

Part I

Authorship



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To many members of the public at large, the question of authorship is the most fascinating problem in the study of Shakespeare, but to members of the Anglo-American academy “the mystery” of who wrote the plays attributed to William Shakespeare has not seemed very compelling. For the most part, scholars and critics accept the facts that history has provided: they believe the documentary evidence that a glover’s son from a market town in Warwickshire moved to London and that he there became an actor, a playwright, and a theatrical shareholder. They further accept that after his death his colleagues assembled as many of his surviving theatrical scripts as they could gather and published them as *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, the book we know as the First Folio. Consequently, most professional Shakespeareans and students have devoted themselves to study of the work, not its creator – to matters of text, language, structure, theme, historical context, political uses, conditions of production, theatrical afterlives, and any number of other topics having little to do with the biography of the playwright. This is not to say that biography is of no interest to scholars. Lives of Shakespeare have been appearing regularly over the past three centuries – a few even before that – and towards the very end of the period covered in this book several new biographies appeared, such as Park Honan’s *Shakespeare: A Life* (1998), Irving Leigh Matus’s *Shakespeare, in Fact* (1994), and others by Jonathan Bate, Dennis Kay, Garry O’Connor, Ian Wilson, and Anthony Holden, to name only the most prominent. But Shakespeare scholarship has taken another approach to the problem of authorship.

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Rather than fret about the identity of the person who wrote the plays, Shakespeare critics have elected instead to interrogate the concept of authorship itself, attempting to understand the term in a more sophisticated sense than the usual. To some extent this mode of thinking is an effort at correction, a reaction to the romantic glorification of the solitary artist and an attempt to debunk the myth of the genius transcending his contemporaries and his culture. This new sense of authorship positions the artist historically, studying the writer in a network of political, commercial, literary, religious, and other cultural affiliations. In pursuing such an approach, critics of Shakespeare tread the path of postmodern criticism in general: following Foucault and other theorists, they have challenged conventional notions of textual authority, modifying the contribution of the “author” so as to disperse responsibility into the culture at large. A number of influential articles and book chapters regarding the playwright in this light might have been included under the rubric of authorship, but since such a revised understanding of the author is one of the foundations of new historicism and cultural materialism and has influenced other critical modes as well, the reader is referred to those sections for examples of such thinking.

The work of one biographer cannot be omitted, however. Samuel Schoenbaum became the foremost authority on Shakespeare’s life in the second half of the twentieth century, and he did so through a rare combination of scholarly diligence, brilliant deduction, and a witty narrative style. He is the author of *Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*, the book that, while not as ambitious or detailed as he wanted to make it, has become the standard biography. The volume from which the selection below is taken is the magisterial *Shakespeare’s Lives*, a wide-ranging, thorough survey of Shakespeare’s biographers and biographies. When it was published in 1970, it made an immediate splash: Stanley Wells declared in a review that “with this book Dr. Schoenbaum joins the ranks of the heroes of Shakespeare scholarship.”¹ In introducing his work, Schoenbaum reports that he had imagined “a little book narrating the quest for knowledge of Shakespeare the man,”² but what he produced instead was a massive, detailed history of Shakespearean biography, and of much more as well.

It occurred to me that I must try to find out how the various documents – the marriage-license bond, the Belott-Mountjoy deposition, the will – came to light. The formal Lives, from Rowe to Rowse, would of course occupy much of my space, but what of the accretions of biographical notes in eighteenth-century editions, the bits and pieces of information in newspapers, magazines, and miscellanies, the prefaces to innumerable popular collections, the encyclopaedia articles from which ordinary readers formed their impression of the National Poet? These, surely, could not be ignored. From the nineteenth century onwards, critics hunted for biographical revelations in the works, especially the Sonnets: I would have to confront this daunting mass of material. The representations of Shakespeare are in their own way biographical documents; belief in the various icons, all but two doubtful or spurious, would furnish curious evidence of human credulity deserving a place in my pages. The invention of biographical data by means of forged papers would also comprise part – a fascinating part – of the story. And then one must reckon with the amateurs, the eccentrics, the cranks with theories. Of these the worst would be the heretics, alert to conspiracies, who saw a sinister plot to take away the plays from their true progenitor, Bacon or Marlowe or some Earl or other, and bestow them instead on the Stratford boor. I did not relish this aspect of my assignment,

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although I knew that Mark Twain and Freud rubbed shoulders with less celebrated schismatics.³

The excerpt I have chosen to include here concerns the claim of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, as represented by his early twentieth-century proponent, J. Thomas Looney. In the last decade of the twentieth century members of the Oxfordian camp gathered strength and made a fresh assault on the Shakespearean citadel, hoping finally to unseat the man from Stratford and install de Vere in his place. Thus Schoenbaum's pages are timely. Although the initial section of this volume is the briefest, containing only one item, that item is choice.

Notes

- 1 *Notes and Queries*, n.s., 19 (April 1977), pp. 142–3.
- 2 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, revd. edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. vii.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. vii–viii.

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The month that saw an armistice bring to an end the Great War witnessed another event hardly less momentous, at least for members of the Shakespeare Fellowship. In November 1918 J. Thomas Looney, a Gateshead schoolmaster, deposited with the Librarian of the British Museum a sealed envelope containing an announcement of his discovery that the plays and poems of Shakespeare issued from the pen of Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. Before taking this unusual step the schoolmaster had submitted his work, the result of years of patient investigation, to a publisher; but the latter rejected it when Looney refused to adopt a *nom de plume* to forestall the hilarity of reviewers. Now, covetous of priority, he resorted to the device of the sealed letter with its overtones of mysterious significance so congenial to the anti-Stratfordian mentality.

The book, *'Shakespeare' Identified*, appeared in 1920, and initiated the Oxford movement, which has given the Baconians a run for their madness. In his introduction Looney disclaims an expert's knowledge of literature (when he began he had read only Shakespeare, Spenser, and Sidney among the Elizabethans), nor does he pride himself on a critic's soundness of literary judgement. Instead he makes a virtue of amateurism. 'This is probably why the problem has not been solved before now,' Looney asserts. 'It has been left mainly in the hands of literary men.'¹ For years, however, he had been putting his young charges through their paces with *The Merchant of Venice*, prolonged intimacy with which persuaded Looney that the author knew Italy at first hand, and – more important – had an aristocrat's indifference to business methods and an aristocrat's casual regard for material possessions. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that snobbery led Looney, a gentle retiring soul, to seek a Shakespeare with blue blood in his veins. His own family, the pedagogue boasted, was descended from the Earl of Derby, once kings of the Isle of Man, whence came Looney's immediate forebears. He expresses the heretic's customary disdain for the 'coarse and illiterate circumstances'

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of Shakespeare's early life, and in an unconsciously revealing passage implies that a great writer must have lords and ladies in coaches driving up to his door.²

'My preparation for the work lay', Looney reflected in old age, '... in a life spent in facing definite problems, attempting the solution by the methods of science, and accepting the necessary logical conclusions, however unpalatable & inconvenient these might prove.'³ His impartial science, derived from the Positivism of Comte, led Looney to seek nine 'general features' in the author of Shakespeare's works:

- 1 A matured man of recognized genius.
- 2 Apparently eccentric and mysterious.
- 3 Of intense sensibility – a man apart.
- 4 Unconventional.
- 5 Not adequately appreciated.
- 6 Of pronounced and known literary tastes.
- 7 An enthusiast in the world of drama.
- 8 A lyric poet of recognized talent.
- 9 Of superior education – classical – the habitual associate of educated people.⁴

To these Looney added nine 'special characteristics':

- 1 A man with Feudal connections.
- 2 A member of the higher aristocracy.
- 3 Connected with Lancastrian supporters.
- 4 An enthusiast for Italy.
- 5 A follower of sport (including falconry).
- 6 A lover of music.
- 7 Loose and improvident in money matters.
- 8 Doubtful and somewhat conflicting in his attitude to woman.
- 9 Of probable Catholic leanings, but touched with scepticism.⁵

Without the advantages of historical or literary training, Looney had now to find the candidate who met all the general and special requirements.

Plunging in, he selected *Venus and Adonis* and began to look for a poem with similar stanza and cadence in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, which alone constituted Looney's reference library of sixteenth-century verse. In 'Women', by Edward de Vere, he found the poem. He next had to learn something about the poet. After several false starts in history textbooks, Looney discovered with delight from the *DNB* that Oxford '*evinced a genuine taste in music and wrote verses of much lyric beauty*'; also that 'Puttenham and Meres reckon him *among the best for comedy* in his day; but though he was a patron of players *no specimens of his dramatic productions survive*.' (The italics in these misquoted passages are supplied by Looney.)

The de Veres traced their descent in an unbroken line from the Norman Conquest: higher aristocracy, there can be no question. Evidence of Lancastrian sympathies (Looney's third special criterion) may be found in the fact that the twelfth Earl lost his head in 1461 for loyalty to the Red Rose. Sidney Lee's *DNB* sketch describes Oxford as having had a thorough grounding in Latin and French, great prowess at the tilt, and

an ambition for foreign travel gratified by a journey to Italy in 1575. As a youth, however, he also manifested ‘a waywardness of temper which led him into every form of extravagance, and into violent quarrels with other members of his guardian’s household’. At the age of seventeen he fatally wounded an under-cook at Cecil House. Report held that he threatened the ruin of his first wife in order to avenge himself on the father-in-law who had incurred his displeasure. There were other indications of a volatile temper: Oxford grossly insulted Sidney on the tennis court at Whitehall – addressing him as a ‘puppy’, according to Sir Fulke Greville (Sidney’s biographer) – and afterwards plotted his assassination; in 1586 he quarrelled with Thomas Knyvet, duelled with him, and entered into a subsequent vendetta. Irresponsible, he hired lodgings and left others, of humbler station, to foot the bill. The Earl’s improvidence brought him into financial straits from which he tried to extricate himself by selling his ancestral estates at perversely low prices. Lee does not dwell on the Earl’s seduction of one of the Queen’s Maids of Honour, nor does he report Aubrey’s presumably apocryphal anecdote: ‘This Earl of Oxford, making of his low obeisance to Queen Elizabeth, happened to let a fart, at which he was so ashamed that he went to travel, 7 years.’⁶ In any event, Looney does not include flatulence as another of his hero’s special attributes. Nor does he list cruelty, perversity, and profligacy as features of the author evident from a perusal of his work.

Looney properly relishes the contemporary evidence that Oxford wrote plays (after all it cannot be demonstrated that Bacon or most of the other chief claimants performed this necessary activity), and he attempts to bolster the testimony of Puttenham and Meres by the familiar tactic of converting Shakespeare’s dramas into *pièces à clef*. Indeed the Earl can scarcely restrain himself from putting in appearances everywhere in the canon. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost* he is Berowne mocking Holofernes – Gabriel Harvey, the ‘kissing traitor’ who had circulated satirical verses about Oxford behind his back. Elizabeth’s royal ward is Bertram in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, the jealous husband is Othello, the Patron of Oxford’s boys is the master of the revels at Elsinore. It follows that the rest of the dramatis personae must have historical identities; and so Laertes is Thomas Cecil; Polonius, Burleigh (to reappear in Venice as Brabantio); Ophelia, Lady Oxford (reincarnated after drowning only to be strangled as Desdemona); Horatio, the Earl’s cousin Sir Horace de Vere – principally, it would seem, because of the partial congruence of Christian names. Such a view of drama implies that plays are secondarily intended for theatrical representation, being pre-eminently literary artifacts. To this reversal of priorities Looney freely subscribes: ‘... if we must choose between the theory of their being literature converted into plays, or plays converted into literature, on a review of the work no competent judge would hesitate to pronounce in favour of the latter supposition.’⁷ Looney, one suspects, has not polled all the competent judges.

His subjective ruminations do little to strengthen an hypothesis which has certain inherent limitations. The attestation of Puttenham and Meres to Oxford’s playwriting activities cuts two ways. Meres after all lists Shakespeare separately in *Palladis Tamia* and names twelve plays, as well as *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and the Sonnets: clearly he did not believe that the Earl wrote *The Comedy of Errors*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the rest. And if people knew that Oxford graced the stage with plays, why had he need of employing Shakespeare as a mask? The only motive that Looney can

suggest is self-effacement. ‘We may, if we wish,’ he adds, ‘question the sufficiency or reasonableness of the motive. That, however, is his business, not ours.’⁸ But of course the man who sets out to convince the public of the validity of an eccentric theory *must* make the motivation his business. These considerations, however, pale into triviality alongside the principal drawback of the entire argument: Oxford, born in 1550, died in 1604. Thus he was forty-three when he offered the first heir of his invention to Southampton, and was buried before *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *Winter’s Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Henry VIII* appeared on the stage.

To get round this perplexity Looney must urge that the authorities have misdated *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, and that Oxford at the time of his death left unfinished manuscripts which inferior dramatists then completed. ‘The people who were “finishing off” these later plays took straightforward prose, either from the works of others, or from rough notes collected by “Shakespeare” in preparing his dramas, and chopped it up, along with a little dressing, to make it look in print something like blank verse.’⁹ Such a considered judgement emanates naturally from a sensibility to which the music of Shakespeare’s final period is ragtime. *The Tempest* presents Looney with his greatest challenge, for topical references and other internal considerations lead him to accept the late date to which the commentators assign it. So he must deny it altogether to his candidate – at the same time admitting that ‘but for the theory that Edward de Vere was the writer of Shakespeare’s plays we might never have been led to suspect the authenticity of “The Tempest”’.¹⁰ The task of denigration proceeds apace. Prospero’s speech on the cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces becomes ‘simple cosmic philosophy, and, as such, it is the most dreary negativism that was ever put into high-sounding words.’¹¹ (The disciple of Comte insists upon the positivism of his idol.) Elsewhere in the play Looney finds stolen thunder, muddled metaphysics, witlessness, and coarse fun. Above all, the verse is bad, which by Looney’s standard merely means that it has irregular scansion syllables. This evaluation of *The Tempest*, needless to say, has met with a cool reception – even from fellow Oxfordians. Looney had at the outset confessed his lack of critical equipment; in the end, having constructed his elaborately rationalized fantasy, he becomes a casualty of that handicap.

Despite its intellectual *naïveté* – perhaps because of it – ‘*Shakespeare Identified*’ impressed the impressionable. In his introduction to the 1948 reprint (which drew some respectful journalistic notices) the maritime novelist William McFee compared the Looney book, for revolutionary significance, with *The Origin of Species*. He also described the Gateshead pedagogue as a sleuth ‘methodically and relentlessly closing in on the author, not of a crime, but of a mystery’. The mantle of Conan Doyle sits more comfortably on Looney than that of Darwin; Galsworthy pronounced ‘*Shakespeare Identified*’ ‘the best detective story’ which ever came his way. Herein must lie much of the fundamental appeal of the work and of anti-Stratfordian demonstrations generally. Sober literary history is metamorphosed into a game of detection, in much the same manner as James Thurber’s American lady in the Lake Country transformed *Macbeth* into a Hercule Poirot thriller (‘“Oh Macduff did it all right,” said the murder specialist.’). To such a game the cultivated amateur can give his leisure hours in hopes of toppling the supreme literary idol and confounding the professionals. Little wonder that one heretic, Claud W. Sykes, casts his investigation as an exercise in

detection, with Sherlock Holmes tracking down the true perpetrator of the plays by means of Baker Street deduction!

Be that as it may, Looney founded a school. A tangible result of 'Shakespeare Identified' was the formation in 1922 of the Shakespeare Fellowship, a society hospitable to all heretics but chiefly devoted to perpetuating the claims of Oxford. *The Shakespeare Fellowship News-letter*, issued by the association, performed a service analogous to that of *Baconiana*. In addition to schoolmasters and attorneys the group attracted military and naval types, the novelist Marjorie Bowen, and Christmas Humphreys, QC, an authority on Buddhism. It appealed to the young at heart: Canon Gerald H. Rendall, sometime Gladstone Professor of Greek at University College, Liverpool, read Looney and, at the age of eighty, experienced a conversion. He proceeded to advance the cause with a series of volumes: *Shakespeare Sonnets and Edward De Vere* (1930), *Shakespeare: Handwriting and Spelling* (1931), *Personal Clues in Shakespeare Poems & Sonnets* (1934), and *Ben Jonson and the First Folio Edition of Shakespeare's Plays* (1939). So prodigious was the display of energy that one admirer was prompted to exclaim in 1944 that Canon Rendall 'represents one of the biological reasons why the Germans, despite all their sound and fury, will never overcome the British'. After the outbreak of the Second World War the continuity of the Fellowship's work was assured by the formation of an American branch presided over by Dr Louis P. Bénézet of Dartmouth College. This true believer's own contributions include the suggestion, made in *Shakespeare, Shakespeare and De Vere* (1937), that in the Sonnets the Earl addressed his illegitimate son, who acted in his father's company of players under the name of William Shakespeare.

The publications of the de Vere sect are too numerous for listing, much less evaluation, in these pages, but a few of the principal items may be mentioned. A member of the Fellowship, Captain Bernard Mordaunt Ward, produced in 1928 a massive biography from contemporary documents, *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, 1550-1604*, aimed at rehabilitating the nobleman's somewhat tarnished reputation. While not overtly concerned with the authorship debate, Ward gives tacit support to the theory (suggested by Lefranc) that Oxford and the Earl of Derby were in some way connected with the composition of Shakespeare's plays. Others too favoured the idea of mixed authorship, for example, Slater's *Seven Shakespeares*. In *Lord Oxford and the Shakespeare Group* (1952) Lieutenant-Colonel Montagu W. Douglas ingeniously proposed that the Queen charged the Earl with the control of a Propaganda Department for the issuance of patriotic pamphlets and plays, and that he satisfied this commission by putting together a syndicate which included Bacon, the Earl of Derby, Marlowe, Lyly, and Greene: a motley assortment by any standard. Still others sought to adjust the Shakespeare chronology to the facts of Shakespeare's life and thus get round the embarrassment of denying him *The Tempest*. Mrs Eva Turner Clark, in the 693 pages of *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays* (1931), arranges the works in a sequence beginning with *Henry V* and culminating with *King Lear* in 1590; for *The Tempest* she finds a snug niche half-way between. This novel arrangement is made possible by identifying Shakespeare's plays with the titles of lost Tudor interludes, and by correctly interpreting internal historical references which had escaped all other scholars. In *King Lear*, for example, the banishment of Kent parallels the banishment of Drake in 1589, while the play as a whole reflects Oxford's bitterness over 'the failure of the Queen to

back him up in his patriotic endeavour to support the throne and country against the factions that were, as he saw them, disintegrating forces in the government, if not actively seditious.¹² Into such tracts for the times do the plays dwindle in Oxfordian hands.

In a note appended to the last page of *'Shakespeare' Identified* Looney had admitted to a belief that the Grafton portrait of Shakespeare really depicts the Earl. The Shakespeare iconography fascinates the Oxfordians. In the pages of *Scientific American* for January 1940, Charles Wisner Barrell, one of the brethren, revealed that X-ray and infra-red photography had detected underneath the Ashbourne portrait the pigment of another painting representing de Vere. This discovery was greeted with hoots of delight by the Fellowship, but how it materially aids the cause (even if we accept the doubtful findings of a partisan) is not clear, for the Ashbourne picture, like the Grafton, has no standing as a genuine likeness of Shakespeare.

Among those who applauded Barrell were Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn in *This Star of England* (1952), the most monumental contribution ever made to the literature of heresy. As one would expect from a volume running to 1297 pages, all the familiar Oxfordian arguments appear, and also some new ones. The quality of the Ogburn reasoning may be illustrated by a single example. They reproduce Touchstone's interrogation of William in *As You Like It*, with certain words and clauses italicized: 'Art thou learned? ... all your writers do consent that ipse is he: now, you are not ipse, for I am he. ... He, sir, that must marry this woman. Therefore, you clown, abandon.' This straight-faced commentary follows:

*How can a man speak more plainly than this? Oxford – or William Shakespeare – tells Shaksper, another William, to abandon all pretensions to the plays and clear out, forthwith. 'You are not ipse, for I am he.' All the 'writers' – Jonson, Marston, Dekker, Peele, et al. – know this, 'do consent' to it. What other possible interpretation can be put upon these candid lines?*¹³

The aggrandizing tendencies of the heretic surface: Oxford must be credited not only with all of Shakespeare, but also with the apocryphal plays, Marlowe's *Edward II*, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, and Lyly's *Endymion* and other comedies. In such a context we learn without astonishment that the Earl of Southampton sprang from the loins of Oxford and the womb of Elizabeth, somehow legitimately mated; the Sonnets to the Fair Youth (pun: Vere Youth) therefore become a touching poetical testament of a father to his son. Without once referring to *This Star of England* the Ogburns – this time Dorothy and her son, Charlton Junior – warmed over their stew as *Shakespeare: The Man behind the Name* (1962), which has at least the merit of comparative brevity.

With *The Mysterious William Shakespeare: The Myth and the Reality* (New York, 1984) Charlton Ogburn goes once more unto the breach, to do battle for his own brand of Oxfordian reality, this time with a volume of almost 900 large pages – not the longest such exercise but very long indeed – which surely qualifies as one of the seven wonders of anti-Stratfordianism, although I would be hard pressed to name the other six. Most of the terrain Ogburn traverses will be familiar to initiates. He argues that de Vere is the Will Moxon of Thomas Nashe's *Strange News*; the same Will who partook of Rhenish wine and herrings with Nashe and Robert Greene a month before Greene's

death: this Will is to be identified with another Will, the celebrated – if supposititious – playwright of the English stage. Elizabeth’s grant of £1,000 a year to Oxford facilitated the writing and production of plays supportive of the throne. The author dwells upon parallels between Shakespeare’s plays and Oxford’s life, unmindful of the discommoding truth that literature and life are full of cunning parallels. Ogburn also ruefully recounts one unbeliever’s encounters with the Shakespeare Establishment. *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* inspired Richmond Crinkley’s sympathetic review article, ‘New Perspectives on the Authorship Question’, which mysteriously appeared in that Establishment bastion, *Shakespeare Quarterly* the next year (36, 515–22). ‘Shakespeare scholarship’, Crinkley concludes, ‘owes an enormous debt to Charlton Ogburn.’ Not everyone would agree.

Washington, DC, attorney, business executive, connoisseur of the arts, philanthropist, and Oxfordian enthusiast, David Lloyd Kreeger was the master spirit behind the moot-court debate sponsored by the American University in the nation’s capital, and argued by two members of that university’s law-school faculty (Peter Jaszi for the Oxfordian position and James Boyle for the man from Stratford) before a trio of Supreme Court justices in appropriate juridical garb: Harry A. Blackmun, William Brennan, and John Paul Stevens. The event took place on 25 September 1987, at the Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church in the presence of bus-loads of high-school students, contingents of Oxfordian and Stratfordian partisans, white-collar Washingtonians, and the youthful Charles Francis Topham de Vere Beauclerk, a collateral descendant of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. All told, roughly a thousand – maybe more – jammed into the church that autumn morning. The lawyers presented their arguments, with occasional interjections from the bench, and the court recessed until afternoon when the justices returned to their seats to deliver their opinions. Justice Brennan, the acting chief, spoke first, concluding that the case for the Oxford side remained unproven. ‘What business have I to be judging this?’, Justice Blackmun could not help asking himself. He thought of Isabel in *Measure for Measure* (‘Oh, it is excellent / To have a giant’s strength but it is tyrannous / To use if like a giant’). He agreed, however, that Justice Brennan’s conclusion was ‘the legal answer’. Justice Stevens similarly arrived at a legal verdict for the Stratford man, although qualified by a degree of personal uncertainty. The event was chronicled in the *Washington Post* and – more conspicuously, as might be expected – in the *New York Times*. Months passed. The Authorship Question became the subject of a long essay by James Lardner in the ‘Onward and Upward with the Arts’ department of the *New Yorker* (11 April 1988), 87–106. In a retrospective contribution to the *de Vere Society Newsletter*, a new periodical (1988), Ogburn denounced the moot ‘trial’ as a ‘miscarriage of justice’ in which Justice Brennan acted for all practical purposes as a witness for the Stratfordian side.

A permanent record of the great Washington Shakespeare debate was eventually published in the *American University Law Review*, 37 [1988], 609–826. Included was a verbatim transcript of the Justices’ opinion, as well as prefatory remarks by Kreeger and essays by Jaszi (‘Who Cares Who Wrote “Shakespeare”?’) and Boule (‘The Search for an Author: Shakespeare and the Framers’). There the matter did not rest: a reprise with a different dramatis personae (Kreeger, Ogburn, and Shakespeare excepted), took place on 26 November 1988 at the Middle Temple – in the same (then new) ‘large and stately’ hall where a young lawyer, John Manningham, had the good fortune to see a

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special production of *Twelfth Night* performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men on 2 February 1602, and jotted down his impressions. On the occasion of the Middle Temple Moot this author was invited to testify as an expert witness, but, as circumstances worked out, the sponsors were unable to accommodate the expense of my journey. Nor was Ogburn able to take part, so Kreeger, Shakespeare, and the Earl of Oxford had to manage without us. The Oxfordians were represented by L. L. Ware, a founding member of the Mensa Society, and Gordon C. Cyr, former director of the Shakespeare Oxford Society; the Shakespearean side by Stanley Wells, director of the Shakespeare Institute, and Professor Honigmann. The presiding judge, Lord Archer, won applause by delivering the day's closing comments in blank verse. The three Law-Lords judging the Shakespeare Moot, as the mock trial was called, all found for the man from Stratford. Court adjourned.

To the Baconians it was not given to glory alone in a cipher. In *Edward De Vere: A Great Elizabethan* (1931) George Frisbee prints a multitude of ciphers based on the six letters of de Vere's name. Not surprisingly, he finds these characters everywhere: in Gascoigne's *Supposes*, in Marlowe, in Harington, Puttenham, Raleigh, Spenser, James I, above all in Shakespeare (most curiously in the contents page and dedication of the 1623 Folio). Even Canon Rendall gratifies us with a cipher:

Why write I still all one, E.VER the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That E.VERY word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed?

The Canon takes a special pride in this bit of inanity, which, he modestly allows, rescues Sonnet 76 from inanity.¹⁴

For the parallelism of the Oxfordians with the Baconians to be complete we need only the spirit from the grave and clues to the whereabouts of the Earl's lost manuscripts. No disappointment, alas, awaits us. In the autumn of 1942 Percy Allen, author of several Oxfordian treatises, consulted a London medium, Mrs Hester Dowden, daughter of the celebrated Dublin authority on Shakespeare.* The *séances* continued over an extended period, with one *Johannes* serving as control, and Hester Dowden herself taking down conversations in automatic writing, of which she was a most gifted practitioner. At these sessions Allen (through the good offices of his deceased brother) met Oxford, Bacon, and Shakespeare. They described their mode of collaboration with alacrity. 'I was quick at knowing what would be effective on the stage,' Shakespeare owned. 'I would find a plot (*Hamlet* was one), consult with Oxford, and form a skeleton edifice, which he would furnish and people, as befitted the subject.'¹⁵ Often they took their efforts to Bacon, whose advice was requested but (the Viscount sadly reports) seldom accepted. All this Allen found extremely fascinating, as well he might, but a small difficulty troubled him. In 1943 one Alfred Dodd published a book, *The Immortal Master*, containing scripts by Hester Dowden reporting direct communication with Bacon, in the course of which the latter claimed for himself Shakespeare's writings. 'My friend, I *can* help you,' Bacon reassured Allen. 'I was acting through a Deputy in the case of Dodd – a Deputy who has never been personally in touch with me, and who questions nothing; for he is firmly convinced that I wrote the plays and

sonnets, and took no trouble to have a direct message from me.’¹⁶ Some spooks, it seems, are unreliable.

Where three centuries of scholarship had failed, Dowden’s gatherings succeeded, clearing up disputed points in Shakespearean biography and producing fresh details. The poet indeed entered the world on St George’s day, his mother invariably having her infants baptized three days after birth. The parents were Protestant (so much for John Shakespeare’s Spiritual Last Will and Testament!). At the free school Will was considered a dull scholar. Although the deer-poaching legend had some basis in fact, the youth ran off to London not because of Lucy’s wrath, but rather to escape becoming a butcher, the occupation selected for him by his father. At the as yet non-existent Globe in 1581 there was no stage, only a courtyard. ‘My first duties’, the shade recalled, ‘were connected with preparation, cleaning the yard and seats, and putting them in order. ... I was receiving so little from an unwilling father, that I had to increase my earnings; and so, being accustomed to horses, I held them while the spectators came.’¹⁷ In 1583 Shakespeare met Oxford, who advised the young actor (as he then was) to set down on paper some of the stories rattling around in his brain. From these beginnings ensued the collaboration of the nobleman and the rustic. Will contributed the villains – Shylock and Iago and Edmund – and the scenes of great passion and simple English humour. To Oxford we owe the more lovable characters and most of the poetry.

All this and much more the *séances* brought to light. Perhaps the most exciting of the disclosures was the location of the priceless play manuscripts. They were buried in Shakespeare’s tomb. (Surely the shade is confused – he must mean the grave; it happened so long ago.) One bundle served as the pillow for the corpse, another lay between the hands, a third at the feet; *Hamlet* reposed on the breast. Delia Bacon’s intuition had been right after all.

Notes

- * Allen, Dowden’s biographer informs us, was selected by Spirit People to be the final unraveller of the Shakespeare Mystery (Edmund Bentley, *Far Horizon* [London, 1951], 148).
- 1 J. Thomas Looney, *‘Shakespeare’ Identified in Edward De Vere the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* (London, 1920), introd., 16.
- 2 Ibid. 57. I owe this insight to R. C. Churchill, *Shakespeare and his Betters* (London, 1958), 197.
- 3 Letter of J. Thomas Looney to Charles Wisner Barrell, dated 6 June 1937; printed in *The Shakespeare Fellowship Quarterly*, 5 [1944], 21.
- 4 Looney, *‘Shakespeare’ Identified*, 118–19.
- 5 Ibid. 131.
- 6 *Aubrey’s Brief Lives*, ed. O. L. Dick (London, 1949), 305. This episode, which has escaped the noses of the Oxfordians, is cited by Wadsworth (*The Poacher from Stratford*, 111).
- 7 Looney, *‘Shakespeare’ Identified*, 385.
- 8 Ibid. 211.
- 9 Ibid. 413.
- 10 Ibid. 530.
- 11 Ibid. 509.
- 12 Eva Turner Clark, *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare’s Plays: A Study of the Oxford Theory Based on the Records of Early Court Revels and Personalities of the Times* (New York, 1931), 603.

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- 13 Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn, *This Star of England: 'William Shakespeare' Man of the Renaissance* (New York, 1952), 1004. This particular aberration is cited by Giles E. Dawson in a withering review; see *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 4 [1953], 165–70.
- 14 Gerald H. Rendall, *Shakespeare Sonnets and Edward De Vere* (London, 1930), 210.
- 15 Percy Allen, *Talks with Elizabethans Revealing the Mystery of 'William Shakespeare'* (London, n.d.), 40.
- 16 *Ibid.* 32.
- 17 *Ibid.* 72–3.

