

Letters:

To the Editors:

Barbara Burris' most interesting and well-presented article in the first edition of *Shakespeare Matters* referred briefly to the poem, *A Lover's Complaint*. In her article Ms Burris referred to a line taken from the second verse: "Upon her head a platted hive of straw," which she construed as a possible reference to Queen Elizabeth's "gold red periwig, etc." I am sure that Ms Burris will not object to my adding, that this type of head-dress was forcibly imposed upon women, in some parts of medieval Europe, after they had given birth to an illegitimate baby. The subject of the poem has therefore been discreetly labelled as an unmarried mother, resulting from her seduction. I also suggest that this symbolism is reinforced by the opening line which sets the scene: "From off a hill whose concave womb ...," since this also implants thoughts of pregnancy in the mind of the reader from the very start.

By a fortunate coincidence, an exhibition of "Inquisition Torture and Intolerance" at the Museum of Man in San Diego presently has an exhibit on display of a woman attired in a plaited straw head-dress, after having given birth to an illegitimate child.

David Roper
Truro, Cornwall
United Kingdom
16 October 2001

To the Editors:

With my receipt of the first issue of *Shakespeare Matters* I was immediately drawn to read Barbara Burris' first article on the Ashbourne portrait, having recently heard her presentation at the SOS Conference. The evidence she reviewed at Carmel was fascinating; but, as usual, I craved the hard copy.

There are two issues I found in the article to worry me. That Chapman's two *Bussy D'Ambois* plays link Oxford to *Hamlet*, point to Oxford's trip abroad, and hint at his authorship of poems credited to Shakespeare, I completely agree. That the words "verse in paper royall ...bound richly up, and strung with Crimson strings" is a description of the exact book held in the hand of the man in the Ashbourne portrait in particular is an assumption I would

hesitate to make. It is true that the text does "link the Poet" to this type of book, but it doesn't "identify" Oxford in this portrait and this specific book. Secondly, I do not credit the connection in *Romeo and Juliet* she proposes, though I understand her argument.

The specific details of Chapman's text relative to the book of the "foolish Poet" lead me, as a librarian, to picture a large book, as "paper royall" is a term meaning "paper of a size measuring 24 by 19 inches, as used for writing and 25 by 20 for printing." (OED, royal paper, paper royal) Consulting Gaskell's *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (1995) we find that a royal octavo would be about 23 X 15 cm. after the usual 3 folds of that size sheet of paper. The paper in this period would probably have been imported from Italy or France. The 6th edition of *The Bookman's Glossary* puts the size at of a royal octavo at 10 X 6 and 1/4 inches. The book in the portrait looks as if it might be a regular octavo or perhaps a smaller size, but a "royall" evokes the image of a larger book, especially a royal folio. This is backed up by the next line where a presumably large piece of parchment is being "smooth'd with the Pumice" and "rul'd with lead," as a very richly ornamented manuscript page might be prepared. A book on parchment would have

been about three times more expensive than paper. The word "royall" may have poetic overtones add to the picture of those highly-born who have over-blown egos about their verse, but there were more such courtier/poets than De Vere on the scene to whom this description might apply.

Because Harvey used the word "apish" and "ape" to describe Oxford, I can't assume that every use of "ape"—a man who imitates, often Continental manner and dress—always means Oxford. Jonson seems to use the word about the Stratford man. The Shakespeare plays employ it in several instances applying to characters created there. French manners were aped at court by many, even if we think of Oxford as the leading example. And "never" and "ever" have evermore been great end-rhyme words. If the Bard used them, so could Chapman, and thereby gain attention. I even think that "Admiring E.Ver." might ask to be taken seriously. I'll concede at the same time Chapman might be highly ambivalent about Oxford and tried to write a better Hamlet character without necessarily subscribing to the picture of De Vere as a "ditcher." That the passage is a paraphrase of one from Catullus seems reason enough for creating a satirical portrait which happens to be at odds with the passage praising De Vere.

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The purpose of the Shakespeare Fellowship is to promote public awareness and acceptance of the authorship of the Shakespeare Canon by Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), and further to encourage a high level of scholarly research and publication into all aspects of Shakespeare studies, and also into the history and culture of the Elizabethan era.

The Society was founded and incorporated in 2001 in the State of Massachusetts and is chartered under the membership corporation laws of that state (nonprofit status pending).

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As for Lady Capulet's speech to Juliet asking her to read Paris like a book (Lines 81-94, I, iii) and by marrying him provide a cover "that in gold clasps locks in the golden story," I submit that the figure is a natural one for the author of many plays to use. Gold clasps around a golden story don't necessarily equal Shakespeare's manuscript book of sonnets. In fact, if anything is specifically suggested in Romeo and Juliet it may be that a "golden book" in this period referred to a register of the nobility of the state of Venice. (OED) Oxford knew the distance from Venice to Verona.

Books—richly bound books with gold-stamping or tooling, gilded edges and tied with crimson string or cord—were prized possessions. Most books didn't come bound, but only sewn, and the wealthy or "noble" often decided to afford richly decorated bindings with either ties (usually worn off) or metal clasps to keep the pages compact. However, Gaskell says, "Gold tooling... became increasingly common from the mid sixteenth century and was not confined to bespoke binders..." while "heavily gilt retailers bindings such as the small English devotional books that were sold in large numbers from the 1560s until the later seventeenth century were indeed intended to look expensive while really being cheaply executed..." Photographic examples of finely done "golden" volumes can be seen in the works of Mirjam M. Foot, leading scholar of bindings of this period. The Huntington and Folger own many examples in all sizes and yes, the OED uses the Chapman lines from *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* to define the term string—"to bind, tie, fasten or secure with a string or strings."

The book in the Ashbourne portrait might not be the Sonnets. A book, either printed or in manuscript, is the proper symbol for the Bard and his life of writing as Ms. Burris points out, but assuming it is a portrait of Oxford, might it not be Hamlet's book, *Cardanus Comforte*, or Castiglione's *El Cortegiano* with Oxford's prefatory letter, or maybe a copy of a commonplace book which he probably made and isn't extant? Maybe it was a copy of sonnets by his uncle, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, or a prayer book such as Queen Elizabeth may have held in one or more of her portraits. From our perspective we'd like it to be *The Sonnets*, but we might be mistaken.

There are many facets to the fine and
(Continued on page 32)

From the Editors

Tender airs, Tudor heirs

Some irreverent wag once claimed that if a drunken Stuart compositor had up-ended the "n" in "tender air" (*Cymbeline* V,iv,140; V,v,445), the result would be a perfect homophone for the controversial theory over which there has recently been so much trouble. We don't claim to know why Shakespeare chose to transform this curious turn of phrase, which also appears so prominently in the Sonnets under the variation "tender heir" (1.4), where it refers to the Fair Youth, into an oracular enigma in *Cymbeline*. But there is no doubt that "tender air" and "Tudor heir" are close enough to invite a circumspect second glance. Nor is there any doubt that Posthumous Leonatus' oracle concerns royal succession. Nor is there any doubt, finally, that dynastic questions are fundamental to Shakespearean texts, as are—in many—royal bastards and changeling children. Often these ultimately inherit—or at least are seen to deserve to—in the fictional, compensatory world of the Shakespearean oeuvre.

To anticipate some of the objections Paul Altrocchi's analysis of the "Persian lady"—apparently a portrait of Queen Elizabeth I—is likely to evoke in some rarified quarters, we'll take this opportunity to lay some cards on the table: yes, we think that the "Tudor heir" theory—which argues that the Shakespeare question is inextricably linked to issues of the dynastic succession of the Tudor government under Queen Elizabeth I—merits open-minded consideration and very close examination.

This is a matter of principle, not dogma or even private conviction.

Shakespeare Matters will evaluate submissions, in consultation with our editorial associates, on the basis of the quality of argument and analysis, not on whether we happen to agree with the conclusions of a given writer. We will deploy our editorial prerogatives to combat the unfortunate tendency of Oxfordians to replicate the censorious values which have produced the present intellectual cul-de-sac of Shakespearean orthodoxy. Banning discussion of "offensive" topics which can't harm anyone, and might open up new avenues for inquiry and investigation, is bad ethics, bad strategy, and bad thinking.

On the contrary, we expect and hope to publish articles which will challenge the

presuppositions of our readers, and of ourselves. We vow to go out of our way to find articles which offer controversial interpretations, to print them, and then to facilitate as much dialogue, debate, and discussion as possible.

We regard this as our editorial responsibility.

The conclusions of articles, then, are always those of the individual writers, not the editors, the Shakespeare Fellowship or its Trustees. In no case does publication of an article imply an endorsement of the conclusions or reasoning of the article; it merely indicates our conviction that the article is sufficiently probative to stimulate a useful and educational dialogue which facilitates the purposes of the Fellowship as defined in its Mission Statement.

The Shakespeare Fellowship neither endorses nor condemns the "Tudor heir" theory in any of its published permutations. Some of our members believe that the theory, in one form or another, resolves many longstanding enigmas of Shakespearean scholarship and Tudor/Stuart cultural and diplomatic history.

Tudor heir advocates such as Mrs. Sears in her *Shakespeare and the Tudor Rose* (2nd edition forthcoming from Meadow Geese Press) have, in our opinion, established a firm foundation for the plausibility of the theory. However, a new theory inevitably produces new problems and questions. Its proponents, if they practice intellectual honesty, must consider these. By no means have the advocates of this theory prevailed by satisfying all our doubts on some critical points of fact and interpretation. And their critics have sometimes made valid arguments which deserve consideration, discussion and debate.

Shakespeare Matters welcomes dissent—polite, open, reasoned dissent—from any article or editorial we publish. In fact, we propose to establish a regular feature in our newsletter which is specifically designed to allow readers the opportunity to "talk back" to the editors (or writers of major articles). This "My Turn" column will afford us a chance to hear from you, our readers. Of course we hope you'll write to agree as well as disagree, to clarify as well as complain, and to enlighten as well as to argue. But even if you're just feeling cranky please, do, write.

Letters (continued from page 3)

extensive research here presented for which I am grateful and which will send me back to the bookshelf to read more of Allen, Barrell, Chapman etc. bearing on the subject. Ms. Burris has a compelling tale to tell, at least as I remember hearing it, and she doesn't need a good deal of this "layer of evidence" which I find shaky. The evidence will stand without it and I'm looking forward to reading it in the next several issues of *Shakespeare Matters*.

Virginia J. Renner
Retired Reader Services Librarian
Huntington Library, California
1 December 2001

To the Editors:

We would like to share with your readers some news from our Sydney-based Kinetic Energy Theatre Company.

We are creating a series of plays about the authorship question, the first of which—*SHAKE-SPEARE, Part 1*—premiered in October 2001. The plays look at how Shakespeare's work reflects the life of Edward de Vere in stunning detail, therefore suggesting the Earl to have been the true author, ingeniously concealed within his own words. This drama-documentary leads the audience, with the help of co-narrators Francis Bacon and Mary Sydney, through de Vere's personal history and the socio-political labyrinth surrounding it. The characters (protagonists: Oxford, Eliza-

beth I, Burghley, Anne Cecil, Hatton, Leicester, Henry Howard, Anne Vavasour, Henry Wriothesley, et al.) come to life breathing Shakespeare's own words: taken from their portraits in the plays and sonnets where they were trapped in disguise.

The process of this reverse interpretation is guided by a combination of forces: our artistic intuition, our own detective work, as well as the excellent Oxfordian research spanning from Looney via Ogburn to now. Parts 1, 2 and 3 cover the Elizabethan past; Part 4 will look into more recent issues, using as a major inspiration the Barrell courtcase and intrigues surrounding the Ashbourne portrait. Our pre-season publicity met with no response, perhaps because it coincided with the September 11 events. But later, when we tried again to drum up some interest from local academics and teachers, the response was bluntly: "Who cares. It's not important to know who the author was. We've got the plays."

Public dialogue began when the major paper's review came out. It was a classic case of Stratfordian vitriol. Virtually ignoring the play, the critic contented himself with attacking our Oxfordian perspective. Numerous complaints caused the arts-editor to give us redress, inviting us to write a defence of the Oxford case, while giving the same critic (!) the opportunity to respond from the Stratfordian view. He expected to spark off a debate among the wider public. But the double article prompted only one reply: from the director of a company specialising in Shakespeare

productions, with a virtual monopoly on the subject. Without seeing our play, this director defended the critic's arguments and added to the list of Stratfordian misconceptions. The debate then fizzled out (further contributions from us were not desired). But there is hope it may be rekindled when we premiere our *SHAKE-SPEARE, Part 2*, which is planned for early 2002.

Feedback from our audience has been overwhelmingly positive: for many it was an eyeopener, not only into the man behind the name, but also into the mind and spirit of the Elizabethan age. To be witness to a great man's story, obliterated from official history, inspired many to look into the authorship question themselves. The underlying metaphor relevant today was not lost on them: and so it stands—de Vere, after 400 years, still serving truth.

Jepke Goudsmit and Graham Jones,
Co-writer/directors
Kinetic Energy Theatre Company
Sydney, Australia
23 November 2001

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