

Caliban is always an important element of the play, whether or not one thinks Shakespeare was thinking about slavery and/or colonialism. In this version, he was no monster; he was an entirely recognisable rebellious figure, as well-enough known to us in the 21st century as doubtless he would have been in Shakespeare's time.

As a recently converted Oxfordian, I allowed myself to reflect on questions of authorship. I should stress that the production team were almost certainly fully paid-up Stratfordians – I spoke to one, tentatively letting slip my views, and she made a rude remark about Sir Mark Rylance, which said it all. What I found myself wondering was whether the play was really the author's last one, written at the end of his life, as the Stratfordian narrative has it. Certainly, as presented in Leinster Square, it seemed a young person's *jeu d'esprit* with all its magic and silly plots. But what about Prospero's famous valedictory speeches? Couldn't a young man of high intelligence and vivid imagination write about a magician giving up his magic? I wonder who that could have been!



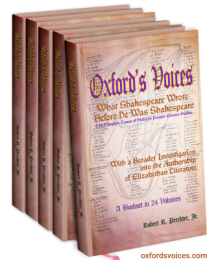
## **Oxford's Voices: What Shakespeare Wrote before he was Shakespeare – The Complete Canon of History's Premier Literary Genius**

**by Robert Prechter**

Available online from <https://oxfordvoices.com/> and through the DVS website: <https://deveresociety.co.uk/library/books-journals/>

### **Review by Jonathan Foss**

How does one write an entertaining and informative review of a 3,200-page book – a 24-year project to unearth the writing history of a man, Edward de Vere, who used a host of pseudonyms and allonyms to mask his literary trail? What was his motivation? What books were written? What names were used? What skills were gained? All this from a writer so capable that he has far more quotable phrases and invented words than the #2



writer, even when counting just one Voice: ‘William Shake-speare’. This book review is on *Oxford’s Voices*. It is important to humanity because it shows that expertise is hard won and no happy accident.

For one hundred years, we have known that the man behind Shakespeare was Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. *Oxford’s Voices* (OV) takes on an equally challenging task: a survey of the literature from England’s Golden Age to find Oxford’s complete canon. Robert Prechter took up Stephanie Hughes’ challenge in 1995 and has worked steadily for 24 years, seemingly reading it all. The result is something remarkable.

Prechter’s starting assumptions are not new: young Edward de Vere was a child prodigy; he was addicted to poetry and plays; he dedicated his life and fortune to compulsively writing, producing and publishing. From the age 10 until his death, Oxford was a writing machine, always improving. If Shakespeare’s quotable quotes alone were compared to hit songs, he would be the equivalent of a Bach/Mozart/Beethoven/Chopin/Lennon–McCartney combined. But no one starts writing hit songs at age 43. So what, then, are his youthful works, written from 1560 to 1593, before *Venus and Adonis* suddenly appears?

First some background. Robert Prechter is an accomplished person in real life, building successful businesses, writing books, doing 500+ TV interviews, a socioeconomic theorist, a family man and Oxfordian scholar. I thought, ‘Ahh, um, wow. A disciplined brain took up a challenge and began to dig, dig, dig, for a quarter of a century. This is going to be interesting.’

Prechter is an honest umpire. Honorable and humble, he is always giving credit to the researcher who first discovered a factoid or found a ‘Voice’ of Edward de Vere. Everything is footnoted, giving hat-tips to a century of Oxfordian authors’ books and papers. Prechter’s software team developed a patented method to allow one to shuttle back and forth to footnotes by clicking a blue asterisk. Pretty cool stuff.

This review will not dwell on listing or debating the scores of ‘Voices’ Oxford used, but when I do, I will use another OV convention. **Bold** indicates a Voice of de Vere, easily allowing you to differentiate between Voices such as **Robert**

**Greene** and **Thomas Nashe** on the one hand and completely independent writers, such as Anthony Munday and Edmund Spenser, on the other.

The premise of OV is based in 150-year-old *Science of Excellence* (Anders Ericsson, Malcolm Gladwell et al.), which demands 10,000 hours of intense practice, commencing as a child to gain ultimate expertise. Edward de Vere, at age 43, began writing under the -nym of **Shake-speare**, so why would he not use 2, 5, 10 or 50 more -nyms to fill those first 33 years gaining skill? It seems logical.

How many hours did it take for Wolfgang Mozart to reach his level of expertise and canon of 900 works? 100,000 hours? Likely more. There are countless other genius examples who follow the same path of hyper production, and Prechter lists some of them. Italian polymath Girolamo Cardano, author of Hamlet's book, *Cardanus Comforte*, published 400 books on virtually every subject. Such rare geniuses are unstoppable machines for good reason. They are special minds captured as children, then compelled over a lifetime to produce. They are hyper-competitors, born into special families and given special tutors, who push themselves beyond the normal limits of expertise. It may be that Prechter's life followed that same path, as his Curriculum Vitae reflects a similar incessancy.

The OV is a compelling doctoral dissertation, fun to read and packed with facts! facts! facts! you have never seen before. It is an Oxfordian MOUNTAIN, an 'Iron Man' test for my attention, an Everest of erudition, a truly worthy challenge which I encourage everyone to take on. OV is the first reading of the entire Golden Age of England using the Science of Excellence perspective, and it will be a powerful resource for the future. Do you want to decode the secret poetic language of the 1609 Sonnets? You'll need to read all the sonnet cycles published by *Oxford's Voices*. Do you want to know how many words Oxford invented? You have to go past Shakespeare.

### **Shall we begin the climb?**

The early chapters explain the argument and the method of approaching *Oxford's Voices*. In total, it is a survey of 450 16th-century writers and a reading of every story, play and poem from the English Golden Age. Prechter has also read over a thousand publications on writers of the time, covering countless backgrounds on hundreds of possible authors. He created a list of 72 stylistic characteristics from a

close reading of Shakespeare and subsequently discovered Voices, very similar to J.T. Looney's seventeen characters, but more complex. A strict standard must be met, and the result is what we might call the MINIMUM LIST of Voices from 1560 to Oxford's possible death in 1604. I say minimum because all characteristics must be met within the observable five styles of writing analyzed. **Thomas Nashe** (Oxford) boasted, 'if any such deepe insighted detracter, will challenge mee to whatsoever quiet adventure of Art, wherein he thinkes mee least conversant, hee shall finde that I am *Tam Mercurio quam Marti*, a Scholler in some thing else but contention'. As a hyper-competitor, Oxford has a Gibraltar-sized chip on his shoulder to prove that he is the best man of letters of his day.

Prechter is kind to readers. He does not bash us over the head with dozens of obtuse literary terms or dense scientific writing in an attempt to prove intellectual superiority. OV is agnostic on the Prince Tudor, Dark Lady theories and avoids the 'guess who wrote this' or 'guess what I mean' puzzles of the Sonnets and the First Folio. The analysis is based upon dedications with ties to family, friends and court allies of the Earl of Oxford, as well as shared vocabulary, new words, super-rare words and writing characteristics. One finds a psychological profile of Oxford as a mostly affable comedic genius loyal to his queen. De Vere, it seems, had lots of friends, balancing the impression that he had lots of enemies.

OV is well structured; the book may be accessed at [www.oxfordvoices.com](http://www.oxfordvoices.com). Google's chrome browser worked best. I offer the following overview.

## Trail map to OV Mountain

### \*\* Must-Read chapters

1. **Preparation:** Prechter starts with notes on navigating the book, a list of types of Voices, a list of Voices' writing traits and responses to anticipated questions and objections.
2. **Prologue and Opening Argument:\*\*** The Prologue **can be read for free** and is a strong section. The Opening Argument describes a child genius from a family involved in theater and poem-writing, who studied under exceptional tutors and who becomes addicted to learning and creating literature. Prechter postulates that Oxford's compulsion was to present Elizabethan England as equal to the great ages of Greek, Roman and Italian literature.

3. **The Earl of Oxford:** A short, 60-page compilation of E.O. facts. You will learn something new.
4. **Early Voices, 1560 to 1579:** 303 pages of necessary reading, starting with two song lyrics by **W.E. (William Elderton)** and continuing through **T.H. (Thomas Hackett)** in 1560, **Arthur Brooke** in 1562 and ending with **William Averell**, who debuted in 1579. Compelling stuff.
5. **Early Euphuists:** 112 pages on Oxford's early prose fiction, written under three names.
6. **The Wits:** 450 amazing pages on **John Lyly**, **Robert Greene\*\***, **Thomas Lodge**, **George Peele\*\*** and **Thomas Nashe\*\***. These chapters explain so much. The **Nashe** section is particularly powerful, filling the gaps in the timeline of Oxford's life and tracing Oxford's Voices' pamphlet war with the Harvey brothers.
7. **The Pamphleteers:** Details the hot-selling genre of anti-Martinist and anti-Harvey pamphlets, nearly all of which were written under obvious pseudonyms.
8. **The Playwrights:\*\*** Prechter argues successfully for many Shakespearean works not included in the 1623 Folio, including plays erroneously credited to Thomas Kyd and Anthony Munday.
9. **Independent Writers to Whose Canons Oxford Contributed:** This section offers analysis of the independent writers Christopher Marlowe, Robert Wilson and Ben Jonson, isolating the one or two items Oxford contributed to each canon. Prechter makes a powerful case for the saucy *Edward II* as 100% de Vere.
10. **Senecan Dramatists:** This section discusses plays by **Thomas Hughes**, **Mary Sidney**, **Samuel Daniel** and **E.C.** Compellingly, Prechter attributes half the poetry and none of the prose of **Samuel Daniel** to Oxford. It shows why Ben Jonson said Daniel was 'a good honest man ... but no poet'.
11. **Narrative Poets:** Most of the 33 poets covered in this section have but a single masterwork to their names. That widely-accepted idea is far more suspect than the idea that one person wrote them.
12. **Sonneteers:\*\*** Expanding upon Joseph Sobran's 'Shake-speare's Orphans' argument, Prechter identifies about 15 Sonnet Sequences by Oxford prior to 1609's *Shake-speare's Sonnets* and is careful to exclude sonnet sequences Oxford

did not write. Many of these sonnet sequences grant a new nickname to the Virgin Queen (Cynthia, Diana, Moon, Delia, Emaricdulfe, etc.).

13. **Compilers:\*\*** This chapter examines several Elizabethan compilation books. The 'Proctor' section is worth your time! Describing 18 of the 92 poems in 1578's *Gorgeous Gallery* as Oxford's missives to Elizabeth.
14. **Shakespeare:\*\*** 212 pages. Oxfordians will know much of this material, but Prechter adds quite a bit on his own. To challenge the myth that Shakespeare collaborated with a dozen other people, Prechter analyzes each claim in turn. This chapter could be a stand-alone book.
15. **Sixty-three contemporaries 'Who Knew'** the Score: Similar to Alexander Waugh's YouTube series, everybody knew, and they said so in various ways. They also said, time after time, that they liked or loved Edward de Vere.
16. **The 258 Independent writers and 41 Independent Anonymous Works:** Our poet had serious competition, and it pushed him to stratospheric heights. Thomas Watson, Phillip Sidney and Edmund Spenser were the most respected among the numerous contenders and pretenders. I cross-checked a number of the obscure ones, and the writing quality seems easily discernible from anything Shakespearean.
17. **Summation:** 60 thoughtful pages summarizing the picture. Some of his best points are on pages 2278 to 2284!
18. **References:** 307 pages you don't need to read! The 8,775 references tied to text within the book.

### The View from the Top of the Mountain

Interestingly, many Voices had a first work or a single poem by Oxford, which jump-started their careers or elevated them at court or in the bookshop. I imagined a sea of aspiring scholars and courtiers asking for a push. Did a rival faction hire the ultimate champion to quell the argument of the Puritans? Was de Vere a kingmaker who built goodwill with nearly everyone in the literary establishment? Surely, this is why people constantly referred to him as Apollo, Pallas, Minerva, etc.

As part of writing this review, I went 'off trail' maybe twenty times to fact-check. I would flip to EEBO or [archive.org](https://www.archive.org) and read a new book, poem or author. On every occasion I concluded, 'Yes, this could be Voice'. For example, when confronted with the analysis for **Barnabe Rich's** 1581 *Apolonius & Silla*, I

dug it up and read it completely. I was struck by the Shakespearean exactness of the writing. Parts are completely autobiographical yet willingly published under another nobleman's name.

So much of importance is learned along the way. So many people must have been ingratiated and honored by these plays, poems and tributes. Five times de Vere humorously dedicates a work to the Earl of Oxford. What a cool inside joke.

The reader may well begin with serious reservations about the idea that Oxford had a hundred Voices. This is understandable, for none of us will write or achieve anything at such a level. Each publication by a Voice has value and is a trophy, a work of art. And they all come in a chronologically steady stream, fitting the output of one person.

The addition of each Voice transforms the traditional story. The **Thomas Nashe** chapter tells us why Oxford as **Nashe** stays at the estates of the three of the most powerful men in England for weeks during the time of the plague. We find out why **George Peele** was issued a payment equivalent to \$10,000 for producing a play for the court in 1583. Some may be transfixed by the widely disseminated black-sheep persona for de Vere, when in fact he was probably the toast of the town.

### **A few critical thoughts on *Oxford's Voices***

1. One might struggle with Prechter's determinations, even as he softens the blow, when he disqualifies a name that in your mind may have been a Voice. Prepare yourself for a few disappointments in exchange for a great deal more surprises.
2. If you see something to be added or corrected, keep an email open to Prechter with your corrections or questions. On several occasions, he responded to me with detailed explanations, clarifying beyond what's in OV.
3. I got lost because I didn't have a good plan. *It is best to read it straight through*, using a notebook to log your notes and observations. Look around, but then come back to the path you were on. You don't want to miss something.
4. The back and forward buttons on the browser are your best friends! You need to figure out how to search and open new tabs. This is not a normal book.

5. I appreciated Prechter's keen awareness of *pareidolia*, the syndrome of finding the patterns one searches for. Sensitivity to it likely reduces his list of Voices. The **Gascoigne** chapter was the most difficult for me. Prechter concludes that the play *Supposes* is Oxford's, but nothing else, which to me did not make sense. His war on the *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* theory seemed unnecessary. I was 100% in favor of the idea that Gascoigne, George Turberville and George Whetstones are Voices, using the Poulter's measure, but Prechter tags them as independent. Now I don't know. I will have to reread their works.
6. Prechter will often quote lines and give stunning commentary, yet he appears to miss some humorous intent. His close reading appears at times to seem literal and scientific. Humor is the #1 character of Shakespearean writing. His 'poor pen' and his 'humble first effort'; to me appear to be inside jokes. Everyone must have known how skilled de Vere was.
7. The list of 72 writing traits is important and should be improved, rank ordered and explained with examples. It could be a stand-alone book.
8. None of the Elizabethan books critiquing or explaining writing made the list. William VVebbe's (ed dev v backwards) *Discourse on English Poesie* is not listed as a Voice, but **Edward VVebbe** is? It seems to me that de Vere would have competed in categories beyond the five styles considered in OV; for instance William Webbe's book on how to write poetry. I ask myself, who would dare write a 'How to' book on Poetry when the All-World, All-History best poet uses the same printer?
9. Notes and highlighting should be added to the Brightbook platform. It would be interesting to read others' highlights and helpful comments.
10. I would recommend skipping the *55 Hot Answers to Cool Questions* at the front of the book, leaving those interesting conclusions till after you finish. It was hard to unsee them, and it tainted my perspective.

## Conclusion

As you read OV, imagine a massive peg board in the basement of Prechter's brain, as he solves the crime of how Oxford became **Shake-speare**. That image is hilarious: so much yarn connecting everything to this or nothing to that. On virtually every page he cross-references a word or spelling of an independent author or a verified Voice. Prechter links rare words, notable lines, memorable hendiadys and similar plot twists. By the end, it all makes sense. Edward de Vere



trod a clear road from precociousness to excellence, leaving behind a relatively unbroken string of works from a youthful prodigy in 1560 through a publishing polymath in 1604. There are just a few periods of zero production, and they fit times de Vere was occupied with Queen Elizabeth, touring Italy or confined to the Tower of London. Another fact worth noting is that many of the era's plays are not extant, but Oxford's works have survived intact. The reason is that de Vere could afford to see them to print, after which they were cherished by their possessor. *Oxford's Voices* is a step toward solving the wonderful mystery that is Edward de Vere. It is a mountain of erudition that every serious Oxfordian should attempt to climb.



### About the reviewer

Jon Foss is an entrepreneur and executive from Minneapolis MN, USA. He became interested in the authorship question in 1982.



### Editor's note about the author of *Oxford's Voices*, Robert R. Prechter Jr

Robert Prechter is a truly remarkable man, even a polymath. His recent article in the Fall 2021 *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* is one of more than twenty of his related publications since 1999 in that Newsletter as well as *The Oxfordian* and *Shakespeare Matters*: <https://robertprechter.com/prechters-shakespeare-publications/>

Prechter explains that his online book is a culmination of a 24-year research project, started when he was 48 years old. What he doesn't mention is his 'day job' as an eminent financier and predictor of world events. After graduating in Psychology at Yale, he became a drummer in a rock band before joining Merrill Lynch and learning about the [Ralph Nelson] Elliot Wave Principle, which formed the basis of his highly successful work as a financial analyst. As someone in the know told Jon Foss, 'there are thousands of people round the world who listen to his every word of his market predictions' and he developed 'guru' status for his predictions around 1987. Needless to say, his entry in Wikipedia does not mention the Earl of Oxford or Shakespeare. He says his project is 'a labor of love, designed to inform and delight enthusiasts. The text is meant to be read start to finish, although the preface suggests shortcuts for people with limited time'.

