Prefacing Note

Oxfordian Phoebe Nir suggested that we make the book's summary of the Oxfordian case freely available for anyone new to the subject. We thought it was a great idea. The text is editable, so if friendly scholars wish to suggest corrections, additions or deletions, please write the author at bob@oxfordsvoices.com.

The following article is drawn from the opening one-quarter of the **Shakespeare** chapter of *Oxford's Voices*. References to Oxford's other pen names have been edited out so as not to stray from the focused case presented here for non-readers of the book. The entire chapter provides a fuller experience and is accessible at www.oxfordsvoices.com.

For easy navigation, we have placed a carat (^) before each section header, so you can skip from one section to another by searching on that symbol. To access a reference, just click on the associated asterisk (*). You can return to your text page by clicking on the "Back" button.

by Robert Prechter

AN OVERWIEW OF THE OXFORDIAN CASE FOR EDWARD DE VERE AS SHAKESPEARE

"Harvard has no 'official' attitude on the subject, but I can assure you that no member of the English Department has the slightest doubt that the plays were written by William Shakespeare [sic]. The evidence is overwhelming and is not to be shaken by cranks."* Fine, but who is William Shakespeare?

"It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say, as John Chapman did, that Shakespeare regarded the writing of his plays as a harmless kind of nonsense."*
Perhaps?

"The life of Shakespeare is a fine mystery, and I tremble every day lest something should turn up." — Charles Dickens*
Let us not tremble but rejoice.

^**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE/SHAKE-SPEARE [WILL SHAKSPER]** (1564-1616)
(V 1593-1604/1609/1623/1634) (3 narrative poems, 1 short poem, 2 Sonnet Sequences, 37+ plays)

In the Prologue, I said that a "basic ability to reason" will guide anyone through this book. Over a century ago, Mark Twain could not identify that quality among Stratfordians — those who believe Will Shaksper of Stratford was Shakespeare. In his inimitable way, he wrote, "We are a reasoning race, and when we find a vague file of chipmunk tracks stringing through the dust of Stratford village, we know by our reasoning powers that Hercules has been along here."*

Twain expressed skepticism about the case for the Stratford man a decade *before* 1920, when J. Thomas Looney figured out who Shakespeare really was and triumphantly displayed his detective work in his book, *"Shakespeare" Identified*.* It seems silly that a hundred years later, we are still called upon to lay out the arguments against Will Shaksper of Stratford and for Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford as the author of Shakespeare's works. Orthodoxy, however, has given us no choice.

If at times this chapter expresses exasperation or disrespect, I apologize. Most chapters in this book present fresh, new discoveries. This one mostly reiterates arguments that others have made time and again,

although I do add perspectives here and there. I hope you find it convenient to have all this information in one place.

Stratfordians have insisted, "It is silly to say that Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare." An equivalent sentence would be, "It is silly to say that Mark Twain didn't write Mark Twain." But Mark Twain did not write Mark Twain; Samuel Clemens did. People speak quite naturally of Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, George Eliot, George Orwell, Dr. Seuss and thousands of actors who have adopted stage names. Some people in the day probably spoke of William Shakespeare just as naturally, even though the real writer was not born with that name. It's a *pseudonym*. That is all we Oxfordians are saying.

If you would like to get the story from others, here are eight seminal sources: J. Thomas Looney's 1920 book, *"Shakespeare" Identified*, ideally the Centenary Edition, edited by James Warren (Veritas Publications, 2018); Louis P. Benezet's *Shakspere, Shakespeare and De Vere* (Granite State Press, 1937); Diana Price's *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (Greenwood Press, 2001); A.J. Pointon's *The Man Who Was Never Shakespeare* (2011); Richard Roe's *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy* (2011); Hank Whittemore's *100 Reasons Shake-speare was the Earl of Oxford* (Forever Press, 2016); Robin Phillips' *Shakespeare—The Truth Behind the Name* (Vision Films, 2021); and Laura and Lisa Wilson's documentary, *Last Will. & Testament* (2012), which as of mid-2021 enjoys a 100% rating on Rotten Tomatoes and is available free at TubiTV.com (although I urge you to purchase the DVD for the benefit of the producers). All the books and newsletters cited throughout this book are excellent sources of information (and sometimes of misinformation), but I consider these six books and two films to be among the most concise, meticulous, engaging and comprehensive sources while also being substantially free of psychologizing, dramatizing, agenda prejudice and overspeculation.

The goal of this chapter is to summarize the case against Will Shaksper of Stratford, to show why Oxford fits better, to determine which works do and do not belong in the canon of William Shakespeare and to decide upon the proper authorial attribution for plays in Shakespeare's name for which multiple authors have been postulated.

We begin with Part 1: Shakespeare's Biography vs. Oxford as Shakespeare. If you are already well versed in the Oxfordian case for Shakespeare, you may wish to skip the fun and go directly to "Part 2: Shakespeare's Works."

^PART 1: SHAKESPEARE'S BIOGRAPHY VS. OXFORD AS SHAKESPSEARE

William Shakespeare debuted with two narrative poems and produced a sonnet sequence, so his name would fit among the Sonneteers and the Narrative Poets. Oh, and he also wrote some plays. Within those plays are songs, so his name would also fit among the Songwriters.

What's in a Name

Thanks almost entirely to two ambiguous phrases in the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays and an ambiguous monument to "*Shak*speare" in the Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon, scholars have attributed the William Shakespeare canon to one William Shaksper, who was born and grew up in that rural market village of some 1500 souls. Absent the monument, there would be no finding this particular Will Shaksper. "The archives of no less than twenty-four towns and villages there contain notices of Shakespeare [sic] families in the sixteenth century, and as many as thirty-four Warwickshire towns or villages were inhabited by Shakespeare [sic] families in the seventeenth century. Among them all William was a common Christian name."*

The Shaksper family name in the council books of Stratford "is spelt in sixteen ways…. The commonest form is 'Shaxpeare.'"* According to the Ogburns,* "His own [primary] spelling was Shaksper," and in the marriage records it is "Shaxper and…Shagsper."*

Most Oxfordians have used "Shakspere" as the spelling for the Stratford man, but when skimming through their pages I find that rendering difficult to discern easily from "Shakespeare," so for this book I have adopted the shorter version, Shaksper. I add contrast by citing the country lad more informally as Will Shaksper vs. the poet and playwright William Shakespeare.

Orthodox scholars have equated the names Shaksper and Shakespeare on the basis that Elizabethan spelling was erratic. But the variant spellings in this case indicate different people. The renditions of the former name that use an *x* in place of the *ks* and a *g* in place of the *k* confirm the short *a*, as in *flax*, as the only utilized pronunciation of the Stratford man's name. "Shakespeare," on the other hand, requires a long *a*.

Over Fifty Years of Personal Doubt and Disappointment

In my teens, I experienced two major events of disappointment in the Stratfordian scenario. The first pertains to biography, and the second to locale.

When I was in high school, I was subjected to the conventional line of thought in the Folger Library editions of Shakespeare's works, edited by Louis B. Wright. I recall turning eagerly to the introductory section titled "Author," expecting an engaging discussion of the life of this literary giant.

To say that the biography was disappointing would be an understatement. It covers a bit over seven pages in a hand-sized paperback book.

Because "The Stratford records give considerable information about John Shakespeare,"* William's father, I was treated to a full page about this glover, shopkeeper and small-town mayor. That filler left only five pages of biography. These are small pages. In a normal-sized book, the text would cover 2½ pages.

Even within those 2½ pages, there are many non-facts: "There is little documentation of Shakespeare's boyhood"; "What William Shakespeare was doing in Stratford during the early years of his married life, or when he went to London, we do not know"; "How Shakespeare broke into the London theatres as a dramatist and actor we do not know."*

In the bit of text that remains, there is but a smattering of bland facts: He was baptized; he got married; he was fined; he held shares in a theatre; he bought a house; he bought 107 acres of farmland.

That's it. I recall coming away from this exposition with a feeling of cavernous emptiness.

The remaining two pages out of the seven are spent attacking the very idea of an authorship question. One gets the feeling that the editor's acute embarrassment over the paucity of facts motivated him to launch into the polemic.

It is starkly revealing that someone charged with writing an introductory biography of the world's greatest writer would elect to spend a quarter of it attacking "naïve and ignorant" doubters who write "so much nonsense" about an idea which is "one of the most absurd in the history of human perversity."* These fervid terms refer to the innocent question of whether the Will Shaksper of Stratford was qualified to write the works of Shakespeare. If you were writing a biography of Charles Dickens, would you spend a quarter of your time railing about fools who thought Dickens was a pen name for someone else? Only a weak theory that has been mortally challenged would prompt such a defensive yet contentless response. Wright's pompous style of verbiage has persisted within orthodox scholarship right up to the present.

I realized much later that the Folger edition's brief "biography" was a model of honesty and restraint compared to the reams of conjecture and filler constituting more recent padded biographies of Shakespeare. Purported biographies of the man are a combination of boring general descriptions of Elizabethan life, detailed discussions of Shaksper's relatives' and neighbors' mundane activities, inferences from Shakespeare's poems and plays, expansions upon the Stratford monument and two unconnected phrases in the preface to the First Folio, and boundless conjecture.

As Mark Twain put it a century ago in a detailed, intelligent investigation following fifty years of interest on the subject, "the giant Biography of William Shakespeare [is] a brontosaur: nine bones and six hundred barrels of plaster of Paris."* In 1987, a daring scholar catalogued a stark difference among Elizabethan-era biographies. He found that whereas the profiles of George Peele (ironically), John Lyly (ironically) and Christopher Marlowe were fairly straightforward, the profile of William Shakespeare "contains…21 qualifying phrases [in] 40 sentences."* Renegade (meaning intellectually honest) Stratfordian Eric Sams saw through all the nonsense. In 1995, he wrote in deepest consternation, "What I noticed immediately… was that *people were just making things up! Absolutely non-stop!*"*

Since then, sad to say, Shaksperology has slithered to new lows. A book on the Bard from 2004 begins "LET US IMAGINE"* (capitals in the original). In a Shakespeare compendium, the same author offered a "biography" of Shakespeare based on "probable circumstances" that opened the door for him to "indulge briefly in the biographical daydreams [and] vignettes that are conjectural."*

In a speech delivered in the 1980s, a celebrated Shakespearean actor* blew off Oxfordians as "social snobs." He asked his audience, "How did Shakespeare get into the professional theatre?" and proceeded to tell us. He recalled that Will's father "John Shakespeare was bailiff or constable of Stratford-upon-Avon, and one of his official duties was to welcome civic visitors to the town, such as the professional actors who toured through Stratford." Would a lowly sheriff's officer really have any such public welcoming duty? He would not; that would be the mayor's job. Nevertheless, the audience was invited to "imagine the scene" as the town crier bellowed out a welcome to "*the greatest actors in the worrrrld!*" as Constable John beams proudly and his wide-eyed, impressionable son Will stands by in a mud lane in Stratford. Our speaker even has John taking Will backstage to meet the actors. Never mind that almost nobody ever does that. Should you buy into that romantic scene? Ask yourself: Is it not curious that the Bard never depicted an acting troupe on tour in a small-town setting? Is it not a problem that John Shaksper's public-service days were first recorded in 1559, before Will was born, and ended sometime before John was charged with petty crimes in 1572 (see biographical notes below), when Will was only seven or eight? Is it not a red flag that the Bard in fact thought constables — like Shaksper's dad — were flat dolts, exemplified by Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*? Like all romantic scenes in Stratfordian mythology, this one, too, melts in the sunshine of the briefest consideration.

In 2005, an author wrote a whopping 586 pages under the title, *Shakespeare, The Biography*. How much one will learn! But no. A reviewer in *Publisher's Weekly* was as kind as he could be:

> At their best, Shakespearean biographers are like great jazz musicians, able to take a few notes of an old standard and spin them into *dizzying riffs of conjecture*. [The author] *doesn't offer a new explanation* of how the glover's son of provincial Stratford became the sophisticated poetic genius of London. Instead he gives us intelligent, often elegant, variations on the old ones. Like many of his fellow biographers, *he warns us that a particular 'tradition' has no corroboration and then plays it out anyway*."*

In 2008, one author took the obscure fact — inferred from a signature on a lease — that Will Shaksper lodged in London for a year in the house of a family of Huguenots. He turned that wisp of information into a 400-page tome arguing in part that Shakespeare received story ideas for his incandescent plays from his landlord! Even the normally accommodating *Publishers Weekly* could not help but admit that the book "waxes tedious, and only the Bard's cultish devotees will care about the minutiae of headgear and wigs or the Mountjoy lawsuit. For the rest, it's much ado about nothing."* Repeat: *nothing*. How could it be otherwise when Shaksper's biography offers no useful, relevant facts?

In 2019, an accomplished stage and film actor of Shakespeare's plays issued a film titled *All Is True*. A May 2019 review in *The Atlantic* was headlined in part, "Not All Is True. In Fact, Much Is Invented." In short, it was just another movie script, like *Shakespeare in Love*.

In 2012, a critically thinking Stratfordian, David Ellis, Professor Emeritus of English Literature at the University of Kent at Canterbury, called his colleagues to the carpet. His book, *The Truth About William Shakespeare: Fact, Fiction and Modern Biographies* (Edinburgh University Press), "looks at the methods that Shakespeare's biographers have used to hide their lack of knowledge."* A professor from the University of Bristol who reviewed the book concluded, "In exposing the fabrications that biographers have resorted to in the face of the lack of knowledge of any kind to be had about Shakespeare's personality and private life, this book is sharply incisive, humorously as well as forensically so."*

Sams' exclamation that biographers were "making things up…*non-stop!*" is no exaggeration. A'Dair* estimated that 10,000 books have been written about Shakespeare under the assumption — or in vigorous defense of the idea — that he was the same man as Will Shaksper of Stratford-upon-Avon.

My second disappointment came the summer after graduation from high school. In 1967, my best friend and I traveled overseas for seven weeks, and one of our stops — approached with cautious hope of encountering a useful fact — was Stratford-upon-Avon. I was only eighteen, but I knew bogus thatched cottages and factory-made artifacts when I saw them. I realized, "There's no information here."

I did not find out until 55 years later that the first director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon resigned in 1891 after discovering that the entire project was fraudulent.*

Some information does exist. Unfortunately for orthodoxy, it ultimately reveals and debunks what one critic wryly called "the literary Piltdown that is Shaksper of Stratford."*

What Did Shakespeare Look Like?

Many people think they know what Shakespeare looked like. Many people think they know how Jesus should have looked, too.

We know what Ben Jonson looked like. We know what John Fletcher looked like. We know what the dedicatee of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* looked like. We know what the dedicatees of the First Folio looked like. We even know what their father's mistress looked like. What did William Shakespeare look like? Is there a miniature, a portrait, an etching, even a description?

Orthodox scholars have claimed, "Only two extant portraits can be regarded as fully authenticated: the bust in Stratford church and the frontispiece to the folio of 1623. *There is considerable discrepancy between the two*."* When two portraits have been *authenticated*, but they *differ considerably*, there is a problem.

Oxfordians have done a thorough job of debunking the validity of both portraits. In 1636, Sir William Dugdale made a careful sketch of the original Stratford bust for his book, *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656). It depicts the head and torso of a man who has his arms folded over a sack of wool, known as a woolpack. (To view reproductions of the differing renditions of the monument, just search the Internet.)

Some Stratfordians have resorted to charging that Dugdale must have made up the image out of sheer incompetence. But Dugdale was no hack. He "was a highly respected historian and antiquarian who wrote several important books [and] was commissioned by an officer of King Charles I to record monuments and epitaphs of London churches…."* All his other drawings have been proven accurate.

In 2007, a Stratfordian scholar mined the church archives to find many records pertaining to repairs and renovations of the bust. He concluded that the present bust probably bears little likeness to the original, which is just what Dugdale's drawing proves.

Who exactly did the original bust represent? It was not Will Shaksper but his father, John, who had "became a successful wool dealer."* The inscription on the monument mentions only "Shakspeare," keeping the short *a* sound and omitting the first name. Kennedy* argued cogently that the original bust depicted John the wool dealer, not his son. Why would a monument to Shakespeare depict a local man named John? Because the locals would have known that William Shakespeare the playwright never lived there, and they would have known that John did. The obfuscating device had to serve only as long as locals who could have testified to the truth were alive.

The later version, installed after four generations had passed, turns out to be yet another fabrication:

> …Bianchi presented persuasive evidence that the Shakespeare bust in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-on-Avon was replaced by another bust while undergoing beautification and repair in 1746. She identified the new bust as being that of Carlo Vizziani, an Italian attorney and Rector of La Sapienza, University of Rome, who died in 1661 and had never set foot in England.*

The new bust cannot depict Shakespeare, because the subject sports a moustache that was briefly in style only in the mid-1600s. The man holds a pen, which is poised, absurdly, above a pillow. No one can write on a pillow. Apparently, it is there because the redesigners did not wish to make the new image differ too much from that of the original depicting a woolpack. An unbiased person would infer both a hoax and a conspiracy. For more on this subject, see the article by Waugh* and the references cited therein.

Proponents have yet to retreat on this issue. "The *Guardian* ran a big feature on March 19, 2021, trumpeting recent research done by Lena Cowen Orlin, a professor of English at Georgetown University, who now asserts that the famous bust…shows what the Bard actually looked like. 'It is highly likely that Shakespeare commissioned the monument,' she said."* "Orlin herself is a trustee of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust,"* which is the most stalwart bastion of claims for the traditional Bard, because its livelihood depends upon it. McNeil quickly offered four objections, and "Oxfordian Alexander Waugh wasted little time in debunking Professor Orlin's claims."* Orlin herself even established "that the gown worn by the subject is that of an undergraduate at Oxford University…"* to which Will Shaksper had no affiliation whatsoever. Offering a contrasting view of its inspiration, Waugh* showed that the bust is the spitting image of a bust of Thomas Bodley, a fellow of Merton College, Oxford.

The second "authenticated" portrait of Shakespeare is the cartoon-like engraving of a head and torso in the First Folio. The face has been described, even by Stratfordians, as "oafish," "pudding-faced," "uncomely" and as bearing an "unintellectual expression."* This impression is not due to shoddy workmanship, as orthodoxy might wish it. "No other portrait made by the engraver, Martin Droeshout, depicted a human being so contrary to nature."* Rather, the entire picture is deliberately riddled with errors: The head is large and detached from the body, the face has two right eyes, and the portion of the doublet on the sitter's right is actually an accurate rendering of the left-rear of the garment.* It is as if whoever designed the image wished viewers to realize, "A lot is wrong with this picture."

There are also about half a dozen unauthenticated portraits of Shakespeare. Each one has had its turn as headline bait. The latest of them, painted circa 1610, was discovered in 2009. The Chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in England promoted it as genuine on the basis that the sitter was William Shaksper's age at the time. Never mind that the sitter, by his dress, was also a man of high social position. The claim quickly failed: "One of the country's most eminent art historians," Sir Roy Strong, challenged the claim immediately: "It is codswallop…. I don't know why Stanley Wells has gone off on this fantasy journey."* The answer is obvious: Stratfordians are starved for "actual facts" about their candidate. The painting turned out to be of a writer named Sir Thomas Overbury (1581-1613).

Because there are no portraits of Shakespeare, people took to manufacturing them. "[T]here are at least 12 altered (into Shakespeare) portraits of undoubted Elizabethan or Jacobean composition."* Every one of them has been discredited.

The only portrait that seems to have held some truth within it is the Ashbourne. It, too, has been altered to make it look like the cartoonish depiction of William Shakespeare in the First Folio. Its story, however, is more sinister than mere forgery. See the reproduction in the **Robert Greene** chapter and further discussion below.

Thanks to the information revolution, pictorial forgeries may finally have ceased. Dismissal and apologetics have supplanted them.

Will Shaksper and the London Theatre

If the traditional story were valid, researchers should have found some history of activity in the literary arts that would show Will Shaksper preparing himself to create *Venus and Adonis* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There is none.

Instead, we find murky rumors of lowly professions. In London, he "apparently...worked for a man who ran a bear-baiting arena (Philip Henslowe)…."* According to **Phillips Stubbes**' *Anatomie of Abuses*, bear-baiting was "a filthie, stinking, and loathsome game." Such an activity would not have left a paper trail, but it might have served to bring young Will in physical proximity of the theatre world. Along those lines, "There is also a legend that when first he came to London he earned his living by holding horses outside a playhouse and presently given employment inside, but there is nothing better than eighteenth-century hearsay for this."*

Is it reasonable to believe that only wisps of hearsay inform us about the theatre employment of the greatest dramatist in history? No, but they do fit the man in question. Shaksper's early biography justifies such jobs as parking attendant, usher, sanitation engineer and ticket-taker, and "holding horses" fits into that list. As for the possible accuracy of such "hearsay," consider the source: "*a descendant of William Shakspere's sister* had, in 1818, stated that 'Shakespeare owed his rise in life, and his introduction to the theatre, to his accidentally holding the horse of a gentleman at the door of the theatre, on his first arriving in London. His appearance led to inquiry and subsequent patronage.'"* That story fits what we know of Shaksper and what we suspect of the Earl of Oxford's use of him (see discussion below).

Seven records offer hints that Shakespeare might have been an actor. None of them are definitive.

The first one is a record dated March 15, 1595 stating that three members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men — "Will Kemp, Will Shakespeare & Richard Burbage" — were paid "twenty pounds for performances at Court in December 1594…."* Whalen judged it to be "suspect and possibly fraudulent."* Even if the record is genuine, it is not clear precisely to which "Shakespeare" it applies.

In 1603-1604, the name "Shakespeare" appears on two lists, one of performance licenses for members of the newly titled acting troupe, the King's Players, and the other of men given scarlet cloth so they could make presentable attire for King James' procession through London. There is no telling if that name refers to the Stratford man or is the equivalent of "Twain." Regardless, they mean only that the man indicated was employed in the theatre and was to make himself presentable enough to join a royal procession.

In June 1609, when Shaksper was back home suing someone named Addenbrooke, a Stratford court record in Latin stated that he was "recently of the court of King James." A reasonable inference would be that Shaksper was working for King James' acting troupe, because "when they became the King's Men, members of the Company were made Grooms of the Chamber to the King…."* Such a role is compatible

with Oxfordian theory, because Shaksper's participation in the theatre explains how Oxford would have met him. If Shaksper did work for the King's Men, in what capacity remains unknown.

The names of actors John Heminges and Henry Condell appear beneath poems contributed to *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, (1623), otherwise known as the First Folio. "The Stratford Man definitely knew Heminges and Condell: he was a member of the King's Men, and they all owned shares in the Globe and Blackfriars theaters."*

A problem with this aspect of the First Folio evidence is that this pair of supposed fellow actors had no background for fine writing. They "are not known to have written anything, and there is no evidence they could write or had been to school."* Fitting their lack of book learning, "Heminges later became a grocer, and Condell ran a pub."* So, who wrote their well-crafted poems? Their poetry "so strongly echoes the Introduction to [Ben] Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* that many are convinced Jonson" — the primary editor of the First Folio — "wrote the preface himself."*

Shaksper's will left money to buy mourning rings for three actors, "my ffellowes John Hemyngees, Rychard Burbage & Henry Cundell," prompting scholars to assert that his best buddies were actors. Even this seemingly confirmatory fact arouses suspicion, however, because the bequest to them is inserted between two lines of the original text of the will. Orthodox biographies rarely mention that fact, because it seems to indicate a posthumous, perhaps fraudulent, interlineation. Even if the bequest is genuine, it would not tell us why the three men were Shaksper's pals. Maybe he kept their snack table supplied backstage; we don't know.

From two names in the First Folio and the will's single line, Stratfordian biographies have woven tapestries of text about an acting career that otherwise seems never to have existed. "None of the records from Will Shaksper's lifetime that are cited by Stratfordians as evidence of his supposed acting career are theater records. His name, in whatever spelling, does not appear in cast lists, records of payment to actors, or diaries of theater managers."*

Shakespeare's name does appear on three lists of actors, but they are *retrospective* and even posthumous, having been published in 1616, the year Shaksper died, and 1623. Looney made a convincing (and entertaining) case that they are so "exceptional and irregular" as to be assuredly phony. Ben Jonson placed two of them in public view in a belated report of cast lists for productions of *Every Man in his Humour* in 1598 and of *Sejanus* in 1603. At the time these plays were acted, no one noted Shaksper or Shakespeare as being anywhere near them. Scholars have searched for more evidence of Shaksper's participation in the very acting company with which Jonson's lists associate him but to no avail: "The municipal archives of no less than seventy towns and cities have been carefully inspected, [but] never once has the name Shakespeare been discovered."* "There are innumerable records of the specific parts played by the leading actors of the day, Heminges, Condell, Burbage, Tarleton, Alleyn and others…"* including Cowley, Bryan and Pope, but "not once does the name William Shakespeare occur in all these accounts."*

In sum, there is no indication from records kept within Shaksper's lifetime that he was an actor, and the posthumous suggestions that he was are highly suspect. Making a case for after-the-fact, conspiratorial maneuvering is hardly a stretch with evidence such as this.

The way Stratfordians fill the void that is Shaksper's acting career is instructive, too. In 1709, Nicholas Rowe reported century-old gossip that "the top of his Performance was the Ghost in his own *Hamlet.*"* The Ghost is a bit part consisting of 87 lines and some melodramatic moaning. According to another conjecture, he "played Adam in *As You Like It*,"* another small part. These unflattering anecdotes are hearsay, reported many decades after the fact. Taken at face value, they fit an emerging picture that Will Shaksper was a hanger-on backstage who perhaps on occasion was tapped to fill in doing bit parts.

Further damning evidence against the idea that Shaksper treaded the boards is the diary maintained by actor Edward Alleyn. Among all his detailed notes and thoughts recorded from 1617 to 1622, he never once mentions Will Shaksper or William Shakespeare. See the Edward Alleyn chapter.

Shakespeare's non-presence on stage is evident even among what should have been his devoted audience: "Not a single document has shown any aristocrat [or anyone] at all interested in the person of William Shakspere. None wrote to him, received a letter from him, or so much as mentioned him in private correspondence. [In contrast,] Burbage and Kemp…have emerged as living personalities in dramatic history… it is safe to say that Shakspere, as a known actor on the Elizabethan stage, has no existence whatsoever."* This dearth of mention is strong evidence that the two cast lists including his name posthumously are bogus.

"[I]n 1635, Cuthbert Burbage…called on the name, among others, of the dead William Shakspere whom he described as a 'player'. …This statement is so damning that one scholar tried to dismiss Burbage as 'a pizzle-pated old boy.'"* Why would scholar invested in orthodoxy feel compelled to ridicule, for a seemingly innocuous, offhand comment, the entrepreneur who "was for four decades a significant agent in the success and endurance of Shakespeare's company, the King's Men"?* Because by calling Shakespeare merely a "player" rather than a playwright, Burbage's comment is "solid testimony Shakspere was not Shakespeare."*

In 2016, researcher Heather Wolfe of the Folger Library, after perusing documents relating to Will Shaksper's pursuit of a coat of arms in 1599 and 1602, concluded, "it becomes clear that 'Shakespeare, Gent. from Stratford' and 'Shakespeare the Player' are the same man." This conclusion inadvertently bolsters Burbage's depiction as well as the inescapable, withering deduction: Shaksper was a bit player but no playwright.

Some Stratfordians have taken the tack of attempting to elevate evidence that Shaksper may have been an actor to evidence that he was a playwright. As late as 2017, Wolfe's report prompted leaps of logic and celebratory language from Stratfordians:

> In other words, "the man from Stratford" is indeed the playwright. [We have] cracked the case of Shakespeare's identity [and] delivered the coup de grace to the wild-eyed army of conspiracy theorists… who contest the authenticity, even the existence, of the playwright known to contemporaries as Master Will Shakespeare. …Wolfe's research nails any lingering ambiguity in which the Shakespeare deniers can take refuge. …James Shapiro [commented,] "it is one more nail in the coffin of those who can't bring themselves to acknowledge that the glover's son from Stratford was also the successful man of the theatre who left us so many extraordinary plays.*

Let's be logical. The question is, does *player* equal *playwright*? It does not. The description offered in fact leads one to precisely the opposite conclusion of the one stated above. If Shaksper were the famous playwright who had been thrilling London with his productions, then records produced as late as 1599 and 1602 — and 1635, as noted above — would have said so. Omitting such a truth would be like summarizing the career of film producer/director Sidney Pollack as simply "actor." He did appear in some films, but *actor* was not his defining occupation. The single descriptor applied to Shaksper on documents is merely *player* — a profession widely and deeply ill-regarded at the time (see Opening Argument). So, Shaksper could not possibly be Ben Jonson's "Soule of the Age!" who generated such "applause!" and "delight!" with his theatrical creations. According to these documents, acting must have been the most elevated among Shaksper's base occupations; and that is exactly the conclusion his biography supports. Waugh composed a similar reply to an earlier, slightly less exuberant article on the same subject in *The New York Times* of June 19, 2016.*

Why do Stratfordians sponsor ticker-tape parades over mere wisps of information? Because they have so little substance upon which to seize.

Further references to Will Shaksper only get weaker. Despite his supposed blazing success as a playwright and actor in London, where he would have had the highest of profiles, "In all three documents — the two indentures and the mortgage deed — Shakespeare is described as 'of Stratford-on-Avon, in the Countie of Warwick, Gentleman.'"* In those and most other records, he's not even a player.

^When Shaksper Became Shakespeare

Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* flew off the shelves in 1593 and for years afterward. *Lucrece* became the talk of the town in 1594. Both poems were sensations, but where was the poet? There is no surviving personal news, from any existing document, that William Shakespeare the poet was about town during those years in any way.

Once *Venus and Adonis* became popular, people must have started combing the bookstalls for the author, and Oxford found himself in need of a front man. Oxfordians have figured that Oxford came to know Shaksper as an employee attached to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a theatrical troupe that performed Shakespeare's plays. William Shaksper was fortunately named, and he was no doubt happily available to serve as a paid front man for Oxford's pseudonym, which suddenly and conveniently became an allonym.

(Several researchers have wondered if Oxford chose Will Shaksper as cover because "…Edward de Vere and William Shaksper were distant 8th cousins,"* according to a retrospectively constructed genealogy that finds a common ancestor in the late 1300s and progresses through a series of marriages and offspring involving half a dozen different family names over a period of 200 years to locate the relationship. Few people know their second cousins, and nobody knows their third cousins, much less the hundreds of people that would qualify as 8th cousins. Oxford and Shaksper were no more related to each other than to any randomly selected Englishmen of the time. The deal was surely done primarily because of the *compatible name*, which would serve well as camouflage—as history testifies it did—after the principals and those who knew them were dead.)

I believe we can narrow down the date of the deal. Shakespeare's name was attached to no plays until 1598. Prior to that time, seven plays later attributed to Shakespeare were published anonymously: *Titus Andronicus* and *Henry VI Part 2* in 1594, *Edward III* and *Henry VI Part 3* in 1596, and *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and *Richard III* in 1597. The clear implication is that Oxford had not attached a pseudonym or allonym to those plays. He probably thought he didn't need one, because several of his other plays had previously come out anonymously, generating no calls for an author. This time, however, complications arose. Having chosen dozens of allonyms for his poems and prose stories, he was now operating with a pseudonym, and the narrative poems of 1593 and 1594 issued under the name William Shakespeare had become big hits. The heat must have been on to provide a body to go with the name.

In 1596, William Shaksper suddenly renewed his father's quest for a coat of arms, "and it is obvious he was confident he could not only find the application fee, but could also meet the various additional payments the College of Arms would require at every stage…totaling about £100."* £100 was a lot of money, the equivalent of more than $50,000 today — to pay for a scroll on the wall. Not only did the money likely come directly or indirectly from Oxford, but Hess and Tarcia* also offered graphic evidence that Oxford personally filled out the second application for John Shaksper's coat of arms. After some tainted proceedings suggesting bribery, a coat of arms was finally granted to John Shaksper, which entitled both him and his son Will to the designation of "gentleman."* The grant generated at least one major objection, a formal complaint from the outraged York Herald, who accused two officials of "granting arms for profit"* and "of having made grants to base persons, among whom 'Shakespeare' was named.'"*

A few months later, in May 1597, Shaksper showed up in Stratford with enough money to buy a very expensive house. In 1599, "Shakespeare" became the happy owner of a 21-year lease on an unknown portion of shares of the receipts from the Globe theatre.

At his death, Shaksper owned five houses. He did not earn the money to buy them from writing. Ben Jonson, a professional playwright and masque-writer for the courts of Elizabeth and James, "estimated that, during his life, he made less than £200 from all his writing.…"* Yet somehow Shaksper was able to bequeath "an estate worth over £2000,"* ten times Jonson's lifetime income, an amount worth "well over £1 million today."*

Where did Shaksper suddenly get so much money? He couldn't have earned it though business deals in London, because doing so would have left a paper trail of commercial transactions and office and residence leases, of which there is nothing but a single lodging record. He couldn't have earned it from selling plays, as Ben Jonson's experience proves.

In **1598**, three more things happened:

1) In his *Encomion of Lady Pecunia*, **Richard Barnfield**, citing the Bard's two narrative poems, issued "what seems to be the absolutely earliest praise of Shakespeare."*
2) The first plays issued in Shakespeare's name, *Love's Labor's Lost*, noted as "Newly corrected and augmented By W. Shakespere," and *Richard II* and *Richard III,* both noted as "By William Shakespeare," were published.
3) Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* credited Shakespeare with twelve plays (see list in the Francis Meres chapter).

This series of events suggests that sometime between the publication of *Lucrece* in 1594 and Shaksper's application for a coat of arms in 1596 — that is, **1595** plus or minus a few months — Oxford forged a deal with Will Shaksper by which he would front for the two extant poems and a number of soon-to-be-published plays. In **1596**, with the deal in place, Oxford retired with his new wife to Hackney, where he would edit his favorite plays in peace.

Fitting this scenario, *Love's Labor's Lost*, whose genesis dates to 1578 (see discussion below), "was not issued in its final form until 1598, and every line of it bears marks of most careful and exacting revision."* *Hamlet*, a play originating in the 1580s, did not achieve its final form until 1604. So, the deal began bearing fruit in 1598. That is when Oxford had one of his Voices praise Shakespeare, when the first play attributed to Shakespeare came out, and when Meres reported that Shakespeare had written a dozen plays.

This scenario allows for some deductions that expand the story as follows: Oxford initially intended the name William Shakespeare to be just another briefly employed Voice, author of two narrative poems. He probably would have retired the name then and there, just as he did **John Trussel** after one narrative poem in 1595 and **Francis Sabie** after three poetry books in 1595-1596. Then Oxford got the idea to begin publishing all the court plays he had crafted, mostly from 1576 onward. But he wanted them to be perfect, so he retired to Hackney to amend, revise and augment them, as several title pages on quartos attest. He probably figured he had twenty more years to live, which would give him plenty of time to leave behind theatrical masterpieces for all time. Way back in 1886, Butler saw what was happening:

> The play of *Troilus* was a dozen years in growth. Internal evidence favors the opinion that *Romeo and Juliet* was an early work, and that it was subsequently revised and enlarged. Shakespeare, after having sketched out a play on the fashion of his youthful taste and skill, returned in after years to enlarge it, remodel it and enrich it with the matured fruits of years of observation and reflection. *Love's Labor*

> [sic] *Lost* first appeared in print with the annunciation that it was "newly corrected and augmented." … *Cymbeline* was an entire *rifacimento* of an early dramatic attempt, showing not only matured fullness of thought but laboring intensity of compressed expression. [T]he poet sought to find out acceptable words, or what he terms "an army of good words." He poured his new wine into new bottles, and never was at rest till he had arrayed his ideas in that fitness of phrase which comes only by inspirations.*

Ben Jonson confirms this view. In his dedication for the First Folio, in speaking of the Bard's "true filed lines," he "maintains that Shakespeare was a careful reviser of his own work."* To drive home the point, he adds, "he/ Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,/ (Such as thine are) and strike the second heat/ Upon the Muses' anvil… For a good poet's made, as well as born./ And such wert thou!" As noted throughout this book, the practice of careful revision pertains to nearly all Voices; Sonnet LIX of **Samuel Daniel**'s *Delia* celebrates "these lines, the worke of carefull houres."

Butler concluded of Shakespeare, "Had he survived fifty years longer I supposed he would to the last have been, like Plato, perfecting his phrases.* Unfortunately, upon his retirement, Oxford had only eight years of life remaining, and in that time, he polished and issued eleven plays under the name Shakespeare, the last one being *Hamlet,* published in 1603. After Oxford died, the pace of published plays slowed dramatically. For the next nineteen years, only four plays by Shakespeare trickled out. Twenty of Oxford's plays would have been lost forever had the grand possessors not seen fit to publish most of his remaining texts in the First Folio of 1623.

If Shaksper ever was an actor, "William Shakespeare" would prove to be his greatest role. Fitting what were his likely lowly talents, he didn't have much to do. All he had to do was keep quiet and nod and smile a lot.

An action taken by Shaksper the year after Oxford died fits the case that people with long-range plans were engineering a coverup. "In the summer of 1605 [on July 24], Shakespeare [Shaksper] was able to raise the very considerable sum of £440 to purchase from Ralph Hubaud a half-share in a lease of a portion of the Stratford tithes."* That is a huge amount of money for someone with no documented income. Why would Shaksper or his handlers have chosen that particular investment? Upon taking that action, because tithes were tied to church revenues, "Shakspere automatically becomes a lay rector, entitled to burial in the parish church chancel."* Taking that step could have been part of a plan that ended with the monument to "Shakspeare" that resides to this day inside Trinity Church in Stratford-Upon-Avon.

"Although Shakespeare died 'a man of considerable means'…His purchases came to a virtual end in 1605…' one year after the death of Edward de Vere."* Any oversized payments he was receiving must have ceased at that time.

Why did Shaksper continue to remain silent? There is an unusual and deliberately unspecific line in the will (1612) of Oxford's widow, Elizabeth Trentham. It bequeaths "unto *my dombe man* yearlie duringe his life [ ] powndes, to bee paide him by my Executors."* The blank where an amount should be indicates that it was to be filled in later. Oxfordians have suspected that Trentham was referring to annual payments — probably smaller than he had previously received — to Will Shaksper to keep him quiet. No competing explanation has arisen.

^**The Elusive William Shakespeare**

Despite "centuries of scholarship"* and armies of historians combing the records for information on the life of a man who "has been subjected to the greatest battery of organized research that has ever been directed on a single person,"* the pitiful result is that Will Shaksper of Stratford-upon-Avon has almost no biography

at all, much less that of a writer. "There is no evidence whatever, not an iota, that anyone during Shaksper's life ever referred to him as the playwright."* There no record whatsoever of a man named Shakespeare being in London during the first half of the 1590s, when someone by that name was supposedly wowing the theatre-going public. There is no record of anyone referring to Shaksper as a playwright *even after he died*. On the contrary, the very people closest to his family who wrote about Stratford never mentioned him in that capacity. Price* studied the records attending 25 writers of the day and found that William Shakespeare is the *only one* who lacks ten different types of documentary evidence indicating a literary career.

Theatrical producer Philip Henslowe kept records that mention 27 playwrights, but he never once wrote Shakespeare's name, even in connection with his staging of *Hamlet*, *Andronicous*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *the Tamynge of a Shrowe* and *King Leir*. "The names, signatures, handwriting, of all other leading playwrights of the day are to be found in Henslowe's journal; but not Shaksper's. Frequent are the names of Ben Jonson, Dekker, Chettle, Marston, Wilson, Drayton, Munday, Heywood, Middleton, Porter, Webster, Day, Chapman, and others, but never one mention of Shaksper or Shakespeare as an actor playwright."*

Actor Edward Alleyn left dozens of letters and memoirs of business matters relating to plays at London theatres. Not one of them mentions Shakespeare in any capacity, not as writer, player, payee or investor.

In the Oxfordian context, these omissions are immediately explicable: No playwright named Shakespeare existed, and Will Shaksper did not write any plays. Henslowe must have gotten hold of the plays directly from Oxford, through intermediaries (see discussion of *Patient Grissill* in the **Henry Chettle** chapter) or surreptitiously. Whatever the process, Shakespeare's name was not attached to them.

The traditional story is that the playwright was an upwardly mobile man out to make his fortune. It seems strange, then, that during Will Shaksper's lifetime, Shakespeare's plays were published only anonymously through 1597 and oftentimes thereafter,* and that Shakespeare's name is absent from the Stationers' Register through 1599 and cited only four times thereafter.* Shaksper seems to have been lax in protecting the presumed bases of his livelihood. As chronicled below, he saw fit to sue his neighbors repeatedly for small amounts of money, yet he never sued printers and publishers over unauthorized sales of his plays.

Will Shaksper died in 1616. Aside from Ben Jonson, who was surely speaking of the Earl of Oxford in "*De Shakespeare nostrati*" (see Those Who Knew), "No other contemporary left on record any definite impression of Shakespeare's personal character."*

Shaksper bequeathed virtually his entire estate, including his fine home and its contents, to his daughter, Susanna Hall. Had he left any manuscripts, she surely would have kept them. But "In 1642 James Cooke, a surgeon in attendance on some royalist troops stationed in Stratford, visited Mrs. Hall and examined manuscripts in her possession, but they were apparently of her husband's, not of her father's, composition."*

Orthodoxy has protested that people concluding that Oxford was Shakespeare must believe that there was a conspiracy to hide his authorship. That charge, however, is no less true of orthodoxy's position, because Shakespeare's elusiveness is there either way. "The fact is that every contemporary document that might have related authorship of Shakespeare's plays and poems to an identifiable human being have…simply vanished."* There is no imaginable reason why documents relating to Will Shaksper, if he were the writer, would have been rooted out and made to vanish. Only the Oxfordian position explains why there are no records linking Will Shaksper to plays, and only the Oxfordian position offers theories — both social and political — as to why there would have been a conspiracy to hide links to Oxford.

A Stratfordian scholar recently stated of the Oxfordian thesis, "First of all, the founding premise is false — there is nothing especially mysterious about William Shakespeare…." Really? Read on, and see

what you think.*

What Is Known of Will Shaksper

In one of the longest chapters in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, comprising 49 pages, there appear just over two dozen facts about Will Shaksper. Over the ensuing near-century since Lee's text was published, intrepid researchers have uncovered not quite another two dozen bits of trivia pertaining to him. In the second edition of *William Shakespeare — The Complete Works*, published by the Oxford University Press in 2005, editor Stanley Wells added them to Lee's pitiful list. The recorded events, primarily from those two sources, are as follows:

1) He was baptized on April 26, 1564. (His birthdate is unknown.)
2) At age 18, he began living with Anne Hathaway, who was eight years his senior; she became pregnant.
3) On November 27, 1582, a marriage license was issued for "Wm Shaxpere" and Anne Whateley, and a day later a marriage license bond was issued for "Willm Shagspere" and Anne Hathaway.
4) He had three children by Anne: Susanna (baptized on May 26, 1583) and twins Judith and Hamnet (baptized on February 2, 1585). Hamnet died early and was buried on August 11, 1596 in Stratford-upon-Avon.
5) In 1596, a London court received "A petition by William Wayte (of London) for sureties of the peace against 'Willm Shakspere' and others."* Today we would call it a restraining order.
6) On May 4, 1597, "he purchased the largest house in the town [of Stratford-upon-Avon], known as New Place."*
7) On November 15, 1597, "William Shackspeare" of Bishopsgate ward, London, was listed "as not having paid taxes due in February."*
8) He owned "ten quarters of corn."*
9) In 1598, records show a "Sale by 'mr shaxpere' of a load of stone in Stratford-upon-Avon."* One can imagine a busy playwright, at the top of his game, buying some stone for, say, building a wall, but *delivering* stone? This is a guy with a cart.
10) On February 4, 1598, "Wm Shackespe" is "listed as [a] holder of corn and malt in Stratford-upon-Avon."* Specifically, "Shakespeare was cited for holding eighty bushels of grain on his premises, which violated a government prohibition [following] successive failures of the grain crop during 1594-96 in Warwickshire[, which] led to widespread famine…."*
11) On October 1, 1598, "William Shakespeare" is "named as [a] tax defaulter in Bishopsgate ward, London."* Because the sums are small, he had recently become wealthy, and he moved twice while avoiding paying, "the infractions appear to have been deliberate and purposeful."*
12) On October 15, 1598, Richard Quiney wrote a letter to "mr Wm Shackespe" asking for a loan of £30. (Thomas Quiney, his son, married Judith Shaksper in 1616.)
13) Sometime in 1598-99, "Willm Shakespeare" was "named in Enrolled Subsidy Account (London),"* suggesting that he was a recipient of welfare payments.
14) In both 1599 and 1600, "Willmus Shakspere' was "named as owing money to the Exchequer (London)."*
15) "In March 1600 he recovered in London a debt of 7£ from one John Clayton."*
16) In 1601, Shaksper inherited from his father two houses on Henley Street in Stratford and permitted his mother to live in one of them while renting out the other.
17) Sometime before 1602, he planted a fruit orchard.

18) In 1602, there was a "Reconveyance of New Place to William Shakespeare,"* suggesting that he had temporarily lost title to the property.
19) In 1602, the York Herald filed a complaint in court and made mention of "Shakespear the Player." This is the one reference to Shaksper as an actor that is untainted with suspicion that it refers to someone else.
20) On May 1, 1602, he paid £320 for 107 acres of land in nearby Old Stratford.
21) On September 28, 1602, he bought a cottage and garden in Chapel Lane, Stratford.
22) "In July 1604, in the local court at Stratford, he sued one Philip Rogers, to whom he had supplied since the preceding March malt to the value of 1£, 19s, 10d., and had on 25 June lent 2s in cash."*
23) In 1604, "he was a lodger in the house of Christopher Mountjoy, a Huguenot."* This information comes from yet another lawsuit, this one involving Mr. Mountjoy and his son-in-law, filed eight years later, in 1612.*
24) On May 4, 1605, actor Augustine Phillips bequeathed "to my fellowe William Shakespeare" a 30-shilling piece in gold. This reference is taken as suggesting that Shaksper was an actor, but he could just as well have been a stagehand.
25) On July 24, 1605 he bought "an unexpired term of thirty-one years of a ninety-two years' lease of a moiety of the tithes of Stratford, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe."*
26) On October 16, 1608, "he stood chief godfather to William, son of Henry Walker, a mercer and alderman."*
27) During 1608 and 1609, he sued "another fellow-townsman, John Addenbroke,"* for a debt of 7£, 5s.
28) Addenbroke didn't pay, so Shaksper sued the man who put up Addenbroke's bail, his neighbor Mr. Thomas Horneby, who, failing to make bail, was "thrown into prison."*
29) In 1609, Shaksper became owner of an unknown share of receipts from the Blackfriars theatre. This interest is not mentioned in his will.
30) Sometime after 1609 he was party to a lawsuit entered to determine "the exact responsibilities of the tithe-owners."*
31) In April 1610, he bought 20 acres of pasture in Stratford.
32) On September 11, 1611, "Shakespeare subscribes to the cost of a bill for repairing highways."* (Might he have supplied stone for the purpose?)
33) In 1612, "Shakespeare testifies in Stephen Bellott's suit against Christopher Mountjoy, in London."*
34) On January 28, 1613, "John Combe of Stratford-upon-Avon bequeaths £5 to 'mr William Shackspere.'"*
35) On March 10, 1613, "Shakespeare buys a gatehouse in Blackfriars for £140."*
36) On March 31, 1613 is recorded a "Payment to Shakespeare and Richard Burbage of 44 shillings for an *impresa* for the Earl of Rutland."*
37) In 1613, Shaksper purchased in London a haberdasher's shop with living quarters above and a yard and leased the property to a Mr. John Robinson.
38) In 1614, he joined a Mr. Thomas Greene in obtaining "a deed indemnifying both"* against loss in a land development project.
39) On April 26, 1615, "Shakespeare [became] engaged in litigation concerned with the Blackfriars gatehouse."*
40) In March 1616 his will was drawn up.
41) He died on April 23, 1616.
42) He was buried on April 25, 1616.

43) He had become a lay rector and as such had a "right of internment" inside Stratford church, where he was presumably buried.

It's a good thing courts keep records of lawsuits, or much of this information would not exist.

Pointon* offered a list of every fact unearthed about William Shaksper's entire family, and it covers only five pages. Nothing in it elevates the Shakspers' indicated interests.

Did you notice something stunning about the timing of the events cited in the above list? "[F]or the first 33 years of the incumbent Bard's life we have only five solid documents relating to him…the entry of his baptism in the church records, the one for his marriage to Anne Hathaway and then the baptismal records for his three children. *That is it* for the entire period from his birth in April 1564 to May 1597. Call it what you may, everything else is conjecture, supposition or speculation as to where he was or what he was doing…."* Actually (as noted above), we now have the record of a restraining order taken out against him in 1596, leaving but a 32-year blank. He lived only twenty more years. So, the void of meaningful records covers more than three fifths of his time on earth.

In 2013, scholars at Aberystwyth University in Wales studied every bit of surviving information relating to Will Shaksper's life to determine aspects of his personality. What did they find? They found that he was of "unsavory character" as "a ruthless businessman who did all he could to…exploit the vulnerable" by "hoarding food to sell at inflated prices…at a time when Europe was suffering famines" and who "was repeatedly…threatened with jail for evading tax payments."* Crider used a five-factor psychoanalytic model to conclude that Will Shaksper of Stratford was "simultaneously antagonistic and conscientious," fitting the mold of "a successful psychopath."*

How can one revolve the difference between a man who *hoards commodities in times of famine for resale at peak prices* and a playwright whose protagonist pleads, "Here, *take this purse*, thou whom the heavens' plagues/ Have humbled to all strokes… So distribution should undo excess,/ *And each man have enough*" (*King Lear*, IV,i)? It's not possible.

The researchers at Aberystwyth evaded the proper conclusion by charging Shakespeare with being a miscreant in life and hypocrite on paper, where, they said, he championed the hungry only "to expunge a guilty conscience."* They missed the true meaning of their evidence, but they came close to the truth in concluding that Shakespeare had "another life." In fact, Will Shaksper had one life, and William Shakespeare had another.

One skeptic minced no words in expressing the dichotomy between the acknowledged "grain hoarder" of Stratford and his supposed works: "if we look at the reality of Shaksper, not the myth, we don't see anything to indicate any great intelligence or romantic sense. …The idea of a man like him writing something as magical as Sonnet 73, as despairing as Sonnet 92, as elegant as Sonnet 53, is just preposterous."*

Erroneous Inferences

Stratfordians have *inferred* things about Shakespeare. Scholars have believed fervently that two references — **Robert Greene**'s "Shake-scene" and one of Chettle's "play-makers" — refer to Shakespeare. Even Looney conceded, "The only thing that can be described as a reliable personal reference to William Shakspere in the whole course of his life was made in 1592 when **Greene** attacked him as an 'upstart crow'…." The **Robert Greene** chapter shows conclusively that these references do *not* refer to Shakespeare but to Edward Alleyn and then to Marlowe, Peele and Lodge. These are devastating amendments to the standard Shakespeare biography. As Hoster wrote, "The importance of 'shake-scene' to the Shakespearean position cannot be underestimated."* Dispensing with it leaves no evidence of Shakespeare's presence in London until 1596.

Further down the ladder of potential validity, one story "sounds apocryphal"; another is a "vague statement"; another is a "stage tradition"; and another "is fair to infer."* The list goes on.

On Shakespeare's vs. Shaksper's Education and Literacy

Shakespeare's poems and plays are densely informed by hundreds of books of classical literature and philosophy. Shakespeare's lines have been traced to original texts in "Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish [and suggest] familiarity with Dutch and German"* as well as Old English and Hebrew. For discussions of some Greek sources, see Showerman.* Shakespeare must have had access to the rarest of books and must have been educated to a degree that few human beings are privileged to attain.

Shakespeare amassed the largest vocabulary of any known human being: "John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, has about 8,000 different words. The King James Version of the Bible, inspired by God and translated by 48 of Great Britain's greatest biblical scholars, has 12,852 different words. There are 29,066 different words in Shakespeare's Canon."* Craig found that Shakespeare used no more words *per page* than his contemporaries but nevertheless admitted that from the material available "...Shakespeare has a larger vocabulary than his peers."* Shakespeare's canon is only part of Oxford's Voices' canon, so the number of different words Oxford used is probably closer to 35,000.

In 1640, John Warren, in a poem addressed to Shakespeare, accurately spoke of "thy *learned* skill." Shakespeare could not have attained his profound education without leaving at least *some* trail.

For families such as the Shakspers, illiteracy was the typical condition. "The literacy rate in Elizabethan London is estimated to have been fifteen to thirty percent."* That's in *London*. Commoners in rural England suffered an illiteracy rate of at least 85%. "Dirt and ignorance…"* typified the pig-farming village of Stratford-upon-Avon. Stratfordians assert that because John Shaksper was an alderman of the town for a while, he would have sent his son to the local grammar school. That inference is unfounded. As Mark Twain pointed out way back in 1909, "Of the nineteen important men charged with the government of the town, thirteen had to 'make their mark' in attesting important documents, because *they could not write their names*."* To conclude, it would have been unusual for Will Shaksper and his family to have been literate, much less to have attended school. But did they?

Will Shaksper of Stratford left no record of any education. Stratfordians have long asserted, as if it were a matter of course, that young Will "had a very good education, acquired in the Stratford Grammar School…."* In fact, the probability is overwhelming that he did not. In his day, "there was no compulsory education."* There was also a "relatively low uptake of schooling at the time,"* because a country boy was expected to chip in at home or assist in his father's work. Honan recognized, "A grammar boy was part of an elite,"* not the average local kid. To get admitted, William would have had to enter "petty" school, a type of preschool, from age 5 to 7, after which he would have had to demonstrate enough ability "to cope with Latin from day one."*

It may be true that "As a citizen and alderman of Stratford, John Shakespeare [sic] was entitled to send his son to the grammar school free."* That statement is somewhat misleading, however, because John was finished with public service before Will became of school age: "Shakespeare was elected to several municipal offices, serving as an alderman and culminating in a term as bailiff, the chief magistrate of the town council [sometimes asserted to be "the equivalent of a mayor"*] of Stratford in 1568, before he fell on hard times for reasons unknown."* He was also a lawbreaker. "Records indicate that he was…engaged in trading wool illegally in 1571 [and was] prosecuted in the 1570s for usury and for illegal dealing in wool."* So, John was hardly the kind of citizen for whose son the local school would have been inclined to offer special favor.

Four pesky facts seriously challenge the orthodox assumption that John sent his kids to school: (1) John

Shaksper was illiterate; (2) Will Shaksper's brothers were illiterate; (3) Will Shaksper's daughter Judith was illiterate and signed with a mark, although his daughter Susanna twice signed her name late in life; (4) six signatures of Will's name on documents differ and are crabbedly wrought, particularly when compared to others' signatures from that time, suggesting that he, too, was illiterate.* Jacobi quoted an ironic summation of the Stratfordian view of the linguistic abilities of the various members of Shaksper family: "illiterate — illiterate — illiterate — *world's greatest writer* — illiterate…."* In short, there is no evidence that William or his "brothers attended the school," and the evidence against it is that "no one in William's family was literate."* That is, literate in *English*, much less in Italian, French, Latin, Greek, Old English and Hebrew, as Shakespeare was.

There is no evidence tying Shaksper to books or letters, either. Books were prized possessions in the early 1600s, yet his will mentions no books. He composed no surviving letters. Only one letter is known to have been written *to* Shaksper. His neighbor Richard Quiney wrote it to request a loan. But "The letter was never sent, [which] suggests he learnt that Shaksper could not read."*

Have you ever met someone from an illiterate family who delivers fill dirt yet *also writes highly learned and erudite plays*? Have you ever known of an erudite playwright *who also delivers fill dirt and whose wife and children can't read*? In a rational world, shouldn't that single datum be enough to disqualify the Stratford man as the playwright who enthusiastically celebrated the razor-sharp wits of men and women in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *As You Like It*?

Will Shaksper had no known experiences or background compatible with the knowledge required to produce the Shakespeare canon. The facts of his life are incompatible with a biography of a literate man, much less a man of letters, much less history's greatest writer.

How Shaksper Fails to Fit: Count the Ways

Most conjectured scenarios about the playwright's life would have left a paper trail. If Shaksper read many fine books, he had to have bought or borrowed them from somewhere. If he received a legal education, he had to have gotten it somewhere. If he learned to play and compose music, he must have taken lessons. If he learned the intricacies of medicine, astronomy and the occult, he must have studied under someone or had access to relevant books. If he became fluent in Latin, Italian and French and knew enough Hebrew, Greek, Middle English and Old English to navigate works in them, as well as a bit of Dutch, German and Spanish, so extensively as to have coined, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, no fewer than 3200 new English words from those languages, he must become educated in them. "…English scholar Sir Sidney Lee noted that Shakespeare coined more words based on French than any other English Renaissance writer."* How could that be, when Will Shaksper, as far as anyone can tell, learned no French? "[T]he well-known French Renaissance scholar Abel Lefranc published a two-volume study of the French influence in Shakespeare…in which he examines French locations, literary works, politics, history, and royalty — a mass of information not available to anyone who had never spent time in France and did not know the language."* Shakespeare could even spout idiomatic French ("Yo buddy, what's cookin'?"), implying an intimate relationship with speakers of French. But there is no record of Shaksper having left England, much less of dwelling in France.

The same void applies to facts relating to Shakespeare's publications. Standard biographies routinely describe Shakespeare's dedicatee for Venus and Adonis and Lucrece, the 3rd Earl of Southampton, as Shakespeare's patron. There must be a thousand published statements of this ilk: "That Henry Wriothesley… was for a time Shakespeare's literary patron…is clearly indicated in the public, the published, record."* Shakespeare's dedications, however, in no way indicate any such relationship. Read them online and see

for yourself. Nor was Southampton in a position to patronize poets. In 1593, he was a teenaged ward of the state living on a meager allowance, with no access to his inheritance,* so he had no money for patronage. Evidence, or the lack of it, is staunchly opposed to the traditional view. "Mrs. C[harlotte] C[armichael] Stopes confessed that, in writing her biography of the Third Earl of Southampton, she spent eight years of industrious and painstaking research, ransacking public record-offices, in the hope of finding some connection between Southampton and 'Shakespeare' but found absolutely nothing; in consequence she felt her life had been a failure."* On the contrary, her research was a rousing success in providing yet more evidence that Will Shaksper had no connection whatsoever to Shakespeare's dedicatee.

Nobody at court or in the country ever mentioned a playwright named William Shakespeare. Denizens of Shaksper's hometown, including his own family — even after he died — never referred to him as having any kind of reputation, much less as a playwright. Chroniclers of Stratford and the Warwickshire area, including poet and playwright Fulke Greville; poet, playwright, Warwickshire native and geographical historian Michael Drayton; renowned British historian William Camden; and even Will Shaksper's own son-in-law, John Hall, a Stratford doctor (see Those Who Knew); never once mentioned Shaksper or Shakespeare among their commentaries on the local luminaries of Stratford and Warwickshire.

Looney divided Shaksper's life into three phases. Two of them — the first 25 years and the last 12 — are "perfectly homogeneous."* They suggest a small-town job-hopper, tax evader, grain hoarder and money lender ensconced in Stratford. Then there is the 12-year period from 1592 to 1604, when he was supposedly penning "the greatest works in English literature"* and wowing audiences at court and in the theatres. This dichotomy matches that expressed by Jacobi: transcendent brilliance bracketed by common lowliness. Even if one were naïve enough to believe such a biography were possible, the fact is that specifically in Shaksper's case, it is not, because "this great period of 'Shakespearean' publication (1597-1604) corresponds exactly with William Shakspere's busiest period in Stratford."* In those years, he was buying properties, delivering stone, planting an orchard, participating in lawsuits, stockpiling grain, obtaining a coat of arms, purchasing tithes and suing his neighbors. When did have time to write 38 plays?

Notes on the Shaksper Family

Will Shaksper's early family life is instructive. It does not suggest an upbringing fit to produce one of the most educated men in human history.

John Shaksper, William's father, was a jack of many trades, primarily dealing in "all manner of agricultural produce[, including] corn, wool, malt, meat, skins and leather."* He also worked as "a butcher and wool-merchant…."* Because "Butchers…had (sheep) pelts for sale," and "glovers…were great wool dealers,"* Kennedy deduced that John's businesses as a butcher, glover and wool dealer were all connected. He sold sheep's wool and then butchered the sheep, and he butchered cows and made gloves from their hides.

John's stints as alderman and bailiff are respectable activities by "an enterprising man."* Unfortunately, many indications of John's behavior prompt a dispassionate re-casting of his peak activities as those of a small-time rural opportunist who couldn't keep up the pace, as several events attest:

- "[H]e is first mentioned in the borough records as paying [in April 1552] a fine of twelve-pence for having a dirt-heap in front of his house."* This note is freshened with Stratfordian bias. John was in fact fined for maintaining a "sterquinarium," "otherwise a great dung heap."* To be fair, dung heaps are a fact of life in rural areas, as animal dung is a commodity valuable as fertilizer. Still, John was breaking the law. We are further reminded that the Shakspers rubbed shoulders with farmers, not courtiers.

- "In 1557, he was elected an ale-taster, whose duty it was to test the quality of malt-liquors…."* Might John have been an alcoholic? Read on.
- In 1572, he was "exposed for usury and illegal dealing.* He was fined for the offence.
- In 1575, he applied to the College of Arms for a coat of arms and was rejected.
- "By 1576 he was broke…."*
- He was cited for "neglecting his role as an alderman"* and fired. "[T]here are records of his non-attendance at Stratford council meetings and church from 1577-86, as a result of which he was dropped as an alderman."*
- "When attesting documents, he made his mark; and there is no evidence that he could write…."* This is not "no evidence"; it is proof that John could not write his own name.
- His wife "was only able, like her husband, to make her mark in lieu of signing her name."* So, both Will Shaksper's parents were illiterate.
- Despite having married the daughter of "a wealthy farmer of Wilmcote…In 1578 he was unable to pay…the sum of fourpence for the relief of the poor, or his contribution"* to a civic activity. Four pence!
- In 1578, "he borrowed money from his wife's kinfolk, and he and his wife mortgaged…her valuable property at Wilmcote…."* They also sold her property at Snitterfield.
- "Creditors harassed him unceasingly."* In lawsuits, he played "his customary role as defendant," and he became reclusive "due to 'fear of process for debt.'"*
- "By 1582 the neighbours were threatening him and he petitioned for sureties of the peace against four townsmen 'for fear of death and mutilation of his limbs.'"*
- In 1591, he was "'presented' as a recusant for absenting himself from church."*
- In March 1595 "he retired from trade, vanquished at every point."*
- "On 20 Oct. 1596 John Shakespeare [sic] applied for a coat-of-arms,"* for which he had no pedigree.
- When he died in 1601, "He apparently left no will."*

Kline astutely concluded, "when we read between the lines of the public records we find a picture of encroaching alcoholism."*

A forensic financial analyst challenged the widely held conclusion that John fell on hard times. He concluded that John was thriving as an unlicensed wool dealer who was hiding his activities from the government and his assets from the taxman.* So, John was either an abject failure or a thriving lawbreaker. Either depiction is fine with me. Unfortunately, the Stratfordian analyst then extrapolated his conclusion into an elaborate story that young Will must have been in London handling his father's illegal wool-dealing enterprise and financing his plays from the proceeds. Centuries of searching for records of Will Shaksper in London have turned up no evidence for that scenario, as well as positive evidence, such as his absence from Henslowe's theatre diary, contradicting it.

No matter how one analyzes John's situation, his achievements shine in comparison with what is known of his son. Comedian Jeff Foxworthy made a living with a routine called, "You know you're a redneck if…." Based on Foxworthy's catalog of signs, we may postulate that Will would pass as a man of like stature. Will Shaksper's CV contains these stellar points:

- Tradition has suggested, "Probably in 1577, when he was thirteen, he was enlisted by his father in…his father's trade, which, according to the writer [Aubrey], was that of a butcher."* But

this "anecdote from John Aubrey…has been discredited because John Shakspere would have needed a license for that trade, and there was already a butcher in Stratford."*

- On November 27, 1582, the bishop of Worcester authorized the 18-year-old Shaksper to marry Anne Whateley of a nearby town called Temple Grafton. The very next day, perhaps having gotten wind of the action, friends of Anne Hathaway of Shottery signed a bond indicating that there existed no "impediments" against her marriage to him. A shotgun was apparently involved in his union with Anne Hathaway, as documents and posted sureties imply that William "was forced into marrying her by her friends…"* at which time Anne was three months pregnant. (Some biographers have conjectured that two William Shakspers were involved, and no one knows for sure; but the proximity of these events suggests otherwise.)
- "Bearman discovered that Shakspere's marriage at eighteen was unusual in Stratford. He was 'one of only three known teenage bridegrooms from Stratford marrying during the years 1570-1640,"* a seventy-year period.
- Despite detailed records of parish activities, and although "both bride and bridegroom were parishioners,"* there is no record of any marriage between Anne and William.
- According to Rowe, "He had…fallen into ill company [who] made a frequent practice of deer-stealing [and participated] more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote near Stratford."* Lee set this time as 1585, when the future playwright should have been educating himself.
- Archdeacon Davies, the vicar of Saperton, reported local gossip a century later to the effect that William "was much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits, particularly from Sir Thomas Lucy, who had him oft whipt, and sometimes imprisoned…."* According to this report, Will was not only a petty thief but a dim-witted one.
- Will Shaksper left his wife and three young children behind for London.
- In 1596, William Wayte of London felt so threatened by "Willm Shakspere" that he applied for a "surety of the peace" — a restraining order — against him for fear of bodily harm. Shaksper's co-defender was Francis Langley. "Francis Langley was a real villain, mixed up in every criminal activity that can be imagined, particularly usury at rates between 20 and 100 per cent."* Langley's "reputation as a loan shark…" prompted McClarran to conclude, "the obvious implication is that Shaksper was acting as Langley's debt-collector (thug)…."* Also cited in the surety were two women — Dorothy Soer and Anne Lee — who were apparently dangerous people.
- "From Shaksper's testimony in a domestic dispute (Belott-Mountjoy) we have reason to believe he associated with a co-witness, one George Wilkins….the alleged brutal abuser of women"* who was "In touch with the underworld…."* Specifically, Wilkins operated a brothel, incensed his neighbors, and was arrested several times for assault, including an incident of kicking a pregnant woman in the belly. Will Shaksper hung out with this guy.
- In 1598, William was listed as a tax defaulter and was sought by London authorities for non-payment of taxes. There is no record that he was found or that he responded. Since he had bought a house in Stratford the previous year, he could easily have skipped on the tax bill, figuring the collectors wouldn't find him.
- Around this same time, Shaksper was named in an "Enrolled Subsidy Account (London)," which, as noted above, sounds like a public assistance program. (Please correct me if you know elsewise.)

- For two years in a row, 1599 and 1600, he was indebted to the Exchequer of London.
- In 1604, Shaksper sued one of his neighbors for the piddling sum of less than two pounds after supplying him with some malt, presumably to make beer. As Clark put it, he was "a penny-pinching businessman [engaged in] the pettiest of squabbles with neighbors and associates…."*
- William was both an incorrigible non-payer of debts and a ruthless collector of them. "In Stratford in 1608 Ralph Hubaud dies leaving instructions to recover £20 from 'Mr. Shakespre'. That same year in Stratford, Shaksper sued John Addenbroke for a debt of £6."*
- William's father, mother, wife, and daughter Judith — the immediate family of the man who supposedly wrote the world's greatest literature — were illiterate and signed with a mark. Only daughter Susanna, "who signed her name to legal documents…in 27 May 1639 and 2 June 1647,"* managed to master a signature.
- In 1612, Shaksper testified in the Belott-Mountjoy court case. A summary, written in third person by a court clerk, paints him "as the associate of London lowlifes. He couldn't state his age with specificity. …An expert witness, he couldn't remember what year he first suggested the original deal for the disputing parties. He couldn't sign his name clearly"* but rather scrawled what "looks like 'Willn Shandy,' if it can be said to look like anything."* Ray mused, are we to believe this is the same person who memorized the entirety of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*? The bankruptcy of the conventional biography of Will Shaksper is so thorough that this meagre glimpse of him — covering about the size of an average paragraph — prompted an eminent Shakespeare scholar to declare this court record "the Shakespearean discovery of the century."* Well it may be, because it shouts that he is not the playwright.
- There is no record of any handwriting by Will Shaksper. The half dozen signatures of his name are so different that some analysts have found it "obvious at a glance" that except for the two specimens on his will, which are very similar, they "are not the signatures of the same man."* Some Oxfordians have concluded that spelling his own name must have presented a significant challenge to Shaksper, but the truth is worse. Because the signatures from different documents differ markedly *letter by letter*, "in her authoritative article 'Shakespeare in the Public Records,' Jane Cox of the British Records Office established that the six signatures of Mr. Shakspere on legal documents can now be regarded as quite likely not having been made by him at all."* If Shaksper did scratch them out himself, he must have been "struggling through the process, probably with a copy in front of him."* Recent research, however, has definitively dispensed even with that possibility and firmly established that — in stark opposition to similar documents relating to learned men of the day — "all six signatures…were actually penned by law clerks."* Therefore, "the presumption of literacy provided by the signatures vanishes. The man may not have been able to write."* That statement is too generous. The differing signatures prove he could not write.
- "Shakspere's friends, such as Richard Quiney, Thomas Greene, and Thomas Russell, all left documentary paper trails showing that they were literate and educated,"* whereas Shaksper left nothing. Literati of the day sent and received letters, owned books, attended or even taught at universities, traveled abroad and/or participated in oratory, for which activities evidence abounds, but there is no indication from any such activities from William of Stratford.
- Shaksper left virtually everything to one of his daughters, Susanna. "The name of Shakespeare's wife was omitted from the original draft of his will, but by an interlineation in the final

draft she received his second best bed with its furniture."* Orthodox scholars, with stunning offhandedness, have tried to excuse that demeaning gesture, saying, for example, that it "indicates only that Anne liked that particular bed…."* But as Cutting* demonstrated, Shaksper's neglecting to name his wife and the lack of loving terms were highly unusual for the day, and the will's language was rendered precisely as legally required if a husband wished to deprive his wife of everything he owned. The famous snub was surely dictated, after the first draft was finished, by a lawyer who knew that this petty mention would cut off any possible legal challenge to the will.

- In the Elizabethan era, books were as special and valuable as a collection of classic cars is today. "The overwhelming number of extant wills from the Elizabethan era listed books in the will proper."* A number of men of Stratford in Shakespeare's day "left long lists of book bequests in their wills, [but] Shakspere mentioned no books in *his* will."* Nor is there any mention of manuscripts, a pen, an inkwell, a blotter, a bookcase or a desk.
- As for Shaksper's being the great dramatist, Cutting, in a devastating analysis, concluded, "there is not the slightest glimmer of a cultivated mind anywhere to be found in the Stratford Will."* On the contrary, "The Religious Preamble [of the will] is basically copied from a 'formula' book[, whereas] a writer should have been able to write his own or at least embellish a 'formulary one'…."*

Shaksper's wife and children fit the picture, too:

- Anne got pregnant out of wedlock.
- "The only contemporary mention of his wife between her marriage in 1582 and her husband's death in 1616 is as the borrower…of forty shillings from Thomas Wittington, who had formerly been her father's shepherd. The money was unpaid when Wittington died in 1601…."* Anne, then, was more destitute than a local shepherd.
- "On 10 Feb. 1616 Shakespeare's younger daughter, Judith, married, at the parish church…. The ceremony took place before a license was procured, and the irregularity led to the summons of the bride and bridegroom before the ecclesiastical court at Worcester and the imposition of a fine."*

In contrast to John Shaksper's comparatively accomplished life, no contraindicating facts dilute the portraits of backwater bumpkinism in the biographies of Will and his immediate family. Its members never figured into London's literary society. They never figured into *local* history until William suddenly came into money in 1597 and bought the most expensive house in Stratford.

We can summarize the picture: An objective, unbiased assessment of the records relating to William of Stratford reveal an illiterate ne'er-do-well who spent fifteen of his grown-up years on the periphery of society, leaving not a single record of noteworthy activities. He left his family behind to eke out a living in London as a jack-of-all-trades, eventually landing some theatre work. During this time, he served as an enforcer for a London loan shark, was the subject of a restraining order, became indebted and defaulted on his taxes. Around age 32, he came into big money in an unspecified way, returned home and bought a huge house. The tenor of his activities hardly changed, though, because he became a petty moneylender (rising a notch from legbreaker) and, in a lesser version of his father's commodities trade, became a small-time dealer in, and hoarder of, stuffs such as corn, malt and stone (for the likely storage of which he leased "a

barn" in 1611), while spending much of his time wrangling with his neighbors in small-claims court. He invested his money in tithes, Stratford and London properties, and a few theatre shares. He died in obscurity, uncelebrated by anyone.

A Slew of Nonwitnesses

Orthodox scholars have presumed that Shaksper earned his money as the world's greatest playwright. There is no evidence to back up that assumption. No records support it. No one ever mentioned even in passing that Will Shaksper was a playwright. No one ever referenced his family members' roles as wife or child to England's greatest poet and playwright.

When actors revived Shakespeare's plays in the late 1700s, admirers began to "try to find some evidence linking the traditional author to his works."* Wherever they dug, the hole was bare. Jimenez chronicled the vastness of the informational desert:

> we can identify at least ten people who personally knew the William Shakespeare of this Warwickshire town, or met his daughter, Susanna. At least six of them, and possibly all of them, were aware of plays and poems published under the name of one of the country's leading playwrights, William Shakespeare. All ten left us published books, poems, letters, notebooks, or diaries, some of which referred directly to events or people in Stratford. Yet none of these nine men and one woman — it is fair to call them eyewitnesses — left any hint that they connected the playwright with the person of the same name in Stratford-upon-Avon.*

Jimenez's list comprises William Camden, Michael Drayton, Thomas Greene, Dr. John Hall, James Cooke, Sir Fulke Greville, Edward Pudsey, Queen Henrietta Maria, Philip Henslowe and Edward Allyn. For their stories, see discussions below and in the **Thomas Greene** chapter and the chapter on Thomas Greene in the section on Those Who Knew. Egan summed up the problem: "*You'd think somebody in Stratford would have noticed the most powerful intelligence of the millennium, but no*."*

^Evading vs. Explaining Away

As noted in the **Robert Greene** chapter, "Explaining away something is not the same as explaining it." **Greene**'s biographers are pikers compared to those defending the claim that the man from Stratford is Shakespeare. Stratfordians' method — especially since Looney discovered who Shakespeare really was — has consisted mostly of *explaining away*.

A century ago, the DNB admitted to what so many people have recognized, namely "The apparent contrast between the homeliness of Shakespeare's Stratford career and the breadth of observation and knowledge displayed in his literary work….."* Editor Sidney Lee was forced to admit to another jarring conclusion about Shakespeare: "the successive order in which he approached [the plays] bore *no explicable relation* to the course of his private life or experience."*

Would that not be enough to prompt a scholar to reconsider his viewpoint on authorship? For him, it was not.

Lee evaded the proper conclusion and tried to bridge the chasm. He ascribed Shakespeare's encyclopedic knowledge of "birds, flowers, and trees" to his living "in the country." He accounted for the Bard's detailed knowledge of sports popular among nobility such as "hawking, hunting, coursing, and angling" to the fact that "his kinsfolk were farmers." I would judge the explanation and the explicandum mutually exclusive. He attributed Shakespeare's unparalleled knowledge of English law to "his observation of the many legal processes in which his father was involved"* in dealing commodities and acting as alderman. There is rather

a chasm of difference between the two scopes of experience. To explain away the lack of any documented education in these fields, Lee simply asserted, "Every phase of feeling lay within the scope of his *intuition*…"* as if Herman Melville could "intuit" *Moby Dick*, Dickens *Oliver Twist* or Twain *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. We must protest: Genius is one thing; knowledge is another.

Shakespeare reveals intimate knowledge relating to Italian artworks, laws, customs, geographical features and obscure local personages. An astonished Roe wrote, "In each place, he is describing something so obscure, off the wall, peculiar that a tourist would not even pay attention to it. He's giving you what I have come to believe is his personal, direct knowledge of his experiences in Italy."* Roe,* Magri* and Prior* all demonstrated that Shakespeare's knowledge of specific, striking details of Italy could have come only from someone who personally visited the country, in some cases only if he had been there in the mid-1570s, as Oxford was.

I once gave Richard Roe's book to a long-time Stratfordian friend and noted that Oxford had been to the places in Italy that Shakespeare talks about. He said, "Well, Shakespeare of Stratford must have gone to Italy." It is nearly impossible, however, for him to have done so. "Travel outside England during this period *required the Queen's permission*. There is no record that Shakespeare ever applied for permission to travel or was ever granted permission."* Might he have snuck out of the country? The answer again is no, because researchers — and there have been many — have never found a record indicating the presence of Will Shaksper anywhere in Italy. Oxford's travelogue is packed with compatible facts. Shaksper's life supports only musing , and most of it fails to stand up.

Some Stratfordians have proposed that the playwright picked up all this knowledge of Italy from tavern talk. How much knowledge of geography, fine arts and culture have *you* learned in bars? My band played bars, clubs and lounges for four years in the early '70s, and I do not recall gleaning a single fact of that type. Most apologists have simply evaded the issue: "…Shakespeare's love affair with Italy, does not get mentioned in some orthodox biographies at all."* Even the 500-page ones!

Among Roe's many achievements is the vindication of the long-hooted statement in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* that Valentine traveled from Verona to Milan by water. As it turns out, old maps show the linkage of rivers and later-abandoned canals that made boating a common mode of travel between those cities at that time. Shakespeare's reference to catching "the tide" and "the flood" (II,iii) also seemed wacky, but Hatinguais discovered that the term refers to the brief flood of water from an opened flash lock, an event that "operated on a regular schedule, usually twice a week,"* thus explaining Pantino's impatience over the possibility of "losing the flood" and delaying a voyage. Modern scholars didn't know about this practice, but once again "…Shakespeare knew precisely what he was writing about."* Stratfordians will have to change their tune from "Shakespeare made up ridiculous falsehoods about Europe" to "He must have learned these obscure details from a traveler in a tavern."

The Brenta River, by the way, links Verona to Padua to Venice, the respective settings of Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Oxford traveled to all those places, almost certainly by water, which is why he knew how one would navigate the journey. *The Merchant of Venice*'s reference to the Tranect, a large mechanical device — long since demolished — that aided boat traffic just outside Venice, "gives yet another proof of the remarkably detailed quality of Shakespeare's knowledge of Venice."*

Shakespeare possessed knowledge of English history and Greek, Roman, French and Italian classical literature in their original languages. He learned from a set of books that would have been far too expensive for the man from Stratford to own. This problem is less easily but no less fancifully explained away by the Stratfordians: *He read them* (no kidding; this is in a 2010 book) *while browsing the London bookstalls*. Paul's

Churchyard was stuffed with bestsellers, not peppered with plays by Aeschylus and Euripides in Greek, which inform *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Macbeth*.* In 1774, "the Shakespeare editor George Steevens…wrote that a plea for proper funeral rites in *Titus Andronicus* convinced him that its author 'was conversant with the Greek tragedies in their original language…of which no translation was extant in the time of Shakespeare.'"* In 1904, Churton Collins "cites with great admiration more than seventy-five passages in Greek drama that correspond closely to passages in Shakespeare's plays…. He often comments such as 'exactly Aeschylus,' 'exactly Sophocles'…" etc.* Werth* demonstrated Shakespeare's reliance on untranslated, original Greek sources. Even Professor Stanley Wells, head of Stratford's Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, acknowledged Werth's contribution in a 2012 speech to the World Shakespeare Congress.

Shakespeare did not know Italian merely as a schoolboy might. "In 2005, Christophe Camard explained that Shakespeare treats the Italian language in a curious and intimate manner, and is capable of creating new meanings in English, of playing with a foreign language in a way quite different to other English dramatists…"* indicating deep familiarity. Some orthodox scholars have been bold enough to admit that Shakespeare knew Italian:

> Although we have no direct proof that Shakespeare could read Italian, based on the frequency with which he used Italian works as source material, some of which were not even translated into English at the time, it is likely that Shakespeare did know Italian.*

But they have offered no explanation for how he learned the language.

How do apologists explain the Bard's knowledge of ancient Greek? Wells opined "that Greek may have been taught at Stratford grammar school, or that some unknown collaborator may be responsible for importing Greek source material into the Shakespeare canon."* Neither explanation works. The Stratford Grammar School did not teach Greek, nor did it teach French or Italian, in which many of Shakespeare's sources were written. The idea that some ghostly collaborator meticulously inserted myriad references to Greek (as well as French and Italian) literature into Shakespeare's plays does not hold water, primarily because such a person would have had to accomplish his task so intimately that one cannot tell where an editor intervened. As many scholars have observed, Shakespeare's metaphors often combine material from three or four sources in a single expression. We must also ask: Who is this mysterious language scholar? I have not seen anyone suggest a name.

As Showerman pointed out, some explanations-away are even less grounded. One Stratfordian wrote, "we must assume that *instinct* let Shakespeare to the Greek conception of the scope and function of tragedy and that by a certain *natural affinity* he caught also the accent and tone as well as some of the most striking characteristics of Greek tragedy."* Read that sentence carefully again and observe the stunning breadth of the claim: that Shakespeare magically adopted and reproduced the *scope, function, accent, tone* and some of the *most striking characteristics* of Greek drama, having never read a jot of it!

"Gilbert Highet, a famous professor of Greek and Latin at Columbia,"* recognized that Shakespeare's lines were at times identical to those by Greek playwrights, but he nevertheless wrote, "We can be sure that he [Shaksper of Stratford] had not read Aeschylus. Yet what can we say when we find some of Aeschylus's thought appearing in Shakespeare's plays? The only explanation is that great poets in times and countries distant from each other often have similar thoughts and express them similarly."* His explanation is a Platonic zeitgeist.

One pair of scholars who recognized the influence of Greek and Latin classics on the Bard threw up their hands and wrote that it is "a miracle we cannot explain."* It is indeed inexplicable, but only within the confines of the Stratfordian paradigm. When a proponent is reduced to postulating miracles, what does

that tell you about his premise?

We still have not reached the bottom of the barrel. The worst cop-out of all has been simply to wave away Shakespeare's stunning depth and breadth of knowledge as if it didn't exist: "Shakespeare was not a scholar…. he was not even an 'intellectual.'"* "The plays show no evidence of profound book learning. …His learning in books was anything but profound…."* Had Will Shaksper been highly educated, no one would have stooped to such bald apologetics.

Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* implies knowledge of yet another language. Goldstein explained, "In 1871, the German philologist Karl Elze discovered that the names Jessica, Tuball and Chus were to be found in *Genesis*, X and XI. …One turns to the book of *Genesis* in the Old Testament unable to find the word Shylock — until one consults a Hebrew text."* Goldstein went on to show two puns within the play that can be understood only by "a select audience which knew its Bible in the original Hebrew."* He identified two other plays in which the Bard's depiction of characters "shows his knowledge of Hebrew" and concluded that Shakespeare was "someone who had read carefully the Old Testament in the language in which it was originally written."* How could Will Shaksper have become conversant with yet another dead language, this one obscure even among the educated classes?

Bianchi wondered: If Shaksper did go to grammar school, would an education there equip him for institutions of higher learning, as did educations at Kings School of Canterbury, where Christopher Marlowe went, the Merchant Taylors School, where Thomas Kyd and Thomas Lodge went, or Westminster School, which Ben Jonson attended? In pursuit of an answer, she scoured the databases of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge to see if any student had entered after receiving an education at Stratford's grammar school. She reported, "Are you surprised that in the schools' records there were NO students of either university who also were recorded as having attended school in Stratford-upon-Avon the last third of the 16th century?"* This void suggests that the Stratford grammar school offered insufficient preparation for a university education and therefore insufficient preparation to become Shakespeare.

As for how Shaksper learned not just to play but also to compose music, no answer — as far as I know — has arisen. Perhaps he picked up these skills from wandering minstrels during his lost years.

What about Shakespeare's knowledge of law, which is so broad and precise that professional lawyers are continually impressed with it? Well, Shaksper did sue local acquaintances over a few bob on occasion, so he must have seen the inside of the Stratford courthouse.

What about the "over 800 naval, sea, and gunnery terms found in Shakespeare's works"?* "According to naval officer A.F. Falconer, there is a 'surprisingly extensive and exact use of the technical terms belonging to sailing, anchor work, sounding, ship construction, navigation, gunnery and swimming' in the Shakespeare canon. He adds that 'Shakespeare does not invent sea terms and never misuses them' (vii)."* Again, no response. Maybe Shaksper's knowledge of seamanship came from chatting with oarsmen while crossing the Thames to get to the playhouses; or maybe he spent time as a dockworker.

Then there is the pesky fact of Shakespeare's prodigious medical education. Dr. R.R. Simpson, in his book *Shakespeare in Medicine*, wrote, "The accuracy of his observation, his apt use of words, and the clinical picture he leaves in the mind of his audience, or his reader, are not only unsurpassed, they are not even approached in clinical value in any medical writings, however erudite."* Davis concluded "that Shakespeare had either studied anatomy or read medical literature."* Some of the Bard's medical knowledge was obscure. "…Shakespeare refers to the *pia mater*, the ultrathin, innermost membrane surrounding the brain and spinal cord, in three plays: *Twelfth Night* (1.5.123), *Troilus and Cressida* (2.1.77), and *Love's Labor's Lost* (4.2.70-1). [T]he author was familiar with the theory of circulation of blood many years before William Harvey's

published report. …Dr. Bucknell took particular note of Shakespeare's unique representations of mental illness."* As demonstrated in the **William Fulwood** chapter, Oxford studied the anatomical structures of the brain from a 1548 medical text no later than 1562, when he was twelve years old. Maybe Shaksper read his book!

Shakespeare used no fewer than 398* different medical terms throughout the canon. Davis* demonstrated that medical references in Shakespeare's plays outnumber and outclass those among eleven representative works of his contemporaries in literature, with two striking exceptions: *Edward II* by **Christopher Marlowe** and *Endymion* by **John Lyly**, providing further confirmation that Oxford wrote those plays.

Showerman summed up the breadth of Shakespeare's medical knowledge:

> the over 700 medical references in the plays display a highly sophisticated knowledge of anatomy, physiology, surgery, obstetrics, public health, aging, forensics, neurology and mental disorders…. Shakespeare's descriptions of the features of secondary and tertiary syphilis in *Timon of Athens* and *Troilus and Cressida* read like textbooks of pathophysiology…. Lord Cerimon's resuscitation of Queen Thaisa in *Pericles* uses language directly derived from two rare sources, the *Corpus Hippocraticum* and the *Corpus Hermeticum*. According to F. David Hoeniger (1992) in *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance*, "There is no other speech like his devoted to medical art in the whole range of Elizabethan, Jacobean or Caroline drama. Cerimon exemplifies the Hippocratic ideal in medicine."*

Stratfordians have tried to claim that Shaksper could have learned about medicine from his son-in-law, John Hall, who became a doctor. That conjecture fails, because "most, if not all, of Shakespeare's medical allusions were in works written before Hall came into Shakspere's life."* One awaits a Stratfordian assertion that Shaksper intuited surgical knowledge from watching his glover-father making stitches and his butcher-father chopping up meat.

What about the Bard's knowledge of law? "Shakespeare uses more than two hundred legal terms and legal concepts in numerous plays — as case references, as similes and metaphors, images, examples, and even puns — with an aptness and accuracy that can no longer be questioned."* Whittemore listed a "torrent of legal terms"* just in the Sonnets. Stratfordian Eric Sams, in a tone of astonishment, wrote, "Not only the plays but the Sonnets [as well] are crammed with legal references and allusions, *far more so than any comparable oeuvre in any period or language*."* A pair of researchers identified "just shy of 1400 legal references"* in Bard's canon. In 1885, a lawyer, after exhausting analysis of but a *single passage* in Shakespeare's most famous play, declared, "No law writer has yet stated the English law relating to suicides so completely as is done in *Hamlet*."* Queen Victoria's Secretary of State, John Campbell, "made it clear that—in his opinion—Shakespeare knew the Laws of England as well or better than most practicing lawyers at that time—or any time."* In 1911, another lawyer gushed, "In Shakespeare's multiple personalities, there is *none* in which he appears more naturally and to better advantage than in the role of the lawyer. [He] must, at some time in his life, have studied law."*

Stratfordians have tried to deal with the vast extent of Shakespeare's legal education by proposing that maybe Shaksper had served somewhere as a law clerk. But all law clerks leave paper trails, and there is none such for Will Shaksper. In 1909, Samuel Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain, rejected the conjecture that perhaps Shakespeare got his legal education from serving somewhere as a law clerk. Twain observed that Shakespeare's knowledge of the law was more intimate than a law clerk could obtain. He scoffed, "This is a charming specimen of Stratfordian argument [in being] a lame conclusion…evolved out of the fertile

imagination of embarrassed Stratfordians."*

The Bard's knowledge of politics is on the same elevated plane. "Every scholar is aware of the precision with which Shakespeare limns contemporary knowledge of medicine, science, and the law…Yet few are aware that the political behavior depicted by Shakespeare is equally accurate…."* The customs, banter and statesmanship practiced by royalty and nobility, both domestic and foreign, permeate the plays in a most natural manner. Will Shaksper of Stratford could not possibly have known the court as intimately as Shakespeare did.

Stratfordian scholars have explained away that problem, too. They have said that Shakespeare simply *imagined* how kings, queens, nobles and their servants spoke and acted.

Let us examine that claim. Read the following description, and then I'll ask you a question.

> It was a monstrous big river down there – sometimes a mile and a half wide; we run nights, and laid up and hid daytimes; soon as night was most gone we stopped navigating and tied up – nearly always in the dead water under a towhead; and then cut young cottonwoods and willows, and hid the raft with them. Then we set out the lines. Next we slid into the river and had a swim, so as to freshen up and cool off; then we set down on the sandy bottom where the water was about knee deep, and watched the daylight come. Not a sound anywheres – perfectly still – just like the whole world was asleep, only sometimes the bullfrogs a-cluttering, maybe. The first thing to see, looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line – that was the woods on t'other side; …you could see little dark spots drifting along ever so far away – trading scows, and such things; and long black streaks – rafts; sometimes you could hear a sweep screaking; or jumbled up voices, it was so still, and sounds come so far; and by and by you could see a streak on the water which you know by the look of the streak that there's a snag there in a swift current which breaks on it and makes that streak look that way; and you see the mist curl up off of the water, and the east reddens up …. then the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you from over there, so cool and fresh and sweet to smell on account of the woods and the flowers; but sometimes not that way, because they've left dead fish laying around, gars and such, and they do get pretty rank….
>
> …maybe see a steamboat coughing along up-stream, so far off towards the other side you couldn't tell nothing about her only whether she was a stern-wheel or side-wheel; then for about an hour there wouldn't be nothing to hear nor nothing to see – just solid lonesomeness. Next you'd see a raft sliding by, away off yonder, and maybe a galoot on it chopping, because they're most always doing it on a raft; you'd see the axe flash and come down – you don't hear nothing; you see that axe go up again, and by the time it's above the man's head then you hear the K'CHUNK! – it had took all that time to come over the water…. Once there was a thick fog, and the rafts and things that went by was beating tin pans so the steamboats wouldn't run over them. A scow or a raft went by so close we could hear them talking and cussing and laughing – heard them plain; but we couldn't see no sign of them; it made you feel crawly; it was like spirits carrying on that way in the air….
>
> Yonder was the banks and the islands, across the water; and maybe a spark – which was a candle in a cabin window; and sometimes on the water you could see a spark or two – on a raft or a scow, you know; and maybe you could hear a fiddle or a song coming over from one of them crafts.
>
> …Once or twice of a night we would see a steamboat slipping along in the dark, and now and then she would belch a whole world of sparks up out of her chimbleys, and they would rain down in the river and look awful pretty; then she would turn a corner and her lights would wink out and her powwow shut off and leave the river still again; and by and by her waves would get to us, a long time

after she was gone, and joggle the raft a bit….

After midnight the people on shore went to bed, and then for two or three hours the shores was black – no more sparks in the cabin windows. These sparks was our clock – the first one that showed again meant morning was coming, so we hunted a place to hide and tie up right away.

One morning about daybreak I found a canoe and crossed over a chute to the main shore – it was only two hundred yards – and paddled about a mile up a crick amongst the cypress woods, to see if I couldn't get some berries. Just as I was passing a place where a kind of a cowpath crossed the crick….

— from *Huckleberry Finn*, Chapter 19, by "Mark Twain"

My question is: If someone told you that a man named Marc Twayne, who had resided in Brooklyn, New York his entire life, wrote that description out of his imagination, would you believe it? "Well, you *must* believe it; his name was *Marc Twayne*." 'So?" you might reply, "The author's name is not spelled that way in the books." "Maybe not, but it's close enough." "Still, how could a lifelong urban dweller cook up such a scene?" "He must have read books!" "How could he know some of those obscure facts?" "He chatted with Midwesterners in the local bar!" "How did he nail the dialect, with words such as *anywheres* and *chimbleys*?" "He must have befriended a river rat on Flatbush Avenue and memorized his speech patterns!" A devotee can explain away anything.

There is another possibility, one that requires no excuses: Marc Twayne did not write that passage; someone who had lived on the river wrote it under the pseudonym Mark Twain. And "mark twain" is a riverboat expression! Isn't it a fitting choice? Oxford's choice, Shake-speare, is likewise fitting. Pallas, the spear-shaker, **Robert Greene** reminds us, was the goddess of "letters and arms," a noble ideal standing in contrast to the "arms above all" point of view of most noblemen of the day. When the goddess donned her helmet, she became invisible,* another clever fit for a writer employing a pseudonym.

An author once wrote, "It's an illusion that writers have a lot of choice about what they write. Your stories are your stories. They're the only ones you can tell, and if you try telling ones the world would like you to tell, you'll do it badly."* Oxford told *his* stories, and he told them uniquely. None of the plays tell stories fitting the man from Stratford.

Yet Stratfordians try desperately to make him fit. A professor at the University of Oxford (no less) wrote, "Personally, I believe that allusions to the Cotswolds and detailed technical knowledge of glove-making, not to mention a scene in which a cheeky but clever schoolboy called Will is given a Latin lesson by a Welsh schoolmaster, suggest that the plays were written by a glover's son from middle England who went to a local grammar school where there was a master of Welsh descent."* Never mind trying to account for the playwright's knowledge of music, medicine, law, languages, Italy and the court! These tiniest of bits will do. Actually, they will not do, even on their own terms. "Allusions to the Cotswolds" seems to refer to a single offhand mention in *Richard II* (II,iii): "I bethink me what a weary way/ From Ravenspurgh to Cotswold will be found/ In Ross and Willoughby…" which is not a comment about the Cotswolds but about a *road*. Shaksper was not a glover, who would have known the trade, but a glover's *son*. There is in fact no "detailed technical knowledge" of glove-making throughout Shakespeare but rather just two tossed-off terms in the entire canon: "'a glover's paring knife' in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and 'cheveril' (a type of leather) in *Romeo and Juliet*."* The schoolmaster at Stratford was not Welsh, as in the play, but only of Welsh *descent*. Nor is there any evidence that Will Shaksper attended the local grammar school and manifold reasons to conclude he didn't. Finally, said schoolboy Will is a minor character in a canon filled with hundreds of fascinating characters; why is that one so significant to authorship? Answer: *because that's all they have*.

Here is a quote from Mark Twain on the possibility that Will Shaksper was William Shakespeare:

> The author of the plays was equipped, beyond every other man of his time, with wisdom, erudition, imagination, capaciousness of mind, grace and majesty of expression. Everyone has said it, no one doubts it. Also, he had humor, humor rich in abundance, and always wanting to break out. We have no evidence of any kind that Shakespeare of Stratford possessed any of these gifts or any of these acquirements. The only lines he ever wrote, so far as we know, are substantially barren of them — barren of all of them.*

Read Shaksper's will. Read the verse at his gravesite. If those mundane words are Shaksper's, he was not Shakespeare. If they aren't his, he composed not a single known word. Take your choice.

Sigmund Freud, a man who knew something about the human mind and who became an Oxfordian upon reading Looney's book nearly a century ago, protested Stratfordians' apologetics. He wrote to a colleague, "the man from Stratford…seems to have nothing at all to justify his claim…. It is quite inconceivable to me that Shakespeare should have got everything secondhand."*

Another fact difficult to explain away is that the Warwickshire dialect — spoken in Shaksper's hometown — is absent from the plays. A scholar writing in 1900 was surprised "in not finding a single Warwickshire word among the 60,000 in *Venus and Adonis*…."* As for the plays,

> Kokeritz acknowledged in 1953 that the accent implicit in Shakespeare's works is inconsistent with Warwickshire. Brook confirmed this when he observed that the playwright's colloquialisms mainly reflected usages in the southwest and London. Yorkshire, East Anglia, Scotland and Ireland also contributed substantially to Shakespeare's vocabulary. The modern linguist David Crystal notes that "original pronunciation" performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida* at The Globe bear no traces of the Warwickshire accent. As A.J. Pointon remarks, "Of all the regions of Britain, Warwickshire...had the least influence on Shakespeare's language.*

The *least* influence!

As late as 2021, apologists are still trying to make the language of the plays for their man. A chapter within a Stratfordian book titled *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt: Evidence, Argument, Controversy* took on the challenge: "Undaunted, Kathman says that 'ballow' and "mobbled' are uniquely Warwickshire words, despite Egan's having already refuted those assertions."* Three years later, those claims were re-refuted. In a 2016 paper, "Shakespeare and Warwickshire Dialect," published in a mainstream journal,

> Rosalind Barber demonstrates the falsity of the allegations that Shakespeare's works contain words from the 'Warwickshire, Cotswold or Midlands dialect.' Barber shows that these claims are based on errors of fact, misidentify well-known words as dialectical, are poetic inventions, or rely on circular reasoning.*

The issue of dialect is not only negative for Shaksper but also positive for Oxford. Oxford was born in Essex. Goldstein* found over a hundred examples of an "Essex dialect" in Shakespeare's plays.

The same neutering effect relates to one of the very few aspects of Shakespeare's plays that Stratfordians can tie to their man: "the Shaksperes of Stratford were glovemakers and Shakespeare mentions gloves more than fifty times — therefore William of Stratford is the author."* A case that stoops to citing mere mentions of gloves while ignoring the author's knowledge of dozens of intellectual and cultural fields is already flimsy. But there is an equally valid authorship link in the other direction. It is on record (see **Thomas Nashe**

chapter) that Oxford was gifted a pair of "Cambridge gloves with verses" during a visit to Saffron-Walden in 1578, and in turn "de Vere sent the Queen fine Italian gloves which…became the vogue of her court."* If anything, the latter link is superior, because Shakespeare wrote for courtiers, not for tradesmen.

In 2021, a member of Mensa declared that Shakespeare "could not have been Edward de Vere"* and offered two reasons. First, Hamlet uses the term "Rough-hew," and only a hedge trimmer from a country town could possibly know the meaning of the term. Second, only the "part-owner of [an] acting company" could have fit players to parts, as Shakespeare did with Will Kemp and Robert Armin. These claims plumb new depths of feebleness, and they, too, backfire. Young Edward Vere grew up at the sprawling country estate of Sir Thomas Smith, where he got the education in horticulture that Shakespeare displays. If Will Shaksper had a job, it was probably as a glover's and butcher's apprentice with his father. Where would *he* learn horticulture? Nor is it the job of owners of a few theatre shares to fit actors to parts and parts to actors. That is the director's job and the writer's job, respectively.

Even the conspicuous *absence* of certain topical references works against the Stratford man. By the time of King James, smoking tobacco, an activity introduced to the old world circa 1586, had finally become *de rigeur*. A stumped Cunningham wrote, "Shakspeare [sic] is the only one of the dramatic writers of the age of James, who does not condescend to notice tobacco: all the others abound in allusions to it. *This is a singularity for which I cannot account*, as he is generally sufficiently ready to invest his characters with the prevailing fashion of the times.*

Cunningham's bewilderment derives from the fact that he thought Will Shaksper, who was born in 1564 and lived until 1616, wrote the plays. In the proper context, the anomaly melts away. Moore* demonstrated that the dates of Shakespeare's sources expand from the 1560s through the 1580s, flatten out and recede into the 1590s, and then end in 1604, one year into the age of James. Oxford, then, wrote most of the content of Shakespeare's plays before tobacco use became widespread in England. Oxford did become aware of the habit by the mid-1590s. In *The Wisdome of Doctor Dodypoll* by **Anonymous**, a prince carries a tobacco pipe, and **Thomas Nashe** mentions tobacco in 1594, 1596 and 1599 (see **Anonymous** chapter). By that time, Oxford was spending more time polishing old stage favorites rather than composing new ones.

Records prove that Will Shaksper was a financial opportunist, even a money-grubber. To make Shakespeare fit that profile, Stratfordians have tried to paint him with the same brush: "Shakespeare apparently considered himself a commercial playwright who from the beginning to the end of his professional life was concerned chiefly with *the attraction of paying customers*, whereas Jonson thought of himself as a poet…."* Jonson a poet and Shakespeare a moneygrubber! Yet over half of Shakespeare's plays were unpublished during Shaksper's lifetime, indicating that he did not grub money through publishing.

Stratfordians have claimed that, in order to sell tickets, Shakespeare's "sole aim was to please an audience, most of whom…were not only illiterate, but unable to either read or write."* If that view were correct, one would think that the content of Shakespeare's plays would reflect a craft for wrenching pennies from masses of theatre goers by speaking for them and to them. He did not speak for them; Shakespeare found the rabble disgusting. He did not speak to them, either. Over a century ago, Edwards wrote, "It is a mistake caused by a misapprehension of the facts to say, as R.G. White does, and as John Fiske does, that William Shaksper wrote the plays 'to fill the theater and his own pockets.' Had the manager attempted a course of Shakespeare plays, he would have bankrupted the theater."* Why? because Shakespeare's expressions — such as "deracinating savagery," "incarnadining the multitudinous seas," "captious and intenible sieve" and "exsufflicate surmises" — would have been incomprehensible to such people. They confound even highly

intelligent people today. Briggs quoted "only one of hundreds of speeches in the canon that serve to destroy the claim that these were 'popular' plays, written for a common audience. ...the groundlings...would have had no idea what most of this speech meant."* Shakespeare's plays were written *by* a hyper-literate person *for* hyper-literate people among the intelligentsia, who viewed them at court, at Blackfriars, at both universities (see **Robert Greene** chapter) and in the homes of nobility. In sum, "…Stratfordians misread the plays not only by misidentifying the author but by misidentifying the audience as well."*

The origin of the pop-writer myth among scholars is Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare's Audience* (1941). Ben Jonson refuted it three centuries earlier, in 1623, when he spoke of Shakespeare's plays "That so did take Eliza, and our James," two monarchs who never once stepped foot into the Globe theatre. Scholars from both sides of the aisle have refuted it since. Oxfordian Richard Whalen, citing several professors in agreement, demonstrated that Shakespeare wrote for a court audience.* Stratfordian Richard Dutton combed the records and confirmed that both the original and the revised versions of Shakespeare's plays were directed to audiences at court, where they were mostly performed.* (For a review of both works, see Showerman.*) Even Shakespeare's one domestic comedy, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, is set a few blocks from Windsor Castle in a neighborhood that courtiers would have known.

The tradition that the Bard wrote for the public has been discredited, yet it lives on in the service of shrouding one of its meaningful implications: A lad from the sticks could never have debuted his plays at the socially exclusive English court in the days of Elizabeth. A member of the court would have had leave to do so.

The people of London confirmed the irrelevance of Will Shaksper of Stratford by their inaction not only during his lifetime but upon his demise: "As far as we know, the incumbent Bard's death in April 1616 was met with total silence, although the less productive and less famous Francis Beaumont had been interred with all due ceremony in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, a mere six weeks earlier."* Clearly, no one of the time who appreciated poetry and playwriting took seriously any connection between the Stratford man and Shakespeare. If the Parnassus plays (see Those Who Knew) are any indication, they were mocking the idea. Hayes* demonstrated via social-network theory that the utter lack of commentary, private or public, upon Shaksper's death would have been statistically impossible had he been the well-known poet-playwright. He concluded, "This anomaly, the 'silence of his peers,' is the single most serious threat to Stratfordianism and its first premise."* Hayes' observation is accurate, but his conclusion is false. Stratfordian theory is so riddled with inconsistencies, anomalies and non sequiturs that said silence is only one of dozens of serious threats to its validity.

Disregarding "autobiographical parallels in the plays, educational backgrounds [and various] hypotheses," Paul Chambers, PhD (engineering) applied a "full Bayesian analytical framework" primarily to a mundane set of facts, namely the "historical timing of events" in Oxford's and Shaksper's lives. From those events alone, he concluded, "the Earl of Oxford is over 2,790 times more likely to have authored the works attributed to William Shakespeare than William Shakspere of Stratford."* Michael Dudley investigated the evasions, excuses and inventions of Stratfordianism and concluded of the standard story, "it meets virtually none of the conditions necessary for ethical belief."*

If you would like to expand your knowledge of the voluminous evidence that Shaksper is not Shakespeare, I highly recommend two books: *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (2001), by Diana Price; and *The Man Who Was Never Shakespeare* (2011) by A.J. Pointon. Price's book contrasts Shaksper's meager paper trail with those of other poets and playwrights of the era, and Pointon's volume shreds with surgical precision the evasions, errors, fabrications, postulations, equivocations, petty deceptions, outright frauds and "spectacular nonsense"* perpetrated and, in most cases, still maintained by the Stratfordian camp. Neither

of these authors advocates one person as the true author, but they leave no doubt who the true author is *not*. Truly, there remains not one Stratfordian assertion favoring Shaksper over Oxford that challengers have not soundly refuted.

Beyond Rationalizing: Forgery and Suppression

The stubborn dearth of links between Shaksper and Shakespeare eventually sent some scholars into such paroxysms of cognitive dissonance that they went beyond explaining away to engage in even baser behavior. There were dubious fanciful stories about the Bard in the 17th century, a minor industry of forged documents in the 19th century, deliberately altered paintings in all four centuries, wisps of fact expanded with fluff into entire books in the 21st century, and fanciful depictions such as paintings labeled "Shakespeare Arrested for Deer Stealing" that one finds in various sources.*

"Finally, a treasure trove of relevant letters and manuscripts was discovered by the young William Ireland. He later admitted he forged it all. John Payne Collier, a serious scholar, made his own discoveries. But in the 1830s, he admitted he too had forged all his supposed discoveries."* Collier forged evidence relating to other Voices, too, as related in the **Robert Greene, George Peele, T.W. (Thomas Watson)** and **Thomas Nashe** chapters. He even "forged a reference to *Cymbeline* in Forman's Diary."* A handful of other scholars in the 1800s were outed as forgers. The same thing motivated them all: the utter lack of documentary evidence linking any actual Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe or William Shaksper to literary achievements.

If it were incontrovertible that Shaksper was Shakespeare, no one would have undertaken such skullduggery. The mere fact of its practice reveals the bankruptcy of the conventional view.

As noted above, the Ashbourne portrait is one of the offerings purporting to depict Shakespeare, but it has proved to be a doctored portrait of someone else. (The **Robert Greene** chapter shows a picture of it.) Who was that someone?

In an article for *Scientific American* (January 1940), Charles Wisner Barrell identified the original sitter as the Earl of Oxford. The Folger Shakespeare Library countered with a claim that the sitter is a London merchant named Hugh Hamersley.* In a series of articles for *Shakespeare Matters* in 2001-2004, Burris* not only revitalized Barrell's case that the painting originally depicted Edward de Vere but also offered voluminous evidence that later alterations were made deliberately to hide that fact. Chiljan* concurred, citing several points indicating that the sitter is Oxford. For related discussions, see the **Robert Greene** and George Chapman chapters.

For our purposes, we need not choose sides on whether Oxford is the original sitter. Yea or nay, what we have is yet another instance in which the mythological Shakespeare of Stratford is so elusive — in this case lacking a single reliable image of his face — that someone was encouraged to manufacture evidence of his presumed likeness on a portrait, based on the bald-pated, cartoonish image in the First Folio. If Barrell, Burris and Chiljan have correctly identified the sitter, then all or part of the forgery was in service of making the painting either look more like the First Folio picture* or less like the Earl of Oxford, who, with a small book (of sonnets?) in his hand and Yorick's skull on the table beside him, appears to be posing as Shakespeare.

Suppression has modernized by moving into the electronic realm. In April 2011, Boyle charged that sometimes anonymous, self-appointed censors succeeded in whitewashing the Shakespeare Authorship page on Wikipedia and having Oxfordian contributors banned from it. He also reported that they were even banned from the page titled "Oxfordian theory of Shakespeare authorship." Boyle reported,

> the new article misrepresents the entire history of the debate. It contains 231 footnotes, the overwhelming majority from mainstream scholars who support the Stratfordian status quo. …There are few entries from any anti-Stratfordians, [and] in most of those instances the article cites what they say and then

refutes it. There are no quotes in which any anti-Stratfordian is cited for refuting a Stratfordian, a perfect example of how unbalanced the article is.*

Is the Wikicoup an electronic version of *Fahrenheit 451*? Read Boyle's article.*

^Preconditions of Genius

Stratfordians have asserted that the knowledge revealed in the Bard's plays and poems are simply the result of genius. This argument also circles back to strike them in the head. They have failed to reckon with the preconditions of genius.

Oxfordians, on the other hand, have done an excellent job of fitting their man to the profile. Shahan and Whalen gave a concise account:

> Dean Keith Simonton, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Psychology at UC Davis, and a leading expert on creativity and genius, describes the characteristics one would expect to find in such a creator in *Origins of Genius, Darwinian Perspectives on Creativity* (1999). The research he summarizes is based on the biographies of other, better-known geniuses (not including Shakespeare because too little is known about him — especially his youth). The main characteristics he found are (1) enriched home environments during childhood, (2) living in diverse locales during childhood, (3) family reversal of fortune – especially loss of one or both parents early in life, (4) self-educated, with unusually broad interests, (5) a tendency to be independent, autonomous, unconventional, rebellious, iconoclastic, (6) later-born children, rather than first-borns or 'functional' first-borns, (7) emotionally and psychologically unstable, (8) multicultural and bilingual (*Origins*, Chapters 3 and 4).
>
> Looking over these characteristics, it's difficult to make a case that the Stratford man fits. He was essentially a first-born, two older siblings having died before he was born. There's no indication of any enriched home environment. Both of his parents signed with a mark, and the odds are that there was no book in the house. He evidently lived only in Stratford until at least twenty-one. Yes, his father fell on hard times, but there was no great reversal of family fortune during childhood along the lines of the major ones Simonton describes. Both parents survived into his adulthood. He wasn't multicultural, and nothing shows, or even suggests, that he ever left England. Nothing shows or suggests that he was bilingual. Some just assume he was self-educated, without documentary evidence. Nothing shows that he was particularly unconventional, rebellious, or mentally or emotionally unstable.
>
> Oxford, on the other hand, fits the profile exactly. He was a second-born, with older and younger sisters. He had a very enriched home environment, including a troupe of players. One of his uncles was the translator of the *Aeneid*, and another of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. He had outstanding tutors, living in the household of one of them in two different locales. He matriculated at Cambridge University at age eight, but spent only a few months there. He received honorary degrees from Cambridge and Oxford, and then went to law school.
>
> His father died when he was twelve, and he became a royal ward and was sent to London. His legitimacy was challenged, and others managed his earldom until he was twenty-one. By the time he regained control of the Oxford earldom, it was already greatly diminished. These traumatic events were a major reversal of family fortune for the heir to an earldom.

He spent over a year in Europe, mostly Italy, learning Italian and becoming multicultural. He had a broad range of interests, becoming a patron of art, music, literature, and theater. He was fiercely independent and at times rebellious, often in trouble with the authorities. He was described as a volatile personality, and seems to have been emotionally unstable.

Which of these men seems more likely to have made the Great Leap to literary greatness? The man who doesn't fit the profile, and had no apparent preparation to become a genius? Or the one who does fit, and whose writings were highly praised before, during and after?*

Young Edward Vere's enriched life at home included a visit from the Queen of the realm and her retinue, which could hardly have failed to spur his ambition and imagination. The influence on his mind of his travels abroad in his mid-twenties should not be underestimated. Eighteenth-century English writer Samuel Johnson wrote, "The use of traveling is to regulate the imagination by reality, and instead of thinking how things may be, to see them as they are." If anyone depicted humans in their diverse array as they are, it is Shakespeare.

^Oxford Fits Like a Glove

In contrast to Stratfordians' litany of conjectures and evasions, Oxford's life fits everything in Shakespeare. Jimenez did not exaggerate when he wrote, "The personal and literary evidence that the Earl of Oxford is the real Shakespeare is overwhelming…."*

Education was crammed into young Oxford like grain into a *foie gras* goose, and he in turn relished it (see Opening Argument). Price recorded, "*Specialists* in various fields have documented Shakespeare's *detailed knowledge* of ancient history, archery, art, astrology, astronomy, the Bible, botany, the classics, court politics, coursing, dancing, falconry, fencing, France, heraldry, horsemanship, hunting, Italy, languages, law, literature, medicine, music, ornithology, politics, seamanship, royal tennis, and tournaments."* The Opening Argument explains how he came to have all that knowledge.

In early childhood, Oxford studied under Sir Thomas Smith and experienced "an early immersion in the very subjects in which Shakespeare was so steeped that he used them as metaphors: medicine and distilling (21 titles in Smith's library), the Law (54 titles), astrology (45 titles), English and Roman History (115 titles), Greek literature and philosophy *in Greek* (42 titles)…."* The setting in which Oxford lived while studying under Sir Thomas Smith informs scenes of groves, gardens, bowers, streams and woodlands found in the works of Shakespeare:

On the Berkshire side of the river were thousands of acres of woodland, the Forest of Windsor. Here deer, boar, and other wild creatures, including the occasional hermit and poacher, managed to live a life of Eden-like immersion in Nature, disturbed only by the trumpets, shouts, and dogs of the occasional royal hunt. Smith enjoyed the sports of hunting and hawking…horsemanship and falconry….*

"…Smith confessed to Cecil [that hawking] was among his chief occupations during the years of Mary's reign, the very years Oxford was with him."*

Shakespeare speaks as an expert on all these aristocratic activities. Will Shaksper would not have had access to any of them. As the Huntsman in **John Lyly**'s *Midas* explains, "hunting is for kings, not peasants."

Where did Shakespeare learn to use French words, to coin words in French, to pun in French and to speak in the French idiom? As a ward of the state at the Burghley household, Oxford received

two hours of French instruction every day (Anderson 21-22). By the age of thirteen, he could write fluently in French, as a letter from him addressed to Lord Burghley demonstrates (Fowler 1-2…). When

> he was nineteen, de Vere ordered a copy of Plutarch's works in French (Anderson 41). When he was twenty-five, de Vere traveled to Paris and was introduced to King Henry III, Marguerite Valois, and Catherine de Medici, among others, then continued on through France to Italy (Anderson, 74-75). At age forty-five, de Vere received a letter in French from King Henry IV of France, thanking him for his diplomatic efforts at Elizabeth's court (Henry IV).*

As enumerated by Waugaman, numerous details of Oxford's stay in Paris show up in the Bard's *Love's Labor's Lost*.*

Can you imagine the buzz among Stratfordians were they to discover that Shaksper once French-kissed a maid? Can you imagine their excitement were they to discover that the maid Shaksper kissed was French? "Shakespeare's lady friend would no doubt have told him intimate details of the French court…."

Oxford attended the University of Cambridge, thereby accounting for "the curious fact that Shakespeare shows familiarity with certain distinctively Cambridge terms."* "For example, when King Lear complains to his daughter Regan saying, 'Tis not in thee…to scant my sizes', that phrase is Cambridge jargon for 'to reduce my rations' — an undergraduate punishment."* In other words, Shakespeare "either studied at Cambridge or had close association with that university."*

Lear's rebuff fits two other widely confirmed observations: "…William Shakespeare…had a liberal attitude toward money[, and] De Vere had a very liberal attitude toward money."*

Speaking of money, it took a lot of it to stage Shakespeare's productions at Hampton Court. "The Revels Accounts reveal that no expense was spared in the construction of stage-sets there. The bill, on one occasion, included charges for the 'painting of seven cities, one village, and one country house' and for the importation of trees into the hall intended to represent a wilderness."* Shakespeare's shows must have been magnificent. Only he and the court could have afforded to produce them. Shaksper couldn't have done it, nor could Henslowe.

Oxford knew how to play and compose music (see Songwriters section). He participated in noble sports, including jousting. Shaksper participated in neither of those activities.

Six times Oxford crossed the English Channel between England and Europe. He likely sailed the east coast of England multiple times (between London and a family home in Essex). According to analysis in the **Thomas Nashe** chapter, he also ferried to the Isle of Man and back. Oxford traversed Italy, often via its extensive canals. Roe's identification of specific descriptions in the plays of Sicily and the Aeolian island of Vulcano indicate that Shakespeare sailed the Tyrrhenian Sea if not the Ionian, Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas.

Hughes deduced a likely path of sea travel "from the locations of his Italian plays":

> Taking off from Venice in a coastal galley, he would first have sailed north along the coast — past Trieste (then Bohemia) then south down the coast of Dalmatia (Croatia) where Perdita is lost in *A Winter's Tale* past Illyria where Viola and Sebastian are shipwrecked in *Twelfth Night*. Approaching the Gulf of Corinth where the battle of Lepanto had taken place, he would skirt Epidaurus — where Egeon seeks his lost family in *Comedy of Errors* — then on to Ephesus on the far eastern shore — where he finds them.
>
> Stopping to explore Cyprus — where he will locate *Othello* — he must have turned to sail west to Sicily, where he will envision the characters in *Much Ado* celebrating their great victory. Rounding the Sicilian coast — after investigating Vulcano and heading north along the west coast of Italy — the long voyage comes to an end on the Italian mainland….*

Oxford's known travels and Shakespeare's inferred voyages explain why Shakespeare is "astonishingly

accurate in his use of nautical technicalities."*

Speaking of nautical terms, "Shakespeare's works contain three references to seamarks…"* which are tall coastal structures sought by sailors to determine where they are. What would mid-country dweller Will Shaksper know about seamarks? As Hyde revealed, Oxford's family owned a seamark: "…Edward de Vere…signed his letter to Bedingfield in 1573 'from my country muses at Wivenhoe.'"* A Wivenhoe tourist booklet "states that Wivenhoe Hall was a large elegant house 'with towers of great height that served as a sea mark" and continues, "By the middle of the 15th century, John de Vere, 12th Earl of Oxford, was Lord of the Manor at Wivenhoe."*

Oxford traveled throughout northern Italy and knew its cities first-hand. Compatibly, Shakespeare reveals "profound knowledge of Milan, Bergamo, Verona, Mantua, Padua and Venice."* American and Italian scholars have verified "the accuracy of numerous details"* of the Italian settings in the Bard's plays. In 1581, Arundel and Howard reported a comment by the Earl of Oxford regarding the anti-New-Testament beliefs of "the Jewes of Italy," from which Nelson presumed "he had met with Jews in the Venetian Ghetto."* Some of the action in *The Merchant of Venice* takes place in that very spot.

The only areas Roe deduced that Oxford did not visit are "the papal states" (including Rome) "and Naples."* Jimenez added, "The Italian cities and city-states that Oxford did *not* visit, such as Bergamo, Naples, Ravenna, etc…"* while sometimes mentioned in the plays, are afforded no geographic or cultural detail within the Shakespeare canon. For the record, an Italian banker's letter of March 23, 1576* seems to indicate that Oxford did visit Naples. If so, he was not as taken with it as he was with the northern cities.

The Earl of Oxford studied law at Gray's Inn, and "Oxford's letters [show] an intimate acquaintance with a large range ('over one hundred examples' in one instance) of legal precedents."* Lawyer Thomas Regnier* noted that Oxford's personal experiences directly inform aspects of *Hamlet* relating to inherited property rights and the legal and religious views of homicide and suicide. Fitting Oxford's life experience precisely, "Edith Z. Friedler of Loyola Law School…notes that the law in *The Merchant of Venice* is not English law but the law of Venice (where Oxford lived for several months), that the Venetian law is essential to the plot and that the dramatist was extremely well-versed in it."*

It is a little-known fact that *The Comedy of Errors* is more than just a raucous farce; it poses conundrums that would intrigue the law professors and students who attended its performance at Gray's Inn in 1594: "The juridical scenarios which Shakespeare presents would have posed numerous questions of a doctrinal nature to the audience of lawyers at Gray's Inn. [The play offers] simultaneous perspectives on the form and content of law and the legal institution: the symbolic community of law in the Hall of Gray's Inn; the exaggerated representation of law in the fictional realm of Purpoole; and the hyper-fictional depiction of law in *The Comedy of Errors*."* That play was composed, therefore, by someone possessing intimate knowledge of the law and one who had ties to Gray's Inn, as Oxford did. The play "shows what Heard calls 'some of the most refined principles of the science of special pleading, a science which contains the quintessence of the law.' And Lord Chief Justice Campbell wrote that the jests (II,ii) 'show the author to be very familiar with some of the most abstruse proceedings in English jurisprudence.'"*

From childhood onward, Oxford had access to many obscure medical publications in the libraries of his tutor Sir Thomas Smith and his warder and future father-in-law, Lord Burghley. John Hester and the highly respected Dr. George Baker dedicated their first medical books to Oxford (see section on Those Who Knew). No wonder Shakespeare knew the subject of medicine.

The moody Dane of *Hamlet* carries a book that scholars of all stripes have identified as being *Cardanus Comforte*, a translation of which the Earl of Oxford "commanded" into print (see **Earl of Oxford** chapter).

"[Yet as] Ms. Miller comments, while these orthodox critics have lavished attention on the significant connections between *Hamlet* and *Cardanus Comforte*, they have not demonstrated 'the slightest interest in the person who was responsible for introducing this important work to the intelligentsia of Elizabethan England' (Miller 2: 504)."* Gilbert* proposed that Hamlet was carrying a different book, Gorgias' *On Nature*, the thesis of which is reflected in the works not only of Shakespeare but also of **John Lyly**, linking the book to Oxford through our thesis of Oxford's Voices.

Speaking of books, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* draws significantly from *Beowulf*,* presenting another problem for Stratfordians: Will Shaksper could never have seen that text. The Oxfordian context clears up the mystery: "The only text of *Beowulf* was a manuscript at Cecil House in the hands of Laurence Nowell, Oxford's tutor."*

Oxford also had access to the classics on ancient warfare. He owned Herodotus' writings on the Greek and Persian wars. He repeatedly expressed a desire for military service* and three times was dispatched to war zones. Accordingly, "…Shakespeare possessed 'an extraordinarily detailed knowledge of warfare, both ancient and modern' (Edelman 1)…and numerous obscure military analogies and references can be found throughout the canon."*

Shakespeare's opinion of the general population is that of an unrepentant aristocrat: "in Shakespeare there are only three extended treatments of 'the people' as a separate political agency: the Roman plebians in the first three acts of *Julius Caesar* and *Cariolanus*, and Jack Cade's rebels in Act IV of *2 Henry VI*. In all three plays they appear as a mindless, fickle and murderous 'rabble.'"* The street vigilantes in **[Anthony Munday]**'s *Sir Thomas Moore* have the same traits. As a nobleman, Oxford disdained the rabble; Shaksper was a member of it.

A university English professor who called the Oxfordian case "nonsense," said this about the Bard's true-to-life depictions of nobility: "you can argue the opposite case, that he would have to be a laborer to create such wonderful workingmen"* "such as Bottom in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.'"* That adroit riposte misses the point. Shakespeare's working-class characters are not salt-of-the-earth bedrocks of the economy but buffoons. Nor does Shakespeare discourse on the specialized knowledge of a laborer or depict his honest activity. Of the 38 plays in the currently accepted Shakespeare canon, all but one features at least one "King, Emperor, Prince or Duke among their main characters,"* and they are all — even when behaving badly — treated with respect.

The aristocratic point of view in Shakespeare's plays is ubiquitous, yet Stratfordians still say things such as, "He was always in some way a country lad at heart."* No, he was Hamlet; he was Henry V.

The Ogburns insightfully contrasted Shakespeare's point of view with that of Ben Jonson:

> One is aristocratic, the other bourgeois. [I]n portraying the lower classes Shakespeare is unconvincing. He makes them clods or dolts or clowns, and has them amuse us by their gaucheries. He gives them undignified names: Wart, Bullcalf, Mouldy, Bottom, Dogberry, Snout, etc. …On the other hand Jonson's bourgeois characters are natural, while his nobles are caricatures. They bear the same kind of names that Shakespeare gives to his commoners: Sir Paul Eitherside, Sir Amorous La-Foole, Sir Epicure Mammon, lady Haughty, Sir Diaphanous Silkworm, etc. …Shakespeare is the natural aristocrat[, whereas Jonson] has no sympathy with aristocratic aloofness and superiority.*

It is no good to wave one's hand in dismissal of the Bard's aristocratic interests as mere dramatic fodder. They are unique: "although kingship, its duties and responsibilities as well as the problem of loyalty to the sovereign, were *constant* Shakespearean themes, *they do not recur* in serious fashion *in any play* written after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603."* That is to say, after the death of the Earl of Oxford in

1604. That statement endorses our case for Oxford's Voices, too, because many of the Voices' plays treat those themes, and no playwright does so after 1604. Will Shaksper lived another dozen years. If he were the author, he would have composed more plays of this type. He didn't.

Stratfordians have charged that Oxfordians are just snobs because they wish to see an aristocrat as Shakespeare. That is nonsense. Oxfordians have simply pointed out that *Shakespeare* was a snob, in every play and on nearly every page. That fact fails to fit Will Shaksper.

^Oxford's Life in the Plays

No one has shown that details in Shakespeare's plays reflect Will Shaksper's life in any way. Countless details of Oxford's life appear in them. Here are but six, to give you the flavor:

- In *Hamlet*, the King is murdered by poison, and the Queen remarries quickly. Oxford's father may have been murdered by poison, and Oxford's mother remarried quickly.
- Oxford was a royal ward who was pushed into marrying a lower-born woman. Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well* is a royal ward who is pushed into marrying a lower-born woman.
- In 1576, Oxford became convinced his wife committed adultery, thanks partly to the machinations of his cousin Henry Howard, and the couple remained estranged from April 1576 until Christmas 1581. *Much Ado About Nothing* dramatizes a scheme of misdirection in which the calculating Don John leads Claudio to believe his fiancée has cheated on him.
- On Christmas of 1581, Oxford reconciled with his wife, implying he had concluded she was innocent. Othello in *Othello*, Posthumous in *Cymbeline*, Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* and Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing* each becomes convinced that his wife (fiancée in the latter play) has gone astray, and in all four cases the women are innocent.
- In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, "the conventional hero of the play, Fenton…is one who 'dances, writes verses, kept company with the wild prince and Poins' (iii., 2), was 'great of birth,' (whose) 'state was gall'd…with expense,' and who speaks of 'my riots past, my wild societies' (iii., 4). All this fits the Earl of Oxford exactly."*
- On his return by sea from the continent in 1576, Oxford was captured by pirates, stripped naked and left ashore.* On a sea voyage, Hamlet (*Hamlet*, IV,vi,vii) is captured by pirates, stripped naked and left ashore.
- Even small things fit. Two prominent Stratfordian scholars deduced that the character of Fluellen in Shakespeare's *Henry V* is "modeled on that of soldier of fortune and military author Roger Williams." It took an Oxfordian, though, to discover that "Roger Williams was a retainer of the Earl of Oxford."*

"After reading Shakespeare's most celebrated play (in Russian and German translations, as well as in English), Tolstoy famously remarked that there was "no possibility of finding any explanation whatever of Hamlet's actions or words, and therefore no possibility of attributing any character to him. [M]ore than a few scholars have spent the better part of their careers trying to remove the 'veil of print' that shrouds the play."* Such is the dead end that Stratfordianism has created.

Many of the play's meanings have come to light only under the Oxfordian lamp. Why did Shakespeare choose the name Polonius? "There really was a Polonius, 'the man from Poland' literally, who was the minister of foreign affairs to the King of Denmark. Polonius met Lord Burghley in May 1586. [Author Sten Vedi found] circumstantial evidence that Oxford's brother-in-law Lord Willoughby, had served in a mission to Elsinore, and his papers and personal remembrances would have been available to Oxford. Vedi even

found two previously overlooked pages of writing by Willoughby, particularly describing an encounter with Polonius."* William Shaksper would not have been privy to any of this information, but Oxford would have, because Lord Willoughby was Oxford's brother-in-law, the husband of his sister, Mary Vere. "Between the 1582 voyage and a subsequent 1585 trip to Elsinore, Bertie spent five months in the castle that *Hamlet* immortalizes."* He even met people whose names attend two of the play's minor characters: "In the 1580s, De Vere's brother-in-law was an ambassador to Denmark, where he met one official named Rosenkrantz and two named Guildenstern."*

In speaking to Horatio about his deceased father and his replacement, Hamlet warbles something cryptic: "For thou dost know, O Damon dear,/ This realm dismantled was/ Of Jove himself; and now reigns here/ A very, very — pajock." Horatio replies, "You might have rhymed." A century ago, Looney figured out the meaning of this exchange:

> Hamlet, it will be remembered, utters a rhyme in reference to his step-father which ought to have finished with the word 'ass.' Instead, however, he pauses, and substitutes the word 'pajock,' a term of contempt for a peacock. Our scholarly Shakespeareans have written much in seeking a reasonable explanation of the substitution, but not with much success. When, however, it is remembered that Oxford's step-father was Sir Charles Tyrrel, and that the peacock's tail is the distinctive feature in the Tyrrel crest, the obscurity disappears under the new theory of authorship.*

In short, *the Oxfordian context clears up numerous mysteries in the play*, for which Tolstoy could find no explanation. For a more extensive list of autobiographical elements in *Hamlet*, see Goldstein.*

The occasion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been connected in three ways to the Earl of Oxford. Two proposed settings of its performance relate to the Voices' closest friends, the Careys, to whom Oxford's Voices dedicated the most books (see **Thomas Nashe** chapter), and the Stanleys, into whose family Oxford's eldest daughter married. A typical source tells us,

> it is generally agreed that the play was created to celebrate a wedding in a noble household. There are two such occasions appropriate for this first performance. One is the wedding in 1595 of Elizabeth Vere, Lord Burghley's granddaughter, to William [Stanley, 6th] Earl of Derby at Greenwich Palace.*

Observe that such sources habitually cite Elizabeth Vere as "Lord Burghley's granddaughter" but consistently omit naming her father, Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, who ranked higher than Burghley among English peers and who was renowned in his time (see Opening Argument) for writing plays.

> The other, considered more likely, is the wedding in 1596 of Elizabeth Carey to Thomas, son of Lord Berkeley at the Blackfriars house of the bride's father, Sir George Carey. Elizabeth Carey was the granddaughter of Henry, Lord Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain to Queen Elizabeth. Lord Hunsdon was the patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's company. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was probably performed at court on 1 January 1604.*

"Wiles argues convincingly…based on a close reading of the play's astronomical imagery, that it was written for the February 19, 1596 Carey-Berkeley wedding…."*

If that is the correct occasion, does it leave the Earl of Oxford's family out of the picture? Not at all. Orthodox sources have overlooked the groom's family connection to the Earl of Oxford:

> Thomas Berkeley was the son of Henry Berkeley, 7th Baron Berkeley (d. 26 November 1613), by his

> first wife, Katherine Howard (d. 7 April 1596), third daughter of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and Frances de Vere, daughter of John de Vere, 15th Earl of Oxford, and Elizabeth Trussell."*

In other words, Mistress Elizabeth Carey's new husband was a great grandson of Oxford's grandfather, a grandson of Oxford's poetic uncle the Earl of Surrey and his aunt Frances Vere, and the son of Oxford's first cousin, Katherine Howard, making Thomas Berkeley Oxford's first cousin once removed.

So, the wedding involved either Oxford's daughter or his cousin, take your pick. Some scholars have proposed a third setting. Does it maintain a connection between *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Vere family? See for yourself:

> On May 2, 1594 Sir Thomas Heneage, then Vice Chamberlain of her Majesty's Household (Ward 37) and approximately sixty-two years of age — like the play's Duke Theseus, a man no longer in his prime — married the dowager widow of the second Earl of Southampton, Mary Browne (1552-1607)…. Several orthodox scholars…A.L. Rowse [and] Charlotte Stopes…concur with this line of reasoning…. Anderson…agrees that "several references in the play suggest that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had its world premiere on the night before the marriage of Sir Thomas Henage and Mary Browne Wriothesley" (276).
>
> [T]he Greenworld lovers [in the play] correspond to a younger cohort whose marriage arrangements were the subject of great public speculation and controversy during the mid-1590s and hence a fit topic for dramatization. These included Browne's son, the third Earl of Southampton (1573-1625), the playwright William Stanley (1561-1642), Elizabeth Vere (1575-1627), and ultimately Elizabeth Vernon, who in 1598 married the young Southampton. This cast of characters forms an intriguing fit with the four young lovers of the play.*

Hughes fleshed out the case:

> We agree with Stritmatter that the most likely occasion for MSND was the wedding of the Dowager Countess of Southampton to the Court official Sir Thomas Heneage on May 2, 1594. As we have suggested elsewhere, we believe that Oxford had a special place in his heart for the Countess, who, as Mary Browne, was Juliet's age (thirteen) in February, 1566 when she was married to the twenty-one-year-old second Earl of Southampton, while Oxford was Romeo's age (fifteen). Then living at Cecil House, he and the sixteen-year-old Earl of Rutland were perfectly placed to crash the Montague-Southampton wedding party at Montague House (Akrigg 7), just across the river. With the staunchly Protestant Cecil as their guardian, the two young earls would never have been invited to this Catholic wedding, just as Romeo and Benvolio could not have been invited to the Capulet wedding. It was this same Mary Browne whose girlhood face Shakespeare compared to her son's in Sonnet 3.*

In short, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which dramatizes a poem by **Arthur Brooke** published in 1562, may have inspired or derived from an event in Oxford's life in 1566, which remained in his mind as he prepared *A Midsummer Night's Dream* three decades later for the remarriage of his aging Juliet. At that very time, in 1593 and 1594, Shakespeare was dedicating two narrative poems to Mary Browne's son, Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, who was matched with Oxford's daughter Elizabeth at the time and was also the object of Shakespeare's Sonnets to the Fair Youth. So, even this option for the impetus for A Midsummer Night's Dream links to Oxford via his prospective son-in-law's mother.

It may well be that all three analyses are correct. Shakespeare could have written A Midsummer Night's

Dream in 1594 to celebrate the marriage of Sir Thomas Heneage to Countess Mary Brown Wriothesley, the mother of Henry Wriothesley, the Fair Youth of Shakespeare's Sonnets. He could have revived (and perhaps revised) the play in 1595 to accommodate the wedding of William Stanley to Elizabeth Vere, Oxford's daughter. He could have revived (and perhaps revised) it again in 1596 for the marriage celebration of Elizabeth Carey to Sir Thomas Berkeley, Oxford's cousin. The play would have been a natural hit with brides and their mothers, making it the perfect entertainment for guests of all three sets of nobility.

Mistress Elizabeth Carey had also been promised for a time to William Herbert, who later was slated to marry Oxford's daughter, Bridget, and who in years following helped pilot Shakespeare's legacy. Although William did not marry Elizabeth Carey or Bridget Vere, his brother Philip married Oxford's daughter Susan Vere. All these events demonstrate affiliations among all three families closest to Oxford's Voices: the Herberts, the Careys and the Veres.

What about seeming contradictions to Oxford's authorship? Suffice it to say that Oxfordians have dismissed them all. Here is but one example: As noted in the **Barnabe Rich** chapter and Those Who Knew, in October 1595 Oxford wrote that the Earl of Essex had mistreated him. Orthodox scholars have long opined that Shakespeare speaks favorably of the Earl of Essex in the 1599 edition of *Henry V* (V, Prologue) when the Chorus says,

> Were now the general of our gracious empress,
> As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
> Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
> How many would the peaceful city quit,
> To welcome him!

Does the favorable language in this presumed allusion to Essex's departure for Ireland mean that Oxford could not have written *Henry V*? No, because orthodoxy has it wrong again. Jimenez recognized that the passage was in fact referring to Sir Thomas Butler, Earl of Ormond's suppression of the Desmond Rebellion in 1583. With that one stroke, he demolished orthodoxy's dating of *Henry V* to 1599 based on this text and dated the play more accurately to November 1583-May 1584. Cementing the connection to the true Shakespeare, "Oxford and Butler were not only long time friends, they were distantly related by marriage, and had remained in contact during the 1570s."* Traditionalists beware: *Whatever fact you offer to challenge Oxford's authorship of Shakespeare's works will turn on you and provide yet more evidence favoring it*.

The list goes on and on. McClarran put it well: "While we cannot say that these correspondences are more than coincidence, we can say that these are *indisputable and precise correspondences*."*

Oxfordian literature is full of such insights and connections between Shakespeare's writing and Oxford's life. To list them all would be superfluous, as they are available in the many excellent books on the subject, six of which are listed above.

There are limits, to be sure, on what Moore called "the Eva Turner Clark approach of seeing Oxford's autobiography all over the plays…."* This fault is especially evident in the Ogburns' approach of retrofitting vast swaths of Elizabethan history and biography to fit events in Shakespeare's plays. One could just as easily weave Nostradamus' predictions into a recitation of the past half-millennium of world history. When one reads comments about the Bard such as "he used the two Annes, Cecil and Vavasor, for Juliet and also, together with the Queen, for Cressida; he combined Elizabeth with Lady Mary Pembroke for Olivia, *and so on*"* and "…*Hamlet* was aimed at Elizabeth and Leicester-*cum*-Hatton, vis-à-vis Oxford and Sussex, with a backward glance at Leicester and the Countess of Essex, *etc*."* one is tempted to conclude that such characters must in fact be utterly independent of real-life models.

Fox weighed in: "There is a huge literature on *Love's Labor's Lost* and every editor and critic tries his hand at identifying the characters. They all seem to be so absolutely confident in their choices, whereas I am absolutely doubtful."* One of those identifications is challenged below. Think about your favorite movie or TV show. Do you think the writers craft all those characters from their own circles of friends? I don't think so. Fox conceded, "good arguments can be made."* They can indeed, *when* they are good arguments, and some of them are.

Regardless of where one draws the line, "It is the Stratfordian view, not the Oxfordian, that lacks all literary pertinence."* If William Shaksper's life had any links to Shakespeare's plays, orthodoxy would be trumpeting them. Correspondences they have tried to squeeze out of Shaksper's life have either crumbled under investigation, such as the claim, covered above, that the author used terms peculiar to Warwickshire, or are of miniscule import, such as the idea that Shaksper named his son Hamnet in celebration of Hamlet. (Well, he did misspell it, so that fits; wait; no, it doesn't.) Scoff as they may when Oxfordians point out dozens of parallels to Oxford's life, Stratfordians cannot show any at all.

In response to that dead end, Stratfordians have put forth the idea that Shakespeare's plays are merely artistic creations with no correspondence to the author's life. Yet again, that is not explaining; it is explaining away.

Stratfordians have treated the dearth of information relating Will Shaksper as a license to *imagine*. But the factual void is a fact in itself, telling us that Shaksper never did anything his contemporaries considered worth noting.

One of the Stratfordians' favorite gambits (proved false; see **Earl of Oxford** chapter) is to insist that Oxford's youthful poems do not foreshadow Shakespeare's talent. As Hess* quipped, at least Oxford *has* juvenilia. Shaksper has none — not even a surviving note to the milkman.

With no known literary experimentation, Shaksper supposedly emerged from obscurity to pen a mature masterpiece of poetic composition titled *Venus and Adonis*. Was his debut really a freshman effort? Gladwell* asserted that humans need about 10,000 hours of practice to become highly skilled at a craft. If Oxford studied and wrote an average of five hours a day from 1560 to 1593—probably a conservative estimate—he would have put in 60,000 hours of effort, six times the required amount. That's how he progressed from boy genius to becoming Shakespeare.

One would think that rejecting Oxford's authorship would be a slam-dunk simply based on the two men's times of death. Will Shaksper lived twelve years longer than Oxford did. Just a single line in any play derived from a source or event after 1604 would kill the case for Oxford.

Stratfordians tried to declare that *The Tempest* is a post-1604 play. They claimed its source was two pamphlets and a letter written by William Strachey in 1610, which describe the 1609 wreck of the Sea Venture in Bermuda. Strachey's letter was not published until 1625 (too late even for Shaksper to have consulted it), so they figure Shakespeare "somehow" must have come across the original. But in 2002, orthodox scholar David Lindley wrote that there is "virtually nothing"* in common between the play and the descriptions of the Bermuda wreck. Nina Green* refuted all 53 of one scholar's "alleged parallels" between the play and those documents, to which he has not replied. In 2013, Stritmatter and Kositsky's *On the Date, Sources and Design of Shakespeare's The Tempest* demonstrated definitively that Shakespeare's source was in fact Richard Eden's 1555 translation from the Spanish of Peter Martyr's *Decades*. In 2021, Chiljan* brilliantly established the play's time of composition as 1581-1582, noting its reflection of Oxford's banishment from Court beginning in March 1581 and Philip Sidney's response to the play (see Philip Sidney chapter) in *Apologie for Poetrie*, "which scholars maintain was written before 1583…."*

Despite Stratfordians' claims for several plays' late composition, in fact "*No play* has been found to

date definitively after 1604, the year of Oxford's death."* Orthodoxy has clung to the claim that Shakespeare wrote plays after 1604, but even among their ranks, that year rings out: "all of Geoffrey Bullough's careful scholarship turned up no topical reference…in the plays later than 1604, the year de Vere died."*

Five quartos of Shakespeare's plays are denoted as "newly" "corrected," "augmented," "emended" or "enlarged" by the playwright. Brazil reported the "remarkable" fact that all five of them were published "during the time span of 1598 to 1604. …After 1604, Shakespeare was apparently unavailable for revisions."*

Looney wrote, "We have a flood of Shakespearean plays being published authentically right up to the death of Edward de Vere, then a sudden stop, and nothing more published with any appearance of proper authorization for nearly twenty years…."* Specifically, from 1593 to 1604, 17 new plays were published in twelve years; from 1605 to 1622, only 5 new plays were published over eighteen years.* In our context, the reason for the shift in frequency is obvious: Shakespeare died in 1604.

Representatives of orthodoxy have reasoned that Shakespeare retired: "his name is not mentioned in a drama after the year 1603; for, at the end of that year, or the beginning of the next, 'tis supposed he took his farewell of the stage, both as author and actor."* At least one statement from orthodoxy, published in naïve honesty before Looney's book came out, nails the Oxfordian timeline perfectly: "We suppose Shakespeare to have ceased to act *in the summer of 1604*."* The Earl of Oxford died on June 24, 1604.

Looney's discovery of the true author prompted some revisionism among orthodox scholars. As Anderson noted, their citations of 1604 as Shakespeare's retirement year mostly date "from before 1920, after which the authorship question became an issue…."* The only basis orthodoxy has had for extending the timeline of Shakespeare's activity is supposed instances of topical allusions to events post-1604. Oxfordian scholarship has brilliantly dismissed every one of them.

The pivotal year brought yet another change: "In 1604 the King's Men, formerly the Chamberlain's Men ('Shakespeare's company'), having gone without problems since its inception in 1594, suddenly has trouble with the authorities."* Why? because the highly placed Earl of Oxford was no longer there to override them.

King James' Relationship with Oxford as Shakespeare

That King James held a good view of both Oxford and Shakespeare is a natural confluence under Oxfordian theory. The confluence was sometimes revealingly tight.

Immediately upon his accession to the throne in 1603, King James restored Oxford's place at court, appointed him to his Privy Council, and granted him lands he had pursued for years. The King's Men, formerly The Lord Chamberlain's Men, acted a play before James at the Earl of Pembroke's estate at Wilton on December 2, 1603. E.K. Chambers* conjectured that the play was Shakespeare's As You Like It.

Oxford held a prominent place in King James' major public appearances right up until shortly before the time of his death. One event stands out. In 1604, "On 15 March the King rode in triumph through London,"* and Nichols* cited records indicating that immediately on the King's left was "The Lord Great Chamberlaine," i.e., the Earl of Oxford. With respect to that very event, Price* noted that in a document from 1604, "'William Shakespeare' heads the list of 'Players' who are issued red cloth for ceremonial livery on the occasion of King James's procession through London…on 15 March,.* Does that entry refer to the Earl of Oxford posing as Shakespeare or Will Shaksper of Stratford? No records attest to Will Shaksper's presence in London at any time in 1604, much less as a participant in the king's procession. A record from just twelve days later shows that Will Shaksper "was back in Stratford selling malt to Philip Rogers."* This datum does not preclude Shaksper's having journeyed to London and back, a six-day round trip, to participate in the procession. But transactional records throughout the spring show that he remained in

Stratford while the Kings Men players were presumably back at work on the boards after the ban on players was lifted in early April. His absence from London at these times is strongly suggestive that he never went there in March. In contrast, the Oxfordian perspective makes it perfectly natural that Edward de Vere, the man whom over a century of Oxfordian scholarship identifies as Shakespeare, was present in a ceremonial role in the same place on the same day as the elusive "William Shakespeare" was due to wear ceremonial livery. Oxford was filling a role in the final months of this life that he had played for James' predecessor, Queen Elizabeth. On this occasion, he represented both the Earl of Oxford, Great Chamberlain of England, and William Shakespeare, the first-listed receiver of ceremonial livery among the King's Men's players.

James expressed his heartfelt attachment even after Oxford's death: "Six months after the Earl's death, at Christmas time, King James had eight productions of the Shakespearean plays given at Court; and following the death of Oxford's widowed Countess, in December 1612, he had fourteen. But no notice whatsoever was taken of the death of William Shaksper of Stratford in 1616."* James loved the plays of Shakespeare, but — naturally in our context — he paid no attention to Will Shaksper of Stratford.

^Oxford's Self-References in the Plays and Poems

A discussion in the Opening Argument demonstrates that Oxford used *ever*, *never*, *true*, *truth* and other self-referencing words throughout the writing in his own name and in the names of his Voices. The section titled Those Who Knew shows that other poets knew of his practice and used the same words when referring to him clandestinely.

Oxfordians have pointed out that the title of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* makes little sense as it stands, as winter pertains in no way to the story, and this three-hour play is hardly the stuff of tales to be told by the fire on long winter nights. On the other hand, it works well as a pun. *Winter* in French is *Hiver*, the pronunciation of *Hi* and the ensuing spelling rendering the title as *E. Ver's Tale* or *The Tale of E. Ver*. Alternatively "…*The Winter's Tale* translated into French is *Le Conte d'Hiver*, homonymic to *Le Comte d'Ever*, the Count de Vere…"* a *count* on the continent being equivalent to an *earl* in England.

The Winter's Tale is not the Bard's only punning title, because "the alternative title of another of his last plays, *Henry VIII* [is] 'All Is True.'"* This fact is testified by "…Sir Henry Wotton, writing on the 2d of July [1613] of 'a new play, called, *All is True*, representing some principal pieces of the Reign of Henry the 8th.'"* Whether Oxford or his successors changed the title we do not know, but either way it indicates that someone knew and used the pun.

Characters in Shakespeare's plays that speak for the playwright, or about characters who do so, use such puns; for example, Pisanio in *Cymbeline* says in an aside, "for, true to thee/ Were to prove false, which I will never be,/ To him that is most true," meaning the principal of the play. When Sebastian agrees to wed Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, he says, "And having sworn truth, ever will be true." Polonius encourages Hamlet, "To thine own self be true," and a dying Hamlet exclaims to Horatio, "If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart…."

Such remarks occur in special abundance near the start, but especially near the end, of Shakespeare's plays, as if denoting a signature:

- *Richard the Third* begins, "Now is the winter of our discontent."
- *Two Gentlemen of Verona* begins "…Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits."
- A dying Richard II says in his final speech, "That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire."
- At the end of *Love's Labor's Lost*, a character named Ver sings, "The cuckoo then, on every tree,/ Mocks married men."
- Bassetti* pointed out five such references in Oberon's final speech from *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream: "Ever shall be fortunate…. Ever true in loving be…. Never mole, hare lip, nor scar…. Every fairy take his gait…. Ever shall in safety rest."

- The fourth-to-last line that King Lear utters before dying is "Thou'lt come no more,/ Never, never, never, never, never!" The play ends, "we that are young/ Shall never see so much…."
- *Romeo and Juliet* ends, "Never was there a tale of such woe…."
- *Cymbeline* ends, "Never was a war did cease…."
- *Pericles* ends, "So, on your patience ever more attending…."
- *Twelfth Nigh*t ends, "And we'll strive to please you every day."
- *As You Like It* ends, "As we do trust they'll end, in true delights."
- *King John* ends, "I do bequeath my…true subjection everlastingly. …This England never did, nor never [some texts read "ever"] shall,/ Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror…. Nought shall make us rue,/ If England to itself do rest but true."
- Shakespeare's epic poem *Lucrece* ends, "The Romans plausibly did give consent/ To Tarquin's everlasting banishment."
- Prospero's epilogue in *The Tempest* is a touching revelation of playwright's identity as a mere mortal after his play is done: "Now my charms are all o'erthrown,/ And what strength I have's mine own, — / Which is most faint: now, 'tis true…."

Shakespeare says in Sonnet 116, "love…is an ever-fixed mark,/ That looks on tempests, and is never shaken." The poem ends, "If this be error, and upon me prov'd,/ I never writ, nor no man ever loved." The poem contains three more *ver* words: *true*, *remover* and *every*. In Sonnet 76, famous among Oxfordians, Shakespeare writes, "Why write I still all one, ever the same,/ And keep invention in a noted weed,/ That every word [that E-Ver-y word] *doth almost tell my name*."

After intensive study, Gray concluded, "Worked into *Hamlet*'s dialogue, these three hundred guide-words, when translated into French, all begin with the letters VER. Many of these 'Ver words' are no longer in the language. *Yet every word beginning with the letters 'Ver' in the ancient French-English dictionaries can be found in* Hamlet!"* That is an astonishing fact. Yet it is right up the alley of the man who, when he was 11 or 12 years old, wrote **William Fulwood**'s *the Philosophers game* to explain a precociously complex board game. He must have set out, with a dictionary in front of him, to work every *Ver* word in French into the play. *Hamlet*, then, is not only the most autobiographical Shakespeare play but also the most autographical. I have not perused Gray's book, but her finding explains part of what Oxford was doing when, while ensconced at Hackney, he was revising *Hamlet* to its final form, published in 1604 as "Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was." In that same year, Will Shaksper, as noted above, "sued one of his neighbors for the piddling sum of less than two pounds after supplying him with some malt, presumably to make beer."

Stratfordians may not dismiss the form of Gray's observation, because they have used it themselves. In 1971, Andrew Gurr proposed that Sonnet 145's "hate away" is a pun on "Hathaway," Shaksper's wife's maiden name. As recently as 2020, Stratfordians* with access to the Cambridge University Press were still parroting the same claim. This would be a very lonely reference, and it makes no sense. The lines are, "'I hate' from hate away she threw,/ And saved my life, saying — 'not you.'" Stuff "Hathaway" into that space, and you get nonsense. If Shaksper were to refer to his wife once in all his works, you would think he would have it mean something.

^Oxford's Impiety Matches Shakespeare's

Religious devotion was the law of the land in Elizabethan England. Atheism was a crime. Literature and

other evidence of the time show that most English people were religiously minded, if not militantly so. There were illegal Catholics, illegal Puritans and people falsely accused of atheism such as Ralegh and Marlowe. From my reading, I recall no personages from that time with an enduring reputation for free thought aside from the Earl of Oxford and Shakespeare.

One of Jimenez's observations about the Bard's *King Lear* and the Shakespeare-precursor play *King Leir*, which he dated to 1567, reveals a change in Oxford's thinking about religion shortly thereafter:

> Another obvious difference between the two plays is Shakespeare's replacement of the overt but anomalous Christianity of the characters in *King Leir* with a group of characters in a pagan setting where the presence of justice, both poetic and divine, is routinely questioned. …His first version… reflected his basic Protestant beliefs, [but] Three decades later, Edward de Vere had a different view of life and the Creator… He transformed this simple tale, infused with Christian piety, into a powerful and violent tragedy in which pagan Gods are repeatedly invoked, and the very idea of justice is questioned.*

Although the mature Shakespeare might simply have chosen to be historically accurate on ancient Britain's unfamiliarity with Christianity, the shift in religious orientation between these plays also seems to reflect Oxford's own views. As his uncle Arthur Golding would testify shortly thereafter (see quote immediately below), Oxford's tutors steeped him in Christian beliefs. But based on the Voices' material he seems to have abandoned most pretenses to the faith before he exited his teens.

Oxford's View of Religion

Oxford's Voices mention God and Christ at least through 1563. In *The Castel of Memorie* (1562), **William Fulwood**'s address to the Reader closes, "I truste to thy furtherance, and the glorye of almightye God the father, the Sonne, and the Ghost: to whom be laude and praise worlde without ende. Amen." In *The Enimie of Idlenesse* (1568), mentions of Christ are absent, although **Fulwood** speaks of "that small talent that God hath lent me." It seems reasonable to conclude that in the mid-1560s, Oxford dropped the unique tenets of Christianity and became somewhat of a deist, presuming only a god and a heaven.

There is no question that most of Oxford's contemporaries saw him as impious. Evidence comes from four separate time periods: the early 1570s, the early 1580s, the early 1590s and the early 1600s.

In 1571, Oxford's uncle, Arthur Golding (see **Arthur Golding** chapter), nearly apologized for dedicating a translation of the Psalms to him, as follows:

> It may peradventure be thought in respect of the matter wherof this woork treateth, that *it ought rather to have bin dedicated to som of my very good Lords the Lords spirituall*, [but I] only had an eye to my dutie toward your Lordship…. But if you shuld become eyther a counterfayt Protestant, or a perverse Papist, or a colde and careless newter (which God forbid) the harme could not be expressed which you should do to your native Cuntrie.

In other words, "Maybe I should have dedicated this book to one of the many peers who believes in the spirit world, but I feel duty-bound to dedicate it to you."

Golding goes on to protest, "I assure your Lordshippe I write not these things as though I suspected you to be digressed from that soundnes and sinceritie, wherein you were continually trained," indicating that Oxford was stuffed with religion as a boy. But he clearly knows that his nephew has strayed and nearly begs him to adopt "true Religyon, true Godlynesse" and especially to avoid "the Atheistes which say in their hartes there is no God: and the Epicures which deprive GOD of his providence in governing the world."

Golding gives Oxford's "vertuous and deerbeloved Spouse" a pass, so Anne Cecil must have been sufficiently devout to escape similar entreaties.

Oxford's father-in-law held the same opinion and expressed it twice. In the first instance, Burghley wrote in his diary on June 12, 1576 that his son-in-law showed "contempt for God and of all good ordres arguing allways agaynst the articles of fayth."*

On May 6, 1581, a Puritan named Thomas Stocker, who had spent some childhood years in the 16th Earl of Oxford's house, issued *Divers Sermons of Master John Calvin* and dedicated it to the 17th Earl of Oxford. The dedication is in the form of a sermon, in which Stocker pointedly wonders how anyone "can bee so blockish" as to fail to recognize God when He is all around us. He expresses some hope for the earl based on knowledge that he had recently engaged in "conference with a certeine godly learned man for the better *reforming* of yourself and your whole family, to the obedience of the word." Stocker applauds this presumed new course, which "the Lord our God…hath so *lately begun* in you" and invites Oxford "to shewe your selfe a constant mainteiner of the trueth of the glorious Gospell of his deare Sonne Christ Jesus our Lorde," etc. His wording makes it abundantly clear that Oxford, apparently along with some of his family members, was known for his lack of taste for religion. Why, then, would he have held out such hope that the impious Oxford would suddenly adopt the faith? The date of his dedication is significant. This is precisely the time when, from March to June, Oxford was at the bottom of a pit of disgrace, locked up in the Tower with Anne Vavasor and their illegitimate child. Perhaps he did profess a desire to eschew his mistress and return to family life, if only the crown would take him back into the fold. Evangelicals have always been alert for people in emotional pain and at low ebb in their lives, because that is when they are most susceptible to religious conversion. So, Stocker pounced.

In December 1581, Charles Arundel, Henry Howard and Francis Southwell gave testimony that Oxford was an atheist who called the Bible merely an instrument "to hold men in obedience" and characterized the Holy Trinity "a fable" and "an old wives tale and voyde of reason."* Precisely fitting Arundel's charge, **Thomas Lodge** had stated in *In Defence* of the previous year, "if…we examine the Scriptures litterallye, nothing will seeme more falls [false]…." From that concurrence we may conclude that, in this case, the traitors' charge is accurate. Oxford was smarter, by leagues, than anyone around him. It must have driven him crazy to find no one in agreement on this issue.

The pair further testified that Oxford disdained the Bible, bragging that "he could make a better and more orderlie scripture in [six] dayes warninge."* No doubt he could have. **Thomas Nashe** later expresses a similar point of view when he joins half a dozen other Voices in berating the slim rhetorical talents of preachers (see **Thomas Nashe** chapter) and proceeds to show them how it should be done.

The conspirators further charged of Oxford "that he cold never beleve in suche a God as delte well with those that deserved evell and evell with those that deserved well, that he wuld prove by scripture that after this life we shuld be as yf we had never ben and that the rest was devised to make us afrayd — like babes and childerne — of owr shadowes."* One would be tempted to dismiss this charge of flat-out atheism but for the fact that Francis Southwell, the only Catholic conspirator who had the integrity to stick to truth-telling, confirmed two of the blasphemy items. He further charged Oxford with saying "that Solomon was blessed with 300 concubines, and that the Bible was written to keep men in obedience."*

For the record: Although the libelers' statements about Oxford's irreligion agree with other evidence, there are reasons to believe they are formulaic. In 1580, John Stow in *Chronicles* had published a list of Hamont's "Heresies," and Nelson noted "a similarity"* between Stow's list and the conspirators'. Nicholl further challenged their validity: "The blasphemous squibs that were attributed to Oxford sound like an early version of the Marlovian blasphemies reported by Baines,"* which were entirely trumped up by Marlowe's enemies. Nicholl explained that the same type of charges against Walter Ralegh initially seemed plausible,

too, but Ralegh was innocent and beat the rap. In other words, if you wanted to get someone in serious trouble with the state, there was a handy script from which to work, and Howard merely delivered a version of it to the authorities. It just so happens that this time, the formulaic charges jibe with others' assessments.

Despite allegations, Oxford was not charged with any crime. In his defense "…Andrew Trollop, who served the Earl for eleven years as a deputy steward — 'during all that time being privy not only of his public dealings, but also of his private doings and secret intents — found and knew him indued with special piety….'"* Perhaps Oxford's piety was "special" because it was of a moral, as opposed to a religious, nature. There is no question the Voices have principles. Or perhaps he was a deist, disdaining biblical accounts but believing that a god, whom his Voices usually call Jove, existed in heaven.

As Golding's efforts failed, so did Stocker's. Just a year later, Stephen Gosson was on the verge of becoming a churchman. In *Playes Confuted in five Actions* (1582), he describes **Thomas Lodge** as one who was "hunted by the heavy hand of God." A few months later, on March 12, 1583 (1582 by the old calendar), Burghley wrote a letter to Christopher Hatton defending Oxford against charges levied by the Knyvet clan. He added, "But I submit all these things to God's will, who knoweth best why it pleaseth Him to afflict my Lord of Oxford in this sort, who hath, I confess, forgotten his duty to God…."*

Today many people agree with skeptical talk, but four centuries ago, it was shocking and appalling. Up to the early 1600s, the social pressure to express religious devotion was immense. Accordingly, Oxford's friends and family's anxiety over his freethinking was deep. "Today many find it hard to grasp the ubiquity and power of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It underlay virtually every assumption about the nature, purpose and value of life."* Oxford's independence and skepticism on this matter were rare for an era when "Religion defined the social, political, and intellectual life of medieval and Renaissance Europe."* For Oxford to think outside that box was frightening to his friends, his enemies and his Queen.

Evidence from a decade later indicates no change in Oxford's views or in people's views of him. In 1589-1590, Oxford supported the political and religious status quo by defending the Anglican bishops against Martin Mar-prelate through his pseudonymous Voices, **Pasquill**, **Pasquin**, **Mar-phoreus**, **Double V** and **Cutbert Curry-knave**. Yet a careful reading shows that he got through all those exercises without in fact promoting Protestantism. As demonstrated in the Pamphleteers section, these Voices never make their arguments from religion or philosophy but rather with burlesques and scoffs at writing style. In his pamphlets of 1592-1597, Gabriel Harvey repeatedly accuses **Thomas Nashe** of atheism, as quoted in the **Thomas Nashe** chapter. He saw through the fake piety of *Christes Teares* and called him on it.

It is well to recognize that Oxford's irreligion had limits, not only in philosophical terms but also as prescribed by social courtesy. In 1577, when the Catholic inquisitors in Italy asked choirboy Oriazio Cuoco if Oxford had tried to convert him from Catholicism to Anglicanism, he said no, he did not. They were not wise enough to ask him if Oxford tried to convert him to atheism, but my guess would be that he did not do that, either. As demonstrated in the **Earl of Oxford** chapter, Oxford's letters to William and Robert Cecil include some religious language by which the Cecils would have been comforted and more inclined to help further his interests. Oxford does not seem to have made a public display of non-belief, and he never berated others for their beliefs. Throughout the 1580s, **Robert Greene** closes his prefacing material with variations on "I commit you to the Almightie," but they ring as a friendly formality rather than a heartfelt sentiment.

To conclude, Oxford was a rational skeptic about religion. Yet he seems to have maintained some respect or at least deference to religion and even to have turned toward it at times.

Shakespeare's View of Religion

Shakespeare's writings are in concert with Oxford's views as described above. In equally stark contrast

to the sentiments of the day, Shakespeare was astoundingly cavalier about Christianity. His works are packed with classical mythology and paganism. They refer to the Greek and Roman gods far more often than to the Christian god. Many of them neglect even the most compelling feature of nearly all religions: the presumption of attaining heaven in an afterlife.

Countless scholars have noted these traits. Carter recoiled over Shakespeare's use of Scripture, which "becomes so daring and indiscriminate in his use that he shocks the sensitive mind."* Gifford added, "Shakspeare is, in truth, the coryphaeus of profanation. Texts of Scripture are adduced by him with the most wanton levity."* Jaques' reference to Noah's ark in *As You Like It* (V,iv), for instance, is not solemn but flip and wry. Then there are Shakespeare's Sonnets, "which are explicitly and insistently secular,"* "virtually never spiritual."* In them, the Bard occasionally "seems to push his idolatrous substitution of friend-worship for Christian worship to flamboyantly blasphemous extremes…."* In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (I,i), Theseus expresses the Bard's love of this life over Catholic devotion: "You can endure the livery of a nun;/… To live a barren sister all your life,/ Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon./ …*earthly* happier is the rose distill'd,/ Than that…withering on the virgin thorn…."

Gifford wrote, "I will venture to affirm that more of the heathen mythology may be found in a single scene, nay, in a single speech, of Shakespeare…than in the whole of Jonson's thirteen comedies."* Speaking of *Much Ado about Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Winter's Tale* and *As You Like It*, Hughes remarked, "There's far more of pagan revelry in all of these than anything Christian…."*

Like Oxford, Shakespeare did not embrace the inevitability of an afterlife. Trevor-Roper opined "… Shakespeare was really a non-religious man. [He] never utters a syllable which suggests a personal religion. …Most probably he was a skeptic. In his comedies he loves this life only; in his tragedies there is no hint of another."* In *Romeo and Juliet*, when the lovers die, and in *King Lear*, when Cordelia dies, there is no hint that souls will meet in an afterlife. They are dead, and that's that. Prospero in *The Tempest* (IV,i) says that everyone and everything will disappear, and non-existence ("a sleep") both precedes and follows their transient existence. Macbeth (*Macbeth*, V,v) is even more nihilistic: "Life's but a walking shadow…Signifying nothing." **Thomas Hughes**' play, *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, expresses the same sentiment (see **Thomas Hughes** chapter). Claudio in *Measure for Measure* (III,i), while leaving open the possibility of some sort of post-life existence, outright denies the certainty of heaven:

> Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
> To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
> This sensible warm motion to become
> A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
> To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
> In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
> To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
> And blown with restless violence round about
> The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
> Of those that lawless and incertain thought
> Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!
> The weariest and most loathed worldly life
> That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature is a paradise
> To what we fear of death.

In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (II,vii), a character speaks of a soul resting not in Heaven but in Elysium. We know exactly where this penchant came from. Oxford loved Ovid's stories of the classical deities that he read in his youth, as revealed in the **T.H. (Thomas Hackett)** and **Arthur Golding** chapters and all the ensuing literature the Voices produced.

When Oxford has his Voices undergo religious conversions, as he does with **Robert Greene**, **Thomas Lodge** and **Thomas Nashe**, they seem to embrace it wholeheartedly. But one can see through it in every instance. In *The Repentance*, **Robert Greene** reports that he had made sport of the belief in an afterlife, saying, "what talke you of hell to me? I know if I once come there, I shall have the company of better men than my selfe," but now he has repented. Yet prior to that change, Oxford has **Greene** tell us exactly what he plans to do: stage a repentance (see **Robert Greene** chapter). **Lodge** and **Nashe** write some books in passionately Calvinist tones, but they quickly follow them with more romantic, comedic and secular fare, revealing the falsity of their presumed conversions.

Shakespeare's secular point of view is not due to ignorance of religion. Quite the contrary: "… Shakespeare cites far more scripture than any other contemporary writer."* "He may be said to use Scripture on any and every occasion, to dignify the thought of a king, to point the jest of a wit, or to brighten the dulness of a clown."* "Shakespeare's habitual use of the Bible is well-known. In all the plays there is hardly a scene that does not contain some Biblical quotation, paraphrase, allusion, or parallel. …Shakespeare's favorite books [are] Genesis, Psalms, Corinthians, Revelations, and above all the Gospels, especially Matthew."* The difference between Shakespeare and everyone else is that he treats the Bible not as divine writ but merely as another source for literary inspiration. He mines its content to express secular metaphors, not devotion.

Fitting this detailed knowledge, Oxford owned and marked passages in a Geneva Bible, which Stritmatter* linked to lines in Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare made intricate use of the *Book of the Wisdom of Solomon*, which is considered biblical or non-biblical according to various arguments. Waugaman wrote, "in Sonnet 30, he [the Youth] is implicitly compared with the Spirit of Wisdom, who repeatedly rescues and redeems the righteous from life's assorted tribulations."* Equating the Youth with a divine spirit is a secular application of religious material that many would consider blasphemous.

Shakespeare's goodly friars, depicted in *Romeo and Juliet, Much Ado about Nothing* and *Measure for Measure*, are respected for their worldly knowledge and counsel, not their godliness or preaching. Oxford shows another side of that coin in depicting the lecherous and larcenous friar in **George Peele**'s *Edward I*.

As detailed in the **Thomas Nashe** chapter, **Arthur Brooke**, **Robert Greene**, **Thomas Lodge**, **B.R. (Barnabe Rich)**, **Henry Chettle** and **William Warner** all berate preachers as dullards, and **Thomas Nashe** does so even while penning Calvinist material in *Christes Teares*. In sympathy with them, the Bard portrays Sir Nathaniel the Curate in *Love's Labor's Lost* as insipid.

He goes a step further in charging preachers with hypocrisy. In *Twelfth Night*, Feste dons a curate's gown as a guise and comments, "I would I were the first that dissembled in such a gown" (IV,ii). In *Hamlet* (I,iii), Ophelia says, "Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,/ Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;/ Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,/ Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads…." In *The Merchant of Venice* (III,ii), Bassanio remarks, "In religion,/ What damned error, but some sober brow/ Will bless it and approve it with a text,/ Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?" In *Richard III* (III,iv), when the antagonist's aim is to deceive, he appears with a prayer book in hand and strolling between two bishops. Other Voices share this sentiment. In **B.R. (Barnabe Rich)**'s *Greenes Newes*, the spirit of **Robert Greene** promises mischievously to "get up into the Pulpit and preach, but you may easily discerne mee, for my text shall be, Doo as I say, but not as I doo."

Some Voices seem genuinely devout. **Phillip Stubbes** issued religious pamphlets. **Anonymus** in *Remedies Against Discontentment* (1596) warns his readers, "there is no seazon wherein men doe sooner forget god, then when they have attained to some high estate." Oxford composed prayer books under the names **Thomas Twyne** and **John Phillips**. But because so many Voices scoff at the poor rhetoric of preachers, we can deduce that Oxford was simply showing them how to do their jobs.

The Bard has even less respect for Puritans: "it is possible to quote from the plays many contemptuous references to the puritans and their doctrines…."* In *Twelfth Night*, Sir Andrew laments, "Methinks sometimes I have no more wit than a Christian or an ordinary man has" (I,iii), and Maria observes of Malvolio, "sometimes he is a kind of Puritan…The devil a puritan…an affectioned ass" (II,iii). Trevor-Roper, in a discussion of Shakespeare, spoke curtly of "…*God, whom he ignored*, and the puritans, whom he detested…."* A character in **Joshua Cooke**'s *How To Chuse* mangles a dinner grace to hilarious effect, and another grumbles, "Wenches, methinke you sit like Puritants." Other Voices, especially **Thomas Nashe**, disparage Puritans, as quoted in the **Thomas Nashe** chapter.

When the Voices use puritanistic language, as in **Robert Greene**'s, **Thomas Lodge**'s and **Thomas Nashe**'s invectives, Oxford is simply play-acting, as demonstrated conclusively in the **Robert Greene** and **Thomas Nashe** chapters. Thomas Nashe contradicts that very stance in *Pierce Penilesse* when he files "under hypocrisie, all Machavilisme, puritanisme."

The Puritans did get their revenge. "…English Puritans during the late 16th and early 17th centuries wanted to do away with Shakespeare and briefly succeeded in doing so between 1642 and 1660,"* when they took over the British government.

In 21 out of the 22 times that Shakespeare briefly mentions Jesu or Jesus, the name is used in exclamations; it is never invoked in reverence. **George Peele** has the same habit. In *Edward I*, even a Friar avoids the name of the Christ except in exclamation. "As Roland Frye observed in his classic work *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (1963), more than thirty persons die in the Bard's plays but not one utters the name of 'Jesus Christ' or even 'God' on their death beds (51-2)."* In the Shakespeare canon, only the Bishop of Carlisle and Richard II in *King Richard II* and King Henry in *King Henry IV Part 1* mention Christ in reference to a noble cause, fitting the religiosity of leaders of earlier times.

Shakespeare also shows little reverence for the term *Christian*, using it primarily in a culturally and/or historically fitting utterance; in similes: "she defies me,/ Like Turk to Christian" in *As You Like It* (IV,iii); as a geographical term: "One of the greatest in the Christian world" in *All's Well That Ends Well* (IV,iv); as an epithet, as when Juliet's nurse exclaims, "God rest all Christian souls!" in *Romeo and Juliet* (I,iii); as a synonym for good and gentle behavior: "A virtuous and a Christian-like conclusion" in *Richard III* (I,iii); and in the case of *Twelfth Night* as a symbol of credulity and dim-wittedness: "there is no Christian, that means to be saved by believing rightly, can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness" (III,iii) and "I have no more wit than a Christian or an ordinary man has" (I,iii).

Samuel Daniel in his preface to *Delia* implies an arm's-length view of Christianity when he says not that the psalms are songs to God but rather that they are lyrics composed by "Israels Singer to *his* God." Even the Voices' religious characters sometimes forget God. **Henrie Wotton** mixes up God and Jove in his *A Courtlie controversie* (1578). A postulate nun in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* attributes thunder to Jove! Well, after all, she is in training.

Shakespeare's irreligion had the same limits as Oxford's. The Bard does not make a habit of denouncing religion and its theories. On the contrary, he has great kings, when appropriate to the time, speak passionately in Christian terms. Like Oxford, Shakespeare does not push religion or antireligion on others.

Oxford vs. Shaksper on the Matter of Religion

Oxford and Shakespeare knew Christian literature better than most Christians. They had as much understanding of religion as they had of law, science and highbrow sports. Will Shaksper would have been privy to no such learning.

Oxford is on record as having studied Christianity intently. He owned a Geneva Bible, which he purchased in 1570. He possessed a translation of the *Whole Booke of Psalms*, published by his uncle, Arthur Golding. He marked many of passages in both books, and both books were among Shakespeare's sources. Roger Stritmatter* demonstrated "that of the one thousand verses marked and underlined in the Earl of Oxford's Geneva Bible, as many as two hundred, or one fifth, demonstrate a definite, probable, or possible influence in the Shakespeare canon."* Waugaman* came to the same conclusion with respect to the *Psalms*.

Stratfordians have supposed, with no evidence, that Will Shaksper of Stratford "knew the Bible through hearing it read in church."* The problems with that factoid are that there is no evidence Shaksper attended church, and if he did, "The Bible he heard there…was by law the Bishop's Bible, not the Geneva translation that is widely agreed to be the one quoted most in Shakespeare's works."*

The very idea that an illiterate rural country boy could ever have become a religious skeptic on logical and philosophical grounds requires belief in miracles. But forget the odds. On religious grounds, *does* Will Shaksper qualify as Shakespeare? Not in the least. His will of 1616 opens with a wholly Christian declaration:

> In the name of god Amen I William Shackspeare, of Stratford upon Avon in the countrie of Warr., gent., in perfect health and memorie, God be praysed…. ffirst, I comend my soule into the hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredlie beleeving, through thonelie merites, of Jesus Christe my Saviour, to be made partaker of lyfe everlastinge, and my bodye to the earth whereof yt ys made.

The writer of Shakespeare's plays never used such language. It is, however, compatible with the type of man who might condone a carving of "for Jesus' sake forbear" on his gravestone.

So, in the matter of religion, our candidate for the authorship of the Shakespeare canon fits like a glove. More important, he fits that glove *uniquely*. No other Elizabethan person's known views are as compatible.

The same spirit permeates nearly all the plays, poems and stories by Oxford's Voices as cited in this book. This parallel feature among the Voices' works, issued from within a society and a literary tradition that were highly devout, is one of many elements supporting the validity of my list.

Was Oxford — and Therefore Shakespeare — Ever Secretly Catholic?

A small but vocal contingent among Stratfordians* has long made a case that members of Will Shaksper's family were secretly of the Catholic faith. You can get the flavor of their suspicions at the Wikipedia entry on "Religious views of William Shakespeare." The case is a flimsy as that claiming he was Shakespeare. If it were ever proven, it would disqualify him as the Bard.

Some scholars have seen pro-Catholicism in Shakespeare's portrayal of kindly friars in three plays and in a plot element within *Hamlet* that conforms to the Catholic view of an afterlife. But these plays are not pro-Catholic; they merely fit the Italian and Danish settings.

The Bard's "intimacy with Catholicism…"* is simply another expression of Oxford's deep learning. He knew just as much about Catholicism as he did the Anglican church and a hundred other topics.

Shakespeare often expresses sentiments that are in direct opposition to Catholicism. A pro-Catholic writer would never have one character speak of something "As fit…as the nun's lip to the friar's mouth," as the Clown does in *All's Well That Ends Well* (II,ii). Nor would he have another character equate the life of a nun to a living death, as Theseus does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (I,i). Shakespeare's *Lucrece* — in

utter contradiction to Catholic teaching — treats suicide as a noble act. Other Voices' works (see **Samuel Daniel** chapter), especially **Samuel Daniel**'s *Cleopatra*, so the same thing. Anderson concluded, "no papist authority figure in Shake-speare is treated with respect or dignity."* Rather, there are "blatantly anti-Papal sentiments"* in *King John*, *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear*.

Numerous books and plays by Voices disparage popes and make fun of Catholic beliefs. They include **Thomas Preston**'s "A lamentation from Rome" (1570), **John Phillips**' *A Frendly Larum* (1570) and *A cold Pye for the Papistes* (1570), **John Studley**'s *The Pageant of Popes* (1574), four of **Phillip Stubbes**' books, **John Lyly**'s *Euphues Wyt* (1579) and *Euphues England* (1580), which take passing swipes at the old religion, **Robert Greene**'s *Oration or Funeral Sermon* (1585), **William Averell**'s *A mervailous combat of contrarieties* (1588), **Robin Goodfellow**'s *Tarletons Newes out of Purgatorie* (1590), **B.R. (Barnabe Rich)**'s *Greenes Newes both from Heaven and Hell* (1593), **George Peele**'s *Descensus Astraeae* (1591), *Edward I* (1593) and *Alcazar* (1594), **Jo. La. (John Lane)**'s *Tom Tel-Troths Message* (1600) and **Henry Crosse**'s *Vertues Common-wealth* (1603), which characterizes Catholicism as "a laborinth of blinde superstition." Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353) "was entered into the Catholic Church's first Counter-Reformation Index of banned books in 1559. It was…offensive to the Vatican…"* because it depicts the clergy and nuns engaging in loose behavior. Yet **Unidentified Translator**, exhibiting no qualms, rendered the entire volume into English in 1587 (see **Unidentified Translator** chapter). In concert with all these Voices, "Edward de Vere had written practically nothing that treated Catholicism or Spain kindly."*

Some Oxfordians have wondered if Oxford was Catholic for a time. "According to Mauvissiere, the French Ambassador…on December 26, 1580…Lord Oxford took the occasion to confess, apparently before the entire Court, that he had been a secret Catholic for some years. At the same time he accused his first cousin, Lord Henry Howard, Howard's kinsman, Charles Arundel, and their associate, Francis Southwell, of being secretly reconciled to the Roman Catholic Church and, worse, involved in treasonable correspondence with Catholic agitators (Ward 207)."* This book shows, however, that Oxford's Voices were disparaging Catholics and their practices as early as 1570 (see **John Phillips** and **Thomas Preston** chapters) and in **John Lyly**'s *Euphues England*, which came out the year before Oxford's supposed confession.

Oxford's long association with Archbishop Whitgift, the lack of pro-Catholic views in the Voices' writing over their entire 44 years, and their occasional swipes — both offhand and passionate — at the old religion pretty much prove that Oxford was never a Catholic. This deduction may lend some credence to the suggestion of some Oxfordians that on December 26, 1580, Oxford was play-acting to cover the fact that he had been spying on the conspirators in the Queen's service. To have admitted he was a spy would have ruined his future effectiveness in that role, so an open confession may have been the practical thing to do. The administration's declination to censor or punish Oxford in any way thereafter fits that version of events.

^Oxford's Age Matches Shakespeare's

On rare occasions when linguists come up with evidence they were not expecting to find, the results can be delightful. As opposed to stylometrics (see further discussion below), by which computer programs are designed to detect differences in authorship, Jonathan Hope developed an ingenious approach to determine the approximate birth year of various writers.

> Using "socio-historical" linguistic evidence to identify certain gradual changes in English usage, Hope found distinctive patterns among five selected dramatists — Marlowe, Dekker, Fletcher, Massinger, and Shakespeare. Each author's use of half-a-dozen changing word forms — thou/you, that/which, etc. — seemed to reflect his birth date, with one startling exception. Instead of the expected similarity of

usage between Marlowe and Shakespeare of Stratford, both born in 1564, Hope found that the author of the Shakespeare canon had the socio-linguistic habits of a man significantly older than Marlowe.*

Typically for a Stratfordian, the author of the study tried to explain away the difference as being due to Will Shaksper's rural upbringing. He did so without checking rural writers to see if any evidence supported his proposal. He simply dodged his own work.

Yet again, Oxfordians do not have to *explain away* anything. The explanation is right in front of us: The Earl of Oxford was fourteen years older than Marlowe.

^Dispensing with Two Famous Red Herrings

Throughout all the encomiums prefacing the First Folio, there is not a whit of personal information about Shakespeare. Nothing tells us who he was, where he lived, who worked with him or any other substantive fact. How, then, does orthodoxy link the text to Will Shaksper of Stratford?

Two phrases in the First Folio seem to hint at a connection between Shaksper and Shakespeare, and generations of scholars have swallowed the bait. But the hints are vague, and they can be interpreted far better under Oxfordian theory. We will explore them both in turn.

"Sweet Swan of Avon"

Perhaps the most famous relevant line is Ben Jonson's identification of Shakespeare in the First Folio as "Sweet swan of Avon" within the following passage:

> Sweet Swan of Avon! what a sight it were
> To see thee in our waters yet appeare,
> And make those flights upon the bankes of Thames,
> That so did take Eliza, and our James!

Although Jonson cryptically warns readers not to take his text at face value, generations of scholars have jumped to the conclusion that "Avon" is a reference to *Stratford-upon-Avon*. But Jonson *doesn't name that town*; he just says *Avon*. The word in Celtic simply means *river*, which is why at least nine rivers in England have that name.

The meaning of this word in the Oxfordian context was a mystery until 2014, when Alexander Waugh shone the brilliant light of historical research on it:

> There can be no doubt that by "the flights on the [bankes of] Thames" Jonson meant stage performances of Shakespeare's plays…though where exactly did the monarchs so enjoy these poetic "flights"? Neither ever attended the public theatre, so the Globe, Hope, Rose, and Swan, all situated on the Thames, must be ruled out.
>
> …By far the grandest, most elaborate and most frequently used Court theatre, throughout the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James, was the Great Hall at Hampton Court, located in Surrey on the banks of the Thames, 16 miles west of London. It was here…that Queen Elizabeth…mounted huge shrove, summer and Christmas-tide festivals of plays annually from 1572. When James I came to the throne in 1603 he chose Hampton Court over all his Royal Palaces as the best venue for dramatic entertainment.
>
> …In 1607 Camden published an exhaustive Latin history of Great Britain and Ireland entitled *Britannia* [in which] he quotes six lines by the historian John Leland, apropos of Hampton Court. …Others may

have had to wait for Camden's 1610 English translation of *Britannia*, in which (p.420) Leland's lines on Hampton Court are rendered thus:

> *A Stately place for rare and glorious shew [show] There is, which Tamis [Thames] with wandring stream doth dowse; Times past, by name of Avon men it knew.*

…So it would appear that Hampton Court was anciently known as "Avon." Camden's source was Leland's *Genethliacon* of 1543, but this was by no means his only reference to the Royal palace as "Avon." In his *Cygnea Cantio* (1545) Leland explained that Hampton Court was called "Avon" as a shortening of the Celtic-Roman name "Avondunum" meaning a fortified place (*dunum*) by a river (*avon*), which "the common people by corruption called Hampton." This etymology was supported by Raphael Holinshed, who wrote in his Chronicles (1586) that "we now pronounce Hampton for Avondune."

[Jonson's lines, then, may be] summarized in the following paraphrase: "*Sweet Poet, star of Hampton Court stage, What a joy it would be to see your plays, Which so delighted Queen Elizabeth and King James, Performed once again in that Great Hall on the banks of the Thames*."*

So, "Avon" does not refer to Will Shaksper's hometown; it refers to the most sumptuous theatre venue of the Elizabethan court, where Shakespeare's plays, as Jonson confirms, delighted the Queen and the King. Will Shaksper is not known ever to have been near the place, much less in it. The courtier-playwright Earl of Oxford would have been quite at home there.

Jonson may have gotten his idea of linking Avon, Thames and Swan and the Hampton Court Theatre from Oxford, whose Voices use all four terms in various poetic lines in 1591-1595. In sonnet LVIII of *Delia* (1591) **Samuel Daniel** writes,

> No, no, my Verse respects not Thames nor Theaters, [Verse, capitalized, is a Ver word]
> Nor seekes it to be knowne unto the Great,
> But Avon rich in fame, though poore in waters,
> Shall have my Song, where Delia hath her seat: [Elizabeth has a throne at Hampton Court]
> Avon shall be my Thames, and she my Song,
> No other prouder Brookes shall hear my wrong. [Brookes, capitalized, suggests Ox-fords]

The actual Samuel Daniel in 1591 had done nothing for the theatre. Oxford had supplied it for nearly thirty years.

In *Rosamond* (1592), **Daniel** speaks of "the times to come:/ When mirthlesse Thames shall have no Swanne to sing." Oxford is speaking of the time when he is gone and Hampton Court no longer hosts his plays. **Richard Barnfield**'s *The Affectionate Shepheard* (1594) twice mentions "the silver swan," possibly playing on Oxford's family name. **Barnfield**'s *Cynthia* (1595) expands on the image in these lines in Sonnet VII: "Sweet Thames, I honour thee…/ for thou hold'st the keeper of my hart,/ For on thy waves…/My fairest fayre, my silver Swan is swimming."

The idea of a Swan on the Thames as an object of worship seems unique. It is hard to believe that Oxford and Jonson thought of the idea independently. Jonson was probably talking *about* Oxford using a metaphor originated *by* Oxford. In short, his reference in the First Folio to the Sweet Swan of Avon with flights on the Thames has poetic connections to Oxford that those "in the know" would have recognized.

"Thy Stratford Moniment"

The second pregnant phrase about Shakespeare in the First Folio is within Leonard Digges' poem, which anticipates an eventuality when "Time dissolves thy Stratford moniment." The conventional view is that Digges is referring to the bust posted at Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. If such is the case, what would a traveler to that site have found?

Documentary evidence shows that the original Stratford monument depicted a grizzled figure with his arms crooked atop a sack of wool. The verse accompanying the bust mentions "*Shak*speare" but says nothing of poetry or plays. Anyone visiting the church would have seen what looked like a monument to John Shaksper, the grain dealer. No wonder Digges avoided celebrating the monument but rather anticipated its dissolution.

There is a way to reinterpret both *Stratford* and *Avon*. Jonathan Star* a champion of Mary Sidney as Shakespeare, summarized the case that Digges' "Stratford" indicates somewhere other than Stratford-upon-Avon. Mary Sidney Herbert, whose sons William and Philip were the dedicatees of the First Folio, resided at Wilton House, two miles from the center of a community called Stratford-sub-Castle, whose main street is Stratford Road. Above the town is Old Sarum, the elevated site of the earliest settlement in Salisbury and former site of a Norman castle, and at the western edge of the hamlet is the Avon River. "Philip Herbert (later 4th Earl of Pembroke – and one of the 'incomparable pair') seems to have lived at Mawarden Court, Stratford-sub-Castle from 1603 to 1618; presumably with Susan de Vere (Earl of Oxford's daughter), from 1604. The River Avon ran along the bottom of their garden; and still does, in fact."*

There is no monument at that site, but Digges does not say *monument*; he says *moniment*. A *moniment* can refer to a body of writing. Jonson's line in the First Folio, "Thou arte a moniment without a tombe," bolsters that interpretation. The phrase, "Stratford moniment" could refer to the "True Originall Copies" of Shakespeare's plays used for the First Folio, held and protected by Susan Vere and her husband, Philip Herbert in Stratford-sub-Castle.

In the Second Folio, published in 1632, presumably after the Stratford-upon-Avon bust was installed, the spelling was changed to *monument*. That change, perhaps deliberately, served to further the misdirection.

Supporting this interpretation, Star* showed that five consecutive lines in Leonard Digges' poem to Shakespeare in the First Folio resemble five nonconsecutive lines from **Samuel Daniel**'s dedication of *Cleopatra* to Mary Sidney Herbert. Star did not realize that **Daniel** is a Voice of Oxford's. Here are the lines:

To Mary Sidney Herbert:

> This monument cannot be overthrown…
> When Wilton lies low, level'd with the ground…
> By this (great Lady) thou must then be known…
> Where, in eternal Brass remains thy Name…
> Unto thy voice Eternity hath given….
>
> — **Samuel Daniel**, 1594

To **Shakespeare**:

> Thy Tombe, thy name must when that stone is rent,
> And Time dissolves thy Stratford Moniment,
> Here we alive shall view thee still. This Booke,
> When Brasse and Marble fade, shall make thee looke

Fresh to all Ages….

— **Leonard Digges**, 1623

The similarities between these two sets of lines suggest the possibility that Digges chose to paraphrase **Daniel**'s lines to Mary so that an astute reader might recognize his linking the "Stratford Moniment" to "Wilton," meaning Wilton House, the home of Philip Herbert and his wife Susan Vere, the Earl and Countess of Montgomery, who appear to have been the "grand possessors" of Shakespeare's works. Digges' lines, then, can be interpreted to mean, "when Time dissolves the original copies of Shakespeare's works, this book will remain to be published again and again, keeping the Bard's plays "Fresh to all Ages."

In 1640, Digges offered another poetic nod to Shakespeare, blatantly hinting throughout that he was referring to Edward de Vere (see Leonard Digges chapter in Those Who Knew). We may therefore presume that he also knew that the Earl of Oxford was behind **Samuel Daniel**'s *Cleopatra*. In sum, his lines in the First Folio deliberately link **Samuel Daniel**, Shakespeare, the Earl of Oxford, Mary Sidney Herbert, Wilton House and Stratford-sub-Castle, all in one swoop.

Recent research has revealed that people helped Oxford retain his anonymity long after his death. Bianchi even found out who replaced the Stratford bust in 1746:

> She further showed that all of the people she considered as most likely to have been involved in the Shakespeare head-swapping were 18th century descendants — by blood or marriage — of the 17th Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere. The persuasiveness of the evidence she marshalled in support of her astonishing conclusion left the audience virtually convinced that she's right.*

Many Oxfordians have proposed that to get the First Folio published and avoid official censorship, the grand possessors made a deal with the administration to hide Oxford's authorship of Shakespeare's plays. Bianchi's evidence confirms that hypothesis by showing that the family continued to uphold its end of the bargain for years, until knowledge of the pact became lost to Oxford's descendants.

^A Substitute Herring, Not Red

Of immense interest is the lack of a herring where there should be one. Brazil pointed out "that the Shaksper family arms are inexplicably absent from the First Folio."* Will Shaksper worked hard and paid dearly to obtain his coat of arms, and "the Shaksper arms were easily available to Jonson or the Jaggards, obtainable from the nearby College of Heralds…."* Yet they declined to affix them to the volume.

Was it a massive oversight? Assuredly not. As Hyde demonstrated, the editors instead inserted woodcuts depicting "the unique calgreyhound emblem…with its unique ancestry from Edward de Vere and the Earls of Oxford."*

^Who Preserved the Texts?

The prefacing note for the 1609 publication of *Troilus and Cressida* (see further discussion below) speaks of the "grand possessors" of the original copies of Shakespeare's works. The Shaksper family was hardly "grand" by any stretch, and "No representative of the Stratford man's family appeared at all in connection with the [First Folio]."* If the grand possessors were members of the Shaksper family, we would probably have those invaluable papers today. But we don't.

In 1623, the First Folio came out. Its "presenters," John Heminges and Henry Condell, issued the book under the "most noble patronage" of "The Most Noble And Incomparable Paire of Brethren, William Earle of Pembroke…and Philip Earle of Montgomery." They are named as premier admirers of Shakespeare and as the only imaginable patrons of a book of plays by "your servant Shakespeare." Neither man is known to

have been close to Will Shaksper.

Oxford's daughter Susan Vere was Philip's wife and William's sister-in-law. She was also a patron of the arts and a frequent participant in court masques, making her "the most active theatrically"* among the Vere sisters. So, she is the best candidate for having preserved her father's plays.

Moscovich, summing and adding to observations of others,* made this handy list:

> In **1619**: Susan was an active patron of literature. *Arxaio-Ploutos*, published by William Jaggard in 1619, was dedicated "To the most Noble and Twin-like paire, of truely Honourable and compleat perfection, Sir Phillip Herbert...Earle of Mountgomery...As also, To the truly vertuous and Noble Countesse his Wife, the Lady Susan, Daughter to the right Honourable Edward Vere, Earle of Oxenford." In 1998, Stritmatter* discovered that this dual dedication served as the model for the dedication in the First Folio, [also published by William Jaggard,] which substituted Pembroke for Susan Vere.
>
> In **1620**: *The Countesse of Mountgomeries Eusebeia*, by Robert Newton (London, 1620), was meant for Susan de Vere, as the title declares. Mary Sidney is mentioned first, because she was a mother, "a root" of the Herbert-Vere family. [The dedication reads:] "To that noble root of honour and vertue, the Lady Mary, Countesse of Pembrooke, and her Illustrious Branches, William, Earle of Pembrooke, Lord Chamberlaine to his Majestie, Philip, Earle of Mountgomery, with their Honourable Ladies, Mary, Countesse of Pembrooke, Susan, Countesse of Mountgomery, and her Vertuous Honourable Sisters; Elizabeth, Countesse of Darbie, and Bridget, Lady Norris." It is interesting that three Vere sisters here are mentioned together. Presumably, all dedicatees were on friendly terms with each other.
>
> In **1621**: Mary Wroth wrote the chivalric novel *Urania* (1621), especially for her dearest friend Susan Vere. Susan was [the] real literary patron behind her husband Philip Montgomery, who did not enjoy reading, unlike his brother William. Philip Herbert's biographer Josephine Roberts notes, the Earl of Clarendon claimed scornfully that he [Philip] "pretended to no other qualifications than to understand horses and dogs very well." John Aubrey in Brief Lives noted of Philip that he "did not delight in Books of Poetry: but exceedingly loved Painting and Building." When a literary work is dedicated to Philip Montgomery, we should assume that the author meant his wife, [Susan,] countess of Montgomery.*

Two years later, the First Folio came out. Its dedication to Philip indicates that Shakespeare's legacy was carefully maintained by Oxford's youngest daughter, Susan Vere. No such book of that time was, or would be, dedicated to a woman; and, more important, to dedicate a book by Shakespeare to Susan Vere would have revealed too much information. But the connection is there if you know where to look. In Stritmatter's words,

> The similarity between the 1619 dedication [of *The Ancient Treasury*] "To the Most Noble and Twin-like Paire…" and the 1623 Folio dedication "To the Most Noble and Incomparable Paire…" [both published by William Jaggard] is striking. It is difficult to believe that Jaggard did not have the 1619 version in mind when he designed the 1623 Folio dedication.*

Even the layouts of the two dedication pages are nearly identical, from the woodcuts at the top of the opening pages to the giant, adorned **W** that begins each address. Based on all the evidence, Anderson poetically wrote, "as *King Lear* had prophesied, the youngest daughter proved true to her father's life and legacy."*

Nina Green* argued that the dedications were not by Jaggard but by the anonymous translator of the 1619 volume and by Heminges and Condell, respectively. As established above, however, these two actors almost certainly were not writers but rather served as front men for Ben Jonson. So, Ben Jonson may have copied — and perhaps even designed — the 1619 format.

Considered in conjunction with the debuts of Shakespeare's narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, the First Folio completes a remarkable set of links to the Vere family: "all three of the dedicatees of Shakespeare's works had been Oxford's prospective sons-in-law; Southampton was matched with Elizabeth Vere; Pembroke with Bridget Vere; and Montgomery with Susan Vere (whom in fact he did marry)."* This trio, moreover, comprises the *only* dedicatees of Shakespeare's works.

The Vere family's connections to the First Folio do not resonate with Stratfordians. An exasperated Oxfordian commented, "Orthodox scholars never mention that Philip Herbert, 1st Earl of Montgomery, was the son-in-law of Edward de Vere…. Had the *First Folio* been dedicated to a son-in-law of Wm Shaksper of Stratford-on-Avon, what an out-pouring of books and articles that fact alone would have produced."* For Oxfordians, it is merely Fact #784 linking the Earl of Oxford to Shakespeare.

Dickson* proposed that Oxford's eldest daughter Elizabeth and her husband William Stanley, Earl of Derby, were the grand possessors. He based his argument on the fact that Thomas Walkley published *Othello* in 1622 and a few months later dedicated his next book (a translation from Spanish) to the Derbys' three children, noting "his Duty and Service to their Parents…and both the Families, from whence they are derived." Under Oxfordian theory, the Stanleys were certainly situated to come into possession of a Shakespeare play. Stratfordians would kill for any such evidence relating to their Stratford man.

Although the Montgomerys have the stronger claim due to their relationship to the First Folio, either pathway is fine with me. Perhaps the Montgomerys and the Derbys were joint possessors.

The timing of the First Folio had nothing to do with the concerns of the Shaksper family of Stratford-upon-Avon. It had much to do with the concerns of the Vere family. The climate that prompted the publication of the First Folio was the politically divisive "Spanish Marriage Crisis" of 1621-1624, in which factions developed over whether Prince Charles should marry the sister of King Philip of Spain. For some details of the situation, see Mark Anderson's *Shakespeare by Another Name*, pp. 372-377. In brief, on one side of the issue was the administration. On the other side were Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford, William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby, Susan Vere, and the Earls of Montgomery, Pembroke and Southampton. These people were Oxford's son, his son-in-law, his daughter, her husband, her brother-in-law and Shakespeare's only dedicatee, who had once been slated to become Oxford's son-in-law. (This family was *tight*.) (For a revealing discussion of the publishing process, its open, non-furtive nature, and its connection to the Veres and the pending Spanish Marriage, see Ready.*)

Stratfordian scholars are mute about these stunning coincidences. Such sparkling facts should engage the interest of any unbiased detective.

The grand possessors were careful to avoid setting in type plays that Oxford had already published in the names of other Voices, such as **Lyly** and **Greene**. Had they made but one mistake in that regard — such as occurred with *The Passionate Pilgrime* (see below) — they might have opened the door to inquiries. Oxford's daughters were, after all, the offspring of a genius, so whoever handled the project would have possessed the acumen to do it properly. Perhaps Oxford was instructing them in the final weeks of his life, pointing out his most treasured manuscripts. They were a gift to the world.

^**The Only Objectively Sensible Candidate**

Sobran asked a question that telescopes one's perspective on the supposed controversy of authorship:

> I once asked David Kathman, a bright young Shakespeare scholar who claims to be Stratfordian: 'Suppose the Shakespeare works had been ascribed to Oxford by the First Folio of 1623, and that his authorship had been accepted for four centuries. What in those works would have led you to break with

the herd and challenge Oxford's authorship? And what in those works would have led you to believe that the real author was William of Stratford?' He had no answer. There is no answer."*

It is a travesty of justice that the true author — the one who deserves the accolades — was buried in oblivion. But *Shakespeare himself said it would happen*:

My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.
For I am shamed by that which I bring forth,
And so should you, to love things nothing worth.
— Sonnet 72

From hence your memory death cannot take,
Although *in me each part will be forgotten*.
Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
Though *I, once gone, to all the world must die*:
The earth can yield me but a common grave, [which is exactly what happened]
When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.
— Sonnet 81

The true author's name faced oblivion because it was not attached to any of his works. He had attributed them to others or to no one.

^Why "William Shake-speare"?

Where did Oxford get the idea for his pseudonym? Oxfordians have proposed that the origin of the name "Shake-speare" is a reference to the goddess Athena, or Pallas Athena (Pallas deriving from the Greek "girl"), called Minerva by the Romans. She is "the Greek virgin goddess of reason, intelligent activity, arts and literature."* "In poetry she is the incarnation of Wisdom, Reason and Purity [but] above all, she is the Goddess of the City, the protectress of civilized life, of artesian activities, and of agriculture,"* "the City" referring foremost to Athens, the birthplace of the theatre. She is also the "warrior goddess" with a specific nature: "she only is a warrior to defend the State and the native land against the enemies coming from outside."* "Athena was different from Ares [Mars]; she represented *the intellectual and civilized side of war*. She was a wise and prudent adviser." Oxford saw himself as the intellectual warrior-defender of the great state of England when he penned what Clark identified as the first version of his first Shakespearean play, *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fift*.

Athena was "the favorite child of Zeus,"* and the highest ranking among all the gods except for Zeus and Hera. As Lord Great Chamberlain of England, Oxford was at a similar relative level in the ranks of Elizabethan society.

Elizabethans saw Pallas as representing the noble ideal of "arms and letters," which the Earl of Oxford had championed as far back as his early twenties when he supported Bartholomew Clerke's translation of *Il Cortegiano* (1572). **Robert Greene** in *Never Too Late* (1590) states precisely the goddess's role: "When the Troyans sought to pacifie the wrath of Pallas: the peoples presents were books and launces, to signifie her deitie, as well as defended by letters and armes." Anthony Munday in the preface to *A Banquet of Daintie Conceits* (1588) describes "Irus…comming into the Temple of the Goddesse Pallas, and seeing her holde a Booke in the one hand, & a Launce in the other." Munday's copious writings include very few references to

classical mythology, so how did he know of this obscure episode in the life of Irus? Munday was Oxford's servant for nine years; his description of Pallas probably came from his employer.

The name William, spelled *Gulielmus* in Latin, means "gilded helmet." "Athena is usually depicted with a golden helmet…."* Athena is the perfect model for Oxford's pen name: "She wore a *helmet* and carrying a *spear* and shield, the magic aegis, a goatskin breastplate, fringed with snakes, that produced thunderbolts when *shaken*."* E.K., the editor of Edmund Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender — who is not Oxford (see Edmund Spenser chapter)* —, explains in his Gloss for the October eglogue a specific event from mythology about Pallas: "...Vulcan seeing so faire and comely, lightly leaping to her, proferred her some curtesie, which the Ladie disdaining, *shaked her speare at him*, and threatened his saucinesse." From such tales, one of the goddess's nicknames is the "spear-shaker." In Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine Part 2*, a character relates this action to the threat of war: "Wilt thou have war, then *shake this blade* at me…." So, there we have it: "Gulielmus…Shake…Spear," or "William Shakespeare," means "golden-helmeted spear-shaker," describing Athena.

Some scholars have pointed out that a helmet worn by Pallas Athena "in one instance during the Trojan War."* conferred invisibility upon the wearer. This detail in the account of her powers invites us to make yet another link to Oxford, in that his use of pen names was a magic helmet that made him invisible to the world.

Elizabethan and Jacobean writers often rendered the name "Shake-speare" with a hyphen. Shakespeare's name was hyphenated "45% of the time on the works"* and numerous times in other writers' often sly references to him, beginning in 1594 within *Willobie His Avisa* (see Henry Willobie chapter). Why?

Two-part names, such as those beginning with *Fitz* (old French for "son of"), were occasionally hyphenated. Ben Jonson cites a "Fitz-Herbert" in *Every Man out of His Humour* (II,i). But by far the bulk of the hyphenated names of the era were pseudonyms. They include Martin Mar-Prelate, Mar-phoreus, Pierce Peni-lesse, Adam Foule-weather, Simon smel-knave, Martin Merry-mate, Robin Good-fellow, Cuthbert Conny-catcher, Cutbert Curry-knave, Oliver Oat-Meale, Philip Foul-face, Kind-Hart, Tom Tel-Troth (see **John Lane** chapter) and William Shake-speare. Observe that thirteen of those fourteen names are pseudonyms of the Earl of Oxford. The name Shake-speare was hyphenated because it began not as an allonym but as a pseudonym. Only later did Oxford find a person to whom to attach it.

Oxford's pseudonymous Voices are not the only possessors of hyphenated names. The Bard himself doubled the list of hyphenated names with thirteen characters in his plays: Oliver Mar-text, Andrew Ague-cheek, Doll Tear-sheet, Jane Night-work, Kate Keep-down, Mistress Over-done, Hugh Oat-cake, James Sound-post, Touch-stone, Dog-berry, Mustard-seed, Pease-blossom and Gads-hill. Oxford must have enjoyed creating such names, of which we have just listed more than two dozen. Shake-speare was just another of them.

Although William Shakespeare did not make his publishing debut until 1593, Oxford was called "Will," "Willy," "William," "W.S." and "Will Shakespeare" well before that time. In 1577, Oxford as **W.S.** contributed a poem beginning "Of silver pure" to John Grange's *A Golden Aphroditis* (see **W.S.** chapter). John Grange is a pseudonym of George Gascoigne (see John Grange chapter), who refers to Oxford as W.S. in text written no later than 1577 and published posthumously (see Henry Willobie chapter). In 1578, Gabriel Harvey addressed Oxford in a Latin oration during a stop by the Queen and her attendants at Audley End, Essex, along her progress to Cambridge. In it, he stated, "*scintillant lumina: vultus/ Tela vibrat*." Nelson noted that the word *Tela* is plural for a term "meaning any projectile weapon,"* so he chose the translation, "Your glance shoots arrows." But "shoots" is not part of the phrase, so "arrows" cannot be the intended meaning. An unbiased Professor of Classics in England, "unaware of the relevance of the statement to the Shakespeare Authorship issues,"* translated the line as "Your expression brandishes spears." Brandishing is akin to shaking, leading B.M. Ward — who understood the Oxfordian context — to translate the line as

"Thine eyes flash fire, thy countenance shakes a spear."* Hannas* identified the phrase as even more cleverly rendered: *Vultus*, in the *Dictionary* of Thomas Elyot from 1538 and 1559, is printed twice, the second entry reading, "Vultus, of olde wryters is taken for wylle," i.e. *will*. Thus, the second half of Harvey's line may be taken as saying, "your will shakes spears." Yet further, *you're* is a homonym of *your*, so the line could be meant to communicate, "You're Will Shakes-Speare."

The link maintains in ensuing years. In 1582, Stephen Gosson referred to Thomas Lodge as "William." In 1591, Edmund Spenser in *Teares of the Muses* speaks of "Our pleasant Willy," whom Oxfordians have long identified as Oxford (see Those Who Knew). In 1592, **Thomas Nashe** asserted that "Will. Monox" joined him at dinner with Robert Greene. In 1593, **Nashe**'s *Strange News* referred to his patron, Oxford, as "Gentle M[aster] William." That same year, "William Shakespeare" debuted as a poet.

Those Who Knew argues that sometime prior to 1578, Oxford adopted "William Shake-speare" as a stage name. He did not use the name in print until 1593, when he attached it to *Venus and Adonis*. As detailed above, it wasn't until after Oxford tapped Will Shaksper as a front man around 1596 — thereby turning his pseudonym into an allonym — that he finally chose to link the name "Shakespeare" to plays beginning in 1598.

Once Will Shaksper became Shakespeare's stand-in, Oxford seems to have been unable to refrain from expressing disdain for him. If you wrote plays that were great art, would you continually give your dopiest characters your own first name? In the orthodox context, that is exactly what Shakespeare did. His dullest dullards are named William! There is William the country bumpkin in *As You Like It*, William the bone-headed student in *Merry Wives of Windsor* and William the crooked cook and one of the "arrant knaves [who] will backbite" in *Henry IV Part 2*. In our context, Shakespeare's practice makes perfect sense: A playwright named William wasn't lampooning himself; a playwright named Edward was lampooning William, the marginal citizen who posed as Shakespeare.

^Checklist

In 2016, James Warren* created a checklist contrasting Shaksper's candidacy with Oxford's. Stratfordians may try to refute a stray point here and there, but the weight of evidence eventually becomes evidence in itself:

CONTRASTING THE STRATFORDIAN AND OXFORDIAN PARADIGMS		
Applicable to William Shakspere?	**Criteria**	**Applicable to Edward de Vere?**
J. Thomas Looney's characteristics of the author[1]		
General Characteristics		
No	A matured man of recognized genius	Yes. Oxford was praised as best the best of the court poets and as being the best for comedy and tragedy.
No	Apparently eccentric and mysterious	Yes. Several contemporaries commented on his eccentricity.
No	Of intense sensibility -- a man apart	Yes.
No	Unconventional	Yes. He was praised as "the most singular man" in England.
No	Not adequately appreciated	Yes. Puttenham raises this very point when identifying Oxford as the best of the court poets whose works are not widely known.
No	Of pronounced and known literary tastes	Yes. Oxford sponsored many literary publications; many works praised his literary sensibilities.
No	An enthusiast in the world of drama	Yes. Oxford was praised as being the best for comedy and tragedy.
No	A lyric poet of recognized talent	Yes. Many of his poems still exist.
No	Of superior education -- classical -- the habitual associate of educated people	Yes. See list of writers he knew below.
Special characteristics		
No	A man with feudal connections	Yes. He was the Earl of Oxford.
No	A member of the higher aristocracy	Yes. He was the Earl of Oxford.
No	Connected with Lancastrian supporters	Yes. His ancestors supported the Lancastrian cause.
No	An enthusiast for Italy	Yes. He stayed there for an extended visit and was regarded as the most "Italianate gentleman" of his generation.
No	A follower of sport (including falconry)	Yes. Falconry and other sports were common activities of men in Oxford's position.
No	A lover of music	Yes. He was praised as being a better performer than most professional musicians.
No	Loose and improvident in money matters	Yes. He sold or was forced to sell most of his estates.
?	Doubtful and somewhat conflicting in his attitude to women	Yes. See Oxford's poems.
Yes	Of probably Catholic leanings, but touched with skepticism	Yes.
Diana Price's list of a literary paper trail (modified)[2]		
No	Evidence of Education	Yes. Private tutors, Thomas Smith, Oxford and Cambridge Universities.
No	Record of correspondence, esp. concerning literary matters	Yes. Letters to and from the Cecils.
No	Evidence of having written literary works	Yes. Many references to him as a poet and dramatist.
No	Evidence of a direct relationship with a patron	**
No	Extant original manuscript	No
No	Handwritten inscriptions, receipts, letters, etc. touching on literary matters	Yes. Many handwritten letters in *The Geneva Bible*.
No	Commendatory verses, epistles, or epigrams received or contributed	Yes. More than 30 works dedicated to him, and he wrote many such verses for others.
No	Misc. records referred to personally as a writer	Yes, many.
No	Evidence of books owned, written, borrowed, or given	Yes, many.
No	Notice at death as a writer	No overt references; many indirect references.
Ramon Jimenez's ten witnesses who would have known Shakspere but did not comment on any literary activities by him[3]		
No	William Camden, historian	**
No[4]	Michael Drayton, poet and dramatist	**
No	Thomas Greene, Stratford Town Clerk and writer	**
No	John Hall, doctor and son- in-law	**
No	James Cooke, surgeon	**

No	Sir Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, Recorder of Stratford; poet and dramatist	**
No	Edward Pudsey, avid theatergoer	**
No	Queen Henrietta Maria, amateur playwright who visited Stratford	**
No	Philip Henslowe, theatrical entrepreneur	**
No	Edward Allyn, most distinguished actor of Elizabethan era	**
***Katherine Chiljan's* list *of plays written too early for Shakspere, born* in *1564, to have been the author*[5]**		
No	*Romeo and Juliet* (1562)	Yes
No	*Taming of the Shrew* (1578)	Yes
No	*Measure for Measure* (1578)	Yes
No	*Merchant of Venice* (1579)	Yes
No	*Timon of Athens* (1579)	Yes
No	*Antony and Cleopatra* (1579)	Yes
No	*King John* (1579)	Yes
No	*Twelfth Night* (1579)	Yes
No	*Much Ado About Nothing* (1579)	Yes
No	*Henry IV, Part 2* (1579)	Yes
No	*Cymbeline* (1583)	Yes
No	*Henry VI, Part 1* (1587)	Yes
No	*Richard III* (1587)	Yes
No	*Julius Caesar* (1587)	Yes
No	The *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1587)	Yes
No	*Troilus and Cressida* (1588)	Yes
No	*Richard II* (1588)	Yes
No	*King Lear* (1588)	Yes
No	*Richard III* (1588)	Yes
No	*Titus Andronicus* (1588)	Yes
No	*Hamlet* (1588)	Yes
Links to important people that appear in disguised form in the plays		
No	Queen Elizabeth (many)	Yes. DeVere was Lord Great Chamberlain in her court.
No	Lord Burghley (Polonius)	Yes. Burghley was his guardian and father-in-law.
No	Robert Cecil (Richard III)	Yes. Cecil was Oxford's brother-in-law.
No	Earl of Southampton (Sonnets)	Yes. Both were wards of Burghley's and were fellow members of court.
Links to other writers		
No	George Baker	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Practice of the New and Old Physic,* and in *Oleum Magistrale.*
No	Thomas Bedingfield	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Cardanus' Comfort.*
No	John Brooke	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *The Staffe of Christian Faith.*
No	Angel Day	Yes. He was Oxford's secretary. Dedication to Oxford in *The English Secretary.*
No	Edmund Elviden	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Peisistratus and Catanea.*
No	John Farmer	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Plainsong* and in *English Madrigals.*
No	Arthur Golding	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *The Histories of Trogus Pompeius* and *The Psalms of David.*
?	Robert Greene	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Card of Fancy.*
No	Gabriel Harvey	Yes, went to school with Oxford.
No	John Hester	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Phioravanti's Discourse on Surgery.*
?	Ben Jonson	?
No	Henry Lok	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Ecclesiastes.*
No	John Lyly	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Euphues and His England.* Served as Oxford's secretary.
No	Christopher Marlowe	?

No	Anthony Munday	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *The Mirror of Mutability,* and in *Palmerin d'Olivia, Parts I and II,* and in *Primaleon of Greece.*
No	Thomas Nashe	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Strange News*.
No	Edmund Spenser	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *The Faerie Queene*.
No	Thomas Stocker	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Diverse Sermons of Calvin*.
No	Thomas Twyne	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *The Breviary of Britain*.
No	Thomas Underdowne	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *An Aethopian History.*
No	Thomas Watson	Yes. Dedication to Oxford in *Hekatompathia.*
Substantive knowledge and experience		
No	Education	Yes. Private tutors and universities.
No	Law	Yes. Attended law school.
No	Medicine	Yes. Studied with Smith.
No	Classical mythology	Yes. William Golding, translator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, was Oxford's uncle and tutor at the time the translation was done.
No	Aristocratic sports	Yes. Two-time champion at jousting.
No	Science	Yes. Smith.
No	Philosophy	Yes. Smith.
No	Greek drama	Yes. Smith.
No	Heraldry	Yes. His own.
No	Military	Yes. Campaigns in Scotland (1570), the Netherlands (1585), and against the Armada (1588).
No	Fluency in several languages	Yes. From tutors, travels, letter written in French.
No	Travel to Italy	Yes. Travels there in 1575-76, including all of the cities in which scenes were set in Italy in Shakespeare's plays.
No	Shakspere at court	**
Works that most influenced Shakespeare		
No	Ovid's *Metamorphoses*	Yes. It was translated by Oxford's uncle when Oxford was tutored by him.
No	*The Geneva Bible*	Yes. Oxford's annotated copy is in the Folger Library.
No	Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*	Yes.
No	Plutarch's *Lives*	Yes.
Psychologists' understanding of genius, creativity		
No	Development of genius through early exposure to many subjects	Yes: His father's acting troupe, tutoring by Thomas Smith, education at Burghley's house.
No	10,000 hours of intense involvement needed to acquire basic competence in any field	He was praised as the best for comedy and tragedy, and was known to have produced theatrical productions at court.
No	Highly connected with others creating in the same field	Yes. See above.
No	Authors write about what they know about	Yes.
Totals		
William Shakspere		**Edward de Vere**
Yes: 1 **Maybe: 3** **No: 101**		**Yes: 89** **Maybe: 4** **No: 1** **N/A: 11**

Endnotes:
[1] John Thomas Looney, 1920. See especially pages 109-133. [2] Diana Price, pages 310-313. [3] Ramon Jimenez, pages 74-85.
[4] Actually Drayton does refer posthumously to Shakespeare as his familiar in his 1627 *The Bataile of Agincourt*, page 206. See Waugh and Stritmatter, forthcoming.
[5] Katherine Chiljan. See especially pages 343-381.

Most of this definitive exercise in contrast has been available to academia for a hundred years, yet most professors of English literature and the spokespeople at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in England and the Folger Shakespeare Library in the U.S. still champion Will Shaksper over the Earl of Oxford as the author of Shakespeare's works. Support for the Stratfordian position is melting, albeit at a glacial pace. The bravest professors and professionals have been slipping away from the Stratfordian side by signing the Declaration of Doubt* and by endorsing Edward de Vere as Shakespeare.

^Goodbye to the Fake Shakespeare, and a Fitting Goodbye to the Real One

Poets of the Jacobean era were celebrated when they died. Shaksper's death went unnoticed, unremarked and uncelebrated. This fact is devastating to Stratfordian theory.

Biographers have told us that Oxford's death went unnoticed, too. But it didn't. You have to know where to look. Oxford died in June 1604. Fittingly, "the Christmas revels of 1604-5 at court bear all the signs of a Shakespeare-fest, a good-bye and thank-you celebration to the recently deceased author."* It just so happens that Oxford's daughter Susan Vere married the Earl of Montgomery in the heat of those revels, on December 27, 1604. During that holiday season, King James' players performed eight plays by Shakespeare, one of them twice. One play was titled *The Spanish Maze*, which Stritmatter and Kositsky* identified as an alternative title for *The Tempest*.

During those revels, the King's Men also performed two plays by Ben Jonson: *Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man Out of His Humour*, which were eight and five years old, respectively. The planners probably chose these plays by Jonson for two reasons: Oxford contributed heavily to the first play (see **Ben Jonson** chapter), and the second play "contains the most direct and complete refutation of the pretensions of William-Shakespeare-as-author, [making it] a very good choice for the Shakespeare-fest."*

A Stratfordian might toss out a proposal that the court was celebrating Will Shaksper's retirement. But there is no direct evidence that Shaksper retired from anything. The evidence that Oxford died in 1604 is conclusive, and James' celebration is more evidence of that fact.

William Shaksper of Stratford is not the greatest literary genius of all time. He did not write narrative poems, plays or sonnets. He is just another Voice of the Earl of Oxford, one whose canon contains much of his best material, making his name famous.

Lauds that once went to the Stratford man we can now shower on the real Shakespeare: "In knowledge of human character, in wealth of humour, in depth of passion, in fertility of fancy, in soundness of judgment, and in mastery of language, he has no rival."* Thanks to the evidence of Oxford's Voices, we now know how he got there.

^The Role of Academia

Scholars have sacrificed a vast forest of trees to produce literature on the wrong man. Dickinson summed up the picture: "The whole field of Shakespearean study has become a wonderland of absurdity."* The antidote, which has begun to work its cure, is Oxfordianism.

Professors of English have tried to lock this medicine in the cabinet. With the notable exception of faculty at the now defunct Concordia University in Washington, which opened its arms to the authorship question, university professors of English have long rejected open inquiry on the authorship question and reacted to it with hostility. One Stratfordian professor compared anti-Stratfordians to "sub-religious Scientologists."* On the contrary, they are exposers of a faulty religion. Another Stratfordian professor dismissed Oxfordians' challenge as being akin to "the evolution versus creationism argument."* It is precisely so: Stratfordians are the creationists defending a mythical construct, and Oxfordians are the scientists inducing a theory from facts and evidence. Another Stratfordian professor compared anti-Stratfordians to Holocaust deniers.* On the contrary, they are heroic holocaust identifiers, exposing those whose m.o. has been to mass-murder the reputations of those who questioned or opposed them by hurling such epithets as "Scientologists," "creationists" and "Holocaust deniers." As late as 2011, "a Harvard Scholar who wrote his dissertation on Elizabethan England"* stated of Oxfordianism, "absolutely no competent student of the period, historical or literary, has ever taken this theory seriously."*

The incompetent, sub-religious, Scientological, holocaust-denying, creationist type of person that the Stratfordian mind has dreamed up as the typical Oxfordian now includes Roger Penrose, professor at the University of Oxford, who was awarded a share the 2020 Nobel Prize for Physics. In a 2014 interview, he affirmed, "my father…was a great believer that the person called Shakespeare was not the author of the plays…. I think the view that [is] the most probable one, was that it was Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford."* Penrose is a professor of *physics*, a field in which precise, logical thinking is mandatory, not of English literature, where imagination and storytelling rule.

Although the academy has roadblocked the authorship question, Warren offered this hopeful prediction: "Literary scholars will eventually conclude that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, wrote the literary works traditionally attributed to William Shakespeare. Once that happens, they will bring academia's tremendous resources to bear on exploring and documenting not only de Vere's authorship of Shakespeare's works, but also the broader issue of authorship in the Elizabethan era."*

In my view, that expectation is way too optimistic. All the innovative, groundbreaking, investigative work will continue to be performed — as it has been for over a hundred years — by people outside academia. The case for Oxford is already so overwhelming that we can now simply ignore the Stratfordians and move forward. Let them shout into the void. By the time academia accepts the case for Edward de Vere's authorship of the Shakespeare canon, progress will be one to two centuries ahead of them, and there will be nothing left to do but teach it.

MORE TO THE CASE

The **Opening Argument** within *Oxford's Voices* describes Edward de Vere's prodigious education, his theatrical bent and the praises he received for writing poems and plays. The **Earl of Oxford** chapter links phrases in Oxford's personal letters and his early poems to numerous lines from Shakespeare. **Those Who Knew** quotes from all contemporaneous writers who hinted that Oxford wrote under pen names. The rest of the **Shakespeare** chapter analyzes Shakespeare's poems and plays, lists apocrypha and challenges the multi-author theory of Shakespeare's works with refutations of every proposed collaborator. Accessible at www.oxfordsvoices.com.

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