of the greater show of morality, which is the authentic darkness of the best Sonnets and of all Shakespeare from *Hamlet* onward. The Sonnets are poetry for kings and for enchanted readers, because few besides Shakespeare can fully portray that shadow, which in this greatest of all poets becomes "millions of strange shadows."

## 2

**A**stonishing as the Sonnets remain, they are of a different order than, say, *As You Like It*, *Henry IV* (1 and 2), *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *The Winter's Tale*, and about a dozen other Shakespearean dramas. Most simply, the Sonnets do not invent (or, if you prefer, represent) human beings. Necessarily more lyric than dramatic, these poems have their clear affinities with Falstaff and

Hamlet and many more of Shakespeare's protagonists, and yet the affinities remain enigmatic. Unless you are a formalist or an historicist, Falstaff and Hamlet will compel you to see them as larger even than their plays, and as more "real" than actual personages, alive or dead. But the speaker of the Sonnets presents himself as a bewildering series of ambiguities. He is not and yet he is William Shakespeare the playmaker, and his two loves of comfort and despair, a young nobleman and a dark woman, never have the substance or the persuasive force of Anthony and Cleopatra, and of their peers in the greater plays. Shakespearean characters are adventures in consciousness; even the speaker of the Sonnets evades that immensity. Of the inwardness of the fair young man and of the dark lady, we are given only intimations.

We cannot recover either the circumstances of the personal motives (if any) of the Sonnets. *Love's Labour's Lost*, uniquely among the plays, shares the language of the Sonnets. Shakespeare's apparent dilemma in the Sonnets, rejection by beloved social superior, seems analogous to Falstaff's predicament in the *Henry IV* plays, but the speaker of the Sonnets has little of Sir John Falstaff's vitality, wiliness, and aplomb. Some of the Sonnets turn violently aside from life's lusts and ambitions, but these revulsions are rendered only rarely in Hamlet's idiom. It is dangerous to seek illuminations for the plays in the Sonnets, though sometimes you can work back from the dramatic to the lyric Shakespeare. The poetic achievement of the Sonnets has just enough of the playwright's uncanny power to show that we confront the same writer, but the awesome cognitive originality and psychological persuasiveness

of the major dramas are subdued in all but a few of the sequences.

From at least *Measure for Measure* through *Othello*, and on through *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, sexuality is represented primarily as a torment—sometimes comic, more often not. As an archaic Bardolator, I am not inclined to separate this dramatic version of human reality from the playwright himself. Formalist and historicist critics frequently give me the impression that they might be more at home with Flaubert than with Shakespeare. The high erotic rancidity of *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Timon of Athens* is too consistently ferocious to be dramatic artifice alone, at least in my experience as a critical reader. The bed trick, harlotry, and venereal infection move very near the center of Shakespeare's vision of sexuality.

### 3

**T**hose who devote themselves to the hapless suggestion that Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare are secret, perhaps unknowing resenters of his cognitive and imaginative power. The greatest of all converts to the Oxford lunacy was Dr. Sigmund Freud, who could not acknowledge that his masterly forerunner had been a rather ordinary young man out of Stratford-upon-Avon. The Earl of Oxford, dead before Shakespeare's last twelve dramas had even been composed, left behind some commonplace lyrics, not worthy of rereading. Those who resent Shakespeare always will be with us; our only response should be to return to the plays and the Sonnets.

## V. DEATH

### i.

#### CURST BE HE YT MOVES MY BONES

By Richard F. Whalen

**A** deafening silence marked the death of Will Shakspere, allegedly the famous playwright, on April 23, 1616, in Stratford-upon-Avon. No eulogies have been found, though poets often wrote eulogies for the deceased. His son-in-law, an educated doctor who left a diary, makes no mention of him at all, not even his passing. No

contemporary letters or other writings noted his death; no one seems to have thought him anyone of importance.

No gravestone with his name marked his burial place. A grave in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford is identified as his because his wife and a daughter—with names on their stones—were later buried on each side of an unnamed stone. The stone carries only four lines of doggerel cursing anyone who digs up the grave. Why his family and friends would bury a prominent citizen in such obscurity is not known, especially if he were also the popular poet and playwright. He did get a monument later, but it, too, argues against him being the author. The monument on the wall of the church was sketched eighteen years after his death by

William Dugdale, a prolific, well-regarded author of illustrated histories. His rough sketch, the first eyewitness record of the monument, shows a half-length bust of a man with a down-turned mustache, arms akimbo, and grasping a sack of grain or wool; there is no sign of pen, paper, or writing surface. Will Shakspere was a grain dealer.

A century later the monument was refurbished, and today the bust depicts a man with an upturned mustache, goatee, and, befitting a writer, pen and paper. The sack has become a pillow, which oddly enough serves as a writing surface.

Dugdale's sketch was preliminary to an engraving for his book, *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656). His engraver followed it quite faithfully, depicting the same man grasping a sack. Dugdale accepted the engraving as an accurate depiction of the monument he saw and sketched. The engraving remained unchanged even into a second, revised and corrected edition of Dugdale's book.

Unsurprisingly, conventional biographies of Shakespeare almost never show or discuss the early engraving of the monument. The late Professor S. Schoenbaum, the dean of Shakespeare biographers, did recognize the problem, and he fretted that the engraving is "perplexing rather than helpful, for we reconcile it with difficulty" with today's monument. He concluded, incredibly, that either Dugdale or the engraver got it wrong.

The monument's inscription is also a problem for Stratfordians because it fails to identify him as the great poet and dramatist of London. Two lines of Latin mention Nestor and Socrates, neither of whom were writers, and Virgil, when Ovid—whom everyone agrees had the greatest influence on Shakespeare—would have been more appropriate. Six lines in English ask the passerby to read "if thou canst"—an almost insulting reproach—whom death had placed within the monument. But the body is not within the monument. The deceased is named simply "Shakspeare," and no first name is given to distinguish him from all the other Shaksperes (in whatever spelling) in Warwickshire. The epitaph concludes, "Since all that he hath writ leaves living art, but page, to serve his wit." This obscure line in a most enigmatic epitaph is the only mention of writing, and nowhere is the deceased described as a popular poet, playwright, or theater personage. Whoever commissioned the bust and whoever wrote the epitaph pointedly avoided identifying Will Shakspere of Stratford as the author of Shakespeare's works.

Yet another problem is Will Shakspere's last

will and testament, a detailed, three-page document that is totally devoid of anything literary; it is the will of a businessman. In this utterly pedestrian document, Will disposes of a silver bowl, a silver plate, his sword, his clothes, and his second-best bed. There is no mention of any books, a surprising omission if he was the learned poet, or any manuscripts. The three signatures on the will's pages are in a crabbed handwriting that is probably not his, according to the will's custodian in London. Nothing in the will connects Will Shakspere to the theater except an interlineation, a late addition in another hand that leaves small sums for commemorative rings to three men, his "fellows" in their acting company. Seven years later two of them signed the dedication and a promotional letter to readers in the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, yet it is almost certain that they did not write these documents. Stratfordian scholars see the hand of Ben Jonson in the texts.

The proponents of the traditional view attempt to use the prefaces of the First Folio to connect the Stratford man to the works of Shakespeare—and this is, in fact, their only plausible evidence—but the links are ambiguous, almost coy. Avon comes first. Ben Jonson alludes to Shakespeare as the "Sweet Swan of Avon" in his poem extolling him as "the Soule of the Age . . . the wonder of our stage." Three pages later Leonard Digges refers to "thy Stratford Moniment."\* Only if the separate allusions are joined does Stratford-upon-Avon emerge. That's the closest the First Folio comes to biography. It provides no birth or death dates, nor anything about the author's life, except to recognize him as a member of an acting company.

Oxfordians suggest an explanation for the two allusions. If the 17th Earl of Oxford was the author, Jonson could have been alluding to the estate Oxford once owned on the Avon River, not far from Stratford. Digges might have been alluding to the Stratford suburb of London, which would have been more familiar to Londoners than a small town on the Avon a four-day journey away. As it happens, Oxford lived his final years on a country estate just outside the London suburb, and Digges's "moni-

\* Stratfordians point out that Digges's stepfather was probably Thomas Russell, the overseer of Shakspere's will. In *The Genius of Shakespeare*, Jonathan Bate makes much of a note Digges inscribed in a 1613 edition of Lope de Vega's poems comparing the Spanish poet to "our Will Shakespeare," but this reference adds nothing to the debate. In fact, Digges, who was born in London and educated at Oxford, seems closer to Oxford's circle. In 1622, when the First Folio was being prepared, he dedicated a book to Oxford's son-in-law, the Earl of Montgomery, and the Earl's brother.

ment," a word that meant a narration as well as a memorial, could denote Oxford's writings there. These readings may seem bizarre, but writers at that time were notorious for ambiguity and indirection. Jonson and Digges could defend either reading of "Avon" and "Stratford."

There is no ambiguity, however, in the telling fact that the Folio was dedicated to the earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, who undoubtedly financed and engineered its publication. Montgomery was married to Susan Vere, Oxford's daughter, and his brother, Pembroke, was lord chamberlain, the court official who controlled the performance and publication of plays. Pembroke was also a patron of Jonson's, and he arranged for an increase in Jonson's pension just as the printers were beginning work on the Folio.

The evidence piles up, any single piece of which might be dismissed as a coincidence, and the cumulative effect argues powerfully that the man from Stratford was not the author. Everything points to Oxford.

**W**hen Oxford died in 1604 there was an abrupt interruption in "first editions" of Shakespeare's plays. During the seven years before his death, publishers had issued twelve new plays, eight of which were the first to carry Shakespeare's by-line; five were issued in 1600 alone. This outpouring of new plays stopped when Oxford died, and only four new plays appeared over the next twenty years. Finally, eighteen new plays, half the dramatic canon, appeared in the Folio in 1623. Stratfordians have no explanation for this abrupt halt in publication, which makes perfect sense if Oxford was the author. The Stratford man, by the way, was active in his various businesses until 1616.

Oxford's death in 1604 has also been used against him. Stratfordian scholars argue that he died too soon, claiming that a dozen plays were written after 1604, some in collaboration with John Fletcher. Dead men, they intone dramatically, don't write plays. Yet there is no historical evidence to support the Stratfordian chronology: no diaries, no manuscripts, no letters. Fletcher could have "collaborated" by completing a play left incomplete at the author's death. There is no evidence that he and Shakespeare worked together. Most responsible scholars admit deep uncertainty about the dates of composition, and Professor Sylvan Barnet, editor of the Signet edition of the plays, says that the exact dates of most of the works are "highly uncertain." E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare scholar and play chronologer, says that there is "much conjecture" dating the plays to particu-

lar years and admits fitting the plays "into the time allowed by the span of Shakespeare's dramatic career."

Stratfordians most often cite *The Tempest* as evidence against Oxford's authorship. The play opens with a ship being battered by a storm near an island, a detail, it is argued, that depends on descriptions of a shipwreck near the island of Bermuda in 1609 written by Sylvester Jourdain, who published a pamphlet in 1610, and William Strachey, who dated a letter concerning the event to an unnamed lady the same year. Composition of *The Tempest* is thus dated 1611. It's a neat sequence of years. But even if Shakespeare needed to read descriptions of a storm at sea, he need not have waited until 1610 for Jourdain and Strachey to provide them. There were many such descriptions before Oxford died, among them accounts of a shipwreck at Bermuda by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1591, a storm at the start of Virgil's *Aeneid*, St. Paul's wreck at Malta, and even one in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. All provided storm details very similar to those in *The Tempest*; all were in print long before Oxford died. As is always the case with Stratfordian attempts to prove that the plays contain references to post-1604 events, this piece of chronological evidence collapses under scrutiny.

**P**erhaps the simplest and most appealing Stratfordian argument is that a vast, implausible conspiracy would have been required to hide Oxford's authorship. But there is no need to postulate such a conspiracy. Shakespeare's true identity was probably an open secret; there would have been little reason to "reveal" Oxford as the author after his death. To be sure, many questions remain to be answered, though far fewer than plague the traditional view. Archives undoubtedly hold more information about Oxford, but it is unlikely that much more will be found about the Stratford man. For centuries scholars have searched in vain for evidence that would prove his authorship; research on Oxford has really only just begun.

Today we are left with a choice. Which man is the more likely author? The Stratford merchant and theater investor, a simple man of mundane consequence? Or the recognized poet, patron of acting companies, and playwright, known at the time to be writing under a pseudonym; a complex, mercurial nobleman in Queen Elizabeth's court whose life is mirrored in Shakespeare's works; a man with direct personal links to the publishers of the First Folio? The choice seems obvious.

## GOLDEN LADS AND CHIMNEY-SWEEPERS

By Jonathan Bate

**T**here are few sights more moving than that of a dying man remembering his friends. Some time early in 1616, a well-to-do gentleman of Stratford-upon-Avon dictated his will. It follows the legal formula of the time and mostly concerns the disposition of real estate ("And all my barnes stables Orchardes gardens landes tene-mentes & hereditamentes . . ."). The beneficiaries are mainly family members, but token gifts are bestowed upon other local gentlemen—Thomas Russel Esquire, one of the overseers of the will, is given five pounds, and Hamlet Sadler, an especially long-standing friend, is left twenty-six shillings and eight pence for a mourning ring.

But tucked away in the middle of the will is evidence of another life. As well as the Stratford properties, there is a house in the London theater district of Blackfriars. And among those given money for memorial rings are "my fellows John Heminges Richard Burbage & Henry Cundell." They were fellows in more than one sense: friends, but also fellow-actors and fellow-shareholders in a highly successful business venture dating back over twenty years. The business was a theater company, established on a joint-stock basis in 1594 as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and upgraded to the title of King's Men by courtesy of James I on his accession to the English throne in 1603. The Stratford gentleman was, of course, Master William Shakespeare. Soon after dictating the will, he died and was buried in the parish church. A monument was erected, commemorating him as a national writer, not a local businessman: it shows him holding a pen,\* and it is inscribed with a text that refers to the "living

\* Anti-Stratfordians make much of an engraving of the monument published in 1656 in *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*. They say that it shows Shakespeare holding a woolsack, not pen and paper resting on a cushion. But this is a mistaken impression, deriving from the engraver's alterations to Sir William Dugdale's drawing. A recent re-examination of the original drawing reveals that Dugdale definitely drew a tasseled cushion. Furthermore, a much more reliable early drawing of the monument, by George Vertue, clearly shows the pen and paper.

art" of his writing and compares him to the greatest poet and the greatest thinker of antiquity, Virgil and Socrates.

There is no reference in Will's will to the manuscripts of the plays that had made him both rich and famous. This is because he did not own them: they belonged to the King's Men. Such had been the deal throughout his working life—a bit-part actor himself, his principal duty was to furnish his fellows with two or three new scripts each season, perhaps a comedy, a tragedy, and a history play. It was left to Burbage, the company's leading player, and Heminges and Condell, its sharpest businessmen, to decide what to do with the work. Their goal was to keep as much as possible in manuscript as the exclusive property of the theater company, because once a play was disseminated in print, control of it would be lost. The demand in the literary marketplace for Shakespeare's writing was such that, by one means or another, about half his plays had already found their way to the press, sometimes in the form of what Heminges and Condell called "stolen and surreptitious copies." For a while, at least, it seemed best to keep the written text of the other works out of the public domain.

But in 1619 a publisher named Thomas Pavier, who had already laid his hands on a number of the plays, appeared to be moving toward the production of what would advertise itself as a complete Shakespeare. Burbage died that year, and so it was left to Heminges and Condell to act. They set about blocking Pavier's plans and launching their own edition. It was a formidable task to gather together all the texts and transform them from working theater scripts to coherently and consistently presented printed works that would stand the test of time. Even once the copy was prepared, it would still take a long time to print the book—each individual letter of type had to be set on the press by hand. Heminges and Condell had thirty-five plays in their possession. At a late stage in the process, they made room for a thirty-sixth, *Troilus and Cressida*. They decided to exclude *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Cardenio*, Shakespeare's final two plays, written in collaboration with John Fletcher, his successor as the King's Men's in-house dramatist. Presumably they felt that to have included them in Shakespeare's works would have been a slight to Fletcher. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was eventually included in the collected plays of "Beaumont and Fletcher." *The History of Cardenio* by Mr. Fletcher & Shakespeare was later registered for publication but is now lost. There is, however, ample evidence that it was a collaboration between the

two dramatists, undertaken shortly after the publication in 1612 of the English translation of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Oxfordians are strangely silent as to how Edward de Vere co-wrote a play with John Fletcher some eight years after his own death.

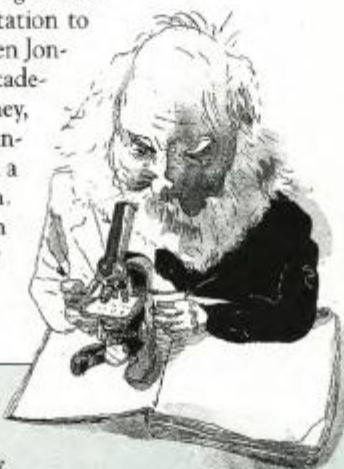
By 1623 the great book was finally ready. It was printed on large paper in double-columned "folio" format. A consortium of publishers, headed by William and Isaac Jaggard, had joined together in the publication of *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies. Published according to the True Originall Copies*. That latter phrase proclaims the accuracy of these texts, in contrast to the unauthorized earlier editions of individual plays.

The title page of the 1623 Folio (known as the "First Folio," to distinguish it from the reprints of 1632, 1663, and 1685) was adorned with Martin Droeshout's famous woodcut of the dramatist, his forehead domed like the Globe, as if to gesture toward the name of his theater and the universality of his genius. Opposite the "cut" is a brief poem by Shakespeare's friend and fellow dramatist Ben Jonson, attesting to the authenticity of the image. Heminges and Condell contributed both their address to the reader and a dedicatory epistle to the Pembroke brothers, two noble earls who had assisted them in the blocking of the *Pavier* edition. Each of these documents explicitly states that William Shakespeare, their colleague in the King's Men, was author of the plays. Special praise is given to his extraordinary verbal facility, to what we would now call his innate genius: "His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarce received from him a blot in his papers."

The preliminary pages of the First Folio also include four commendatory poems. One of these, by a poet identified only by the initials "I.M.", makes the assumption—which was made by everyone in the period—that "Master William Shakespeare" was both an actor and the author of the works. Oxfordians reply that a universal assumption is not necessarily a truth. Could "I.M." and others have simply not been in the know? Could it have been that Master William was just the front man, and that the plays were really written by Earl Edward? In response to such questions, the Stratfordian will point to the identity of the authors of two of the other dedicatory

poems. For they knew what they were talking about.

**D**ride of place in the Folio's front matter is given to Ben Jonson's magnificent tribute, "To the memory of my beloved, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare: and what he hath left us." This great poem has long been recognized as the chief stumbling block in the way of the Oxfordian case. William Shakespeare of Stratford, an actor who lacked a university education, and Ben Jonson of London, an actor (and sometime bricklayer) who lacked a university education, were intimate friends and friendly rivals. They were swiftly acknowledged as the nation's two greatest living dramatists. The best response to skeptics who doubt that the Stratford man could have written his plays on the foundation of nothing more than a grammar-school education is an invitation to read the complete plays of Ben Jonson. They are vastly more academic than Shakespeare's, yet they, too, were written on the foundation of nothing more than a grammar-school education. The thing is, Elizabethan grammar schools were very good. They put our high schools to deep shame.



**S**uperb and inimitable as all is, it is mostly an objective and physiological kind of power and beauty the soul finds in Shakspere—a style supremely grand of the sort, but in my opinion stopping short of the grandest sort, at any rate for fulfilling and satisfying modern and scientific and democratic American purposes. Think, not of growths as forests primeval, or Yellowstone geysers, or Colorado ravines, but of costly marble palaces, and palace rooms, and the noblest fixings and furniture, and noble owners and occupants to correspond—think of carefully built gardens from the beautiful but sophisticated gardening art at its best, with walks and bowers and artificial lakes, and appropriate statue

groups and the finest cultivated roses and lilies and japonicas in plenty—and you have the tally of Shakspere. The low characters, mechanics, even the loyal henchmen—all in themselves nothing—serve as capital foils to the aristocracy. The comedies [exquisite as they certainly are] bringing in admirably portray'd common characters, have the unmistakable hue of plays, portraits, made for the advertisement only of the élite of the castle, and from its point of view. The comedies are altogether non-acceptable to America and Democracy. \*

—Walt Whitman,  
"A Thought on Shakspere"  
[1889]

\* Several occurrences of the dramatist's name in the preliminary matter to the First Folio are hyphenated, but most are not. The presence or absence of a hyphen is quite arbitrary—printer's vagary, not the momentous matter supposed by Oxfordians.

Shakespeare acted in Jonson's plays. He was godfather to one of Jonson's children. Jonson described Shakespeare's writing habits in his private notebook and wrote that "I loved the man, and do honour his memory (on this side idolatry) as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open, and free nature . . ." In the First Folio poem to the memory of his beloved friend, Jonson praised Shakespeare's plays to the skies and referred to him as the "Sweet Swan of Avon." In the Through-the-Looking-Glass world of the Oxfordians, this is not a reference to Stratford-upon-Avon! The supporters of Edward de Vere ask us to suppose that the whole body of preliminary matter in the Folio was an elaborate hoax to cover up the true identity of the author of the plays. Setting aside the question of why there would be any need for a cover-up so long after de Vere's death, why on earth would Jonson have continued to perpetrate such a hoax in his private notebook?

Heminges and Condell are remembered with affection in the will of the Stratford man, and they were editors of the First Folio. Jonson knew the dramatist intimately in the context of the London theater world but also linked him to the Avon. This ought to be evidence enough to lay all anti-Stratfordian claims to rest. But still another contributor to the Folio establishes an equally strong link that has, surprisingly, been overlooked by previous contributors to the authorship debate. Opposite the "Catalogue of the severall Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies contained in this Volume" there is a poem by Leonard Digges entitled "To the Memorie of the deceased Authour Maister W. Shakespeare." Digges's verses refer both to the stone of the author's tomb and to "thy Stratford Moniment." Digges, then, knew that "the deceased Authour" lay beneath a stone in the aisle of Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, and that there was a monument to him and his work on the adjacent wall.

He knew this because he was brought up in a village just outside Stratford. His stepfather was none other than Thomas Russell, overseer of Shakespeare's will and legatee of his ceremonial sword. Here, then, is another decisive, hitherto insufficiently recognized, link between the Stratford man and the plays. Digges was proud of his acquaintance with the great writer from his own locality. On a visit to Spain, he wrote a memorandum to himself, noting that Lope de Vega was admired as both a poet and a dramatist as "our Will Shakespeare" was admired back in England for both his plays and his sonnets. As with Jonson's private notebook, a personal note of this kind is a very special sort of evidence.

The Oxfordian account of the First Folio as a gigantic put-up job presupposes a conspiracy extending not only through Heminges, Condell, Jonson, and the rest of the London theater world but also to Digges, Russell, and the family and friends who erected the Stratford monument. Equally conspiratorial is the Oxfordian approach to the plays themselves. *Hamlet* is approached via fantastically cryptic supposed parallels between Lord Burghley and the character of Polonius. More obvious associations do not appeal to the Oxfordians' cloak-and-dagger mentality: plain old intuition inclines me to the view that the dramatist who anglicized the name of the historical Amleth Prince of Denmark was a certain Stratford gentleman who named his own son after his old friend Hamlet Sadler. "Hamlet" was a distinctive Warwickshire name. In December 1579, a Katherine Hamlett drowned in the Avon at Tiddington, a village just outside Stratford. At the inquest, which was held in Stratford, there was some debate as to whether she had committed suicide, but it was concluded that she had died by accident and would therefore be entitled to Christian burial. Sounds to me like the origin of Ophelia's end.

**R**ead the First Folio from cover to cover and you will be filled with wonder at the sheer range and variety of Shakespeare's style and vocabulary. The courtly language may make you think he must have been a courtier. But then the country language will make you think he must have been a countryman. In establishing the author's identity, what you need to look for are the quirky things. Courtly language may be learned by imitation. It is the small, seemingly inconsequential details that constitute the unique fingerprint. The plays were written by someone with an intimate knowledge of the technical terminology of leather manufacture. Sounds to me like the son of a glover, not the son of a lord. In one of his loveliest songs the dramatist writes, "Golden lads and girls all must,/As chimney-sweepers, come to dust." In Warwickshire vernacular dialect, a dandelion is a "golden lad" when in flower, a "chimney-sweeper" when ready to be blown to the wind. This does not feel like a lord's memory. It belongs to a local country boy in a Warwickshire field. And it is because of such lovely little things as this that my money and my reputation will always be staked firmly on the friend of Jonson and Digges, "our Will," the Stratford lad. There is too little room for doubt.