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ESSAY

To Be or Not To Be a Genius: The Argument for Acquired Knowledge and Life Experience

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HIGHLIGHTS

The life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, strongly matches the works of Shakespeare and thus suggests an autobiographical connection.

ABSTRACT

The personal attitudes and experiences of the greatest authors are usually reflected in their works, a phenomenon that gives literary biography its rich potential for new revelations and insights. Within this premise, the Shakespearean poems and plays appear to reflect the viewpoint and education of a high-ranking Elizabethan nobleman of vast experience and deep learning. In fact, many aspects of the life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, appear to be closely mirrored by the title character of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Both the Earl and the Prince are each on intimate terms with a female monarch; each is involved with the daughter of the Queen's chief minister; each brings actors to perform at the royal court; and while the author of *Hamlet* demonstrably referred to classics of the Italian Renaissance-- *The Courtier* and *Cardanus' Comforte* -- Oxford himself sponsored publications of both these works in England. The specific focus of this essay is on aspects of such "special knowledge" within the Shakespearean works, special knowledge that has no specific connection to the life of the man from Stratford but which was deeply imbued in the life of Edward de Vere. Cited here will be details of the author's connections to France and the French language; to the unique culture and geography of Italy; to the literature and drama of ancient Greece; to legal terminology and intricacies of the law; his proximity to persons and places of state power; to his military expertise; his medical knowledge; his intimacy with the sea and seamanship; to astronomy; to music; horses and horsemanship; heraldry; and to plants gardens and gardening. Such experiences and knowledge was possessed by the Earl of Oxford, and it is contrasted here with the paucity of similar experience and learning in the life of Will Shakspere of Stratford. The evidence clearly suggests that it was Edward de Vere using the pseudonym William Shakespeare rather than Will Shakspere who actually was behind the Bard's work.

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INTRODUCTION

The personal experiences, knowledge, and attitudes of the greatest writers are usually reflected, directly or indirectly, in their works, a phenomenon that gives literary biography its rich potential for insights into the links between an author's life and works. Within this premise, the works of William Shakespeare appear to reflect the experience, learning, knowledge, and attitudes of a high-ranking Elizabethan nobleman of vast experience and deep learning from books, formal education, and from life.

In 1920, when the British schoolmaster J. Thomas Looney identified "Shakespeare" as the pen name of Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), he cited multiple aspects of Oxford's life that appear to be reflected in the author's works, and he repeated the long-standing critical consensus that the play *Hamlet* and its title character was "a special and direct dramatic self-revelation" of the author.

> It is this personal factor, doubtless that has given to the drama that intense vitality and realism which makes its words and phrases grip the mind ... It is this fact of Hamlet representing the dramatist himself which also makes him stand out from all Shakespeare's characters as an interpreter of the motives of human actions. Into no other character has the author put an equal measure of his own distinctive powers of insight into human nature."
> (J.T. Looney, Warren edition, pp. 393-94)

Looney saw that Oxford stood in virtually the same relation to the English court as Hamlet stands in relation to the Court of Denmark, that is, he was the highest-ranking earl at the physical center of the monarch's absolute power:

> Oxford, of course, was not a prince of royal blood: but then there were no princes of royal blood at the English court, and the Earl of Oxford, in his younger years, was the nearest approach to a royal prince that the English court could boast ... And when it is remembered that noblemen of inferior standing to Oxford were, in those days, contemplating the possibility of sharing royal honors, either with Elizabeth or her possible successor, the Queen of Scotland, for the dramatist to represent himself as a royal prince was no extravagant self-aggrandizement.
> (Looney, Warren ed., pp. 395-396)

FIGURE 1. A bust of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, sculpted by American artist Paula Slater on commission by Ben August. Image copyright August Group, L.L.C. Used by permission.

These are some short versions of the connections:

- In the play, Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude of Denmark. As a royal ward, Oxford was technically the son of Queen Elizabeth of England.

- Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, is engaged to Ophelia, daughter of Polonius, the king's chief minister. Edward de Vere was engaged to Anne Cecil, the young daughter of William Cecil (Lord Burghley), the queen's chief minister.

- Hamlet brings actors to the Danish court and writes lines for them. Oxford was the patron of several Elizabethan theatre companies and was himself a playwright, regarded as the "best for comedy" in the English court by Francis Meres in his volume *Palladis Tamia* (1598).

- The author of Hamlet demonstrably drew from two classics of the Italian Renaissance – Il *Cortegiano, or The Courtier* by Baldesar Castiglione (1478-1529), and *De Consolatione* (*Cardanus' Comforte*) by Jerome Cardan (1501-'76) – while Oxford, during his early twenties in 1572-'73, sponsored translations and publications of both works. In the case of *The Courtier*, he contributed a Latin preface in which he cited "the protection of that authority," the Queen.

What follows is a survey of some areas of "special knowledge" acquired through reading and studies as well as life experience, displayed by whoever the author of the Shakespearean works really was, along with suspiciously similar acquired knowledge and experience that we know

was acquired by Edward de Vere.

Power

Traditional biographies of William Shakespeare – meaning Will Shakspere of Stratford -- necessarily place him far from the royal court, but the dramatist writes consistently from the vantage point of an insider, one who knows how and when the levers of power are used. Edward de Vere lived at the heart of Elizabethan political life from at least age 12 at the London home of William Cecil, the most powerful man in England. In 1571, when he turned 21, he entered the House of Lords, continuing in the Queen's highest favor for another decade.

In late 1580 he discovered that some of his high-ranking Catholic friends or associates were involved in a plot to overthrow Elizabeth, and he accused them of conspiracy to commit treason. He knew these men of power—their thoughts and emotions, their fears, as they took him into their confidence and eventually tipped their hand. One thinks here of an excerpt from *Julius Caesar*:

> Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar,
> I have not slept.
> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
> The genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection. (II.1. 61-69)

De Vere had close-up knowledge of power and real-life political intrigues of the kind to be found not just in *Julius Caesar* but also in *King John, Henry V, Richard II, Richard III, Macbeth, King Lear, Hamlet*, and many other Shakespeare plays. After the 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada, Oxford left court life, and over the next decades, poems and plays began appearing by an unknown and invisible author named "Shakespeare," someone who possessed remarkably keen knowledge of the real uses of power.

Mark Alexander writes in his online presentation of "curious connections" between Oxford and Shakespeare that "Oxford had frequent access to court, an insider's experience with Elizabeth, the machinations of foreign heads of states and ambassadors, and fawning courtiers."

The Earl saw power manifested in a variety of corruptions. Furthermore, being raised as a ward in Cecil's household, and given his noble position, Oxford would have been exposed to the absolute center of England's power.

Theatre scholar Alvin B. Kernan says, "Of all the major writers in the Western literary tradition, there is none who deals so consistently and so profoundly with political matters as Shakespeare.

> He wrote almost exclusively of courts and aristocratic life; and matters of state, of law, of kingship, and of dynastic succession are always prominent parts of his dramatic matter. This is true even in his comedies ... but it is even more obviously true in Shakespeare's history plays, and in his tragedies, where the political issues are the very substance of the plays, and where crucial matters of state are explored with remarkable precision and in great depth. (Kernan, p. 47)

Tim Spiekerman observes in his 2001 work on the "political realism" of the great dramatist that:

> all ten of Shakespeare's English history plays are named after politicians. And they're all about the same thing: who gets to rule....The plots are political plots (literally plots) ... assassination, treason, civil war, foreign conquest....If ambition seems to be a universal aspect of political life, so too does the concept of 'legitimacy,' which is the most salient theme of the English history plays. At stake in these plays is the question not only of who will rule, but of who is supposed to rule ... Legitimacy, that is the proper acquisition and use of political power, will remain a problem so long as the desire for power arises in those who shouldn't have it. (Spiekerman, pp. 3, 5)

Others agree, including Irving Ribner:

> The dominant political question which produced the history plays ... was the terms of political obedience...Under what conditions, if ever, was rebellion against a lawful monarch justified? (Ribner, p. 318)

"Shakespeare was anything but a writer of commonplace entertainments or an indifferent recorder of history," notes American scholar Daniel Wright.

> He was, instead, an informed commentator on the contemporary political scene, an expositor of political conviction and an advocate for policy that, often enough, contravened or challenged government—which is to say 'Cecilian'— philos-

ophy and practice. (Wright, p. 155)

The noted Elizabethan historian A.L. Rowse says of Edward de Vere:

> The 17th Earl of Oxford was, as the numbering shows, immensely aristocratic, and this was the clue to his career. In an Elizabethan society full of new and upcoming men, some of them at the very top, like the Bacons and Cecils—the Boleyns themselves, from whom the Queen descended, were a new family -- the Oxford earldom stood out as the oldest in the land. He was the premier earl and, as hereditary Lord Great Chamberlain, took his place on the right hand of the Queen and bore the sword of state before her. (Rowse, p. 75)

So the question has to be: how did the author William Shakespeare gain his intricate, deep knowledge of power and his perceptive insights into the powerful? The Oxfordian answer is that from early boyhood, he was living within that world as both observer and participant. It was a world that he would recreate in his plays with skill and imagination based not on guesswork or genius but on his own personal experience.

The Law and Legal Matters

"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," attorney Edward J. White wrote in 1911.

> If true that all dramatic writing is but a form of autobiography, then the immortal Shakespeare must, at some time in his life, have studied law. [It is apparent] that he had a natural inclination toward the law, for otherwise the legal comparisons and terms would not have come so naturally to him, in expressing the emotions and giving vent to the imaginative flights of poetry...almost every play, as well as the sonnets, display great legal learning and accurate knowledge, not only of legal terms, but of the science and philosophy of the law, as well... This is not the learning of the lawyer's clerk, either, but that of the scientific lawyer, thoroughly acquainted with the remedies and rights of persons and of the rules governing the ownership and alienation of property. The sonnets and poems as well are as replete with law terms and legal illustrations and similes as if they were written by one deeply learned in the science of the rights of litigants. (White, pp. 7-9)

Supporting this view, Charlton Ogburn wrote in 1984:

> Any intelligent writer can acquire knowledge of a subject and serve it up as required [but it is] something else to have been so immersed in a subject and to have assimilated it so thoroughly that it has become part of one's nature, shaping one's view of the world, coming forward spontaneously to prompt or complete a thought or supply an image or analogy." (Ogburn, p. 296)
>
> The plays and poems of Shakespeare supply ample evidence that their author not only had a very extensive and accurate knowledge of law, but also that he was well acquainted with the manners and customs of members of the Inns of Court and with legal life generally. (Ogburn, p. 301)

Earlier in the 20th century, Sir George Greenwood wrote that "at every turn and point at which the author required a metaphor, simile, or illustration, his mind ever turned first to the law." Greenwood went on to quote Lord Penzance, who had said of the great poet-dramatist:

> He seems almost to have thought in legal phrases ... his knowledge of law protruded itself on all occasions, appropriate or inappropriate, and mingled itself with strains of thought widely divergent from forensic subjects. To acquire a perfect familiarity with legal principles, and an accurate and ready use of technical terms and phrases not only of the conveyancer's office but of the pleader's chambers and the Courts at Westminster, nothing short of employment in some career involving constant contact with legal questions and general legal work would be required. (Greenwood, pp. 111-112)

Lord Penzance also said that Shakespeare's knowledge of the law was

> so perfect and intimate that he was never incorrect and never at fault ... At every turn and point at which the author required a metaphor, simile, or illustration, his mind ever turned first to the law. He seems almost to have thought in legal phrases...." (Brown, p. 90)

In their 2000 study, *Shakespeare's Legal Language: A*

Dictionary, B.J. and Mary Sokol analyzed the plays in detail and said:

> of the 37 Shakespeare plays considered in this Dictionary, 35 contain the word 'judge' and 35 the word 'justice' ... Reference to a trial appears one or more times in 25 of Shakespeare's plays, and many contain or describe trial scenes... Shakespeare's use of legal language was not always very serious, and certainly not always straightforward. He frequently employed legal ideas and terminology metaphorically or in symbolic contexts, especially in his lyric or narrative poems ... It is our view, derived from cumulative evidence, that ... Shakespeare shows a quite precise and mainly serious interest in the capacity of legal language to convey matters of social, moral, and intellectual substance. (Sokol and Sokol, pp. 1-3)

That said, there is not a shred of evidence to support the idea that Will Shakspere of Stratford was ever educated beyond grammar school (if he even attended school at all), much less to a university or law school.

Mark Twain argued only somewhat humorously that Will could certainly not have written Shakespeare's works because the man who wrote them had to be totally familiar with the laws and the law courts, and law proceedings "and lawyer talk, and lawyer-ways – and if Shakespeare was possessed of the infinitely-divided stardust that constituted this vast wealth, how did he get it, and where, and when?" He goes on:

> a man can't handle glibly and easily and comfortably and successfully the argot of a trade at which he has not personally served. He will make mistakes; he will not, and cannot, get the trade-phrasings precisely and exactly right; and the moment he departs, by even a shade, from a common trade form, the reader who has served that trade will know the writer hasn't. (Twain, pp. 14-16)

We know that Edward de Vere, on the other hand, was 17 when he entered Gray's Inn to study law. We know, too that throughout his life he was deeply involved in legal issues involving both his earldom and the royal court. Indeed, he sat on the juries at the treason trials of the Duke of Norfolk in 1572, of Mary Queen of Scots in 1586, and of the Earls of Essex and Southampton in 1601.

Traditional Stratfordian scholars usually assert that the author Shakespeare didn't really demonstrate any exceptional knowledge of the law while at the same time they struggle to explain how he "shows a quite precise and mainly serious interest in the capacity of legal language to convey matters of social, moral, and intellectual substance." (Sokol and Sokol, 3)

Scholar Katherine Chiljan quotes from one of Oxford's many letters in which he shows his familiarity with the law and with legal terms:

> But now the ground whereon I lay my suit being so just and reasonable ... to conceive of the just desire I make of this suit ... so by-fold that justice could not dispense any farther ...The matter after it had received many crosses, many inventions of delay, yet at length hath been heard before all the Judges—judges I say both unlawful, and lawful ... For counsel, I have such lawyers, and the best that I can get as are to be had in London, who have advised me for my best course ... [to Queen Elizabeth]: And because your Majesty upon a bare information could not be so well satisfied of every particular as by lawful testimony & examination of credible witnesses upon oath. (Oxford in Chiljan, pp. 135-147)

De Vere actually attended the House of Lords on 44 occasions during nine different sessions between 1571 and 1601. In the sessions from 1585 onward, he was appointed as a judge, one of the "receivers and triers of petitions from Gascony and other lands beyond the seas and from the islands." In 1586 he was part of a committee appointed to recommend to Elizabeth the guilt or innocence and sentencing of Mary Queen of Scots.

In Sonnet 46, Shakespeare describes just such a trial by jury:

> Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war
> How to divide the conquest of thy sight;
> Mine eye, my heart thy picture's sight would bar
> My heart, mine eye the freedom of that right;
> My heart doth plead that thou in him dost lie
> A closet never pierced with crystal eyes,
> But the defendant doth that plea deny,
> And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
> To 'cide this title is impaneled
> A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart,
> And by their verdict is determined
> The clear eyes' moiety, and thy dear heart's part:
> As thus, mine eyes' due is thy outward part,
> And my heart's right, their inward love of heart.

Even scholars working within the Stratfordian tra-

dition have occasionally speculated that "Shakespeare" must have been a lawyer or have worked in a law office. Obviously, the fact that Oxford was himself a lawyer does not prove he was the great author, but it is one more important piece of circumstantial evidence in his favor.

The Italianate Englishman

If the case for Edward de Vere as William Shakespeare does finally gain popular acceptance, not the least reason will be the overwhelming evidence within the works that the author had traveled widely in Italy and must have lived in Venice for a time. Such was the Italian experience of 25-year old Oxford in 1575, when he was welcomed in one city palace after another as an illustrious dignitary from the English court—a young, high-born nobleman absorbing Venice, Verona, and numerous other Italian cities along with its people and the Italian renaissance generally. Indeed, it was the dramatic work set in Italy that inspired J.T. Looney's search for a credible Shakespeare in the first place:

> For several years in succession, I had been called upon to go through repeated courses of reading in one play, namely *The Merchant of Venice*. This long-continued familiarity with the contents of one play induced a peculiar sense of intimacy with the mind and disposition of its author and his outlook upon life. The personality which seemed to run through the pages of the drama I felt to be altogether out of relationship with what was taught of the reputed author and the ascertained facts of his career. (Looney, Warren edition, p. 2)

He continues, comparing de Vere's travels with Will of Stratford's:

> The Stratford Shakspere was untraveled, having moved from his native place to London when a young man, and then as a successful middle-aged man of business, he returned to Stratford to attend to his lands and houses. This play, on the contrary, bespeaks a writer who knew Italy at first hand and was touched with the life and spirit of the country. Again, the play suggested an author with no great respect for money and business methods, but rather one to whom material possessions would be an encumbrance to be easily and lightly disposed of: at any rate one who was by no means of an acquisitive disposition. (Looney, Warren edition, p. 2)

One authorship doubter whose work implicitly questioned the traditional Stratfordian narrative was the American Richard Roe. In his volume, *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy* (2012) Roe offered up the research he did over 25 years traveling the length and breadth of Italy on what his publisher aptly described as "a literary quest of unparalleled significance." Speaking of "Shakespeare" in relation to the prime location of *The Merchant of Venice*, Roe wrote:

> In the latter part of the sixteenth century, the gifted English playwright arrived in the beating heart of this Venetian empire: the legendary city of Venice. He moved about noting its structured society, its centuries-old government of laws, its traditions, its culture, and its disciplines. He carefully considered and investigated its engines of banking and commerce. He explored its harbors and canals and its streets and squares. He saw the flash of its pageants, its parties and celebrations; and he looked deeply into the Venetian soul. Then, with a skill that has never been equaled, he wrote a story that has a happy ending for all its characters save one, about whom a grief endures and always will: a deathless tragedy. (Roe, p. 115)

De Vere's travels, in fact, skirted Spanish-controlled Milan before navigating by canal and a network of rivers on a 120-mile journey to Verona. His travels took him to Padua, Mantua, Pisa, Florence, Siena, Naples, Florence, Messina, Palermo and elsewhere, from his base in Venice. If de Vere were the author, the result was ten plays set in whole or in part in Italy: *Romeo and Juliet, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice, Othello, A Midsummer Night's Dream, All's Well That Ends Well, Much Ado About Nothing, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest*, which opens aboard a ship in the Mediterranean somewhere between North Africa and Italy.

Compare this to only one play -- *The Merry Wives of Windsor* -- set in England. Why? The logical answer is that "Shakespeare," whoever he was, must have fallen in love with Italy. But it would seem difficult to fall in love with a country without ever visiting it. It is argued that, in fact, de Vere "brought the European Renaissance back to England" when he returned in 1576 after 15 months of European travel (He also spent time in France and Germany). On his return, he became the quintessential "Italianate Englishman," wearing "new-fangled" clothes of the latest styles.

He also brought back richly embroidered, perfumed

Italian gloves for Queen Elizabeth, who delighted in them. The gloves, in fact, became all the rage among the great ladies of the time. The earl also returned home with a perfumed leather jerkin (a close-fitting, sleeveless jacket) and "sweet bags" with costly washes and perfumes, and for many years after, it was called the Earl of Oxford's perfume." (Orgel & Braunmuller, p. 868b)

It was soon after Oxford's return that his personal secretary and stage manager, John Lyly, published two novels about an Italian traveler -- *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and *Euphues and his England* (1580). The latter was dedicated to de Vere, who apparently supervised the writing of both books comprising what can be called "the first English novel." In the following decade, "Shakespeare" would demonstrate what was termed Lyly's influence upon his plays.

Roe argues in the preface to his volume on Shakespeare's Italy that:

> There is a secret Italy hidden in the plays of Shakespeare. It is an ingeniously-described Italy that has neither been recognized, nor even suspected—not in four hundred years—save by a curious few. It is exact; it is detailed; and it is brilliant.

He adds that the descriptions are in "challenging detail" and "nearly all their locations" can be found there to this day. Whoever wrote them "had a personal interest in that country equal to the interest in his own." The places and things in Italy to which Shakespeare alludes or that he says "reveal themselves to be singularly unique to that one country." His familiarity with Italy's "specific details, history, geography, unique cultural aspects, places and things, practices and propensities....is, quite simply, astonishing." (Roe, pp. 1-5)

As an example, Roe takes the reader directly to Verona, the setting for *Romeo and Juliet*, and recounts a trip to search for sycamore trees that "Shakespeare" located "just outside the western wall" as "remnants of a grove that had flourished in that one place for centuries." The trees are described in the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet*.

> Where underneath the grove of sycamore
> That westward rooteth from the city's side (I.1. 120-121)

The fact is there are no sycamore trees in any of the known source materials for the play. They were deliberately put in this spot by Shakespeare himself. Roe described his search in the old city of Verona with his driver taking him to the Viale Cristoforo Colombo. Turning south onto the Viale Colonnello Galliano, the boulevard where he had earlier glimpsed trees but had no idea what kind they were. His car crept along the Viale and came to a halt. And there were sycamores at the very same spot where "Shakespeare" said they were. How did the playwright know this "unnoted and unimportant but literal truth" about Verona? Clearly, he had deliberately "dropped an odd little stone about a real grove of trees into the pool of his powerful drama" (Roe, pp. 7-10)

In sum, Roe made many similar discoveries, which collectively, demonstrate Shakespeare's depth of knowledge and personal experience of Italy. All of these comprise more circumstantial evidence that Oxford, not Will Shakspere of Stratford, could have been the great poet-dramatist.

Commedia dell'arte

Scholars identify at least a dozen Shakespeare plays influenced by the Italian form of dramatic performance known as Commedia dell'arte, with its stock characters and improvised skits that were often bawdy and satiric. The list includes *Love's Labour's Lost, The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, Twelfth Night, and Much Ado About Nothing*. The same scholars, however, cannot plausibly explain how "Shakespeare" became so familiar with this "comedy of art" performed by troupes of traveling players in Italy, a form virtually unknown in England when he was supposedly writing the plays.

In 1956, Julia Cooley Altrocchi discovered in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, a book called *Dell'Arte Rappresentativa Premeditata ed all'Improviso* or Dramatic Art by Rote and Extemporaneous Performance (1699) and subsequently reported that there was a

> long section...devoted to the stock character of Graziano, the talkative Bolognese 'doctor' who tells long tales and never stops for breath. With little schooling and without a medical degree, he blabs endlessly, often in Latin, impressing everyone until he is always shown to be a quack. One of his famous recitals is the so-called 'Tirade of the Tournament' (Tirata della Giostra) in which the actor rattles off the names of 20 or 30 knights and ladies, their titles and countries of origin, the color and trappings of their horses, the color and devices of their garments and shields, and the events that befell each one on the field of tourney. Even the ladies took part in this hypothetical tournament." (Altrocchi, J.C., Ruth Lloyd Miller edition, pp. 134-135)

To Altrocchi's surprise, the book offered a specific example of such a long and hilarious "tirade" -- with a reference to Oxford himself. Included in the tirade was the following speech:

> I found myself ambassador of my illustrious country of Bologna at the court of the Emperor Polidor of Trebizond and attending the great tournament celebrating his marriage to Irene, Empress of Constantinople. Present were many great worthies: Basil, King of Zelconda; Doralba, Princess of Dacia; Arcont, vaivode of Moldavia; Arileus, heir of Denmark; Isuf, Pasha of Aleppo; Fatima, Sultan of Persia; Elmond, *Milord of Oxfort*. (emphasis added, Altrocchi; Clark: ed. pp.134-135)

Here, in a book published in Naples at the end of the 17th century, was an apparent reference to Edward de Vere, mentioned by his earldom title as "Elmond Milord d'Oxfort," within the speech of a stock character in a skit ("Tirata della Giostra" or "Tirade of the Joust" performed by members of the Commedia dell'arte.

Altrocchi continued:

> With his outgoing nature, his innate acting ability which would later manifest itself so impressively before the Queen, would he have consorted in friendly fashion with the finest improvisators in the world? Otherwise, why was he given a place in the Doctor's exuberant oration? Wouldn't it have been known that he was a tournament champion in 1571 in England at the young age of 21? Wasn't Graziano paying him a form of personal tribute as an honored guest?

The "Doctor" in his tirade, reports that "Milord of Oxfort" rode a faun-colored horse named Oltramarin ("Beyond the Sea") and wore a violet-colored costume while carrying a large sword. "In this Tirata," Altrocchi reports, "Milord of Oxfort, amusingly enough, tilted against Alvilda, Countess of Edemburg, who was mounted on a dapplegray, and was armed with a Frankish lance while robed in lemon color. In the end, Edward and Alvilda, alas, threw one another simultaneously off their horses, both landing face down in the dust!" She concludes that Oxford must have been "well and very companionably known" at presentations of the Commedia dell'arte while in Venice for many weeks during 1575. He was recognized as being a good sport as a well as a good sportsman," not to mention having "so resilient a sense of humor that he could be introduced into a skit and, with impunity, be described as meeting a woman in tilt and being un-horsed and rolled to the ground with her in the encounter! (Altrocchi; Clark: p. 135)

If Oxford witnessed commedia performances, among them may have been this skit in which the actor playing Doctor Graziano, perhaps knowing the earl was in the audience, suddenly paid him a public tribute by improvising a "tirade" that included him by name.

In their 2011 Oxfordian edition of *Othello*, Ren Draya and Richard Whalen comment on the surprising evidence that even this painful tragedy is strongly influenced by Commedia dell'arte. They indicate, for example, how the opening of the tragedy can (and probably should be) played for laughs, with Iago (the scheming Zanni of the Commedia skits) and Roderigo (the witless, rejected suitor) waking up Brabantio (the foolish, old Pantalone) to taunt him with lewd suggestions that his daughter, Desdemona (the innocent), is having sex with Othello in a bestial way after they have eloped -- the stuff of a satirical burlesque.

"If the influence of commedia dell'arte on the composition of *Othello* were to be seriously considered and explained by editors of the play," Whalen writes in the Oxfordian journal *Brief Chronicles*,

> readers and theatergoers might well enjoy a greatly enhanced appreciation of the author's intention and design for this disorienting comedy gone wrong. The perplexing aspects of the comedy throughout *The Tragedy of Othello* would disappear. The mystery of Iago's evil and his motivation would be dispelled. Othello's naive inability to see through Iago's lies and scheming would make sense.
>
> With a more realistic understanding of the play, *Othello* could be read and performed as the author probably intended, as a bitter, satirical comedy with a disturbing, frustrating, tragic ending that denies the audience its expected catharsis -- a play inspired by satirical commedia dell'arte performances in Italy, instead of a romantic tragedy about a jealous military hero, who is black, and his aristocratic Venetian bride, who is white ... one of the greatest commentaries exposing the folly of mankind through laughter and the abrupt shift to the tragic shock of two murders and a suicide at the climax of the play. (Whalen, p. 99)

As Whalen points out, the commedia dell'arte was at

the height of its popularity in Italy during the very same period when Oxford traveled there in 1575-'76, making his home base in Venice. The leading troupes performed for Italian dukes and princes, who were usually also their patrons, and they often played in public squares or theaters. The difficulty Stratfordian scholars have in accounting for commedia dell'arte elements in Othello creates "a biographical conundrum." How could

> the dramatist, without ever setting foot outside England...have acquired enough knowledge to appreciate its improvisational nature? There are no records of commedia dell'arte performances in England from the 1580s into the early 1600s, when he [Shakspere of Stratford] was supposed to be writing the plays, except for one command performance by a visiting troupe for Queen Elizabeth in 1602. (Whalen, p. 94)

It should be added here for historical accuracy that there were commedia performances in England during the 1570s, but at that time, Will of Stratford was between the ages of six and twelve. Edward de Vere was in his twenties at that time and enjoying her Majesty's highest favor.

Military Matters

"Warfare is everywhere in Shakespeare," Charles Edelman writes in the introduction to *Shakespeare's Military Language: A Dictionary*, "and the military action in many of Shakespeare's plays, and the military imagery in all his plays and poems, show that he possessed an extraordinarily detailed knowledge of warfare, both ancient and modern."

Edelman provides a comprehensive account of Shakespeare's portrayal of military life, tactics, and technology and explores how the plays comment upon military incidents and personalities of the Elizabethan era. How do Stratfordian biographers assume Will of Stratford accumulated such "extraordinarily detailed knowledge" of warfare and military matters? Clearly, it is through automatic assimilation by which all intricacies are miraculously absorbed into the very fiber of Will's being and are then translated into the dialogue and characters in his plays. Edelman writes that it is often thought that Shakespeare took a "haphazard approach" to the details and language of military life and warfare, but he argues otherwise in many of his entries.

Another researcher, C.W. Barrell, suggests that

> The author of *Othello* and the great historical plays beginning with *King John* and ending, say, with *3 Henry VI*, expresses the courtier-soldier's point of view too clearly and naturally and displays far too familiar a grasp of military methods, objectives and colloquialisms not to have acquired this knowledge through serious study plus firsthand experience of the arts of war. No such study and experience can be documented in the career of the Stratford native.... Oxford's personal familiarity with the subject can be categorically documented; and this is particularly true in respect to 'Shakespeare's' fund of military information." (quoted in Altrocchi/Whittemore, p. 191)

At issue is "information" as opposed to innate genius—the former term defined by the *Random House Dictionary* as knowledge "communicated or received concerning particular facts or circumstances," or otherwise "gained through study, research, instruction and experience." The great author's information about military life was, however, not genetically inherited; it was acquired. He draws upon his wealth of information spontaneously, during the white heat of composition, and employs it for various purposes the way an artist will mix paints on his canvas.

On and on come the military terms in plays such as *2 Henry IV*, for example, with words such as alarum, ancient, archer, beacon, beaver, besonian, blank, bounce, bullet, Caesar's thrasonical brag, caliver, captain, chamber, charge, cavalier, chivalry, coat and corporal.

How did the Earl of Oxford acquire this information? One can start with his cousins Horatio and Francis Vere, known as the "Fighting Veres" and for their exploits as soldiers. Indeed, they may have been the models for the similarly named soldiers Horatio and Francisco in *Hamlet*. Add to this Oxford's brother-in-law, Peregrine Bertie (Lord Willoughby d'Eresby) who devoted his life to the political and military service of Queen Elizabeth.

More specifically,

- When the Northern Rebellion by powerful Catholic earls began in November 1569, Oxford, then 19, requested military service, which was granted in the spring of 1570 when he served under the Earl of Sussex. The chief action he would have seen was the siege of Hume Castle, whose defenders surrendered to avoid any further bombardment—an episode that calls to mind the siege of Harfleur by Henry the Fifth.

- Oxford was a champion at tilting, winning his first tournament at the Whitehall in May 1571, perform-

ing "far above expectation of the world" in front of Queen Elizabeth and the royal court. Giles Fletcher of King's College, Cambridge, wrote in Latin (as translated by Ward), that he blazed his way "with fiery energy," ... adding that Oxford presented "a mimicry of war" as he "controlled his foaming steed with a light rein and, armed with a long spear, rides to the encounter.... 'Tis thus that martial spirits pass through their apprenticeship in war ...The country sees in thee both a leader pre-eminent in war, and a skillful man-at-arms.... (Hatfield MSS. Cal. XIII, 109; quoted in Ward, 60)

- A decade later, in January 1581, Oxford prevailed as champion of his second and final jousting tournament at the Whitehall tiltyard. (Ogburn, p. 775)

- *The Defence of Militarie Profession* by Geffrey Gates was published in 1579. A volume "wherein is eloquently shewed the due commendation of Martiall prowess" the volume sought to prove "how necessary the exercise of Armes is for this our age." It was dedicated by Gates "To the Right honourable Edward de Vere, Earle of Oxenford," adding that the book came "under the shield of your noble favour and judgment." Ogburn comments that "it may be supposed that the Earl encouraged and arranged for its publication." (Ogburn: 599) The publisher, John Harrison, would later issue *Venus and Adonis* in 1593 and *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1594, the first appearance in print of the name "William Shakespeare", with both narrative poems apparently having been personally overseen by the poet.

- On 25 June 1585, Oxford wrote to Burghley asking for a loan to help in his suit for a military command in the Netherlands in England's impending war with Spain. In this letter, he launched into a Shakespearean string of military metaphors, writing, "For, being now almost at a point to taste that good which her Majesty shall determine -- yet am I as one that hath long besieged a fort and not able to compass the end or reap the fruit of his travail, being forced to levy his siege for want of munition." (Lansdowne MSS., 50.22; Fowler, p. 342)

- "Munition" was not a common word at the time, but Shakespeare used it more than once, as when Gloucester in *Henry VI, Pt. 1* declares, "I'll to the Tower with all the haste I can to view the artillery and munition" (I1.167-168)

- Later in 1585, Oxford was commissioned to command a company of horse in the Low Countries. (Ward: 252) In 1850, William J. Thorne wrote in *Notes and Queries* that the intimate knowledge of military affairs displayed in Shakespeare's plays shows that the poet had seen military service specifically in the Low Countries. (Edelman, p. 1)

- Oxford was reported among the many "honourable personages" in the summer of 1588 who "were suddenly embarked, committing themselves unto the present chance of war" when the Spanish Armada arrived on its mission to crush England. Oxford's ship was apparently disabled, because he went directly home for his armor, and even his enemy Leicester reported that "he seems most willing to hazard his life in this quarrel." (Ogburn, p. 704)

The very life of Oxford provides a plausible answer to the question of how "Shakespeare" acquired his military knowledge.

> In September 1572, after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Protestants in France, Oxford wrote to Burghley saying he would be eager to serve the queen on the Continent: "I had rather serve there than at home where yet some honour were to be got; if there be any setting forth to sea, to which service I bear most affection, I shall desire your Lordship to give me and get me that favour and credit, that I might make one. Which if there be no such intention, then I shall be most willing to be employed on the seacoasts, to be in a readiness with my countrymen against any invasion." (Landsdowne MSS., 14.84; Fowler, p. 97)

Indeed, Edward de Vere never lost his eagerness to serve as a military man, always connecting that activity with honor. It is easy to imagine him composing *Hamlet* and having Ophelia cry out:

> O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
> The expectancy and rose of the fair state (III.2.150-153)

De Vere was all that and much more.

The Sea and Seamanship

Lieutenant Commander Alexander Falconer, a naval officer during World War II and a professional sailor

steeped in the history of seamanship and navigation, completed two books that were largely ignored when they were published: *Shakespeare and the Sea* (1964) and *A Glossary of Shakespeare's Sea and Naval Terms including Gunnery* (1965). Falconer brings firsthand knowledge and experience to an investigation of Shakespeare's use of seafaring terms and situations involving the sea. He concludes that the poet-dramatist possessed detailed, accurate knowledge of naval matters and was well informed about storms, shipwrecks, pirates, voyages of exploration, and navigation:

> Shakespeare's interest in the navy and the sea held him throughout his life. The greatest of dramatists remained profoundly impressed and influenced by the greatest naval tradition the world had seen. The manning and running of royal ships and the ceremony observed in them; the duties of officers and seamen and their characteristics, qualities and ways; strategy and the principles of sea warfare, gunnery, grappling and boarding are all known to him; so, too, are the main types of ship, their build, rigging, masts, sails, anchors and cables. The sea itself in its varied working, tides, waves, currents, storms, and calms, never goes out of his work. He draws on all this knowledge with great ease and readiness, not only in making incidents and characters true to life but in nautical imagery and figures of speech." (Falconer, *Shakespeare and the Sea*, xii)

Falconer notes that in the opening scene of *The Tempest*, when the ship is wrecked in a storm, Shakespeare took care for details. He

> could not have written a scene of this kind without taking great pains to grasp completely how a ship beset with these difficulties would have to be handled. He had not only worked out a series of maneuvers but has made exact use of the professional language of seamanship, knowing that if this were not strictly used aboard ship, the seamen would not know what they were required to do ... He could not have come by this knowledge from books, for there were no works on seamanship in his day. (Falconer, pp. 39-41)

Shakespeare's exact use of naval and maritime language, along with his intimate knowledge of the sea and seamanship, cannot be explained by anything in the documented life of the man from Stratford. Traditional scholars generally fail to notice the Bard's experience at sea because they know that the Stratford man never once left dry land. As Paul Altrocchi writes:

> Closed minds automatically blockade new information which conflicts with their own beliefs, preventing highly persuasive evidence from entering their brains for evaluation, Oxfordians believe with conviction that Stratfordianism represents a classic example of the common human tendency to stick tenaciously with conventional wisdom, preventing much more logical and coherent newer theories and facts from being given a fair hearing. (Altrocchi, Paul: *Ideational Changes*, p. 27)

The sea was there in 1572 when Oxford wrote to Burghley, in reaction to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Protestants in France, offering to help defend England in any way he could. "If there be any setting forth to sea, to which service I bear most affection," he wrote, "I shall desire your Lordship to give me and get me that favor...." (Fowler: 97). And further, the earl crossed the Channel to France in 1575, and while returning to England in April 1576, he was captured by pirates in the Channel and nearly killed, a situation reported in *Hamlet*.

Oxford also had his own ship, the Edward Bonaventure, which he had contributed to Captain Edward Fenton's expedition to the Spanish Main in 1582. In June 1588, with the Armada on its way, Oxford prepared to take the Bonaventure into battle; although the English defeated the great fleet, it appears his ship became disabled. In 1589, a poem (apparently, but not certainly, by Oxford's secretary Lyly) envisioned the Earl standing on the hatch-cover of the Bonaventure, literally breathing fire, that element instilled within him by the goddess Pallas Athena, the spear-shaker:

> De Vere ... like warlike Mars upon the hatches stands.
> His tusked Boar 'gan foam for inward ire
> While Pallas filled his breast with fire...
> (Ward, p. 291)

In the *Shakespearean Authorship Review* of Autumn 1965, I.L.M. McGeoch, examined Falconer's volume *Shakespeare and the Sea* and noted "only those who actually served at sea could acquire a profound knowledge of the practice of seamanship and the correct meaning and use of the terms proper to the working of ships. That Shakespeare possessed such a profound knowledge is instanced many times." (Altrocchi, Whittemore, Vol. 5: 170-172)

Shakespeare's Medical Knowledge

In his edition of the Shakespeare sonnets, Stephen Booth reproduces the title page of T*he New Jewell of Health*, wherein is contained the most excellent Secrets of Physic and Philosophy, divided into four Books by the surgeon George Baker, published in 1576. Booth presents an illustration of the doctor's important book in connection with Sonnet 119, which builds upon metaphors and analogies from alchemy and medicine, opening with these two lines:

> What potions have I drunk of siren tears,
> distilled from limbecks foul as hell within . . .

"Shakespeare" knew about the "distillations" of waters, oils, and balms as set forth by Dr. Baker, whose book has been long considered a key source for the Bard's interest in alchemy as well as the full range of medical knowledge at the time. Baker, who would become surgeon to Queen Elizabeth, was the personal physician of de Vere and dedicated *The New Jewel of Health* to the Earl's wife Anne Cecil. Baker had dedicated his first book, *Olenum Magistrale* (1574), to de Vere himself, and in 1599 dedicated his *Practice of the New and Old Physic* to the earl as well. Baker was part of the household of de Vere, whose patronage helped to make it possible for this medical pioneer to write his books in the first place.

This is one example of how Shakespeare's remarkable knowledge of medicine is mirrored by Oxford's own connection to the leading medical experts and advances of his time, not only in England but also on the Continent. If Baker had just once treated Will of Stratford for a cut finger, upholders of the Stratford faith would, no doubt, have devoted entire books to that medical incident and its influences upon Shakespeare's writings. On the other hand, Booth uses a full page to illustrate The *New Jewell of Health* in connection with Shakespeare's sonnets, but never indicates that Baker dedicated that very book to Oxford's wife nor does he mention that the doctor dedicated two other books to the Earl of Oxford himself. (Booth, p. 399)

He was tutored during childhood by Sir Thomas Smith, the scholar and future diplomat known for his interest in diseases, alchemy and therapeutic botanicals. As well, Oxford had access to William Cecil's library with some 200 books on alchemy and medical topics and then, in his twenties, he lived next door to Bedlam Hospital, a source of firsthand knowledge about patients suffering from mental illness.

That is to say, Oxford's life forms a picture that can truly deepen perceptions of the Bard's plays and poems. Earl Showerman, M.D., points out that the Shakespeare plays contain "over 700 medical references to practically all the diseases and drugs" that were known by the year 1600, along with "knowledge of anatomy, physiology, surgery, obstetrics, public health, aging, forensics, neurology and mental disorders," not to mention "detailed knowledge of syphilis." He quotes from R.R. Simpson's 1962 volume *Shakespeare and Medicine* which says that the poet-dramatist demonstrates "not only an astute knowledge of medical affairs, but also a keen sense of the correct use of that knowledge"—a sign that he was well acquainted with the medical literature of his day.

Another work, *The Medical Mind of Shakespeare* (1986) by Aubrey Kail, argues that the Bard's plays "bear witness to profound knowledge of contemporary physiology and psychology" and that the author "employed medical terms in a manner which would have been beyond the powers of any ordinary playwright or physician." Oxfordian researcher, Frank M. Davis, M.D., writes that in Shakespeare's time, "true medical literature, like medicine itself, was still in its infancy...[and] the vast majority of medical works were [only] published in Latin or Greek."

Davis finds it especially remarkable that Shakespeare refers in three plays to the inner lining of the covering of the brain and spinal cord, the pia mater.

> Knowledge of this relatively obscure part of anatomy could only mean that Shakespeare had either studied anatomy or read medical literature ... Even more striking to me as a neurosurgeon is his acquaintance with the relationship of the third ventricle with memory.... a possible source was Thomas Vicary's *Anatomy of the Body of Man* (1548), which refers to the third ventricle as the 'ventricle of memory'—a phrase used in *Love's Labour's Lost*, when the pedant Holofernes states that his various gifts of the mind 'are begot in the ventricle of memory, nourished in the womb of the pia mater ...' (IV.2.68-69).

One can, of course, add here the Bard's knowledge of blood circulation. William Harvey's 'discovery' was announced in 1616 but "Shakespeare" was likely aware of it long before then. There are, in fact, at least "nine significant references to the circulation or flowing of blood in Shakespeare plays." Davis notes that England was far behind the advances in medical technology taking place on the Continent. Most of the great doctors and teachers were based at the University of Padua, then the center for medical learning; others studied there before returning to their hometowns to practice medicine.

Oxford, touring the cities of Europe in 1575, visited

Padua at least once, probably twice. "With the background in pharmacology gained from his years with Sir Thomas Smith," says Davis, "it seems unlikely that Oxford would have visited Padua without attempting to discover the latest developments in 'physic''. Indeed, in 1574, the Renaissance doctor Fabricius had discovered "the valves in veins responsible for keeping the blood flowing in one direction toward the heart....Fabricius was the first to bring this important discovery to light." Even if Oxford had never met Fabricius in person, says Davis, it is easy to imagine that the great teacher's 1574 discovery of those valves, along with other topics related to the circulation of the blood, "would have been an ongoing staple of conversation among the students and faculty at the time of Oxford's visit."

Horses and Horsemanship

When J.T. Looney began his search for the author that led to *'Shakespeare' Identified* in 1920, he listed 18 characteristics based on the poems and plays that the great author—whoever he was—must have possessed. Among them were: "an enthusiast for Italy; a follower of sport (including falconry); a lover of music." Much later, after discovering Oxford, he realized "a grave omission" in his list of characteristics was that of horses and horsemanship: "We find there is more in Shakespeare about horses than upon almost any subject outside human nature. Indeed we feel tempted to say that Shakespeare brings them within the sphere of human nature."

An example:

Benedick:
Sir, your wit ambles well; it goes easily.
—*Much Ado About Nothing* (V.1.135)

Rosalind:
Time travels in divers paces, with divers persons: I'll tell you who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal, and who he stands still withal.
—*As You Like It* (III.2.301-304)

Looney continues:

> There is, of course, his intimate knowledge of different kinds of horses, their physical peculiarities, all the details which go to form a good or a bad specimen of a given variety, almost a veterinary's knowledge of their diseases and their treatment....But over and above all this there is a peculiar handling of the theme which raises a horse almost to the level of a being with a moral nature .... Not only did Oxford learn to ride, but, in those days when horsemanship was much more in vogue than it will probably ever be again, and when great skill was attained in horse-management, he was among those who excelled, particularly in tilts and tourneys, receiving special marks of royal appreciation of his skill. Horsemanship was, therefore, a very pronounced interest of his.(Warren edition, pp. 206-207)

We know that de Vere's father was the owner of valuable horses in the stable of the family estate at Castle Hedingham in Essex. In his first will, made in 1552, his father listed "ten geldings; nags with saddles, bridles and all things pertaining to them." In his final will (1562), the 16th earl bequeathed "one of my great horses" to each of several friends.

In September 1562, following the death of his father, 12-year-old Edward de Vere "came riding out of Essex" to begin his wardship "with seven score horse all in black; through London and Chepe and Ludgate, and so to Temple Bar," as noted in *Machyn's Diary*. Clearly, he knew his horses. About a dozen distinct breeds were in England during Oxford's lifetime, the most popular for riding being Turkey, Barb, Neapolitan, and Spanish Jennet. Of all of them, the Barbary horse or Barb "was undoubtedly the great author's favorite," writes A. Forbes Sieverking, adding, "With such affection and intimacy does he dwell upon its merits that it is probable that the poet at one time possessed a roan Barb"

It may well be that the Bard actually owned a roan Barb, but probably only if the author was the Earl of Oxford. The Barb was a special breed from northern Africa, an expensive riding horse known for its fiery temperament and stamina. It was highly prized by the Italians, their noble families established large racing stables making it truly a horse for kings.

Hotspur:
Hath Butler brought those horses from the sheriff?

Servant:
One horse, my lord, he brought even now.

Hotspur:
What horse? A roan, a crop-ear, is it not?

Servant:
It is, my lord.

Hotspur:
That roan shall be my throne. (*1 Henry IV*.2.3.66-70)

We know that Henry VIII had purchased Barbary horses from Frederico Gonzago of Mantua and that private owners in England used the Barbs to what came to be called thoroughbreds. In the 14th century Richard II owned a roan Barb, as "Shakespeare" wrote in the play bearing that king's name. When he is in prison after his crown has been taken by Bolingbroke, who is now Henry IV, the Groom tells him:

O, how it yearned my heart when I beheld
In London streets, that coronation day,
When Bolingbroke rode on Roan Barbary,
That horse that thou so often hast bestrid,
That horse that I so carefully have dressed!
(5.5.76-80)

First Bolingbroke took his crown ... now his horse! Richard cannot conceal his suffering:

Richard:
Rode he on Barbary? Tell me, gentle friend,
How went he under him?

Groom:
So proudly as if he disdained the ground.

This is too much for Richard. His own horse has betrayed him.

Richard:
That jade hath eat bread from my royal hand –
This hand hath made him proud with clapping him.
Would he not stumble? Would he not fall down,
Since pride must have a fall, and break the neck
Of that proud man that did usurp his back?

There are additional passages referencing "Barbary" horses in *Hamlet*, in which the king wagers six Barbary horses against six French rapiers and poniards on the prince's ability to win the fencing match with Laertes, and in *Othello*, when Iago describes Othello as a Barbary horse, rakishly alluding to the Barbary's Moorish origins and, also, to the practice of breeding one to an English mare.

A favorite Shakespearean passage about horses is to be found in *Venus and Adonis* in which, Looney wrote, "a mere animal instinct is raised in horses to the dignity of a complex and exalted human passion."

A breeding jennet, lusty, young, and proud,
Adonis' trampling courser doth espy,
And forth she rushes, snorts, and neighs aloud.
The strong-necked steed, being tied unto a tree,
Breaketh his rein, and to her straight goes he.
Imperiously he leaps, he neighs, he bounds,
And now his woven girths he breaks asunder.
The bearing earth with his hard hoof he wounds,
Whose hollow womb resounds like heaven's thunder;
The iron bit he crusheth 'tween his teeth,
Controlling what he was controlled with... (Venus and Adonis, pp. 260-270)

The full scene comprises 59 lines (260-318), leaving no doubt that the poet must have been an expert horseman.

Astronomy and the Universe

In 1584, John Soowthern, a Frenchman writing under that pen name while in the household of "Dever" (Edward de Vere) referred to the "seven turning flames of the sky" in his poem *Pandora* to indicate the sun, the moon and the five known planets. According to Soowthern, the Earl was an expert in the exciting but politically dangerous field of astronomy, which was threatening to overturn the old conception of the cosmos and even upend the old relationships of man to himself, to the world and to God.

In the opening lines of Sonnet 14, Shakespeare wrote:

Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck,
And yet methinks I have Astronomy.

Shakespeare is not speaking of astrological fortune-telling here or of superstitions. He is not writing about the making of predictions such as that used by Queen Elizabeth to choose the luckiest and most balmy date for her coronation:

But not to tell of good or evil luck...
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality,
Or say with Princes if it shall go well.
By oft predict that I in heaven find...
(Sonnet 14, 3-4; 7-8)

On the contrary, by "astronomy" he was referring to that revolutionary science in 16th century England that

was being studied in secret, notably by the group (later called the School of Night) whose members included Walter Raleigh, Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, the mathematician Thomas Harriot and de Vere himself. Oxford had studied astronomy from boyhood in the 1550s with his tutor Thomas Smith, and in the 1560s with John Dee. The latter was not only the Queen's astrologer, but also a serious mathematician and geographer; because of the book *De Revolutionibus* (1543) by Polish mathematician-astronomer Nicholas Copernicus, these English scholars understood that a great change of paradigm was underway. The perception of the universe was in the process of drastic change, but also undergoing upheaval was the social-religious-political order itself, which even Hamlet was reluctant to mention aloud:

> There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
> (1.5, 169-170)

Such free-thinking men were moving from the old Ptolemaic model of the earth at the center of the universe to the revolutionary Copernican model, by which the Sun is at rest, or motionless, near the center of the Universe, and the Earth, spinning on its axis once daily, revolves annually around the Sun, as Hamlet writes to Ophelia:

> Doubt thou the stars are fire,
> Doubt that the sun doth move,
> Doubt truth to be a liar,
> But never doubt I love –
> (II.2.116-119)

When Oxford was 23 in 1573, the English mathematician and astronomer Thomas Digges (1546-'95) published a treatise on a supernova, or exploding star, seen in the sky the year before. In this work dedicated to Lord Burghley, Oxford's father-in-law, Digges includes warm praise for the Copernican hypothesis. Burghley and spymaster Francis Walsingham, who made it their business to develop intelligence in defense of the realm, were keenly interested in a new-fangled device called a "perspective" glass or telescope, which enabled astronomers to see farther into space. In fact, such new devices would help to quickly spot the warships of the Spanish Armada upon their arrival, playing a significant role in England's victory in 1588.

In 1582, when Watson dedicated his volume *Hekatompathia* to Oxford, thanking him for his help editing the manuscript and getting it into print, his sequence of 100 consecutively numbered "passions" or sonnets contained the first known description of the Milky Way as a collection of discrete stars rather than a single mass. Watson was preceding Galileo's published discovery in 1610 by nearly 30 years.

In the same year, Elizabeth sent Oxford's brother-in-law, Lord Willoughby, on a mission to the Danish court. During that extended visit, Willoughby met with Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, who, in 1572, had made precise observations of the inexplicably brilliant star that became known as "Tycho's Supernova"—a celestial phenomenon which traditionally-trained scientists could not explain. The playwright Shakespeare, however, would describe it in the night sky over Denmark:

> Last night of all,
> When yon same star that's westward from the pole
> Had made his course to illume that part of heaven
> Where it now burns...
> Bernardo, *Hamlet* (I.1. 35-38)

"Tycho's Supernova" confirmed the presence of a growing scientific understanding of the dynamic universe, as opposed to the prevailing Ptolemaic system, which posited that all heavenly bodies were unchanging and firmly fixed in place.

In June of 1583 the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno arrived in England and delivered lectures at Oxford University, contradicting the university's continuing dogma that every object in the universe orbited a centrally positioned earth. The free-thinking Bruno preached in favor of the Copernican solar system and proposed that the sun was just another star moving in space. Inevitably, the university academics rebuked him.

"Oxford University and Giordano Bruno were celestial bodies in opposition," de Vere biographer Mark Anderson notes:

> The university preached the ancient geocentric theories of Aristotle and Ptolemy. Every object in the heavens, it was said, orbited the earth, and the earth occupied the center of the universe. Bruno advanced the heresies that "the stars, contrary to fixed church doctrine, are free-floating objects in a fluid celestial firmament; that the universe is infinite, leaving no room for a physical heaven or hell; and that elements in the universe [called 'monads'] contain a divine spark at the root of life itself. Even the dust from which we are made contains this spark. (Anderson, 196)

If circumstances lead me, I will find
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
Within the center.
Polonius in *Hamlet* (II.2, 157-159)

Oxford would be launching into *Hamlet* in the late 1570s or early 1580s, just when discussions of the new ideas about the heavens were accelerating in England. The prince is a student at the University of Wittenberg in Germany, a major center for Copernican theory, a place Bruno went on to teach, a university where he could freely voice his bold ideas. In 1593, however, Bruno was imprisoned, and in 1600 the Roman Inquisition burned him at the stake for heresy.

According to Peter Usher, Professor Emeritus of Astronomy and Astrophysics at Pennsylvania State University, *Hamlet* is:

> an allegorical description of the competition between two cosmological models. On one side is the heliocentric universe of Copernicus being taught at Wittenberg and personified by Hamlet; on the other is the old geocentric order, personified by Claudius, so named for the ancient astronomer Claudius Ptolemy. (Usher, *Prener Review*: pp. 157-158)

Claudius:
How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Hamlet:
Not so, my lord. I am too much in the Sun.
(I.2. 66-67)

Hamlet deserves by blood to be king, the royal sun at the center. According to the new astronomy of Copernicus and the sun-centered universe of Digges, the prince belongs on the throne at the center of the realm. As such, he is dangerous to the stability of the old hierarchy and, therefore, poses a direct threat to Claudius and Gertrude.

Horatio:
This bodes some strange eruption to our state.
(I.1. 69)

Hamlet:
The time is out of joint. O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!
(I.5.191-192)

Within the cosmological allegory, the play is full of allusions to this struggle between the old and new structures. "The idea of a rotating and revolving earth was counter-intuitive to most people and contrary to established religious and scientific doctrine," Peter Usher writes. When Claudius and Gertrude express their desire that Hamlet not return to Wittenberg, they do so by saying that such a course is "most retrograde to our desire"—an astronomical term for contrary motion, that is, the prince's motion away from them and toward the Copernican cosmology as taught at Wittenberg—the same place where Martin Luther had initiated the Protestant Reformation that was also disrupting the traditional order in England. (Usher, *Prener Review*: pp. 157-158)

Scientists have observed that Shakespeare's record of astronomical knowledge, and his references to major celestial events, ceases by mid-1604, the year of Oxford's death. Will of Stratford, however, would live until 1616 --long enough, if he were really "Shakespeare," to continue to record momentous events such as the discovery of sunspots and of Jupiter's moons, or other significant celestial phenomena and developments in astronomical science. But the plays of Shakespeare say nothing about any of the astronomical observations occurring between 1604 and 1616.

Music and Musical Knowledge

Music is pervasive in Shakespeare's works. According to British Museum scholar scholar W. Barclay Squire in his study *Shakespeare's England*, some 170 passages include the words "music" or "musical" or "musician." (p. 22).

Listen to Lorenzo from *Merchant of Venice* on the subject:

> How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
> Here will we sit and let the sounds of music creep
> in our ears.
> Soft stillness and the night become the touches
> of sweet harmony.
> Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
> Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold!
> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still choiring to the young-eyed cherubins.
> Such harmony is in immortal souls
> (V.1. 54-63)

Shakespeare also uses the word "sing" in various forms no less than 247 times. And, again according to Squire, some 40 passages deal with musical instruments. He includes or alludes to the texts of well over a hundred songs. In addition to the numerous stage directions for music and sound effects, his dramatic and poetical work

is permeated with specific references to more than 300 musical terms.

Again, Lorenzo in *Merchant*:

> The man that hath no music in himself
> Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils:
> The motions of his spirit are dull as night
> And his affections dark as Erebus.
> Let no such man be trusted.
> Mark the music!
> (V.1. 83-88)

De Vere was associated with music from his teenage years at Cambridge and Oxford, long before he gained the highest favor of Queen Elizabeth, becoming a favorite dance partner and apparently performing for her on both the lute and the virginals. Early on he was associated with Richard Edwards, Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, who is credited with compiling *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576), which includes at least eight of Oxford's early poems that actually appear to be song lyrics.

He also maintained a company of adult actors and one of choir boys, who sang as well as performed stage works. Documents from the 1580s indicate he patronized a traveling company known as The Earl of Oxford's Musicians. As well, Oxford was the patron of celebrated madrigalist John Farmer, de Vere was involved from about 1572 onward in musical activities at court with composer William Byrd, one of the greatest musicians England ever produced. It appears he was Byrd's patron as well. The Earl's own accomplishments in the field were also praised by professional musicians. (Ogburn, pp. 720, 750; Anderson: 65-66)

Shakespeare was "far in advance of his contemporaries" in terms of musical references, says Squire, although his education in that field, "wherever it was acquired," had been "strictly on the lines of the polyphonic school a teaching that all parts of a composition must fit equally into the whole, as expressed by the tragic king in *Richard II*:

> **Richard:**
> Music, do I hear?
> Ha, ha! Keep time. How sour sweet music is
> When time is broke and no proportion kept!
> (V.5. 41-43)

Such a passage "cannot be understood without some knowledge of the elaborate system of proportions inherited by Elizabethan composers from the earlier English school," Squire observes. It is "remarkable that the musical terms of the plays should be so consistently those of the old school of polyphony." Why is that remarkable? Because, during the last half of the 1590s, a new style of musical arrangement replaced the old one, yet the great dramatist was apparently unaware of it. "This change dates from about the year 1597," Squire writes, unable to conceal his bafflement, "yet in all the plays which Shakespeare produced from then [on], no allusion to the 'new music' can be discovered." (Squire, p. 16)

This would be baffling indeed if the author had been Will Shakspere of Stratford, who, within the traditional time frame, still had the best part of his career in front of him. In that case, he surely would have incorporated the "new school" of music into his plays. But in the Oxfordian view, de Vere had finished writing the early versions of virtually all his plays by 1589, which easily explains why "Shakespeare" failed to embrace a musical revolution that began almost a decade later. And the evidence shows exactly that, although not in the way that Stratfordian history would have it.

For example, one can look at the case of William Byrd who was past 50 when he moved from London in about 1593 to the small town of Stondon Massey, Essex, where he lived the rest of his life. According to the traditional biography, The Stratford man was just then getting started, so on that basis alone he and the great composer would never have met each other. De Vere, on the other hand, was in his early twenties and enjoying royal favor in 1572 when Byrd was named a gentleman of the Chapel Royal and began to work for Queen Elizabeth as organist, singer, and composer.

The evidence suggests "an association between Byrd and Oxford of at least ten years," states musician Sally Mosher, who adds that they "were both at the court of Elizabeth I from about 1572 on .... Both were involved in activities that provided music for the court; and during this period, Oxford saved Byrd from possible bankruptcy by selling a certain property to Byrd's brother."

The Chapel Royal itself consisted of two dozen male singers and organists who would provide church music for the royal household. They usually remained with the Queen as part of her entourage, which often included Oxford himself, as she traveled from palace to palace. "The likelihood is strong," Mosher writes, "that both Oxford and the Queen would have played these pieces [on lute and virginal keyboard] by the composer whom both had patronized." One of Byrd's compositions, *The Earl of Oxford's March*, "has been preserved in at least four versions," she reports, and "it was clearly well-known during the period."

As a ranking Earl, Oxford had his own "tucket" or musical signature announcing his arrival at certain events.

The tune at the heart of *The March* "has all the earmarks of such a tucket," Mosher suggests, adding, Byrd worked Oxford's tucket into a musical setting that called up visions of battle." Indeed, she says,

> The Shakespeare plays are full of tuckets...In *Othello*, when Iago hears 'Othello's trumpets,' it means that he recognizes Othello by his tucket. The brief and open-ended tune that introduces *Oxford's March* has all the earmarks of this kind of semi-military identification . . . Oxford, a veteran of real military action by the time he and Byrd met, would have known the military calls in use and could have supplied them to Byrd.
> (Mosher, pp. 43-52)

Byrd also composed music for Oxford's poem "If Women Could be Fair," included in a 1588 collection of Byrd's vocal works. Still another example of their collaboration involves "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is," a poem attributed to Oxford and published in Byrd's *Psalms, Sonnets, and Songs of Sadness and Piety* (1588).

"This poem is one of the true masterpieces of the Elizabethan era," *Harper's Magazine* notes, adding it is "understandable on many levels: as a sanctuary of conscience, as a statement of Calvinist precepts, as a dissertation on contentment, as a praise of the powers of imagination and invention. William Byrd's setting of the Oxford poem is one of the finest English art songs of the Elizabethan era."

As well, John Farmer dedicated his most important work, *The First Set of English Madrigals* (1599), to "my very good Lord and Master, Edward Devere Earle of Oxenford," praising his "judgment in Musicke" and declaring that "using this science as a recreation, your Lordship have overgone most of them that make it a profession."

This is high praise indeed for Oxford, to whom Farmer had also dedicated his previous work, *Plainsong Diverse & Sundry* (1591), telling the Earl he presented it to him because he knew "your Lordship's great affection to this noble science."

"Nothing is more astonishing in the whole history of music than the story of the English school of madrigal composers," writes Michael Delahoyde, Professor of English at Washington State University, noting that the adapter of the earlier *The First Set of Italian Madrigals Englished*, (1590) was Thomas Watson, who had dedicated *Hekatompathia, or the Passionate Century of Love* (1582) to de Vere, his patron. Included in that 1590 songbook are "two excellent Madrigals of Master William Byrd, composed after the Italian vaine, at the request of the sayd Thomas Watson."

One sees here that Oxford is clearly connected both personally and professionally to Farmer, Byrd and Watson as well as to his own company of musicians. And many of his youthful poems also seem to be lyrics for songs. Oxford may well have also been a driving force behind the rise of the English Madrigal School.

Heraldry

Two books devoted entirely to Shakespeare's knowledge and treatment of heraldry are *The Heraldry of Shakespeare: A Commentary with Annotations* (1930) by Guy Cadogan Rothery and *Shakespeare's Heraldry* (1950) by Charles Wilfred Scott-Giles. Taken together, they show that the Bard knew a great deal about coats of arms, blazons, charges, fields, escutcheons (shields), crests, badges, hatchments (panels), and gules (red markings or tinctures). Indeed, his considerable knowledge about heraldry is an integral part of his thought process.

He uses heraldic terms in spontaneous, natural ways, often metaphorically, making his descriptions more vivid while stirring and enriching our emotions. Take, for example, the word badge, which in heraldry is an emblem indicating allegiance to some family or property. Shakespeare uses it literally, of course, but also metaphorically: Falstaff in *2 Henry IV* speaks of "the badge of pusillanimity and cowardice" (4.3.103-104); King Ferdinand in *Love's Labour's Lost* cries out, "Black is the badge of hell" (4.3.250); Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* talks about "bearing the badge of faith" (III.2.127); Tamora in *Titus Andronicus* declares, "Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge" (1.1.122); and in Sonnet 44 the poet refers to "heavy tears, badges of either's woe." Surely this author was:

> a proud nobleman for whom hereditary titles, shields and symbols were everyday aspects of his environment. Conceived out of the fullest heat and pulse of European feudalism -- personifying in unparallel'd ways the medieval aristocracy, its towering spirit of ruthless and gigantic caste, with its own peculiar air and arrogance (no mere imitation) -- only one of the 'wolfish earls' so plenteous in the plays themselves, or some born descendant and knower, might seem to be the true author of those amazing works -- works in some respects greater than anything else in recorded literature. (Whitman: "November Boughs")

From early boyhood, de Vere had been steeped in the history of his line which dated dating back 500 years to William the Conqueror. The heraldry of his ancestors, as

well as that of other noble families, became part of his vocabulary.

Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* extends the metaphor of two bodies sharing the same heart by presenting the image of a husband and wife's impaled arms: "So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart; two of the first, like coats in heraldry, due but to one and crowned with one crest" (3.2).

Another example of "Shakespeare" thinking and writing in heraldic terms occurs in the opening scene of *Henry VI, Pt.1* at the funeral of Henry V at Westminster Abbey. A messenger warns the English against taking recent victories for granted, describing setbacks in France as the "cropping" or cutting out of the French quarters in the royal arms of England: "Awake, awake, English nobility! Let not sloth dim your honors new-begot: cropped are the flower-deluces in your arms! Of England's coat one half is cut away!" (I.1. 78-81)

England's coat of arms presented flower-de-luces or fleur-de-lis, the emblem of French royalty, quartered with Britain's symbolic lions. Cropping the two French quarters would cut away half the English arms—a vivid description of England's losses in France.

"The Vere arms changed repeatedly over many generations," researcher Robert Brazil notes, adding that details of Oxford's arms had "numerous documented precedents" consisting not only of drawings but also the "blazonry" or descriptions of shields in precise heraldic language, using only words. "Through the science of blazon, infinitely complex visual material is described in such a precise way that one can accurately reproduce full color arms with dozens of complex coats, based on the words of the blazon alone." (Brazil, pp. 11, 50)

At his family's estate, Castle Hedingham in Essex, the young earl would obviously have studied the seals and tombs of his ancestors. He, after all, was a child of the waning feudal aristocracy who would inherit the title of Lord Great Chamberlain of England. To assert the rights and rankings of his Vere identity, he would need exact knowledge of his family's five centuries of history to "blazon" or describe it in words. "Shakespeare" uses "blazon" just as we might expect it to be employed by someone of de Vere's background. Mistress Quickly, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, employs the word in a burst of heraldic imagery:

> About, about; search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out ... Each fair installment, coat, and several crest, with loyal blazon, evermore be blest!"
> (V.5, 54-55; 62-63)

From the same pen comes "blazon" in a variety of metaphorical contexts:

- I'faith, lady, I think your blazon to be true.
  Much Ado About Nothing (II.1. 279)

- Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit do give thee five-fold blazon.
  Twelfth Night (I.5. 281-282)

- But this eternal blazon must not be to ears of flesh and blood.
  Hamlet (I..5. 21-22)

In Sonnet 106, the poet uses "blazon" in the context of accounts of medieval chivalry, writing of "beauty making beautiful old rhyme, / In praise of Ladies dead and lovely Knights," followed by: "Then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best, / Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow, / I see their antique Pen would have expressed/ Even such a beauty as you master now." (106. Lines 3-8)

In *Hamlet*, the prince tells the players that a speech he "chiefly loved" was the one that Virgil's Aeneas delivers to Dido, Queen of Carthage, about the fall of Troy. Before the first player can begin to recite it, however, Hamlet delivers 13 lines from memory -- describing how Pyrrhus, son of the Greek hero Achilles, had black arms while hiding inside the Trojan horse, but then his arms became drenched in the red blood of whole families that were slaughtered.

The story would have had even greater impact upon aristocratic members of the audience who knew the bloody tale was being told in heraldic terms, each one italicized here:

> The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose *sable* arms,
> Black as his purpose, did the night resemble
> When he lay couched in the ominous horse,
> Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared
> With *heraldry* more dismal. Head to foot
> Now is he total *gules*, horridly *tricked*.
> (*Hamlet* II, 2. 392-397)

Even *Lucrece* (1594), the second publication signed by "Shakespeare," is filled with heraldic imagery:

> But beauty, in that white entitled
> From Venus' doves, doth challenge that fair field...
> This heraldry in Lucrece's face was seen...
> (lines 57-58; 64)

Robert Brazil in essays in *The Oxfordian*, (1999, pp.

117-37) and *Shakespeare Matters*, (spring 2006, pp. 15-25) notes that previous Earls of Oxford had employed a special greyhound as a heraldic symbol, but that Edward de Vere had stopped using it. That said, in the opening scene of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which begins and ends with humorous dialogue involving heraldry, there is a line (unrelated to anything else) about a "fallow" greyhound, one that is no longer used:

Page:
I am glad to see you, good Master Slender.

Slender:
How does your fallow greyhound, sir?
(1.1.81-82)

In this "throwaway" exchange, is de Vere pointing to his own heraldic history?

Gardens and Gardening

> One occupation, one point of view, above all others, is naturally his, that of a gardener: watching, preserving, tending, and caring for growing things, especially flowers and fruit. All through his plays he thinks most easily and readily of human life and action in the terms of a gardener ... it is ever present in Shakespeare's thought and imagination, so that nearly all his characters share in it. (Spurgeon, p. 86)

When de Vere's father died, the 12-year old Edward became a ward of Queen Elizabeth and for the next nine years he lived at the London home of William Cecil. "One of the chief features of Cecil House was its garden," the scholar B.M. Ward wrote in 1928. "The grounds in which the house stood must have covered many acres, and were more extensive than those of any of the other private homes in Westminster. John Gerard would become Sir William Cecil's gardener for 20 years (1578-1597); and Sir William himself evidently took a great pride in his garden.... Cecil imbued his sons and the royal wards under his charge with his own keenness in horticulture." (Ward, p. 12)

Referring to Cecil's country seat of Theobalds, Charlton Ogburn writes that gardens "were laid out on three sides of the mansion by the same John Gerard ... (author of *The Herball, or General Historie of Plants*, 1597). Trees and shrubs seen rarely if at all in Britain were imported from abroad. The gardens were widely known in Europe." (481).

In fact, gardening runs all through Shakespeare's language. And Oxford's.

O, what pity is it
That he [the King] had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land
As we this garden! We at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees,
Lest, being over-proud in sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself:
Had he done so to great and growing men,
They might have lived to bear and he to taste
Their fruits of duty: superfluous branches
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live:
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.
(*Richard II* , II.4. 36-66)

The gardener sows the seeds, whereof flowers do grow,
And others yet do gather them that took less pain I know.
So I the pleasant grape have pulled from the vine,
And yet I languish in great thirst, while others drink the wine.
(Oxford, *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, 1576)

O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee....

When I have plucked the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again,
It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree.
(*Othello*, IV.2 67-69; V.2. 13-15)

Oxford wrote a prefatory letter (preface) to *Cardanus' Comfort* when it was translated into English by Thomas Bedingfield and published in 1573. In it he shows his deep connection to growing and gardening once again:

> What doth avail the tree unless it yield fruit unto another? What doth avail the rose unless another took pleasure in the smell? Why should this tree be accounted better than that tree, but for the goodness of his fruit? Why should this vine be better than that vine, unless it brought forth a better grape than the other? Why should this rose be better esteemed than that rose, unless in pleasantness of smell it far surpassed the other rose? And so it is in all other things as well as in man.

The labouring man that tills the fertile soil
And reaps the harvest fruit, hath not indeed
The gain but pain, and if for all his toil
He gets the straw, the Lord will have the seed.
The manchet fine falls not unto his share,
On coarsest cheat, his hungry stomach feeds.
The landlord doth possess the finest fare,
He pulls the flowers, the other plucks but weeds.

Clearly, Oxford was uniquely positioned to assume the point of view of the gardener, as well as to acquire the love and knowledge of seeds, plants, flowers and trees exhibited in the works of Shakespeare.

A Conclusion

Based on the matching interests and shared points of view exhibited by both the author William Shakespeare and Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, it seems more than possible – indeed likely -- that they were one and the same person, William Shakespeare becoming Oxford's pen name. Yes, this evidence is circumstantial to be sure, but circumstantial evidence itself is often used as proof even in courts of law.

It was certainly something J.T. Looney acknowledged at the outset of his seminal volume, *'Shakespeare' Identified in Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford*. As he put it:

> What then is the usual common-sense method of searching for an unknown man who has performed some particular piece of work? It is simply to examine closely the work itself, to draw from the examination as definite a conception as possible of the man who did it, and then to go and look for a man who answers to the supposed description....
>
> We rely in such cases very largely upon what is called circumstantial evidence; mistakenly supposed by some to be evidence of an inferior order, but in practice the most reliable form of proof we have. Such evidence may at first be of the most shadowy description; but as we proceed in the work of gathering together facts and reducing them to order, as we hazard our guesses and weigh probabilities, as we subject our theories to all available tests, we find that the case at last either breaks down or becomes confirmed by such an accumulation of support that doubt is no longer possible.
>
> The predominating element in what we call circumstantial evidence is that of coincidences. A few coincidences we may treat as simply interesting; a number of coincidences we regard as remarkable; a vast accumulation of extraordinary coincidences we accept as conclusive proof. And when the case has reached this stage, we look upon the matter as finally settled... (Looney; Warren edition, p. 80)

More than a century after Looney's identification of Oxford, the question of whether Edward de Vere is the true author of the Shakespearean works remains far from settled in the court of public opinion. A major reason, I suggest, is that the accumulated evidence, along with the many "coincidental" similarities between de Vere and "Shakespeare," have yet to be examined seriously by traditional scholars who remain stubbornly committed to the Stratfordian story. That work remains for new generations.

BIOGRAPHY

Hank Whittemore is an independent scholar and an award-winning author based in New York with more than a dozen nonfiction books and one novel to his credit. These include *The Monument* (2005, Meadow Geese Press), a major study of the Shakespearean sonnets, for which he received the Excellence in Scholarship Award from the Shakespeare Authorship Studies Centre at Concordia University in Portland. Oregon, and *100 Reasons Shake-speare was the Earl of Oxford* (2016, Forever Press).

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