

## CHAPTER 4. “SECRET INTENTS”

Perhaps in view of Oxford's reputation as a spoiled aristocrat addicted to lavish expense, who improvidently squandered his family fortune in *Timon*-like feasting and patronage, and frittered away his talents in practical joking and comic diversions beneath the dignity appropriate to his station, an excerpt from a little-noticed<sup>1</sup> 1587 letter written to Lord Burghley by Andrew Trollop will serve as a useful point of entry to the intrinsically complicated subject of identifying the “real” *Edward de Vere*. The letter is significant not just because it voices what might be considered a minority opinion – that is, a positive one -- regarding Oxford's character, but also because it so clearly acknowledges, as the very context of its production, the pre-existence of the controversy which still today swirls about the man. Unlike published book dedications, furthermore, the testimony is beyond criticism as mere flattery -- it is written privately to a third party, apparently in response to some request for testimony regarding Oxford's character. It points unmistakably to a legacy of controversy which did not end with Oxford's 1572 abortive attempts to rescue the imprisoned Thomas Howard by force, his 1576 marriage crisis, his September 1579 “falling out” at tennis with Phillip Sidney, his 1581 informing on Charles Arundel and Henry Howard for plotting against the Queen, his fathering of a bastard child – which Gloucester-like he “blushed to acknowledge” -- on Anne Vavasour in 1581, or even his protracted feuding with Anne's uncle Thomas Knyvet or any of the other myriad incidents which are conventionally cited by orthodox literary historians as evidence of his disgraceful conduct and un-Christian character. The letter possesses an air of disclaimer, as if the writer has volunteered to serve as a character witness in response to accusations lodged against Oxford by powerful and implacable enemies:

From the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> year of Her Majesty (1568-1579), I was deputy to Thomas Gent, esquire, then steward of the manors of the Right Honourable the earl of Oxford, and during all that time *being privy not only of his public dealings, but also his private doings and secret intents*, found and knew him indued with special piety, perfect integrity, great care to discharge all trust imposed in him, and no less desire to do good in the commonwealth.

(cited in Slater 1931 199: emphasis supplied)

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<sup>1</sup> The document, dated October 6 1587, is not cited by Looney (1920), Ward (1928), Ogburn (1984), Hope and Holston (1993) or Sobran (1996). Only Ogburn and Ogburn (1952 770) and Slater (199), in his survey of anti-Stratfordian theories, seem to have noticed its potentially very great relevance in establishing the case for de Vere's authorship of "Shakespeare."

This reference to Oxford's "private doings and secret intents"<sup>2</sup> is, of course, particularly intriguing. The aura of mystique communicated in this phrase hangs about Oxford in many contexts; he often earned the respect and discreet praise of the creative and intellectual figures with whom he came in intimate contact, and their admiration for his "secret intents," often echoed in the documentary record of the period, seems to have endured on some level at least until 1827, when the anonymous *roman à clef* entitled *De Vere, Or The Man of Independence* remembers the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford in a series of chapters each introduced with a quotation from Shakespeare. The novel, constructing an elaborate series of allegorical identifications between Oxford and his fictional descendent, the novel's protagonist Mortimer de Vere<sup>3</sup>, remembers him, somewhat curiously, as one who "in the days of Elizabeth, united in his single person, the character of *her greatest noble, knight and poet*" (Ward 1827 I: 88: emphasis added).<sup>4</sup>

Abundant contemporary testimony also corroborates Trollope's witness. In his earliest extant letter Oxford himself, aged thirteen, begs off from extensive correspondence with Burghley because "quant<sup>5</sup> à l'ordre de mon estude pour ce que il requiert un long discours à l'expliquer par le menu, et le temp est court à ceste heure" (Fowler 1986 1: emphasis added). A 1599 letter from his seventeen-year-old nephew Robert Bertie refers to the writer's previous inability to "trouve encores aucun subject (sic) assez digne de vous divertir de vos plus serieux affaires" (Ogburn 1984 749: emphasis added). Even Lord Burghley noted that "there is much more in him of understanding than any stranger to him would think" (cited in Jenkins 167). Finally, after his death Percival Golding reaffirms the mystique, the sense of things which cannot be spoken directly, which clings to Oxford's memory:

Edward de Vere, the only son of John....: Of whom I will only speak what all men's voices confirm; he was a man in mind and body absolutely accomplished with honourable endowments....

(Ogburn 1984 765: emphasis added)

One possible approach to the question of Oxford's 'private doings and secret intents' – those things about which all men *would not speak* -- may lie in the study of his intellectual and creative

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<sup>2</sup> Although the grammatical antecedent could be either Thomas Gent or Oxford, the content unambiguously identifies the individual as Oxford, whose doings with respect to "the commonwealth" would of course concern Burghley.

<sup>3</sup> The character is apparently based on the historical personages of Robert (1661-1724) and Edward (1689-1741) Harley, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Earls of Oxford (2<sup>nd</sup> creation). According to the inscription attached to George Vertue's 1745 engraving made after Michael Dahl's 1728 portrait of him, the latter also bore the title Earl of Mortimer. Vertue's engraving is published in Arthur Collins' *Historical Collection of Noble Families* (15752). The DNB has Robert Harley assuming both titles in 1711. This father and son were the greatest English antiquarians of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their bequest to the British Museum is known as the Harleian Collection. I am indebted to Andrew Hannas for drawing attention to the significance of the Harleys' investiture with the Mortimer title.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that this characterization of Oxford as the greatest poet of Elizabeth's reign, while it has abundant support from contemporary documentation, is apparently contradicted at another point in *De Vere: The Man Of Independence*, where we read that de Vere "was a poet, and not a very good one, but ranked with those of his time" (I: 22).

<sup>5</sup> Archaic *quand*.

life, both as attested through the unambiguous witness of the extant literary creation published under his own name or produced under his patronage, or even, as it has been hypothesized by the Oxfordians, under names other than his own. To gain the credibility it deserves in the reader's mind the latter proposition, however, must be placed within the larger context of the theatrical history of Elizabeth's reign. Finally, then, we arrive at the published witness – scattered, oblique, sometimes frustratingly obscure witness – to Oxford's reputation as a leading literary figure of the day – a poet and dramatist who, among others in the court, “suffered his works to be published without his own name to it” (“Puttenham” 1589: for the context of this quote, see discussion *infra*).

The official account of Oxford's poetic and dramatic endeavors is of course well known to any student of the authorship question. Looney first drew attention to Sidney Lee's acknowledgement of the relevant circumstances in his *Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Oxford, and since that time few, even among the true believers in the Shakespeare orthodoxy, have attempted to deny them. William Webbe's 1586 declaration that “in the rare devices of poetry...the earl of Oxford may challenge to himself the title of most excellent among the rest” (Ogburn 687) is well known. That Francis Meres (1598) called him the “best for comedy” is -- perhaps --qualified by the fact that Meres also lists “Shakespeare” as “the most excellent in both [comedy and tragedy] for the stage” (Ogburn 3-4). De Vere's role as a leading Elizabethan lyric poet, musician and author of dramas (particularly comedy), one “from infancy dear to the muses” as Edmund Spenser apostrophized him in a dedicatory sonnet in *The Fairy Queene* (1590), is acknowledged by all but the most dedicated partisans of the official story of Shakespeare. His early fascination with history and foreign language studies was nourished by the greatest tutors of the day – among them the eminent Anglo-Saxon scholar and legal historian Lawrence Nowell and the Latinist and theologian, Oxford's uncle Arthur Golding. In music he was celebrated not only as John Farmer's Patron but also his musical peer; William Byrd set music to the lyrics of his poems in *Psalmes, Sonets & songs of sadness and pietie* (London 1588); in literature he patronized Munday, Lyly, Nashe, and Watson; his disciple Angel Day authored the outstanding Tudor text on epistolary composition, *The Englishe Secretary* (1586; 1599), and Thomas Bedingfield translated “Hamlet's book,” *Cardanus Comforte* (1573; 1576), under his patronage.

More controversial has been the discovery by Charles Wisner Barrell – evidence not known to Looney – of extant testimony from *The Arte of Englishe Poesie* (1589), which directly confirms the view that among Oxford's “secret intents” was the authorship and production of dramatic works which have survived, if they have survived at all, without his name attached to

them. The pair of relevant quotations has recently been the subject of much controversy and is herewith reproduced for the reader's consideration:

I know very many notable gentlemen in the Court  
that have written commendably, And suppressed it  
again, or else suffered it to be published without  
their own names to it: as if it were a discredit for a  
gentleman to seem learned. (Arber 37)

And in her majesty's time that now is are sprong  
up another crew of courtly makers, Noblemen and  
Gentlemen of her Majesty's own servants, who  
have written commendably well as it would appear  
if their doings could be found out and made public  
with the rest, of which number is first that noble  
gentleman Edward Earl of Oxford.  
(Arber 75)

The first quotation does not, of course, directly name Oxford as one who "published without their own names to it"; indeed it leaves the names of these gentlemen entirely unmentioned. Yet it seems a reasonable inference from the second quotation that Oxford is intended to be thought of as one of the un-named group in the first quotation, contrary to the claims of Terry Ross and David Kathman<sup>6</sup>.

Have we not here the answering echo to Anthony Trollope's enigmatic 1587 reference to Oxford's honorable but "secret" intents, in the direct verification that his literary activities were foremost among those which could not be publicly disclosed?

Also significant is the testimony of Henry Peacham in *The Complete Gentleman*, which in 1622 places Oxford first in the author's list of prestigious poets

who have honored Poesy with their pens and practice: Edward Earl of Oxford, the Lord  
Buckhurst, Henry Lord Paget, the noble Sir Philip Sidney, M Edward Dyer, M Edmund  
Spenser, Master Samuel Daniel, with sundry others whom (together with those admirable wits  
yet living and so well known) not out of Envy, but to avoid tediousness, I overpass.  
(Peacham 106)

William Shakespeare of Stratford was of course no longer living in 1622; his omission from the list –unlike such names as George Chapman, Michael Drayton, or Ben Jonson -- must be credited to Peacham's own stated purpose to "avoid tediousness."

Gabriel Harvey's 1578 apostrophe to the Earl may certainly be suspected of hyperbole, not to mention anti-Spanish jingoism. That it should be neglected as mere "flattery" begs the question; and in any case the classical symbolism is not without intrinsic interest for those capable of comprehending the ludic potential of the name "Shakespeare" as it might have been heard by an

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<sup>6</sup> The meaning and relevance of these passages from the anonymous *Arte of English Poesie* has recently become the object of dispute pursuant to accusation by Terry Ross and David Kathman, on their *Shakespeare Web Page* ([www.bcpl.lib.md.us/~tross/ws/ox.html](http://www.bcpl.lib.md.us/~tross/ws/ox.html)), that Oxfordian scholars have misrepresented the above quotations to subserve a nefarious agenda of misrepresentation; an accusation vigorously answered by Hannas (1996) and Stritmatter (1996) in the on-line *Ever Reader* (3) (Spring-Summer 1996), [www.everreader.com/everrea3.htm](http://www.everreader.com/everrea3.htm). As of September 1998, Mr. Ross persists in trumpeting his "victory" in discussion on the Usenet discussion group, as if neither Hannas nor Stritmatter had bothered to refute his silly claims in this matter.

Elizabethan readership schooled in the Renaissance topos of “arms and arts” and ever-fond of that lost cultural form, the rebus<sup>7</sup>:

Virtus fronte habitat: Mars occupat ora; Minerva  
In dextra latitat: Bellona in corpore regnat:  
Martius ardor inest: scintilla lumina: vultus  
Tela vibrat: quis non redivivum iuret Achillem?  
III:3) (STC)

Virtue occupies your helm; Mars stirs his steed in your mouth when you speak; wise-counseling Minerva lies concealed in your right hand and Bellona the war goddess assumes her royal seat in thy martial poise.

The ardor of smoke and fierce battle blazes in your heart; the flint sparks: Your brow trembles in expectation of new-woven plots. Who would Dare to say that Achilles had not come to life again?

(translation mine)

There is much which might be said about this famous encomium, immortalized in gentle satire by Edmund Spenser in the October Eclogue of the *Shepheard's Calendar* in Piers's speech beginning "Abandon then the base and viler clown" (37-54) and urging a rapprochement between Cuddie and "the white bear" chained to "the stake" (48) –the Earl of Leicester -- an ambitious project of which Harvey and Spenser both dreamed. Let us focus only on the most immediately pertinent aspect of Harvey's oration. Are we reading the local origin of the sobriquet “Shakespeare,” in the phrase “vultus tela vibrat” – which B.M. Ward first translated as “[your] countenance shakes a spear” (1928: 158) but which may with equal plausibility be translated as “[your] will shakes a speare”<sup>8</sup>? Evidence from the same passage of Harvey’s encomium supplies further insight into Harvey's "insider" knowledge of de Vere’s “secret intents.” When Harvey declares that “Minerva in dextra latitat” – "the Goddess (of statecraft and the arts) Minerva *lies concealed* in your right hand” (emphasis added) -- he places the patron saint of the "Shakespeare" gambit -- the spear shaking Pallas Athena<sup>9</sup> -- in de Vere's secret hand.

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed contemporary discussion of this paramount cultural form, as adapted to England, see William Camden's *Remains Concerning Britain*, (1870 ed., 177-181), first published in 1605 as a supplement to the *Britannia*. The classic Renaissance discussion of the form, on which Camden and other English theorists primarily derived their own theoretical conceptions, is found in Henri Estienne's *Art of Making Devises*, first published in London in 1648 but known before then in the French original. See also Russell (n.d.).

<sup>8</sup> The pivotal phrase “vultus/Tela vibrat” was originally translated in English by Ward as “thy countenance shakes a spear” (1928: 158). More recently, Hannas (1993) has noted that the word “tela” does not seem to be the most natural choice for the Latin rendering of the English phrase “Shake speare”. *Hasta* is alleged to be a much more standard Latin equivalent for “speare”; *telum* denotes a broader class of weapons thrown by the hand, although in practice it is often translated as “spear,” sometimes by “weapon,” and least often as arrow, javelin, or missile. Therefore its usage must be dictated by some other consideration, which Hannas suggests was Harvey's intent to form a double-punned phrase, in which *vultus* can mean either “will/intention” or “face/countenance” and *tela* can be the neuter plural for either “spears” (correctly translated into English as either plural or singular) or “web/enterprise.” Since, as Hannas cleverly notes, *tela* is a neuter plural which can be either subject or object of the verb, and *vultus* is a fourth declension neuter which can also stand as either subject or object of the verb, the three words yield two perfectly coherent and probably fully intended translations into English: “thy will/countenance shakes a spear” or “thy web/enterprise shakes (ie, disturbs) the will/countenance [of others].” A third possibility, employed in my translation here, is to take *vultus* as the nominative subject of the verb but treat the *tela* as [de Vere's] plots: “your brow trembles in expectation of new-woven plots,” a reading which to me seems most consistent with the motion of the entire passage. Harvey was a master, somewhat pedantic it is true, of such linguistic arcana.

<sup>9</sup> For a contemporary witness to Minerva/Pallas Athena's fame as “spear-shaker” see E.K.'s notes to the October Eclogue in Spenser's *Shepheard's Calendar*; glossing Cuddie's mention of “Quaint Bellona” as “Pallas...[who]...when Iupiter hir father was in traveile of

As B.M. Ward (1928 264-282) first formally asserted, significant evidence supports the view that by 1586 Oxford had been authorized under privy seal warrant to undertake the role of theatrical impresario and patron for the Queen's Men as well as for the nation as a whole. Only three days after the June 23, 1586 Star Chamber decree reorganizing printing – the most important censorship act in Elizabeth's reign, specifically designed to consolidate the control of the Crown and Anglican authorities over the sphere of propaganda and symbolic action -- a 1000 pound per annum grant was issued to Oxford. As B.M. Ward discovered (Ward 1928 255-263), the grant was issued under a formula used for secret service payments, stipulating that neither Oxford nor his heirs should ever be called to make an accounting for the money's expenditure. Ward stresses that although the terms of the account indicate some service to the state, Oxford fulfilled none of the usual roles one might expect for a man of his station and undoubted talents. The entire operation is shrouded in the secret authorization of the Privy Seal Warrant:

He certainly did none of the things we might have expected. He did not serve her as a Minister, but as a Privy Councillor, as an Ambassador, or as a Soldier. But in a less obvious respect he undoubtedly did serve her. He was instrumental, by means of his brain, his servants, and his purse in providing the Court with dramatic entertainment.

(282)

The close temporal proximity of Oxford's annuity to the 1586 statute on censorship seems unlikely to be a coincidence; it strengthens the view that Oxford's "secret intents" involved matters of utmost political delicacy to which only the highest officers of the land were privy. Already in 1584 – a year after Elizabeth's Spymaster, Principal Secretary Francis Walsingham, convened the Queen's Men to replace the Company supervised by Oxford's elder friend, Lord Chamberlain of the Household Thomas Radcliffe (The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Sussex), known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men -- Oxford tempestuously rebukes Burghley with the bold assertion that "I serve her majesty." However, his role as court impresario and "allowed fool," appears not to have been formalized, and then only covertly, until the 1586 Warrant. Such are the "secret intents" to which Trollop evidently refers in 1587; even before the earliest published use of the *nom de plume*, it appears that de Vere's artistic endeavor was subordinated to the political interests of the nation as defined by William Cecil, the Queen, and the Privy Council, with the result that *Minerva in dextra latitat*.

In weighing the plausibility of this scenario, one should not forget that, at the moment of Harvey's 1578 apostrophe, England was entering the most dangerous period of international instability in many decades. War with Spain seemed imminent to astute observers; in 1578 Elizabeth began to flirt openly with the de Medici brothers. In reaction, counter-reformationist

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her, he caused his sonne Vulcane with his axe to hew his head....Out of which leaped forth lustely a valiant damsell armed at all points....[who]....shaked her speare at him" (186-194).

plots swirled thickly about Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I's Spanish cousin and Catholic heir to Henry VIII. As Elizabeth fretted over and deferred Mary's execution, Mary's other cousin, the Spanish King Phillip II, aided by powerful English nobles such as Oxford's antagonist Charles Arundel, prepared for military conquest and counter-reformation. On the other end of the religious spectrum, Puritan nonconformists, with the covert approval of Principal Secretary Francis Walsingham and Burghley himself -- both of whom profited handsomely from Ecclesiastical appropriations and consequently became the object of rather bitter satire as the Ape and the Fox in Spenser's suppressed 1591 complaint, *Mother Hubbard's Tale* -- were gaining strength in numbers. Phillip's Armada struck from without May 20 1588 -- sending 132 vessels and over 8000 armed men to conquer England, execute Elizabeth and restore Catholic rule. Under adverse weather conditions, the armada went down to a humiliating but unexpected defeat.

Historically-minded Elizabethans, rejoicing at the unexpected repulse of Phillip's armada, invoked the precedent of the sinking of Xerxes' fleet off the shores of Attica at the battle of Salamis in September 480 (B.C.E.); after less than a year's delay, however, Martin Marprelate and his nonconformist allies, the Spanish threat momentarily deflected, struck from within at the heart of the Elizabethan settlement<sup>10</sup> with their propaganda campaign. Despite this respite from the immediate threat of conquest, Spanish power remained an ominous danger for England at least up until the signing of the 1604 peace treaty.

It is against this twin threat -- of military conquest by Spain and Puritan revolution from within -- that Tom Nashe explicitly pits the Anglican "policy of plays" in his *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil* (1592). This "policy of plays," writes Nashe, "is very necessary, howsoever some shallow-brained censurers (not the deepest searchers into the secrets of government) mightily opugne them" (McKerrow I 212). Allied with known Anglican propagandists such as Nashe himself, Oxford (Nashe's "Master Apis Lapis") appears to have played<sup>11</sup> a major if purposefully obscure role in furthering this "policy of plays."

There is little doubt, in any case, that de Vere was among the most prominent and dedicated patrons of the 16<sup>th</sup> century English theatre. The first commercial playing house in England, James

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<sup>10</sup> The historical compromise effected by Elizabeth, with the assistance of Archbishops Matthew Parker (1504-1575) and John Whitgift (1530-1604; AC 1583-1604) Principal Secretary William Cecil, and the Privy Council and Court of High Commission, between Catholics and Separatist factions such as Presbyterians and Anabaptists. The two chief documents of the settlement were the 1559 statutes of Supremacy and of Uniformity. The first formalized the break with the Roman church and required all clerics to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen as the "Supreme governor of this realm." The act of Uniformity, much more controversially, re-instituted the second prayer book of Edward VII (with some modifications such as allowing more latitude ~~in~~ with regard to vestments and ornaments, and adopting the more conservative "Latin" language of the first Edwardian prayer book). The foundation for the Elizabethan settlement was laid by Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII and Edward ~~VII~~ VI, who was burned at the stake under the Marian counter-reformation in 1556. Cranmer's ecclesiastical reforms (1547-1553), particularly the 39 articles of religion and editorship of the Book of Common Prayer, formed the framework for the subsequent innovation of the Elizabeth settlement.

<sup>11</sup> One does not doubt that this matter requires more elaboration, evidence, and argumentation than is possible, for reasons of economy, in the present place.

Burbage's Shoreditch *Theatre*, opened for operations in 1576, the year de Vere returned from his 18-month continental sojourn to Tuscany, Germany and France. De Vere may not have been a workaday "man of the theatre," but like Hamlet he was, undeniably, a patron and aficionado of the stage, as well as a prominent but apparently pseudonymous playwright. Like Hamlet's own players, furthermore, Oxford's theatrical associates seem to have frequently run afoul of official dicta. A June 21, 1580 memorandum from the Chancellor of Oxford University refuses Lord Burghley's request that de Vere's players be allowed to "show their cunning in certain plays already practised by them before the Queen's majesty" (Ward 267-68), noting that "the commencement time at hand...requireth rather diligence in study than dissoluteness in plays" -- even if they had been practiced before the Queen! If Oxford was, as B.M. Ward (1928 264-282) argues, closely associated with the Queen's Men during their heyday from 1583-1592, he may have been held responsible for the troop's excessive zeal in parodying Puritans during the Marprelate scandal of 1589, an episode which precipitated the troop's decline in royal favor and eventual dissolution. From a functional perspective, they were replaced by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who first began performing in royal livery before the Queen in 1594. A troop explicitly patronized by Oxford was not authorized to perform again in London until 1602, after a long hiatus, at their "customary" venue at the Boarshead tavern in Eastcheap -- and then only through the intercession of the Queen acting through the Privy Council<sup>12</sup>.

Oxford's role as covert impresario of the Queen's Men seems to have been jeopardized as early as 1589, when the Queen's Men, along with Derby's, came into conflict with the London Council over their notorious lampoons of Martin Marprelate. The powerful Puritan Lord Cobham, among others, seems to have raised strenuous objection<sup>13</sup> to this politicization of the stage. The period 1589-1592 was a low water mark for the theatrical troops which had played such a prominent role in the public discourse of the 1580's and aroused the ire of the Puritans by lampooning Martin. In August 1589, Nashe's preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, a satire of the official account of contemporary English letters published just weeks before in *The Arte of English Poesie*, alludes to the suppression of the theatres in the same breath as it lampoons *The Arte's* reference to the "sundry gentlemen" who have "published works without their own name attached to it":

Sundrie other sweete Gentlemen I know, that have vaunted their pens in private devices,  
and trickt up a companie of taffata fooles with their feathers, whose beauty if our Poetes

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<sup>12</sup> Oxford's Men were apparently amalgamated with, or perhaps more accurately in collaboration with, Worcester's Men at this turning point in the theatrical liberty of the aristocratic troops to play in London. Several of these had apparently been under interdiction since around 1589 when they were held responsible for the unacceptable lampooning of Martin Marprelate. For the documents pertaining to the Worcester-Oxford amalgamation, see Chambers (1923 II 99-102).

<sup>13</sup> The ill-feeling between Cobham and the literary set seems to have been profound. Ten years later, Cobham was still being hounded by Thomas Nashe in his topical satire, *The Praise of the Red Herring* (1599).

had not peecte<sup>14</sup> with the supply of their periwiges, they might have antickt it untill this time up and downe the cuntry with the King of Fairies, and dinde everie daie at the pease porredge ordinarie with Delphrigus<sup>15</sup>.  
(Harrison 1927 17)<sup>16</sup>

Nashe is still complaining of the suppression in *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, his rhetorical appeal to Archbishop Whitgift at Croyden three years later in Autumn 1592 (McKerrow IV: 416-19). In that play, Nashe hopes to restore Anglican support for the theatrical arts which had been withdrawn in response to Puritan backlash during the Marprelate scandal. The prologue of the play announces that for "this twelvemonth," for fear of the "paynted serpent" of envy, the players have "ceased to tune any musike of mirth to your ears" (235).

On July 7 1594 -- within weeks of the first official notice of the Lord Chamberlain's Men<sup>17</sup> - - we find Oxford still objecting to Burghley that his previous complaints of being hindered "in mine office" have not been answered, nor the abuses of which he complains corrected (Fowler 1986 484-495). At this date, the theatres had only recently reopened after a hiatus of more than eighteen months. From January 1593 until June 1594 they had been closed by authority, on the pretext of inhibiting the spread of the plague, which was associated with the disease vector created by the large numbers of persons who congregated in the enclosed public spaces of theatres such as the Swan or the Rose in Southwark. Grose and Oxley report that this inhibition "destroyed the organization of many companies" (27). Commented Ward on this 1594 reference to Oxford's "office:

He is evidently referring to some work he is doing for Her Majesty, no doubt in return for his 1,000 pounds a year. It is almost tantalizing that he tells us so much, and yet so little, for he gives no hint -- no more than the Queen did in her original warrant—what this work is.  
(312)

That furtherance of this office eventually required Oxford to acquire the public vizard of a false name, within which to enclose any threat to "public manners" (Sonnet 111)<sup>18</sup>, might be

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<sup>14</sup>Apparently an Anglicization of "piqued."

<sup>15</sup> Bill Moebius has suggested that this *hapax legomenon* may be a (somewhat awkward) conflation of Δελφος (the oracle of Apollo) and χορηγος (the leader of the chorus). If so, the word in this context means something like "the Apollonian playwright and patron of players," i.e. Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford.

<sup>16</sup>When Nashe speaks of the "sundry gentlemen" who have "vaunted their pens in private devices" he is referring to, and satirizing, the practice of pseudonymous publication documented three years previously in *The Arte of English Poesie*. Nashe, furthermore, adds the intriguing wrinkle that one or more these gentlemen is, or was, associated with the theatre. To "antic...up and down the country" evidently refers to going on theatrical tour. However, Nashe makes it clear that the gentlemen in question, because certain poets have been "peecte with the supply of their periwiges," are no longer "on tour." A periwig is a wig worn in the theatre.

<sup>17</sup> It appears that during a period of months or even years, as the Queen's Men suffered the political consequences of the "throwing about of the brains" engendered by the Marprelate episode, the players of Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange (1559-1594), brother to Oxford's future son-in-law, the playwright William Stanley, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby, absorbed some of the leading players and functions of the Queen's Men; however this troop was apparently no less subject to straying from the path of authorized propaganda and was subsequently replaced in royal favor with Hunsdon's "Lord Chamberlain's" men, also known as "Shakespeare's company".

<sup>18</sup> The sonnet chides the "guiltie goddess" of "fortune"

gleaned from an exchange in *Comedy of Errors* in which the changeling Dromio of Syracuse bars his master Antipholus of Ephesus from entering his home while his counterpart abuses him for having “stolen both *mine office* and my name” (emphasis added):

Anti.           What art thou that keep'st mee out from the howse I ow<sup>n</sup>e<sup>19</sup>?

S. Dro.           The Porter for this time, Sir, and my name is Dromio.

E. Dro.           O villaine, thou hast stolne *both mine office and my name*,  
The one hath got me credit, the other mickle blame:  
If thou hadst beene Dromio today in my place,  
Thou wouldst have chang'd thy face for a name, or thy name for an asse.

(3.1.42-47: emphasis added)

A little later the same character sardonically relates this “office” both to the figure of “a thousand pounds” and also the rope which his master uses to beat him:

I buy a thousand pound *a year*: I buy a rope.           (4.1.21: emphasis added)

We should not fail to notice that the reference is to *an annuity* of the same amount by which Oxford's “office” was subsidized. Each word reinforces the salience of the comical self-reference to the author's own conflicted circumstance: Oxford “bought” this annuity through the sale of his own encumbered estates to rising bourgeois such as Lord Burghley. That the annuity came with its own “rope” attached seems the most natural thing in the world: money has often been used as a leash for creative artists whose symbol-making powers threaten, or appear to threaten, a social order. In *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*, Sartre defines “le conflit originel qui définit sa [the artist's] condition” as one which makes him “un parasite de ‘l'élite’....” Enlightened elites, according to Sartre, go out of their way to pension (pensionnent) the artist “pour contrôler sa puissance destructrice.” (105). In view of his manifest powers of satirical comment, “Shakespeare” was certainly an artist whom one can imagine an enlightened monarch such as Elizabeth I needing to regulate. The December 28 1594 performance of *Comedy of Errors* at Grey's Inn almost provoked a riot and was remembered as a “night of errors” (Wilson 1968 xxvi). Not surprisingly, the play was not published for another twenty-seven years until the first folio of 1623. Like Dromio of Ephesus, de Vere seems to have run as fast as he could to escape the consequences of his parody of his mistress, the fat Kitchen Wench “Nell” -- whose name, like that of Elizabeth, “spells an ell and three quarters”<sup>20</sup> -- but the rope, along with the annuity which he

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That did not better for my life provide,  
Then publick means which publick manner breeds.  
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,  
And almost thence my nature is subdu'd  
To what it works in, like the Dyers hand.

<sup>19</sup> F. reads “owe,” an archaic form of “owne.”

purchased out of the alienation of his own feudal inheritance, kept him running in place for several decades.

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<sup>20</sup> That is, “El” + three additional syllables, or “El-liz-a-beth.”