

CHAPTER 2. MARK HIM WELL...

The man whose Bible forms the subject of this dissertation was born, we are told¹, into the ancient noble house of Vere on April 12 1550, at the midpoint of the short and anarchic reign of Henry VIII's pious but ineffective Protestant son Edward VI, and only three years before the bloody counter-reformation effected by Edward's half-sister Mary Tudor. England had another eight years to wait for Elizabeth I to ascend the throne; she restored the nation to moderate Protestantism and civil peace, ushering in the "golden age" of Gloriana in a reign which lasted fifty years and cultivated the genius of "Shakespeare," Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson.

The de Veres had held the earldom of Oxford since Edward's ancestor Aubrey de Vere (1040-1088) had "come in with the conqueror." By the reign of Elizabeth I they were the oldest intact patrilineal dynasty within the English nobility. After the death of his first wife Dorothy Neville, by whom he had one child, John de Vere, the sixteenth Earl of Oxford, remarried in 1548; his second wife was Marjorie Golding, the sister of the noted Calvinist theologian and translator Arthur Golding. The couple raised two children -- Edward and his sister Mary². At the death of John in August 1562, young Edward, now the 17th Earl of Oxford, entered the Court of Wards and the care of William Cecil, the newly appointed master of this venerable institution. An account of the orphan boy's flamboyant escort into London from his ancestral estate at Castle Hedingham in

¹ Hatt. MSS Cal. (XIII.-142). The document is Lord Burghley's memorandum (January 3, 1576), taken on the instruction of The Queen's own physician Richard Master (see Lansdowne MSS. 19.83, excerpted by Ward 114-115), who requested that "there may a note be taken from the day of her [Anne Cecil's] first day of quickening, for thereof somewhat may be known noteworthy". It is curious that in the midst of all this sound and fury about Anne's own pregnancy, while trying to remember and make note of every time during the past six months when his daughter and her husband were lodged in the same household, to see if he could pin a paternity button on the husband, the Master of the Court of Wards should pause to recalculate the husband's birthday. [Note to the third \(Feb 2003\) printing: some critics seem to have misunderstood this footnote. They need to read more carefully. Hatt. XIII.142 is, aside from mention of Oxford's baptismal cup in state papers, an item of evidence which came to light subsequent to the writing of this dissertation, the only document known the writer which states or even implies the birth date of the 17th Earl of Oxford.](#)

² I have not been able to discover Mary Vere's date of birth.

Northern Essex, preserved in Machyn's diary for September 3, 1562, vividly pictures him passing through London, Chepe and Ludgate, and from there on to Temple Bar, escorted by seven score -- 140!-- mourning horsemen all in black (Ward 15). De Vere took up residence in Cecil house on the Strand, which remained his chief residence during the years of his minority; although appointed to the Earldom as early as 1568 when he turned eighteen, the former ward remained a debtor to the Court until after his 1591 second marriage to Elizabeth Trentham in his forty-first year.

Let us pause for a moment to take account of the one, and perhaps only point, on which the myriad narratives of Edward de Vere's life, both those written from sympathy and those written from envy, are agreed: both during his lifetime and after his death, up until the close of the present millennium, intense and often bitter controversy has always swirled about this extraordinary human figure. Reviled during his own lifetime, often, after his 1575-76 visit to Continental European states and extended stay in Tuscany, as the "diablo incarnato" of the Italianate Englishman, or sometimes as a wild English boar set loose in the orchards of public decency, de Vere is still actively despised, sometimes with a passion which seems to call in question professional responsibility to render objective judgements about the past, by a number of prominent modern historians. William Cecil's biographer Conyers Read reviles him as a "cad" and "unwhipped cub" (1960 135). To the great Shakespearean biographer and critic A. L. Rowse he was a "frightful intellectual lightweight" who "never wrote a play in his life" (PBS Frontline 1989). Elizabeth Jenkins characterizes him as one of those who, "like Hamlet, are so impressed with the importance of their own sufferings, that they are completely indifferent to the pain they themselves give to other people" (1958 13).

If there is therefore some doubt among orthodox scholars regarding Oxford's character, his education and intellectual accomplishments have always, at least up until recently, been regarded with consistent admiration. No honest cultural history of the Elizabethan court can fail to notice his accomplishments -- even under his own name -- as poet, scholar and patron. It was Oxford whose court allies during the 1570's and 80's defended the naturalism of the English language in opposing the misplaced faith in classical meters -- the "Hexameter Folly" as Alexander Grosart (1884, I: xlvi) terms it³ -- espoused by Sir Philip Sidney's *Areopagus*, which had unfortunately

³ "None but a 'fantastic pedant' could have insisted on experiment so nonsensical," writes Grosart (1884 I: xlvi). "And none but a man blinded by 'vanity' could so have boasted of being the Inventor of the Hexameter. The paper on 'Hobbinol' is deftly dumb on the whole absurdity." Other distinguished witnesses in the field of the history of metrical form concur with Grosart's opinion. Mayor (1901 263) writes that Harvey's verses "met with deserved ridicule from Green and Nashe." Spenser in his own letter to Harvey identifies the "only or chiefest hardness" of English hexameters as "the accent, which sometime gapeth and as it were yawneeth ill-favoredly....but it is to be won by custom, and rough words must be subdued with use. For why, a God's name, may not we, as well as the Greeks, have the kingdom of our own language, and measure our accents by the sound, reserving the quantity of the verse" (in Mayor 265). It seems that even Spenser was very early aware of the absurdity of the great poetaster's aesthetic principles.

fallen under the aesthetic sway of that great Nestor of the Elizabethan court, Oxford's former Cambridge classmate and classicist Gabriel Harvey. Oxford's lyrics, in his own day and among the discerning moderns of previous centuries, have been regarded as remarkable specimens of cultivated wit, manifestations of a superlative intellect, deeply imaginative and tuneful, yet always restrained by the sort of decorum exhibited by the character Euphues in the popular novels of that name by Oxford's quondam secretary John Lyly. Alexander Grosart in his *Miscellanies of The Fuller Worthies' Library* (1872-76), felt confident that his gathering of unpublished lyrics by Oxford would "prove a pleasant surprise...to most readers". The poems themselves are not, supposed this imminent critic, "without touches of the true Singer, and there is an atmosphere of graciousness about them that is grateful" (IV, 11). His talent as a comic dramatist is praised as early as 1598 when Francis Mere's declares him the "best for comedy". Even Conyers Read concedes that "there can be little doubt that Oxford was a diligent student (126)...[He] distinguished himself as a classical scholar, showed considerable talent as a poet, took a great interest in the drama" (440).⁴ Stephen May, a leading contemporary authority on manuscript poetry collections, concurs, calling Oxford "a nobleman with extraordinary intellectual interests and commitments" whose biography exhibits a "lifelong devotion to learning" (8).

From the documents of Oxford's early life and education emerge three prominent themes: his very early and intense fascination with history, his love and aptitude for foreign languages, and his versatile and precocious wit. By the age of twelve, the young Earl had earned the ultimate compliment of a tutor, when the Anglo-Saxon scholar Lawrence Nowell informed William Cecil that "I can clearly see that my work for the Earl of Oxford cannot be much longer required" (Ogburn 440-41). "It is not unknown to others, and I have had experience thereof myself," wrote his uncle Arthur Golding in his dedication to de Vere of his translation of *The History of Trogus Pompeius* (1564) "how earnest a desire your honour hath naturally graffed to you to read, peruse, and communicate with others as well the histories of ancient times, and things done long ago, as also the present estate of things in our days, and that not without *a certain pregnancy of wit and ripeness of understanding*" (Chiljan 4: emphasis added). John Brook, in his 1577 dedication of *The Staff of Christian Faith*, remembers him as one who "even from your tender years bestowed your time and travail towards the attaining of [learning]" (Chiljan 32). Even his implacable enemy Charles Arundel, speaking of the adult Oxford, admitted that his table talk "left nothing to reply, but everyone to wonder at his judgement." Oxford was, declared Arundel, "reputed for his eloquence another Cicero, and for his conduct a Caesar" (Ward 1928 124).

⁴ Read even admits that de Vere has been "put forward seriously as the author of Shakespeare's plays" (440).

The Geneva Bible, considered in detail in the present dissertation, is just one of many books which have left a distinctive imprint in "Shakespeare," for which scholars can trace a direct connection to de Vere. Indeed, in reviewing Oxford's educational experience, one cannot fail to notice numerous tangible points of connection between de Vere's life and the established sources of Shakespeare's plays, as identified in works such as Geoffrey Bullough's *Sources of the Plays of Shakespeare*.

De Vere's former Cambridge tutor Bartholomew Clerke, under the patronage of his former student, translated into Latin Baldassar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, a book which left a profound imprint on *Hamlet* and other Shakespearean works. *Il Cortegiano* records a discussion with participants of both genders at the court of the Duke of Urbino on the question of what constituted the perfect courtier. To this seminal 1571 translation de Vere affixed a Latin prose preface, first translated by B.M. Ward in his 1928 biography of Oxford.

Castiglione endorsed a very different ideal of courtly life than that espoused by Machiavelli's "new science" in works like *Il Principe*; his ideal of the humanist Courtier, himself versatile in the arts of music, painting, poetry, and theatre, a scholar and an artist as well as a soldier, profoundly shaped the *imago* of the cultivated courtier depicted in such Shakespearean characters as Hamlet. Castiglione was the antiquated anti-type of Machiavelli, the founder of modern political science. Charlton Ogburn writes of the latter that by "developing techniques for managing affairs based on that appraisal which would be of advantage to the state, he bequeathed the science of politics to our century" (500). Between "Shakespeare" and the new breed of politicians nursed on Machiavelli's advice, however, it seems that there could be no quarter drawn. In Shakespeare the Florentine philosopher is assimilated to the Medieval character of *Vice*, a figure excavated and refurbished with contemporary allegorical signification out of the dustbin of the indigenous Saxon and Norman theatrical traditions to which de Vere was heir. Shakespeare's Machiavelli, as Ogburn says, is a "fount of evil" (500). In Shakespeare Machiavellian politicians such as Lord Polonius are exposed as busybody meddlers and corrupt apparatchiks. Richard of Gloucester, the scheming devil figure of the entire Shakespearean historical epic, can think of no paragon of evil beyond Machiavelli, and accordingly establishes his own pre-eminence by declaring that his example will "set the murderous Machiavel to school" (*3 Henry VI* 3.2.193).

Just as "Shakespeare" despises the values extolled in Machiavelli, he constantly illustrates the ideal of the cultured courtier found in *Il Cortegiano*, a book published under de Vere's patronage. In his introductory note to the Everyman edition of *The Courtier*, Drayton Henderson even offers the following curious wager:

I...venture to say, if a trifle hyperbolically, that without Castiglione we should not have Hamlet. The ideal of the courtier, scholar, soldier developed first in Italy, and perfected in the narrative of *Il Cortegiano*, was Castiglione's gift to the world.....Hamlet is the high exemplar of it in our literature.

(Ogburn 1984 499)

Other prominent Shakespearean sources demonstrate similar connections to de Vere. Jerome Cardan's *De Consolatione*, Englished by Thomas Bedingfield and published as *Cardanus' Comforte*, by "the commandment" of Edward de Vere in 1573 has in fact left a much more explicit and detailed trail of testimony documenting its connection to *Hamlet* than has *Il Cortegiano*. Hardin Craig, summarizing and commenting upon this tradition in his 1934 *Huntington Bulletin* article, found that the connections between Hamlet and *De Consolatione* were

More numerous and of a more fundamental character than even Hunter seems to have realized. Indeed, it may be said, without great exaggeration and irrespective of whether or not Shakespeare presented his hero as reading in this particular book just before he spoke his soliloquy (2.2.160-223), that Cardan's *De Consolatione* is pre-eminently "Hamlet's book," since the philosophy of Hamlet agrees remarkably with that of Cardan.

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De Vere's prose and poetic prefaces to Cardan's treatise, known by several prominent Shakespeare scholars -- Francis Douce, Joseph Hunter, Lily Campbell and Hardin Craig -- as "Hamlet's Book," are the subject of a recent article of my own published in *The Oxfordian* (1998), updating a 1946 essay by Charles Wisner Barrell.

Arthur Golding's 1564 translation of the Histories of *Trogus Pompeius*, another book dedicated to de Vere, is also a prominent source text for Shakespeare, according to Charles Wisner Barrell.

Altogether, there are ten or more clear-cut allusions in the plays to the memorable characterizations and passages that appear in Golding's translation of *Trogus Pompeius*. In addition, Shakespeare appears to have drawn heavily from the book in naming many of his dramatic personages. Fully a dozen of the heroes of antiquity that Golding revitalized for the delectation of his brilliant nephew appear in name if not in exact characterization in the Shakespeare comedies and tragedies--exclusive of the Roman plays, modeled directly on Plutarch.

(Barrell 1940 4)

Golding's 1565-67 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into lumbering "fourteeners" has also left a deep imprint on Shakespeare, one scarcely rivaled by any other single source⁵. As Leonard Barkan has recently underscored (Barkan 1986), of all the ancient influences on

⁵ Unlike sources such as Plutarch, Halle or Holinshead, whose influence is limited to the specific plays for which they are germane, Ovid and the Bible manifest a ubiquitous presence in the canon and form a substratum of Shakespearean idea and image. A few other books, for example Palingenius's *Zodiacke of Life*, a popular neo-Platonic poem (available in both English and Latin in Elizabethan England), may manifest a similar ubiquity of influence. But there seems little ground to doubt that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (and the *Fasti* and other lesser known works such as the *Amores*) and the Bible exhibit the most profound and pervasive influence in Shakespeare. For a comprehensive and illuminating survey of the influence of Palingenius in Shakespeare, see Hankins (1953). On Ovid's influence in Shakespeare see Barkan (1986) and Bate (1993).

Shakespeare, Ovid is the most intimate and far-reaching, with the possible exception of the holy Bible. Although most critics concede the controversial point that Shakespeare was familiar with Ovidian texts such as the *Fasti* which were not translated into English until long after Shakespeare wrote (a concession which requires implicit acknowledgment of a bard with a sophisticated understanding of Latin language and literature), it is beyond dispute that the wording of Golding's English translation of the *Metamorphoses* is very often retained in Shakespeare's own text. "The phraseology of Golding's translation so frequently reappears in Shakespeare's page," asserts Sir Sidney Lee, "especially by way of subsidiary illustration, as almost to compel the conviction that *Shakespeare knew much of Golding's book by heart*" (1909 119: emphasis supplied).

In view of this profound and pervasive influence of Golding on Shakespeare, it may be relevant to mention that Golding served as Oxford's Latin tutor during the critical formative years of the 1560's, the same period during which this translation, which Shakespeare is said to have retained "by heart," was being prepared. This, at any rate, is the conclusion of Golding family historian Louis Thorne Golding in his 1937 biography of the classicist. Both as the son of a distinguished nobleman and as a precocious student with pronounced literary interests, de Vere would have expected and obtained the best possible tutor in the field of classics. By this criterion alone, Golding was the obvious choice. There was, however, another reason to suspect an intimate early association between Arthur Golding and Edward de Vere during the 1560s: Golding's sister Marjorie was Edward de Vere's mother, and Golding was appointed legal retainer of many of the de Vere estates in Essex after the death of the 16th Earl in 1562. Although "no definite record has been found indicating⁶ such a connection...[Golding's role as Oxford's Latin tutor]...would appear reasonable in view of the factor of relationship as well as the fitness of the one and the youth of the other" (1937 29). Golding's 1564 dedication to the young de Vere, if it does not prove him to have been his tutor, at least shows how closely the translator assumed an interest in his nephew's educational development. Would this have been repaid, at the very least, by the boy's diligent comparative study of Golding's famous translation of *The Metamorphoses*, alongside the Latin original in one of the famous editions of Regius? If so, such early and intimate acquaintance with this Latin poet, psychologist, and humorist -- from whom, among other characteristics, Shakespeare has in part derived his profound comprehension of the psychology of gender and sexuality -- would account for much of de Vere's reputation as an irrepressible wit. He shared this character trait with the naughty mythographer Ovid. Like Shakespeare's precocious young Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*, the young de Vere could naturally

⁶ The verb is very badly chosen. A great deal of evidence "indicates" the alleged relationship; none *yet* proves it.

have joked, of the most important book in the plot, "'tis Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; my mother gave it me"⁷ (4.1.42: emphasis added).

To these examples of influence upon "Shakespeare" of sources or authors with whom de Vere was demonstrably familiar many more might be added; a complete list would require a volume as extensive as the present study of De Vere Bible annotations. Miller (1975 486) for instance, records the remarkable influence of Democritus on Shakespeare. The English Democritean Nicholas Hill (c. 1570-1610), father of the atomic theory in English science was -- according to Anthony á Wood (86) and the *Dictionary of National Biography* -- secretary to de Vere during the 1590's. Miller also discusses Oxford's patronage of the Irish composer John Farmer in view of Shakespeare's profound knowledge of music, music theory, and the pronounced "musicality" of his lyrical forms. To Farmer one must of course add William Byrd, to whose 1588 *Psalms, Sonets & Songs of Sadnes (STC 4254)*, Oxford contributed at least two lyrics, "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is" (May 1975) and "If Women Could be Fair and Yet Not Fond" (Palgrave 1861; Chiljan 1998). Most recently, Robert Brazil (1999) has noted that *The New Jewell of Health* (1576), which Stephen Booth (1976: 389-399) identifies as a primary source for the dense and extensive alchemical imagery of the Sonnets, was authored by the de Vere family physician Dr. George Baker, and the book itself is even dedicated to Anne Cecil de Vere, Countess of Oxford with a full page depiction of the de Vere armorial devices.

Along with de Vere's fascination for history and his penchant for reading books which would in time become known among the most important sources of the Shakespearean dramas, one should not omit notice of his scandalous "pregnant" wit. The "antic disposition" which earned him a distinguished reputation as the leading comic dramatist of the 1580s seems to have frequently boomeranged against de Vere when powerful individuals whom he offended, unable to defend themselves against his jests, expressed their displeasure at his foolery. Like Queen Gertrude responding to Hamlet's assumed role as the court fool of Elsinore, his relations often found themselves in the awkward position of having "screened and stood between much heat and him" (3.4.4), long past the moment when shielding him seemed politically expedient. We catch one tantalizing glimpse of Oxford's notoriety for inflicting damage with his tongue - or pen? -- in a letter to Burghley from his prospective mother-in-law Katherine Willoughby, the Duchess of Suffolk, whose son Peregrine Bertie married Edward's half-sister Katherine de Vere, when she reports in dismay Mary Vere's admission that she "could not *rule her brother's tongue*, nor help the rest of his faults...." (cited in Ward 152: emphasis added). A first hand opportunity to

⁷ Note the potential ~~if not~~ actual joke: it was de Vere's *mother's brother* who "gave" the young scholar the *Metamorphoses* by engaging him in the process of translation.

overhear the kind of jests to which Katherine Willoughby must have been objecting, comes from the Arundel-Howard Interrogatories. Charles Arundel and Henry Howard answered Oxford's December 1581 indictment that they were plotting regicide and counter-reformation by accusing him, among other crimes and misdemeanors, of

Railing at Francis Southwell for commending the Queen's singing one night at Hampton Court, and protesting by the blood of god that she had the worst voice and did everything with the worst grace that ever woman did.

(Transcription: Ward 213).

While the accusation was surely calculated to arouse Elizabeth's ire against Howard's accuser, Southwell himself has apparently written an exculpatory clause in the margins of the interrogatory: "audibi⁸, sed in poculis" – "I have heard it, but [he was] 'in his cups' at the time" (Ward 1928 213: translation mine). Oxford's crack at the Queen's singing voice, however, seems to have become almost legendary. Consider the cosmic humor in the line, delivered back at the author by Elizabeth/Portia in *Merchant of Venice*, on the subject of having a bad singing voice in 5.1. Lorenzo, entering to greet Portia and Nerissa, announces that he has recognized Portia from another room *by her voice* -- by which he means the familiar timbre and tones of her *speaking* voice. Responds Portia, in the one play in the entire Shakespearean canon which, from start to finish, is *about* music: "He knows me as the blind man knows the Cuckoo, by the bad voice!" (5.1.112). Portia, in a moment of mental confusion which seems uncharacteristic for Shakespeare's mistress of Jurisprudence, mistakes the intent of Lorenzo's line, taking it for a criticism of her singing talent. Apparently, Portia has heard the complaint before.

Other characters in Shakespeare often confuse the right to say what it is *they feel*, with what they *ought* to say. Often the clown figure, like Touchstone, Feste or LaVache in *All's Well that Ends Well*, represents de Vere-the-court-fool, always making fun of things about which he should keep his mouth shut. In *All's Well* for instance, Helena's mother, echoing the real-life complaints of Oxford's unruly tongue, despairs that LaVache will forever remain a "foul mouth'd and calumnius knave"⁹ (1.3.57).

Oxford's "pregnancy" of wit is affirmed not only in his reputation of being "the best for Comedy" -- as Francis Meres calls him in 1598 -- and his offenses against actual or potential in-laws--but, far more significantly, in Tom Nashe's glowing tribute to him in *Strange News* (1592), the previously mentioned anti-Harvey tract dedicated to Oxford under the sobriquets "Master

⁸Spelling Ward's: "b" and "v" are allophonic in Hispanic Latin.

⁹"Aye, madam," replies the irrepressible clown, "I speak the truth -- in the next way," an utterance in which "the next way" evidently functions in a prophetic and apocalyptic sense as meaning that time will unmask the significance of his riddling offenses and show them to be not calumnious but true.

Apis Lapis”¹⁰ and “Gentle Master William” (see Barrell 1944). In that tract, Nashe warns Gabriel Harvey that he has “courtly incensed the Earl of Oxford against you,” and instructs him to beware of further offense¹¹, lest Oxford’s wit turn him into a laughing stock on the public stage, as Nashe and the Queen’s Men had recently done with Martin Marprelate:

Mark him well. He is but a little fellow, but he hathe one of the best wits in England. Should he take thee in hand again (as he flieth from such inferior concertation) I prophesy as many readers will die of a merry mortality engendered by the eternal jests he would maul thee with, than there have done of this last infection...

(McKerrow I:300-301)¹²

¹⁰ The “stoned bull” or “castrated ox.”

¹¹ Harvey had previously been brought before the privy council for his lampoon of Oxford as an Italianate fop in *Speculum Tuscanismi* (1581) – published strategically enough right at the moment of Oxford’s greatest vulnerability during the Vavasour and Howard affairs. Nashe’s detailed account of the affair, which reprints Harvey’s own account in italics, is given in *Strange News* (G2 1-35).

¹² Ogburn (1984) and some others have questioned whether the “little fellow” with the rapier wit in this passage is really Oxford or -- as John Lyly’s biographers seem to have assumed -- Lyly himself. Ward (1928 192), the first to argue that the passage referred to Oxford, adduces arguments in favor of identifying the “little fellow” with Oxford which seem to me to be decisive.